

Ideas for a More Effective Environmental Movement in Canada

A discussion paper prepared for The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation

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Introduction

A draft of this discussion paper was prepared in advance of a meeting of environmental leaders engaged in capacity-building initiatives. Based on the input received at the meeting, this paper has now been updated. This meeting was hosted by the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation on May 13, 2005 and served as an exciting opportunity to discuss some key issues facing the environmental sector:

- How can the environmental sector become more effective?
- What capacity-building initiatives should be undertaken?
- What funding opportunities should be considered for the future of the environmental sector?

These are big questions. But pausing to consider where we've come from can help to ease the task of choosing future directions. What seems like a new problem or new idea may turn out to be a variation on a theme from a decade or two ago. In that case, we can seek guidance from the collective experience of many environmental leaders among us, and from the few available written histories and analyses of the environmental movement.

The purpose of this paper is to stimulate discussion about and provide input into The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation's next steps in its environmental program, in particular those aspects that relate to building the capacity of the environmental sector. It is also intended to help the sector and funders think about the environmental sector's needs and future directions more generally. While this paper builds on previous meetings of the McConnell capacity-building group, it raises issues that will also benefit from the experiences gained in McConnell's community foundations and citizen engagement streams. Hence, representatives from those programs also participated in the meeting to discuss this paper.

Though the focus of this paper is on the Canadian environmental sector, it must be remembered that environmental groups are part of a larger voluntary sector within Canada. Some of the questions posed herein may also be relevant to others in the voluntary sector and may serve as an opportunity to encourage broader discussions within the voluntary sector. Moreover, much of the work of voluntary sector organizations is situated within a global context that has a significant impact on domestic initiatives. Some of the obstacles and opportunities we face are a result of global dynamics that go well beyond the boundaries of the Canadian movement. In seeking to improve the effectiveness of the Canadian environmental movement, we must not lose sight of the larger progressive movement and global agenda.

I wish to thank the many generous advisors who contributed their insights to this discussion paper and helped generate much fruitful discussion at the meeting. I received valuable input from many individuals who are undertaking capacity-building initiatives in their organizations as well as other leaders from the environmental community, philanthropic foundations and government.

The first part of this paper is a synthesis of thoughts around the effectiveness of the Canadian environmental movement. Spurred in part by the ongoing debate about the environmental movement's performance in the United States, this section seeks to raise key issues and

questions that will help inform an ongoing conversation about the Canadian movement. Key themes include: working together, engaging Canadians, and reflecting diversity.

The second part identifies several needs and/or wants for the Canadian environmental sector and discusses possible initiatives that could address them. Where feasible, as gaps are identified, some initial thoughts are provided on addressing them. This “wish list” should be viewed, of course, as preliminary and I hope it helps generate further views on any items that may be missing.

Keeping this draft discussion paper short was a challenge (especially for a lawyer!). Each conversation or research idea led to more opportunities to explore. The universe of my task kept expanding – especially when I encountered a report entitled: “*The Expanding Universe: New Directions in Nonprofit Capacity-Building*”.¹ At a certain point I decided I had to stop my universe from expanding any further if I were to succeed in getting a draft of this paper completed in advance of the McConnell Foundation’s May 13, 2005 meeting. Therefore, I have noted key references only and have focused on presenting ideas that promise to stimulate interesting and useful discussions.

Debating the Effectiveness of the Canadian Environmental Movement

Consider the following passage:

Environmental groups of all stripes are weathering some serious and unexpected storms at present. Several factors are challenging the traditional strategies of the environmental movement, including fiscal constraints and changing decision making processes in both the public and private sectors.²

Do these words resonate with your current situation? What storms are you weathering? What fiscal constraints do you face? What changes in decision-making are you adapting to? Do these issues apply to other environmental groups you know of?

Ironically, the above passage about ‘current challenges’ was written in 1993 but still rings true today. Clearly, some current challenges are really ongoing challenges that have remained in the background or that recur periodically. So it is with the current debate over *The Death of Environmentalism*³ south of the border. While it seems revolutionary, it is in many ways simply a louder and more pointed version of a long-standing debate about the direction, approaches and evolution of the environmental movement.⁴

¹ See: http://www.allianceonline.org/pcbr_programs.page/the_expanding_universe.file

² Griss, Paul, “Environmental Groups: Adapting to Changing Times,” *National Round Table Review*, Spring 1993, p. 1 (<http://www.nrtee-trnee.ca/Publications/PDF/Spring1993E.PDF>). See also: *Canadian Conservation/Environmental Organizations: Selected Profiles, Context and Commentary*, a report for the Henry P. Kendall Foundation, October 2002 for a recent review of the challenges facing the sector.

³ See: Shellenberger, Michael, and Ted Nordhaus, *The Death of Environmentalism*, 2004 (<http://www.grist.org/news/maindish/2005/01/13/doe-reprint/>).

⁴ The work of Canadians John Livingston and Neil Evernden from the 1980s comes to mind. Both advised caution vis-à-vis technocratic and managerial approaches to environmentalism. Several years ago I used Livingston’s *Fallacy of Wildlife Conservation* as a springboard for reflecting on approaches to biodiversity conservation, touching on some of the issues around language, culture and relationships central to the current debate: “As

Just like living organisms, environmental organizations are evolving and adapting to their environment (and indeed also changing it). Further changes mandate more adaptations. And so it goes with this evolutionary process. Some want to accelerate our ability to adapt while others are more comfortable with the present or recent past. A challenge is to find those changes or adaptations that are especially positive and to encourage their uptake and replication even if this means departing from a comfortable lineage. We should also remember to take stock of and build on our assets and strengths and not simply focus on needs or problems to be addressed.

While surrounded by controversy, the ongoing debate about environmentalism in the United States is useful in raising critical questions about the effectiveness of the movement and about perceptions of the environment in general. Using the example of the movement's failures vis-à-vis climate change, the authors of *The Death of Environmentalism* contend:

- that the movement is not articulating a vision commensurate with the crisis,
- that the focus is on technical policy fixes rather than on popular inspiration and political alliances,
- that leaders are failing to question their basic assumptions and solutions, and
- that the movement still views the "environment" as a thing or special interest to be protected.

They believe that framing issues as strictly environmental and focusing on technical solutions has led to the U.S. movement's lack of success on climate change.

There are major disagreements in the U.S. over the thesis presented in *The Death of Environmentalism*⁵ and much of what is presented therein is not applicable to the Canadian context. Nevertheless, the larger lesson for us may be to avoid complacency. We should not

Canadian ENGOs develop and mature, attention to relationships is bound to be crucial in sustaining the diversity of life. While certainly ENGOs can take a great deal of credit for raising awareness of and taking steps to address threats to biodiversity, they have often been hampered in their efforts by their isolation and limited constituency. Even though nature protection generally is supported by the public, translating heartfelt visions into comprehensible, workable, widely acceptable strategies has proven a daunting task. Consequently, notwithstanding the many hard-won success stories, the overall outlook for biodiversity conservation in Canada is alarming. As naturalist John Livingston contends, nature advocates seem to be "stamping at tiny smoulders in the carpet, rushing from hot spot to hot spot, when all the while the roof is racing to a fire-storm and the walls are creaking towards collapse" (Livingston, John, *The Fallacy of Wildlife Conservation*, Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1981, p. 13). Part of the problem, it seems, is that conservationists traditionally have made mistake of separating discussions of biodiversity from the cultures in which they are embedded. Increasingly, however, ENGOs are recognizing the inaccessibility of scientific jargon and argument and the weakness of "management" approaches to conservation which fail to factor in human lifestyles and livelihoods. Working from an understanding of the interdependence of cultural and biological diversity, they are beginning to reach out to First Nations and others, hoping to establish some common ground. They know that, in addition to advocating new protected areas and recovery plans for endangered species, they must meet the challenge of finding the words and images that appeal to gardeners, farmers, cottagers, loggers, and the rest of us. The hope is that we will be reminded of and thus ready to stand up for the many ways that life's infinite variety enriches us all (Nabhan, Gary Paul, *Cultures of Habitat: On Nature, Culture and Story*, Washington: Counterpoint, 1997, pp. 17-29)." (excerpt from: DeMarco, Jerry V., and Anne C. Bell. "The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations in Biodiversity Conservation," in Bocking, Stephen, ed. *Biodiversity in Canada: Ecology, Ideas, and Action*, Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2000, pp. 347-365).

⁵ See: <http://www.grist.org/news/maindish/2005/01/13/doe-intro/>

assume that the best path of evolution for the Canadian environmental movement is simply an extrapolation (with some tinkering) of the past. It could be that a much different path is better suited to the characteristics of our changing environment. We may be keeping pace with the rapid technological changes to communications, but what other recent or upcoming changes are deserving of attention and have implications for the way we behave and operate? What about changing demographics, cultural diversity, and urbanization? Are we keeping pace to the same degree?

The debate surrounding *The Death of Environmentalism* invites us to be self-reflective as a movement and to examine the critical differences between the Canadian environmental scene and that of the U.S. While, for the purposes of this discussion, there is no need for us to choose sides in the debate, I think it is incumbent upon us to ask ourselves some of the tough questions that are being raised there. For instance:

- Are we conceptualizing and defining “environmental” issues in ways that undermine our effectiveness?
- Do the words and images we use engage all of those who are critical to the movement’s success?
- Do we need to better articulate a common vision (rather than focusing on more refined, technical arguments)?
- Is it worthwhile to act on our narrower missions as organizations without adequate relation to the collective good?

Again, these questions are not new. As Paul Griss pointed out in 1993:

Sustainable development requires that a range of considerations – including social, economic, and environmental – be incorporated into the decision-making process. Influencing public policy from a discretely environmental perspective is becoming more difficult. Environmental groups are now only one of many voices speaking on issues that they have traditionally considered their own.⁶

It may be that the environmental movement will only succeed in many of its aspirations when the line between other important issues and ‘environmental’ issues disappears. ‘Environmental’ matters were and are inextricably intertwined with the basics of food, shelter, movement, symbolism, story-telling and spirituality. Perhaps when the ‘industrial’ environmental movement became complicit in the argument that the environment needed to be defended against other basic needs and wants, it cut itself off from potential supporters and made our task more difficult than necessary. Or perhaps it is true that our detachment from nature has become so ‘advanced’ that the environment does need defenders like any other disenfranchised component of society. These are difficult questions that have no single answer, but so long as ours is a movement that is

⁶ Griss, *supra* note 2, p. 1. See also: Gelfand, Julie, “Preparing for New Challenges,” *National Round Table Review*, Spring 1993, p. 11 (<http://www.nrtee-trnee.ca/Publications/PDF/Spring1993E.PDF>): “... the environment is now everyone’s issue, not just the domain of the ‘environmentalist’.”

largely predicated on the less-than-compelling task of simply slowing the pace of the inevitable degradation of nature, water, land and air,⁷ we may need to ask them.

Many of us have a nagging feeling that nearly everyone, deep down, agrees with our basic goals – our desire for cleaner air and water, healthy and abundant wildlife and diverse natural landscapes. So we, sensibly, continue on with our work. But in so doing, are we furthering these common underlying values or are we just furthering technocratic ‘solutions’ that seem more achievable than the larger task of the long-term alignment of environmentalists and society at large? One difficulty with departing from the ‘short-term deliverable’ approach (leaving aside certain funder expectations for the moment), is that many of us are remarkably effective at what we are doing. It is rewarding to be part of a sector that accounts for nearly 3% of the voluntary sector, yet benefits from only 1% of the funding⁸ and still manages to deliver remarkable short-term and medium-term results (and possibly long-term too – we just don’t know yet!). Investments in the environmental community have been wise ones, both in terms of the ‘environmental’ successes reaped and also the ‘spin-off’ or ‘trickle down’ benefits that accrue to other subsectors such as health.

Before accepting some of the specific criticisms of the U.S. environmental movement as wholly applicable in Canada, we need to recall some of the critical differences between our situations. At the national level, the differences in how our legislatures work are important to keep in mind. Because of Canada’s party discipline situation, convincing the responsible Minister or key bureaucrats may be much more important than meeting with dozens of MPs. This has a major impact on designing effective lobbying strategies. Also, according to some, progressive movements in Canada are still enjoying important victories on a range of issues (anti-war, gay marriage, etc.) that are not enjoying similar levels of success in the U.S. In many ways, as a movement, we should have an easier time of it in Canada. Public values seem more positive towards environmental issues. We do not have an openly hostile federal government vis-à-vis the environment. And yet, even if many of the specifics of *The Death of Environmentalism* may not apply here, it seems that conversations about our collective effectiveness are needed.

So how are we doing? From the ‘glass half-full’ perspective (acknowledging, for example, the gains we make despite the magnitude of our obstacles), we are obviously doing well. From the ‘glass half-empty’ perspective (acknowledging, for example, that overall natural biodiversity is in decline), we are obviously failing. It all depends on the baseline datum. The correct answer is not either that we are doing well or we are not, for such a choice is simply reflective of the answerer’s perspective. Indeed, perspectives on this question were incredibly varied amongst those contacted for this paper. The only common denominator seemed to be that we provide good results for our small resources (i.e., good bang for the buck) but are losing ground in many ways.

⁷ This can be put in many ways, including Livingston’s analogy in footnote 4 above, Paul Hawken’s metaphor of ‘bailing the Titanic with teaspoons’, or the most recent iteration from one respondent to my queries for this paper: “We’re all going to hell, but thanks to the environmental movement, we’re going there a little bit more slowly than we otherwise would.”

⁸ See Canadian Environmental Grantmakers’ Network (CEGN), *A Profile of Environmental Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations in Canada*, p. 3 (<http://www.cegn.org/NSNVO%20Environment%20Highlights.pdf>).

What will guide us forward? Perhaps it is the belief that regardless of the issue we can always do better. Even though we are doing a lot with our limited resources and constituency, imagine what we could accomplish if we were better able to represent the broader public interest in enhancing the quality of life of all Canadians.⁹ What if we spoke about and worked more on the links between the environment and food production and consumption? What if we engaged more parents around the implications of environmental decisions for children's health? What if we stepped outside the confines of the environmental sector more often to increase ties with labour, health, the women's movement etc.? Can we better build our constituencies through the power of attraction to a common vision rather than guilt over environmental harm?

Indeed, working together to better engage and reflect a greater constituency is a theme that runs through much of the rest of this discussion paper. Through better collaborations and more bridgeheads, we can make each part of the movement stronger and the network itself a more resilient and interconnected community of interests. If we are able to engage more Canadians in a compelling vision that is more reflective of our diversity, we will become not only stronger and more resilient but also more effective. A first step would be to create a safe forum to reflect on our effectiveness, to rigorously evaluate our recent work, to examine some of our language and assumptions, and to reconsider our place within Canadian society.

'Environmental' Sector Needs and Options for Moving Forward

Before discussing sector level needs, it is worthwhile to note that I am using a rather fluid definition of the environmental sector.¹⁰ For the moment, let us set aside questions about conclusively defining each organization as environmental or not and simply assume that is

⁹ Similar points have been made in the literature accompanying the CEGN 2005 Conference (http://www.cegn.org/events/CEGN_2005_Conference.pdf): "While environmental grantmakers differ in size, program priorities, and geographic focus, we share a common goal in creating a more sustainable society. The number and magnitude of obstacles we face in becoming that society can be daunting. Critics (such as Shellenberger and Nordhaus in "The Death of Environmentalism") have recently challenged the environmental movement to re-position itself vis -à-vis the society it seeks to influence – essentially to redirect efforts away from we/they positions and campaigns, and towards the building of resilient, inclusive coalitions in which mainstream concerns such as jobs or health care are considered integral elements in crafting enduring social solutions to environmental problems. As David Suzuki has commented, "Environmentalists of my generation have come to realize that without a fundamental shift in people's view of our place in nature, we will be fighting the same battles over and over again". Nature and human activity cannot be considered in isolation from one another, and in the quest to conserve and restore natural systems, attention must be paid to the social drivers that threaten them – short term thinking, 'dumbed-down' tax policies, poverty, ignorance, fear, greed, and so on."

¹⁰ See CEGN, *A Profile of Environmental Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations in Canada*, supra note 8, pp. 2-4, which uses a wide definition of the sector and includes over 4000 groups. The Canadian Environmental Network's "Green List" includes over 2000. While either of these lists could be considered to comprise the environmental sector, there is a lack of consensus of what constitutes the environmental sector or the environmental movement. For the purposes of this paper and without trying to resolve those debates, I am viewing the Canadian environmental groups (i.e. ENGOs) together as the environmental sector (which in turn is part of the larger Canadian voluntary or non-profit sector). The environmental sector is also part of a larger 'environmental movement', which includes other non-environmentally focused organizations as well as individuals working for environmental improvements in all sectors. This movement and other similar movements can be collectively viewed as progressive movements. I believe that looking at environmental groups as part of a sector, which in turn is part of a movement amongst many movements helps to identify some of the commonalities and links we all share.

perfectly acceptable to be in more than one category and also acceptable to live with the tensions of not fitting within others' preconceived categories. Indeed, I would argue that hybrid and bridging organizations are a critical element of the overall voluntary sector. Leaving behind the problematic discussion of boundaries that define the environmental sector, let us proceed to identifying some environmental sector needs. It should be noted that the following section focuses on sector and movement level issues rather than organization-specific ones.

i) Thinking and Acting Like a Movement

First, and most obvious is the threshold question of whether the sector needs to set aside time and space to consider redefining itself or at least its approaches. Regardless of whether one is hoping for an evolution or revolution within the environmental sector, I believe that the sector does need to take stock of both its constituent parts and its workings as a whole. For example, the current focus on short-term outcomes and project-based approaches (recognizing the role that funding pressures play in this dynamic) causes environmental groups to look a lot like the governments and corporations that they often criticize for 'discounting the future.'¹¹ It is ironic that as a sector we advocate sustainability and long-term thinking, and yet often set those perspectives aside in the rush to carry out short-term deliverables. Many seem to recognize this. But admitting we have a problem is only half the way to recovery. Why don't we see if we can actually do something about it?

The environmental sector needs an open dialogue forum or process that allows and promotes critical thinking about identity and approaches. Especially helpful would be a rigorous feedback mechanism whereby we could continuously evaluate the sector's performance and identify effective innovations that can be used by others. Let's not move from one issue to the next without evaluating and hence learning from where we have been.

Nearly everyone who offered insights for this paper spoke of the need for 'convening,' whether for the purpose of reflection or for any other important reason. Unless we are working on 'issue coalitions' (such as climate change or the budget), we do not seem to have the time, resources or incentive to simply get together as a movement to discuss strategy, assumptions, priorities, future scenarios, etc. We consequently miss out on the advantages that could be generated by the collectivity of great enthusiastic leaders within the movement. We also, as a consequence, underperform on broad issues such as public opinion, corporate greening initiatives and government budgets – all of which have a major impact on each organization – because they are above the level at which we normally operate. Thus, a regularly convening forum (perhaps consisting of specific skills development sessions and broader open dialogue fora) - ideally sponsored by many leading funders - is a possible means of addressing the need for us to get together. By getting together, we would have a better chance of getting our act together!

Having interacted with nearly every large environmental group in the country and a good number of small and medium sized ones, I am struck by how rare it is that movement-level discussion actually takes place. The movement is often good at creating issue-based coalitions and

¹¹ Lavigne, Peter M., and David W. Orr, *Rethinking Green Philanthropy*, Rivers Foundation of the Americas, June 2004 http://riversfoundation.org/ee/publications/Rethinking_Green_Philanthropy_-_AP_mag_5b.pdf. These authors identify, in particular, the problem of funders focusing on specific projects rather than on general support as one of the main causes of the failure to adopt long-term perspectives.

collaborations but seems rather weak on broader sector-based issues. Looking at the broad landscape of elections, the market, or public opinion, for example, how often does the sector set aside specific issues of concern to work at framing environmental considerations as a key issue? How often do we participate in the threshold decisions of how much money governments put towards environmentally beneficial expenditures and environmentally detrimental ones? How often do we work on raising the profile of environmental interests at Cabinet tables and board room tables? Presumably, inroads in any of these areas would necessarily assist each environmental organization in its own specific mission. Yet rarely do we step outside our ‘mission-boxes’ to work on the environmental sector plane *per se*.¹² While there is no doubt that we need a diversity of groups occupying different niches of expertise (or core competencies), this should be accompanied by a greater degree of cooperation in managing the ‘whole’.¹³

Again, these comments echo a call for greater integration in the movement made over a decade ago:

“Without a doubt, the powerful big lobby strategy for political action is a reality in Canada today... The uncontested master of the strategy is the powerful and successful Business Council on National Issues (BCNI). Among their coups they can list the passage of the Canada/U.S. Free Trade Agreement. They also succeeded in having the Manufacturing Sales Tax abolished in favour of the G.S.T... these representatives of multinational corporations have learned about collective action. They will subjugate their individual corporate agendas and egos to the overall interest of all their corporations. They have learned to speak with one voice and to back up their demands with corporate action at the regional and national levels... The environmental movement stands out as one group that really does not have a national or, for that matter, a regional collective lobby group. That must change if those of us that are really concerned about the environment want to be truly effective in making positive environmental changes. Oh sure, the environmental groups exchange information – sometimes they even co-operate – but it cannot be said that they work in unison, burying their pet environmental issue in favour of the overall strategy... Calling it an environmental movement is really a misnomer – it is more like environmental anarchy. This can only be corrected by creating what I term “One Big Environmental Movement” bringing organization where much

¹² Griss, *supra* note 2, p. 1 noted: “There are frequent calls for consolidation or greater co-operation within the environmental movement. Some believe that there can, or should, be one voice for the environmental movement. In reality, though, the environmental movement is comprised of an extremely diverse array of groups – all with differing philosophies, strategies, and objectives. While there have been many successful examples of co-operation among these groups, usually around specific issues, more are needed. The obstacles to broader interaction are more perceived than real, and each group needs to rise above its own self-interest to develop a greater understanding of the realities confronting others and the movement as a whole. Progress will be obstructed by those with unfounded fears that greater co-operation will threaten their funding, profile, power, or credibility. Groups must also develop the skills and expertise necessary to work constructively with partners outside the movement, including those that have been traditionally considered to be adversaries.” See also, Ferretti, Janine, “Strategies for Success in the 1990s,” *National Round Table Review*, Spring 1993, pp. 5-6 (<http://www.nrtee-trnee.ca/Publications/PDF/Spring1993E.PDF>); Gelfand, *supra* note 6, p. 11; and Rosenblatt, Gideon, *Movement as Network: Connecting People and Organizations in the Environmental Movement*, January 2004, p. 17 (<http://www.movementasnetwork.org/MovementAsNetwork-final-1.0.pdf>): “...the key to strengthening the environmental movement is building more and stronger connections between its participants.”

¹³ Ferretti, *supra* note 12, p. 6.

chaos exists, revenue where poverty exists, and real political punch where fly-swatting exists.”¹⁴

Much of the above passage is applicable today. Generally, we still only collaborate on issues (though we do occasionally collectively tackle meta-issues such as the federal budget) and we still lack the strong national ties that corporations, labour, municipalities, and other non-profit subsectors have. But, there is a whole range of issues that could be worked on nationally (e.g. public opinion and broad government decisions affecting the environment including the importance of environment in Cabinet, in budget-making, in foreign policy, in tax policy, etc.). Achieving success on these large issues could contribute to achieving the missions of many individual environmental organizations.

To achieve better movement-level coordination, strategizing and action, some sort of forum would need to be created. It would need to have long-term funding and resources allocated to it such that it is not a flash in the pan. It would likely require the ability to take positions (or at least reflect them) and lobby, while having sufficient independence.¹⁵ Similarly it would need a permanent secretariat or body associated with it so that it does not exist simply by piling more responsibilities on existing individuals and groups. A ‘Future Search’ process or similar approach with broad support from funders and organizations may be a good initial forum to begin work on a shared strategic vision. The best mechanisms for movement-level action could also be discussed at such a forum, ideally with the participation and insights of those outside the movement who have relevant experience.

ii) Sector-level Capacity-building

As part of the McConnell Foundation’s community foundation environmental program, a report was produced on best practices in environmental grantmaking. Though the focus of the report was at the local level (in keeping with its audience of community foundations), it is worth noting this finding:

“While there are many examples of support for various types of capacity building within individual organizations, examples of sector-wide involvement are much more limited.”¹⁶

What are some existing sector-level capacity-building initiatives? Examples include the Canadian Environmental Network, Regroupement national des conseils régionaux de l’environnement du Québec, the Sustainability Network, Training Resources for the Environmental Community and Hollyhock. Other groups provide a specific service (e.g., media, environmental resource centres/libraries, litigation, grassroots organizing skills, etc.). Are these initiatives, several of which are relatively new, adequate to build the necessary capacity of the sector as a whole? It seems to me that they serve to supply only a fraction of the demand or need that exists within the sector. Supporting service-providing organizations in a way that helps build

¹⁴ Martin, Dick, “The Need for a Collective Voice” *National Round Table Review*, Spring 1993, p. 12 (<http://www.nrtee-trnee.ca/Publications/PDF/Spring1993E.PDF>).

¹⁵ This would likely distinguish it from previous efforts such as the Canadian Environmental Network’s National Groups Caucus.

¹⁶ Reid, Ron and Ric Symmes, *Towards Best Practices in Environmental Grantmaking: Strengthening Community Engagement and Capacity at the Local Level*, April 2004 (<http://www.cegn.org/Best%20Practices%20Report.pdf>), p. 14

the capacity of the individual organizations that they serve would go a long way towards building the capacity of both organizations and the sector as a whole.

Nearly everyone contacted in preparing this paper noted the relative lack of sector-level opportunities for leaders to learn and work together, exchange experiences and create a lasting non issue-specific network or movement. Suggested solutions included:

- an invigoration of support for existing capacity-builders,
- new environmental leadership or management programs modeled after the U.S. Institute for Conservation Leadership or the McGill-McConnell program, and
- the creation of an institute that provided programs for leaders,¹⁷ managers, fundraisers, etc. at various different levels in the environmental sector.

Satisfying this need may provide two key outcomes: (1) building specific capacities, and (2) creating a lasting network of individuals and groups who will work together as a movement.¹⁸

iii) Reflecting Canadian Diversity

A consistent theme amongst those who were contacted in this exercise was the slowness with which many larger environmental groups have engaged new Canadians at the youth level and the cultural level. Compared, for example, to political parties and some other voluntary subsectors, the environmental movement is remarkably less diverse. Similarly, youth engagement is lacking amongst many (but not all) groups.¹⁹ A related question is how to respond to the growing urbanization of the Canadian population. In addition, several respondents commented on the lack of integration and interaction between Quebec-based groups²⁰ and those outside the province. Several current environmental issues (e.g. climate change, water pollution in the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence, boreal forest conservation) have obvious transboundary implications. It would seem that groups on both sides of the Quebec border could reap mutual benefits by engaging each other more than at present.

Without appropriate intervention, we may become irrelevant to many, if not most, Canadians. Despite the frequency with which this issue was raised, however, few specific recommendations were put forward to address this need. Perhaps reasonable places to start would be with other

¹⁷ See Seel, Keith and Anita Angelini, *Strengthening the Capacity of Executive Directors*, 2004 (www.vsi-isbc.ca/eng/hr/pdf/strengthening_executive_capacity.pdf).

¹⁸ Related to the need for sector-level capacity-building is the possibility of disseminating more broadly the learnings and innovations from the first phase of the McConnell Foundation's capacity-building program (including the learnings from the groups that had other non-McConnell capacity-building projects). While the sector is bolstered any time the capacity of any one organization is increased, dissemination of lessons learned can result in more than simple 'aggregated' benefits. The challenge, however, is that many capacity-building successes were predicated on large funding sources and these may be more difficult to replicate in other organizations. Still, it would be worth exploring successful models, perhaps through a widely disseminated report or meeting or presentations at relevant gatherings (especially if several funders and organizations could contribute at one event).

¹⁹ See: <http://www.canadianfundraiser.com/newsletter/article.asp?ArticleID=1590&ClientID=1>

²⁰ According to one survey (with a wide definition of the environmental sector), Quebec harbours the greatest concentration of environmental groups in Canada (over one third) but has a relatively small revenue base (on a 'per organization' basis). See CEGN, *A Profile of Environmental Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations in Canada*, *supra* note 8, pp. 2-4.

sectors that are more advanced such as more diverse social justice movements and with the lessons learned in the McConnell Foundation's ongoing citizen engagement program. At another level, we could also do a much better job of reaching out to underrepresented communities by better linking health, social justice and the environment. Indeed, there is evidence that youth see these issues in a much more interrelated way than previous generations. Phrases such as 'equity for future generations,' 'environmental justice,' and 'environmental and health rights' may have more success than standard catch phrases like 'protecting the natural environment.' The need to rethink the boundaries of environmentalism is also true with respect to many cultures where health, quality-of-life and environmental considerations are viewed in unison and not as separate spheres.

But reaching out to different cultures and generations is not just about finding the right language that resonates with them; it is about seeking to understand and truly reflect their concerns and values. Opening up to these constituencies may mean that we will prioritize issues differently, work at the interface of environment and social justice and health more frequently, and give up strict control of our agendas. To the extent that we are truly public interest organizations, however, this should not be a major cause for concern. Undoubtedly it would forward our efforts to start thinking and acting like a movement. And of course, the more relevant and representative we are, the more effective we will be.

iv) Expanding 'Environmental' Concerns and Opportunities

As mentioned above, 'environmental' issues are no longer easily compartmentalized. Their interactions with economics and social considerations are much more evident nowadays, especially with the predominance of terms like sustainable development and sustainability. Sufficiently or not, environmental issues are now raised and dealt with within fora (e.g., corporate and government arenas) previously criticized for excluding environmental considerations from their purview. Building bridgeheads with potential allies and new constituencies, as alluded to above, is viewed by many as a necessary precondition to becoming more effective. Such a 'missionary' undertaking may help bring environmentalists out of the special interest box in which they are sometimes placed. An undercurrent to this issue, however, revolves around those environmental issues that are not well covered under the surrogate concerns of human health and quality-of-life. For instance, appealing to health arguments and allies or economic arguments such as the high cost of health care may be a sound basis for arguing against coal-fired electricity generation. But when it comes to wilderness protection or endangered species, for example, the link to other concerns may not be so strong. Reaching out to non-traditional allies and using non-traditional arguments may cause environmental arguments to become more human-centered than many advocates are comfortable with.

Nonetheless, recognizing these tensions, it is clear that environmental issues are not easily compartmentalized any longer. Our strategies should recognize this and adapt to the changing realities of how societies view environmental issues. If we portrayed our collective vision as a positive one for the environment and quality-of-life, we may be able to start down the road of being reflective of a greater community. The ways of addressing this need, like the ways of addressing the need to better reflect Canadians (and indeed there is an overlap between the two issues), are likely quite varied. We should be prepared to examine the way we frame issues (negatively and positively) and the language we use in describing 'environmental' issues.

Specific collaborations could be undertaken. A project to examine existing examples of good dialogue amongst environmental groups and other key sectors and organizations could be undertaken with a view towards evaluating whether such collaborations achieved good results. Lessons learned and best practices could be disseminated widely and follow-up projects could be initiated.

v) Taking Account of and Celebrating Key Assets

While it is common to simply speak about needs or problems and ways of addressing or solving them, we should also consider looking at the movement from an asset-based perspective. In this approach, we would examine our strengths and our successes and build on them. For example, a key success of the movement has been to help make the environment a consideration in a range of decision-making processes like issuing approvals, resource management, governance, and at a range of levels from individuals to governments to industry. A key strength is the high level of dedication exemplified by the volunteers, staff and supporters of the movement. Many involved in the movement care deeply about their work and hence exhibit a high degree of motivation. A key asset, as mentioned previously, is the high level of public support for many of the basic tenets of the movement. Celebrating (including opportunities for using humour to step back from the negative aspects of the movement), disseminating and further developing successes and assets could be an important source of positive energy within the movement. One way of delivering on this would be to include a forum for asset-based thinking in whatever movement-level convening forum may arise.

vi) New Leaders and Spokespersons

Several respondents expressed concern about fostering a new generation of leaders for the movement. Many existing leaders can actually trace their work back to ‘day one’ of the Canadian environmental movement. They harbour an enormous amount of knowledge, commitment and experience. Will equally effective leaders emerge from the next generation? Will they be able to draw on the wisdom of their predecessors? Will they be more representative of the cultural and demographic diversity of Canadians? Providing some added capacity within the movement for possible emerging leaders, through peer groups, learning exercises, mentoring and the like may improve our chances of attracting promising young leaders to the movement. Organizations can also encourage this process by identifying emerging leaders and providing them with added responsibilities, exposure and the permission to take risks and learn from mistakes. Building future leaders is key to sustaining the momentum of the movement.

vii) Learning from the Past

There is no comprehensive written source of information on the history of the Canadian environmental movement. There are useful accounts of particular groups (e.g. Greenpeace) or specific campaigns (e.g. Ontario and British Columbia wilderness protection efforts) but little else that is widely available. I do know that prior to his early passing, one of the founders and leaders of the environmental movement, Gary Gallon, had started compiling initial documentation and conducted some interviews for such a project.

In my relatively short career in the movement, I can already recall several new idea ‘ah-ha’ moments – many of which were followed quickly by ‘been there, done that’ moments after I chatted with more experienced environmental advocates than I. I have always wondered how

many ideas and experiences we lose as the environmental movement's generations march along. For a sector where changeover is commonplace, it may be worth exploring the value of a written history to provide a reference point for future work. Or perhaps, events or exchanges could be sponsored where those with experience meet, talk with and mentor the next generation?

viii) Science and Policy Capacity and Think Tanks

The need for in-house 'content' capacity amongst national groups was identified by some respondents. Pointing to examples in the U.S. like the Natural Resources Defense Council's stable of experts, some feel that Canadian environmental groups lack core capacity in science and policy areas. Admittedly, key experts are often on staff for particular projects, but having staff scientists and policy analysts as part of the core staff would allow groups (and hence the sector) to be more responsive to immediate needs.

Related to this issue is the creation of formal ties between environmental groups and academics, as was noted over a decade ago:

“If the level of trust between environmental groups and academics can be developed, they could make a very powerful team.”²¹

Such formal relationships are emerging. For example, the Canadian Boreal Initiative has adopted this model for part of its work by creating an ongoing partnership with the University of Alberta.

Other respondents pointed to the need for a think tank that can deal with environmental issues (and other issues of concern to progressive movements) in a way that raises broad public awareness. One respondent noted that the Fraser Institute does well by not only producing reports but also by making sure that its work is cited by the media and politicians. Some feel that a think tank could provide equal prominence for Canadian environmental issues.

All of these points suggest that the Canadian environmental movement could increase its effectiveness through an invigoration of capacity in science, policy and research. This could be accomplished by funding staff experts who are ready to deal with emerging issues, supporting think tanks that produce quality research products that are well disseminated, and supporting links between environmental organizations and academia. It should be noted that there is a possible tension between this approach and the call to focus less on technocratic responses to 'environmental' problems. Perhaps both types of capacity are needed, however - the policy and expertise capacity to level the playing field in certain decision-making processes and the ability to motivate the public on a more general, value-based plane?

ix) Shared Systems

Savings and synergies can accrue by sharing resources such as 'back office' functions. An obvious example involves two small organizations, each of which cannot justify or afford a particular full-time position, sharing one individual's time. The same can be done with office space and equipment. While the obvious benefits of such sharing examples relate to efficiency and affordability, consider also the less tangible community-building role it can play:

²¹ Fortier, Claire, "Adding Depth to Limited Resources," *National Round Table Review*, Spring 1993, p. 21 (<http://www.nrtee-trnee.ca/Publications/PDF/Spring1993E.PDF>).

We also need to share our experiences and tools with other like-minded ENGOs. This sharing can take the form of fax machines, direct mail consultants, office space, research services, campaign strategy, and board networks. And too, we can share in our vision of a world that cares for both people and the ecosystem that is our home.²²

Examples such as an Earth Embassy, which would house several Ottawa-based groups, are being explored. There are existing examples across the country of shared space and systems within the voluntary sector. There is no reason why the environmental sector could not engage in the same sort of approach, either with other environmental organizations or other members of the voluntary sector.

x) Local Capacity

The capacity of local and regional groups to effect environmental change was raised by several respondents. As pointed out in a number of fora, environmental work needs to take place at all levels, from the individual to the neighbourhood to the municipality to the province to the nation, and so on. In Canada, for several environmental issues, the role of local governments is increasing in importance. There are many examples where groups in two municipalities will be working on the same content but with two different geographic audiences. Building a network to support this work (and here there is an analogy to the Foundation's work with community foundations) may be an excellent capacity building project to consider, especially if a 'New Deal' for cities does take hold. The power of place-based action and learning must be kept in mind. Often it is the local neighbourhood issues that may excite people into immediate action. Causes and effects are more proximate and tangible. Supporting a variety of local actions can improve the nation as a whole (witness how the proliferation of local pesticides by-laws in Quebec spurred the Quebec government into province-wide action and spurred municipalities in other provinces into action as well). It should also be noted that environmental innovations often occur at the local level (e.g. recycling, pesticide restrictions, etc.) and if this process of experimentation and innovation can be accelerated, then so will its uptake into other levels of action and decision-making. Supporting a range of local groups (whether part of a formal network or just a learning network) to foster local innovations is an idea that could be explored in conjunction with other funders, especially community foundations.

xi) Leveraging Greater Financial Support for the Sector

Several respondents felt that it was important for funders to work together in improving the environmental sector. It is often funders who have an integrated view of how several different groups operate and perform. If funders regularly shared their knowledge amongst each other (and the CEGN is working toward this) and with grantees, we could reap important synergies.²³ As

²² Robinson, Mike, "Cash Flow, Ozone, and Church Basements," *National Round Table Review*, Spring 1993, p. 8 (<http://www.nrtee-trnee.ca/Publications/PDF/Spring1993E.PDF>).

²³ See Brodhead, Tim, *How do Environmental Grantmakers Lead?*, speech to the Canadian Environmental Grantmakers Network Annual Conference, Calgary, June 20-24, 2004: "What we do is not just about projects and grants, it is about the world we bequeath to our children. Grant seekers and grant makers are two sides of the same coin: we have different roles but a common aim. It is time, I believe, for us to sit down together to develop a common strategy to transform a fragmented collection of organizations and concerned individuals – including those in the private sector and government – into a powerful movement for change. We in the granting community have a particular responsibility: we can choose to fund 'smarter'; to ensure the infrastructure exist to enable a multitude of

well, given that the environmental subsector receives a disproportionately small share of the voluntary sector's resources, any assistance amongst environmental funders to encourage other funders in Canada and the U.S. to support environmental work is to be encouraged. Similarly, any efforts that could be made in reducing reliance on project-funding would go a long way towards building the core operations of individual organizations.²⁴

Conclusions

In reflecting on the content of this paper, I would ask you to consider the following three words: Effective, Environmental, and Movement.

With regard to being effective, I believe that we need to focus our capacity building activities on effectiveness. This means building capacities that will further the collective missions and vision of the community of interests in the movement. It means looking at capacity building as a means to an end. It means that we want to develop and secure particular capacities, not for their own sakes, but as an essential aspect of more effectively accomplishing our objectives. Effective at what, however? For organization-level capacity-building, this answer is simple: effective at accomplishing organizational missions. At the movement level, I believe that there is a collective mission or vision that we can align under and hence become more effective at achieving, but key members of the movement may need to convene to help articulate and get support for that vision.

With regard to the word environmental, I believe that some of the debate going on in the U.S. has applicability here. Several 'environmental' issues that we work on are not just 'environmental' (at least in the way that word is often used). Smog is a public health issue as well as an environmental issue. Climate change affects dozens of spheres. Building non-traditional alliances outside the environmental movement may be critical to effecting real change in the array of cross-cutting issues that are, in part, environmental. We need to increase our ability to engage Canadians in environmental matters, and to sustain that engagement. Reaching out to new allies and constituencies may help us achieve the momentum needed to respond to the magnitude of the environmental challenges we face.

The word movement should connote some sort of planning or arrangement, as it would in music. I believe that the Canadian environmental movement is a long way from being a coordinated entity. It is more a *medley* than a *movement*. National environmental leaders seem to rarely convene for movement level strategizing and action planning outside of issue-specific coalitions. We seem comfortable acting within mission boxes despite our holistic rhetoric around sustainability and the ecosystem approach. The positive side of this criticism is that nobody I have spoken to disagrees with the notion that we need to foster a better and truer movement through more coordination and face-to-face convening. It seems that geography and the lack of a forum for convening are the main impediments – both of which are far from insurmountable.

organization to turn their diversity into an asset rather than a liability; and to invest – in capacity building, leadership development, opportunities for all Canadians to get involved, and in particular programs which engage youth and which place sustainability in the broader framework of equity and social justice, which for them cannot be dissociated.”

²⁴ See Lavigne and Orr, *supra*; and Rich, Andrew, “War of Ideas: Why mainstream and liberal foundations and the think tanks they support are losing in the war of ideas in American politics,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, Spring 2005, pp. 18-25.

Where should we start? I believe that there is broad support and an immediate need for building sector-level linkages such that the array of environmental organizations can better think and act like a movement. Related to this is the need for the movement to convene more often in order to, amongst other things, develop and share its strategic vision for the future of Canadian society. There is also a need for capacity-building initiatives at all levels - from the grassroots to the national groups. Existing service-providing programs and/or new initiatives could play an important role in fulfilling this need. Developing our ability to reflect Canada's diversity is another key priority for the movement. We should therefore consider the development and implementation of programs that stimulate and sustain the engagement of Canadians as a precondition to remaining relevant as a movement. This would also provide an opportunity for us to expand our understanding of so-called 'environmental' issues to the broader societal context. By better understanding this context and the importance of the language we use, we may be able to reach out to the greater constituency, on whose behalf we all purport to act.

By looking at the above three words together - "Effective Environmental Movement" – we can see how we could better align our efforts. If, despite our diversity, we do have a collective vision that we all share, can we not act in a more holistic, inclusive and coordinated manner to achieve it?