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Turning Policy Into Practice

The Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector (OCVS) is gearing up for a busy year after several months of planning and the appointment of new staff.

Its main focus is to support government agencies to build the best relationships they can with the non-government organisations (NGOs) they work with.

A Cabinet directive asks each government department to identify the key community, voluntary and tangata whenua organisations they work with and to develop a plan for how they will be consulted with and involved in policy development and service planning.

Office Establishment Director Sue Driver says this work is being approached in a number of ways. "We will work closely with five

departments that are currently engaged with NGOs to better understand what contributes to good and bad relationships. In addition, we will work across all government departments as well as four Crown entities to help them develop departmental plans.

"This work is driven by the Government's commitment to building strong relationships with the community and voluntary sector. The sector plays a unique and vital role in New Zealand. The Government seeks a relationship, outlined in the Statement of Government Intentions for an Improved Community Relationship, which is based on 'honesty, integrity, compassion and caring and recognition of diversity'. Our job is to help realise that goal," Sue says.



The Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector (OCVS) met officials from the five agencies that it will work alongside to develop models of successful relationships with community and voluntary sector organisations. Standing left to right: Claire Brown, (Community Policy Unit, Ministry of Social Development), Ann Reeves, (Community Development Group, Department of Internal Affairs), Don Clarke (NZ Agency for International Development), Diana Suggate and Hugh Lawrence (OCVS). Sitting left to right: Christine Jacobson (Department of Conservation) and Joan Mirkin (Ministry of Health).

Charities Commission Planned

A new Commission aimed at improving the transparency and accountability of the charitable sector is expected to be up and running in October this year.

A working party, made up of people from a cross-section of community and voluntary organisations, was appointed in 2002 to provide the Government with recommendations for a registration, reporting and monitoring regime and how it should be administered.

The Charities Commission will register and monitor charitable organisations wanting to retain

their tax-exempt status.

Organisations that choose not to register will still be able to call themselves charities but will no longer qualify for tax exempt status. The Commission will also operate a second register for approved donees (those receiving donations).

The Commission will be a Crown entity that sits within the Ministry of Economic Development. It is anticipated that the Commission will have five to seven members.

One of the Commission's functions will be to educate and support

charitable organisations to meet the legal requirements of the Charities Act.

After the introduction of the Charities Bill, which was expected to be introduced into the House in March, there is an opportunity to present submissions on the Bill to a select committee.

Following the Bill's tabling, expressions of interest for positions on the Commission will be sought, a website and freephone number will be launched and a nationwide information roadshow will start. Further details on these initiatives can be found at www.med.govt.nz

Community Sector Considers Strategic Shift



Taskforce Chairperson Gill Genet.

Over the next two months people from community and voluntary organisations will be meeting throughout the country to consider a proposal for a nationally mandated leadership entity for the whole sector.

The 25 meetings are being organised by the Community Sector Taskforce, a non-government organisation set up by the Community-Government Relationship Steering Group.

The Taskforce is independent of government and has the task of strengthening and supporting the sector.

Its vision is to have a sustainable sector that is informed, connected and able to do its work.

According to Taskforce Chairperson Gill Genet people want to identify as a sector.

“They want the sector to be proud of what it does and to be recognised for what it does.

“They also want a way to decide how to act together on common concerns while taking account of the diversities and differences that exist.

“There’s a desire to start setting the agenda rather than responding to it and to have the voices of the sector heard by government.

“Our aim is for these forums to mandate what will in effect be a significant strategic shift for the community and voluntary sector,” Gill says.

The regional forums will discuss two proposals: a common statement or charter for the sector; and a leadership entity or model. They will then feed into a national hui to be held at the end of May.

The forums will also provide an opportunity to discuss local and national issues and will update work resulting from the Steering Group’s report to Government – He Waka Kotuia.

To find out more about the forums visit www.community.net.nz, www.nzfvwo.org.nz or contact the NZ Federation of Voluntary Welfare Organisations 04 385 0981.

Passionate About Resolving Conflicts

Not many people would try bringing some of the world’s most conflicted communities together to discuss their differences and find some common ground, but that is what American Hal Saunders is passionate about.

The Office for the Community and Voluntary Sector (OCVS) organised a lunchtime meeting to provide government officials with an opportunity to hear Hal talk about his work.



Hal Saunders discusses sustainable dialogue with public servants and community sector people at a lunchtime forum.

Hal visits New Zealand about once a year to run workshops on a technique called ‘sustainable dialogue’ that he has developed to help communities deal with difficult or fractious issues.

He works with the Institute of Sustained Dialogue – an American-based not-for-profit organisation committed to seeking answers to what he describes as “the problems behind the problem”.

Hal’s work began in the 1980s when he facilitated a group of Soviet and American citizens. The group met every six months over a nine year period. This year he will work with a group of Arabs, Europeans and Americans to focus on the Middle Eastern conflict. He also mentors groups in both New Zealand and South Africa.

“With this process we get beyond the conflict to the human relationship level. People begin to understand why other people care about particular things. It’s possible to talk differently with each other, to talk analytically and to find common interests. Over time, we create what we call an ‘accumulative agenda’ of items that people have in common.”

The Office will continue to host such forums in Wellington with a view to providing a platform for debate on issues of interest to government and community.

For more information about the sustainable dialogue process visit www.sustaineddialogue.org

For information on upcoming forums contact: Glenda McCallum 04 918 9513 or email ocvs@msd.govt.nz