Creating a Code of Ethics:
Developing ethical standards for a sector

Canadian Council for International Co-operation

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For additional materials on the CCIC Ethics Programme, please visit CCIC’s web site at www.web.net/ccic-ccci/volsector.htm

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Executive Summary and Lessons

In the early 1990s, members of the Canadian Council for International Co-operation recognized the need and went on to conceptualize and develop a membership-wide Code of Ethics. Ratified and adopted in 1995, the Code of Ethics delineates the minimum ethical standards which CCIC's members must observe in the areas of governance, organizational integrity, management/human resources, financial management, and fundraising communications.

This report records the steps involved in developing the Code of Ethics and the Ethics Programme. It includes the reasons both were conceptualized and developed, who were involved, what items were included and why, as well as the key lessons learned in its development and implementation. The report does not encompass an evaluation of the Code itself or members' compliance.

The CCIC membership preferred to develop a collegial ethics programme that would strengthen the ethical standards of all members through self-reflection and common dialogue on ethical issues, rather than externally monitor one another. The Ethics programme, therefore, was developed based on a philosophy of peer accountability.

The Code of Ethics is the heart of the Ethics Programme. A second vital component is the self-reflection and interpretative analysis that each organization undertakes through the self-certification process. The third vital component is the external reflection that occurs between organizations with the guidance of the Ethics Review Committee, which serves as a forum for such reflection.

By offering an historical analysis of the process of developing the Code, this document will provide a record for CCIC's institutional memory as well as insights for other NGOs and related organizations involved in similar processes. These lessons are shared with the hope of benefiting any other organization wishing to implement an ethics programme.

As the ethics programme continues to move forward, it will adapt and improve with the help of lessons along the way. A summary of the key lessons learned so far include:

- Membership ownership, leadership and resources, rather than an imposed process were essential factors for success
- The creation of the programme was possible due to the timing of a convergence of various factors that helped to highlight a vulnerability of the sector
- Initial timelines for completing the compliance process were too tight and permitting extensions ensured organizations the required time to complete the process more fully.
Flexibility in terms of Code interpretations helped to make the Code applicable to the diverse nature of organizations in the membership.

Continuous support and pressure was needed throughout the process to keep members moving toward compliance.

Leadership from the CCIC Board contributed to highlighting the membership ownership behind the programme and ensuring the process moved forward.

Provision of interpretive documents (e.g. Guidance Document) would have been more timely if provided at the beginning stages of the process.

The self-certification process gave members the opportunity to discuss and develop their own policies and practices most relevant for their own organization creating a learning environment.

The requirement that the self-certification tool had to be submitted and each member had to attest to compliance, provided organizations with the impetus to address management and governance issues that had previously been given low priority.

Development of various means of promoting the Code of Ethics and Programme helps to ensure that ethical discussions stay pertinent and alive.

Diversity within the committees brings a helpful mix of expertise and opinions;
The Canadian Council for International Cooperation (CCIC) is a coalition of approximately 100 Canadian non-governmental organizations (NGOs), working on the frontlines of social justice, humanitarian aid, economic and democratic development—both in Canada and in the developing world. Among the members are religious and secular development groups, professional associations, labour unions and groups devoted to literacy, education or youth.

In the early '90s, members of CCIC conceptualized and began to develop a membership-wide set of ethical standards. This culminated in 1995 with the adoption of the CCIC Code of Ethics, which delineates the minimum ethical standards that CCIC's members must observe in the areas of governance, organizational integrity, management/human resources, financial management, and fundraising communications.

The Ethics Programme grew out of the Code in recognition of the need to implement the Code and ensure its continuing evolution. This programme was designed to be collegial rather than judgmental; it was designed on the basis of peer accountability. NGOs are asked to attest to CCIC that they have policies and procedures in place that meet the spirit and/or letter of the Code. The self-certification process of coming into compliance is designed to help members reflect upon their ethical policies and promote dialogue about ethics.

This report records the steps involved in developing the Code of Ethics and the Ethics Programme. It includes the reasons both were conceptualized and developed, who were involved, what items were included and why, as well as the key lessons learned in its development and implementation. The report does not encompass an evaluation of the Code itself or members' compliance. In providing an historical analysis of the process of developing the Code, this document will provide a record for CCIC's institutional memory as well as insights for other NGOs and related organizations wishing to implement an ethics programme.

The methodology used to research the findings for this report involved consultation of existing documents and Minutes of Board meetings pertaining to the Code, external documents regarding the nature of codes of conduct/ethics and some 22 interviews with key people involved throughout the development and implementation of the Code. These included members of the Code of Ethics Committee, representatives from the Ethics Review Committee, CCIC staff, and representatives of member NGOs. The interviews generally covered context, process/development, challenges, and recommendations/suggestions.
Context

The development of a code of ethics relating to organizational, management and operational activities was initiated in the early 1990s by members in response to a series of concerns and pressures which seemed to converge at that time. By the AGM in 1992 members had fully expressed their concerns and suggestions for a formalized code of ethics process. There were four broad sets of concerns and issues that served as the impetus for calls for a code of ethics.

First, there was a conjunction, in the early 1990s of two or three key events. The 1990s were a period of increasing media attention on NGOs, especially in relation to issues of public accountability and trust. In this respect media attention began to focus increasingly on issues of governance, operational and administrative practices. At least two member organizations came under specific media scrutiny during this period for their practices. It was in this context that many members expressed a need to develop a code of ethics. Of particular concern was the sense that negative public and media attention often fails to differentiate between specific organizations. As a consequence, any negative public attention on inappropriate administrative, financial or communication practices tends to impact on the sector as a whole. The call for a code of ethics in this context was an attempt to protect the whole sector. “We thought,” mentioned one member, “that we could avoid any broad-based negative media reports.”

Second, there was an increasing trend, in both public and private organizations and agencies, for public accountability, internal governance, management efficiencies and performance review processes. By the early 1990s, many public organizations and private agencies began to emphasize management processes which attempted to implement more transparent and public reporting practices, performance review processes and general accountability mechanisms. Members felt that the sector should participate in this general trend in order to both develop more efficient practices (especially in the context of the low public support for development initiatives that was happening at the time) and to ensure and increase the level of public confidence.

Third, members were increasingly concerned about fund-raising methods and communications as they have a particularly key impact on the perceptions and reputation of the sector among the public. As one member suggests, fund-raising constitutes “the most central bond” between the public and the sector. In this sense, fund-raising is an issue that can both provoke undue public attention and disproportionately impact levels of public confidence if an ethical crisis occurs. For example, questions had begun to arise as to whether donor funds were actually being
used for the purpose they were solicited. A code of ethics would help protect the sector by standardizing and ensuring transparency around issues of fund-raising.

Fourth, in the context of both changing public sector accountability practices as well as increasing public scrutiny of agencies and organizations, many members anticipated the possibility of pressure from external agencies (notably from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)) to conform with various codes or accountability practices. In this sense the early 1990s represented a limited ‘window of opportunity’, as one member described it, during which the sector could engage in a self-directed process and avoid the imposition of a code or accountability programme from government bodies. In this context, members expressed concern that the sector should be pro-active and develop their own code in order to avoid conditions imposed from CIDA that may not conform to the specific objectives and priorities of the sector.

**Drafting a Code of Ethics**

In 1992, CCIC members began to discuss development of a set of ethical standards that would be subscribed to by the entire CCIC membership. In 1993, a sector-wide Code of Ethics was conceptualized, as well as an approach to implementation-namely a self-certifying and learning process. The Annual General Meeting then established a Code of Ethics Committee (consisting of individuals from member organizations, some being CCIC Board members) to develop the draft code. This process took two years and involved feedback from Annual General Meetings (AGM) in both '93 and '94. During this stage, the Committee consulted with external experts and ethicists, researched different models, and finally, developed the draft Code of Ethics. After the 1994 AGM discussed and approved the draft Code of Ethics, the Committee developed a draft Self-Certification tool and piloted it with a sample of some member organizations. On the basis of this pilot, the Code of Ethics Committee modified and revised the Code.

One of the first challenges in the Code’s development was that existing models of other codes were rare, and therefore benchmarking was made difficult. In fact, one of the only sources was an American template, developed by Interaction. There were many challenges in having to use this model, since some of the aspects of this template did not apply to Canadian NGOs and thereby had to be modified, sections had to be added, and a Canadian context had to be emphasized. It was nonetheless noted that the American template, in its broader, more philosophical ethical ideas, was applicable.
Adoption of Code of Ethics

In 1995 the Code of Ethics was officially ratified and adopted by the AGM, along with an implementation process and time frames for members to come into compliance. The implementation process involved a self-certification exercise where members examined their policies and practices to ensure that they met the spirit and letter of the Code. The Code of Ethics Committee revised their Self-Certification tool based on the results of the pilot and distributed it to members. To help with the self-certification process, the Committee developed, and in 1996 distributed, the Guidance Document; a background document that would help members interpret the Code. Members were initially given two years to reach full compliance.

A learning/discussion process was at the forefront of the Ethics Programme from its inception. The members preferred to develop a collegial programme that would strengthen the ethical standards of all members through self-reflection and common dialogue on ethical issues, rather than externally monitor one another. CCIC was not given the mandate to independently assess members’ ethical standards. Instead, the Ethics programme was developed based on a philosophy of peer accountability. Each member would be expected to attest when they are in compliance with all the items of the Code. However, if other organizations or individuals, including the public, become concerned that a member is not abiding by certain areas of the Code, then a concern procedure could be launched with CCIC. The Code of Ethics Committee developed a Registration of Concern form to assist with this latter procedure.

The Code of Ethics Committee led the Ethics Programme through this initial period. The membership of the Committee changed over its 4-year life, but was always composed of CCIC members, including one liaison to the CCIC Board of Directors. Designated CCIC staff began to provide support to this Committee in 1994 to help move forward the finalization of the Code and the development of the Guidance document. In 1997 additional expertise was added to that of the Committee to form the Diversity Reference Group. This sub-committee of 5 people met four times between January and June ‘97, and was established to assist members to come into compliance with the Code items related to diversity and to develop a culture of inclusion through their policies and practices.
Components of the Ethics Programme

The Code of Ethics is the heart of the Ethics Programme. A second vital component is the self-reflection and interpretative analysis that each organization undertakes through the self-certification process. The third vital component is the external reflection that occurs between organizations with the guidance of the Ethics Review Committee, which serves as a forum for such reflection.

The Code

The Code of Ethics brings together the long-standing CCIC Principles of Development, which are the broad, philosophical vision of development held by the Council, and a Code of Conduct, which delineates both practical conduct rules and broader ethical principles.

The ethical principles in the Code relate to things such as fair and impartial governance, integrity, transparency, accountability to donors, etc. They are goals to be attained, but at times may conflict with one another (e.g. transparency and confidentiality) and so require dialogue and consensus building among colleagues when applying them to everyday decision-making.

The conduct components were considered important because of the changing nature of NGOs in the 1990s. For example, many NGOs have complex administrative structures, and need to have an ethical code of conduct in place regarding finances and employment practices, among other areas. The kinds of conduct rules include, for example that all fundraising contracts shall be put in writing, or that each organization shall submit an audited financial statement to CCIC within ninety days of its AGM. Failing to abide by such rules may not always be an unethical practice, but they are 'do's' and 'don't' rules that members agreed should be followed.

The ambiguity inherent in judging ethical principles and the fact that conduct requirements may change if new effective ways of working are introduced, speaks to the necessity of continually reinforcing a dialogue process and the danger of falling into a rigid policing process.

The Code has been both praised and criticized for the extent of its content. While this study was not to be an evaluation of the Code, the interviews did highlight the need for reflection before undertaking any future revisions. For example, there was some disagreement as to whether or not the Principles of Development should be incorporated into the Code. Some interview subjects praised the Code for its...
comprehensive content, but there were also those who felt that the Code is generally too prescriptive: and that in order to encourage more dialogue and compliance, it should be less rigid. One interview subject felt that the Code has a "militant, left-wing, politically correct" tone and felt that it was important to achieve a greater sense of moral objectivity in the tone of the Code. However, developers of the Code did seek to strike a balance between moral objectivity and the Principles of Development that were already agreed to by all CCIC members.

The Self-Certification Process

The Self Certification Tool

Once the Code was implemented, the draft Self-Certification Tool that had been piloted with some organizations was finalized and distributed to all members. This tool is a form on which members indicate their compliance by recording how they are in compliance, or the ongoing work they are engaged in to reach compliance (see example in appendix 2). The information in the form must be provided and signed off by both staff and Board before compliance is recognized. It continues to be used for new members of CCIC.

The Self-Certification Tool was a compromise between an automatic sign-on to the Code (i.e. where the organization agrees in principle to the Code), which could be meaningless in that compliance did not have to be justified, and costly, burdensome, external verification. This tool was conceived as a way to allow members to determine the steps they need to take to reach compliance. The document highlights the different areas of the Code and then asks members to demonstrate how they are in compliance and allows them to make comments. In 1995, 2 columns were added to help this process: the 'Describe How' column and 'Assistance Desired' column. Additional columns for 'Timeline' and 'Action Steps' were also later added at the suggestion of the Ethics Review Committee in order to better monitor member progress and show that the members were indeed working on compliance in an active way. Demanding written explanations appears to be a means to respect autonomy and yet observe compliance while also being a means for members to provide information on their material and needs for advice as they strive for compliance.

CCIC used the self-certification tool to identify each member's request for assistance. As a result, a collection of sample policies from a cross-section of the members were collected and distributed as needed. In addition, questions raised on the form were brought to one of the Committees for advice on clarifying interpretations of the Code. A Diversity workshop to elucidate issues and concerns surrounding NGO diversity policies was also held. A Policy Kit on minority equity and diversity policies was developed and distributed. This kit listed the key steps involved in developing and implementing a diversity policy.
The initial implementation procedure provided members with a 2 year grace period, until June '97, to come into compliance. Few members met this timeline and the grace period was at first extended to May '98, then again until September '99 and finally until May, 2000. It was recognized that the initial grace period was not realistic given the amount of work that organizations found needed to be done to reach compliance. Most organizations did not have the expected written policies in place and it took them much longer than initially expected to develop and adopt such policies.

By early 1998 concern was growing about the length of time it was taking members to finally reach compliance. Although there was a willingness to extend the grace period, this could not go on indefinitely. At their May 1998 meeting, the CCIC Board determined the long-term consequences of failing to come into compliance. It was determined that members would face the loss of the right to have their names included in CCIC communications, and the loss of access to CCIC funds. These consequences were not applied, however, if members were showing a willingness to move ahead on compliance by describing the concrete action steps being taken. The prevailing desire remained that members be encouraged to reach compliance, rather than be punished for not reaching it. The Board played a key role in this encouragement and made a final push toward the May 2000 AGM, when the desired goal of more than 90% compliance was reached.

**The Guidance Document**

It was decided early in the process that members would need some sort of interpretative document to accompany the Code to determine if their policies/practices were in compliance with the spirit and precepts of the Code. Following the adoption of the Code, work on what was to become the Guidance Document was initiated.

By 1996, the Guidance Document was completed and distributed to member organizations. It was central to CCIC’s thoughts concerning the interpretative aspects of the Ethics Programme. Unlike the Code itself, the Guidance Document needed to be developed from scratch. Membership input needed to be solicited to understand their concerns regarding the Code, before the Guidance Document could be developed and fine-tuned. This meant, however, that it was not immediately available to members at a time when it would have been most helpful.

A primary role of the Guidance Document was that it would explain the flexibility in how the Code could be applied. The Guidance Document sought to engage people meaningfully with the issues, and members appreciated that the Guidance Document was developed to explain both the flexibility and the precision regarding the application and implementation of the Code of Ethics. The explanations within the Guidance Document illustrated the diverse range of ways members could apply and implement the Code while also providing more clear definitions and interpretations of what specifically the Code required. Thus, the Guidance Document strove for a balance
between allowing for flexibility in implementation and for providing a common language and interpretation of the Code.

Ethical Reflection

Ethics Review Committee

By March 1997 the mandate of the Code of Ethics Committee was considered completed. A new committee, the Ethics Review Committee (ERC), was then formed. As planned in the initial implementation of the Ethics programme, the mandate of the ERC was to:

- periodically review and recommend to the Board of Directors of CCIC revisions of the Code of Ethics;
- do an annual compliance review of all Member organizations;
- revise and adapt the guidance document according to the experiences and wisdom of the membership;
- conduct special compliance reviews in cases of written complaints about the possible non-compliance of other member organizations.

The turnover period between committees was somewhat awkward. Because some members were in compliance, the expertise of the next level of the programme, namely the establishment of the Ethics Review Committee was needed. However, fewer members were actually in compliance and the rest were still undertaking the implementation process. Despite a continuing need for the role played by the Code of Ethics Committee, it was disbanded and the Ethics Review Committee was recruited. This created a dilemma for the new committee as their mandate was designed to assist members after compliance was reached. New committee members were initially put into a potentially compromising position in that they could have been asked to provide advice on allegations regarding compliance of members who had not yet even certified that they were in compliance. There was also a contradiction between the enforcer role of pushing members to complete the compliance process and the objective advisor role for which they were mandated. To remove this contradiction and to put the responsibility more directly into the hands of the CCIC Board, the Membership and Bylaw Committee was given the mandate to pursue membership compliance, releasing the Ethics Review Committee to resume its true mandate.

The ERC was designed to include 5 members: one is to be a member of the Board of CCIC, two are recruited from within the membership and two are recruited from outside the membership. All are chosen for their understanding and knowledge of organizational ethics and the international co-operation sector. The term of service is 2 years. The balance of people from within and outside the NGO sector provides the
Committee with an excellent mix of expertise. It has been important that the ERC has been able to function bilingually. It is apparent that the ERC has kept ethical issues alive with CCIC Board members, and has been diligent in arguing that compliance with the Code must be reached.

The ERC has played a key role in promoting the Code and benefits of the Ethics Programme to the membership. Strategies have included writing articles for CCIC's quarterly Au Courant Magazine, responding to members' ethical dilemmas through a column called Dear Ms. Ethics and flagging items of interest in "Ethics in a Flash", in the bi-weekly CCIC email publication Flash. In addition, a section of the CCIC web site (www.web.net/ccic-ccci) includes these and other items related to the work of the Committee. The latter is one of the means through which the profile of the Ethics programme is being raised with a wider audience, beyond the membership.

It was always recognized that the Code would need to encompass vehicles through which ethical issues could be discussed. Ultimately, these mechanisms were conceived of as a means of keeping the Code, and discussions about the practical applications of ethics, alive in the minds of members. For example, Dear Ms. Ethics is intended to answer ethical questions and provide a vehicle for the ERC to share these concerns among the wider membership. Along with these promotion mechanisms, the ERC has continued to play an active role in keeping up its consultative and ongoing sounding-board role.

**The Concern Procedure**

As part of the peer-accountability process, the programme identified the need for a mechanism to allow for allegations by organizations or individuals concerned about the possible lack of compliance of a member. To accommodate such concerns, the Code of Ethics Committee created a Registration of Concern form that included a description of the issue, the organizations involved, and suggestions for ways that this concern could be handled. Again, the purpose of the concern procedure was not punitive, but set out as a forum for dialogue. The concern procedure was not designed to pronounce judgement, but to verify the organization's compliance and further elaborate the ethical standards of the sector.

The Concern Procedure is an integral aspect of the learning process. It is also integral to the mandate of the Ethics Review Committee, as it is a vehicle through which members can take advantage of the ERC's expertise, particularly when it comes to potentially controversial areas of the Code. The Registration of Concern form is completed and submitted to the ERC who then discuss the concern registered, determine whether there has been a breach of the Code and, if necessary develop a learning process with the member concerned and/or the wider membership. There is allowance for disciplinary action in extreme cases of non-compliance and resistance to change. In such instances the CCIC Board of Directors may determine that a member organization would no longer be eligible for membership.
Recently, the Ethics Review Committee has agreed that the concern procedure is not limited to allegations of perceived wrong-doing, but is also open to responding to the requests of organizations with questions about potential ethical dilemmas within their own organizations. This role is considered a vital part of building a membership-wide organizational culture of day-to-day ethical decision-making, rather than a reactive culture that waits for an ethical crisis before responding.

Key Lessons

The overall process of implementing and developing the CCIC Code of Ethics programme has provided numerous lessons, in terms of both its strengths and the recognized challenges faced by everyone involved. What follows are some of the key lessons learned throughout the process to-date.

Need for Flexibility

A notable lesson was around the need for flexibility of time lines. For many members there were unpredictable problems and delays related to the implementation of the Code and the completion of the Self-Certification Tool. There were some difficulties encountered, for example, in interpreting some elements and specific provisions of the Code. In addition there were also difficulties in actually developing policies required by the Code. The process of writing, revising and approving policy documents – a process in which some organizations had only limited experience – proved to be a time-consuming and intensive process. In this sense, there was less difficulty in adopting specific practices mandated by the Code than in ensuring that those practices were inscribed in written policies. All of these factors proved to be substantially more time consuming than many participants had initially envisioned. The amount of time actually required for some aspects of the implementation process, says one member, “completely took us by surprise.”

In this context, members appreciated the overall flexibility that CCIC was able to provide. The initial time frame for compliance, which was adopted at the 1995 Annual General Meeting, asked all members to complete the self-certification process by February 1996. The self-certification tool was distributed to members by late 1995. In addition, a grace period was introduced which lasted until June 1997 during which members would use the self-certification process to identify challenges and implement appropriate policies. It became clear, however, that many of the groups would not be able to achieve the certification and compliance objectives within this initial time frame.
Because of the recognized problems with the deadlines and time frames, adjustments were made throughout the process. Time-flexibility allowed members both to complete the compliance procedures thoroughly and to feel less pressure throughout the process. “It allowed us to be more complete” comments one member, summarizing a view held by many members. Although allowing each member the flexibility to self-certify and interpret the Code within their own context was necessary, this flexibility was also identified as time-consuming and delayed the ability of CCIC to move into the cross-organizational reflection stage of the programme. Further delays reached the point of becoming detrimental to the programme and a firm deadline date became necessary.

Adequate Support

The need for support provided by CCIC was another lesson from the process. As has been mentioned, the implementation and compliance processes confronted many members with a number of unanticipated delays, problems and concerns. For example, there were delays related to the requirement to write and adopt policy statements to support the compliance process. Some of the smaller organizations did not have the policy-development capacity or experience required to quickly develop and write effective policy statements. In addition, difficulties or delays were encountered in interpreting the Code and in facilitating dialogue among major stakeholders (staff, Board members, partners, lawyers, etc.). Boards often meet only 3 or 4 times a year so the approval process was sometimes lengthy as a result.

The Guidance Document was an important source of support to members trying to interpret the Code in their own organizations. In response to some of the problems, CCIC was able to provide a high level of support to members in a number of different and important ways. CCIC dedicated staff to provide advice, analysis and clarifications to CCIC members on all facets of the process. In addition, by 1996 CCIC began collecting policies from various members and distributing these as samples of how Code provisions could be incorporated. These proved invaluable for many members during the compliance process.

The need for significant staff support was not initially recognized. Instead staff believed that the members would be able to proceed through the compliance process on their own and notify CCIC when the process was complete. The need for assistance was underestimated and extra staff time had to be subsequently allocated to ensure movement toward compliance and to capture the learnings from the process.

In the words of one member, the support from CCIC was both practical and important in reducing “the possibility of isolation” during the process of compliance.
Timely Material Support

Although, as mentioned, the support provided by CCIC (staff resources, policy models and interpretive advice) was an integral part of the process, several components of the support could have been provided earlier in the process. Of particular concern in this regard is the timing of the Guidance Document. The document was not finalized and distributed to members until 1996. In this sense, although conceived in the early stages of the process, the Guidance Document was not an initial component of the self-certification process; yet it played an integral role in organizations' self-certification once it was available. Policy models had been collected and distributed by the time most organizations were ready to develop and write policies at a later step of the process. But the Guidance Document was needed from the very beginning of the process, as organizations began the process of interpreting the Code and assessing the status of existing practices in relation to Code provisions, and it was not immediately available. Time-consuming discussions in relation to interpreting Code provisions, seemed to improve when the Guidance Document was released. Developing the Guidance Document earlier could have helped some organizations meet earlier time frames. “The deadlines,” suggests one member representative, “might have been more easily achieved if the Guidance Document was available from the beginning.” In hindsight, seminars and workshops for interpretation of the Code also may have been beneficial at the early stages of development and distribution.

Learning Process

A further lesson of the process relates to the internal benefits that accrued to members. The process was structured in such a way that it allowed members to engage in a meaningful learning process. The self-certification process allowed members to discuss and ‘work through’ issues in their organizations. By allowing members to both manage their own self-certification process and to develop their own policies, the process encouraged organizations to review operational, governance and management procedures. One member, for example, indicated that the self-certification process prompted “important discussions” that had been avoided for some time. In the day-to-day life of organizations, discussions relating to management and governance procedures, although important, are often subordinated to ‘core’ activities relating to campaigns and programming. The Code of Ethics, in this sense, presented a timely way to move administrative and governance issues higher on organizational agendas. In the words of one member, the Code of Ethics and compliance processes provoked a “healthy set of discussions” that have improved the quality and procedures of the organization.
Member Ownership

The Code was membership-owned and led from its inception; active membership involvement even in the initial stages was integral to the Code's eventual acceptance and success. This lesson is shared by another Canadian organization that had developed their own Code of Ethics and noted that having member buy-in at the early stages results in less debate and fewer conflicts when members are expected to come into compliance. Members are also not likely to feel as though the umbrella organization is too restrictive in imposing a code. A top-down, authoritarian code would not have worked for CCIC members, who pride themselves on the autonomy and integrity of their organizations.

Although the initial call for a code of ethics originated within the membership, there arose some concerns with maintaining a sense of member ownership throughout the compliance process. As CCIC staff became more involved, and provided more support and, in particular, began encouraging respect for time frames, the sense of member-ownership became a more urgent concern. As the compliance processes became lengthy and complex there was a general sense of ‘fatigue’ or occasional lack of focus. Initially it was decided that members would mainly direct the self-certification process. However, it became evident that, in addition to the staff involvement mentioned above, CCIC Board involvement was also required to provide increasing support, and this served as an important factor in maintaining interest and focus. Board reports and key discussions at CCIC Annual General Meetings served to remind members that the process was a member-originating and member-oriented process. One member, for example, mentioned that the 1998 AGM, which adopted modified time lines, was useful in ensuring that the priorities of members (for flexible time frames) remained central to the process. The leadership that the CCIC Board provided to push for full compliance ensured that the process continued to move forward.
Keeping the Programme Present

A final challenge associated with the overall process relates to the difficulties in ensuring that the Ethics Programme remains a visible, active and important element in the organizational life of the sector. Now that the compliance processes are nearing completion, there is a concern that the work and impact of the Code will be considered ‘finished’ or complete. Perhaps because so much energy and time was devoted to the overall compliance process, there is now a concern that members will relegate the Ethics Programme to the ‘back shelf’ and it will no longer serve as a useful learning tool. Similarly, there are some difficulties in ensuring that the Ethics Programme continues to remain present as an ongoing source of both ethical dialogue and learning activities. Although it is clear that the Dear Ms Ethics and Ethics in a Flash initiatives have, to some degree, helped to keep the Ethics programme present, this remains an ongoing challenge. A certain amount of ‘fatigue’ exists that is associated with lengthy or difficult compliance discussions and processes. Some additional time would be required during which members could become ‘refreshed’ and could identify ways to ensure that the Ethics programme becomes an ongoing process of dialogue and ethical ‘introspection’.

One example of this challenge relates to the Concern Procedure. At the time of this writing, it has not been widely used by member organizations or members of the public. It is difficult to assess exactly why the Concern Procedure has not been widely utilized. On one hand, most members are aware of the Concern Procedure and the general ways in which concerns would be initiated and addressed. On the other hand, it has not yet been an actively engaged part of the programme. Given the fatigue mentioned above, it may be only a matter of time, therefore, before organizations begin to use the concern procedure and begin to engage in ethical dialogue. There seems, however, to also be some general hesitation to initiate a Concern and, in so doing, possibly causing a rift within the sector. A continuing challenge, in this regard, therefore, remains how to promote the Concern Procedure as a mechanism of dialogue, discussion and learning and less as an exercise in policing. In this respect it may prove to be difficult to promote a view of the Concern Procedure as an important check on non-compliance while at the same time promoting it as being a positive learning process.
Facing new challenges

Now that the compliance processes for existing members is completed, there is a need to promote the compliance process as an important learning process and as the basis for continual learning activities and dialogue throughout the sector (for example at CCIC AGMs) on recurring ethical issues and concerns. At this point, ethical concerns within the sector are mainly dealt with as confidential and formal complaints, and not as broad and public dialogues. There will be a new challenge, in this sense, to translate private ethical complaints into more public processes and dialogues. For example, it is possible for CCIC to initiate and facilitate roundtable discussions and seminars among a wide range of members on issues that provoke frequent complaints and ethical concerns. More work is required to develop new ways for the Code to develop and evolve. The Code’s impact could be evaluated through a formal evaluation process with member organizations so that further development and evolution could be identified.

Conclusion

The CCIC Ethics programme has taken much longer than originally anticipated to develop and implement. There has been a great deal more time and resources needed for the process than anyone anticipated. Despite the challenges, members continue to understand and appreciate the need for a set of ethical standards and a peer accountability process. Members acknowledge the difficulties they have faced in reaching compliance but at the same time appreciate that it has forced them to make necessary changes to strengthen their organizational structures. CCIC has not noticed any backlash of withdrawals of members as a result of the compliance requirement. Organizations continue to be willing to undertake the process before being accepted as a new member. Although this study may outline some ways that things could have been done differently, we are working with the benefit of hindsight. Resources such as this one that outline lessons and suggestions were not available to the creators of the CCIC Ethics programme. Overall the programme appears to be holding up well and will continue to evolve and improve as the lessons are integrated. This report is offered as a tool for others to also benefit from these lessons.
Appendix 1

Chronology

1993

- Initial requirement for a Code of Ethics discussed and acknowledged;
- AGM establishes a Code of Ethics Committee to develop a draft code;
- Committee consults with experts and ethicists, researches other models, and develops a draft Code of Ethics.

1994

- AGM (May) discusses and approves draft Code of Ethics;
- Self-certification tools developed, and self-certification trial initiated with a sample of member organizations;
- Self-certification trial evaluation is initiated, and the Code of Ethics Committee modifies and revises Code.

1995

- Code of Ethics officially ratified and adopted by AGM;
- AGM also adopts implementation process and compliance processes and time frames;
- Work on Guidance Document initiated.

1996

- Work on Guidance Document completed and distributed;
- Self-certification tool distributed to all CCIC members;
- Members begin to initiate certification and compliance processes in their organizations;
- Code of Ethics Committee consults and supports self-certification process and collects policy samples from members;
- Compliance Logo developed.
1997

- Concern procedure and document developed and distributed
- Diversity Committee established and report delivered.
- Ethics Review Committee established

1998

- AGM ratifies new timelines for compliance (by May '99);
- Diversity Workshop held;
- Policy Kit on minority equity and diversity policies developed and distributed.

1999 - 2000

- Ms. Ethics and Ethics in a Flash strategies developed and implemented.
- Greater than 90% of members indicate they have reached full compliance
### CODE OF CONDUCT

#### Governance

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>In compliance</th>
<th>Describe how</th>
<th>Action Steps</th>
<th>Timeline and level of priority</th>
<th>Assistance desired</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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3.1.1 Organizations shall be governed fairly, impartially, and responsibly by their respective Board of Directors.

3.1.2 Each organization shall have an independent, active, and informed Board of Directors, serving without compensation as directors. The Board shall have policies which specify the frequency of Board meetings (at least two per year) and adequate attendance by directors (at least a majority on average). The Board may designate an Executive Committee, will define its role and will review its reports. The Board shall have policies restricting the number of employees who are voting members of the Board; providing limits for directors being related to one another, the Founder, or the Executive Director; and establishing limited terms of service for directors and officers.
Who was involved in the self-certification of the organization?

We, the undersigned, certify that the above information is accurate and correct.

_____________________________________     __________________________        __________________________________
Chairperson                                                            Date                                                     Executive Director