

HR Council^{for the} Voluntary & Non-profit Sector

Building Capacity for Effective HR Management in the Non-profit Sector

Summary Recommendations Report



HR Council for the Voluntary & Non-profit Sector

The HR Council for the Voluntary & Non-profit Sector works with organizations, educators, labour and government to identify and address issues related to paid employment in the voluntary and non-profit sector.

Our priorities are to:

- Build and share knowledge
- Promote good HR practices
- Foster training and learning opportunities
- Provide leadership on HR issues
- Engage voluntary and non-profit organizations

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Canada

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201-291 Dalhousie Street Ottawa, Ontario K1N 7E5
613.244.8332 | TF: 866.594.8332
info@hrcouncil.ca

Contents

Acknowledgements	3
About this Project	4
Recommendations	5
What's Next	8



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Steering Committee

Aly Bandali
Encompassing Visions

Patricia Fiori
Education Manager
Museums Association of Saskatchewan

Eldon Emerson
HR Council Board Member
Manager of HR Initiatives
The Muttart Foundation

Gilda Good
Executive Director
Centre for Non Profit Management

Suzanne Lawson
Organizational Consultant
Suzanne Lawson & Associates

Claudine Lowry
Dean of Organizational Learning
Nova Scotia Community College

Rahima Mamdani
Director of HR and Organizational Development
United Way of Greater Toronto

Amanuel Melles
Director, Organizational Capacity Building Unit
United Way of Greater Toronto

Bill Palamar
Director of Human Resources Services
Scouts Canada

Keith Seel, Ph.D
HR Council Board Member
Director of the Institute for Non-profit Studies
Mount Royal College

Vivian Wiseman
Community-based trainer
Centre St. Pierre

Discussion Group Participants & Key Informants

Karen Archibald
Diane Bazin
Philippe Beaudoin
Sheri Benson
Carol Boulding
Gerard Bremault
Celine Charpentier
Geoff Chaulk
Edie Copland
Sue Davidson
Tammy Davis
Dawn Day
Kathleen Dennis
Dwayne Docken
Jennifer Ellis
Christine Epp
Carolyn Fast
Rita Field
Chris Fraser
Margaret Fraser
Elizabeth Freire

Karyn French
Shannon Friesen
Barb Gemmell
Lorraine Gerard
Fabienne Gilles
Val Green
Ken Holland
Terry Hoover
Colleen Kelly
Isha Khan
Rosalyn Kirkham
Joan Kotarski
Sandy Kuperberg
Daphne LeDrew
Suzanne Leroux
Isobel Mackenzie
Barb Macpherson
Julie Martin
Janet Matheson
Don McCreesh
Debbie McInnis

Melanie McKenzie
Leon Mills
Kelley Moore
Bob Morrison
Ken Muggerridge
George Parsons
Mandy Richard
Karen Shaver
Sharon Smith
Terry Smith
Anne Smith
Doug Soo
Thom Sparling
Wendy Stewart
Tammy Sturge
Irene Szabla
Rhonda Thomas
Yvette Walton
Janice Wing
Wendy Wright

Organizations

ACI Manitoba | Autism Services Saskatoon | Beacon Community Services | Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada | Canadian Hard of Hearing Association (N&L) | Centre for Child Development (Vancouver) | Centre for Non Profit Management (Victoria) | CHEP Good Food Inc. | Child Development Centre (Whitehorse) | Children's Aid Society of Toronto | CHMA-NL | CHTS Recreation and Regional Services | Canadian National Institute for the Blind | COSTI Immigrant Services | Crisis Intervention Saskatoon | CSMO-ESAC | Dignitas International | Fairfield Community Association (BC) | Family Service Association of Toronto | Greenpeace Canada | Kidney Foundation of Canada | Kids Eat Smart Foundation | Kilbride – Ferryland Family Resource | M-RON Inc. | Manitoba Association for Volunteer Administration | Manitoba Quality Network | Médecins Sans Frontières | Muttart Foundation | Org-Aide Society (Victoria) | Oyate Tipi Ma Mawi | Pacific Assistance Dogs Society | Pacifica Housing Advisory Association (Victoria) | Red Deer & District Community Foundation | Saskatoon Regional Intersectoral Committee | Saskatoon Sexual Assault & Information Centre | Silver Threads Service & Meals on Wheels (Victoria) | Single Parent Association (St. John's) | Toronto International Film Festival Group | United Way of Avalon | United Way of Greater Moncton & Southeastern New Brunswick Region | United Way of Saskatoon and Area | United Way of the Alberta Capital Region | Urban Aboriginal Strategy (Saskatoon) | Victoria Women's Transition House | Volunteer Manitoba | Volunteer Saskatoon | Volunteer Vancouver | Volunteer Victoria | Winnipeg Military Family Resource Centre | YMCA Saskatoon | YWCA Saskatoon

About this project

About the Building Capacity for Effective HRM project

This project set out to build a solid foundation for raising awareness, providing information and encouraging and supporting specific actions to build human resources management (HRM) capacity in the voluntary and non-profit sector. The HR Council wanted to assess HRM training needs, to identify and compile HR training opportunities and resources available in the sector and to determine if there are gaps between what is needed and what resources are available. The project research was comprised of three tiers of data gathering:

1. A survey of individuals with primary HR responsibility in their organization
2. Five discussion groups with executive directors, board members and HR managers from small, medium and large organizations
3. Thirteen key informant interviews

We realize that there is not a single route for acquiring skills and information about HRM. As the project progressed, we switched from the language of training to that of learning to recognize diverse approaches to skill and knowledge development including classroom, self-directed, e-learning, workshops, conferences, formal coaching, mentoring, networking, peer learning in addition to learning from resources such as books, articles and practical tools.

The project steering committee, a diverse group of HR managers, educators and trainers with extensive experience in the non-profit sector, provided input throughout the project to shape the research approach, and most importantly, to use the research findings in order to develop recommendations for the HR Council to determine future priorities and action towards HRM capacity building in the sector.

Steering Committee Recommendation 1:

Demonstrate why good Human Resources Management matters

We need to build awareness across the sector by developing and communicating a strong case for the value of HRM and why it is integral to running an effective non-profit organization.

The views shared in the research process are reflective of what the sector is experiencing: reduced funding, a declining workforce, increased volume of work, greater diversity and expectations. This experience is resulting in a reactive (crisis management) versus a strategic or proactive approach to HRM. This results in HRM being framed in a negative way – it is problem-centric vs. solution-based.

Suggestions for action

- Reframe good HRM as part of an organization's mission & promote HRM as a way to operationalize values.
- Promote investment in HRM as *working smarter*. Lack of HR skills, knowledge, practice and strategy means that managers spend a lot of time putting out fires, trouble shooting and solving the same problems over and over again. Demonstrate how effective HRM makes the manager's job easier.

Steering Committee Recommendation 2:

Increase understanding of the practice and principles of Human Resources Management

To identify where skill and knowledge development is required, there needs to be a greater understanding of what HRM is and whose job it is. Executive directors and managers need to know what the different components of HRM are, how they fit together, where HRM fits into overall organizational management and planning, and, in particular, what the HRM roles and responsibilities are for board members, directors and managers.

While some individuals did express a strong understanding of the various components of HRM, their interdependence and the need for strategic HRM, many comments reflected a piecemeal, reactive approach to HRM, indicating that many were not aware of the full body of knowledge and practice of HRM.

A number of comments demonstrated that many managers and board members do not understand the board's potential legal liability related to HRM. If those responsible for HRM in organizations aren't aware of their responsibilities, clear on their role or fully understand what HRM is, there is little to motivate them to seek opportunities for building capacity in these areas.

Suggestions for action

- Develop and clearly articulate an HR framework for the sector. Ensure that HRM information available on hrcouncil.ca demonstrates the connection between the various components of HRM and reflects the HR Framework once it is developed.
- Identify and share existing tools that outline the HR-related roles and responsibilities of typical executive directors, boards and board members.
- Develop an in-depth resource on hiring executive directors and good executive director and board performance management models.
- Investigate methods that would be most useful in creating learning opportunities regarding HRM roles and responsibilities for board members.

Recommendation #3

Steering Committee Recommendation 3:

Promote a culture of learning and collaboration

The research indicated that managers and directors recognize a need to increase their own skills and knowledge and those of their staff, however allocating time and resources for training is often viewed as a luxury rather than a necessity. Finding and accessing learning opportunities for board members is an even greater challenge.

There are also negative perceptions about training commonly expressed as “we train them, then they leave” – a belief that increasing skill levels increases the chance of losing employees. However, many managers also acknowledged that in an increasingly competitive labour market, people and professional development opportunities can be a competitive advantage.

Suggestions for action

- Use the lexicon of ‘investment in the workforce’ to continually promote the importance of people development and learning in and across sector organizations.
- Enhance existing relationships with colleges, universities and other capacity builders, and work to promote their available learning opportunities and resources. Share what we have learned about the need for multiple collaborative delivery models for learning opportunities that reflect sector culture, values and language.
- Get the message out that contributing to and supporting the development of skills, knowledge and increased professional capacity of employees in the sector is part of being a good employer and is an important leverage point, linked to employee recruitment and retention.
- Promote learning tools and approaches that are accessible for the sector – many collaborative or networking approaches don’t cost a lot of money but require time, there are also free tools and resources available online.

Recommendation #4

Steering Committee Recommendation 4:

Encourage the development and delivery of sector-appropriate Human Resources Management learning

Participants mentioned the need for HRM strategies that align with the mission and culture of the sector. When the uniqueness of sector as it relates to HRM was explored further, the findings were not that HRM was different functionally but that there was a need to ‘fit’ with sector culture when applying practices and policies.

A broad range of HR skills and knowledge needs were identified by participants, from high level skills and knowledge to a functional level, including HR processes and transactional elements. Areas that research participants identified to be included in formal HR training included labour legislation, performance management, recruitment, retention, succession planning, compensation, diversity, HR strategy, HR policy and integrated management of paid and unpaid labour.

While most participants acknowledged that in-person learning is the preferred means to acquire skills and knowledge, many indicated that use of technology may support the desire for the connection between peers and colleagues to share issues and experiences; may be a cost effective means and reduce or eliminate the need for travel, particularly for those in smaller organizations and rural areas where travel was not desired or appropriate. The biggest barriers to overcome were identified as time, cost, knowing what’s available and how to best find it.

Suggestions for action

- Develop a sector-specific HR 101 curriculum that provides an overview of HRM, addresses key HR challenges and can be easily tailored to different audiences (board members, executive directors, managers). Disseminate curriculum for broad use in the sector and make it accessible through hrcouncil.ca.
- Learn from the experiences of collaborative learning opportunities including the Muttart Foundation’s HR Cluster project and the CSMO-ESAC’s work on succession planning.
- Promote the inclusion of HRM as an essential component of leadership and management training and learning opportunities. Encourage colleges, universities, capacity builders, and provincial/territorial HR associations to develop HRM resources that reflect the culture, values and language in the sector, and draw on examples from the sector.
- Use hrcouncil.ca to disseminate information about sector-specific learning opportunities.

What's Next?

What's Next?

It is clear that a diversity of approaches to increasing HRM capacity is required to serve the needs in the sector. Academic institutions, capacity builders and other trainers and educators must respond to the needs of the sector through a broad range of learning opportunities offered in different durations and frequencies.

The recommendations of the Project Steering Committee are in line with the role of the HR Council as a leader in developing and disseminating HR knowledge, as a champion and promoter of good HRM practice, and as a facilitator of collaboration amongst different audiences and networks in the sector.

The HR Council Board of Directors will now determine how best to incorporate the recommendations of the project steering committee into the future and ongoing work of the HR Council. Some recommendations will be integrated into current projects and ongoing communications strategy and activities; others may be the basis for developing new projects, while some may inform, more broadly, the strategic priorities of the HR Council which will be revisited during the next strategic planning phase in early 2009. Work on several fronts has already begun!

For more information about this project, the Recommendations Report or related questions, please contact:

Lee Rose
Communications Manager
613.244.8332 extension 225
lrose@hrcouncil.ca