Getting the Voluntary Sector On-line

VolNet

The Voluntary Sector Network Support Program

Canada

What is VolNet?

The Voluntary Sector Network Support Program (VolNet) is a federal government program administered by Industry Canada to improve the voluntary sector's access to information technology and to the related skills and tools available to help it play a stronger role in Canadian society. VolNet is part of the government's Connecting Canadians initiative, which aims to make the Information Highway accessible to all Canadians in the new millennium.

VolNet's mission is to enable voluntary organizations to access and use Internet technologies to further their own missions. The program's goal is to offer Internet connectivity, including computer equipment, new information technologies, network support and Internet skills development, to 10 000 voluntary organizations by March 31, 2001.

VolNet's Objectives:

- increase the number of voluntary organizations connected to the Internet by 10 000;
- increase voluntary organizations' awareness of the benefits and strategic importance of the Internet;
- enhance the voluntary sector's ability to share information with other voluntary organizations, governments and stakeholders via the Internet;
- address the barriers to using the Internet that are the result of social inequalities of race, poverty, gender, disability, age or language by assisting voluntary organizations working in these areas to access and use the Internet;

- where appropriate, assist voluntary organizations to empower their constituents through the use of the Internet; and
- ensure that organizations become aware of the need for a strategy to sustain the use of the Internet within the organization.

Who is involved?

VolNet is a joint undertaking of the federal government and the public, private and voluntary sectors. It is guided by the VolNet National Advisory Committee (VNAC), which is comprised of voluntary and private sector representatives, along with federal government officials. The VolNet program design reflects key recommendations that were made by VNAC in their report, *Building the Technological Capacity of the Voluntary Sector* (January 1999).

The VolNet Service Package

The VolNet Service Package includes three components:

- **Internet access and support services —** basic Internet account for one year.
- **Computer equipment needed to connect to the Internet —** 50 percent of the cost of the equipment is covered by Industry Canada (up to a maximum specified by VolNet), with the recipient paying the remainder.
- **Basic Internet skills development —** basic Internet skills development to get on-line and start using the Internet.

Applied Skills Development and Support

In addition to the VolNet Service Package, VolNet also makes available applied learning opportunities and ongoing support (such as on-line discussion groups, workshops and a volunteer recruitment program to provide technology assistance) to voluntary organizations in need.

How is VolNet delivered?

Industry Canada is in the process of creating a network of VolNet delivery agencies, which will provide VolNet services to charitable and not-for-profit organizations.

Delivery agencies are responsible for:

- identifying eligible VolNet Service Package recipients and assessing their needs;
- delivering the VolNet Service Package to selected voluntary organizations;
- serving as a central point for applied skills development and support for voluntary organizations in a particular region or sector;
- leveraging resources and developing collaborative agreements.

How are delivery agencies selected?

Industry Canada is holding an ongoing competition inviting potential delivery agencies to submit proposals. Proposals received are submitted to VNAC for review against specific eligibility and evaluation criteria. VNAC then makes recommendations to Industry Canada on which delivery agency proposals to support.

Who may apply to become a delivery agency?

Industry Canada is seeking organizations or consortiums with a unique mix of Internet and voluntary sector experience to take on the role of delivery agencies. Delivery agencies may be not-for-profit organizations working in the community Internet field, charities or not-for-profits with Internet project experience, or consortiums including both a not-for-profit organization and a for-profit Internet services company.

Organizations interested in applying can obtain a copy of the *VolNet Delivery Agency Proposal Guide* by contacting VolNet at:

Tel.: 1-800-575-9200
Web site: **http://www.volnet.org**
TTY: 1-800-465-7735
E-mail: volnet@ic.gc.ca
Proposals will be accepted up to October 1, 2000.

How can voluntary organizations receive VolNet services?

Individual voluntary organizations interested in benefiting from VolNet should contact a VolNet delivery agency in their region or sector (please note that delivery agencies will be established on an ongoing basis throughout the life of the program). The delivery agency contacted will assess the organization's eligibility for VolNet services.

To find out more about VolNet, or the names and locations of delivery agencies as they are established, contact VolNet at:
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