

# **Voluntary Planning Board**

**Annual Accountability Report  
For The Fiscal Year 2008-2009**



**VOLUNTARY  
PLANNING**

*A Citizens' Policy Forum*

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Accountability Statement.....	1
Introduction. ....	2
Priorities and Accomplishments. ....	5
Financial Results. ....	6
Performance Measures . ....	7
<i>Appendix - Voluntary Planning Approach to Citizen Engagement</i>	

## **Accountability Statement**

The accountability report of the Voluntary Planning Board for the year ended March 31, 2009, is prepared pursuant to the Provincial Finance Act and government policies and guidelines. These authorities require the reporting of outcomes against the Voluntary Planning Board business plan information for the fiscal year 2008-2009. The reporting of Voluntary Planning Board outcomes necessarily includes estimates, judgments and opinions by Voluntary Planning Board management.

We acknowledge that this accountability report is the responsibility of Voluntary Planning Board management. The report is, to the extent possible, a complete and accurate representation of outcomes relative to the goals and priorities set out in the Voluntary Planning Board business plan for the year.

Ron Smith, FCA  
Chair, Voluntary Planning Board of Directors

Honourable Frank Corbett  
Chair of Treasury Board

## **Introduction**

This accountability report is based on the goals, priorities and performance measures set out in the Voluntary Planning Board business plan for the fiscal year 2008-2009. The business plan, available on our website at <http://vp.gov.ns.ca> *Publications*, more fully describes the organization's core business areas, goals and priorities for the year. It is recommended that this accountability report be read in conjunction with the business plan.

## **Mandate**

### 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.

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 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.

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.

### 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

## **Core Business - Engaging Citizens**

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.

## 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, 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 1'08-Mar31'09)	Estimated	100 person days
Natural Resources Citizen Engagement Committee -7 volunteers (Apr 1'08-March 31'09)	Estimated	<u>255 person days*</u>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>355 person days</b>

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 \$355k.

\*Over the two fiscal yrs. that the project was underway, from November 2007 to March 2009, the Committee volunteers contributed a total of 450 person days of volunteer time.

### 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.

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

## **Priorities and Accomplishments**

### **I Citizen Engagement**

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

#### Priorities for 2008-2009

- 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.

#### Accomplishments for 2008-2009

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, 2005-2007 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 2008-2009, and were expanded to include work with other departments such as those that were in the process of implementing their own citizen engagement initiatives.

### **II Major Project Priorities**

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

#### Priorities for 2008-2009

The priority for 2008-2009 was a citizen engagement process led by Voluntary Planning's volunteer Natural Resources Citizen Engagement Committee, to learn what Nova Scotians value about the province's natural resources, as the first phase in the development of a new provincial natural resources strategy.

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## Accomplishments for 2008-2009

In May, 2007 the Department of Natural Resources announced plans for a new natural resources strategy that will govern future directions for Nova Scotia's forests, minerals, parks and biodiversity. Nova Scotians play an important part in shaping that strategy. Voluntary Planning was asked by the department to find out what Nova Scotians value about our natural resources, with a view to strengthening the final strategy. Voluntary Planning recruited a volunteer Natural Resources Citizen Engagement Committee in late 2007 to lead the citizen engagement process.

Nova Scotians filled 2000 seats in 27 community meetings held around the province in May and June 2008 discussing the future of the province's natural resources. In addition, Voluntary Planning received over 600 submissions in writing and by phone. This input was refined in Fall 2008 through 60 comments received on a working paper and in three workshops with 117 participants.

All written submissions, where permission was given, were posted on the Voluntary Planning website at <http://vp.gov.ns.ca/>. Any information considered important to other government strategies was forwarded to the relevant departments, and all submissions were made available to the Department of Natural Resources for work on later stages of strategy development.

As part of the process, Voluntary Planning met with the Offices of Aboriginal Affairs, Acadian Affairs, and African Nova Scotia Affairs to seek advice on involving their respective communities. One of the considerations in the selection of the 27 meeting locations was easy accessibility by these communities. French-language meetings were held in Tusket, Saulnierville, and Cheticamp.

In a final report released April 17, 2009, the Citizen Engagement Committee presented the key thoughts, concerns and values expressed by Nova Scotians. The information gathered through public engagement will provide the foundation for later stages in the development of a natural resources strategy. In phase two, a steering panel and panels of expertise will conduct a more detailed analysis of the Voluntary Planning committee findings. Phase three will be the development of the long term strategy itself by the Department of Natural Resources.

### **Financial Results**

<b>Voluntary Planning Board</b>			
<b>Program and Service Area</b>	<b>Estimate 2008-2009</b>	<b>Actual 2008-2009</b>	<b>Variance</b>
	(thousands)	(thousands)	
<b>Total Program Expenses</b>	\$537	\$508	(\$29)
<b>Provincially Funded Staff (FTEs)</b>	<u>7.0*</u>	<u>5.0</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

## **Performance Measures**

### **Core Business:**

#### **Citizen Participation in the Formulation of Policy Advice to the Premier & Cabinet**

The Voluntary Planning Board 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.

Three intended outcomes of this core business are i) to raise awareness, education and participation by citizens on specific pressing issues of public policy and on the value of citizen involvement in policy development ii) to have an impact on public policy in Nova Scotia and iii) to enable diverse citizen participation in public policy development.

#### **Intended Outcome 1:**

Raise awareness, education and participation by citizens on specific pressing issues of public policy and on the value of citizen involvement in policy development.

#### **Measure:**

The number of informed comments received on issues under consideration

#### **What does this measure tell us?**

The participation level of those who have thoughtfully considered the issue

#### **Where are we now?**

Nova Scotians filled 2000 seats in 27 community meetings held around the province in May and June 2008 discussing the future of the province's biodiversity, forests, minerals and parks. In addition, Voluntary Planning received over 600 submissions in writing and by phone. This input was refined in Fall 2008 through 60 comments received on a working paper and in three workshops with 117 participants.

Our target for this measure was to receive, from the public, 600-800 informed comments per year on issues under consideration, by adopting a higher public profile. Looking at the project, the target was exceeded through written submissions and community meeting/workshop discussions.

#### **Where do we want to be?**

Voluntary Planning will continue to raise awareness, education and participation by citizens on policy matters by following approved communications guidelines, continued strong advertising to raise awareness of citizen engagement projects, intensive use of IT to solicit public response and negotiation and implementation of new projects.

**Intended Outcome 2:**

To enable diverse citizen participation in public policy development.

**Measure:**

The participation level of individuals reflecting Nova Scotia's diverse population and communities of interest in Voluntary Planning's initiatives.

**Where Are We Now?**

As part of the natural resources strategy, citizen engagement process, Voluntary Planning met with the Offices of Aboriginal Affairs, Acadian Affairs, and African Nova Scotia Affairs to seek advice on involving their respective communities. One of the considerations in the selection of twenty-seven community meeting locations was easy accessibility by these communities.

French-language meetings were held in Tusket, Saulnierville, and Cheticamp. Other French-language services provided included translation of communication material. Audio technicians were hired from the Acadian community for the community meetings. With the help of the Office of Acadian Affairs and local community organizations, three individuals from the local communities were hired to provide administrative support for the meetings.

Voluntary Planning project committee representatives met with the Native Council of Nova Scotia to encourage participation in the strategy process.

The efforts of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society and D250 in promoting this citizen engagement project to Nova Scotia youth are directly responsible for many of the youth submissions the committee received and posted to the Voluntary Planning website.

The website includes written and drawn submissions from grade 1 and 2 students of the Halifax Independent School, who also took part in the Halifax community meeting. Youth who belong to GPI Atlantic's youth program also shared their vision for Nova Scotia's natural resources through their participation at the Halifax community meeting and through written submissions and artwork posted to our website.

During 2008-2009, two student groups from Dalhousie University's Management Without Borders graduate program prepared reports on topics related to citizen engagement, one focusing specifically on the natural resources strategy process and a second on youth engagement.

**Where do we want to be?**

To continue to partner with government agencies that work with specific communities of interest.

## **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. 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 or findings.

### **5) Responsive:**

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