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INFORMATION
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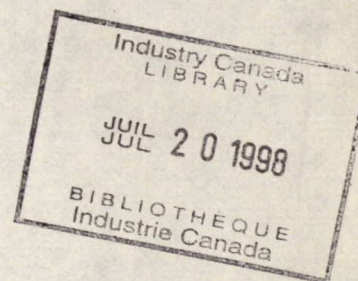
② / MAKING CONNECTIONS ⸮

a new orientation for communications policy ⸮

a report prepared for

The Consumers' Association of Canada

and

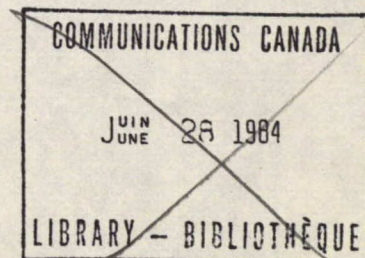The Department of Communications /

by ①

/ Cathy Starrs /

May, 1973

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I. Introduction

In 1971, the Consumers' Association of Canada sponsored a study of community information centres in Canada. The study, undertaken in conjunction with the Canadian Computer/Communications Task Force, presented a comprehensive overview of the centres, their functions and activities. As a follow-up to that project, the Consumers' Association has sponsored this investigation with the assistance of the federal Department of Communications. Its objectives were:

- to determine in conjunction with community information centres specialized data banks which might assist the centres in handling requests for information from their users;

- to determine with the operators of specialized data banks the nature and content of the data banks, such modifications as may be required to enhance their relevance to the centres, the means and ease of access to these data banks and their capacity to provide meaningful information to the centres and their users;

- to compile a list of such specialized data banks as are discovered in the course of this investigation to be relevant to community information centres, including a description of content, modes of access, etc.

- to update the Handbook of Information and Helping Services in Canada using automated techniques;

- to determine with the centres and operators of specialized data banks the characteristics of a demonstration project which might flow from this investigation designed to give the centres "hands on" experience with computer technology or other forms of linkages with specialized data banks and their operators;

- and, finally, to report to the Department of Communications on the findings of this investigation and to make recommendations with respect to federal data banks relevant to the public concerning improvements or modifications which might enhance their relevance and, with respect to other data banks, to suggest areas where the federal government might support projects designed to fill gaps or to supplement existing data.

It was well recognized by the project team, CAC and the Department that this was indeed a tall order, given the few months available to undertake it and the abundance of specialized information sources which now exist within our institutions of government and industry. However, all those involved felt that at the very least some useful insights into communications needs in Canadian communities could be gained and a methodology developed which might be appropriate for further work.

The methodology we chose focussed on processes rather than structure. From the beginning it was clear that more useful experiences of community information centres could be gathered by a process of interviewing than through a standardized questionnaire survey. Nor did it seem useful to approach operators of specialized data banks other than through a process of face-to-face discussion. The appropriateness of this methodology was confirmed when a very general set of questions, sent to all centres towards the end of the project, elicited answers much less revealing than those obtained in our interviews.

This meant of necessity that we had to restrict our focus to a sample of communities and a sample of data banks. We decided to select, for the sample of community information centres, the five cities which accounted for approximately one-half of the centres identified in the 1971/72 study — Vancouver, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and Halifax. While

this sample was also designed to give a picture of regional dif-
ferences in the information problems of the centres, the pattern
of responses we obtained may well fail to reflect the full range
of diverse communications needs which exist in urban areas. Not
only might centres in smaller urban communities in Canada present
a different picture of community communications needs, but rural
areas, which were not included in our sample at all, might well
reveal a significantly different impression from that of urban
communities generally. We suggest that communications needs in
small urban communities and rural areas should be investigated in
any further studies of this nature.

We began by talking with the operators of all-purpose community
information centres in Ottawa, Toronto and Montreal. In virtually
all cases, the responses to the questions about problems they experi-
enced in gaining access to information suggested that there was
little difficulty. We will outline the details of our conversations
with the centres in a later section. Suffice it to say at this
point that we found the answers we received in these initial stages
to be surprising. The assumption of our project was that on every
side there would be cries for improved access to information.[1] We
therefore asked ourselves whether the problem was correctly defined.
Was the referral nature of most of the information given out by the
all-purpose central and neighbourhood centres with whom we spoke at
issue here? Would a different set of responses emerge were the
question to be put to specialized information centres, those whose
users have articulated their problem and are requesting information
more along the lines of "what to do" than "where to go"? Would
citizens' groups be likely to experience greater difficulty in gain-
ing access to the information their members needed as they wrestled
with issues of concern to them?

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[1] Problems of access to information have been well documented in
many studies — e.g., To Know and Be Known, the Report of the
Task Force on Government Information; and in much of the
literature in the consumer and poverty fields; they also under-
lie calls for "freedom of information" legislation involving
compulsory dissemination of government information.

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We posed our question to specialized centres and to some citizen groups in the communities we visited and a different pattern did begin to emerge, not so much in terms of difficulties, although there were indications of more specific problems, but rather in terms of differences in information flows. We began to picture community information sources as arrayed along a spectrum. At one end lie central and neighbourhood centres dealing in information which might be best described as that needed in assisting people to cope with immediate problems; at the other end are found a variety of citizen groups whose members attempt to aid one another in anticipating problems and in planning how to better their environment. In the middle range fall those specialized information centres, crisis centres, service agencies and ethnic centres whose information-giving activities attract persons with both immediate and anticipatory concerns. The relationship between the various types of information exchanges at the community level and difficulties experienced in gaining access to the information required as one moved along the spectrum became the hypothesis we tested during the next stage of our enquiries.

To some extent, this hypothesis held up; that is, problems with respect to finding specific sources of relevant information did appear to increase as the enquiries changed from an immediate to an anticipatory nature; however, the increase was not significant. Instead, as we pursued our question, it gradually became clear that something else, something much deeper, was really at issue. On all points on the spectrum, the importance of what we have come to call personal networks continually emerged as the main channel through which persons prefer to obtain information. In that context, concepts other than access to information were emphasized as of far greater importance. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF TRUST RELATIONSHIPS, OF A SENSE OF COMMUNITY AND OF SHARED VALUE SYSTEMS EMERGED AS THE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS TO GENUINE INFORMATION SHARING AND REAL COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN PERSONS. The problem became transformed from one of access to data banks to one of identifying and removing impediments to the development of trustworthy human communications channels.

Our investigations have therefore taken us down varied paths, many of which might well surprise the readers of this report as indeed they initially surprised us. In the course of our enquiries, we were continually forced to discard preconceived ideas and old understandings as our perceptions shifted in the course of trying to understand what was being said to us. Gaining some new insights and shedding old ones, we continually tried to ask ourselves whether the questions we were asking were the relevant ones. We did so in the belief that many research projects, by sticking rigidly to their original formulation of the problem and failing to question it, all too frequently turn out to be irrelevant — to miss the real issues to which the study is attempting to address itself. Once we began to question the fundamental assumptions embedded in what we were asked to do — to examine the problem of access to information faced by centres and their users — we found ourselves moving out and away from it into larger issues and seeing it in ever clearer perspective.

This report then contains the results of our enquiries. It presents many issues and offers suggestions for possible ways of dealing with some of them. Other questions which are raised here will, we hope, be addressed in the course of further work which may be undertaken by the operators of centres and data banks themselves, by the Department of Communications, the Consumers' Association and others.

We want to express our thanks to the many people closely involved with community information centres who welcomed so warmly still another research team. We are grateful also to those officials in government departments who allowed us to probe the efficacy of their information activities and assisted in directing us to still more sources. All were helpful in enabling us to see more clearly the realities of communications needs apparent in our society today and in perceiving — or so we hope — at least some elements of a viable communications policy for the future.

Finally, all of us on the project team which undertook this investigation wish to thank those most closely associated with it. To Gail Stewart and other members of CAC's National Committee on Information who acted as a sounding board for our ideas and questions and whose "playback" function was of such great assistance in keeping us on the right track and in encouraging us to go further still, our deep appreciation and grateful thanks. We thank too our technical advisors, Ken Stein of the Department of Communications and Diana Ironside of The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, the director of the earlier study, for their advice and support.

I wish to record also my deep-felt and grateful thanks to the other members of the project team. Without their help and support, the many threads of this project would have become hopelessly entangled. Sue Mitchell not only shared with me the extensive round of interviews which were such an important part of this investigation but assumed the major responsibility for compiling Part II of the document which accompanies this report — "Information Centres: A Handbook for Canadian Communities"; she was also a valuable source of support and advice in developing the issues raised in this report. Nesta Hankey shouldered the mammoth task of shepherding Part I of the Handbook through to publication; she contacted all the centres, compiled their profiles, tracked down late respondents, and typed the profile sheets. Phil Bromiley joined us toward the end of the project and willingly took on the task of completing the interviews and filling in the information for the Handbook. I owe each of them a great debt.

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Since policy-making is a slow process, those who purport to advise policy makers must continually force themselves to look ahead, to try to discern future patterns, if their advice is in the end to be at all appropriate to the needs of Canadians. The next section of this report presents some of our impressions about the future of our society, the

context in which communications policy will be framed. We then go on to examine the institutional role of community information centres and to look at some of the factors which impede their development. Section IV deals with problems of access to information which the centres reported experiencing and describes those specialized data banks which are seen to be of some usefulness; this section deals as well with relevant computer-based information systems now in operation or being developed. Section V reports on the deeper issue which was much the more predominant theme: barriers to communicating. The following section assesses computer technology generally in this larger context, and Section VII turns to the role of government. Following a summary statement of the conclusions we have reached, we pause briefly to consider the implications of those conclusions with respect to policy directions and formulations. The report concludes with our recommendations which are addressed to governments, to the centres themselves, to the Consumers' Association of Canada, and to others interested in community information and community enterprises.

We hope that the Department of Communications in particular will accept the major premise we have reached: that it is the human processes of communicating that need to be given predominant attention. This may seem an unusual message to address to a department whose jurisdiction extends for the most part over the hardware of telecommunications, but we are convinced of the necessity of according prior consideration in the formulation of communications policy to the well-being of persons in community. This means that social policy must no longer be regarded as a separate and special aspect of concern but must be the context, the frame of reference in which other policies are set and against which they are perceived and evaluated.

The Consumers' Association of Canada has for some years been trying to bring this point to the attention of government officials concerned with communications policy. In its response to "Branching Out, the Report of the Canadian Computer/Communications Task Force", the CAC stated:

"We believe the role which communications policies play
in shaping a society can hardly be overemphasized. Our
capacity to communicate with each other in large measure
determines who we are and what kind of society we live in.
Decisions with respect to computer communications policy
which will shape our society for years to come should in
our view be made only after a range of alternatives have
been thoroughly explored and discussed. The structure
of a communications network both reflects and reinforces
the structure of a society, and before reinforcing or
altering the present structure we should be as clear as
possible about the implications of doing so. The central
role which computer/communications policy decisions can
play with respect to the overall configuration of our
communications networks and hence with respect to our
capacities to communicate with each other has not in our
view been accorded the attention it deserves."

The Association also questioned whether the work of the Task Force
had not implicitly ranked as first among the four national goals of
the present government the goal of economic growth — against what
then become the constraints of national integrity, social justice
and personal fulfillment. It decried the inevitable outcome of
such a framework: that the "social issues" of communications become
something of an embarrassment to the general thrust of communications
policies.[1]

We believe a fundamental re-examination of social policies and
the "social aspects" of communications policies can no longer be
delayed. The time is here and now.

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[1] Other organizations have also raised similar questions about the
direction of communications policies in general and computer
communications in particular. See, for example, the comments
by The Vanier Institute of the Family on the Report of the
Canadian Computer/Communications Task Force.

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II. Informing and Communicating in
the Current Canadian Context

The Context of our Study

Most Canadians would agree that today's world is marked by
change more turbulent than we have known before. While agreement
on the nature and root causes of the changes affecting us may not
be widespread, it is clear that familiar patterns are breaking up
wherever one looks. As a result, it is now commonly accepted that
we can no longer take for granted the traditional ways in which we
have organized human activity to achieve collective ends.

It is therefore important that we attempt to understand the
dominant organizing principle which has shaped our society in the
past and to comprehend such new principles as are emerging, however
dimly discernible at present. To this end, numerous social philosophers
are offering their theories for public debate and discussion. In
a growing volume of literature[1], many of them are comparing our
society to a vast production machine and are suggesting that it is
this single-minded focus which is generating the current turbulence
and damaging human well-being. We seem to have held a common view
that the fundamental problem of human society is the need to overcome
material scarcity. To meet this problem, we have concentrated our
attention on the production of a rising volume of output and have
given economic policies predominance over social policies. We have
become ever more specialized cogs inside this production machine and
ever more rabid consumers of its output.

We are only now realizing the adverse side effects of this
organizing principle. They are clearly visible in the pollution which

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[1] See, for example, Lewis Mumford, "The Myth of the Machine", Pentagon
of Power, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, New York, 1970; Willis Harmon,
"Planning Amid Forces for Institutional Change", a paper presented
at the symposium "Planning in the Seventies", Washington, May 3-4,
1971; Manfred Halpern, "A Redefinition of the Revolutionary
Situation", Journal of International Affairs, Vol. XXIII, No. 1,
1969.

mars our physical environment and in the strains tearing at our social environment. We are also coming to see the inter-relationships which exist among many of our current problems — the "spillover" effects of our specialized producing activities. And we have begun to suspect that our efforts to solve problems through specialized policies and specialized organizations breed still more problems.

Thus whether one looks to the arguments advanced by the Club of Rome that there are limits to growth; or the sense of meaninglessness that surrounds so much of our world of work; or the expressed dissatisfactions with our institutions of business and government; or the increasingly visible inadequacies of many of our professional services; or indeed to almost any one of our organized activities, it is the predominance given to man's producing and consuming roles that is fundamentally at issue. As various liberations movements are reminding us, man is much more than a mechanism producing and consuming "things".

Out of this process of questioning our traditional social mores and of re-examining many of our previously taken-for-granted assumptions, it appears that a new organizing principle is beginning to emerge. What it suggests is that the predominant emphasis of our collective endeavours might better be placed on the quality of relationships among persons in community — on the nature of the connections between man and his social and physical environment — and that issues of scarcity, output and economic growth must be settled in the context of this broader concern for relationships. What is not yet clear, however, is the focus our national policies might take were we to move toward applying this new principle to them. Would the result be simply a shift away from a focus on the production of goods and services to the production of a different set of "things" — "the quality of life", "clean air", "the stable state", "justice", or other similar output objectives? Or will it embrace a more comprehensive understanding of the nature of man and the full range of his capacities for learning and growth in community

with others? To these questions, both the public and private
policies which we pursue in the future and the social experiments
we agree to undertake in the next several years must address them-
selves. Such questions adhere to them, either explicitly or
implicitly, and are thus unavoidable.

The Implications for Information and Communications

In calling attention to our tendency to accord predominant
emphasis to the production of "things", several social philosophers
have pointed to a range of our institutionalized activities to sup-
port their thesis. The school system, for example, is frequently
used to illustrate the consequences of "reification" — of turning
dynamic human processes of educating and learning into institutions
of education, and of focussing on the output of these institutions to
such an extent that those human processes become damaged and the
real purposes of those institutions almost forgotten.[1] Rather than
seeing change as normal, we have associated security with stability
and tried to contain human activity by institutionalizing it.

Such also appears to be the case when we come to think about in-
formation and communications. We have made industries out of the
human activities of informing and communicating and have entrusted
the outputs of those industries to specialized experts intent on
achieving efficient production. We have turned the problems of com-
municating into the problems of communications and have lost sight
of the main point. Our public policies in this area have been used
only to the extent necessary to protect the public from the dangers
of blatant mis-information and to ensure that access to mass com-
munications is not denied to those in isolated communities across
the country. We have developed information systems and information
theories and we have appointed information officers within our in-
stitutions, supplying them with sophisticated information retrieval

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[1] Ivan Illich and John Holt are prominent among those who have
criticized the damaging consequences of our current systems
of education. See Illich, Deschooling Society, Harper & Row,
New York, 1971; and John Holt, How Children Fail, Dell Pub-
lishing Co., New York, 1970.

systems whose products threaten to overrun us all — to pollute our social environment. And we appear to have taken for granted that the result of such activities will enhance the processes of communicating.

But many are now reminding us of the difference between nouns and verbs, between outputs and processes. The following set of definitions from the Oxford dictionary supports the contrast between information and informing, between communications and communicating:

information	:	thing told; item of knowledge; news
inform	:	inspire; imbue (person, heart, thing) with feeling, principle, quality
communications:		the act of imparting (especially news); information given
communicate	:	impart, transmit heat, emotion, feeling, news, a discovery; to share a thing with.

Information is thus the fuel that feeds the engine of communications. Both are static "things" or outputs which we have become very capable of delivering efficiently, although often forgetting in the process to ask "to whom" and "why". But informing and communicating are processes involving interaction between human beings with all their "inefficient" human qualities.

Nor can this be dismissed as a mere play on words. We in the Western World actually live the lines between nouns and verbs, between "things" and processes to an extent we only infrequently perceive. A recent Ottawa conference on Changing Concepts of Work highlighted the difference between our officially legitimated "work" activities and the whole range of "working" activities lying outside our official labour market concepts but which are nonetheless socially useful activities. Some government officials at this conference admitted that the contrasts between "work" and "working" raised important issues which were all too often left out of consideration in discussions about manpower policies.

There is mounting evidence to suggest that the production of
information and of communications tools is failing to meet the needs
of our society. The greater part of the benefits of these outputs
accrue to man in his institutional role, whether as producer or con-
sumer. But outside his role in the machine — in his personal, family
and community roles — man appears to have been less well served.
Many recent developments attest to this:

- the growing numbers of community information centres

- the parallel growth of crisis centres, dealing not only
  with emotional distress but also with information
  required to cope with sudden emergencies

- the move by government information services to storefront
  centres in an effort to bring such information closer
  to the people and enhance its relevance

- the questioning of the expertise of information officers
  and information departments attached to all our in-
  stitutions as indicated by allegations that they are
  adding to, rather than eliminating, an overload of
  increasingly irrelevant information.

- the consistent reappearance of advertising as a public
  issue and our apparent inability to deal with it, an
  inability related in large part to the support provided
  by advertising revenues in maintaining our mass media

- the questioning surrounding the fragmented and specialized
  information base on which many political and institutional
  decision-makers appear to base their deliberations and
  their policies

- the rise of community-initiated programming in television
  and radio broadcasting and the growth of the "alternate"
  press.

These developments are responses to the negative "spillover" ef-
fects which have resulted from the application to information and
communications of our predominant organizing principle — the production
of an ever-rising volume of specialized output.

Community-based information outlets appear to be one place to
which people turn for recognition of their individual needs — a place
where their role as consumers of specialized programs and services takes
secondary place to their wholeness as persons and where their concerns
and problems can be dealt with in integrated and human rather than
specialized and mechanical ways.

The following excerpts from "The Power to Communicate", the report on Phase I of this project, serve to highlight this observation:

> "The revolutionary aspect of information handling today....
> derives from a new perception of the nature of information.
> Many concerned individuals recognize the intimate connection
> between access to information and the power to participate
> effectively in the decisions that control our lives. These
> people tend to operate on the principle that information-
> giving should be accompanied by purpose, and unlike many
> information specialists, no longer conceive of information
> as an impartial or neutral commodity which merely requires
> efficient dissemination....
>
> In any event, information overload — the rise of sensory
> input to almost intolerable limits, attributable in part
> to the multiplicity of communications channels, to the size
> of social agencies and government departments, and to the
> multiplicity and complexity of available services — seems
> to have caused people to turn in desperation to human-sized
> information sources....
>
> In such environments, the person with the question or the
> problem appears so much more important than the regulations,
> his need is still the centre around which resources are
> mobilized, his dignity more important than efficiency."[1]

In many community information centres, the isolated and the alienated find it possible to establish relationships with others in their own community who are prepared to be responsive to their needs and to share their concerns. Centres thus can provide an environment in which the dehumanizing cycle of isolation and alienation, loss of community and powerlessness in which many people now feel so entrapped can begin to reverse itself.

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[1] The Power to Communicate: A Revolution in Information Sharing, a report on information handling in community information centres in Canada in 1971/72, by Diana J. Ironside, Dorene E. Jacobs, and Mary Jane Lennon, assisted by Barbara Blanchard of the Department of Adult Education, The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, prepared for the Consumers' Association of Canada and the Canadian Computer/Communications Task Force, May 1972.

Valuing, Trusting and Sharing

As mentioned in the Introduction, our interviews revealed that information problems at the community level are not primarily those of access to information and to specialized data banks. Rather, the problem was cast in a different way — as one of making contact with persons knowledgeable in specific subjects. Regardless of the position held by those with whom we talked — staff member of an information centre or member of a citizen group or government official — static sources of information and specialized data banks were seen as a channel of information running a poor second behind face-to-face (or telephone) discussion with persons knowledgeable in a particular field. Only in such a context, it was consistently argued, could "real" information — that which is lived by people — be exchanged.

At the root of these comments is the growing recognition that the process of becoming informed cannot be divorced from the processes of valuing, judging, defining, trusting, perceiving, sharing, exchanging and learning. All are involved in an interrelated continuum in any context in which people inform and communicate with one another. Rather than being regarded as value-free, those we interviewed acknowledged that information is value-laden and that its validity is a function of the extent to which the perceptions, attitudes and values of those involved in its dissemination are in accord with those of its recipients. Furthermore, the ability to perceive information as relevant to the problem at issue is very much related to the way in which the problem is defined and to the factors which are recognized to impinge upon it. Where perceptions and values differ and where the problem is defined from differing perspectives, then what constitutes information to one person is almost certain to be misinformation to another. What is essential for overcoming this hurdle is the establishment of a trust relationship in the context of which the differing perceptions and definitions can be made explicit, shared and discussed in an effort to arrive at a mutual understanding.

Much of our organized information disseminating activities
are widely regarded at the community level as inappropriate since
they tend for the most part to reinforce dominant values and deny
opportunities for a two-way exchange of ideas and queries — for
a genuine learning environment. The inherent one-way nature of
mass communications and of standard information packages (addressed
to standard people) is particularly inappropriate in a society in
which traditional value systems are being subjected to fundamental
questioning and re-examination. Reliance on mass communications as
the primary means of conveying information to the public is approp-
riate in a society where there is some middle ground of consensus
around national and institutional goals and around the capacity of
those goals to further human well-being. But when that consensus
is eroding, then mass communications techniques will fail to serve
the purposes for which they are intended. If, as some social scientists
argue, our society is unique in that it is marked by the existence of
a greater number of significantly different value systems than has
been the case in any earlier period[1], communications across the
barriers of cognitive dissonance that different value systems impose
becomes increasingly difficult. Mass information and mass communica-
tions serve only to add to this dissonance.

The Problem Recast

The results of our investigations reveal growing concern about
our present communications environment. Those staffing community
information centres, as well as those closely associated with citizen
groups, expressed serious reservations about the relevance of existing
specialized data banks and specialized information activities. The
language used by government officials in disseminating information
about government programs and services, for example, was as much at
issue for its implicit value assumptions as for the assumption that
all intended recipients could comprehend the message. Where the

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1/ See for example, Clare Graves, "Levels of Personality Development",
   Journal of Humanistic Psychology, Nov. 1971.

language used was statistical, the reservations were even more
strongly expressed. The assumption that the observed behaviour
which is the subject of measurement is by definition preferred
behaviour, and therefore revealing of appropriate policy directions,
appears to be much more seriously questioned by those being measured
than by those undertaking the measuring. The outputs of govern-
mental information services were also widely recognized to be in-
complete in failing to provide information about the judgmental
criteria used by government officials in sorting through competing
claims with respect to program eligibility. One-way communications
techniques are themselves regarded in large part as frustrating com-
munications. Impediments to two-way discussion and dialogue emerged
as of much greater significance than access to sterile specialized
data banks.

From this perspective, it appears that we need to re-examine our
communications policies and to move away from concerns about the
output of our communications systems and the distribution of that
output towards a concern for communicating — for reducing misunder-
standing and creating a communications environment conducive to
learning and tolerance among the growing diversity of Canadians. This
re-examination is all the more crucial in a society characterized by
the breaking of connections between people and the institutions which
serve them and between groups holding radically differing views around
specific issues. Rather than focussing on access to static bodies
of "factual" knowledge, informing and communicating might more
appropriately be viewed as flows — as processes through which per-
sons inform one another and themselves become informed. Thus,
instead of attempting to identify and fill gaps in information needs
at the community level, those of us who are interested in facilitating
community information should, we believe, unite in searching for
barriers to open-ended two-way information channels.

III. Community Information Centres Revisited -

In Phase I of this project, community information centres were defined as those organizations which see their prime function as that of information-giving and referral. In the interval since that study was conducted, some controversy has arisen over the definition of a community information centre. A few centres reported finding the definition used in "The Power to Communicate" far too broad in scope and suggested that lines needed to be drawn to delineate a manageable and distinct set of organizations. In some cities, the centres themselves have been trying for their own satisfaction to arrive at a standard definition.[1] Many centres have argued that those who bear their label must possess one of a number of characteristics: community-operated; independent (not attached to any other organization); non-commercial; all-purpose (not restricted by subject matter); not identified with any one movement or popular cause; and so on. However, such controversies are, we believe, merely another reflection of the overriding tendency in our society to specify, rigidify and exclude, to become ever more compartmentalized and specialized producers and consumers.

Aside from the definition of a community information centre, one other term alluded to in the course of some of our conversations was also interpreted in a variety of ways: the word "community". It was evident that this term, while normally used to indicate a geographic area (either a city or a neighbourhood within a city) is also used to denote groups of people who share common interests or who engage in mutually supporting activities across local geographic boundaries. The definition of community information centres can therefore involve controversy over the communality of the bond distinguishing the communities they serve.

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[1] In Toronto, for example, the centres established in January 1973, "The Federation of Community Information Centres in the Toronto Area". This group excludes specialized centres and ethnic groups limiting service only to their own nationals. It is also of interest that the Metropolitan Toronto Public Library Board has adopted a policy which prevents community information centres operated by libraries from joining the Federation — apparently for fear that the new Federation would adopt an active advocacy role.

For our part, we have chosen to retain the broad definition used in the previous study. We have done so in the belief that it more closely matches the diverse spectrum of the information-giving requirements of the public.[1] Much less important than whether the centre is run by a library, social planning council, government, business firm or community group, and whether or not it specializes, is the degree of satisfaction which members of the public experience in approaching the centres with their various enquiries. That satisfaction is in turn highly dependent on the capacity of those in the centre to gain the trust of their enquirers.

In the five cities we visited, we tried to sample as varied a population of information centres as possible. We talked with those operating large central information and referral centres and with some of the small neighbourhood ones. We visited centres which specialize in specific subjects and those which serve special groups. We met also with crisis centres and with some citizen groups whose interests involve them in information collection and dissemination. We talked as well with a number of persons interested in facilitating communications among Canadian communities; some of these were government officials responsible for the funding of community information centres, others were community-based research groups while a few were persons attached to universities. In some of our interviews, we encountered significant criticism of the centres. Some people regarded them merely as faddish responses to a more fundamental need. Others argued that they were failing to become genuine "people places" where members of the community could gather and discuss their common concerns. Many thought they were performing a useful function in reaching "outsiders" in the community, while others advised us that the centres in their communities were not "where the action is". (A list of those with whom we talked is contained in Appendix A).

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[1] Even this definition fails to capture all the sources fitting the realities of community communications channels since it includes only organizations specializing in information and thus ignores the very real possibility that the most useful channel of communication in a community may be the local grocery store or barber shop.

The Life Cycles of Communities and Information Centres

The urban environment in each of the communities we visited differed, both as to the interests and concerns of its people and the attitudes of those in positions of influence with respect to the importance of well-informed citizen input into decision-making processes. And it was evident that some information centres flourish in an environment conducive to encouraging mutually supporting activities among its residents, while others languish apparently without support or a sense of purposefulness. In examining a variety of factors which might explain this, we began to discern a patterning of two interrelated life cycles, one having to do with the social environment in which the centres operate, the other with the growth of the centres themselves. Just as the family exerts the major influence on the development of a young child, so too the environment importantly influences the potential transformation of information centres into useful community activities. Both cycles involve the concept of human growth and learning, of a growing sense of awareness of self in community with others.

A mature community is one in which membership is marked by continual interaction, by a sense of working together on the basis of relationships founded on respect, trust and a recognition that all are involved in trying to improve the environment.[1] In such a community it is also likely that institutions will support and encourage the participation of community groups in the decisions that affect them. Rather than regarding such interventions as unwarranted intrusions, governments are likely to actively seek out informed citizen input and to do so well in advance of policy formulation. Recognizing that community information centres sit at the crossroads between institutions and those they serve, government officials will check with their personnel about indications of emerging community problems and needed institutional reform. Such officials will also

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1/ This does not mean that conflict does not exist in the community, but only that, when it does occur, it is more open and hence more healthy.

take pains to àvoid putting community groups in the position of
being forced to express opinions, within a limited period of time,
on a policy proposal in which they have not been earlier involved
or to make instant choices from among a number of policy options.
This openness in turn encourages community groups to take more creative
and more positive stances than when consultative processes are more
restricted.

Community information centres are not unlike seeds planted in
fields, some of which are more fertile than others. The degree to
which the seed takes root is highly dependent on the receptiveness of
the community in which it tries to grow. But it is also dependent on
the health of the seed itself, on its consciousness that it is an
organism capable of interacting with its environment. At times the early
growth of a centre is handicapped by community resistance. This occurs
when those involved in establishing the centre have not tested the need
for such an organization or when they have not taken care to see that
their style of operation corresponds to the preferences of the community.

But if the centre is made welcome, like a child its early energies
are devoted to survival — to learning how to adjust to its environment
and how to cope with the demands put upon it. As it begins to compile
an inventory of community agencies and services and to undertake such
other tasks as the community demands of it, a new centre quickly enters
into a process of self-education, learning about the community, the
resources available in it and the unmet needs of its members. Once
the problem of survival diminishes, the next stage of growth is marked
by a modestly more active role as the centre begins to acquire legiti-
macy and credibility in the eyes of the community. Advocacy, however,
while a subject of continual discussion, is relatively little practised
in a confrontational fashion for fear of antagonizing different members
of the community. Instead, as it extends its roots into the community,
the centre begins to make increasing use of personal networks in order
to bring about institutional responsiveness and thus to better the com-
munity environment. As the recognition grows that the lines between
information-giving and problem-solving are blurred at best, the centre
slowly begins to respond in an ecologic fashion to all the needs of the
community; it moves away from an exclusive focus on information per se
to assume responsibility for resolving issues of community concern.

Maturity develops when a centre is accorded the legitimacy granted to any respected member of society — when it receives recognition and support for its endeavours and comes to be trusted by growing numbers of persons in the community, including those in institutional roles. Advocacy as a theoretical issue recedes with the more realistic recognition that maturing wisdom and perception makes advocates of us all. The lines separating many activities in the community come increasingly to be seen as artificial, particularly the lines separating information centres from other community activities. Operating in a mature community, a community information centre is able to develop much more quickly than others. It can almost from the outset become the hub around which a variety of community projects and group activities are located. In addition to dealing with the enquiries of its users, a centre in a mature community is also more likely than others to put people in touch with one another, to actively promote the responsiveness of institutions to the needs of those in the community, and to support the involvement of the residents in planning for community needs.

Some examples might help to clarify what we are saying. In 1969, the City of Vancouver formally established 21 local area councils composed of community representatives for purposes of planning social services in the city. In some instances, these area councils have grown to be remarkably active forces within the communities they serve. The Grandview-Woodlawn Area Council, which was established in 1964, was the forerunner of the Area Council movement. It established in 1967 an information centre which is now frequently cited as the model for information centres. in British Columbia, if not in all of Canada. It houses within its premises a multi-lingual centre for the use of ethnic groups in the community. Other unmet needs it helped to identify have led to the establishment of a community health clinic and a storefront architect firm, while other community enterprises, such as a job placement program and a free university, apparently attracted by the community environment, have located in a two-block area around the information centre. In this

community, the area council has responded to the perceived need for a community centre to house the growing number of community enterprises and so become a focal point for its residents; it has employed a firm to analyze expressions of opinion, collected with the assistance of the centre, about its design and about plans for the redevelopment of the area.

Nor are area councils and the City Social Planning Department alone in according recognition to the value of citizen input into decision-making. The Greater Vancouver Regional Government has recently employed a small group of persons whose function is to act as ombudsmen — as an information bridge between the regional government and citizen groups. Rather than representing the government, the function of this group of regional government employees is to inform citizen groups when issues of particular concern to them are about to be discussed and to give them the information they require for effective participation in such discussions. Halifax was also remarkable for the ease with which citizens could make contact with elected leaders and government officials, an environment to which the open door policies of its officials and its comparatively small size undoubtedly contributed. These two communities stood in marked contrast to our overall impressions of the environmental characteristics of the three cities in central Canada included in our survey.

Other centres find different ways of bettering their environment, some by promoting alternate institutional structures. L'Association Coopérative d'Economie Familiale, a citizen organization in the Province of Quebec, has worked for some years in the area of credit counselling and family budgetting. Recently it has been involved with its users in setting up such alternate structures as cooperative finance companies and, in recognition of the extent to which family credit problems are a function of the workings of other institutions, it is also active in cooperative industries and housing developments.

In summary, then, the ability of any community information centre or citizen group to respond to the needs of its community is partly a function of the openness of the environment in which it operates. The willingness to engage in experimental processes and to try on alternate ways of doing things appears to stem from the perception that, by working together, institutions and community groups can arrive at a common understanding and work towards a common purpose — the development of a more enriching social environment for the community as a whole.

Impediments to the Functioning of Community Information Centres

Community information centres cover a wide spectrum of information-giving functions. As we have already mentioned, specialized centres tend to deal in information more directly related to "what to do" than is the case with all-purpose information centres. The latter, which include the large central outlets serving a city-wide population as well as centres serving a particular neighbourhood, act largely as referral agents, suggesting where a particular service may be obtained and what specific programs exist to assist their users in working out specific problems. Their files and their directories constitute in effect a data bank of community resources.[1] However, their main function is that of assisting their users to define their problems and then to communicate their needs as a first step toward resolving those problems. Their users tend to be those in the community who are unable to articulate the root causes of their difficulty or who perceive the problem to be of one sort when on reflection it turns out to be something quite different.

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[1] To some extent, their printed directories comprise only a partial inventory of community resources however; the cost of printing often results in the omission of resources newly established or only infrequently called upon. But other values also influence the resources listed in the directory — one centre defined its criteria with respect to directory listings as "stable, non-commercial and respectable". A new centre, which is taking over the publication of a city-wide directory from a long-established centre now closed, drew our attention to a sizable file of "alternate" community resources which it plans to include in addition to the list of established agencies published in the directory of its predecessor.

One centre, for example, told us of receiving a call from a mother wanting to find a nursery school for her three-year old daughter who, she said, suffered from lack of companionship and speech difficulties. After some discussion, it turned out that the mother was in the habit of tying the child to a tree in the yard, leaving the family dog to watch her. Instead of learning how to talk, the child had learned how to bark! Obviously this was an exceptional illustration. Much more common was the experience of many centres in dealing with people who ask initially for assistance in finding legal aid facilities for divorce cases; in the course of subsequent conversations the enquirer many times reveals that what is really wanted is marriage counselling, addiction treatment, assistance in coping with a delinquent child or merely some way of releasing the mother from the confines of the household for a few hours each week. Clearly, other more fundamental problems and other less drastic remedies underlie the initial question and the obvious response.

Assisting the isolated, the alienated and the inarticulate to discuss and then act on the problems which concern them is an activity much needed in the fragmented machine-like society we have built for ourselves. It is also very time-consuming. We asked the staff of the centres we visited whether they could identify energy-draining activities which diverted them from this prime function, i.e., impediments to their capacity to facilitate communications in their community. Their answers pointed to two problems — trying to keep pace with changes in their directories and securing adequate financial support.

i) Directories

With the exception of new centres, those with whom we spoke told us of the difficulties encountered in keeping their files and directories up-to-date. The problem was particularly acute for the central information outlets whose directories are heavily depended upon by neighbourhood and specialized centres as sources of referral. "On the way to the printer, our directory was out-of-date" was a frequent

complaint heard during our interviews. While some of the centres had resorted to issuing periodic revisions to their directories, others could not afford the cost entailed.

In some urban areas, efforts are being made to find different ways of compiling and sharing this information. One particular technique has been tried in a number of cities we visited — that of meetings involving all information centres in the city concerned. At such meetings, information about changes in services or programs can be exchanged and unmet needs in the community discussed. However, on the whole they have not proven highly successful media for information exchange. They have tended instead to become absorbed in considerations of funding — the second energy-draining preoccupation of many of the centres.

ii) Funding

The difficulty of securing adequate financial support remains a continual thorn in the flesh of those who attempt to launch community enterprises. Many centres who have begun operations in the last year or two have secured LIP or OFY grants sufficient to cover only a few months of their operations. The confusion resulting from the termination of such programs, their eventual reappearance, and the length of time taken for approval of applications have resulted in the closing of many centres; some of these include centres that are regarded by the inhabitants of the community concerned as performing a very significant role.[1] While other governmental funding sources extend support for a period of one year, delays in considering applications for renewal force many centres, if not to close their doors, at least to substantially retrench their activities until word on the status of their application for renewal is received. The time spent in filling in grant applications, in compiling progress reports and in assessing the effectiveness of their operations appears to be absorbing a significant amount of energy on the part not only of the boards of

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[1] As one person we interviewed put it: "LIP can destroy a community".

the centres but of the staff as well. They are thus diverted from
their main function — that of helping their users to communicate
their problems so that appropriate solutions could be arrived at.

This is not to argue that all groups who wish to launch a com-
munity information centre or who seek support to continue in operation
should automatically be provided with public funds to do so. But it
does point to the inadequacies of current governmental mechanisms for
funding community enterprises and to the invisible impacts which fre-
quently result in damage both to the expectations of the community and
to the communications environment. In exploring such issues with many
departments of government presently supporting information centres,
we learned that what may also be thwarted is the expressed desires of
some of those charged with administering such programs to see the
centres become agents for social change in the community and instruments
generating more responsive behaviour on the part of the institutions.
But such an outcome appears patently impossible when the funding tap is
turned on only for short intervals. Under such constraints, centres
are forced to open before they have had sufficient time to build up
their data base, to determine community needs and to open their chan-
nels of communication with those in institutions and service agencies
whose programs affect the community.

Nor is simple recourse to long-term funding likely to result in
any better outcomes, at least under our current decision-making pro-
cesses regarding requests for financial support from governments.
Familiarity with the real needs of Canadian communities is not normally
among the qualifications required on the part of officials charged with
arriving at such decisions, nor is it likely that such familiarity can
be obtained by infrequent visitations to communities on the occasion of
applications for financial support.

What is frequently forgotten in governmental processes is that
planning and administering and evaluating are not separate and sep-
arable functions. When the program administrator or the program
evaluator comes to develop and apply criteria to implement the program

and to allocate resources among competing claimants, he is making policy just as surely as is the policy planner, although much less visibly than were he too in the political arena. What is required on the part of those responsible for government funding of community activities is therefore not only a consciousness of the goals of their program but a particular awareness of the need to develop appropriate criteria in the context of a deep appreciation of more comprehensive and fundamental community needs. Some of our recommendations will suggest alternate evaluation processes in which such criteria appear to us more capable of emerging than they now do when government officials are forced to make independent and isolated decisions.

iii) Visibility

To some extent, the two impediments mentioned above relate in the main to all-purpose information and referral centres. Specialized information centres — those dealing with specific subject matters or specific groups — face an environment posing problems of a related yet different sort. Their immediate concerns centre on problems of enhancing their visibility in the community. Budgetary constraints often mean they are unable to advertise their existence or the details about the sort of information they have available or are willing to provide.

iv) Other Impediments

Governments also place other impediments in the way of the centres' attempts to improve the communications environment of their communities. The fragmented nature of departmental jurisdictions frequently results in one arm of government supporting community information centres while other arms appear to be largely unaware of their existence. Thus governments frequently fail to take advantage of the potential afforded by the centres as outlets for needed information about their programs. At the federal level, for example, the Departments of the Secretary of State and National Health and Welfare and the branch of the Department of Manpower and Immigration which is concerned with the Local Initiatives Program are all involved in funding community information

centres. Yet we received many complaints that information about government programs operated by these same departments is difficult for many of the centres to obtain. More cooperation is required within government if the centres are to achieve their objectives, including those which are the object of government support.

But some of the actions of the centres themselves also serve to frustrate the attainment of their own objectives. Failure to select a location and premises which fit the preferences of their users may vitally damage the relationships between the centres and the community. While some users wish to contact the centres only by telephone, drop-in facilities are important to those wishing to engage in face-to-face discussion. For some enquirers, the appearance and location of the physical premises of the centres may be a deterrent. Some may be intimidated by an impersonal downtown office, others may be offended by the lack of concern of pride conveyed by a sloppy run-down street location. To the extent that the choice of location is dictated by monetary constraints, it is a factor which should be drawn to the attention of governments, but to the extent that it is a deliberate choice of the personnel of the centres themselves, we believe it might well be the subject of more thoughtful consideration.

Similarly, the selection of the staff of the centre communicates messages about the nature of the concern and the commitment of the centre. We have already mentioned the importance of personal networks as channels of communication. Community information centres can play a supporting role in facilitating their users to link into such networks but their ability to do so is contingent on having staff who are seen to be understanding and to have personal experience with many of the situations which give rise to concern. Centres whose staff do not personify this commitment and understanding run the risk of being seen as useless appendages which merely add one more layer to the already confusing number of irrelevant information outlets.

At times, the personnel of the centres impede communications between themselves and their users when they fail to go beyond the ethics of their professional disciplines. They may be unwilling, for example,

to provide some types of information which their users request or which would be helpful to them in choosing among a variety of alternative programs and services that which would be most relevant to their particular needs. We have in mind such professional ethics as might stand in the way of the centre offering information embodying value judgments — information which might assist people in choosing the most suitable nursing home or day care centre for example. Since it is precisely this type of information which many people find so difficult to obtain, as evidenced by the many comments we received in this vein, we would urge those operating information centres to move responsibly to fill this gap — to have no hesitation in drawing on their own personal experience and the judgments of those they trust and respect in supplying opinions if requested to do so.

Professionalism also appears to be behind the frequent statements on the part of some of the larger centres and some personnel in government funding agencies as to the need to derive minimum standards appropriate for centres in Canada or in any one province. Standard definitions and standard rules which emerge from the specialized understandings of "producers" of goods and services have all too frequently become a mechanistic technique whose net effect is to exclude others from providing those same goods and services and thus to make them scarce. The veracity of this argument can be seen in the current confrontations between the medical profession and paramedic technicians and between dentists and denturists. We urge centres to consider carefully any move in the direction of professional standards and to resist those which appear to run the risk of impeding the overall communications environment. If minimum standards in fact appear necessary, care should be taken to ensure that they do not impede any person in the communities affected from becoming informed and from communicating his interests and concerns in a context of his choosing.[1]

1/ At a recent national conference of crisis centres held in Ottawa in March 1973, this question of standards attracted considerable attention; however a move to draft standards applicable to all Canadian crisis centres was not successful.

We also wish to draw attention to another communications impediment which surrounds the discussion of confidentiality. Blanket assumptions that the confidentiality of users is to be protected at all costs have left many centres incapable of securing feedback about the quality of the service or program to which their users are referred. In some cases, no files are kept at all, thus preventing the centre from mapping its responses to similar problems so as to learn from them. Rules of confidentiality may further prevent centres from being able to assist a person seeking a service which does not exist in his community in making contact with others who are interested in the same service. We believe there should be no automatic assumption that users would prefer not to leave their name and phone number with the personnel of the centre — rather this should be a question put to each of its users. We suggest the centre might then explain to each enquirer that its own needs for such information devolve from its assumption of responsibility for collecting feedback on institutions in the community. Centres might also explain that an enquirer's name will be used only with his permission and only for such purposes as putting him in touch with others sharing similar concerns.

Summary

We have pointed to some of the impediments to the effective functioning of community information centres. Some of these are created by external forces — by the imposition of governmental modes of operation which are not rooted in a firm understanding of the unique environments in which centres operate. Others reflect inadequate understandings on the part of the centres themselves, while still others result from a mix of these two forces. On the removal of these impediments hangs the future of community information centres. If these impediments continue to exist, then the

centres appear to be in danger of becoming merely one more service
agency adding to the multiplicity of services in the community.
Were the communications environment to become the centre of atten-
tion, then different measures of success than the volume of en-
quiries now used by the centres and by their funders as simple
indices would emerge, measures which focus not on statistical
indicators but on the human processes of communicating.

IV. Information: Problems and Sources

The preceding section examined the institutional functioning of community information centres. This section looks more closely at the business of information-giving in which the centres are engaged. In addition to the opinions of those whom we interviewed, it draws on responses to the questionnaire which was sent to the centres in the latter part of February.

The Questionnaire

Phase I of this project produced the first comprehensive listing of community information centres — the preliminary edition of the "Handbook of Information and Helping Services in Canada". The centres included in the Handbook formed the major part of our mailing list for the questionnaire. We supplemented this with additional names obtained from government funders of community information centres and other similar avenues of assistance. In addition, our letter to the centres asked them to help us identify centres not included in the preliminary edition. Several centres did supply this information but unfortunately the short period of time between the receipt of their replies and the termination of this project meant that we were unable to follow up a number of these leads.[1] However, the names of those centres which are not included in the current edition of the Handbook will be kept to support future work in this field.

We wrote to 467 centres explaining the purposes of this project and requesting their cooperation in updating and supplementing the profile sheets describing their activities and in completing the short questionnaire on "Information: Problems and Sources". (Copies of the letter and the questionnaire are included in Appendix B). Deducting from this total the letters returned to us marked addressee unknown or moved and those which were later discovered to have closed, we estimate there are about 440 centres in existence in Canada. Of these, 269 indicated their willingness to be included in the current Handbook,

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[1] Speaking of communications, there were inordinately long delays between posting, by first class mail, letters to the centres and their delivery to the addressees. After writing again to advise centres of an extension on the suggested deadline for returns, we learned that several centres had never received the original letter.

a response rate of over 60 per cent... Their profiles form Part I of the current Handbook, which we have entitled "Information Centres: A Handbook for Canadian Communities".

Table I analyzes the overall pattern of the questionnaire responses to problems of access to information. Perhaps the most startling aspect of this tabulation is the high proportion of responding centres — over 75 per cent — who either failed to return the questionnaire or who returned it indicating they have experienced no problems of access to the information they require. There are a number of factors which could account for the low numbers reporting difficulties of access.

In the first place, as already mentioned, many community information centres are predominantly referral agents. Information pertaining to specific problems emerges as a responsibility of all-purpose information centres only when they become aware that other sources are not proving relevant to their users. Such centres therefore might well be oblivious to problems faced by their users at the agencies to which they were referred. But other reasons for the low response rate also became evident during our interviews. The letter accompanying the questionnaire and the questionnaire itself were deliberately very general in order to avoid the risk of directing the responses; it may well be that the generality of the questions we posed served to deter many centres from taking the time to think about their import. During the course of our interviews, we at times encountered expressions of considerable frustration at still another research study directed at the activities of the centres. Some of the personnel wondered when, if ever, the studies which had been undertaken would lead to action in the form of tangible assistance to them. There were also a few opinions expressed to the effect that governments were interested in studying them only to test their own plans for opening street-level government information centres in competition with community-initiated centres. Not without reason, therefore, many thought the time spent in granting interviews and filling out questionnaires was not likely to be worth the candle.

Table I

Problems of Access to Information
Reported by
Community Information Centres

Information Problems:	B.C.	Prairie[1]	Ontario	Québec	Atlantic	Total
Government	2	4	16	3	-	25
Housing	5	4	10	2	1	22
Funding	2	-	5	-	-	7
Social services	3	-	4	-	-	7
Medical and legal	-	-	7	-	-	7
Consumer	-	-	2	2	-	4
Directories, citizen groups	-	2	2	-	-	4
Drugs	1	-	1	-	1	3
Other	1	1	11	2	-	15
Total[2]	14	11	58	9	2	94
No Problem	8	4	24	9	5	50
No Response	31	18	82	20	9	160
Total number of centres	48	32	138	35	16	269

(1) Includes 1 centre in the Yukon.

(2) Includes multiple responses.

Source: Responses to Questionnaire "Information: Problems and Sources", March 1973.

Of those centres who did return the questionnaire, many clearly stated that they had not experienced problems which they had been unable to handle. Several centres told us that, from their perspective, the problem was not that of access to information but rather that of providing services to fill the gap between community needs and existing services. As one respondent put it:

> "The problem is not so much in getting information as in getting services. The community is gutted with fancy folders about housing, but this does not produce accommodation geared to income."

Other comments attached to the questionnaire which are of interest are included in Appendix C.

a) Information Problems:

In the questionnaire responses, information about government programs ranked first among the types of information creating problems of access. At the federal level, manpower programs, unemployment insurance regulations and immigration programs were specifically identified. Provincial welfare programs were also mentioned, along with medicare programs. Some respondents commented that governments, in offering services to all members of the public, failed to assume the corresponding obligation of ensuring that information about those services is readily available. Referring to information about urban development plans and land transfers available at municipal government offices, one citizen group commented: "the information is there but it's so badly organized that digging it out is a full time job."[1] Governments may allege that information is publicly available but, in reality, it is frequently publicly inaccessible when it is organized in such a way as to predominantly serve the needs of administrators.

1/ Responding to this need, a Toronto businessman is now offering information on land transfers to paying subscribers in that city.

Just as information about job opportunities and unemployment insurance benefits is creating problems in a time of high unemployment, so too it was not unexpected to find that the rising costs of construction and serviced land were reflected in the responses; many centres reported encountering difficulties in obtaining information about available housing accommodation, particularly for large families on limited incomes.[1]/ The lack of day care facilities also emerged in our interviews as a problem. Some centres were attempting to narrow the gap between demand and supply by operating registers for accommodation, day care and home care. By notifying their communities that these problems are creating hardships, they are succeeding in generating responses from those with available accommodation and those willing to offer their services to care for children or to help out in homes in case of illness.

Our interviews revealed additional information problems and added greater weight to others that the written responses did not reveal. In discussions with members of citizen groups, for example, repeated requests were made for information about funding sources for community projects; this subject also dominated many of our conversations with the personnel of the centres. Citizen groups also referred to one topic rarely mentioned by the centres -- the difficulties of getting in touch with other groups across the country who might be concerned with similar interests. Many of those with whom we spoke also mentioned problems of access to information incorporating value judgments about the calibre of professional services -- "who's the best doctor, most reliable mechanic", etc.

Finally, several community information centres regarded the lack of government directories as hindering them in accessing federal and provincial government information. However, they called for directories of a different sort than those usually provided by governments -- organized not by department but by subject matter and accompanied by

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1/ The frequency with which problems with respect to housing emerged in the responses may partially be accounted for by the fact that housing was used in the questionnaire to illustrate the detail we hoped to elicit in the responses.

either the name or phone number of the person in charge of programs for the public. This type of directory they believed might be of significant help in enabling the centres both to obtain promptly information about program changes and, more particularly, to make contact with officials of sufficient knowledge and authority to deal with problems too complex to fit neatly into the tidy boxes of our government programs.[1] Were such directories available, their use might well enhance the responsiveness of our institutions. By luring government officials out from behind their mask of anonymity and facing them with the real-life experiences of those on whom their programs impinge, much more flexible and sensible administrative procedures might emerge.

b) Information Sources:

Our letter asked the centres to tell us if they themselves had information or had discovered helpful information sources they would like to share with other information centres in Canada. Surprisingly few replied to this question. Yet in the course of our interviews, we discovered several instances of information compiled by the centres which might well prove useful to their counterparts across the country. Many, for example, had translated the jargon used by the bureaucracy to explain government programs into the everyday parlance of our two official languages and into a number of other languages. Our own speculations as to the reasons why so few volunteered this information have ranged from short-sighted modesty on the part of the centres in failing to recognize the usefulness to others of their activities, to fears that, were they to do so, the demand for their material might well place a severe strain on their already limited resources. Furthermore, many of the centres told us they would prefer not to reveal to others information sources which they had found helpful for fear of overloading the source to the point of breakdown.

1/ The Government of Ontario is investigating the possibility of producing such a directory using a computerized data bank and accessible through toll-free telephones by MPPs, government field officers and community information centres.

We have supplemented the information sources we were referred
to by the centres with additional sources we ourselves identified
in the belief they might be helpful. This task proved to be very
time-consuming. As we discovered, there is a wealth of energy
directed at solving some of these problems at the community level,
though much of it is not visible to those unfamiliar with the com-
munity scene. As a result, far from exhausting the potentially
useful information sources in each of the five cities we visited,
we left with long lists of places still to visit and persons still
to consult. We offer the results of our search — Part II of the
Handbook — as a contribution to those concerned with community in-
formation needs. We hope that, if they find it a helpful starting
point, interest might be stimulated in making it more comprehensive.

This section of the Handbook has been organized by subject matter
and provides short descriptions of the nature of the information
offered by the specialized sources we were able to identify. These
sources cover a wide range of organizations and groups. They include
those information centres we identified as compiling specialized
information material and publishing directories of available com-
munity resources. Information compiled by citizen groups and
voluntary organizations which appear to answer at least some of the
problems brought to our attention is also included, as are particular
information-giving functions of government departments, some fairly
well known and others not so well known. Some of the data banks we
have included contain information of interest only to local communities;
however, they illustrate interesting and innovative methods of over-
coming problems of providing certain kinds of information.

The Handbook combines into one resource tool the profiles of
community information centres and specialized information sources.
Potentially, if not in fact, community information centres are them-
selves specialized information sources or data banks of community needs
and interests, so that there is little logic in separating them from
other data banks.   But further steps will need to be taken if our

suggestion that this material be transformed into a useful "living" resource for centres, community groups and individual Canadians is accepted; the material will need to be made more readily accessible and kept more up-to-date than is possible with print-based directories. With this in mind, we have coded the information sources in both parts of the Handbook into broad categories. In Part I, the information on community information centres has been coded to facilitate access to particular subject matter areas or activities in which the centres may be engaged. In Part II, the specialized information sources have been coded by subject matter, users, geographic applicability and form of output. We hope that, if our recommendation is accepted by the centres, they will identify additional information about their own activities which has not come to our attention.

What follows below are some brief highlights from among the specialized information sources listed in the Handbook. The comments are in two parts — those pertaining to the computer-based information systems developed mainly for institutional purposes follow our report on information sources which have evolved from community needs.

i) Funding sources:

The frustrations encountered by community groups in discovering where to turn for financial assistance in undertaking community enterprises has not escaped the attention of governments. While many departments and agencies produce a variety of pamphlets and brochures outlining the conditions governing eligibility for grants, governments are moving to recognize the need for a comprehensive reference source which would pull together all information applicable to each level of government. The Department of the Secretary of State, for example, expects to publish this summer a guide to all federal funding sources open to community enterprises, while the Non-Medical Use of Drugs Directorate is considering plans to supplement this with a similar guide to provincial funding sources. These two documents, when produced,

would serve to complement recently published information about corporate funding sources. "Misgivings", compiled by Memo from Turner, a Toronto-based research group, incorporates and supplements the information contained in the "Directory of Foundations and Granting Agencies", published for some years by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada; in addition, it includes useful and candid comments on the attitudes of the corporation officials running donations programs as perceived by the researchers.

ii) Citizen groups:

"What groups are interested in sharing with us their experiences about issues with which we are concerned? How can we locate them and make connections?" These questions emerged time and again in our conversations. In response, we have listed in the Handbook such directories of citizen groups as we were able to identify. However, most of them do not couple the names and location of the groups listed with specific issues which have engaged their attention in the past or in which they are currently involved. Instead they provide only a general indication of the nature of the groups. The listing of OFY, LIP and New Horizons projects moves in this direction but classifies the projects undertaken by province rather than subject matter. Since these are short-term projects, the disappearance of the groups at the termination of the projects, frequently with no record left as to the success or failure of their undertakings[1], severely limits usefulness as contact references.

iii) Government programs:

Many community information centres and citizen groups have reworked information pertaining to government programs into more relevant form than that provided by the departments concerned. Others have material available regarding government programs in various languages.

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[1] Our society's tendency to constantly bury the results of activities deemed to be failures was repeatedly brought to our attention; many of those we interviewed felt strongly that there was as much to be learned from project failures as from successes.

The Bloor-Bathurst Information Centre in Toronto, for example, has compiled a "Guide for People Who Want to Become Landed Immigrants", explaining the intricacies of regulations faced by persons securing immigrant status in Canada. SPOTA (Strathcona Property Owners and Tenants Association), a citizen group in Vancouver, has translated the British Columbia welfare legislation into Chinese and has added this to material in other languages available through the Multi-Lingual Information Centre in that city.

But providing information about government programs relevant to community needs is not an activity restricted solely to community groups. Personnel in some government departments have been known to answer enquiries from members of the public wanting to inform themselves about topics which are related to aggregate statistical information compiled by the departments concerned. CMHC regional officers, for example, sometimes answer enquiries from the public about the fairness of rental rates for particular types of dwellings in particular neighbourhoods within their regions, and about available rental vacancies. We have already mentioned the group of civil servants in the Greater Vancouver Regional District who act in an advocate capacity for citizen groups within the region — informing them when issues of concern to them are about to be discussed and supplying them with information needed to participate in such discussions. Individual citizenship officers of the Department of the Secretary of State, field officers of provincial governments and a variety of other government personnel frequently go to great lengths to respond to requests for information and to interpret that information to suit the particular concerns of individual enquiries. To some extent their willingness to do so is related to the nature of the Department — the more structured and the more specialized, the greater appears to be the reluctance to provide relevant information to the public.

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iv) Professional services:

Obtaining information about the quality of professional ser-
vices appears to be a recurring problem. Two groups offer interest-
ing illustrations of ways to provide that information. The Automobile
Protection Association of Montreal compiles information for the use
of its members about "honest" and "dishonest" garages; in addition,
it brings groups of car owners experiencing problems with respect to
certain makes of cars together to help organize confrontations with
the manufacturers concerned. The Women's Bureau in Vancouver main-
tains information about gynaecologists in that community based on
questionnaire returns from female patients recording their views as
to the quality of service obtained; this information is made avail-
able to telephone or drop-in enquirers.

Professionals are themselves coming to recognize the need to
de-mythologize their arts. Many lawyers, for example, are writing
a variety of books and pamphlets dealing in laymen's language with
some common problems of a legal nature and providing some simple
do-it-yourself guides around legal services.[1] Similarly, the
computer-based system operated by Principles Only Real Estate In-
formation Service in Toronto is attempting to reduce the dependency
of buyers and sellers of houses on the services of real estate
brokers by putting potential home buyers in direct contact with
persons with homes to sell. When asked about the reaction of the
profession to his operation, the president of this firm commented
that, while real estate agents, whom he described as operators of
"the most expensive taxi business in the country", did not particularly
care for the inroads made into their clientele, some of them were
using his services to buy and sell their own homes.

c) Computer-based data banks

One of the tasks given to us in the course of this project was
that of determining the feasibility of putting computer technology

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1/ See, for example, the Handbook listing of the books and pamphlets
published by the Self-Council Press.

at the service of people in some Canadian communities. The Department of Communications was particularly interested in this aspect of our work since it is mandated to support demonstration projects making use of computer technology. The CAC was also interested in pursuing the explorations of its concept of a Community Information Network, and in ensuring that both the hardware and the software of our communications technology are developed in ways which are centrally focussed on the public interest.[1]

For these reasons, some part of our own investigation into information sources of potential interest to the public concentrated on computer-based information systems. Among our selection of specialized information sources are several computer-based data banks, some of which are now in operation and others which could be of use to the public once further developmental work has been undertaken.

Governments are moving rapidly into computer information systems, not only to eliminate tedious manual handling of massive amounts of information, chiefly of an administrative character (payroll records and the like), but to refine and combine manual data banks. Their activities in this latter connection are of particular interest to groups concerned with various aspects of community planning. Some of the Census data collected by Statistics Canada for large metropolitan areas is now available in geo-coded form (i.e., on a block-by-block basis). Some municipal government planning departments are attempting to refine this data further still so that information can be used on a lot-by-lot basis within each block.

1/ The original concept of this network was developed by an Ad Hoc Committee on Consumer Information, established by the CAC in 1968. Its original hypothesis had been that CAC could be effective in the consumer information field by directly seeking the creation of a separate, specialized consumer information service, based on an extensive computerized data bank of consumer information. But this hypothesis did not hold up over the course of its investigations. In fact, the Ad Hoc Committee suggested that almost the opposite was the case: that CAC was likely to be most effective in the consumer information field by supporting the creation of non-specialized community-based and community-operated information centres. This interest has been furthered by the National Committee on Information formed after the Ad Hoc Committee had completed its work.

The National Capital Commission, a federal agency responsible
for federal development plans for the Ottawa/Hull region, has pioneered
a system refining geo-coded municipal census and assessment records
and other sources of data to the point where it can now produce, through
the use of automated techniques, maps of the entire region, as well as
of parts of the region, locating buildings and owners of buildings on
each lot in the area depicted. This system, although still in the
experimental phase, has already been used by at least one citizen group
in Ottawa as a tool to assist them in investigating housing needs in
a particular neighbourhood. Using maps of the specific city block
areas it wanted to study, the group was able, with the assistance of
a consultant, to visualize certain characteristics of their neighbour-
hood which impact on housing needs. It was reported to us that those
participating in the study are shedding many long-held myths about
their neighbourhood. Another use made of the NCC system was a study
undertaken by Commission officials of population mobility within the
City of Vanier, a community entirely surrounded by Ottawa. This study,
in revealing substantial migration of persons in and out of Vanier,
could be of potential use in a variety of studies and planning
activities: from voting patterns to housing needs to programs aimed
at citizen participation.

Municipal governments are beginning to make use of geo-coded data
in the course of urban and social planning. In Vancouver, for example,
planning officials are attempting to use geo-coded information in a
fashion similar to the NCC. In that community, as in many others in
Canada, one of the major topics preoccupying the attention of politicians
and citizen groups alike is the impact of developers' plans on the
urban environment. Vancouver city planners see in the further develop-
ment of automated mapping techniques such possible uses as depicting,
in visual form, the potential impact on each neighbourhood of con-
structing residential and non-residential buildings to the maximum
limit allowed by current zoning regulations.

Not all computer systems involving data banks in the field of urban affairs are being developed in ways that community groups find useful however. For example, the Inter-Institutional Policy Simulator (IIPS), under construction at the University of British Columbia for the past three years, was seen as providing Vancouver planners with a tool which would help avoid the planning errors of other major cities. Unfortunately the model has not, at least at this stage, lived up to its billing as "a tool made for people". Both the limited range of contributors to the project and doubts about how it will be used and by whom combine to raise in the minds of many community groups the fear that the model is merely another technical exercise of interest only to experts "stoned on their technology" rather than a tool which all in the community could find useful.

Moving into areas of less direct interest to community groups, the undertaking of research by experts and non-experts alike appears to demand recourse to print-based references and hence to the network of Canadian libraries. The willingness of local library staff to be of assistance in locating published sources is supplemented by inter-library lending facilities and by computer-based retrieval systems. The National Library of Canada will be using a computer system this year to produce "Canadiana", a compilation of all publications in Canada and of publications from outside the country connected to Canada. That system is also being developed to extract many other types of information and to enable each publication to be catalogued by matching subject matter categories to title words. The implication of mechanized title searches, however, may mean that, without additional key word indicators, at least some publications will be virtually irretrievable — someone searching for "The Egg and I" might well be able to retrieve it only under the heading of poultry![1]

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[1] One of the personnel of the National Library with whom we discussed this system suggested that, as mechanized title searching became more common, authors of fiction and other non-abstracted works would of necessity have to become as precise as scientists in selecting titles which fully capture the subject matter of the contents.

The facilities of Canada's national libraries are also linked together in a computer-based system designed primarily to search current literature on behalf of those interested in varied technical subjects. The National System for the Selected Dissemination of Information, or CAN/SDI as it is called, has been developed by the National Science Library. Joining with it in this network are the National Library, the Geological Survey of Canada and, more recently, the Department of Agriculture. This service scans, on a regular basis (weekly, bi-weekly, monthly), machine-readable tapes abstracting literature from more than 25,000 professional and trade journals, books, conference proceedings, technical reports and patent literature. Responsibility for the search is assigned by broad subject categories to the four libraries involved. The National Science Library is responsible for information of a scientific, technological and medical nature; the National Library for humanities and social sciences; the Geological Survey for geological sciences; the Department of Agriculture hopes to initiate a search of agricultural material in the fall. To ensure that those who subscribe to the service receive only such citations as are of specific interest to them, librarians are being trained to develop interest profiles tailored to the requirements of each subscriber.

Most of the literature which is searched by this system is of a highly technical nature. Its users, therefore, tend to be government officials and university researchers who are not deterred by the cost of subscriptions (a minimum of $40.00 per year which is credited against specific charges depending on the particular tapes searched, special requests, etc.). However, the service is also of possible interest to community groups who can find their way around the costs entailed to avail themselves of the less technical research material (review articles for example) or who can command the assistance of a specialist in making the literature relevant. On the whole, however, those librarians familiar with the system advised us that non-experts would be better served were they to take advantage of local library facilities or to contact directly the four libraries participating in

the system. While they are apparently all willing to respond to direct enquiries from the public, it was suggested that non-experts might find their local librarian better able to determine their interests and capabilities through face-to-face dialogue.

Other computer-based systems operated by the federal government have more direct implications for the Canadian public: specifically the data banks of Canada Manpower and the Unemployment Insurance Commission. A few of the local offices of Canada Manpower are experimenting with computer technology in matching job seekers to those employment opportunities listed with them by Canadian employers. Qualifications in terms of education and previous work experience supplied by employers are included in the data bank, along with descriptions of job openings classified according to the Dictionary of Job Classifications; this information is then matched with the characteristics of those registered as looking for work. Information about job openings in each locality is passed to other Canada Manpower Centres within five days of listing if not filled in the local area. Although CMC officials see themselves serving on an equal basis the needs of prospective employees and employers, it is interesting to observe that the names of prospective employers are not released to job seekers until they have been screened by Canada Manpower counsellors. Fear of antagonizing employers by sending too many applicants or applicants who are not qualified is the reason advanced for initially withholding this information. Further, job seekers are usually directed to openings similar to their last-held position, even were the individual to want to try his luck at another occupation. Recently, however, "job information centres" have been introduced in CMC offices in Ottawa and Hamilton; in these centres, a book listing all job openings is available to those who come to the centre so that they themselves can see what is available and select the openings for which they wish to apply. The only screening by CMC officials before releasing the names of the employers is undertaken to ensure that certain obvious criteria (union membership, equipment needed) can be met by the prospective employee.

The Unemployment Insurance Commission also uses a computer system for purposes of recording entitlements. Recently, CMC lists of job openings have been forwarded to UIC offices so that those officials can quickly inform UIC recipients of available employment opportunities. Employers who are impatient with the delays in finding job applicants through CMC offices have continued to notify UIC offices directly about job openings.

Other governmental plans for computer-based information systems appear to foreclose on public access to the information incorporated in the system. The Trademarks Branch of the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, for example, is presently contemplating plans for automating information on registered trademarks in Canada using a system which the professional trademark agents expect to find difficult to use, let alone consumers of the trademarked products. The recommendations of The Economic Council of Canada in 1971 visualized this system as a potentially useful source of information to Canadian consumers in obtaining information about trademarks owners and about the product characteristics laid down by trademark owners licensing their marks to other manufacturers and distributors. It recommended the transformation of the trademark system into a consumer information system. There appears to be a sharp contradiction between this recommendation and the plan which is going forward in the Trademarks Office.

This section has dealt with specific problems of information and specific sources of information collected in the course of our enquiries. But we came to see these specifics as taking second place to a much more significant theme. In the next section we turn to impediments to the forging of personal networks and experiential information sharing, themes which uncover the heart of communications difficulties being experienced by people in Canada today. Section VI then comes back to the question of computer technology as it relates to communications.

V.   The Issue: Barriers to Communicating

        Our investigations have revealed that to put primary emphasis
on the viability of the Canadian communications industry, on access
to data banks, or even on promoting the activities of community in-
formation centres, would be to mistake the real communications needs
of persons in Canadian communities today. Mobilizing our policy
efforts around such goals is to address ourselves to the wrong
problems — to what indeed are only symptoms of the larger problem.[1]
The results of our study suggest that a more fundamental reappraisal
is required.

        In the context of the shifting value systems now visible in our
rapidly changing world, there is widespread dissatisfaction with one-
way channels of communication and with information which is rooted in
the assumption that people hold standard values and have standard
needs. Among the many activities subjected to deep-seated question-
ing today are those of expert communicators who purport to inform
people about what they need to know and how they need to behave. Yet,
our institutions of government and industry, our service agencies and
established non-profit organizations, continue to proliferate one-way-
out information. They appear to be largely unaware that such activities
are adding to the social unrest we see about us and to the distrust
with which many individuals regard these institutions and organizations.

        What has emerged from our investigations is that there is little
interest in "getting more information" and in improving access to
specialized data banks. Of predominant importance and rising urgency
is the need to open up two-way channels of communications. Only two-
way channels are in accord with the first law of ecology — "everything
is connected to everything else"[2] — and with the recognition that
communications and information are as inextricably intertwined as are

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1/ Many observers have pointed to the sharp contrast between the
    Western tendency to focus on "answering the question" and the
    Japanese preoccupation with "asking the right question". See
    Peter Drucker, "What We Can Learn From Japanese Management",
    Harvard Business Review, March-April 1971.

2/ Barry Commoner, The Closing Circle, Bantam Books Inc., New York,
    1972.

the complex human processes through which information is trans-
formed into judging, valuing, sharing, learning and acting. In
other words, communications policy must look not to improving access
to static data banks but rather to improving access to persons know-
ledgeable in topics of community concern — to opening channels of
communications which facilitate experiential information sharing.[1]
These channels, which once flourished in our society, have today be-
come blocked by institutional barriers, specialized expertise and,
more recently, by diverging value systems. In the light of this,
it is clear that further moves to "wire us all together" in a one-
way communications network, designed to let us see tonight the movie
we missed last night, run the grave risk of shortcircuiting our
capacity to communicate.

In the course of our study, expressions of the need for two-way
person-to-person channels arose in many forms. Attention has already
been drawn to some of them: the requests of community information
centres for government directories organized by subject matter and
accompanied by names of those in charge of specific programs; the
difficulties of community groups in locating others sharing their
concerns; the efforts of some centres and groups to compile informa-
tion based on real life experience with government programs, social
agencies and professional services. In addition, in their question-
naire responses, a few centres reported that such information problems
as they had experienced were eliminated when they made personal contact
with government officials or the personnel of service agencies. But
the theme of personal networks emerged even more vividly in the course
of reflective personal conversations with information centres, citizen
groups and government officials. In that context, all acknowledged
that such networks constitute their preferred channels of communica-
tion and their prime source of information.

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[1] The implications of this conclusion affect not only our public
policies but those of our private organizations as well. It
has led CAC, for example, to rethink the community data bank
proposed in the document, A Community Information Network,
Consumers' Association of Canada, Ottawa, 1971.

Such channels of communication provide us all with highways
to experiential information and with access to persons whom we
trust and therefore on whose judgment we rely or on occasion feel
free openly and honestly to question. Only when channels to our
personal network of friends and acquaintances fail to provide us
with the information we seek or frustrate our need to make connec-
tions with persons with whom we can share topics of immediate concern,
do all of us in all our roles turn to more impersonal sources.

Blockages to these human channels have given rise to commercial
information services and community information centres, to citizen
groups trying to bring home to expert decision-makers the inadequacies
of their fragmented understandings of integrated community needs and
the damage done by clinging to mechanical taken-for-granted assump-
tions about human behaviour.[1]

The reliance on personal contacts by those staffing information
centres was highlighted in Phase I of this project. Speaking of in-
formation centres intervening on behalf of individuals with social
or government agencies, the investigators stated:

"Such an intervention usually requires the use of personal
contacts, informal links, agency procedures — but the
underpinning appears to be that strong yet informal
personal network. which we all use at times to solve
problems in our work and private lives." [2]

Our investigations have served to reinforce this observation and to
extend over a wider horizon the importance of its message.

[1] A recent American study has indicated that community satisfaction
is related more to how people perceive the community environment
than to the objective conditions themselves. The studies showed
that community satisfaction was more directly related to the evalua-
tion of public schools, climate and upkeep of streets and roads
than to garbage collection, public transportation, police protection
and the like; within a neighbourhood, feelings about neighbours and
housing conditions most affected satisfaction. This argues that
those who wish to improve community satisfaction must come to under-
stand as much about subjective indicators of satisfaction as they
now do about objective indicators. See Robert W. Marans and Willard
Rodgers, "Toward an Understanding of Community Satisfaction",
Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, as cited in
ISR Newsletter, Winter 1973.

[2] The Power to Communicate, op. cit.

Community information centres have grown in response to blockages to personal networks and to the incoherent information flows from increasingly specialized institutions dealing with increasingly specialized problems. The success of their ventures lies in their ability to help open channels of communications and to build trust relationships among members of the community in a responsive environment. One would therefore expect that, as person-to-person links are restored in the community, information centres would either significantly transform the nature of their activities into more integrated communicating-acting-transforming endeavours, or would disappear. There are, in fact, indications that this is beginning to take place in some communities. In Vancouver, for example, a community information centre serving a Chinese community closed its doors after the establishment of block representatives, initiated by the citizens group which had sponsored the centre, resulted in significant improvement in information exchange among residents in the community.[1]

Citizen groups are also becoming increasingly expert at tapping networks of politicians, government officials, and specialized agencies and professions. Their ability to do so is causing some experts to re-examine the myth that citizen groups are composed of the inarticulate, the unintelligent and those who fail to comprehend the complexities of technical problems. Like other of our apparently hard-edged categories, the perception that members of citizen groups are persons who park their brains at the door when they leave their work environment is beginning to blur. As this happens, government officials too are coming to recognize the usefulness of tapping into community networks in order to more comprehensively assess community needs and community experiences.

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[1] The need for human interaction and for experiential information sharing is also rising to the surface in the U.S. A Philadelphia community information centre has for the last few years used the telephone to engage in three-way conversations with an enquirer, a person in a service agency relevant to his problem and a person in the centre who, when needed, acts as interpreter. This centre is looking to the possibility of serving a larger community and, in recognition of the differing users which it might then attract, is considering plans to add to its existing data bank more diverse sources of information, in particular information of an experiential character.

There are both advantages and disadvantages in personal net-
works. The advantages obviously lie in open and frank information
sharing in a context founded on trust where values and perceptions
are either mutually shared or where shifting perceptions can be
openly discussed. The disadvantages are also obvious. They are
inherent in the danger that they will be used as an "old boys' net-
work" extending privilege to the favoured few who have access to
them. Their invisibility could thus act as a deterrent to needed
institutional transformation. Unless such networks incorporate open
access, they can become channels mirroring only uniform value systems.
Thus they can be used to reinforce impersonal power rather than to
facilitate the spread of personal authority.[1]

What this indicates is the importance of "the new man" if these
networks are not to be used to reinforce old values and established
power. New concepts of responsibility and accountability are crucial
if networks are to become vital channels of human communication and
learning. New men living these new concepts would be able to act as
"network connectors", to go beyond the roles of their official lives
and to see themselves as resource persons capable of facilitating
wholistic human interaction. Such persons could assist in bridging
gaps between institutionalized decision-making networks and social
networks, and perhaps even between networks of persons with differing
perceptual understandings. Through such connectors, networks could
be opened to all who want to use them.

The role of personal networks is well understood by the scientific
community. Basic scientists are commonly envied for the ease with
which they can obtain information. It is said that at most five phone
calls can put a researcher in touch with a person at the frontier of
that discipline where imaginative basic research is being undertaken.
To test the degree to which networks available to persons in their
community lives are by comparison constricted, Stanley Milgram, an

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[1] William Irwin Thompson makes this distinction in "The Individual
as Institution", Harper's Magazine, Sept. 1972.

American psychologist, conducted a simple experiment. He selected
a random group of starting persons from all walks of life in two
cities in the United States and asked them to pass a message to a
person in a distant city. They were given only the name and address
of the target person and asked to mail a card to a personal acquaint-
ance, one known on a first-name basis, who might be better able to
make contact with the target. Through feedback mechanisms built into
the experiment, Milgram was able to count the number of stops along
the way and to identify when the chain of social contacts broke down.
Of the chains that were completed, the median number of links in the
networks was only five. However, what was also significant was that
70 per cent of the chains did not reach the target person.[1]

Milgram later conducted a similar experiment designed to test
what happens to acquaintance chains when they are impinged upon by
social structure.[2] Specifically, this experiment chose white
starting persons and asked them to reach separate target persons,
one half of whom were Negro and the other half white. While 33 per
cent of the white target chains were completed, only 13 per cent of
the Negro target chains reached the person involved; excluding chains
which never started at all, the percentages of completion rose to 39
per cent for white targets and 15 per cent for Negro targets.

Experiments along these lines, if conducted in Canada, might well
reveal interesting aspects of our communications environment. Varia-
tions going beyond the Milgram model would likely prove even more
revealing. For example, would an experiment designed to reach un-
named persons — the targets defined merely in terms of finding someone
who knows about a certain topic — result in a lower or higher number
of stops along the way? Research into the role and use of personal
networks and into impediments which prevent their use as channels of
communication might shed valuable insights into ways in which those
invisible networks can be nurtured to become strong links which bind
together our visibly fragmented communities.

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[1] "The Small World Problem", Stanley Milgram, Psychology Today, 1967,
     pp. 61-67.

[2] "Acquaintance Networks Between Racial Groups", Charles Korte and
     Stanley Milgram, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 1970,
     Vol. 15, No. 2.

Other factors which are related to impediments to the use of personal networks and access to experiential information revolve around the perceived need for secrecy. Reluctance in revealing the names of persons considered to be useful information sources emerged: many times in the responses we received "I don't want to risk closing off my source by spreading his name around" was one comment made to us in this vein about a government official regarded as a helpful source of information. This is a real danger where expertise is scarce and therefore requires protection against excess demand. But at a time when the validity of many so-called forms of expertise is being questioned and when traditional understandings are being re-examined, perceptions of what constitutes expertise are increasingly diverging. Indeed, we would argue that real expertise in the issues of concern to persons is much more abundant and more diverse than we perceive. Expertise in government programs, for example, is not confined to policy makers; rather it resides in the knowledge and experience accumulated by all those affected by the program. Confidentiality of any one source would therefore warrant diminishing attention were the wealth of information known by those experiencing the program to be made accessible. Furthermore, the creation of barriers to knowledge which is in short supply serves only to make it still more scarce. Excessive caution in revealing genuine expertise not only restricts opportunities for learning and for passing on to others the information acquired, but it hides from view the realities of information needs and reinforces a misallocation of information resources.

In conclusion, what our common sense tells us should be the focus of communications -- communicating between persons -- is increasingly difficult in our current social environment. Our present communications policies have played their role in this: their central focus has been on increasing the outputs of our communications technology and ensuring the viability of a Canadian communications industry, on the assumption that this will facilitate human well-being. But in our desire to protect Canadian industry -- to keep United States influences out --

we may unwittingly have copied their approach. Seeing national
unity as an objective of communications policy, the adoption of
imported criteria for assessing policies may result in losing
our identity even faster as a direct result of our own efforts.
More importantly, it appears that the net result of our present
focus is that we have actually inhibited our communications
capacity — created impediments to person-to-person links. Com-
munications policies need to be founded on a broader understanding
of the human processes of communicating and to focus on removing
blockages to those channels through which people prefer to ex-
change information, to inform and become informed, to learn.

VI. Computers — For or Against People?

The statement that any technology has embedded in it the values of the society which creates and uses it is one which conjures up a great deal of contention within the scientific and technological community. Many members of this community still cling to the belief that technology is value-free — that it is merely in the uses made of technology that values become entwined. But this ignores the realities of linked decision chains which culminate in the technology which exists at any given time. From the initial decisions to invest time and energy in the invention and design of a certain type of technology, to decisions to carry through to its production and distribution, and finally to decisions about how it may best be used, each fork in the decision tree involves a process of selection from among a number of alternatives. Thus, the existing hardware and software of communications are the technologies which have survived the long cumulative chains of value judgments.

In a society characterized by centralized decision-making and by bigness — big governments, big business, large schools and health care systems — the environment is conducive to a perceived need for big management information systems and for systems analyses capable of developing a big total approach to problem-solving. Hence the advent of computers and the development of cost benefit and program planning budgetting analyses to handle information needed for policy making. With its ability to process massive amounts of information and to perform complex mathematical calculations at high speed, the computer enables institutional decisions to be made on the basis of aggregate measuring techniques which take into account a range of complex factors. Computerization also permits policy makers to study the ebbs and flows of a change in one policy across a series of interconnected policy fields.

But there are a number of disadvantages to the growing use of computers in decision-making processes. The success with which

computer technology[1] was applied to such large and complex under-
takings as defense weapons delivery and to putting man on the moon
challenged policy makers to apply the same techniques to often larger
and always more complex social systems. Implicit in the assumption
that such techniques can be transported successfully is another re-
lated assumption: that the structure of social systems is such that
they can be reduced to measurable controllable components, all of
whose relationships are fully recognized, appreciated and amenable
to manipulation.[2] But social systems are not of this sort — they
are much more open-ended. Only in situations requiring a high degree
of discipline, such as the space program, do men behave with the
mechanical clockwork precision of closed systems. Computer technology
may therefore be most inappropriate when indiscriminately applied to
social systems, to analyses of human behaviour, and to operations
affecting the human side of large-scale enterprises.

Yet social scientists and administrators are now preoccupied with
extending to social systems mechanical techniques of measurement, as
well as assembly line concepts of program eligibility, fraud and en-
forcement. Used in such a way, computer technology tends to reinforce
the mechanical ways we see one another. In the eyes of those who
invent and use these techniques and who formulate policies and imple-
ment and administer programs based on mathematical calculations, man
becomes little more than a cypher, and measures of what he has done
in the past are assumed to reflect what he wants to become in the
future. As even momentary reflection on the present state of our
schools and hospitals tells us, the assessment of the effectiveness
of social services using such mathematical formulas as numbers handled,
teacher/student ratios, numbers of hospital beds per 1,000 of population,
etc., has led to rising awareness that the users of those services have
become merely another tool in an increasingly mechanized world.

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[1] The term "technology" is not restricted to machinery but includes
the technology associated with cost benefit analysis and program
planning budgetting systems.

[2] See Ida R. Hoos, "Systems Analysis as a Technique for Solving Social
Problems — A Realistic Overview", Socio-Economic Planning Science,
Vol. 4, 1970.

The increasing complexities of computer-based information systems and measuring techniques are now such that few of those charged with making policy decisions are capable of comprehending the information on which they are asked to base their decisions. In speaking of the many information programs relied upon by management, Joseph Weisenbaum has pointed out that many of them rest not on explicable theories but are instead enormous patchworks of programming techniques strung together to "make them work". He has commented:

> "In our eagerness to exploit advance in technique we quickly incorporate the lessons learned from machine manipulation of knowledge in theory-based systems into such patchworks. They then 'work' better. I have in mind systems used in Vietnam and war games used in the Pentagon, and so on. These often gigantic systems are put together by teams of programmers, often working over a time span of many years. But by the time the system comes into use, most of the original programmers have left or turned their attention to other pursuits. It is precisely when gigantic systems begin to be used that their inner workings can no longer be understood by any single individual or by a small team of individuals....
>
> Not only have policy makers abdicated their decision-making responsibility to a technology they don't understand, all the while maintaining the illusion that they, the policy makers, are formulating policy questions and answering them, but responsibility has altogether evaporated. No human is any longer responsible for 'what the machine says'. Thus there can be neither right or wrong, no question of justice, no theory with which one can agree or disagree, and finally no basis on which one can challenge 'what the machine says'". 1/

Weisenbaum called for deliberate and publicized humility on the part of computer scientists, stressing what they don't know, instead of allowing to go unchallenged ridiculous claims on behalf of computer simulation, claims which lead to the unquestioned acceptance of the myth that computers will solve all of mankind's problems.

1/ Joseph Weisenbaum, "Impact of the Computer on Society", Science, May 12, 1972, as cited in "The Metaphors of Certainty", Manas, February 7, 1973.

Warnings of the limitations of the users of computer technology
are being articulated by some of the more thoughtful practitioners of
computer arts. Norman Faramelli is only one of a number of profes-
sionals pointing out the limitations of binary machine language using
logical circuits to produce simple yes/no responses.[1] But the thought
processes of man encompass more than a rational logical progression
along linear highways. There are other more spontaneous elements in
his makeup that do not lend themselves to rational description. Emotion,
intuition and sensation also play their part in the processes of human
learning and in explaining human behaviour.[2] To apply linear mech-
anical relationships to techniques used to explain social behaviour
and to predict the future with certainty is to risk regarding as
"deviant" behaviour factors such as spontameity, creativity, imagina-
tion, to ignore ambiguity and symbolism, to exclude the "eureka!" of
surprised discovery in human learning. In many ways and by many people
the emphasis placed by our society on linear rationality as the pre-
dominant if not the only acceptable mode of thinking and on "objective"
measurement as the dominant tool used to make decisions is being
questioned.

McLuhan has argued that whenever a new technological development
makes obsolete the technology of the previous era, it turns that tech-
nology into art form. Just as the advent of the industrial era made
obsolete the agricultural era and brought about gentlemen farmers
preserving as art an antiquated way of life, so too the electronic era
in embracing the industrial age turns the old industrial tools such
as the automobile into art. The instantaneous character of elecricity,
he suggests, has ended the mechanical principles of fragmentation and
separation of operations and has enabled us instead to see more clearly
the interrelationships. It has ended subject matter categories in the
world of learning. It has also ended the distinction between work and
leisure, expanding the older mechanistic idea of jobs as fragmented tasks
or specialized slots for workers to the point where paid learning is

[1] Norman J. Faramelli, "Computers and Modelling", Soundings, Summer 1972.
[2] See for example, Kiyo Izumi, "The (In)Human(e) Environment", a CBC
lecture series.

already becoming the dominant occupation of our society.[1] It is para-
doxical that at the very time categories are beginning to blur, we have
developed machines which can handle categorized data superbly.

Despite McLuhan's theories, the warnings of Faramelli and others,
and the challenges to the persistent use of statistical lenses through
which to explain human behaviour, social scientists continue to extend
mathematical techniques to social systems and to measure the efficiency
of social service delivery. It is not surprising to find the public
attitude to computer technology a mixture of fear and distrust on the
one hand and wary interest on the other.[2]

The Power to Communicate pointed out that many community informa-
tion centres expressed fear that, were they to avail themselves of a
computer, the machine would detract from the personal nature of the
service they offer. We encountered the same reaction in many of our
conversations in this project. However, some of the larger centres
expressed cautious interest. The central information centre in Toronto
saw in the technology a useful tool in assisting the personnel of the
centre to search through its many directories of community resources,
but at the same time wondered: "Would we become so fascinated with the
tool that we forget the larger human problems of our enquirers?" The
Vancouver central information centre hoped to use computers in the near
future for the purpose of storing directory information, seeing in the
technology not only the advantages of rapid access but a means of
freeing some of its personnel and, more particularly those of satellite
neighbourhood centres, from the time spent in updating the information
in each centre's directory so that the centres could become true "people
places". In Halifax, several people spoke of the need for a central
data bank of experiential information (such as the attempts by other
communities to solve problems) which could be used to relieve frustra-
tion, provided it maintained a neighbourhood character and could be
established without conflict.

1/   Marshall McLuhan, <u>Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man</u>; McGraw-
     Hill Inc., New York, 1964; also "Mail", Letters to the Editor,
     <u>The Atlantic Magasine</u>, Boston, October 1971.

2/   See <u>Reactions to Computer Service in the Home</u> and <u>Additional Insights
     into "The Family Computer" Concept</u>, studies undertaken by the Social
     Survey Research Centre for the Department of Communications, Toronto,
     1971.

Outside the centres, other members of the community are increasingly aware that individual institutions are using sophisticated information retrieval systems to store information collected through census enumerations, employment offices, school enrolment records, tax assessments, credit purchases, credit ratings, and so on. However, lack of information on the extent to which individual data banks can be integrated with one another, and/or accessed by institutions for a variety of planning and other purposes, precludes obtaining a full picture of the extent to which larger and larger aspects of our personal lives are being brought within the ambit of institutional inspection. Only occasionally do we become aware of the amount of personal data which is being measured, coded, stored and retrieved and the purpose for which it is being used. In Vancouver, for example, city social planners planned to incorporate into a computerized information system data on delinquent and predelinquent youths in order to assist planners to cope with youth problems in that city. The public outcry which occurred when these plans were recently revealed in the press has apparently led to the abandonment of the proposal.

Mounting concerns over privacy have focussed in large measure on computerized banks of personal information and on technological means of acquiring further information. But what receives little attention is the fact that institutions may not only collect such data already and have it available in manual files but are passing it to others. Rather than questioning the right of institutions to compile such information in the first place, the issue of privacy has become the predominant focus of public discussion and the question of appropriate safeguards the focus of policy prescriptions.[1]

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[1] See E.R. Olson, "Notes for a Speech to the Annual Meeting of the Association of Registrars of the University Registrars on the Confidentiality of the Academic Record", Toronto, Oct. 30, 1972, mimeo. While this paper raises the fundamental question of institutional rights, it stops short of suggestions for coping with it, perhaps in recognition that each institutional situation would need to be dealt with separately. It may well be that our suggestion of "integrated community committees" to evaluate computer-based demonstration projects at the community level might also provide a useful context within which to consider the issue of the collection and dissemination of personal information by individual institutions.

Apart from general concerns about privacy, what is also being learned by some community groups is the absurdity of many of the uses to which technology is now being put. Fancy urban simulation models purporting to provide hard, objective data for the use of politicians and planning officers are frequently subjects of ridicule on the part of those citizens informed about their development and proposed uses.1/ Several groups are deciding to join planners, academics and statisticians in playing statistical games, but with tongue in cheek. Some voluntary organizations, for example, have used PPBS in grant applications, costing out the voluntary time contributed by their members (some at $25.00 an hour) in undertaking their various programs. One citizen group alertly observed that cost benefit analysis, as applied to the programs of service agencies, had the effect of fitting people to the outputs of the agencies; in an attempt to reverse this, the group has collected information about agency resources allocated to its particular neighbourhood and is trying to use the data to force the institutions concerned to fit the needs of people. A group in Ottawa, as mentioned earlier, is finding that automated techniques throw up data which at times they know to be questionable, at others of help to them in de-mythologizing their perceptions about their own community.

Through growing exposure to technology, community groups are thus undertaking their own technological assessment. More cognizant of the dangers of placing too much faith in statistics than are those deeply involved in compiling and programming them, these groups are learning to probe deeply into the assumptions underlying the collection of data. They are increasingly able to recognize that the medium is the message and that the linear, non-synergistic thought processes of computer systems can impede self-growth and human learning. And in the process, they are rapidly learning to regard computers as playthings and

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1/ An article, "Warning: UBC Growing a Monster", The Ubyssey, Feb. 16, 1973, commenting on the over-extension of the IIPS model into social areas, was much more pessimistic about constraining its use than were many people with whom we talked; some spoke with amusement about meetings designed to involve citizen groups in the development of the model, which instead had served only to expose the shaky assumptions and the existence of dissension among the experts involved.

computer-based information systems, which attempt to measure
aspects of the social environment, not as life-saving tools to
be taken seriously, but as art forms, casting up impressionistic
images of reality. As this process continues, one might well
wonder, in the light of McLuhan's argument, whether the computer
is not already obsolete!

VII. The Role of Government

The Scope of Communications Policy

Were the premises of communications policy to be re-examined and communications policy to come to focus on identifying and removing impediments to human communications, such re-focussing would clearly involve us in considering issues beyond those normally encompassed by traditional definitions of information and communications policies. From the viewpoint of impediments to communicating among Canadians, communications policy more broadly defined would embrace consideration of class and cultural differences imposed by institutional barriers, including those created by hierarchical structured lines of authority which so often impede communications within our institutions and between those inside and those outside them. It would include transportation policy and travel budgets for both government officials and community groups. It would bite deep into the funding and evaluation of community enterprises and raise the question of needed supports to communication among all Canadians, such as telephone budgets and copying equipment. It would involve a reconsideration of personnel policies — of the qualifications and responsibilities of government officials, particularly those in the field, as well as personnel requirements of service agencies, community information centres, and others dealing directly with the public. It would demand a re-thinking of some of the practices of our communications industry. It would question the design of our meeting rooms and office spaces and the location of community centres, as well as barriers to communicating imposed by television lights, camera stands and simultaneous translation facilities.[1] All these elements normally seen to fall outside communications policy would need to be re-examined in conjunction with government information activities and its responsibilities with respect to the tools of communications.

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[1] At a recent Ottawa conference held in the Conference Centre, one participant was heard to observe that it was little wonder that Federal-Provincial relations tended to be strained by adversarial debates if the Conference Centre was the most frequently used site of such gatherings; the main conference room is so cavernous that earphones are necessary at all times.

Government Information

Our investigations revealed that, to the extent that access to information constituted a problem for community information centres and community groups, government information headed the list. Community groups documented several instances where government information is publicly available but in such a way as to make it inaccessible or incomprehensible. We also referred to plans now being developed by the Trademarks Office for a computerized retrieval system which, if implemented, may have the effect of thwarting completely the ability of the public to access this system if they wish to do so.

Our terms of reference require us to make recommendations with respect to needed improvements in existing government information programs of relevance to the public and to point to gaps which may need to be filled if Canadians are to gain improved access to government information. We would do so were it not for our conviction, and that of most of the people with whom we spoke, that information alone is virtually useless. A list of recommendations looking towards improved one-way information flows from government to citizen would indeed be lengthy, witness the deficiencies in existing flows documented in the comments drawn from our questionnaire (Appendix C). However, in light of the slow machinery which is involved in governmental moves to implement such recommendations as might be accepted, it is highly probable that their adoption would address last year's problems. This is not to say that those departments at all levels of government whose information programs have been singled out by community information centres as requiring substantive improvement should not move immediately to consider remedies. Indeed, we urge them to do so, and we are confident that community groups will continue to exert pressure in this direction. But we are suggesting that much more is needed. Person-to-person channels between government officials and persons in communities and access to the experience of

those who have "lived" the effects of government programs appear
to offer more dynamic and more flexible avenues to information.
Furthermore, government officials themselves are in need of access
to these data banks of community experiences. By listening to
what is recorded they could gain new and much more fruitful under-
standings of appropriate policy approaches and needed program changes.

There is another remedy which is frequently called for but which
we believe would be as deficient as mere improvements in "information
out".   Many times in the past persons outside government institutions
have called for a "Freedom of Information Act" which would clearly set
out the government's obligations to disclose information. However,
the experience with similar pieces of legislation in other countries
does not support expectations that this would improve public access
to information.[1] While in the initial stages, such legislation may
lead to the release of a substantial volume of information previously
stamped confidential, the passage of time usually results in a marked
lengthening of the list of information exempted from the legislation.
Furthermore, the procedures through which the public can challenge
rulings on exempt information are frequently so cumbersome as to be
largely useless. Such remedies appear to be merely mechanistic
responses to situations created by institutionalizing and standard-
izing our concepts of confidentiality, accountability and responsibility.
In addition, the assumption that such information as might be reluct-
antly disclosed under legislated compulsion is of import to more than
a small proportion of the population is questionable.

Rather than proliferating one-way-out sources of government in-
formation, sources which may well prove irrelevant to community needs,
it is much more desirable to open channels of communication between
government officials and the public. Rather than determining on the
basis of "objective" criteria what information should be automatically
revealed or withheld, we suggest that new approaches to information
sharing should evolve, based on criteria mutually arrived at in a con-
text of trust and responsible behaviour.

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[1] See, for example, the discussion of United States legislation in
     To Know and Be Known; the Report of the Task Force on Government
     Information, Vol. II (pp. 28-29), Queen's Printer, Ottawa, 1969.

We have drawn attention to the fact that some community groups who reported finding persons within government departments helpful sources of information were reluctant to reveal those sources for fear of cutting off their own access. This reaction points to other policy elements which can constitute barriers to communicating. They can perhaps be best described in terms of resource misallocation. By making either difficult or impossible access to government personnel regarded as helpful contacts by those on whom their programs impinge, the unintended effect is not only to make knowledge and information scarce but to distort perceptions on the part of government departments as to the kind of information which needs to be conveyed by their information services. Furthermore, as we noted in the previous Section, it is increasingly apparent that as a wealth of experience with newly implemented programs builds up and transforms sterile program information into reality, the issue of the scarcity of expertise with respect to those programs virtually disappears. Were governments, therefore, to free the time of officials charged with administering programs having important community impact in order that they could nurture channels of government-community dialogue[1], and to support community groups in sharing their experiences with others, such misallocations would be considerably reduced.

Government Information Centres

Governments are continuing the trend begun a few years ago of opening information outlets in street level locations in numbers of Canadian communities. At the federal level, Information Canada is still planning to open more Enqiry Centres, although at a slower pace than had been contemplated earlier, and is considering the use of mobile officers to reach some communities. The Department of

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[1] We are well aware that embodied in this suggestion is a different concept of what constitutes "work" within government departments. Discussions in Ottawa offices between government officials and those outside government frequently conclude with the official concerned remarking that he must now "get back to work", forcing the other parties to query their impression that the time spent in the discussion itself constituted very useful work

Consumer and Corporate Affairs conducted a small pilot project in the fiscal year 1972-73 using "Consumer Help" outlets in three communities and is anticipating the transformation of this project into a more extensive program in the current year. At the provincial level similar plans are underway. The Province of Ontario, for example, has undertaken an experiment in a Citizen Enquiry Branch and the City of Ottawa is considering following the example of Toronto and Vancouver in establishing a municipal information outlet.

These well-intended efforts may, however, serve only to add to the frustrations of many people seeking information to whom the "realities" of inter-governmental jurisdictions are unimportant details. Furthermore, these moves ignore accumulating evidence that, to many people, information acquired through community outlets is more trusted than is that provided by government information outlets. By failing to take account of community preferences in information-seeking, governments may well be communicating a message more basic than what is intended -- that the need to fly specific governmental flags over certain programs has a higher priority than does that of assisting people to find the information they need in as easy a way as is possible. A different approach would appear to be needed. In communities where community-run information centres have won the acceptance of the community, governments might more appropriately respond to invitations from community information centres to station government personnel as resource people in such centres, rather than setting up separate operations in competition with community centres. Furthermore, we believe it is imperative that, if governments are to avoid raising further barriers to the communications environment, they need to consult and cooperate with community information centres prior to opening their own centres. This is particularly to be desired where the governments concerned publicly profess an interest in citizen participation. Working together rather than in competition with community-initiated centres would serve as a visible sign of commitment to that message.

Governments and their personal networks

The fact that government officials in their own work recognize
the importance of personal networks as a source of information has
been mentioned earlier. These channels are used by at least some
officials to collect from a variety of sources impressions about
government policy and experiences with government programs. In the
course of our interviews, we discovered that many of the persons we
talked with had been visited several times by government officials
in search of community feedback on their programs. One comment of
particular interest, however, drew attention to the fact that in most
such instances officials fly into far-away communities for only a
few days and then fly out again thinking they have come away with a
valid sample of community impressions. In reality, they have talked
only to those long known to be interested in the particular topic of
concern, whose views may have solidified over the years and hence who
may be out of touch with new perceptions and newly emerging opinions
in the community. One government official spoke of repeated instances
where, had more than a few hours warning been given about impending
visits by officials from federal and provincial capitals to her com-
munity, she could have arranged a more interesting and informative set
of conversations with groups or individuals expressing new perceptions
of community needs.

The use of networks as more informal and at the same time more
relevant channels of communication between governments and citizens
is coming to the fore in at least one United States Department. The
Office of Education of the Health, Education and Welfare Department,
frustrated by years of experimentation in supposedly innovative educa-
tional programming at a cost of hundreds of thousands of dollars for
little result, recently launched a new experiment. "Project Open",
undertaken in November 1972 under the auspices of the Training of
Teacher Trainers program, has begun to link up thousands of TTT partici-
pants, including community representatives, into the "first national
network of educational reformers". This network has two prime functions:

to transmit information about alternative schooling, credentialling, interdisciplinary programming, community involvement, and so on, and to connect innovators as trainors to people new in these fields. While more modest than the costly proposals of the past in terms of dollar outlays and expansive promises, the program is supporting mutually constructive and instructive endeavours on the part of those participating in it. As the following comment indicates, it appears to hold the promise of facilitating cooperative endeavours that ultimately may lead to the transformation of the education system.

> "...an attempt to draw these people closer so that they can discover the powers lying in their connectedness may well be no trivial undertaking. Who that has participated in an innovative teaching venture can be unaware that the moment of belief is strongest not when the grand moment comes but when the sense of solidarity arrives — the consciousness that you are not alone, that others have perceived the need as you've perceived it, that they, too, have faced up to the frustration, pressed themselves, and found the ways out? In a word, despite the jargon and the beleaguerment, the OE's new thing could be an interesting school-reform sleeper. Sad and wrong that it takes everyone — bureaucrats, grantsmen, legislators — a whole expensive generation to learn where and how real change happens. But the lesson very plainly was worth the learning. The people who've mastered it are now in a position to freshen their own lives and, just conceivably, those of a dozen million school kids in the bargain."[1]

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[1] Benjamin Demott, "When the Money Stops: What Lies Beyond for the OE?", Saturday Review, December 9, 1972.

VIII. Conclusions

In this report, we have considered a number of issues arising from our investigations with respect to the information needs of people in Canadian communities, supplementing and extending some of the issues raised in "The Power to Communicate: A Revolution in Information Sharing". We now briefly recapitulate the conclusions we have reached during our enquiries, before turning to the recommendations which flow from them.

1. The revolution in information sharing documented in the earlier report is continuing and deepening and there is little evidence to suggest that policy makers are even beginning to come to grips with it.

2. In the wake of this revolution, new light is being thrown on the nature of information and of data banks; information is seen as made of softer clay or fuzzier sets than the hard data we have formerly thought it consisted of, while those data banks which persons in Canadian communities view as significant contain information of an experiential rather than an uninterpreted "factual" nature.

3. Urgent questions are being raised about the beneficence and even the neutrality of computer technology as it is now being developed in many situations; it appears that we need not only a technological assessment but a technological assessment in the context of an even more fundamental social assessment.

4. What is happening also suggests that the premises of present communications policies need fundamental reappraisal; we need to look at their underlying assumptions and to go beyond them at a more profound level.

5. All of this suggests that the implications of Wired City and other technology-focussed demonstration projects are potentially far too damaging to be lightly undertaken.

6. Final users of communications technology, i.e., all of us as persons (as individuals or families, as citizens, as consumers, as householders, as workers) should be exercising the dominant influence in the design and extension of communications facilities rather than, as now, the imagination and purposes of corporate managers, civil servants, academics and technologists holding sway; in this context, what is happening in and around community information centres and other community groups in Canada, as well as what is happening in Canadian homes, is of overriding importance.

IX. Where Do We Go From Here? —
The Road to Recommendations

At this stage in a report of this nature, it is conventional to set out a long list of recommendations dressed in the stern tones of objective expertise, telling governments what they should or should not do about the issue in question. In so doing, the assumption is often made that only governments can deal effectively with the recommendations which are presented and that initiatives should come from governments rather than elsewhere. What frequently follows from such assumptions is that the context in which the recommended actions are to be taken goes unquestioned — the context of ever bigger governments, of a society increasingly planned and directed from the centre and of traditional governmental modes of perceiving issues and traditional bureaucratic ways of dealing with them. But we believe that, for several reasons, such an approach would in this instance be entirely inadequate.

In the first place, the issues which we have tried to articulate — the issues surrounding human communications — are so dynamic, so fluid and so ubiquitous that, by definition, they cannot be viewed as issues of which only experts can speak and to which only governments can address. For we are all involved. All of us in all our roles have a hand in both facilitating and impeding communications between ourselves and those around us. And to some extent at least, we all possess the know-how to overcome some of the barriers which we perceive as standing in the way of our capacity to communicate with each other. Thus, there is no particular expertise on which to draw in connection with the issues we have tried to raise — we are all expert in some or all of their dimensions. But what is lacking is expertise in improving the fit of our collective actions — our public and private policies — with the contours of the human processes of communicating. This is the issue which we all need to understand and to come to grips with.

Nor is the question of "what to do" about communications policies restricted to considerations of what governments should or should not do. We all need to re-examine our own responsibilities for improving the quality of the communications environment. Furthermore, the fact that we seem almost to have forgotten what communications policy is really all about, coupled with telling indictments of the extent to which present government information flows are out of kilter with community needs, suggest that present governmental policy stances, far from being part of the solution, are part of the problem. For this reason, familiar approaches on the part of government or calls for only minor fine-tuning departures from such approaches offer little hope of facilitating communications. New experimental policies appear to be required if we are to succeed in changing directions.

We are encouraged to move beyond conventional kinds of recommendations addressed solely to governments for another reason. In this project, we report to two organizations. The Department of Communications has asked us to make recommendations with respect to demonstration projects at the community level designed to make use of computer technology. And we speak as well to the initiator of this project — The Consumers' Association of Canada, a citizens group with a membership of 100,000 persons across the country. Through its National Board, the CAC has for the last several years attempted to develop its own understanding of appropriate communications policy and has asked us to assist in that process. In addressing ourselves to this wide audience, we address a community of friends in both institutions, a community in which many are attempting to go beyond roles and beyond institutional styles of operating to wrestle with more fundamental and more comprehensive issues.

We have tried to suggest in this report that we live in a world of fundamental change, a world in which new styles are emerging, old perceptions are breaking down and new ones beginning to take root, new men living in old institutions, new communications theories being

tried on in attempts to replace the decay of the old, new institutions trying to avoid entrapping themselves in old patterns. In this context, we in Canada should be prepared to experiment with a whole series of policy approaches over the course of the next few years if we are to found our communications policies securely on social rather than merely economic, technical and industrial considerations. Were we to agree to foster a learning society in which community groups, government personnel and industry alike engage in re-thinking the whole range of policies which impinge on the human processes of communicating and to experiment with such policies as seem to facilitate those processes, then Canada might well evolve into a country in which national identity is more firmly rooted in understanding, tolerance and diversity than is the case today. We all have much to learn and much to unlearn as we try to invent new social technologies appropriate to our changing world. Such technologies are not instantly at hand. The process of inventing them will be longer, more risky and probably more painful than adheres to the invention of the mere hardware and software of our communications tools.

And so we eschew the path of presenting recommendations which pretend to rest firmly on the bedrock of specialized expertise and to suggest that there is only one "right" course of action. We eschew for the most part the language of "should", "must", and "ought" in setting forth our suggestions. (Indeed, if we had the nerve and the ability, we might even eschew prose for poetry or song!) To the extent that we have gone into some detail in respect of some of our suggestions, it is for the purpose of enabling those who read this report and ponder its implications to grasp the full extent of the directions in which our thinking has taken us before deciding to accept our various suggestions or to reject them in favour of what may appear to be even more fruitful paths to explore. In so doing, we recognize that we run the risk that we may not be heard by those in many of our institutions who have grown hard of hearing under the

barrage of strong statements and stern remonstrations which they
have had to endure from policy advisors over the years. But this
is a small price to pay for the opportunity of reaching the wider
audience, those persons within and without the bureaucracy more
receptive and more responsive to soft language and tentative
steps.

X. Recommendations

1. The Fundamental Assumptions
    of Communications Policy

    We have alluded in earlier sections of this report to the fact
that little is known about the overall communications environment in
Canada and about impediments to the processes of human communications.
We know a great deal about communications technology, about the dis-
semination of information which purports to be "factual" and "object-
ive", and about the role and functions of our mass media. We are
coming to learn more about community information resources and to
express concerns about privacy as institutions collect more and more
"information" about each of us. But we know very little about the
most human communications systems — the personal networks which are
the preferred channels on which we all first rely for our information
needs. Before proceeding to install sophisticated communications
systems and communications technology which purport to help people,
it is crucial that we understand more about the channels through which
persons prefer to communicate and share information and about the
impediments to those channels. If those human processes are not more
fully understood, then there is grave danger that the spread of com-
munications tools, the dissemination of information to the public,
the design of communications networks and even the activities of
community information centres themselves will serve only to increase
the dissonance and turbulence which already exists in our society.

    In the context of what is going on in the world around us, it is
clear that communications policy needs to be more broadly defined and
more critically focussed on social considerations. There is a great
tendency in our society to relegate such considerations to the periphery
and to treat them as separate and separable from economic, technical
and industrial considerations.[1] But they raise more fundamental

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[1] CAC has repeatedly tried to raise this point with government
     officials over the past few years. In addition, there are in-
     dications that at least some communications technologists are
     beginning to share the same concerns. At a recent meeting of
     the International Electrical and Electronic Engineers, fully
     one-third of the papers presented dealt with social issues.

questions than those of our communications tools and our informa-
tion systems. For what is at stake is the broader issue of impediments
to communicating among <u>all</u> Canadians, within our institutions and out-
side them. We therefore trust the issues raised in this report will
not be relegated to the peripheral programs of "citizens information"
or "community communications" but instead treated as the central
issues of communications policies.

It is increasingly apparent that the appropriate framing of com-
munications policy needs to be given immediate priority if we are to
create for ourselves a more human environment. In the search for
such a framework, it is essential that all government departments
come to grips with the nature of the revolution in information sharing
which is underway in Canadian communities. We are convinced that a
full appreciation of what is happening requires first-hand exposure.

> We therefore suggest that community groups invite
> senior government officials to come and work with
> them in their communities on a variety of community
> projects. For their part, we urge governments to
> take advantage of these invitations, to regard them
> as learning opportunities whereby the officials
> concerned can secure a genuine understanding of the
> overall communications environment and the role of
> person-to-person channels in facilitating communica-
> tion among Canadians.

At first blush, such a recommendation may sound highly improbable.
Indeed, its very improbability is itself a mark of the distance which
exists between government officials and those they would purport to
serve. However, in the context of what is currently going on in our
society, it is becoming increasingly clear that communities provide
a much more germane learning environment than do our traditional in-
stitutions.

There also appears to be a need for some means of facilitating
communications among community groups wanting to check out their
developing perceptions of communications needs in their own communities
and their understandings of the broad ramifications of communications
policy.

> We therefore suggest that the CAC and any other
> community-based groups interested in the design
> of communications policy from a community per-
> spective make their interest widely known and
> offer to respond to requests from any community
> group wanting to make contact with groups or in-
> dividuals in other communities wrestling with
> similar policy issues — to act as connectors in
> an evolving communications network.

In the event that this function were to expand to the point where it
absorbed an increasing proportion of the resources of whatever groups
acted as network connectors, then those groups might request assist-
ance from federal and provincial Departments of Communications.
Various members of the communications industry too might be invited
to lend support to this network, in light of their new-found recog-
nition of the need to be concerned with "the consumer point of view".
Officials from some of the major companies in the industry have in-
vited the CAC, for example, to attend their conferences and to meet
with officials to discuss the public interest in the activities of
the industry. But we believe that before such discussions can result
in fruitful outcomes, a framework for communications policy appropriate
for Canada over the course of the next several years needs to be
developed and articulated. This framework can best be developed
through networks of persons interested in enlarging their understand-
ing of the role of communications policy in enhancing human dialogue.
Once such a framework has been developed, economic, technical and
industrial considerations could be seen with greater clarity.

Research on impediments to communicating and on the effects of
technological mediation on human behaviour urgently needs to be under-
taken. Despite our propensity to be captives of the technological
imperative (we have the technology, therefore we must use it) and to
contemplate a freeze on wages and prices much more readily than a
technological freeze, little is known about the subtle ways in which
communications technology influences and shapes us all. This would
seem to be a highly appropriate research effort for the Department
of Communications to undertake and/or to sponsor.

We therefore suggest that the Department of
Communications pursue studies about the effect
of technology on human behaviour and on atti-
tudes, values and perceptions.

Since departmental personnel are largely drawn from the ranks of
technical experts, such studies would need to be either contracted
out or undertaken by newly recruited personnel experience' in social
and community concerns. But we believe that research into communica-
tions issues should not be restricted to those in government or in
university-based research institutes. Fundamental research into
many of the issues we have raised can only be undertaken by persons
unencumbered by narrowly specialized academic disciplines and bureau-
cratic interests. It is crucial that encouragement be given to com-
munity groups who wish to become involved in studying the communications
environment in their communities. Community groups might, for example,
wish to conduct experiments along the lines of the Milgram study men-
tioned earlier and such other projects as might make more visible
impediments to communicating which exist in their communities. How-
ever, to facilitate their involvement, the federal government needs
to provide more flexible funding arrangements than are presently
available. Without institutional resources to fall back on, community
groups are frequently unable to survive the often lengthy period be-
tween approval of research contracts and reimbursement for work
completed.

We therefore suggest that the Department of
Communications bring to the attention of the
Treasury Board its interest in supporting com-
munity groups in undertaking research on the
communications environment and, in this con-
nection, point out the urgent need to develop
funding arrangements appropriate for non-
institutional researchers.

Nor is the assessment of the appropriateness of any particular study
and the evaluation of its success or failure something we believe should
be left to the sole discretion of government personnel. Where the
proposed research effort aims to focus on one particular community,

residents of that community are much more likely than anyone else
to provide valid judgments as to whether or not the study as it is
proposed is relevant, or requires amendment, or whether something
quite different needs to be undertaken.

> We therefore suggest that federal and provincial
> departments supporting research into communica-
> tions needs of Canadian communities elicit a
> sample of the opinions from community groups in
> the particular communities involved as to the
> merits of proposed research studies and the
> relevance and effectiveness of completed projects.
> We further suggest that members of community groups
> interested in the broad issues of communications
> policy offer to act as advisors to any group wish-
> ing assistance in testing the usefulness of its
> research projects.

It would be essential that persons interested in performing this
function be prepared to go beyond any position currently held by
their organization to encourage, free from vested institutional
stances, exploration into evolving Canadian needs from a community
perspective and to probe as deeply as necessary the implications of
those needs.

These suggestions would, we believe, make more real and more
practical the invitation to participate in its policy-making activities
which the Department of Communications has extended to those outside
our institutions of government and industry. It has invited at least
a few voluntary organizations concerned with the social implications
of communications policies to comment on the report of the Canadian
Computer/Communications Task Force. And it has just issued a green
paper as a means of encouraging public discussion in advance of
moving to implement the Task Force's recommendations.[1] Our suggest-
ions are designed to extend these government initiatives even further
and to facilitate other and perhaps more promising initiatives.

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[1] Computer/Communications Policy: A Position Statement by the
Government of Canada, Department of Communications, Ottawa
April 1973.

2. Computer Technology and
   Data Banks for Communities

Earlier in this report we expressed some concerns about the current state of the art with respect to computer-based data banks. We turn now to the question of demonstration projects designed to put computer technology at the service of community groups.

We would have grave misgivings about a move by the Department of Communications or indeed any other government or organization which tended to "lay on" demonstration projects in any community. All too often in our society governments have moved into communities with the expressed intent of gaining a better understanding of a given situation. And all too often these moves have resulted in attempts to control or coerce that situation, to mould it according to the narrow, specialized understandings of experts and to apply standard models in total disregard of the unique aspects of each community environment. These dangers are of particular concern when what is under consideration is technology-focussed experiments under-taken by governments desiring to become a more visible presence at the community level. Were governments to leap quickly into community-based communications projects without seriously reflecting on the implications of their actions, the inevitable outcome would be further damage to the quality of communications in the communities concerned. From the perspective of what we have learned in the course of our investigations, it appears to us that, until such time as a broad framework appropriate for communications policy has been developed and articulated and its implications understood, all involved in communications experiments have much to learn and to re-think.

If the Department were to support such projects, it is crucial to avoid attaching a lengthy list of pre-determined conditions, the effects of which would be to impose the project on communities.

> We therefore suggest that experiments designed to
> make use of computer communications technology at
> the community level be community-initiated, subject
> to the five preconditions outlined below.

The criteria which we believe to be appropriate in assessing
requests for participation in such experiments and in the evalua-
tion of those selected should in the main be evolved gradually
through a process of discussion with those involved. Our investigations
lead us to suggest that the following conditions are all that is needed
to attach to such proposals from the outset:

1. Only those requests which emerge from community in-
    formation centres and citizen groups in "mature"
    communities would be considered. By "mature" com-
    munities we mean those in which a) there are already
    visible signs of significant citizen involvement in
    decision-making processes at the community level and/or
    active citizen groups attempting to better their en-
    vironment and, b) the various groups are beginning to
    work together, to move away from vested interest
    position and to broaden their understanding of what
    constitutes the self-interest of their members and
    their community in a total environment.   Without such
    evidence of "maturity", the data bank which is proposed
    for transfer to a computer system is likely to be used
    in ways which restrict information flows; or it would be too
    limited to warrant the costs entailed, in which case
    other forms of technology might be more appropriate.
    Application of this criterion would therefore result in
    disallowing applications from those wishing only to
    undertake their own self-interested research in the
    community — to use the community as a "laboratory" for
    their studies.

2. The data bank which is proposed for the computer-based
    experiment should be of the sort which we have described
    as "experiential" — which suggests where to locate people
    who have experience with specific problems or particular
    issues or where recorded experiential information can be
    obtained. Thus, directories of community resources such
    as are now produced by community information centres or

citizen groups could be candidates for such an experiment, subject to some qualifications noted below. However, proposals for computerized data banks purporting to provide hard, "factual" answers to the enquiries of its users, such as CAC's initial proposal for a Community Information Network, would be deemed ineligible. Also, the information which is proposed for a computerized system must already have been tested, in its manual form, for its usefulness in dealing with the enquiries of community users.

3. It would appear important to ensure that the content of the data bank is not subject to the sole control of any one group in the community. While a central information centre may appear to be an appropriate starting point for a data bank of community resources, other neighbourhood and specialized centres would be invited in the planning stages of the experiment to include such of their information sources as are not covered by the central information centre; the same invitation would also be extended to citizen groups in the community concerned.

4. It is important to ensure that access to the data bank is not subject to the sole control of its designer. The storage and retrieval system should therefore be designed in such a way as eventually to enable the public to add to the data bank sources of information not otherwise included and to access it directly. Furthermore, its users should be able not only to locate persons experienced in a certain topic or agencies providing a certain service, but to signal a newly emerging interest in a topic not yet covered by the data bank.

5. Such experiments should be conducted over a period of up to three years; this should be sufficiently long to permit those involved to assess the degree to which the project

reduces impediments to communicating in the communities
concerned. However, since it is not at all clear that
computers, as they are presently designed, are an approp-
riate means of furthering human communications, community
groups participating in the experiment should have the
right to terminate the project at whatever stage they
perceive it to be damaging or irrelevant.

Once a community group has developed a proposal and submitted
it to the Department, we believe it would be useful for departmental
officials to meet with the group involved in order to explore the
advantages and limitations of the proposal. These preliminary ex-
plorations might focus particularly on assessing whether computer
communications technology can be of assistance in accomplishing the
purposes intended. It would also be appropriate to determine whether
the applicant groups have undertaken their own technological assessment
and have a broad understanding of the capabilities of the computer.[1]

It would not be surprising if one of the crucial points raised
in these discussions related to the question of whether or not the
Department would support the continuation of projects deemed to be
successful during the experimental period. The applicant group would
quite rightly be concerned about the impact on the communications
environment in their community were the project to terminate abruptly
at the end of the experimental phase without regard to indications
that the computer system still has a useful role to play in facilitating
communications in the community. One of two responses might be predicted.
The Department might agree to extending ongoing financial and technical
support of a program nature, subject to the verdict reached in the
evaluation process we outlined below, or alternatively, the group
could insist, as a condition of its participation, that other potential
funding sources be invited to monitor the experiment from its inception.
The involvement of possible future funders in the experiment would en-
able them to reach a decision at the end of that phase about the ex-
tent and nature of their ongoing support and to do so in full knowledge

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[1] This is not to suggest that community groups need be well versed in
the technical aspects of the computer, but only that they have done
some thinking around what the computer can and cannot do.

of earlier decision-making processes. Should the groups not know
of potential future funding sources, they might wish to request
assistance in locating them from department officials. It would
also be expected that departmental responsibility would extend to
assisting groups whose proposals might lend themselves to the use
of communications tools other than computers to make contact with
more appropriate sources of government support.

In agreeing to participate in the experiment, the Department
would provide for the costs of such technology as may be needed and
would place at the disposal of the community group the technical
expertise of one of its personnel. Personnel so assigned would be
expected to act in a resource capacity — as technicians knowledgeable
in what could be done to meet the aims of the groups.

The experiment should be amenable to testing its usefulness from
a variety of perspectives:

- From the point of view of the information centres,
  does such a computer-based system serve to liberate
  the energies of the personnel in the centres and thus
  enable them to free more time to engage in other
  activities needed by the community, such as assisting
  those who come to them to articulate and define the
  parameters of their problems?

- From the point of view of citizen groups, is the system
  a useful tool in assisting people in the community to get
  in touch with others interested in anticipating problems —
  in planning?

- From the point of view of governments, service agencies
  and others offering services to the community, does the
  system act in an effective way to enhance community aware-
  ness of the existence of such services? Does it expose
  gaps, needed changes or redundancies in these services?

- From the point of view of the public, does such a
system enhance the responsiveness of institutions
in the community to the expressed needs of the com-
munity? Is it a useful tool for helping bring to-
gether persons and the insitutions which serve them?
To reduce the dependency of the community on informa-
tion centres? To erode narrow vested interest positions?
To inspire a sense of community?

- From the point of view of participating government
officials, does this tool help to enable people in the
community, including institutions, to communicate with
one another? Does it seem likely to result in less need
for government by helping people come together to solve
common problems? Does it help politicians and bureaucrats
to see more clearly the impact on the community of their
information and communications activities? To re-assess
the role and function of community and regional government
offices?

Obviously, few if any of these questions can be answered by
objective measuring techniques brought to bear on the experiment
largely after the event by experts who have stood outside the process.
Answers to the questions we have outlined can be provided only by
those who have been actively engaged in planning and monitoring the
project as it develops. Thus, a close and continuing involvement by
the Department, the applicant centre, and by other centres and citizen
groups is required if the usefulness of the project in enhancing human
communications is to be legitimately assessed. This seems to us to
clearly point to the need for an experiment in evaluation in conjunc-
tion with the experiment in computer communications.

> We therefore suggest that such experiments in
> the use of computer technology at the community
> level be accompanied by experiments in integrated
> community evaluation designed to provide a learning
> environment in which flexible evaluation criteria
> can be developed and applied through a process of
> discussion among government officials and community
> representatives.

As we have suggested, the evaluation of the experiment should not be focussed only on the ability of computer technology and computerized data banks to provide rapid access to relevant information sources sought by the community. Rather, we believe it needs to be more centrally focussed on the effects brought about by the liberation of the human energies of participating community groups on the communications environment in the community at large. Specifically, we suggest that the evaluation committee attached to any one experiment in computer technology be charged with the following tasks:

1) assessing the merits of the application and forming a view as to what changes in the proposal might need to be effected as the experiment progresses;

2) monitoring the development of the experiment through a process of continual evaluation addressed to the questions we have suggested and such others as the participants may wish to add; and

3) recommending whether or not the project should be continued beyond the terminal date of the experiment.

Obviously, the success or failure of this experiment in integrated community evaluation will be crucially dependent on several factors, not the least of which is the question of who is represented on the committee. And this is indeed an issue fraught with difficulty, one for which there are no clear guidelines. What we have in mind in putting forward the suggestion for such a committee is to facilitate the evolution of a largely unstructured learning environment in which the interests of the community transcend the narrower interests of the Department or any one centre or community group. To bring this about, our own thinking suggests to us that, apart from the Department of Communications officials and the applicant centre or group, the participation of other persons drawn from the community would be essential. Further, since the processes of the committee would take the form of informal dialogue and discussion, the size of the group needs to be

small enough to permit full and open discussion; for this purpose
the numbers of those on the committee should be limited — perhaps
to no more than ten or twelve persons. The question of ensuring
continuity in the discussions over the whole of the experimental
period is also a consideration of some importance. This suggests
that two representatives from each group might be invited, although
both need not attend each meeting of the committee.

Were we in the position of inviting community groups to reflect
on computer-based experiments in community communications, we would
try to include a variety of differing perspectives. We would first
ask those centres and community groups who are interested in adding
additional information to the data bank of the applicant to join in
the evaluation process. And if their numbers result in the committee
reaching a size greater than the limit suggested, we would ask them
to select from among themselves those who might appropriately rep-
resent them. Other centres and citizen groups expressing interest
in the experiment but not directly involved in supplementing the data
bank might also be invited. And we would think it important to ex-
tend an invitation to members of the community at large — persons
not associated with any information centre or with other citizen
groups on the committee. Such representation would best be chosen
and approved by mutual agreement of the other members. We have al-
ready suggested that the applicant group might wish to invite sources
of future support to monitor the experiment; and we would keep others
indicating an interest in the experiment, such as representatives of
other levels of government and of service agencies in the community,
informed about its progress.

To avoid the danger that the committee might come to see itself
and its endeavours as tokenistic participation in government decision-
making, rather than a joint exploration of equal partners, it appears
important that its decisions not be arbitrarily overruled nor bypassed
in traditional governmental decision-making processes. This suggests
that, in instances where those government personnel who are ultimately

charged with committing public funds to such projects have reservations about certain of the conclusions reached by the committee, they should refer such reservations and questions back to it for further elaboration and/or consideration.[1]

We would expect that some part of the deliberations of the committee would be devoted to a consideration of the question of how best to categorize the information which is to constitute the community data bank. Members of the committee might well spend considerable time studying the classification mode used in the manual system of the applying centre to ascertain whether that method represents, in their view, the best possible way of retrieving the information. In such discussions, what would receive predominant attention is consideration of whatever simplified indexing and cross-indexing techniques best match the enquiries of the public rather than the convenience of the administrators of any one centre. Another factor which would likely need to be considered, given the eventuality of direct access by the public, would be the question of what form of output best matches the preferences of the community — visual display, printout, voice, etc. Since government officials are unlikely to have had experience in handling the information-seeking activities of the public, their appropriate role in such discussions is clearly that of mediator between such differing community views as may emerge.

Were the Department of Communications to determine that the experiments in computer communications at the community level led to results which upheld the general hypothesis that computers can be of assistance in enhancing the human communications environment, then it may wish to consider moving beyond experiments to undertake long-term programs. However, such a step should only be conceived in a more flexible manner than what is usually conceived of as a national program.

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[1] These and other factors which affect such an experiment in evaluation are more fully outlined in a monograph entitled "Beyond Cynicism: Toward Communauté: A Report on Evaluation Procedures" prepared by a committee jointly appointed by Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation and the Ministry of State for Urban Affairs in October 1972.

Policy makers frequently expect that from what is learned in undertaking demonstration projects can be distilled the essence of a national program. When applied to experimental projects which are aimed at exposing impediments to the communications environment in selected communities and at working toward their reduction, such expectations are patently unrealistic. Each community has a unique set of priorities and is likely to contend with a unique set of impediments to communications. It is therefore highly improbable that a standard national program will emerge out of a selection of demonstration programs undertaken in accordance with the criteria we have suggested and evaluated according to the type of process we have outlined. It might well be the case that further clarification of the operating principles suggested for experimental projects could evolve during the course of such projects and new ones emerge, but ongoing programs would still likely resemble a linked series of flexible projects, each one tailored to the particular needs of participating communities.

> We therefore suggest that, were the Department of
> Communications to evolve a national program from
> community-based experiments in computer technology,
> the objective for such a program be identical to
> what has been outlined for demonstration projects —
> the reduction of barriers to communicating in the
> communities concerned. We further suggest that the
> evaluation process also involve persons in partici-
> pating communities and that the criteria we have
> outlined for assessing experimental projects, if
> they prove appropriate, be supplemented only by those
> which have emerged fairly consistently during the
> experimental phase.

3.   Other Community Media

We have confined our attention during the course of this study to computer technology. We did so because of the breadth of our enquiries and because many questions affecting non-computer communications media were raised in "The Power to Communicate".

One aspect not specifically mentioned in that report did emerge in the course of our investigations and is, we believe, worth drawing to the attention of those who read this report. Some of the persons with whom we talked took note of the fragmentation to communities caused by the decisions of telephone and cable companies with respect to defining toll zones and laying cable lines. In many cases such decisions appear to be made in the absence of any consideration about their impact on communications within natural communities. We were told that in Ontario, for example, residents at one end of what is regarded as an integrated rural community, though one which is spread over a large area, must pass through two toll zones in telephoning residents at the other end. Even more frequently, the laying of cable lines and the allocation of territories among cable companies in the same city is undertaken without considering the audience reached by community programming. Nor do licensing authorities exhibit any greater regard to the bifurcation of natural geographic communities, whether defined by political, school of similar existing boundaries, which results from corporate decisions.

> We therefore suggest that licensing authorities,
> in dealing with applications from cable and tele-
> phone companies, accord high priority to considerations
> of the consequences of the behaviour of the communica-
> tions industry in facilitating or impeding communications
> in the communities they serve.

4. Community Information Centres and Community Groups

We have referred to the fact that information centres and citizen groups in one community frequently appear to have much to offer their counterparts in other communities. We believe it would be desirable to facilitate both the sharing of ideas on the part of community groups in Canada as to ways of compiling information requested by their users and the exchanging of information already compiled. By making more widely accessible material translating government program information into everyday English or French and into languages used by various ethnic groups, a communications mechanism should also be of

considerable interest to governments concerned about reaching those
not attracted by normal government information services.   But even
more important than the exchange of recorded information is the need
to facilitate personal contact between groups interested in similar
issues in their various communities and between those who know and
those who want to know.

> We therefore suggest that the Department of
> Communications fund the establishment of a
> phone-in communications resource — a Community
> Communications Centre — accessible by all
> Canadian communities through a Zenith number.

This resource tool could be made available in one community informa-
tion centre in each community for the use of all centres, citizen
groups and individuals to assist them in their efforts to seek in-
formation and to contact other information resources across the
country. We envision such a tool as connecting participating centres
to a small group of non-government personnel (say two or three persons).
who would act as facilitators in locating specific sources of informa-
tion when requested to do so. The staff would also arrange conference
calls between a group in one community and persons in another with
whom it wishes to exchange information. Alternatively, it could act
as a switchboard relaying messages from one community to another.
It would be important that the personnel in each of the community
centres in which such a resource is located not prevent anyone wishing
to use the Centre from doing so. It would however be appropriate for
them to suggest that recourse first be made to such community resources
as might be capable of providing the information or to regional offices
of governments or voluntary agencies.

We see the group manning the Centre maintaining and supplementing
the information about existing community information sources and special-
ized data banks collected in the course of the Info/CIN project so that
it is always up-to-date and comprehensive. In the light of this, and
given the increasing inadequacies of print-based modes of conveying
information about community resources in our rapidly changing world,

the information now in the Handbook would probably need to be
transferred to a storage and retrieval system more amenable to
continual updating and easy access. For this reason, we have
attempted during this project to code the information in both parts
of the Handbook into broad categories as a first step toward moving
to card indexes, microfilm or a computer-based system.[1] Were the
suggestion of a Community Communications Centre to be accepted, its
usefulness should be subject to regular evaluation by those who use
it.

We also have some suggestions to make about the funding of new
and existing community information centres. Earlier sections of this
report drew attention to the contradiction between community groups'
forced reliance on temporary financial support on the one hand and,
on the other, the expressed desire of many of the funding agencies
to see such groups become agents for social change and a presence
in the community auguring for more responsive institutional behaviour.
We drew attention to the fact that the insecurities of short-term
funding become the tail that wags the dog, draining the energies of
the centres' personnel and impeding them from working to improve the
quality of the communications environment in their community.

> We therefore suggest that government departments
> funding community enterprises extend their grants
> over a period of two years, subject to annual
> evaluation by integrated community committees.

The concept of the integrated community committee, already out-
lined in the discussion of computer-based experimental projects,
appears to us to be likely to lead to funding decisions far more
sensitive to the real needs of the community than are decisions arrived
at by government officials acting in isolation. We also see integrated
community committees as capable of arriving at decisions in a manner
which promotes the responsiveness of community enterprises — that is,
the evaluation process appears to provide a context in which those in-
volved can see more clearly the impact of their activites on the community.

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[1] These categories are a first cut only and would need to be checked
with each of the centres and specialized information sources
listed as to the appropriateness of their fit and their comprehen-
siveness.

These committees, composed of governmental and non-governmental representatives, might be asked to consider all funding applications by new and existing information centres in the same community which are directed to the federal government.[1]/ Such committees would then be in a position to deal coherently with applications of concern to their community now assessed by separate government departments. To accomplish this, all centres wishing to apply for federal funds would need to file their applications by the same date -- perhaps six months or so ahead of the expiry of outstanding grants. Government representatives from the funding departments would be expected to reveal, at the outset, whatever constraints are attached to their funding activities. These might include limitations on the amount to be given to any individual centre or allocated to any one region, as well as priorities, hopefully few in number, which have already been determined by departmental mandates and the preferences of the program administrators. Government members would also be expected to inform the committee of such plans as might exist regarding the opening of government information centres in the area concerned.

With these factors in mind, the committee should move to consider the following questions, among others:

-    Are governmental constraints likely to damage or facilitate the capacity of members of the community to communicate with one another?

-    Are existing community information centres and other community information resources filling the needs of the community, having regard to indications of emerging value differences within the community and its neighbourhoods, and the ability of residents to get in touch with sources outside their immediate environment?

-    If not, are existing information resources able and willing to fill this need? Are there indications, for

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1/   We will confine our suggestions to federal funding sources, though similar committees would also be appropriate with respect to the funding activities of other levels of government.

example, that their existing users are learning to
find their own networks of information sources;
that their location, the background and experience
of their personnel, are no longer appropriate?

- Are there centres now in operation which are failing
to meet the needs of their neighbourhoods? If so,
can a group applying to start a new centre in that
neighbourhood prove that it offers a more suitable
alternative?

- Would the existing centres welcome the entry of a new
centre from the point of view of enabling them to
liberate their energies to take on new tasks, such as
to specialize in a certain subject field? Is there
evidence of need for such a change in focus?

- Do existing centres now have opportunities to tap other
funding sources that may be closed to those proposing
to start a new centre?

- Should centres now operating on the first year of
conditional two year grants continue to be supported?

To assist in its decisions, the committee would be expected to
have made available to it not only the budgetted requirements of the
applicants but whatever additional information it might reasonably
request, such as comments from users of the applying centres, the
views of citizens in the community, etc.

Applications from groups proposing to establish a community in-
formation centre in a community where none exists might be dealt with
by a committee established to deal with applications from nearby
areas. In addition to the above questions, such a committee might
be expected to enquire whether existing groups or individual citizens
are now filling the effective functions of a community information
centre and to examine the experiential backgrounds of those proposing to
staff the centre in order to determine their relevance to the community.

If the available federal funding sources have been allocated
by region, and if the applications recommended of the community
committees exceed the funds made available to the region, then it
would appear necessary that a regional committee be constituted,
consisting of representatives from each of the community committees
falling within that region. To this group would fall the task of
tailoring the approved applications to fit the available cloth.

We turn now to non-financial forms of assistance which we be-
lieve would be useful to provide to the information centres in
Canadian communities.

First, there is the question of enhancing the awareness of the
community that such centres are in existence and of enabling all
Canadians to seek through them information about other communities.
Since the yellow pages of the telephone book are commonly used to
locate information about the availability of local commercial ser-
vices, they appear to be the logical place to find out about available
information sources within the community. However, few information
centres can afford the cost entailed in such listing.

> We therefore suggest that Canadian telephone
> companies provide a list of all community
> information centres in the telephone directories
> of every community, indicating the neighbourhood
> served and whether they specialize in particular
> categories of information. We further suggest
> that such lists be provided to the long-distance
> information desks operated by the telephone
> systems so as to facilitate the attempts of
> Canadians to contact information resources in com-
> munities other than their place of residence.

We urge that the federal Department of Communications, provincial
governments, the Consumers' Association of Canada and any other
interested organizations bring this suggestion to the attention of
the telephone companies.

Some government officials frequently allege that community-operated
centres at times provide to the public information which is inaccurate
and incomplete. Similar assertions have also been made by those in

community information centres who allege that the personnel of
government centres are equally remiss when they deal with enquiries
relating to community resources. Cooperative efforts are required
to dissipate these charges and countercharges and to ensure that
the requests of all information centres are handled as capably as
possible.

> We therefore suggest that all government
> departments offering enquiry services to
> the public offer to establish an exchange
> program between personnel in government-
> and community-operated information centres.

This program would offer persons in both centres an opportunity to
learn from one another in their own areas of expertise and to obtain
a more comprehensive view of the information needs of the community.
Such a program should be operated on a continual rotating basis,
offering new and experienced personnel the advantages of a change
in perspective.

Centres which translate government brochures and produce other
documents explaining government programs in everyday language under-
standable by English- and French-speaking Canadians and by recent
immigrants to this country not proficient in either of the official
languages should, we believe, be reimbursed for this service.

> We therefore suggest that a fee-for-service
> contract be extended to cover the time spent
> by community information centres in undertaking
> projects aimed at distributing informative and
> relevant information on government programs in
> their communities.

Such material should also be provided to the staff of the Community
Communications Centre for distribution to other communities at their
request. We also believe that all government departments, and
particularly Information Canada, should be quick to inform community
information centres about the availability of free brochures explain-
ing government programs to the public; departments might well work

particularly closely with community information centres in communities outside cities in which regional offices are located to ensure that information about their programs and services relevant to community needs is continuously available in those communities.

And finally, we have one recommendation which is more than a suggestion — one which we believe to be the essential first step in testing our ideas.

> We recommend that the suggestions we have made in this report, and those contained in "The Power to Communicate", be brought to the attention of community information centres and other interested community groups for discussion and debate prior to their implementation.

We would particularly not wish to see the suggestion for an exchange resource — a Community Communications Centre — implemented without consultation with information centres as to the usefulness they see in such a proposal.

XI. A Final Communiqué

We have stressed in this report one major theme — impediments to our capacity to communicate — and we have raised several inter-related issues. We have pointed to the need to develop a comprehensive conceptual framework for communications policy, one which is rooted in social considerations. We have pointed to the dangers inherent in some of the activities of community information centres and, as well, in uncritical acceptance of the myth that computer-based demonstration projects designed to disseminate community information are of themselves a "good thing". We have suggested that such projects need to be broadly assessed. Their potential usefulness lies in the human energies they may liberate on the part of participating community groups, energies which then flow more usefully towards assisting others in the community to forge personal networks and to access experiential information which are the heart and core of human communications. The concept of an integrated community committee has been outlined as an attempt to suggest a context in which government officials and community groups can fundamentally re-examine the communications environment. And we have drawn attention to the need for less adversarial stances between governments and the people they serve.

We have done so in the belief that governments spend too much time in looking for things to do and in making their presence more visible at the community level. Community groups as well spend too much time charging governments with lack of understanding and with being "solutions looking for problems". Were we all to listen and reflect more than we now do and to place persons rather than institutions at the centre of our concerns, we might then be better able to talk together more humanly. To this end the revolution in information sharing will hopefully be directed.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A - List of Persons Interviewed

APPENDIX B - Letters and Questionnaire

APPENDIX C - Some Comments from the Questionnaire

List of Persons Interviewed

HALIFAX

Tony Barclay
Social Planning Council

Bob Butler, Fred Bayers
Halifax Neighbourhood Centre

Eric Dennis
Nova Scotia Information and Communications Centre

Nick Filmore
4th Estate

Janet Fountain
Help-Line

Bob Fowler
Veith House

Cannon French
Ward 5 Resources Council

Frank Hendsbee, Sylvia Kitely
Public Housing Tenants Association

Norman Horrocks
Library School
Dalhousie University

Angela Julien, Joan Jones, etc.
Planning Department
City of Halifax

Don MacLean
Institute of Public Affairs
Dalhousie University

Johanna Oosterveld
Move

Don Padmore
Information Canada

Ernie Rafuse
Michael Mitterante
Allan Dwyer
Community Consultants

Wally Scott
Ward 5 Information Centre

Peter Zimmer
Teled Video Services Association

MONTREAL[1]/

Jeannine Boyer, Blanche de St. Croix,
Greater Montreal Information and Referral Centre

Kerry Johnson, Sol Kassimer
YMCA

Pierre Marois
L'Association Cooperatif d'Economie Familiale

Mme. Irene Lemerise
Consumers' Association of Canada

OTTAWA

John Banks
Social Science Research Council

Frances Balls
Consumers' Association of Canada

Charles Boyle
Department of Manpower and Immigration

Chris Bradshaw
Committee for a National Association of Public Housing Tenants

Rosemary Cavan
Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada

Robert Cournoyer
Canadian Council on Urban and Regional Research

Pat Delbridge
Ottawa Distress Centre

1/ While we spent several hours on the telephone in Montreal
    trying to make connections with persons interested in com-
    munity communications and to go beyond those directly involved
    in community information centres, our efforts were in the main
    without result: we understand that members of other community
    groups not directly involved in the local Montreal scene have
    also encountered similar difficulties.

H. W. Deroche
Ottawa-Hull Better Business Bureau

Michael Devine
STAND (Serving the Aims and Needs of the Disabled)

Paul Dubé
Non-Medical Use of Drugs Directorate
Department of National Health and Welfare

Gladys Dunn
Bureau of Consumer Services
Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs

Daryl Eagles
Director-General, Information
Department of the Environment

Phil Fay
Department of Manpower and Immigation

Tom Ford
Information Canada

Inez Gaffney
National Research Council

Stewart Goodings
Department of the Secretary of State

David Hanley
Consultant
Neighbourhood Improvement Committee

Conrad Harris
Consumers' Association of Canada

Molly Hirsch
Ministry of State for Urban Affairs

S. Homulus
National Museums of Canada

Larry Huniu
Sports Canada

K. Keeler
CANFARM
Department of Agriculture

Lise Lavoie
Department of Community and Social Services
Government of Ontario

N. Laycroft
R & D Laboratory
Department of Public Works

Jacques Ledoux
Community Planning Association of Canada

Alice Maitland
Neighbourhood Improvement Committee

William Markey
Regional Office
Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation

George Mauerhoff
National Research Council

Laughlin McCrea
National Library of Canada

R.F.W. Nelson
Department of National Health and Welfare

Eleanor Ordway
Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs

Huguette Petruk
Community Information Service

L. Racine
National Research Council

Rhonda Read, Bob Bennett
Automobile Protection Association

Helen Rogers
National Library of Canada

Ken Rubin
Community Consultant

C. H. Sager
Department of National Defence

Terry Shepherd
Communications Research Centre

Steven Skully
Department of Justice

Marie Slusar
Food Advisory Services
Department of Agriculture

Jeff Solway
Department of the Secretary of State

Graham Spry
Canadian Broadcasting League

Susan Stack
Community Switchboard

Claire Stewart
Department of the Secretary of State

Jill Stocker
Canadian Bureau of International Education

Ray Thomas
Glebe Information Centre

Fred Walden
Department of National Health and Welfare

Paul Warran
Communitycations
Township of Nepean

Diane Wood
Communications -- Sandy Hill

Les Zukerman
Unemployment Insurance Commission

TORONTO

Lola Battiselli
Community Development Branch
Government of Ontario

Harry Campbell
Metropolitan Toronto Public Library

Bill Clement
Human Behaviour Research Group

David Cole
Community Development Branch
Government of Ontario

Connection

John Cornish, Brian Hamill
North Pickering Project

Susan DePoe, Laurie Rubin, Don Allan
Memo from Turner

Mary Dominico
Community Information Centre of Metropolitan Toronto

Downtown Action

Ben Gelnay
Wayland Research Co.

Margo Greer
Intergovernmental Committee on Urban and Regional Research

Diana Ironside
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education

Jim Lemon, I. Frerichs
CORRA

Andrew MacFarlane, Helen Bourke
Citizen's Enquiry Branch
Government of Ontario

Ernestine van Marle
Rexdale Community Information Directory

Mary Ellen Matise,
Toronto Transportation Plan Review

Lucia McGuire
Metropolitan Toronto Public Library

Barbara Mercury, Sheila Martin
Information Scarborough

Beth Nealson
Information Officer
Toronto City Hall

Pollution Probe

Fred Schindler, Tom Atkinson, Michael Stevenson
Institute for Behavioural Research
York University

Mel Schindler
Project '73

Whipple Steinkrauss
Metropolitan Toronto Plan Review

Elizabeth Tyrwhitt
Bloor-Bathurst Information Centre

Jean Watson
Neighbourhood Information Centre

VANCOUVER

Pat Canning
Regional Office
Department of the Secretary of State

Shirley Chan
Strathcona Property Owners and Tenants Association

Michael Clague
Grandview Woodlawn Area Council

Jean Douglas
Consumers' Association of Canada

Ernie Fledell, Jeff Fohey,
City Information Works

Tony Green
Urban Design Centre

Ron Grey, Christine Prescott,
Information Canada

G. Roland Hennessey
Regional Office
Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation

Pat Hindley, Vianne Lyman, Gail Martin, Jean McNulty
Communications Studies Department
Simon Fraser University

William Hockins
Data Division
City Hall

David Kerr
Community Information Centre

Darlene Mazari
Vancouver City Council

Len Minsky
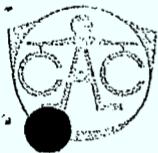Greater Vancouver Regional Government

William Nicholls
School of Social Work
The University of British Columbia

Roger Patillo
United Community Services

Chris Pinney
National Film Board

Douglas Purdy
Social Development Branch

Dorothy Thomas
Grandview Woodlawn Information Centre

CONSUMERS' ASSOCIATION OF CANADA
ASSOCIATION DES CONSOMMATEURS DU CANADA

NATIONAL OFFICE   ·   SIEGE SOCIAL

100 RUE GLOUCESTER STREET, OTTAWA 4, CANADA
TELEPHONE (613) 236-2393

February 23, 1973

Dear Friend,

On behalf of the Consumers' Association of Canada, I am writing to request
your assistance in a project which the Association believes will be of
interest to Community Information Centres.

For several years, CAC has been particularly interested in public
participation in communications policy decisions in this country and in
the ways and means by which communications technology can be placed at the
service of people. Among other things, we have felt strongly that people
are best able to define their own information needs and that this should
appropriately be done at the community level.

This conviction led the Association last year to sponsor, with the assistance
of the federal Department of Communications, a study of about 200 Community
Information Centres across Canada which we were then aware of. This study--
Info/CIN Phase I--was directed by Diana Ironside of the Ontario Institute
for Studies in Education. It was designed to collect information about the
overall functions and day-to-day operations of such centres, including
their channels of communication both to relevant sources of information
and to the people in the communities they serve. Diana's report is now in
the hands of the Department and publication is expected in the next few
months.

Another outcome from last year's study was the first Handbook listing
Community Information Centres in Canada. A first edition of a "Handbook
of Information and Helping Services in Canada" has already been distributed
to the centres who participated in the study. The Handbook lists central
and neighbourhood information centres of many varieties which operate
primarily to meet citizens' needs for information in day-to-day living.
It is a collection of profiles in which are described the major purposes
and some of the key characteristics of the activities of the centres.

CAC has just secured some further support from the Department of Communi-
cations to undertake another project in this area. One of the purpose
of Project Info/CIN Phase II is to update the Handbook - to revise where
necessary the information about centres which are now included and to add
centres which have newly opened or which were overlooked in the first
edition.

I would be very grateful if you would agree to being included in this
year's Handbook, and to supply the information needed for this purpose
by filling in the short questionnaire I have attached. Since this is
intended to be your Handbook, we hope you will want to be included.
Those who participate in helping us compile this second edition will be
sent a copy of the book as soon as it is completed.

We have not used any one definition of information centre for either of
the studies. Many organizations, businesses and groups in the community
give out information as part of their job. We have been directing our
studies to those central and neighbourhood information services which, as
noted earlier, operate primarily to meet citizens' needs for information
in every day life. Some centres are independent; others function as part
(a department or unit) of a social planning council, a library or other
agency. If you are uncertain about whether you meet this idea of an
information centre, would you fill in the questionnaire anyway and indicate
on it ways in which you differ from our concept.

If it is possible, could you return the questionnaire to me by return
mail or, failing that, by March 5th at the latest. Because of the
extremely tight time constraint under which we are operating, we will
not be able to contact you again to see whether you wish to have your
centre included in the Handbook. If we have not received your questionnaire
by March 5th, we will regretfully have to omit mention of your centre in
the second edition of the Handbook.

The major purpose of the current project, apart from updating the Handbook,
is to compile a listing of specialized information sources which may help
answer the enquiries of users of Community Information Centres, especially
those identified by the centres as posing particular difficulties in
locating the information concerned. As you are undoubtedly aware, there
are many specialized sources of information within government, industry,
trade associations, service agencies, voluntary organizations and citizen
groups which may well be useful to people, individually and collectively,
in enabling them to make their own decisions and to further their interests
in specific issues which affect or will affect their daily lives. One
outcome of this project will be a listing of such specialized information
sources as we are able to discover, a listing which we believe may provide
the centres and their users with a useful tool. Recognizing the potentially
enormous scope of this project, we know we can realistically expect to
make only a small beginning on this task. That beginning, however, would
be substantially improved through your help and suggestions.

Most of this work is being carried on through in-depth interviews with
a number of centres in a selected sample of cities. In case you have
not been included in the sample but have experienced difficulty in securing
specific kinds of information for your users and would like to draw your
experience to our attention, I would greatly appreciate hearing from you.
Also, if you are aware of specialized information sources which, for one
reason or other, are not generally known or are not publically available

or which would need to be subject to some modification to enhance their relevance, please let us know where and to whom we might turn to explore these questions.

I have enclosed a separate yellow sheet on which you can briefly outline your answers to these questions. If you find you require more space to respond than is provided, please use the back of the sheet or add as many pages as you need. Alternatively, if you feel your response is best expressed in the form of a personal letter, please feel free to do so. What we are looking for are clues to information you have difficulty in obtaining for your users and to sources you may know of which could be of assistance to the people in your community and, possibly, to people in other parts of Canada. We will not refer to your response by name if you do not wish us to do so, so please indicate your preference in this regard on your reply.

Let me thank you in advance for your assistance in this study. I look forward to receiving the questionnaire profile of your centre for inclusion in the Handbook and such help as you may be able to give with respect to specific information problems and specialized information sources by March 5th.

Yours sincerely,

Cathy Starrs per REHarkey

Cathy Starrs,
Project Director,
Info/CIN Phase II.

HANDBOOK PROFILE

Name of Centre.............................   Name of Co-ordinator, Director..........

....

Address...................................   ....

....   Title Used..............................

....   Telephone...............................

....   Area Code........ Number...............

Broad objectives or goals (e.g., community development, better use of resources by
people, etc.):

Types of services offered (e.g., giving general information, drug counselling, finding
baby sitters, etc.):

Any special groups (e.g., youth, Italian immigrants, etc.) served by your centre:

Days and hours during which your centre is open for drop-in:

Days and hours during which your centre receives telephone inquiries, indicating if
and when an answering service is employed:

If your centre is part of another organization, please give its name:

Describe how your centre is managed (i.e., who is responsible for determining policy,
whether elected, appointed, etc.):

Describe the origins of your centre (who was involved in setting it up, why did they
set it up and for whom, etc.):

Number of staff on duty together: Paid................

                                                    Volunteer..........

Total number of staff as of Feb. 1, 1973:   Paid staff........ Full time..........

                                                                       Part time.........

                                                    Volunteers........

Special comments: (use reverse side if necessary)

PROJECT INFO/CIN PHASE II

Information — Some Problems and Sources

Name and Address of Centre:

I. If you are having any difficulty in gaining access to particular types of information, can you specify the nature of the information you would like to obtain? Indicate as many specific information problems as you wish.

Note: Please be as precise as possible. For example, if information on housing accommodation in your community is a particular problem, can you tell us whether the information needed pertains to accommodation for low-income and/or large families? Rental accommodation or home ownership? Information on how to build low-cost homes? Experiments in communal living or other forms of shared accommodation? All of these? Other (specify)?

II. Do you know of specialized information sources which, if they were made more accessible to the public, might help you provide the information described above?

Yes_____   No_____

If yes, can you indicate what government department, industry, trade association, voluntary organization or citizen group might have this information?

Name of department or agency_____

Address:_____

Type of Information:_____

III. If you have discovered specialized information sources which have been helpful to you, would you like to share this information with other centres in Canada?

Yes _____   No_____

If no, can you tell us why?_____

b) If yes, can you specify:
    i) The nature of the information concerned

    ii) The source of the information
            Name of department of agency
            Address

            City and province

iii) How you have used this information

    iv) Modifications which might be made or gaps which need to be filled
         to further enhance the usefulness of this information.

Please return this sheet by March 5th to:

        Ms Cathy Starrs,
        Project Info/CIN Phase II,
        Room 701,
        71 Bank St.,
        Ottawa K1N 5N2, Ontario

<u>SOME COMMENTS FROM THE QUESTIONNAIRE</u>

There are essentially three types of information: harmless in-
formation, information which helps you adapt to your pain, and
information on the basic causes of your pain (usually called
restricted or inaccessible). The first two are already available,
but most research on information deals with improving their
delivery; what is needed is research into ways of liberating the
third type of information.

We are pleased to report that we get very good cooperation from
all sources of government in the area. Other organizations are
also cooperative.

We have been in operation for less than two months and have not
reached the point where our researcher has not been able to find
the information desired. However, there is one exception to the
rule. We requested information on consumer cooperatives from the
Ministry of Agriculture and Food (Ontario); the reply managed to
give no information except that consumer coops in Ontario have not
been successful. REALLY!

The trouble we have in working through clients problems is track-
ing them through the bureaucracy. We can learn what the various
requirements of the different programs and services are. The
difficulty arises when the client has been disqualified or the
application is taking an undue amount of time. Who do we contact?
If there is a real emergency, who has the authority to make a quick
decision to issue a cheque for example?

I feel all government ministries and departments should have direct lines available to all citizens wanting specific information. No citizen should have to pay long distance charges to phone a government department that they may need.

In general, rather than the informee having to work his --- off to seek out an appropriate informer, the informer should see it as his function to get information to those resources to which it might be potentially useful, and not vice versa. This goes for all levels of government right down to private and voluntary organizations.

We like to think of our centre as more than just a "referral agency" but a place where people will always find a willing ear to listen to their problems, whatever they may be.

We have a good relationship with the community in general but we have to maintain a constant advertising campaign to let people know we exist and exactly what we do.

See enclosed Feedback report on what the people want but the government won't give us! (The report referred to contained a description of a citizen meeting requesting a ceiling on growth.)

Information on finding sources for operations of the nature of [ours] , i.e., who, how to apply, general terms of reference, etc.

We find that we don't give out much specific information over
the phones because we are not sure we have heard all of the
situations and are therefore not comfortable with giving out
facts that apply to them. What we try and do is refer them on
to someone who can advise them comfortably.

Generally acquiring precise, comprehensive information is both
difficult and time consuming. Many necessary sources are outside
the community (provincial and federal) and are difficult to survey.
Basically what is needed are provincial and federal information
centres designed to support and assist local information centres.
Existing federal and provincial sources have not developed in
response to information needs as expressed locally through community
based I & R centres. Therefore their information is more PR than
pragmatically useful.

The greatest problem I have at the Information Centre is keeping
up a good flow of up-to-date communications with local agencies
with similar or complementary functions. It would be a much easier
task for me if a means were found to disseminate changes in services
at other centres in a rapid way in order to keep my information and
referrals up-to-date....
On a busy day it is next to impossible to explain "why" a problem
occurs. I am tempted to solve the problem and neglect the explana-
tion of how and why it occurred. I feel the extra explanation is
necessary to give people personal satisfaction.

We have a great deal of difficulty in finding places where ex-mental
patients can live after discharge from hospitals. The need is enor-
mous and the supply very limited.... The other problem is in finding
employment for these people. Canada Manpower has dropped their
Special Service Department. It would help us greatly if they re-
opened to help the hard-to-place find jobs.

One of the greatest frustrations is that the Provincial Ministry of Social and Family Services in Ontario has had a policy of having sections of the Family Benefits and General Welfare Assistance Act written in a way that essential needs are left to the discretion, interpretation or vague regulations which are usually only given to their own officials....
I doubt if we could really share the information which we received from a particular welfare administrator without the provincial government finding out in very short order as to who the person is.

Government information and reports are not readily retrievable because they are not all indexed or controlled in any real way.

We have some staff (especially trainees) hired from and living in various small communities who can provide us with local informal services. There are some difficulties in obtaining information on former patients of the local Ontario hospital, and also general information from the local Chamber of Commerce and the Municipal Office, but their indifference seems widespread to everyone.

Government information is most difficult due to the complexities of all levels of government.

We want to find out what specifically are the rulings regarding transients and emergency aid. The Department of Rehabilitation & Social Improvement of the Government of British Columbia has this information. We believe our problem may improve soon as we have finally got someone from their office to come down for an information session.