

Survey Results: Characteristics & Capacity of the Non-Profit Social Sector

RESEARCH BRIEF



INTRODUCTION

The non-profit social sector in the Columbia Basin-Boundary plays a significant role in the socio-economic well-being of residents, communities, and the region as a whole. Sustaining non-profits, however, has become increasingly challenging. The *Exploring Characteristics and Capacity of the Non-Profit Social Sector in the Columbia Basin-Boundary Region* research project was designed to explore organizational capacity within the region's non-profit social sector.

This research is a critical first step towards enabling evidence-based decision-making by our regions' colleges, funders, and non-profits in efforts related to strengthening this important sector. Results provide benchmark data against which to compare and develop a baseline for monitoring into the future. This Research Brief provides an overview of results from an online survey of social non-profits conducted in spring/summer 2015. Please see the **full report**¹ for more detail or view the **webinar recording**², as well as RDI's **Knowledge Brief and Research Briefs**³ on follow up interviews and focus groups related to social innovation, success stories, and ideas for the future of the social sector.

METHODOLOGY

This research project was developed and implemented in consultation with the RDI's Social Research Advisory Committee, a group of representatives from the social sector across the region.

The research began with an online survey of social non-profits. As no publicly available regional inventory existed, the RDI developed a list of organizations in cooperation with the Kootenay Boundary Community Services Cooperative. 150 social non-profits were identified across the region, and the Executive Director / Coordinator was asked to complete the survey on behalf of their organization. The inventory of social non-profits is available [here](#)⁴ through the RDI's Digital Basin. Of the 150 organizations invited, 88 fully completed the survey, providing a 59% response rate.

Data analysis used descriptive statistics and grounded theory. Preliminary results were discussed with the RDI Social Research Advisory Committee and the Social Sector Advisory Committee of Columbia Basin Trust. Recommendations were developed by the RDI and shared with the RDI Social Research Advisory Committee for discussion prior to release.

SURVEY RESULTS

SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Table 1 shows the number and percent of organizations across the region who participated in the survey. Based on the known location of survey respondents, there is proportionate representation of organizations across sub-regions. 57% of organizations serve their community and surrounding area, while 37% serve corridor, sub-regional, and regional geographic scales.

Location of Main Office	Number of Organizations	Percent of Organizations
Boundary	8	9.1%
West Kootenay	38	43.2%
Revelstoke	7	8%
Valemount	3	3.4%
Columbia Valley	9	10.2%
Elk Valley	6	6.8%
SE Kootenay	17	19.3%
Total:	88	100%

Table 1. Location of survey respondents.

The majority (84.1%) of organizations have been in operation for 10 years or more, with 52.3% in operation for more than 20 years. The majority of organizations (73.9%) are registered charities.

SERVICES PROVIDED

Survey respondents were asked to complete a table of the types of services they provide by population group. All organizations selected multiple services and/or audiences. In terms of populations served, aside from 'everyone' (n=164), the highest number of organizations provide services to women (n=140), men (n=113), youth (n=109), children (n=102), Aboriginal people (n=98), seniors (n=90), and immigrant populations (n=82).

In terms of service provision, the majority of organizations provide counseling (n=106), followed by food security (n=104), education and awareness (n=100), housing / shelter (n=86), mental health (n=72), parenting programs (n=66), employment (n=53), disabilities (n=50), addictions (n=43), transportation (n=39), protective services (n=38), child care (n=35), literacy (n=34), and settlement services (9).

Other had a high response (n=63) where respondents mentioned services such as support for organizations and professionals in the social sector, financial assistance, art therapy, advocacy, legal information services, support with the justice system, toy lending, and others.

FINANCIAL RESOURCES

REVENUE

Total revenue is an indicator of organizational capacity. The wide range of revenue found in survey results is indicative of the range in capacity of social non-profits in our region, from very low to high capacity. As shown in **Table 2**, the majority (60.2%) of organizations have total revenue of \$299,999 or less, with 14.8% having \$29,999 or less, while 11.4% have total revenue of \$2 million or more, and another 10.2% report revenue of between \$1 million and \$2 million.

Total Revenue (first fiscal year)	Percent of Organizations
\$0 - \$29,999	14.8%
\$30,000 - \$49,999	10.2%
\$50,000 - \$99,999	10.2%
\$100,000 - \$199,999	17.0%
\$200,000 - \$299,999	8.0%
\$300,000 - \$399,999	1.1%
\$400,000 - \$499,999	3.4%
\$500,000 - \$749,999	6.8%
\$750,000 - \$999,999	6.8%
\$1,000,000 - \$1,499,999	5.7%
\$1,500,000 - \$1,999,999	4.5%
\$2,000,000+	11.4%

Table 2. Total revenue for last fiscal year.

Respondents were asked to estimate the percent of revenue their organization received from six different types of funding sources in their last fiscal year. For each of the sources, respondents could select the amount received from 0% to 100% in 5% increments. Organizations were also asked to indicate the general trend in revenue from each source over the last three years.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT FUNDING

About one quarter of organizations received some funding from federal sources. 60.2% received 5% or less, with 47.7% receiving no federal funding at all. No organization reported receiving more than 60% of their funding from federal sources. The majority indicated that the trend over the last three years is staying the same.

PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Based on their last fiscal year, 22.7% indicated they received no provincial funding. The rest indicated a wide range from 5% to 100% as shown in **Figure 1**. 36.4% received at least 50% of their funding from provincial sources. The highest number of respondents indicated that the three year trend in provincial funding is staying the same, with 11 organizations saying provincial funding is increasing and eight saying it is decreasing.

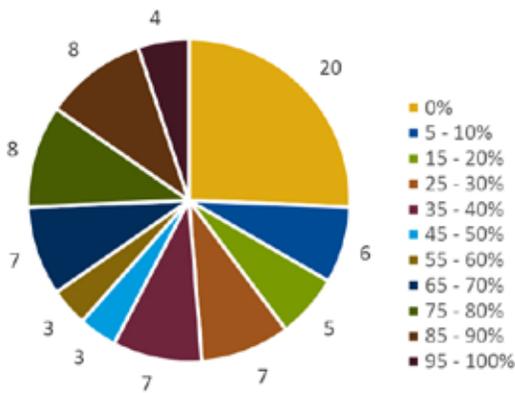


Figure 1. Number of organizations by percent of total funding received from provincial sources in last fiscal year.

MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT FUNDING

No organization indicated receiving more than 30% of its funding from municipal sources. 69.3% indicated receiving 10% or less in their last fiscal year, with 45.5% receiving no municipal funding at all. The highest number of respondents said the trend for municipal funding is staying the same.

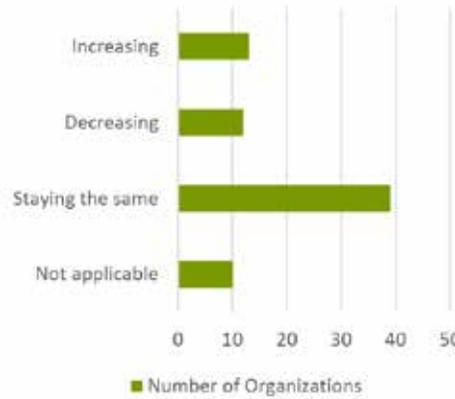


Figure 2. Number of organizations indicating trend in funding from foundations and trusts over last three years.

FOUNDATIONS AND TRUSTS

A few organizations are completely or almost completely dependent on foundations and trusts, however most (68%) received 20% or less of their funding from this source. Most respondents said the trend over the last three years has been staying the same, while others were split between an increasing and decreasing trend in funding from foundations and trusts, as shown in **Figure 2**.

DONATIONS

About half of the organizations surveyed received 10% or less of their funding through donations. 12.5% said that 75% or more of their funding was from donations, with 4.5% of organizations relying completely on donations. About the same number of organizations said funding from donations was either staying the same (n=26) or increasing (n=28).

OTHER SOURCES

Almost half of respondents noted receiving funding from other sources, varying from 5% to 95% of revenue for their last fiscal year. Other sources of funding include earned revenue such as through social enterprise, sale of products, fee-for-service, and sub-contracts. Some groups also mentioned revenues from rent, property, and interest, as well as subsidies. Others indicated they received funding from major industry, while raffles, bingo, bottle collection and food drives were also included.

Financial Resource Challenges by securing or providing adequate:	None	Small	Moderate	Serious	N/A
Federal and provincial government contracts	8.0%	15.9%	21.6%	20.5%	34.1%
Funding from municipal government	10.2%	18.2%	13.6%	25%	31.8%
Funding from foundations and trusts	9.1%	26.1%	25%	25%	14.8%
Funding from individual donors	9.1%	15.9%	27.3%	22.7%	25%
Funding for administration and organizational overhead	4.5%	12.5%	23.9%	42%	17%
Funding for organizational planning and development	4.5%	20.5%	25%	31.8%	18.2%
Funding to collaborate with others	5.7%	21.6%	20.5%	25%	25%
Pay and/or benefits for staff	2.3%	12.5%	23.9%	43.2%	17%
Diversifying our funding sources	2.3%	25%	27.3%	30.7%	14.8%
Competition with other organizations for funding	12.5%	22.7%	23.9%	29.5%	11.4%
Other	0%	0%	0%	4.5%	17%

Table 3. Financial resource challenges.

FINANCIAL RESOURCE CHALLENGES

Survey respondents were asked to indicate if and the degree to which their organization is experiencing any financial resource challenges. Ten different specific challenges were outlined as well as an ‘other’ category. The percent of organizations that indicated each challenge is shown in the **Table 3**. All organizations indicated some kind of financial resource challenge. 42.1% said that securing adequate federal and provincial government contracts was a moderate to serious challenge. One organization noted in particular that “government contracts are not increasing to offset [an] increase in costs of benefits, MERCs, WCB premiums etc”, and another commented “there seems to be a trend where overhead expenses (e.g. rent, heat, phones) are not allowable expenses in government contracts”.

38.6% of organizations indicated that securing adequate funding from municipal governments was also a moderate to serious challenge. One comment relating to municipal funding was that “our municipal government provides limited cash however provides our space and utilities for free”. These in-kind contributions can be significant for some groups.

The challenge in securing adequate funding from foundations and trusts was higher at 50% of the organizations surveyed noting this as a moderate to serious challenge, with another 26.1% indicating this as a small challenge.

Half of the respondents also said that securing adequate funding from individual donors is a moderate to serious challenge. One respondent felt that “donations from businesses & individuals tend to be given to the high profile causes such as the food bank”.

The majority (78.4%) of respondents said that securing funding for administration and organizational overhead is a challenge, with 42% expressing this is a serious challenge. As noted above regarding government contracts, another group commented that “government contracts don’t allow for overhead expenses”. Another respondent said that “overhead costs (building maintenance, insurance etc) keeps increasing & has never been adequately funded”. Two others commented on the difficulty in “getting ongoing funding that is not project based”.

The majority (77.3%) of respondents also said that securing funding for organizational planning and development is a challenge. “Maintaining funding is a serious problem but increasing funding to grow programs is so far impossible”. Another said that “the use of our Food Bank has doubled in the last Hunger Count and looks like it may increase another 50% this year. Funds to purchase food has not increased in the last three years”.

Securing funding to collaborate with others is evidently a challenge with 67.1% of organizations indicating this as a small, moderate, or serious challenge (split about 1/3 each). One respondent

did note however, they have “found that project specific partnerships create solutions”.

Providing adequate pay and/or benefits for staff is another critical challenge with 43.2% selecting this as a serious challenge and 23.9% indicating this as a moderate challenge. One group remarked that “many of our staff could make significantly more in public (any level of govt) sector”.

Diversifying funding sources and competition with other organizations for funding are other trials faced, with organizations splitting the degree of challenge for both of these by about 1/3 each for small, moderate, and serious challenge. One organization felt quite strongly that “revenue diversification is one of greatest challenges”.

HUMAN RESOURCES

Organizations were asked about their existing human resources, including number of full-time (35 hours per week or more), part-time (less than 35 hours per week), and casual (any casual, temporary, or contract work) staff, as well as their total payroll. Survey participants were also asked to indicate the number of volunteers and volunteer hours contributed to their organization, including program volunteers and board directors.

STAFFING

As shown in **Figure 3**, almost half the organizations (47.7%) surveyed do not have full-time staff, while the other half (52.3%) has at least one full-time staff person. 19.3% have 10 or more, while 10.2% have only one full-time staff. The average number of full-time staff is 6.

Most organizations (73.9%) have at least one part-time staff person, while 26.1% of groups have no part-time staff. 25% have 2 to 5 part-time staff, and the average number of part-time staff is 8.9. Most organizations (64.7%) also have at least one casual staff person. 21.6% have one casual staff, while 23.9% have 2 to 5. 13.6% have 10 or more casual staff. The average number of casual staff is 5.3. 11.4% of organizations surveyed have no staff at all, meaning they rely completely on volunteers.

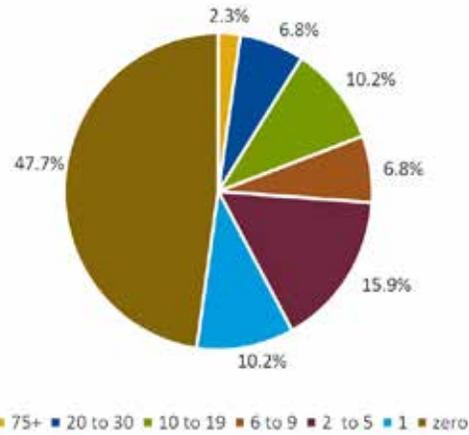


Figure 3. Percent of organizations by number of full-time staff.

The total number of people employed by the 78 organizations who have staff is 1,776 people, including 528 full-time, 783 part-time and 465 casual staff.

PAYROLL

There is a wide range in payroll expense. 14.8% of organizations surveyed indicated zero for their payroll, while 12.5% of organizations have a payroll of over \$1 million. A significant number (42%) have a payroll of less than \$100,000.

The average payroll is \$423,232. **Figure 4** shows the percent of organizations by category of total payroll expense (which includes all wages and MERCs (Mandatory Employment Related Costs) for all full-time, part-time and/or casual employees). Similar to total revenue, payroll expense is an indicator of organizational capacity.

VOLUNTEER NUMBERS AND HOURS

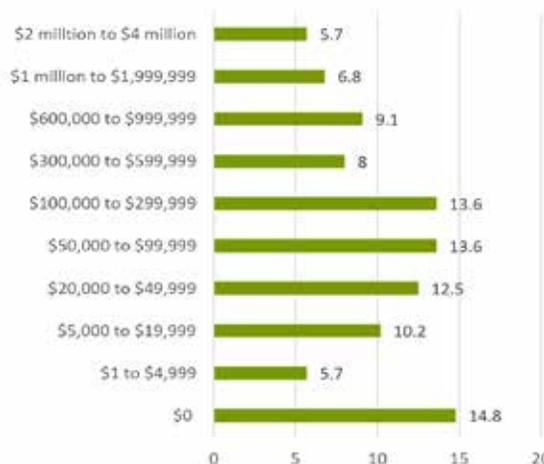


Figure 4. Percent of organizations by total payroll amount.

As shown in **Figure 5**, most organizations have program volunteers, although 18.2% said they did not. Another 18.2% have 50 or more volunteers, and 9% have 100 or more.

There are 2,612 program volunteers serving 72

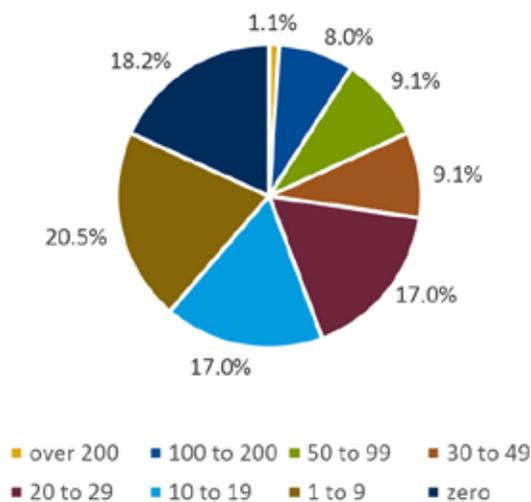


Figure 5. Percent of organizations by number of program volunteers.

organizations. 52.3% of organizations indicated that their program volunteers contribute over 200 hours per year. For the rest of the groups, the number of hours varies, with 14.8% indicating zero hours.

Most organizations said the trend in volunteer hours is either staying the same (37.5%) or increasing (38.6%), while 13.6% said hours contributed are decreasing.

There are 651 people serving on the board of directors for 84 organizations, with the average number of volunteer directors at 7.4. For most organizations (57.9%), the estimated annual contribution of directors is over 100 hours, with many organizations (38.6%) showing director volunteer hours of over 200 hours per year. Most organizations said the hours contributed by directors is either staying the same (51.1%) or increasing (40.9%)

HUMAN RESOURCE CHALLENGES

Survey respondents were asked to indicate if they are currently experiencing any human resource challenges related to (1) attracting / recruiting, (2) retaining, and (3) providing training / professional development for volunteers and staff. As shown in **Table 4**, over half of respondents indicated that attracting / recruiting directors and program volunteers is a challenge. “Our biggest challenge is finding youth and aboriginal representation on our Board of Directors” commented one. A further comment noted a “trend to fewer volunteers and board members - people report being too busy to volunteer”. About one third expressed that retaining directors and program volunteers is a challenge, as well as providing training / professional development.

Only about one quarter of respondents said that attracting / recruiting program staff is a challenge, with a few comments regarding attracting child care workers in particular.

The challenge of adequate pay surfaced again with a comment that “we can’t pay enough to keep the number of casuals we need on call” and “we are basically severely limited in our ability to pay for adequate human resources to support the organization”. Another group, however, said that “it has not been difficult to find program staff on a contract by contract basis”. Some organizations (15.9%) are also challenged in attracting / recruiting management staff.

This data indicates there to be little challenge in retaining staff, with only one organization indicating retaining program and management staff as a challenge. However, results from the responses to organizational challenges paints a different picture (see below). While the data does not indicate a challenge in providing training / professional development for program staff, almost 30% of organizations indicated this as a challenge for management staff. “Training is costly and our sector has a limited pro-d budget.”

	Attracting/Recruiting	Retaining	Providing training / professional development
Directors	59%	34%	37.5%
Program volunteers	51.1%	33%	22%
Program staff	23.9%	1.1%	1.1%
Management staff	15.9%	1.1%	29.5%

Table 4. Percent of organizations reporting human resource challenges.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHALLENGES AND NEEDS

Survey participants were asked “At this point in time, what are your top three organizational challenges or needs?” All respondents included a primary challenge or need, while all but five included a secondary, and all but 10 groups indicated a tertiary challenge or need. Major themes are identified with specific quotes for each.

PRIMARY ORGANIZATIONAL CHALLENGES AND NEEDS

Funding was the top organizational challenge identified. “Lack of funding”, “limited funding”, and “funding” were noted numerous times. Particular emphasis was placed on the need for “core funding” or “permanent secure funding”. Funding for administration is evidently a significant challenge with several comments related to having “adequate overhead funding” and “adequate funding to pay staff”. The need for multi-year funding to allow for sustainability of programs and staff was noted, along with a need in “diversifying funding”. This echoes some of the results found under questions related to financial resource challenges.

Another number one challenge for organizations is *recruiting volunteers*. These comments included recruiting both board members and volunteers, and “attracting younger directors and volunteers” in particular.

Connected to the challenges of funding and recruitment, *staffing* was another primary challenge. “Finding qualified staff” and “attracting and retaining personnel” were specific comments. “Staff development” and “adequate organizational capacity” were others.

These comments affirm some results of the responses related to human resource challenges. Qualitative results from the question about organizational challenges however somewhat contradict the quantitative results from the human resources question where only one organization noted retaining staff as a challenge. Staff retention, retaining personnel, and “stability in human resources” is mentioned a few times as a primary organizational challenge, and is also present within the secondary and tertiary organizational challenges.

An *increased demand for services* was another major theme. One respondent said “meeting community needs/all programs at capacity/demand for services skyrocketing”. Being able to “adequately serve the needs of people” is important to groups, while “core operating grant[s]...[are] not keeping pace with increased demand for clinical services”.

SECONDARY ORGANIZATIONAL CHALLENGES AND NEEDS

Funding was also the main theme for the secondary organizational challenges and needs. Emphasis included the need for core funding and new sources of funding, as well as support for staff wages. There were a few particular comments regarding “competition with other organizations for funding”, as well as the need for “securing funding to maintain current programs”. Securing on-going funding is clearly a challenge. There is “limited funding in comparison to demand and need for services”. A few groups also noted challenges related to funder requirements, such as “obtaining matching funds required by most funders” and “trying to make programs fit into funding requirements”.

Volunteer recruitment and retention came up again as a significant organizational challenge. One group said it is “getting much harder to maintain appropriate level[s] of directors and

volunteers". Some comments related to "replacing aging volunteers as they are unable to continue" and "getting young people to help and take on organizational challenges". Recruiting and retaining board and volunteer members is a clear challenge, and results from this question reiterate results from earlier questions related to human resource challenges.

Staffing was a theme that reappeared, with particular comment related to "workload" and "finding enough time in a day", as well as issues regarding "providing professional development" and the "cost of training". Again, many of these issues circle back to the need for adequate funding.

Another theme related to the need for *space* such as "adequate space to house programs" and the need to "replace and repair aging structures". Some groups are searching for adequate space while others need "renovations to...expand services". Two groups also commented on the need for adequate technology such as "organizational funds to upgrade ancient and poorly functioning phone/IT systems".

Meeting the needs of clients is of top importance, and connectedly, a challenge for many groups. There are "increasing community social challenges without additional funds to address them". One group said a major challenge is "supporting people with complex and challenging needs". The demand for services is increasing while also becoming more socially complex, while at the same time funding to provide these critical services is becoming more difficult to access.

TERTIARY ORGANIZATIONAL CHALLENGES AND NEEDS

Most organizations listed a third organizational challenge or need, and once again *funding* was foremost. Comments this time were specific to expanding groups' work such as for "new programs" or "to work regionally" and to "collaborate with others". Funding related to staffing was emphasized including "securing funding for long term staffing". It is obvious that many groups face significant challenges around being able to secure funding for wages and administration. Several groups also noted challenges particular to government funding. One said their main challenge is "stagnant provincial and federal budgets and cutbacks and

increasing operating and capital costs". Another said that there are "excessive reporting requirements for government contracts [which] can go well beyond the effort of delivering the actual service".

Volunteer recruitment and retention was again listed as significant. "Getting members to be more active and involved" was one comment, while another said that their need is "attracting new capable directors to share the load". With many groups dependent on volunteers, it is not surprising that this is a substantial organizational need.

Organizational development was another theme. Training and professional development were listed by several groups, as well as issues of capacity such as "development capacity" and "building our own capacity". Two groups noted partnerships in particular by stating a challenge is "the amount of time it takes to engage in effective partnerships" and "partnering with local businesses" as challenges.

Another main theme was *administrative* needs. There is "inadequate administration time" and a need for "adequate administrative capacity". This theme reaffirms previously mentioned challenges around funding for overhead and administration, speaking once again to the need for core operational dollars. While administration is an essential aspect of running an organization there are "restrictions put on by funders for allowable administration fees", and a general lack of funding to cover the costs of administrative duties.

Infrastructure and equipment was a final theme which mentioned the need for "adequate space at reasonable cost" as well as "housing". Other specific needs included "protein for the food bank", "air conditioning", and "technical tools".

COLLABORATION

With considerable interest and discussion about collaboration and its importance to the non-profit sector, organizations were asked whether their organization had collaborated in the past or are currently collaborating with other groups. As shown in **Figure 6**, the vast majority (89.8%) of organizations said yes. Collaboration, put simply, is where two or more organizations work together to realize shared goals. This definition was shared as part of the survey question.

MOTIVATIONS FOR COLLABORATION

For those who responded “yes”, a further question on what motivated them to collaborate was asked. The main themes emerging from the responses to what motivated organizations to collaborate include: *better services, efficiency and effectiveness, greater capacity, ability to fundraise, sharing knowledge and resources, shared goals, and organizational ethos.*

The most comments were made around the theme of providing *better services* as a motivation to collaborate. Comments such as “to prevent duplication of service” and to “improve service delivery to our community” were common. There was an obvious sentiment that these groups exist to serve their clients and community, and that collaborating is a way to “ensure our clients are receiving the best possible care”.

Increased *efficiency and effectiveness* was another motivation. As noted by one respondent, “collaboration with other non-profit (social profit) groups increases the effectiveness of what we bring to the table”. There is a “desire for increased efficiency”, and as one elaborated “when we work with others there are no limits”.

Closely connected to effectiveness is the theme of *greater capacity*. Collaboration can “break isolation” and “builds social capital required for long term planning and future projects”. It allows for “new areas of growth” and a “shared workload”. As one respondent described, collaboration is where “the sum of the parts is greater than the whole”.

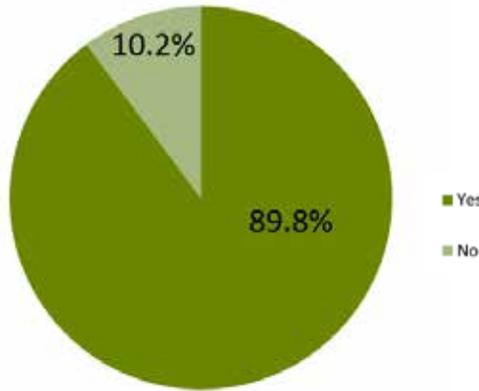


Figure 6. Percent of organizations who are currently collaborating or have in the past.

It also evidently provides groups with a greater *ability to fundraise*. By working together groups can “avoid competition” and “bring new programming into the community and valley”. Collaborating on funding applications makes “stronger grant proposals”, and can also be a “requirement of many government contracts”.

Several comments were made around the theme of *sharing knowledge and resources*. “Sharing resources and projects makes more sense than continuing to live in a silo mentality, which cannot realistically be supported in future”. Collaboration allows for an “exchange of skills and expertise” and “greater opportunities to learn together”. It also creates an opportunity to “share information and concerns regarding clients” as several groups may serve the same people. The idea of not “reinvent[ing] the wheel” was noted. Sharing and exchange within a network is a foundation to collaborative efforts.

Shared goals is another feature of collaboration. As noted by one respondent “we cannot hope to reach our mission without collaborating with other organizations”. “Mutual goals”, “common goals”, “common interests” were some of the motivations. With a “shared vision for the community” groups are more likely to “achieve [their] goals”.

A final theme related to the motivation to collaborate was that it is an *organizational ethos*. As commented by one respondent “we collaborate because it is the right thing to do to make a better community”. “Working together is a philosophy we follow”. There are clearly people and groups who believe that collaboration is integral to their social service work.

BARRIERS TO COLLABORATION

For those who responded “no”, they had not collaborated in the past nor are they currently collaborating, a further question on barriers was asked. Some organizations that responded yes to whether they are or had collaborated also included comments about barriers, which were included in the analysis to reveal several key themes.

The main themes emerging as barriers to collaboration include: *lack of time, lack of resources, competition, lack of trust and relationships, and lack of opportunity.*

Time was mentioned as a significant barrier as many “staff work part-time and are challenged to get their regular work done”. Collaboration takes time, a resource that many non-profits already struggle with having enough of. This ‘extra’ time spent can take away from “other organizational priorities and pressures”.

Lack of resources, including human and financial resources, is a common barrier. “The main barrier to collaboration is securing adequate funding to support efforts to establish joint relationships”. There was also concern expressed regarding expending precious resources on collaboration when it could instead be spent directly on serving clients. Lack of appropriate technology was also mentioned, along with geographic distance. In order to overcome these barriers, resources are required.

Connected to the subject of resources is *competition*. Competing for the same, often limited resources, is a barrier to collaboration. Competition also relates to the barrier of *trust and relationships*. One organization commented that “our needs get lost in the group discussion”. Another said there are cultural differences and animosity between communities. Collaboration can be seen as competition between organizations’ goals and objectives, programs or projects. This can lead to “organizations drift[ing] from their mission”. Stated quite clearly, one comment was, “before effective collaboration can take place, we need to start building relationships and establishing trust between the organizations”. Many of the themes emerging around barriers are connected.

The final theme that arose from survey respondents regarding barriers to collaboration was a perception

of a *lack of opportunity*. The “opportunity has not presented itself in this small community”. Another said they had “not found the correct fit”, and one more felt their organization was so unique that others may not see a fit; although these organizations did also express an interest in collaborating with others.

DATA COLLECTION

With the potential for the RDI to play a role in consolidating regional data relevant to the social sector, organizations were asked if they collect data related to program delivery, services, and/or impacts. 83% of organizations listed data sets they are collecting. The word cloud (Figure 7) illustrates data sets that organizations indicated they are collecting – the larger the text, the more this data set was noted in responses.

Number-served is the data set collected the most. The number of *referrals* was the next most, followed closely by the number of *service hours* provided. *Volunteer hours* is another commonly collected data set, as well as *client satisfaction*.

Surveys was mentioned by several groups, which can include client and service provider surveys, “surveys to find out gaps in services”, and surveys related to specific programs.



Figure 7. Word cloud of data sets collected by social service organizations.

DISCUSSION

This survey of social non-profits provides details regarding the characteristics, capacity, and challenges the social sector faces in our region. It also offers insight into actions to strengthen this important sector. Several recommendations emerged through the analysis and review of survey results by RDI and its Social Advisory Committee.

With a high number of social non-profits with varying levels of capacity, groups should continue to network and collaborate to enable sharing of knowledge and resources, minimize duplication, and maximize impact. With a majority of organizations operating at the community scale, social non-profits may see improved outcomes by working together across service streams and sectors.

In reviewing the financial and organizational challenges of social non-profits surveyed, there is clearly a need to examine current funding models and to consider how to best support the sector. Operational and on-going funding is a significant challenge and is vital to the sustainability of the delivery of critical services. Funders could allow groups to allocate funds towards core and administration costs, as well as provide multi-year funding, which can foster organizational stability, and allow for planning and development. Social non-profits could explore how to increase and diversify their funding base.

Evidence from this survey suggests that people working in the social sector are overworked and under compensated. Closely related to the issues of funding, there is an opportunity to examine strategies to ensure suitable compensation, training, and conditions for staff and volunteers. With volunteers as a critical resource, innovative ways to attract and retain volunteers, particularly younger volunteers could be considered.

RDI shared survey results and hosted discussions on solutions to identified challenges through a series of focus groups in spring 2016. Individual interviews were also conducted with social non-profit leaders within and outside the region to explore ideas and innovations. RDI has produced further Research Briefs on focus group and interview results which can be accessed on the **non-profit social sector research page**.³

The learning from this research project is a resource for anyone interested in helping to strengthen the social non-profit sector in our region, or other regions who share similar challenges. The RDI, under its State of the Basin initiative, will continue to work with organizations to consolidate data sets to assist in monitoring and reporting relating to social, economic, cultural and environmental well-being across the region.

REFERENCES & RESOURCES

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