

ABNN Recommendations: Moving us toward our policy agenda

In January 2019, ABNN coordinated two workshops, one in Edmonton and one in Calgary, with more than 50 representatives of 49 nonprofit and voluntary sector organizations (nonprofit sector). The purpose of the workshops was to create a 2019 policy agenda for the nonprofit sector leading up to the provincial elections.

The discussions offered considerable insight into how the sector perceives itself, its strengths and challenges, and key initiatives that would advance the sector as a whole.

A number of policy-related priority actions emerged through ABNN's insights related to:

- An assessment of Alberta's nonprofit and voluntary sector's value and contributions
- A comprehensive review of Alberta nonprofit and voluntary sector policy-related research and literature
- Policy prioritization conversations at January 2019 workshops

The policy agenda that will guide sector discussions with potential candidates and elected officials now and into the future includes four priorities:

- Increase policy and program-focused collaboration between the Government of Alberta and the nonprofit sector
- Develop a government-led and sector-informed Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Strategy
- Modernize Alberta's laws, policies, and funding models to realize the public benefits of nonprofits
- Adopt an ongoing provincial data-driven assessment of the nonprofit sector's contributions

These advancements would significantly bolster the sector's ability to do its best work and reach its potential of positively impacting Albertans. However, it is critical to recognize that successfully advancing the policy agenda depends on the sector pulling together and achieving greater cohesion and influence, through ABNN's coordination and leadership.

Recommendations

1. Define and articulate the collective story of the nonprofit sector

Why it matters

The lack of definition and cohesion in the sector is a disadvantage. People within and outside of the sector doesn't always know who belongs within the designation of nonprofit sector (e.g., public benefit or member organizations, organizations that deliver services on behalf of government and those that do not, organizations funded through government-service contracts and those funded through a combination of sources) and what common interests are shared. The lack of clarity means that instead of one strong voice, there are many questions about the sector affecting how it is understood and how its impact is measured.

In tandem with defining what constitutes the nonprofit sector, it is critical to for Alberta's nonprofit and voluntary sector to write, give voice to, and amplify its collective story. The goal being to help other members of the sector, people who benefit from and engage with the sector, and stakeholders, including the Government of Alberta, understand who the sector is, why it matters, what it contributes, and what is possible if it is supported to work at its full potential (or, equally, what Albertans will lose if it is not supported). Some of the key questions that underlie this story are:

- Who are we?
- Why are we needed?
- What drives our sector?

- How do we understand our contributions?
- Why do we choose to do the work we do, and who does it affect?
- What would be our impact on Albertans be if we functioned at our very best?
- What would Alberta lose without our contributions?
- What is our potential?

What it will achieve

- A stronger network of nonprofit and voluntary sector organizations based on a sense of belonging and commonalities
- A collective voice that is more influential together and stronger because of its diversity
- Comfort and confidence among sector leaders to articulate a shared story and to use that shared story to advocate on behalf of the sector
- A unified voice that the government can turn to for counsel, ideas, and solutions

2. Build a strategic communications plan to create understanding of the impact of the sector and garner support for the sector among key audiences (Led by the ABNN Value and Impact Steering Committee)

Why it matters

The breadth and impact of the nonprofit sector in Alberta is substantial and has potential to draw support from key audiences including decision-makers, policy-makers, and other public opinion influencers. A comprehensive, strategic communications plan will outline umbrella key messages that are common to the sector and that each organization can use and customize as they see fit, delineate target audiences and how they can best be reached as a sector, and assess the most impactful tactics and how they can best be employed. A sector-wide communications strategy will build upon and enhance existing organization-specific communications priorities and plans.

What it will achieve

Organizations within the network can rally around a set of common, customizable messages to express a shared voice when interacting with stakeholders in the public and private sector, contributing to, gathering, and sharing resources and tools for greater impact.

3. Design processes and practices to meaningfully connect regularly to advance priorities that will benefit the sector as a whole

Why it matters

The nonprofit sector is known for its ability to respond quickly and organically, stretching what is available to better meet the needs of Albertans. Working in solidarity, with a shared vision and voice, requires more deliberate, coordinated effort. It means asking tough questions—and working through them. It means educating one another about policy processes and segues to influence them. It means amplifying sector commonalities while celebrating its diversity. All of this requires coordinated effort. Processes and practices that give the sector the space to connect, talk, deliberate, prioritize, act, and evaluate.

What it will achieve

Coming together in a purposeful, meaningful way will lift every organization in the sector. Accountability to each other to work for the good of the sector as a whole will increase, enabling the network to have greater control over its collective future.