

Moving Towards “Clear Results”:
A Cross-Sectoral Workshop on the
Recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Panel
Report on Grants and Contributions

WORKSHOP REPORT

June 2007



THE PUBLIC POLICY FORUM

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On June 11, 2007, the Public Policy Forum facilitated a Workshop on Grants and Contributions that brought together 60 individuals from government departments and recipient communities to follow-up on the recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Panel Report released by the government in February 2007.

The day focused on three issues identified by recipient communities as being of particular importance:

1. How will the government and recipient communities work together on these issues?
2. Multi-year funding/predictability of funding.
3. Horizontal consistency across government departments.

Discussions were started by bringing each other up-to-date on developments that happened over the spring, and by sharing of existing “Best Practices” that could provide models for addressing the three issues.

Key Points

From the day’s discussion, there are several key messages that should help frame future interaction and provide a basis for moving forward:

1. There is a significant amount of work taking place both within departments and horizontally across government to reform the administration of grants and contributions as follow-up to commitments made by the President of the Treasury Board of Canada when the Blue Ribbon Panel Report was released.
2. Recipient communities will continue to be engaged in the process.
3. An Action Plan for the way forward will be released by government in the fall.
4. Community nonprofit sector under the leadership of Imagine Canada will continue to work together on the Report recommendations and to promote dialogue with government.
5. Aboriginal organizations see the review of the transfer payment policy as a positive step forward and would like to see more work done on the notion of accreditation and web-based solutions.
6. There are a number of Best Practices that need to be shared and used more broadly. The work Service Canada and their recipient communities are doing is an excellent model for working together and achieving concrete results.
7. Government and recipient communities should be striving to make the use of multi-year funding agreements and more predictable funding the norm not the exception.
8. Action should be taken to promote horizontal consistency across departments in a number of areas. Standardizing audit requirements would be a good first step. Standardizing contract and contribution agreement language would be another.

Next Steps

1. Develop a strategy for recipient communities' engagement.
2. Identify where multi-year funding is taking place and the conditions that enable these. Share these "conditions" broadly so that other recipients can endeavor to achieve this.
3. Formalization of a Centre of Expertise to provide the focal point for a horizontal approach to grants and contributions.
4. Development of an Action Plan that targets areas for early successes that will make a real difference to recipient communities, such as a review of audit requirements.

The Tone and Spirit of the Day

The day ended with a declared sense of hopefulness. Several participants felt the Workshop had provided a great opportunity to get to know each other and that it had renewed their belief that change was possible. Recipient community representatives indicated their desire to be part of a process to move forward and their delight at hearing the government's commitment to engagement and action.

"This can be a win-win-win situation where politicians, the public service and recipient communities can all benefit from streamlined processes that lead to the biggest win - better service to Canadians." – *Recipient*

1.0 BACKGROUND

On February 14, 2007, the Government of Canada released The Blue Ribbon Panel Report on Grants and Contribution Programs: *"From Red Tape to Clear Results"*. In the accompanying news release, The Honourable Vic Towe announced, as a first step in response to the report, a series of immediate actions to improve how grants and contribution programs are managed. These steps included "the development of an action plan to reform the administration of grants and contributions with a view to ensuring they deliver clear results in the most effective and efficient way possible within a sensible risk management framework" and the commitment to "continue to consult with the recipient community as this action plan is developed."

With the express purpose of moving forward with these government commitments, the Treasury Board of Canada asked the Public Policy Forum (PPF) to bring together individuals from government and recipient communities to discuss the way ahead.

1.1 The Process

Informal advisory group for designing this Workshop: In the spirit of modeling working together, the PPF worked with an informal advisory group of recipient communities, the Treasury Board Secretariat and departments identified as being the “vanguard” for change. The group worked towards creating a day of initial engagement that talked through issues that matter to both government and recipient communities and identified next steps. The design of the day reflected the desired outcomes and issues initially identified as important to both government and recipient communities as articulated by the informal advisory group.

The Goal for the day: The goal was to create a day that would help move the Blue Ribbon Panel recommendations forward and be a constructive next step in working together on these recommendations.

1.2 How the Day Was Designed

The Blue Ribbon Panel’s report called for “continuing engagement of concerned departments and agencies and ongoing dialogue with recipient communities” in order to support a “sustained program of changes.” The report also laid out proposed timelines that demonstrated that this process is long-term. It was recognized that the issues put forward in the Report could not be solved in the span of one day. Rather, the workshop was meant to bring together a diverse group of departments and recipient community organizations to continue the momentum that has been generated by the Panel’s report and to help strengthen the on-going engagement process.

Working with the PPF, the advisory group proposed the following **desired outcomes** for the day:

- Determine how to work together on this issue;
- Identify the areas where engagement and collective focus is necessary;
- Share best practices and discuss the “art of the possible”; and,
- Provide a neutral environment, where participants can have a frank and open exchange in order to build an understanding of the issues faced by both government and the recipient communities.

In deciding how to structure the day, the advisory group thought it was important to focus on three issues identified by recipient communities as being of particular importance:

1. How will the government and recipient communities work together on these issues?
2. Multi-year funding/predictability of funding
3. Horizontal consistency across departments

1.3 The Participants

Government participants at the workshop were selected by their departments and approached the issue from various perspectives: policy, finance and program delivery. Most representatives from recipient communities had been involved in the consultations of the Blue Ribbon Panel. Others were recommended for inclusion by advisory group members who felt their perspectives would enrich the day's discussion. The help of Imagine Canada in coordinating the participation of many of the participants was invaluable. (See annex A for complete list of participants.)

1.4 Important Issues to be addressed as we go forward:

Given the limited time available and to help set the tone for the day, it was essential that participants be given the opportunity to voice their views on what other issues (in addition to the initial 3 identified by the informal advisory group) were important and need to be addressed. The following were identified as other important issues:

- Governance process and structure? How are we going to steer and guide this change process?
- Structure and process being set up in government (TBS and Vanguard departments)
- Need a new model for how we engage and manage change
- How does this day fit into change process?
- What the future holds: Time frame and Process
- Create a common vision/goal
- Pick a few key places to focus
- Learn from the past
- Types of Funding: Instruments, Core
- Recognition of the Current context: Erosion of funding
- Encouraging innovation within recipient communities by the government providing long-term funding
- Interlocutor role – a focal point?
- “Recipients’ as stakeholders?
- Working with other orders of government – need to consider this
- Involvement of other departments?

2.0 WORKING TOGETHER

Guiding Question: How will we work together/What processes will we use?

Representatives from government and recipient communities agreed that finding an effective way to work together on the issue of grants and contributions program reform was extremely important.

Common Ground:
“We all just want the same thing – to make this process simpler and get results for Canadians.”

2.1 Bringing each other up to date

In the spirit of sharing and transparency and to set the context for the day, participants started by bringing each other up-to-date on what they have been doing about the Blue Ribbon Panel Report.

2.1.1 Treasury Board Secretariat

The Treasury Board Secretariat (TBS) talked about this Workshop as part of on-going engagement and a collaborative process to develop a more coherent, modern and smart approach to service for Canadians. Regular meetings at the Deputy Minister, Assistant Deputy Minister and Director/Director General levels are taking place in support of changes to the grants and contributions program. In particular, government is working on:

“We are committed to working with recipient communities on a sustained program of change”.
- *Government*

- 1) the development of a government-wide action plan to reform the administration of grants and contributions;
- 2) a business review exercise to identify opportunities for improved service and efficiencies;
- 3) the development of departmental action plans;
- 4) the engagement of recipient communities as the action plans are being developed; and
- 5) the establishment of a Centre of Expertise.

Highlights:

- We need to develop pragmatic solutions based on the numerous existing Best Practices.
- Front-line managers in both government and recipient communities should be encouraged to recommend other possibilities to simplify the functioning of the current program.
- Change in the magnitude envisioned by the Blue Ribbon Panel will require a cultural shift and sustained leadership.
- TBS plans to table its Action Plan in the fall.

- It is really important for government and the recipient communities to work together on a sustained program of change.
- This Workshop provides an excellent opportunity to extend collaboration.

2.1.2 Vanguard Departments¹

The vanguard departments spoke of the work being undertaken within their own departments.

Highlights:

- They are active in the government-wide exercise and are formulating their own departmental Action Plans.
- Departmental Action Plans will be a key part of the government-wide plan.
- Interaction between departments at the working group level is helping them recognize what they were already doing well and inspiring them to make changes based on what others were doing well.
- It is important to work towards incremental and sustained change.
- They are seeking ways to streamline the funding process and developing consistent risk management approaches.
- Some departments are piloting new service standards and on-line applications, as well as looking at the feasibility of offering a single window approach for applications, joint audits and an accredited partner concept that would streamline the application process.
- Departments want to hear from the recipient communities about what is important to them and what areas of change would have the most impact from their perspective.
- Some departments have already engaged their particular recipient communities.
- It is important to find a common agenda for moving forward.
- There needs to be a good understanding of what government and recipient communities are doing well e.g. ACOA's approach.

“Recipient communities are going to have to push us to ensure the momentum for change is maintained....This is a risk adverse culture.”
- *Government*

2.1.3 Recipient Communities

Representatives from a range of recipient communities were in the room and spoke about their views and experiences

¹ Canadian Heritage, Health Canada, Human Resources and Social Development Canada, Service Canada, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, Canadian International Development Agency, Canada Economic Development

Highlights:

- An ad hoc committee for the community nonprofit sector has been convened by Imagine Canada to monitor the work that is being undertaken in response to the Blue Ribbon Panel's Report and to provide feedback to their community. The Chair of the committee spoke about the informal network of organizations that had been formed under Imagine Canada's leadership to work together to move the recommendations forward.
- There are a lot of parallels between what government has been doing and what recipient communities have been doing.
- We need to determine how we will work together and build linkages.
- The need to continue the dialogue with government and to include the recipient communities in finding solutions is important.
- This Workshop is a good step in the right direction.
- The funding situation among Aboriginal groups is varied. Some receive endowments, some transfer payments and some grants and contributions.
- There is support for the current work being undertaken to revise the transfer payment policy.
- More work should be done on the idea of accreditation as a way to recognize the maturity of organizations and on the possible establishment of a First Nations' Auditor General.
- More web-based tools could help lighten the paper burden.
- Aboriginal recipient communities are working on their own issues as well e.g. exploring whether they can establish their own accreditation process; streamlining the number of reporting items.
- Strengthening capacity of aboriginal organizations in the area of finance and governance is important.

2.2 BUILDING ON WHAT IS WORKING WELL: BEST PRACTICE OF ENGAGEMENT AND RESULTS**Guiding question: What can we learn from what we are already doing well?**

Hearing about the "Best Practices" that currently exist set the stage for participants to build on what is already working well and to use these as models for further action.

Service Canada and recipient communities Best Practice: How Service Canada and recipient communities have worked together to bring about innovation and change.**Joint processes – the importance of engagement and shared governance**

- Service Canada worked with recipient communities to establish an interim advisory committee with representatives from a wide variety of recipient organizations.
- Working groups were co-chaired by recipient communities and ADM.

- Communiqués were issued jointly.
- Joint training sessions were held to ensure equal understanding of the issues.
- Information was readily shared between government and the recipient communities.
- Recipient Community leadership was really important

Administrative burden improvements – what has been achieved

- Revised and streamlined ‘Call for proposals’ process.
- Streamlined internal approval process by eliminating multiple internal review committees.
- Streamlined audit requirements.
- A new eligible cost list to address many of the shortfall areas experienced by recipient communities.
- Full cost recovery for programs being delivered on behalf of the government.
- Improved budget flexibility.
- Simplified accounting that cut cost areas down to 7.
- A flat rate option that allows for 15% administrative overhead.

New Structures – embedding the change

- Established a Permanent *Voluntary Sector Advisory Committee*.
- Established the *Office of the Fairness Advisor* to address complaints and suggestions for further improvements. The voluntary sector was part of hiring process.

Critical success factors – what made this work

- There was a leadership commitment from the Deputy Minister.
- The Committee was co-chaired by the Assistant Deputy Minister and a Voluntary Sector representative.
- There was a spirit of openness and trust.
- Government and recipient communities agreed on what issues required focused attention.
- Working groups were task oriented.
- Issues were approached from a position of problem solving.
- The recipient community established an engagement sub-committee to support communications internally, to collaborate and communicate with one voice, and to engage the sector across Canada.
- Government brought the right people to the table (including Treasury Board and other departments) at the right time.
- All participants bought into the principles and commitments contained in the Voluntary Sector Initiative Accord² as touchstones to guide discussions.

² Voluntary Sector Initiative Accord can be found at www.vsi-isbc.ca.

- Service Canada provided funding to cover the time and travel of recipient community members involved.
- Being clear on what recipient communities and government had to work on together and what was work that each sector needed to do on its own

Participants then discussed the importance of identifying what can be changed and how to deal with the current inhibitors to change. It was acknowledged that having a set of principles to guide discussions is very useful and that it is important to find areas for early success. It was suggested that there should be an examination of the existing financial authorities and a determination of why they are not being used to their fullest.

“We need to be clear about what we are engaging on” and “find the areas where the impact will be the greatest.”

- *Government*

“It is important that we pick specific areas for focus.” – *Recipient Communities*

Communities

2.3 How can we build on this Best Practice? Next Steps on working together?

1. Develop a strategy for recipient engagement.
2. The Centre of Expertise in the Treasury Board Secretariat will ensure focus on generating cultural change and demonstrate leadership in streamlining the administration of grants and contributions.
3. Recipient communities have an important role to play in their own communities and need to stay involved in departmental discussions.
4. Recipient communities will require capacity and financial support to participate in any on-going dialogue in a meaningful way.
5. Sharing information on Best Practices as a way to help departments and recipient communities understand what is actually possible and what each sector can do. An “education and consultation kit” for front-line government employees and recipient communities that highlights follow-up to the Panel’s Report and existing Best Practices would be very useful. Consider a website space on best practices that all can access and learn from.
6. Not everything can be done at once and not everything needs to be done together. This process is multi-layered and requires consultation/discussion inside departments, inside government, between specific departments and their recipient communities, as well as between government writ large and recipient communities writ large on collective issues that affect all.
7. Front-line workers need to be involved.
8. The key is being clear on what must be done together, focusing on solving problems and having successes that will maintain the momentum.

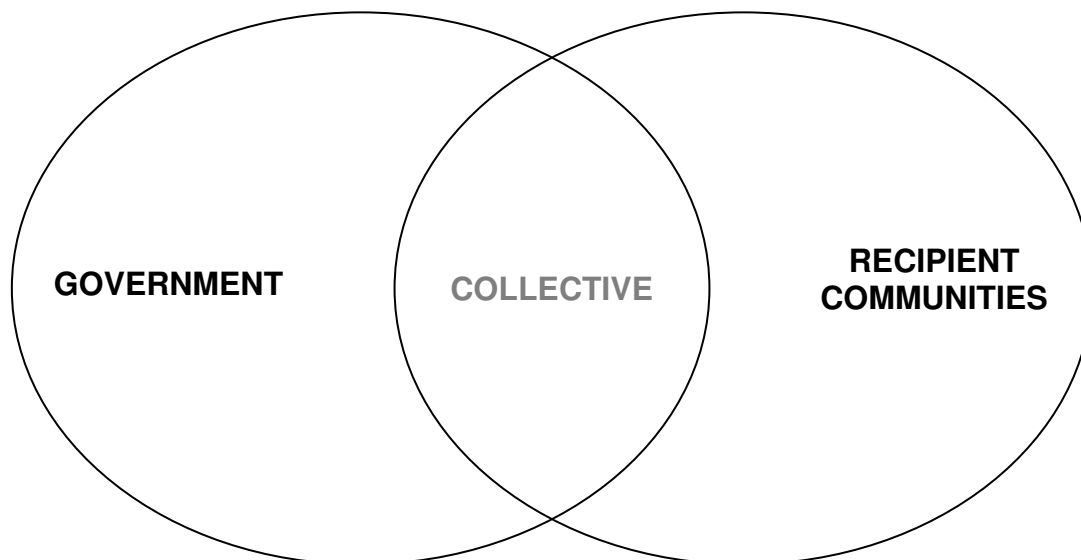
“Recipient communities want to be equal partners engaged in common tasks.”

– *Recipient Communities*

Approach to working together

The approach used in the Service Canada model was described as the “Overlapping Circles” approach. The concept recognizes that there are areas where each of the groups of participants needs to work on their own and deal with their own challenges, accountabilities and terms and conditions. This is the case for departments, government, Aboriginal communities and the community nonprofit sector.

Where the circles overlap there are possibilities for collective action and impact.



3.0 FOCUSING ON TWO HIGH IMPACT ISSUES

3.1 Multi-Year Funding/Predictability of funding

The advisory group identified multi-year funding as one of the two key issues to be discussed at the Workshop. To recipient communities, this term meant predictability of funding that allowed them to continue to deliver programs, hire staff and pay the rent on office space. In short, multi-year funding/ predictability of funding was stressed as key to ensuring stable service delivery.

Guiding Question: What can we learn from existing multi-year funding arrangements and other best practices to create similar conditions with other recipient communities and do this more broadly?

Highlights of discussion:

- Multi-year funding can and is being done but there is an important link between multi-year funding and having multi-year programs.

“Multi-year and predictable does not equal eternal.”
– *Recipient Communities*

- Multi-year agreements can provide access to support from Banks should government funding get delayed.
- Multi-year agreements can also include the notion of a responsibility for budget management that would allow for a carry-forward of funds not spent within a fiscal year.
- Multi-year funding should be available to organizations with a proven track record, should include the ability to shift an agreed upon percentage of funds from one category to another and cover the actual cost of delivering programs.
- There is an important difference between on-going administration funding and core funding which was not on the agenda for this meeting.
- What is needed is a system that makes life simpler for government and recipient communities and that ensures money is well spent.

Some important **principles** were tabled for consideration:

1. Funding is used to deliver results for Canadians.
2. The goals are outputs and outcomes not processes.
3. Service standards were proposed: e.g. where ever possible funding commitments should be for 3 years, with a 3 month termination clause.
4. Consideration needs to be given to exit strategies when funding is terminated.
5. Administration costs to run programs should be included as eligible costs.
6. Multi-year funding agreements should include a yearly evaluation.
7. Accreditation and trusted relationships should provide a basis for eligibility to multi-year agreements.
8. Carry over of surpluses should be considered

Why is multi-year funding possible in some cases...

- There is a multi-year program in place.
- There is a proven track record of service delivery with the recipient.
- The building of an on-going relationship with the recipient community is valued.
- Risk management practices are in place.

And not others...

- Some Terms and Conditions are written so only one year funding is possible.
- There is not a proven track record of service delivery.
- Where programs are designed to keep the door open to other possible recipients to ensure equity of access.

Where to from here...? Next Steps?

1. What needs to happen to expand the use of multi-year funding agreements and to make funding more predictable? Where are multi-year funding agreements in place and what are the conditions that enable these?
2. How should the concept of accreditation be pursued?
3. What does government need to ensure good and timely service by government to recipient communities, what service standards should be put in place?

3.2 Horizontal Consistency

Guiding Question: What can be done to improve the consistency of practices across departments to lighten the work load for both government and recipient communities?

Horizontal consistency was seen by both government and recipient communities as being important to moving forward. It was noted that consistency and coherence are needed, not only across government, but within individual departments. Continuing the dialogue across departments and with recipient communities can build a consistent approach and understanding.

“...need to differentiate between horizontality, horizontal consistency and horizontal accountability ...standardization is probably easier than coordination.”
– *Government Department*

Promoting Horizontal Consistency of practices - Areas for early successes

1. Develop consistent and streamlined audit requirements.
2. Standardize the wording in Contribution Agreements/contracts within departments and across government. Simplify, simplify. Simplify!
3. Train public servants and recipient community representatives to ensure the grants and contributions program is applied consistently and to publicize Best Practices.
4. Develop and implement a communications strategy to ensure that the work on this issue is understood across all departments/organizations.

4.0 THE WAY FORWARD: Looking ahead to next steps

Key Areas for Immediate Attention

Possible areas for working together:

- Develop a strategy for recipient engagement.
- Follow through on the ideas and momentum begun today

Multi-year funding/predictability of funding:

- Identify where multi-year funding is taking place and the conditions that enable these. Share these “conditions” broadly so that other recipients can endeavor to achieve this.

Horizontal Consistency:

- Establish a Centre of Expertise to provide the focal point for streamlining the administration of grants and contributions.

- Develop Action Plans that targets areas for early successes that will make a real difference to recipient communities, such as a review and simplification of audit requirements and streamlining audits, standardizing language in contribution agreements and contracts

Participants stressed that in order to have real follow-through on the Blue Ribbon Panel Report, there needs to be a renewed sense of trust and that this Workshop had made them more hopeful at that prospect. There was talk of how this day could evolve into a win-win-win situation where politicians, the public service and recipient communities could all benefit from streamlined processes that lead to better services to Canadians.

“I think today’s discussion has created a good recipe for action”
– *Recipient Communities*

5.0 CLOSING COMMENTS: COMMITMENT AND CURRENT CONTEXT

The Treasury Board Secretariat closed the day by indicating that making progress on the modernization of the grants and contributions program was tremendously important to the government.

Highlights:

- Commitment of current government - This has been identified by the Prime Minister as key in dealing with the so-called “web of rules”.
- This is a very complicated process that will need to be worked on at various levels.
- It is clear that early “wins” are possible but that changes can not stop there.
- How the government and the recipient communities can work together will be key to cultural change.
- Early progress will help sustain the momentum.
- This may mean taking some risks to move innovation forward so investing in management capacity and risk training will be very important.
- This Workshop has helped to kick this off.
- Hope to see good progress by the fall.

“Having clear and shared objectives across government and with the recipient communities is essential.”
- *Government*

ANNEX A – PARTICIPANT LIST

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