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Social Sector Surprises? Regional Survey Highlights Challenges

With over 150 social non-profits serving our region, it's no surprise there is diversity in the characteristics, capacity, and approach to providing social services. If there is one thing in common though, along with a passion for helping people, the majority of social non-profits are faced with considerable challenges.

"The non-profit sector plays a critical role in the health and well-being of our residents and region", said Nadine Raynolds, Researcher at the RDI. "Survey results highlight just how committed these groups are, but also how they need support to keep up with an increasingly complex demand for social services in our communities."

A recent survey of social non-profits conducted by the RDI describes the characteristics of organizations across our region, indicating that most groups have been in operation for 10 years or more and are registered charities. A wide range of services are provided from counselling to food security, parenting programs to palliative care.

"While many groups operate with small budgets and few staff, what they are able to accomplish is extraordinary," said Rona Park, Executive Director of the Nelson Community Services Centre and Advisory Committee member for the RDI's social research project.

Research results show that most organizations have at least one part-time staff person, and many rely on volunteers. The average number of program volunteers is 30, with several groups having 50, 100, or more people volunteering their time. Along with a real need for core funding, recruiting new and younger volunteers was among the top organizational challenges for the 88 organizations who responded to the survey.

While various challenges were highlighted, survey results show that 90% of social non-profits are collaborating.

"Groups are working together to ensure the best possible services," said Gwen Noble, Executive Director of Community Connections Society of BC, a collaborative organization based in Cranbrook. One survey respondent elaborated "when we work with others there are no limits".

Non-profit leaders, local government representatives, funders, and others interested in the social sector are invited to participate in a **free webinar on Thursday, February 11 from 10 to 11am PST**, where RDI will share details and facilitate discussion on the survey results. To register, please contact Sharon Stoddart at sstodart@selkirk.ca or 250-365-1392.

RDI will be further exploring innovation in the social sector this winter and spring through follow up interviews and focus groups. The research is a critical step towards enabling evidence-based decision-making by our regions' colleges, funders, and non-profits in efforts related to strengthening the social sector.

The full report on survey results is available at www.cbrdi.ca/research-areas/applied-research/non-profit-social-sector/.

As part of the research process, RDI developed an inventory of social non-profits across the Columbia Basin-Boundary region. The inventory is available [here](#) through the RDI's Digital Basin.

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Contact: Nadine Raynolds - Researcher, Columbia Basin Rural Development Institute, 250-365-1282, nraynolds@selkirk.ca

About the RDI: The Columbia Basin Rural Development Institute at Selkirk College is a regional research centre with a mandate to support informed decision-making by Columbia Basin-Boundary communities through the provision of information, applied research and related outreach and extension support.