

# **Voluntary Planning Board**

## **...A Citizens' Policy Forum**

### **Business Plan**

#### **2009-2010**



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## **Message from the Chair, Voluntary Planning Board of Directors and the Minister Responsible for Voluntary Planning Board**

Voluntary Planning ...A Citizens' Policy Forum, is dedicated to involving Nova Scotians in the development of provincial policy. Guided by the philosophy of continuous improvement, the Voluntary Planning Board of Directors undertook a strategic review in 2004-2005 that paid particular attention to sharpening the organization's focus on long-term planning and policy advice. This strategic review also re-emphasized the importance of reflecting the diversity of Nova Scotian society in all its policies and practices.

Through the adoption of a statement of philosophy on citizen engagement, Voluntary Planning has demonstrated a commitment to principles that provide Nova Scotians from all parts of the province with an opportunity to influence major policy direction. In furthering these principles, the organization has developed successful partnerships with government agencies that work with specific communities of interest, including the offices of Aboriginal Affairs, Acadian Affairs and African Nova Scotian Affairs.

Through an on-going dialogue between Cabinet and the Voluntary Planning Board of Directors, major projects are undertaken regularly. These projects typically involve the elements of public input, world-wide research, expert and stakeholder testimony, and deliberation through volunteer-led citizen engagement processes. Recommendations and findings that result from these processes are presented to government and citizens to be considered for adoption. At year end 2008-2009 a Voluntary Planning project committee had completed its work leading citizens and stakeholders in discussions to lay the foundation and define the values for a long term natural resources strategy, on behalf of the Department of Natural Resources.

Operating at arm's length to the provincial government, the Voluntary Planning Board stands ready to apply its highly successful citizen engagement and advice generating processes to major public policy topics. Voluntary Planning is proud of its unique ability to engage Nova Scotians in helping shape the future of our society.

Ron Smith, F.C.A.  
Chair, Voluntary Planning Board  
Board of Directors

Honourable Frank Corbett  
Chair of Treasury Board

# **Business Plan for Voluntary Planning Board 2009-2010**

## **1.0 Mission**

To measurably improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of all Nova Scotians by providing the Premier and Cabinet with valuable volunteer and citizen-based advice on relevant policy issues for today and for the future.

## **2.0 Planning Context**

Many of the issues of importance to society are long-term and directional in nature. Many citizens wish to play a part in shaping the strategic directions of the future, which may extend into 5-20 year time frames and well beyond electoral mandates. By necessity, much of government's attention is focused on the shorter term. Also, many policy related matters, both existing and emerging, being cross-societal or horizontal in nature, range across departmental and societal boundaries.

A major strength of Voluntary Planning is to work effectively with these two aspects of horizontality and long-term planning. Voluntary Planning, through its excellent cadre of volunteer citizen leaders and experts, is well positioned to address matters of strategic importance to the province. Sound advice on policy options, based on a variety of citizen engagement processes, is provided to government decision makers.

Government is striving to be more open, transparent, and accountable. If successful in these efforts, benefits can be achieved through increased confidence and trust among citizens, stakeholders, politicians, and government leaders. An exceptional contribution to this goal involves citizen participation and collaborative policy development, the very core strength of Voluntary Planning.

Voluntary Planning's system of consulting, researching, and engaging talented people on the complex issues of the day, when employed, contributes significantly to the process of public policy making.

One contextual factor of note, in terms of business planning for the Voluntary Planning Board, is that some of the project requests we receive from government are of an unexpected nature, and may arrive at any time of year. This is an accepted circumstance which results in this organization participating in business planning both formally, on an annual basis, and informally throughout the year. Occasionally, as a result, considerable flexibility is required.

### **3.0 Strategic Goals**

The Voluntary Planning Board strives to improve quality of life for Nova Scotians by:

- Addressing long-term policy issues
- Ensuring direct citizen participation in policy development
- Contributing to more responsive government policy and legislation
- Providing value and relevance to government and citizens

### **4.0 Core Business Area**

Voluntary Planning has a single core business, that being to enhance democracy and improve the quality of life for Nova Scotians by engaging knowledgeable volunteers and citizens in the formulation of policy advice to the Premier, Cabinet and departments.

The Voluntary Planning leadership entity is its Board of Directors. Its operations are carried out primarily through volunteer-led citizen engagement processes.

#### **Major Projects**

In recent years, Voluntary Planning has undertaken major projects assigned by the provincial government including the most recent citizen engagement process on a natural resources strategy.

Under volunteer-led citizen engagement processes, a group of knowledgeable volunteers is recruited to thoroughly research the subject, give all Nova Scotians an opportunity to provide input and comment, and produce their best advice in the form of recommendations or findings. Citizens are one important element, the others being stakeholders, experts, world-wide research and the thinking of the carefully selected people on the committee.

The Voluntary Planning processes consider the long-term benefit of the entire province and take full advantage of the opportunity to increase public knowledge and awareness on the issue at hand and of the value of contributing to such deliberations.

#### **Direct Advice**

On occasion, the Voluntary Planning Board of Directors, or other volunteers as assigned, are asked to provide advice directly to the Premier or other senior government representatives.

#### **Other Models**

While the above two operational modes are the typical approaches taken by Voluntary Planning to provide citizen based advice to government, the organization has the ability to modify its approach, depending on the issue at hand. In partnership with client departments, Voluntary Planning develops engagement processes that respond optimally to the specific needs of citizens and government and follow the organization's guiding principles for citizen engagement.

## 5.0 Priorities and Performance Measures

### Citizen Engagement Priorities

*To strive to include all Nova Scotians geographically, sectorally and socially in providing citizen-based input to government on policy issues.*

In 2004-2005, the Voluntary Planning Board of Directors undertook a strategic review with particular attention to sharpening the organization's focus on long-term planning and policy advice, and on reflecting the diversity of Nova Scotian society in all its policies and practices.

One of the first outcomes of the review was the adoption of a statement of philosophy on citizen engagement as a tool in promoting and increasing the involvement of Nova Scotians in developing policy advice to government. (Appendix)

In furthering these principles, 2005-2006 marked the beginning of successful partnerships with government agencies that work with specific communities of interest, including the offices of Aboriginal Affairs, Acadian Affairs and African Nova Scotian Affairs. These partnerships continued in subsequent years, and were expanded to include work with other departments such as those that were in the process of implementing their own citizen engagement initiatives.

#### Priorities for 2009-2010

- Continue to work closely with departments that are shaping plans to consult with Nova Scotians on important government policies and directions.
- Be prepared to undertake any such projects, as above, that may get approved for implementation during the period.
- Seek and develop creative ways to encourage constructive citizen engagement in policy shaping.
- Develop for Cabinet approval a proposal for a Citizen Engagement Institute or Centre-the first of it's kind in the world.

#### Outcome Measure

Core Business Area: Volunteer & Citizen Participation in the Formulation of Public Policy Advice to Premier, Cabinet & Departments					
Outcome	Measure	Data	Target '09 -'10	Ultimate Target	Strategic Actions to Achieve Target
Raise awareness, education, and participation by citizens on specific pressing issues, and on the value of citizen involvement in policy development	Participation level of those who have thoughtfully considered the issue: # of informed comments received on issues under consideration	<u>Natural Resources Citizen Engagement Process</u> Nov'07 -Mar'09: project spanned two fiscal years:  Over 600 responses to initial call for written submissions; feedback from 63 Nova Scotians on working paper; over 2000 participants at 27 community meetings; 117 participants at three follow up workshops.	600-800	Achieve/ exceed 600-800 annually	Continue to implement a VP Communications Strategy  Strong advertising to raise awareness of major projects  Intensive use of IT to solicit public response  Negotiate & implement major projects

## Major Project Priorities

To provide policy advice to government based on the input of citizens, stakeholders and communities, through volunteer-led citizen engagement processes.

A proposal for a Citizen Engagement Institute or Centre, involving the provincial and federal governments, and a number of national and international corporations, and a network of universities, is under development and is planned for submission to Cabinet by October, 2009.

### Outcome Measure

Core Business Area: Volunteer & Citizen Participation in the Formulation of Public Policy Advice to Premier, Cabinet & Departments					
Outcome	Measure	Data	Target '09 -'10	Ultimate Target	Strategic Actions to Achieve Target
Enable diverse citizen participation in public policy development	The participation level of individuals and communities of interest reflecting Nova Scotia's diverse population in Voluntary Planning initiatives	<p><u>Natural Resources Citizen Engagement Process</u> Nov'0 -Mar'09: project spanned two fiscal years:</p> <p>French-language community meetings held in three Acadian communities.</p> <p>Met with Native Council of Nova Scotia.</p> <p>Youth participation through efforts of Can. Parks and Wilderness Society and D250; Halifax Independent School; GPI Atlantic youth program</p> <p>Report on participatory approaches - Dalhousie University <i>Management Without Borders</i> student project.</p> <p><u>Heritage Strategy Task Force</u> Aug'05-Dec'06: Independent impact assessment completed on engagement process. Similar assessment being carried out for Natural Resources citizen engagement process.</p>	Involve additional communities of interest in citizen engagement initiatives	All citizen engagement initiatives enable diverse citizen participation	Continue to partner with government agencies that work with specific communities of interest to ensure diverse participation in citizen engagement initiatives

## 6.0 Human Resource Strategy

### Volunteer Contributions

The strength of the Voluntary Planning organization is in the commitment of our dedicated volunteers. For the fiscal year 2008-2009 and a fifteen month project committee framework, the following is an estimate of the total volunteer time contributed to the Province of Nova Scotia by the Voluntary Planning membership in the development of policy advice.

Board of Directors - 11 volunteers (Apr '08-Mar '09)      Estimated 100 person days

Natural Resources Citizen Engagement Committee-9 volunteers (Nov '07-Mar '09)

Estimated 450 person days

**Total      550 person days**

To assign a monetary value to this volunteer contribution, at a per diem rate of \$1,000 for consulting services, for example, this contribution would be \$550K.

### Funded Staff

FTEs: 6

Executive Director (1)

Project Manager (1)

Policy Staff (2)

Administrative Assistants (2)

The above six positions are core staffing to support the ongoing Board of Directors. These positions are supplemented through secondments or term positions to support major projects as required.

In addition, Voluntary Planning hired a Policy Associate through the Post Secondary Internship Program. This is a two year position, September 2008 to August 2010.

## **Corporate HR Plan Goals and 2009-2010 Voluntary Planning Priorities**

Goal # 1: To make a difference through a skilled, committed, and accountable public service

- Continue to implement an HR strategy that builds leadership and professional capacity, including workforce planning, performance management, training and career development.

Goal # 2: To be a preferred employer

- Continue to seek approval for co-op student and intern placements.
- Make presentations on citizen engagement in policy development, and on Voluntary Planning's unique role, to university students and others upon request.
- Openly discuss secondment and transfer opportunities for interested, appropriately skilled civil servants.

Goal # 3: To be a safe and supportive workplace

- Continue to provide staff representation on the Joseph Howe Building Tenants' Committee.
- Continue to provide staff representation on the Treasury and Policy Board - Joint Occupational Health and Safety Committee.

Goal # 4: To be a diverse workforce

- Continue staff participation on the Public Service Commission - Diversity Roundtable.
- Support staff participation in diversity training.
- Continue to consider candidates from the Diversity Talent Pool during new hiring processes.
- Continue to contribute to the implementation of new French-Language Services legislation through staff involvement in working groups.

Goal # 5: To be a learning organization

- Organize joint learning opportunities such as through tele-learning seminars.
- Support individual training and career development needs, as identified through the performance management process.

## 7.0 Budget Context

<b>Voluntary Planning Board</b>			
<b>Program and Service Area</b>	<b>2008-2009 Estimate</b>	<b>2008-2009 Actual</b>	<b>2009-2010 Estimate</b>
	(\$thousands)	(\$thousands)	(\$thousands)
<b>Total Program Expenses</b>	537	508	526
<b>Provincially Funded Staff (FTEs)</b>	<u>7.0</u> *	<u>5.0</u>	<u>6.0</u>

\* Figure includes core staffing and one FTE provided to Voluntary Planning by the Department of Natural Resources for additional administrative support during a citizen engagement project undertaken on behalf of the department

## **Voluntary Planning ...A Citizens' Policy Forum *Approach to Citizen Engagement***

### **Voluntary Planning Mission**

To measurably improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of all Nova Scotians by providing the Premier and Cabinet with valuable volunteer and citizen-based advice on relevant policy issues for today and for the future.

### **Engaging Citizens**

Voluntary Planning provides citizen-based input to government on policy issues affecting the lives of Nova Scotians. To do so, it draws on the expertise of volunteers who seek, hear, consider and deliberate on input and thought gained through various forms of citizen engagement and other sources. This approach is rooted in the belief that democracy is strengthened when citizens are engaged in an inclusive and transparent policy process designed to produce advice to government and fellow Nova Scotians.

To this end, Voluntary Planning strives to include all Nova Scotians geographically, sectorally and socially. Also we strive to operate in the service of government's policy needs but at arm's length from government. Finally, the process is transparent, open and fair, and is perceived to be so, in representing the consensus of citizens' views in combination with world-wide research, stakeholder and expert input.

### **Definition of Citizen Engagement**

Citizen engagement refers to a process of involving citizens in the development of public policy. It is described as "...interactive and iterative processes of deliberation among citizens ... Its purpose is to contribute in meaningful ways to specific public policy decisions in a transparent and accountable manner".<sup>1</sup> The International Association for Public Participation outlines a Spectrum of Public Participation reflecting increasing levels of public impact: inform, consult, involve, collaborate, empower.<sup>2</sup> Voluntary Planning endeavors to achieve the optimum, appropriate level of participation in its citizen engagement work.

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<sup>1</sup> Phillips, S.D. and M. Orsini. (2002). *Mapping the Links: Citizen Involvement in Policy Processes*, Canadian Policy Research Network.

<sup>2</sup> International Association for Public Participation. (2000). *IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum*

## **Guiding Principles for Citizen Engagement**

In carrying out its work, Voluntary Planning (VP) will observe the following guiding principles:

- 1) Recognition of the interests of Stakeholders, Citizens and Communities:**
  - a) Communities, citizens and stakeholders are categories having a direct concern or interest in the decision or policy under discussion.
  - b) Stakeholders are persons or groups who are likely to be impacted in a specific manner or (conversely) may be able to impact the decision or policy under discussion.
  - c) “Community” may exist as geographic entities, or communities of interest(s).
  - d) The VP process will strive to ensure fair, comprehensive and equitable representation of stakeholders, citizens and communities in its consultation and engagement programs.
  
- 2) Inclusive:**

Voluntary Planning will enable diverse citizen participation by including variation in social class, gender, race, ethnicity, religion and age at every opportunity. Particular attention will be given to inclusion of the First Nations, women, persons with disabilities, African Canadians, Acadians and members of racially visible groups.
  
- 3) Respectful:**
  - a) VP will ensure the purpose and objectives of its consultation and engagement activities are clear to participants.
  - b) VP will foster a respectful atmosphere in its public consultation and engagement processes. A respectful atmosphere is one that enables participants to: have open dialogue; freely express ideas; achieve clear understanding, and; avoid premature judgement.
  - c) VP will adopt ground rules appropriate for the issues and for the needs of participants.
  - d) VP will design engagement activities to avoid or remove barriers, as much as possible, which may inappropriately limit stakeholder or citizen participation.
  
- 4) Objective:**
  - a) Besides citizen engagement, the VP process includes a commitment to independent research and the solicitation of stakeholder and expert opinion. In blending research, expert opinion and consultation, the VP process will always strive to be objective and fair in considering the input of all parties.
  - b) The VP process is an enabler and advocate for citizens as a vehicle through which relevant and important information can be gathered, clarified and distilled, leading to the formation of particular recommendations.
  
- 5) Responsive:**

The VP process will always undertake a response to participants such as through reports and/or set of recommendations reflecting the public input.