

VOLUNTARY SECTOR VOICES

**RESULTS OF AN ON-LINE SURVEY ON HUMAN RESOURCES
PRIORITIES**

**PREPARED FOR:
THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR HUMAN RESOURCES COUNCIL
FEASIBILITY STUDY**

JANUARY, 2005

**THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR HUMAN RESOURCES COUNCIL FEASIBILITY STUDY IS A JOINT EFFORT OF
COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS OF CANADA AND UNITED WAY OF CANADA – CENTRAIDE CANADA.
IT IS SUPPORTED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF CANADA.**

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On-line survey designed and conducted by:



I. INTRODUCTION

■ ABOUT THE FEASIBILITY STUDY

Over the past few years, increasing demands on voluntary sector organizations have reinforced the sector's need to attract, support and keep skilled and committed employees. Ensuring a strong paid workforce in the voluntary/non-profit sector requires attention over the long term on sustainable ways to understand human resources needs, as well as a forum for working together to meet these needs.

With this goal in mind, Community Foundations of Canada and the United Way of Canada – Centraide Canada have embarked on a Voluntary Sector Human Resources Council Feasibility Study. The aim of the study is to determine whether a Human Resources Council makes sense and, if so, how it can best work to strengthen the sector. The study is guided by an Advisory Committee, comprised of 17 members from a range of voluntary sector and other organizations.

For more information ...

To find out more about the Feasibility Study, go to the project Web site at:
www.hrvs.ca/hr_council

■ INPUT FROM THE SECTOR

Hearing from the voluntary/non-profit sector is at the heart of the Feasibility Study. One major source of input was a series of 43 discussion groups that were held in small and large communities across the country during May and June 2004. "What We Heard," the report of findings from discussions in communities about a Voluntary Sector Human Resources Council is available on the project Web site www.hrvs.ca/hr_council

In order to hear from the broadest possible range of voluntary sector organizations, project leaders also conducted an on-line survey in the late summer of 2004; the key findings from that survey are presented in this report.

■ ON-LINE SURVEY

As with the discussion groups, the purpose of the on-line survey was to determine the human resource needs and concerns of sector organizations with respect to paid workers and to explore how a Human Resources Council might address them.

Kevin Wennekes and Alain Azzam of ePenso.com designed and conducted the on-line survey and analyzed the results. The survey questionnaire and tables showing the distribution of responses to the survey questions are available on the project Web site: www.hrvs.ca/hr_council.

The survey was distributed by e-mail directly to a list of individuals who had established contact with the project and were known to be employed in voluntary/non-profit organizations. It was also sent to organizations recognized for their broad or specific reach into various voluntary/non-profit communities with a request to announce the survey on their Web site and/or forward the e-mail to organizations and individuals in their networks. The questionnaire itself asked respondents to identify peers who might also wish to participate; surveys were then forwarded to these referrals.

■ A WORD OF THANKS

In all, 1,193 individuals took the time to complete the survey – substantially more than originally anticipated. The high response rate is in large part due to support received from the hundreds of organizations and individuals that helped to spread the word and distribute the survey. The response also confirms the compelling interest that voluntary sector organizations have in human resources issues and in the possibility of establishing a Human Resources Council.

II. A PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS AND THEIR ORGANIZATIONS

ABOUT PARTICIPANTS

It should be noted that the invitation to respond to the on-line survey requested that it be completed by an employee with responsibility for human resources management.

■ POSITION/TITLE

As indicated in *Chart 1*, the majority of respondents (56%) are either Executive Director or CEO of their organization. An additional 17% of respondents identified themselves as a line manager or project coordinator with human resources responsibilities, while 9% classified themselves as a human resources director or manager. Respondents are more likely to be in a position other than Executive Director or CEO if their organization's operating budget is over \$2M, reflecting the fact that larger organizations are more likely to have staff dedicated to human resources issues.

A high proportion of respondents classified their role as "other." While some of these responses were ultimately assigned into existing categories, many did not "fit" because of the specialized skills and responsibilities described. This finding may reflect the unique character and sense of identity that many respondents ascribe to their roles in the organization. It is also noteworthy for future research studies, as it underscores the need to make categories as relevant as possible to the population under study, rather than using "generic" research tools.

Some quick facts ...

Most respondents:

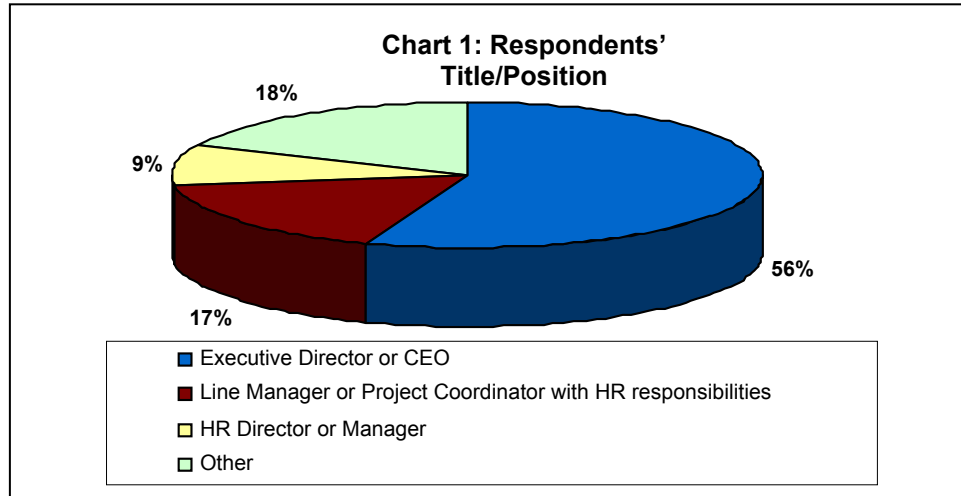
- are Executive Directors/CEOs
- have two to five years' experience in their current job
- have eleven to twenty years' experience in the voluntary sector

The vast majority of respondents (85%) completed the survey in English; the remainder submitted French-language surveys.

Most organizations:

- work in the social services or health fields
- serve neighborhoods or cities
- operate in urban centres with a population of more than 80,000
- have operating budgets under \$1 million

Almost one in five respondents (17%) said that employees in their organization were unionized.

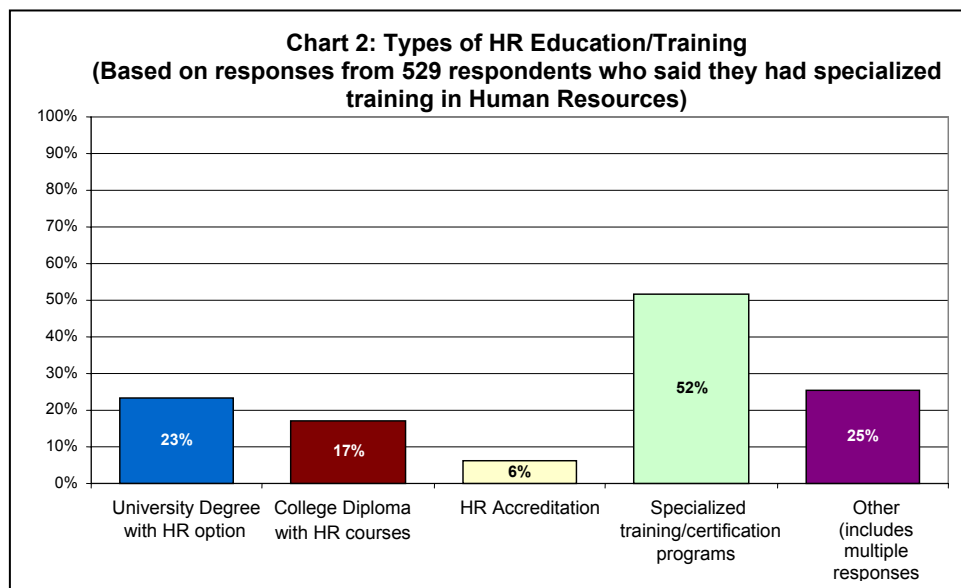


■ **YEARS OF SERVICE**

About half of respondents have 11 or more years' experience in the sector, although respondents from small organizations (i.e., with operating budgets of less than \$250,000) are less likely to have that many years' experience. This may be a reflection of more frequent staff turnover experienced by many smaller non-profit organizations. Of note as well, almost two fifths (18%) of those responding have held their current position for 11 years or more.

■ **HR EDUCATION/TRAINING**

More than two fifths (44%) of those responding to the survey indicated they have some human resources education or training. *Chart 2* shows that more than half of respondents with HR education or training have completed specialized training or a certification program. Six percent of them said they have human resources accreditation.

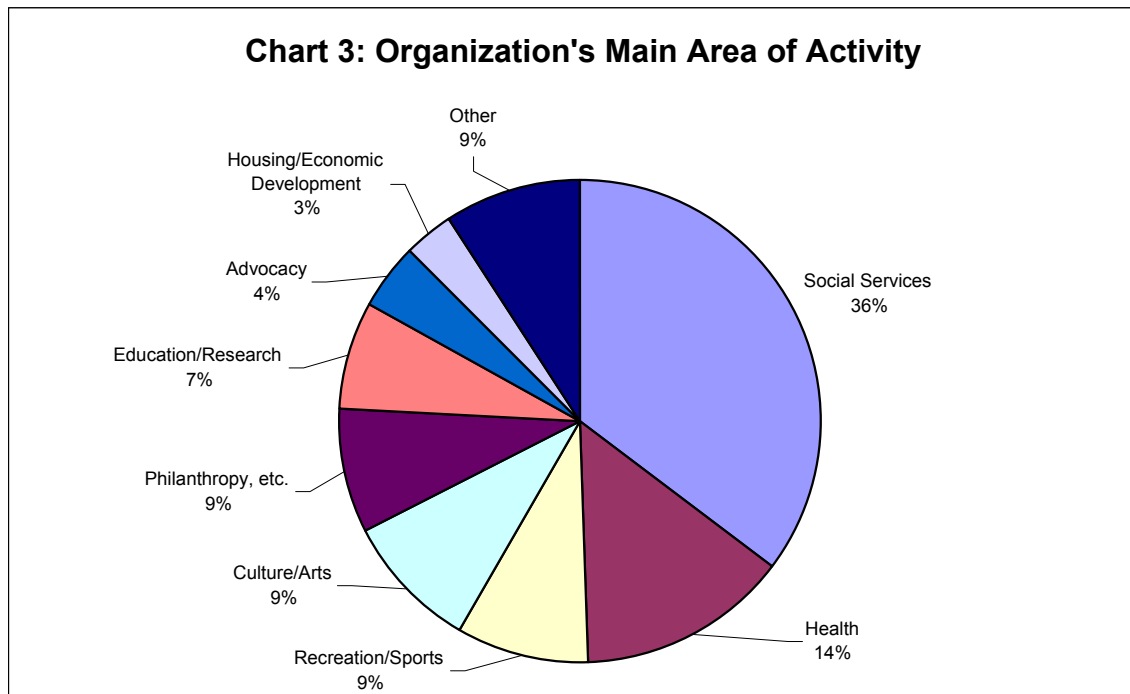


ABOUT RESPONDENTS' ORGANIZATIONS

As expected, the majority of people responding to the on-line survey are from urban areas – almost 85% indicated that their organization is located in a large urban or small city setting.

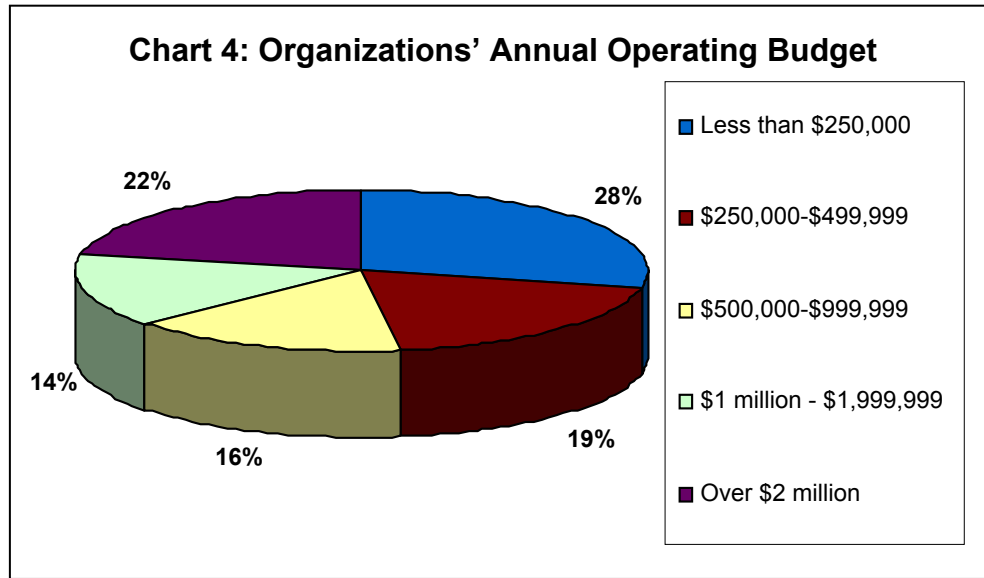
■ Area of Activity

As shown in *Chart 3*, the highest proportion (32%) of respondents indicated that their organization works in the social services field. Significantly fewer respondents (13%) work in the health sector, the next highest area of activity. Of the remaining activity areas identified in the survey, culture/arts (8%), recreation/sports (8%), foundations, philanthropy/volunteerism promotion (8%), and education and research (7%) are the most highly represented.



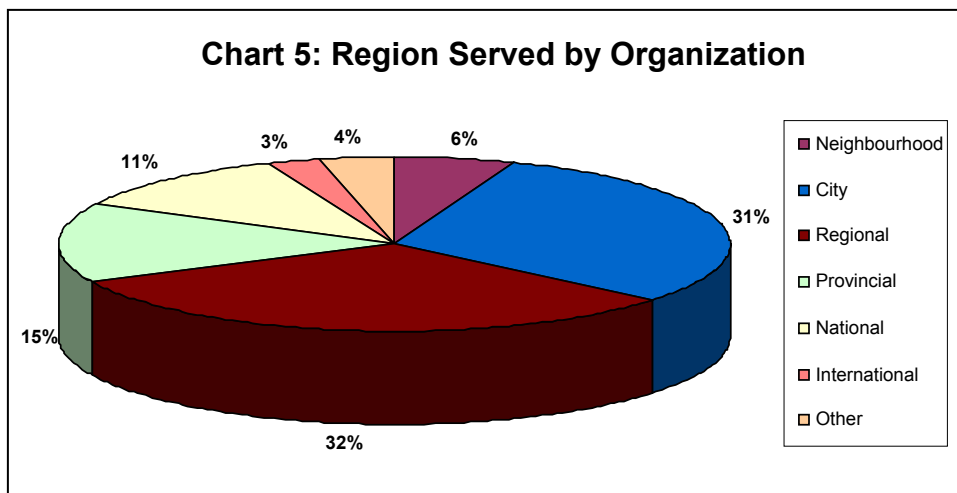
■ **OPERATING BUDGET**

As *Chart 4* below illustrates, there was fairly equal representation across the range of operating budgets outlined in the survey. However, when these results are aggregated into two groups – organizations with budgets below \$1 million and those above – there are almost twice as many small organizations (63%) as those with large operating budgets (37%).



■ **REGION SERVED**

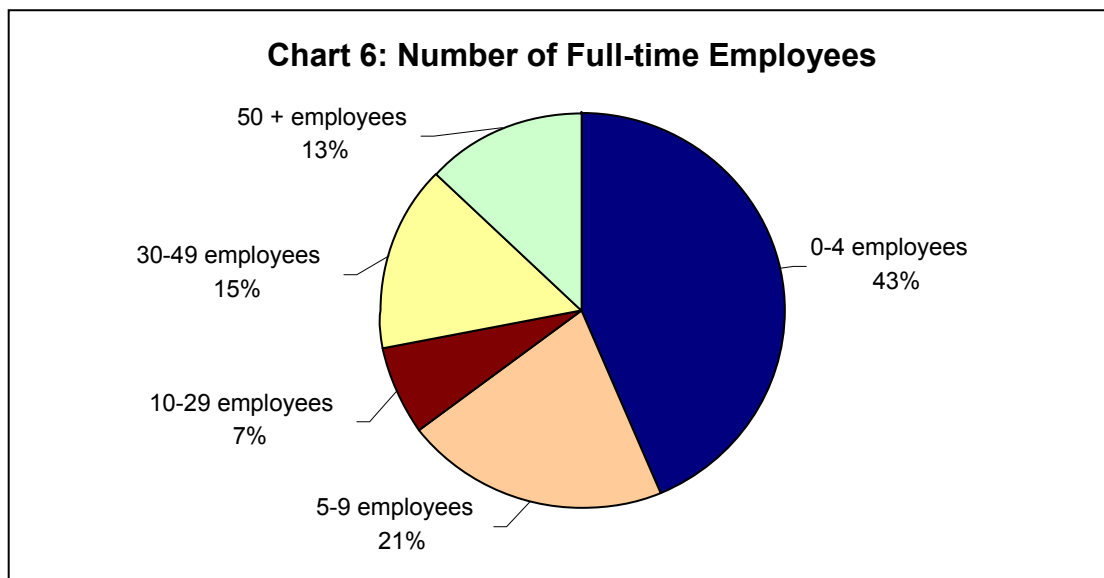
Most organizations serve either a region (32%) or a city (31%). Compared to organizations that serve larger areas, the ones that serve a region or a city are over-represented among those with operating budgets under \$250,000. On the other hand, organizations with international or national service areas tend to be in the higher budget categories. A breakdown of respondents by region served is presented in *Chart 5*.



■ HUMAN RESOURCES

Chart 6 shows that slightly more than two thirds (64%) of respondents' organizations have fewer than 10 full-time permanent employees, with the largest group (43%) having fewer than five. It is worth noting that the proportion of respondents working in organizations with 50 or more full-time permanent employees- (13%) suggests that employees in larger organizations are under-represented in the survey. According to the Canadian Policy Research Networks, more than half of all employees in the non-profit sector work for organizations with 50 or more employees (Kathryn McMullen and Grant Schellenberg, *Mapping the Non-Profit Sector*, CPRN, 2002).

The findings clearly demonstrate the degree to which voluntary sector organizations rely on volunteers as well as paid staff. More than half (57%) of responding organizations have 50 or more volunteers at peak periods and 39% have that many on an on-going basis. As might be expected, organizations with larger operating budgets tend to have more human resources (including volunteers, and permanent and non-permanent full- and part-time paid staff).



■ HR RESPONSIBILITY

More than two fifths (42%) of respondents said that more than two people in their organization have human resources-related responsibilities. However, organizations with smaller operating budgets generally have only one or no staff with a human resources role. It is worth noting that only 4% of respondents indicated that their organization has no staff responsible for human resources. A very small proportion of respondents (3%) said that their Board plays a direct role in human resources management.

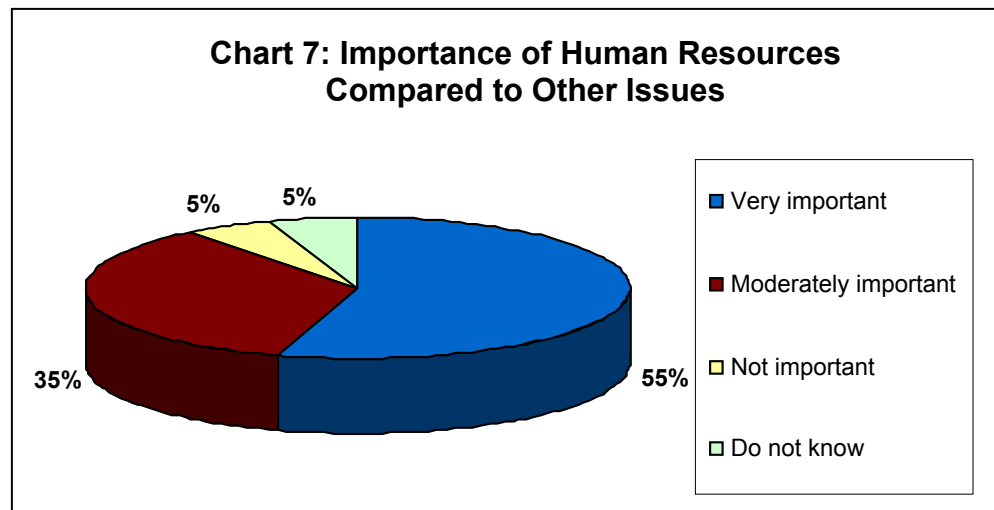
■ UNIONS

Overall, 17% of respondents indicated that their organization’s employees are part of a union. A union presence is much more common in organizations with larger operating budgets. According to the respondents in organizations with budgets of \$2 million or more, 40% of them have unionized employees - compared to only 3% of organizations with budgets under \$250,000. Unionized staff are primarily found in two job categories – professional and clerical/administrative.

III. THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

1. HR ISSUES ARE IMPORTANT

The survey recognized that access to adequate sustainable funding is an overarching issue for many organizations. With this in mind, respondents were asked to compare the importance of



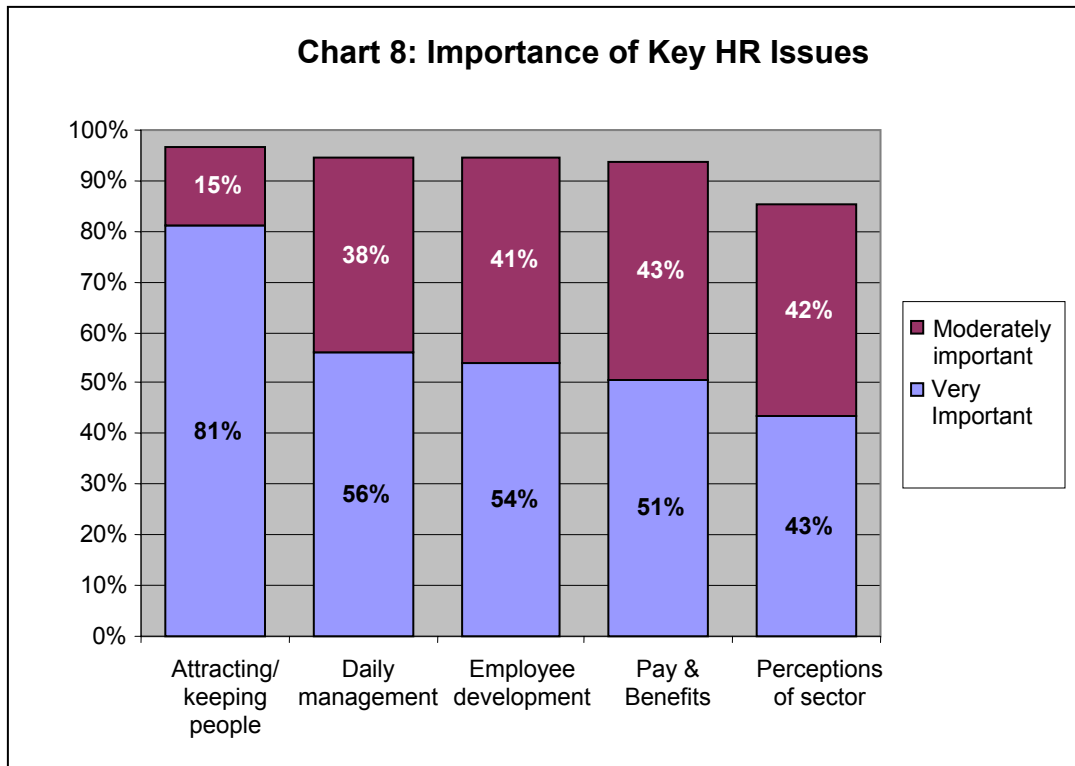
human resources and other issues facing their organizations. An overwhelming majority of them feel that human resources issues are important. As *Chart 7* shows, 90% agreed that human resources issues are either “very” or “moderately important.” Only 5% of respondents said that human resources is not an important concern for them at the moment.

A comment ... on the importance of human resources issues

“As a growing agency, we find that human resources issues are a major concern for us in all areas. Currently, we are struggling with implementing new staff models, creating up-to-date policy and procedures, staff training, succession planning, low staff wages and benefits, and keeping staff motivated to stay in the volunteer sector is tricky.”

2. ASSESSING THE PRIORITIES

Participants were asked to assess the importance of five key human resources issues related to paid employment: attracting and keeping the right people; day-to-day management of people; pay and benefits; employee development; and perceptions of work in the sector. As *Chart 8* demonstrates, all five areas were ranked as either “very important” or “moderately important” by at least 85% of respondents.



That being said, those responding to the survey gave a clear message that their greatest priority is “attracting and keeping the right people,” with 81% rating this issue as “very important.” “Attracting and keeping the right people” topped the priority list regardless of the size of the organization’s operating budget. Interestingly, respondents noted in written comments that *finding* staff has not been and will not be a significant challenge (with the possible exception of management and professional categories, which respondents predict will be moderately difficult to staff in the future). One is left to conclude that it is not *attracting*, but *retaining* talent that is the major challenge for the sector.

A comment ... on human resources priorities

“The biggest concern or challenge facing me is keeping staff. Because of the size of this organization and the limited opportunity for movement, people use this position as a learning opportunity and then move to other positions. Identifying ways to hire and keep staff would be helpful.”

3. FOCUS ON TRAINING AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Respondents were asked how important it was to for paid employees in their organization to have new or updated skills in 10 key areas. As the results show (see the sidebar on this page), respondents consider each of these areas to be important – more than 80% rated all but one category (“updated professional skills”) as either “very important” or “moderately important.”

“Communications” and “leadership” are considered to be the most important skill areas – 97% of respondents rated communications as either a “very important” or “moderately important” focus for training and skill development, while almost as many (96%) gave “leadership” the same ratings.

The importance given to “fundraising skills” was clearly linked to the size of the organization’s operating budget. Among respondents from organizations with the smallest budgets (i.e., \$250,000 or less), fundraising skills were fourth on the list. Among respondents from organizations with the largest budgets (i.e., more than \$2 million) fundraising skills were tenth.

Overall, the results point to the need for continuous development and training in each of the areas identified, but with the strongest focus on supporting more effective communication and leadership skills among paid employees.

Asked to identify areas other than those on the list provided that are important for skill development, respondents most often identified skills such as volunteer management, human resources management, time management, conflict management, customer service, change management, strategic planning, lobbying, risk management and bilingualism.

How they rated* ...

▪ Communications	97%
▪ Leadership	96%
▪ Marketing/PR	93%
▪ Project management	90%
▪ Organizational mgmt	90%
▪ Managing partnerships	90%
▪ Technology	90%
▪ Fundraising	84%
▪ Financial management	83%
▪ Updated professional skills	74%

*includes ratings of “very important” and “moderately important”

A comment ... on training and skill development

“I’d love to develop more expertise in HR, but with the focus being on programs and services, no one has the expertise or time to develop it. Anything you offer needs to be very efficiently delivered, or a consulting service. We don’t necessarily have time to take advantage of excellent offerings, though we know we should.”

4. AREAS TO IMPROVE

The on-line survey asked respondents to consider a list of nine areas in which their organizations may need to make improvements to enhance employee satisfaction. As indicated in the sidebar on this page, virtually all of these areas are seen to be important, with most rated as either “very important” or “moderately important” by at least 75% of respondents. These findings underscore the need for continuous organizational improvement and for the tools and methods with which to do so.

More specifically, respondents clearly identified **training for staff** and **competitive salaries** as the most important focus areas for improvement – more than 90% of all respondents rated these as either “very important” or “moderately important.” At the opposite end of the scale, employee retirement plans was the lowest ranked category, with 72% of respondents rating it as important. Among “other” areas (i.e., not on the list provided) identified as meriting improvement efforts were team building, funding and job security.

How they rated*...

▪ Training for staff	95%
▪ Competitive salaries	93%
▪ Adequate equipment and tools	87%
▪ Engaging employees in decision making	87%
▪ Work-life balance	84%
▪ Healthy, safe work Environment	83%
▪ Opportunities for career advancement	82%
▪ Employee benefits	82%
▪ Employee retirement plans	72%

*Includes ratings of “very important” and “moderately important”

It is important to note that some respondents may not have identified areas as needing improvement because their organization is currently faring well in these areas, and not because they do not see a particular factor as an important influence on employees’ satisfaction.

A comment ... on areas for improvement

“I think the utmost HR issue in the voluntary sector is being able to afford/fund/pay/hire core staff who can help an organization make the most of all its efforts and resources, human (paid and volunteer) and otherwise.”

5. DIRECTIONS FOR AN HR COUNCIL

The survey findings on respondents' immediate and future needs for HR tools and services provide direction on possible priorities for an HR Council. Specifically, respondents focused on the following **immediate needs** from the list provided:

- information about easy-to-access, affordable training 64%
- performance management tools and best practices 52%
- data/information on compensation/wages 50%
- workshops/seminars to develop employees' skills 48%

In addition, respondents identified three areas as **future needs** from the list provided:

- succession planning tools and best practices 42%
- workshops/seminars on HR management 39%
- improved networking with people in the sector who have responsibility for HR 39%

Asked to identify *other* possible tools or services needed (i.e., not identified in the list of 16 provided in the survey), respondents suggested areas such as advocacy, funding, compensation/salaries, volunteer issues, training/workshop needs, and human resources tools and best practices.

Comments ... on directions for an HR Council

"Ce secteur est très important au Canada. Joindre les forces pour offrir de meilleures conditions de travail aux employés de ce secteur et assurer une plus grande stabilité du personnel."

"Think about small communities where there are no lawyers, accountants, HR specialists. These isolated groups need help with many day to day issues."

IV. MOVING FORWARD

The findings from the on-line survey provide essential input on the issues currently facing voluntary sector organizations and on possible directions for a Human Resources Council. These findings, together with the results of the community discussion groups, will provide input into a "Next Steps" report that will be the basis for working with Human Resources and Skills Development Canada on how to proceed with the creation of an HR Council for the voluntary/non-profit sector.