

Intersections and Innovations

Change for Canada's Voluntary and Nonprofit Sector



The Muttart Foundation



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Acknowledgements

For far too long, Canada has lacked a comprehensive resource examining Canada's charitable sector. That has now ended.

The Muttart Foundation has spent many years focusing on building the capacity of charities in this country. The publication of this collection is another contribution to that effort. By understanding more about itself, the sector can continue to develop and find new ways to serve Canadians and those in need outside our nation.

The authors of these essays bring different perspectives on the role and inner workings of Canada's charities. Collectively, they bring an unprecedented insight into the work of organizations whose diversity is exceeded only by their desire to serve.

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The work of all of these individuals has come together in this resource which we dedicate to all of those in, or interested in, Canada's charitable sector.

Malcolm Burrows, President

Bob Wyatt, Executive Director



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Leaders, Employees,
and Volunteers



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Part II Navigating a Changing Environment

The People Environment: Leaders, Employees, and Volunteers

Chapter 18

Decent Work in the Nonprofit Sector

Pamela Uppal and Monina Febria
Ontario Nonprofit Network



The concept of “decent work” – a global movement for fair and productive work – is being applied to the nonprofit sector in Canada. This chapter provides a brief background on the nonprofit sector labour force, and then dives into characteristics of the sector that impact employment and create barriers to implementing decent work. Recognizing that decent work is possible and that there are solutions and strategies at the organizational, network, and systems levels, along with a value proposition that everyone in society benefits from decent work in the nonprofit sector.

Building a Decent Work Movement

Developed by the International Labour Organization (ILO), “decent work” is a way in which to conceptualize fair, equitable, and stable work (ILO, 2018). More specifically, decent work consists of opportunities for work that are productive and deliver a) fair income, b) security in the workplace and social protections, c) better opportunities for personal development and social integration, d) the freedom to express concerns, organize, and participate in the decisions that affect workers’ own lives, and e) equality for all workers. The ILO’s decent work vision and agenda is a commitment to developing high-quality jobs and working collectively to ensure that structures, regulations, and practices are in place to support organizations and individuals (Lalande & Ymeren, 2015). Decent work is not just about meeting minimum requirements; it is also about creating workplaces in which diverse people can thrive and recognizing the positive impact decent workplaces have on communities.



It is a global movement where individuals, organizations, governments, and communities recognize that decent work is a critical way to address many transnational social issues, such as poverty, and to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth (ILO, 2018). The global economic crisis of 2008/09 in particular emboldened policy-makers around the globe to stress the urgency of quality jobs with social protections and respect for rights in the workplace (ILO, 2018). Decent work is also embedded in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity.

In Canada, the decent work movement is slowly growing across sectors. Organizations in Ontario, such as the Atkinson Foundation, the Workers' Action Centre, the Association of Early Childhood Educators, the Decent Work and Health Network, and the Better Way Alliance are using this approach to advocate for better working conditions not just in their sectors, but for all workers.

The Ontario Nonprofit Network (ONN) is building a decent work movement in Ontario's nonprofit sector to strengthen one of its most critical resources – its labour force – and champion fair working conditions and social policies. The sector's labour force is key in visioning, leading, and delivering critical programs and services; achieving objectives; and engaging in public policy advocacy for the most vulnerable people in communities (Edwardh & Clutterbuck, 2015; Hall et al., 2003). The decent work movement in the sector is driven by the belief that when employees are offered decent work, they excel – and so do the organizations in which they work. As a result, nonprofits can better meet their missions and contribute to creating thriving communities.

As the nonprofit sector is women-majority (an estimated 80% of the sector in Canada consists of women workers), ONN's decent work movement means decent work for women as well.¹ This entails looking intentionally at which supports women workers in particular need to thrive in their workplaces. In doing so, sector stakeholders can ensure that employment experiences of different groups of women and appropriate solutions are incorporated into broader labour-force strategy conversations. The concept of decent work for women can be a catalyst for women's economic empowerment.

Using the ILO's decent work approach as a guiding framework, the ONN has identified seven elements of decent work that are of particular relevance for the nonprofit sector:

- **Employment opportunities:** Access to quality jobs, recruitment and retention of workers with diverse backgrounds and skill sets, and recognizing the impact of being a feminized sector on the type of employment opportunities available.
- **Fair income:** Adequate earnings, social protections, predictable income that ensures income security, equal pay, equal pay for work of equal value, and pay transparency.
- **Health and retirement benefits:** Health benefits including drugs and vision, dental, life insurance, retirement benefits (a pension or contribution to an RRSP), and top-ups to maternity and parental-leave benefits.²
- **Stable employment:** Employment protections and specific policies and mechanisms that are put in place to reduce high turnover and seasonal or precarious and unpredictable work.
- **Opportunities for development and advancement:** Access to both formal opportunities



and a culture of growth in an organization to develop and advance.

- Equality rights at work: Employees are able to express their concerns, participate equally, feel included and safe in the workplace, and have access to safe reporting mechanisms for discrimination and harassment.
- Culture and leadership: Regulations, standards, and leadership norms that govern workplaces, management styles, and work cultures; gender parity and diversity in sector leadership; and challenging gendered roles in organizations.

Over the years, the decent work lens on Ontario's nonprofit labour force has resonated with diverse stakeholders, including boards of directors, senior leaders, frontline workers, communities, and funders.

Spotlight: The Better Way Alliance

The Better Way Alliance is a national campaign composed of employers (for-profit and nonprofit) who believe that investing in their employees is not only an investment in the long-term success of their companies, but also an investment in their communities and the broader Canadian economy. As they state, "It just makes good business sense."

The alliance was successful in drawing attention to the importance of decent work for businesses by participating in Government of Ontario consultations for Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act, 2017 (Bill 148), Making Ontario Open for Business Act, 2018 (Bill 47), and Pay Transparency Act, 2018 regulations.

A Gendered Workforce

An estimated two million paid employees work in the Canadian nonprofit sector (Hall et al, 2004).³ Interestingly, nonprofits (excluding hospitals and post-secondary institutions) with large budgets account for only a small percentage of sector organizations but employ the largest share of paid staff. Organizations with the smallest budgets account for the largest percentage of sector organizations yet employ the fewest employees (Hall et al., 2004). This characteristic of the sector signals that a "one size fits all" labour force strategy cannot be implemented sector-wide.

The sector's workforce is also women-majority. According to the 2008 results of the former Canadian HR Council for the Nonprofit Sector's study of nonprofit sector employees, women make up 75% of the nonprofit sector labour force in Canada (HR Council, 2008). Charity Village's *Canadian Nonprofit Sector Salary and Benefits Studies* from 2011 to 2019 also report that the sector consists primarily of women workers at all position levels and that there have been no significant changes to that number since the first survey was issued in 2011.

There are limited data on Canada's nonprofit labour force and no data on diversity within the labour force. It is unclear how many workers in the nonprofit sector across Canada are



immigrant, Indigenous and racialized, from the LGBTQ community, or identify having visible or invisible disabilities. It is also unclear which job titles they hold and which subsectors they work in. This is important because a gendered and racialized division of labour exists in the sector.

Although more than a decade old, a snapshot of Toronto data highlights that racialized women workers make up a large portion of Toronto's nonprofit labour force. Using Statistics Canada's 2006 industry and occupation data in *Not Working for Profit*, Zizys (2011) found that in Toronto (census metropolitan area) almost 42% of women workers in the sector were from racialized groups (referred to as visible minorities in the report), compared to about 41% of women workers from racialized groups in all other industries. There was a higher concentration of Black women in the nonprofit sector (11.8%) compared to all other industries, followed by Chinese women (5.8%), and Filipino women (5.4%) (Zizys, 2011). About 48% of women workers in the nonprofit sector were from immigrant populations, a proportion that was slightly less than across all other industries (Zizys, 2011). Having more robust and up-to-date data on diversity within the nonprofit sector labour force would be useful in creating labour-force strategies that meet the needs of various workers and fill gaps.

Barriers to Decent Work

The nonprofit sector differs from other sectors, with its own characteristics, challenges, and opportunities that significantly impact employment in the sector. For example, a key characteristic of the nonprofit sector is its ongoing dependency on time-limited and restricted funding in a climate of resource constraints.⁴ The only national nonprofit sector research (the National Survey of Nonprofit and Voluntary Organizations project, conducted in 2003) noted that financial capacity issues were among the greatest challenges for nonprofits and charities in meeting their missions. It was about having not just more money, but "better money" that was stable, longer term, helped fund core operations, and gave organizations autonomy to direct their operations and programs (Hall et al., 2004).

Resource constraints can also be exacerbated by legislative and regulatory structures, impacting long-term planning and flexibility of organizations (Lalande & Ymeren, 2015). For example, the Pay Equity Act in Ontario was particularly difficult for nonprofit organizations to implement when it came into effect because it requires critical human resource (HR) support for administration and resources to cover any pay-equity liabilities. More recently, while many organizations in Ontario's nonprofit sector had in principle welcomed the Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act, 2017, which increased the minimum wage and provided other protections for employees, few nonprofit subsectors saw an increase in their funding to support increased costs.

Another challenge is the complex narrative of the sector. The sector is understood as "do gooder," "caring," "helping," and "altruistic" for a number of reasons. It has roots in religious organizations and pervasive references to the charity model. Moreover it is considered carework⁵ and thus women's work, particularly that of immigrant, racialized, and low-income women. As a result, how the sector is understood and valued is directly linked to the perception of its importance and the impact of its work. For this reason, there is a dominant narrative that those working in the sector should not be paid as well as people working in other industries and sectors and that all resources should be focused on programs and clients.



Given the sector's competing priorities in a changing and resource-scarce environment, many nonprofits are left with an impossible choice of investing in their workforce or investing in the communities they serve. It is this context that can often make it difficult to implement decent work practices. Inevitably, employment conditions are the most affected as HR is usually the first part of a nonprofit organization's budget to be cut (McIsaac et al., 2012). This has a variety of negative impacts, including increased precarious part-time and contract employment, non-competitive wages, increased shift work, and fewer benefits and pensions. These in turn contribute to job dissatisfaction and result in high staff turnover in the sector (McIsaac et al., 2012). Compensation levels for nonprofit sector work is much lower than national averages in Canada. For example, new national data reveals that in 2017 the average compensation in nonprofits across Canada was \$42,500, while the average compensation in the entire labour force was approximately \$59,800 (Statistics Canada, 2019).

To better understand the particular barriers women workers face in Ontario's nonprofit sector, ONN conducted a comprehensive [literature review](#), a series of learning circles (focus groups), and a survey through a gender-based intersectional lens (GBA+). Six key findings emerged from this work.⁶

First, the sector is women-majority but not women-led (ONN, 2018). Based on their employment share, women are disproportionately concentrated in non-leadership positions and are more likely to lead smaller-sized and low-budget organizations (ONN, 2018). Women made up 71% of senior leadership roles and 85% of support staff roles (Charity Village, 2019). Unequal job opportunities and a glass ceiling exist particularly for immigrant and racialized women and women with disabilities, resulting in a gendered and racialized hierarchy in the labour force (ONN, 2018).

Second, women have lower average compensation than men (ONN, 2018). Three components impact women's compensation in the sector (ONN, 2018). First is a phenomenon known as the "care penalty," where wages in the sector are lower compared to other sectors, despite the fact the workforce is highly educated and experienced. Within the sector, women earn less than men, especially in senior leadership positions. The gender wage gap between men and women is the greatest at the senior leadership level, at 17%, where men reported an average salary of \$100,733 and women \$85,760 (Charity Village, 2019). Last, limited access to pension plans, health benefits, and maternity-leave top-ups in particular lower women's compensation over the course of their careers.

Next, women experience sexism at all levels (ONN, 2018). Busting the myth that sexism doesn't exist in a women-majority sector, women experience sexism on a day-to-day basis – in the types of roles they occupy, in distribution of work, and in the value of that work (ONN, 2018). Board members were cited as treating their male and female executive directors unequally. Women also overwhelmingly experience bullying and some sexual harassment (ONN, 2018). Bullying was experienced from other women in similar positions and those in power, while sexual harassment was experienced in interactions with external parties, such as clients.

Gender plays a significant role in the nonprofit sector (ONN, 2018). At the macro level, nonprofit work is considered carework, and thus women's work, decreasing its value, while power dynamics between organizations and their boards, donors, or funders can be rooted in traditional notions of masculinity and femininity (ONN, 2018). At the micro level in the sector, precarious employment is increasing, and the sector has difficulty recruiting and retaining staff,



dealing with lower wages and limited access to benefits and professional development (ONN, 2018).

Racism and ageism are other common forms of discrimination (ONN, 2018). People's identities are complex, and discrimination is experienced in multiple ways. Some women experience discrimination primarily based on gender; some at the intersection of gender and another aspect of their identity, such as ability or age; and others primarily because of one part of their identity that is not gender, such as race (ONN, 2018).

Decent Work Is Possible: How to Start Implementing

While implementing decent work may seem like a daunting task, organizations are successfully incorporating it into their workplaces. Across Canada, nonprofits are becoming champions of decent work. The goal of the decent work movement is to start somewhere and to build on it over time at the organizational, network, and systems levels. It is in a coordinated and holistic way that decent work practices can become the norm in the nonprofit sector.

We make decent work happen



“We meet quarterly as an entire staff to review the annual budget together, making group decisions.”

Alexandra Badzak,
Director
and Chief
Executive Officer
Ottawa Art Gallery



“The checklist is an excellent tool for our Board of Directors to track our progress and set priorities.”

Bill Sinclair,
Executive Director
St. Stephen's
Community House



“By increasing our full-time positions ... we will get closer to our goal for staff to work for one employer.”

Laura Hanley,
Executive Director
Community Living
Guelph Wellington



“We held an information session on defined pension benefits ... This is a great first step.”

Debbie Douglas,
Executive Director
Ontario Council of
Agencies Serving
Immigrants (OCASI)



Organizational Level

Individual organizations have a crucial role to play in promoting decent work in their organizations and communities. While some decent work practices may require financial resources, others will simply require time (Lalande & Ymeren, 2015).

A starting point for organizations is to have a dialogue about decent work with staff, management, and boards of directors. Asking critical questions, such as what does decent work look like in the workplace, can open the door for developing and implementing decent work policies and practices that are rooted in the needs of the organization.

There are a variety of resources to support nonprofits in doing this work. As an early adopter of the decent work framework, the Toronto Neighbourhood Centres (TNC) developed and piloted two free tools: the Decent Work Charter and the Decent Work Checklist. The charter serves as a vision document for organizations to connect their values and goals to decent work. Often, boards show their commitment to decent work by signing the charter. The checklist is an organizational assessment tool of workplace practices. Based on the seven elements of decent work discussed above, it helps organizations identify areas where they are practising decent work, and the areas they need to build up.

Once strengths and areas for improvement are identified, it is important for organizations to develop a plan of action. This might include a pension plan, exploring decent work tools (121 ideas), sharing experiences across the sector in a communications campaign (for example, ONN's Voices Carry campaign), or reviewing compensation structures through a gender-based intersectional lens to ensure everyone is making a fair wage. It could also mean updating maternity and parental leave policies to reflect changing family compositions and unpaid carework.

We make decent work happen



“We hold staff appreciation lunches that include workshops on professional development and staff wellness.”

Herman Ellis Jr.,
Acting Executive Director
Scadding Court
Community Centre



“We are pleased that we have introduced a pension plan for staff in 2019.”

Sarah Hobbs Blyth,
Executive Director
Planned Parenthood
Toronto



“We ensure that staff receive regular training and leadership opportunities.”

Elsbeth McKay,
Executive Director
Operation Come Home



“We understand we need to empower people to embrace personal development.”

Daljit Garry,
Executive Director
Wesley Urban
Ministries



Sector Spotlight: [St. Stephen's Community House](#)

St. Stephen's Community House (SSCH), established in 1962, is a multi-service agency in Toronto that has contributed to the development and piloting of the Decent Work Charter and the Decent Work Checklist.

SSCH is a proud supporter and champion of decent work. Its board has signed on to the Decent Work Charter, and the organization has incorporated decent work into its strategic plan. In addition, SSCH has committed to practising decent work internally and externally, by educating clients and program participants about the importance of decent work and by challenging employer partners to provide decent wages and stable employment as a requirement to working with their employment services team.

Network Level

Connecting and convening to share decent work practices at the network level (across the sector or across individual subsectors, such as arts and culture, settlement services, sports and recreation) is another way in which to make decent work a reality for more workers. Often individual nonprofit organizations don't have the capacity to tackle HR issues and implement solutions and can feel siloed. Connecting and convening at the subsector and sector level is a way for staff and leaders to share and learn from each other. There is a need for networks to support and help one another tackle issues that they cannot take on alone, as well as find new ways to support and develop the well-being of nonprofit workers in the sector (Lalande & Ymeren, 2015). At the subsector level, people can connect and convene through provincial associations and coalition networks, while at the sector level through nonprofit networks, leadership networks, and affinity groups.

Sector Spotlight: [Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario](#)

The Association of Early Childhood Educators Ontario (AECEO) is a provincial association for early childhood educators (ECEs), and its primary purpose is to advocate for respect, recognition, and appropriate wages and working conditions for all ECEs. AECEO recently adopted the Decent Work Charter as part of its Professional Pay and Decent Work campaign. In the lead-up to the June 2018 Ontario provincial election, AECEO used decent work language and the framework in its advocacy work and in discussions with government.



Systems Level

Organizational- and network-level efforts are further strengthened by systems-wide change. While organizations and networks can work on mitigating decent work barriers, changes at the systems level in public policy can help create an overall enabling environment for decent work. There are a range of initiatives across the sector that require cooperation, coordination, support, and advocacy on the part of the sector and government to influence policy change (Lalande & Ymeren, 2015).

For instance, engaging both governmental and non-governmental funders on how they can use the decent work lens in their approach to funding can allow organizations to implement decent work practices that require more resources. Organizations can then ask for higher operating costs or include various HR expenses in their budgets such as pension contributions.

The decent work lens is also important for social and labour policies. Changes here can improve the broader labour market and social safety net, raising the floor of working conditions for workers within the sector and beyond. For example, higher minimum wages and strong employment protections, pay transparency, pay equity, and adequate maternity and parental-leave benefits create a better environment for everyone, and decent work can be more easily offered.

We All Benefit from Decent Work

Global and local movements are amplifying the message of decent work – of fair, stable, and productive workplaces for all. They are recognizing that the decent work lens is not only a solution for broader social issues but that it can also strengthen the nonprofit sector's gendered labour force.

While multiple barriers to offering decent work in nonprofits exist, the context in which the sector operates is very different from that of the public and private sectors and is uniquely tied to employment. The nonprofit sector must offer decent work. If it does not, the sector will not be able to meet increased service demands, recruit and retain skilled employees, or adapt to the future of work and a new generation of workers.

By championing decent work at the organizational, network, and systems level, the sector can attract and retain high-calibre professional staff with the skills and knowledge to deliver public benefit for years to come, building a stronger and more resilient sector. A healthier, happier, and better-supported labour force creates stronger organizations and, consequently, thriving communities.



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Endnotes

¹ The term “women-majority” is used rather than “women-dominated” because, although the sector consists mostly of women workers, women are underrepresented in senior leadership positions. ONN uses an inclusive definition of women that recognizes and includes trans women, queer women, and nonbinary people.

² Employers have the option of “topping up” their workers’ Employment Insurance, maternity, and parental-leave benefits to reduce the difference between the benefits and the workers’ regular earnings.

³ This number includes those employed in hospitals and post-secondary institutions, which was only one-third of the two million paid employees.

⁴ “Restricted funding” means money that has deliverables, outcomes, or directions attached, while “unrestricted” means money that the organization can use as it chooses for mission activities.

⁵ An act of caring for others that is unpaid (parents raising their children, family caring for relatives with disabilities, elder care) or paid (childcare providers, teachers, nurses, home-care providers). See ONN’s [Key Terms](#) document.

⁶ See ONN’s [Women’s Voices](#) report for complete findings.



Biography

Pamela Uppal and Monina Febria, Ontario Nonprofit Network

Pamela Uppal is a policy advisor at the Ontario Nonprofit Network, leading its future-of-work file with a nonprofit and gender lens.

Monina Febria holds a master of arts in globalization and international development from the University of Ottawa and an honours bachelor of arts in international studies from the University of Toronto. Monina has more than 15 years' experience within the social-justice, immigrant, and refugee-inclusion space at the local and international level, including at World Education Services, the Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, the Ontario Nonprofit Network, AMNLAE Casa de La Mujer, and the Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council. Monina was project lead on the decent work portfolio at ONN and facilitated the establishment of the sector-wide pension plan for nonprofits in Ontario.

