

# Trends & Issues

## Gender mix in the nonprofit sector

This report is based on the results of the first major quantitative study of the Canadian nonprofit sector, conducted by the HR Council in 2008. More information on this study and its methodology is available on [hrcouncil.ca](http://hrcouncil.ca)

Where do we find men and women in the nonprofit sector?

The nonprofit sector's labour force is predominantly female: three-quarters (75%) of those working in the sector are women. In most areas of the sector, however, men occupy a disproportionate number of senior management positions, while women are overrepresented in administrative and support-staff positions (see Figure 1). A notable exception to this trend is the Health and Social Services sector, where women are better represented in senior positions.

What are key differences between men and women who work for nonprofit organizations?

**Age.** There are notable age differences between men and women working in the nonprofit sector. Women who work for nonprofit organizations are on average nearly five years younger than men working in the sector (42.3 is the average age for women, 46.9 for men). Women outnumber men in all the 44-and-under age cohorts while men outnumber women in all the 45-and-over cohorts.

**Tenure.** Men tend to have worked at their current organization for longer periods, and also tend to have held their current positions for longer periods than have their female counterparts.

Figure 1

Distribution of nonprofit sector employees by area of activity and gender

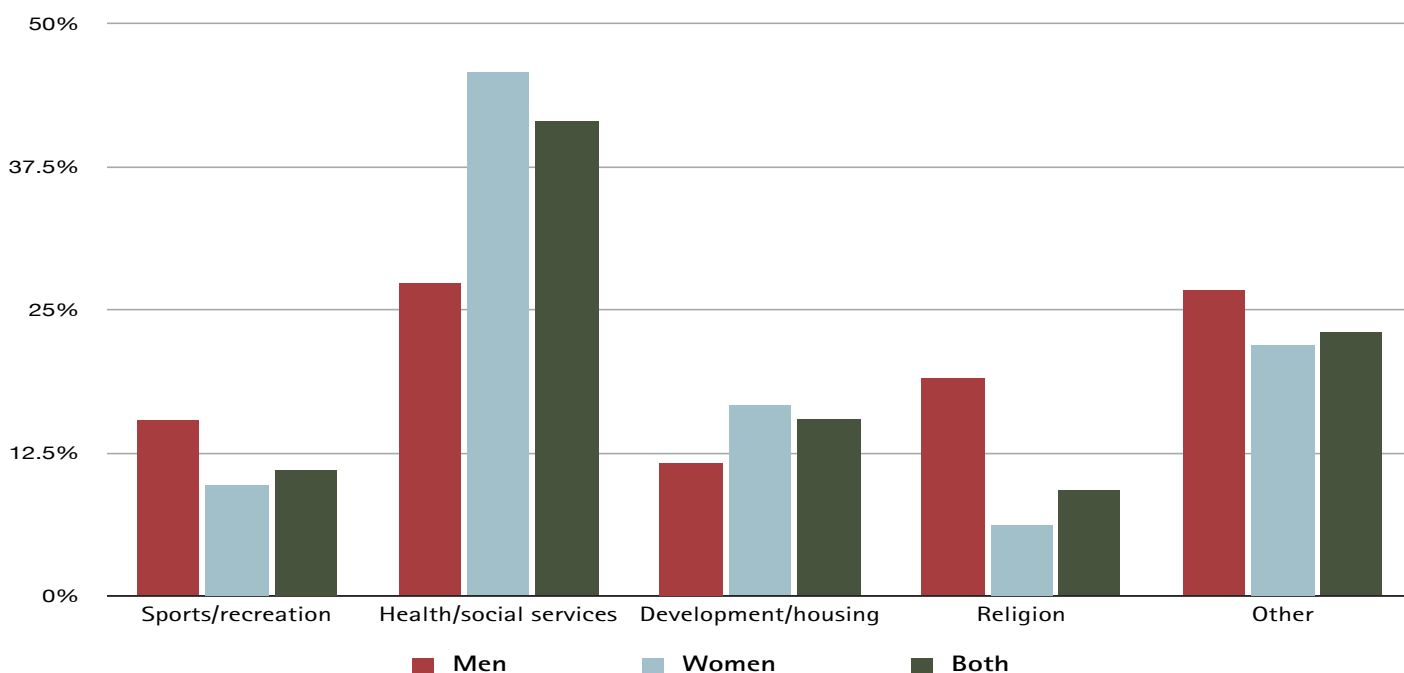
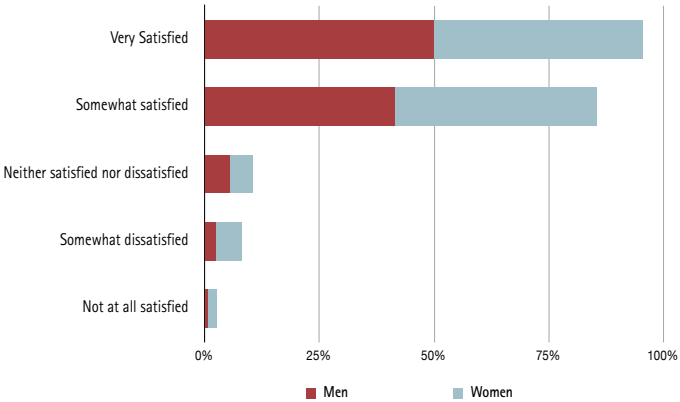


Figure 2

Overall job satisfaction among both men and women



**Education.** Overall, the educational attainment of paid staff in the nonprofit sector is high, with over three in ten women (31%) and men (33%) holding undergraduate degrees—as compared to 23 percent of the working-age population at large. Although men and women are about equally likely to hold undergraduate degrees, women are twice as likely to have completed trade school or community college (29% versus 17%), while men are markedly more likely to hold postgraduate degrees (25% versus 11%). Some of the disparity in college completion rates might be explained by the overrepresentation of women in the health sector: community colleges deliver much of the health-related training in Canada and these programs are likely feeding large numbers of women into nonprofit organizations.

How do men and women feel about their work in the nonprofit sector?

Both men and women express high levels of commitment to and satisfaction with their work for nonprofit organizations. Roughly nine in ten paid employees in the sector rate their job satisfaction as high, and over eight in ten men and women report a sense of commitment to the missions of their organizations.

Nevertheless, some differences in job satisfaction emerge along gender lines: men are more likely than women to have very high satisfaction, and women are more likely than men to have very low satisfaction or be “not at all” satisfied (see Figure 2).

When men and women are asked to rate their satisfaction with specific aspects of their jobs—such as benefits, job security, recognition of their work, and relationships with managers—gender differences emerge on ten dimensions. In every case, it is men who report higher satisfaction.

Low job satisfaction does not always cause people to leave their jobs. But it is worth noting that among women and men who do plan to leave the nonprofit sector, their stated motivations differ along gender lines. Men more often cite “pull factors” (such as a desire to pursue other

opportunities, including those outside the nonprofit sector) whereas women tend to cite “push factors” (such as having no room to advance in their current organization). Women who are considering leaving the nonprofit sector are also likely to say they are simply keeping their options open.

Why do these findings matter?

In order to be effective, nonprofit organizations in Canada need to keep attracting and retaining men and women who have the skills to deliver on their missions. By understanding the gender dynamics at work in the nonprofit sector, we will be better equipped to:

- Change the aspects of work that many female staff find unsatisfying, such as the lack of opportunities for professional development and career growth
- Promote equity in hiring and internal advancement among nonprofit organizations
- Help organizations attract more men at earlier stages of their careers

These efforts will help to ensure that nonprofit organizations across the country have the talent they need to continue their vital work.

# HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector

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