



## 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 six main questions, which are presented below.

**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:

|                                 |                              |   |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| HR Management                   | Intro to non-profits         | Leadership  |
| How to run an organization      | Communication                | Academic research   |
| How to run a committee          | How to work in teams         | Evaluation  |
| Association management          | Cultural Diversity           | Sustainability/viability                                  |
| Self-care                       | Succession planning          | Rural Organizations                                       |
| Governance                      | Board Governance/structure   | Project Management  |
| Government structure (4 levels) | Legal Aspects                | Social Media/marketing                                    |
| Financial Management            | - Responsibilities/insurance | Transitioning from one non-profit organization to another |
| - Grants/grantsmanship          | - Fiduciary duty             | How to network  |
| - Budgeting skills/accounting   | Volunteer management         | Advocacy  |
| - Fundraising/funding           | Strategic thinking           |   |

#### Delivery Methods:

- Online/Televised
- Volunteer experience as a prerequisite
- Job shadowing/mentorship
- How to use regional colleges, Polytechnics, University of Saskatchewan, affiliated colleges
- The education has to be affordable
- 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)

**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.**

- SaskCulture has volunteer/governance best practices for volunteers and staff on website
- Synergy and Volunteer Canada
- College of Commerce Saskatoon - Edwards School of Business
- Very experienced CEOs/EDs in Saskatoon - New EDs groups are emerging to mentor others
  - McClure Centre
- Courses offered in the community on how to be a CEO
- Tap into cooperative movement and training - capture SaskCulture and Heritage
- Offered in Justice Studies at U of R 3<sup>rd</sup> year level: Political Process for Change, and 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:**

- Lack of resources (human resources, monetary resources)
- Lack of knowledge transfer from those who worked in sector for many years
- Lack of succession planning and core operation planning
- Isolation (working in a SILO)
- People are changing jobs every few years. No more 20+ years of experience.
- Struggle with scale – usually 35 hours with 35 hours of outside work
  - Salaries can be poor and can be significant burnout of some staff and volunteers
- Why is it called the ‘voluntary’ sector? - Many people don’t know there are staff in non-profits
- Are we missing other structures?
  - Boards are the colonial way
  - Look at best practices in other countries. Or even ‘Idle No More’.

## **Opportunities the voluntary sector faces:**

### **Awareness in the school system to change attitudes of the young**

- Get younger people interested from schools – social and fun
- Schools implementing credits for volunteering
- New generation with knowledge and understanding of the sector and interest and passion
- Career path: highlight that you can be employed in the sector
- We still need to nurture skills and interaction with the community
  - But to still comply with non-profit regulations
  - Let them set their goals/parameters

### **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 but seem to be more willing to volunteer with organizations that helped them start out
- Pilot project – RODD/MCAS
  - for new Canadians

### **With technology, volunteering is changing**

- Different ways to volunteer
  - Demand for instant return of information
  - Need to have a balance
  - Always depends 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?
- If volunteering is changing... do organizations need to change?

### **Volunteering goes with where people are in their lives**

- Compensation for volunteers (social, 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 volunteer (e.g., school groups, sports)
- Volunteering – social activities, events, friends
- Young people's use of social media and its impact on social capital/cohesion, volunteering, etc.

**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
  - a chance to involve university students
  - core research on voluntary sector: arts, heritage, social service agencies