



THE STATE OF HEALTH OF THE NON-PROFIT/VOLUNTARY SECTOR IN NOVA SCOTIA

Discussion Paper

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

According to Statistics Canada (2003), the non-profit sector in Nova Scotia is comprised of 5,829 organizations that employ 36,098 persons. The non-profit sector is known for playing a significant role in provincial society and perhaps less known for its significant contribution to the economy. To put this in perspective, the construction sector in Nova Scotia reported annual employment levels of 24–28,000 persons over the past number of years.

The primary purpose of this research study is to document the defining characteristics of the non-profit sector workforce and the challenges that exist related to human resource (HR) management.

This study of the non-profit sector's workforce is the first of its kind in Nova Scotia, providing important data on which to base human resource strategies moving forward.

Data was gathered using a mixed research methods including online surveys, personal interviews with key sector informants and a set of four focus groups. As such, well more than 400 points of information were collected.

The Nova Scotia survey design incorporated some features of a national study conducted in 2008 by the Human Resource Council for the Non-Profit Sector. As a result, some national comparisons are made possible.

The **key findings** relating to the non-profit workforce include:

- ❑ **Education levels** among the workforce are very high, with over 75% having at least one university degree.
- ❑ The workforce in Nova Scotia is **better educated than the national average**, but **salaries and wages paid in the sector are lower**.
- ❑ **Health benefits** are available to about two thirds of the sector's workforce while **less than 40% have access to pension plans**.
- ❑ There is a very **high level of job satisfaction and commitment** to organizations' missions.
- ❑ A substantial proportion (40%) of the workforce has been employed by their organization less than two years. More significantly, **almost 60% have been in their current position less than two years**. "Job hopping" was made evident among younger or entry-level employees. Some explanation for these high rates workforce shifts came from interviews that indicated many are employed on a project basis rather than having permanent positions.
- ❑ **Women account for over 87% of the workforce**, which is about 10% higher than the national average and 37% more than the participation rates for women in Nova Scotia's labour force.
- ❑ Only **13% of organizations have dedicated staff for HR management**. This function is most commonly added on to another staff position, such as the Executive Director. This reflects the challenges to dedicate sufficient time and expertise to cope with human resource issues.

- ❑ Seventy percent of organizations in this study report fewer than 10 paid staff, consistent with national findings that **three quarters of organizations are small** (<10 staff). Organization size has potential negative implications for career advancement opportunities.

The research also helped identify some **key issues** facing the sector that have bearing on its long-term health:

- ❑ **Competition from other sectors in the economy for qualified staff** is tough given the real limitations in non-profit sector wages and benefits. Dissatisfaction with salary and compensation is the key reason cited for staff resigning their positions.
- ❑ Research respondents indicated that there is a **demand from society for virtually all organizations to do more**.
- ❑ **Long-term stable support is eroding** for many organizations due, in part, to a greater reliance on short-term, project funding. There is also a perception of competition amongst agencies for **limited funding sources**.
- ❑ Tapping into **volunteer support** has become increasingly difficult.
- ❑ **Rural organizations** face additional challenges in recruitment because of smaller talent pools. Rural issues are compounded by transportation challenges.
- ❑ The administrative **time and cost to recruit and train new staff is significant**, making retention strategies paramount.
- ❑ The sector, like most others, is confronting an **ageing workforce**. There is a perception of heightened competition from both government and private sector employers for staff.
- ❑ Where employees overwhelmingly prefer traditional **professional development** modes such as workshops and seminars, only 34% of organizations said they covered the cost of such trainings. Targeted human resource trainings that are not cost prohibitive remain important.

I. INTRODUCTION

In 2008, the national Human Resource Council for the Non-Profit Sector in Canada presented labour market information on the voluntary sector at a provincial conference in Dartmouth. While the study had much to share regarding the sector nationally, it also revealed that data for Nova Scotia was not available simply because it had not been collected.

This lack of provincial labour market information, combined with the challenges being experienced by organizations, provided the impetus for a partnership between the Federation of Community Organizations (FOCO) and Phoenix Youth Programs to undertake a first-of-its-kind sector study in Nova Scotia.

With funding from Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC), FOCO and Phoenix embarked on a 22-month initiative to conduct a human resource study of non-profits in Nova Scotia.

This initial research report outlines the research findings and identifies key trends for discussion. These findings will be presented at a provincial conference on October 25th, and feedback from conference participants on the research data will be part of a final report scheduled for December 2010.

1. STUDY OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study are to determine:

- ❑ The size and scope of the sector in Nova Scotia in relation to economic contribution.
- ❑ Educational and training experience, employment history and compensation (salary and benefits) for staff at all levels including, but not limited to: frontline workers, middle managers, senior managers and executive directors.
- ❑ Rates of staff turnover as well as push and pull factors associated with staff turnover and mobility.
- ❑ Short-term and longer-term knowledge, skills and expertise needs for the sector.
- ❑ Specific challenges in attracting and retaining “talent” in Nova Scotia non-profit/voluntary sector organizations.
- ❑ Current (and possible future) staff retention strategies with a view to future needs.

2. METHODOLOGY

This extensive research project was supported by rigorous framework of project controls. A seven-member provincial Advisory Group met on a regular basis to provide overall guidance to the project. A larger, province-wide Sector Reference Group provided feedback and helped pilot-test research tools and methods, such as surveys and focus groups. Finally, the two sponsor organizations each provided a co-chair for the project and employed a project manager to oversee the daily administrative functions.

Over a 12-month period, research data was gathered from over 400 sector participants via three main avenues. A detailed on-line survey of both organizations and employees was accessible to sector participants for over nine months. One hundred thirty-one (131) organizations provided

information about their individual circumstances related to characteristics of their workforce, their training needs and experience with recruitment and retention of staff. Organization surveys were completed most often by senior staff.

Over 225 workers responded to the online employee survey sharing their work experiences, views on work conditions and reasons for working in the sector. They also noted their thoughts on continuing to work in the sector and training that would be useful for career advancement.

Both online surveys were available in English and French and provided the opportunity for both quantitative and qualitative information to be collected. Also a notable feature of the two online surveys is that many of the questions mirrored a national survey conducted in 2008 by the Human Resource Council for the Non-Profit Sector. This has allowed for a comparison and contrast analysis against circumstances in the sector at a national level.

This data was further collaborated by 30 follow-up interviews with many of the organizations who responded to the on-line survey. In addition, four focus groups were conducted with 25 participants to further probe the experience of organizations in various parts of the province.

Extensive literature reviews complimented the data analysis, and of note, the non-profit sector has been analyzed at a national level and excellent research has been done in both the province of Ontario and Alberta. Unless otherwise attributed, opinions expressed throughout the document are those of the consultant.

3. ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

I. Introduction

This section describes the objectives of the study and the research methodology.

II. Summary of Key Findings

This section provides highlights of trends drawn from the research data.

III. Survey Key Findings

This section outlines the outcomes of the on-line Organizational survey and the Employee survey.

IV. Focus Group and Interview Key Findings

This section reports the results of the interviews and focus groups.

V. Resources in Responding to HR Issues

In this section, we provide a summary of both the resources and challenges identified by participants to addressing the HR issues confronting the sector.

VI. Discussion Points of Central Issues

Topics are presented for further discussion.

II. SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

Based on data collected from more than 400 participants, our research identified several key characteristics of non-profit organizations in Nova Scotia and their employees:

- ❑ **Education levels are very high among the non-profit labour force in Nova Scotia:** Compared to the national sector, the education level of the Nova Scotia workforce in the non-profit sector is high, (Table 3.17). Almost 75% have at least one university degree, 10% higher than reported nationally. This shows the sector in Nova Scotia has been successful in the past at recruiting a well educated workforce. According to interviews and focus groups, this has enabled the sector to meet its labour force needs with people that are capable of providing necessary services.
- ❑ **Better qualified but pay is lower:** Despite high education levels, pay as compared to national sector participants is markedly lower. In Nova Scotia, almost 65% of workers earn less than \$40,000 per year compared to national (Table 3.23), where about 45% of the workforce earns less than the same.
- ❑ **Availability of health benefits comparable to national levels; pension plans a concern:** Approximately two-thirds of Nova Scotia organizations provided access to various health related benefit plans, (Table 3.24). The Nova Scotia results are very similar to national medium-sized organizations. The availability of pension plans is a concern, as only 35% of organizations in Nova Scotia are able to offer such plans.
- ❑ **High rate of job satisfaction and commitment to mission:** Almost 90% of all employees stated they were satisfied with their current jobs and more importantly, over 96% said they were strongly committed to their work and the cause of their employers.
- ❑ **Women account for 87% of the non-profit workforce:** There is a high ratio of women in the province's non-profit sector, compared both to the national sector (76%) and the province's workforce as a whole (almost 50%). This issue was also a topic of discussion in both interviews and focus groups. Of note, sector managers referenced the workforce challenges associated with the provision of maternity benefits. Because of the percentage of women, it was felt that parental and childcare needs disproportionately affected this sector. Participants also suggested that there may well be correlation between lower rates of pay and proportion of women.
- ❑ **Over 40% of non-profit workers have been with their employer less than two years:** This number increases to 60% for those working less than 4 years with their agency. Similarly, almost 60% have been in their current position less than two years. Interviews and focus groups indicated this could be explained, in part, by the project orientation of many positions and the desire for career advancement. This finding does directly impact on organization operations, as staff turnover requires resource investments in recruitment, orientation and training. Also of note is the potential of adverse effects on service users when the consistency of care is compromised.
- ❑ **An important warning sign:** A warning sign to the sector is an expectation among one third of all employees that they will have some likelihood of being employed by a

different organization within the next year. The two leading reasons for seeking alternate employment relate to dissatisfaction with salary and lack of promotion opportunities.

- ❑ **Recruitment challenges; 75% of all organizations reported having to recruit in the past year:** Almost 35% of organizations found recruitment to be difficult or very difficult. Through our interviews and focus groups, we also found that organizations must sometimes hire under-qualified people, as they are unable to find candidates with all of the qualifications they seek. Recruitment challenges were tied to poor pay level offered and the non-permanence of project positions.
- ❑ **Human resource policies and practices are not well defined:** Only 20% of organizations reported having formal written policies on human resource management, (Table 3.4), and only one-third conduct formal employee performance evaluations.
- ❑ **Coping with human resource issues:** Only 13% of organizations have a dedicated staff for HR management, so this function is most commonly added on to another staff position, such as the Executive Director. As a result, managers, who are often charged with other organizational responsibilities, are challenges in dedicating the required time to develop the requisite HR expertise or tend to the full scope of HR responsibilities.
- ❑ **Organization size has potential negative implications for career advancement opportunities:** Seventy percent of organizations in this study report fewer than 10 paid staff, consistent with national findings that three quarters of organizations are small (<10 staff).

Based on the feedback from respondents, our research also identified many key challenges related to the health of the non-profit sector in Nova Scotia:

- ❑ **Competition from other sectors in the economy for qualified staff is tough:** Given the real limitations in wages and benefits, non-profits felt they were unable to compete for jobs. Dissatisfaction with salary and compensation is the key reason cited for staff resigning their positions.
- ❑ **Short-term project funding eroding long-term support:** Long-term stable support is eroding for many organizations due, in part, to a greater reliance on short-term, project funding. There is also a perception of competition amongst agencies for limited funding sources. Short-term, temporary positions may also explain the practice of “job hopping” among younger and entry-level staff.
- ❑ **Rural organizations face additional challenges:** in recruitment because of smaller talent pools. Rural issues are compounded by transportation challenges.⁴
- ❑ **Pressures to do more:** Research respondents indicated that there is a demand from society for virtually all organizations to do more.
- ❑ **Tapping into volunteer support has become increasingly difficult.**
- ❑ **The administrative time and cost to recruit new staff is significant:** making retention strategies paramount.

- **Demographic and market forces:** The sector, like most others, is confronting an ageing workforce. There is a perception of heightened competition from both government and private sector employers for staff.

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III. KEY FINDINGS OF ONLINE SURVEYS

A. ORGANIZATION FINDINGS

One hundred thirty-one (131) organizations provided information about their individual circumstances related to characteristics of their workforce, their training needs and experience with recruitment and retention of staff. Organization surveys were completed most often by Executive Directors or Board Chairpersons.

1. GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS

This project is intended to reflect the labour realities in the sector across the province. Table 3.1 shows the geographic distribution of respondents.

Table 3.1: Geographic Distribution of Responding Organizations

Area	%
Halifax Regional Municipality, (HRM)	49.7
South Shore / Valley	20.2
Northern and Eastern	17.3
Cape Breton Island	12.7

The non-profit sector is concentrated in HRM and this is reflected in the responses.

2. TYPE OF ORGANIZATIONS

There is a near 50:50 split between registered (45.6%) charities and incorporated not-for-profit organizations (51.6%). Table 3.2 shows the main activities represented by respondents. The largest number relates to social services with some concentration in education and research, environment, development and housing, and health.

Table 3.2: Organizations Main Activities

Activity	%
Social Services	23.8
Development and Housing	11.9
Health	8.3
Education and Research	7.1
Environment	6.0

3. RESPONSIBILITY FOR HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT VARIES WITH ORGANIZATION SIZE

For 62% of organizations, the responsibility for human resource management is typically one part of one person's job (such as the Executive Director, the CEO or other senior manager). Table 3.3 shows the various ways human resource management is accomplished in organizations.

Table 3.3: Responsibility for Human Resource Management in Nova Scotia

Responsibility	%
Human resources management comprises one part of one person's job, such as the Executive Director, the CEO or another senior manager	61.6
Board of Directors take responsibility	12.0
One person is responsible for human resources management	11.2
Other	9.6
Human resources management matters are not assigned to one person in particular	3.2
There is a separate human resource unit employing more than one person	1.6

At the national level, most large organizations (61.5%) and some medium-sized organizations (16%), have a dedicated staff person with sole responsibility for HR management.

We also asked a number of questions related to organizations' human resource plans and policies. The results are shown in Table 3.4. Formal written HR policies exist in 20% of organizations and approximately 30% conduct formal employee performance evaluations.

Table 3.4: Human Resources Policy Approval

Policy	%
My organization has a formal process for assessing/evaluating employee performance with formal discussions and written reports.	30.6
My organization plans for its staffing needs ahead of time in accordance with budget considerations.	25.7
My organization has a formal written policy on human resources management	20.0
The unit or person(s) responsible for human resources management in my organizations is also responsible for managing or coordinating volunteers	18.0

4. ***BENEFITS OFFERED BY ORGANIZATIONS***

Table 3.5 compares Nova Scotia findings to the 2008 national study. Two-thirds of Nova Scotia non-profit workers have health benefits but less than 40% have access to a pension fund.

Table 3.5: Employee Benefits – National Compared to Nova Scotia

Benefit	Nova Scotia	National		
		Small	Medium	Large
	% of employers that offer each benefit			
Prescription drug plan	67.2	46.3	75.0	92.5
Dental care	65.0	42.8	66.3	85.0
Other medical coverage	64.0	39.2	63.2	80.0
Life and/or disability insurance	64.0	40.4	66.7	92.3
Vision care	63.2	31.9	54.5	75.0
RRSP contribution	41.6	18.1	35.7	47.5
Pension plan or pension contribution	34.9	30.1	34.7	65.0

5. ***NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES***

In this study, non-profit organizations in Nova Scotia employ an average of 17 people (including full-time and part-time employees). However, 75% of organizations employ less than 10 staff. Table 3.6 shows the average for Nova Scotia relative to the national study.

Table 3.6: Average Number of Employees by Organization Size

Organization	Average # of Employees	
<i>Nova Scotia</i>	17.2	
<i>National</i>		
Small (1-10 employees)	4.2	
Medium (11-99 employees)	28.6	
Large (100+ employees)	280.7	
Total National	18.2	
Nova Scotia # of organization by # of employees		
Employees	# of Organizations	%
1 – 5	79	57.2
6 – 10	21	15.2
11 – 20	13	9.4
21 – 50	15	10.9
51 – 100	4	2.9
> 100	6	4.3

In Nova Scotia, organizations generally rely on a mix of full and part-time employees. In this study, 86% of respondents are full-time employees (30+hrs/wk) and 14% are part-time (<30hrs/wk).

6. *RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION: EASY OR DIFFICULT?*

Many more organizations experience difficulty in recruitment than retention, both nationally and in Nova Scotia.

Recruitment efforts by employers

Three-quarters (74.6%) of organizations reported recruitment activity in the past 12 months regardless of whether or not they hired new employees. Almost 34% of organizations in Nova Scotia reported difficulty recruiting versus 47% nationally.

Table 3.7: Ease/Difficulty of Recruitment and Retention

	Recruitment		Retention	
	Nova Scotia %	National %	Nova Scotia %	National %
Very difficult	5.9	10.3	4.4	3.5
Difficult	28.1	36.8	14.8	11.0
Neither easy nor difficult	40.7	27.0	34.1	16.7
Easy	20.0	22.1	30.4	30.6
Very easy	5.2	3.8	16.3	28.9

There are several reasons for recruitment difficulty, (Table 3.8) with position salaries at the top of the list.

Table 3.8: Reasons for Recruitment Difficulty

Reason	Nova Scotia %	National %
Salary offered too low	77.5	67.0
Lack of money or funding	73.3	54.0
Applicants lacked relevant work experience	66.4	57.0
Applicant lacked skills	64.0	56.0
Competition from other organizations or government	55.4	45.0
Few or no applicants	54.4	70.0

7. *WHAT JOBS REQUIRED RECRUITING?*

Table 3.9 sets out a comparison of recruitment requirements by job category for both Nova Scotia and nationally.

Table 3.10 shows how organizations responded when they could not find a qualified applicant. The main strategy reported was a sharing of job responsibilities.

Table 3.9: Recruiting for Specific Job Categories

Job Category	Organizations that Experienced Difficulty Recruiting		Organizations that Hired	
	Nova Scotia %	National %	Nova Scotia %	National %
Senior management	8.4	7.9	10.2	16.1
Mid-level managers & supervisors	6.5	11.1	8.4	18.8
Professionals	16.2	22.7	20.8	39.1
Paraprofessionals and technical staff	9.1	16.7	14.6	34.9
Clerical and administrative staff	5.2	13.7	13.7	38.4

Table 3.10: Response When Unable to Recruit Qualified Candidates

Response	Nova Scotia %	National %
Not an issue	28.9	
Share job responsibilities	18.7	32.7
Hire a less qualified applicant	12.8	20.6
Transfer internally	9.1	12.8
Not hire	7.5	19.3
Engage volunteers	7.5	16.0
Contract out	4.8	8.5
Introduced technology to help get work done	0.5	2.3
Other	10.2	2.8

Table 3.11: Difficulty Retaining Current Employees

Difficulty	Nova Scotia %
Very difficult	4.4
Difficult	14.8
Neither easy nor difficult	34.1
Easy	30.4
Very easy	16.3

8. TURNOVER

All types of employers incur a turnover of employees. Table 3.12 compares the national experience to Nova Scotia by job category. Turnover rates in Nova Scotia tend to be lower at all levels.

Table 3.12: Voluntary Resignations by Job Category

Job Category	Nova Scotia %	National %
Senior management	10.6	18.6
Mid-level managers and supervisors	12.4	20.1
Professionals	24.8	36.3
Paraprofessionals and technical staff	17.7	28.6
Clerical and administrative staff	12.4	32.2
Other support staff	8.0	30.5

Strategies to Reduce Turnover

The survey provided a list of actions organizations might have taken in the past 12 months to make their workplaces more attractive. Table 3.13 summarizes the actions taken at both the national and Nova Scotia levels.

Table 3.13: Strategies to Reduce Turnover

Actions	% of Employees Taking this Action	
	Nova Scotia	National
Introduced or increased flexibility in work schedules	8.0	11.0
Implemented ways to improve communication	7.8	4.0
Introduced or improved efforts to help employees feel they make a difference in the community or lives of others	7.3	
Introduced or improved efforts to make workplace more fun	7.2	4.3
Introduced or improved training opportunities for employees	6.5	5.0
Increased salaries throughout the organization	6.0	16.5
Improved physical environment and/or working conditions	6.0	10.5
Modified job descriptions, duties or responsibilities	5.6	4.6
Invested in work tools or technology	5.5	3.0
Introduced or improved non-wage benefits (health benefits, etc.)	4.6	10.1
Did not do anything to make the workplace more attractive	3.4	28.8
Introduced or improved employee rewards and recognition	2.7	4.7
Improved opportunities to work off site	2.7	
Introduced or increased regular salary increments	2.2	7.1

Organizations' likelihood of hiring in the next two years by job category is reported in Table 3.14. The job category that has the highest likelihood of hiring is professionals, with 23% of all organizations expecting to hire. Nationally, this category was also the highest (35.4%).

In all major job categories, Nova Scotia organizations expected to do less hiring compared to the national numbers. This is consistent with the voluntary resignation information shown in Table 3.12 where the national groups reported more resignations across the board.

A potential explanation for the variances between national and provincial numbers is tied to survey timing. The national survey was conducted in 2007/8, prior to the recession.

Table 3.14: Likelihood of Hiring in the Next Two Years by Job Category

Job Category	Nova Scotia %	National %
Senior management	11.8	14.5
Mid-level managers and supervisors	12.6	20.9
Professionals	22.8	35.4
Paraprofessionals and technical staff	14.6	29.0
Clerical and administrative staff	17.9	28.3
Other support staff	14.6	1.7

9. SKILL DEVELOPMENT

An important aspect of human resource planning is identifying the status of skill sets among employees in a sector. Table 3.15 identifies various skills that respondents felt needed development. The top areas for skill development are legal knowledge, marketing, research and campaigning/fundraising.

Table 3.15: Employers Identify Skills that Fall Short of Organization Need

Skill Area	Nova Scotia %	National %
Legal knowledge	51.9	62.5
Marketing	46.5	48.8
Fundraising/resource development	40.3	42.1
Research	39.8	44.7
Campaigning	35.4	48.2
Understanding of technology	30.2	28.8
Strategic planning	30.5	32.7
Finance	27.3	24.9
Monitoring and evaluation	25.9	30.7
Contract management	23.4	23.2
Proposal writing	21.7	34.3
HR/personnel management	18.0	22.6
Project management	20.6	21.3

Nova Scotia organizations lagged behind their national counterparts in offering supports for professional development. Over 75% of national organizations paid development expenses compared to 69.5% provincially. More than two-thirds (70.2%) of provincial organizations provided paid time off to participate in learning and development activities. It was felt that the recession may have had an adverse effect on agencies' ability to support staff development. Table 3.16 reports organization staff development activities.

Table 3.16: Staff Development Activities

Activity	Nova Scotia %	National %
Provided paid time off for employees to participate in learning and development activities, such as taking a specific course, workshop, or attending a relevant conference	70.2	62.4
Paid some or all of the expenses for staff development or skills training, such as taking a specific course, workshop, or attending a relevant conference	69.5	76.3
Provided in-house training programs or courses	61.2	46.5
Provided staff training and development through mentoring, job shadowing, etc.	43.5	42.4
Provided career counseling or self-assessment tools to help employees better understand their skills levels and needs	13.7	19.6
None of the above	6.1	12.1

B. EMPLOYEE SURVEY KEY FINDINGS

Over 225 workers responded to the online employee survey sharing their work experiences, views on work conditions and reasons for working in the sector. They also noted their thoughts on continuing to participate in the sector and what type of training would be useful for career advancement.

1. EMPLOYEE DEMOGRAPHICS

Gender

Over 87% of employees in the Nova Scotia non-profit sector are female and 13% male. National data reveal that 76% of non-profit sector workers are female.

Age

The non-profit workforce in Nova Scotia can be characterized as mature with 45.2% reporting their ages to be over 45 years. The remaining workers were evenly distributed, with younger workers in a notable minority (<30yrs = 10.4%; 30-34yrs = 31.3%; 35-44yrs = 23.4%).

Education

The workforce in the non-profit sector in Nova Scotia is highly educated. In Nova Scotia, approximately 75% of all employees have at least one university degree with almost one quarter having two degrees. This is significantly higher than at the national level where 45% of the workforce have university degrees.

Table 3.17: Employee Education Levels (Last Completed)

Education	% of Employees	
	Nova Scotia	National
Grade school or some high school	.4	1.2
High school	2.5	8.5
Some community college or university, did not finish	9.7	18.8
Technical or trade school or community college diploma	13.1	26.3
Undergraduate degree	51.5	31.1
Post-graduate degree (masters or doctorate)	22.8	14.1

Over 80% of employees in the non-profit sector identify themselves as white/caucasian, (Table 3.18). At a national level white/caucasian accounts for 89% of the workforce. In Nova Scotia, 6.8% of employees are members of a visible minority compared to 4.2% of the general provincial population.

Table 3.18: Employee Group Identification

	% of Employees	
	Nova Scotia	National
White/Caucasian	82.3	89.0
Member of a visible minority	6.8	5.9
Aboriginal	2.4	2.7
Member of an ethnic minority	1.6	2.5
Prefer not to say	2.0	1.9

A small but significant minority (7.6%) of non-profit employees are born in a country outside Canada and now hold Canadian citizenship with an additional 3.8% who are landed immigrants or permanent residents. This compares to provincial numbers from the 2006 Census that identified 5.4% of Nova Scotians as immigrants.

2. WORK EXPERIENCE IN CURRENT ORGANIZATION

Table 3.19 examines the length of time employees have been working for their current organizations. The percentage of workers that have worked less than one year is similar nationally (15.7%) and in Nova Scotia (16.6%). A significant difference is in the 1-2 year category: 27% in Nova Scotia versus 14% nationally. Generally, employees at the national level have been with their organizations for longer periods of time.

Table 3.19: Length of Time Employed by Current Organization

Years	% of Employees	
	Nova Scotia	National
Less than a year	16.6	15.7
1-2 years	26.6	13.9
3-4 years	16.6	16.9
5-9 years	20.1	23.9
10-19 years	15.4	21.5
20+ years	4.6	8.1

Employees were asked the length of time they have held their current positions. Almost one third of the workforce has held their current positions for 1-2 years, (Table 3.20) as compared nationally (20%). Perhaps more significantly, almost 60% of Nova Scotia non-profit workers have been in their current positions less than two years, compared to 40% nationally.

Table 3.20: Length of Time in Current Position

Years	% of Employees	
	Nova Scotia	National
6 months or less	15.3	11.3
7-12 months	12.1	9.6
1-2 years	32.3	19.9
3-4 years	20.2	21.4
5-9 years	11.1	21.2
10-19 years	5.6	13.2
20+ years	3.2	3.5

3. HOW EMPLOYEES LEARNED THERE WAS A JOB OPENING

Word-of-mouth is the most common way that people learn about employment opportunities in both Nova Scotia and at the national level. Over half of all employees learned of their current position this way. Internet job postings have now surpassed traditional newspaper advertisements as a preferred way of finding job postings. Only 12% of employees learned of the availability of their current positions from newspaper advertisements.

Table 3.21: How Employees Learned About Current Position

Learned about Position	% of Employees	
	Nova Scotia	National
From people in the organization	29.3	35.1
From friends, family, neighbours or work colleagues	18.1	20.9
Notice in newspaper or journal	12.4	14.6
Internet job sites	12.4	9.9
Internal posting on current organization's website	5.0	13.7

Why did employees take their current job?

Employees accepted their current job for many reasons. In fact, over 1,000 reasons were identified in the Nova Scotia survey. Among the top reasons was “belief in organization’s mission”. Other notable categories include “opportunity for career advancement” and “type of work”.

Employees' current situations

Table 3.22 compares the number of employees in various job categories. In Nova Scotia, 42% of study respondents were senior or middle management. National level data shows a higher proportion of employees in clerical or administrative positions. This may reflect the limited number of larger organizations that exist in Nova Scotia or be skewed by positions held by survey participants.

Full-time/part-time permanency

Employees were asked whether they worked 30 or more hours (full-time) or less than 30 hours (part-time). Of Nova Scotia respondents, 86% are full-time and 14% part-time. This is a slightly higher ratio than that reported nationally where 81% were full-time.

We also asked about whether their jobs were permanent or contract. Just less than 70% were permanent employees with the balance of almost 30% on working on contracts with set end dates.

Table 3.22: Employee Job Categories

Job Category	% of Employees	
	Nova Scotia	National
Senior management	21.0	12.0
Mid-level manager or supervisor	21.0	20.0
Accredited or certified professional	19.3	15.3
Technical staff and paraprofessionals	11.8	11.6
Clerical, administrative or support staff	14.7	25.0
Other	12.2	1.6

4. COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS

Table 3.23 shows the distribution of full-time employees across salary ranges. Across all job categories in Nova Scotia, almost 65% of employees reported salaries under \$40,000. At a national level, significantly fewer respondents (46%) reported salaries below \$40,000. Lower salaries are earned in Nova Scotia despite the higher levels of education.

Table 3.23: Salaries of Employees

Salary	% of Employees	
	Nova Scotia	National
Under \$19,999	12.4	5.3
\$20,000 to \$39,999	51.9	41.7
\$40,000 to \$59,999	29.2	32.7
\$60,000 to \$79,999	3.9	12.7
\$80,000 to \$99,999	2.1	5.3
\$100,000 or more	.4	2.3

Employee benefits are an integral component of employee compensation packages. Table 3.24 compares Nova Scotia and the national sector in terms of the number of employees with access to a variety of employee benefits. Over 60% of workers have access to some sort of health benefits, but roughly 35% have access to pension or retirement funds.

Table 3.24: Employee Benefits

Benefits	% of Employees	
	Nova Scotia	National
Prescription drug plan	70.2	66.8
Dental care plan	66.4	61.4
Life and/or disability insurance	61.3	63.8
Vision care plan	61.3	50.5
Other medical coverage	47.2	52.2
Family and/or parental leave	43.4	39.1
RRSP contribution	36.5	29.6
Pension plan or pension contribution	23.4	45.3

Overtime

In Nova Scotia, the main type of compensation for working overtime is “equivalent time off”, (Table 3.25). This suggests that for those organizations requiring employees to work overtime compensation with pay may not be available.

Table 3.25: Compensation for Overtime

Type of Compensation	% of Employees	
	Nova Scotia	National
Equivalent time off	59.5	42.0
No financial compensation	16.7	19.3
I do not work overtime	7.6	15.3
Pay at regular rate	3.8	7.4
Combination of pay and time off	2.7	5.7
More than equivalent time off	2.7	9.6
Pay at premium rate	.8	8.2

5. JOB SATISFACTION

Overwhelmingly, employees’ ratings of job satisfaction at work are positive both in Nova Scotia and nationally. Almost 90% of employees are satisfied with their jobs both in Nova Scotia and at a national level, (Table 3.26).

Table 3.26: Satisfaction with Current Job

Satisfaction	% of Employees	
	Nova Scotia	National
Very satisfied	37.1	45.1
Somewhat satisfied	51.4	43.2
Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	3.5	5.1
Somewhat dissatisfied	7.3	4.8
Not at all satisfied	.8	1.7

Consistent with earlier findings of lower pay rates in Nova Scotia, respondents indicated almost 15% less satisfaction with pay compared to national numbers. Satisfaction with job security, career advancement opportunities and career development are all lower in Nova Scotia than for the national sector.

Satisfaction with benefits is comparable even though there is a lower rate of access in Nova Scotia. Categories such as employment status and amount of responsibility are similar. Employee satisfaction with different work components is outlined in Table 3.27.

Table 3.27: Employee Satisfaction

Category	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied
<i>Pay</i>			
Nova Scotia	43.4	8.9	46.5
National	61.6	14.0	24.4
<i>Benefits</i>			
Nova Scotia	51.7	11.2	22.8
National	57.4	21.0	21.6
<i>Job Security</i>			
Nova Scotia	54.3	16.7	27.9
National	70.1	16.9	13.0
<i>Employment Status (FT/PT/Temp)</i>			
Nova Scotia	80.2	7.4	12.1
National	86.1	7.0	6.9
<i>Amount of Responsibility</i>			
Nova Scotia	81.5	7.3	10.7
National	81.8	10.2	8.0
<i>Career Advancement</i>			
Nova Scotia	32.8	25.1	32.1
National	42.9	32.9	24.2
<i>Career Development</i>			
Nova Scotia	60.1	14.0	22.9
National	60.4	22.5	17.1

6. WORK – LIFE BALANCE

There is a significant difference, (Table 3.28) between the work–life balance of the non-profit sector in Nova Scotia compared to the national sector. Although Nova Scotia workers cannot work from home as often they do have much greater flexibility related to workday schedule, vacation days and personal requirements.

Table 3.28: Work-Life Balance

Work-Life Balance Statements	% of Employees Who Agree “Somewhat” or “Strongly”	
	Nova Scotia	National
Positive Statements		
I can interrupt my work day for personal reasons and then return	84.4	17.8
The number of working hours is manageable	81.9	9.0
I can take my vacation days pretty much when I want to	74.1	18.8
My work day has flexible arrival and departure times	72.5	30.7
I can work from home when and if I want to	44.0	57.5
Negative Statements		
My work schedule is subject to last minute changes	45.9	47.2
My job leaves me with little time to get other things done	45.7	46.3
I often end up working more hours than planned	37.2	29.5

7. COMMITMENT TO WORK AND CAUSE

An astounding 96% of employees in Nova Scotia are strongly committed to the cause of their current organization, (Table 3.29). This exceeds national commitment by more than 10%.

Table 3.29: Commitment to Work and the Cause

Statements About Commitment	% of Employees Who Agree	
	Nova Scotia	National
I am strongly committed to the cause(s) my current organization support(s)	96.1	85.4
I could work for any organization as long as it supports a cause I believe in	75.0	70.2
I am strongly committed to working for an organization in the voluntary and non-profit sector	66.5	63.8
I continue to work at this organization because I do not have any better alternatives	26.8	25.9

8. TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Table 3.30 illustrates employee preferences for various types of training. In Nova Scotia, the first choice was for workshops, seminars and conferences. The next most popular were professional association type programs and university or college courses. On-line training was favoured by about 20% of respondents.

Table 3.30: Preferences for Types of Training

Training Types	% of Employees	
	Nova Scotia	National
Workshops, seminars or conferences	83.8	73.6
Professional association courses	51.9	44.2
University or college courses	46.8	38.1
Formal mentoring or coaching	28.9	14.6
Informal mentoring or coaching	27.7	22.3
Courses provided by organization	26.0	36.6
Online training	19.2	19.8
Job shadowing	10.2	11.0
Internships	6.8	8.9

Table 3.31: Professional Development Opportunities

Type of Professional Development Opportunity Provided in the Past 12 Months	% of Employees	
	Nova Scotia	National
Paid time off for learning opportunities or skills training	56.2	45.3
In-house training program or course	40.8	50.7
Payment of some/all fees for tuition and career development	33.6	32.7
None	16.2	24.0
Other	10.2	2.1
In-house career counselling or self-assessment tools	5.1	12.1

9. GENERIC JOB SKILLS REQUIREMENTS

We asked employees to self-assess whether they had the generic skill requirements of current jobs, (Table 3.32). Employees are very confident that their communication, teamwork and literacy skills fully meet job requirements. Computer skills are also strong, however, the lowest score (93%) related to numeracy skills.

As a baseline, employees were asked what specific skills were required for current jobs. Table 3.33 shows many employees must possess a wide range of skills to perform their jobs. Client services ranked high as did leadership, strategic planning and project management. The top ranked specific skill requirement related to working with other organizations.

Table 3.32: Generic Job Skills Meet Requirements for Current Job

Skills	% of Employees	
	Nova Scotia	National
Communication	100	96.7
Literacy for daily activities	99.6	92.2
Ability to work in teams and collaborate	97.9	93.0
Computer skills, including proficiency with computer programs	97.9	80.0
Numeracy for daily activities	93.0	75.8

Table 3.33: Specific Job Skills Required for Current Job

Skills	% of Employees	
	Nova Scotia	National
Working with other organizations	83.4	55.8
Public relations	71.1	n/a
Project management	71.1	43.3
Monitoring and evaluation	70.6	57.5
Leadership	70.2	57.8
Client services	69.8	71.3
Strategic planning	69.8	44.1
Research	57.8	37.5
Proposal writing	52.3	28.3
Management of volunteers	51.9	31.4
Fundraising or resource development	48.1	23.6
HR & personnel management	42.1	34.0
Finance	38.3	32.8
Marketing	38.3	22.0
Management of paid staff	37.9	30.8
Procurement & purchasing	35.3	27.3
Managing contracts with suppliers	31.3	19.9
Legal knowledge	28.1	23.1
Campaigning	24.3	13.0
Language skills	9.4	8.2

10. FUTURE JOB INTENTIONS

Over three quarters of those employed nationally are emphatic that they are not looking for a new job, (Table 3.34). Compared to Nova Scotia, less than half of employees say they are not currently looking for a new job. In Nova Scotia, almost one third of all employees feel there is at least some likelihood that they will resign in the next 12 months, (Table 3.35). Nationally, the comparable figure is about 8% lower, indicating the national workforce is more stable than our provincial non-profit workforce.

Table 3.34: Job Search Situation

Status	% of Employees	
	Nova Scotia	National
I am not currently looking for a new job.	47.3	75.7
I am looking for a new job in a different organization.	16.6	11.8
I am looking for a new job either in my current organization or in a different organization.	9.0	8.3
I am looking for a new job within my current organization	3.9	4.2
Other	23.1	23.7

Table 3.35: Likelihood of Resigning in the Next 12 Months

Status	% of Employees	
	Nova Scotia	National
Definitely will	3.8	4.6
Very likely	12.2	6.8
Somewhat likely	16.0	13.2
Somewhat unlikely	20.7	15.4
Very unlikely	27.4	27.5
Definitely will not	14.3	29.4
Does not apply	5.5	3.3

Employees are looking for a new job for a variety of reasons, with dissatisfaction with salary as at the top (52.7%). Salary was also the top reason at a national level, but fewer (41%) noted it. The other top reasons in Nova Scotia included lack of promotion opportunities, limited opportunities for current development and job security, (Table 3.36).

Table 3.36: Reasons for Looking for a New job

Reasons	% of Employees	
	Nova Scotia	National
Dissatisfaction with salary	52.7	40.9
Lack of promotion opportunities	26.7	26.0
Limited opportunities for career or skill development	19.8	18.2
Current position not challenging	20.6	21.6
Not feeling valued	18.6	19.5
Workload too heavy	14.5	12.3
Dissatisfaction with benefits	16.0	9.6
Keeping all my options open	23.7	33.5
Lack of job security at my current organization	19.8	13.9
Interested in pursuing opportunities outside of the sector	14.5	12.4
Dissatisfaction with current employment status	9.2	12.5
Poor relationship with manager	5.3	11.7
Dissatisfaction with work schedule	4.6	10.2
Poor relationships with co-worker	1.5	4.5
Dissatisfaction with physical working conditions	0.8	6.8

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IV FOCUS GROUP AND INTERVIEW KEY FINDINGS

Four focus groups were conducted across Nova Scotia with approximately 25 participants and key informant interviews were completed with 30 individuals for a total of over 50 interactions with different organizations. In this section, we summarize some of the key messages provided by participants.

1. FOCUS GROUPS

Focus groups were conducted during the month of May 2010 in each of the following communities:

- ❑ Dartmouth
- ❑ Kentville
- ❑ New Glasgow
- ❑ Sydney

The format for each focus group included a presentation of interim on-line survey results to date followed by a discussion on how the results were either consistent with experience in local regions and if there were important realities not being captured or portrayed in the survey data.

Key responses from the focus groups included:

- ❑ **No real surprises in initial findings:** Overall, participants in the sector were not surprised by the key findings, including low salaries, high education levels and high turnover among younger employees on project-related jobs.
- ❑ **Funding challenges directly affect human resource practices:** The number one issue discussed in the focus groups related to issues associated with funding. An ever-increasing amount of time is spent by senior managers applying for grants or coordinating fundraising activities. Often these same people are responsible for human resource management. Funding challenges directly impact time available for the practice of good human resources management. Funding levels were also cited as the primary reason why the sector offers low compensation.
- ❑ **Recruitment of new employees depends on the nature of the job and the area of the province:** For example, in the Annapolis Valley most available positions attracted sufficient applications from qualified people. In Cape Breton, organizations struggle to fill all positions with qualified candidates.
- ❑ **Transportation for employees is a real issue in rural areas:** Public transit is simply not available to many potential employees in rural regions. Organizations report that this has affected their recruitment success for positions at the lower end of the pay scale.

- ❑ **Salary and wages not adequate:** Participants report challenges in attempting to maintain staffing levels when they could only offer pay that is below that available from alternative employment. Examples provided:
 - Loss of professional employees to government jobs.
 - Out-migration of young people from the area resulting in no applications from young people for non-permanent jobs.
 - Temporary positions do not attract good candidates who are job ready.
- ❑ **Women comprise vast majority of workforce:** Several facets of this issue were raised:
 - Few men apply for many of the positions.
 - Recruitment of senior managers can be difficult in rural areas as often job opportunities for spouses do not exist.
 - Spouses often provide cross-subsidy through better benefit packages that enable women to work in the sector.
- ❑ **Networking is second nature to non-profit sector participants:** Most focus group participants noted that they are participants in many partnerships designed for both service delivery as well as targeting common sector issues.
- ❑ **Findings related to job satisfaction and commitment must be viewed carefully:** Given the passion for the work, there is danger that employee burnout can occur. In human resource strategies this must be proactively managed.
- ❑ **Response of young people to working in the sector:** In two of the focus groups, students participated in the sessions. They offered quite strong comments related to low compensation offered at entry-level positions. University and college educations are expensive and many finish with high student debt. These debt levels prevent many young people from entering the sector in Nova Scotia.

2. INTERVIEWS

Key informant interviews were designed to collect additional qualitative data to verify and expand upon survey and focus group responses.

- ❑ **Organizations lack formal human resource policy guidelines:** A key finding of the survey shows that only one-fifth of organizations have formal policy manuals or job descriptions. Interview respondents recognized the need for these but self-professed to limited expertise in human resource management. Some respondents who reported prioritizing HR policies and evaluations reported success in slowing staff turnover.
- ❑ **Career advancement opportunity limited:** Due to the size of many organizations, there are limited opportunities to move up through the ranks. Senior management positions are limited and most are associated with a few large organizations.
- ❑ **Flexible work arrangements have been a key strategy to dealing with turnover and retention issues:** As organizations have faced challenges providing adequate pay to employees, they have successfully adopted flexible work arrangements that have served to meet employee needs. It was recognized that some agencies have difficulty in offering flexible work arrangements due to the nature of their client services.

- ❑ **Best human resource policy enhancements have significant staff participation:** Where joint job analysis has been utilized to develop job descriptions, there have been positive results with workers seeing their input reflected.
- ❑ **Information on pay scales is generally available:** Most respondents felt they were well informed on the going salary rates for the various positions in their organizations. In part, project guidelines dictate compensation levels for frontline staff. Senior executives believed they were aware of what others receive in their sector for remuneration.
- ❑ **Organizations have been innovative in coping with funding shortfalls in meeting salary demands:** A variety of strategies were noted including extending vacations in lieu of salary increases, enhancing days off policies such as allowing for “call in well” or “birthday off” days.
- ❑ **Organizations are noting the changing priorities of younger workers:** New sector entrants are expecting to be reasonably well paid, have defined career advancement opportunities, do meaningful work and strongly connect to missions. They have a greater expectation related to flexibility in the work environment.
- ❑ **Job satisfaction and commitment to mission are what sustains the sector:** This is a key characteristic of the sector. Some Executive Directors offer caution that this commitment has potential to lead to burn out and commitment must be directed in a positive way.
- ❑ **Networks play a positive role in addressing human resource issues:** Most interviewees were well connected to other non-profit organizations in their regions. Positive information flow and support was reported. Several also noted involvement in either provincial organizations or national organizations in their area of interest. Often human resource support was available at this level.

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V. RESOURCES IN RESPONDING TO HR ISSUES

The sector has both assets and potential partners to respond to human resource challenges. The following list was identified in focus groups and interviews and is not meant to be exhaustive.

- The availability of dedicated leaders associated with the sector, comprised of both senior staff and board members, is a significant resource available. In keeping with this, highly motivated workers are also key stakeholders.
- The province of Nova Scotia through the Department of Labour and Workforce Development has developed a strategy related to human resource development in the province¹. The strategy is based on strategic principles of partnership, shared ownership, innovation, protection and talent development. This plan is intended to foster the social and economic well being of Nova Scotians.
- The national Human Resource Council on the Non-Profit Sector is also a resource available at a provincial level.
- Capable human resource managers are active within the sector in Nova Scotia and the provincial professional body, the Human Resource Association of Nova Scotia.
- Post secondary education resources are available at Dalhousie University, Continuing Education, Acadia University's Centre for Social Business Enterprise, the Nova Scotia Community College and other institutions.

¹ Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Workforce Development Strategic Plan 2009 – 2013.

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VI. DISCUSSION POINTS

DISCUSSION OF CENTRAL ISSUES

1. SECTOR-GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

Although the nature of sector-government relations was not a direct question asked research participants, it emerged as a theme in a number of forms.

Overall, human resource practices were felt to be directly affected by funding challenges. The number one issue discussed in the focus groups related to issues associated with funding.

There was a perception noted in the focus groups that organizations with core funding support from government are able to provide more competitive wages and benefits.

A potential area for consideration is how the sector can better work with government to address some of these issues, including:

- ❑ The impact of short-term contract funding on worker turnover;
- ❑ The practice of funding applications and the result on time and resource availability for HR development and management; and
- ❑ Prioritizing human resource management both at the sector and government levels.

Results from the focus groups and key information interviews identified a number of existing resources available to the sector (see Section V), some of which are existing government structures. Their role and application may be an area of further exploration.

2. SALARY AND COMPENSATION

The survey found that over 60% of the non-profit workforce in Nova Scotia earns less than \$40,000 per year, or \$770 per week.

In comparing to other sectors in the Nova Scotia, the survey found that the majority of non-profit employees are among the lowest paid workers in the province. This comparison is also borne out in the results of the focus groups and key informant interviews that outlined the competition for experienced and qualified workers from other sectors.

Table 6.1: Average Weekly Earnings in Nova Scotia (2010)

Sector	Wage
Overall industrial averages	\$762
Educational services	\$818
Health Care/Social Assistance	\$808
Public administration	\$1,015
Provincial government	\$1,142

Source: Stats Can Annual Estimates of Employment Earnings.

Where the sector's workforce is predominantly female, discussions should be held regarding gender-based inequities. Some of those interviewed made the point that access to a spouse's stable income and job benefits that extend to families were what made it possible for many women to continue to work in the sector.

While many argue the sector offers young people first opportunities at career building positions, students in one focus group offered that due to student debt levels, they would be challenged to seek opportunities in the non-profit sector unless wage levels increase.

3. RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Two of the main cornerstones for any organization's human resource strategy are directly connected to the recruitment of new staff and the retention of dedicated and capable staff.

- ❑ 34% of organizations reported difficulty in recruiting for available positions.

The survey, combined with the interviews and focus groups, found that some organizations are encountering real challenges in attracting people with the right skill sets and desire to work in the sector.

- ❑ 16% reported difficulty in retaining staff.

The top reasons cited for difficulty in recruiting staff and reasons for voluntarily resigning work are the same:

- ❑ Dissatisfaction with the low pay scale.
- ❑ Uncertainty of the short-term nature of the work.

The survey research and discussion via interviews and focus groups show that staff turnover appears to be inversely related to both job permanency and job tenure; it is also higher "for direct service workers, and for workers younger than 35 years old." We also understand from our literature review that this is common to the sector in other jurisdictions.

We believe the sector should consider closely aligning with various provincial strategies for addressing labour market challenges. These include recruiting from non-traditional populations like newcomers to Canada, Aboriginal people, recent retirees and people with disabilities.

The on-line survey shows indications of "job hopping" by younger workers (less than age 35). We recognize that, in part, this is attributable to the project nature of employment arrangements and the maturing of significant portions of the workforce. Recent research in Canada conducted by the Public Policy Forum² has provided insight to what young people value in terms of work and the workplace and on the understanding of influences, interests and their priorities that shape decisions of whether to stay or leave a job. They also suggest this "job hopping" can cost organizations up to 200 percent of an employee's salary to lose and replace. Their concern is that

² The Road to Retention, Public Policy Forum, 2010.

in this post-economic downturn era, the competition will become greater for these younger employees.

Key findings from the Public Policy Research Forum that are applicable:

- ❑ Mentoring is an essential component of professional development.
- ❑ Flexibility and informal work environments have great appeal to young people. It was pointed out that the information economy has brought about a shift in the meaning of work and work patterns. “Outcomes” should be the focus rather than “attendance” or “face time”. There is a need to increase trust between employers and employees.

Feedback from both our interviews and focus groups shed further light on this issue. Many managers in the sector have limited human resource management training and have inadequate skills to tackle retention issues. Some managers already report that they are in constant recruitment mode.

“Job hopping” was seen as a direct outcome of the project nature of a lot of work done in the sector. In fact, some organizations have essentially given project staff permanent status and have taken on the risk of ensuring project funding is renewed. Focus groups and interviewees also recognize that without more prospects of career advancement opportunities, retention of staff could become an even greater issue.

4. LIMITATIONS ON CAREER ADVANCEMENT

New entrant employees are often looking for career advancement opportunities. Small organizations often have limited capacity to provide this. Young people report bumping into seniority constraints within the non-profit sector in Nova Scotia and feeling, for example, promotions can be based on time served rather than capability.

Given that three quarters of organizations are small, with fewer than 10 employees, advancement within one organization has real limits. As a result, advancement opportunities may be better viewed as across the entire sector.

The recommendations of the Public Policy Research Forum, relative to retention and provision of advancement opportunities, included:

- ❑ Recognize and nurture creative thinking.
- ❑ Understand the boundaries of the office have shifted.
- ❑ Maintain open door policies.
- ❑ Show young employees how they can grow.
- ❑ Shift the focus from the bottom line to people.
- ❑ When thinking about benefits, put yourself in their shoes.
- ❑ Stimulate inter-generational conversation.
- ❑ Be a corporate citizen (employers must be open about the environmental and social impacts of their organization).
- ❑ Eliminate gender and culture-related inequities.

5. DEMOGRAPHIC AND MARKET FORCES

The non-profit sector in Nova Scotia will be affected by a number of demographic trends. Not only is the baby boom generation approaching retirement, there is a trend of decreasing retirement age that is speeding their exit from the general workforce. Our survey data shows a clustering of older workers who hold senior positions and a clustering of younger people holding entry-level positions.

It was noted that several Executive Directors are nearing retirement age and that generally the sector has not done succession planning for these positions. It was also noted that many see a potential future labour pool for the sector to come from early retirees who wish to remain active to some extent in the workforce, perhaps not full-time.

A recent survey by the Conference Board of Canada found that “even though many baby boomers will want to supplement their income or keep active after retirement, very few employers plan to recruit from this large, underutilized labour pool”. If the trend continues, it may prove to be a boom to the sector in the short term, whether it can be sustained will remain to be seen.

Another interesting demographic feature is that the overall non-profit workforce is predominately female, so a movement towards earlier retirement is of added significance to our efforts to understand how the non-profit workforce will change over time. Will retiring males be interested in working in the sector?

6. HIGH JOB SATISFACTION

As noted in the key findings of our survey, employees reported that they have a very high level of job satisfaction. Job satisfaction in most positions in the general workplace can be attributed to a number of variables including pay rates, access to benefits, job security, flexibility, access to training and career opportunities. Interestingly, pay rates in the non-profit sector are lower than many other sectors and many do not have adequate job security. It is perhaps the high commitment to the organizational mission that plays a significant role in employee satisfaction.

Participants in the sector acknowledged that organizations are very fortunate to have such a satisfied and committed workforce and they attribute this finding in part to explaining why some employees continue in the sector despite poor salaries and wages.

The Canadian Policy Research Network (CPRN), 2004 reinforces some of our provincial findings:

- ❑ Job satisfaction is high among non-profit employees.
- ❑ Concerns raised related to pay, benefits and career advancement.
- ❑ There is an earning gap compared to many other sectors.

To explore this a bit deeper, it may help to explain this phenomenon considering that workers in the sector must derive some value from the fact they believe in their organization’s mission and their relative contribution toward achieving that mission. In the research done by the CPRN, they refer to this as the intrinsic rewards of working in the sector (fulfilling a valued vision) contrasted with the extrinsic rewards (pay, job security).

A potential concern is that an overreliance on the intrinsic rewards is not sustainable over time. The economic realities of workers, such as recent graduates with debt loads and older workers needing pension or retirement supports, may not be able to afford to stay employed in the sector.

7. TRAINING NEEDS AND AVAILABILITY

Education

Our surveys show non-profits boast a well-educated workforce. In some cases, employers are reporting that they have difficulty hiring people with the qualifications needed for the job but in many cases are able to hire people who can be trained for the position. This applies mainly to non-professional positions. Given the competitive nature of labour markets, this trend is expected to continue and its implications for training needs and ongoing staff development must be considered in the go-forward strategies.

Training & mentoring

Virtually all of the studies of the sector that looked at human resource issues recognized the need to improve knowledge sharing between veterans, brand-new staff and employees with some experience. We believe the high education possessed by the workforce in Nova Scotia lends itself well to training uptake.

It is fair to say that in terms of urgency, the most frequently mentioned training needs were sub-sector, vocation or activity specific and related to keeping abreast of new knowledge and innovative practices for developing and delivering services.

Perhaps the biggest challenge to providing staff with development and training is the availability of resources, both financial and expertise.

A number of strategies to improve the ability of organizations to provide their employees with training and professional development were cited in various reports reviewed for this research.

These included the following:

- ❑ Leveraging existing networks to share costs and resources with partner organizations;
- ❑ Cross-training in-house and allowing employees to gain experience or training at another organization;
- ❑ Offering incentives like promotions, and increased wages or education bursaries for staff to take classes on their own time; and
- ❑ Incorporating ongoing employee development into operational practice.

8. JOB QUALITY

Although the high level of job satisfaction could be interpreted as meaning that all is well, there are a number of aspects of job quality that need to be considered by sector human resource planners.

Job permanency

Job security is a key feature related to job quality and is a major factor that influences an individual's decision to remain with an employer. Contract positions are generally less attractive and they can be more difficult to fill. The lack of job security is also recognized as a contributor to workplace stress and anxiety.

Overtime work

Administrative and frontline staff, supervisors and senior managers all reported overtime work but there was marked difference in how or if that time was compensated. Front line and administrative staff were more likely to have their overtime work compensated, financially or in the form of earned-time-off.

Often senior managers reported that they, in effect, donate a significant number of hours to their organizations each week.

Engagement of employees in determining workplace arrangements and job descriptions

The ability to make alternative work arrangements is one of the more commonly cited job quality attributes in the survey of employees. Employees appreciated the fact that there was often flexibility in working hours with time in lieu of overtime pay available. With a predominance of women working in the sector, part-time work was seen as an important option for workers seeking to better balance jobs and family life.

Through the survey, we observe that the non-profit sector in Nova Scotia has done an excellent job in providing considerable flexibility to employees in terms of hours of work and location. This is commendable and compared to the national survey, Nova Scotia organizations are recognized for offering good flexibility.

There is still room for further enhancement both in terms of increasing the number of organizations that are able to meet this need and ensuring the type of job features that can be flexible are fully considered. To assume there isn't more to do could stall what is seen as a job asset to work in the non-profit sector.