Taking the Measure of Canada's Non-Profit Sector

December 17, 2002 – Canada's non-profit sector is pulling more weight than ever before. Even so, it remains an enigma. We know very little about its true size, make-up and workplace realities.

A new series of publications from CPRN's Work Network will help to rectify that.

The first paper in the series, ***Mapping the Non-Profit Sector***, by Kathryn McMullen and Grant Schellenberg, does the essential groundwork of defining and setting the boundaries of the sector. The authors draw on two Statistics Canada data sources in particular: the 1999 *Workplace and Employee Survey* and the *Business Register*. Because of data limitations, they focus on paid employees and their non-profit employers.

The non-profit sector employs almost 900,000 workers. That's about the same as the paid workforce in Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick combined, or that of the country's construction, mining and oil and gas industries. The wages and salaries of non-profits amount to about $22 billion a year.

The sector's 58,000 employers are involved in activities that range from culture and recreation, through health, education and social services, to residential construction, manufacturing, retail trade, professional services and finance.

"Clearly, the sector has become a vital part of Canada's social and economic fabric," says Schellenberg. "It's time we got to know it better."

Among the authors' findings:

- Small employers predominate – 53.4% had less than 5 paid employees – but the sector is not homogenous. Large employers dominate some industries, like health, education and social services.
- Non-profit organizations vary in importance regionally, ranging from 7.5% of employers in Atlantic Canada to only 4.4% in British Columbia
- The sector is heavily composed of women – 75% of all paid employees, with special concentration in health, education and social services – 80%.
- Educational attainment in the sector is high – 30% of paid employees hold university degrees.

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- Many (33%) are professionals in their prime working years.
- Many have family responsibilities – 20% are women with at least one child under the age of 12 at home.

"All of these characteristics," says Schellenberg, "have implications for the quality of work in non-profits, for human resources policies, and for strategies to attract and retain workers."

The authors argue that while there are intrinsic rewards to work with non-profits – commitment to a cause, for example – the quality of jobs, access to training opportunities, and enlightened human resource practices will become increasingly important in future. The non-profit sector, they conclude, will find itself competing for skilled workers with both the government and for-profit sectors as the Baby Boom generation retires.

With these considerations in mind, future papers in the series will examine the quality of work among non-profits; training and skill development; human resource practices and organizational change; and recruitment and retention.

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