

# CANADIAN ENVIRONMENTAL NETWORK STRATEGIC PLAN 2010-2013

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## **ABOUT RCEN**

### **Our Role**

The Canadian Environmental Network (RCEN) is an independent, non-partisan organization. For over 32 years, RCEN has been operating as a national network of Environmental Non-Governmental Organization (ENGO) and as a bridge between this community and the Federal government. Our programs help build stronger communities, progressive policies and best practices through public participation.

### **Our Vision**

A healthy environment for healthy living.

### **Our Mission**

To facilitate and promote sharing of knowledge, resources and collaborative efforts to influence domestic and international practices, policies, laws and agreements affecting the environment and human well-being.

## **I. PROGRAMS**

Built around coordination, facilitation, research, consultation, communications and networking services, the Canadian Environmental Network (RCEN) is organized into four key program areas that will serve its strategic goals:

### **1. Communications and networking program**

Through its electronic bulletin, RCEN is able to reach over 2000 subscribers every two weeks. RCEN-specific and Canadian environmental news is disseminated through special announcements, publications and reports, event and job postings, and action alerts from member groups. The e-Bulletin is one of the primary means by which the RCEN shares information with its member groups, along with RCEN's website, its intranet, and targeted communications through its affiliate networks. Networking and information dissemination is promoted at every level of the organization, through provincial and territorial teleconferences, quarterly reports, regular caucus meetings, workshops and RCEN's annual conference.

### **2. Public Policy Development program**

Through the works of its issue-based National Caucuses and their consulting services, RCEN has refined a unique, transparent, national, bilingual, democratic consultation and delegation selection process. Over the years, RCEN has selected over 3000 delegates (and alternates) from its membership to take part in various policy development initiatives sponsored by Environment Canada and other federal agencies.

Stakeholder consultations offer the following benefits to Canadians:

- Engages Canadians with diverse perspectives for a healthier democracy
- Informs Canadian on the issues worked on by government.
- Enriches policy development by providing the expertise of those working on the ground and outside government.
- Provides feedback about existing policies and how they work in practice.
- Builds trust between stakeholders and government.
- Assists stakeholders in resolving differences of opinion & finding a compromise.
- Increases the legitimacy of decisions.
- Tells politicians about Canadians' priorities and values.
- Results in better policies, solutions and decisions.

To this date, the RCEN continues to play a key role in selecting delegates to participate in the development of federal environmental policies.

### **3. Outreach program**

As a national network, the RCEN focuses its outreach efforts on national and institutional actors such as federal government departments, companies, universities and other civil society sectors, whereas our members (through the provincial and territorial affiliates) further the outreach to local communities in their vicinity. RCEN reinforces its outreach program by developing partnerships and furthering opportunities for collaborative efforts and initiatives.

### **4. Affiliate Networks capacity program**

The RCEN's Provincial and Territorial Affiliate Networks, located in each Canadian province and in the Yukon Territory, play an essential role in the Network as the local, regional contacts for both ENGOs and the public. They support their members in local and provincial initiatives and consultations, and connect them to national and international opportunities through networking activities, regional caucuses and working groups and RCEN's national caucuses.

Over the past 5 years, through its federal contribution agreement, RCEN has allocated over \$1 million in direct funding to its provincial and territorial affiliates. The RCEN is also conducting training initiatives such as the "Board Development Sessions" as well as workshops conducted during the Annual General Assembly.

## **II. CONTEXT**

Since the birth of the Canadian Environmental Network (RCEN), in 1977, we have seen an increase in local, national and international government initiatives in response to issues raised by conservationists and environmental activists around the world. The environmental dialogue has also expanded, and we are seeing a growing consciousness within the public and private realms. At the same time, over the course of the last three decades the state of the world environment has continued to degrade despite the many efforts made. The human impact on the environment has been underestimated and the complexities of the issues and potential impacts are believed greater than originally understood.

It was concluded by the RCEN that it is critical that we revisit the way we dialogue, operate, and interact with the environment and society. While the RCEN's role remains critically valuable, in order to interact

with a rapidly changing environment, and to meet our vision of a sustainable world with a healthy environment for healthy living, the organization must refine its approach to allow room for innovation .

### III. Strategic Goals for 2010-2013:

For 2010-2013, the RCEN will focus on attaining the following three key objectives:

- A. **To strengthen** the organizational capacity of the Network
- B. **To broaden** the voice of the environmental movement in Canada
- C. **To build** capacity in preparation for the transition to a sustainable society

#### A. Strengthening the organizational capacity of the Network

The RCEN is committed to strengthening the capacity of ENGOs across Canada by:

- Providing access to extensive expertise in the movement through:
  - Promoting effective consultations in federal policy development processes
  - Research and consulting projects
  - Managing a delegate selection process that allows ENGOs from across Canada to participate in federal decision making policy processes
- Supporting an extensive caucus structure that allows ENGOs from across Canada to exchange information on various environmental issues;
- Incubating working groups on emerging issues which groups may evolve into caucuses ;
- Providing funding to 11 affiliate networks that provide a wide range of services to ENGOs (training, workshops, information dissemination, etc);
- Providing staff, affiliates and members access to better communication tools;
- Actively engaging in securing multi-level funding for the organization;
- Investigating all potential areas of streamlining and operational efficiency within the organization.

#### B. Broadening the voice of the environmental movement across Canada

Much has changed in the environmental movement over the past few decades. All elements of society are increasingly engaged in solving environmental problems. Environmental issues affect Canadians from all sectors including: labour groups, for-profit organizations, government. While the current structure of the organization is primarily focused on ENGO composition there is growing consensus that new players must be invited to the table in order to push the environmental agenda in Canada.

The RCEN will continue to work with its members, affiliates and caucus in order to determine the best way to engage new partners in this discussion and promote a multi-stakeholder approach to reaching sustainable development.

#### C. Building capacity in preparation for a transition to a sustainable society

Our environmental scan indicates that due to increasing environmental degradation there is a need for mitigation and adaptation measures resulting from climate change, toxic pollution and other environmental changes which will have social and economic impacts. In order to transition

to a sustainable society, the links between ecology, society and economy need to be better understood and new mechanisms must be put in place. The RCEN will build capacity amongst its membership in order to contribute to community resilience and adaptation activities.

#### IV. Strategic Plan Framework

| Strategic Objective  | Strategic Initiatives   | Projected Outcomes  |
|--|---|---|
| <p>1) <b>To strengthen</b> the organizational capacity of the Network</p>                    | <p>a) Maintain relationships with current funders and secure continued government funding ;</p> <p>b) Explore new revenue streams by approaching and engaging new sponsors, funders and clients;</p> <p>c) Explore multi-stakeholder accounting modules and social financing opportunities.</p> <hr/> <p>a) Engage new and existing members ;</p> <p>b) Explore ways to enhance support for affiliate and caucus activities ;</p> <p>c) Improve internal and external communications ;</p> <p>d) Explore new technologies for engaging with existing and potential members ;</p> <p>e) Evaluation and updating of existing consultation framework ;</p> <p>f) Expand educational and training programs for staff and members;</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Security of annual funding via diversification of revenue streams;</li> <li>• Increased funding to affiliates and programs from federal and other sources;</li> <li>• Greater utilization of resources;</li> <li>• Increase in membership;</li> <li>• Increased services to members via affiliate networks ;</li> <li>• Increased participation of members in caucuses ;</li> <li>• Increased access to website portal and tools;</li> <li>• Improved consultation services;</li> <li>• Expanded educational component at the AGA ;</li> <li>• Improved communications;</li> <li>• Increased National Council participation;</li> <li>• Increased staff working knowledge and efficiency;</li> </ul> |
| <p>2) <b>To broaden</b> the voice and the impact of the environmental movement in Canada</p> | <p>a) Expand client base;</p> <p>b) Survey of membership levels with a view to increase membership ;</p> <p>c) Diversify membership and create platforms for non-ENGO participation</p> <p>d) Continue collaborative work with organizations from different sectors ;</p> <p>e) Encourage creation of new affiliate(s).</p> <p>f) Increase profile of AGA conference activities.</p> <p>g) Promote RCEN programs, and consultation process.</p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased membership;</li> <li>• Increased participation of key groups (e.g. youth, indigenous new Canadian, etc);</li> <li>• Increased number of collaborative activities and partnerships with other sectors and organizations;</li> <li>• Increase in website visits;</li> <li>• Affiliates in NWT and Nunavut;</li> <li>• Media profile of AGA conference;</li> <li>• Increased profile of Network.</li> </ul>   |

| Strategic Objective  | Strategic Initiatives  | Projected Outcomes  |
|--|--|---|
| <b>3) To build</b> capacity in preparation for the transition to a sustainable society | a) Collaboration on a survey measuring public awareness<br>b) Engage sustainable businesses, social enterprises and educational initiatives.<br>c) Support training through regions;<br>d) Build community resilience capacity in RCEN member groups;<br>e) Expand educational programs. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased awareness and support of member groups, affiliates and the RCEN in pursuing sustainable social enterprises and educational initiatives</li> <li>• Increased profile of key elements of corporate social responsibility;</li> </ul> |

## V. Summary

The 2010 to 2013 Strategic Goals outlined herein provide a foundation for strengthening the RCEN’s existing core activities and programs, and support the development of innovative approaches for advancing the environmental agenda in Canada.

## Annex A

### RCEN History

The Canadian Environmental Network (RCEN) has been operating as a bridge between the Environmental Non-Governmental Organization (ENGO) community and government for 32 years.

The RCEN began in 1977 when ENGOs from across Canada formed a National Steering Committee to help facilitate meetings between environmentalists and Environment Canada. Many of these environmentalists were members of national (or soon to become national) ENGOs. The Network was formed to support the valuable contributions of a wide range of grassroots educators, organizers, researchers and activists. Environment Canada (EC) facilitated the development of this network throughout the next decade by means of financial support from their internal consultation secretariat, in-kind contributions and contracts.

The 2001 review, involving interviews of a wide range of stakeholders, (Mel Gill), concluded that most of the functions currently performed by the RCEN were very valuable, and even critical, to environmental protection and to both the grassroots environmental movement in Canada and to the government agencies for which the RCEN's members provide consultation services. The network was regarded as the only vehicle for grassroots environmentalists to have a voice in consultations on environmental policy. The delegate selection and consultation services at the national, provincial and inter-governmental levels were considered to contribute important perspectives and talent to policy deliberation and formation. *The core funding delivered to RCEN and PTA has been determined as crucial / essential / critical to both the effective operation and engagement of the network and the provision of its invaluable services.*

The structure of the Network changed in 1987 when it was formally incorporated as a national non-profit and non-political organization dedicated to supporting the work of environmental groups across the country. The EC Secretariat was disbanded and the network assumed some of its coordinating functions, supported by its first 'Contribution Agreement' from the department. RCEN's core funding from EC of \$600,000 annually has remained static since the early 1990s. The erosion of this funding through inflation and increases in core costs over time, has required the organization to be increasingly dependent upon pursuit of project funding to continue to offer services to the members and to EC.

Outside consultants' reviews of the Canadian Environmental Network were commissioned jointly by EC and CIDA in 1995 and by CIDA alone in 1997. Both reviews identified a number of problems within the RCEN's governance and general operation and with its financial viability. Membership fees were instituted in response to the 1995 report but these have remained fixed since then and have not derived significant revenues. The provincial affiliates charge different rates and they each send to Headquarters a percentage of their membership income to the National Office.

In response to the 1997 consultant's report, the RCEN reduced the National Steering Committee from 16 to 6 members (bylaw amendment, 1997 AGM) as both a cost-containment measure and an effort to clarify control by members over elections to the National Steering Committee. However, governance issues continued to grow, in particular around internal disagreement over the allocation of scarce resources. The financial and governance pressures resulted in the loss of several executive directors and

precipitated another independent review of the RCEN in 2001 to again examine its organizational structure of the RCEN and make recommendations with respect to its longer-term future.

Environment Canada and other funders reported that they derived excellent value for money invested in the RCEN. All the functions of the RCEN and its affiliates rely on: committed low-cost staff; efficient and economical administrative operations and enormous amounts of volunteer time in bringing grassroots perspectives and environmental expertise to policy development and consultations.

Major strengths for the RCEN were identified as follows:

- the network structure with its broad-based membership;
- the democratic and transparent process for selection of delegates to government consultations;
- the high quality of delegates;
- the strength of policy work done by caucuses;
- financial support for the affiliates which sustains the network and provides leverage for fund-raising elsewhere;
- growing credibility associated with stronger leadership, more effective Board decision-making and professional and committed staff;
- effective project fund-raising and coordination;
- publication of the weekly e-bulletin.

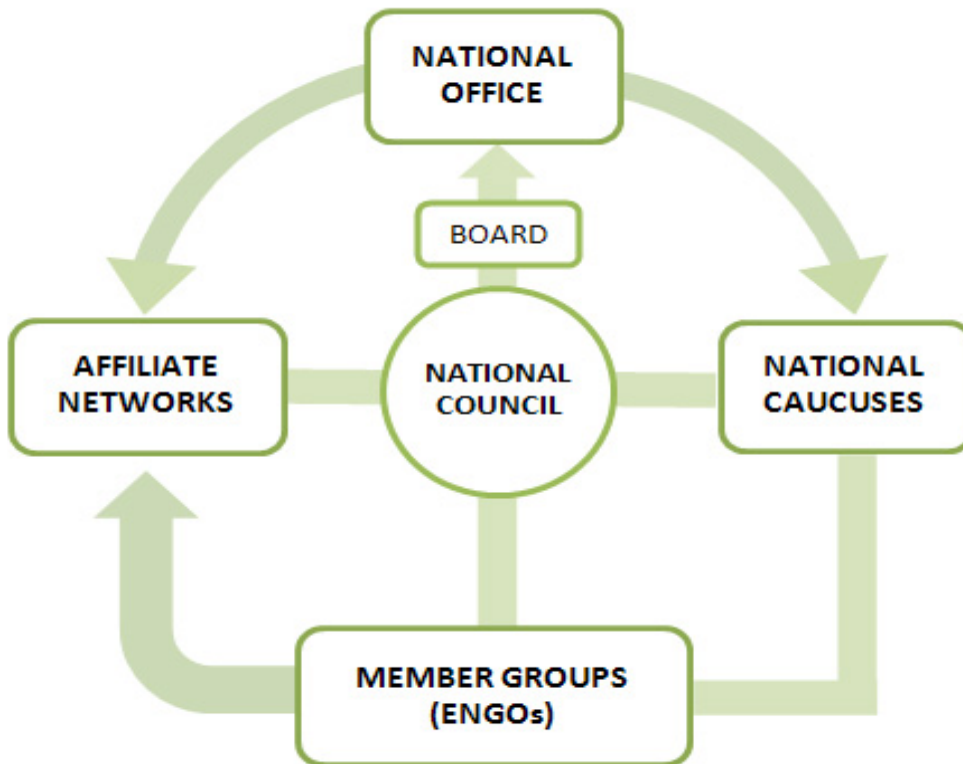
The following organizational concerns were identified:

- reliance on a single source, EC, for the preponderance of funds
- scarce resources resulting in
  - inadequate funding for key meetings of members required for good governance and policy development;
  - a preoccupation with organizational maintenance;
  - lower than desirable staff retention;
  - inactivity in some caucuses;
- volunteer fatigue among members;
- an overly confrontational approach by some delegates making some federal agencies unwilling to use RCEN services;
- management of the affiliate MOUs ;
  - Inconsistency between affiliates re membership criteria;
  - Insufficient clarity of expectations and affiliate accountability for funds;
- organizational issues such as;
  - insufficient communication between the Board and National Council;
  - under-representation of Quebec ENGOs, aboriginal persons and youth;
  - insufficient ethnic and cultural diversity;
- low visibility of the RCEN.

The 2005 Strategic Plan identified a series of emerging opportunities which were incorporated into the goals and objectives. The Strategic Plan concludes that “Environmentalists around the world are concerned that the current pace of human development is degrading the environment at a rate that threatens the future of all species and the capacity of the planet to sustain life.” Under the 2005-10 Strategic Plan the RCEN continued to strive to make progress on each of the issues identified and to maximize the opportunities presented – as resources permitted.

## Annex B

# Organizational structure



Explanatory note:

This chart is designed as a wheel and should be read circularly starting from the center. For more information on the organization, please visit [www.rcen.ca](http://www.rcen.ca)

## Annex C

### Partial list of RCEN contract related activities

- Coordination of water fisheries and Oceans advisory committee (Department of Fisheries and Oceans)
- Management of the “Challenge ” component of Canada’s first chemical management plan (Health Canada)
- Preparation of written report and capacity building activities related to the 7 year review of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act (Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency)
- Coordination of the writing of a handbook providing the ENGO perspective on Biodiversity in Canada (Environment Canada, Biodiversity division)