

The Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations distributed the following questionnaire concerning non-profit sector matters to the six parties running in the 2008 Alberta Provincial Elections shortly after the election was called. As of February 28th, the NDP, Liberals and Progressive Conservative parties have responded. Their responses are included below in the order in which they were received.

Question #1

The Alberta Non-Profit/Voluntary Sector Initiative (ANSVI) was created to inspire an open, transparent and accountable relationship between the Government of Alberta and the non-profit/voluntary sector. This relationship is based on a collaborative model which engages both sectors through equal representation at a joint table and is based on the principles of accountability, independence, dialogue, consensus, cooperation and collaboration. The ANSVI is a framework that enables the non-profit/voluntary sector and provincial government to develop a better understanding of the issues that affect the sustainability of the sector (e.g. human resources, administrative and risk management issues) and work together to address these issues.

Is your party in support of the principles of the ANSVI and how do you plan to foster a productive relationship between the government and the non-profit/voluntary sector?

Answers

Alberta New Democratic Party:

Yes the Alberta NDP is in favour of the ANSVI and intends to continue fostering a cooperative, consensus based interaction between the non profit/voluntary sector and the government.

Alberta Liberal Party:

Yes, the Alberta Liberals support the principles of the ANSVI. The Alberta Liberals believe that volunteer services, as represented by ANSVI, are critical to the success of Alberta. Their services provide a public benefit, to enhance communities and build a healthy future for all Albertans. The ANSVI is an organization that must be supported by government as it is unique from other groups, such as industry or other government departments.

The Alberta Liberals believe that the non profit/voluntary sector has not received the support from the provincial government that is deserved. The Alberta Liberals are committed to certain principles, such as compassion for the most vulnerable members of society and support for those that provide services to them.

An Alberta Liberal Government will develop its social policy on the foundation of a social justice values perspective. We invite you to review the "Alberta Liberal Action Plan for Social Justice" and "Alberta Liberal Action Plan for Human Services" in the Alberta Liberal platform document, *It's Time*. This can be found at: http://www.albertaliberal.com/index.php/alp/policies_index

Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta:

The not-for-profit and voluntary sector is vital to Albertans' quality of life. The sector strengthens communities through the provision of programs, services and leadership. It provides opportunities for Albertans of diverse cultures, languages, identities, interests, views, abilities and communities to participate in civil society.

The Progressive Conservative government has a long history of working with the non-profit and voluntary sector to ensure the delivery of quality programs and services to Albertans. Recently,

the Progressive Conservative government worked with the key leaders in the non-profit and voluntary sector to progress the Alberta Nonprofit/Voluntary Sector Initiative (ANVSI). Together we engaged in a process to develop a Framework and an implementation plan to bring the non-profit and voluntary sector and the Government of Alberta together in a working relationship. The purpose of the Framework is to "engage both the Government of Alberta and the non-profit and voluntary sector in a collaborative partnership that continues to honour their unique strengths and contributions as they increase their abilities to build healthy, active communities."

A Multi-sectoral Collaboration Committee has been appointed by the Minister of Municipal Affairs to implement the Framework. It brings together leaders of the non-profit and voluntary sectors' capacity building organizations along with other leaders and government ministries' senior decision-makers. The mechanisms and processes this committee puts in place to implement the Framework for Collaboration will lead to solutions for commonly shared issues, build capacity within the sectors and engage both sectors in an integrated policy dialogue.

A Progressive Conservative government will continue to honor the Framework for Collaboration and provide the resources required for its implementation. It will establish a Secretariat to support the work of the committee and to ensure an ongoing productive relationship between the Government of Alberta and the non-profit and voluntary sector.

Question #2

The non-profit/voluntary sector provides services and supports necessary for all Albertans. Government funding for organizations that provide services to the public has not kept pace with both the increased community demand for services and the increased costs of providing these services. Funding issues are forcing organizations to reduce the level of service or number of programs they offer, potentially undermining the sustainability of these organizations, despite the increasing demand in the community.

How does your party plan to ensure there is financial sustainability for the non-profit/voluntary sector, including organizations that deliver services in communities on behalf of the government?

Answers

Alberta New Democratic Party:

It is the intention of the Alberta NDP that funding levels should be immediately stabilized. Long term funding needs and expenditure by the government will be decided in conjunction with the relevant stakeholders.

Alberta Liberal Party:

The Alberta Liberals agree fully that government support has not kept pace with the demands for service. As Alberta grows at a rapid pace, and with more people moving here, every sector is faced with increased demands and escalating costs. However, the current government has simply not addressed these realities.

An example of this lack of foresight and planning can be seen directly in the affordable housing crisis. In 1998 the government went through a process called "A Housing Symposium – Affordable Housing for Albertans". The report's first line says "The Housing Symposium was held...to address the PRESSING NEED for more affordable housing for families, senior citizens and Albertans with special needs." It was chaired by the then Minister for Municipal Affairs (Iris Evans)...10 years ago. There is no clearer evidence that the current government has failed to plan, even though they were warned that affordable housing was a serious problem.

The same type of a lack of planning can be seen in the non-profit sector. Organizations are forced to deliver services, but do not receive operational funding. This trend needs to stop immediately.

An Alberta Liberal government is committed to rethinking the way services are delivered in the non-profit sector. Current funding arrangements will be immediately reviewed to determine an optimal level of funding that is sufficient to actually deliver programs and maintain operations on an on-going basis. Our platform document, *It's Time*, highlights the following action:

Provide social investment to the non-profit sector to help them build capacity, maintain staff and provide adequate services.

Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta:

Albertans expect that whenever there is a natural disaster, a needy child, or a frail senior that someone will respond whether it be the government or the non-profit and voluntary sector. The volunteers and the paid staff who organize the sector are closest to the community, and often are the most able to respond. The ability of many non-profit and voluntary sector organizations to deliver services is limited by challenges in human resources, evolving expectations of volunteers, over burdened organizational administration, limited financial resources and overall increased demand.

A significant number of non-profit and voluntary sector organizations, many of them contractors with the Government of Alberta, are having difficulty fulfilling their mandate of service to Albertans.

Healthy and functional non-profit and voluntary sector organizations are essential to maintaining Alberta's quality of life. The financial resources for the NPVS organizations come mainly from public donations. That is one of the reasons why during his first 14 months, Ed Stelmach increased the tax credit for total annual charitable donations above \$200 by more the 60%. After including the federal credit, Albertans will now receive a 50% tax credit for every dollar donated over the \$200 threshold. This is the highest incentive in Canada.

The enhanced tax credit is complemented by a Community Spirit Fund that will provide proportional matching grants for donations to Alberta-based charities. Progressive Conservatives believe in the power of community spirit and that incentives and matching grants will enhance the capabilities of our not-for-profit sector to continue to offer their valuable services to Albertans.

Many volunteer organizations are partners with government ministries and local municipalities in the delivery of programs and services to Albertans. These include services to children, youth, adults, seniors, disabled, and the challenged; and comprise a wide scope including health and social services, supported living, recreation, culture, arts, education and research.

A Progressive Conservative government will inventory all of the program and service interactions with the non-profit and voluntary sector and provide that information to the Collaboration Committee. The committee will then be tasked with making recommendations to government on how service to Albertans can be improved through a collaborative partnership with the non-profit and voluntary sector.

Question #3

Alberta's labour shortage is affecting everyone, particularly non-profits. Non-profit organizations face strong competition to hire and retain qualified staff. Since government and industry are able to offer higher compensation, better opportunities for advancement and other benefits, non-profit organizations are reporting increasing staff shortages and

high turnover rates. These conditions erode their ability to deliver services to Albertans and increase the stress on community-serving organizations.

What is your party's plan to support the non-profit/voluntary sector in addressing these HR issues?

Answers

Alberta New Democratic Party:

The Alberta NDP is acutely aware of the labour issues facing this province and intends to provide greater occupational mobility through enhanced training and retraining programs.

Alberta Liberal Party:

Work in the non-profit/voluntary sector can be extremely demanding. Many workers are dealing with increasing workloads and on-the-job stress. At the same time wages have lagged behind other sectors and in the current tight labour market this can make attracting and retaining the needed staff very difficult.

The Alberta Liberals are very clear on our policy in regards to wages in the non-profit sector. They have been underpaid for far too long for such important work. Our platform document, *It's Time*, highlights the following action:

To address the current staffing crisis, we will ensure that human services workers in the not-for-profit sector receive the same wages and benefits as their government counterparts.

Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta:

Working to resolve the human resource challenges of the non-profit and voluntary sector is one example of an issue that can be addressed by the new Collaboration Committee appointed by the Progressive Conservative government. We will work with the sector through the Collaboration Committee to create a workforce strategy. We will seek the advice of the Collaboration Committee to identify the actions required to stabilize the sectors workforce so it can better deliver the services and programs Albertans expect to be part of their communities.

The Progressive Conservative election platform further commits to assist volunteer agencies with the task of providing security clearance for volunteers in the not-for-profit sector.