

# Bookshelf

HEATHER HISEY, *Editor*

*Torys, Barristers and Solicitors LLP, Toronto, Ontario*

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## **The Nonprofit Sector and the Government in a New Century**

*Edited by Kathy L. Brock and Keith G. Banting*

*Part of the Public Policy and Third Sector Series, published by The School of Policy Studies, Queen's University, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001, pp. 256, paper, Cdn. \$27.95; cloth, \$55.00.*

## **Improving Connections Between Governments and Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations**

*Edited by Kathy L. Brock*

*Part of the Public Policy and Third Sector Series, published by The School of Policy Studies, Queen's University, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002, pp. 179, paper, Cdn. \$26.95; cloth, \$55.00.*

## **The Nonprofit Sector in Interesting Times: Case Studies in a Changing Sector**

*Edited by Kathy L. Brock and Keith G. Banting.*

*Part of the Public Policy and Third Sector Series, published by The School of Policy Studies, Queen's University, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003, pp. 272, paper, Cdn. \$29.95; cloth, \$65.00.*

## **Working Across Boundaries: Making Collaboration Work in Government and Nonprofit Organizations**

*By Russell M. Linden*

*Published by Jossey-Boss, 2002, pp. 326, cloth, US \$32.00.*

## REVIEWED BY DONALD BOURGEOIS

*General Counsel and Director, Legal Services, Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario*

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The academic community has, in recent years, turned its attention to the charitable and not-for-profit sector with much more vigour and rigour than in the past. Recognizing the importance of governments to that sector, academic researchers and others have focused on the relationships between the sector

and governments. In reality, there are multiple relationships that exist at different levels of sophistication and nuance, often crossing each other.

Queen's University's School of Policy Studies has taken a lead role in the academic research into these relationships in Canada – importantly, “in collaboration” with others. Three of the books considered in this review are from a series on public policy and the third sector.

The fourth text, by Russell Linden, is a guide to collaboration for the charitable and not-for-profit sector and the public sector. While it concentrates on collaboration “across boundaries” from a practical perspective, the underlying philosophical approach is similar. Ultimately, for most charities and not-for-profit organizations to succeed, there needs to be a good relationship with government. Mr. Linden attempts to provide guidance to achieve a good collaboration.

*The Nonprofit Sector and the Government in a New Century* is the second text in the series on public policy and the third sector. It focuses on the “evolving relationship between the nonprofit sector and governments in Canada.” An impetus for the text was the implications that a “restructuring of the state” had on the role of charities and not-for-profit organizations, their fiscal situation, and their relationships with traditional communities. The text includes an excellent overview by the editors that introduces the topic. The introduction summarizes the events and trends that occurred in the 1990s (and earlier) leading to the restructuring and responses. The emphasis is on research and empirical study and why it is needed.

The seven remaining chapters examine the impact of changes in the funding environment, provide an analytic framework for classifying organizations in the “social economy,” examine the role of informal and formal networks in supporting families with young children as an example of community capacity, comment on the role of the sector in threatened coastal communities from a capacity perspective, and discuss the move by the Victorian Order of Nurses toward commercial activity and the delivery of preventive homecare services in Saskatchewan. The chapters are typical of research papers, with hypothesis, research and findings, and substantial referencing throughout. While some chapters present a more thorough examination than others, this comment really reflects the status of the research. This area is relatively recent one for research in Canada. The text does what it intended to do – report on some of the implications of the restructuring state on the sector.

*Improving Connections* is a report on the first annual National Forum on the Third Sector and Public Policy, which was held at the School of Policy Studies, Queen's University, in October 2000. The objective of the forum was to bring together academics and practitioners from the third sector and governments to contribute to developing a better understanding of the evolving relationship between governments and the sector in Canada. The forum included three

keynote speakers who highlighted future trends in the sector, put the Canadian experience in context of the rest of the world, and reflected on the future of the relationship.

There were several other contributors who provided papers or comments as part of a panel on a number of related themes, which included the importance of the voluntary sector in public policy; improving the relationship between the sector and the state; democracy, civil society, and the state; learning across the provinces; case studies on making the relationship work; and engaging in the policy process.

Ms. Brock, in her preface, noted five “modest hopes” for the text:

- to build the research capacity of the third sector;
- to assist in the instruction and training of academic researchers on the third sector for the future study of third sector and government relations and issues;
- to facilitate classroom learning and the training of current and future researchers and leaders;
- to assist in the development of a corpus of literature on the third sector which is underdeveloped at present in Canada; and
- to help build better relationships between governments and the third sector.

These hopes are, of course, far from “modest.” They speak to a start of a long process that will be successful only if the type of research that is discussed is actually carried out. The success of the text – and the forum itself – is in helping to start this process. But the text also captures a number of themes that existed at that time from which development has occurred over the last few years.

The third text in the series is *Interesting Times*, in more ways than one. It is the result of a competitive research grant program and, as result, there is no single theme. The text examines different aspects of the sector. Again, Ms. Brock provides a useful introduction in the first chapter, “The Nonprofit Sector in Interesting Times: An Introduction Plus.” She begins to tie together the developing research into a strategic list of work for the sector.

The other chapters look to the voluntary sector/government relationship as one in transition and one that should learn from international experience, an exploratory analysis of the financial decisions that are made by organizations (spend now versus save and build up financial capacity), how organizations have changed in and within the Canadian Breast Cancer Network, preliminary research into the role of organizations in protecting biodiversity, assessment of the relationship(s) between government and the sector in Manitoba based on an empirical study, and the impact of the Internet on charitable fundraising and the regulatory regime for the Internet. This last topic is, at the surface, a bit of an odd inclusion but is, in fact, simply a variation on the theme. As with

the first text, we have the results at more or less preliminary stages, which provide direction for future research and important discussion within the sector and with government.

While none of these texts expressly refers to “collaboration,” ultimately that is what is underlying the relationships between (or among) the sector and governments. And for many and in many situations, there have been boundaries that are almost insurmountable between the sector and governments. So much in our society that we value and need depends upon charitable and not-for-profit organizations, governments, and successful working relationships amongst them. Mr. Linden’s text, while not directly falling into the type of research undertaken and set out in *The Public Policy* and *The Third Sector Series* relates to that overall theme.

Mr. Linden, in *Working Across Boundaries*, argues that problems in society will be solved if public and not-for-profit organizations are able to work collaboratively together. They must work across the agency boundaries. This text attempts to provide a strategy for doing so – how to select potential partners, guidelines for assessing projects for collaboration (or not), suggestions on avoiding pitfalls, phases of collaboration, and comments upon the nature of leadership.

The first part of the text provides an overview – what are the benefits of collaboration, a case study, and some obstacles to success. The second part examines the framework for making collaboration work, including prerequisites for success such as open and trusting relationships, high stakes, strategies to encourage collaboration, and leadership. The last part focuses more on leadership. Throughout the text are comments about specific instances of collaboration and case studies based on American experiences.

There are also a number of appendices presenting resources, assessment tools, references, and bibliography. This text, though, is intended to be more “practical” than a research paper. The language and style reflects this approach. It serves to highlight what can be done where government and organizations work together and how to achieve the level of collaboration that is necessary to solve problems.

All of these texts are useful works. We need research before we can understand fully the issues from a Canadian perspective. That research, though, needs to be grounded in what occurs on a day-to-day basis, which is largely the case with all the papers. That research will help us find ways to improve the relationships between the sector and government – and perhaps even within the sector itself.