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February 10, 2007

To: Director of Evaluation at Department of Canadian Heritage

**Re: Briefing Note for the Evaluation of the Canada Volunteerism Initiative**

We are pleased to have this opportunity to provide a briefing note on the evaluation of the Canada Volunteerism Initiative for the Director of Evaluation at Department of Canadian Heritage.

We at gold.TECK Consulting have a strong background in evaluating government programs and are especially sensitive to the methodological rigor that is crucial to determining a program's success. We feel that it is important that results be presented in a clear, easy-to-understand manner, and have made every effort to do so in the enclosed report.

Our team has prepared a brief overview of the previous evaluation, as well as the strengths and weakness of the methodology employed and how it might be improved. We have also outlined the five key evaluation issues that should be addressed in the future summative evaluation, along with their indicators and possible data collection methods.

We hope that this report will benefit you and we thank you for this opportunity.

Sincerely,

gold.TECK Consulting

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# **EVALUATION OF THE CANADIAN VOLUNTEERISM INITIATIVE**

## **Briefing Note**

**Prepared for:  
Department of Canadian Heritage**

**Prepared by:  
gold.TECK Consulting**

**February 10, 2007**



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## I. Issue

To provide feedback on the formative evaluation, including strengths, weaknesses, and proposed additional methods. Additionally, key evaluation issues for the upcoming summative evaluation are identified.

## II. Background

The Canada Volunteerism Initiative (CVI) was approved in June 2002 with the objectives of:

- Helping organizations to benefit from volunteer contribution
- Encouraging volunteerism among Canadians
- Enhancing the experience of volunteers.

Three national centres (the Knowledge Development Centre, the Information, Capacity-Building and Awareness Centre, and the Community Support Centre) are responsible for delivering CVI's programs and services.

The formative evaluation (a procedure to gather information that will aid in program improvement; Rossi, Lipsey, & Freeman, 2004) examined five key areas of CVI

- The appropriateness of the program's design for reaching the target outcomes
- The implementation of the program
- The processes toward which expected outcomes are achieved
- The ways in which challenges toward achieving outcomes were overcome
- The appropriateness of planned methods of data collection and performance monitoring.

Methodology consisted mainly of interviews of key informants and of file reviews of funding recipients.

Evaluation findings concluded that:

- The program design was well implemented, but CVI is at a stage where organizational practices may need to be modified
- CVI's decentralized approach was effective
- There is a need for greater SMC involvement in strategic matters and for greater communication between different CVI levels
- Government and voluntary sector representatives were satisfied for the most part with the partnership between the two sectors
- Progress has been made towards all short-term outcome goals, despite some delays in knowledge transfer and dissemination
- National centres and funding recipients are meeting their contribution terms and contract agreements, although data on the first two years of CVI's performance is limited



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- CPP respondents reported the need for an electronic database to be used in gathering, synthesizing and reporting results that would be used toward monitoring and evaluating

The evaluation made the following recommendations:

- Greater cooperation between CPP and other members of the Strategic Management and Coordination Committee (SMC)
- Consultations are required between CPP and its key stakeholders to develop possible alterations to the program design
- An electronic database should be created to facilitate data gathering, synthesis, and reporting
- Continued cooperation between CPP and the national centres to ensure proper monitoring, reporting, and assessment of CVI activities, outputs, and outcomes

Management accepted all recommendations, with the exception of the recommendation of creating an electronic database. Management accepted that recommendation with the modification that data gathering may not be through a Web-based database.

### **III. Current Status**

The formative evaluation of the CVI covered the period from June 2002 to March 2005. The CVI continues to be implemented and will undergo a summative evaluation (a procedure to determine how well a program is performing; Rossi et al., 2004).

### **IV. Key Considerations**

The formative evaluation of the Canada Volunteerism Initiative (CVI) completed by the Evaluation Services Directorate (ESD) of the Department of Canadian Heritage was quite comprehensive and rigorous. A variety of complimentary methods were utilized, including:

1. Document Review (CVI and volunteerism in general)
2. Key Informant Interviews
3. File Review of Funding Recipients
4. Telephone Interviews with Funding Recipients
5. File Review and Interviews with Unfunded Applicants
6. Administrative Systems and Database Review

A brief overview of each method, along with a description of the strengths and weaknesses of each, follow below:



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## 1. Document Review

**Description:** A comprehensive review and analysis of relevant CVI and general volunteerism documents was completed. The purpose of this analysis was to help inform and guide the overall evaluation.

**Strengths:** Provided a firm ground from which to: describe and evaluate CVI's design, activities, and outcomes; develop the evaluation questions and a comprehensive evaluation plan.

**Weaknesses:** Given the large number of organizations, each with their own program documents, it can be difficult to incorporate or cover all pertinent documents. In addition, program documents may not accurately reflect the actual day-to-day operations of the CVI.

## 2. Key Informant Interviews

**Description:** Twenty-five in-person, telephone, and group interviews were conducted with managers of PCH headquarters; heads of National Centres; local network coordinators, members and host organizations; representatives of the CSC and KDC National Advisory Committees, and representatives from the SMC, SDC, and NNVO.

**Strengths:** Provides more detailed and rich information than statistics. The interviews were complementary to the document analysis by confirming the documents concur with the day-to-day operations of the CVI. Allowed participants to provide their opinions, perceptions and reflections regarding a program that is highly salient to them. Also, allows the participants to drive the research in some respects; allows them to be apart of the research. Highlights what is important to the people on the front-line.

**Weaknesses:** Interviews are very costly and time-consuming. Interview techniques used were not consistent among interviewees (face-to-face vs. telephone; individual vs. group), which can lead to different responses from participants. The choice to include the particular key informants was not random, and therefore could have introduced some bias. One should be cautious in interpreting the quality of this data. Finally, interview data in general is subjective in nature, and therefore must be interpreted cautiously.

## 3. File Review of Funding Recipients

**Description:** File documentation, such as contribution agreements, financial reports, work plans, evaluations, contracts, action plans, and project summaries, were reviewed and analyzed from the five different funding recipient groups (e.g. national centers, host



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organizations, and the KDC).

**Strengths:** Provided objective data for indicators that answered the questions created for this formative evaluation. Allowed for a comprehensive analysis of the implementation of the CVI at many levels (including funding, communication, and knowledge transfer) and time periods (from inception to the current state of the program).

**Weaknesses:** Data may be incomplete, inaccurate, and/or dated, and similar to document review, may not accurately reflect the day-to-day workings of the organization. Six of the files were selected because the local networks were not visited during key informant interviews. Unfortunately, for these six cases there is no ability to complement the data with interviews.

#### 4. Telephone Interviews with Funding Recipients

**Description:** Sixteen telephone interviews were completed with individuals from the various groups (e.g., Ecology North, Canadian Red Cross, and Hope and Cope) who received funding from the CVI. Interviews were conducted to achieve a mix of provinces, funding years, amounts, and themes.

**Strengths:** Complimented the file reviews, and provided confirmation of findings from file analysis. Provided information on the perceptions and opinions of the people who CVI is to directly impact, and allow the front-line workers to drive and be involved in the research process.

**Weaknesses:** Interviews are very costly and time-consuming. Also, interview data in general is subjective in nature, and therefore must be interpreted cautiously.

#### 5. File Review and Interviews with Unfunded Applicants

**Description:** Applications, letters of decline, and evaluation summaries were collected and reviewed from 10 unfunded applicants. Interviews were conducted with 4 of these unfunded applicants.

**Strengths:** Including unfunded applicants allows for examination of the relationship between CVI and those agencies that did not receive funding. The file review allows for examination of the direct, unbiased communication, while the interviews allow for insight into the applicants' subjective experiences. Additionally, information that is not available in the file review may be clarified through interviews.

**Weaknesses:** As previously mentioned, interviews are subjective in nature, and thus



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may be biased. Additionally, the small number of interviewees may not accurately reflect the larger population of unfunded applicants.

## 6. Administrative Systems and Database Review

**Description:** A document review consisted of activity and financial reports, reporting templates, and evaluation templates. Interviews were conducted with six CPP and Centre officials who were responsible for collecting performance indicators and undertaking ongoing performance measurement. Follow-up information was collected from interviewees to identify the Accountability, Risk and Audit Framework indicators that are collected as well as how they are collected.

**Strengths:** The large amount of information collected provides detailed insight into the administrative functions. The document review provided accurate and unbiased financial activity. The interviews allowed for greater understanding into how performance is measured. Interviews allow the benefit of the interviewee providing their subjective experience and for additional clarification as necessary.

**Weaknesses:** Due to the subjective nature of interviews, information received in this method may be biased. Due to the potentially large amount of data received in the document review, the data may be cumbersome to review.

### *Additional Methods to Enhance the Evaluation*

Generally, the methods employed in the formative evaluation were quite comprehensive and well-developed. Additional methods that could have been implemented to increase the rigor and comprehensiveness of the evaluation are:

- 1. Focus groups with volunteers:** As many anticipated goals of CVI concern volunteers (e.g., increased volunteerism, enriched experiences of volunteers) it is important that this target group be included in an evaluation. Although interviews could be utilized, this may be very time-consuming and costly. A focus group (a small group of people gathered to discuss a topic guided by a facilitator) would be a convenient way to get the opinions of many different volunteers in a shorter time than one-on-one interviews.
- 2. Surveys:** The formative evaluation relied mainly on interviews to obtain opinions of various stakeholders. While interviews are a good way to obtain qualitative information, surveys are both time-saving and cost-effective. While interviews are an invaluable way to ask open-ended questions, surveys can be useful in asking more close-ended, quantitative questions. Additionally, more informants may respond to a survey as they are less time-consuming than an interview.





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3. **Evaluation Taskforce:** Because there are a wide variety of stakeholders involved with CVI, a taskforce should be established with representatives of the various organizations and committees. This would ensure that the concerns of all stakeholders are being addressed and that all members will feel included in the evaluation process. The taskforce should meet regularly to discuss what evaluation issues need to be addressed and to debrief the various members on the evaluation activities to date.

## V. Next Steps

Based on our analysis, we have outlined the five most important evaluation issues along with their associated indicators and data collection methods for the future summative evaluation.

**1. Increased awareness of volunteerism:** One of the activities of CVI is to develop and conduct promotional activities. It is hoped that this will result in an increased awareness by Canadians of volunteerism. Promotional campaigns have been run, and it is important to assess if they have effectively increased awareness of volunteerism.

**2. Enriched experience of volunteers:** The original formative evaluation did not examine opinions of current volunteers. As enriched experience of volunteers is one of the intended outcomes of the CVI, this should be assessed.

**3. Increase in volunteerism:** Although we have previously proposed evaluating increased awareness of volunteerism, it is important to note that an increase in knowledge does not always translate into behaviour change. Therefore, an increase in awareness may not directly result in an increase in volunteerism. As such, we feel that it is important to assess an increase in volunteerism as well as increase in awareness.

**4. Increased information sharing:** The formative evaluation found that although progress was being made towards the achievement of goals in all key program areas, there were significant lags in dissemination and knowledge transfer. This should be addressed in the future summative evaluation. Various knowledge transfer activities have been undertaken, such as the Volunteer Resource Centre, Volunteer Canada's extranet, the KDC web site, and CSC presentations.

**5. Increased capacity of voluntary sector organizations to provide programs and services:** As this is one of the ultimate goals of CVI, it is important that it be evaluated. An increase in volunteerism will result in man-power of organizations which will in turn lead to this increased capacity.

Evaluation Issue	Indicators	Method of Data Collection
1. Increased awareness of	○ Canadians aware of volunteer opportunities in	○ Nation-wide phone survey (using random sampling) to assess whether



volunteerism	<p>their community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Increase in Canadians considered volunteering</li> </ul>	<p>or not Canadians have considered volunteering, if they are aware of volunteer opportunities in their community, if they have been exposed to promotional and media materials, if said materials are effective</p>
2. Enriched experience of volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Volunteer self-reported satisfaction</li> <li>○ Volunteer retention</li> <li>○ Recognition of volunteers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Focus groups with volunteers</li> <li>○ File review for retention statistics</li> <li>○ Feedback from organizations (#, type of recognition events/programs)</li> </ul>
3. Increase in volunteerism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ # of Canadians volunteering at the various organizations involved with CVI</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ File review of organizations to ascertain number of volunteers (has this # increased?)</li> <li>○ Feedback from organizations (interviews to establish if they are receiving more inquiries re: volunteering, do they perceive a change in interest)</li> </ul>
4. Increased information sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ # of final reports made available to organizations</li> <li>○ Time delay between end of projects and when report/results are disseminated</li> <li>○ Satisfaction of organizations re: info sharing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ File review to determine the # of reports made available and time delay</li> <li>○ Interviews with organization managers to determine if they perceive an improvement in info sharing</li> </ul>
5. Increased capacity to provide programs and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ # of programs/services offered by organizations</li> <li>○ Hours of operation of programs/services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Feedback from managers of organizations (interviews to establish if they perceive an increased capacity)</li> <li>○ File review to examine the #'s of</li> </ul>



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		programs and services and hours of operation
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## VI. Conclusion

In closing, we have provided a brief overview of the previous evaluation, as well as the methodological strengths and weaknesses and how they might be improved. We have also outlined some key issues to be assessed in the future summative evaluation.

Because summative evaluations are intended for decision-makers with major roles in the program, it is important that they result in credible findings derived from scientific methods that can withstand criticism (Rossi et al., 2004). We hope that you will find our suggestions for the future evaluation helpful in this regard. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions, comments, or concerns.

## VII. References

Rossi, P. H., Lipsey, M. W., & Freeman, H. E. (2004). *Evaluation: A systematic approach* (7<sup>th</sup> ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

