

Voluntary Planning Board

**Annual Accountability Report
For The Fiscal Year 2006-2007**



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Accountability Statement

The accountability report of the Voluntary Planning Board for the year ended March 31, 2007, is prepared pursuant to the Provincial Finance Act and government policies and guidelines. These authorities require the reporting of outcomes against the Voluntary Planning Board business plan information for the fiscal year 2006-2007. The reporting of Voluntary Planning Board outcomes necessarily includes estimates, judgments and opinions by Voluntary Planning Board management.

We acknowledge that this accountability report is the responsibility of Voluntary Planning Board management. The report is, to the extent possible, a complete and accurate representation of outcomes relative to the goals and priorities set out in the Voluntary Planning Board business plan for the year.

Ron Smith, FCA
Chair, Voluntary Planning Board of Directors

Hon. Jamie Muir
Minister Responsible for Voluntary Planning

Introduction

This accountability report is based on the goals, priorities and performance measures set out in the Voluntary Planning Board business plan for the fiscal year 2006-2007. The business plan, available on our website at www.gov.ns.ca/vp *Publications*, more fully describes the organization's core business areas, goals and priorities for the year. It is recommended that this accountability report be read in conjunction with the business plan.

Mandate

Mission

To measurably improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of all Nova Scotians by providing the Premier and Cabinet with valuable volunteer and citizen-based advice on relevant policy issues for today and for the future.

The Voluntary Planning organization is unique in its ability to provide supplementary advice to Government decision makers, based on citizen input. This source of advice is not normally available to other governments in Canada.

Many of the issues of importance to society are long-term and directional in nature. Many citizens wish to play a part in shaping the strategic directions of the future, which may extend into 5-20 year time frames well beyond electoral mandates. By necessity, much of government's attention is focused on the shorter term. Also, many policy related matters, both existing and emerging, being cross-societal or horizontal in nature, range across departmental and societal boundaries.

A major strength of Voluntary Planning is to work effectively with these two aspects of horizontality and long-term planning. Voluntary Planning, through its excellent cadre of volunteer citizen leaders and experts, is well positioned to address matters of strategic importance to the province. Sound advice on policy options, based on a variety of citizen engagement processes, is provided to government decision makers.

Voluntary Planning's system of consulting, researching, and engaging talented people on the complex issues of the day, when employed, contributes significantly to the process of public policy making.

Strategic Goals

The Voluntary Planning Board strives to improve quality of life for Nova Scotians by:

- Addressing long-term policy issues
- Ensuring direct citizen participation in policy development
- Contributing to more responsive government policy and legislation
- Providing value and relevance to government and citizens

Core Business - Engaging Citizens

Voluntary Planning has a single core business, that being to enhance democracy and improve the quality of life for Nova Scotians by engaging knowledgeable volunteers and citizens in the formulation of policy advice to the Premier, Cabinet and departments.

The Voluntary Planning leadership entity is its Board of Directors. Its operations are carried out primarily through volunteer-led citizen engagement processes.

Major Projects

In recent years, Voluntary Planning has undertaken major projects assigned by the provincial government including the most recent citizen engagement processes on a natural resources strategy and on a heritage strategy.

Under volunteer-led citizen engagement processes, groups of knowledgeable volunteers are recruited to thoroughly research the subject, give all Nova Scotians an opportunity to provide input and comment, and produce their best advice in the form of recommendations or findings. Citizens are one important element, the others being stakeholders, experts, world-wide research and the thinking of the carefully selected people on the committee.

The Voluntary Planning processes consider the long-term benefit of the entire province and take full advantage of the opportunity to increase public knowledge and awareness on the issue at hand and of the value of contributing to such deliberations.

Direct Advice

On occasion, the Voluntary Planning Board of Directors, or other volunteers as assigned, are asked to provide advice directly to the Premier or other senior government representatives.

Other Models

While the above two operational modes are the typical approaches taken by Voluntary Planning to provide citizen based advice to government, the organization has the ability to modify its approach, depending on the issue at hand. In partnership with client departments, Voluntary Planning develops engagement processes that respond optimally to the specific needs of citizens and government and follow the organization's guiding principles for citizen engagement.

Organization

Volunteer Contributions

The strength of the Voluntary Planning organization is in the commitment of our dedicated volunteers. For the fiscal year 2006-2007, and a 16-month task force time frame, the following is an estimate of the total volunteer time contributed to the Province of Nova Scotia by the Voluntary Planning membership in the development of policy advice.

Board of Directors and planning steering committee - 15 volunteers (Apr 1'06-Mar31'07)
95 person days

Heritage Strategy Task Force - 11 volunteers (Apr 1'06-Dec 31'06) 345 person days *
Total 440 person days

To assign a monetary value to this volunteer contribution, at a per diem rate of \$1,000 for consulting services, for example, this contribution would be \$440k.

*Over the two fiscal yrs. that the project was underway, the Task Force volunteers contributed a total of 840 person days of volunteer time.

Funded Staff

FTEs: 6

Executive Director (1)
Project Manager (1)

Policy Staff (2)
Administrative Assistants (2)

The above six positions are core staffing to support the ongoing Board of Directors. These positions are supplemented through secondments or term positions to support major projects.

In January 2006, the Office of Economic Development hired a Community Development Project Director under the Community Development Policy Initiative. The Project Director worked out of the Voluntary Planning Board office until March 2007 in support of the organization's involvement in implementation of the policy.

An FTE and funding was provided to Voluntary Planning by the Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage to enable administrative support to be hired as a casual position for the duration of the Heritage Strategy Task Force project.

Voluntary Planning hired two Policy Research Associates through the Summer and Fall 2006 Co-operative Education programs.

Priorities and Accomplishments

I Citizen Engagement Priorities

To provide access to all Nova Scotians geographically, sectorally and socially in developing citizen-based input to government on policy issues.

In 2004-2005, the Voluntary Planning Board of Directors undertook a strategic review with particular attention to sharpening the organization's focus on long-term planning and policy advice, and on reflecting the diversity of Nova Scotian society in all its policies and practices.

One of the first outcomes of the review was the adoption of a statement of philosophy on citizen engagement as a tool in promoting and increasing the involvement of Nova Scotians in developing policy advice to government. (Appendix)

In furthering these principles, 2005-2006 marked the beginning of successful partnerships with government agencies that work with specific communities of interest, including the offices of Aboriginal Affairs, Acadian Affairs and African Nova Scotian Affairs. These partnerships continued in 2006-2007, and were expanded to include work with other agencies.

II Major Project Priorities

To provide policy advice to government and share findings based on the input of citizens, stakeholders and communities, through volunteer-led citizen engagement processes.

Heritage Strategy

On August 30, 2005, the Voluntary Planning Board announced the appointment of a Heritage Strategy Task Force. An 11-member panel engaged representatives of stakeholder organizations, experts and citizens to find out what Nova Scotians value most about heritage including the elements they wanted to see most celebrated and protected. Voluntary Planning conducted this review on behalf of the Province of Nova Scotia. The Task Force worked in partnership with the Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage and the Federation of Nova Scotian Heritage.

In addition to 22 community hall meetings held around the province in November 2005, and sessions with 49 stakeholder organizations and experts, the Task Force made special efforts to hear the views of typically under represented aspects of Nova Scotia's society in consultation processes including Mi'kmaq, African Nova Scotian, Acadian and newer immigrant communities. The Offices of Aboriginal Affairs, Acadian Affairs and African Nova Scotian Affairs, as well as the Multicultural Association of Nova Scotia worked with the Task Force to ensure the populations they serve had a strong voice in the early development of Nova Scotia's Heritage Strategy.

On June 21, 2006 the task force published its interim report that included 49 recommendations on a range of policy issues affecting Nova Scotia's cultural and natural heritage. A call for public responses to the interim report yielded 200 additional written submissions. Considering this input and the information gained from a second round of stakeholder meetings, the task force prepared a final report that was released December 14, 2006.

Fifty-nine recommendations for a provincial heritage strategy were issued in the final report entitled *Our Heritage Future: A Shared Responsibility*. The report addressed a comprehensive range of topic areas representing Nova Scotia's cultural and natural heritage. The task force called upon the provincial government to make difficult decisions, to invest more in heritage, and create several key partnerships.

Specific recommendations in the Task Force's final report include:

- the need to focus on cultural diversity, particularly Nova Scotia's Mi'kmaw, Acadian, and African Nova Scotian communities
- review, rationalize and restructure the province's museums system as soon as possible
- repeal the Treasure Trove Act to protect Nova Scotia's underwater heritage
- create a Nova Scotia Heritage Council to act as a strong independent voice on behalf of the heritage sector
- amend the Heritage Property Act to enable municipalities to protect municipally registered heritage properties

Community Development Vision

One of the key components of the Nova Scotia Community Development (CD) Policy Action Plan is to clarify the roles of communities and government in community development. In 2006-2007 Voluntary Planning assisted the Department of Economic Development in implementation of the policy through the following:

- Communication established through a variety of methods with community groups and presentations delivered to community, government and academic audiences about the CD Policy.
- Research conducted about key aspects of sustainable community development, including: using vision for community development, citizen engagement, collaborative leadership, community resilience, inclusion, social capital, social economy, social movements, sustainable communities.
- Preliminary steps taken to recruit a team of volunteers that would engage citizens and community groups in discussions about their vision for the future of Nova Scotia's communities.

Prior to fiscal year end, the Department of Economic Development announced a decision to suspend the citizen/community engagement initiative.

New Projects

At fiscal year end, March 31, 2007, it was expected that Voluntary Planning would be asked to undertake a major citizen engagement project to address the first stage of strategy development for the Department of Natural Resources. It was subsequently announced in May, 2007 that Voluntary Planning would lead a full year of independent consultations on the province's minerals, forests, provincial parks, and on the interaction among and within plant and animal species in our ecosystem (biodiversity).

III Vision Nova Scotia Priorities

To create and continuously update statements of vision about Nova Scotia life 5 to 20 years into the future, as advice to government.

One outcome of a strategic review undertaken in 2004-2005 by the Voluntary Planning Board of Directors was the creation of Vision Nova Scotia as an evolution of Voluntary Planning's sector committee approach to organizing and drawing upon the contribution of a network of volunteers.

Through the work of a volunteer steering committee in 2005-2007, preliminary work took place to define a structure and method of operation for Vision Nova Scotia. Subsequently, a decision was made by the Board of Directors to not proceed with this citizen engagement model at this time, however the principles of inclusiveness and sustainability developed through the planning process (encompassing the four dimensions of environmental, economic, social and cultural sustainability) have been incorporated in the overall operations of the organization.

IV Board of Directors Priorities

Offer advice directly to the Premier and Cabinet as requested and bring proposals and advice forward to government on potential new projects.

No direct advice from the Board of Directors was requested by the Premier and Cabinet in 2006-2007. Potential projects for 2007-2008 and beyond were discussed with Minister Angus MacIsaac, Minister Responsible for Voluntary Planning during the fiscal year.

Financial Results

Voluntary Planning Board			
Program and Service Area	Estimate 2006-2007	Actual 2006-2007	Variance
	(thousands)	(thousands)	
Net Program Expenses			
Major Projects	\$220	\$196	
Volunteer Network	\$194	\$156	
Board of Directors	\$94	\$85	
Total Net Program Expenses	\$508	\$437	(\$71)
Salaries and Benefits	\$382	\$394	\$12
Provincially Funded Staff (FTEs)	<u>6.0</u>	<u>5.7</u>	

Decrease of \$71.0

- **Increase in Less Chargeable of \$132.0** due to:
 - Salary recovery for NSGEU wage settlement (MCP, AS, Other and NSGEU employees) and MCP pay for performance from Restructuring Costs appropriation.
 - Recovery of costs relating to Heritage and Community Development Projects.
- **Offset by increase in salaries/fringe benefit costs of \$12.0**, mainly due to NSGEU wage settlement (MCP, AS, Other and NSGEU employees) and MCP pay for performance, offset by savings from vacancies.
- **Offset by increase in Operating costs of \$48.0** due to increased expenditures relating to the Heritage and Community Development Projects, offset by savings in Voluntary Planning's general office operating costs.

Performance Measures

Core Business:

Citizen Participation in the Formulation of Policy Advice to the Premier & Cabinet

The Voluntary Planning Board has a single core business, that being to enhance democracy and improve the quality of life for Nova Scotians by engaging knowledgeable volunteers and citizens in the formulation of policy advice to the Premier, Cabinet and departments.

Three intended outcomes of this core business are i) to raise awareness, education and participation by citizens on specific pressing issues of public policy and on the value of citizen involvement in policy development ii) to have an impact on public policy in Nova Scotia and iii) to enable diverse citizen participation in public policy development.

Intended Outcome 1:

Raise awareness, education and participation by citizens on specific pressing issues of public policy and on the value of citizen involvement in policy development.

Measure:

The number of informed comments received on issues under consideration

What does this measure tell us?

The participation level of those who have thoughtfully considered the issue

Where are we now?

The Heritage Strategy Task Force project spanned two fiscal years. In 2005-2006, 300 responses were received to the initial call for written submissions to the Heritage Strategy Task Force. 1000 Nova Scotians participated at 22 community meetings; 320 of the 1000 participants took the opportunity to provide their input at the meetings. In addition, the Task Force met with 49 stakeholder organizations and experts and 10 cultural communities of interest.

Based on this input, the task force published an interim report in June 2006. A call for public responses to the interim report yielded 190 written responses. In addition, the Task Force met with the Policy Advisor & Executive Assistant to the Minister for Gaelic Initiatives as a cultural community of interest, and 4 stakeholder organizations. The additional input and information gained was considered by the Task Force in producing its final report, released in December 2006.

Our target for this measure was to receive, from the public, 600-800 informed comments per year on issues under consideration, by adopting a higher public profile. Looking at the project over the two fiscal years, the Heritage Strategy Task Force exceeded this target through responses to the initial call for submissions in 2005-2006 and input to the interim report in 2006-2007.

During this fiscal year the Board of Directors approved Communications Guidelines for use by Voluntary Planning volunteers and staff.

Where do we want to be?

Voluntary Planning will continue to raise awareness, education and participation by citizens on policy matters by following approved communications guidelines, continued strong advertising to raise awareness of citizen engagement projects, intensive use of IT to solicit public response and negotiation and implementation of new projects.

Intended Outcome 2:

To have an impact on public policy in Nova Scotia

Measure:

The degree and potential effect of advice adopted and implemented by the provincial government

What does this measure tell us?

The adoption level of advice provided to the Premier & Cabinet and the level to which the adopted policy advice has been implemented

Where are we now?

Targets and strategies to measure the impact of Voluntary Planning's advice to government are to be considered.

Where do we want to be?

Voluntary Planning consistently seeks feedback from government on the degree to which its recommendations are adopted and implemented. Citizens in general and volunteers need a formal and transparent procedure to ascertain how their advice is being received and acted upon by government. This is essential for our business planning process as it will allow us to measure our impact.

Intended Outcome 3:

To enable diverse citizen participation in public policy development.

Measure:

The participation level of individuals reflecting Nova Scotia's diverse population and communities of interest in Voluntary Planning's initiatives.

Where Are We Now?

The Heritage Strategy Task Force project spanned two fiscal years. In 2005-2006 the Task Force received input from 9 community meetings conducted by the Office of African Nova Scotian Affairs. In addition, the Task Force held focus sessions with representatives from the Acadian community, the African Nova Scotia community, the Mi'kmaq Cultural Network and 7 newer immigrant communities. In 2006-2007 they met with the Policy Advisor and Executive Assistant to the Minister for Gaelic Initiatives. Input and information gained was considered by the Task Force in producing its final report, released in December 2006.

Where do we want to be?

To continue to partner with government agencies that work with specific communities of interest.

Voluntary Planning ...A Citizens' Policy Forum *Approach to Citizen Engagement*

Voluntary Planning Mission

To measurably improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of all Nova Scotians by providing the Premier and Cabinet with valuable volunteer and citizen-based advice on relevant policy issues for today and for the future.

Engaging Citizens

Voluntary Planning provides citizen-based input to government on policy issues affecting the lives of Nova Scotians. To do so, it draws on the expertise of volunteers who seek, hear, consider and deliberate on input and thought gained through various forms of citizen engagement. This approach is rooted in the belief that democracy is strengthened when citizens are engaged in an inclusive and transparent policy process designed to produce advice to government and fellow Nova Scotians.

To this end, Voluntary Planning strives to include all Nova Scotians geographically, sectorally and socially. Also we strive to operate in the service of government's policy needs but at arm's length from government. Finally, the process is transparent, open and fair, and is perceived to be so, in representing the consensus of citizens' views in combination with world-wide research, stakeholder and expert input.

Definition of Citizen Engagement

Citizen engagement refers to a process of involving citizens in the development of public policy. It is described as "...interactive and iterative processes of deliberation among citizens ... Its purpose is to contribute in meaningful ways to specific public policy decisions in a transparent and accountable manner.¹ The International Association for Public Participation outlines a Spectrum of Public Participation reflecting increasing levels of public impact: inform, consult, involve, collaborate, empower.² Voluntary Planning endeavors to achieve the optimum, appropriate level of participation in its citizen engagement work.

¹ Phillips, S.D. and M. Orsini. (2002). *Mapping the Links: Citizen Involvement in Policy Processes*, Canadian Policy Research Network.

² International Association for Public Participation. (2000). *IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum*

Guiding Principles for Citizen Engagement

In carrying out its work, Voluntary Planning (VP) will observe the following guiding principles:

- 1) Recognition of the interests of Stakeholders, Citizens and Communities:**
 - a) Communities, citizens and stakeholders are categories having a direct concern or interest in the decision or policy under discussion.
 - b) Stakeholders are persons or groups who are likely to be impacted in a specific manner or (conversely) may be able to impact the decision or policy under discussion.
 - c) “Community” may exist as geographic entities, or communities of interest(s).
 - d) The VP process will strive to ensure fair, comprehensive and equitable representation of stakeholders, citizens and communities in its consultation and engagement programs.

- 2) Inclusive:**

Voluntary Planning will enable diverse citizen participation by including variation in social class, gender, race, ethnicity, religion and age at every opportunity. Particular attention will be given to inclusion of the First Nations, women, persons with disabilities, African Canadians, Acadians and members of racially visible groups.

- 3) Respectful:**
 - a) VP will ensure the purpose and objectives of its consultation and engagement activities are clear to participants.
 - b) VP will foster a respectful atmosphere in its public consultation and engagement processes. A respectful atmosphere is one that enables participants to: have open dialogue; freely express ideas; achieve clear understanding, and; avoid premature judgement.
 - c) VP will adopt ground rules appropriate for the issues and for the needs of participants.
 - d) VP will design engagement activities to avoid or remove barriers, as much as possible, which may inappropriately limit stakeholder or citizen participation.

- 4) Objective:**
 - a) Besides citizen engagement, the VP process includes a commitment to independent research and the solicitation of stakeholder and expert opinion. In blending research, expert opinion and consultation, the VP process will always strive to be objective and fair in considering the input of all parties.
 - b) The VP process is an enabler and advocate for citizens as a vehicle through which relevant and important information can be gathered, clarified and distilled, leading to the formation of particular recommendations.

- 5) Responsive:**

The VP process will always undertake a response to participants such as through reports and/or set of recommendations reflecting the public input.