

Loud & clear

The Alberta nonprofit workforce speaks up.



WorkforceConnect

How can the nonprofit sector in Alberta effectively attract, develop and retain staff?

This report summarizes candid insights and important recommendations offered by employees through a sector-wide survey in which they shared their view of the benefits and challenges of working in the nonprofit sector.

WorkforceConnect addresses nonprofit sector workforce issues by engaging a broad range of stakeholders. It is an initiative of the *Alberta Nonprofit Workforce Council* – working collaboratively to find long-term solutions to sector workforce issues.

A strong base: The nonprofit sector supports our communities

The nonprofit sector provides an essential foundation that is a fundamental support to the function of all other components of society.

Through the work of 23,000 nonprofits employing more than 100,000 Albertans in social services, the arts, health, sports and more ... our citizens and communities are strengthened, enhanced, kept well and vibrant.

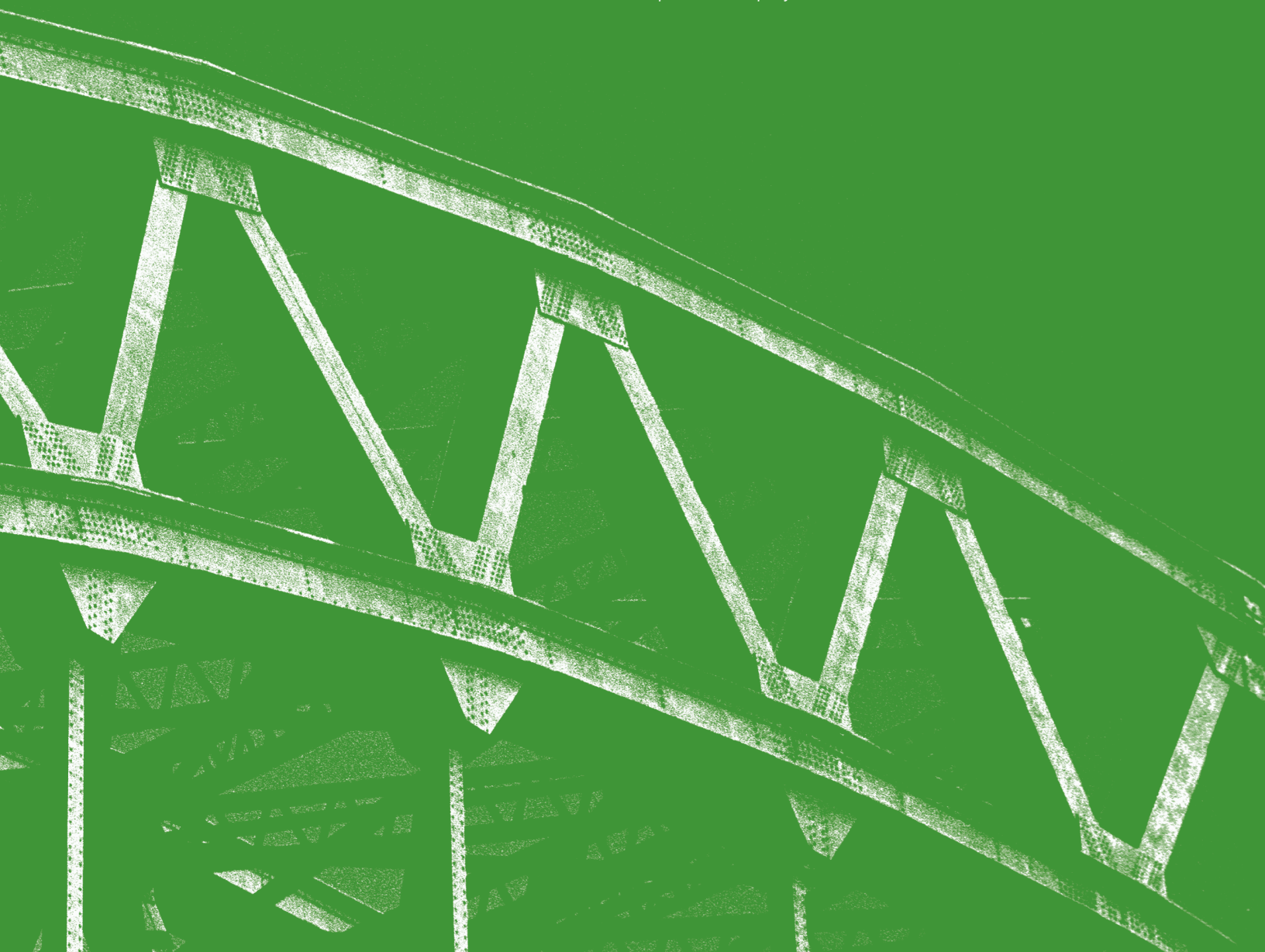
If we don't attract, develop and retain employees in the nonprofit sector, this foundational infrastructure is compromised and other sectors of society are less effective. As a sector, we must recognize that our employees are our most important resource. The following pages highlight insights gathered from sector employees and offer recommendations for how the sector can better respond to human resource challenges.

Proactive, workforce-driven action

The *Alberta Nonprofit Workforce Council*, with support from Alberta Human Services (formally Employment and Immigration), is implementing *100,000 Voices*, a province-wide Nonprofit Sector Profile Project, to raise the profile of important careers in the nonprofit sector and its critical role in contributing to the quality of life Albertans enjoy in our province.

This project has two distinct phases: the first provides an opportunity to inform and engage the nonprofit sector workforce. It gives nonprofit sector employees a chance to learn more about the impact of their sector on the quality of life in this province and a chance to tell us what inspires and challenges them.

The second phase will inform the broader community of the exciting opportunities to both work in this sector and to support the sector's workforce to ensure that Alberta's nonprofit sector continues to attract and develop highly qualified employees.

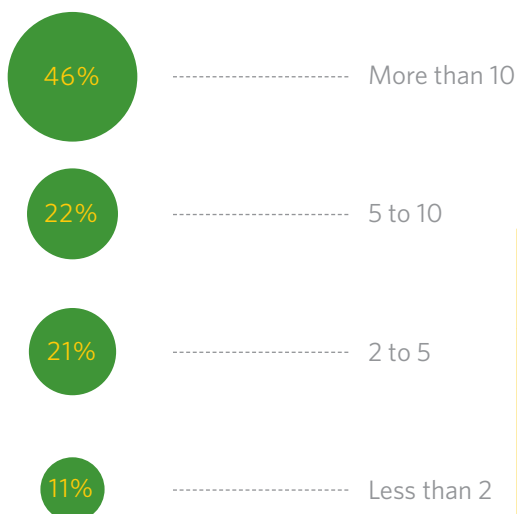


Starting with a grass-roots voice

In the fall of 2011, 569 nonprofit sector employees in Alberta responded to an online survey. They shared insightful, candid comments about their employment experiences, challenges, career motivations and offered important recommendations to sector employers and funders. The following report offers a summary of this survey and will guide some of the work of the 100,000 Voices campaign to elevate the sector's profile and to attract and retain a sustainable workforce. Additionally, the rich, compelling and constructive comments from the survey will be leveraged to drive further collaborative and individual action to strengthen the sector.

As the chart below indicates, of the 569 survey respondents nearly half were long-time employees of the sector with a depth of experience from which to draw their comments, and a full third were relatively new to the sector working five years or less.

Question: Overall, how many years have you been employed in the nonprofit sector?



Passion, skill, commitment

The survey findings indicated that the nonprofit workforce demonstrates passion, skill and commitment to their work, clients and organizations. When asked how long they intended to stay in their current role, a third indicated they intend to stay indefinitely.

While many spoke of the disparity between wages in the nonprofit government and private sector, employees say they are highly motivated to work in the sector because: the work is meaningful and significantly impacts others; their organization's goals are not linked to profit but rather affect positive community change; and the work aligns with their training, interest, skills, personal values and passions. Employees told us that they are able to be innovative, creative and they have flexibility within their work lives.

In their open ended comments, respondents cited the top three reasons for choosing to work in the nonprofit sector:

39% Work / job satisfaction

36% Impacting community

23% Personal values / passion

"This sector needs dedicated, passionate, purposeful and forward thinking people who don't mind making less money than a corporate job. I want to help people improve their quality of life and help develop our community to have increased capacity."

What matters most

Respondents were asked to rank six key issues in order of relevance, from most important to least important. When respondents' ratings were averaged, their rankings indicated **being valued for their contributions** was the most relevant issue, followed by compensation.

Respect & appreciation, with a livable salary

Employees know the sector's funding challenges typically result in lower salaries compared to the private and government sectors. Employees want higher wages and say they need them given the increasing cost of living. However, when asked to rank which issues were most relevant to them, they indicate that being valued, respected and appreciated for their contribution is more important to them.

"Value your staff. Listen to their concerns and offer them opportunities to voice their opinions about how they think things could improve. Celebrate achievements and our efforts."

"Promote the sector as a viable career option to the many caring, industrious youth seeking to contribute skills."

Across the spectrum, what's valued differs

When the data was cross-tabulated by the length of time people have been employed in the sector and what they valued most, the story varied.

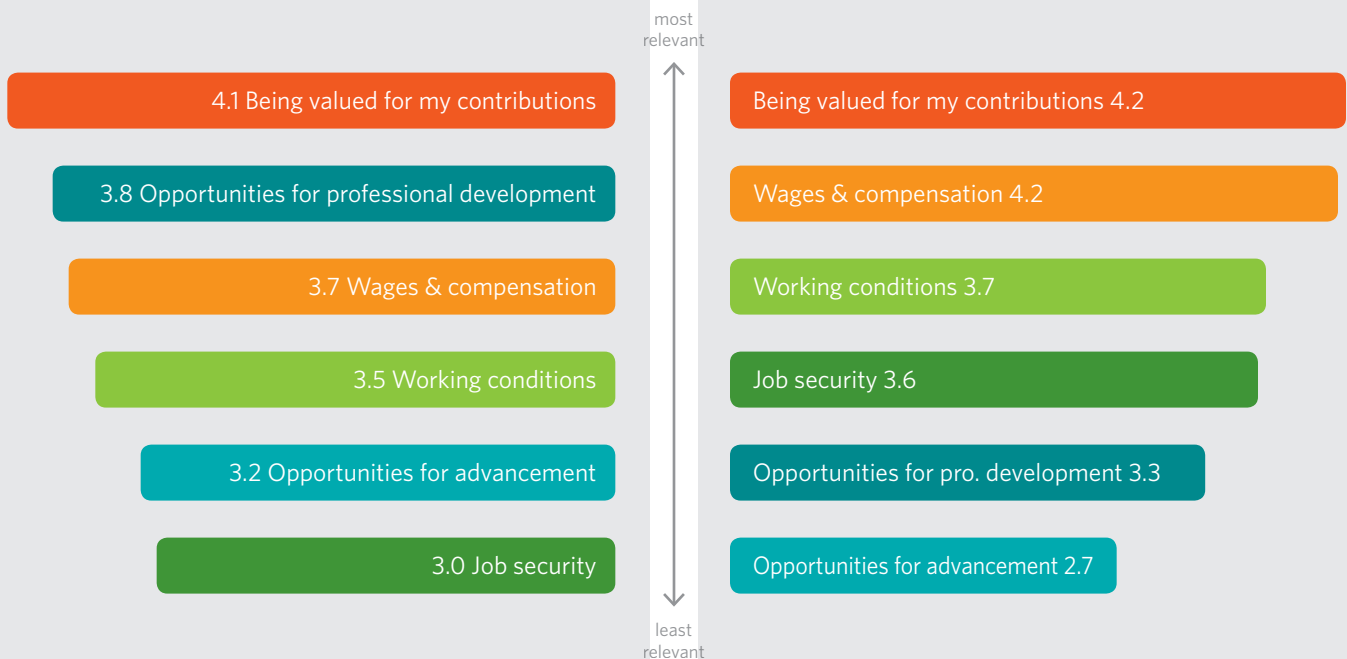
Those who have worked in the sector between five and 10+ years cite job security as highly important to them and they indicate they are likely to remain working in nonprofit organizations. Those employed for two years or less say opportunities for professional development are what they seek most. They also indicate they are uncertain how long they will stay in the nonprofit sector.

Employed in the nonprofit sector for 2 years or less

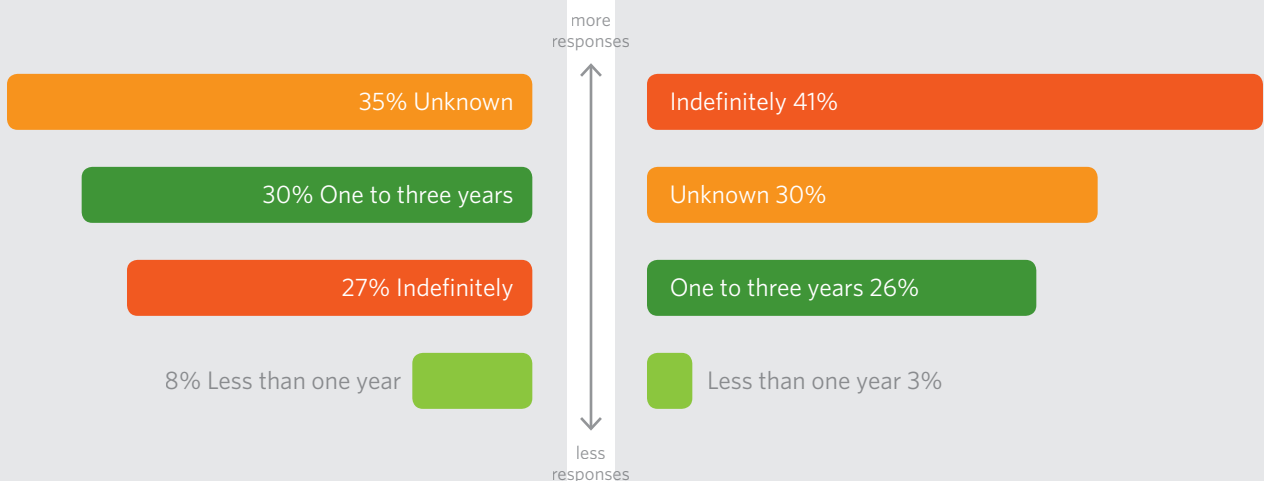


Employed in the nonprofit sector for more than 10 years

Question: Which of these issues are most relevant to you? Rank them on a scale of 1 to 6, with 6 being most relevant.



Question: How long do you intend to stay in your current role?



The perfect storm



Systemic challenges & workforce sustainability – a chain reaction

There are many systemic challenges facing nonprofit sector workforce sustainability. Survey respondents had clear opinions about the human resource issues facing the sector as employers seek to successfully attract, develop and retain employees. Respondents also shared strong views about supports required for the sector from government and other funders.

Throughout the survey, several themes developed and demonstrated that when there is a shortage of sustainable funding and strong leadership, a negative chain reaction occurs. These two key influencers reduce the sector's ability to attract workers and meet the community's needs.

The two key influencers

Funding

A lack of funding for needed positions, underfunding roles, providing funding that does not allow for a competitive wage environment, or providing unpredictable funding (which results in lack of job security year-over-year) creates instability that negatively affects the sector's ability to support workforce sustainability.

Leadership and people management

Survey respondents indicated the need for a personalized and creative approach to workforce development within the nonprofit sector. There is deep understanding that a choice to work in the sector is made not for financial gain, but for many personal reasons – and employees are asking that these choices be recognized and honoured as a way to demonstrate how staff are valued. Respondent comments indicated strongly that the leadership within the sector, including boards and leadership teams, have the ability to have significant positive impact on the quality of the work experience for employees beyond the financial compensation challenge inherent within the sector.



"Service demand is too high; we don't have enough staff to do the work and to meet the increasingly unreasonable demands of funders. Then if we lose staff due to low wages we are not delivering on our mandate, not fulfilling our funding contract ... and yet need more funding to resolve it all."

43%

indicated **compensation** issues have the most significant impact on the nonprofit workforce

18%

indicated **turnover or workload** challenges as key issues to consider in workforce sustainability

Workforce Challenges

Compensation

Today, compensation encompasses more than wages, it reflects a comprehensive package of rewards that more broadly represent how a sector values its workforce. Within the nonprofit sector, survey respondents concur that chronic under-funding is not only reflected in lower wages but also in the lack of scope in compensation packages.

Turnover & retention / workload & burnout

Demanding work, not enough staff, underpaid staff and, at times, not the right staff because the right staff cannot be hired without a competitive wage – creates a slippery slope because the needs of the community and the clients haven't changed. Staff turnover is expensive. Training and knowledge retention are key challenges in any sector, particularly in a booming economy or in challenging fields, such as the human services.

"We are grossly underfunded when compared with government entities. We tend to lose out on the best staff sometimes because they can do less work elsewhere for double the pay."

Without sustainable funding, the findings from this survey indicate:

A deterioration in the sector's ability to develop sustainable and proactive human resource planning that addresses the competitive environment in Alberta and ensures continued quality service delivery to the community.

Without strong organizational leadership and people management, the findings from this survey indicate:

A sector that is not responding with the capacity it has to address many of the issues that are not related to funding. With good planning and leadership, there's much that can be accomplished that doesn't rely on funding.

Change starts **here**

This is not someone else's issue.
Change starts *here* in your
organization first.

Employees suggest employers can be more creative and progressive in how they acknowledge and compensate employees in order to attract, develop and retain staff by:

- Offering flexible work schedules, alternative working arrangements, and extending medical benefits
- Providing paid professional development and presenting opportunities for advancement
- Empowering employees to own their role and developing a positive working environment
- Including employees in decision-making and recognizing their contributions
- Advocating on behalf of their employees when negotiating with funders

Other suggestions included simple and easy-to-implement opportunities such as dress-down and pizza days, gift cards, and bonus time off.

Stay tuned to hear more from
100,000 Voices

The Nonprofit Sector Profile Project now enters the second phase. The responses from this survey will help shape the *100,000 Voices* campaign. We invite you to help further. Contact us if you're interested in learning more about this project. Please support, promote and advance our *100,000 Voices* campaign once launched to raise the profile of the nonprofit sector throughout Alberta.

WorkforceConnect is working on developing a sustainable nonprofit sector workforce – use the resources and influence the work!

You can:

- Utilize workforceconnect.ca – for future opportunities to build on this valuable research. Watch for upcoming peer learning opportunities.
- If you are a funder, take this information to help shape your organization's exploration and direction as you determine future funding in the nonprofit sector.



The *Alberta Nonprofit Workforce Council* coordinates a province-wide, cross-sectoral implementation of *A Workforce Strategy for Alberta's Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector*. **To learn more, contact:**

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