



FLATLANDER CONSULTING GROUP

PRELIMINARY REPORT

ANALYSIS OF THE
FORMATIVE EVALUATION
OF THE
CANADA VOLUNTEERISM INITIATIVE

PREPARED FOR THE DIRECTOR OF EVALUATION AT THE
DEPARTMENT OF CANADIAN HERITAGE

FLATLANDERS CONSULTING GROUP
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Flatlanders Consulting Group has been hired to critically assess the Formative Evaluation of the Canadian Volunteerism Initiative prepared for the Department of Canadian Heritage. In particular, we have been asked to address three key aspects;

1. Critically analyze the evaluation's methodology identifying and assessing the strengths and weaknesses of each data collection method.
2. Propose additional methods that could have been implemented to increase the rigor and/or comprehensiveness of the evaluation.
3. Identify the five most important evaluation issues along with their associated indicators and data collection methods for the summative evaluation.

CANADA VOLUNTEERISM INITIATIVE

The Canadian Volunteerism Initiative (CVI) was established in 2002 with the objective to encourage Canadians to participate in voluntary organizations, to enhance the experience of volunteering, and to help organizations benefit from the contribution of volunteers.

FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS

The evaluation process would have been less complex if more effort had been made to concentrate the organization and administration of the program at a more senior level of government. If this were done at the outset of the program, communication would be between fewer individuals and fewer organizations, thus reducing the need for a better communication network. The budget and time line for the program would also be easier to coordinate if decisions were left in the hands of fewer people.

An evaluation of this program must include feedback from volunteers and the general public in order to assess whether the main objectives are being met. It is also necessary to create a plan for a long-term evaluation of program effectiveness.

ANALYSIS OF EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

HAS THE CVI BEEN DESIGNED APPROPRIATELY FOR ACHIEVING THE TARGET OUTCOMES?

Methodology Used: Document review, key informant interviews, interviews with funded recipients, interviews with non-funded recipients.

Strengths and Weaknesses: Interviews of key informants provide detailed data of those most knowledgeable about the efficacy of the CVI. Interviews of both funded and non-funded recipients provide multiple perspectives on the appropriateness of the CVI. Qualitative data collected through interview is highly detailed.

Interviews provide small sample sizes, decreasing power of findings. Data collected during interviews is difficult to analyze and difficult to compare across regions. Limiting interviews to individuals involved in the program results in biased data, as those individuals have vested interests in the program. We predict difficulty obtaining critical analysis and negative feedback, given the vested interests.

Given two of the key objectives outlined by the CVI are: 1) to encourage Canadians to participate in voluntary organizations and 2) to enhance the experience of volunteering, the methodology currently implemented will not adequately address these objectives.

Proposed Methodology: General survey administered to random subset of population to determine if program is encouraging Canadians to participate in voluntary organizations. Surveys administered to all existing volunteers of both funded and non-funded agencies would provide data that accurately assesses the two key objectives of the CVI. Surveys, as opposed to interviews, should be utilized to address this issue. Survey data is easily collected, relatively cheap to administer, and provides opportunity for large sample sizes. Additionally, surveys are easily analyzed, and provide a standardized measure that can be compared across regions.

IS THE CVI BEING IMPLEMENTED AS PLANNED?

Methodology used: Document review, key informant interviews, interviews with funded recipients, interviews with non-funded recipients, file review of funding recipients.

Strengths and Weaknesses: Interviewing key informants is crucial in determining whether the CVI is being implemented as planned, as knowledge of the interior workings of the program is required. Interviewing funded and non-funded recipients provides multiple perspectives on the appropriateness of the CVI. Qualitative data collected through interview is highly detailed.

Small sample sizes provide few perspectives; personal biases can affect data collected. Current methodology will not obtain an accurate evaluation of the whole project and is limited to smaller, isolated resources of information. Evaluation methodology does not address volunteers' opinions. The methodology implemented does not assess two key objectives of the CVI (enhanced volunteer experience, increase in volunteer participation.) Difficult to compare data across regions and across governing bodies (KDC, ICBA, CSC).

Proposed Methodology: Focus groups should be conducted with varying groups across the country. One focus group per region, per volunteer agency, would provide a more accurate picture of the success of the implementation plan. Following a similar focus group guide with each group will allow comparisons across regions and governing bodies.

WHAT TANGIBLE PROGRESS CAN BE IDENTIFIED TOWARD ACHIEVING THE EXPECTED OUTCOMES?

Methodology Used: Document review, file review of funding recipients, and anecdotal evidence collected through interviews with key informants and funded recipients.

Strengths and Weaknesses: The methodology used in the formative evaluation was effective in that it addressed all of the expected immediate and intermediate outcomes from the majority of the stakeholders.

The primary weakness in this evaluation is the failure to provide feedback from volunteers and from the general public on program outcomes. Two of the main objectives of the program are to encourage Canadians to volunteer and enhance the volunteer experience, but there is no effort made to establish whether these objectives are being met. Rather, the focus of the evaluation is on the administrative and organizational aspects of program effectiveness. According to program objectives, volunteers are critical stakeholders in the program, and should play a major role in its evaluation.

Another weakness in the evaluation of immediate outcomes is that the contribution on the part of Social Development Canada (SDC) is unclear. In this case, other methods could be used to evaluate the role that this funded organization plays in achieving the projected goals of the program.

Finally, the ultimate outcomes of the program are not evaluated. There should be statistics available to determine whether volunteerism has increased in Canada, and information could be gathered from funded organizations to evaluate whether their capacity has increased to provide programs and services for their volunteers.

Proposed Methodology: Further methods could be used to evaluate program outcomes. First, it is critical that volunteers, as stakeholders, are able to share their opinions and experiences of the program as it relates to program effectiveness and value. In order to do this, we are proposing that a survey be administered to volunteers of funded organizations.

Another survey could be created to evaluate whether an expanded body of knowledge had resulted from the program implementation. This survey would include a random sample of volunteers and the general public. It would also be helpful to establish in totality what documents exist as evidence of this expanded body of knowledge on volunteerism.

HOW HAVE THE CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED DURING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CVI BEEN OVERCOME SO AS TO ENSURE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE SHORT-, MEDIUM-, AND LONG-TERM OUTCOMES?

Methodology Used: Review of existing documents (e.g., plans, funding agreements, activity reports, and centre evaluation reports), file reviews of funding recipients and non-funding recipients, and interviews with key informants and funding recipients.

Strengths and Weaknesses: Interviews with key informants provides data from both a national and local level thus allowing for an understanding of the unique challenges in implementation at the various levels. Such information can also provide a source of information concerning how these challenges were met and to what degree of success.

The use of file review to identify challenges and reported solutions can be lengthy and time-consuming. Further, based on the evaluation report it was unclear as to the methodology used to identify challenges in the files and measure the level of effectiveness in addressing these

challenges. Finally, because interviews with key informants are not confidential, participants may be resistant to discussing issues faced and unsuccessful methods of addressing these challenges.

Proposed Methodology: It is suggested that a questionnaire specifically addressing challenges faced and methods of overcoming said challenges. An open-ended questionnaire addressing the challenges faced, the goal challenged (i.e., short-, medium-, or long-term), solutions implemented and perceived level of success could be added to the existing semi-annual reports. This additional data would provide easy access to this information during file review and can be shared among the various organizations when the electronic database has been implemented.

WHAT MECHANISMS HAVE BEEN PUT IN PLACE TO COLLECT DATA AND MONITOR THE PERFORMANCE OF THE INITIATIVE? ARE THESE MECHANISMS APPROPRIATE?

Method Used: File review, key informant interviews, interviews with funded recipients, file review/interviews with non-funded recipients, administration system and database review

Strengths and Weaknesses: Key informant interviews included representatives from key stakeholders to ensure that that data collected and available had met their needs. Utilization of systems and databases at primary sources (i.e. PCH, Volunteer Canada, CPP), assessment of adequacy of available funding for data collection to monitor performance, involvement of an external expert (e.g. assessment of appropriateness of frequency, content and quality of reports). Interviews with funded recipients.

The limited sample of participants does not include key informants from local network coordinators in all provinces to ensure representativeness in gathering information across geographical regions. The evaluation matrix does not indicate whether key informants included participants from local networks. Also not included is critical analysis of the utility of mechanisms in place to collect data. An external expert was the only assessor of the appropriateness of systems and databases and the appropriateness of frequency, content and quality of reports. Interviews with non-funded recipients were not included and may be an important component to evaluate relevance of the program.

Proposed Methodology: Suggest critical analysis of the utility of mechanisms in place to collect data that includes, for example, more in-depth interviews with participants who believed that the data collection was time-consuming. Cost-benefit analysis of mechanisms that are used to collect data and monitor performance of the initiative. Selection of key informants from local networks should be from both smaller and larger urban centers. In-depth interviews with key informants who considered the data collection to be labour-intensive could be conducted. Suggest inclusion of other participants and stakeholders to assess the appropriateness of systems and databases as well as to assess the appropriateness of frequency, content and quality of reports. Inclusion of interviews with non-funded recipients as key informants will ensure a more comprehensive evaluation of issues of relevance and accountability of the program to stakeholders. Include more in-depth questions of voluntary respondents to further query their concerns about establishing partnership with the government.

Inclusion of key informants who are both funded and non-funded may facilitate a more comprehensive evaluation of issues of relevance and accountability of the program to stakeholders.

KEY EVALUATION ISSUES

Evaluation Issues and Questions	Indicators	Data collection techniques
1. Is the CVI meeting its objectives? a. Help organizations benefit from the contribution of volunteers; b. Encourage Canadians to participate in voluntary organizations; and to c. Enhance the experience of volunteering.	Increased awareness of volunteerism by Canadians	Survey of Canadian citizens Survey of all volunteers in funded and non-funded organizations
	Increased satisfaction of volunteers	Document review
	Volunteer perspective on CVI	Focus groups
	# of projects raising awareness	Interviews with funded recipients
	Feedback from organizations on efficacy of program	Interviews with non-funded recipients
2. Is the CVI cost effective?	# of Canadians volunteering	
	% change in number of volunteers, across funded and non-funded recipients	
	Audit documents	Survey of all volunteers in funded and non-funded organizations
	Budget (KDC, ICBA, CSC)	Document review
	Feedback from organizations	Interviews with funded recipients Interviews with non-funded recipients Key Informant Interviews Admin System and Database Review
2. Is the CVI cost effective?	Resources/expenditures	
	Perceived adequacy of funding	
	Needs analysis	
	Level of communication (quantity and quality) between stakeholder groups	Survey of stakeholders at administrative level
	Quantity of information used coming from other stakeholder groups	Interviews with organization representatives Admin System and Database Review Key Informant Interviews
3. Establishment of communication networks	Workshops/forums/briefings	
	Unintended influences of CVI	Survey of all volunteers in funded and non-funded organizations
	Key informants describe issues	Document review
	Alterations to program	Interviews with funded recipients
	Activities outlined	Interviews with non-funded recipients
4. Implementation/challenges	Representation of regions	Key Informant Interviews
	File review	Admin System and Database Review
	Access to relevant information	Interviews with local network members/representatives
	Feedback from local networks	Interviews with local network coordinators
	Methods of communication and information sharing	Interviews with heads of national centers
5. Dissemination of Information and knowledge transfer	Capacity of organizations to produce reports (i.e. time, resources)	Document review Review of governance policy and mechanisms

PROPOSED TIMELINE

Timeline
 Timeline for implementation of program evaluation. Designed for the director of evaluation at the Department of Canada Canadian Heritage by Flatlanders Consulting

