PROFILING THE NON-PROFIT SECTOR IN THE WOOD BUFFALO REGION

fuse social

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FuseSocial would like to recognize the team who created this report.

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Land Acknowledgement

FuseSocial would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the Indigenous Peoples of Treaty 8 region, which includes the Cree, Dene, and Métis, whose footsteps have marked these lands for centuries.

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

The non-profit sector in the Wood Buffalo Region currently finds itself in a state of dynamic change. This change has been precipitated by a host of environmental, economic, and social factors. Factors such as the downturn in the economy, the devastation caused by wildfires, and social issues brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic have forced non-profit organizations in the Wood Buffalo Region to adapt and significantly adjust how they support residents within the community. Like most situations involving this type of response, there are both complex challenges and unique opportunities for improvement.

Prior to developing solutions to these challenges or capitalizing on these opportunities for improvement, clarity about the composition of the non-profit sector and the nature of the organizations that compose this sector in the Wood Buffalo Region is required. FuseSocial is committed to pursuing this clarity. This pursuit has involved gleaning useful insights from other organizations with a vested interest in understanding the broader non-profit sector in Canada and the province of Alberta. Several of these organizations have conducted research studies. While the results and recommendations reported from these studies are useful, important local knowledge gaps persist. Thus, in 2021 FuseSocial commissioned a research study in an effort to fill some of these knowledge gaps and support the development of clarity for the non-profit sector in the Wood Buffalo Region.

This report begins with an overview of key research studies previously conducted by other organizations. This overview is provided to set establish the landscape and set the context for FuseSocial's research study. The remainder of this report consists of the methods used to conduct FuseSocial's research study as well as the results that emerged from the study. It is hoped that this report will serve as the baseline for all future efforts to profile, reconcile, and understand the non-profit sector in the Wood Buffalo Region.

SECTION 2: RELEVANT RESEARCH STUDIES

The non-profit sector is a crucial pillar of all communities across Canada. The organizations that comprise this sector are commonly viewed as an important part of the fabric that shapes that character, culture, and customs that residents in communities adopt and live by. An innumerable amount of supports and opportunities are offered to residents by non-profit organizations and no community would function well without these organizations. To better understand how the non-profit sector lives, breathes, and evolves numerous research studies have been carried out within Alberta and across Canada. Recent studies have focused on how to stabilize and improve the non-profit sector as it grapples with change in uncertain times. Many studies focused on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Six key studies are summarized here.

Study 1

Catalyst for Change: A Roadmap to a Stronger Charitable and Non-Profit Sector

In 2018 the Senate of Canada examined and reported on the charitable and non-profit sector in Canada. The task was deemed to be urgent with service demands rising and funding becoming increasingly more constrained. The Senate determined that a new roadmap was needed to enable the sector to continue to build upon its strengths as it adapts to new and emerging realities. Through the course of the study the Senate held 24 public hearings and heard from 160 individuals, including government officials, legal and policy experts, funders, volunteers, front-line workers, and board members. Four key topics were explored through this study.

1. The people working and volunteering within the sector.
2. Funding for the sector.
3. The rules governing the sector.
4. The need for a "home within the federal government for the sector.

Key findings from the study were as follows.

1. People lie at the heart of the sector success. However, the Senate identified that charities and non-profit organizations are concerned about the barriers to volunteering and the challenge of recruiting the next generation of volunteers and staff. Concerns about pay pensions benefits and training work top of mind amongst employers within the sector.
2. The charitable and non-profit sector relies on three main sources of funding: government funding, donations, and earned income. The Senate concluded that innovative approaches are needed to ensure the future viability of these sources of funding.
3. It was found that the current rules, guidance, and policies that organisations in the sector are expected to operate under make it difficult for them to partner with other organizations both within Canada and abroad.
4. There is no one single strategy or quick fix that would ensure the sector can continue to thrive and play a vital role at the heart of Canadian communities. A key to the sector's continued success is a strong relationship between the sector and the federal government.

At the conclusion of this study the Senate was impressed and inspired in equal measure. Impressed by the unstinting commitment of those who work tirelessly to serve their communities locally nationally and internationally. Inspired by the deep reservoir of talent and tenacity that runs through our country. The acknowledged that the sector enriches the lives up citizens across the country in an infinite variety of ways and should be provided with the resources and respect that it required to be sustainable and grow to meet challenges as they arise. To this end, the Senate made 42 recommendations. These recommendations aimed at accomplishing the following.

- That the people who comprise the sector are fully recognized and supported.
- That a national volunteer strategy is established.
- That strong and stable funding for organizations within the sector is ensured.
- That donations do not languish in donor advised funds.
- That clear rules, guidance, and policies are in place to support governance and operations.
- That charities and non-profit organizations have greater freedom to work with partners.
- That the legal meaning of the term "charity" and "non-profit" correspond with public expectations.
- That a strong relationship between the sector and the federal government is built.
- That a report on the state of the sector is developed annually.

Study 2

Transforming the Non-Profit Community in Edmonton

In 2021 the Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations (ECVO) conducted research to identify myths, trends, and areas for change their non-profit community. The goal was to lay the foundation for a model of change that would allow the community to transform and reinvent itself in the face of emerging challenges.

ECVO facilitated 24 focus groups involving 58 stakeholders within the community to accomplish the following.

1. To begin the process of critical reflection by discussing the ideological shifts and operational changes they have emerged over the past several decades of change in the non-profit community.
2. To gather information about our current ways of thinking and doing to improve both individual and organizational circumstances.
3. To ensure that individuals working in the sector were not only supportive of this work but ready and willing to engage in collective actions to generate change.

Myths and trends were identified during these focus groups. These myths and trends are summarized below.

MYTHS

1. That the non-profit sector is truly voluntary.
2. That non-profit organizations are flexible and responsive.
3. That non-profit organizations operate as representatives of the community.
4. That the non-profit sector is apolitical.
5. That non-profit programs are fully data-driven and evidence-based.
6. That the non-profit sector is truly altruistic.

TRENDS

1. Short-term, contract-based funding
2. Venture philanthropy
3. 'Business-like' practices
4. The organization as the primary unit of analysis
5. Outdated board structures
6. Individualized programming of subsectors

The ECVO proposed a model of change to support the "re-imagining" of their non-profit community. This model consisted of four pillars: the pillar of service, the pillar of power, the pillar of consciousness, and the pillar of policy. Each pillar was supported by a distinct series of recommendations to enable action. The recommendations for each pillar are presented below.

PILLAR OF SERVICE

1. Shift our focus from organizational relief to structural transformation by articulating a 50-to-100-year vision for Edmonton's non-profit community.
2. Reframe how we organize and deliver services, while de-centring the organization.
3. Stand behind the value of the work, while seeking new funding arrangements.

PILLAR OF POWER

1. Authentically engage with and remain accountable to the community.
2. Stop discussing the lack of diversity of our leadership positions and do something about it.
3. Train and hire those impacted by interpersonal, institutional, and systemic harms.
4. Address the inequities in workforce practices.

PILLAR OF CONSCIOUSNESS

1. Build the social justice competencies of the non-profit community.
2. Value the need for structural change and fund the mechanisms required to generate it.
3. Introduce new knowledge systems into our decision-making processes.
4. Collectively position the non-profit community as an essential element of our social, political, and economic fabric.

PILLAR OF POLICY

1. Develop a system-level framework for advocacy and awareness.
2. Collectively invest in a mechanism to do the research required for proper advocacy.
3. Be brave enough to fund advocacy efforts.

ECVO expressed hope that their research would serve as a catalyst for a process of bottom-up mobilization for transformative change. To this end, ECVO challenged their community to make use of the information in their research report to build new forms and methods of participation, decision making, leadership, and resource distribution.

Studies 3 and 4

From Emergency to Opportunity: Building a Resilient Alberta Non-Profit Sector After COVID-19 and Community Prosperity Now: A Blueprint for Community Recovery

In 2020 the Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations (CCVO) identified the need to assess the impact of recent changes brough about by the COVID-19 pandemic on the state of the non-profit sector. This led CCVO to conduct two research studies.

The first study drew on data collected in the 2020 Alberta Non-Profit Survey, and from surveys by the Alberta Non-Profit Network (ABNN), Imagine Canada, and other partner organizations across Canada. This study highlighted four areas where non-profit organizations are expected to feel the greatest impact of the pandemic.

1. Increased service demand without timely recognition and support.
2. Decreased revenue.
3. Diminished organizational capacity.
4. Transitioning technology and the impacts of remote work.

CCVO recommended that organizations in the non-profit sector work together and collaborate with each other to identify and implement solutions to these issues. Further, CCVO stated but the private sector is well positioned to contribute two solutions as well by providing pro bono services, encouragement to staff employees in their organizations to volunteer, provision of emergency planning professionals, access to corporate training opportunities, and technology access training and maintenance. CCVO called upon funders to Fund operational costs, emergency service supports, and innovative projects that address the impacts outlined above. With provincial government support, CCVO reasoned that current and future issues associated with the pandemic and other emergencies that resemble the pandemic can be appropriately managed effectively responded to.

The second study delved deeper into the findings from the first study and provided a blueprint for community recovery. The blueprint provided asked the following.

1. That the non-sector, private sector, provincial government, and funders work together to reframe their thinking about the role and purpose of non-profit sector.
2. That the non-profit sector be bold.
3. That the non-profit sector create more possibilities by focusing on select key priority areas.
4. That governments and community champions supported investment in social infrastructure.

The fourth ask of CCVO's community recovery blueprint came with a specific recommendation. Namely, that the provincial government create a $350 million Social Infrastructure Fund to aid community recovery. This Fund would address the diversity of the non-profit sector, the mental health of community members, support for technological advancement, and engaging Alberta youth to be the leaders of our communities.

Studies 5 and 6

The Impact of COVID-19 on Alberta's Non-Profit and Voluntary Organizations and Imagine Canada's Sector Monitor: Charities and the COVID-19 Pandemic

In 2020 the Alberta Non-Profit Network (ABNN) and Imagine Canada both conducted research studies to assess the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. ABNN's study focused on Alberta non-profit organizations and Imagine Canada's study took non-profit organizations from across Canada into consideration.

Key findings from the ABNN study were as follows.

- More than 60% of organizations anticipate dealing with the impacts of COVID-19 long-term.
- Five anticipated future impacts of the pandemic were concerns over low financial reserves, increased demand for services by clients and communities, reduced hours for staff due to budget constraints, difficulties engaging volunteers, and reduced revenue from earned income.
- More than 75% of organizations indicated that emergency funding would be needed to maintain operations and meet service demands.
- Organizations would like emergency funding to support their operations, service delivery, and adoption of new technologies.

Key findings from the Imagine Canada study were as follows.
- Organizations are experiencing significant and broad-based declines in revenue.
- Organizations have been forced to reduce paid staff and have a limited base of volunteers.
- Organizations with earned income have been hit the hardest.
- Organizations are pessimistic for the future but are continuing to operate, nonetheless.

Both ABNN and Imagine Canada recommended periodic, ongoing surveys to monitor emerging trends and developments in the non-profit sector. This recommendation was based on the fact that the duration and long-term impacts of the pandemic are largely unknown due to the unprecedented nature of the issue. Without ongoing monitoring important impacts may be unreported and consequently overlooked.

Lessons from Relevant Research Studies Aforementioned

Six important lessons can be learned by considering the research studies summarized above.

1. There is a high degree of interest in developing a clearer understanding of the non-profit sector across Canada and in Alberta. This interest is primarily being driven by the fact that the values and principles that drive the strategy and operations of organizations within the sector are poorly understood. In addition to being poorly understood, the nature of the non-profit sector is constantly evolving, and historical practices have become antiquated and of low utility in current conditions. Widescale change and significant, high-impact society events (e.g., COVID-19) have shattered the stability of any previously accepted knowledge or assumptions, pushing those within and outside the non-profit sector to seek higher forms of insight and new concrete information and knowledge.

2. The people who work within the non-profit sector (i.e., staff, volunteers) are the bedrock upon which sustainable success will be built upon. Concerns about locating, recruiting, developing, and retaining high-quality people with an enduring level of commitment to the non-profit sector abound at the national and provincial level. All parties, from elected officials to organizational leaders within and outside the non-profit sector have expressed an urgent desire to rectify these concerns and have articulated the need for broader, coordinated strategies to accomplish this goal.

3. Funding, or a lack thereof, is something that consistently ranks as an area of concern for non-profit organizations. The sheer lack of funding to support basic operations and delivery of programs and services lies at the heart of this concern. The lack of opportunities to explore partnerships and collaborations that would lead to better use of limited funds is a less well defined, but equally important root cause of this concern. High impact society events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, have only served to exacerbate this concern with a significant number of non-profit organizations struggling to offer the volume and quality of services that their communities need and demand. These needs and demands are predicted to increase in the years ahead as both the number of funders and the number of funding dollars diminish, and social issues rise.

4. Those within and outside the non-profit sector have grown tired of dialogue about how to make positive, sustainable changes to the non-profit sector and emphatically support the application of research knowledge to influence policy and process changes that lead to tangible improvement-oriented actions. The adage expressions that "talk is cheap" and "actions speak louder than words" ring clear and true for many in the non-profit sector.

5. Preparation for the unexpected has been problematic leaving many organizations in the non-profit sector at a loss when challenges inevitably arise. There has been a rising call for more organizations to invest in strategies that help not only them but the entire sector to align, collaborate, partner, and rally together when these challenges occur. Research findings that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic serve to reinforce this notion and serve as strong illustration of what potentially devasting impacts can occur when a future oriented, resiliency-minded orientation to planning and implementation are not consistently adopted by all members of a non-profit community.

6. Considerations related to the measurement of both organizational and sector-level performance are consistently absent when the state of the non-profit sector is being researched. This gap is concerning as without this form of data, those within and outside the non-profit sector are constantly left guessing as to whether they have achieved the type and level of impact desired. Any discussions about the sustainability of the non-profit sector, how the sector will evolve, and what the future holds for the sector are irrelevant without pausing to think about how success will be defined and measured by all parties involved in this work.

Gaps Requiring Further Research Attention

The most important gap that exists is a clear and concise picture of the composition of the non-profit sector. At a national level the most recent attempt to capture this information was carried out in 2003[1]. At the provincial and territorial level no comprehensive efforts have been undertaken to date. Similarly, few regional and community level non-profit sector profiles have been developed. This is especially true in the northern region of Alberta where to date no such profile has been created. Thus, no other data of this nature exists. As a consequence, it is not possible to clearly and accurately describe how the non-profit sector in the Wood Buffalo Region is built.

For the Wood Buffalo Region, this gap is tremendously important because without a clear and accurate profile of the non-profit sector, it is not possible to engage in productive discussions about sustainability and the future of the sector. Knowledge about how the non-profit sector is built is a fundamental building block for these conversations because it promotes alignment, focus, trust, and confidence. All of these items are building blocks for coordinated action aimed at achieving sustainable, collective impact at a community level. Without this picture, non-profit organizations lack the confidence to invest in wider-scale activities that facilitate collective growth and development. Instead, they choose to safely work within the confines of their own organizational environments, serving what they perceive to be "their" target audiences. These behaviours are well intentioned, but inadvertently lead to the construction of arbitrary silos. These silos lead to and consistently reinforce solo rather than collective action, effectively eliminating opportunities to coordinate the application of limited resources to serve the needs of the entire community effectively.

FuseSocial commissioned the current research study in an attempt to eliminate the knowledge gap and to create an up-to-date profile of the non-profit sector in the Wood Buffalo Region. FuseSocial commissioned this research with the full awareness that it would likely be difficult to create a full and comprehensive profile through one research study. There was a conscious recognition that asking all organizations in the non-profit sector to share what has historically been perceived as private or confidential information openly is bold. Further, it was recognized that asking all organizations in the non-profit sector to collectively invest in this research and actively support the development of a profile that has never existed before is unfamiliar and may met with distrust or disinterest. However, the benefits envisioned for the non-profit community in the Wood Buffalo Region were strong enough to motivate FuseSocial to proceed with this research study.

SECTION 3: CURRENT RESEARCH STUDY

Research Purpose

The purpose of this research study was to develop a clear and comprehensive profile of the non-profit sector in the Wood Buffalo Region.

Several key aspects of the non-profit sector in the Wood Buffalo Region were to be included in this profile. The key aspects were to include, but not to be limited to the following.

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[1] *National Survey of Non-Profit and Voluntary Organizations.* Statistics Canada. 2003.

- The number of active non-profit organizations in the Wood Buffalo Region.
- The target populations served by identified organizations.
- The types of programs and services offered by identified organizations.
- The level of engagement in collective impact initiatives and local events
- The funding streams supporting program and service delivery of identified organizations.

Glossary of Key Terms

The definitions of key terms used during the current research study are presented in the table below.

TABLE 1: ALPHABETICAL LISTING OF KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Key Term	Definition
Accreditation body	An accreditation body is an organization that provides accreditation services, which is a formal, third-party recognition of competence to perform specific tasks.
Active non-profit organization	Assigned to an Alberta society, Alberta non-profit company, or extra-provincial non-profit legal entity that is valid. Subsisting or presently operating in Alberta.
Inactive non-profit organization	Assigned to an Alberta society, Alberta non-profit company, or extra-provincial non-profit legal entity that is invalid. No longer subsisting or presently operating in Alberta.
Non-profit organization	Non-profit organizations are associations, clubs, or societies that are not charities and are organized and operated exclusively for social welfare, civic improvement, pleasure, recreation, or any other purpose except profit. In Alberta, incorporation can take place under the Agricultural Societies Act, Companies Act, Religious Societies Lands Act, Societies Act, and a small number of private acts.
Parent organization	Parent organization means that part of a non-profit/ charitable organization or sponsor which coordinates, supervises, or exercises control over policy, fund-raising, and expenditures, or assists or advises one or more chapters, branches, or affiliates of a non-profit/charitable organization or sponsor.
Programs and services	Programs and services are the activities conducted by a non-profit entity in the fulfillment of its mission. An efficient non-profit will expend the bulk of its funds on programs and services. Donors are more likely to contribute funds to non-profits that spend the bulk of their income on programs and services
Registered charity or non-profit organization with charitable status	Registered charities are charitable organizations, public foundations, or private foundations that are created and resident in Canada. They must use their resources for charitable activities and have charitable purposes that fall into one or more of the following categories: ▪ The relief of poverty ▪ The advancement of education ▪ The advancement of religion other purposes that benefit the community

Research Methodology

The Government of Alberta's non-profit registry was consulted to identify non-profit organizations operating in the Wood Buffalo Region. As of March 2021, 441 non-profit organizations were listed in this registry. Information about these non-profit organization was collected using an online survey.

The online survey consisted of 32 questions designed to gather the insights necessary to develop a comprehensive profile of the non-profit sector in the Wood Buffalo Region. The 32 questions in the online survey were grouped into six sections.

Section 1: Organizational Overview

- The name of the organization and when the organization was founded
- The leader and contact information for the organization
- Whether the organization is part of a parent organization
- Whether the organization has charitable status
- Whether the organization has accreditation status
- Whether the organization offers programs and services
- Whether the organization serves individuals or other organizations
- The topic areas of focus that the organization is dedicated to

Section 2: Strategic Focus

- The mission and strategic objectives of the organization
- What strategic challenges the organization currently faces

Section 3: Programs and Services

- What types of programs and services the organization offers to the community
- The types of individuals and groups that the organization's programs and services serve
- What issues the organization strives to address through the delivery of programs and services

Section 4: Results and Impact

- What the measures of success are for the organization
- Whether the organization collaborates with other organizations in the community
- How the organization defines success when it collaborates with other organizations in the community
- Which organization(s) in the community would be trusted to convene collective impact discussions

Section 5: Financials

- The types of funding the organization receives
- The level of current concern about funding
- Whether the organization has considered merging with another organization
- Whether the organization has considered winding down its operations

Section 6: Staff and Board Composition

- The number of paid staff in the organization
- The number of Board members
- The number of volunteers (outside of Board members)
- The roles that volunteers are utilized in by the organization

Non-profit organizations were invited to complete the online survey using multiple communication channels. Specifically, the following communication channels were used.

- Email messages
- Facebook messages
- Telephone calls
- Social media posts
- Radio advertisements

The information to complete the online survey was collected using two approaches. The first approach was to request that non-profit organizations complete the online survey themselves. If the non-profit organization was unable or unwilling to complete the online survey, publicly available documentation from online sources

(e.g., websites, social media postings, reports) was rigorously reviewed and relevant information was extracted to complete as much of the online survey as possible.

Research Results

A proportion of the data collected during this research study was provided by non-profit organizations through direct completion of the online survey. The online survey was fully completed by 52 (11%) non-profit organizations. The data from the remaining 389 (89%) of non-profit organizations was collected through rigorous review and extraction of publicly available documentation from online sources. Whenever possible, all the results reported below are a compilation of non-profit organization reported and extracted from online sources data. However, in circumstances where data could not be located and extracted from online sources, results are from the surveys completed by non-profit organizations themselves. A footnote will be used to highlight these circumstances.

ORGANIZATIONAL OVERVIEW

Active and Inactive Non-Profit Organizations

342 (78%) of the 441 non-profit organizations in the Wood Buffalo Region were active. The remaining 99 (22%) of non-profit organizations were inactive.

Active Non-Profit Organizations' Membership in a Larger, Parent Organization[2]

46% of active non-profit organizations are members of a larger, parent organizations. The remaining 54% of active non-profit organizations are not members of a larger, parent organization.

Active Non-Profit Organizations with Charitable Status

120 (35%) active non-profit organizations have charitable status.

Active Non-Profit Organizations with Accreditation Status[2]

25% of active non-profit organizations have been accredited by a nationally recognized accreditation body. Organizations with accreditation status tend to identify strengths and gaps in programming more consistently, mitigate safety risks, have stronger communication, and staff empowerment[3]. 77% of active non-profit organizations with accreditation status have been accredited by Imagine Canada. The remaining 23% of active non-profit organizations with accreditation status did not share who they have been accredited by. 75% of active non-profit organizations have not been accredited by a nationally recognized accreditation body.

Active Non-Profit Organizations Offering Programs and Services

Of the 342 active non-profit organizations, 236 (69%) indicated that they provide programs and services directly to Wood Buffalo Region residents.

Target Served by Active Non-Profit Organizations[2]

82% of active non-profit organizations target individuals when delivering programs and services. 2% of active non-profit organization target other organizations when delivering programs and services. 21% of active non-profit organization target both individuals and other organizations when delivering programs and services.

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[2] Results only from online surveys completed by non-profit organizations themselves. Only response percentages are reported.
[3] *Top 5 Benefits of Accreditation*. Accreditation Canada. 2021.

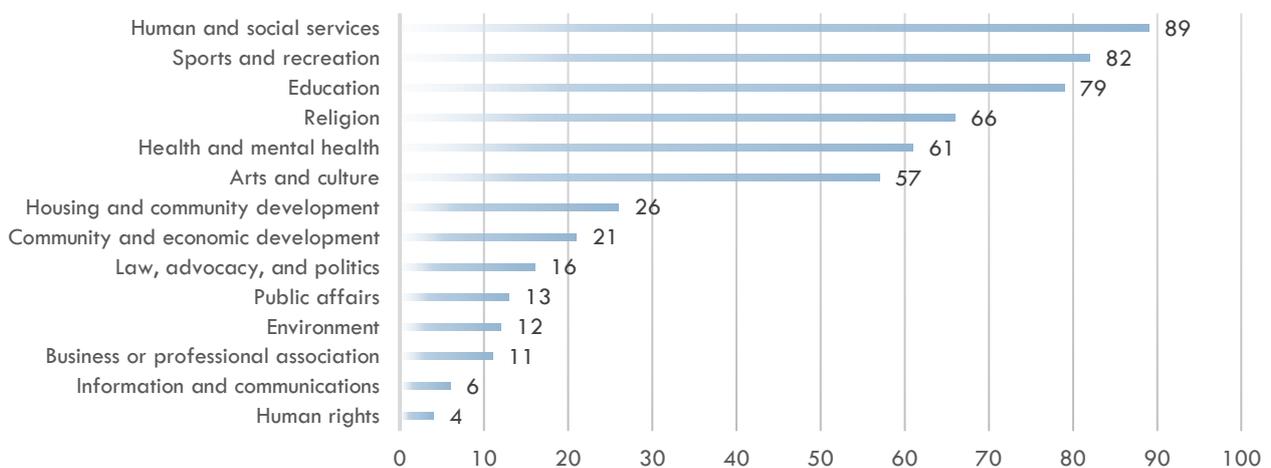**Active Non-Profit Organizations' Topic Areas of Focus**

Organizations were asked to identify their topic areas of focus. Fourteen topic areas of focus were presented. These topic areas of focus were consistent with the topic areas of focus in the 2003 national survey of non-profit and voluntary organizations. Definitions for these topic areas of focus are presented in the table below.

TABLE 2: ALPHABETICAL TOPIC AREAS OF FOCUS DEFINITIONS

Topic Area of Focus	Definition
Arts and culture	Visual or performing arts, historic or literary societies, as well as museums, zoos, and aquariums
Business or professional association	Regulating or promoting the interests of specific professions, branches of business or groups of employees
Community and economic development	Development of infrastructure, financial services such as credit associations, entrepreneurial training, employment training, and vocational counselling
Education	Providing formal educational programs
Environment	Protection and beautification of the natural environment, animal protection and veterinary services
Heath and mental health	Providing health care and public health and wellness education
Housing and community development	Providing housing, housing services, housing management, and operating community or neighbourhood organizations
Human and social services	Delivery of programs and services that respond to, alleviate, or eliminate issues cause human distress and suffering or social barriers or discord
Human rights	Promoting or preserving individual human rights and civil liberties
Information and communications	Media and communications
Law, advocacy, and politics	Advocacy on behalf of a specific cause or group, legal services, crime prevention, victim services, offender rehabilitation, and politics
Public affairs	Government relations, issue management, corporate and social responsibility, information dissemination, and strategic communications
Religion	Religious congregations, or organizations supporting a religious congregation, but not religiously inspired groups that focus on some other type of activity, such as international development
Sports and recreation	Providing opportunities for sports and recreation, tourism, and service clubs

Organizations were allowed to choose more than one topic area of focus. For 131 (38%) of the non-profit organizations only one topic area of focus was identified. For the remaining 211 (62%) non-profit organizations more than one topic area of focus was identified. The top six areas of focus for non-profit organizations were human and social services, sports and recreation, education, religion, health and mental health, and arts and culture. All topics of focus are presented in the table below.

TABLE 3: TOPICS OF FOCUS

Strategic Focus

Missions and Strategic Objectives of Active Non-Profit Organizations

Missions

320 (94%) active non-profit organizations have developed mission statements. It was not possible to identify how recently these organizations updated their mission statement though. The missions that these organizations are striving to achieve vary widely. However, common themes are identifiable in these missions. These common themes are listed below, by topic area of focus.

Human and Social Services

- Providing supports to individuals living in conditions that result in increased vulnerability
- Helping individuals develop knowledge and skills that will allow them to improve their lives
- Offering access to opportunities and experiences that positively change how individuals view themselves, others, and the environments and circumstances that they in
- Ensuring that all members of the community have barrier free access to programs and services
- Encouraging thoughts, behaviours, and emotions that foster healthy development across the lifespan

Sports and Recreation

- Building awareness and interest in a diverse array of sports and recreational activities
- Encouraging all individuals to seek out and participate in sports after the lifespan
- Fostering healthy, active lifestyles amongst all members of the community
- Strengthening individuals' health, wellness, and resiliency through physical activity
- Mentoring individuals to become better leaders through sports and recreational activities
- Developing discipline, respect, team-work, and other life skills through participation in sports
- Creating safe environments that allow community members to connect, socialize, and have fun

Education

- Providing all community members with barrier free access to educational opportunities
- Encouraging self-reflection, exploration, and the development of a growth mindset
- Promoting thoughtful examination of new information, resources, and knowledge
- Structuring and offering learning activities for individuals of all ages and all levels of need
- Building curricula that is diverse and able to meet the learning needs of individuals with diverse personal and professional backgrounds
- Building confidence, competence, and self-efficacy through education

Religion

- Creating welcoming environments and facilitating worship
- Teaching the doctrine and values of religious denominations
- Helping members of the community gather and establish social bonds
- Providing support to individuals in need within the community

Health and Mental Health

- Identifying opportunities for early intervention to reduce morbidity and mortality
- Ensuring ease of access to health and mental health programs and services
- Assessing health and mental health needs to ensure effective treatment
- Treating all forms of health and mental health issues using evidence-based approaches
- Placing the patient at the centre of all health and mental health care decisions

Arts and Culture

- Support growth and success of the arts in community
- Develop and grow a strong and passionate community of artists
- Celebrate culture and cultural diversity
- Create platforms for multicultural engagement and networking
- Enhance the community and build meaningful relationships through arts and culture
- Educate, inform, and inspire the community through artistic expression
- Stimulate creativity and generate fun for all

Strategic Objectives

The strategic objectives that active non-profit organizations utilize to advance their missions are unclear. Few organizations that completed the online survey themselves provided their strategic objectives.

For other organizations, publicly available documentation from online sources did not contain their strategic objectives. Either these organizations have not developed strategic objectives, or they have decided not to share them openly at this time.

Strategic Challenges Currently Faced Active Non-Profit Organizations[2]

58% of active non-profit organizations that completed the online survey themselves shared insights into their current strategic challenges. 80% of these active non-profit organization indicated that funding and availability of resources was a current strategic challenge. 40% of these active non-profit organization indicated that accessing volunteers to support governance and operations was a current strategic challenge. 33% of these active non-profit organization indicated that communications and awareness building was a current strategic challenge. All strategic challenges identified are summarized in the table below.

TABLE 4: CURRENT STRATEGIC CHALLENGES
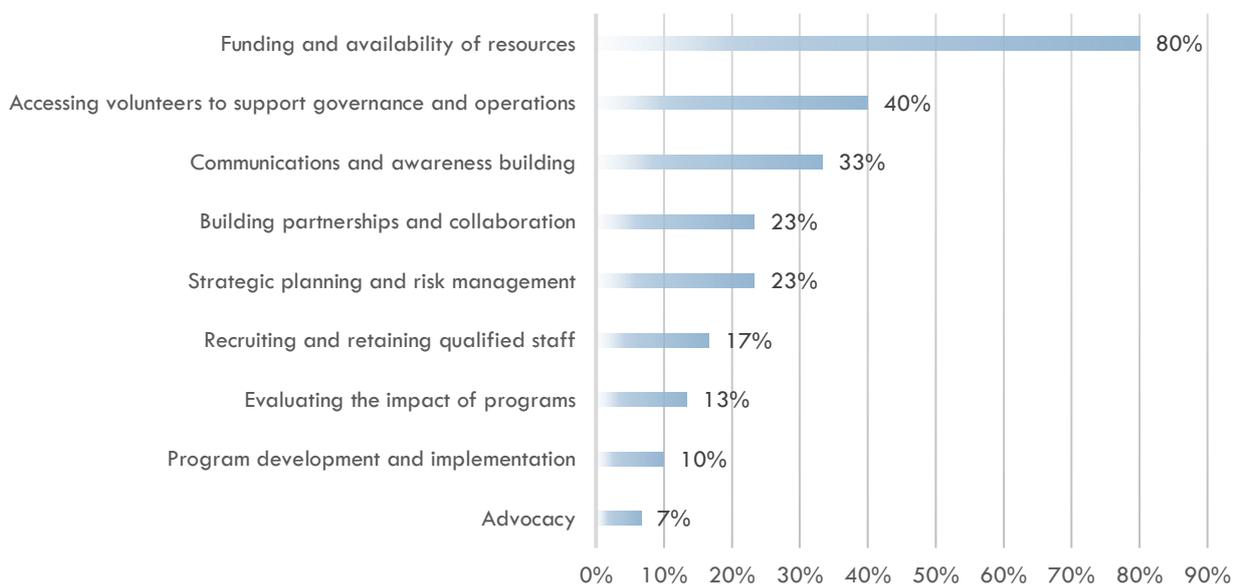
The current strategic challenges identified by active non-profit organizations in this research study expand compliment the current strategic challenges shared by non-profit organizations contributing to the research conducted by the Alberta Non-Profit Network (ABNN)[4] cited earlier. Again, ABNN's research was focused on understanding the challenges experienced by non-profit organizations due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

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[4] *The Impact of COVID-19 on Alberta's Non-Profit and Voluntary Organizations*. Alberta Non-Profit Network. 2020.

The top five current challenges cited in the ABNN study were as follows.

- Challenges related to staff and volunteers needing to work remotely
- Disruption of service to clients and communities
- Adjusting in-person events to a virtual platform
- Staff absences due to childcare requirements such as daycare and school closures
- Reduced revenue from fundraising (e.g., cancelled events, donations)

The top five anticipated future challenges cited in the ABNN study were as follows.

- Concern over low financial reserve
- Increased demand for supports/services from clients and communities
- Reduced hours for staff due to budget constraints
- Difficulty engaging volunteers
- Reduced revenue from earned income (e.g., sales or fees)

Programs and Services

Individuals and Groups Active Non-Profit Organizations' Programs and Services Serve

As noted earlier, of the 342 active non-profit organizations, 236 (69%) indicated that they provide programs and services to directly Wood Buffalo Region residents. These organizations offer a diverse array of programs and services. The remaining 106 (31%) did not indicate that they provide programs and services directly to Wood Buffalo Region residents. At present, it is unclear what activities these organizations invest their resources in.

The types of individuals and groups served by the programs and services that these organizations offer were grouped into categories and listed below. These categories are listed in alphabetical order. Please note that not all active non-profit organizations that indicated they provide programs and services shared the types of individuals and groups served.

- Artists and musicians
- Athletes
- Children including infants and toddlers, adolescents, parents, and families
- Immigrants and refugees
- Indigenous peoples
- Individuals with health issues and disabilities
- Individuals with mental health and addictions issues
- Individuals with social barriers
  (i.e., low-income, lack of employment, legal issues, housing issues, food insecurity)
- Seniors and their caregivers

Results and Impact

Active Non-Profit Organizations' Measures of Success[2]

29% of active non-profit organizations that completed the online survey themselves shared their organization's measures of success. For these organizations, success was measured by assessing the degree of positive change or growth that the individuals who participated in programs and services experienced after receiving support. Many of these organizations also noted that they struggle to consistently define measures of success and would like to enhance their evaluation capacity in the future.

Whether Active Non-Profit Organizations Collaborate with Other Organizations[2]

37% of active non-profit organizations that completed the online survey themselves shared whether they collaborate with other organizations. 95% of these organizations indicated they do collaborate with other organizations. This information is summarized in the table below.

TABLE 5: COLLABORATION WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

- Yes ■ No
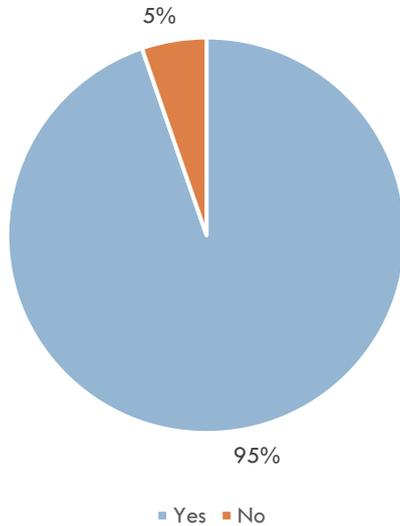
How Active Non-Profit Organizations Define the Success of Collaboration[2]

The 37% active non-profit organizations that indicated they do collaborate with other organizations shed light on how they define the success of their collaborations.

79% of these organizations believe that their collaborations are successful when participants have a shared vision for change, including a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions.

74% of these organizations believe that their collaborations are successful when consistent and open communication occurs across the many players and among external stakeholders to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and create common motivation.

58% of these organizations believe that their collaborations are successful when a learning culture is embedded into the collaboration and participant activities are differentiated while still coordinated through a mutually reinforcing plan of action.

Two other indicators of successful collaborations identified were as follows.

1. The presence of dedicated staff and strong leaders who serve as the backbone for the collaboration and coordinate participating organizations and agencies.
2. Data is collected and results are measured consistently across all participants to ensure that efforts remain aligned, and participants hold each other accountable.

**Organizations Trusted to Convene Collective Impact Discussions[2]**

31% of active non-profit organizations that completed the online survey themselves identified an organization that they would trust to convene community-level discussions about collective impact. This was an open-ended response question, and no options were provided. 81% identified FuseSocial, 13% identified the Arts Council of Wood Buffalo, and 6% identified the Wood Buffalo Food Bank.

Financials

Types of Funding Received by Active Non-Profit Organizations[2]

50% of active non-profit organizations that completed the online survey themselves shared they types of funding that they receive. 65% of these active non-profit organizations are funded through individual donations. 62% of these active non-profit organizations are funded through corporate donations. 46% of these active non-profit organizations are funded through corporate sponsorships and municipal government funding. All types of funding received is summarized in the table below.
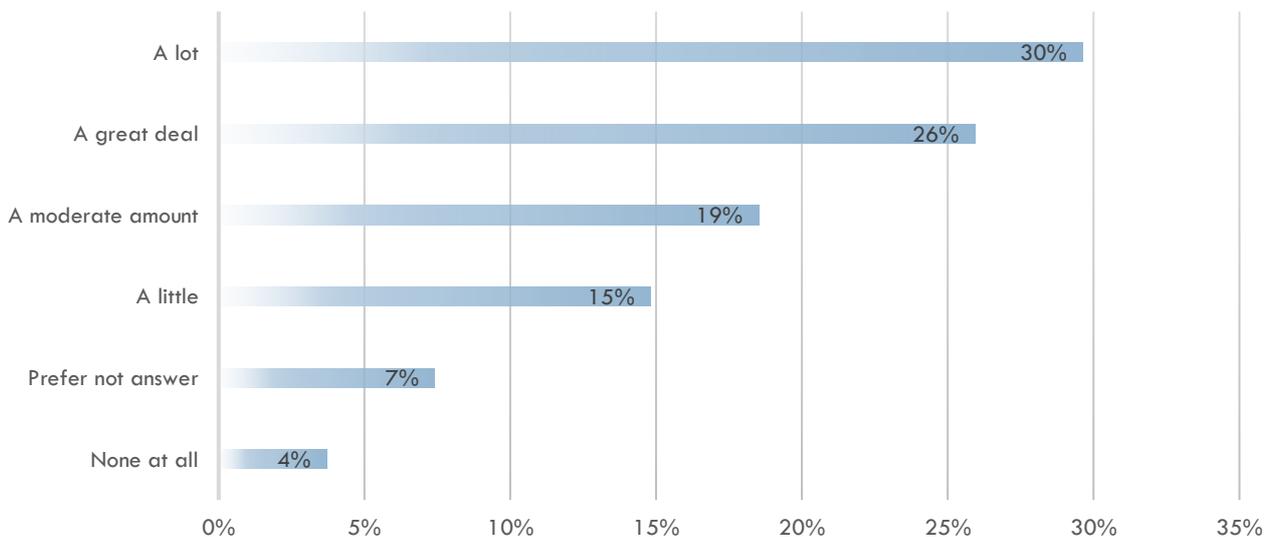
TABLE 6: TYPES OF FUNDING RECEIVED
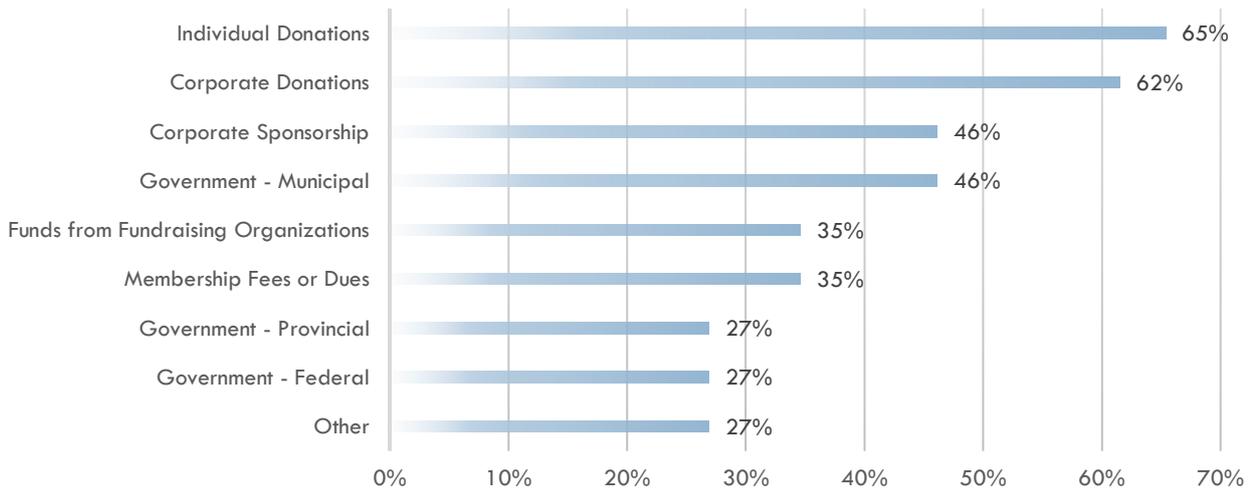
Active Non-Profit Organizations' Level of Concern About Funding[2]

52% of active non-profit organizations that completed the online survey themselves shared their level of concern about funding. Most organizations expressed some level of concern about funding, with the majority indicating that their level of concern is high. One organization stated, "2022 onward will be challenging as our needs increase but revenue streams and personal donations dwindle." This information is summarized in the table below.
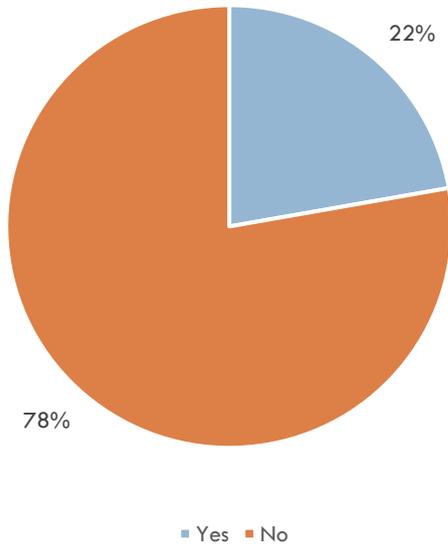
Table 7: Level of Funding Concern

Whether Active Non-Profit Organizations Have Considered Mergers[2]

52% of active non-profit organizations that completed the online survey themselves shared whether they have considered merging with another organization. 22% of these organizations indicated that they have considered merging with another organization. The remaining 78% organizations indicated that they have not considered merging with another organization. This information is summarized in the table below.

TABLE 8: ORGANIZATIONS CONSIDERING MERGERS

- Yes - No

Whether Active Non-Profit Organizations Have Considered Winding Down Operations[2]

52% of active non-profit organizations that completed the online survey themselves shared whether they have considered winding down their operations. 22% of these organizations indicated that they have considered winding down their operations. The remaining 78% organizations indicated that they have not considered winding down their operations. This information is summarized in the table below.

TABLE 9: ORGANIZATIONS CONSIDERING WINDING DOWN OPERATIONS

- Yes - No

16
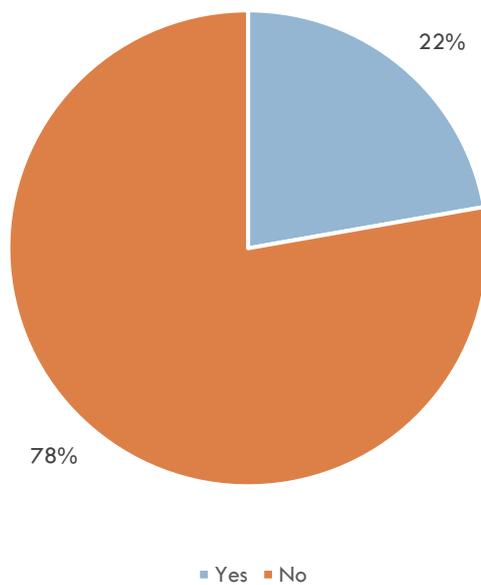
Staff and Board Composition

Active Non-Profit Organizations' Paid Staff[2]

48% of active non-profit organizations that completed the online survey themselves shared how many full-time and part-time staff they employ. This information is summarized in the tables below.
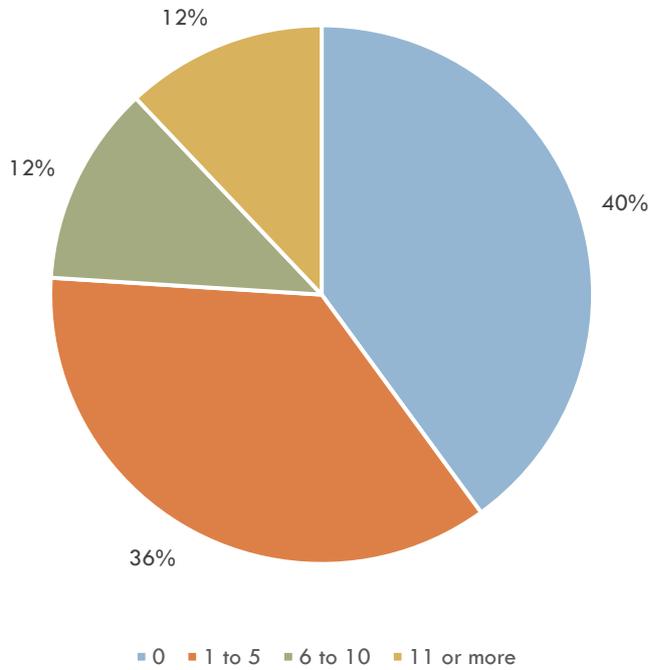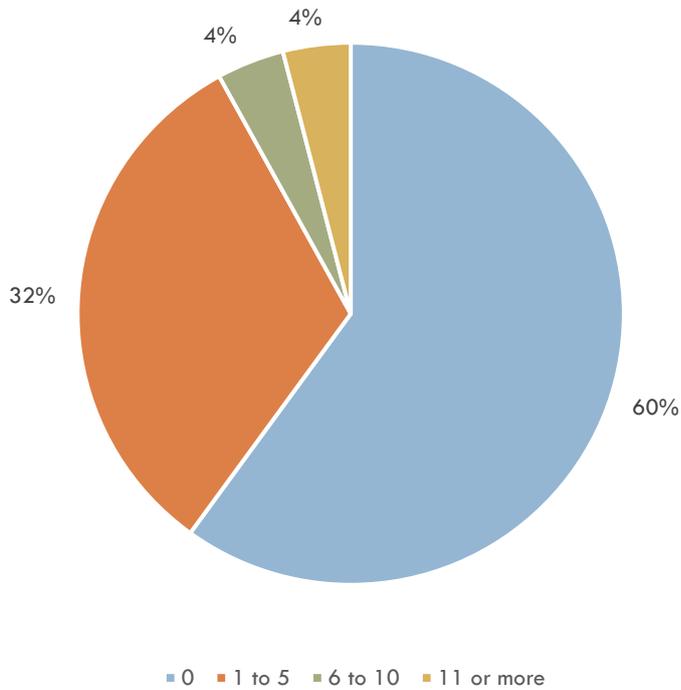
TABLE 10: FULL-TIME STAFF

0   1 to 5   6 to 10   11 or more

TABLE 11: PART-TIME STAFF


0   1 to 5   6 to 10   11 or more

The proportion of full-time and part-time paid staff reported by active non-profit organizations are consistent with the information reported about non-profit organizations in the recent Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo labour study[5]. A total of 46 organizations that contributed to this labour study identified as non-profit organizations.

Active Non-Profit Organizations' Board of Directors[2]

50% of active non-profit organizations that completed the online survey themselves shared how many individuals sit on their Board of Directors. This information is summarized in the table below.

TABLE 12: BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Legend: ■ 1 to 5   ■ 6 to 10   ■ 11 to 15   ■ 15 or more
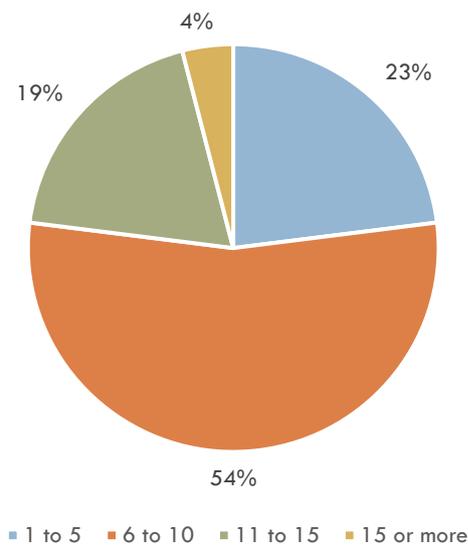
Active Non-Profit Organizations' Volunteers (number, roles)[2]

50% of active non-profit organizations that completed the online survey themselves shared how many volunteers their organization utilizes on regular basis. This information is summarized in the table below.

TABLE 13: VOLUNTEERS

Legend: ■ 0   ■ 1 to 25   ■ 26 to 50   ■ 51 to 99   ■ 100 or more
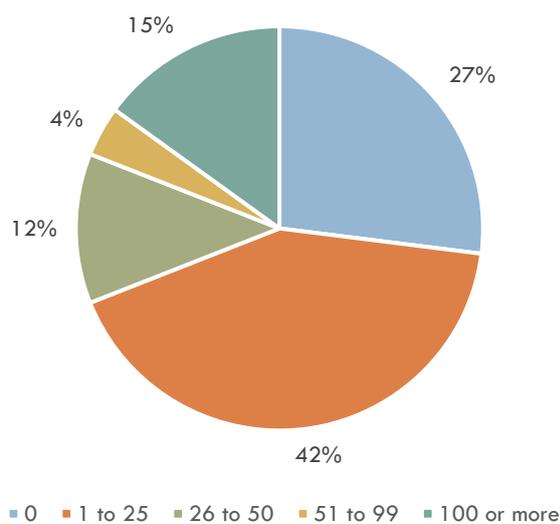
[5] *Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo Labour Study.* Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo Economic Development & Tourism. 2021.

Organizations that utilize volunteers do so in the following ways.

- Mentoring
- Facility maintenance
- Transportation
- Fundraising

- Events support
- Program and service support
- Project support
- Communications and social media support

Research Conclusions

The purpose of this research study was to develop a clear and comprehensive profile of the non-profit sector in the Wood Buffalo Region. The current research study was needed for two reasons. First, no such profile has been developed for the Wood Buffalo Region. Second, there has been a significant amount of change in the non-profit sector in the Wood Buffalo Region over the past five years. FuseSocial commissioned this research with the full appreciation that it would likely be difficult to create a full and comprehensive profile through one research study. FuseSocial also recognized that asking all organizations in the non-profit sector to collectively invest in this research and actively support the development of a profile that has never existed before is unfamiliar and may met with distrust or disinterest. However, the benefits envisioned for the non-profit community in the Wood Buffalo Region were strong enough to motivate FuseSocial to proceed with this research study.

441 registered non-profits organizations in the Wood Buffalo Region were identified. 342 of these organizations were currently active and operating in the community. These 342 organizations were asked to provide information about their structures, strategies, programs, measures, and human and financial resources using an online survey. 11% of these organizations shared this information by completing the online survey themselves. The remaining 89% of these organizations' information was extracted from publicly available documentation from online sources.

The information gathered during this research study is useful and has begun to clarify how the non-profit sector in the Wood Buffalo Region is structured. As a result of this study, the following is now known about the non-profit sector in the Wood Buffalo Region.

- The number of active and inactive non-profit organizations
- The proportion of active non-profit organizations with charitable status
- The number of active non-profit organizations that provide programs and services to residents
- The topics of focus for active non-profit organizations
- The common themes in the mission statements of active non-profit organizations
- The types of individuals and groups supported by the programs and services that active non-profit organizations offer

As expected prior to the implementation of this research study more information is needed in a few important domains. Thus, it is recommended that additional research be carried out to develop a deeper understanding of the following items.

- The key strategic challenges that active non-profit organizations are currently facing
- How active non-profit organization define and measure the impact of their programs and services
- How active non-profit organizations collaborate with other organizations and assess the impact of these collaborations
- Whether active non-profit organizations wish to formally partner with other organizations to leverage collective human and financial resources, reduce program and service redundancies, and eliminate program and service gaps
- Additional insights into the financial circumstances of active non-profit organizations

▪ Detailed information about the staffing composition and volunteer base of active non-profit organizations

SECTION 4: MOVING FORWARD

The additional research necessary to develop a deeper understanding of the items listed has already begun. During preparations for the inaugural Wood Buffalo Non-Profit Sector Summit, the design consultancy that FuseSocial, though its collaboration with the Wood Buffalo Community Foundation and United Way Fort McMurray and Wood Buffalo, contracted to support this summit, Overlap Associates, conducted interviews with 13 key stakeholders in the sector. These stakeholders shared insights into the challenges and obstacles that organizations in the non-profit sector are facing. Specific challenges noted were as follows.

1. Sector competition and tension for funding interrupts collaboration opportunities.
2. Funding issues and processes are a large obstacle for organizations.
3. Organizations work in silos which is a barrier to collaboration.
4. Equitable practices are not integrated into sector processes and are exclusionary.
5. Lack of communication leaves room for ambiguity and negative perceptions of the sector.
6. Staff and organizations are burning out and need mental health support.
7. High turnover rates contribute to loss of knowledge and interruptions of work.
8. Sector relationships are fragile.
9. External influential barriers have been further heightened by the pandemic.
10. The sector is operating from a place of "survival", leading it to feel strong and resilient, but insecure.

Additional details can be found in Overlap Associates' insights summary report[6]. These findings provide a strong starting point for the additional research that will be required to ensure that the profile of the non-profit sector in the Wood Buffalo Region is as clear and comprehensive as possible.

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[6] *Key Informant Engagement – Insights Summary*. Overlap Associates. 2021.

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