



Frequently Asked Questions

What is the role of the Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations (ECVO) in this new initiative?

The ECVO is committed to building the capacity of the voluntary sector in the Edmonton capital region, and thus is very well placed to support this exciting new initiative. The organization's strategic priorities include building governance and leadership expertise and establishing a rich repository of volunteer human capital for the sector to draw upon. Although its own resources are limited, ECVO is happy to provide initial administrative and marketing support, as well as support to seek additional funding to ensure that the initiative continues to have a significant impact on the voluntary sector.

Will the voluntary sector organizations have to pay for the volunteer consulting services they receive?

This is still a matter of some discussion! ASCN plans to start by offering the consulting services free of charge, although our limited experience has suggested that requiring at least a modest payment may be in everyone's best interest! We know that the Management Assistance Services (MAS), which offer very similar services to the voluntary sector in Toronto, asks for a donation from the organizations receiving the assistance. MAS receive sufficient annual donations to cover the administrative overhead for providing their consulting services.

We have also proposed placing a financial threshold so that the focus will generally be on small and medium sized charities and nonprofits. This way, our volunteer resources will be directed to those organizations with limited financial resources. However, there will be an agreement that the volunteer organizations receiving help will be required to pay for the volunteer consultant's out of pocket expenses, such as mileage, parking, coffee and lunch.

What commitment expectations does ASCN have of its volunteer consultants?

ASCN is looking to attract skilled professionals who have a commitment to supporting the work of the voluntary sector. We are hoping that each volunteer consultant will be willing to take on a maximum of three projects a year, with each project taking approximately 15-20 hours. We're looking for professional expertise in one or more of the service areas identified on the ASCN website: such as board governance, strategic & financial planning, human resource management and fund development. As well, we would like to see volunteer consultants with previous significant experience as staff or board members in the voluntary sector, who are perceptive listeners and observers, as well as skilled communicators who can build trust and respect.

How does ASCN respond to the criticism that this initiative will be taking work away from professional consultants in the community?

Experience suggests that there is plenty of consulting work for everyone in the voluntary sector! By establishing a financial threshold we believe this will leave a significant amount of work in the sector for active professional consultants in the community. It is also likely that ASCN will be able to offer recommendations to organizations in the sector that have an interest or desire to contract with a consultant. ASCN has also been working with at least three other organizations in the Edmonton region, each with slightly different models that are willing to help the voluntary sector build its capacity. The four helping organizations have agreed to make referrals to each other where the fit might be better.



Will insurance coverage be in place if a voluntary sector organization brings a legal complaint concerning the advice given by a volunteer consultant?

This is one of the benefits of ASCN working within the governance umbrella of ECVO. We have been assured that the insurance coverage carried by ECVO, for general liability and errors and omissions, will be sufficient to cover all volunteer consultants.

Are there any issues that ASCN has already decided it just won't touch?

While we have been careful to identify specific areas of expertise for which we hope to recruit, our experience tells us that the presenting issues coming from the voluntary sector seldom conform to our prepared list. We will likely often be very surprised by the requests for assistance that come our way! In our discussions we have generally agreed that in principle we would like to take on issues that have a good chance of success, but understandably this will be difficult to assess at the start of each journey.

Should we take on issues where there is a significant conflict between the Executive Director and the Board of Directors, or at least a portion of the board? In response, some of us have decided, 'let's stay away'. Others have taken the alternative stance that 'we need to do what we can to help the organization deal with the conflict'. Perhaps more discussion is still required!

Will there be a contract for service signed between the volunteer consultant and the organization seeking assistance before the work begins?

Here is how we anticipate it will operate. The voluntary organization will contact ASCN through its website or by telephone, complete the application form and indicate the nature of the problem it is

seeking help with. A member of ACSN will contact the representative(s) identified on the application form (hopefully within 48 hours) and arrange to have a meeting to discuss the issues and the assistance that could be made available by ACSN. Our experience has told us that often the 'presenting problem' is not the real problem faced by the organization!

All of this information will be recorded and held in confidence. On the basis of an internal ASCN review of the identified issues and knowledge of the expertise available, one or more volunteer consultants will be approached to see whether they would be prepared to help the particular voluntary organization looking for help. If interest is confirmed a further meeting will be set-up between the selected volunteer consultant(s) and the organization, all past documentation will be reviewed, and a draft agreement will be drawn up.

As well as being clear about the nature of the contractual engagement, a schedule of activities and time lines will be drafted and attached to the contract. We anticipate that in many of the arrangements a mentoring relationship will be established so that the volunteer consultant will build in some follow-up contacts that will be available to the voluntary organization, should they be required.

ACSN also anticipates that there may be circumstances where the first relationship established between the voluntary organization and the volunteer consultant proves to be a struggle. New information is uncovered, personality differences appear to be insurmountable or additional expertise is now required. ACSN can facilitate follow-up meetings to try to resolve any impasses. However, there may be a point reached where a decision is made that ACSN is not able to provide assistance, and other community resources may be recommended to the voluntary organization.



