MEASURING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Application of the Genuine Progress Index to Nova Scotia

MODULE ONE

THE ECONOMIC VALUE of
CIVIC & VOLUNTARY WORK in NOVA SCOTIA

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction __________________________________________ 1
   1.1 Limitations of the GDP and the Development of Expanded Accounts ____________________________ 1
   1.2 Nova Scotia GPI: First Data Release and Work Plan ____________________________________________ 1
2. Civic & Voluntary Work in NS: Summary Of Major Results _______________________________________ 5
3. Why Measure the Economic Value of Voluntary Work? _________________________________________ 6
4. Definitions: Who are the Volunteers? __________________________________________________________ 9
   4.1 Definitions ____________________________________________ 9
   4.2 Formal Volunteers ______________________________________ 10
   4.3 Informal Volunteers ____________________________________ 12
   4.4 Motivations for Volunteering _____________________________ 13
5. Civic & Voluntary Work in NS: Results & Valuations ____________________________________________ 13
   5.1 Hours of Voluntary Work ________________________________ 13
   5.2 Monetary Valuation ____________________________________ 17
   5.3 Job Equivalents ________________________________________ 20
   5.4 Indirect Contributions to the Economy _________________ 20
      5.4.1 Skills Training ____________________________________ 20
      5.4.2 Contributions to Others’ Work and Business ________ 22
   5.5 Connections between Volunteer Work and the Market Economy ___________________________________ 22
      5.5.1 The Time Crunch I: Overtime, Voluntary Work and Education ________________________________ 22
      5.5.2 The Time Crunch II: Women and Voluntary Work ________ 25
6. Conclusion and Recommendation ______________________________________________________________ 28
   6.1 Summary of Basic Policy Issues ____________________________ 30
   6.2 Beyond the GPI ______________________________________ 31
7. Appendix: Data Limitations and Methodology ________ 32
   7.1 Historical Data ________________________________________ 32
   7.2 Monetary Valuation Methods ____________________________ 34
      7.2.1 Alternative Valuation Methods _______________________ 36
   7.3 Out of Pocket Expenses and Skills Training ____ 37
   7.4 Job Equivalents ______________________________________ 37
   7.5 The Problem of "Involuntary" Voluntary Work ___ 38
   7.6 Exclusion of Paid Staff of Voluntary Organizations ____________________________________________ 39
   7.7 Recommendations on Data Issues _______________________ 40
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.8 Replicating the Value of Voluntary Work for Other Provinces</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Endnotes</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. References Cited</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF CHARTS

Chart 5.1:
Average Hours of Voluntary Time, by Province _______ 14
Chart 5.2:
Formal Volunteer Participation Rate, Major Canadian Cities ______________________ 15
Chart 5.3:
Informal Volunteer Participation Rates, by Province ______ 16
Chart 5.4:
Value of Voluntary Work Compared to Annual Payrolls, Selected Industries, Nova Scotia ______________________ 18
Chart 5.5:
Provincial Gross Domestic Product at Factor Cost by Industry, Nova Scotia, and Equivalent Value of Voluntary Work ______ 18
Chart 5.6:
Voluntary Work Job Equivalents, Nova Scotia _______ 21
Chart 5.7:
Overtime Participation Rates, Canada, by Education ______ 23
Chart 5.8 (Part I):
Formal Volunteers, Aged 20-54, Participation Rate by Level of Education, Nova Scotia ______________________ 24
Chart 5.8 (Part II):
Formal Volunteer Participation by Educational Attainment, Canada ______________________ 24
Chart 5.9:
Volunteer Participation Rates by Sex and Marital Status, Nova Scotia and Canada ______________________ 26
Chart 7.1:
Replacement Cost (Specialist) Hourly Rate for Volunteer Work, by Province ______________________ 35

LIST OF TABLES

Table 5.1:
Participation Rates, Voluntary Work, Nova Scotia ____ 16
Table 5.2:
Hours, Job Equivalents & Value of Voluntary Work, NS, 1997 ______________________ 19
Table 7.1:
Value of Voluntary Work Hours, Canada & Provinces, Population, 15 and Over ______________________ 43
Civic & Voluntary Work in NS:

Summary of Major Results

In 1997 Nova Scotians contributed an estimated 134 million hours of their time to civic and voluntary work, helping those in need, caring for their environment and contributing to society and local communities. Their work was worth nearly $2 billion a year to the economy, the equivalent of 81,000 jobs and nearly 10% of GDP, but was not reported or measured in any of our economic accounts. This contribution averages out to $2,500 a year for every adult Nova Scotian and $3,400 for every volunteer in the province. If this voluntary contribution were withdrawn, either our standard of living would decline dramatically, or the work would have to be replaced for pay by government and the private sector.

The generosity of Nova Scotian volunteers was not limited to time. They paid out $128 million in non-reimbursed out-of-pocket expenses to perform their voluntary work. Nova Scotians contributed another $100 million in donations to registered charities. Volunteer organizations also contributed to the formal economy by providing valuable skills training to workers in areas such as organization and management, communications, fundraising, office and technical skills, and specialized knowledge of direct use to paid jobs.

On average, every adult Nova Scotian devoted 3 hours and 23 minutes a week to civic and voluntary work, the highest rate in the country and well above the Canadian average of 2 hours and 40 minutes a week. Most volunteers are women. One-third of adults in the province work for non-profit volunteer organizations, and three-quarters volunteer informally, visiting the sick, caring for the elderly, shopping and cooking for the disabled, providing unpaid child care for working mothers, and performing a variety of other social and civic services.

Excluding the out-of-pocket expenses and monetary donations already included in the GDP, the aggregate asset value of voluntary work hours in Nova Scotia for 1997 is estimated at $1,754 million. This is the figure included in the
provincial *Genuine Progress Index* and represents the amount that would have to be paid in the government and private sectors to replace existing voluntary work in the province.