



# **Towards a Skills Strategy for the Voluntary/Non-profit Sector**

## **Discussion Paper**

### **Prepared For**

### **The Voluntary Sector Human Resource Council Feasibility Study**

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and United Way of Canada – Centraide Canada

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## Foreword

I can recall a meeting with a few voluntary sector leaders in 1993 to talk about the size and scope of the sector. The conclusion was that not much was known. There was no data, not much literature, and no one was asking the question. By 1997, the Kahanoff Foundation was asking the question, and commissioned CPRN to undertake three exploratory studies – we called the final report *The Emerging Sector: In Search of a Framework*.

Times have changed. The sector has come a long way, thanks to an enormous investment of time and energy by leaders from the sector and an extended period of engagement with the federal government, leading to an Accord (yet to be fully implemented). On the data side, much better data have been developed, Statistics Canada has a first estimate of the role of the sector in the National Accounts, and the literature on the sector is growing, thanks to the work of Imagine Canada, the Canadian Council on Social Development, a number of academic institutes and CPRN. We know a lot more about the economic clout and the social mission of the sector, yet, there is much still to uncover. And public policy still has to respond to the emerging knowledge base.

The sector has also begun to develop its own institutional framework, with the advent of regional federations of non-profits, and the federal government has taken an interest in the entrepreneurial side of the sector – the social economy. It is now reviewing an application to charter a bank built to serve the thousands of organizations serving Canadian communities. This paper is part of the effort to create a Voluntary Sector Human Resource Council to work with the non-profit organizations to identify skill requirements, provide information about existing training programs, foster collaboration on human resource issues and provide practical tools. As part of the feasibility study for the Council, the paper was designed to set the scene for a workshop on what a skills strategy would look like for the sector. The paper may also be useful for other groups interested in developing a sector HR strategy, as it highlights the key components of skills strategies developed by other sectors. Readers may also be interested in the summary of the outcome of the workshop, available at [www.hrvs.ca/hr\\_council/](http://www.hrvs.ca/hr_council/)

My thanks to the authors, Richard Brisbois and Ron Saunders, and to their partners at Community Foundations of Canada and United Way of Canada-Centraide Canada. Together they continue to extend the knowledge base about the voluntary sector and to use their expertise to strengthen a sector which contributes so much to the well-being of Canadians. They in turn are part of a national movement to bring non-profit organizations into the mainstream of economic and social policy in Canada.

Judith Maxwell  
April 2005

## **Executive Summary**

Efforts are now under way to prepare for the establishment of a Human Resource Council for the voluntary/non-profit sector. In March 2005, the Voluntary Sector Human Resource Council Feasibility Study – a joint project by Community Foundations of Canada and the United Way Canada/Centraide Canada - brought together voluntary/non-profit sector stakeholders for a one-day facilitated workshop to focus on issues and questions that would need to be addressed by the HR Council in the early stages of research and inquiry about the sector’s skill needs.

The purpose of this discussion paper was to stimulate dialogue at the workshop on what a skills strategy might look like for the sector. CPRN has prepared a summary of the workshop discussions, *Report on the Voluntary Sector HR Council Feasibility Study Workshop*, which is available on the Human Resources Council Feasibility Study website ([www.hrvc.ca/hr\\_council/](http://www.hrvc.ca/hr_council/)) and the CPRN website ([www.cprn.org](http://www.cprn.org)).

### **What a Human Resources Council for the Voluntary/Non-profit Sector Could Do**

The purpose of an HR Council for the voluntary/non-profit sector would be “to develop a qualified, committed, and diverse labour force with the knowledge, skills, and attributes to meet community needs in an era of increasing complexity, challenge and change.” It would bring “employers and employees together to provide leadership and work collaboratively on research, strategies and action related to paid employment in the voluntary/non-profit sector.”

The specific roles of an HR Council for the voluntary/non-profit sector in relation to a skills strategy could include:

- working with organizations to analyze labour force trends and human resource needs and challenges related to paid employment in the sector;
- identifying skill requirements;
- providing information about existing training programs that can help meet these requirements;
- connecting voluntary/non-profit organizations to enable them to share learning and expertise on human resource issues;
- providing practical HR tools and resources; and
- developing new programs targeted at sub-groups within the sector.

### **The Size and Scope of the Voluntary/Non-profit Sector in Canada**

Previous research by CPRN indicates that the voluntary/non-profit sector has over 900,000 paid employees, about 8 percent of all paid employees in Canada. Non-profit organizations operate in a wide range of activities such as: social services; sports and recreation; religion; and arts and culture.

The sector’s paid workforce is predominantly female (women account for 75 percent of all paid employees in the sector), somewhat older on average than the Canadian workforce overall, and relatively well-educated. There is a relatively high incidence of temporary and part-time work.

Continued research is needed on the size and economic impact of the voluntary/non-profit sector in Canada as well as on the characteristics of paid employees and work in the sector, particularly with regard to trends over time.

### **Skill Needs in the Voluntary/Non-profit Sector**

CPRN's research has found that about 36 percent of employees in the voluntary/non-profit sector say the amount of training they receive is too little for the demands of their job, a higher percentage than in the for-profit sector.

In 2004, the Voluntary Sector Human Resources Council Feasibility Study conducted a series of workshops with voluntary/non-profit organizations across Canada on issues that included employee development. Workshop participants noted the need for the following skills: management training (financial, HR, performance), leadership development, fundraising skills, technical skills, and proposal writing.

An electronic survey was also conducted to gather information on HR issues from a variety of stakeholders. Results found that communication and leadership skills were considered the two most important skill areas for workers in the voluntary/non-profit sector out of 10 categories.

Studies by community groups of skills needs in the voluntary/non-profit sector in their communities/regions have found that these needs are diverse, particularly true for senior managers. The National Learning Initiative (NLI) has identified a range of competencies needed by leaders in the voluntary sector in Canada.

More research is needed in a number of key areas:

- There is need for a national survey on human resource issues (including skill needs) that takes into account the unique activities and skill needs of both voluntary/non-profit sector employers and employees;
- Information is needed on the effectiveness and relevance of skills development and training that is currently being offered to the sector's paid workers and how they are applying newly-acquired skills in the workplace;
- More information is needed on the different skill requirements within voluntary/non-profit sub-sectors, and the extent to which accessibility or training programs differ between small and larger voluntary/non-profit organizations; and
- It is important that the sector deepen its understanding of how skill needs and attitudes about training are evolving over time.

### **Developing a Skills Strategy**

There is no single template for what a skills strategy should look like. Key components of skills strategies developed by other organizations (including existing Sector Councils in Canada) include:

- conducting research on a regular basis on the supply and demand for different skills in the sector;
- profiling the specific competencies required for skills/occupations that are in demand;
- developing customized assessment and training tools that will make a difference;
- partnering with other organizations that have objectives that match those of the sector;
- sharing information on best practices; and
- measuring whether goals are achieved.

### **Questions for Discussion**

A series of questions were used to guide the discussion at the workshop. They cover issues such as:

- the scope and focus of skills development activity in the voluntary/non-profit sector;
- the usefulness of the federal government's Essential Skills framework in the voluntary/non-profit sector; and
- research gaps.

It is hoped that this discussion paper and the workshop dialogue summary report will help the HR Council for the Voluntary/Non-profit Sector to identify the key issues and questions that need to be addressed in the early stages of research and inquiry about the sector's skill needs.

## **Acknowledgements**

We would like to thank a number of individuals for their contribution to this report: Lynne Toupin and Bonnie Shiel for their valuable input and comments in the preparation of this discussion document; Patrice de Broucker for his assistance with the stakeholder interviews. Finally, we would also like to thank the individuals that were interviewed from the various national and provincial sector councils presented in this document for their participation and valuable contribution to this report.

## 1. Introduction and Background

It is increasingly recognized that, in a knowledge economy, the skills of employees are critical to the success of organizations. This is true of the voluntary/non-profit sector no less (and arguably more so) than other sectors of the economy. The voluntary/non-profit sector has experienced a rapid pace of change over the past decade in such areas as its funding, accountability measures, patterns of volunteering, and the scope of demands placed on the sector. As one study notes, “Organizations are only as good as the people who run them and work in them. In order to build the capacity of the [voluntary/non-profit] sector to work effectively, measures need to be in place to support the development and skills of the individuals who work within the sector” (VSNTO, 2004, pg. 6). This means that people working in the sector need constantly to develop new skills to adapt to change and to be creative in the solutions they find to the challenges they encounter. Sometimes this can involve informal learning activities, sometimes formal training programs. In order to be effective, skills development measures need to respond to the needs of employers in the sector as well as the career aspirations of employees.

In their 2003 CPRN report, *Skills and Training in the Non-profit Sector*, Kathryn McMullen and Grant Schellenberg found that the incidence of training for paid employees is relatively high in the voluntary/non-profit sector compared to that in the for-profit sector. However, they also noted that the data in the *Workplace and Employee Survey* (WES), upon which their study relies, provided only limited information, and at a fairly general level, about changing skill requirements and training needs, and did not provide information about the quality or relevance of the training. Moreover, a relatively high proportion of those surveyed said that the amount of training they received was too little for the demands of the job. McMullen and Schellenberg noted that further research would be needed to identify the skill needs of specific organizations and sub-sectors within the voluntary/non-profit sector, and to identify how training can be used to meet those needs.

Efforts are now under way to prepare for the establishment of a Human Resource Council for the voluntary/non-profit sector - generally referred to as the HR Council for the remainder of the document. In March 2005, the Voluntary Sector Human Resource Council Feasibility Study<sup>1</sup> brought together voluntary/non-profit sector stakeholders for a one-day facilitated workshop to focus on issues and questions that would need to be addressed by the HR Council in the early stages of research and inquiry about the sector’s skill needs.

The purpose of this discussion paper was to stimulate dialogue at the workshop on what a skills strategy might look like for the sector. CPRN also prepared a summary on the workshop discussions which is available on the Human Resources Council Feasibility Study website ([www.hrvc.ca/hr\\_council/](http://www.hrvc.ca/hr_council/)) and the CPRN website ([www.cprn.org](http://www.cprn.org)). This report will help the new HR Council to begin to develop a research and action strategy regarding skill needs in the voluntary/non-profit sector.

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<sup>1</sup> The feasibility study has been undertaken jointly by Community Foundations of Canada and the United Way of Canada – Centraide Canada.

In particular, this discussion paper aims to

- identify the key elements of a skills strategy;
- illustrate what can be achieved through a skills strategy;
- outline the kinds of research-based information that provide the foundation for developing a skills strategy;
- review the state of knowledge about skill needs in the voluntary/non-profit sector; and
- put forward a series of discussion questions for the stakeholders' workshop, focused on identifying research directions that would build a better understanding of the voluntary/non-profit sector's skill needs.

The discussion paper proceeds as follows: The next section briefly describes the research method. The role of sector councils is discussed in section 3. Section 4 presents a brief overview of the voluntary/non-profit sector including the size and characteristics of the paid-workforce in the sector. Section 5 highlights some of the known skill needs of the voluntary/non-profit sector. Section 6 provides examples of skills strategies developed by other organizations and sector councils. Key considerations and advice in developing a skills strategy based on feedback from interviews with stakeholders is presented in section 7. The paper concludes with a series of questions for discussion at the workshop.

## **2. Approach/Methodology**

The discussion paper is based on interviews, a survey of relevant literature, and an examination of published materials and website content from various stakeholders.

Interviews were conducted with officials at Human Resources and Skills Development Canada and select Sector Councils about their approaches and experience in developing skills strategies.

Literature in Canada and the U.K. was reviewed on skill needs of paid employees in the voluntary/non-profit sector. This includes CPRN's research using the *Workplace and Employee Survey* and the findings of the CPRN/Association of Fundraising Professionals *Survey of Fundraising Professionals*. We also looked at recent work to develop competency profiles for voluntary/non-profit sector employees. Key gaps in the available research are identified.

### **3. The Role of Sector Councils**

This section provides a brief overview of what existing Sector Councils do, and what might be expected of a Sector Council for the voluntary/non-profit sector.

#### **Existing Sector Councils in Canada**

Currently there are 29 national Sector Councils operating as part of the Sector Council Program of Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC). (There are also sector councils in some provinces).<sup>2</sup> They represent a wide range of industries, with an overall goal to improve the quality in the Canadian labour force and assist organizations in these sectors to meet ever changing competitive demands.

Sector Councils bring together representatives from business, labour, education, and government to understand issues and implement long-term human resource planning and development strategies for their respective sectors including areas such as:

- defining human resource issues;
- anticipating skills shortages;
- developing occupational standards; and
- recruiting and retaining workers.

Sector Councils have developed a wide range of programs and solutions that work for their sector.

#### **What a Human Resources Council for the Voluntary/Non-profit Sector Could Do**

The purpose of an HR Council for the voluntary/non-profit sector would be “to develop a qualified, committed, and diverse labour force with the knowledge, skills, and attributes to meet community needs in an era of increasing complexity, challenge and change.” It would bring “employers and employees together to provide leadership and work collaboratively on research, strategies and action related to paid employment in the voluntary/non-profit sector.”<sup>3</sup>

The specific roles of an HR Council for the voluntary/non-profit sector in relation to a skills strategy could include:

- working with organizations to analyze labour force trends and human resource needs and challenges related to paid employment in the sector;
- identifying skill requirements;
- providing information about existing training programs that can help meet these requirements;
- connecting voluntary/non-profit organizations to enable them to share learning and expertise on human resource issues;
- providing practical HR tools and resources; and
- developing new programs targeted at sub-groups within the sector.

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<sup>2</sup> There were 29 national Sector Councils as of March 2005. For more information on HRSDC’s Sector Council Program see -[www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/hip/hrp/corporate/init\\_sector.shtml](http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/hip/hrp/corporate/init_sector.shtml).

<sup>3</sup> For more details on the roles and mandate of the HR Council see the report “*Towards a Human Resources Council for the Voluntary/Non-Profit Sector*” at [www.hrvs.ca/hr\\_council](http://www.hrvs.ca/hr_council).

## 4. The Size and Scope of the Voluntary/Non-profit Sector in Canada

“Canada’s “non-profit” sector consists of thousands of organizations, groups and agencies that work at the local, regional, provincial/territorial and national levels to provide a multitude of services and supports to Canadians in almost every field of human endeavour. The sector is extraordinarily vast and diverse, with many differences across the country and across areas of activity and interest” (Goldenberg, 2004, pg. 5).

Despite agreement on the importance of the voluntary/non-profit sector in Canada, until recently, there has been little information about the size of the sector, how the sector is organized, or the economic contribution of the sector. There has also been a lack of information about paid workers in the voluntary/non-profit sector, such as their demographic characteristics, their working conditions, and the human resource challenges associated with their labour market experience. However, recent research has begun to fill this gap.

### The Size and Economic Impact of Canada’s Voluntary/Non-profit Sector

What do we currently know about the size of the voluntary/non-profit sector, its economic impact, and the paid workers who work in the sector?

Within the past year, two new sources of data on the voluntary/non-profit sector have emerged: the *National Survey of Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations* and the *Satellite Account of Nonprofit Institutions and Volunteering*. They provide information on the size of the voluntary/non-profit sector in Canada and the economic impact of this sector on the economy.

The *National Survey of Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations* (NSNVO) was conducted in 2003 and provides statistics on Canada’s non-profit and voluntary organizations, including: their numbers and geographic distribution, their primary areas of activity, and the financial and human resources on which they rely. According to the NSNVO, there are 161,000 non-profit and voluntary organizations in Canada with over 2 million paid employees in the sector. The organizations operate in a wide range of activities such as: social services; sports and recreation; religion; and arts and culture. Voluntary/non-profit organizations in the NSNVO also include large institutions such as hospitals, universities and colleges, and unions.<sup>4</sup>

In 2004, Statistics Canada released the results of the *Satellite Account of Nonprofit Institutions and Volunteering* (Satellite Account) which provides the first ever official estimates of the economic contribution of the voluntary/non-profit sector in Canada, putting it on equal footing with other economic sectors. The voluntary/non-profit sector’s GDP in 1997 was estimated at \$61.8 billion or 6.8 percent of the total economy. The economic contribution of volunteer work is also included in the Satellite Account – estimated at about \$14 billion in 1997, thus increasing the economic contribution of the voluntary/non-profit sector to 8.6 percent.<sup>5</sup> The Satellite Account was funded through the Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI) and it is now an annual program at Statistics Canada, with the next scheduled release in 2005. This will allow for more meaningful trend analysis of the economic impact of the sector over time.

For purposes of international comparability, both the NSNVO and Satellite Account provide statistics for a broadly-defined voluntary/non-profit sector. This definition includes/excludes

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<sup>4</sup> See Statistics Canada (2004a) for more information.

<sup>5</sup> See Statistics Canada (2004b) for more information.

certain categories or organizations according to the International Classification of Nonprofit Organizations (ICNPO). This classification system was developed through the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project at Johns Hopkins University.<sup>6</sup> This definition of the voluntary/non-profit sector includes organizations such as hospitals, universities and colleges, religious organizations, and organizations run entirely by volunteers.

While the findings from the NSNVO and Satellite Account are important in understanding the economic impact and size of a broadly defined voluntary/non-profit sector, they do not provide detailed information on paid workers in the sector. What are the characteristics of paid employees? What are the working conditions like in the sector and what kinds of human resources issues does it face? How are skills needs changing and what type of training do employees in the sector receive?

Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN) has produced a series of research papers examining human resource issues in the voluntary/non-profit sector in Canada using data from the 1999 *Workplace and Employee Survey* (WES) - which for the first time allowed voluntary/non-profit organizations and employees to be identified. The CPRN/WES analyses use a more narrowly defined voluntary/non-profit sector than the NSNVO or Satellite Account. The NSNVO and Satellite Account analyses on the voluntary/non-profit sector include hospitals, schools, colleges and universities and similar organizations as part of the sector. However, these may also be considered to be quasi-public institutions that are financed and controlled by government – the so-called “quango” sector (quasi-autonomous non-governmental organizations).<sup>7</sup> The term “non-profit sector” as used in the CPRN/WES studies does not include such organizations.<sup>8</sup>

In using data from the WES, CPRN was able to examine a wealth of information from a nationally representative survey on human resource and workplace issues, allowing comparisons to be made between the voluntary/non-profit and for-profit sectors. The focus of CPRN’s analysis was on the sector’s paid employees.

Below are some highlights of the key findings from the CPRN/WES studies on the size of the voluntary/non-profit sector, characteristics of the voluntary/non-profit sector workforce, and characteristics of work in the sector.<sup>9</sup>

#### Size of the Voluntary/Non-profit Sector and Organizations Within It

- The voluntary/non-profit sector employs almost a million Canadians - over 900,000 paid employees. This represents about 8 percent of all paid employees in Canada. This is about the same as the paid workforce of Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick combined, or that of the country’s construction, mining and oil and gas industries.

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<sup>6</sup> For more information on the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project see [www.jhu.edu/~cnp/](http://www.jhu.edu/~cnp/).

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Saunders (2004), and Quarter et al (2003).

<sup>8</sup> See McMullen and Schellenberg (2002) for more details on how the voluntary/non-profit sector is defined in the CPRN research papers and see Brisbois and Saunders (2005) for details on the comparison between the CPRN/WES statistics and those from the NSNVO and Satellite Account.

<sup>9</sup> Much of the data on the size of the voluntary/non-profit sector is drawn from Statistics Canada’s *Workplace and Employment Survey* (WES) (1999) and *Business Registry*, as reported in McMullen and Schellenberg (2002, 2003a, 2003b) and Saunders (2004). It should be noted that the WES includes only workplaces with at least one paid employee. It does not include information on the numbers of volunteers who work in those organizations, and it does not include information on workplaces run entirely by volunteers.

- Voluntary/non-profits with paid employees number close to 60,000 - payroll expenditures by voluntary/non-profit organizations are over \$22 billion a year.
- Small organizations predominate in the voluntary/non-profit sector - over half (53 percent) of organizations with paid employees have fewer than five employees, and almost three-quarters have less than ten. Only about 5 percent have fifty or more employees.
- However, half of paid employment in the sector is found in organizations with fifty or more employees and 20 percent in organizations with between twenty and fifty employees.

### Characteristics of the Voluntary/Non-profit Sector Paid Workforce

- The paid workforce of the sector is predominantly female - women account for 75 percent of all paid employees in the sector.
- Many paid employees are in their prime working years – 39 percent of paid workers are over 45 years of age.
- Voluntary/non-profit organizations have a relatively high percentage of well-educated, professional staff – 28 percent have a university degree, compared to 15 percent for the for-profit sector.
- Employment in the voluntary/non-profit sector consists of a large professional and managerial component - about one-third of paid employees in the voluntary/non-profit sector are in professional occupations.

### Characteristics of Work in the Voluntary/Non-profit Sector

- There are more temporary jobs in the voluntary/non-profit sector than the for-profit sector (14 percent of jobs in voluntary/non-profits are temporary, compared with 8 percent in for-profits) and therefore higher levels of job insecurity.
- Twenty five percent voluntary/non-profit jobs are part-time – double the level in the for-profit sector.
- More voluntary/non-profit organizations offer flexible work hours.
- Almost 40 percent of voluntary/non-profit employees are dissatisfied with their pay and benefits - only 20 percent of for-profit employees feel likewise.
- Limited revenues and financial uncertainty among voluntary/non-profits may result in fewer permanent jobs, limits to benefits, and heavier workloads.

### **Community-based Research on the Voluntary/Non-profit Workforce**

Research has also examined human resource and skill issues in the voluntary/non-profit sector at the local or regional level.

Studies in Sudbury (Ontario), London (Ontario), the Niagara Region (Ontario), and New Brunswick have profiled the voluntary/non-profit sector workforce in these communities/province and examined the challenges and issues voluntary/non-profit organizations face in their day to day operations.<sup>10</sup> These studies' findings about work and

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<sup>10</sup> See Sudbury Social Planning Council (2001), Pillar (2004), and Centre for Community Leadership (2003), Government of New Brunswick (2004) for more information.

workers in the voluntary/non-profit sector in their communities are similar to the results of the CPRN national studies using the WES. For example, the voluntary/non-profit workforce in these communities is mostly comprised of women, the workforce is highly educated, and there is a high incidence of temporary or part-time work. These local research initiatives are important in providing information on workforce issues or skill needs at the community level.

Other studies have been done on skills needs and human resources issues facing the voluntary/non-profit sector in Canada at the community, regional or sub-sector level. The examples presented in this report are not exhaustive but rather provide information on common human resource issues facing the sector, as well as specific local issues.

The research described in this section of the paper sheds light on the size and economic impact of the voluntary/non-profit sector in Canada as well as on the characteristics of paid employees and work in the sector. Continued research in this area is needed, particularly with regard to trends over time.

## 5. Skill Needs in the Voluntary/Non-profit Sector

“The collaboration in the sector has not only meant change for organizations, it has had a significant impact on leaders and managers. New competencies, skills, and abilities are now required to work effectively in voluntary sector leadership positions. Educational and training opportunities tailored to these new skills are essential for building a stronger voluntary sector in Canada and a stronger society”.<sup>11</sup>

What do we currently know about the skill needs of employers and employees in the voluntary/non-profit sector? Is increased skill development important to workers in the sector as well as their employers? Are skill requirements changing? What are the top skills development issues to leaders in the sector?

### Changing Skill Requirements and the Incidence of Training

A number of studies – both national and local – have attempted to answer these and other questions. This section highlights key findings from some of these studies.

The third report in CPRN’s research on human resources in the voluntary/non-profit sector, *Skills and Training in the Non-profit Sector*, examined issues of changing skill requirements and the incidence of training in Canada’s voluntary/non-profit sector. This study did not provide specifics on which skills are seen as most important to the sector but looks at the importance of skills development and upgrading in general. Below are some highlights of its key findings on skills issues in the sector based on results from the *WES*.<sup>12</sup>

#### Changes in Skill Requirements

- About half of employees in the voluntary/non-profit sector reported increases in overall skills requirements since beginning their jobs.

#### Importance of Increasing Employee Skill Levels

- Seventy percent of employers in the voluntary/non-profit sector rate “increasing employee skills” as very important/crucial or important. This was similar to ratings in the for-profit and quango sectors.
- Larger organizations place greater importance on increasing employee skills than do small voluntary/non-profits. While half of all voluntary/non-profit organizations with 20 or more employees rated increasing employee skills as a very important or crucial part of their organizational strategy, this was only the case for just under 30 percent of voluntary/non-profit organizations with less than 20 employees. Given the large proportion of smaller voluntary/non-profit organizations in the sector, emphasizing the importance of employee skill development to smaller organizations and providing them will tools and information to do so may need to be among the goals of the HR Council.

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<sup>11</sup> National Learning Initiative (2003b).

<sup>12</sup> See McMullen and Schellenberg (2003b) for more information.

### Provision of Training and Adequacy of Training

- More employers in the voluntary/non-profit sector (68 percent) than the for-profit sector (55 percent) provide some type of training (classroom, on-the-job, or training subsidies/reimbursements), but this is less than in the quango sector (75 percent).
- Again there is a strong relationship between the provision of training and size of the organization. Virtually all voluntary/non-profit organizations (99 percent) with over 20 employees provide some training compared with only 63 percent of voluntary/non-profit organizations with less than 20 employees.
- About 36 percent of employees in the voluntary/non-profit sector said the amount of training they received was too little for the demands of their job (compared to 38 percent in quango and 27 percent in for-profit). There was little difference between small and large voluntary/non-profit organizations in regard to perceived adequacy of the training (34 percent in small versus 36 percent in large).

A study by CPRN on professional fundraisers in Canada<sup>13</sup> also found sharp differences between small and larger organizations (as defined by annual revenue generated) in regard to the perceived adequacy of and satisfaction with training. Close to two-thirds of fundraisers in large organizations (with annual revenue of \$4 million or more) agreed they got the training needed to do their jobs compared with only 50 percent in smaller organizations (with annual revenue of less than \$250,000). Similarly, satisfaction with training is higher among fundraisers in large organizations (70 percent) than those in smaller ones (41 percent). These findings reinforce the importance of considering the special needs of smaller voluntary/non-profit organizations when developing a skills strategy for the sector.

### **Skill Needs**

The CPRN/WES research provides helpful information on the increasing importance of skills, on the attitude toward skills upgrading by employers, and the incidence and adequacy of training. But what are the specific skills that paid workers and employers in the voluntary/non-profit sector need to achieve their goals?

In 2004, the Voluntary Sector Human Resources Council Feasibility Study conducted a series of discussion groups with voluntary/non-profit organizations across Canada. The discussion groups were designed to gather the opinions and insights of leaders in the voluntary/non-profit sector on current and emerging issues in five key human resource areas (pay and benefits, attracting and keeping people, perceptions of the work, managing people, and employee development) relevant to paid employees in the sector. An electronic survey was also conducted to gather further information on these issues from a variety of stakeholders.<sup>14</sup>

Below we highlight information from this research – both the discussion groups and on-line survey - relating specifically to employee skill development.

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<sup>13</sup> See McMullen (2002).

<sup>14</sup> Information presented in this section is drawn from “*What We Heard: Findings From Discussions in Communities About a Voluntary Sector Human Resources Council*” and “*Voluntary Sector Voices: Results of an On-Line Survey of Human Resources Priorities*” by the Voluntary Sector Human Resources Council Feasibility Study (2004a, 2004b).

- Workshop participants placed more emphasis on building skills that would help organizations and employees do their work, rather than on skills that foster career development.
- Participants noted the need for the following skills: management training (financial, HR, performance), leadership development, fundraising skills, technical skills, and proposal writing.
- Results from the on-line survey found that communication and leadership skills were considered the two most important skill areas for workers in the voluntary/non-profit sector out of 10 categories. This was followed (in order of importance) by: marketing/public relations; project management; organizational management; managing partnerships; technology; fundraising; financial management; and updated professional skills.

The results from the workshops and on-line survey point to the need for a wide range of skill needs for employees in the voluntary/non-profit sector including generic skills (communications, management, leadership, IT) and skills that are of particular importance in the voluntary/non-profit sector (e.g. fundraising, project management).

The on-line survey also revealed that 95 percent of respondents indicated that “training of staff” was an important focus area for improvement to enhance employee satisfaction.

As part of the Pillar study on London’s voluntary sector employment and training needs, an entire section of the survey instrument was dedicated to training issues.<sup>15</sup> This included information on areas of training and challenges in training staff – all of which was available by occupational category. A unique part of this survey asked respondents to indicate which skill sets (from a list of over 20) were “required” to be performed in seven job functions (sr. mgmt., mgmt. sr. admin., clerical/admin support, professional, intermediate/technical, and other) and where “critical training” was required in these skills sets. Some noteworthy findings are:

- The survey results suggest that senior managers and managers are required to have a “diverse skill set”. Other than skills like “setting up bookkeeping systems, accounts, payroll, banking, etc.” over 20 percent of respondents indicated that all of the skill sets were required by senior managers.
- Critical training areas needed for a number of senior managers/management included: fundraising and grant proposal writing, project planning, dealing with conflict, project development, and leaderships skills.
- As noted in the report, knowing where training is needed can help organizations develop training programs.

The Centre for Community Leadership at Niagara College undertook a study on the Niagara Region’s voluntary/non-profit labour force which aimed to, among other things, develop a profile of the sector’s workforce and identify required skills and training needs within Niagara’s voluntary/non-profit sector.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See Pillar (2004) for more details.

<sup>16</sup> See Centre for Community Leadership (2003) for more information.

The study found that the skill needs of those working within the sector are diverse - this was particularly true for senior managers who must have the skills to run an organization, be fundraisers, understand board governance, and in some cases, manage volunteers. The report suggested that training and skills development of Executive Directors is imperative in the sector. Other key recommendations from focus group in the study include:

- Develop a mentoring program to partner experienced senior management with those just entering the sector.
- Share identified training needs with organizations and boards and encourage them to invest in training.
- Develop a checklist of voluntary sector leadership competencies that can be used for self-assessment for those working in or thinking of entering the sector.
- Focus on developing national skills for the voluntary/non-profit sector.

The Voluntary Sector National Training Organization (VSNTO) in the U.K. undertook a survey - *Futureskills 2003* - of over 1,000 voluntary organizations examining skills issues and skills gaps among the paid workforce in the sector.<sup>17</sup> It builds on a similar survey – *Skills Matter* – which was carried out by the VSNTO in 2000. *Futureskills 2003* was conducted to highlight the skills that employers consider to be of top priority both at the present and for the future of the sector<sup>18</sup>. Key findings include:

- The priority skills needed for the future in the sector included: management skills (e.g. planning and organizing); project management and strategic planning; team work; strategic use of IT; written communication; leadership; and fundraising skills.
- Using the earlier results from the *Skills Matter* survey, persistent skill gaps were found in areas such as IT and some softer skills such as dealing with clients.
- The report recognized there is sometimes a difficulty in assessing skills gaps between survey years given that there are so many new employees in the voluntary sector.

The VSNTO study also suggested that the large number of voluntary organizations with fewer than 10 staff may contribute to the demand for “multi-skilled” personnel. This is a similar finding to the need for employees with a “diverse skill set” as noted in the Pillar and Niagara studies outlined above. The need for employees who are multi-skilled could have an important impact on the strategies of the HR Council.

A study by the Ontario Network of Employment Skills Projects (ONESTEP) on Ontario’s community-based training (CBT) sector provides a perspective on skills needs facing a specific sub-sector within the voluntary/non-profit sector. The CBT sector is comprised of non-profit organizations who deliver training and pre-employment preparation. (e.g., basic skills such as literacy and numeracy, career counselling, academic upgrading) for individuals who may face barriers to participation in the labour market.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See VSNTO (2003) for more details.

<sup>18</sup> Information from *Futureskills 2003* was later used by the VSNTO in developing a skills strategy for the voluntary sector. See the report *A Skills Strategy for the Voluntary and Community Sector* (VSNTO, 2004) for more information on the skills strategy developed in the U.K. voluntary sector.

<sup>19</sup> See ONESTEP (2001) for more information.

So what are the skills needs facing the CBT sector? The most common skills needs (or professional development needs) identified by staff in the sector are specific CBT skills such as understanding clientele and their needs, adult education techniques, and counselling and assessment methods.

A majority of managers (over 80 percent) also noted the need for “entrepreneurial skills development” of CBT managers and resource development personnel. These entrepreneurial skills include the ability to secure new opportunities, creativity, marketing and sales, communications and management.

The need for a broad range of skills by managers at CBT organizations is consistent with the other studies presented above and clearly points to a need for multi-skilled leaders in the general voluntary/non-profit sector.

## **Competencies**

The National Learning Initiative (NLI) undertook a research project to look at competencies among leaders in the voluntary sector in Canada.<sup>20</sup> The goal of this project was to identify the main competencies or common set of skills and knowledge that voluntary sector leaders need to have. Five workshops were held across Canada in 2002 involving over 60 leaders from the voluntary sector.

What do we mean by leadership competencies? The NLI defines competencies as “The knowledge, skills, abilities, intangible/tangible mindsets and behaviours (savoir, savoir-faire, et savoir-être) that lead to improving life in the community and the world through principled actions and professional behaviour in the voluntary sector. Core competencies are those competencies which are common across the voluntary sector, irrespective of regional or sub-sectoral differences.” (NLI, 2003a, pg. 6).

Leaders in the workshops identified the skills and abilities (core competencies) they need to do a good job. These were later grouped into four general areas as follows:

Vision and Alliances – skills in this area allow leaders to build support for a vision. This includes skills to be able to: lead effective and innovative public action; play a role in developing public policy; and help to develop and gain support for a vision.

Strategies and Resource Management – these skills allow leaders to use sound and ethical management practices. This includes: raising funds in ways that are diverse and ethical; ensuring sound financial stewardship; and maintaining and developing research.

Relationships – this involves leaders fostering team involvement; developing and maintaining interpersonal relationships; and excelling at written and spoken communication.

Complexity – competencies for leaders in this area include: being aware of the environment; sustaining a healthy working environment; and excelling at cooperation.

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<sup>20</sup> See NLI (2003a) for more information.

The researchers note that a key objective of this research is to begin a larger discussion within the voluntary and educational sectors about building leadership capacity, including questions such as: How can leadership be taught? How can leadership competencies be learned? What methods or educational systems would meet the educational needs of voluntary sector leaders? How can we support the capacity development needs of existing voluntary sector leaders? How can we "grow" the next generation of leaders?<sup>21</sup>

The study on the Niagara Region's voluntary/non-profit workforce<sup>22</sup> (noted above) recommends the development of a competencies checklist for leaders of voluntary/non-profit organizations in the Niagara Region. A competencies checklist could be used as a self assessment tool for those already working in the sector, or by those interested in working within the sector, as a method of assessing what skills competencies they would need to develop as a leader in the voluntary/non-profit sector. The study also suggests that the individual competencies could be linked with existing training opportunities and resources.

## **Conclusion and Skill Needs Research Gaps**

The research outline above provides some information on skill needs and training gaps in the sector, but (with the possible exception skill needs for managers/leaders) at a fairly general level. More information and research is needed on a number of important issues, as follows.

### Specifics on Skill Needs and Training Gaps

- The ability to identify the voluntary/non-profit sector in a broad national survey such as the *WES* has made a valuable contribution to our knowledge on human resource issues in the sector. However, most of the organizations included in the *WES* are in the for-profit sector and many of the questions asked in this survey are geared toward a for-profit organizational model (e.g. questions on total quality management or new production/operating techniques). The NSNVO is, of course, designed for the voluntary/non-profit sector, but provides limited information regarding skill needs and training priorities. There is arguably the need for a survey of human resources in the sector that takes into account the unique activities and skill needs of voluntary/non-profit sector employers and employees.
- Information is needed on the effectiveness and relevance of skill development and training that is given and of how employees are applying newly-acquired skills in the workplace; and
- More information is needed on specific skill requirements within voluntary/non-profit sub-sectors, and the extent to which skill needs and the accessibility or training programs differ between small and larger voluntary/non-profit organizations.

### Trend Analysis

- McMullen and Schellenberg note that, like other sectors of the economy, the voluntary/non-profit sector is going through rapid change. It is important that the sector continue to deepen its understanding of how skill needs and attitudes about training are evolving, and how they may change in the future. Data from the 1999 *WES* provide only

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<sup>21</sup> Dialogue questions from HRVS website at – [www.hrvs.ca/initiatives/pg002\\_e.cfm](http://www.hrvs.ca/initiatives/pg002_e.cfm).

<sup>22</sup> See Centre for Community Leadership (2003) for more details.

a snapshot on training and skills needs of the voluntary/non-profit sector (and, as noted above, do not provide enough information on specific skills needs). As new demands are placed on voluntary/non-profit organizations, skill needs will have to be assessed on a regular basis.

## 6. Developing a Skills Strategy

There is no one “model” of what a skills strategy should look like, what it should or should not include, or what the focus of the strategy should be. Skills strategies will largely be determined by the specific goals and needs of a sector.

In this section we provide highlights of the key components of skills strategies developed by other organizations as examples of what to consider in developing a skills strategy. These examples include skills strategies developed at other Sector Councils in Canada as well as other voluntary organizations in Canada. While some of these Sector Councils operate in a context that is very different from the voluntary/non-profit sector, the processes they followed may provide lessons that can be more widely applied.

### Essential Skills

Several of the case studies presented below on skills strategies from other Sector Councils refer to the Essential Skills framework developed by the federal government. Accordingly, we provide here a brief overview of this framework before discussing the case studies.

Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) has identified a set of skills – termed Essential Skills - that are used in most (if not all) occupations and are seen as necessary to be successful in these occupations.

Essential Skills are seen as skills that people use to:

- Learn more technical skills;
- Perform required job tasks; and
- Adapt to workplace changes.

HRSDC’s list of nine Essential Skills includes: reading text; document use; writing; numeracy; oral communication; thinking skills (problem solving, decision making, critical thinking, and finding information); working with others; computer use; and continuous learning.

Essential Skills were developed under the Federal Government’s Essential Skills Research Project (ESRP). The goal of the ESRP, initiated in 1994, was to identify the measurable, transferable and teachable skills present in virtually all Canadian occupations listed in the National Occupational Classification (NOC), the authoritative taxonomy of occupations in Canada. The NOC organizes the Canadian world of work into 520 occupational groups according to skill type and skill levels and is the framework for occupational data collection in Canada.

The ESRP has directly generated occupation-specific essential skills profiles that are used by industry and educational partners across Canada to set training standards appropriate to particular occupations. According to the ESRP website<sup>23</sup>, there are some 190 occupational profiles currently available - 150 of these profiles refer to occupations that can be entered with a high school diploma or less. There are also some 40 profiles that describe occupations requiring study beyond high school. Additional profiles will be added as they become available. The

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<sup>23</sup> See ESRP website at – [www15.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/English/general/esrp.asp](http://www15.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/English/general/esrp.asp)

methodology developed to profile Canadian occupations has sometimes been tailored by others for use in particular sectors or workplaces (such as the trucking sector, as we will see below).

### **Construction Sector Council**

The Construction Sector (CSC) works to identify critical human resources challenges in the construction industry and find common solutions and approaches.<sup>24</sup> Like many industries, the construction sector faces a number of human resources challenges. These include the need to forecast labour demand and supply (nationally, provincially, and locally), to make the most of new technologies in the sector, and to cope with an ageing workforce. As a result, the CSC focuses on four key priorities:

- labour market information;
- technology at work;
- career awareness programs; and
- standards and skills development.

In this section, we will focus on the CSC's work on labour market information and standards and skills development.

A key focus for the CSC is a detailed ongoing examination of a sector's labour force through their Labour Market Information Program (LMI). The LMI is one of the largest projects of the CSC and is designed to provide the industry with detailed information on current and forecast demand for labour, by construction sector, by trade and by province or territory. The LMI studies helped reveal the need for Essential Skills in the construction industry. The information generated by the LMI also helps the sector to deal with human resource challenges such as an aging workforce, needs for technical skills upgrading and worker mobility. The basic goal of the LMI is to answer the questions: what skills are needed, how many workers are needed, and how to find them?

As part of their work on "standards and skills development", the CSC launched their Essential Skills Strategy in February, 2005. The CSC's decision to focus its skills strategy on Essential Skills was made in the light of research (including the LMI noted above) that identified the real need for Essential Skills in the construction industry workforce. The human resource needs of the construction sector have been analyzed in a number of labour market studies of particular construction trades over the past 15 years. The issue of Essential Skills (ES) has been raised in many of these studies and pointed to a need to upgrade the ES of the current construction sector workforce in areas such as literacy, basic math, document use, computer use, and thinking skills.<sup>25</sup>

A number of Essential Skills projects have already been developed in the construction industry (with support from the federal government), including: Essential Skills profiles for construction sector occupations; integrating Essential Skills training into technical trades training; and promoting Essential Skills in the workforce.

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<sup>24</sup> For more information, see the CSC website at – [www.csc-ca.org](http://www.csc-ca.org).

<sup>25</sup> See the CSC report *Essential Skills Strategy for the Construction Industry* for more information.

Prior to embarking on their Essential Skills Strategy, the CSC hosted an Essential Skills workshop in 2003, bringing together key industry, government, and practitioner stakeholders. The goals of the workshop were to: raise awareness of ES activities in the construction industry; obtain industry direction and needs regarding ES and possible roles for the CSC; and help develop an ES strategy document to guide future work by the CSC.

The overall objective of the CSC's Essential Skills Strategy is to "assist the construction sector workforce in achieving the levels of Essential Skills required to fully participate in training and employment" in the sector. The CSC's Essential Skills Strategy has five key components:

1. Research – the CSC will facilitate new research necessary to support the needs of the sector. Before developing any new tools, resources, or training on ES, a comprehensive inventory of existing materials will be made available to industry.
2. Awareness – the CSC will engage the sector on Essential Skills and be open to partnerships that will: increase awareness among employees of importance of Essential Skills and raise the sector's awareness of resources and tools available and how to access and use them.
3. Clearinghouse – the CSC will provide a clearinghouse function for Essential Skills information relevant to the sector. This would include: making results available of in-house research; sharing best practices resulting from projects undertaken by the CSC and other stakeholders; making information, tools, and resources easily accessible for use in the sector; and partnering with groups who wish to share results of the work with industry. The CSC aims to see its' website as a "one-stop" point of access for all information and links on Essential Skills for the industry.
4. Coordination – the CSC will facilitate the pooling of resources, thereby enabling the industry to achieve economies of scale and more efficient use of resources. The CSC will partner with organizations wishing to do work on ES for the construction industry. This will be done by establishing a national Essential Skills Coordinating Committee with mandate to provide guidance to the CSC on matters related to Essential Skills.
5. Standards and training – the CSC will incorporate Essential Skills into national construction trade/occupational standards and into training projects where applicable.

### **Canadian Trucking Human Resources Council**

Established in 1994, the Canadian Trucking Human Resources Council (CTHRC) plays a national leadership role in coordinating human resources research and development in the Canadian trucking industry. The mission of the CTHRC is "to assist the Canadian Trucking Industry to recruit, train and retain the employees needed to meet current and long term requirements".

The CTHRC, like the other sector councils, has undertaken research analyzing the human resource needs of the industry. Some of the key HR issues identified include: a lack of training standards; an ageing workforce; a weak take up on national standards; low levels of literacy of drivers in the sector; and a growing shortage of qualified drivers.

One of the Council's key Business Lines is the establishment of National Occupational Standards. These outline both technical and Essential Skills (the same nine Essential Skills as developed by HRSDC noted earlier) requirements for key positions in the trucking industry. By May 2002, National Occupational Standards, also referred to as profiles, were developed for four trucking sector occupations - Professional Driver, Dispatcher, Professional Driver Trainer, and Transportation Safety Professional. These four positions were chosen first to be profiled because of the strong need to find qualified workers in these positions.

In 2002, the CTRHC launched the *Essential Skills Needs Assessment (ESNA)*<sup>26</sup> project to review current industry practices in assessing and training for Essential Skills and to identify the learning needs of the workforce in the four profiled positions. This involved a national steering committee of industry representatives, a survey of drivers and training schools, focus groups, and one-on-one interviews with stakeholders in the sector. The ESNA compared the trucking industry's demand for Essential Skills (as outlined in the Occupational Standards profiles noted above) with the available supply in the workforce. Major findings of the ESNA included:

- A significant portion of Professional Drivers have poor reading text skills.
- In some regions of the country there are significant skill needs around oral communication because English is their second language. Similar learning needs exist among new immigrants.
- The current Dispatcher workforce has sufficient skill in reading text, document use and numeracy.

As a direct result of the findings from the ESNA, the CTHRC plans on leading the industry in addressing its Essential Skills learning needs through a "National Essential Skills Strategy" which was officially launched in 2003. The National Essential Skills Strategy features four key components:

1. Assessment – the CTHRC will develop national, customized assessment tools for the four key occupations that profiles have been developed for.
2. Upgrading – the CTHRC will work to develop industry specific curriculum to upgrade text, document use and numeracy skills – low level scores on all of these were found in the trucking workforce based on essential skills pilot studies.
3. Partnerships – the CTHRC will partner with industry to lead pilot projects and partner with colleges and universities in regard to training development.
4. Awareness – the CTHRC will introduce the National Essential Skills Strategy to the trucking industry and disseminate information on essential skills through the CTHRC – via the Council's website as well as conferences and workshops.

In September 2004, the CTHRC launched the *Essential Skills Toolkit* - a suite of assessment and upgrading resources developed as part of its National Essential Skills Strategy. The toolkit is comprised of a number of resources to help promote essential skills within the trucking industry and includes: the Essential Skills profiles for four key occupations in the sector (as noted above);

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<sup>26</sup> See CTHRC (2002) for more information.

and a customized assessment tool for use by the trucking industry which allows for testing the essential skills of reading text, document use, and numeracy skills in these four occupations.

## **Cultural Human Resources Council**

The Cultural Human Resources Council (CHRC) works to address the training and career development needs of cultural sector workers – artists, creators, technical staff, managers as well as the self-employed.

In 2000, the CHRC decided to take a fresh look at the human resource issues facing the cultural sector, building on a study conducted in the mid-1990's. The study - *Face of the Future* - was initiated in response to changes affecting the cultural sector such as: demographic shifts, public policy developments, and globalization.<sup>27</sup> As part of the study, a literature review and a series of 181 interviews were conducted across the country intended to reveal the current human resource conditions in the Canada's cultural sector and to identify the most significant HR issues and challenges facing the sector.

A key component of the study examined the demand for new competencies or skills needed in the cultural sector workforce. The final report poses the questions: Can the cultural worker dedicate him/herself exclusively to their work? Can the cultural worker simply rely on his/her talent and expect to be discovered? Can he/she ignore the new environment in the sector? Most of the respondents interviewed suggested that workers cannot separate themselves from the market and therefore culture workers are increasingly in need of “multi-disciplinary competencies.”

Multi-disciplinary competencies refer to competencies (or skills) that are not directly related to the cultural work or “the artistic discipline”, but rather those that are part of a “tool box” of skills possessed by workers in the cultural sector.

These competencies include:

- Career management – skills in financial management; taxation, copyright, promotion, marketing, etc.;
- New technologies (related to career management) – word processing, email, etc.;
- Export marketing – skills to take advantage of globalization in culture exports; and
- Personal competencies – flexibility, adaptability, creativity, the capacity to learn, etc.

The report suggested that in order for cultural workers to succeed in the new economy they must not only develop their professional skills, but also develop general and career management skills or competencies – the “tool box” of skills they possess. The recognition of a need to expand the skill sets of culture workers has now been included as a key element of a national, cross-sectional human resources development strategy by the CHRC.<sup>28</sup>

Competency charts and profiles are tools that the CHRC has developed to help expand the skill “tool box” for culture workers. These competency charts and profiles provide information on the full range of necessary skills for a specific occupation. The competencies are identified through

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<sup>27</sup> See the CHRC report “*Face the Future: A Study of Human Resource Issues in Canada's Cultural Sector*” for more information.

<sup>28</sup> See the CHRC report *Building On Success* for more details on the council's human resources strategy.

an analysis conducted for specific occupational groups.<sup>29</sup> Competency profiles and charts have been developed for New Media Content Creators (e.g. 3D animator, graphic artist, music and sound composer) as well as cultural workers involved in export marketing of cultural products or services.

These profiles can then be used by individuals to evaluate their own skills and determine which areas they should develop through additional training. Organizations can also use the competency charts and profiles to develop job descriptions or develop recruitment strategies. Education and training providers can use the profiles to develop competency based training.

The occupational profiles are also used by the CHRC to assess training gaps. For example, a training gap analysis was conducted for the occupational group of New Media Content Creators. The study looked at both the training needs and training offerings by training providers for these occupations, and then outlined the gap between the two. Where gaps exist, the CHRC is able recommend ways to address the gap.

It should be noted that the cultural sector competency profiles do not utilize Essential Skills as was seen in the trucking sector occupational profiles. In fact, Essential Skills are currently not being used in any capacity by the CHRC. It is felt that the development of Essential Skills is not a key issue facing the culture sector at this time and it was difficult to currently assess how Essentials Skills could play a role in this sector.

### **Comité sectoriel de main-d'oeuvre économie sociale et action communautaire (CSMO-ÉSAC)**

The Comité sectoriel de main-d'oeuvre de l'économie sociale et de l'action communautaire (CSMO-ESAC) is one of 26 sectoral committees established under the Quebec Department of Employment (Emploi-Québec) to define specific needs of the sectors, propose measures to stabilize employment, reduce unemployment, and develop continuing education and training.

Économie sociale (Social economy) and Action communautaire (Community action) form two distinct sectors of activity within the non-profit sector, although there is an acknowledgement that there is an expanding grey area between them.

The non-profit sector in Quebec is a large, diverse sector.<sup>30</sup> As a consequence the approach to defining skills strategies is not seen as one central strategy, but rather a series of approaches to the skills needs emerging within each sub-sector. The work of the CSMO-ESAC in the skills area has been mainly driven by requests coming from sub-sectors in the social economy. The CSMO-ESAC has developed a number of tools for the analysis of skills/competencies (e.g. competency grids, questionnaires).

When approached by a sub-sector or a group of organizations within a sub-sector, the CSMO-ESAC generally starts with a portrait of the sub-sector with an emphasis on the human resources characteristics. Based on in-depth skills/competencies analysis, they develop diagnostic tools

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<sup>29</sup> See the CHRC website ([www.culturalhrc.ca](http://www.culturalhrc.ca)) for details on the development and results of the competency charts and profiles.

<sup>30</sup> See the CSMO-ESAC website for more information at - [www.csmoesac.qc.ca](http://www.csmoesac.qc.ca).

(questionnaires and competency grids) for the sub-sector, detailed for various types of jobs. The diagnostic tools precisely indicate the competencies required for the performance of given tasks in various jobs. This allows for the subsequent definition of specific training needs for groups of employees.

They do not use a pre-established set of skills, such as the Essential Skills framework, as a reference in developing the competency grids, as the types of jobs and the skill sets needed vary greatly from one sub-sector to the other and even often within a sub-sector among the different organizations. The only exceptions are in two types of jobs that can be considered as more generic across sub-sectors and organizations: board members and senior management. For these two categories, they may have a more standardized approach to skills analysis. For all other types of jobs, the questionnaire and competency grids are customized for each specific request to best adapt the analysis to the specific skills needs of the particular sub-sector.

The whole process involves various partners within the sub-sector, the parent organization (Emploi Québec), and representatives from the education institutions (CEGEPs and school boards). This ensures that the analysis is well-grounded in the reality of the jobs and that, as the diagnostic develops, everyone is aware of the training activities that may emerge from the analysis. When the diagnostic is complete and training programs are proposed, the connections with potential funders (the provincial government through Emploi-Québec in particular) and the education and training partners (colleges and school boards) allows for the development of a training plan well-adapted to the specific needs uncovered in the sub-sector considered.

## **7. Considerations in Developing a Skills Strategy**

Skill needs and strategies will differ for different sectors or industries. Nevertheless, there are some common lessons learned and keys to the successful launch of a skills strategy that were noted from our interviews and literature scan, which may be relevant to efforts to develop a skills strategy for the voluntary/non-profit sector.

### **Understand the Workforce and Skill Needs**

Having a good, evidence-based understanding of the labour force and skill needs is a fundamental part of any skills strategy. This includes having a clear understanding of the labour supply and demand issues in the sector. As one stakeholder noted, “you need to build a foundation of knowledge and understand drivers of the sector”. Labour market research is needed to identify the broad targets of a skills strategy. This can then be followed by detailed skill profiles in the priority areas as a basis for identifying more specific skill needs.

The skills strategies developed in the organizations noted earlier in this report all were based on research on their sector’s workforce. This research ranged from profiling the local voluntary/non-profit sector workforce, as we saw in studies in London, Sudbury, and the Niagara Region, to a province-wide study as we saw in New Brunswick, to a very detailed ongoing examination of a sector’s labour force, as we saw with the Labour Market Information Program (LMI) at the Construction Sector Council (CSC).

Provincial, regional, or local workforce skill needs should be considered and researched when developing a skills strategy. It is important to recognize that labour surpluses and shortages can exist in different parts of a sector or industry. There may also be unique skill needs in certain areas of the country that need to be addressed. For example, the Canadian Trucking Human Resource Council’s *Essential Skills Needs Assessment* found that in some communities (e.g. Vancouver, Toronto, and Quebec) there were significant learning needs among workers in some occupations related to oral communication because English is their second language. The New Brunswick voluntary/non-profit sector study highlighted the increasing difficulty in attracting and retaining bilingual employees in the sector in some areas of the province.

### **Relevance**

Tools and products designed to address skill needs must be driven by demand from the industry or organizations in the sector. If they are not developed with input from the sector or do not help address a perceived need, employers and employees in the sector will not use the products. When developing a product or tool, you need to ask “what is in this product that can help our organizations meet their goals?” If the question cannot be answered, then this is likely the wrong tool for the workforce.

### **Customized Tools**

Customized skills upgrading initiatives and tools can be developed by the council to address the unique skill needs of the sector, and of the regions or communities within it. For example, the Trucking Sector Council developed an Essential Skills Assessment tool that was derived from the generic tools made available by the federal government, but tailored to the nature of the work

in the sector. Similarly, training programs can be customized to help the employees in question improve their competencies in specific, targeted areas of need.

## **Research Considerations**

Stakeholders interviewed note the importance of asking what it is that you don't know and not just what you do know about the workforce and skills needs of the sector. Findings from this "research gap" then need to be prioritized and a research strategy needs to be developed to determine the most effective way to gather this information.

It is key that the research be linked to action. Information gathered on skills needs by the sector councils profiled above was used directly to develop a skills or human resources strategy. As noted in one interview, it is imperative that "work is driven by the research". For example, research in both the trucking and construction sectors revealed the importance of Essential Skills development in their respective workforces, leading the sector councils in these industries to focus on Essential Skills. In comparison, research in the culture sector did not point to the need for development of Essential Skills in that sector's workforce, but rather suggested the need for development in "multi-disciplinary competencies" including professional, career, and management skills. This has now become a key focus of the culture sector council's human resources strategy.

Workforce and skills need research needs to be ongoing, rather than just one-time events. An HR Council for the voluntary/non-profit sector will need to be able to re-examine workforce issues and skills needs as they change over time and be able to uncover any trends that may occur. The construction council's Labour Market Information (LMI) program is designed specifically to allow for forecasting and trend analysis of the construction industry – providing information on where the sector is growing, what skills workers will need in the future, and how requirements may differ nationally, provincially/territorially, and locally. The culture sector council also decided it needed more current information on changing human resource and skills needs in the sector when it launched its' *Face of the Future* study in 2000. A previous study had taken place in the mid – 1990's, but the council recognized that the workplace and workforce had changed and it needed more current information in order to have an accurate picture of the skills needs facing today's workers in the culture sector.

At the same time it is important not to be paralyzed by research. There is always more information that can be gathered. But there is also a need to deliver helpful tools on a timely basis.

## **Partnerships**

Partnerships and collaboration were key factors in the development and implementation of all the skills or human resource strategies noted in this report. The importance of partnerships was mentioned in all the stakeholder interviews as well as the literature reviewed. These can include research or financial partnerships with government, industry/sector organizations, educational institutions, and even other sector councils. Partnerships can be national or local in scale. The benefits of partnerships can include economies of scale as well as sharing of experiences and best practices. By coming together, partners are able to see what is being done or what has been done in their sector and learn from others.

## **Information Sharing**

A key driver of all the skills and human resources strategies discussed in this report was the need to share information. The construction council called this a “clearinghouse”; the trucking council called it “awareness”; the U.K. voluntary sector study call it a “hub”. Whatever the term used, a key role for an HR Council for the voluntary/non-profit sector should be information sharing in the areas of skills and workforce development. This will allow for dissemination of information and good practice in skills and workforce development.

The Developing Human Resources in the Voluntary Sector (HRVS) website already plays a key role in sharing information on human resource issues and skills issues facing Canada’s voluntary/non-profit sector.<sup>31</sup> The website also provides practical HR tools and best practice examples on human resources issues facing the voluntary/non-profit sector in Canada. It is anticipated that information from this website would be rolled into the HR Council’s future website and that valuable information would continue to be available to the sector.

## **Measuring Success**

How can you assess the success of a sector council’s skills strategy and products it develops, such as skills research information or skills development tools? Sector councils interviewed suggest that success is measured by the fact that their members are using the skills assessment and development tools, attending conferences or workshops organized by the council, and actively approaching the council to propose specific projects.

One sector council said that it wanted its work to be so relevant, that if government funding was pulled then the council would continue to operate with funds from industry. This is how it would know it was successful.

## **Conclusion**

The considerations reviewed above indicate that, while there is no single template for a skills strategy, there are a number of elements that will likely be, in some fashion, part of the mix:

- conducting research on a regular basis on the supply and demand for different skills in the sector;
- profiling the specific competencies required for skills/occupations that are in demand;
- developing customized assessment and training tools that will make a difference;
- partnering with other organizations that have objectives that match those of the sector;
- sharing information on best practices; and
- measuring whether goals are achieved.

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<sup>31</sup> See HRVS website at [www.hrvs.ca](http://www.hrvs.ca) for more information.

## **8. Proposed Questions and Issues for Discussion**

In light of the results of the work outlined above, the following questions were developed to guide discussion at the facilitated workshop. The questions addressed at the workshop were not limited to those presented below. However, discussions at the workshop generally focused on the following issues:

### **Goals**

- What should a skills strategy for the voluntary/non-profit sector be expected to have achieved five years from now?

### **Scope/Focus of Skills Development Activity**

- To what extent should the HR Council focus its skills development efforts on generic skills (e.g. management, leadership, IT skills)? What are the advantages and drawbacks of such an approach?
- To what extent should the HR Council look at particular occupational groups (such as executive directors, professionals, other front-line staff)? Are there specific occupations that need special attention in the early stages of the Sector Council's work? What are the advantages and drawbacks of this sort of focus?
- Are Essential Skills important to the voluntary/non-profit sector? Should Essential Skills be a key part of a skills strategy for the sector?
- To what extent should the HR Council emphasize skills development activities that could be applied throughout the sector? To what extent should it also focus on the special needs of sub-sectors? What are the pros and cons of each approach?

### **Research Gaps**

- What are the key things we know about skill needs of the sector based on existing research? What are the key gaps in our knowledge?
- How can we best improve our knowledge of current and future skill needs? Would it be useful to survey organizations throughout the sector regarding their skill needs and/or gaps in available training programs? What are the challenges involved in undertaking such work?
- What do we know about regional differences in regard to skill needs and gaps in the voluntary/non-profit sector?
- The Culture Human Resources Council talked about a "tool box" of skills that workers in the culture sector need to succeed in their careers. Can we identify a "tool box" of skills that would help workers in the voluntary/non-profit sector succeed in their careers and development? What skills would this "tool box" include?

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