

Submission to the Community Non-Profit Task Force

from the

New Brunswick Disability Executives' Network

c/o Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons

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Introduction:

The New Brunswick Disability Executives' Network (NBDEN) is a coalition of organizations and mostly non-profit agencies directly involved in advocating and/or providing direct services to persons with different disabilities in this province.

Each of the member organizations represents a distinct segment of the disability community but together they cover a wide range of types of disabilities, age levels and topics likely to be of interest to persons with disabilities. Some of the issues addressed by these groups include access to rehabilitation equipment and services; affordable and accessible housing; improved access to education, training, and appropriate employment opportunities; income security; accessible and affordable transportation options; inclusive recreation and social programs; access to public information in appropriate formats; and other relevant disability supports required to enable citizens with disabilities to fully participate in all aspects of their community and to fully enjoy their rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

The purpose of this joint submission from NBDEN is not to specifically present information about disability issues and recommendations on how to resolve them. We would rather focus on how government can strengthen effective partnerships with the many disability related non-profit community organizations who are anxious to build community capacity and to offer networks and needed supports for persons with disabilities in New Brunswick. We will leave the individual organizations to submit their own ideas about the specific needs of their members around specific disability issues. However, we thought it would be useful for the Community Non-profit Task Force to receive some of our suggestions on how government could be more helpful in assisting these disability related organizations to achieve ongoing objectives in a cost-effective and timely manner. **The following recommendations are not to be considered a final or all inclusive list but rather as a starting point for developing meaningful and ongoing partnerships between government and the community non-profit sector which is very active in the area of disability.**

We are encouraged by this effort of government to offer mutual dialogue and consultation on such an important concept of improved partnerships. However, we must also report that there is a significant level of skepticism

in the community as to whether or not we will see a significant and long-term commitment to sharing ideas and resources to meet mutual targets for improving services throughout the province. There is also some concern that government may wish to offload responsibilities to community non-profit organizations without addressing the fundamental issue of adequate financial and human resources required to carry out the various objectives and specific programs of such non-profit groups struggling to survive and to meet the high level of community needs.

The NBDEN members are willing to make the leap of good faith that this communication and consultation exercise is not only genuine but has the potential of re-organizing the community non-profit sector and the relationship with government to make both partners more effective in addressing the needs of our citizens within the joint capacity of human and financial resources likely to be available now and for the foreseeable future.

We have also looked for ways to improve productivity and outcomes within current levels of resources. We want everyone to also recognize that increasing the volume of activity and services to be offered from the non-profit sector to address the actual real needs of the community will certainly require financial investments not yet available in the current system. We would invite your feedback to the following recommendations and would be happy to elaborate on the rationale behind them as well as to work cooperatively in developing an efficient implementation strategy for any of these recommendations accepted by government. These recommendations are not necessarily listed in order of priority.

Recommendations:

1. The Government of New Brunswick should develop fair and reasonable criteria for a meaningful and comprehensive grant program to be available for eligible non-profit groups to cover some of their core operating expenses related to staffing, office rent, utilities, supplies, etc. so that eligible non-profit groups would have greater predictable operational stability. They would then be able to focus more of their public fundraising on costs for direct program services which would be more effective in generating donated support from the public at large.
2. Funding contracts with non-profit agencies and the provincial government should be set up for a multi-year cycle when possible to enable predictability of program funding and management of staff resources etc. We would suggest a three-year budget cycle as appropriate but still including the necessary accountability measures and the option to terminate contracts for unsatisfactory performance.
3. The Government of New Brunswick should consider automatically waiving property taxes for buildings owned and operated by eligible non-profit community organizations.
4. The Government of New Brunswick could consider waiving rental fees for eligible groups using space in government owned buildings.
5. The Province of New Brunswick should enact appropriate volunteer liability protection legislation to prevent frivolous legal proceedings against volunteers who have acted in good faith and without personal financial gain in activities related to their roles with non-profit organizations. (See legislation in N.S.)
6. Government should investigate whether they could help non-profit groups to access coverage under Government's insurance plans or to help groups to jointly obtain insurance at lower net costs to individual groups.
7. The Province of New Brunswick should clarify the legal responsibilities for governance volunteers such as members of the Board of Directors for non-profit organizations so that more persons

- would be willing to serve in that capacity without fear about personal responsibilities or legal risks that they did not understand. Governance volunteers who have acted in good faith, with due diligence, and without personal profit should be clearly protected from legal liability for their volunteer efforts to help their community and the organizations from the non-profit sector.
8. How could Government assist non-profit groups to obtain pension and health benefits for the employees of non-profits who cannot afford group benefits on their own.
 9. Government should ensure that all public facilities, programs, services, and information are barrier free to persons with different disabilities.
 10. Government should adopt a formal policy to encourage government employees to be allowed to volunteer with non-profit community agencies. Community service activities should be included in the permanent personnel file of any government employee who has volunteered time in the non-profit sector.
 11. Government employees should be eligible for consideration to be temporarily seconded during work time to assist with the development and delivery of services within the non-profit sector and/or to participate in a particular project or event deemed to be of value. Such arrangements would have to be based on mutually beneficial guidelines as to the amount of time to be made available and for what specific purpose. Usually such arrangements would be for a fixed period of short-term duration or on a periodic part-time basis to avoid undue hardship to the employer and to avoid abuse and would have to be approved with the employee's supervisor.
 12. Government should offer on going diversity training to their employees to be more aware of the challenges faced by citizens with disabilities and other minority groups.
 13. Government should allow eligible non-profit community-based organizations to purchase office supplies through "Central Stores" to achieve lower costs possible through their bulk purchasing. Every

dollar saved from overhead or administrative costs can then go to increased direct program services.

14. Government should allow eligible non-profit organizations to be connected to the government Internet server system and to access lower telephone rates under the current government telephone service system which would usually be cheaper compared to the same communications services provided in the private sector to non-profit groups.
15. Government should be encouraged to offer recycled government office equipment and/or surplus furniture to non-profit organizations at no cost as another way to provide support through services in kind.
16. Government should allow eligible non-profit organizations to promote their activities, awareness and fundraising campaigns, and/or volunteer opportunities through the internal communications system of government.
17. Staff and volunteers of non-profit community agencies should be able to participate in appropriate training sessions offered through the internal provincial government human resource training opportunities for government employees when such training seats could be added at little or no cost.
18. Government departments and agencies should look for additional partnership opportunities with non-profit disability groups to efficiently deliver public services in such program areas as the recycling of rehabilitation equipment; diversity training for government employees; employment services counseling and job placements for persons with disabilities etc.
19. Disability related non-profit organizations should have regular opportunities for consultations about government programs and services intended to address the needs of citizens with disabilities.
20. Communications New Brunswick should be tasked with the mandate to provide public relations advice and support to eligible non-profit community organizations. This could include such services as assistance with preparing appropriate public messages to promote the

need for people to volunteer in their community and to promote examples of best practices within the non-profit sector that could serve as a role model for others and to generate support from the public at large.

21. The annual report for each government department and agency should include a mandatory section to provide accountability on what specific measures they have undertaken in the previous year to demonstrate their involvement and concrete support with the non-profit community sector in New Brunswick.
22. Government should look for ways to provide financial or tax incentives for more citizens to become more active volunteers through such measures as covering limited out-of-pocket expenses for providing transportation services to people in need; a possible tax credit for approved volunteer time; curriculum credit in the school system and the postsecondary education system to encourage students to find ways to become connected with the community through volunteer service with a non-profit organization; etc.
23. The provincial government should hold an annual conference involving both community and government stakeholders to review and acknowledge best practices in the past year and to develop further opportunities for effective and efficient cooperation between government and the non-profit sector that could create and maintain further effective partnerships which meet common objectives.
24. Future partnerships between the government and the non-profit sector need to be outcome oriented and accountable but should also have the necessary flexibility to effectively manage available resources to meet stated priorities. Some of the previous accountability measures used by government seemed to focus on measuring things that are not relevant or appropriate to the task at hand.
Someone once said that “Not all things that can be counted--count; and not all things that count; can be counted.”

In certain situations related to the delivery and evaluation of social programs, we have to recognize that some positive outcomes will take a significant period of time to be demonstrated. Therefore in some partnership agreements, the accountability measures need to look not just at financial

expenditures and short-term statistics but should be able to review the long-term potential for positive outcomes and significant social and economic gains.

Conclusion:

The member groups of NBDEN are pleased to share these recommendations with the Community Non-profit Task Force. We look forward to receiving some feedback from you and would be happy to arrange a joint session to discuss these ideas further or to give you some of our feedback to any suggestions you may wish to discuss before you finalize your report. We wish you every success in moving forward on the challenges to be examined as part of your review.

Attached you will find a list of the member groups of NBDEN who have endorsed this joint submission to date.

Member groups of NBDEN who have endorsed this joint submission

- Premier's Council on the Status of Disabled Persons
- Neil Squire Foundation
- New Brunswick Association for Community Living
- Canadian Deafblind & Rubella Association
- Canadian Mental Health Association
- Canadian Paraplegic Association (N.B.) Inc.
- Stan Cassidy Centre for Rehabilitation
- Saint John Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Inc.
- South-East Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Inc.
- Learning Disabilities of N.B.
- Muscular Dystrophy Canada
- Canadian National Institute for the Blind – N.B. Division
- Easter Seals New Brunswick