

A Different Voice

Perspectives on the
United Kingdom's civil society

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Introduction

“We hope this report will stimulate broader conversations within the voluntary sector in Alberta and, more broadly, Canada.”

Chambers of voluntary organizations, such as the Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations (CCVO), are fairly recent additions to the Canadian nonprofit world. As a relatively new organization (founded in 2004), CCVO can benefit tremendously by learning from the experience and practices of other sector-serving organizations, which motivated CCVO President and CEO Katherine van Kooy and Senior Policy Analyst Kim Mustard to visit a number of lead organizations in the United Kingdom (UK) in October 2010.

The UK's political and regulatory environment is similar to Canada's, increasing the potential to apply and transfer models and practices to the Canadian context. The UK also has a long and successful history of sector infrastructure organizations that provides a relevant and rich source of experience from which CCVO can further its own practices. Based on the success of a previous site visit with the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits in 2006, our expectations were high and we were not disappointed.

Over the course of a week, we met with six lead organizations:

- Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (ACEVO)
- Central London Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) Network
- Charities Aid Foundation (CAF)
- Charity Commission for England and Wales

- London Voluntary Service Council (LVSC)
- National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)

(More information about these organizations can be found in Appendix A.)

The geographical range (local, regional and national) and mandates of these organizations reflect the scope of CCVO's work and relate to various aspects of our program areas. Our primary areas of interest were:

1. Policy work and building policy capacity.
2. Research approaches and the strategic use of sector data.
3. Approaches to member and sector engagement.
4. Revenue development practices.

The trip proved to be an incredibly rich learning experience. We returned with reams of information, reports and notes from our meetings, and renewed energy in our vision and mission. This report summarizes our key observations and findings. What we learned will influence CCVO's work in many ways and we hope this report will stimulate broader conversations within the voluntary sector in Alberta and, more broadly, in Canada.

Observations and Findings



Civil society in the UK is grappling with many of the same issues that challenge the voluntary sector in Canada.

Different Countries, Similar Issues

We expected that the similarities in political and regulatory context would ease the transfer of knowledge, practices and resources from the UK to the Canadian environment, but were somewhat surprised by the extent of similarities between the two countries.

Civil society in the UK is grappling with many of the same issues that challenge the voluntary sector in Canada – issues related to funding, workforce development, the need to build organizational capacity, implications of changing government priorities and the impact of new funding models. The various research reports we reviewed describe situations and recommend actions that are equally applicable to the Canadian experience.

The impact of the global economic downturn is felt in many parts of the sector, especially in terms of increased demand for services; however, there is great concern about the impact of deep government funding cuts, announced during our visit. Organizations are struggling to understand what the British government's Big Society¹ vision would mean for the sector and the communities they serve.

The voluntary sector in Canada has also been anticipating changes as federal and provincial governments address their budgetary shortfalls. For the most part, Canadian governments have not yet announced major changes affecting the sector, but the UK experience will be interesting to watch in terms of both policy directions and implications for the sector.

Beyond funding cuts in the UK, there was an expectation that government would rely more on outcomes-based contracted service delivery models. Concerns were raised that the scale of the contracts (i.e. regional services) would make it difficult, if not impossible, for nonprofits to compete because they would not have the financial resources necessary to assume the risk for such large undertakings. Specific changes were still unclear; however, the expectation was that changes to funding models would change the way many nonprofits do their business.

In Alberta, changing funding models, such as outcomes-based service delivery or using a coordinating agency such as the Calgary Homeless Foundation to allocate program funding from a number of different sources, are also driving changes in roles, structures and practices of nonprofits.

Workforce development was one of the issues we were particularly curious about. Although workforce issues are important in both Alberta and in the UK, there are some striking differences. For example, in Alberta, the main workforce challenges stem from intense competition for workers, which is expected to worsen in the future, and the difficulty for voluntary sector organizations to offer competitive wages and benefits. In the UK, the major challenge is upgrading the skills and competencies of the civil society workforce. The salary disparities that exist in Alberta, for example between similar positions in government and the nonprofit sector, do not seem to be an issue in the UK where wage parity is more the rule. When responsibilities devolve from government to the voluntary sector in the UK, the nonprofit organizations are expected to maintain equivalent salaries and benefits. As a result, one of the concerns about further transfer of service delivery from government to civil society organizations in the UK is the liability organizations would be assuming for future pensions.

1. Big Society is a new coalition government agenda, introduced in May 2010, which focuses on three areas: community empowerment; opening up public services; and social action.



The commonality of issues and challenges experienced by the voluntary sector in Canada and the UK, point to the value in tracking and monitoring programs and research in the UK and using this to inform our work in Canada.

Role and Value of Sector Infrastructure Organizations

The UK enjoys a comprehensive network of local, regional and national infrastructure organizations within the voluntary sector. Many organizations have long histories of serving their communities. For example, NCVO and LVSC have been operating in some form for more than 100 years.

The infrastructure organizations in the UK seem to have an accepted and valued role, both within the sector and with government, which often refers to them as a partner.

For example, the Charity Commission explicitly states that it will work “in partnership with sector umbrella groups” as a means of fulfilling its mandate to support charities. Umbrella groups or other infrastructure organizations are seen to provide a valuable and legitimate role in connecting organizations locally, regionally or nationally. They are an efficient means of providing services or resources to a wide range of organizations; engaging them around common issues; and communicating on behalf of the sector and also providing an effective mechanism through which government can work with the sector.

The recognition by government of the importance of sector infrastructure is illustrated by *ChangeUp*, a government program introduced by the Home Office in 2004 to fund the development of voluntary sector infrastructure. The goal of this program is to build capacity and achieve a sustainable baseline of infrastructure support locally, regionally and nationally. While we can’t comment on the effectiveness of this initiative, recognition of the need and a deliberate government investment strategy to support voluntary sector infrastructure is enviable.

Each of the organizations we met with serves the sector in different ways, but there is a lot of commonality with similar organizations in Canada.

The civil society infrastructure in the UK demonstrates what is possible when the need for sector infrastructure is recognized and supported.

We were intrigued by the CAF, which plays a lead role in developing more and better financing options for the sector, including charity banking services and access to capital and micro-financing through Venturesome. The CAF also seeks to foster understanding between the corporate and voluntary sectors through its research, convening peer learning circles and other means of sharing knowledge about and between the two sectors.

The value of a network of infrastructure organizations is the ability to leverage off each others’ work, amplifying the benefit for frontline organizations. We met with organizations operating at all three levels, and saw the complementary roles they played in supporting the broader voluntary sector.

Similar to CCVO and our Canadian colleagues, the lead UK organizations are aware they need to stay connected with the frontline organizations working at the community level. This becomes more difficult as the infrastructure organizations move away from the local level. For example, regional organizations expressed challenges in gaining a strong sense of where local organizations sat on issues. In these situations, strong communication between the local and regional infrastructure organizations is critical. National organizations strive to maintain connections at the local level through regional events, conferences, considerable surveying on issues and maintaining multiple avenues for communication and networking.

The infrastructure organizations at all levels also discussed challenges in fostering collaboration and sharing best practices between local organizations. The Central London CVS Network workforce development initiative is an example of



working towards a more collaborative approach by organizations in seven London boroughs to strengthen their capacity to address common workforce issues – in this case, training and development needs. Projects like this demonstrate the value of a coordinating group to animate and support this broader collaborative activity.

But building these networks takes time and resources. The UK examples demonstrate on a large scale the role supported networks play in sharing information and helping to replicate projects, increasing impact and value for money spent. It also points to the need for sustained funding support for these types of initiatives in order to move beyond the start-up challenges and begin to see real benefits emerge.

From a Canadian perspective, the civil society infrastructure in the UK demonstrates what is possible when the need for sector infrastructure is recognized and supported. Our challenge is to determine how we can build this understanding and support both within and outside the sector.

Understanding the Dynamic Relationship between Government and the Sector

Time and time again, we were struck by the differences between the sector-government relationships in Canada and the UK. From an external perspective, three areas seemed to highlight the nature of the sector-government relationship in the UK:

- The role of the charity regulator, the Charity Commission for England and Wales.
- Advocacy and the engagement of the sector in public policy.
- The level of funding support.

Role of the Regulator

The Charity Commission (the UK equivalent of the Canada Revenue Agency's Charities Directorate) is the regulatory agency for the 180,000 registered charities in England and Wales. The Commission is an independent regulator of charitable activity. Described as a modern regulator, the Commission's

mandate and activities reflect marked differences in government culture and attitude from those in Canada. In addition to ensuring charities comply with the law, the Charity Commission serves as a sector enabler, as described in the *Risk and Proportionality Framework* for the Commission's compliance work, "We put an emphasis on enabling charities to maximize their impact and on encouraging innovation, effectiveness and collaborative working across the sector." The Commission's role includes promoting the understanding and awareness of public benefit and supporting charities, essentially acting as an advocate for the role and contribution of civil society.


The Charity Commission publishes a minimum of three research reports annually on a variety of issues affecting the sector. Scanning the list of research projects and reports provides a fascinating perspective on the work of the Charity Commission. It has done extensive work on collaboration (*Strength in Numbers*); research into the barriers to engaging young people on charity boards; the issues relating to charity reserves and restricted funding; and numerous descriptive reports on topics such as membership charities, charities in Wales and charities in the human rights field.

We found the Charity Commission's research on the impact of the economic downturn and public sector funding cuts to be a particularly interesting example of the difference in approach from Canada. While the CRA's mandate is not broad enough to incorporate some of the activities of the Charity Commission, the UK model provides insight into projects, approaches and research that is mutually beneficial to the sector and government. For example, the sector and the commission share their research agendas to leverage each other's work and to avoid duplication. The

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commission also used its rich repository of data and information from annual reporting to undertake an analysis of the impact of the economic downturn on organizations. The analysis then enabled the commission to tailor its outreach and auditing of organizations, and through collaboration with NCVO, brought rich details about the current context to frontline organizations.

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If these are models we could adopt and modify in Canada, what would be required to develop and articulate such a comprehensive position for the sector, provincially or nationally?

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Advocacy and Engagement in Public Policy

Through our meetings and review of documents, we were struck by the level and nature of advocacy on behalf of the sector. There are many voices advocating for the sector in the UK, including the Charity Commission, but what we found particularly interesting was the acceptance of advocacy. While there are differences in approach across the organizations we met with, the extent of open advocacy on issues reflects a confidence in the acceptability of advocacy activity by nonprofits within the UK, which seems markedly different from our experience in Alberta and Canada.

This activity takes many different forms. LVSC staff prepare policy briefings on the positions of the Regional Voices Network (nine regional networks in England) and the work of the 3rd Sector Alliance, a cross-sectoral policy network in London that informs the sector of policy issues and supports voluntary sector engagement in policy development and strategy. ACEVO and NCVO produce policy briefings aimed at informing their stakeholders on issues and influencing public policy. The variety and nature of reports, for

example, on the impact of the economic downturn and the potential implications of the government's Big Society aim both at disseminating information and fostering discourse on the issues.

There were numerous examples of advocacy initiatives undertaken by these organizations, but the following are two that state very clear positions on the role of the voluntary sector in society and the relationship with government. Prior to the 2010 election, NCVO released its manifesto for the voluntary and community sector, *We believe in the good society. What do you believe in?* NCVO recognized there would be substantial changes in Parliament following the election and the need to build understanding of the voluntary sector and the issues that concern it with politicians of all parties. The manifesto presented their vision for society and the contribution of the sector. It was sweeping in its scope and explicit in its policy recommendations. A similar manifesto from the Community Alliance, Social Enterprise Coalition and ACEVO, *The Time is Now*, identified four things government needed to get right to support a thriving third sector, with specific recommended actions in each area.

If these are models we could adopt and modify in Canada, what would be required to develop and articulate such a comprehensive position for the sector, provincially or nationally?

There also seemed to be considerable interaction at the political level. NCVO, for example, promotes invitations to regular semi-annual receptions with MPs at Westminster as a membership benefit for its larger member organizations; ACEVO holds workshops or meetings at party conferences. The overall impression is of political access and a working relationship with government, including engagement in policy development on matters that broadly affect the sector. This differs greatly from the Canadian experience, nationally and provincially.

The UK level of engagement is supported by the various infrastructure organizations in many ways including preparing and disseminating topical briefing papers, providing learning opportunities at conferences, facilitating networking and providing practical resources for organizations to use for their



own activities. NCVO's Parliamentary Workers Group (PWG) illustrates one approach to building policy capacity. PWG is a network of individuals who are engaged with the political process on behalf of their organizations, providing opportunities to share information, form alliances, hear outside speakers on topics of common interest, and keep abreast of developments in the legislature.

Funding

The UK has experienced high levels of government involvement and investment in sector infrastructure organizations such as the NCVO. This support has been a catalyst that has led to a network of infrastructure organizations serving the local, regional and national levels. This investment has been direct from government departments, as well as through arms-length organizations, such as Capacity Builders, which has been the mechanism for a major government-funded sector capacity building initiative.

From a Canadian perspective, the level of government funding support for the sector and the work of infrastructure organizations in the UK is difficult to imagine. While the Voluntary Sector Initiative held the promise for some much needed change in the relationship with the Government of Canada that largely ended with changes in political leadership. It has been disappointing to observe the lack of support for some of the excellent work done by the VSI and watch the steady erosion of some of the most promising initiatives, particularly the collection of essential data about the sector.

The timing of our visit to London coincided with the release of the coalition government's new austerity budget and the launch of their Big Society agenda. Organizations anticipated cuts that would sweep across the sector, and hit infrastructure organizations particularly hard. While the true impact will not be clear for many months, the budget promised £83 billion in public spending cuts, much of which will impact voluntary sector organizations. With many organizations, including infrastructure organizations relying heavily on government funding, the cuts threaten their sustainability. During this difficult time, when government

wants to direct the majority of funding to front line organizations, infrastructure organizations are trying to articulate their critical importance to the health of the sector while also exploring ways to diversify their revenue sources.

Therefore, while the level of government funding support for infrastructure organizations in the UK is enviable in many ways, the current situation is also a reminder of the risk inherent in depending on a major funding source, such as government, particularly in a volatile economic environment. Without a history of strong financial support from government, most Canadian infrastructure organizations already have varied revenue streams. Nevertheless, given Canada's geographical expanse, population density, and the absence of the large foundations which support this work in the United States, building and strengthening essential sector infrastructure in Canada will require more substantial funding support than is currently available.

Research

Two of the areas we were particularly interested in exploring were the type of research being conducted and the information available about the sector. We found there was extensive, high-quality research being conducted on topical issues by many organizations.

The UK Civil Society Almanac produced annually by NCVO is a major reference publication. A comprehensive compilation of information and data about the voluntary sector, the Almanac includes: definitions; information on the composition of the sector and its contribution to the economy; employment in the sector; and the role of civil society organizations in addressing issues like unemployment or the environment and financial information ranging from the big picture to detailed analysis of income streams, assets, expenditures, reserves, beneficiaries and more.

More than just a summary of facts, the Almanac provides context and builds understanding, addressing topics such as growth in the sector and trends that will impact organizations, i.e. volunteering or the affect of social media on



membership organizations. Comparisons are often drawn between the experience of the sector and that of the public and private sectors.

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The absence of a comprehensive and reliable database of information about the voluntary sector in Canada greatly complicates the task of conducting sector-wide research.

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The purpose of the Almanac is to provide a solid information base that can inform policy and practice, and provide a foundation for future planning. Aimed at policy makers and practitioners, the Almanac draws together information from many sources – NCVO’s research, academic research and research done by other organizations, including CAF and the Charity Commission, as well as government data.

There is no similar compilation available on the Canadian voluntary sector. The National Survey of Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations (NSNVO) released in 2003, provided the first significant picture of the size, scope and nature of the voluntary sector in Canada. Together with the Satellite Account of Nonprofit Institutions and Volunteering data, we began to get a better understanding of the economic impact of the voluntary sector in Canada. Unfortunately, the federal government has not provided funding to replicate the NSNVO. As a result, the value of this information base is being eroded as it becomes increasingly outdated and continued funding for the Satellite Account is uncertain.

The absence of a comprehensive and reliable data base of information about the voluntary sector in Canada greatly complicates the task of conducting sector-wide research. In the UK, some of this work is facilitated by access to a large database of charity

information, gathered through annual reporting by charities to the Charity Commission. The Charities Act of 2006 extended the description of charitable purpose beyond the original four (relief of poverty, education, religion and health and saving lives) to include amateur sports, environment, animal welfare, arts, culture, heritage and science among others. While some organizations in the UK are exempted from registration due to size or function (e.g. religious organizations,) the range of nonprofit activity registered with the Charity Commission, is considerably larger than with the CRA in Canada, covering most of the voluntary sector. Because the CRA only collects information about federally registered charities, compiling a more comprehensive picture of the sector would require tapping provincial or territorial government databases of other nonprofits.

There are initiatives, like the Human Resource Council for the Nonprofit Sector’s efforts to improve the labour market information available about the voluntary sector. CCVO’s State of the Sector Report, which is due for release this spring, is an effort to develop a picture of the voluntary sector in Alberta and there is growing interest in some other provinces to undertake similar projects. While a series of provincial sector snapshots would be an improvement on the current dearth of information, the real value comes from producing regular reports with consistent and comparable information. A Canadian version of the *UK Civil Society Almanac* would be a valuable addition to current information available about the sector, but producing it would require more than interested organizations to do the work. It would require substantial enhancement of the data available about the sector, data that probably needs to be collected by governments through annual compliance reports or statistical surveys to provide a basis for research by other organizations and academics.

We received too many examples of research initiatives to do justice to them all here, but have compiled a resource list in Appendix B. One area that caught our attention was the body of research on the impact of the economic downturn on the voluntary sector.



- NCVO has been conducting regular surveys (quarterly charity forecast) to monitor the impact of the downturn, as well as organizing a series of “recession summits” in conjunction with the Office for Civil Society (the Government Department responsible for the relationship with the voluntary sector) bringing together sector leaders with the Minister for Civil Society.
- LVSC has conducted similar economic impact surveys at the London regional level, which it uses to inform its voice and activities.
- The Charity Commission uses data it collects from the annual reporting by charities to analyze how they are being affected by the economic downturn. The Commission uses this knowledge to modify their outreach and audit processes and collaborates with NCVO to share information with the sector.
- Both NCVO and the Charity Commission have produced useful resources to aid organizations in coping with reduced revenues.
- NCVO has a series of practical guides on funding, strategy, managing the workforce, innovation and collaboration.
- The Charity Commission produced an excellent resource for Boards: *The economic downturn: 15 questions trustees need to ask*.

Taken together, there is abundant research and resources to monitor the evolving economic situation and support frontline organizations.

One final comment about research - staff with the Charity Commission spoke of sharing their research agendas with other organizations in the sector, in order to leverage off each other's work and to avoid duplication. This is a practice that could be transferred easily to the Canadian environment. More than presentations on research findings, it would be useful to have a mechanism by which organizations conducting research on the sector could share their research agendas, potentially creating opportunities for increased collaboration and replication of studies across jurisdictions.

Sector Engagement

Representatives from the organizations we interviewed discussed the need to remain connected with organizations working on the ground level in local communities. In the UK, there are extensive opportunities for engagement with the sector, resulting in a two-way flow of information, such as from umbrella organizations to grassroots organizations and *vice versa*. In general, the approaches used to engage the sector are very similar to those employed in Canada.

- Surveys are used extensively at all levels for research and to provide mechanisms for community-based organizations to contribute their input to collective voices on issues.
- NCVO and ACEVO hold national and regional conferences, providing opportunities for training, discourse and networking.
- Online networks are used as effective and efficient ways to connect peer groups or communities of interest.
- Government departments and organizations such as the Charity Commission work in partnership with umbrella organizations such as the NCVO, especially to connect with smaller charities for research, education and consultation purposes.
- At the local and regional levels, the LVSC and the Central London CVS build connections that engage small and medium sized organizations in capacity-building initiatives or advocacy activities.

Overall it seems to be an environment with many and varied ways of connecting across organizations locally, regionally and nationally.

It was interesting to see the different approaches of the membership-based organizations. NCVO, with a mandate to serve the broad sector, and with substantial government funding support, provides free memberships to small organizations as a means to get them connected and engaged. ACEVO serves a different market – CEOs of organizations large enough to afford substantial



membership fees. Different approaches for different situations.

Workforce Development

Workforce issues have been one of the major challenges for many charities and nonprofits in Alberta. CCVO has been very engaged in addressing workforce issues through the development of a Workforce Strategy for the Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector in Alberta, the establishment of the first provincial Workforce Council for the nonprofit sector, the local Calgary Human Resource Initiative and working with the National HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector on labour market information. So we were eager to explore the experience in the UK and learn more about the nature of the issues there and how they were being addressed. The various organizations we met with gave us insight into the type of work being undertaken at the national, regional (London) and local (Central London boroughs) levels.

While many issues are common to both countries, there is much greater emphasis in the UK on the skills gap in the sector. Looking at the work of three organizations – NCVO, LVSC and the Central London CVS Network – highlights the important role of sector infrastructure organizations in conducting research, developing resources and coordinating activities. It also illustrates how the focus of the activity changes the more closely the working relationship with frontline organizations.

One aspect of NCVO's work is research and analysis of issues affecting the sector across the UK. This includes research on skills gaps, a salary survey, research into the attitudes of the younger generation and a workforce almanac, which presents a 10-year analysis of the UK nonprofit workforce. NCVO also produces a variety of resources aimed at promoting careers in the nonprofit sector and resources to assist community organizations in employing, managing and developing their staff. *Working for a Better World: Your Guide to Careers in the Charity Sector* highlights opportunities in different parts of the sector, such as the environment, fundraising or frontline organizations; provides career profiles for

different occupations; and a questionnaire to help people decide whether a career in a nonprofit is for them. NCVO's capacity building program, *Working for a Charity*, promotes employment in the sector, including an online tool for people interested in starting a career in the sector. *The Good Guide to Employment* provides HR and employment practice resources for organizations.

LVSC's work at the regional level mirrors much of the national work in promoting and developing career pathways and supporting recruitment and retention through building awareness of the voluntary sector as an employer. They have developed a regional skill strategy, a coordinated approach to skills development by sub-sector, e.g. health care, sports and recreation, care and development (children), justice, etc. LVSC works with agencies in these areas to develop and coordinate implementation of the strategies.

The Central London CVS Network's involvement in workforce issues illustrates yet a different level of activity. Their Target HR initiative is a five-year pilot project aimed at providing HR support to small and medium organizations. Delivered through an HR Advisor, this program provides a number of services including HR audits and action plans, tailored HR policies, training of volunteers (Board members) to provide HR services, and promotes the sharing of learning between organizations. At our meeting, they spoke about a specific initiative to share training and development opportunities between the participating organizations.

The work of these three organizations is similar to some of the work that is on-going in Alberta and Canada, but also provides ideas for different ways to approach workforce issues, particularly the coordinated regional skills development programs. Looking at the collective work of these organizations illustrates the benefit of multiple infrastructure organizations working at different levels to meet different types of community needs.

Resource Development

While in the UK, we explored how umbrella organizations generate the revenue to support



their operations. As mentioned previously, national and regional (London) governments have been a major source of funding for infrastructure organizations. The prominent role of government as a source of funding for services, research, and capacity-building initiatives, however, has become a growing concern in an era of significant funding cuts. Every organization we connected with expressed concerns about the potential impact of reduced funding.

Membership fees and earned revenue from events and conferences seemed to be the primary sources of non-governmental funding for several organizations. For NCVO, its mandate as a national umbrella organization has resulted in greater focus bringing organizations into the tent and keeping services and events affordable in order to keep them accessible to smaller organizations. NCVO uses a graduated membership fee structure, with free memberships for many small organizations. Similarly, their conferences serve more of a convening purpose, providing opportunities for engagement and networking, without an imperative to generate revenue to sustain general operations. ACEVO has taken a more entrepreneurial approach, generating a revenue stream from its conference activity through corporate sponsors and donors, and the sale of booth or display space for suppliers seeking to reach the nonprofit executive audience.

Several organizations generate revenue from selling products, information or consultancy services. Products include resources such as *The UK Civil Society Almanac* or ACEVO's full cost accounting tools. Organizations are increasingly selling their professional skills and services such as forecast research or skills mapping. CAF offers a variety of fee-based services, for example, marketing its expertise about the sector to corporations and individuals wanting to invest in the sector. The organization is even developing this role beyond the UK and growing its capacity to advise on trends and investment opportunities on a global basis.

CAF also offers fee-based corporate consulting work for corporate investment programs that focuses on measurement and evaluation, and provides a charity vetting service for corporate

granting programs, and manages grant programs and administration for organizations.

The resource development experience of the organizations we met with mirrors, to a significant degree, the funding challenges of similar umbrella or infrastructure organizations in Canada. The broader the mandate of the organization – e.g. serving the entire sector rather than a sub-set that can afford substantial fees – the more difficult it is to raise sufficient revenue from memberships, services or event fees to support the work of the organization. In the absence of other significant sources of funding support, organizations will inevitably face difficult choices between accessibility and sustainability.

In the UK, the government has provided this support. In the US, large foundations are often major sources of funding. In Canada, infrastructure organizations currently have less access to either source of funding, which will continue to limit the potential to develop provincial or national sector infrastructure organizations.

Conclusion

We returned from this trip inspired by the examples of strong infrastructure organizations serving the UK voluntary sector (or civil society as they call it) and committed to the continued development of CCVO and a broader network of infrastructure organizations in Alberta and throughout Canada. The contribution of sector-serving organizations in the UK was apparent and valued particularly in the areas of giving voice, providing leadership on policy issues, building connections between organizations, and undertaking research and providing essential services and resources that meet the needs of a broad range of organizations.

You can never replicate what has developed over a long period of time in another country, nor would we want to; however, there is a lot that we can learn from the UK and aspire to in a unique Albertan and Canadian way. The following areas really stood out as topics worth broader discussion with other sector-serving organizations, governments and other funders:



- **A different voice.** There are many voices for the voluntary sector in Canada, but by comparison with the UK, our voices are muted. Many factors contribute to this, including political cultures, but it does not serve us well in building awareness of the contribution of the voluntary sector to Canadian society or in addressing the legitimate issues that challenge the effectiveness and sustainability of organizations.

How do we create a more confident public voice for the sector; one that is accepted as valued, respected and legitimate?

- **Dynamics of the relationship between governments and the voluntary sector.** The relationship between the infrastructure organizations and government in the UK is more of a partnership, based on the recognition of mutual benefit. There are some encouraging moves towards developing different relationships between government and the sector in Canada, especially at the level of provincial government. There was broad engagement on changing this relationship during the VSI. Is it time to renew this discussion, at least on the sector side to try to create a more positive working relationship?
- **Funding support.** The organizations we met with benefit from significant funding support, principally from government sources, enabling them to provide a high level of quality of support to the sector. In the US, similar support often comes from major foundations. Whatever the source, it seems clear that infrastructure organizations require some level of sustainable funding beyond what can be generated from membership fees and earned income, especially if they are to serve the broad needs of the sector and not just those organizations with the financial capacity to pay large fees to participate.

In the Canadian environment, there is very little sustainable operating support for infrastructure organizations and limited availability of funding for research or other projects. So, how do we sustain infrastructure

organizations? How do we build a network of strong organizations serving the sector in individual provinces and nationally without funding support? And if we can't achieve this, what does that mean for our ability to support and sustain a strong voluntary sector?

- **Research and shared resources.** We were impressed by the amount of fine research available about, and for, the sector in the UK. Much of it contributes to practical and accessible resources for use by individual organizations. Other work supports understanding and awareness of the voluntary sector and provides a basis for strong policy work.

There are a number of organizations in Canada that do similar work and there is growing interest and activity on the part of emerging regional networks. We were intrigued by the prospect of sharing research agendas and looking for opportunities to leverage the work that is being done by different organizations. Given that we are working in a resource-limited environment, how can we leverage our research activity for greater impact? Is there an interest within the sector for greater sharing and coordination of research and resource development? Are there opportunities to support greater collaboration in this area?

We appreciated the opportunity to meet with, and learn from, our counterparts in the UK and now look forward to opportunities to share what we have learned with our Canadian colleagues. Comments, feedback and discussion on this report and the questions raised above are welcome. Please visit www.calgarycvo.org for contact information.

Appendix A

Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (ACEVO)

Founded: 1987

Employees: 43

Website: <http://www.acevo.org.uk/>

ACEVO is the voice for chief executives in the UK nonprofit sector. With over 2,000 members nationwide, it supports, develops, connects and represents third sector leaders. ACEVO offers a variety of services to its members including: access to a wide range of professional publications, free helplines covering areas such as HR, fundraising and accountancy, discounted special services from management consultancy services to private medical insurance.

Central London CVS Network

Founded: 2001

Employees: 3

Website: <http://www.clcvs.net/>

The Central London CVS Network is a voluntary partnership whose members are the Councils for Voluntary Service (CVS) in seven Central London boroughs. It was set up in 2001. The network's role is primarily to:

- Identify opportunities to maximise resources for the sector through partnership working and to promote and raise awareness of the value, profile and contribution the voluntary sector makes.
- Share good practice, skills and experience.
- Ensure the sector has effective representation on any planning groups operating across the sub-region and region.
- Enable the involvement of the voluntary and community sector in sub-regional work in the areas of training and development for staff and volunteers, commissioning and procurement, measuring impact and transforming social care.

Charities Aid Foundation (CAF)

Founded: 1924 (independent of NCVO since 1974)

Employees: approx. 500

Website: <http://www.cafonline.org/>

The CAF is an integrated customer-focused organization for donors and charities that stimulates giving, social investment and the effective use of funds. It distributes over £1m to

charities on each working day of the year. Through the bank it owns, its higher interest rates and lower fees mean an extra £20m goes to the charity sector each year.

The CAF's core activity is to provide innovative financial services to charities and their supporters.

- For individuals it makes it easy to give, find charities and support them tax-efficiently.
- For companies it sets up giving, volunteering and community programs.
- For charities, it offers low-cost banking, investment and fundraising services.

Charity Commission for England and Wales

Founded: 1853

Employees: 466

Website: <http://www.charity-commission.gov.uk>

The Charity Commission registers and regulates charities in England and Wales. It offers them advice and provides a wide range of services and guidance to help them run as effectively as possible. The Commission also keeps the online Register of Charities, which provides information about each of the thousands of registered charities in England and Wales.

The Charity Commission is a non-ministerial government department, part of the Civil Service. The Commission is completely independent of ministerial influence and also independent from the sector it regulates. The Commission is required to report on its performance to Parliament annually.

London Voluntary Sector Council (LVSC)

Founded: 1910

Employees: 19

Website: <http://www.lvsc.org.uk>

LVSC brings London voluntary and community sector organizations together to learn and share best practices and to create a co-ordinated voice to influence policy makers. It provides policy briefings, up-to-date information on management and funding, advice and support for voluntary and community groups, topical e-bulletins and short courses for those working in the sector.



London's voluntary and community sector is at the heart of LVSC's work while poverty, inequality, health and climate change are cross-cutting themes throughout it.

National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)

Founded: 1919

Employees: 117

Website: <http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk>

NCVO aims to give a shared voice to voluntary organizations and to help them achieve the highest standards of practice and effectiveness in all areas of its work. NCVO is also a highly effective lobbying organization and represents the views

of its members, and the wider voluntary sector to government, the European Union and other bodies. It is at the leading edge of research into, and analysis of, the voluntary sector.

NCVO campaigns on generic issues affecting the voluntary sector, such as the role of voluntary organizations in public service delivery and the future of local government. It has several specialist teams that provide information, advice and support to others working in or with the voluntary sector.

With over 8,400 members, 280,000 staff and over 13 million volunteers working for its members, NCVO represents and supports almost half the English voluntary sector workforce.

** The employee numbers are taken from organizational annual reports from 2009.*

Appendix B: Resource List

Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organizations (ACEVO)

www.acevo.org.uk

Digital Gift Giving: Modernising Gift Aid; Taking Civil Society into the Digital Age

Charities are missing out on £750 million of gift aid because of an antiquated system.

Full Cost Recovery: A Guide and Toolkit on Cost Allocation

In the 2002 [HM Treasury](#) review 'The Role of the Voluntary Sector', government acknowledged the need for organizations to meet their full costs and committed all government departments to fund accordingly by April 2006.

Is It Time for a Full Cost Recovery?

The impact of full cost recovery within the third sector has been substantial and it looks set to remain an integral part of the future of a successful and progressive third sector.

Mind the Gap: A Funder's Guide to Full Cost Recovery

The examples set by the Big Lottery Fund and the other funders highlighted in this report are crucial. Each has made a firm commitment to the principle of full cost recovery, and has taken active steps to implement it across their funding programs.

Rediscovering Charity: Defining Our Role with the State

This lecture looks back at the historic tradition of charity in the British Isles and explores how that charitable tradition and heritage has shaped this inheritance.

The Big Society: Moving from Romanticism to Reality

A speech by ACEVO's CEO Stephen Bubb to members on the government's "Big Society" agenda, outlining what it means for the sector and how ACEVO believes the sector should be responding.

ACEVO and the Community Alliance, Social Enterprise Coalition – The Time is Now

A manifesto on the four things government needs to get right to support a thriving third sector.

Charities Aid Foundation

www.cafonline.org

Financing the Big Society – Why Social Investment Matters

Social investment can play a key role in transforming the UK into a Big Society. This paper outlines the opportunities and challenges ahead.





World Giving Index 2010

The "World Giving Index" is the first report of its kind looking at charitable behaviour across the world.

Charity Commission for England and Wales

www.charitycommission.gov.uk

A Breath of Fresh Air: Young People as Charity Trustees

This report investigates one aspect of trustee diversity by looking at young people's attitudes towards trusteeship.

Economic Survey of Charities, March 2009

The Economic Downturn – 15 Questions Trustees Need to Ask

This checklist is a template which can be used by different types and sizes of charity, and adapted to suit particular circumstances. It is intended to help structure a discussion as an agenda item at a trustee meeting, away-day discussion or planning meeting.

Research Reports

Each year the Commission publishes a minimum of three research reports that focus upon a variety of governance, finance and other issues currently affecting the sector. The purpose of the reports is to provide an overview of what is currently happening in the sector and strengthen accountability by assessing how far best practice is being followed in relation to each topic.

Risk and Proportionality Framework for the Commission's compliance work

The purpose of this paper is to set out the Commission's enhanced regulatory approach when working with charities where their assets, services, beneficiaries or reputation are at risk of serious abuse or damage. This includes risks to the reputation of charities generally and levels of public trust and confidence in them.

Strength in Numbers

This research report focuses on the experiences of small charities collaborating, and explores the issues and challenges they face when doing so.

Collaborative Working and Mergers

This guidance sets out the issues and factors that need to be taken into account before charities seek to work collaboratively or to merge.

London Voluntary Sector (LVSC)

www.lvsc.org.uk

The Big Squeeze 2010

LVSC and its partners have sought evidence from voluntary and community organizations across London about the impact of the recession on the sector.

National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO)

www.ncvo-vol.org.uk

Civil Society Almanac 2010

The UK Civil Society Almanac provides in-depth analysis and data on the broad range of groups, societies and organizations that make up civil society.

Coping With Cuts: Practical Advice Guides

Smart planning and creative thinking will be crucial to remaining sustainable and resilient in the current economic climate. Here NCVO pulls together a selection of practical advice guides to help future-proof your organization in tough financial climes.

- Funding & Finance
- Strategy & Impact
- Managing & Developing Your Workforce
- Collaborative Working
- Innovation
- Use Your Compact

The Good Guide to Employment

The Good Guide to Employment helps voluntary and community organizations to successfully employ, manage and develop their staff.

Working for a Better World: Your Guide to Careers in the Charity Sector

This guide describes some of the practical ways to get involved in both paid and voluntary work within the sector.



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