

Voluntary Planning Board

**Annual Accountability Report
For The Fiscal Year 2005-2006**



**VOLUNTARY
PLANNING**

A Citizens' Policy Forum

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Accountability Statement

The accountability report of the Voluntary Planning Board for the year ended March 31, 2006, 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 2005-2006. 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. Angus MacIsaac
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 2005-2006. 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 and environmental 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 and well beyond electoral mandates. A major strength of the Voluntary Planning Board process is to work effectively with these two aspects of horizontality and long-term planning.

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

The Voluntary Planning Board 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 public consultation. This approach is rooted in the belief that democracy is strengthened when citizens are engaged in an inclusive and transparent process designed to produce policy advice to government and fellow Nova Scotians.

To this end, Voluntary Planning strives to include all Nova Scotians geographically, sectorally and socially, and to operate in the service of government's policy needs but at arm's length from government. Finally, the process is transparent so that it is fair, and is perceived to be fair, in representing the views of citizens (See Appendix – *Approach to Citizen Engagement and Guiding Principles*).

The Voluntary Planning leadership entity is its Board of Directors. Its operations are carried out in three distinct ways:

1. Major Task Force Projects

In recent years, the Voluntary Planning Board has accepted major projects assigned by the provincial government. Most recently, the Heritage Strategy Task Force and the Community Development Policy Task Force and earlier, the Off-highway Vehicle Task Force, are three examples.

Under the task force process, a committee of knowledgeable volunteers is recruited to thoroughly research the subject, give Nova Scotians from all parts of the province an opportunity to provide input and comment, and produce their best advice in the form of recommendations. The Voluntary Planning process considers the long-term benefit of the entire province and takes 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.

2. Vision Nova Scotia

Vision Nova Scotia was a newly structured operational arm of the Voluntary Planning Board, created as an evolution of the organization's sector committee approach to organizing volunteers. Led by a small Steering Committee, which reported to the Voluntary Planning Board of Directors, its mandate was to create and frequently update statements of vision about Nova Scotia life 5 to 20 years into the future.

Vision Nova Scotia was seen as a unique organization within the province using inclusive approaches to address the full spectrum of societal life. This entity would direct and perform roles of research, discussion, deliberation and publication on long-term policy directions for government and citizens to consider for adoption. Subsequent to the fiscal year-end, a decision was made by the Board of Directors to not proceed with this citizen engagement model at this time.

3. 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. This service normally would not involve consultation beyond the Board of Directors or the set of volunteers engaged for the particular purpose.

Other Models

While the above three 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 to respond optimally to the specific needs of citizens and government depending on the issue at hand.

Organization

Volunteer Contributions

The strength of the Voluntary Planning organization is in the commitment of our dedicated volunteers. For the fiscal year 2005-2006, 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 - 13 volunteers (Apr 1'05-Mar 31'06)	90 person days
Vision Nova Scotia volunteers (Apr 1'05-Mar 31'06) (6-member Steering Committee meetings; 1 meeting with 41 volunteers)	115 person days
Heritage Strategy Task Force - 11 volunteers (Aug 31'05-Mar 31'06)	<u>495 person days</u>
Total	700 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 \$700,000.

Funded Staff

FTEs: Executive Director (1)	Policy Staff (2)
Project Manager (1)	Administrative Assistant (1)

The above five positions are core staffing. These positions are supplemented through secondments or term positions to support Major Task Force initiatives.

In January 2006, the Office of Economic Development hired a Community Development Project Director under the Community Development Policy Initiative. The Project Director is working out of the Voluntary Planning Board office over the next two years in support of the organization's involvement in implementation of the policy.

An FTE 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 a Policy Research Associate through the Summer 2005 Co-operative Education program.

Priorities and Accomplishments

I Citizen Engagement Priorities

To strive to include all Nova Scotians geographically, sectorally and socially in providing 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. The specific thrust of these partnerships is to expand Voluntary Planning's ability and capacity to be as inclusive as possible of Nova Scotia's diverse population in shaping public policy. These partnerships will continue, and be expanded to include work with other agencies in 2006-2007.

II Major Task Force Priorities

To provide policy advice to government based on the input of citizens, stakeholders and communities, through major project exercises led by selected volunteer Task Forces.

Heritage Strategy

On August 30, 2005, the Voluntary Planning Board announced the appointment of a Heritage Strategy Task Force. An 11-member panel consulted with stakeholders, experts and general citizens to find out what Nova Scotians value most about heritage including the aspects of it they want to see celebrated and protected. The Task Force conducted the review on behalf of the Federation of Nova Scotian Heritage and the Province of Nova Scotia.

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 communities of interest typically under represented in consultation processes – Mi'kmaq, African Nova Scotian, Acadian and newer immigrant communities. The Offices of Aboriginal Affairs, Acadian Affairs and African Nova Scotian Affairs, and the Multicultural Association of Nova Scotia partnered with the Task Force to make sure the populations they serve had a voice in the early development of Nova Scotia's Heritage Strategy.

At fiscal year end an interim report was being produced, capturing issues and points of view gathered from the public consultations. This report was released for public comment in June 2006 with a final report and recommended strategy to follow.

Community Development - Common Vision Project

The Government of Nova Scotia has adopted a new Community Development Policy to help communities respond to the challenges of today and tomorrow. The Community Development Policy recognizes that “the community plays the leadership role in its own development.”

One of the principles of the Community Development Policy is *Common Vision*: “Community members and Government define a common vision for the future.” The Office of Economic Development and Voluntary Planning have agreed to a partnership for building a province-wide vision for the future of Nova Scotia communities that will provide a framework for future community development. This work will build on the achievements of many groups in Nova Scotia in the past. The outcomes of this project will include:

- A common vision for communities as the basis for community-government collaboration
- Clarification of the roles of communities and government in community development
- Identification of a mechanism and/or processes for community-government collaboration

In 2005-2006 the project began with a planning and design phase to define how the work will be done. This phase included world wide research on citizen engagement and the use of vision to guide community development. Project staff also began networking with community development stakeholders around the province to let them know the work is underway and to engage them in the process.

The project will be led by a volunteer task force to be recruited by Fall 2006. A broad range of stakeholders will be invited to participate in a community development forum in November 2006 to launch the Common Vision Project and engagement plan. The forum will be followed by six months of engagement (January to June 2007) in two streams - citizens and stakeholders – to hear their ideas about a vision for the future of their communities and how communities, government and other stakeholders can work collaboratively toward that vision. The task force is expected to release a final report to government by March 2008.

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.

A preliminary launch for the Vision Nova Scotia arm of the Voluntary Planning Board took place in September 2005. Former sector committee members met to learn more about the concept of Vision Nova Scotia and provide input into its proposed structure and method of operating as developed to date by a volunteer Steering Committee.

Beyond the expressions of interest from former sector members, additional participants were being recruited to reach a total membership of approximately 60. In partnership with government agencies, a specific focus was made on recruiting individuals reflecting Nova Scotia's diverse population, in particular, First Nations, women, persons with disabilities, African Canadians, Acadians and members of racially visible groups. Voluntary Planning also explored ways of involving Nova Scotia's youth in this and other Voluntary Planning initiatives.

At fiscal year-end, a forum was being planned for Spring 2006 as the official launch with the full Vision Nova Scotia team. 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 (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 2005-2006. Potential projects for 2006-2007 and beyond were discussed with Minister Michael Baker, Minister Responsible for Voluntary Planning during the fiscal year.

Financial Results

Voluntary Planning Board			
Program and Service Area	Actual 2004-2005	Estimate 2005-2006	Actual 2005-2006
	(\$thousands)	(\$thousands)	(\$thousands)
Ordinary Revenues	\$0	\$0	\$0
Total Expenses - Gross	\$413	\$446	\$533
Less Recoveries for Task Force Projects	\$45		\$83
Less Recoveries for Salary Adjustments	\$4		\$8
Total Expenses - Net of Recoveries	\$364	\$446	\$442
Salaries and Benefits	\$227	\$329	\$343
Provincially Funded Staff (FTEs)	<u>5.0</u>	<u>5.0</u>	<u>5.0</u>

Voluntary Planning contributes resources directly to Major Task Force efforts in the form of office administration and support as well as salaries and benefits for applicable Voluntary Planning staff assigned to various projects.

All operations funding for Major Task Force initiatives typically comes from outside of Voluntary Planning's core budget.

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 volunteer members 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 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?

Heritage Strategy Task Force: 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.

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. It is expected that the total responses to the Heritage Strategy Task Force will exceed this target through responses to the initial call for submissions in this fiscal year and input to the interim report to be released 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 task force projects, intensive use of IT to solicit public response and negotiation and implementation of new projects.

Discontinued Measure:

The number of editorials, articles, radio or TV presentations prompted on issues under consideration as an indicator of the degree to which the media has been prompted to participate thoughtfully in the discussion of an issue.

Although media coverage is tracked on an informal basis, it was felt data may not be sufficiently captured to consider it an accurate measure.

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?

On December 8, 2005 Bill 275 was passed amending the Off-highway Vehicles Act. The legislative amendments covered the major categories of the final Task Force recommendations. As a result of this initiative, and the others in government's action plan announced in November 2005 a substantial portion of the Task Force's recommendations have been accepted and are in the process of being implemented.

Targets and strategies to measure the impact of Voluntary Planning's advice to government were not set for 2005-2006.

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 Task Force members 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.

New Outcome:

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?2005/06 Achievements

At fiscal year end additional Vision Nova Scotia participants were being sought with a specific focus on recruiting individuals reflecting Nova Scotia's diverse population.

The Heritage Strategy 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.

Where do we want to be?2006/07 Commitments

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 improve in a measurable way the social, economic and environmental 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 public consultation. 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; and to operate in the service of government's policy needs but at arm's length from government. Finally, the process is transparent so that it is fair, and is perceived to be fair, in representing the views of citizens.

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 highest possible level of participation in its citizen engagement work.

¹Phillips, 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.