



# Stepping stones - *Envisioning what's next for building talent*

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This spring has been filled with opportunities to connect, converse, and consider how best to strengthen nonprofit sector talent today and build talent for strong and vibrant communities of tomorrow.

What does our destination look like? What paths are currently being taken? Which stepping stones show promise? Who is interested in the journey?

These questions provided the base for two rich conversations hosted by the Community Foundations of Canada (CFC), with contributions from the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

## **Envisioning talent needs 25 years from now**

To choose pathways forward, we need a sense of where we are headed.

Through a foresight exercise, a small thoughtful group of younger professionals from different sectors were brought together to explore a range of possible futures and discuss with peers from across the country what Canadian communities may look like in 2040. This day long exercise of interactive, reflective and intentional thinking had an end goal of envisioning future talent needs to support strong and vibrant communities.

The conversation went in many directions as the group thought about future communities - the increasing impacts of technology, the disappearance of the middle class, decreased job security and continued transformation of traditional systems. Turning the focus to the people in these communities, their interests and ways of working, the following themes emerged:

- More people are becoming entrepreneurs because of changes to political and economic systems that are putting more onus on individuals
- With the increase of entrepreneurs a sense of isolation is experienced as work is increasingly being done remotely and through contracts
- The traditional educational system will no longer be relevant as an experiential and customized learning approach is adopted

What does this mean for the nonprofit sector of the future? Will some of the work that is now done by organizations known for stability be carried out by entrepreneurs characterized by greater agility? Will we need to support these entrepreneurs, or the organizations in collaborating with them? What about the way a job applicant's educational experience is assessed – will there be an increased focus on competencies? This conversation is just beginning.

## **Building talent for the nonprofit sector**

Given the important role nonprofit organizations play in building strong and vibrant communities, the second conversation focused on how to support the vitality of nonprofit sector talent.

Over 50 people – invited because they currently play a role in this context - participated in a 2 day *National Conversation*. Despite busy schedules, the room was filled to capacity. Participants shared knowledge about successful efforts, talked about directions for moving forward and discovered opportunities for collective action. Overall, the experience was a compelling confirmation of our need as a sector to connect around best practices, lessons learned and developing work.

Several key points surfaced through the discussions and challenged us to reconsider our perspectives:

- Talent to what end? How does our work *today* fit with what we will need *tomorrow*? What is our vision for the sector in 2050?
- Are we prepared to look at everything differently, be innovative?
- Cooperation and collaboration are critical – at a level we aren't used to. To achieve this, we will need to overcome old dynamics, the urban-rural and cross-sector differences, and divergent viewpoints.
- We need to be our own champions and consider ourselves as an essential service. Move away from a scarcity perspective, and instead demonstrate an abundance mindset; what we can do vs. what we do or don't have.
- This work is important and being intentional about it is critical. Will we put skin in the game, and if so where?

Twelve themes were identified as needing attention and focused work. The first three were selected by participants for in-depth discussions during the conversation.

### *1) Identify and carry out national level work*

National level work was identified as being essential. This one topic galvanized the group, as they see that a national effort has the capacity to: build a common front, inspire, foster momentum, and support consistency and coherence.

Types of work identified ranged from HR management support – in particular the need to maintain and develop the [HR Toolkit](#) - to government relations, supporting collaborative efforts and developing national research priorities.

A small group has already begun to craft a plan to ensure that national work can take place.

### *2) Position the nonprofit sector as employers of choice (Brand)*

The sector is capable of competing for the skills and talent it needs. To compete, organizations need to remain current with: their labour market competitors, the reasons why people are or would be drawn to sector employment and how to build workplaces that respond to labour force needs.

While delivering on the *brand* is a challenge for each workplace, a collective effort is needed to explore what needs to take place to solidify and communicate this brand.

### *3) Leveraging efforts on leadership development*

There is a critical need to invest in the leadership of today and tomorrow. It is not a 'one size fits all' – given the wide diversity of organizations in the sector. Work in leadership development must leave room for different types of approaches and different types of *leaders*. Lots of work is taking place but we are missing the connective tissue.

*4) Developing data and information* - Collaborate to gather data and insights about people, skills, needs and opportunities.

*5) Shaping policy directions* – Develop the sector's capacity to explore policy issues and exert influence where appropriate.

*6) Keeping on top of technology trends* - Explore how technology can enhance employee experience and support an organization's ability to perform day-to-day functions.

*7) Looking differently at nonprofit sector work and talent* – Explore creative ways to adjust to today's realities and seize new opportunities.

*8) Supporting good people practices* – Focus on ensuring that good practices 'take hold' in organizations and evolve as needed with the changing workforce.

*9) Engaging new sources of talent* – Prepare organizations at all levels (e.g. Boards, management and front line staff) to seek out and engage people from under-utilized talent pools.

10) *Engaging younger workers* – Encourage organizations to review their current practices and share more broadly the effective ways youth are being engaged.

11) *Engaging older (legacy) workers* – Share the benefits of creating multi-generational organizations. Review models for valuing and integrating the wisdom of elders.

12) *Fostering skills development* – Build the capacity of organizations to support skills development and strengthen the connections with postsecondary institutions to influence curricula.

## **Your role in building talent**

There is strong interest and commitment for this work which is GREAT because everyone needs to be involved! By sharing this document, our intent is to offer everyone the chance to find their *stepping stones* in this journey.

Start by considering how you build the capacity of talent in your own organization.

Then consider what you can contribute to collective efforts. Are there successful practices you can share, expertise you can impart or time you can use to explore the above themes? For example, Elizabeth McIsaac of Maytree Foundation has taken a step by inviting others to explore with her a *commons* approach to sharing leadership development materials, knowledge and successes. Mike Grogan of the Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations has volunteered to be a point of contact for people interested in continuing the important work on data collection and labour market insights. Cathy Taylor of the Ontario Nonprofit Network has also volunteered as a point person for information on policy-focused work that is ongoing.

**Feel free to share your thoughts or questions about this work with us:**

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