Skills development

Using evidence-based information to inform practice

December 2012

HR Council
for the Nonprofit Sector

HR Council
for the Nonprofit Sector

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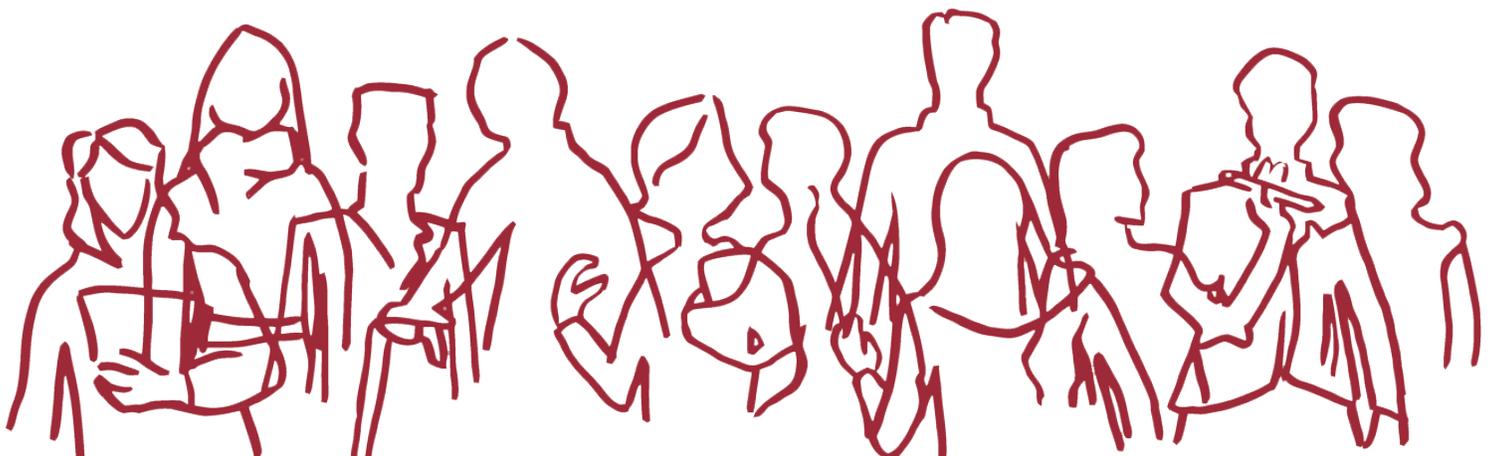
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Dear reader,

As members of the Advisory Committee for the HR Council's skills development project, one of our aspirations for our sector is to maintain a vibrant, highly skilled workforce that continues to provide a high degree of proficiency for our communities. However, given the current prolonged state of austerity and an uncertain future, our aspirations to maintain our current state of skills in the sector is in jeopardy. We knew from our experiences that there exists a direct link between skills development, work proficiency and positive work outcomes, which in turn benefits our communities. While we knew this intuitively, we wanted to show evidence to support such a claim within the nonprofit sector context. Our efforts over the past two years have produced evidence that has confirmed some of our intuitions and assumptions. The production of this evidence could not be timelier because we know that much of what we have captured can play a critical role in supporting decision makers to not cut skills development funds and resources as a first step austerity measure.

The total sum of our findings and what we have learned along this process has culminated in the development of this framework, created as a living document that would exist beyond the end of the project and something that would not collect dust on a shelf. We aimed to create a document that is primarily intended for organizations while recognizing the important role played by Boards and funders in supporting skills development. We focused on making something that is not overly prescriptive or perceived as top-down, but rather a framework informed by organizations for organizations.

It is our hope this framework can assist your organization by outlining some recommended approaches to skills development that are cost efficient and can be used to inform your organization's strategic planning. We recommend leveraging the use of technology, partnerships and networks, and to capitalize on our experiences to learn from and teach one another. We suggest borrowing evidence-based skills development practices from others and being innovative in our approaches. We see "innovation" as any approach that works for your organization and helps to achieve your goals, even if this means reviving a practice from the past. Innovation doesn't have to be new or risky.

Our sector has always been and will continue to be in a perpetual state of change, renewal and uncertainty and our labour force needs the skills necessary to keep pace with our ever changing world. We offer this framework as a means to continue to thrive, be efficient and effective and to make a difference for our communities.

The Skills Development Advisory Committee

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The HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector undertook this project to develop goals and recommended actions that would provide a framework to enhance skills development in the Canadian nonprofit sector.

The goals and actions outlined in this report are intended to assist non-profit organizations – in particular Human Resource managers, Executive Directors and other leaders involved in skills development – to identify and act on ways to strengthen skills development at a cost that is manageable for organizations. This skills development framework holds interest for board members, sector funders, and educators/trainers because they play critical roles as decision makers and trainers in supporting and providing skills development to organizations and the broader nonprofit sector.

The HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector undertook this initiative to develop goals and recommended actions that would provide a framework to enhance skills development in the Canadian nonprofit sector. The goals have been developed to inspire your organization to take more action on skills development, to work with other organizations and sector partners, and to encourage other organizations to take other actions for the benefit of the sector as a whole. There are three goals that include:

Learning

- Goal 1: Encourage organizations to adopt an organizational learning culture, integrate organization-wide learning and skills development into ongoing activities, and collaborate on creating a learning strategy for the nonprofit sector.

Collaboration

- Goal 2: Support innovative skills training for nonprofit organizations that focus on collaboration and partnership and emerging and innovative ways of organizing; and share the learnings across the nonprofit sector.

Capacity building

- Goal 3: Build understanding and support from nonprofit organizations and their partners - including funders - for investments and partnerships in training and skills development, and the importance of sharing promising practices and innovations.

To support achieving the goals, eleven key actions have been identified. These actions fit into four themes, named by their acronym "RENT."

Theme	Actions
R = Research	1. Assess skills development activities
	2. Explore ways to enhance HR management capacity of boards
	3. Research the value proposition
E = Education and communication	4. Educate stakeholders
	5. Share what has been learned
	6. Use evidence-based information
N = Networks and partnerships	7. Build understanding with funders and other partners
	8. Create networking mechanisms
	9. Be strategic about networks and partnerships
T = Tools, processes and products	10.Share existing skills development tools
	11. Identify, adapt and create HR management tools, processes and products

The goals, "RENT" and the recommended actions aim to stimulate investment in skills development in the nonprofit sector and encourage the sector and its partners to identify what works, share findings, innovate and adapt practices and extend the capacity of the sector in all its diversity.

Organizations are key to the success of this framework, yet can only work within their capacity. By taking on what can be done today and then looking at what can be done tomorrow, each organization can contribute to increasing skills development and developing career paths that attract and keep qualified people working in the nonprofit sector. The framework is intended to:

- Enhance the sustainability and adaptability of an organization and the nonprofit sector by stimulating more effective use of existing infrastructure
- Increase the sector's focus on the impact of skills development
- Engage your organization, the sector, and the public in conversations on the value of skills development to our organizations and the communities we serve

By using this framework and selecting actions that are most suitable, organizations will continue to drive skills development. Taken together, the actions of individual organizations will become part of a more co-ordinated approach to skills development for the sector.

It is anticipated that this collective approach to skills development will:

- Enable organizations to address key skills gaps in a cost effective way, taking advantage of promising practices and innovations
- Enhance recruitment and retention within individual organizations
- Encourage people to stay in the sector by providing skills development and offering career path options within an organization and between organizations
- Develop evidence on what works in skills development, how it is effectively adapted and shared, how networks, partnerships and collaborations contribute to enhancing skills development in the sector, and how these benefits impact communities
- Directly benefit clients and communities by enabling organizations to deliver their services more effectively

Introduction

Who and what is this report for?

This framework is intended to help nonprofit organizations to identify their learning practices and strengthen skills development – at a cost that is manageable for the organization. This report is intended particularly for HR managers, Executive Directors and other leaders involved in skills development. This skills development framework is of particular interest to board members, sector funders, and educators/trainers because they play critical roles as decision makers and trainers in supporting and providing skills development for organizations and the broader nonprofit sector.

This report aims to help nonprofit organizations and their partners take action on skills development in the nonprofit sector by focusing on skills development that is:

- Community and client centred, meaning focused on clients and delivered in communities, and recognizes the importance of lifelong learning.
- Asset based, meaning that organizations reflect on what they are already doing, what they might do more of or differently, and how they could work with and support other nonprofits with skills development in their communities.
- Evidence-based, meaning that organizations take a strategic approach to investments in skills development and collaboration, including assessing the results for their staff, the organization and the communities they serve.

Employing a long-term view that training benefits the individual by enhancing their skills then benefits the organization in terms of recruitment and retention; this in turn helps communities through developing more qualified and engaged staff and benefits the nonprofit sector by encouraging people to work and develop careers in the sector.

Why is skills development important?

The nonprofit sector is an essential part of the Canadian economy. Representing 7.2% of the country's total paid workforce, the collective salaries of employees in the sector add up to an annual payroll of $22 billion.[2] To provide some perspective, paid employees in the sector outnumber the workforces of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador combined.[3] According to Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada's pre-budget consultations "As manufacturing declines and governments devolve more services to the regional and local level, the role of the nonprofit sector is expanding. These organizations make highly significant contributions to the quality of life in communities, and Canadians rely on the essential services and options for enrichment offered through the nonprofit sector."[4]

> "There is an opportunity to reinforce, at a national level, the importance of learning and skills development as a direct means of serving the clients of the nonprofit sector. At the same time, we need to make sure that Canadians appreciate and understand the importance of the work of the sector."
>
> —Director, Organizational Capacity Building

Environmental factors are impacting communities and the nonprofit organizations that serve them. The nonprofit sector faces the same demographic pressures as all sectors in Canada: an aging workforce, low birth rate and the need to be able to attract and train new employees and leaders to replace those who will be retiring. Demographic changes also reflect greater diversity, with the ranks of new workers increasingly including Aboriginal peoples, new immigrants and people with disabilities.[5] "A shift in health care has resulted in many patients moving out of hospitals and back home, creating demands for more community based and home care support. Governments have been reducing their roles and taking a more austere approach to support in areas such as social services and housing, leaving nonprofits to pick up the slack. These trends are occurring at a time when the populations of those served by nonprofits (including the elderly, Aboriginal people and new immigrants) are increasing, and when greater collaboration between organizations and sectors is required to address the multi-faceted issues faced by Canadian society."[6]

> "There is an increase in service demands on the sector as governments vacate areas of service delivery and either freeze or reduce funding."
>
> —Public policy forum

Without taking more action on skills development, nonprofits run the risk of finding it harder and harder to recruit and retain good staff as they compete for a dwindling and more diverse workforce. This in turn will make it difficult for organizations to fulfill their mandates of serving their clients and communities.

2. According to research published by the Canadian Policy Research Network (CPRN) in 2009; available at: http://hrcouncil.ca/labour/overview.cfm

3. Ibid.

4. According to research published by the Parliament of Canada and used by the Standing Committee on Finance (FINA), Pre-budget consukltations 2012; available at http://www.parl.gc.ca/Content/HOC/Committee/411/FINA/WebDoc/WD5709773/411_FINA_PBC2012_Briefs%5CBigBro thersBigSistersofCanadaE.pdf

6. "Current State of Skills Development in the Canadian Nonprofit Sector," pp. 7-8.

Why is a strategic approach recommended?

The HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector (HR Council) led a research project to produce this skills development framework. One World Inc. was hired to support the initiative, and an advisory committee helped provide guidance (for a list of advisory committee members, see the Appendix). One World and the committee read reports about sector skills development and learned from the experiences of Canadian nonprofit Executive Directors, HR Managers and other sector leaders through a survey with 772 responses, 15 one-on-one interviews and two face-to-face consultation sessions. The conversations with sector leaders, including the project advisory committee, confirmed and built on findings from the background research and skills development survey.

Highlights of what we learned from the survey on skills development were:

- The most important skills gaps facing the Canadian nonprofit sector in the next few years are **strategic leadership, finances and fundraising, and part–nership development**. (For more information about what was included in these key skills gaps, see "Priority Skills Gaps Identified in the Survey" in the Appendix.) While these skills gaps are not explicitly addressed in the broader goals and recommendations that follow, any efforts nonprofits make to increase the learning and skills development in their organizations could be focussed in these areas if they are relevant to their organization.

- The majority of organizations surveyed were not spending, or do not have access to, sufficient financial resources to meet their skills development needs. It appears that small organizations may actually be spending more per employee than either mid-sized or large organizations, likely explained by the need within small organizations for more multi-tasking and multi-skilling. Nonetheless, small organizations also face the greatest overall levels of financial stress.[7] Mid-sized and large organizations, while spending more on an organizational basis than smaller ones, appear to be spending significantly less on a per employee basis.

- Access to information on training programs that meet the needs of the nonprofit sector is a barrier, especially for smaller and mid-sized organizations and those in smaller, rural or remote communities. These organizations are using networking as important sources of information about skills development options.

- Practices such as the use of performance evaluations to identify training needs and the involvement of employees in training decisions seems to yield good results in terms of training outcomes. Unsurprisingly, these practices were more prevalent among large organizations. Integrating the background research, it was concluded that workplace and HR practices must be (1) *combined* in clusters or bundles of reinforcing practices, (2) *integrated* to fit with the overall strategy of the organization, and (3) *supported* by managers, supervisors and the union if present.

- The *usefulness* of available training was examined in the survey. While few indicated that the training they engaged in was not helpful, significant numbers noted that the training only partially addressed a skills gap. While there are often many components to addressing a skills gap, this finding highlights the importance of gathering evidence about the effectiveness of any training – for individuals, organizations, clients and communities. Developing the evidence about what is effective will enable organizations to make strategic investments in training while ensuring that there are opportunities to try, fail, adapt and innovate in the provision of skills development.

In the one-on-one interviews and the consultation sessions, sector leaders reflected on the survey findings and background research. These conversations led to the conclusion that a strategic approach would be most effective in addressing skills gaps and undertaking skills development. Why? Because being strategic allows organizations to address skills development priorities that meet their needs and fit within their resources. It targets the skills development resources to those activities that will best support the achievement of the mission. It provides a testable rationale for skills development dollars and staff time that can be assessed and revised based on the results. Taken together, the actions of individual organizations will become part of a more strategic and co-ordinated approach to skills development in the sector, culminating in and informing a national approach that puts evidence-based information into practice.

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7. Public Policy Forum, Introductory letter.

Ways organizations could adopt strategic approaches to skills development:

- Building skills development into strategic and operational planning so that training efforts fit and align with such plans, creating efficiencies and targeting efforts at areas of most importance to organizations, staff, clients and communities

- Delivery of training in diverse ways, including face-to-face, via the web, peer networks, etc.

- Providing training to meet job competencies, skills needed for a promotion, and transferable skills

- Gathering evidence-based practices and success stories and communicating them to illustrate the benefit of investment in skills development

- Sharing evidence in skills development and design

- Sharing information about good resources, with the Internet as a key tool

- Recognizing the benefits of cross-pollination between sectors – public, private, nonprofit – through training activities

- Leveraging the use of technology, partnerships and networks

- Borrowing evidence-based skills development practices from others and being innovative in order to learn from and teach one another

- Partnering with the private sector on learning initiatives that help with their corporate social responsibilities while offering training to the nonprofit sector

Organizations are key to the success of this framework, yet can only work within their capacity. A strategic approach can work at a pace that works for a specific organization, and does not need to be costly. Building on evidence and innovations and using networks, partnerships, collaborations and new technologies can substantially reduce the cost of skills development. Organizations can contribute to increasing skills development and developing career paths that attract and keep qualified people working in the nonprofit sector.

Focusing on skills development enables organizations to:

- Provide high quality services, programs and activities based on evidence and lessons learned

- Attract staff based on an organization's reputation in the community

- Retain staff based on a demonstrated commitment to learning, collaboration and partnerships

- Build on successes and evidence-based practices, while finding innovative new practices and innovative ways of implementing old practices to develop skills

This framework has been written for a bottom-up approach. Organizations are encouraged to adopt an organization-wide learning culture, invest in skills development, and build their own capacity to collaborate and network. With the support of sector partners, including funders, nonprofit organizations will be able to collectively serve their clients and communities more effectively, thus contributing to a strategic approach for the sector as a whole.

"What is needed is an organizational strategic plan that includes professional development and learning as well as other human resource supports, and an organizational culture which is supportive of continuous learning and innovation. We need to look for new ideas, take risks and, look for innovative future-oriented learning."

—Executive Director

A **learning culture** is found in organizations that actively demonstrate their commitment to ongoing learning throughout the organization – as well as across organizations and between organizations – by encouraging innovation, risk and change, learning from failures as well as successes, and often by following learning organization processes. Such organizations build learning into how the organization works internally and how it delivers services.

A **learning organization** has embedded a continuous learning process – ongoing learning and skills development – into its structure and has developed an enhanced organizational capacity to change or transform.

Organization-wide learning is learning that occurs within an organization and that involves all staff and its board.

Lifelong learning is the ongoing building of knowledge and skills, gained from formal and informal education and training, throughout a person's life; this enables organizations to better fulfill their missions.

Collaboration involves developing partnerships and networks across organizations and between organizations in the nonprofit sector and one's specific sub-sector, as well as with governments, funders and the for-profit sector, and then working together on projects and activities.

Collaborative leadership is a leadership approach that is based on knowledge and skills in collaboration, and uses collaboration within organizations and in partnerships and networks to achieve goals and accomplish activities.

Skills development goals

A key component of the initiative was to create goals that would provide a framework for enhancing skills development in the Canadian nonprofit sector. The following goals were developed through an iterative process involving a skills survey, key informant interviews, and conversations with sector leaders during two consultation sessions, followed by considerable thought and discussion with the advisory committee, and then validated by the individuals involved in the interviews and consultations. The following three goals highlight the importance of learning, capacity building and collaboration in preparing the nonprofit sector for current and future demands for service in Canadian communities and recruiting and retaining qualified staff to deliver on organizational mandates.

Learning

GOAL 1: Encourage organizations to adopt an organizational learning culture, integrate organization-wide learning and skills development into ongoing activities, and collaborate on creating a learning strategy for the nonprofit sector.

This goal encourages organizations to focus on learning and skills development by integrating learning into ongoing activities and offering skills development to staff and volunteers at every level of an organization, including the board. It also encourages organizations to contribute to a sector-wide learning strategy, recognizing that investments in training by individual organizations contribute to a more highly skilled sector. Such efforts will help position these organizations as employers of choice in an increasingly competitive labour market, improve career opportunities for their staff, and increase retention and career pathing within the nonprofit sector as a whole.

"Nonprofits need to see the development of a learning culture and environment as essential — a must-have, rather than a nice-to-have."

—Executive Director

Collaboration

GOAL 2: *Support innovative skills training for nonprofit organizations that focus on collaboration and partnership and emerging and innovative ways of organizing; and share the learnings across the nonprofit sector.*

More and more, organizations need to use collaboration, partnership and innovation to deliver services and skills development in the nonprofit sector and in partnership with other sectors. However, establishing and maintaining successful collaborations and partnerships are skills themselves and require training, as well as education/training partners to develop and deliver effective training in such skills. In addition, people working in the sector need to learn about different ways of organizing partnerships and collaborations and identifying promising practices and innovations. This goal is intended to highlight the importance of learning these skills to the success of individual organizations and to the nonprofit sector more broadly.

Capacity Building

GOAL 3: *Build understanding and support from nonprofit organizations and their partners - including funders - for investments and partnerships in training and skills development, and the importance of sharing promising practices and innovations.*

Tough economic times impact people in communities all across Canada and are especially hard on more disadvantaged groups. In such times of austerity, nonprofit organizations must attempt to meet the increasing needs in their communities while coping with fewer financial resources. Cutting professional development budgets is one of the ways that organizations and their boards attempt to meet the shrinking bottom line. However, lack of investment in skills development or sharing of promising practices and innovations or utilizing systems thinking can result in organizations not having the skills and therefore capacity to meet community needs. This goal aims to increase understanding about the importance of investment in skills development to service delivery, so that sector funders and Boards recognize the link between skills development and organizations effectively serving their clients and communities. It also aims to encourage organizations to share and adopt promising practices and innovations, including ones you have developed internally.

Recommended Actions: "RENT"

The following actions are intended to encourage nonprofits to see what they could act on today and what they might do tomorrow to advance their own skills development priorities and the goals of the sector. Many of the actions apply to more than one goal, which is why the recommended actions are grouped into four categories: Research (R), Education and Communication (E), Networks and Partnerships (N), and Tools, Processes and Products (T). The resultant acronym, "RENT", is the lens through which nonprofit organizations are encouraged to view and take action on skills development. The suggested actions are explained in the following pages, and summarized in the "RENT" Action Chart that follows.

R = Research

During this initiative, considerable effort and discussion focused on exploring what will support

Systems thinking is the process of understanding how things influence one another within a whole. In organizations, systems consist of people, structures, and processes that work together to make an organization healthy or unhealthy.

Cross-collaboration is collaboration between different organizations, within the nonprofit sector and with other sectors where learning goes both ways.

Transfer is the successful acquisition of knowledge or skills from one individual or organization to another.

Human capital refers to the knowledge and economic value of people in the workforce.

Social capital refers to the value of relationships and networks that facilitate collective action for mutual benefit.

and stimulate skills development in the Canadian nonprofit sector. The following actions are intended to build on the skills development activities in the sector and the research undertaken through this initiative (see the "Current State of Skills Development" report) that captured some of our overall skills development picture. The proposed actions are intended to help organizations focus on more effective skills development practices that will not only benefit your organization but also serve to gather a more complete picture of skills development practices in the nonprofit sector. As such, we encourage organizations to examine existing promising practices, how practices have been adapted and changed, the conditions required for creating effective networks for skills development, the role of boards in HR management, and other mechanisms, processes and tools that the nonprofit sector employs in skills development. The continuation and progression of this type of research within your organization and across the sector will enable your organization and eventually the sector to develop a stronger business case for organizational investment in skills development from boards down through entire organizations and to sector funders.

1. **Assess skills development activities**. Encourage organizations to monitor and measure the results of each of their skills development activities to determine whether the training achieved the desired results, including the impact on individual staff members, the organization and the communities they serve.

2. **Explore ways to enhance the HR management capacity of boards**. Research structural and other barriers to Board recruitment and the HR Management capacity of nonprofit boards, identifying promising practices and innovations to support their skills development capacity.

3. **Research the value proposition** (business case) for how training impacts and benefits organizations, their communities and the sector, and the role of innovation in skills development. Key national nonprofit organizations and sector leaders would lead. Address

cost-benefit analysis; calculation of return on investment for funders, organizations and society; examination of human capital and social capital; the relationship between skills development, direct and indirect impacts on clients and communities, and recruitment and retention for individual organizations and the sector; and evidence about the value of specific types of training (i.e. informational, tactical, strategic, etc.). Develop a framework to track results, and encourage organizations to share stories on some of their strategic skills development activities, results and lessons learned.

> "The biggest issue is getting government and private funders to accept that skills development is diorectly aligned with service delivery to clients."
>
> —Foundation representative

E = Education and communication

Nonprofit organizations may be reluctant to invest in skills development because staff may leave, or because they feel guilty about using their limited resources to provide skills development to their staff rather than in direct service delivery. Education about the value and effectiveness of skills development on delivering on mission and mandate is needed to increase investments in organizational learning and skills development. Gathering success stories and communicating them while researching promising skills development practices and innovations will illustrate the benefits of investment in skills development.

> "It is necessary to take into account the needs of small organizations, rural areas and also First Nations."
>
> —Executive Director

4. **Educate stakeholders** – nonprofits, learners, funders and other stakeholders with a vested interested in skills development – on the value of creating a learning culture and the need for strategic investments in skills development for the sector.

5. **Share what we have learned**. Collect and share what we have learned about skills development, its importance, and the benefits to organizations, employees, clients and communities.

6. **Use evidence-based information** to articulate and promote the effective use of partnerships, networks and innovative ways of learning for skills development and training in the nonprofit sector.

"Target organizations based on size - small, mid-sized and large - as that is where there is uniqueness."

—Executive Director

N = Networks and partnerships

Networks and partnerships can be effective ways to learn from and with each other, disseminate information, often reduce costs, and avoid re-inventing the wheel by sharing evidence-based practices and innovations. Participating in networks that focus on skills development can provide inexpensive opportunities to learn from peers in the sector, reduce isolation especially in smaller organizations, build bridges and partnerships between mature and younger organizations, and welcome and encourage a greater diversity of people to stay in the sector. Organizations gain new perspectives from partners, including those outside the sector, which can stimulate and nourish learning and innovation. These and other new ways of organizing for learning require support and building understanding among nonprofits, funders and partners.

7. **Build understanding with funders and other partners**. Create a shared understanding among organizations, funders and other partners about each other's realities, cultures and terminology. Use this knowledge to enhance networks, partnerships and other emerging and innovative ways of organizing, and foster investments and partnerships in skills development.

8. **Create networking mechanisms**. Develop mechanisms for sharing skills and promising practices for networking, such as reviewing terms of reference, effective network maintenance, ways to be more inclusive and diverse, etc.

9. **Be strategic about networks and partnerships**. Encourage organizations to analyze the networks and partnerships they participate in or are considering joining: Do they have a clearly stated purpose and goals (which could be as simple as an ideas exchange on skills development)? Do they focus on developing and sharing knowledge, skills and tools? Are new partnerships created through their networks? And, in networks, are some resources – even if limited – available for support (coordination, spaces to meet, etc.)?

"We've arrived at a time in the life of the nonprofit or community sector when we have to know how to work across and with different sectors."

—Foundation representative

T = Tools, processes and products

It is also important to share existing tools, processes and products developed by an organization and other nonprofits rather than spending resources to re-create ones that have already been developed. Using technology to share information about what has been effective allows organizations and their staff in any part of the country to benefit from what works and adapt it to suit their specific purposes and context.

10. **Share existing skills development tools**. Identify, share and use potential resources for skills training on topics such as capacity building, collaboration, etc. Use, share and contribute to sector websites for knowledge exchange on promising practices and innovations in skills development for both staff and boards. Cover topics such as board recruitment, performance development, boards as employers, compensation levels by size/culture/complexity, key board policies, etc. (the HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector's Resource Centre is a good source for information.)

11. **Identify, adapt and create HR management tools, processes and products** that enhance skills development, building on promising practices and innovations, including:

- Tools and guidelines for modifying or adapting promising practices that work in an organization, determining whether they can be transferred, making modifications as appropriate, incorporating cross-collaborative processes, and using results-based strategies
- Transferable skills assessment tools
- How to align skills development plans with strategic plans

- A guidebook on creating effective partnerships, covering why, what and who (including the "usual suspects" and systems thinking); objectives; expectations of partners and capacity of an organization; common starting points and timeframes; roles; accountability; diversity; measurement of impact; the importance of context; and organizational literacy about being a good partner
- Tools that help organizations better understand their recruitment needs and that aid employees in recognizing their transferable skills
- Tools to help organizations recognize and address generational differences, including the use of cross-generational coaching
- Behavioural screening tools that HR managers can use in interviews to select a good "fit" within their organization, including guidelines on adapting the tools to the specific context of an individual organization.

"RENT" Action chart: A lens for enhancing skills devlopment

The following table describes how each of the recommended actions contributes to reaching the skills development goals, and who is key to making the actions successful. "Sector wide" means the umbrella organizations that serve the sector as a whole or one of its subsectors, and joint actions would be undertaken by umbrella organizations and individual organizations working together. It is important for organizations to take on actions that are most important to their mission and match their capacity.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS	Who could take action			Skills development goals		
	Organizations	Joint action	Sector wide	Learning	Collaboration	Capacity building
R=Research						
1. Assess skills development activities	X			X		
2. Explore ways to enhance HR management capacity of boards	X		X		X	X
3. Research the value proposition		X	X			X
E= Education and communication						
4. Educate stakeholders	X		X	X	X	X
5. Share what we have learned	X		X	X		X
6. Use evidence-based information	X		X		X	X
N= Networks and partnerships						
7. Build understanding with funders and other partners	X	X		X	X	X
8. Create networking mechanisms		X			X	X
9. Be startegic about networks and partnerships	X				X	X
T= Tools, processes and products						
10. Share existing skills development tools	X		X	X	X	X
11. Identify, adapt and create HR management tools, processes and products	X	X		X	X	X

Next steps

For individual organizations

This framework is intended to help individual organizations take action on skills development. Based on the "RENT" Action Chart (see previous page), organizations are encouraged to identify which additional actions would be of most benefit to people and communities in the short, medium and long term. The actions that organizations might start or enhance include:

- "R": Assess skills development activities. Contribute to research on barriers to boards' support for skills development, and the value proposition for skills development.
- "E": Participate in educating stakeholders about the importance and value to clients and communities of investing in skills development. Share evidence-based success stories about specific skills development activities and innovations and the role of networks and partnerships.
- "N": Build relationships with funders and other partners, both on your own and in collaboration with other nonprofits, that includes sharing different perspectives, exploring new ways of organizing joint activities, and increasing investment in skills development. Be strategic about the networks and partnerships in which to participate.
- "T": Share skills development tools, processes and products that were developed or adapted. Consider using or adjusting promising practices from other organizations and explore ways to contribute to the collaborative development of mechanisms and tools that would benefit the sector more broadly.

Making a commitment to increased skills development does not mean doing it all right away. Instead, organizations are encouraged to select specific actions that will have the most benefit for people, communities and staff that can be undertaken at a manageable cost. Over time, other actions can be added after evaluating what is working and what would further strengthen the learning culture within an organization. Organizations may also take advantage of innovations and innovative ways of learning for skills development.

For the nonprofit sector more broadly

Some of the actions identified in this framework require action by umbrella organizations or the joint efforts of one or more umbrella organizations and other individual organizations. These actions are largely directed to the whole sector or for the benefit of many nonprofits and include:

- "R": Foster research partnerships that would map existing promising practices, examine how practices are shared and adapted, and how skills development results can best be measured. Research the many aspects that describe the value proposition, the barriers to nonprofit board recruitment and HR management capacity.

- "E": Take the lead in educating stakeholders about the importance and value to people and communities of investing in skills development. Facilitate the sharing of evidence-based success stories about specific skills development activities and innovations and the role of networks and partnerships.

- "N": Encourage nonprofits to build genuine relationships with funders and other partners. Develop mechanisms for learning and sharing networking and partnership skills that can be employed and adapted by individual nonprofits.

- "T": Enhance web-based portals where skills development tools, processes and products can be shared. Encourage and facilitate the identification, adaptation and creation of materials and mechanisms that can be used by individual organizations, networks and partnership to provide and strengthen skills development for and in the sector.

The HR Council, the project advisory committee and other sector leaders will be called on to develop a sustainability plan for this framework. Their leadership is needed to generate interest on the part of umbrella organizations, create awareness about the framework and its potential benefits to individual organizations, and build greater understanding for the sector, its funders and other partners about the importance of investment in skills development.

Appendix

Participants

Skills Development Advisory Committee

Chair
Sandra Watt, Director, HR & Administration, Lutherwood

Members
Doug Soo, Dean, Continuing Studies, Langara College

Gerda Kaegi, Professor Emeritus, Ryerson University

Marileen Bartlett / Tamara Cardinal, Centre for Aboriginal Human Resource Development Inc.

Nancy Anningston, Business Manager, Prior Learning Centre

J. Richard Blickstead, CEO, Wellesley Institute

Susan Climie, Director of Training, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada

Wendy MacDonald, W.L. MacDonald and Associates

Ex Officio
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Other Participants

Eight sector leaders participated in the Halifax consultation in December 2011 and another 12 joined the project advisory committee in Ottawa in February 2012. A further 15 sector leaders participated in one-on-one interviews in the fall of 2011, and 772 individuals involved in HR issues in the sector completed the survey in the spring and summer of 2011.

We thank everyone very much for their participation in this initiative, especially the ongoing and thoughtful contributions of the Skills Development Advisory Committee.

Priority skills gaps identified in the survey

Strategic leadership

- Leadership
- Strategic planning
- Project / program management
- Change management
- Risk management
- Monitoring and evaluation

Finances and fundraising

- Financial management
- Proposal / grant writing
- Fundraising
- Entrepreneurship / innovation

Partnerships

- Collaborating / partnering with other organizations
- Negotiating / influencing / advocacy
- Community development
- Cultural competency

Related documents

"Current State of Skills Development in the Canadian Nonprofit Sector," conducted and analysed by One World Inc. for the HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector (2011).

Peter Senge, on learning organizations: see http://www.infed.org/thinkers/senge.htm or *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization or The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook: Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organization.*

Public Policy Forum, "Adapting and Thriving: Innovative Practices by Small and Medium Nonprofits Emerging From the Economic Downturn," 2011.

"Strategies Supporting Skill Development in the Nonprofit and Other Sectors: Background Paper," researched and written by Morley Gunderson and One World Inc. for the HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector (2011).

For more information about the research that led to this skills development framework, see hrcouncil.ca.

One World Inc. was commissioned by the HR Council to develop this report.

One World has assembled a team of specialist staff and associates committed to the innovative design and delivery of consultation processes that can help effectively engage stakeholders or the public at large – in both Official Languages.

HR Council
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