Voluntary & Non-profit HR Forum

Nova Scotia

REPORT BACK TO PARTICIPANTS

HR Council for the Voluntary/Non-profit Sector
&
Federation of Community Organizations

October 2007

Contents

PREFACE

About the HR Council

The HR Council for the Voluntary/Non-profit Sector (HR Council) is a national non-profit organization committed to the development and enhancement of a skilled workforce that is focused on building better communities and improving the lives of Canadians. With more than 1.2 million employees working in 69,000 organizations, the voluntary and non-profit sector represents a significant portion of Canada's paid workforce. By providing leadership, knowledge and opportunities for collaboration, the HR Council aims to contribute to the development of a sustainable and vibrant workforce for the sector.

The HR Council is funded by the Government of Canada's Sector Council Program.

About the Voluntary and Non-profit HR Forum

On Friday, September 21, the HR Council and the Federation of Community Organizations (FOCO) hosted representatives from nearly 100 community organizations based in the Halifax Regional Municipality and across Nova Scotia at a forum to discuss issues relating to paid employment in the voluntary and non-profit sector.

Throughout the day, participants had the opportunity to engage with their peers in open discussions about HR issues, experiences, challenges and successes specific to the sector. In the morning, members of the HR Council Board of Directors hosted concurrent table discussions on a range of HR issues such as diversity, recruitment and succession planning. Each table identified existing challenges and participants worked collaboratively to find practical solutions to address the issue.

After a networking lunch, four Nova Scotia organizations showcased innovative solutions to address HR issues including recruitment and retention, youth engagement and shared services.

A thought-provoking panel discussion ended the day, with Hilary Amit (Highland Community Residential Services), Peter Mortimer (United Way of Halifax Region) and Wendy Robichaud (Coastal Communities Network) sharing their perspectives on the sector's labour force challenges and opportunities. They encouraged participants to remain engaged and to work collectively to address issues affecting the entire sector.

About this report

This report summarizes the group discussions about ten HR issues that affect paid employment in the voluntary/non-profit sector. Each section provides a summary of key themes, existing challenges, and recommended solutions for the issue that were expressed by forum participants.

Please note that the opinions expressed and recorded in this report are those of the speakers and the participants of the Voluntary & Non-profit Forum. They do not necessarily reflect the position or opinion of the HR Council, its funders or the Federation of Community Organizations.

For more information

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HR HOT TOPICS

Attracting and recruiting employees

Challenges

There is an acute shortage of people who are interested in working in the sector.

People who apply for positions often lack the necessary skills.

The lack of job security and financial resources make it difficult to attract and retain employees.

Organizations are often unable to offer basic benefits packages such as health, dental and vision coverage.

Recommended solutions

Leverage flexible hours, job sharing and training opportunities when promoting the benefits of working in the sector.

Include benefits expenses in project proposals when submitting funding requests.

Recruit new employees from target groups such as youth, people returning to the workforce, retirees and existing volunteers.

Promote the advantages and benefits of contract work.

Hire co-op students and support their work experiences.

Encourage and facilitate the development of networks for contract employees who may be looking for future employment opportunities within the sector.

To overcome the challenge of competing with compensation packages offered by the public and private sectors, organizations must capitalize on the benefits and advantages they can offer employees, instead of focusing on what they cannot offer. This will better position paid employment in the sector as an opportunity of choice.

KEY THEME

Diversity

Challenges

It is often difficult to define what a diverse workplace looks like.

There is often a lack of commitment towards embracing diversity at all organizational levels.

There is the perception that in order to achieve diversity in the workplace, organizations have to "lower the bar" on required skills and qualifications.

Recommended solutions

Encourage dialogue to establish acceptable organizations standards for diversity.

Address all potential ways that discrimination may be occurring, such as screening out resumes from applicants with "non-Canadian" names.

Demystify cultural stigmas, promoting understanding through education and dialogue

Strategically and intentionally reach out to under-represented groups when recruiting new employees.

Challenge systemic discrimination at all levels, making a visible and tangible commitment to embracing diversity.

Review HR policies and practices on a regular basis to ensure an ongoing and clear commitment to diversity.

Organizations cannot simply tolerate diversity, they must demonstrate a total commitment to embracing diversity in the workplace by developing, implementing and evaluating appropriate policies and programs while fostering an inclusive work environment.

KEY THEME

Effective relationships with unions

Challenges

Traditionally there is an adversarial relationship between management and the union. Union representatives may not understand the culture of a non-profit workplace and may be too hard line.

It is challenging to secure funding for administrative staff and operational costs, including labour relations.

Recommended solutions

Advocate in partnership with unions for additional funding for non-profit programs and initiatives.

Offer union representatives training to teach them about the specificity of the voluntary and non-profit sector such as the philanthropic attitude of volunteers and employees

Combine resources for training and workplace education with the organization providing space and time and unions providing the training.

There are distinct cultures that exist within unions and non-profit organizations. These respective cultures, and the work accomplished by both groups, must be better understood, appreciated and valued.

KEY THEME

Keeping employees

Challenges

Lack of permanent, full-time work and the current trend toward contract work creates challenges in retaining employees.

Organizations are unable to provide salaries, benefits and pensions that are competitive with the private or public sectors.

The high cost of post-secondary education is creating student debt loads that prevent people from working in sector.

Shift work is problematic, especially in group homes.

Competing for staff with other industries (wages, benefits, working conditions/leading edge) is challenging for many organizations.

Over the past 10 years there has been limited opportunity for promotion and career advancement. Workers do not see the sector as a viable place to build a career.

It is difficult to manage generational gaps within the workplace.

Recommended solutions

Offer a menu approach to benefits: extra incentives, EAP, flex hours, indirect compensation and modified workdays.

Share best practices around job–sharing and maternity leave arrangements.

Provide access to professional development opportunities.

Explore shared or collaborative benefit plans (eg. United Services Co-op, Chamber of Non-profits)

Promote breadth of experience to be gained in sector; the opportunity to use a range of skills and develop new experiences.

Attract retirees from other sectors who are not ready to retire.

Involve staff and management in developing organizational culture "team spirit" – walking groups, fitness clubs and flexible management.

Provide interchange or mentorship opportunities with other organizations.

To better address the challenge of keeping employees, organizations must develop flexible benefits packages that promote work-life balance and provide opportunities for growth.

KEY THEME

Leadership and succession planning

Challenges

When staff are continuously hired on a project to project basis there is a lack of resources to develop potential leaders.

There is a general lack of attention placed on succession planning for leaders.

Boards often do not understand the important role they play in succession planning for both staff and board leadership.

It is challenging to be able to offer support to younger leaders.

Recommended solutions

Document organizational history, processes, policies; and tie this information into strategic planning and recruitment processes if most staff are project based.

Explore funding opportunities to help staff to become leaders of organizations.

Recruit young people to volunteer and they will be encouraged to consider career in non-profit organizations.

Provide age appropriate and accessible career entry points.

Identify who has the skills to become a manager.

The current tendency towards project funding is detrimental to developing staff and increases the need for effective succession planning.

KEY THEME

Professionalization of the sector

Challenges

What do we mean by professionalization of the sector? There is confusion around the term. Are we collaborating with professional organizations in community? Implementing professional practices in our organizations?

Professional 'manager' function is different than professional service provider. Credentials do not necessarily lead to professionalism.

Credentials as a prerequisite to work are valuable but may establish barriers to enter the sector if the formal standards are set too high.

The assumption about an automatic career path within an organization is wrong.

Funding agencies may be driving professionalization; should it be a funder's concern?

Recommended solutions

Recruit more professional board members. There needs to be professionalism on the board; not necessarily a board of professionals.

Organizational accreditation processes are becoming more common. They may provide models and best practices to consider

Clarify what accreditation contributes – consistency, standards, continuous learning commitment

Implement self assessments and peer review processes.

Organizations must develop and work towards a set of standards to be applied at all levels of the organization.

KEY THEME

Role of the board and executive director in HR management

Challenges

Lines of responsibility between the board of directors and the executive director are often blurred.

Lack of policies create challenges when trying to manage human resources.

Recommended solutions

Make board education part of the board agenda.

Implement effective board orientation to clearly define policies, procedures and the responsibilities of the board members.

Clearly define board governance vs. operational management and clarify who the board serves.

Develop a 12 month calendar to spell out what happens and when; particularly related to fiduciary responsibilities.

Ensure that fiduciary responsibilities are understood by all.

Develop clearly defined policies that support organizational structure and vision.

Control management's choices through policy decisions aligned with vision. Policies should be regularly checked to make sure they are on track.

The lines of responsibility between senior management and the board of directors must be clearly drawn and understood. Collaboratively developing policies and adopting an ongoing review process will help clarify and support roles.

KEY THEME

Safe and healthy workplaces

Challenges

New Violence in Workplace Legislation being introduced in October 2007 will impact organizations.

The indirect lines of responsibility can be challenging. Staff are employed by the organizations and government funds the organizations so they aren't direct employees of Social Services.

The physical settings are often an issue in relation to creating a safe workplace. Location, physical structures, parking facilities all impact on the retention of employees.

Stress and anxiety in many jobs lead to burnout.

Minimal financial resources are allocated to address health and safety issues.

Recommended solutions

Recruit and retain adequate staff numbers

Offer training in workplace health and safety, and look for solutions and resources to address the wide variety of situations and clients.

Implement risk assessment initiatives and monitor on an ongoing basis.

Strive for a better balance between work and life; follow the good example of younger people who aren't willing to work endless hours of unpaid overtime.

Give more attention to providing additional health benefits such as an Employee Assistance Program.

Employers must make a formal commitment to creating safe and healthy workplaces that are free from harassment, occupational hazards and dangers, while promoting employee wellness and work-life balance.

KEY THEME

Sharing services and resources among organizations

Challenges

Many organizations cannot afford the costs of auditors and bookkeeping.

There is a geographical and connectivity challenge to developing shared services.

Sharing initiatives in rural communities often start out on a friendly basis; the move to a more business like approach can be difficult.

Funders will not pay for salaries to coordinate sharing but they will pay for services.

There may be conflicts in philosophies; bringing together different policies and procedures can be difficult for staff and boards.

Recommended solutions

Pursue collective efforts around bulk purchasing, shared services, accountants, book keeping etc.

Identify community connections related to services and clients.

Let go of respective agendas and pursue shared values discussions.

Identify and revisit the benefits of sharing resources – buying power, business expertise, shared training.

Reduce meeting costs by establishing driving pools and video conferencing technologies available through community colleges.

Develop formal agreements to provide clarity around principles, expectations, structure, responsibilities.

Ensure those leading the sharing efforts have appropriate training and expertise.

There are many benefits to be realized through shared services and resources, however it takes careful planning and clarity around values, expectations and roles in order to be successful.

KEY THEME

Training and learning

Challenges

Individual learning vs. organizational learning: Boards are often reluctant to adapt.

Training takes time and logistical planning. Clients are not being served during training time, employees training on own time; finding locations and funding for employees and facilitators is challenging.

Need to recognize and address different training needs – male vs. female; generational and cultural differences.

Paid training focuses on hard skills; insufficient funding provided for soft skills like relationship building.

Learning opportunities provide incentive to stay with the organization but can also provide skill sets which cause people to move on to better jobs.

Recommended solutions

Develop an ongoing culture of learning not just an interest in gaining hard skills.

Find mentors to take us through a new learning experience.

Encourage training by inspiring curiosity about learning; budgeting for professional development; allowing time away from work for conferences or self funded study leaves.

Reduce duplication by sharing resources and information.

Develop learning friendly policies.

Use 'coordination' money to bring the groups together to share resources and best practices.

Organizations must have a comprehensive strategy to develop and maintain a culture that encourages and supports learning.

KEY THEME

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