

AUTUMN 2007

PERSPECTIVES

The newsletter of the HR Council for the Voluntary/Non-profit Sector

HR FORUM: NOVA SCOTIA Non-profit organizations come together to discuss HR challenges

In November 2006, the HR Council held the inaugural HR Forum in Toronto, bringing together representatives from voluntary and non-profit organizations to discuss pressing HR issues. This past September, the HR Council took the model to Nova Scotia, presenting the first sector event of its kind in Atlantic Canada.

In partnership with the Federation of Community Organizations (FOCO), an umbrella organization working to connect and strengthen the voluntary sector in the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM), the HR Council hosted more than 100 sector representatives from the HRM and across the province in a day of candid discussion and dialogue about issues relating to paid employment in the sector. "At first when we discussed bringing the forum to the east coast, we were concerned that there wouldn't be enough interest," said HR Council Board Chair Neil Cohen in his opening remarks to forum participants. "I'm very happy to see that our initial presumptions were quite unfounded, and that you are all gathered here today for a productive and engaging session."

Organizations find common ground in HR issues

Forum participants came together to share ideas with their peers on a range of human resources issues. Members of the HR Council Board of Directors hosted concurrent table discussions on

a range of HR hot topics including attracting and recruiting employees, leadership and succession planning, and working effectively with unions. Participants were able to select an issue that was of particular interest to them, share their existing challenges and work collaboratively with other participants to find practical solutions to address the issues. "This is the part of the forum that I looked forward to most," said HR Council Executive Director Lynne Toupin. "It's an opportunity for people to work together to find solutions and it allows us to better understand which challenges are similar to those found in other parts of the country and which are unique to Halifax and Nova Scotia."

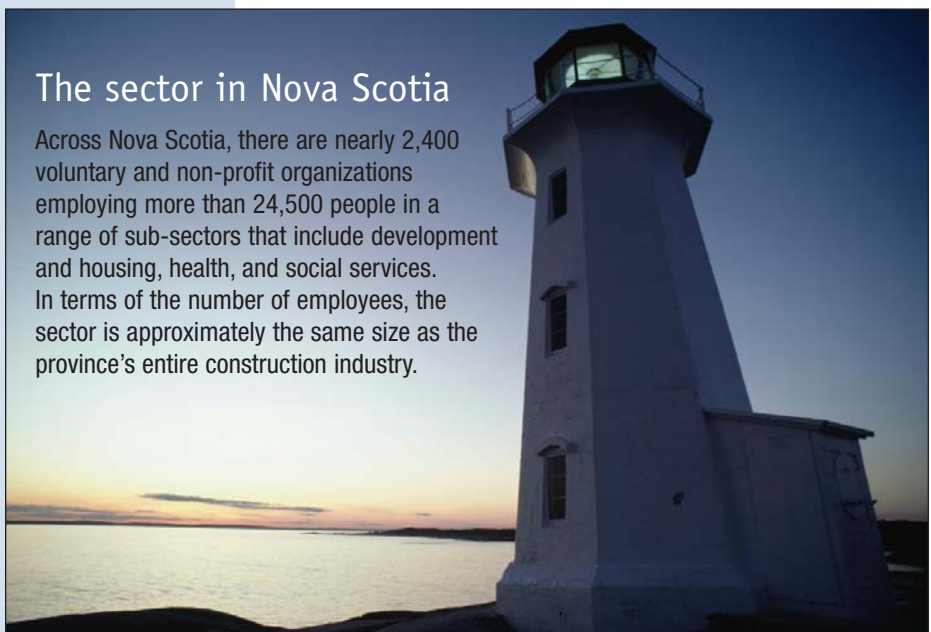
Sharing best practices

After a networking lunch, participants learned how some local organizations have found innovative solutions to address a particular HR issue.

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The sector in Nova Scotia

Across Nova Scotia, there are nearly 2,400 voluntary and non-profit organizations employing more than 24,500 people in a range of sub-sectors that include development and housing, health, and social services. In terms of the number of employees, the sector is approximately the same size as the province's entire construction industry.



QUEBEC NON-PROFITS INTRODUCE INNOVATIVE PENSION PLAN

Perhaps it's homelessness. Maybe poverty or even hunger. Whatever the issue, voluntary and non-profit organizations share a proud history of coming together to help those in our communities who are in need. Now organizations in Quebec are turning that community focus onto themselves, working collectively to introduce a unique pension plan to help ensure that their own employees don't end up homeless, in poverty or hungry when they retire.

The Centre de formation populaire (CFP) and Relais-femmes have been working with the support of a number of stakeholders since 2004 to research the feasibility of a viable and sustainable pension plan for the sector. Implementing a pension plan in the best of circumstances is a considerable undertaking. When you also have to consider the sector's history of chronically low wages, general lack of permanent employment and limited organizational capacity, the challenge seems monumental.

After an extensive consultative process that included surveying nearly 5,000 community organizations, and an in-depth analysis of available options, the project committee, with the support of the Université du Québec à Montréal's own pension plan managers, have designed an innovative multi-employer pension plan for the nearly 115,000 men and women who are employed in Quebec's 14,000 community and social economy organizations.

The plan at a glance

Like all retirement financial planning options, this pension plan aims to supplement the limited financial support offered by the Canada and Quebec Pension Plans, Old Age Security and the Guaranteed Income Supplement. However, the plan offer some unique benefits to employers and employees that may not be available in other investment vehicles such as an individual or group RSP including:

- **Defined benefits**
Unlike most pension plans which are based on defined contributions, this plan is designed to provide certainty about income at retirement.



- Few community organizations in Quebec are able to offer their employees either a group RRSP (9%) or pension plan (less than 1%).
- A typical paid employee earns \$15.47 per hour and works nearly 30 hours per week.
- 40% of employees are between the ages of 35 and 49.
- Women hold 80% of the paid positions in the community and social economy sector in Quebec.
- The majority (62.4%) of employees earn less than \$25,000, with a full 25% earning less than \$15,000 per year. (Université de Sherbrooke, 2001)

- **Accessibility for employees**

Contribution amounts can range from 2 to 18% of an employee's salary and depending on the organization, the plan is available to part-time and temporary employees.

- **Affordability for organizations**

By joining the collective, organizations will be able to take advantage of economies of scale to offer their employees a competitive, well-managed pension plan that they may otherwise be unable to afford.

- **Socially responsible investments**

Designed with the sector's values at heart, the plan will invest in socially responsible funds.

- **Portability**

Employees who leave their organization to start working with another member-organization can continue to contribute to the plan without penalty.

Next steps

With the research completed and the plan developed, the CFP and Relais-femmes are currently conducting presentations across the province for managers, employees and boards of community and social economy organizations to share information about retirement planning options and to encourage organizations and individuals to join the plan. The initiative must secure the participation of 800 individuals before December 17, 2007. If that number is reached, employees in community organizations across Quebec will start to contribute to Canada's first non-profit sector pension plan in April of next year.

For more information about this innovative project visit www.relais-femmes.qc.ca or www.lecfp.qc.ca (available in French only)

VOICE FROM THE SECTOR: Scott Lundell



Name: Scott Lundell
Age: 33
Location: Sherwood Park, Alberta
Organization: Information and Volunteer Centre for Strathcona County
Position: Assistant Director
Length of Service: 5.5 years

On any given day at the Information and Volunteer Centre for Strathcona County (IVC), Assistant Director Scott Lundell finds himself doing things that don't always fit neatly into his job description. He might meet with a community committee to establish a new program, respond directly to questions from local residents about volunteer opportunities or sit in on an interview for a new staff member with his executive director.

As is the case with many non-profit organizations, especially those with a small staff team, IVC relies on the skills and abilities of its entire staff to respond to the needs of the organization, even if that means stepping out of their comfort zone. "No two days are the same here," he says.

While constant change may dissuade some, Scott sees it as an opportunity to develop new skills and to learn more about the mechanics of running a non-profit organization, skills that are vitally important, considering IVC's dual role as a provider of information about community services and as the community's volunteer centre. "I really enjoy being able to switch gears and see how all the pieces fit together."

Like many people working in the sector, Scott started as out as a volunteer. When he was nine years old he stacked books in his school library and as a teenager he ran winter hockey programs for disadvantaged youth. While he continued to volunteer into his 20's as a hockey coach with the Alberta Sports and Recreation Association for the Blind, Scott didn't consider starting a career

in the sector until a friend of the family told him about an innovative program for non-profit leadership at Grant MacEwan College. I originally studied culinary arts and worked in that field for three months. Before I started the program at Grant MacEwan, I wasn't even aware that a career in the sector was an option."

The program is offered in a hybrid delivery model, with students completing the program requirements over a period of two years. Students attend one or two-day sessions on campus approximately ten times throughout the program, with the remaining coursework completed independently, with the support of instructors and fellow students. Scott had the opportunity to complete his practicum requirement at Volunteer Edmonton, where he had the opportunity to build a lot of great relationships and networks that he still uses today.

With his career on track, Scott doesn't think he'll ever look for work outside of the voluntary and non-profit sector. "I really enjoy the culture of non-profit organizations," he says. "I love working with a network of people who are trying to make the community a better place. It's very rewarding to see first hand the impact that you can have on the lives of the people around you."

For more information about the Information and Volunteer Centre for Strathcona County, visit www.ivcstrathcona.org

Publisher's note:

This is the last edition of HR Perspectives in its current semi-annual format. Starting in 2008, HR Perspectives and the HR Council's popular biweekly e-news will be brought together in a new monthly electronic bulletin featuring:

- The latest in relevant HR news, information and updates
- HR tips and advice from the revised, updated and expanded HR Toolkit
- Updates on HR Council projects and research initiatives
- Sector perspectives on current trends and issues

ABOUT THE HR COUNCIL

The HR Council for the Voluntary & Non-profit Sector (HR Council) 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 in our work

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Janet Everest, executive director of the provincial Health Care Human Resources Sector Council, provided an overview of an online recruitment and retention toolkit developed for health organizations that could also be applied to the broader voluntary and non-profit sector.

Tim Crooks, executive director of Phoenix Youth Programs, a community based organization working with at-risk and homeless youth, talked about their collaboration with post-secondary institutions to offer meaningful and engaging co-op placements.

HR Hot Topics

- Attracting and recruiting employees
- Diversity
- Effective relationships with unions
- Keeping employees
- Leadership and succession planning
- Professionalization of the sector
- Role of the board and the executive director in HR management
- Safe and healthy workplaces
- Sharing services and resources among organizations
- Training and learning

Claudette Legault, executive director of the Halifax Immigrant Learning Centre and Gerry Mills, executive director of the Metropolitan Immigrant Settlement Association, shared their candid perspectives on how and why their two organizations decided to share a common space and the positive outcomes of co-habitation on their human resource practices.

A call to action

A thought-provoking panel discussion ended the day, with Hilary Amit of Highland Community Residential Services, Peter Mortimer of United Way of Halifax Region and Wendy Robichaud of the Coastal Communities Network sharing their perspectives on human resource issues and the broader context in which these organizations work. A common theme emerged about the importance of working collectively to address issues affecting the entire sector. "This forum was a great opportunity for us to get together to discuss issues of paid employment in the sector," said Hilary. "However, it doesn't stop here. We must move forward together to make the sector a better, more vibrant and worthy environment to work in Nova Scotia."

For more information about the HR Forum, or to download a copy of the HR Forum Nova Scotia: Report back to Participants, including copies of the presentation slides, please visit hrcouncil.ca or foco.ca.

Discover practical tools, information and services related to non-profit workplace issues and HR management online at **hrcouncil.ca**

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**HR Council for
the Voluntary/
Non-profit Sector**

201-291 Dalhousie Street
Ottawa, ON Canada
K1N 7E5

Tel: (613) 244-8332
Toll Free: 1 (866) 594 8332
Fax: (613) 241-2252
hrcouncil.ca