

BUILDING TOMORROW

Transforming Nonprofit Governance

A Community Action Research Project

The Social Innovation Lab on Gender, Sexuality, and Culture
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ABOUT THIS REPORT

This project is a partnership between the Social Innovation Lab on Gender and Sexuality at the University of Saskatchewan and the United Way of Saskatoon and Area.

The Social Innovation Lab on Gender and Sexuality is a community-based participatory research laboratory that brings communities and individuals together to collaborate on intersectional social justice projects.

The United Way works to invest time and money into positively impacting the lives of vulnerable children, youth, and their families in our community.

DISCLAIMER AND ETHICS

This research was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, the United Way of Saskatoon and Area, and the University of Saskatchewan. This project was approved by the University of Saskatchewan's Behavioural Research Ethics Board. Some quotes have been modified for clarity. Questions about this research can be directed to Dr. Rachel Loewen Walker at rl.walker@usask.ca.

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The researchers conducted this work from Treaty 6 territory, the homeland of the Cree, Saulteaux, Dene, Dakota, Lakota, Nokota, Blackfoot, and Métis people. Many of our research participants also live on this land, while some hail from Treaty 4 territory and possibly other territories across Saskatchewan. We recognize the value in coming together to engage in truth telling, the work of reconciliation, and the work of cultural humility. We also recognize the need to engage in the ongoing work of both Indigenizing and decolonizing our nonprofit, community-based and institutional systems at all levels.

Thank you to Elder Joseph Naytowhow for spending the day with us at the Building Tomorrow Summit at Wanuskewin Heritage Park on October 11th, 2024.

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We would like to thank supporters of the research summit: The United Way of Saskatoon, The Social Innovation Lab, The University of Saskatchewan, The Saskatoon Community Foundation, and The Saskatchewan Non-profit Partnership.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The *Building Tomorrow* project seeks to explore and transform nonprofit governance practices through community-driven research, engagement, and action. The project is a partnership between the Social Innovation Lab on Gender and Sexuality at the University of Saskatchewan and the United Way of Saskatoon and Area, alongside local champions of Saskatchewan's nonprofit sector including board members, executive directors (EDs), CEOs, staff members, consultants, and other key stakeholders.

Saskatchewan is home to over 8,000 nonprofit organizations (NPOs) that contribute significantly to the provincial economy, and more importantly to the wellbeing of wide-ranging communities and social sectors. However, despite their critical role, these organizations are often hampered by strained resources, outdated governance models, declining volunteerism, and a lack of diversity in leadership. The Building Tomorrow project goes beyond diagnosing these issues to actively proposing, challenging, and creating space for practical, real-world innovations in nonprofit governance. As an evolving, "evergreen" initiative, it seeks to drive reforms that will help the nonprofit sector remain adaptable, inclusive, and responsive to community needs.

Central to this project is a reimagining of governance itself. Rather than focusing solely on

governance as a tool for individual organizations, the project emphasizes the importance of shared leadership and sector-wide collaboration. The goal is to fundamentally shift how governance is understood and practiced—encouraging collective responsibility and experimentation to find what works. While change will come incrementally, the driving force behind these shifts is the recognition that governance can be a dynamic, collaborative effort that elevates the sector as a whole.

KEY FINDINGS

1. Governance Structures

The traditional board model under the Saskatchewan Nonprofit Corporations Act, is increasingly viewed as restrictive and outdated. Focus group participants questioned the form and function of boards themselves, exploring alternative models like advisory committees or shared boards across multiple organizations. Some even proposed eliminating boards entirely in favor of more democratic, community-led governance models.

A key idea was expanding governance to include more stakeholders like community members, staff, and beneficiaries. This challenges traditional corporate-style governance models within the charitable sector and emphasizes inclusivity and accountability to the public.

2. Board Diversity and Inclusion

While most survey respondents acknowledged the need for more diverse representation on their boards, actual implementation remains difficult. Only 23% of organizations have formal EDI policies at this time, and recruiting diverse board members, particularly in rural areas, is difficult. Women, Indigenous peoples, and 2SLGBTQ+ individuals are underrepresented in leadership positions, despite women making up more than 85% of employees in the sector as a whole. The feminization of the nonprofit sector is a direct contributor to its devaluation. Human and support services continue to be understood as “care work” and therefore undervalued in relation to other sectors such as sales, trades, or other sectors.

Research highlights the benefits of diversity in governance, showing that gender-diverse boards tend to perform better in areas like financial oversight, strategic planning, and community outreach. However, true inclusion requires more than just diverse representation—it demands the meaningful participation of all members and clear policies that translate into action.

3. Volunteerism and Board Capacity

A decline in volunteerism is one of the most pressing challenges facing Saskatchewan’s nonprofit sector. Many participants noted that fewer individuals, especially from younger generations, are willing to commit to long-

term board service. Recruitment difficulties and board member burnout are common and participants suggested more efficient use of volunteers and open conversations about compensating board members to sustain involvement.

4. Funding and Resources

The sector-wide shift away from core funding or operating funds and towards project-based funding has created instability for many NPOs. Organizations rely on a patchwork of grants, each with comprehensive reporting and evaluation expectations. This limits their ability to invest in governance and long-term planning. Competitive and short-term grant processes pit organizations against each other for limited resources, making collaboration difficult.

5. Collaborative Governance Models

Across the board it was identified that increased collaboration was necessary for the future success of the nonprofit sector. Shared governance models, where organizations pool resources and share a board, could reduce the strain on individual members and foster sector-wide collaboration. However, concerns about competition and control, especially in rural areas, hinder implementation. Collaboration on behalf of the sector as a whole and in relation to building the profile and professionalism of all nonprofit organizations was seen as crucial.

FUTURE GOALS FOR THE NONPROFIT SECTOR

One of the last questions in the focus groups was “if you had a magic wand, how would you change the nonprofit sector?” This question provided us with the ability to stretch conversations beyond barriers and difficulties and toward a desired future for nonprofit governance. We close with a collection of goals for the sector, goals which represent the starting point for the next stage of this community research and action project:

The big picture goal is...

Sector-Wide Collaboration and Advocacy

Nonprofits in Saskatchewan work together to identify common interests and advocate for sector-wide improvements, including policy changes and resource allocations at organizational, regional, and legislative levels.

This supports...

Governance as a Shared Responsibility

Governance that extends beyond boards to include staff, funders, unions, community members, and government, fostering a more collaborative approach

And is achieved through...

Flexible Governance Structures

Governance models that are adaptable, allowing organizations to choose structures that align with their mission, resources, and size.

Properly Resourced Governance

Sector-wide recognition that we (funders, donors, and organizations) should invest in core governance activities. This includes board training, succession planning and capacity building, as well as for fiduciary and reporting requirements.

Engaged, Knowledgeable, and Diverse Boards

Boards that reflect the communities they serve and include members with diverse backgrounds, skills, and experiences.

THE BUILDING TOMORROW GATHERING: REPORTING BACK TO COMMUNITY FOR GUIDANCE AND NEXT STEPS

The findings of this project were shared at a Summit in October 2024 which was attended by a wide range of nonprofit governance stakeholders including board chairs, executive directors, CEOs, members of the local municipal government, nonprofit consultants, students who were involved in student government at the local University, funders, and other interested parties. The Summit shared the research results and explored applied opportunities for sector transformation. The findings from this Summit are included in the final section of this report and will serve as a guide for a working group that has signed up to continue working to shape the future of nonprofit governance in Saskatchewan. ■■

NONPROFIT GOVERNANCE: A COMMUNITY ACTION PROJECT

"The governance model we're using is outdated and wasn't designed for the complexities of today's nonprofit world. We need to rethink how boards function."
—Nonprofit CEO, Saskatoon

The *Building Tomorrow: Transforming Nonprofit Governance* project was initiated by a group of individuals who have direct and long-term experience within the community-based, nonprofit sector. We have each served as executive directors, CEOs, consultants, board chairs, board members, service users, and/or volunteers at some point throughout our lives, and are driven by a deep and ongoing respect for the sector, alongside a desire to address ongoing challenges. We are motivated by our love for the work, frustration with current practices, and the lack of clear guidance from the nonprofit corporations act and other governing bodies. We are also motivated to invest in the future of the sector because its health is vital to the health of our broader communities.

Saskatchewan has over 8,000 nonprofit organizations (NPOs) in the areas of recreation, human services, and arts & culture. These organizations range from small drop-in centres to large festivals, from sports teams to language centres, and each contribute significantly to communities across the province. Saskatchewan NPOs have budgets ranging from hundreds to millions of dollars and employ 77000

to 94000 people (Saskatchewan Nonprofit Partnership, 2018; Imagine Canada, 2021), contributing 8% of the province's GDP (Imagine Canada, 2021) at around \$6.3 billion.

Despite their importance, NPOs operate under a governance framework—the Saskatchewan Nonprofit Corporations Act—that hasn't kept pace with the sector's complexity.

Although Saskatchewan's Nonprofit Corporations Act has been updated over the years, updates have failed to recognize the complexity of such a necessary and comprehensive sector. With tens of thousands of volunteers and employees, and hundreds of thousands of clients and service-users, Saskatchewan's nonprofits are central figures in our provincial ecosystem. In fact, and as illustrated above, we would be lost without them.

While research shows a positive link between good governance and nonprofit success, boards often lack the skills and experience needed to manage finances, human resources, and strategic planning. Organizational success also relies on clear and effective relationships between boards and leadership, which engage in collaborative oversight of evaluation, training, and performance management functions. Furthermore, a decline in volunteerism and the shortage of qualified board members is increasingly evident as noted by British Columbia's Vantage Point: "volunteers are aging out and younger generations don't seem to

hold the same commitment to volunteering. [Today] many [would-be] volunteers are looking for paid work” (p. 27, 2024).

Based on historical board sizes, Saskatchewan needs 48,000 to 80,000 board volunteers to support wide-ranging organizations, and many nonprofits struggle to fill these role.

Saskatchewan’s nonprofits are central figures in our provincial ecosystem. In fact, we would be lost without them.

Another key challenge is ensuring that boards are responding to calls to action around decolonization, equity, diversity, and inclusion, whether regarding board and staff representation or in regard to policies and procedures as they relate to equitable practices and under-represented groups. Despite having a heightened role in representing diverse cultures, abilities, ages, genders, sexualities, and lived experiences, nonprofit boards often fail to reflect the diversity of the communities they serve. There is a growing need to prioritize lived and cultural experience alongside skills and expertise, with direct pathways for these priorities to impact organizations.

The *Building Tomorrow* project recognizes the social, cultural, and economic value of the nonprofit sector and its increasing professionalization. It also recognizes how outdated policies and legislation, shrinking volunteer

pools, and limited resources hinder progress. Through research, surveys, and interviews, we explored these governance challenges and potential innovations with the goal of pushing beyond the common themes of “good governance” and “diverse representation” in service to bold reforms that better serve the sector’s needs. The project emphasizes that improving governance isn’t enough—we need to transform it to meet the evolving demands of this robust, complex, and essential sector.

WHAT IS GOVERNANCE?

For some, the concept of governance is equivalent to the board of directors itself. For others, it refers to the organization’s policies and procedures. Cornforth (2011) defines governance as “a framework of responsibilities, requirements, and accountabilities” (p. 9) that nonprofits operate within, including rules for reporting, regulations, and stakeholder relationships. This traditional view of governance focuses on decision-making power, how stakeholders are heard and who is accountable (Institute of Governance, n.d.).

That said, relying solely on the board for direction and policies is increasingly seen as inadequate. For example, the classic image of the dedicated board volunteer offering their time and skills to charity misrepresents the complexity of today’s nonprofit sector, which now rivals the output, function, and professional-

ism of any corporate or healthcare industry.

Additionally, limiting governance to the board creates an isolated structure – one that is disconnected from the people and communities the organization serves. Board members, seen as experts, may lack full engagement with the organization’s mission, or might lack an understanding of the lived experiences of those they are meant to support. This disconnect prompts Renz and Andersson (2013) to argue that governance is more than just boards. Other stakeholders should also be part of governance structures and in fact, some have proposed a greater acknowledgement of the ways that staff are involved in the work of governance, whether through strategic planning, hiring, or policy development.

As we engage in this research, we recognize that many are exploring this very topic. The Ontario Nonprofit Network’s 2021 project, *Reimagining Governance*, highlights that good governance means achieving meaningful impacts and positive outcomes for communities. Similarly, in *Governance as Leadership: Reframing the Work of Nonprofit Boards* (2004), Chait, Ryan, and Taylor identify the two familiar governance functions of the board as fiduciary and strategic, but add a third dimension: generative governance. Generative governance focuses on exploratory thinking and the deeper analysis of organizations through meaningful partnerships between the board and organizational leadership and staff. This model encourages productive discussions and creative thinking, rather than sticking to traditional and more rigid decision-making rules like Robert’s rules of order.

In BC, Vantage Point just finished a feasibility study related to developing a formal provincial nonprofit network, and is currently working to establish such an entity. Vantage Point is made up of a range of organizations that represent the many layers of the sector (co-operatives, charities, social enterprises) and in their study, they identify the ONN (as above) as well as Impact Organizations of Nova Scotia, Nunavut Association of Nonprofit Organizations, and the Alberta Nonprofit Network as key potential models to emulate (Vantage Point, 2023).

Locally, the Saskatchewan Nonprofit Partnership, has been in operation since 2011, and is made up of a group of nonprofit leaders in the province. SNP has held a number of summits over the years, conducted research on the sector, and works consistently to build the profile of the nonprofit sector, ensuring that it is recognized as a central and valuable contributor to public and social life in the province.

While there is a push to “reimagine governance,” and many workshops and trainings are available regarding this topic, challenges like board turnover and varying experience levels continue to hinder skill development among volunteers. Additionally, it’s common to see board resignations when the demands of governance—especially during times of conflict, change, or risk-management—exceed the skills of board members.

WHERE WE STARTED AND WHERE WE WENT

With these challenges in mind, our project is intentional in its efforts to connect research to practice, to open up conversations and strategies that may feel uncomfortable, impossible, or even “radical,” and to ultimately explore possibilities to change Saskatchewan’s community-based sector. In order to do this work, we engaged board members, executive directors (EDs), CEOs, and key informants within the field, in deep conversations about what’s working, what’s not working, and what’s next for nonprofit governance.

Our original vision was to explore alternative models that could be used to optimize the numbers and use of volunteers providing governance functions with the possibility of proposing a broad and formally collaborative governance structure that will allow for streamlined solutions to common challenges. This vision continues throughout this work, however, our discussions went well beyond this original intent, touching on issues including the following:

- The appetite for collaborative governance models across organizations;

- The relationships between the board and Executive Directors/CEOs;
- How to improve volunteer efficiency, reducing the number of volunteers needed for governance tasks, while freeing others for strategic planning or generative input;
- Open discussions on equity, diversity, inclusion, colonialism, and decolonization within and across organizations, focusing on both representation and policy and practices;
- Significantly improving opportunities for capacity building at volunteer and organizational levels; and
- Increasing governance expertise and implementation across the sector.

The potential significance of this project is multifaceted. Primarily, the research results are intended to support governance structures and democratic practices within the nonprofit sector. This includes helping organizations better serve community members by increasing participatory practices and diversity. Additionally, this research could inform improvements to nonprofit legislation in Saskatchewan. The empirical data collected through this research is novel within our province, and in alignment with research in other jurisdictions, our research participants advocate for more open, diversified, and inclusive governance models (see Lalande, 2018; Ontario Nonprofit Network, 2021; Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations, 2021).

OUR PROCESS SO FAR

As of September, 2024, our community-engaged research process included the following steps:

1. A survey on board demographics and composition, as well as details about organizational commitments to building policies aimed at equity, diversity, and inclusion. This survey was sent to 972 of Saskatchewan's nonprofit organizations and completed by 93 participants;
2. Literature reviews on the following topics: Equity, diversity, and inclusion in Nonprofit governance and on the Canadian landscape of NPO governance, including strengths, barriers, and alternative models;
3. One-on-one interviews with each of our key informants;
4. Five focus groups with board members and ED/CEOs of nonprofit organizations in Saskatchewan. Given the breadth of the sector, we narrowed the focus group participants to representatives from Community-Based Organizations, rather than to the sector as a whole. We know this only represents one element of Saskatchewan's diverse and varied nonprofit sector, but feel that learnings can be applied across the landscape.
5. A final focus group with select participants following a first review and analysis of the above data in order to support focus areas; and
6. Analysis of the Nonprofit Corporations Act, 1995 and 2022. ■■

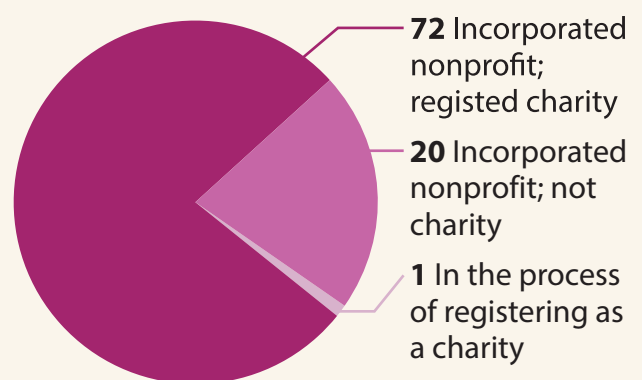
A SURVEY OF NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

In the spring of 2024 we sent a survey out to a list of 972 of Saskatchewan's nonprofit organizations. These spanned the province and included community, arts, recreation, and other organizations in order to collect basic information on board demographics and composition, as well as details about organizational commitments to inclusion. Ninety-three Saskatchewan nonprofit organizations participated in the survey, spanning 37 different locations ranging from the larger cities of Saskatoon and Regina to smaller towns or villages. Of these respondents, 22% were incorporated nonprofits, but not charities, 77% were registered charities and incorporated nonprofits, and one organization was in the process of applying for charitable status. The majority of the survey respondents were the executive directors/CEOs or board members for their respective organizations.

FOCUS AREAS, EMPLOYEES, AND ANNUAL BUDGET

Nonprofit organizations (NPOs) in Saskatchewan are involved in a variety of activities, with most respondents (69%) representing human services and community support. Other sectors represented include sports and recreation (3%), arts and culture (5%), and under "other" participants entered areas like education, animal welfare, heritage, and environmental protection (19%). This data highlights the diversity of nonprofit focus areas in the province, particularly in key areas like social services,

Organizational Status



Organizational Focus



health, and education, which are vital to the well-being of Saskatchewan communities.

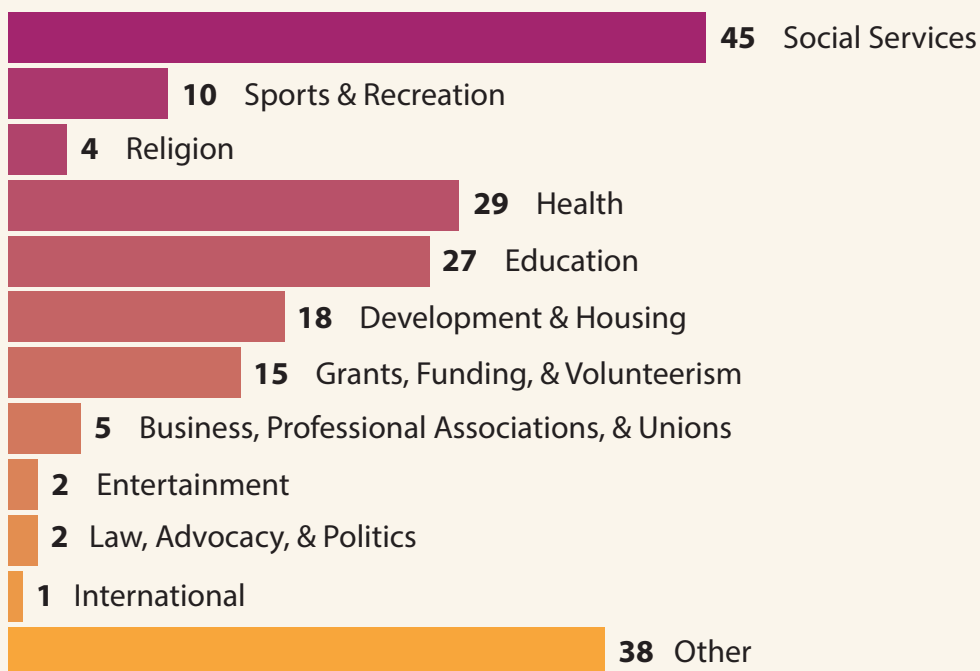
Almost half of the organizations (48%) focus on social services, with other major areas of support including health (31%) and education

and research (29%). There is significant overlap between these areas, along with smaller percentages supporting other sectors. One-fifth of organizations (19%) are involved in development and housing, while 16% focus on grants, fundraising, or volunteerism. Eleven percent were focused on sports and recreation, and 41% of responding organizations indicated “other” when asked for their activity areas. “Other” included childcare, art and culture, residential and day program supports. The findings show that 91% of organizations employ full-time staff, 89% have part-time staff, 70% of organizations have casual staff, and 19% reported having other types of em-

ployees, including volunteers, interns, and mentors. The largest staff complement was 435, while four organizations had no staff and were entirely volunteer run. Across respondents, the average total staff was 45, broken down further as an average of 21 full time staff, 12 part time staff, and 9 contract staff.

Responding organizations had annual operating budgets ranging from under \$100,000 (9%) to more than \$5 million (16%). Most had budgets between \$1 million and \$5 million (35%), while about a quarter operated on budgets between \$100,000 and \$499,999 (see next page). This reflects the varied scale of Saskatchewan’s nonprofit sector, where some organizations

Organizational Activities



Organizational Budget



are small, even without any staff, while others have hundreds of staff, multi-level leadership structures and operate very similarly to corporations. The findings show that 91% of organizations employ full-time staff, 89% have part-time staff, 70% of organizations have casual staff, and 19% reported having other types of employees, including volunteers, interns, and mentors. The largest staff complement was 435, while four organizations had no staff and were entirely volunteer run. Across respondents, the average total staff was 45, broken down further as an average of 21 full time staff, 12 part time staff, and 9 contract staff.

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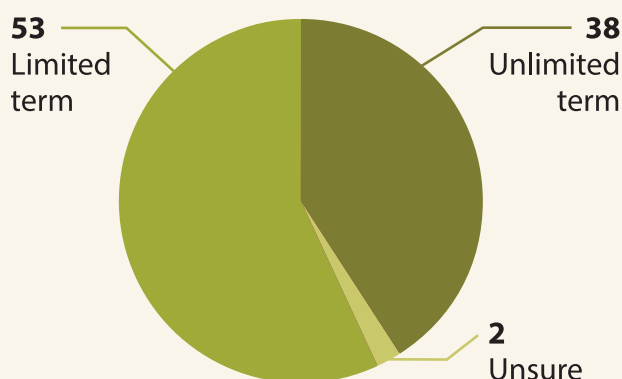
BOARD GOVERNANCE

Most organizations (73%) have a governance board, 18% have a combination governance and working board, and 3% operate with a working board. Governance boards focus on high-level tasks like setting budgets, overseeing the organization, and ensuring accountability. Working boards, on the other hand, take on additional responsibilities, such as day-to-day management and service provi-

Governance Style



Term Limits



sion. Working boards are more common in smaller, volunteer-driven nonprofits.

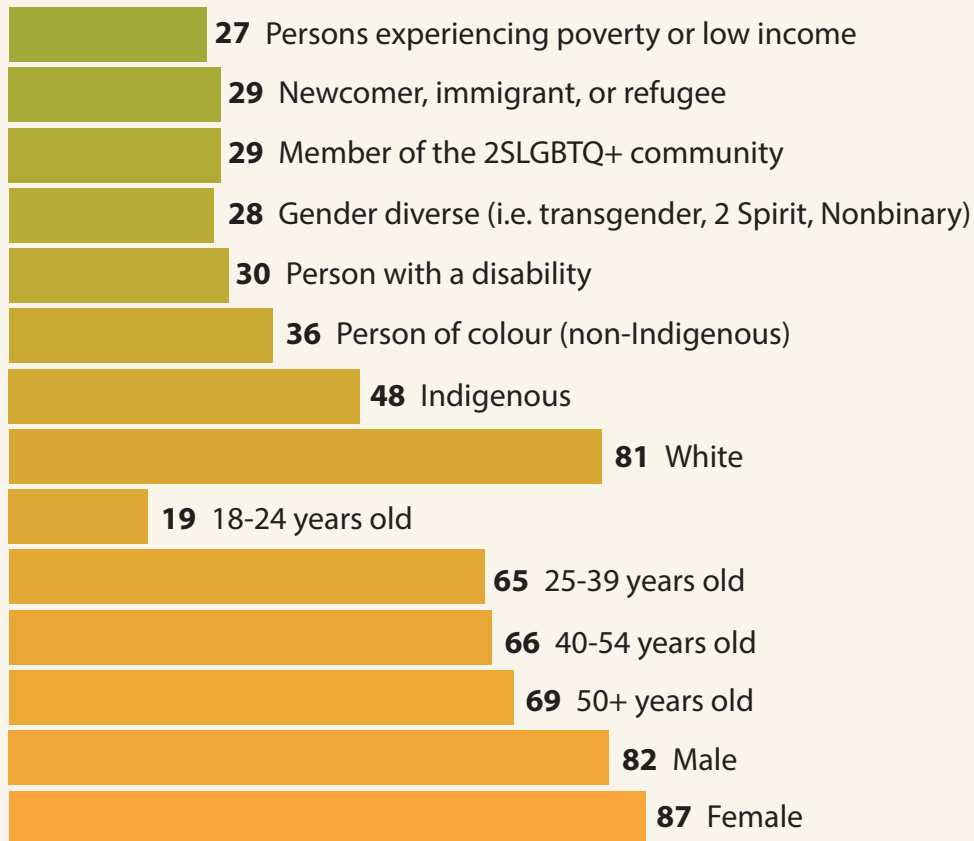
A handful of respondents indicated that their bylaws listed no limit for the number of board members, while the highest number listed was a maximum of 30 board members and the lowest was listed as one board member. The average size, as indicated in organizational bylaws was 11 board members.

When it came to actual board sizes, the largest board documented had 19 members, the lowest had no board members, and on average, organizations had eight board members.

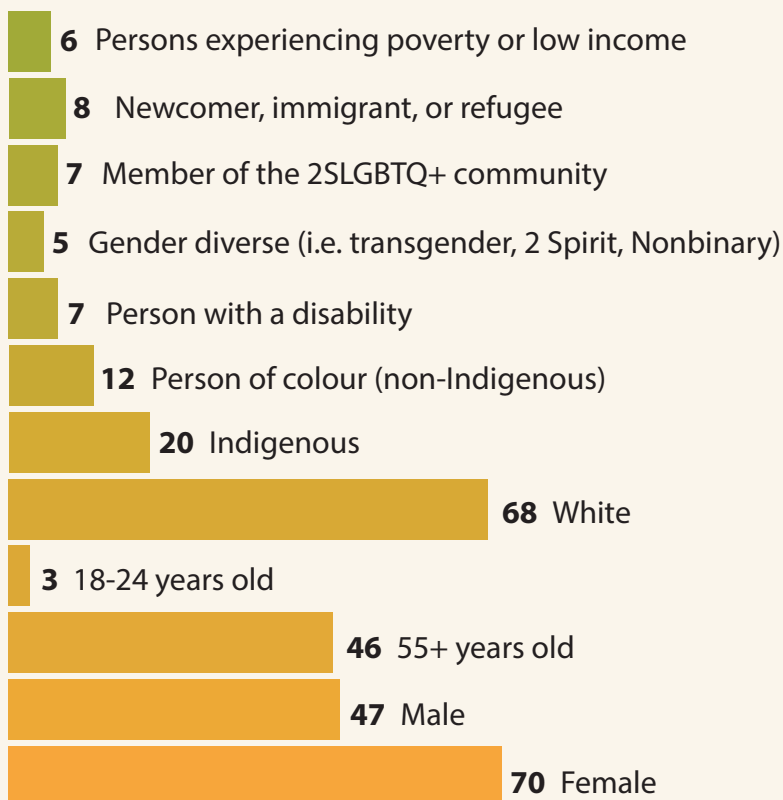
Most organizations (86%) have board policies that are separate from their bylaws and policies are typically updated by board committees or Executive Directors/CEOs.

Considerable variation exists in board member term limits. Over half of the organizations have term limits, while 42% do not. Organizations with limits emphasize the need for new voices and avoiding stagnation, while those without limits often cite difficulties in recruiting new board members, allowing experienced members to stay on indefinitely.

of Organizations with Board Members Who Are...



of Organizations with Board Chairs Who Are...



Organizations of all sizes and focus areas cared about diverse representation, but struggled to actualize this intent.

Women are overrepresented in the nonprofit sector, and this is the same on boards. However, while people from diverse backgrounds (2SLGBTQIA+, racialized, disabled, newcomer or immigrant) sit on boards, they rarely hold leadership positions. (See discussion on next page.)

The hours that board members contributed to responding organizations varied widely, from an answer of “zero hours/month, unless requested” to an organization where board members each contributed 30 hours/week of time. On average, organizations reported 37 hours of total board commitment per month and if we divide this by the average number of board members it totals around 5 volunteer hours per month, per board member. The lowest contribution was no time at all and the highest total board contribution was 165 hours per month. Many respondents also indicated that volunteer time for board members fluctuated widely during the year in response to shifting organizational needs

BOARD DEMOGRAPHICS

In terms of leadership, 75% of organizations have female board chairs, and about 50% have male chairs, with some having co-chairs. However, fewer than 10% of organizations have 2SLGBTQ+ board chairs, and only 5% have gender-diverse chairs. Most chairs are white (73%) and over 55 years old (50%). While boards

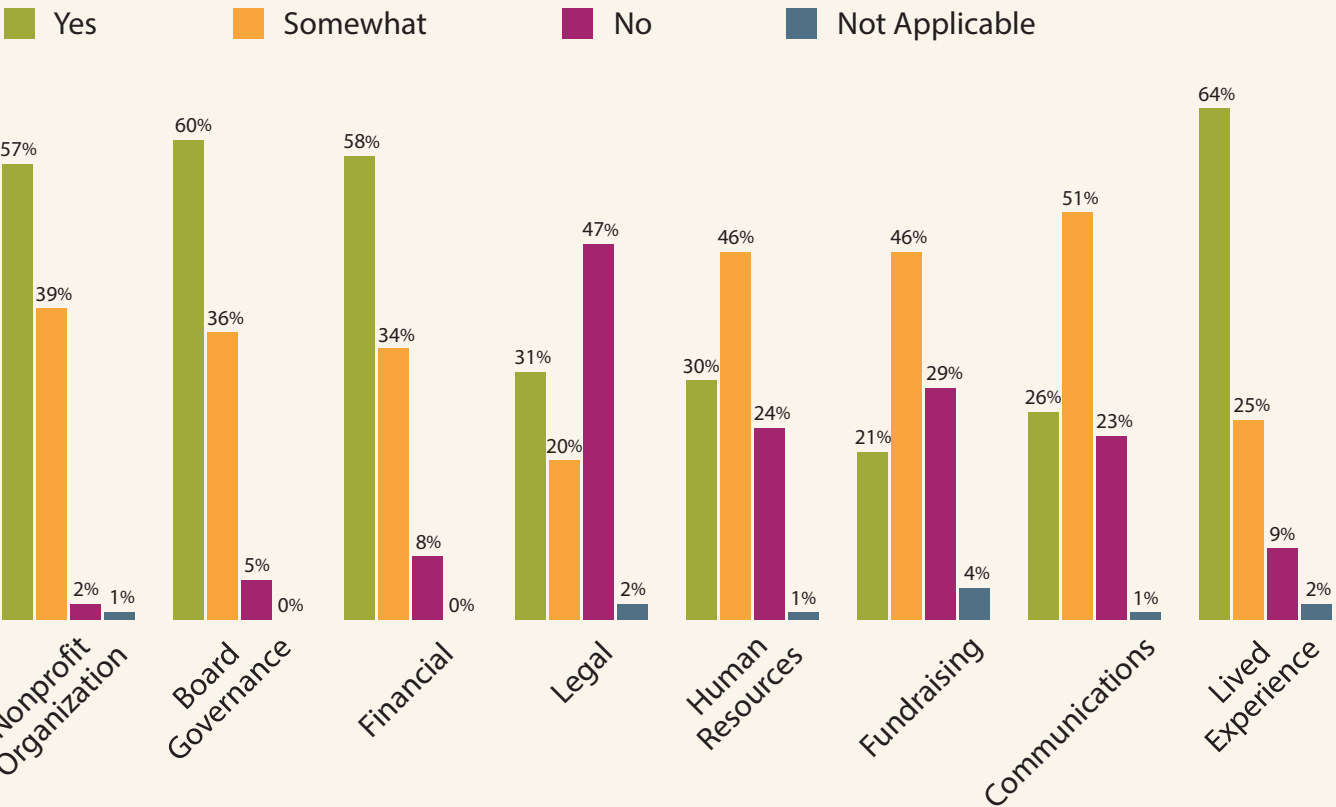
tend to have more diversity overall, this is less reflected in leadership positions. For example, 30% of board members are gender-diverse, and 52% are Indigenous, but these groups are less represented among board chairs.

SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES

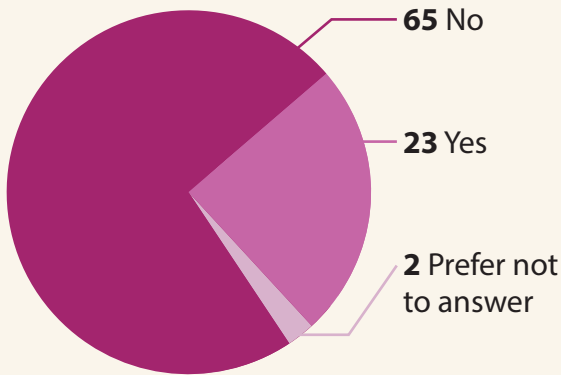
Most boards have strong expertise in nonprofit operations, governance, and financial management, with many members having lived experience relevant to the communities they serve. However, gaps remain in areas such as legal expertise (49% of boards lack this), human resources (24%), fundraising (33%), and communications (23%).

Despite these gaps, 86% of organizations reported being either satisfied or somewhat satisfied with their board’s competencies. This may be because some skills, like legal expertise, are difficult to find, and organizations are content with the strengths their boards do possess. Unfortunately, our survey did not allow for respondents to elaborate on their satisfaction, so we couldn’t explore the reasons behind this contrast in more detail.

Skillsets of Board Members



Financial Compensation or Recognition to Board Members



When asked if they provide financial compensation or other forms of support or recognition to board members, 23 organizations responded yes and 65 responded no. When asked for further detail, those organizations that responded “yes” indicated that they provide meals during board meetings, mileage, cellphone stipends, appreciation gifts, and childcare expenses. A small handful of organizations provided honoraria to their board members, with a few noting financial compensation in the range of \$110 to \$155 per meeting.

EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION (EDI)

A majority (68%) of respondents stated that it is very or extremely important to prioritize diverse representation in their board recruitment practices, with an additional 25% saying it is somewhat important. This indicates that EDI is a significant focus for many of the boards surveyed. We also asked whether orga-

How important is EDI to your board?



nizations had formal policies addressing EDI, particularly related to board representation and leadership practices.

Only 23% of organizations reported having EDI policies for their boards, and 37% did not have such policies. However, 21% said they were currently working on EDI policies, and 11% indicated that it was a future priority. When asked about what they would like to include in present or future EDI policies, respondents supported a range of factors, including board representation, anti-discrimination measures, and EDI statements for both governance and day-to-day practice.

Does your organization have written policies related to EDI?



For Saskatchewan nonprofits, the survey suggests that prioritizing EDI policies, particularly in board recruitment, is a significant goal, but still underdeveloped or not yet fully implemented. Nearly half of respondents also reported having specific policies to promote representation, including recruitment efforts for Indigenous people (57%), people with disabilities (47%), newcomers/immigrants/refugees (45%), and women (43%). Only 17% of organizations included broad representation-al diversity in their board recruitment and retention strategies, though 36% indicated they are working on this. ■■

CHALLENGES IN EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION

A CLOSER LOOK AT GAPS AND BARRIERS IN SASKATCHEWAN

As a bridge between the survey data and the forthcoming interview and focus group data, it is relevant to reflect more comprehensively on matters of diverse representation, inclusive environments, and equitable governance models, including the legacy of colonialism that characterizes nonprofit legislation and governance in Saskatchewan and across the country.

As a settler colonial country, Canada's very formation is based upon widespread efforts to erase Indigenous people and their own governance, leadership, and communal formations. Legacies of colonization include the discriminatory Indian Act from 1876, residential schools (that last of which only closed in 1996), the 60s scoop, and continued barriers to land, self-determination, and full participation in public life and leadership. As such, Canada's charitable sector is far from innocent in relation to the actions of colonization, especially its positioning of Indigenous people within paternalistic, discriminatory, and limited frames of reference (Greensmith, 2022).

"Helping work" itself is built upon colonization as the arrival of European settlers prompted formal governance, alongside social service and welfare systems (Elson and Carmichael, 2022). Churches and faith-based organizations

were the original leaders of Canada's welfare system, basing efforts on ideologies of moral superiority, whereby "social services [were] a way to control social unrest rather than a way to increase equitable access to services and opportunities" (Armitage in Elson and Carmichael, p. 10). Unfortunately, this moral superiority has been cast along cultural and racial lines, and even though the paternalism of the charitable sector has lessened over the years, its colonial roots are sustained through its very governance and operational structures.

In touching briefly on this history, we acknowledge that the research presented here dips only a toe into the important work of decolonizing the nonprofit and charitable sector. We also recognize that efforts to transform the nonprofit sector have the potential to directly counter colonial governance structures and to engage in other ways of knowing, living, and working together.

Representation matters at all levels of an organization. A board that reflects diversity in gender, ethnicity, and skills brings both a deeper understanding of community needs and a wider range of experiences

In their final comments, many survey respondents expressed concerns about the lack of external support, such as information, guide-

lines, and training, to help their boards improve or fulfill their roles effectively. Several organizations wanting to increase diversity on their boards noted challenges in recruiting members based on gender, age, ethnicity, and culture, especially in rural Saskatchewan. Others mentioned that finding any interested individuals for board positions is difficult, making diversity a secondary consideration. Additionally, some organizations have boards that are largely appointed, structurally limiting their ability to achieve diverse representation.

It is well-documented that representation matters at all levels of an organization. A board that reflects diversity in gender, ethnicity, and skills brings both a deeper understanding of community needs and a wider range of experiences (Buse, Bernstein, & Bilimoria, 2016). More specifically, there is a well-established positive correlation between gender parity on boards and improved organizational outcomes. Martinez-Jimenez, Hernandez-Ortiz, and Fernandez (2020) found that gender diversity enhances board effectiveness, particularly in areas like strategic planning, financial oversight, and community engagement. Bradshaw and Fretette (2012) found similar results regarding the representation of women, though they noted slower progress in attracting ethnoculturally diverse members to boards.

Our survey reflected these findings, showing strong representation of women in leadership roles but underrepresentation of people

of colour, especially non-Indigenous people. Additionally, groups such as people with disabilities and openly 2SLGBTQ+ people were significantly underrepresented on Saskatchewan nonprofit boards.

Gender dynamics in the nonprofit sector warrant closer analysis, as women are significantly overrepresented in many roles. Research shows that women make up around 85% of nonprofit support staff in Canada (Dunfield 2024), particularly in caregiving, social services, and education—fields traditionally viewed as “women’s work” and therefore often undervalued. At the same time, women make up only 70% of leadership positions, and a US study found that in human service organizations with budgets over \$10 million only 35% were led by women (Dunfield 2024). Women CEOs in the charitable sector generally lead smaller organizations with fewer resources and lower pay.

This combined overrepresentation in the workforce and comparative underrepresentation in leadership roles ties into broader societal trends, where work traditionally performed by women is seen as an extension of unpaid domestic labor and thus is undervalued both financially and socially. Although women dominate the nonprofit workforce, leadership roles tend to be held disproportionately by men, and the gender pay gap persists across the sector. As Paulette Senior, CEO and President of the Canadian Women’s Foundation,

explains, “It’s not just about the gap in pay, but lower pay in general” (Pall, 2020).

The undervaluation of women’s labor in the nonprofit sector reflects a systemic issue where contributions to the public good are not equated with market-based rewards. The “feminization” of nonprofit work highlights deeper societal inequities—roles perceived as caring, emotional, or supportive are not compensated or recognized at the same level as other forms of labor, even though they are critical to community well-being. Addressing these inequities is essential for the sector to realize its full potential, both in terms of governance and broader social impact.

Research shows that greater gender diversity on boards is strongly correlated with the presence of organizational policies related to diversity, and it consistently enhances overall board performance (Buse, Bernstein, and Bilimoria, 2016). However, the positive impact of racial and ethnic diversity on governance outcomes depends on clear policies and inclusive practices. Without such frameworks, racial and ethnic diversity may negatively affect governance outcomes (Buse, Bernstein, and Bilimoria, 2016). This finding underscores the importance of focusing not only on representational diversity but also on inclusion practices and fostering an inclusive board and organizational culture. As Bernstein and colleagues (2019) argue, effective governance requires organizational leadership that actively promotes inclusion, as well as meaningful equity, diversity, and inclusion policies.

Moreover, Buse, Bernstein, and Bilimoria (2016) suggest that racial and ethnic diversity on boards tends to yield better governance outcomes when there is also strong gender diversity. This highlights the intersections of identity and experience, suggesting that more robust board representation across gender, race, and ethnicity contributes to improved governance.

In our survey, the predominance of board chairs who are white, non-disabled, and heterosexual raises questions about how these

dynamics might influence the inclusivity of decision-making. The underrepresentation of people of colour, people with disabilities, and 2SLGBTQ+ members in leadership roles could indicate a gap in implementing inclusive governance practices.

This finding also underscores the fact that diversity alone does not guarantee better governance. To fully benefit from diversity, boards must establish formal processes and policies that support diverse representation and inclusion. These policies can help attract a wider range of board members and enable them to positively influence governance practices (Buse, Bernstein, and Bilimoria, 2016). For example, increased gender diversity often leads to stronger diversity efforts in other areas, such as racial diversity, improved HR policies, and increased inclusion practices throughout an organization. Increased gender diversity also helps to lessen the inverse relationship between racial diversity and effective external board practices and performance, demonstrating the need for a more intersectional understanding of both diversity and representation.

As this shows, EDI is not only about representation, it is also about the policies, practices, and principles that guide an organization. As such, Buse, Bernstein and Bilimoria (2016) found that boards with well-developed diversity policies were more successful in attracting and retaining diverse members on their boards. Embedding inclusive policies and practices into the foundational makeup of an organization’s governance culture helps reduce personal and group biases and foster a more inclusive environment (Bradshaw and Ferdette, 2012). Governance structures must create authentic opportunities for diversity to grow, evolve, and influence an organization’s core practices. While many organizations in our survey are actively working on implementing EDI policies, there’s still progress to be made in embedding these practices fully into board recruitment and retention. ■■

EXPERIENCES FROM WITHIN THE COMMUNITY-BASED NONPROFIT SECTOR

FOCUS GROUPS AND INTERVIEWS

[The nonprofit sector] has a tremendous social impact, but it is undervalued by the public, and by the government.

—Project Participant

A central component of the project was its engagement with board members, executive directors, CEOs, and other stakeholders within the nonprofit sector. These experts provided layers of insight, detail, possibility, and critique and drove both the analysis and proposed next steps for the project. A total of 22 people were interviewed, across an initial 5 individual interviews with key informants, five focus groups, and a final focus group with the key informants returning. Conversations varied greatly, representing the richness of the sector and the diversity of its leadership. After an initial review of all focus groups and interviews, we took the themes emerging from those discussions back to a cross-section of earlier participants to confirm and further develop our identified themes. As we discuss these themes, we let the words of our participants shine through, focusing first on themes related to the state of Saskatchewan's nonprofit sector and secondly on themes related to NPO governance and leadership.

All interview and focus group participants were from community-based organizations within the human services sector of the nonprofit landscape. This focus was a deliberate choice by the researchers, as these organizations were more highly represented in the survey, and we were most familiar with their challenges. While a focus on CBOs limits the findings' applicability to arts and culture organizations, recreational boards, and boards for various societies and clubs, the insights gathered here respond to an urgent community-identified need. At the same time, many of the findings, though specific to community-based organizations, offer broader relevance for the nonprofit sector as a whole.

Most participants were from Saskatoon, however, a few were from Regina, as enabled through hybrid focus groups.

THE VALUABLE WORK OF NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

Every participant agreed that NPOs are essential to our communities, economies, social fabric, and even political systems, often filling gaps that would otherwise remain unaddressed, particularly by the government. As one participant noted "nonprofits often address missing social determinants of health," such as legal services, wraparound supports,

and other areas beyond traditional healthcare that directly impact people's well-being.

During these discussions, one of our project members highlighted the broad reach of Saskatchewan's nonprofit sector, urging participants to "imagine what our communities would be like without these organizations." They pointed out that many vital services—including minor sports for children, arts and culture, festivals, counselling, and information centres—simply wouldn't exist without nonprofits. Another participant noted, "the high number of volunteers and the dollars" involved in the sector, rivalling other economies in the province. Outside research supports this, as mentioned in our introduction, and similar comments were made in most focus groups. One participant stated that if Saskatchewan's "6,300 nonprofits disappeared from the province, it would mean 50,000 jobs lost and thousands of people without essential services."

By offering resources and services that are otherwise unavailable or too costly for many people to access, nonprofits fill gaps, maintain social systems, and help individuals and communities access essential support. As indicated above, the sheer size of Saskatchewan's nonprofit sector is remarkable, employing a significant portion of the province's residents and contributing to the overall well-being of society. However, despite this, many participants felt that the sector is undervalued, as one participant noted: "it has a tremendous social impact, but it is undervalued by the public, and by the government." Despite operating similarly to private enterprises, nonprofits are often not seen as having the same level of oversight or skill. This perception contributes to the sector being under-resourced since government funding doesn't always reflect the full value of the services provided.

BOARD TURNOVER AND DECLINING VOLUNTEERISM

A critical issue identified in all our conversations was the "decline in volunteerism," with fewer people interested in serving on non-

profit boards or volunteering in general. This decline has been attributed to various factors, including a changing world, the Covid-19 pandemic, and different generational values and interests and aligns with existing research (Rodney, 2023). The decline in volunteerism places increasing pressure on NPOs to find board members. With approximately 6,300 NPOs in Saskatchewan, the sector requires around 50,000 board members across the province. This makes recruitment even more difficult, with one ED/CEO stating, "People don't want to volunteer like this. People want to volunteer for a cause where they see immediate action, without committing for years. It's going to be really hard for us to keep board members."

Another participant emphasized, "volunteerism, especially the kind required for board membership, won't happen without compensation. Short-term volunteers, like those who contribute five hours a month, are different. But long-term, year-long commitments aren't sustainable without financial compensation."

One respondent admitted they were "quite fearful of where we're going with governance with the next generation," while another flagged the need for changes in recruitment processes, noting that "many boards lack rigor in recruitment, tapping people like themselves instead of focusing on skills and mindsets." One organization had already reduced the number of board members required by its by-laws but was still struggling to recruit enough members to govern effectively.

People don't want to volunteer like this. People want to volunteer for a cause where they see immediate action, without committing for years. It's going to be really hard for us to keep board members." –Executive Director

In rural communities, the challenge is particularly acute: "Board member recruitment is really tough in rural areas. Many of our board members are family members of the people we serve," one participant shared, pointing out

that this can lead to conflicts of interest. Another participant noted the struggles of board chairs to engage members, noting “Our board chair is trying to get people engaged, but they just don’t want to. You’ll have one or two who are really keen, but the rest are burnt out. They have full-time jobs, families, and other commitments. They just want to attend the meeting, get the reports, and move on.”

This lack of engagement from board members reduces the board’s effectiveness, creating another layer of difficulty for organizations trying to recruit new members.

LIMITED RESOURCES AND A CHANGING FUNDING MODEL

As Lalande (2018) notes, project-based funding in the nonprofit sector has become increasingly common, often coupled with a reluctance to “fund organizational administrative costs” (p. 1). This shift away from operational, or core funding has created more instability, forcing organizations to rely on a “patchwork of project-based grants to sustain their work” (Lalande, p. 1). This type of funding often excludes or even discourages essential administrative expenses like rent, utilities, office supplies, and even staff, including financial managers, grant writers, receptionists, and sometimes directors. Governance itself is left unfunded, despite representing a critical element of evaluation and reporting requirements. Critical infrastructure, which contributes to achieving project goals, is rarely accounted for in grant budgets, leaving nonprofits struggling to fund basic needs like space, staffing, and supplies.

Moreover, project-based grants are mostly awarded through competitive processes, leading to competition between nonprofits for limited resources. One participant called this a “risk,” noting that “the structure [of NPOs] and funders [can pit organizations] against each other.” Rather than encouraging collaboration, this competition forces organizations to focus solely on their own survival, even at the expense of working together.

Financial constraints are closely tied to governance challenges. Although board members volunteer, there is less funding available to train them or cover essential governance tasks like financial audits. This lack of resources can also hinder collaboration; when limited and competitive funding make it difficult for organizations to stay afloat, organizational needs are prioritized over sector-wide cooperation.

Participants also highlighted another challenge: funders often dictate how money should be spent, which can strain leadership and push organizations to pursue projects that don’t align with their mission. As Alymkulova and Seipulnik (2005) explain, donors may impose “limitations on ways in which money can be spent by designating specific themes which may not be in the interests of all beneficiaries,” (p. 2) leading to donor dependency that can undermine an organization’s goals. This treatment is in stark contrast to for-profit businesses, where, as one key informant noted, “as long as [for-profit businesses] achieve the outcomes, they get to spend the money where they want.” Nonprofits, they argued, should be treated with the same trust that they will achieve the outcomes indicated by funders.

“In a perfect world, there would be something external, and you could streamline all these reports to all your 40 different funders.” –CEO

The administrative burden of reporting to upwards of 30 to 40 funders, each with their own evaluation structures and terms of reference, also emerged as a major issue. Each grant requires unique reports, which drain the time and capacity of senior leaders. One informant shared how a funder “talked to us like they were our sole funder,” which wasn’t the case and added unnecessary strain. As a potential solution, a CEO suggested: “In a perfect world, there would be something external, and you could streamline all these reports to all your 40 different funders.” This solution highlighted the need for not just addressing funding challenges but also rethinking governance struc-

tures to improve how NPOs operate and interact with funders.

On the topic of resources, the nonprofit sector is historically undervalued and underpaid. Nonprofit employees often earn 20-40% less than their counterparts in for-profit organizations due to limited funding, reliance on grants, and the emphasis on directing funds toward services rather than administration. This gap impacts the nonprofit sector's ability to attract and retain talent, making it more difficult to fill key roles, and limiting the capacity for growth and innovation. Consequently, nonprofits face increased turnover and a reliance on "passion" over competitive compensation, which can ultimately affect service delivery and organizational sustainability (Charity Village, 2023).

CURRENT STRUCTURES IMPEDE COLLABORATION

Participants outlined that collaboration within the sector could be a positive factor—but that it doesn't happen often. One key informant linked this to current governance structures, explaining, "the sector hasn't done a good job of having a collective voice. Part of this is due to board structures—each organization has its own board, and these boards tend to be territorial, focusing inward rather than looking at the sector as a whole." Another echoed this sentiment: "When boards are focused on their own organization, they're not necessarily thinking about what's good for the sector. There's a lack of coordination." As a result, collaboration between organizations remains limited, as each NPO prioritizes its individual needs over those of the broader sector.

The scarcity of resources, particularly in smaller nonprofits, where boards might be working boards, limits the ability for boards to think beyond the immediate needs of their organization. One participant remarked, "Boards are so focused on survival" and there aren't any concrete incentives for collaboration. On the other hand, there was robust discussion about the potential for greater collaboration between nonprofit organizations, including

resource-sharing, merging boards, and potentially developing a unified voice for advocacy. As one participant said: "we are all doing the same thing—why can't we collaborate more?"

THE NONPROFIT ACT: AN OUTDATED FRAMEWORK

Though unique to Saskatchewan, the Nonprofit Act mirrors similar legislation across Canada, requiring nonprofits to follow governance structures that many view as outdated. As one participant remarked, these structures "are very colonial and haven't changed much over time." Despite being updated in 2022, the Act remains rigid, mandating governance models such as the requirement for boards of directors. Many participants also criticized the Carver model of governance, which was seen as ineffective and outdated. One participant noted that organizations often stick to these governance systems—either because of the law or internal policies—even when they don't serve the organization well or support complex decision-making.

Expressing frustration with the limits of these traditional systems, another participant asked, "Why can't we do things differently? Because John Carver or some guy from 100 years ago said I couldn't? It's very frustrating... I think it has to change. When was the last big change in board structure? We haven't had one." This sentiment captured a recurring theme throughout our discussions: a desire to rethink governance models and consider whether incremental changes or a complete overhaul might be necessary.

Another participant pointed out that the governance structures mandated by the Act are often modeled after corporate governance structures, which don't always fit the needs of nonprofits: "From my experience reporting to a board and being on boards, the Nonprofit Corporations Act is somewhat modeled after Corporate Shareholders Governance structures. It often doesn't work because people join boards for the mandate without fully understanding the fiduciary obligations or re-

quirements of being on a board.”

This highlights deeper issues surrounding board leadership, diversity, capacity, and the very role of boards in nonprofit governance (see appendix A for a further discussion of the Nonprofit Corporations Act). As well, the framing of the Nonprofit Corporations Act further emphasizes the propensity of boards to focus on one organization to the exclusion of sector wide collaboration.

ED/CEOS AND BOARD CHAIRS: REQUIREMENTS FOR EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

“The ED and the board chair are kind of like pilots in a plane. You want to steer the organization together and then the rest of the board is there for support.”

–Board Chair

The “hourglass” metaphor is often used to describe the relationship between a board chair and an ED/CEO, with both roles positioned at the central point between the organization and the board. This metaphor was reinforced by participants, who unanimously emphasized the importance of a strong relationship between these two key leaders, with one board chair sharing: “I think the ED and the board chair in particular are kind of like pilots in a plane. You want to steer the organization together and then the rest of the board is there for support.” While clear roles and expectations are critical to avoid role confusion or micromanagement, both the board chair and ED/CEO must also have a deep understanding of and commitment to the organization’s mission and vision, allowing them to function as a cohesive team. The board chair was seen as needing to be accessible to the ED/CEO, particularly in urgent situations, while each leader should manage conflicts within their own domains—the ED/CEO handling staff issues and the board chair managing board conflicts. Many participants noted the tendency for board chairs to become too involved in oper-

ations, a behaviour that results in difficult conversations. But when done well, a trusting and transparent relationship between the board chair and ED/CEO serves as an important driver for an organization’s success.

Mary Hiland’s study of 16 nonprofits analyzed the trust between ED/CEOs and board chairs through the lens of social capital. Following in-depth interviews with 32 study participants, Hiland developed an ED/Board chair continu-

Trust Building Model

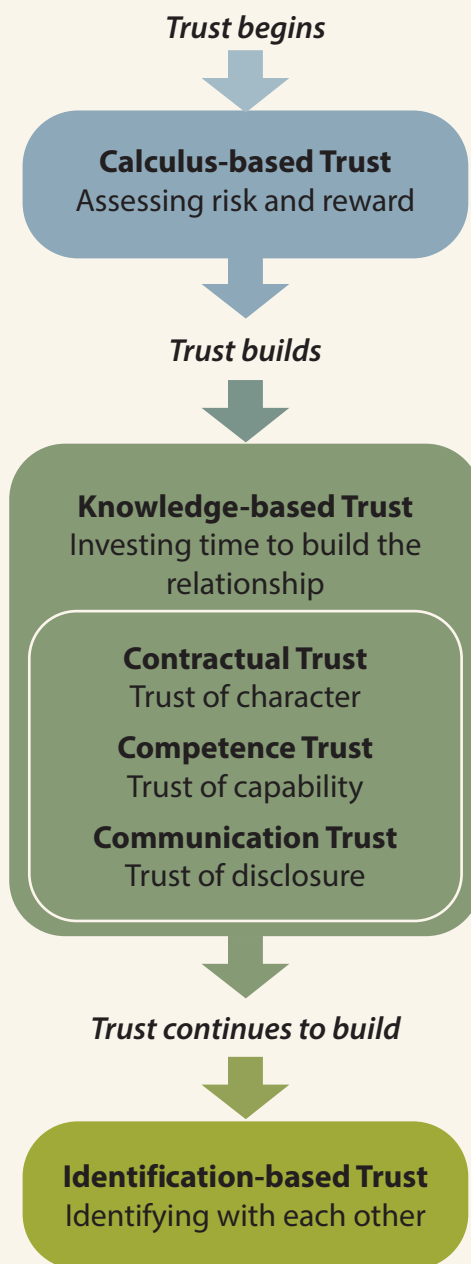


Figure 1: Trust building model.
Adapted from Hiland, 2015.

um that ranged from “good,” “better,” or “great” in terms of efficacy and impact on the organization (2015).

In “good” relationships the ED/CEO and the board chair operated as managing partners, focusing on agreed goals but with limited engagement with other stakeholders, including other board members. These pairs benefited from improved information sharing and decision making.

“Better” relationships between the ED/CEO and the board chair, saw them as planning partners, engaging the broader board in strategic discussions and resulted in increased external connections for the organization.

The “great” relationships, or leading pairs were mission-driven, with deep trust among the ED/CEO, board chair, staff, and the community. In these cases, boards moved beyond their formal roles, creating an interconnected web of relationships and in fact, open access to staff was cited several times by board chairs as a critical source of trust in the executive director (see Figure 1, previous page).

Hiland found that trust was the determining factor in these relationships. Low-trust relationships relied heavily on rigid structures, while high-trust relationships allowed greater flexibility. Interestingly, in leading pairs, board chairs were deeply involved, often collaborating directly with staff and these organizations weren’t as reliant on clear roles and responsibilities (Hiland, 2015).

We often think that hands-on board involvement characterizes younger and less professional nonprofits—e.g. the working board that breaks their necks to get the organization going and then breathes a sigh of relief as the organization is able to shift gears to a governance board. But Hiland’s research participants represented large and longstanding organizations with multi-million dollar budgets. In those organizations whose ED/CEOs and board chairs characterized “leading pairs,” board chairs were very involved in the organizations, having frequent contact with staff and working with them directly on projects. Contrary to long-held beliefs within the sec-

tor, Hiland demonstrated that it was actually through de-emphasizing prescriptive roles and responsibilities that efficacy (and trust) increased.

Returning to our research participants, many highlighted succession planning as crucial for ensuring continued effective leadership. Barriers to a successful ED/CEO and board chair relationship often stem from poor communication or an inaccessible board chair. When succession planning is weak, especially after a board chair’s term ends, both the new chair and the ED/CEO suffer from a lack of mentorship and support. While the ED/CEO can offer input and assistance in terms of onboarding a new chair, this can upset the balance of power between the two roles. Similarly, when a new ED/CEO takes over, a strong board chair is essential for onboarding, as failing to provide this support could destabilize the organization or reduce confidence in the new leader’s abilities. Participants stressed that both new board chairs and ED/CEOs require strong support networks and organizational continuity to succeed.

BOARD DIVERSITY

When we asked, “What makes a good board?” participants emphasized that diversity is key to successful governance. Board diversity—by ability, gender, age, race, ethnicity, experience, and other elements—has a direct impact on governance practices. The diversity of boards, much discussed lately and certainly one of the focuses of our survey, constitutes a clear thread throughout this project. As Buse, Bernstein, and Bilimoria (2016) found, a more diverse board improves practices like financial oversight, strategic planning, legal oversight, and community outreach. Similarly, Martinez-Jimenez, Hernandez-Ortiz, and Fernandez (2020) found that having more women on boards strengthens both board effectiveness and business outcomes.

At the same time, participants amplified existing research that highlights the overrepresentation of women in the sector, and the resulting devaluation of community work. One

executive director shared, “We are predominantly women, and so we are taken less seriously because of the existence of patriarchy.”

It's one thing to be diverse; it's another to seek out the silent partners around the table. –Board Member

he nonprofit sector has historically been both undervalued and underpaid, a reality closely tied to its feminization. Women dominate the workforce in caregiving, social services, and education—areas traditionally viewed as “women’s work” due to their association with caregiving, emotional labour, and unpaid domestic labour. This perception has led to lower wages and diminished recognition for the vital contributions these roles make. Despite nonprofits’ significant role in supporting social well-being and filling gaps in public services, the sector is often underfunded. Moreover, the gender pay gap remains a persistent issue, with women in leadership roles within nonprofits earning less than their male counterparts.

While participants strongly supported the idea of board diversity, they highlighted the gap between “policy vs. practice.” One board member noted, “Diversity is easy to write into policy, but it’s hard to practice real inclusion where people feel empowered to contribute.” This was reflected in another participant’s comments as they shared that “It’s one thing to be diverse; it’s another to include and seek out the silent partners around the table.” In all cases, it was clear that “diversity work” requires genuine inclusion and support for board members who are racialized, gender-diverse, or living with disabilities.

Research supports this. It was clear that while policies related to board diversity are important, they don’t necessarily mean that boards *become more diverse*. Findings showed that organizations needed to dedicate themselves to the practicing of diversity and inclusion. While the implementation of inclusive policies enables organizations to attract diverse groups to their boards, it is the diverse people around the table who are better able to influence fu-

ture practices and behaviours and therefore positively influence future board performance (Bradshaw and Fredette 2012; Buse Bernstein and Bilimoria 2016). In all cases, it is clear that inclusive policies, though an improvement over the alternative (nothing), must be put into *practice* in order to achieve true results.

We also asked what successful board diversification would look like. One participant said it means having “a board that is reflective of the community we serve.” For example, if “50% of the kids we serve are Indigenous, 50% of our board should be Indigenous.” While they stressed there’s no exact formula for board composition, reflecting the community was seen as crucial to diversity, as opposed to representation goals that were disconnected from their own work. Importantly, this participant added that achieving diversity comes from the “practices, behaviors, and values of your organization,” not from simply checking a box. Put another way, if an organization lives by the values of inclusion, equity, or decolonization, it will naturally attract a wider range of volunteers and board members.

Being on a board where I’m the only brown face, it’s like an added responsibility. –Board Member

Our conversations contained a lot of nuance around this topic, including reference to the skills that board members bring to the table and the level of support that new board members receive, including whether or not they are recruited to check off a “diversity box” or fulfill a policy requirement for diverse board membership. Raising concerns about tokenism, many shared experiences where new board members were recruited to fill “diversity” quota and then weren’t supported in those roles. As one board member said “It’s hard to be representative of a population with eight to 12 people but I think you have to try. Being on a board where I’m the only brown face, it’s like an added responsibility.” Without collegial support, these board members don’t stick around long. As one participant said, “When it’s done well, it’s incredibly beneficial... but when it’s done

from a tokenized perspective... people tend to leave boards pretty quickly because they didn't come to speak for an entire community."

Avoiding tokenizing requires proper onboarding and mentoring for new board members. Senior board members and chairs must invest time in supporting all new members, whether they are people of diverse background or not. As our discussions showed, newly recruited members—often serving on boards for the first time—need guidance in navigating non-profit governance. Researchers also note that the success of board diversity depends heavily on leadership and creating an environment where diverse perspectives can flourish and where boards can make decisions together that support meaningful organizational changes (Bradshaw and Fredette 2012; Bernstein et al., 2019).

Finally, it's important to move away from labeling people as "diverse" or "diversity candidates," a practice which is itself tokenizing. Diversity describes a group, not individuals, and a truly diverse board reflects a range of experiences, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, and perspectives.

BOARD SKILLS, CAPACITY, AND EFFICACY

A significant challenge for boards is the capacity of board members as volunteers. For some, this means being over-recruited, particularly for people from diverse backgrounds who are repeatedly asked to join boards. One participant shared an example of an elder on their board who was "on 11 different boards," and she herself asked, "at what point isn't this tokenistic?" The desire to diversify boards often leads to the same individuals being asked to join multiple boards, but this creates a heavy burden and leads to burnout. Rather than relying on the same volunteers, it's essential to recruit new people to create genuinely diverse boards, although this connects to the broader issue of declining volunteerism. Another key informant echoed this sentiment: "Diverse

people are asked to be on 49,000 boards... they are spread far too thin."

Burnout is an issue for board members of any background, but it's particularly common for those with specific expertise, such as financial, legal, or human resources skills. Our survey found these to be the most frequently lacking skills on Saskatchewan NPO boards. As one participant said, "An accountant, lawyer, or human resources expert... are [the hardest people] to find on boards." These highly skilled recruits often end up on several boards, leading to burnout.

As with diversity, new members need to be recruited and trained in nonprofit governance, a factor which was identified repeatedly throughout the focus groups as one of the highest indicators of board member efficacy. As one ED shared "I find on some boards that there's an accountant on there but no leadership skills. They don't need people that just come to meetings; they need to lead the organization."

The problem is compounded by a declining interest in board membership, smaller boards with heavier workloads, and burnout among experienced contributors. If current governance models are to be maintained, the only solution is a significant influx of new board members. However, this would require additional time and resources to train and onboard them, which brings us back to the issue of declining funding that many participants highlighted. This challenge led us to ask each group throughout the research process: "If you had a magic wand and could change the sector in any way related to governance, what would you change? And why?"

THE MAGIC WAND: WHAT CAN WE DO TO TRANSFORM GOVERNANCE?

Alternative governance models have long been a topic of discussion in the nonprofit sector, with many questioning the traditional

dominance of boards of directors themselves. Cornforth and Brown (2013) argue that in countries like Canada, the UK, and Australia, other stakeholders—including staff, advisory groups, and community members—can be just as influential in shaping nonprofit decision-making, and yet they are restricted from the board governance table. In our focus groups, participants echoed this, describing events where staff and community members were involved in policy development and strategic planning to great success. They also suggested that not all contributors to organizational governance need to be formal board members. The voices of various stakeholders could still carry weight through other meaningful roles, such as advisory committees.

Do we even need boards?
—Executive Director

Some participants even advocated for a radical shift, asking, “Do we even need boards?” One informant suggested that boards primarily serve financial oversight, a role that might be better filled by advisory or oversight committees, or even by existing processes such as auditors. One participant had a helpful suggestion: “we all pay for an auditor; we all pay \$5,000 to \$20,000 a year for an organization to come in and look at our files, and then we ask our board to rubber stamp the auditor’s report and then we’re good to go. Why can’t that relationship be tactically extended? Why can’t an accounting firm look at our files four times a year and share it to the board.” The suggestion calls for heightened resourcing for the relationship between an organization and an accounting firm, while also calling for a shift away from requiring many volunteers to pore over financial documents to instead enlisting a professional firm that is paid to complete a central fiduciary responsibility of the organization. As the participant concluded: “this model could be way more efficient” and in the long run, “cost effective” when we take into account the hours of staff and volunteer time that contributes to every audit and financial committee meeting.

Participants questioned whether boards, as required by law, genuinely serve the mission of nonprofits or whether they impose unnecessary restrictions on what could be more collaborative, community-driven governance models. For example, as one person noted, “the Nonprofit Corporations Act [stipulates that] to have a nonprofit or charity, you have to have a board. But I wonder, is there something different that we could do instead, like a community advisory, a mission keeper committee that doesn’t hold the same responsibility?” The idea of removing boards entirely or reducing their governing power was seen as radical, but some participants were open to it: “I am ready to burn the nonprofit model down and would not be sad. If there were a radical shift tomorrow, I’d say, ‘Let’s give it a go.’”

Within the research, one approach calls for a shift toward “associative democracy,” where governance is seen not just as managerial but deeply democratic, promoting active participation from various stakeholders, including beneficiaries and community members. This concept critiques corporate-style governance in nonprofits, advocating for a focus on inclusivity, transparency, and accountability to the public rather than just donors or board members. The idea is to democratize governance and align it more with the values of social justice and equity (Wagner, 2014).

I wonder, is there something different that we could do instead, like a community advisory, a mission keeper committee that doesn’t hold the same responsibility?” —Executive Director

Such approaches are also part of a broader movement that views governance as a tool for systemic change, where nonprofits are seen not just as service providers but as actors for justice. In this model, governance mechanisms are designed to challenge existing power structures and promote practices that are anti-oppressive and community-led (Suarez, 2023).

Some of our participants considered practical alternatives, such as shared boards across multiple organizations, to reduce the number of board members needed while fostering sector collaboration. One participant described how their organization “mentored” smaller nonprofits by providing financial, legal, and human resources services. Shared boards could relieve pressure on individuals serving on several boards, particularly in smaller communities where resources are limited. There were various ideas on how this could work, including building on a model of “business-related sub clusters that share resources in terms of what now would be considered board oversight, but have more agency specific conversations related to generative ideas and individual mission.”

Another participant suggested a model of “super-boards” that provide fiduciary oversight for a number of organizations, while they are complemented by committees or smaller advisory groups that are specific to individual organizations and their strategic pieces. Yet another contributor applied a changed model to rural environments where a shared board would make sense: “if you are in a smaller community, and you have four organizations, it is probably mostly the same people on each of those four boards. It would be interesting to think about what if you had one board that served the governance function for all four organizations.”

Despite these possibilities, concerns about competition for resources continued to characterize conversations around shared gover-

nance models. Lalande (2018) observed similar challenges in rural areas, where organizations fear losing control of resources under collaborative models. In Saskatchewan’s heavily rural landscape, these radical ideas—or similar alternatives—could indeed face resistance or take time to implement effectively among the province’s many board members. That said, risk aversion around this matter may be somewhat misplaced; many organizations already share board members, with individuals often serving on multiple boards simultaneously. The main difference proposed here is that the boards themselves would be fully shared between organizations, rather than individuals splitting their time.

Moreover, while competition is a significant issue in the nonprofit sector, shared governance could shift this dynamic. Instead of seeing each other as competitors for limited resources, organizations could collaborate more closely, working together as allies toward a common goal: strengthening communities and strengthening the sector as a whole.

Ultimately, participants viewed potential changes in nonprofit governance—whether through shared boards, advisory committees, or even eliminating boards altogether—as necessary to address current sector challenges. These ideas challenge the status quo and call for a reevaluation of the Nonprofit Corporations Act to allow more democratic, equitable, and community-driven governance models that better reflect the sector’s evolving needs. ■■

FUTURE GOALS FOR THE NONPROFIT SECTOR

This exploration of nonprofit governance lays the groundwork for further discussions and action with an emphasis on centering principles of equity, diversity, and the input of those historically underrepresented within nonprofit leadership. We were able to identify a handful of future goals for the sector, based on the data from all interviews and focus groups, and tested against our final check-in with key participants. These include:

1. Governance fosters sector-wide sharing, collaboration, and advocacy
2. Governance is a shared responsibility
3. Governance is flexible in structure and size to align with organizational purpose.
4. Governance is properly resourced
5. Governance is supported by engaged, knowledgeable, and diverse board members

On October 11th, 2024, we shared both the research and these goals at a one-day Summit at Wanuskewin Heritage Park just outside of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. This Summit was attended by a wide range of nonprofit governance stakeholders including board chairs, executive directors, CEOs, members of the local municipal government, nonprofit consultants, students who were involved in student government at the local University, funders, and other interested parties. Following a dis-

cussion of the scope and findings of the research, summit participants were divided into breakout groups where they participated in facilitated brainstorming sessions around the five future goals, with an invitation to imagine concrete and actionable changes that might bring these future goals into closer view.

This final section of the report, provides greater detail about each of the our future goals, and then identifies discussion themes and action items. We share them here to inspire and provoke, and ultimately to engender meaningful changes to a sector that we love.

GOAL 1: GOVERNANCE FOSTERS SECTOR-WIDE SHARING, COLLABORATION, AND ADVOCACY.

To strengthen the nonprofit sector, organizations should actively work together to identify shared interests and collaboratively advocate for changes that benefit all. By aligning efforts in areas such as policy reform and funding initiatives, nonprofits can amplify their impact, creating sector-wide improvements that would be difficult to achieve alone. Working together not only elevates the voices of individual organizations but also helps the sector present a cohesive, powerful stance on pressing issues that matter to communities.

Exploring shared governance models can further enhance this collaborative spirit. Nonprofits might consider pooling resources or even sharing boards of directors, an approach that maximizes expertise while alleviating strain on individual boards. Such initiatives foster a culture of mutual support, reducing competition for scarce resources.

Discussion Themes:

- Explore creative funding approaches, even collaboratively between organizations.
- Increase openness to sharing resources, such as funds, staff, and board members.
- Embrace asymmetrical reciprocity (Loewen Walker and MacLean, 2024) in joint applications, allowing each organization to contribute according to its capacity.
- Publicize and share more about the collective work of the sector.
- Cultivate a belief in collaboration and take active steps to practice it.

Action Items:

- Use a collective impact model (<https://collectiveimpactforum.org/what-is-collective-impact/>). Identify networks or larger stakeholders that might be able to take on a coordinating role. For example, in Saskatchewan this could be the Non-Profit Partnership.
- Advocate for standardized reporting practices across organizations
- Facilitate knowledge sharing on grant applications, reporting, and governance to help organizations navigate emergency or high-pressure situations together.
- Pool resources and share personnel across organizations.
- Co-host board member training sessions for multiple organizations simultaneously.

- Share data on the communities served to enhance collaborative insights.
- Establish external, shared advisory committees that serve multiple organizations with aligned missions and constituencies.
- Create networking groups for Executive Directors to meet regularly, exchange knowledge, and collaborate.

GOAL 2: GOVERNANCE IS A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Effective governance extends beyond the board of directors and organizational leadership, encompassing a wider circle of stakeholders. This broader array includes funders, unions, community members, the general public, staff, and government entities at various levels. By involving these stakeholders in governance processes, organizations can ensure that decision-making reflects the diverse interests and needs of the communities they serve. Embracing this inclusive approach to governance fosters transparency, accountability, and stronger alignment with public values.

While the board of directors and the organization's ED or CEO often hold the most direct influence, other stakeholders exert impact in ways that shape organizational leadership and management. For example, funders and government agencies may influence by setting regulations, allocating resources, or defining contractual obligations. This layered approach to governance enables organizations to balance internal decision-making with external influences, ultimately strengthening their resilience and capacity to adapt to evolving community and sector needs.

Discussion Themes:

- Building trust is essential—not only between the Executive Director (ED) and Board Chair but also among all board members and between the board and staff. Trust building should be viewed as non-linear and overlapping.

- Sharing information equates to sharing responsibility; governance is only effective when everyone has access to the relevant information.
- Governance shouldn't be limited to "rights holders" like board members; other stakeholders, including Indigenous leaders, people who access services, and community members, should be invited to participate.
- Meaningful exchange is built upon reciprocity; it's about bringing people into our worlds and equally stepping into theirs
- Think of governance as a verb—"governing"—rather than a static role; this approach makes governance more dynamic and inclusive.
- Board members need proper training to understand their roles, finances, and the legal requirements of nonprofits to contribute effectively to governance.
- Recruiting the Person, Not Just the Role: Rather than focusing solely on specific expertise (e.g., a lawyer), prioritize recruiting individuals who bring value beyond their credentials and are committed to the organization's mission.
- Committees handle much of the "heavy lifting" in governance, with each committee having one board representative who reports back to the full board. Committees can also be made up of volunteers and community members.

Action Items:

- Increase transparency by making governance-related information, such as board meeting summaries and decisions, more accessible to staff and the community.
- Diversify board membership by recruiting representatives from government, community organizations, and funders.
- Implement an advice-based, decision-making process that includes input

from stakeholders.

- Create shared external committees that serve multiple organizations.
- Allocate more funds for board training, integrating it into grant budgets and core funding requests.
- Recruit thoughtfully: evaluate candidates not only for their skills but also for their commitment to the role and potential for long-term engagement.
- Delegate more governance responsibilities to committees to enhance efficiency and shared ownership.

GOAL 3: GOVERNANCE IS FLEXIBLE IN STRUCTURE AND SIZE TO ALIGN WITH ORGANIZATIONAL PURPOSE.

Governance structures need to be adaptable, shaped to align with each organization's unique mission, vision, and capacity. Flexibility enables organizations to implement governance models that best suit their specific goals, such as advisory boards or shared governance structures. Relying on a one-size-fits-all approach can limit effectiveness, as outdated models like Carver or Robert's Rules of Order may not meet modern organizational needs. Instead, governance should be tailored to ensure that leadership composition, functions, expertise, and accountability mechanisms are closely aligned with the organization's mission, moving beyond rigid compliance with traditional governance frameworks or outdated legislative requirements.

Discussion Themes:

- While governance structures are essential, do we always need traditional boards?
- Balancing Structure and Flexibility: Structure helps ensure accountability and efficiency, but flexibility is key to meeting unique organizational needs.

- Governance structures should vary among organizations – i.e. smaller organizations might share boards while larger organizations might have their own. We need a legal framework that supports this flexibility.
- Foster open communication channels that suit the organization's needs.
- Ask relevant questions before making decisions, and embrace patience when necessary. At times, skip large engagement meetings and go directly to the individuals needed for quick input, ensuring efficient use of everyone's time.
- Trust remains a fundamental aspect of effective governance.

Action Items:

- Advocate for legislative reforms to allow nonprofits greater autonomy, including removing the requirement for boards if not essential.
- Pilot collaborative governance models, such as shared boards or rotating board members (e.g., an accountant serving two boards, but taking turns between each organization instead of devoting full time to both orgs).
- Engage with funders to promote simplified or standardized reporting processes.
- Reconsider meeting practices: meet only when necessary, embrace alternative communication methods, and adapt the frequency based on organizational needs.

GOAL 4: GOVERNANCE IS PROPERLY RESOURCED.

Proper resourcing is essential for effective governance, yet it is often underfunded despite being critical for organizational leadership. Funders, who require strong governance structures, should actively invest in these areas by providing resources for board training,

succession planning, and capacity-building within organizations. Additionally, funders can support necessary reporting mechanisms like audits, policy development, and equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) policies, each of which plays a crucial role in organizational governance. Organizations themselves must also commit time and resources to strengthen their governance practices. By alleviating some of the financial burden on nonprofits, this approach enables them to develop resilient, effective boards that are well-equipped to handle complex governance challenges.

Discussion Themes:

- It's time to move away from deficit- or scarcity-thinking
- We need to become comfortable with asking for more funding or pointing out when funding falls short; embrace more radical honesty and assertiveness with funders about what is needed to achieve organizational goals.
- Need to increase resources dedicated to training.

Action Items:

- Encourage funders to work directly with organizations to gain firsthand insight into the realities of running and funding these initiatives, which may lead to more supportive funding practices.
- Advocate for a standard tender practice across the sector that includes governance funding as a required element, making it difficult for funders to exclude it.
- Engage funders more assertively by directly communicating your needs and not settling for insufficient support.
- Ensure governance costs are included in budgets.
- Provide board members with accommodations, such as childcare, to support their participation.

GOAL 5: ENGAGED, KNOWLEDGEABLE AND DIVERSE BOARD MEMBERS

Engaged, knowledgeable, and diverse board members are essential for effective governance. Engaged board members show a strong commitment to their roles by attending meetings consistently, conducting due diligence, and actively participating in discussions and decision-making processes. This high level of engagement is vital for the board's capacity to provide effective oversight and strategic direction. Knowledgeable board members bring essential expertise, not only in areas like finance and law but also in nonprofit sector dynamics, governance practices, and a deep understanding of the organization's mission and work.

Diversity within the board is crucial to ensure representation of the communities served. A truly diverse board includes a range of perspectives across gender, race, age, ability, and socioeconomic background, enriching decision-making and governance. However, diversity extends beyond demographics to include varied experiences, expertise, and skills relevant to the organization's goals. It also involves incorporating diverse models, practices, and worldviews, allowing the board to better address the complex needs of the organization and those it serves.

Discussion Themes:

- Succession planning: Allowing flexibility for individuals transitioning into new roles, including overlap time for outgoing and incoming board members to ease transitions and make them less abrupt.
- Attract better candidates: To support diverse representation we need to provide resources like transportation, childcare, and accommodations to make participation more accessible.
- Ladder of engagement: We could offer multiple levels of engagement and participation, clearly outlining expectations, and fostering open communica-

tion so individuals can see where they fit.

- Actively reach out to individuals who may feel they don't have a seat at the table and ask about any barriers they face to participation.
- Bring in groups or cohorts rather than single representatives from specific demographics (e.g., multiple women, queer people, POC) to create a meaningful impact.
- Make board meetings more enjoyable and engaging to attract and retain board members.

Action Items:

- Revamp Recruitment Processes: Increase outreach and ask more questions about potential needs for participation. Extend personal invitations to reduce the burden on individuals to apply themselves, focusing on purposeful recruitment.
- Make the boards fit the organization: Tailor board diversity to fit the organization's specific needs, moving away from rigid adherence to diversity matrices as long as priorities are met. For example, some boards will need more queer people, so prioritize them, while others might need more people with disabilities to adequately represent an organization's mission and vision.
- Provide honoraria for individuals who need it to join boards or even advisory committees, enhancing accessibility.
- Pilot a mentorship program for board onboarding and succession planning, assigning mentors (not limited to the chair) to support new members.
- Pilot the use of consent agendas to streamline meetings and focus on high-priority discussions.
- Implement a rotating role or position where individuals move across various committees to build trust and broaden organizational insight. ■■

OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS

Informed by both the research and the Summit, the researchers have identified a number of more detailed action items. These repeat ideas in the previous section, but with more pronounced focus on key areas.

FOSTERING SECTOR-WIDE COLLABORATION AND SHARED RESOURCES

01 Develop Resource-Sharing Agreements. Create formal agreements for resource-sharing that outline how organizations will share funds, staff, or technology. This could include shared grant writers, administrative support, or pooled technology licenses, allowing organizations to reduce costs and enhance efficiency.

02 Create a Sector-Wide Online Platform. Develop an online platform or portal where nonprofits can easily share resources, best practices, and funding opportunities. This could also include a forum for organizations to ask questions, share challenges, and brainstorm solutions.

03 Establish Shared Grant-Writing Teams. Form a team of grant writers from various organizations who work together to submit joint funding applications for collaborative projects, leveraging each organization's unique strengths and areas of expertise.

04 Organize Regional Training Hubs. Set up regional hubs where organizations can participate in shared training sessions, covering essential topics such as governance, financial management, and policy advocacy, tailored to the needs of nonprofits in each area.

PRIORITIZE INCLUSIVE AND TRANSPARENT GOVERNANCE PRACTICES

05 Community Engagement and Representation. Appoint a board member or staff person as a community liaison who actively engages with community members, clients, and other stakeholders to gather their perspectives and relay these to the board, ensuring ongoing stakeholder input.

06 Organize Governance Peer Review Sessions. Collaborate with other nonprofits to conduct peer review sessions, where board members from different organizations review and provide feedback on each other's governance practices, fostering mutual learning and shared responsibility.

07 Open and Accessible Governance. Implement policies that make board meetings and decision-making processes more transparent and accessible to stakeholders. This could include regular open-door board meetings, summaries of key decisions shared with stakeholders, and an online governance portal for document access.

BUILD FLEXIBLE GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES ALIGNED WITH ORGANIZATIONAL NEEDS

08 Adaptive Governance Models. Move beyond one-size-fits-all structures by tailoring governance models to align with organizational size, mission, and needs. Options could include advisory councils, “governance lite” models for smaller projects, or shared boards for closely aligned organizations.

10 Decision-Making Frameworks. Create frameworks that clarify when full board involvement is required versus when decision-making can be handled by staff or smaller committees. This flexibility will streamline operations and empower staff.

09 Scalable Reporting Requirements. Develop adaptable reporting practices to ensure that governance activities and financial reporting align with the organization’s current scale and resources, reducing administrative burden where possible. For example, small projects might require smaller scale reporting, or verbal reporting, rather than complex accountability measures, as required for larger and more resource-intensive projects.

ENSURE GOVERNANCE IS PROPERLY RESOURCED AND SUPPORTED

11 Dedicated Governance Funding. Advocate for governance costs to be included as essential elements in budgets and funding applications, and create a case statement to articulate specific governance funding needs, including training, compliance, and development.

13 Sector Advocacy for Governance Standards. Collaborate with other nonprofits to push for sector-wide standards that require funders to cover governance expenses, including capacity-building, board training, and essential administrative costs.

12 Governance Sponsorship and Funding Partnerships. Establish partnerships with local businesses or funders to secure sponsorships for governance-related costs, such as board training, strategic planning, and board member accommodations (e.g., childcare, travel support).

CULTIVATE ENGAGED, KNOWLEDGEABLE AND DIVERSE BOARD MEMBERS

14 Develop a Board Member Training Program. Create a structured training program that includes modules on nonprofit governance, financial literacy, sector-specific knowledge, and the organization's mission. This program could be mandatory for all new board members and offer refresher courses for existing members. If it is a certificate or accredited program it could build reputation and impact.

16 Board Engagement and Accountability Framework. This could include a board engagement charter with clear expectations around meeting attendance, participation, and development; quarterly and annual self-evaluations by board members; a clear board skills matrix that guides recruitment efforts; and gatherings and social events to build camaraderie and a positive board culture.

15 Conduct Diversity and Inclusion Workshops. Hold regular workshops focused on diversity and inclusion to foster a culture of openness and sensitivity. These workshops can help board members understand the importance of representing diverse perspectives and equip them to address unconscious biases.

CREATE DATA-DRIVEN AND EVIDENCE-BASED GOVERNANCE PRACTICES

17 Centralized Data Repository. Collaborate on a shared data repository that allows nonprofits to access anonymized data on service delivery, community needs, and impact metrics. This will support evidence-based decision-making and policy advocacy across the sector.

18 Annual Sector Governance Reviews. Conduct yearly reviews of governance practices across organizations, assessing their effectiveness and identifying trends, gaps, and opportunities for improvement. Share insights with the broader sector to drive continuous learning and adaptation.

NEXT STEPS

The next phase of this ongoing and “ever-green” project will include the development of an action team that will meet regularly to start actioning items in the work of truly reimagining non-profit governance in Saskatchewan. We intend to continue sharing our progress on the Social Innovation Lab website: <https://law.usask.ca/socialinnovationlab/index.php>

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APPENDIX A: REVIEWING THE SASKATCHEWAN NONPROFIT CORPORATIONS ACT

Before 2022, the governing framework for nonprofit corporations in Saskatchewan was the Nonprofit Corporations Act of 1995. This was repealed and replaced by the Nonprofit Corporations Act, 2022, which came into force on March 12, 2023. The new legislation outlines essential guidelines for structuring and managing nonprofit corporations. However, despite the clear provisions of the Act, there are common misconceptions regarding bylaws, board member qualifications, and governance practices. Below are some frequently asked questions and misunderstandings:

TYPE OF NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

The Act differentiates between “member” and “charitable” corporations.

- **Member Corporations** primarily serve their members and are funded by fees or donations. Examples include recreational organizations, daycares, and social clubs. These corporations require a minimum of one director, who can be a paid employee.
- **Charitable Corporations** benefit the public and focus on specific causes or communities, such as community arts or anti-racism initiatives. These organizations require a minimum of three directors. Although member-based organizations participated in the survey, all focus group participants represented charitable organizations, and the governance discussion pertains to these types of organizations.

BYLAWS AND ARTICLES

While Saskatchewan NPOs are encouraged to have bylaws, they are not required. All NPOs must submit articles of incorporation, which can serve in place of bylaws. The articles of incorporation include basic governing information such as the organization’s name, fiscal year, type, number of directors, and initial directors and officers. Bylaws can supplement these articles but must not contradict them. Bylaws may address matters such as meeting quorum, membership rules for directors, and the frequency of board meetings, but their content is not predetermined by the NPO Corporations Act.

- Articles can only be changed by a special resolution, requiring a two-thirds vote at a general meeting.
- Bylaws are easier to amend, as they can be changed at board meetings but must be ratified at an annual general meeting.

BOARD MEMBERS: SIZE, COMPOSITION, AND TERMS

Board members must be mentally competent, 18 years or older, not bankrupt, and without convictions for fraud-related offences. At least one director must live in Saskatchewan unless the corporation has a power of attorney. While the Act specifies a minimum number of directors, there is no maximum.

- Directors can serve up to three years and may be elected or appointed, but only one-third of directors can be appointed, and they can only serve until the next general meeting.

- Directors can be removed by a majority vote at a general meeting or through a court application.

LIABILITIES, INDEMNIFICATION, AND INSURANCE

Directors are largely protected from personal liability, as NPOs are separate legal entities. However, directors have fiduciary duties to act honestly, in good faith, and with reasonable care and diligence. Directors may be liable for unauthorized loans, unpaid wages, tax deductions, GST payments, or environmental damage caused by the corporation.

REPORTING OBLIGATIONS

Nonprofit corporations must hold at least one annual membership meeting to present financial statements and, if available, the auditor's report. This report must be completed within six months after the fiscal year ends. Annual returns, financial statements, and board member lists must be filed with Information Services Corporation within seven months of the fiscal year-end.

CHARITABLE STATUS

To qualify as a nonprofit and potentially obtain charitable status, organizations must meet specific criteria under Saskatchewan law and the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA). Section 1-2(1) of the Act defines charitable organizations, and CRA Guidance CG-002 outlines the requirements for charitable purposes, which

must directly or indirectly benefit the public. Section 149.1(1) of the **Canada Income Tax Act** further clarifies what constitutes a charitable organization.

TAXATION

Nonprofit organizations are exempt from income tax on revenue related to their primary activities but are still liable for payroll taxes and taxes on unrelated business income.

RECORDS AND MINUTES

It is legally required for NPOs to keep accurate records, including articles, bylaws (with amendments), meeting minutes, and resolutions. Any director, member, legal representative, or agent of the organization has the right to examine and make copies of these records.

APPENDIX B: SURVEY QUESTIONS

GENERAL INFORMATION

1. What is the name of your organization?
2. Is your organization incorporated as a not-for-profit organization?
3. Is your organization a registered charity?
4. What is your organization's postal code?
5. What is your role in the organization?

ORGANIZATIONAL FOCUS AND COMPOSITION

6. What would you characterize as your organization's primary focus? (Note that the next question allows for more specific description of activities)
 - ☐ Human Services and Community Support
 - ☐ Sports and Recreation
 - ☐ Arts and Culture
 - ☐ Other (please specify)
7. What primary activities does your organization support (check all that apply)?
 - ☐ Social Services
 - ☐ Sports and Recreation
 - ☐ Religion
 - ☐ Health
 - ☐ Education and Research
 - ☐ Development and Housing
 - ☐ Business, Professional Associations, and Unions
 - ☐ Environment Law, Advocacy and Politics
 - ☐ Grants, Fundraising or Volunteerism
 - ☐ International
 - ☐ Other (please specify)
8. How many staff does your organization have?

9. What is your organization's annual operating budget?
 - ☐ Less than \$99,999
 - ☐ Between \$100,000 - \$499,999
 - ☐ Between \$500,000 - \$999,999
 - ☐ Between \$1,000,000 - \$4,999,999
 - ☐ More than \$5,000,000 Unsure

BOARD FORM AND COMPOSITION

10. How would you describe your Board's governance model?
 - ☐ **Governance Board**—Meets to discuss and vote on budgets and direction of the organization. Provides oversight, high level strategy, and accountability. Sometimes also called an advisory or policy board.
 - ☐ **Working Board**—A governing board whose members have additional responsibilities including day-to-day management of the organization, and/or provision of organizational services.
 - ☐ **Combination** of Governance and Working Board.
 - ☐ Unsure
 - ☐ Other (please specify)
11. How many board members can serve on your organization's Board as stated in your bylaws?
12. How many people currently serve on your organization's Board?
13. Does your organization have a term limit for your board membership?
14. What is your term limit for board members?
15. What are the demographics of your BOARD CHAIR. Select all that apply:

- ☐ Male
 - ☐ Female
 - ☐ Gender diverse (trans, 2Spirit, Nonbinary)
 - ☐ White
 - ☐ Indigenous
 - ☐ Person of colour (non-Indigenous)
 - ☐ Newcomer, immigrant, refugee
 - ☐ Person with a disability
 - ☐ Person experiencing poverty or low-income
 - ☐ Youth
 - ☐ 55+
 - ☐ Member of the 2SLGBTQ+ community
 - ☐ Other (please specify)
16. Please identify the demographics of your BOARD MEMBERS. Select all that apply:
- ☐ Male
 - ☐ Female
 - ☐ Gender diverse (trans, 2Spirit, Nonbinary)
 - ☐ White
 - ☐ Indigenous
 - ☐ Person of colour (non-Indigenous)
 - ☐ Newcomer, immigrant, refugee
 - ☐ Person with a disability
 - ☐ Person experiencing poverty or low-income
 - ☐ Youth
 - ☐ 55+
 - ☐ Member of the 2SLGBTQ+ community
 - ☐ Other (please specify)
17. How many hours per month on average do board members contribute to the organization?
18. Are there any details that you want to add about question 18? (For example, is this number normal? Does this fluctuate throughout the year? Is there a big difference between executive and general board members?)

BOARD FUNCTION

19. Does your organization have board policies outside of your bylaws?
20. If you answered “yes” to the above question, who updates your board policies and procedures?
21. Does your board have the following skills and competencies? (“Yes,” “Somewhat,” “No,” or “N/A”)
- ☐ Nonprofit organizations
 - ☐ Board Governance
 - ☐ Financial
 - ☐ Legal
 - ☐ Human Resources
 - ☐ Fundraising
 - ☐ Communications
 - ☐ Lived Experience
 - ☐ Other (please specify)
22. How satisfied are you that your board has the right combination of skill sets, backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives to support the organization?
23. Does your board receive financial compensation or other forms of support or recognition? For example: honoraria, childcare during meetings, gifts, honours, or other stipends.
24. If you answered “yes” to the above question, what forms of recognition do board members receive on a monthly basis?

EQUITY, DIVERSITY, & INCLUSION POLICIES

25. In your opinion, how important is prioritizing diversity factors in your board’s current recruitment practices/strategies?

26. Does your organization have any written policies regarding equity, diversity and inclusion - whether about the representation of board members or in relation to other factors related to governance and leadership?
27. Which of the following elements are included in your policies (if you do not have a current diversity and inclusion policy, you can identify elements that you would like to include)?
- ☐ Board representation - number of representative board members
 - ☐ Anti-discrimination and harassment policies
 - ☐ Statements about equity, diversity, and inclusion as they impact the overall operations of the organization
 - ☐ Statements about equity, diversity, and inclusion as they impact the governance of the organization
 - ☐ A board matrix which identifies diversity measures and goals
 - ☐ I'm not sure
 - ☐ Other (please specify) None of the above
28. Has your organization performed any formal organizational cultural audits or assessments regarding equity, diversity, and inclusion?
29. If you answered "yes" to the above question, was your board included in the audit or assessment process?
30. What demographics and lived experiences do your organization's board policies aim to address? Please select all that apply:
- ☐ Women
 - ☐ Gender diverse (trans, 2Spirit, Nonbinary)
 - ☐ Indigenous
 - ☐ People of colour
 - ☐ Newcomers, immigrants, refugees
 - ☐ People with disabilities
 - ☐ People experiencing poverty or low income
 - ☐ Youth (under 18)
 - ☐ Older adults - 55+
 - ☐ Members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community
 - ☐ Other (please specify)
31. Does your organization have representational diversity included in its succession planning to successfully recruit and retain diverse board members?
32. How well do you believe your board reflects the diversity of your clients and the broader community?
33. How satisfied are you with the level of racial and ethnic diversity on your current board?
34. Do you have any other comments?

APPENDIX C: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Throughout your experience working with/training/consulting with non-profit organizations, what key things stand out for you?
2. In your work as board members, describe the capacity and expertise needed to be on a board (focusing in on key areas: financial, HR, fundraising, governance, policy, leadership). And to what extent do you see that being met?
3. What do boards bring to CBOs in terms of supporting organizations in achieving their missions? And what barriers and challenges do boards face in supporting the overall mission and work of an organization?
4. What successes and barriers have you seen in relation to the relationship between EDs/CEOs and Board Chairs/Boards? What might improve this relationship? (If applicable)
5. Why is diversity and inclusion important when discussing governance? (I.e. based on gender, race, sexuality, ability, age, lived experience, etc.) What does “diversity” mean in your organization?
6. If you had a magic wand, what changes would you make to the governance framework of non-profit organizations?

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