



Voluntary Sector Studies Network

Luther College at the University of Regina

Focus Group Notes – meeting held February 20, 2015

Heritage Saskatchewan Forum, Regina, SK

On February 20, 2015, approximately 28 Heritage Saskatchewan Board Members and Heritage organizations met at the Delta Hotel during the Heritage Saskatchewan Forum to participate in a Focus Group to discuss the VSSN. The main goals of the Focus Group were a) to create opportunities for connecting and conversations among students, voluntary sector practitioners and university faculty/staff; and b) to share ideas, critique a draft of VSSN and modify it based on participants' experiences and knowledge. Small groups participated in conversations with a focus on the following six main questions:

- a) What do you need from VSSN and what would you use if VSSN provided it? (e.g., what course content areas, what delivery methods such as online, face-to-face, etc.)
- b) What do you, your volunteers and staff, and/or your organization have to offer VSSN? For example, do you have a special set of skills and knowledge that VSSN, and in turn the voluntary sector in Saskatchewan, can benefit from?
- c) What learning opportunities are already available to those who work in the voluntary sector in Saskatchewan (e.g., university and college courses, professional development courses through professional associations, seminars, workshops, etc.)? We know that VSSN should not duplicate what already exists.
- d) What do you believe are major challenges and opportunities facing the voluntary/nonprofit sector in Saskatchewan over the next 5-10 years?
- e) What core competencies (e.g., knowledge, skills, etc.) do you think graduates should have as they leave university/college and enter careers in the voluntary/nonprofit sector?
- f) What innovations or wildly new ideas in the broad field of heritage do you think should be incubated and given life? Might VSSN be able to support this?

The notes from the five small groups have been organized by question. A summary document has been created and can be found on the VSSN website at Luther College.

Question A & E (combined): What do you need from VSSN and what would you use if VSSN provided it? (e.g., what course content areas, what delivery methods such as online, face-to-face, etc. What core competencies (e.g., knowledge, skills, etc.) do you think graduates should have as they leave university/college and enter careers in the voluntary/nonprofit sector?

Course content areas and competencies (not in any particular order):

- **HR Management**
 - Fundamentals of management, employer/employee relationship
 - Staff & volunteers (interpersonal skills)
- **How to run a community organization**
- **How to run a healthy committee**
- **Association management**
- **Self-care**
- **Strategic thinking**
- **Government structure (4 levels)**
- **Advocacy**
- **Governance**
 - Different types and what works
 - Implementation, support, maintain ideas
- **Financial Management**
 - **Grants/Grantsmanship**
 - Grant writing - have granters come and give a session on expectations/how to
 - Would it be possible to link this program or have a course designed that would train people in creating incentive programs and grants. Potentially the people that take this course could consult government on what incentives/grant programs non-profits want and need and this way government may be able to offer more incentives because they wouldn't have to research it on their own, they instead could just find it.
 - **Budgeting skills/accounting**
 - Relationship with funders? What do funders want?
 - Teach volunteer groups fundraising, how to write grants
 - **Fundraising/funding**
 - Other unique ideas for fundraising (especially with organizations from small towns)
- **Intro to non-profit organizations**
 - Basic interest/knowledge of non-profit sector
 - How we work in the sector
 - How to show the culture of nonprofits (how to teach)
- **Communication**

- Face-to-face
- Communications between general public, staff, media
- Communication between organizations – if they are doing the same thing. What's already out there.
- Communicating effectively, cheaply
- **How to work in teams**
 - We currently don't teach people skills
- **Cultural Diversity**
 - Cultural diversity/intercultural communication – decrease culture shock
- **Succession planning**
 - To recruit and keep volunteers, seek younger volunteers
 - Decrease apathy
 - To decrease burnout rate (the more trained the CEO, the less burnout happens)
 - Must be creative with 'hats' so staff/volunteers don't get the same task (to decrease burnout)
- **Board Governance/structure**
 - Learning about becoming a board member – different kinds of boards (policy and operational)
 - How to work with boards
 - Importance of volunteer and board members - job description with hours and expectation
 - Board training – rules and regulations
 - Understanding role of decision makers – board (volunteer) versus paid staff
- **Legal Aspects**
 - Responsibilities/insurance
 - Incorporation
 - Don't want to scare people but need training of how to organize this: 'you are liable for this, but we have you covered'
 - Especially with dealing with money
 - Nonprofits ACT and other legality
 - Protect volunteers
 - Fiduciary duty
 - How to ensure healthy committees, recruitment, as well as individual volunteers
 - Occupational Health and Safety for volunteers
 - Insurance coverage/risk management for volunteers
- **Volunteer management**
 - Direction for volunteers
 - Volunteer management (support and appreciation)
 - What is the skill set required
 - How to motivate volunteers

- In small towns, volunteers volunteer for multiple events because there is no one else to.
- **Leadership**
 - Organization planning, structure
 - To have the vision but to also build the vision and make it possible
 - Leadership in volunteers
- **Academic research** – especially to assess the real impact our work has in the community
- **Evaluation**
- **Sustainability and viability of organizations**
- **Rural Organizations**
 - Differences between how rural and urban organizations run, difference between volunteers, etc.
 - Human capital/human resources – rural change
 - Same number of volunteers to recruit
- **Project Management**
- **Social Media/marketing**
 - How to use social media for marketing purposes – effectively post and maintain accounts
- **How to transition from one non-profit organization to another**
- **How to network**
 - How to network with the private sector to create partnerships. How to build relationships with the media.
 - advocacy relationship

Delivery Methods (not in any particular order):

- Online
- Televised
- Some volunteer experience as a prerequisite
 - A volunteer background is important for managing volunteers. A volunteer manager should have hands on experience in a few nonprofits and types of volunteerism (e.g., organize event, on a board, on a committee, menial tasks at an event) and with more than one organization to see if there are different perspectives to run an organization or manage volunteers or that some nonprofits have a history passed down from volunteers that may not be actual proper governance, etc.
- Job shadowing/mentorship is important
 - Can we do this for rural communities?
 - Hands on and application
 - Need a practicum as part of the course
 - More knowledge of what my work will be (hands on projects)

- This creates a 2 way street of new information for both the student and the organization!
- How to use regional colleges, Polytechnics, University of Saskatchewan, affiliated colleges
- The education has to be affordable for a non-profit/community organization
 - Look at cost of education... how do non-profit organizations afford it?
- Offered with continuing education and distance education
- Should be offered in part with their Bachelor of Arts through electives
- Eventually should have professional development to compliment current skills (shorter courses)
 - For board members and staff

Additional comments offered about content areas (not in any particular order):

- If you wanted someone to work, what skills would you want them to have?
- This would apply towards their degree. More knowledge about what they do.
- A certificate that adds to your curriculum vitae
- Opportunity to raise awareness on campus with students and faculty
- To give this sector credibility

Question B: What do you, your volunteers and staff, and/or your organization have to offer VSSN? For example, do you have a special set of skills and knowledge that VSSN, and in turn the voluntary sector in Saskatchewan, can benefit from?

- Saskatchewan Arts Alliance could offer statistics
 - Saskatchewan Arts Alliance Advocacy Hub
- Museums Association of Saskatchewan could provide practical experience and knowledge
- Knowledge of social enterprises (eg. Museum with a gift shop, long-term/ongoing that supports the core organizations operation).
- Student placement, mentoring internships
- case studies from our sector

Question C: What learning opportunities are already available to those who work in the voluntary sector in Saskatchewan (e.g., university and college courses, professional development courses through professional associations, seminars, workshops, etc.)? We know that VSSN should not duplicate what already exists.

- One day course in WPG, certificate in volunteer management
 - Took it 10 years ago

- SaskCulture (on website) has volunteer/governance best practices (available to volunteers as well as management)
 - Volunteer recognition, show appreciation
 - Be respectful of volunteers, washroom breaks, lunch, etc. especially for event.
- Synergy and Volunteer Canada
- College of commerce Saskatoon
 - Edward School of Business
- Very experienced CEOs/EDs in Saskatoon
 - New ED groups are emerging to mentor new EDs/train new EDs
 - McClure Centre
- Courses offered in the community on how to be a CEO
- Tap into cooperative movement and training
 - Capture SaskCulture and Heritage
 - People learning how to help people
- Offered in Justice Studies at U of R 3rd year level:
 - Political Process for Change
 - Advocacy
- Certified Internet Webmaster
 - A different way of looking at how we are doing as a society and VSSN needs to look/work with the 11 areas being considered by CIW

Question D: What do you believe are major challenges and opportunities facing the voluntary/nonprofit sector in Saskatchewan over the next 5-10 years?

Challenges the voluntary sector faces:

- Crisis involved with volunteers. Saskatchewan is number one now, but it would go down
- Resources (Human Resources, money)
- Knowledge of services
- Isolation (working in a SILO)
- Succession planning
- Recruiting (young people)
- Shifting thinking
- Knowledge transfer
- Core operation planning
- We are now living with people changing jobs every few years. No more 20+ years of experience.
- New requirements where employees must volunteer but this is generally just one event

- We don't blow our horn enough
- Struggle with scale – usually 35 hours with 35 hours of outside work
 - Salaries can be poor
 - Significant burnout of some staff and volunteers
- “Voluntary” sector
 - Why is it called the ‘voluntary’ sector?
 - Many people don't know there are staff in non-profits
- Are we missing other structures, are we looking in the right way?
 - Boards are the colonial way
 - What about looking at best practices in other countries?
 - Look at “idle no more” – look at Metis/First Nations approaches

Opportunities the voluntary sector faces:

Awareness in the school system to change attitudes of the young

- Get younger people interested from schools (target group)
- More awareness with kids about volunteering
- Schools implementing credits for volunteering
- New generation with knowledge and understanding of the sector
- Interest and passion
- Career path: highlight that you can be employed in the sector
- In schools, some require volunteering (high school level)
- We still need to nurture skills and interaction with the community
 - Organization of school supplies for inner city schools.
- Getting young people engaged in volunteering – social & fun
 - But to still comply with non-profit regulations
 - Let them set their goals/parameters
 - University: instead of steak night, its campus beer pong fundraiser

Change in demographics

- Opportunity to bring new demographics to the volunteer sector
- New immigrants may not be sure how to interact with their new country
 - More willing to volunteer with organizations that helped them start out
 - Organizations may not see the return for up to 10 years
- Pilot project – RODD/MCAS
 - For new Canadians
 - Culture districts would be interested.
- Existing volunteers may need to step away and let new in.

With technology, volunteering is changing

- Different ways to volunteer
- May be different and difficult
 - Dislike Skyping – coming together around a table is much easier.
 - Communication is easier together in the room.
- Younger generation are more resistant and its easier for them to skype
 - Demand for instant return of information
 - Phones are never really off
- If volunteering is changing... do organizations need to change?
- Need to be up on technology
- Needs to have a balance
 - Always depending on your target group
- Some volunteers don't want to deal with technology
 - Need to know volunteer's needs, skills, interests
 - With technology, how do we take on hands on exercises?

Volunteering goes with where people are in their lives

- Compensation for volunteers
 - Social (no more lacking)
 - Travel costs
 - Different stages of life, not always the same social structures:
 - Family with kids; Students; Elders
 - Work commitments
- Focus on where they can see family and friends as they volunteers
 - School groups, Sports
- What about down time? Time commitments get in the way.
- Volunteering – social activities, events, friends

Social capital/cohesion happening

- This is now a moving target, changing all the time
- Now with change, social capital looks very different
 - "like" it on Facebook
- If we want to reach other generations, we have to go to them.
 - Call/text/Instagram/Snapchat
- Funding – people will donate to others on Facebook. This is a risk on a scam. This is changing from regular charitable donations.

Question E: (please see question A)

Question F: What innovations or wildly new ideas in the broad field of heritage do you think should be incubated and given life? Might VSSN be able to support this?

What we need from VSSN:

- Reliable sector information (Arts & Heritage)
- Very challenging in our Provincial stats, Canadian stats don't do it.
- Saskatchewan Arts Alliance doing a lot of our own “core” research work
 - If there is a chance to involve university students
 - Core research on voluntary sector: Arts, Heritage, Social Service agencies