**Decent Work Checklist for the Nonprofit Sector**

Decent work practices are not simply limited to financial rewards and benefits. A major aspect of sustaining a decent work environment is through organizational practices and cultures. This simple checklist can help you think about what decent work practices look like for your organization and identify areas where you are achieving impressive decent work practices and areas where you would like to improve.

**Ideas from the sector by the sector**

The checklist builds upon definitions and dimensions of “Decent Work” developed by the International Labour Organization (ILO). It comes from extensive focus group discussions with front-line, non-management and management staff and board members in our local Toronto network of multi-service social-service organizations. Hard and fast industry standards in the area of decent work are not available for the nonprofit sector. Use this tool to create dialogue within your organization, not as a formal evaluation tool.

**The reality of implementing decent work in the nonprofit sector**

Sector employers are often operating in a climate of competition for scarce resources, funding restraints and other restrictive requirements. Plus, there are other pressures in the general labour market. We recognize there are some barriers to making decent work happen. However, we hope organizations use this tool to better understand some of these barriers restricting their efforts. Let’s work together in our networks, and as a sector, to advocate for policy changes that allow us to implement decent work practices more fully.

**Make the checklist your own**

Ask an existing staff or union-management committee to carry out the assessment of workplace practices or form a decent work committee that includes program staff and managers. Then follow up with further planning and action. There are eight areas and 31 indicators. Start with them and feel free to revise and add to them. We know there is no one-size-fits-all template that can reflect the diverse sizes and activities of nonprofit organizations. Share what you add or change – we would love to see how you are using the checklist (email randall@theonn.ca). This is a work in progress and we welcome your feedback. Thank you for helping to strengthen the sector, and the communities we serve, through decent work. Thank you to Toronto Neighbourhood Centres and other ONN supporters who helped us in developing and testing this checklist.

**1) Decent Wages**

Fair income is one common aspect of decent work. This involves not only salaries, but also income security: paid holiday, parental and sick leave, and steady work hours that allow for a predictable income. Support for fair income might mean promoting and adopting "living wage" policies or other standards that promote income fairness within, and between, workplaces.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Indicator A: Adequacy of lowest paid positions in our organization** | **Rating** | **Our organization** | **Comments** |
| Government-mandated minimum wage | Basic ✓ |  |  |
| Between minimum wage and the goal of the current $15 and Fairness Campaign | Better ✓ |  |  |
| More than $15 an hour ("[Living Wage](http://www.ontariolivingwage.ca/living_wage_by_region)" research has identified $18.75 as the wage needed to live adequately in the City of Toronto, given current costs of living in our urban setting) | Best ✓ |  |  |
| **Indicator B: The spread between the lowest and highest wages in our organization** | **Rating** | **Our organization** | **Comments** |
| Highest paid staff are paid more than 5 times the average wage of lowest paid 10% of our organization's positions | Basic ✓ |  |  |
| Highest paid staff are paid no more than 8 times the average wage of lowest paid 10% of our organization's positions ([WageMark](https://www.wagemark.org) proposed ratio) | Better ✓ |  |  |
| Highest paid staff are paid less than 8 times the average wage of lowest paid 10% of our organization's positions | Best ✓ |  |  |
| **Indicator C: Annual salary increases across position levels** | **Rating** | **Our organization** | **Comments** |
| No salary increases have been granted over the past year | Basic ✓ |  |  |
| A modest salary increase (below cost of living or approximately 2%) | Better ✓ |  |  |
| A salary increase at or above the cost of living | Best ✓ |  |  |
| **Indicator D: Wages reflect market rate (internal and external to the sector) and job description** | **Rating** | **Our organization** | **Comments** |
| At the outset wages are set at in consultation with market rate and job description | Basic ✓ |  |  |
| Regular reviews of market rates and job descriptions ensure wages are up-to-date | Better ✓ |  |  |
| Changes in wages for a position are documented with changes in market rates and job description | Better ✓ |  |  |
| **Indicator E: Eliminating Gender Bias** | **Rating** | **Our Organization** | **Comments** |
| There are no wage discrepancies between male class jobs and female class jobs | Basic ✓ |  |  |
| Wage gaps between genders are identified (including within pay scales) at all levels and upward adjustments are made | Basic ✓ |  |  |
| If it applies, pay equity and pay transparency plans are in place with obligations being met as mandated | Basic ✓ |  |  |
| Pay scales for positions are provided in job descriptions | Better ✓ |  |  |
| There is an equitable and consistent stance on salary and contract negotiations across position levels | Better ✓ |  |  |

**2) Decent Benefits**

In addition to extended benefits (such as holiday pay, parental and sick leave, which are governed by the Employment Standards Act), retirement income security and access to essential healthcare are two of the most central elements of the ILO’s social protection pillar to improve the lives of many. These are especially important to the nonprofit sector as a key driver of dignity in the workplace and making our sector an employer of choice.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Indicator A: Key benefits for full-time staff** | **Rating** | **Our organization** | **Comments** |
| Those mandated in Ontario's Employment Standards Act (ESA) | Basic ✓ |  |  |
| Paid sick leave | Better ✓ |  |  |
| Paid holiday time above ESA minimum | Better ✓ |  |  |
| Employee has the flexibility to extend maternity and parental leave and use unused sick and vacation time | Better ✓ |  |  |
| Co-pay (by employer) or sole pay health and dental benefits | Best ✓ |  |  |
| Some kind of employer/employee pension or retirement savings plan | Best ✓ |  |  |
| Maternity and parental leaves are supplemented with a “top-up” | Best ✓ |  |  |
| Benefit plans are reviewed regularly | Best ✓ |  |  |
| **Indicator B: Pro rated benefits (or wages in lieu of benefits) for part-time and/or contract staff** | **Rating** | **Our organization** | **Comments** |
| Those mandated in the ESA | Basic ✓ |  |  |
| Paid sick leave | Better ✓ |  |  |
| Paid holiday time above ESA minimum | Better ✓ |  |  |
| Employee has the flexibility to extend maternity and parental leave, use unused sick and vacation time | Better ✓ |  |  |
| Co-pay (by employer) or sole pay health and dental benefits | Best ✓ |  |  |
| Some kind of employer/employee pension or retirement savings plan | Best ✓ |  |  |
| Maternity and parental leaves are supplemented with a “top-up” | Best ✓ |  |  |
| Benefit plans are reviewed regularly | Best ✓ |  |  |
| **Indicator C: Mental health support** | **Rating** | **Our organization** | **Comments** |
| Staff are provided with mental health days | Basic ✓ |  |  |
| Access to Employee Assistance Program (EAP) | Better ✓ |  |  |
| Access to supports to ameliorate workplace stresses | Best ✓ |  |  |

**3) Decent Contract Security**  
  
There is pressure in the labour market to increase the use of "precarious" part-time and limited-term job contracts to carry out work that used to be done by full-time permanent staff. In some instances, this is done to achieve flexibility, and is a necessary part of some staffing models (for example, with relief and emergency workers). However, this can also be a practice used to avoid the added costs associated with full-time and permanent contracts. The extent to which the nonprofit sector can resist these trends will determine whether or not we can continue to provide good jobs for many people in our workforce.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Indicator A: Ratio of part-time to full-time staff positions** | **Rating** | **Our organization** | **Comments** |
| Part-time staff represent over one-third (33%) of our workforce | Basic ✓ |  |  |
| Part-time staff represent between 20% and 33% of our workforce | Better ✓ |  |  |
| Part-time staff represent less than 20% (one in five positions) of our workforce | Best ✓ |  |  |
| **Indicator B: Over the past 10 years, the ratio of contract to permanent staff positions has:** | **Rating** | **Our organization** | **Comments** |
| Increased. There are now a greater number of limited-term or contract positions relative to permanent positions at our organization | Basic ✓ |  |  |
| Stayed about the same | Better ✓ |  |  |
| Decreased. There are fewer limited-term or contract positions relative to permanent positions | Best ✓ |  |  |
| **Indicator C: Do our part-time staff receive increased salary to compensate for the lack of full-time hours?** | **Rating** | **Our organization** | **Comments** |
| No | Basic ✓ |  |  |
| Yes, pro rated benefits or pay in lieu of benefits are added to wages | Better ✓ |  |  |
| Yes, pro rated benefits and higher wage levels are provided (ex: "living wage" rates) | Best ✓ |  |  |
| **Indicator D: Which contracts provide job security for project positions?** | **Rating** | **Our organization** | **Comments** |
| Staff working on long-term projects are provided one-year contracts | Basic ✓ |  |  |
| Staff working on long-term projects are provided contracts for duration of project | Better ✓ |  |  |
| Staff working on long-term projects are given pathways to permanent employment when possible | Best ✓ |  |  |

**4) Decent Scheduling**   
  
Many programs in the nonprofit sector rely upon flexible and on-call scheduling to meet the needs of the people served. At the same time, the capacity of staff to plan their non-work activities, attend to personal and family needs and attain a positive work-life balance depends on having reasonable ability to plan ahead. Efforts to provide as advanced scheduling are critical.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Indicator A: For program models that require changing shifts and schedules for staff, we set these schedules:** | **Rating** | **Our organization** | **Comments** |
| Weekly | Basic ✓ |  |  |
| Monthly | Better ✓ |  |  |
| Quarterly | Best ✓ |  |  |
| **Indicator B: For flexible programs, part-time staff can stipulate the days they are available to work (this enables them to coordinate with another part-time job, if they wish)** | **Rating** | **Our organization** | **Comments** |
| No | Basic ✓ |  |  |
| Sometimes | Better ✓ |  |  |
| Yes, all the time | Best ✓ |  |  |
| **Indicator C: To support work-life balance staff are allowed flexibility in their schedule, if it does not impact their work activities** | **Rating** | **Our organization** | **Comments** |
| Not at all | Basic ✓ |  |  |
| Sometimes | Better ✓ |  |  |
| Yes | Best ✓ |  |  |
| Frequently/regularly | Best ✓ |  |  |
| **Indicator D: If staff accumulate lieu time, it is tracked and they are able to use it in a timely manner** |  |  |  |
| Not at all | Basic ✓ |  |  |
| Sometimes | Better ✓ |  |  |
| Yes | Best ✓ |  |  |
| Frequently/regularly | Best ✓ |  |  |

**5) Decent Opportunities for Advancement**

Decent work also means thinking about the opportunities available for training, learning, and advancement. This may include formal training and advancement opportunities, and having a workplace and sector culture that is focused on learning and the development of its employees.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Indicator A: Professional development and training opportunities are made available to staff, and we seek to spend a percentage of our organization’s payroll budget on these opportunities (include PD funds plus time off for training).** | **Rating** | **Our organization** | **Comments** |
| 0.5% of payroll | Basic ✓ |  |  |
| 1.0% of payroll | Better ✓ |  |  |
| 1.5% of payroll | Best ✓ |  |  |
| **Indicator B: If we surveyed our staff, what percentage do we think would agree with the statement: "My organization encourages me to take on new challenges and pursue opportunities for advancement within my organization and externally"?** | **Rating** | **Our organization** | **Comments** |
| Less than 40% | Basic ✓ |  |  |
| 40% to 70% | Better ✓ |  |  |
| Over 70% | Best ✓ |  |  |
| **Indicator C: Managers are promoted from within the organization** | **Rating** | **Our organization** | **Comments** |
| Rarely | Basic ✓ |  |  |
| Sometimes | Better ✓ |  |  |
| Frequently | Best ✓ |  |  |
| **Indicator D: Informal training sessions on various topics are offered in the organization (ex: brown bag lunch series)** | **Rating** | **Our organization** | **Comments** |
| Rarely | Basic ✓ |  |  |
| Sometimes | Better ✓ |  |  |
| Frequently/regularly | Best ✓ |  |  |
| **Indicator E: The organization has an up-to-date succession plan** |  |  |  |
| Only at the board level | Basic ✓ |  |  |
| For senior leadership | Better ✓ |  |  |
| Performance check-ins are regularly scheduled | Better ✓ |  |  |
| For all position levels | Best ✓ |  |  |
| Across all position levels, coaching and mentorship structures exist and are accessible | Best ✓ |  |  |
| Succession plans are reviewed regularly | Best ✓ |  |  |
| **Indicator F: Management, senior leadership, and board positions are gender-balanced and reflect the diversity of the community** |  |  |  |
| An evaluation of positions is in process | Basic ✓ |  |  |
| Policies, plans, and targets are in place in order | Better ✓ |  |  |
| All position levels are gender-balanced and reflect the diversity of the community | Best ✓ |  |  |

**6) Decent Processes for Resolving Conflicts**

An environment where people can express their concerns, participate equally and feel included and safe in the workplace underpins all aspects of decent work. This includes strong employment standards, establishing codes of conduct, developing proactive policies for diversity and inclusion, ensuring the safety of workers, respecting the mental and physical health of employees and ensuring that employees understand they have the right to organize and speak up about workplace concerns.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Indicator A: Does our organization have clear, accessible and confidential grievance procedures, policies and practices in place to support staff in addressing and resolving conflicts with co-workers and supervisors?** | **Rating** | **Our organization** | **Comments** |
| If not unionized: policies are in place, but are not often used or followed in practice | Basic ✓ |  |  |
| If not unionized: policies are in place, and are regularly used to identify and address conflicts | Better ✓ |  |  |
| If not unionized: policies are in place, are regularly used, and staff have access to support or third party assistance as part of such processes | Best ✓ |  |  |
| Under our union collective agreement | Best ✓ |  |  |
| Policies and collective agreements are reviewed regularly | Best ✓ |  |  |
| **Indicator B: Does our organization have policies to ensure the safety of workers? (for example, case workers are paired when going to see high-risk clients)** | **Rating** | **Our organization** | **Comments** |
| There is a policy but it is rarely followed | Basic ✓ |  |  |
| There is a policy, sometimes followed | Better ✓ |  |  |
| There is a policy and it is always followed | Best ✓ |  |  |

**7) Decent Workplace Culture of Participation**

Effective leadership and a participatory work culture are crucial to decent work. The leadership norms and management styles practiced in workplaces impact the ability of workers to sustain their passion and commitment to work, and contribute their ideas and skills to advancing the broader mission of the organization. They also impact the ability of workers to balance work, family and personal time. A participatory work culture also goes beyond compliance with human rights and accessibility legislation, and actively fosters inclusion and engagement.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Indicator A: How many joint worker-management committees does our organization have (ex: health and safety, advocacy, equity and inclusion, anti-violence)? \*** | **Rating** | **Our organization** | **Comments** |
| No worker-management committees | Basic ✓ |  |  |
| One or two committees | Better ✓ |  |  |
| More than two committees (or for smaller organizations, a few committees that cover more than two areas of collaborative organizational planning) | Best ✓ |  |  |
| **Indicator B: Does our organization have policies that focus on diversity, equity and inclusion?** | **Rating** | **Our organization** | **Comments** |
| There is no such policy | Basic ✓ |  |  |
| There is a policy but it is not always followed. | Better ✓ |  |  |
| There is a policy and it is always followed. | Best ✓ |  |  |
| **Indicator C: Have we surveyed our staff on issues of workplace culture and work satisfaction?** | **Rating** | **Our organization** | **Comments** |
| No | Basic ✓ |  |  |
| Yes, but not in the last year | Better ✓ |  |  |
| Yes, within the last year | Best ✓ |  |  |
| **Indicator D: Does our organization involve/consult staff when developing program/project proposals?** | **Rating** | **Our organization** | **Comments** |
| Never | Basic ✓ |  |  |
| Sometimes | Better ✓ |  |  |
| Always | Best ✓ |  |  |

\* Note: The [Occupational Health and Safety Act](https://www.labour.gov.on.ca/english/hs/faqs/ohsa.php) (OHSA) sets out roles and responsibilities of workplace parties with respect to workplace violence and workplace harassment, including developing and implementing policies and programs and providing information and instruction on these. The [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act](https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/05a11) (AODA) also sets out regulations for identifying, removing and preventing barriers to employees with disabilities.

**8) Strategies to Promote Decent Work**

Nonprofits can face significant structural barriers to providing decent work. These can be a result of program models that require flexible, part-time or casual contracts, or funders that do not allow funds to be used for certain costs (for example, identifying pension contributions as an "ineligible" expense). In the case of government-funded organizations, there is often restraint and flatlining of program funds for years at a time. Some organizations may be able to overcome aspects of these barriers over time (for example, not accepting low-wage contracts). However, to make systemic change for government funders to include cost of living increases in their allocations, it will take concerted advocacy efforts collectively by our networks and the nonprofit sector as a whole.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Indicator A: Our organization has demonstrated achievements to sustain and/or expand decent work practices** | **Rating** | **Our organization** | **Comments** |
| We are aware of some good decent work practices in our organization | Basic ✓ |  |  |
| We have documented case studies of our positive decent work practices, and have shared them with others | Better ✓ |  |  |
| We are actively engaged in collaborative efforts to promote the importance of decent work, and build our sector's capacity to champion these values and practices | Best ✓ |  |  |
| **Indicator B: Our organization is aware of the pressures and challenges we face to sustain or expand decent work practices** | **Rating** | **Our organization** | **Comments** |
| We have completed an assessment of our decent work practices (like this one) | Basic ✓ |  |  |
| We have identified key decent work challenges that as an organization we would like to address, and have developed a plan to tackle the ones within our control | Better ✓ |  |  |
| We have plans to address key challenges within our control and are participating in collective efforts to advocate for the systemic changes that would remove some barriers our organization faces in providing decent work | Best ✓ |  |  |
| **Indicator C: Our organization has been speaking with our funders, seeking modifications to restrictions so we can provide staff with better wages and benefits.** | **Rating** | **Our organization** | **Comments** |
| No, we have not discussed this with funders | Basic ✓ |  |  |
| We have discussed this with funders but with limited success | Better ✓ |  |  |
| We have discussed this with funders and have been able to get some modifications | Best ✓ |  |  |