



First Steps Toward a Skills Strategy for the Voluntary/Non-profit Sector

Workshop Report

Prepared For

The Voluntary Sector Human Resources Council Feasibility Study

A joint project of Community Foundations of Canada
and United Way of Canada – Centraide Canada.

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By

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the workshop participants for their thoughtful comments and feedback during the workshop dialogue discussions. Thanks also to Lynne Toupin and Bonnie Shiell for arranging the workshop. We would also like to say a special thank you to Ania Wasilewski whose record of the proceedings of the workshop was extremely helpful in the preparation of this document.

Introduction and Background

Community Foundations of Canada and United Way of Canada – Centraide Canada organized a one-day workshop, “First Steps Toward a Skills Strategy for the Voluntary/Non-Profit Sector”, on March 15, 2005 in Ottawa. This workshop was part of the Voluntary/Non-Profit Sector Human Resources Feasibility Study project which has led to plans to establish a national HR Council for the voluntary/non-profit sector. The workshop brought together researchers and leaders from the sector to discuss how to build a better understanding of the skills of paid employees in the sector and how to guide efforts to meet the sector’s skill needs. The purpose of the workshop was to provide a new HR Council with information and suggestions about first steps toward developing a skills strategy for the sector’s paid workforce. To stimulate dialogue, a discussion paper was prepared entitled “*Towards a Skills Strategy for the Voluntary/Non-Profit Sector*” by Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN).

This report summarizes the discussion and outcomes of the workshop.

Discussion Paper: Towards a Skills Strategy for the Voluntary/Non-profit Sector

The discussion paper was prepared for the workshop to stimulate dialogue on what a skills strategy for the sector might look like. The key goals of the paper are described in the text box below.

The discussion paper was based on information gathered from interviews, a survey of relevant literature, and an examination of published materials and website content from key stakeholders.

Interviews were conducted with officials at Human Resources and Skills Development Canada and select national sector councils about their approaches and experience in developing skills strategies for their respective sectors. An interview was also conducted with the Quebec non-profit sector council, *Comité sectoriel de main-d’oeuvre économie sociale et action communautaire (CSMO-ÉSAC)*.

Literature in Canada and the U.K. was reviewed on skill needs of paid employees in the voluntary/non-profit sector. This

Goals of the CPRN Discussion Paper

- 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.
- Put forward a series of discussion questions for the workshop focused on identifying research directions that would build a better understanding of the voluntary/non-profit sector’s skill needs.

included a summary of the research by CPRN on human resources issues facing the voluntary/non-profit sector as well as other national, provincial, regional, and local research initiatives across Canada on skill needs in the sector. Key gaps in the available research were also identified.

Based on the results of the research from the discussion paper, questions were developed to guide discussion among participants at the workshop.

The discussion paper will be published by CPRN and will be available at its Web site: www.cprn.org.

Workshop – First Steps Toward a Skills Strategy for the Voluntary/Non-profit

The workshop took place on March 15th, 2005, in Ottawa. The list of participants is included as Appendix A. The agenda is included as Appendix B.

Opening Remarks

Bonnie Shiell, Project Manager, Voluntary Sector HR Council Feasibility Study, thanked participants for attending the workshop and provided background information on efforts to establish a voluntary/non-profit sector HR Council. The effort to establish this HR Council is a joint project of Community Foundations Canada and the United Way Canada – Centraide Canada. This collaboration had grown out of earlier collaborations to develop human resources in the voluntary sector, in particular a project to develop practical HR tools and resources for non-profits in 2002. The two organizations also worked together on the HR Council Feasibility Study - which involved 43 consultation meetings in 37 communities and input from 1200 respondents to a web survey. It was clear from the feasibility study that people in the sector feel it is time to establish an HR Council. The final report from the feasibility study entitled “*Towards a Human Resources Council for the Voluntary/Non-profit Sector*” is available on the Human Resources for the Voluntary Sector (HRVS) website at www.hrvs.ca/hr_council.

Bonnie Shiell also gave a brief overview on the national sector councils in Canada that are supported by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC). It is expected that an HR Council for the voluntary/non-profit sector will be in place in the fall of 2005. The new HR Council will clarify and elaborate its roles and identify its specific priorities over time, but like councils in other sectors it will have an ongoing focus on skill needs. This workshop was intended to jumpstart a discussion on skills issues and provides the new council with ideas to inform its decision-making about both initial priorities and longer-term strategies regarding skills development.

Proposed Framework for the HR Council

Statement of Purpose of the Council

- Bring employers and employees together to provide leadership and work collaboratively on research, strategies and action related to paid employees in the voluntary/non-profit sector.
- Develop a qualified, committed, diverse labour force with the knowledge, skills and attributes to meet community needs in an era of increasing complexity, challenge and change.

Five Key Roles

- Leader and champion on issues and action to develop paid labour force.
- Provider of practical tools and HR resources.
- Connector – vehicle for collaboration.
- Catalyst for learning and development.
- Centre for knowledge and innovation about labour force trends and strategies.

Scope

- Employers and employees in non-profit organizations, small and large, not including “quangos” (i.e. schools, hospitals, colleges, universities).

Information was also provided to the workshop participants on the framework for the HR Council that was developed by the Feasibility Study. The proposed statement of purpose of the council, five key roles, and the scope of organizations that the council intends to work for and with are summarized in the text box on this page.

Lynne Toupin, Project Director, indicated that the feasibility study had raised expectations within the sector for the new council to “hit the ground running”. Thus the workshop was intended to begin exploring what a skills strategy for the sector should contain. She added that the workshop participants were deliberately a “mixed” group to bring together a wide variety of perspectives, including: researchers from the sector; employees and employers; related sector councils; people with a specific interest in the new council; and representatives from across the country. She noted that many of the individuals who were present “wear more than one hat, which is pretty common in our sector”.

The remainder of this report summarizes the discussions and outcomes of the workshop following the workshop agenda as follows:

- I. Presentation from CPRN: Towards a Skills Strategy for the Voluntary/Non-profit sector;*
- II. Perspectives on the Scope and Focus of a Skills Strategy;*
- III. Research on skills;*
- IV. Putting it all together – Key ideas and suggestions for the HR Council about a skills strategy.*
- V. Concluding remarks.*

I. CPRN Presentation: Towards a Skills Strategy for the Voluntary/Non-profit sector

Richard Brisbois and Ron Saunders (authors of the CPRN discussion paper *Towards a Skills Strategy for the Voluntary/Non-profit Sector*) made a brief presentation summarizing its key elements. Questions posed at the end of this paper were used as the focus of discussions during the workshop.

Participants also identified additional questions and issues that needed to be considered and taken into account in establishing the HR Council for the voluntary/non-profit sector. These included the following:

- Have studies on the effectiveness of other sector councils and their initiatives been carried out?
- How do you measure success? What should the accountability structure be for a sector council? Who says whether it's working or not?
- Where can one find funding for actual workplace training – not just “tools”?

One participant suggested that need to get away from the concept of “training” and move to one of “learning opportunities” or “blended learning”, which can involve much more than formal training courses.

II. Perspectives on the Scope and Focus of a Skills Strategy

Following the presentation by CPRN, participants were asked to break into small groups and discuss questions around two broad issues. First, participants were asked if the federal government's “Essential Skills” framework was applicable the voluntary/non-profit sector. Second, participants were also asked to what extent a new HR Council should initially focus on generic skills (e.g., leadership, management, IT) applicable throughout the sector, and to what extent it should, among its first priorities, pay attention to skills for specific occupations or sub-sectors? Each group then brought back key ideas to the larger group as reported below.

Essential Skills

Participants recognized that Essential Skills would not be relevant to many employees in the voluntary/non-profit sector given the high education levels among the workforce and the diversity of jobs in the sector. However, it was also recognized that there are issues of literacy and numeracy for some employees in the sector, perhaps more than we would like to think.

One participant noted “essential skills are a place to start and not a place to stop” and some saw the use of the essential skills framework as a step towards the development of competency profiles.

At the same time, participants saw value in the Essential Skills framework because it provides a menu of skills that one could draw on in particular instances. Some felt Essential Skills could be used in targeted initiatives for specific groups. For example, Essential Skills tools could be used

to help recent immigrants acquire necessary writing and numeracy skills, which are increasingly more important because of accountability/evaluation requirements.

One participant noted that the Conference Board of Canada's *Employability Skills* are in the process of being integrated with HRSDC's *Essential Skills* and suggested that these be looked at as well because they include many of the softer skills, such as being adaptable and being responsible, that are crucial to working in this sector.

Focus on Generic Skills or Particular Sub-sector Skills

There was a consensus among participants that the HR Council's initial focus should be on generic skills that apply to organizations across the sector. All of the small group discussions pointed to a need for skills that allowed any voluntary/non-profit organization to be "healthy" and function properly. These "functional" skills included communication, management, finance, research, and fundraising (see text box for more details).

Key Generic or Functional Skills Areas Identified by Participants

- management (including HR)
- strategic planning
- fundraising
- accountability mechanisms
- governance
- communications
- customer service
- accounting and finance
- research

There was recognition that skills development initiatives need to be connected to organizational objectives—they need to help voluntary/non-profit organizations operate more effectively.

Workshop participants saw a great advantage in a framework that focuses on broad generic skills that relate to the organizational development of any organization. This approach recognizes the different needs of small and large organizations. For example, large organizations may have one person dedicated to performing a specific function (e.g., fundraising or accounting) while in smaller organizations, one person may be responsible for many functions. By having a "menu" of functions to choose from, organizations would be able to focus on skills development in the functions most important to their own operations and their workforce.

While all participants agreed that the initial focus of an HR Council should be on broadly applicable generic skills, some also recommended that research should begin simultaneously to look at skill needs in specific occupations, sub-sectors, or regions.

Differences in the skill needs of small versus large organizations were seen as very important – it was suggested by some that differences between organizational needs are likely greater by size of organizations than by sub-sector.

The importance of recognizing the skill needs of front-line workers, and not just management, was also seen as essential. It was suggested that the HR Council could help to build the capacity of organizations in the sector to deliver skills development programs for front-line workers.

III. Research on Skills

During the afternoon session, participants were asked to work in small groups on the following questions: What do we know about skill needs in the sector? What are the key gaps in our knowledge? How can we best improve our knowledge of current and future skill needs?

Participants noted that there are still huge gaps in the research on the skill needs and HR issues in the voluntary/non-profit sector. The idea that “we don’t know what we don’t know” was mentioned by most participants.

An inventory or environmental scan of what is currently known about the skill needs of the sector and what is being done to address these issues was suggested by many as a first step for a new HR Council. Another suggestion included the possibility of the HR Council sponsoring a survey to gather more information on who is currently employed in the sector, vacancy levels, growth trends, and expected future skill needs five to 10 years out. There was a consensus that, while ongoing research may be needed to stay on top of changes in the sector, the new council must not be paralyzed by research. It must act quickly on short-term priorities, while at the same time, it should move forward with the planning of longer-term research on the sectors skill needs. Moreover, its research should be linked to possibilities for action.

Key Research Needs and Considerations

- Begin with inventory on current research on labour force issues and skills needs in the sector.
- Need for both national and regional/local research and data gathering.
- HR Council can act as a repository and disseminator of research on labour for and skills needs.
- Important to have both qualitative and quantitative data.
- Recognize unique working conditions in the sector and the implications of this on skills development.
- It is important for the council to start building a relationship with research bodies such as Statistics Canada.

Participants identified some key considerations in future research on the skill needs of the voluntary/non-profit sector. Considerable emphasis was placed on the need for research to have both a national and regional/local focus. The value of having research at the national level is that it raises awareness of a particular issue more broadly in the sector. At the same time, many participants noted that labour market and skills issues are often regional/local (and/or sub-sectoral) in nature and that the HR Council could facilitate community-level initiatives around skills development and become a repository for learning from these initiatives.

Similarly, it was suggested that one of roles of the HR Council could be to stimulate collection of local and regional data on labour market and skills issues. This was envisioned as a possible series of pan-Canadian projects that had a very firm regional presence and could include partnerships with provincial/territorial governments, who are often prime funders in the sector. The HR Council could then bring together the research findings and disseminate the results broadly across the sector sharing outcomes and lessons learned.

Several participants noted the need for a framework to consider both qualitative and quantitative research information. This included the need to build evaluation frameworks that gather qualitative information from pilot projects and other local initiatives. One example given was the *National Learning Initiative* (NLI) where participants identified specific leadership competencies. Participants in this project then shared information with their boards on how their involvement in the project had affected their own leadership practices in the workplace.

Participants also noted that it is difficult to talk about skill needs of the sector without recognizing the unique aspects and conditions of work in the sector and the implications they have on skills development. These included: project based funding; relationships with funders; working with volunteers; the high incidence of temporary employment in the sector; the relatively low wages for managers and professional staff; the difficulty of advancement in small organizations; and the stress that comes from constant change. One participant suggested that more research is needed on working conditions in the sector. Others noted that often when people are hired, much more is expected of them than they were hired for.

It was also noted that a key goal for the HR Council should be to promote the importance and benefit of skills development in the sector to voluntary/non-profit sector boards, leaders and senior managers. As one participant noted “if you don’t have employers or senior management convinced that training is important then it doesn’t matter”.

IV. Putting it All Together – Key Ideas and Suggestions for the HR Council about a Skills Strategy

Workshop participants recognized that the HR Council’s immediate priorities will include establishing itself in the sector, building awareness of its role, and engaging the sector. With respect to efforts on skills development they suggested that the council should pay particular attention to:

- Networking and connecting with sub-sectors, professional associations, and established regional groups (e.g. *Comité sectoriel de main-d'oeuvre économie sociale et action communautaire* in Quebec) that have done their own research on skill needs.
- Fostering the development of new regional groups of stakeholders and partners that could work with the council to design future research and action projects on skills and other HR issues.
- Focusing initially on generic skills (or functional skills) that could apply to voluntary/non-profit organizations throughout the sector
- Synthesizing existing research about skills development including research on particular sub-sectors or regions that might provide information that is applicable across the sector.

- Scanning and creating an inventory of existing training materials for the sector's workforce and place them in a repository that can be easily accessed and used by all organizations.
- The HR Council could make a major contribution to skills development by undertaking a trend analysis to understand how skills are changing in the sector and where they are likely to go over the next five years.

V. Concluding Remarks

Lynne Toupin, Project Director, Developing Human Resources in the Voluntary Sector at Community Foundations of Canada, concluded the workshop by thanking participants for their input. She noted that participants had provided the Voluntary Sector Human Resources Council Feasibility Study project team with a sense of the direction the new council might take in regard to a skills strategy.

Appendix A – Workshop Participants

Voluntary Sector HR Council Feasibility Study Workshop

- On -

First Steps Toward a Skills Strategy for the Voluntary Non-profit Sector

**March 15, 2005 - 9:30 am–4:00 pm
Lord Elgin Hotel (St. Laurent Room), 100 Elgin Street, Ottawa**

Participants

Susan Annis
Cultural Human Resources Council (CHRC)

Morna Ballantyne
Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE)

Cathy Barr
Imagine Canada

Bernadette Beaupré
Ontario Network of Skills & Employment Training Programs (OneStep)

Paul Brennan
Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC)

Alison Burgoyne
Centre for Community Leadership, Niagara College

Ginette Clarke
Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW)

Sid Frankel
Faculty of Social Work, University of Manitoba/Voluntary Nonprofit Sector Organization of
Manitoba (VNSOM)

Kathy Harrison
Canadian Administrators of Voluntary Resources (CAVR)

Rick Hutchins
Policy Link New Brunswick

Sophie Joyal
Statistics Canada

Ruth MacKenzie
Volunteer Canada

Carol Matusicky
BC Council for Families

Parveen Nangia
Sudbury Social Planning Council

Danuszia Mordasiewicz
Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC)

Madina Nicolas
Social Development Canada

Penelope Rowe
Community Services Council, Newfoundland & Labrador

Katherine Scott
Canadian Council on Social Development

Dick Stewart
Community Development Halton

Janice Wing
Red Deer & District Community Foundation

Ron Saunders
Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN)

Richard Brisbois
Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN)

Pierre Lacroix
Facilitator

Ania Wasilewski
Recorder

Lynne Toupin
Voluntary Sector HR Council Feasibility Study and Developing Human Resources in the
Voluntary Sector

Bonnie Shiell
Voluntary Sector HR Council Feasibility Study

Stephane Bordeleau
Voluntary Sector HR Council Feasibility Study

Appendix B – Workshop Agenda

Voluntary Sector HR Council Feasibility Study Workshop

- On -

First Steps Toward a Skills Strategy for the Voluntary Non-profit Sector

**March 15, 2005 - 9:30 am–4:00 pm
Lord Elgin Hotel (St. Laurent Room), 100 Elgin Street, Ottawa**

Agenda

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| 9:30 - 10:00 am | Welcome, Introductions and Opening Remarks |
| 10:00 - 10:45 am | Towards a Skills Strategy for the Voluntary/Non-profit Sector

Presentation by Ron Saunders and Richard Brisbois,
Canadian Policy Research Networks (CPRN)
Q&A |
| 10:45 am - 12:30 pm | Perspectives on the scope and focus of a skills strategy - Should we focus on generic skills (leadership, management, IT), skills for specific occupations or skills in particular sub-sectors? Do “Essential Skills” need attention?

Small group work and discussion |
| 12:30 - 1:30 pm | Lunch |
| 1:30 – 3:00 pm | Research on skills - What do we know about skill needs in the sector? What are the key gaps in our knowledge? How can we best improve our knowledge of current and future skill needs?

Small group work and discussion |
| 3:00 - 3:45 pm | Putting it all together – Key ideas and suggestions for the new HR Council about a skills strategy

Summary discussion |
| 3:45 - 4:00 pm | Concluding Remarks |