Voluntary Sector Studies Network

VSSN Action Plan for 2015-2017: Summary

May 2015

SUMMARY

After a year of hard work on this new initiative, the Voluntary Sector Studies Network (VSSN) has many reasons to believe that it is on to a great idea ... and that we should build it! Given the high degree of support the VSSN has garnered during its first year, the steering group has decided to continuum the momentum.

What is the VSSN?

The VSSN is an interdisciplinary, community-university collaborative, comprising students, the voluntary sector and faculty/staff administered out of the VSSN office at Luther College at the University of Regina. The VSSN program embraces three inter-related themes – learn, research, innovate. A 12-member steering group guides our work and a network of 190 individuals and organizations has participated in some aspect of VSSN during the past year. Our ultimate goal is the sustainability and vitality of the voluntary/nonprofit sector for the benefit of our communities.

VSSN understands the voluntary sector to be a diverse collection of organizations that use their revenues for public good, are independent from governments and the private sector, are self-governing (e.g., they have their own internal democratic processes), have a significant degree of voluntary participation and are governed by unique legislation. The voluntary sector is also known by other labels such as: nonprofit, public benefit, community-based, nongovernmental, charitable and third sector.

What are our goals and objectives for 2015-2017?

Given the high degree of support the VSSN has garnered during its first year, the following goals will guide us over the next two years:
- to continue to strategically, collectively and publicly define and build the VSSN, its three pillars and its long term sustainability (e.g., people skills, partnerships, financial resources and in-kind resources); and
- to implement scholarly and practical, innovative learning programs with and for the VSSN's three main groups – students, voluntary organizations and university faculty/staff – that also results in the incubation of new ideas with/for the voluntary sector.

Six main objectives are our focus for 2015-2017:
1. Communications (both on and off campus) – to expand VSSN communications with VSSN's three main groups – students, voluntary organizations and university faculty/staff - in order to increase awareness and understanding of the VSSN.
2. Sustainability - To build institutional sustainability for the VSSN including: securing the people with specific skills to build VSSN (e.g., communications, coordination, grant-writing); formal partnerships with those with deliverables (e.g., those offering courses in

the new Certificate); in-kind resource sharing (e.g., free meeting space, free experts for learning events, sponsorships); links with governments and businesses; and securing financial resources.

3. Program and curriculum development – to use all research to further develop curricula for the new certificate and for professional development opportunities.
4. Research – to complete research projects currently underway in year one and embark on new sector-wide initiatives for which results are required to further inform VSSN programming and ultimately, to serve the sector.
5. Community development – to continue to create the time and space to connect with and have conversations with voluntary sector organizations, collectively identify and define issues and solutions, operationalize these in learning opportunities and create partnerships for teaching/learning.
6. Administration, co-ordination and planned approach – to ensure VSSN's administrative work is completed and there is proper co-ordination of the above listed VSSN activities within a framework of strategic thinking/choices/action.

What do we want to build?

Building on the many successes of our first year (see our website for our year-in-review, www.luthercollege.edu/vssn), we believe we should build a new academic program. We have priorized deliverables that we know are important components of this new program during the next two years. During this time we expect to have the following completed:

July 2015 – June 2016	July 2016 – June 2017
Communications	
Ad campaigns and social media have reached all regions of the province; staff/volunteers in nonprofit organizations are aware of VSSN and what it offers.	A plan directed at high school students is implemented; 2 high schools have been directly impacted by volunteer fairs held on site.
VSSN and its work are recognized on campus among faculty and staff.	Faculty, staff and students on campus in Regina understand what VSSN is and what it offers.
Students on campus are aware of VSSN because of social media presence, VSSN presence at career and volunteer fairs, and VSSN presentations in undergraduate classes.	Faculty, staff and students on campus in Saskatoon are aware of VSSN and its program.
Sustainability	
VSSN has an network of 400 practitioners, learners, researchers and supporters.	VSSN has an network of 500 practitioners, learners, researchers and supporters.
VSSN meets its targeted funding requirements each year.	VSSN meets its targeted funding requirements each year and has a major financial sponsor/donor.
VSSN has volunteers from the student population and nonprofit sector that consistently support the work of VSSN.	same

Curriculum development	
New Certificate (level 1) is available for students to register in by Mar. 30, 2016; list of 5 core and 3 elective courses have been identified and course outlines drafted based on core competencies identified in the research.	First cohort of 15 students is registered in the new Certificate for Sept. 2016.
List of instructors who have formally agreed to teach a course(s) in the Certificate stream is done.	A curriculum advisory group is in place and meets annually to assess and offer advice on the Certificate program.
At least 50 undergraduate students are enrolled in courses that are part of the new Certificate.	Funding for paid internships has been secured.
The naming campaign resulted in a novel/provocative label for the new Certificate.	At least 2 new IDS/voluntary sector course outlines have been developed and students enrolled.
	Certificate (level 2, advanced) is drafted and some courses are available to students and practitioners to register in.
Research	
A list of core competencies is completed based on literature and VSSN primary research conducted in 2014-2015.	Online census survey of nonprofits in Saskatchewan in collaboration with Saskatchewan Nonprofit Partnership is done.
A list of courses, learning processes and learning outcomes have been identified based on the research.	A graduate student has been funded by Mitacs to complete a VSSN research project.
Inventory of registered charities and nonprofits in Saskatchewan is completed.	A research model has been adopted by the VSSN steering group.
	Community-based research proposals with select First Nations reserves as well as select rural communities are completed.
Community development	
A provincial map of professional development/learning opportunities has been completed and uploaded on to the VSSN website for public use.	VSSN has held 2 technology-supported koffee klatches with northern and/or rural organizations.
VSSN has hosted 2 technology-supported koffee klatches with northern and/or rural nonprofit organizations.	An additional 3 experts who work/volunteer in the sector are engaged in VSSN teaching and research activities and are directly working with students.
VSSN has a clearly defined relationship with Saskatchewan Nonprofit Partnership (formerly known as SNNO).	
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With the achievement of these outcomes, we will be contributing to human capital development and voluntary sector labour market development. In essence, VSSN will promote the sector as a viable career opportunity, provide learning specific to the sector, and enhance the professional

status of those working in the sector. With these enhancements, individuals and whole communities benefit.

Why is this necessary?

There are at least 10 very good reasons why we think this program is necessary:

1. Based on the koffee klatches, focus groups, steering group meetings, the cross-Canada environmental scan and student surveys undertaken during our first year, there is demand for new learning opportunities in Saskatchewan.
2. Many provinces have post-secondary education institutions that offer certificate programs, undergraduate degrees and graduate degrees that focus on the voluntary sector but Saskatchewan does not.
3. Students should be given the opportunity to understand that the voluntary sector is a viable, meaningful, career alternative in the same way that business students learn about working for the private sector and public policy/administration students learn about working in the government sector.
4. The new certificate program will create a more direct, visible and explicit route for graduating students to enter careers in the sector, thus supporting the survival of the sector.
5. A voluntary sector studies stream at the University of Regina complements the emphasis offered by the Centre for Studies of Co-operatives at the University of Saskatchewan, thus the Saskatchewan student market will be well served, thus supporting a provincial government goal of student retention.
6. Saskatchewan had the highest volunteer rate and the second highest number of organizations per capita when compared to other provinces/territories, thus, the province appears to have some unique features, which makes academic programming and research compelling.
7. Given the size, scope and importance of the voluntary sector in Canada, there is an increasing interest in labour force and human capital development by those working and volunteering in the voluntary sector as well as by the funders and governments that fund these organizations.
8. Research on the voluntary sector in Canada generally is in its infancy and in Saskatchewan, there are major gaps in knowledge, but the VSSN research agenda will change this.
9. There is an increasing awareness by all levels of government about the importance of the sector in governance, democracy and society.
10. VSSN is an excellent fit with both the new Luther College and new University of Regina Strategic Plans, thus it is not an isolated idea.

Who will do the building?

The VSSN steering group is committed to moving this new academic network forward but this will be done in collaboration with people and organizations that are also keenly interested. We have a track record of public and participatory processes (e.g., koffee klatches, focus groups,

surveys) that resulted in a community/student/faculty defined draft curriculum – not curriculum designed solely by university faculty. We will do more of the same in our second and third years. The VSSN has a program director and part-time coordinator who are accountable to the Dean of Luther College.

When will this all take place?

We have an action plan written that will guide us over the next two years. We intend to begin this work in July 2015 and finish it in June 2017.

Where will the building happen?

Currently, the VSSN program is based at Luther College at the University of Regina and meetings this past year took place in Regina, but we know our new program will engage and serve individuals and organizations from across the entire province using various technologies (e.g., skype meetings, webinars, online courses). The home base for the educational programming will be at Luther College.

How can we accomplish this work?

We know we can achieve these results with the continued combination of volunteer energy, partnerships with and in-kind contributions from university faculty/staff and voluntary organizations, as well as financial supports from a variety of organizations, governments and companies.