

Exploratory learnings with post-secondary institutions and workforce planning boards across Ontario





About ONN

ONN is an independent nonprofit network for the 58,000 nonprofits and charities in Ontario, focused on policy, advocacy, and services to strengthen the sector as a key pillar of our society and economy. We work to create a public policy environment that allows nonprofits to thrive. We engage our network of diverse nonprofit organizations to work together on issues affecting the sector and channel the voices of our network to governments, funders, and other stakeholders.

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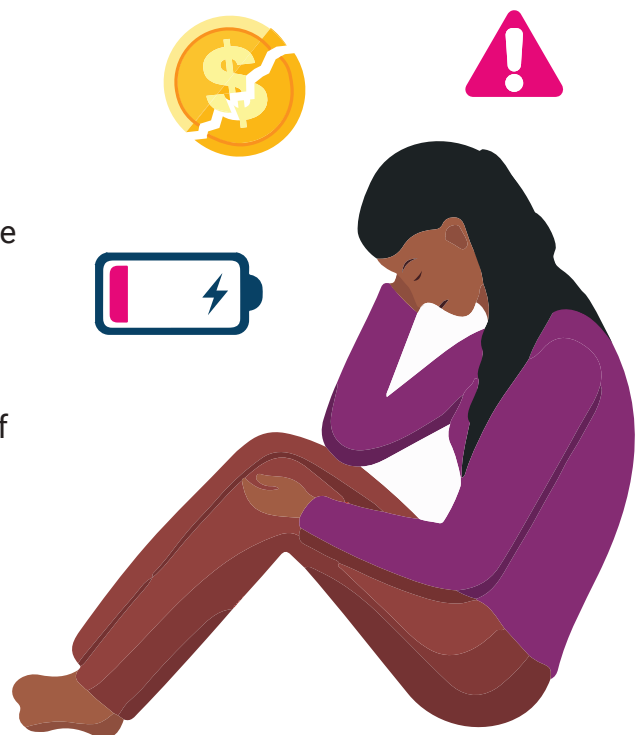
Communities need nonprofits, nonprofits need their workforce

Nonprofits create communities people want to live in and raise their families in. We make communities vibrant with accessible and high quality recreational activities, street festivals, and safe spaces for children before and after school. We provide essential services every Ontarian needs, including care for the old, young, sick, and frail. In addition, nonprofits are fundamental in helping Ontarians battle crises, from affordability to public health and climate emergencies. Nonprofits are supporting people with employment and training, delivering meals on wheels, and providing gender-based violence services. As demand rises, we are also filling gaps for affordable housing, mental health and addictions programs, and settlement services.

However the nonprofit labour force, made up of people who weave together this care infrastructure for communities to thrive, is facing a significant crisis due to the pandemic, and its fallout. People are leaving the sector at a high rate as nonprofits struggle to compete with each other, and across other sectors for people with all types of skills, expertise, and career experience. While labour force issues have always required the sector's attention, this moment has created an unprecedented level of urgency. Workforce issues are impacting every part of the sector, across roles and functions, subsectors, and regions.

The crisis is rapidly intensifying because:

- Resources to do the work are decreasing. Fundraising is harder than ever before, and government funding does not align with true cost of service and program delivery alongside the steep rise in inflation, and resulting affordability crisis.
- Design of funding structures prioritize project based roles, contributing to an environment of temporary contract work.
- There are significant social, economic, and political shifts happening simultaneously.
- Demand for services, particularly complex care, is high and causing staff burnout.



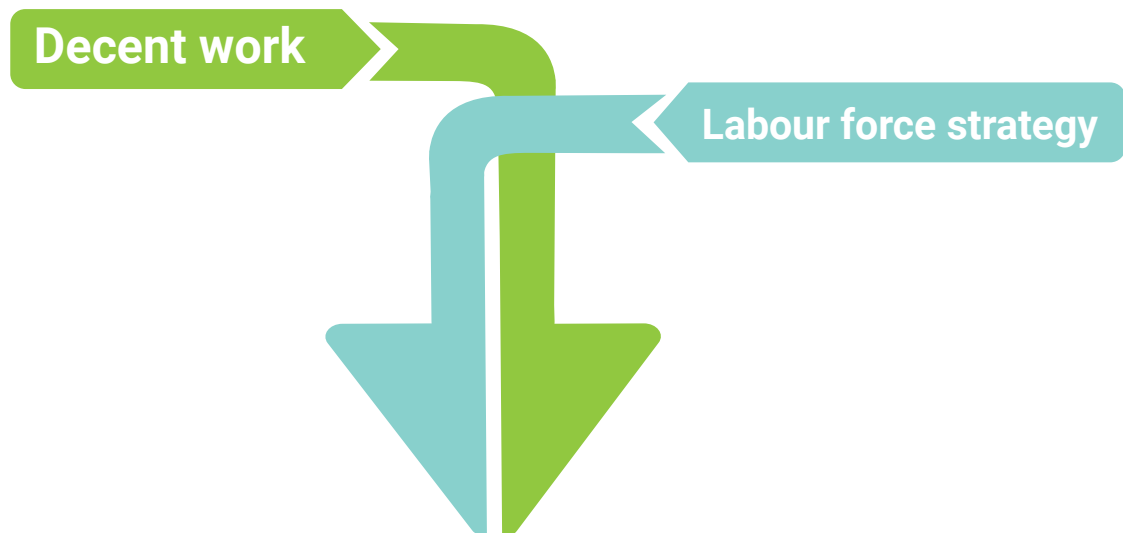
ONN's 2023 'State of the Sector' survey revealed that:

- Staffing challenges remain at a high level, particularly for larger nonprofits.
- Three quarters of nonprofits faced turnover, with most workers leaving for the same job at another nonprofit or public sector.
- Skills shortages, staff burnout and stress, and non-competitive compensation packages are the top factors affecting organizations' ability to recruit and retain staff.

Towards a resilient nonprofit workforce

Since inception, ONN has continuously worked towards a strong and resilient nonprofit workforce where workers, employers, and communities are supported equally, rather than at the expense of each other. This vision is key. Our sector's labour force is not only made up of the communities we are rooted in but is also critical for serving the same communities, from senior leaders and frontline workers to operational and program roles. If nonprofits can recruit and retain skilled people, they will be better positioned to fulfill their community-based missions.

ONN's work has moved along two criss-crossing pathways in Ontario's nonprofit sector: building and deepening a decent work movement grounded in equity, and developing a [labour force strategy](#).



In moving along these two pathways, and while monitoring the sector's labour force challenges, successes, and opportunities over the past decade, ONN has had two learnings. First, that all pathways are needed to build a strong and resilient nonprofit workforce.

Decent work provides a framework and language to talk about what good work is, and the actions we can take at the organizational, network, and policy levels to realize it. On the other hand, a sectoral labour force strategy, developed alongside nonprofits with labour market information and research mapping trends, addresses, mitigates, and prevents critical human resource issues and proactively prepares our sector for the future of work. Often what comes out of the labour force strategy is a workforce development plan which defines the skills and capabilities needed for future sector needs, identifies key gaps in the current workforce, and creates innovative strategies and programs to build, buy, borrow, and apply those capabilities all with the worker in the center.

The second learning ONN has had is that the future of work is bringing many opportunities and risks with it. If the sector is proactive, we can leverage the opportunities to shape our labour force to better meet our missions today and tomorrow, much like many other sectors. If we are not proactive we will be left behind.

A unique sector like ours, combined with a rapidly shifting world of work, means that the usual steps to developing a labour force strategy will not work. We need to do things differently. Our labour force strategy needs to be sector-driven and sector-owned, where we are pooling risk and resources instead of trying to reinvent the wheel one organization at a time. Collectively, we can aspire to have a province-wide strategy that reflects the needs of the breadth and depth of our sector, and it can be adapted by networks and collectives at the local level, as it makes sense for them.

About the project

In 2023, ONN successfully received funding from the Community Services Recovery Fund from the Canadian Red Cross to build pathways that strengthen Ontario's nonprofit sector's ability to recruit and retain workers. The goal was to meet the sector's emerging needs as it weathered through its ongoing labour force crisis, and seed some of the roots for developing a sector-wide labour force strategy.

Utilizing a systemic and sector-driven approach while building on ONN’s existing work, the short project had two streams:

1 Designing and hosting a series of sandboxes for nonprofit leaders to creatively explore and develop solutions for compensation and leadership in the sector. A report including learnings and recommendations from the sandboxes is now available.

2 Building partnerships with post-secondary institutions and regional/municipal economic development and labour boards in Ontario to raise the nonprofit sector’s profile as an employer, find synergies in tackling the sector’s labour force crisis, and carve out new pathways for recruitment.



The focus of this report is **stream two**, and highlights goals, learnings and recommendations presented by stakeholders in learning circles and one-on-one interviews. This report is divided into two parts: key learnings from the post-secondary institutions, workforce planning boards, and nonprofit organizations, and proposed ideas for cross-sectoral collaboration.

Learnings from post-secondary institutions across Ontario

A common recruitment pathway for the nonprofit sector is work integrated learning programs in post-secondary institutions. Post-secondary institutions include public universities, colleges, community colleges, polytechniques, institutes, and others. There are over 100 universities in Canada, and more than half of them are located in the two most heavily populated provinces: Ontario and Quebec. Post-secondary institutions are categorized into degree granting and non-degree granting institutions.

Degree-granting institutions range in size with a wide range of undergraduate, graduate, and professional degree programs. [Non-degree granting institutions](#) typically focus on diploma and certificate programs that lead to short-cycle academic credentials.

As part of this project, ONN hosted two virtual learning circles with post-secondary institutions in Ontario. The goals of the learning circles were to have strategic discussions and understand the following:



- Post-secondary institutions' level of engagement with the nonprofit sector and support for students' learning and career development needs about the sector.
- Issues and challenges in engaging with the nonprofit sector.
- Programming and initiatives that support students' skills development, recruitment, and employment pathways into the nonprofit sector.

The first learning circle was led and facilitated by ONN, and the second learning circle was hosted in partnership with the [Canada Association of Career Educators and Employers](#). Approximately 56 people attended both learning circles.

Outreach and invitations prioritized engaging with staff and leaders in the following departments: Student Affairs, Career Services, Experiential Learning, Co-Op Offices, Community Partnerships, and Academic Programming. Each participant was asked initial registration questions about their interests in joining the learning circle, how their faculty, department, and/or programming engages with the nonprofit sector, and what questions and/or curiosities they have about this topic.

During the learning circles, participants were provided a brief overview of the nonprofit workforce and current labour force issues, and then were divided into smaller groups for cross-learning and discussion. Facilitators led the discussions, and participants were asked to focus on the following themes: success and challenges in engaging nonprofits, preparing students for entering the nonprofit workforce, and post-secondary education perceptions of the nonprofit sector as an employment pathway.

Work-integrated learning opportunities are critical for introducing students into the sector

Work-integrated learning partnerships between post-secondary institutions and nonprofit organizations is the most common approach in preparing students for their first workplace experience in the sector. These are foundational experiences that support students with building their knowledge and skills, resume, references, and potential mentorship opportunities.

In addition, capacity building and workshops are provided by the post-secondary institutions to support the onboarding process into a placement. Workshop topics include resume writing, interview skills, and demystifying the placement experience. Post-secondary programs, like McMaster University's and Toronto Metropolitan University's (TMU) social work programs, are also building the capacity of placement supervisors (nonprofit staff/leaders) that provide mentorship and guidance for placement students.

Examples of capacity building support include access to the library for print and electronic resources, Canadian Association for Social Work Educators (CASWE) online field instructor course, and virtual professional development opportunities.

The following are some examples of the different types of [work-integrated learning \(WIL\) opportunities](#) and partnerships ONN learned about between post-secondary institutions and nonprofit organizations through research and the learning circles.

1 Mandatory professional practicum or clinical placements

Mandatory placements are the most common types of relationships between post-secondary institutions and the nonprofit sector. This type of WIL allows students to gain work experience under the supervision of experienced registered or licensed professionals in any discipline that requires practice-based work experience for professional licensure or certification. Practica are generally unpaid and, as the work is done in a supervised setting, typically students do not have their own workload/caseload. The most common programs that require placements with nonprofit organizations are social work, early childhood education, child youth worker, social services, and nonprofit management.

2 Cooperative education

Cooperative (co-op) education opportunities involve partnerships between students, employers, and the post-secondary institution. They are paid work experiences that are related to a student's field of study, and provide them with workplace experience and an academic credit(s). Co-op education can span much of the operational work of the sector such as accounting, finance, and human resources. These work-integrated learning opportunities require employers to pay for students' time and labour. While not commonly available in the nonprofit sector, some post-secondary institutions are taking proactive steps to change that. The [University of Waterloo recently launched a Co-op for Community program](#) that specifically creates co-op opportunities for students in the nonprofit sector. In addition, nonprofit employers can apply for the [Student Work Placement Program](#) to receive wage subsidies to offset the costs to host internships, co-op placements, practicums, and other work-integrated learning opportunities.

3 Community service learning or experiential learning opportunities

Community service learning integrates meaningful community service with classroom instruction and critical reflection to enrich the learning experience, and strengthen communities. In practice, students work in partnership with nonprofit organizations to apply their disciplinary knowledge to a challenge identified by the community. These types of WIL are common

partnerships between post-secondary education institutions and nonprofits, and can be framed as "sandboxes", "social innovation projects", "capstone projects", "student consulting hubs", or "project service days" where students get to work on "real world challenges" or community projects, and provide their analysis and proposed solutions. For example, [University of Toronto's, Centre for Community Partnerships](#) focuses on building community engaged learning opportunities for students, faculty, and grassroots and nonprofits organizations to work together. These opportunities range from building relationships with faculties' research initiatives with nonprofit organizations, in class projects, and hosting the [Working for Change conference](#): a non-profit career focused conference.

4 Community and industry research and projects

In these types of WIL opportunities, students are engaged in project based work activities, including: consulting projects, design projects, and community based research projects. For example:

[Riipen](#) is a work-based learning platform, connecting, students, educators and employers. Their Level Up flagship program has received 66.5 million dollars in federal funding to create 33,000+ work integrated learning experiences across Canada. In our discussions with Riipen, ONN learned that approximately 12,000+ nonprofit employers in Ontario have published 5,200+ projects on their site to connect with students, early career talent and post-secondary institutions for paid and unpaid learning opportunities.

[Research Impact Canada](#) is a pan-Canada knowledge mobilization network dedicated to maximizing the impact of research for the better good, and works across sectors and stakeholders. Knowledge mobilization connects academic

In addition, career fairs, conferences, and industry focused workshops are opportunities to engage students with learning about the nonprofit sector and career pathways. Here are a few examples of collaborative partnerships between post-secondary education institutions and nonprofit organizations that are sector focused events for students:

- University of Toronto hosts a Working for Change Conference that focuses on career pathways in the nonprofit sector.
- Toronto Metropolitan University hosts a Social Justice Careers Conference that profiles a number of career pathways into the nonprofit sector.
- Toronto Metropolitan University hosted a [Community Services and Arts Careers event](#).

Nonprofit roles are a difficult sell to students as an employment pathway

Post-secondary learning circle participants were asked about their perceptions of the nonprofit sector as a pathway for employment and career development. The goal was to surface, perhaps, some myths and use the learning circle as an educational opportunity to debunk them. While the perceptions were not surprising, below are some poignant learnings for nonprofits with quotes from participants:

LEARNING

Decent working conditions and wages are a problem in the nonprofit sector. Past post-secondary workers' experiences of working in the sector make it extremely difficult to promote the sector to future workers.

“ It is hard to pitch the nonprofit sector to students when our staff leave the sector themselves. The pay is so low which means who is willing to work in the sector is impacted.”

LEARNING

Departments and/or student services priorities dictate how actively the nonprofit sector is engaged with at any higher education institution. For placement-focused programs that are connected to community and/or social services, nonprofits are continuously sought to host a student. However, for career and co-operative departments, it depends on the partnership and/or collaboration needs. The nonprofit sector is not the ideal sector to engage with for co-op placements, as nonprofits often do not have funding to support student wages.

“ The capacity and needs of the nonprofit sector are high, and the sector is not attractive to students from MBA programs because they don't have the capacity to hire and offer employment opportunities after placement, and salaries are too low to support student debt. However, students are interested in larger nonprofit organizations and more analytical roles”.

“ We work in a Co-op department that puts in very little energy into the nonprofit sector. Students are often not looking at roles that pay less. It's not just about trying to convince students, a lot of it is students having to negotiate with their parents. Parents not seeing the sector as a viable career option, and the private sector is hard to compete with, especially based on skill sets. The perception is that nonprofits need free labour”.

A narrative that ONN heard from post-secondary education stakeholders is that the nonprofit sector is a great place for students to build their skills and experience, and move on to get better work, and higher salaries elsewhere. Adjacent sectors that work and support the nonprofit sector for programming, resources, and funding have negative internal perceptions of actually working in the nonprofit sector that showcase how the sector is perceived as a career path.

Post-secondary institutions have significant challenges engaging with the nonprofit sector

Post-secondary institutions shared common challenges they experience in engaging with the nonprofit sector, and highlighted ideas for cross-sectoral relationship building.



The capacity and staff turnover with nonprofit organizations becomes a major barrier to maintaining communications and building relationships with post-secondary institutions.



There needs to be better communication between both sides, and an understanding of the greater systems wide challenges that are difficult to change.



Common barriers that come up in engaging with the nonprofit sector to support students academic and career development include: police record checks, organizational capacity, and unpaid placements,.



The schedule and timing of when students need work integrated learning opportunities (co-ops, placements) do not always align with nonprofit organizations capacities and needs. For instance, post-secondary students are looking to secure employment for summer by April and May, and the Canada Summer Jobs program can be a slow process. The program is a great opportunity for students to learn about and enter the nonprofit sector, but students can also miss the opportunity to work in the sector because the process takes too long.

Learnings from post-secondary institutions across Ontario

ONN also hosted a learning circle with nonprofit organizations to better understand their perspective on building relationships and partnerships with postsecondary education institutions. Approximately 15 nonprofit leaders and staff joined the learning circle, and others shared their perspectives through email. ONN acknowledges that this was not a large sample size, and that there needs to be greater opportunities for engagement and learning from the sector on this topic.

The learning circle focused on the following themes, and provided space for nonprofits to share their thoughts, experiences, challenges, and ideas: successes and challenges with engagement with post-secondary institutions, partnerships to prepare students for entering the nonprofit workforce, and nonprofit preparation of onboarding students and/or recent graduates.

Nonprofits seek transformational engagement

In discussion with nonprofit staff about the challenges working with post-secondary institutions, we learned the following:

LEARNING

Funding timelines can create challenges for nonprofits to engage in, especially research funding timelines that can have a projected start date in a few years. It is difficult to focus on future work and programming, as the sector is so conditioned to thinking about needs, resources, and priorities on a yearly basis.

LEARNING

Student placements can be hard to take on as it requires a lot of work to design placement opportunities, onboard and train students, support and evaluate them over a short period of time, and ensure staff can supervise. There was a natural tension on whether it is the job of nonprofits to train future workers, and questioning the benefits student placements have for the sector.

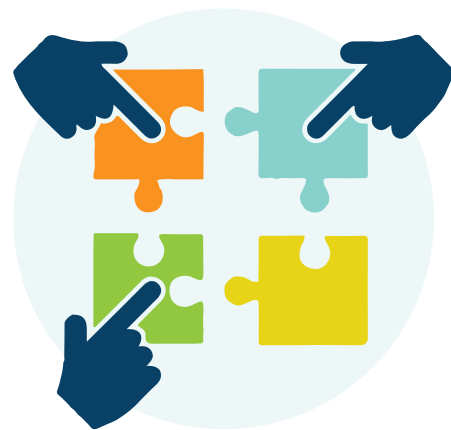
“ Placement coordinators will generally say here’s a student interested in your organization, do these dates work, which feels a bit shoe-horned instead of engaging us further upstream to identify our organizational needs, and design potential placements around this.”

LEARNING

Post-secondary institutions are turning to nonprofit organizations for funded opportunities. Examples include funding to support research initiatives, and partnering with nonprofit organizations to support research activities.

Various types of partnerships exist between nonprofits and post-secondary institutions

Relationship building and partnerships between nonprofit organizations and post-secondary institutions primarily focus on programming to support student skills development and learning. ONN learned about the different types of work integrated learning partnerships between post-secondary institutions and nonprofit organizations in the post-secondary learning circles, and these types of partnerships were confirmed in the nonprofit learning circle.



Innovative partnerships at multiple levels

Nonprofit organizations primarily partner with post-secondary institutions for student placements, capstone projects, and experiential learning opportunities. However, some nonprofit organizations have multiple types of partnerships with a post-secondary institution. For example, [Oakville Community Foundation partners with Sheridan College](#) for research activities. They also have specialized bursaries and scholarships that go to Sheridan students. [Karis Disability Services works closely with the Humber College Culinary Pathways](#) program by creating an adapted curriculum to support students with developmental disabilities to achieve a culinary certificate, and also support students with finding a job placement.

Research partnerships

Nonprofits partner with post-secondary education institutions on research and strategy projects. The [Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council \(SSHRC\)](#) is the federal research funding agency that promotes and supports research and training in the humanities and social sciences. SSHRC funding creates opportunities for academic researchers to work with community partners, most often nonprofit organizations, on research initiatives that can impact how we think, design, lead, and implement policies, practices, resources, and changes in the sector. For instance, McMaster Professor Sandra Lapointe's [project](#) was recently awarded \$2.5 million Partnership Grants from SSHRC. This is a six-year collaborative project involving 15 academic institutions, eight regional United Way networks, and 18 other community partners across six provinces to create 12 campus-community hubs to connect students and researchers in the social sciences, humanities, and arts (SSHA) with community organizations.

Funding programs that promote student hiring and retention

[Canada Summers Jobs](#) (CSJ) is a federally funded program that provides employers wage subsidies to create quality summer work experiences for young people. It aims to provide youth with quality work experiences, including skills development opportunities, and to improve labour market access for youth who face barriers. Many nonprofit organizations utilize the Canada Summer Jobs Program to employ students, recent graduates, and/or youth in the workforce. This program provides nonprofits with an opportunity to recruit and retain talent in their organization on a seasonal, part-time, and/or full-time basis. However, given the labour force crisis the sector is facing, the program has evolved from a temporary youth employment strategy to a band aid solution for nonprofit labor shortages that organizations significantly rely on. Given the intended outcome is quite different from how the program is currently being used by the sector, it poses significant challenges like too short or precarious contracts and low wages.

There are many critiques from the sector on the design and implementation CSJ program and in late 2023, the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills and Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (HUMA) began its study of the Canada Summer Jobs wage subsidy program to determine how the program can be modified to improve funding and flexibility for applicants. Many nonprofits participated in the study and some of their recommendations are reflected in the committee's [final report](#).

Learnings from workforce planning boards across Ontario

Workforce Planning Ontario is a network made up of 25 workforce planning boards covering four regions across the province. They operate as nonprofit organizations, and focus on conducting research on the supply and demand of labour in their local labour market by working with employers to identify and meet their current and emerging needs. The primary role of workforce planning boards is to help improve understanding of and coordinate community responses to labour market issues and needs. Often, the sector as an employer, and not solely a community service provider, is missing in local workforce planning conversations.

ONN engaged 17 executive directors and staff members of the 25 workforce planning boards in Ontario through a virtual learning circle and individual interviews to learn about:

Workforce planning boards' level of engagement and relationships with the nonprofit sector on workforce challenges and solutions (i.e. network tables, research, toolkits and guides, etc.).

Current workforce initiatives that support the nonprofit sector with recruiting, onboarding, and retaining workers.

The main goal for the learning circle was to create an opportunity for cross-learning between ONN and workforce planning boards, and to better understand how they work with and support the sector.

The key learnings below showcase the working relationships between workforce planning boards and nonprofits organizations, the workforce challenges they are prioritizing that align with local labour market needs, solutions they are collaborating on, and ideas for greater relational support and partnerships.

Some level of partnerships exist

Workforce planning boards are engaging with nonprofit organizations by conducting research, co-designing projects and programs, facilitating training and development, building cross-sectoral partnerships, designing job search tools, and convening networks for resource sharing and events. ONN identified a few unique examples below on how workforce planning boards are currently engaging with nonprofit organizations based on community needs and priorities.

Research and labour force data

Workforce planning boards are mandated to conduct research in their regional areas to understand the local labour needs and challenges. They do this by conducting an [EmployerOne survey](#), which provides an opportunity for local employers to share important information about hiring challenges, and workforce issues facing their business or industry. The EmployerOne survey is designed to collect information on a range of topics and trends including projected vacancies, hiring intentions, recruitment strategies and challenges, as well as employer perception on candidate skills, education and training.



After analysis, the aggregated data is released to educators, trainers, community/nonprofit partners, government agencies, and the public so that a better understanding of the local labour markets can be developed to inform strategies and programs to improve overall workforce and employer needs.

This data is helpful for nonprofits offering employment and training services to apply for funding, to inform their programming and services, and support their employer engagement efforts to build relationships on behalf of job seekers facing barriers to employment. However, rarely is it used to inform the sector's workforce needs in a local area.

Collaborative network tables and events:



- [The Niagara Workforce Collective](#) focuses on bringing together economic development, nonprofits, and municipalities to review how they can collectively address workforce challenges in the Niagara region.
- [Sarnia Workforce Planning Board](#) is a part of the Sarnia-Lambton social services network (a network of 40 nonprofit organizations and charities) that focus on sharing resources, community needs, sharing expertise in different areas, and advocating for those in the community that cannot advocate for themselves.
- [Sudbury Workforce Planning Board](#) focuses on organizing a summit for community and social service organizations to come together and share resources and facilitate presentations on social issues and services in the community (i.e. food insecurity, employment services, addiction supports, legal services). The need for organizing an in-person summit was largely due to the challenges in relationship building from the pandemic, and there were no spaces or opportunities for community service providers to share resources and collaborate with others.

Collaborative partnerships

Collaborative relationships with workforce planning boards and nonprofit organizations vary as each planning board operates differently. For instance, [Windsor-Essex Workforce Planning Board](#) (the largest workforce planning board in Ontario) partners with local nonprofits for services and resources. They recently partnered with an arts based nonprofit for some filming and editing services, and also funded nonprofits to lead the design and delivery of migrant worker support programs and employment services transformation. Workforce planning boards primarily work closely with employment and settlement services, as their priorities are aligned working with job seekers and employers in the local community based on supply and demand.

As nonprofits, workforce planning boards encounter similar challenges to other nonprofits

Workforce planning boards operate as nonprofit organizations, and face similar challenges with funding, sustainability, organizational infrastructure, and staff retention. They are provided short term funding by the Ministry of Labour, and are reliant on partnerships with employers across industries to conduct research, co-design resources and services, and convene cross-sectoral networks. In addition, the contract nature of how they hire staff makes it challenging to build and maintain relationships.

When asked about the common challenges in working with other nonprofit organizations, ONN heard not surprising themes: underfunding, staff turnover, and staff capacity for relationship-building:

- The nonprofit sector is under funded, and this creates challenges for nonprofits to sustain operations.
- Staff turnover is a big challenge and impacts how the sector builds relationships and shares resources and relationship building. In addition, nonprofits are understaffed and it limits what they can do.
- Timing to schedule network meetings is a challenge because of varying staff schedules and capacities.

Workforce planning boards' priority workforce issues intersect with nonprofits

Workforce planning boards focus on addressing current community economic needs and priorities, and highlighted below are the local workforce issues that they have been prioritizing. It is important to note that many workforce development initiatives focus on subsectors of the nonprofit sector, instead of the nonprofit sector at large.

Care economy workforce crisis:

The Niagara Workforce Collective worked with nonprofits to develop a [brief](#) on the sector workforce challenges and issues that are impacting the recruitment, retention, and sustainability of organizations and nonprofit leaders. They are also working closely with nonprofits on workforce issues in the childcare sector.

Workforce Planning & Development Board of Elgin-Middlesex-Oxford collaborated with Pillar Nonprofit Network to use their EmployerONE survey to provide a specific [analysis](#) of London’s care economy’s labour force issues.

Workforce Planning Hamilton is working on a [project](#) around the early childhood education sector, and has launched a survey to private and nonprofit child care providers to learn about the challenges the sector is facing. Both Sudbury and the Sarnia Workforce Planning boards are also looking into how to support child care expansion with workforce strategies.

Changing workforce and population demographics

Changing population, and therefore workforce demographics, is a trend manifesting across sectors, and workforce planning leaders shared the impact on nonprofit leadership and succession planning. In particular, that there is an impending retirement wave in nonprofit leadership.

Changing demographics have also contributed to the need for newcomers and immigrants and youth retention strategies in smaller towns and cities, however employers are reluctant to hire diverse workers. Workforce planning boards have been prioritizing the business case with employers to hire diverse talent and some are steering away from the EDI approach and lens.



Employment Services Ontario Changes

Since 2018, Ontario’s Employment and Training Services have undergone a significant transformation. While ONN normally only hears from nonprofits about the critical tensions arising from the transformation, it also emerged as a critical issue for workforce planning boards. ONN did not dive into the transformation as a topic of discussion in our learning circles with stakeholders, and recommend further recent reading from [Maytree](#), [First Work](#), and the [Ontario Disability Employment Network](#).

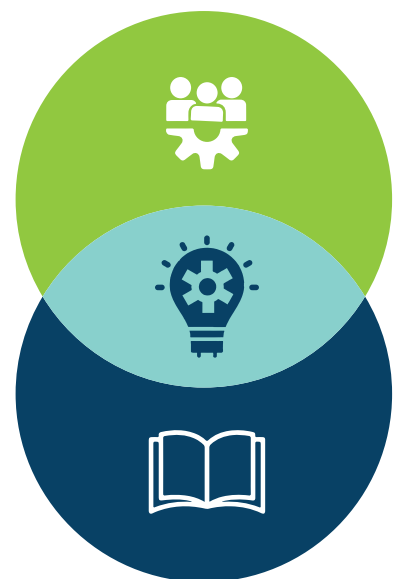
Proposed recommendations for cross-sectoral collaboration

The learning circles and conversations with post-secondary institutions, nonprofits, and workforce planning boards showcased the need for greater strategic collaboration, and spaces to co-design, reimagine, and build reciprocal relationships for shared common goals. When nonprofits, post-secondary education institutions, and workforce development boards take notice of each other, niches of the education-employment ecosystem benefit. Relationship building and communication is going to play a key role in deepening ties across sectors to ultimately build a truly integrated and healthy labour ecosystem in Ontario.

ONN had just started planting the seeds with this project, but there is greater opportunity to explore cross-sector relationships beyond traditional approaches, and understand where there is alignment with resources and assets that promote more holistic thinking on the nonprofit labour force, from education to employment pathways, workforce development strategies, and career development approaches. As a result, we propose three recommendations for the three sectors to collectively move on.

1 Create nonprofit driven labour force strategy council at the intersection of workforce and education

Given that the nonprofit sector is unique, as are its recruitment needs, a collaborative council driven by a nonprofit table of some sort (e.g provincial association, regional/provincial network) could bring together the right players for developing recruitment strategies. The council could be co-chaired, convene on a regular basis, and consist of champions from workforce planning boards, education, and the nonprofit sector. While these would be core champions, the council could expand to include all levels of government and economic development boards (local, regional, or provincial). This type of mechanism at the intersection of nonprofits, employment/labour, education, workforce development boards,, and economic development does not currently exist.



The council would be mutually beneficial in that it would focus on the nonprofit sector's recruitment needs from the lens of employment and education alongside experts in those areas. Post-secondary institutions can leverage the council to better understand the needs of nonprofits as more students pursue social purpose work. As a link between a region's workforce talent and its employer skill needs, workforce development boards can better ensure critical social infrastructure in their communities not only has the labour supply it needs, but that there are good jobs for job seekers.

Some focus areas for the council to explore are:

- 1 Develop nonprofit labour force research and reporting anchored by workforce development boards' analysis of labor market data, training needs, and career pathways and post-secondary institutions' insights. Research and reporting can be done alongside partners such as [Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario](#) or [Future Skills Centre](#).

a.

Explore Ontario's post-secondary credentials with distinct occupational pathways into the nonprofit sector and its subsectors to better understand labour market needs.

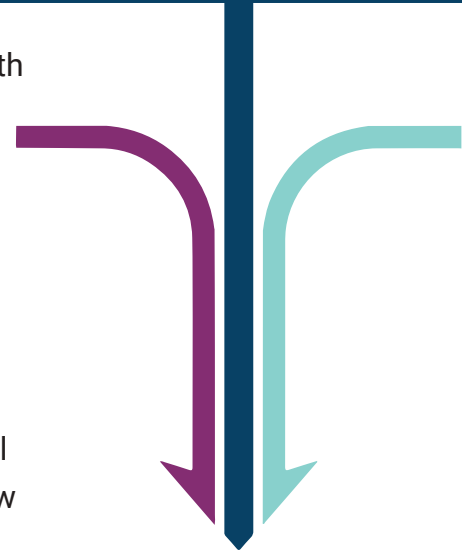
b.

Analyze the nonprofit labour market alignment by credential, field, industry, and geographic region. This research can be utilized across sectors to refine future workforce development initiatives, programming, and policies to support Ontario's labour market needs.

- 2 Lead robust planning for work-integrated learning opportunities (WIL) in the nonprofit sector as aligned with local labour market needs.
- 3 Engage in collective advocacy on joint public policy issues such as labour force strategies, workforce development, education and training, and funding for the whole ecosystem.
- 4 Pursue funding opportunities to support shared work and goals.

2 Co-design student pathways into the sector with post-secondary institutions

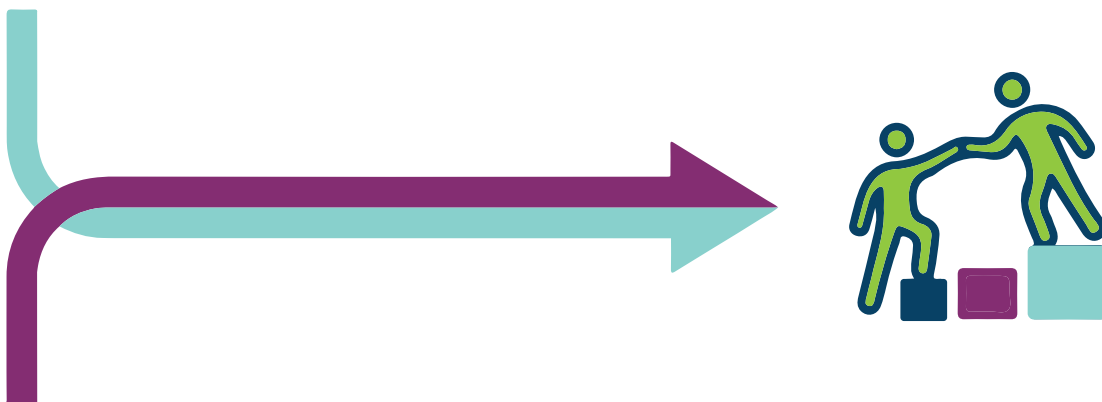
A collaborative council could consist of champions from both post-secondary institutions and nonprofit organizations, be co-chaired, and convene on a regular basis. The mutually beneficial council can guide how both groups work through challenges and tensions and reimagine how processes, policies, and resources need to evolve to support students, work-integrated learning programming, and employment pathways into the sector. The council could also have representation from workforce planning boards. A reciprocal sector to sector relationship through this council would allow for strategic conversations and systems change.



Some focus areas for the council to explore are:

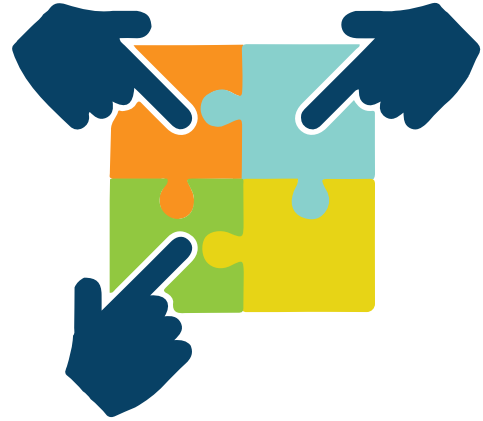
- 1 Develop and share engagement best practices from the perspective of both post-secondary education institutions and nonprofit organizations. Best practices can cover how to build reciprocal partnerships.
- 2 Create engagement opportunities for nonprofit organizations and post-secondary institutions to co-design programming, curriculum, and research engagement partnerships.
 - Map existing relationships, and identify any gaps that would bolster programming, curriculum, and research. For example, academic programs that have placements and heavily rely on nonprofit organizations to take on placement students, can be engaged in curriculum development, program design, career development services, and research partnerships.
 - Build case studies on how academic programming and/or student services have evolved in collaboration with the nonprofit sector, and how revising curriculum, pedagogy, teaching strategies, and resources have supported student learning and development, engagement and understanding of the nonprofit sector.
 - Collectively explore expanded, updated, and relevant nonprofit micro-credential programs.

- 3 Develop an inventory of university and college programs that collaborate with nonprofit organizations and are related to building career pathways into the nonprofit sector.
- 4 Joint promotion and uptake of recruitment pathways into the sector such as job boards, career fairs, conferences, and summits.
- 5 Curate spaces for both sectors to share information and collaborate with each other and with other like-minded organizations in their sector, either provincially or nationally.
 - Sharing promising programs such as the [McMaster University CityLAB model](#) can allow for it to be scaled up or replicated in another jurisdiction without starting from scratch.
 - Connect staff in post-secondary institutions working alongside nonprofits in their respective institutions to share information and promising practices.
- 6 Engage in collective advocacy on joint public policy issues such as labour force strategies, workforce development, education and training, and funding for the whole ecosystem.
- 7 Jointly pursue funding opportunities to support shared work and goals.
- 8 Collaborate with Career Development Mentorship Programming such as [TRIEC](#), [Fora Network for Change](#), and [Prosperity Project](#) in building a stronger professional mentorship stream to support various skilled recent graduates that are looking for impact driven work.



3 Build strategic partnerships between nonprofits and workforce planning boards

Nonprofits and workforce planning boards have more in common than not which both groups have not had an opportunity to fully explore and leverage for mutual benefit. Opportunities exist at both the local level between individual boards and their nonprofit community and Workforce Planning Ontario and nonprofit provincial associations and networks. Greater integration can facilitate allyship on cross-cutting issues.



Opportunities include:

- 1 Workforce Planning Ontario and nonprofit provincial associations, such as subsector focused-ones, and networks, such as ONN can build a reciprocal relationships and encourage their individual networks to work collaboratively and collectively in local communities.
- 2 Recognizing nonprofits as employers and another “industry” that needs workforce development support in various workforce planning board activities: research, employer-one surveys etc.
- 3 Engaging in collective advocacy on joint public policy issues such as labour force strategies, workforce development, education and training, and funding for the whole ecosystem.
- 4 Highlighting nonprofit work and employers at workforce events, highlighting workforce development boards in nonprofit events.
- 5 Jointly pursuing funding opportunities to support shared work and goals.

A beginning not an end

Sustainable labour force planning requires organizations to attract and retain workers from younger generations and newcomer communities, and this requires greater need for government funding and cross-sectoral planning for the sector to build a future workforce.

Ontario's current labour force ecosystem made up of many key players is siloed, fragile, and not designed to meet the challenges of a post-pandemic world of work. It is trying to solve new problems with old strategies and solutions.

This project allowed ONN to add to its efforts to further a province-wide, nonprofit sector-wide labour force strategy. In particular, it was an opportunity for ONN to explore and build relationships with other stakeholders in the broader labour force ecosystem in Ontario that the organization had not pursued before. It was also an opportunity to imagine a sector-to-sector relationship between nonprofits and the post-secondary education sector as well as the workforce development ecosystem.

There's more work to be done, but there's a path forward to creating a stronger, more supported nonprofit labour force.

