

Summary Report on Vancity's Community Consultation on the draft 2004-05 Accountability Report¹

Background

On April 18th, 2006, a community consultation was held between Vancity and selected community leaders in Toronto to provide feedback on the Vancity Group of Companies draft 2004-05 Accountability Report. A similar session was held on April 21st with selected community leaders in Vancouver. A single group worked together in Toronto, while in Vancouver participants were divided into four facilitated break out groups to discuss the draft Accountability Report.

Twenty-six community leaders participated in these community consultations, with eight in Toronto and eighteen in Vancouver.

The community consultation was designed to fulfill the following objectives:

- To provide readers of the 2004-05 Accountability Report with an additional level of assurance as to the report's credibility, completeness, and relevance.
- To help improve Vancity's future Accountability Reports

General findings

In a discussion of overall impressions of the draft report, participants were queried regarding their thoughts on: what they liked about the draft report, their suggestions to improve the draft report, the document's readability, the spotlights on performance, the combination of hard copy and website appendices, and the draft report's credibility.

Summary of overall impressions of the draft report

Report is generally credible: In general, participants were complimentary of the draft accountability report. Participants were virtually unanimous in finding it to be reliable, balanced, and fair. Several participants offered that the report is a "great example of corporate accountability within the financial industry".

Strengths of the report: Participants suggested that the draft report's credibility stems from the stakeholder process used in its development, the comprehensive, rigorous and honest content (including both the "good and bad" news), and the action-oriented nature of the report. Others appreciated the explicit accountability for actions and outcomes, and Vancity's use of the report as a management tool. Other strengths identified during the consultation sessions included: the balance of print and web content, providing a combination of printed text, highlighting the main points, and a longer web site version, offering additional details; use of spotlights on performance; and the external verification process.

¹ The lead facilitator of the consultations drafted this report.

Weaknesses of the report: Participants identified a number of weaknesses that detract from the report's clarity and accessibility including: language that is more suited to auditing committees than the lay public; a lack of clarity regarding the relationship between Vancity, Citizens Bank, and the Vancity Group of Companies, and whose performance is being reported on; an early draft report in which there are gaps in information, targets, and responses; and a layout that detracts from the ease of readability.

Recommendations to improve the report

Explain the relationship between Vancity, Citizens Bank, and the Vancity Group of Companies, and clarify whose performance is being reported on: Most participants found it difficult to distinguish which of the companies within Vancity was being reported on. There was virtual unanimity in requesting that the relationship between Vancity, Citizens Bank, and the Vancity Group of Companies be explained and clarified. Many participants wanted to know "Who's who in the family?" In particular, many participants urged Vancity to clarify the relationship between Vancity and Citizens Bank, and to help readers understand why Vancity owns a bank.

Some participants were confused by the fact that while usually Vancity's performance was the subject being reported; only occasionally was Citizens Bank's performance included. They requested that Vancity explain why in some cases Citizens Bank is included in the reporting, and sometimes is not. Some also felt that explanation was required to ensure that the parallel reporting on Citizens Bank and Vancity does not end up looking like a comparison between the companies.

Explain Vancity's business intention in relation to accountability reporting: Participants urged Vancity to provide an introduction early in the report that outlines Vancity's vision, business intention, statement of values and commitments and the consultation process used in carrying out accountability reporting. They also encouraged Vancity to: provide a summary introduction for each section highlighting key changes from previous reports; distinguish between and highlight the stakeholder verification and external verification processes; and provide targets or action plans (responses) for every key area. One breakout group urged Vancity to place its use of indicators in a strategic and operational context. They felt that including an explanation of Vancity's "big picture plan" for each of its strategic areas would strengthen the report.

Improve readability and accessibility: Most participants provided recommendations to improve the readability and accessibility of the report. Suggestions included:

- Using a range of visual tools, design, color, formatting, charts and graphs, and flowcharts to harmonize the format, language and tone, and help readers navigate between tables and other information;
- Using a consistent and recognizable format for each section;
- Preparing a summary version of the report for the lay reader;

- Including only select tables within the main body of the report, and putting larger, more dense tables in an appendix;
- Improving the correlation of arrows and numbers, and providing explanations if the relationship is not readily apparent;
- Providing better definitions for terms such as “more satisfied”, “less satisfied”, or “well represented”, to name a few; and
- Ensuring links between Web and print information are easy to use.

Use stories, testimonials and spotlights to illustrate the impact of Vancity's various initiatives: Many participants requested that Vancity use more stories, testimonials and spotlights in the report. Further, participants sought information explaining the impact of Vancity's initiatives on individuals, organizations, and/or communities, including real "on the ground" results and outcomes. “If you've got a good story to tell, tell it.” One participant suggested that adding stories about people would reduce the perception of the report as a marketing strategy.

There was strong support for the use of spotlights in the report. Participants invited additional and expanded spotlights, located adjacent to the relevant text, to highlight Vancity's stories. They suggested that Vancity use spotlights strategically to illustrate key performance results, and make them more engaging by explaining what happened in each example, and describing the impact of the initiatives. Still others encouraged more detail in order to help other businesses and organizations follow Vancity's lead.

Benchmark Vancity's performance in relation to the financial industry as a whole wherever possible, and tell us where Vancity has gone beyond its legislative requirements: Participants were largely complementary of Vancity's efforts and performance as outlined in the draft report. In many cases, however, they wanted more information to benchmark Vancity's performance in relation to the broader financial industry. Some participants also encouraged Vancity to relate its performance to a larger community and societal context, by helping to situate their initiatives in relation to those of other organizations in the broader community. Still others invited Vancity to explain where it has gone beyond the minimum standards as required by legislation.

Other recommendations: Several participants provided recommendations to improve the draft report review process, including providing prospective participants with more notice and clear expectations for the consultation session, a copy of the previous accountability report, and a copy of the measures.

Summary of the Toronto Consultation

Overall impressions of the report

Participants acknowledged that the draft report is a great example of corporate accountability within the financial industry. One participant stated, "If all corporations did this, we'd have a much better world." In particular, they appreciated the comprehensive content, structure, and use of the report as a management tool.

General recommendations to improve the report included distinguishing between Vancity, Citizens Bank, and the Vancity Group of Companies to clarify which entity is being reported on. In addition, requests were made to separate out the performance of Citizens Bank and Vancity. In addition, participants acknowledged the need for additional background or context for some sections. Finally, participants encouraged the use of visual design, color, formatting and layout, to make the report more accessible.

Participants did not identify any specific issues that had been missed, but expressed a desire for impact statements, and testimonials to inspire them and help them to appreciate the impact on Vancity's business resulting from these initiatives. As well, they acknowledged the need for an introduction, table of contents, and formatting to improve readability.

In general, participants found the report to be accessible, with clear and concise language that would appeal to a broad group of readers. They also appreciated the balance of printed and Web information, but requested that future draft reports provide a better distinction between the printed and Web information.

Credibility of the report

Participants found the draft report to be reliable, balanced, and fair, citing its use as a management tool with plans, commitments, and targets as contributing to its credibility. While participants appreciated the external verification process, they felt that the stakeholder verification process used in the development of the report adds further credibility. They also felt that the stakeholder verification process and external verification process should be highlighted further in the report.

Completeness, relevancy, and adequacy of organizational response

Review of Responsible Governance

In general, participants found the Governance section to be complete and relevant. However, it was in this section that they felt Vancity had an opportunity to provide inspiration about the company's vision and its mission in relation to corporate social responsibility. Participants also suggested that more explanation or additional information be provided regarding: the governance model of a credit union in comparison to other financial institutions; why the Statement of Values and

Commitments (SOVAC) doesn't apply to Citizens Bank; how the needs and concerns of Vancity's stakeholders are identified and reflected in diversity of the Board; senior management compensation; and how Vancity plans to assess climate change risks associated with their core business.

Review of Responsible Financial Managers

While generally satisfied that this section was complete and relevant, participants requested additional information regarding: why earnings are down; reference materials such as the Basel II Framework; how the operating efficiency ratio is determined, with Vancity's performance benchmarked against other financial institutions; and a general sense of the cost of corporate social responsibility.

Review of Outstanding Service

Again, while generally satisfied with the completeness and relevance of this section, participants requested additional information to help clarify some aspect of Vancity's performance or to better illuminate a finding. For example, there was a desire for more information regarding the impact of complaints on Vancity's business, about plans to address error reduction, and about Citizens Bank withdrawing basic business banking. Participants were also seeking language that is clearer, or better defined. For example, they suggested that the next draft must include either more context or references so that some statements regarding performance are more meaningful (e.g., what is meant by "more or less satisfied"?). Participants felt that having to reference charts to provide clarity to the text did not enhance readability.

In relation to "Access to financial services and social inclusion", and "Support for business", participants acknowledged that these were important issues and requested more analysis and interpretation of numbers and benchmarks where possible. They wanted to be able to compare the performance of Vancity and Citizens Bank with the chartered banks, but felt they didn't have an industry context for this. "If you've got a good story to tell, tell it."

Similarly, they expressed a desire for more information regarding the spotlight on Pigeon Park Savings. They felt that more could be done to inspire readers with this story and its benefits so that others could more easily follow Vancity's model.

Review of Meaningful Opportunities for Input²

Participants were generally satisfied with the completeness and relevance of this section. There were only a few requests for additional information: to benchmark member attendance at AGMs, and clarify how many employees or members; to provide more explanation about the spotlight on the Partnership Model; and to clarify that the position of Vice President of Community Leadership is currently vacant and that recruiting is underway.

² In the final report, the contents of the draft "Meaningful opportunities for input" section appear in other sections.

Review Great Place to Work

Once again, participants were largely satisfied with the completeness or relevance of this section, but had a number of requests for clarification or additional information. A request was made for Vancity to explain the impact on its business of “having a happy workforce”. Another participant stressed the importance of highlighting the structural changes regarding Vancity and Citizens Bank earlier in the report. They felt that this was particularly important to Citizens Bank stakeholders.

More information was requested regarding internal and external movement of employees to and from Vancity and Citizens Bank, and workplace diversity and employee equity. In addition, participants suggested that terms such as “well represented”, “not well represented”, or “we'd like” need to be better defined. Also on the topic of tracking satisfaction with performance, one participant requested that Vancity use visual markers to help track satisfaction with performance in the area of health and safety.

Participants again expressed a desire for more benchmarks throughout the report to help compare Vancity's performance with other banks and credit unions. In relation to this section specifically, they requested benchmarks in the areas of labour relations.

Clarification was requested to help readers understand how employee satisfaction and turnover differs between executive, managers, and non-managers (such as through a class analysis). They also queried when Citizens Bank will address the issue of “voicing opinions openly”. Finally, a request was made to have a union member speak to the issue of employee satisfaction, rather than someone from management.

While largely satisfied with the adequacy of organizational response in this section, in the area of health and safety, participants were curious about Vancity's plans in the event of a pandemic. In addition, they requested an action plan to address employee turnover.

Review of Lead by Example

As a general comment in relation to this section, participants requested that Vancity speak to the impact of these activities on their business. They were looking for a business rationale for these initiatives.

Review of Lead by Example - Strong non-profits and cooperatives

Participants identified a number of areas in which the information presented in this section is unclear or incomplete. For example, they expressed a desire for clarification regarding the goals and intentions of Vancity's efforts in relation to social and economic justice and community economic development. How are these goals related? In addition, the piece on Vancity Community Foundation was an example of where the distinction between Vancity, Citizens Bank, and the Group of Companies was not clear.

There were a number of areas in this subsection where more information was requested in order to strengthen the report, specifically regarding: whether or not geography is a

factor (or not) in the distribution of grants; the program of grants from branches to community groups; the nature of volunteering at Vancity; the employee investment program, the business rationale, strategy and process behind disbursement of responsive grants; and the formal or informal volunteer contributions of skills and expertise. In addition, participants felt that an explanation was needed for the high cost of the postponed employee party.

Review of Lead by Example - Successful social enterprises

The main concern expressed regarding the section on Successful Social Enterprises was the absence of reference to Citizens Bank. Participants requested that activities carried out by Citizens Bank be included in this section, or that an explanation be provided for why this information is not included here. "As a Citizens Bank member, I'm not that inspired by this report. I don't feel represented."

Review of Lead by Example - Climate change and eco-effective solutions

Participants requested a rationale for why climate change and eco-effective solutions are still a part of Vancity's core business. They felt that it is important that Vancity make the business case, because it is such a leader in its field. Several recommendations for improvement were made with the intention of helping other businesses to learn from Vancity's experiences, noting, "Every corporate body should seek to reduce its footprint." For example, they requested a benchmark for the 2010 carbon neutral role in order to help other businesses know how hard (or easy) it will be to meet this goal. They also felt that the story about Vancity's tenant energy savings improvements was compelling, and that with more information other businesses might try to emulate this initiative. "Tell the story."

Participants also encouraged Vancity to share the lessons learned in trying to promote alternative transportation among employees. Again, they felt that other businesses would benefit from understanding what Vancity had tried, what had worked or not, and gaining an understanding of why things did not succeed. For example, what were the elements of the enhanced staff transportation program?

Additional requests for information included: documenting how many buildings Vancity owns and how many are leased; re-labeling the Business Travel table as "CEO travel"; and providing a link between this table and the action plan regarding business travel.

Review of Lead by Example - Responsible Business Practices

The participants found the section on Responsible Business Practices to be inspirational. Given the statement that 90% of Vancity's members think that responsible business practices are important, participants urged Vancity to highlight this more throughout the report. They also requested more information to help readers understand how much it costs to carry out social responsibility, and to better clarify what is inside or outside the Ethical Policy.

General Comments

Participants suggested that the number of readers will likely increase if Vancity implements their suggestions for education and clarification because in doing so, Vancity will add to its leadership profile. In addition, they felt that a continued increased interest in corporate social responsibility would likely increase the number of readers of Vancity's accountability reports.

Summary of the Vancouver Consultation: Governance and Finance Breakout Group

The Governance and Finance breakout group discussed their overall impressions of the report before providing feedback on sections on **Responsible Governance**, and **Responsible and Effective Managers**. Participants in this group also provided comments and recommendations relating to sections on Outstanding Service, Meaningful Opportunity for Input, and Being a Great Place to Work.

Overall impressions of the report

Participants expressed a positive impression of the report, noting the serious and comprehensive nature of the work. One participant suggested that this is a document for the committed. This individual suggested that Vancity should provide a highlight of the three or four key points that they are most proud of, and make this summary available to a wider readership. Participants acknowledged that the draft document is quite dense, and felt that it would benefit from a review by the Communications Committee.

Other suggestions for improvement included: making the report's presentation and layout attractive, outlining Vancity's vision at the beginning of the report, and explaining the "Vancity Group of Companies", including all entities, in the introduction to the report. Finally, some participants noted that the correlation of arrows and numbers are troublesome in some areas, and require further explanation.

Suggestions for improvements and additions to the report were focused on helping Vancity to tell its compelling stories, by helping readers to understand the impact of Vancity's various initiatives. "Who got the money? What happened?" In addition, participants requested more stories about people and their experiences, rather than relying so heavily on numbers. They felt that including more stories and explaining the impacts on people of these initiatives would reduce the likelihood of the report being perceived as a marketing strategy.

Participants acknowledge that Vancity has done much to meet legislative requirements. They were also interested in knowing when and how Vancity has gone above and beyond the minimum standards set by legislation and regulation.

Participants felt that the readability of the draft report depends on whom the audience is. They noted an executive summary would be helpful. In addition, they cautioned that Vancity must recognize that their target audience includes younger people who are more used to shorter, more visual, and animated media. Moreover, they felt that the language in this draft report is more suited to an auditing committee than to the lay public. They suggested producing a plain English version more suited to a lay reader, and requested visual tools to help readers navigate tables and other information.

Participants generally liked the spotlights on performance, and requested that Vancity include the impact of funding in its stories (e.g., what has happened with the bike path?). It was suggested that a visual marker be used to highlight the spotlights.

Participants appreciated the balance of print and web content, but stressed the need to ensure that links between the print version and web version are easy to use. They also stress the importance of helping prospective readers without Internet access to find this information elsewhere. One participant also suggested that Vancity help members find out about these initiatives outside of reading the Accountability Report.

Credibility of the report

Participants were unanimous in believing that the content of the report is reliable, balanced, and fair. They believe that this credibility is a function of the following: the involvement of people and organizations in the development of the draft report; Vancity's long-term commitment to reporting; Vancity's achievement at being a number one employer in Canada; the action oriented nature of the report; and the fact that declines in performance are included as well.

One recommendation to improve the report's credibility was to ensure that the direction of arrows correlates with numbers, and that explanations are provided when the correlation is not readily apparent.

Participants suggested that the draft report review process could be improved by providing prospective participants with the previous accountability report and a list of measures, and telling them which section Vancity would like them to focus on.

Completeness, relevancy, and adequacy of organizational response

Review of Responsible Governance

Participants made a number of recommendations to help improve the clarity and completeness of this section. One participant requested an introductory paragraph referencing the credit union movement to help readers and members understand the difference between belonging to a credit union and a bank. They also suggested that Vancity explain its relationship with Citizens Bank and explain why Vancity owns a bank.

Requests for additional information included an explanation: of "Stabilization Central"; how Vancity's requirements for education and experience as well as orientation and training are sufficient to ensure that directors are competent; the differences between a credit union and a bank in terms of expertise and appointment of directors; Vancity's plans for other types of risk beyond climate change risk; situations in which Vancity is exceeding legislative requirements; and regarding governance and management standards as they relate to employee risk. A request was also made for a benchmark for Board compensation for meetings.

Review of Responsible Financial Managers

Participants requested additional information and clarification to strengthen this section of the report, and to help members understand Vancity's intentions. For example, they felt that Vancity should emphasize why it is important that they use local suppliers and purchasers. They also requested more information about the function of, and link between, the social and financial audits, and clarification that the social auditors are different than the financial auditors.

Again, requests were made to explain why in some cases the reported performance speaks to the Vancity Group of Companies, and why in some cases Citizens Bank's performance is included and in some cases it is not.

Additional information and definitions were also requested to help members understand the importance of a "capped tax break on income taxes", about "Real Assets", and about the efficiency ratio. Finally, participants found it confusing when the direction of arrows did not correlate with the numbers presented.

Review of Outstanding Service

The only request for clarification in this section was a definition for "extreme service". Participants questioned whether this was the right word in this context.

Review of Meaningful Opportunities for Input

Acknowledgment was given that this is an important issue, and participants felt that Vancity has portrayed the topics well. Participants stressed the need for Vancity to continue to take steps to help members understand the role of "meaningful input" in credit unions, and their opportunities as members to express their opinions.

Requests for more information to clarify Vancity's performance included Vancity's definition of participation, a benchmark for participation, and an explanation when arrows show that there has been no change yet numbers have changed.

Review of Great Place to Work

Once again, participants were seeking additional information to help them understand statements regarding Vancity's performance. For example, they wanted to know more about Vancity's understanding of employee diversity and how it is determined. They also wondered why only two aspects of employee diversity (Disabilities and Aboriginals) are being tracked.

A request was made to use a measure other than the poverty line to compare against entry-level salaries. Additional information was also requested to explain why male employees leave sooner, and what constitutes "the market" in the comparison statement regarding average salaries. Finally, a benchmark was requested in relation to both working days lost (health and safety) and employee survey results.

One participant appreciated Vancity's use of hard data and measurables, and "not just opinion survey" information.

Summary of the Vancouver Consultation: Members Breakout Group

The Members breakout group discussed their overall impressions of the report before providing feedback on **Outstanding Service**, and **Meaningful Opportunities for Input**.

Overall impressions of the report

Overall, participants responded favourably to the report as a means for Vancity to demonstrate accountability and responsiveness to its members. Acknowledging that the report is very much in a draft stage, they conveyed both positive feedback and detailed suggestions on how to improve it to better meets members' needs prior to publication.

Generally, participants found the report to be comprehensive, succinct and readable, and found that the balance of print and web site information works reasonably well. A recommendation was made to make the spotlights on performance more engaging in order to offer a balance of qualitative and quantitative information.

Participants offered a number of recommendations to improve the draft report. They recommended that Vancity set a context for the report, by describing its intention in carrying out accountability reporting, and outlining the consultation steps involved. It was also suggested that a summary of the Statement of Values and Commitments be included early in the document, along with an Executive Summary and Table of Contents. Participants also expressed a desire for a summary to introduce the content and highlights of each section, highlighted key changes from the previous report, and offering a status check on actions taken, and results accrued.

While most participants felt that the report is written clearly, in plain English, they did feel the readability could be improved by undertaking the following: using visuals and formatting such as charts, graphs, flowcharts, bullets and boxes to feature key information and augment the narrative, and making use of footnotes for more detailed information. In addition, they proposed that a consistent, recognizable format be used for each section in order to improve and ease readability.

In relation to the review process of the draft report, one participant raised concerns about the draft report review process. This individual felt that insufficient time that been provided to review the draft report, that the expectations for the review session could have been more explicit, and that they would have appreciated having a copy of the previous accountability report. The others concurred with these comments.

Credibility of the report

Participants felt that the report, overall, had the mark of credibility, but that some changes and additions would enhance and improve upon that credibility. They felt that the report's credibility was enhanced by Vancity's use of data and statistics, and its willingness to share both the good news and bad.

Recommendations to improve the report's credibility included: providing benchmark data for the financial industry as a whole, using more "Spotlights on Performance" in order to provide stories that have a longer lasting impact, and providing targets or action plans (responses) for every key area. All participants agreed the external verification is of crucial importance to the report's credibility.

Completeness, relevancy, and adequacy of organizational response

Review of Outstanding Service

In general, participants felt that the measures of outstanding service used in the report are relevant measures, but suggested several additional means for gleaning information related to service satisfaction to augment surveys and focus groups. For example, suggestions were made for Vancity to collect member satisfaction information in additional ways, including: collecting anecdotes from tellers; providing a content analysis of letters and emails Vancity receives; describing the volume of and Vancity's average response time to letters and emails; and conducting exit surveys with people who choose to leave Vancity and Citizens Bank.

Additional information was requested to improve the completeness of the report, and to facilitate readability. Participants identified areas in which targets are missing and requested additional information including: criteria for "low-income" members, a brief explanation of surveys and other sources of data used on the report, the research methodology and sample sizes used to inform this section, a few relevant "one-liners" (quotes) from focus group participants, and additional information regarding Vancity members' attendance at a conference in New Orleans.

Some participants felt unable to assess much of Vancity's response to service issues because of the rough draft stage of the report, in which many responses had not been developed. These individuals felt that seeing the responses is key to the review process, and suggested that the responses should be formatted in such a way as to really "pull them out" to the reader.

A number of suggestions were made for improving this section prior to publication. Participants felt that the clarity and readability of this section could be improved, by: providing an executive summary at the beginning; defining what criteria were used; moving the piece regarding complaint handling; including key data from surveys in the narrative to minimize references to tables; and providing separate targets for errors in personal and business banking; and correcting and fine-tuning language, grammar and definitions.

Participants expressed a concern regarding the language used in relation to low-income members. Specifically, they found the sentence "We know that many of those people living in poverty, and other marginalized groups are often without access to mainstream financial products" to be insensitive. They offered the revision: "We want everyone's financial needs to be met."

Finally, participants stressed the use of data rather than interpretive qualifiers to explain changes in performance. For example, rather than using the term “slightly”, they suggested that Vancity give the actual percentage increase or decrease to increase credibility. As well, they suggested that the Vancity refrain from offering interpretations of data without supporting evidence.

Review of Meaningful Opportunities for Input

This comparatively short (five pages) section was made shorter by participants’ agreement that the material in it is best moved to other locations and the section deleted entirely. The Vancity representative said Vancity is considering moving information on Board elections to the section on Responsible Governance, and participants agreed this would be appropriate. They also suggested information on how members can participate in setting Vancity’s direction be dovetailed with the section on Outstanding Service. However, it should be highlighted as an important subsection.

Several areas were identified where additional information was desirable to improve the completeness and relevance of this section including benchmark information in relation to member participation in Board elections. They also encouraged Vancity to expand and highlight the section on member participation in setting direction at Vancity, by including a “lively section” on how Vancity receives input from business owners, individual members, grant applicants, and so on, listing all mechanisms used. This could include stories and quotes from members and clients regarding their experiences in providing input.

Participants also requested a further rationale for the use of electronic voting to improve member participation in Board elections, and suggested that the information on the Squamish Credit Union merger was not relevant to this section.

Summary of the Vancouver Consultation: Workplace Breakout Group

The Workplace breakout group discussed their overall impressions of the report before providing feedback on the section on **Being a Great Place to Work**.

Overall impressions of the report

In general, all the participants in the Workplace group liked the draft report. Participants were impressed with the overall quality of the content, and the amount of information in the report. One person noted that it was good to have Vancity’s and Citizens Bank’s data displayed side-by-side because it shows how Citizens Bank shares credit union values even though it is a bank.

Everyone found the report easy to read, and most stated that the report was concise, comprehensive, and interesting. Other aspects of the report that were appreciated

included: the use of the arrows in the tables as an easy way to indicate to the reader and understand the company's performance; the spotlights on performance, and several participants felt that more of these spotlights could be included in the report; and the combination of a concise hard copy, including the main points, and the longer web site version, with more details.

Several suggestions for improvements to the report were offered, including: a need to be clearer about the inclusion of Citizens Bank and Vancity in the same report and more consistent with the reporting outcomes; adding more visual elements to the tables, such as graphs, charts, and diagrams, to make the report even more interesting to read and help avoid the potential monotony of percentages; and moving the Workplace section to the front of the report to match more directly the company's mission and commitment to its employees, and to members' and the local community's recognition that employees are very important to the functioning and successes of Vancity and Citizens Bank.

The only items that were suggested as missing from the report were "stories" and more information on employee recognition awards. One individual emphasized that there could be more stories about employees like those published in the last Accountability Report. Another person highlighted that all employee recognition awards should be listed, including the recipients of those awards, to show readers the extent of the company's support for, and commitment to, its employees.

Credibility of the report

Overall, the group felt that the report content was reliable, balanced and fair because it is supported by a lot of data, facts and figures. One person emphasized that the reporting on Vancity's community work enhances the report's credibility, and NGO successes based on Vancity funding. When asked how important it is that the report is externally verified, all participants indicated that they agreed that it is important.

There were three main suggestions for making the report more credible. Firstly, and in general, it was emphasized that there is a need for greater clarity and consistency regarding data for Vancity's other companies and greater balance regarding Vancity's own standards. For example, regarding the inclusion of Citizens Bank data, several participants noted that the information presented in the report created a perception of a comparison between Vancity and Citizens Bank. These participants were not sure if this was intended, but if it was, they felt strongly that this comparison should not be the focus of the report. All participants tended to agree with this view. They suggested a greater division between the two companies' performance outcomes so that the report becomes more of an illustration of each company's performance independently of each other, rather than a comparison between the two. Further, they also felt that if a comparison was intended, then it should be done consistently throughout the report.

The second general suggestion to make the report more credible related to the need for greater consistency in reporting data from other companies, other than Citizens Bank. For example, some of the figures include data about Inventure Solutions, but other

tables do not include that company. Most participants agreed that if other company performance is to be included, that it should be consistently included throughout the report.

The third suggestion for improvement related to Vancity's expectations of itself. One participant suggested that Vancity may need to put their standards in perspective because other companies may be very satisfied with similar outcomes. For example, Vancity' was dissatisfied with its result of 59% of employees who feel safe to voice their opinions. One participant reflected that they would love to see that same kind of outcome in their organization.

Completeness, relevancy, and adequacy of organizational response

Review of Great Place to Work

Overall, the participants felt that the Workplace section included more than enough information necessary to judge Vancity's performance at living up to its commitments. Some participants stated that the information was far beyond what they had expected and one participant noted that there was more information in this report than the previous report. Generally, everyone felt that Vancity is measuring the right kinds of things.

Several participants offered that they find it helpful when Vancity includes its own judgment of its various performance areas ("We are satisfied/dissatisfied with our performance in this area"), because it allows the reader to understand how Vancity feels about its own performance. The information also helps to indicate where Vancity may focus its attention and priorities in the coming year. They suggested that Vancity be consistent in including these judgments in every subsection.

While generally satisfied with the issues included and measures used, participants did offer suggestions to address gaps in information and new sub-measures, including: providing information about why some employees don't feel comfortable giving honest feedback at work; explaining succession planning for all senior level positions so that readers and members can be assured that there is a plan for succession; and including information about the opportunities and support Vancity gives to employees to pursue outside projects and volunteer activities, as employees greatly value being supported to do outside community work, and readers would appreciate knowing about this.

Another suggestion for additional information related to Vancity's role as a leader in the industry, and called for more information about what defines Vancity and makes Vancity different, including "Shared Successes" and the Ethical Policy. Participants emphasized that readers would benefit from understanding what Vancity is doing about its values and business objectives, both in terms of clear examples and measures, and what it is doing for its employees and for its local communities.

Summary of the Vancouver Consultation: Community and Environmental Sustainability Breakout Group

The Community and Environmental Sustainability breakout group discussed their overall impressions of the report before providing feedback on the section on **Lead by Example**.

Overall impressions of the report

All participants congratulated Vancity on their efforts to report on social accountability. Overall impressions were positive and the report was generally seen as credible. Reviewers were generally impressed by the results and supportive of the company's efforts. They admired the general rigour, level of honesty and integrity, and the explicit accountability for actions and outcomes. They see the type of information collected as useful and agree that the indicators are mostly the right ones, although additional ones were suggested.

Participants made various suggestions to improve the report format. They support the use of spotlights and would like to see them complemented with more small examples, "factoids" and "lessons learned". They requested more strategic use of these spotlights and examples to illustrate key performance results for the relevant topic or sector being discussed. Spotlights should better reflect the discussion and data presented in the section. They also agreed that key statistics from the tables should be highlighted in the text, with only selected tables being included within each section as supporting evidence, and the bigger or denser tables put into the appendices.

All participants expressed a desire that the final edit will harmonize the format, language and tone, as well as making the level of detail and type of indicators, data and analysis more consistent. They anticipate liberal use of more illustrative spotlights, more stories and attractive graphics to highlight key points and make the report more readable.

On the broader issue of Vancity's role in the community, participants noted that Vancity definitely has a leadership role already. Its programs and actions can have great leverage with other organizations, as well as members. They suggest that Vancity think more strategically about how best to use that leverage in all aspects of their business dealings and funding support programs.

Credibility of the report

There were three main suggested improvements emerging from the discussion of credibility of the overall report. Firstly, participants spent considerable time discussing the importance of placing indicators in a strategic and operational context. All agreed that analysis of the indicators should relate to the broader context of each strategic area, i.e., what is the SOVAC commitment, the goals/objectives/targets, the strategy to get there, progress to date, obstacles and plans.

Secondly, participants suggested that Vancity try to relate its performance to the larger community and societal context, by placing its results in the framework of what else is going on and who is doing it. They wanted to know more about questions such as: How does the Group of Companies contribute to these efforts? Who are its partners? How do they leverage actions and motivate change from other organizations and individuals, including members? While it is recognized that Vancity is a unique organization, even within the financial sector, participants felt that it would be useful to see benchmark indicators from the sector or a broader groups of businesses to show where Vancity sits.

Finally, participants requested more information about the impact of Vancity's actions and programs as a complement to the information provided on activities. They suggested that report should analyze and present the real "on the ground" results and outcomes for receiving organizations and/or the community. The analysis should include more quantitative and qualitative analysis of impacts in relation to the context, as described above.

Also for credibility, participants requested greater clarity in the report on the roles, relationships and accountabilities among different groups within the Group of Companies, preferably graphically. In addition, they suggested that the text analysis should specify who is "talking", who is committed to what, and who is doing what within the Group of Companies.

Completeness, relevancy, and adequacy of organizational response

Review of Lead by Example

Participants assessed the credibility and relevance of the section on Lead by example. Consistent with their overall comments on the report, participants expressed a desire for the report to identify more clearly what is trying to be achieved for each part of this section; what are the objectives, targets and strategies/action plans and how do the indicators relate to these?

Review of Lead by Example - Strong non-profits and cooperatives

For Strong non-profits & co-operatives, participants invited spotlights and examples that are more relevant to the indicators and analysis in the text. They observed that the current examples seem disconnected from the commitments and somewhat insignificant compared to the scale of the budget. Participants also requested more information on the impacts and results from community grants and funds, including qualitative information on the experience of recipients, preferably by involving them directly in the assessment.

Several participants agreed that the "lead by example" goal/program does not provide any clear opening or fit for performing arts groups, making it hard for the latter to "connect" with Vancity. Some participants offered that under current programs, arts and cultural groups feel they must design programs to fit the funder's objectives. They

suggested that including this sector would strengthen Vancity's community leadership role.

Review of Lead by Example: Successful social enterprises

Participants did not have any concerns or offer suggestions for this part.

Review of Lead by Example: Climate change and eco-effective solutions

For Climate change and eco-effective solutions, participants agreed that Vancity is reporting on the right things and the indicators are the right ones. There was considerable interest in the 2010 carbon neutral program but participants requested more information on the context and on Vancity's policy and strategies on the issue. Suggestions for additional indicators included employee travel, fleet descriptions and member travel. As well, technical refinements were proposed for some indicators.

Review of Lead by Example - Responsible Business Practices

For Responsible Business Practices, participants agreed this section is less specific and more "wordy" and vague than the other sections (and the rest of the report), with fewer specific details on actions and outcomes. They suggested that the section would be more credible if the text and spotlights provided more details on actions and outcomes for this topic. Several participants invited more detail on how the ethical policies of the Group of Companies are being harmonized, and on how Vancity will be approaching shareholder advocacy and the advocacy policy in future, especially in terms of how members might be involved.

Finally, participants suggested that Vancity could demonstrate community and environmental leadership by thinking strategically about how to maximize the impact of its resources, investigating a larger role in shareholder advocacy, and developing an advocacy plan to highlight its role in the community and better promote its funding and grant programs.