



2021

We're On Our Way

Supporting Durham's Non-Profit Sector
through (and post) the COVID-19 Pandemic

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL DURHAM
PROJECT FUNDED BY: ONTARIO TRILLIUM FOUNDATION

Community Development Council Durham (CDCD) is located on the traditional territory of the Huron-Wendat, Haudenosaunee, and Mississauga (Anishinaabe), on land ceded in the Williams Treaty of 1923 by the governments of Canada and Ontario and by seven First Nations of the Chippewa of Lake Simcoe (Beausoleil, Georgina Island, and Rama) and of the Mississauga of the north shore of Lake Ontario (Scugog Island, Alderville, Curve Lake, and Hiawatha). In Durham, we live and work on the traditional territory of the Mississaugas of Scugog Island First Nation. As settlers, we are grateful for the opportunity to meet here, and we thank all the generations of people who have been stewards of this sacred land.

Learn more about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Report, and how we can all use its principles in building a more equitable and just society.

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FOREWORD

In 2020, non-profits all across Durham struggled to manage their daily needs and to fulfill their mission in the middle of unprecedented uncertainty caused by the global COVID-19 pandemic. With determination and resilience, non-profits entered into a mode of survival and adapted to the ever-changing provincial mandates and conditions by capitalizing on their existing resources, and creating opportunities for organizational development and growth. This caused a monumental shift in the landscape of the non-profit sector. Our project paralleled this shift to advance the sector's current recovery work, and to support organizations through their transition building.

Based on the report findings, the sector trends displayed massive gaps in funding and service delivery that were rooted in imbalances of power and regional differences. Factors such as accessibility, funding, geography, and organizational size determined the rate of recovery for each non-profit. When addressing the existing power imbalances in the non-profit sector, it is important to view the issues through an inclusive lens that embraces sector-wide collaboration.

Digital platforms have been critical in delivering social services to vulnerable communities throughout the pandemic. The pandemic increased the need for more digital infrastructure as province-wide closures led to different working models. A year later, staff are still seeking to have a healthy work-life balance and organizations have been conducting their programs digitally and virtually to accommodate their diverse clientele. A lack of access to these digital technologies posed a great barrier in service delivery. The population groups disproportionately affected from a lack of technological access are females, those with limited education, and people in low-income and rural communities.

Financially, the sector is unstable. Businesses, donors, and funders continue to be impacted by financial hardships from the pandemic. On top of maintaining their organizations operations, programs, and services, larger non-profits have been struggling with securing grants and funding, as well as finding difficulty in supporting their local network of organizations that are also facing similar challenges. While the larger, more established non-profits will continue to be resilient, project participants shared that it is an unsustainable way of operating. The fundamental inequities are greatly felt across the sector. It is critical for the sector to address these structural and systemic issues to ensure there is a successful recovery - and organizations cannot do this work in silos.

FOREWORD CONTINUED

Although funding is important for recovery, it is not the main or only area of concern for Durham non-profits. In the report, many participants touch upon the importance of internal and organizational development for sustainability. For instance, attracting and retaining staff remains an ongoing challenge as organizations re-open their doors to resume programs and services. Internal issues like staffing cause ripples in the program and service delivery of these organizations, and also can negatively impact the communities and people involved.

While this report reflects a certain point in time, the lessons that were learned are critical to rebuilding the sector. The term "new normal" became habitual in conversation and dialogue across the sector, but there is no "new normal." Frankly, there never will be a "normal" in the sector. Instead, non-profits will have to re-build and re-create what normal looks like for them. The project findings led us to believe that the "normal" should look like increased accountability, genuine collaboration, and transparency.

Building avenues for non-profits to genuinely collaborate and share ideologies to combat structural and systemic issues without competition will be the foundation for the sector to equitably recover. Our hope is that this report offers Durham's non-profit sector the guidance, insight, and support needed to stay united and to continue the critical work they are doing as they continue on this road to recovery.

INTRODUCTION

Durham's non-profit sector is no stranger to tackling arising emergencies and community crises. Like most of Ontario's non-profit sector, organizations in Durham have become adept at responding to challenges with determination and aplomb.

Durham's non-profits have always had an impact on the local economy - they provide substantial employment, purchase goods and services, and lessen the collective social costs of poverty and homelessness. Simultaneously, they provide incredible social benefits by providing essential services, creating community-based supports, and advocating with residents for improvements to their quality of life. Durham's non-profits meet the triple bottom lines by crafting low-cost, efficient, and environmentally sound practices and resources that deepen civic engagement and ensure high quality community care.

When COVID-19 hit Durham, non-profits responded by doubling their efforts to keep communities connected and safe - even as demands for their services increased and they struggled to balance community need with inter-organizational limitations. COVID-19 highlighted the massive fractures in non-profit infrastructure - non-profits had struggled to do so much with so little investment in themselves and their organizations that the financial uncertainties of COVID-19 threatened their very existence. While the efforts of funders and governments helped buoy non-profit response, the funding provisions were predominantly correlated to providing immediate community benefits. These funds did not offer non-profit organizations ongoing administrative and core support, which would allow non-profits to improve and plan for the next systemic shift.

As vaccinations increase and conversations shift to "returning to normal," there is an urgent need to review how non-profits coped with the pandemic, and what they needed - and still need- to strengthen themselves. The pandemic cemented the fundamental truth that non-profits are critical - both locally and globally. Recovery plans and strategies will need to carefully consider how to include the non-profit voice in their development. After all, what non-profits have long held as "normal" does not work anymore. The pandemic has depleted financial reserves, left staff overwhelmed and overworked, and forced leaders and boards to ask difficult questions about fulfilling missions and mandates while keeping their doors open.



About CDCD

Community Development Council Durham (CDCD) is an independent, not-for-profit social planning organization that has been working to enhance the quality of life for individuals, families and communities in Durham Region for more than 45 years. CDCD's mission is to identify regional community development needs and inform relevant policy and programming, while supporting and delivering effective services.



About Ontario Trillium Foundation

The Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) is an agency of the Government of Ontario and one of Canada's leading granting foundations. Our investments in communities across the province help build healthy and vibrant communities. The mission of the Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) is to build healthy and vibrant communities throughout Ontario by investing in community-based initiatives and strengthening the impact of Ontario's non-profit sector.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

In March 2020, Community Development Council Durham (CDCD) came together with community partners to distribute a survey on the impacts of COVID-19 on the non-profit sector in Durham region. The resulting report sought to depict how COVID-19 created a landscape of uncertainty for many Durham non-profits, with questions lingering about how non-profits would continue to service vulnerable clients while remaining operational with this newest and formidable challenge.

Six months after the start of the pandemic, non-profit needs and challenges had shifted - non-profits, both those who received additional funding and those who have remained under the constant threat of closure, sought sustainability. While several non-profits were successful at securing different supports and creating new connections and relationships, looming fears about decreasing revenue sources and impending austerity measures have emerged as new concerns.

Following Community Development Council Durham's initial report on the impact of COVID-19 on the non-profit sector, an advisory group of five key stakeholders was drawn together to support the second phase of the project. The project team members helped identify 91 key individuals in Durham who could serve as project participants. Targeted outreach efforts were directed at engaging these individuals as well as an open call for focus group participants from the first phase of the project.

The project team hosted 2 focus groups with 12 non-profit stakeholders, who were mostly upper management organizational representatives.

The project team also interviewed 10 key informants and 6 orientation informants to better understand how COVID-19 had affected organizations, subsectors, and communities. Key informants were consulted based on their direct, long-term experience in the non-profit sector (i.e., executive directors), and orientation informants were chosen for their indirect support of Durham's non-profit sector (i.e., funders).

Data collected from the conversations and discussions were transcribed and thematically analyzed into 15 buckets, which were consolidated into 3 major report sections with recommendations. The information was organized by common themes, with special attention given to repeated wording or phrases. The themes were then reviewed for accuracy and usability, and lastly organized for this report.

The project sought to better understand the reality of non-profits now and what would be needed to ensure non-profit recovery in the near future. All project materials, including consent forms and questions, can be found in the appendix, pages 39-49.

This report hopes to continue the narrative that Durham's non-profit sector is complex, interwoven, and important as recovery strategies are drafted and implemented.

The report below is a fulsome summary of major points between all three project activities. Sections also include quotes from our project activities, which have been edited for clarity and to ensure anonymity, and recommendations from project participants.

PROJECT OVERVIEW



5 ADVISORY GROUP MEMBERS

Ajax-Pickering Board of Trade, Ajax Pickering Hospital Foundation, Durham Child and Youth Planning Network, Durham Community Foundation, United Way Durham Region

91

Key Stakeholders were identified as potential project participants



2 FOCUS GROUPS OF 12 NON-PROFIT STAKEHOLDERS

6 ORIENTATION INTERVIEWS

10 KEY INTERVIEWS

Report Limitations

As with all qualitative data analysis, there are several limitations to consider. In comparison to quantitative data analysis, it is difficult to maintain and assess the rigor of the data.

While efforts were made to report content accurately, the report may not have always captured the exact intention of certain statements - the research team made a concerted effort to re-connect with participants to clarify statements where possible.

The research team responsible for this report made it a priority to mitigate and minimize researcher bias through the analysis and writing.

Lastly, despite considerable outreach efforts, there was unequal cross representation of stakeholders and non-profit sub-sectors. Larger organizations with more staff were more likely to participate than smaller or grassroots organizations and efforts. Therefore, the report may more accurately reflect more established organizational input and feedback, and may not be accurate for grassroots or smaller organizations.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to:

Project Partners

- Ajax-Pickering Board of Trade
- Ajax Pickering Hospital Foundation
- Durham Child and Youth Planning Network
- Durham Community Foundation
- United Way Durham Region

All the Organizations that participated as Key Informants

- AIDS Committee of Durham Region
- Boys and Girls Club of Durham
- Feed the Need Durham
- Oshawa Seniors Community Centre
- Salvation Army
- Scientists in School
- Their Opportunity
- Whitby Chamber of Commerce
- Women's Multicultural Resource and Counselling Centre

Stakeholders who participated as our Orientation Informants

- Ajax-Pickering Board of Trade
- Community Development Council Durham
- Durham Community Foundation
- Municipality of Clarington
- Town of Ajax
- Region of Durham

Focus Group Participants

- 1855 Whitby-Technology Accelerator
- A Gift of Art
- Bowmanville Older Adults Association
- Community Care Durham
- Community Justice Alternatives of Durham Region
- Durham Association for Family Resources and Support
- Durham Children's Aid Foundation
- Gate 3:16 Outreach Centre
- John Howard Society of Durham Region
- Precious Minds Support Services

We extend our thanks to our funders, governments, and community leaders for their continued guidance, efforts, and insights. Without their collective efforts, the non-profit sector would not have been able to respond to community demands and needs. Their support, and willingness to provide and partner is deeply appreciated.

We extend a special thank you to the Region of Durham, and our Key Project Advisors, Durham Community Foundation and United Way Durham Region, for supporting this project, and for all the important work they have done and continue to do to support the sector.

We also extend a special thank you to Ontario Trillium Foundation for funding this report, and believing in a project like ours.

Finally, we wish to acknowledge all the non-profits in Durham Region for continuing to do an incredible job against all odds. We know that this past year has been difficult for so many, and that you likely struggled to bring your best selves to the communities you have served.

Thank you for your creativity, strength, and continued existence.

You are needed and necessary. We see your hard work, and we hope you see yourself reflected in this report.

KEY POINT 1



COVID-19 highlighted existing infrastructural challenges in Durham's non-profit sector.

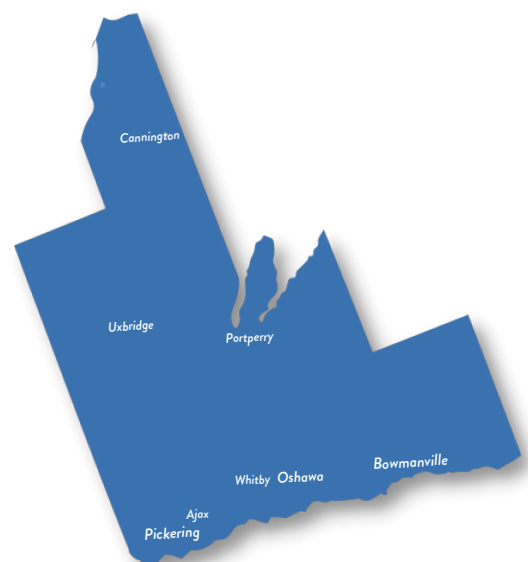
SECTOR DESCRIPTION

The Durham region is a web of vibrant communities that rely on cultural diversity and geography to serve as home to a thriving population of nearly 3/4 of a million people. Like its people and landscape, Durham's non-profit organizations provide an energetic and diverse workforce that has formed a unique sector, which has struggled to serve people throughout Durham with compassion and commitment.

Project participants outlined several unique variables and challenges facing this dedicated workforce. Durham serves a very large geography that is densely populated along the Highway 401 corridor in Pickering, Ajax, Whitby, and Oshawa. North Durham and portions of Clarington are largely rural, which presents challenges when developing policies or programs meant to serve the entire region. Therefore, agencies in North Durham often have to make concerted efforts to remain updated on new developments or sector changes, and must self-advocate for more inclusion on a regular basis.

Durham region's distinct North and South municipalities have significant income and population disparities, requiring localized non-profit presence. Participants alluded to tensions between organizations that are located in or serve North Durham residents, versus those that are located in or serve South Durham residents. Some participants mentioned the perception that South Durham-serving non-profits acquire significantly higher funding and resourcing in comparison to North Durham-serving non-profits. Additionally, non-profits that serve North Durham residents face challenges with serving a remote population who do not have access to quality public transportation and may face broadband issues. These factors may call for more nuanced programs and supports, which require additional advocacy or funding.

Durham also faces an ever-increasing population. As people move or are pushed out by increasing costs of living in major cities like Toronto, they look for communities where homes are relatively affordable and they still have access to Toronto for employment and recreation. In addition to regional growth from newcomers, the pandemic has increased migration from Toronto to Durham. With the increase in population, Durham non-profits face increasing service needs. In particular, one participant noted the increase in homeless individuals from Toronto to Durham region, and the challenges with supporting those individuals without funding or planning for said increase.



Because of South Durham's highway and transit access, and proximity to Toronto, the area's municipalities have neighborhoods that are often referred to as 'bedroom communities.' There are highly affluent suburban populations that may not appear as connected or engaged to issues in their place of residence, presenting a challenge for a sector that relies heavily on community engagement for priority setting.

Participants in interviews consistently confirmed this ambivalence and noted that the strength of the non-profit sector overwhelmingly lies in its dedicated and resilient workforce. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted this strength, as many organizations were forced to cut employee hours, transfer services online, and support marginalized clients through extreme conditions. However, it was done - and continues to be done to this day. Participants noted that the sector was led by individuals who valued intrinsic motivation - their internal call to service belied a resiliency to serve the individual first. Unfortunately, the ability to adapt to changes in technology, funding, or political landscapes often comes second to exceptional client service.

Participants noted a consistent theme of 'chasing' in organizational operations, describing the continuous hunt for clients, funding, and staffing. Funding and staff retention remain ongoing issues, and are emotionally and strategically linked in Durham.

Working in Durham's non-profit sector is often viewed as a career stepping stone, particularly into public sector roles, but retention of existing employees is also based on funding. Therefore, organizations have regularly fallen into 'mission drift' or 'empire building.' These terms refer to an organization's growth into areas outside of its core mission and were noted repeatedly during interviews. Participants noted that they can be conscious of these phenomena, but feel compelled to seek out alternative funding in order to sustain their organization.

Furthermore, participants repeatedly expressed that the culture of the Durham non-profit sector is uniquely collaborative and competitive. The funding models and challenges mentioned above have put stress on organizations to compete for dollars from the same source, and whether real or perceived, they often view other organizations as threats. Because of the prevalence of mission drift and empire building, this can be true regardless of mandates and capacity. The result of this, as many participants spoke about, is an unwillingness to come to speak with complete openness at collaborative tables, specifically ones which focus on common issues. However, Durham non-profits were described as having an incredible ability to work together where individual roles are specified within organizations' missions. For example, there was massive collaboration within the homelessness and housing sub-sectors during the COVID-19 pandemic, in which organizations quickly offered their services to form collective programs and hubs.

This, as participants described, is where the collaborative culture in Durham thrives - but also where it ends. To tackle the large systemic issues into the future, participants surmised that longer-term common planning tables will need to be established with innovation and openness as their mandate.

OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES

Participants spoke at length about the operational challenges they have faced, and continue to face. While most of these challenges have been exacerbated by COVID-19, they are the result of long-term underfunding and under-resourcing.

Participants reflected that some sub-sectors have had additional challenges. For example, organizations that serve homeless clients may struggle to create social distance due to the lack of physical space. Redirecting client flow on one floor, or managing client behaviors with COVID-19 restrictions can complicate daily operations. Organizations that serve newcomers and immigrants may also face challenges as their programs and services often require personal face-to-face interactions, and have a client base experiencing significant language barriers or limited access to technology.

Other participants noted that the pandemic impacted their capacity to fulfill their mission statements - they felt that agility and flexibility present a unique challenge to the non-profit sector because their clients or funders did not respond well to change.

Some participants struggled to offer a full range of services to their clients, or were limited in their ability to create new opportunities for vulnerable populations. Alternatively, non-profits that have the ability or leeway to approach challenges with a more open, learning-based approach may have survived through a pandemic better.

As noted, the non-profit sector struggles to attract and retain qualified individuals. In some sub-sectors, there are higher turnover rates as many people leave the sector for higher-paying roles because non-profits have difficulty paying their staff competitive salaries. Non-profits also struggled with keeping their current staff safe - smaller physical spaces required non-profit leaders to carefully consider how to stagger staff or encourage remote work. Scheduling staffing and completing program goals was further complicated by new staff challenges, such as staff requiring time off to get tested for COVID-19 or isolate, navigate child or elder care, and for bereavement and loss. Participants mentioned the importance of wage subsidies provided by federal grants which allowed them to retain staff - other participants mentioned that new grants allowed them to obtain new staff.

Programs and services also shifted considerably in response to COVID-19. Almost all participants noted their staff's sharp learning curve in quickly adapting existing technologies to serve clients. Non-profits worked hard to either purchase, lease, or learn how to utilize various online modalities. Some needed to "re-imagine, re-build, and re-think" program creation altogether. Participants were mostly positive about the shift, noting that increased online presence allowed adaptability in client outreach.

Some participants even stated that they would continue investing in their online programs and services as it may be a better or more effective way of delivering information or certain programs. In particular, clients with mobility issues or those with small children appreciated these modalities, and have requested further flexibility around organizational logistics, such as hours of operation.

One of the major learnings of this project is the importance of physical space for non-profits. Non-profits require larger spaces to safely maintain physical distancing. The lack of core funding and funds for capital projects, renovations, and retrofitting has resulted in non-profits being housed in spaces that are smaller, older, do not have proper ventilation, or are not appropriate for their mission.

This also impacted non-profits' capacity to obtain and store personal protection equipment (PPE), and program materials and supplies. Serving clients with special needs, including ramps, or entrances that are not public-facing, was also challenging as many non-profit buildings have limited accessibility options. Non-profits required ongoing creativity to safely provide services to their clients.

For many participants, the core operational challenges are mostly attributed to the lack of core and administrative funding. The uncertainty of the pandemic, emergence of new variants, and ever-changing provincial guidelines made it difficult for organizations to budget, fundraise, and navigate through existing funding agreements and apply for new funding.

The pandemic also forced non-profits to work more closely with both municipal and regional staff representatives. For some non-profits, this resulted in obstacles created by bureaucratic processes and increased administrative burdens. Non-profits were tasked to navigate municipal policies that sometimes limited their growth without the budget or staff knowledge. Other participants noted that some municipalities were better resourced to support non-profit members through funds, space, or other agreements. Additionally, participants were sometimes surprised by the lack of knowledge or understanding of their programs, services, or clients by their local councils or elected officials. They felt that the pandemic had given non-profit and government sectors new opportunities to work together.

STAFF SPECIFIC CHALLENGES

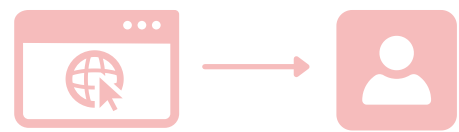
The pandemic has created tangible mental health impacts and challenges for both non-profit leaders and their staff. As the pandemic disproportionately impacted low-income communities, communities of color, and seniors, non-profits leaders tried to simultaneously navigate ever-changing provincial regulations, keep their organizations afloat, retain and support staff, plus create responsive programming to support clients. There was also an open acknowledgement of the very human toll that COVID-19 had on the non-profit sector - leaders and staff were experiencing grief and loss; family health or personal concerns; and trying to keep themselves motivated and together.

Added to the struggle was that organizational staff are not often motivated by financial incentives - non-profit staff are often committed to their cause, clients, and have an alignment of intrinsic values.

Participants reported that their staff were often conflicted by their desires to continue their work, and fears about exposure to COVID-19. However, as organizations implemented strategies and staff began to understand that these strategies could reduce their chances of infection, some of these fears subsided.

The reality is that there was no amount of planning, preparation, or training that could have prepared organizations for the pandemic and its impact - as one participant noted, "very few organizations have pandemic policies." Another participant described it as "feeling like you must have all the answers when you do not." Non-profit leaders and staff reached out to their peers, and reported feeling very supported. Organizations leaned on each other in order to share resources and templates on organizational policies, particularly on human resources. A point of pride for several participants was that they were able to effectively retain all of most of their staff, and some were even able to expand their staff base.

One of the biggest challenges for organizational staff was the switch from in-person to online programming. Not all communities were receptive to the shift - some low-income populations did not have easy access to the internet, or were in areas that did not have strong internet connections. Additionally, some organizations and staff required updates with their hardware, software, or staff training.



""We haven't let go of staff but we have a number of staff who have taken time due to either symptoms or the need for testing. We've had a number of staff who due to their own health issues have had to isolate themselves. But we haven't had to let anybody go yet. Some staff were certainly affected... some have had childcare issues because of the pandemic, which resulted in short staffing. We have hired some staff during the pandemic which was surprising to us. Some individuals applied to postings, we hired them right in the middle of the pandemic; and they're still working today.

Technology was important to help maintain connections - several participants reported that while there were negative impacts of the increased use of technology, technologies like video conferencing allowed their staff to continue to work with clients and maintain a level of connectivity. Some participants noted that their leadership had accountability concerns with remote work.

For many participants, their effectiveness with being able to work remotely would require embracing a new work-from-home scenario where working off-site is either full-time or hybridized with working in the office. Interestingly, participants who were Executive Directors more frequently mentioned their discomfort about the prospect of fully working from home. Participants who were frontline staff or managed frontline staff were more open to supporting off-site work.

Another challenge, particularly voiced by participants in leadership positions, was the emotional and mental health impact on both leaders and staff. These new pressures have made retention issues worse as organizations have decreased funds to pay staff competitive wages.



Participants have reported high levels of:

- Stress
- Anxiety
- Feelings of hopelessness and discouragement

It is interesting to note that the non-profit sector is disproportionately female, and often highly racialized. Several studies have highlighted the disproportionate gendered impact of COVID-19, which has been informally termed “the she-cession,” and shared some shocking statistics on the high rates of women, particularly women of colour, leaving the labour force. The “she-cession” and the slower rates of women returning to the workforce are of particular concern for sectors that require in-person contact, including arts and recreation, childcare, and social services. While this particular phenomenon was not mentioned by participants, it may be important to consider how women, particularly women of colour, are hired, retained, and supported in the non-profit sector.

COVID-19

Participants reflected on both the non-profit and societal shifts attributed to the pandemic. Several participants mentioned the extent to which COVID-19 highlighted the extreme vulnerability of various groups. The considerable emotional, mental, financial, and physical health impacts of the pandemic redefined vulnerability. While groups such as immigrants and newcomers, people experiencing homelessness, and seniors are mentioned, the pandemic revealed how many people in our communities are close to going hungry, and losing their homes and jobs. The growth of automation in the workplace and the gig economy has contributed to the inequitable and precarious labor market. As a result, financial insecurity has continued ramifications on the non-profit sector and its most vulnerable clients.

The structural and systemic inequities that disproportionately impact low-income and racialized communities further broadened the income gap, creating (at least temporarily) an increase in poverty throughout Canada. Also, the pandemic increased social isolation for many populations - as the pandemic continued and people remained isolated, some began to experience mental and physical health impacts. The negative impacts of the pandemic were heightened by the lack of communal spaces and social interactions, plus overwhelmed health systems.

COVID-19 also exposed the limitations of the sector - organizations grappled with several financial and operational challenges in their attempts to increase or maintain their service levels. They faced concerns about their physical spaces, an increased need for financial and mental health resources, plus succession and sustainability plans. The inconsistent or lack of information made it difficult for non-profits to do any concrete operational planning. As COVID-19 is a relatively new virus, information on what is safe and allowed, as well as what is not is constantly changing. Also, non-profits have had to navigate province-wide lockdowns.

Pre-pandemic, organizations in the non-profit sector experienced an unequal landscape. COVID-19 has deepened this - federal and provincial funding for organizations that were deemed "essential" have created opportunities for some organizations, while taking away funding from others. The division of "haves" and "have nots" disproportionately impacts certain sub-sectors, such as arts and recreation, and youth programming. Simultaneously, the pandemic has forced a series of changes in both individual and non-profit organizations on a much broader scale. Participants reflected on how organizations have been "forced" out of their comfort zones in order to innovate, seek new income streams, reorganize programs, or shift to online platforms.

"I think the pandemic has exposed a lot of the gaps and the inadequacy of the "system." It's exposed the need for better communication, coordination of services, a re-evaluation of the efficiency of systems and services [among non-profits]. It's brought non-profits together to the table, more often and more intensely than prior to the pandemic."

Organizations have built new partnerships, developed new skills, and examined their internal and external philosophies. As one participant noted, most non-profits did not have organizational policies that included pandemic planning prior to COVID-19 - but going forward, more organizations will consider contingency planning and review their internal policies more rigorously. Also, the pandemic influenced organizations' understanding of government, with one participant noting their newfound appreciation for the challenges of creating timely, responsive government policies. The uncertainties of the pandemic forced some non-profit leaders to "build the plane while [they] flew it."

From the many conversations on the lessons learned from the pandemic, emerged the need for more strategy. The lack of preparation and warning had left many participants feeling confused - the non-profit is accustomed to navigating complexities, but the pandemic created layers of nuance that were ever-changing and unplanned. Issues to address in recovery strategies can include long-term succession and sustainability planning; service coordination and communication; shifting programs and services to further include emergent populations; and thorough re-evaluation of existing programs and services.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

SECTOR DESCRIPTION

- Recovery strategies intended for Durham region must consider several regional nuances, including geography and proximity to Toronto, and sub-sectoral representation.



OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES



PEOPLE PROBLEMS

- The non-profit sector must review policies and work-life imbalances that disproportionately impact women (i.e., childcare, maternity leave). Non-profit organizations and networks can choose to join federal and provincial campaigns that tackle gendered work or the wage gap, or can implement the recommendations outlined by the Ontario Chamber of Commerce (e.g., offer flexible work arrangements).

KEY POINT 2



Durham's non-profit sector collaborates often for project delivery and to address issues specific to a particular sub-sector but there is little to no collaboration for sector-wide convening and planning. Barriers to sector-wide collaboration include competitive funding structures and limited resources.

FUNDING

The general nature of funding cycles, changes to the funding landscape, plus the challenges of maintaining resilient, strong funding practices throughout the pandemic were indicated frequently throughout the project activities. Several participants noted that the non-profit sector has always been vulnerable to economic recession. Prior to the pandemic, many organizations had precarious funding - and newer or smaller organizations may not have had strong financial policies or practices in place. Additionally, the bureaucratic administrative pressures; emphasis on program funding; limited multi-year funding; and shift away from core and capital funding were all mentioned as contributing to the sector's uncertainty and vulnerability.

Participants acknowledged that every funder is different - each funder has unique funding agreements, requirements, and relationships with their funded projects. The differences between funder expectations and relationships can sometimes complicate internal operations and program development. Overall, participants spoke of their funders with admiration, noting that most funders provided flexibility with agreements and deadlines. Participants were clear on the emergent "haves" and "have nots" in the non-profit sector. Some sub-sectors were deemed as "essential" - they had more access to funding and supports, and could grow. Other participants did not know about government funding or supports, or how to access them. Some organizations do not fundraise, or do not have experience or expertise in fundraising models as they have been entirely reliant on funder dollars.

Program funding does not encourage strong financial practices, such as developing organizational policies; investing in staffing; or retaining administrative staff with financial expertise - leaving non-profits even more vulnerable to funding loss. Practices like lack of financial reserves, or piecemeal funding in order to retain good staff also contributes to financial insecurity. A participant referenced staff retention as program retention, as "employees are themselves often the program." The financial stress of retaining staff shifts funds away from future investments, like reserve funds.

"Our doors are not open and it is a challenge for staff to serve clients the way they know how. Staff has been mobilized 100% remotely. Funders have been supportive of the modifications but revenue from fundraising is down. We're worried about the long-term impacts on the leadership team."

Some organizations - particularly those who have been able to expand their operations or staff because of emergency COVID-19 funding, or who are relying on reserve funds - are especially worried about their sustainability post-pandemic.

Fundamentally, the pandemic has changed the funding avenues used by non-profits. Many non-profits expressed their appreciation and gratitude to the different levels of government and their funders for increased or quickened funding opportunities. Some non-profits mentioned that they were working closely with their funders, or were starting new relationships with other funders or funding sources. For some, this was a shift - funders were acting as project partners, and were offering connections and resources outside of immediate funding. Also, funders were in consultation with non-profits to establish needs, resource mapping, and service distribution.

The pandemic exposed an underlying cycle within the sector - non-profits have been existing on shoestring budgets in order for them to appear financially stable and as strong investments. Being in a position to access or request for additional funding felt "unnatural" for some participants - especially if the funding was not directed towards clients.

Durham non-profits felt the repercussions of economic regression as a result of the pandemic - organizations were grappling with the potential loss of funding from private and public sources; shrinking reserve funding; and management and staff stress associated with these financial losses. Organizations were simultaneously concerned about the financial pressures of maintaining operations, and post-pandemic realities.

A funding model of interest was social entrepreneurship - it allowed flexibility with raising and using funding outside of the project's direct expenses. This model has disadvantages as social enterprises are not non-profits, and are restricted in their capacity to access program funding. Some participants referenced hybrid models: using client or registration fees in order to offset low or no-cost programs.

Several factors contributed to the financial impact faced by individual non-profits. These factors include, but are not limited to:

- **SUB-SECTOR**

- Some sub-sectors have significantly greater access to emergency funding, and/or could collaborate more effectively to access other funds or fundraise. Other sub-sectors lost funding and struggled.

- **DEFINITION OF "ESSENTIALS SERVICES"**

- As Ontario navigated through several lockdowns, some organizations offered services that were deemed "essential." These organizations were often able to access different funding pockets from the various levels of government. Some participants noted that they had greater flexibility with the use of funds, such as spending on capital projects in order to create safer conditions for their clients.

- **PHYSICAL SIZE**

- Physical distancing which is critical to slowing the spread of COVID-19, highlighted the limitations of physical space for many non-profits - some were unable to expand their space size, or retain their space due to financial restraints. Other organizations used creative scheduling, staggered staffing models, or outdoor programming when and where possible.

- **STRONG FINANCIAL POLICIES**

- Organizations that had financial planning in place pre-pandemic, or developed strong financial policies were able to navigate through the pandemic slightly better. They were able to use their budgets and policies in decision-making processes.

- **ACCESS TO RESERVE FUNDING**

- Some non-profits had reserve funds pre-pandemic. For these organizations, reserve funds allowed flexibility and lessened some of the financial strain. However, it is important to note that these organizations were still vulnerable to financial loss - one participant stated, "reserve funding is not always a sign of a 'great year.'" Some participants felt penalized by funders if they had remaining funds, and pressured to present all funds as being spent.

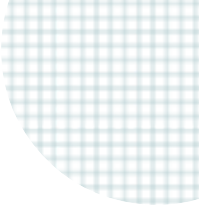
- **PRE-EXISTING RELATIONSHIP WITH FUNDERS**

- Access to funders is not equal across all non-profits - some organizations have carefully created and nurtured relationships with their funders. These organizations felt they had more room to "play" with funders - they could check in about prospective programs; contact them for immediate support if needed; and could have more "honest" conversations about their funding needs. Participants, particularly from grassroots or smaller organizations, expressed frustration about their limited access to funders, and the pressure to prove themselves as worthy recipients.

Understandably, all participants expressed anxieties related to funding. Non-profits often depend on larger funding bodies (e.g., the United Way) for grants for regular program streams.

However, these funding bodies were also impacted by the pandemic - for some funders, corporate funds decreased considerably, or were diverted to specific causes. Also, local businesses that have historically supported community organizations experienced financial hardships - some were unable to offer any or the same level of donorship.

Fundraising has been deeply impacted by the pandemic. Some non-profits experienced limitations with their annual, established fundraising activities - events that required intimate spaces with large numbers of people, or interpersonal interactions were banned as result of health concerns and provincial regulations. For some organizations, the pandemic created opportunities to use technology creatively, and others struggled with possible revenue loss.



Organizations that had successfully secured funds, or even expanded as an organization, expressed their concerns about the sustainability of the growth. Several participants noted their long and short-term concerns about the possible changes in the funding landscape, such as funding shifts post-pandemic, and the repercussions that would influence their ability to plan for the future. Additionally, there were concerns that the current state of generosity and flexibility would be offset by periods of financial conservatism and rigidity.

Some participants reflected on their own organization's relationship with funding, noting that funder-driven accountability sometimes impacted their ability to creatively plan programs, or seek "unusual" partnerships. These organizations may have felt greater duty to their funders over the community members being served - this may result in inadequate advocacy or inflexible programs. Organizations that rely on single-source funding could become protective of their program, refuse partnerships, or restrict their capacity to collaborate with other stakeholders.


COLLABORATION AND INNOVATION

Durham's non-profit sector used the language of "collaboration" to mean a variety of activities, projects, and working relationships. How "collaboration" is implemented and understood is different across sub-sectors - non-profits approach collaboration based on their mandates, capacity, funding and funder relationships, and previous experiences.

For most participants, "collaboration" was used to discuss formal working relationships with other service providers, especially where there is alignment in organizational mandates and values, service coordination, and an established history. Inter-organizational collaboration is often dictated by service coordination to ensure clients receive increased access to certain services, or entry to complimentary services. These coordination efforts can be formal, such as a part of a service agreement or through shared funding - or it can be informal, such as referrals. They may be launched by federal or provincial requirements, such as Oshawa's Age-Friendly Strategy or Local Immigration Partnership (LIP).

In a handful of conversations, some participants reflected on the need for more advocacy and systemic-based collaboration that was not limited to clients or sub-sectors. The broader definition of "collaboration" was rooted in acknowledging the common challenges across sub-sectors, and the need for a more strategic approach as a sector to develop solutions. Historically, there has been very little collaboration for collective action and planning on sector-wide issues, as some participants noted.

Fundamentally, no non-profit can be an island on its own as all participants agreed - working together, both formally and informally, "enables greater success." Some participants mentioned that sub-sector differences correlate with the capacity to provide services, and size of client population. Larger client populations require a range of services, and therefore encourage widespread collaboration and minimize competition. The distribution and size of a client base may allow new services to emerge - without being considered or seen as a "threat" to bigger, more established non-profits.



Instead, these grassroots and smaller organizations are seen as complementary, or that the client base is big and diverse enough for organizations to "share" clients. Also, larger client bases allow services to collaborate with each other to "capture" as many clients as possible.

Participants all agreed that funders have a major role in supporting collaborative efforts by understanding how funding has the power to encourage and limit collaboration, and the impact of program-specific funding. Funding in general, particularly multi-year government funding, is viewed as a competitive process. Non-profits that cannot access a range of funding streams, or who rely mainly on one funding stream are naturally cautious of collaborative efforts that can impact their funding.

Non-profits may collaborate with project partners on specific deliverables - often at the direction of funders. However, organizations may not participate in sector-wide collaboration efforts, especially if the initiative critiques funders, or grants new projects that can shift funding away from their own organizations. Collective efforts and participation can be delayed or hindered if new partnerships are actively discouraged or not formed.

While the pandemic opened up funding streams and resources for several organizations, those means were not always well-managed.

For example, the increase in funding to provide food and meals to vulnerable populations led to a significant increase in organizations who obtained this funding - often without "alignment or connection to existing work being done across the Region." Instead of having a deeper discussion about the structural and systemic roots of food insecurity, organizations sought to respond to the immediate needs of their communities. More frequent non-profit engagement and recognition of sector leaders would have allowed for a more collaborative and sustainable approach.

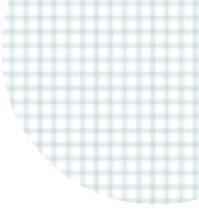
While all participants were unclear as to how meaningful collaboration needed to improve, there was a clear consensus that addressing complex non-profit sector issues through collective efforts is important. In terms of the barriers to collaboration in Durham, it was evident that organizations would feel more comfortable if:

- Their own organization was more securely funded and allowed the capacity to work collaboratively.



- More time and space are provided to learn and develop skills, training, and 'big picture' conversation.






Some participants overwhelmingly expressed an eagerness towards collaboration - and particularly innovative ideas. However, some confessed that participating in such projects is often not a reality. The eagerness, positivity to collaborate, and the negativity of not having the organizational capacity is a product of Durham's non-profit culture. Most participants spoke about the benefits of collaboration outside of service coordination, noting that the benefits extend far past client-centering and programming efforts. Collaboration can bring awareness to the sector, and encourage learning and peer support. Collaboration does not need to be monetary - it can include sharing best practices, data, ideas, opportunities, and resources.

Funders in particular may choose to collaborate by establishing relationships focused on learning rather than problem-solving with non-profit members. It may allow funders to view themselves as partners that are contributing to the collective energy around addressing complex social issues.


The feeling of "togetherness" that is achieved through collaboration can be channeled into a stronger messaging and voice. Sector-wide collaboration is valuable and allows larger corporations, governments, and municipalities to understand the impact of the non-profit sector. A measure of the sector's collective value can force acknowledgement of the sector's importance, and can open avenues to greater investments.

Also, collective efforts can bring more awareness to the sector itself and showcase one of the sector's major strengths: organizations' ability to come together efficiently and effectively in response to community crisis. The sector helps ignite fast mobilization on broader systemic issues, which was seen throughout the pandemic.



Another benefit of collaborations is that it encourages creative problem-solving, as well as new ways of working together. Sub-sectors can learn from each other, and use learned-knowledge to improve their own capacities. The pandemic also changed volunteer-ships - organizations with limited volunteer pools were forced to better coordinate and structure their volunteer programs.

Some participants recognized the need for collaboration outside their immediate sub-sectors - or even outside the non-profit sector itself. In particular, participants mentioned their desire for more established relationships between the non-profit sector, and local decision-makers and politicians. For example, non-profits may have insights on social issues or potential solutions, and may be trusted connections to vulnerable communities that are harder to engage. Also, non-profits can ask for civic involvement with these populations. Conversely, local decision-makers and politicians may have insight into advocacy, civic planning, or have avenues to other sectors (i.e., businesses) that can support the non-profit sector.



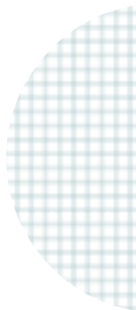
Lastly, some participants reflected on the need for innovation in the non-profit sector. Connected with the intensity of competition for funding and resources, some participants felt that innovation was limited to certain "funder-approved" methodologies, like program creation. Collaboration was viewed as a product of working together - not problem-solving together. The comfort and familiarity built by close relationships between funders and organizations can create feelings of apprehension and reserve around new ideas or people. Some participants spoke about the 'insular' nature of the non-profit sector - the sector feels like an "in-crowd" where new people and organizations are not included in important conversations.

Also, participants noted that the closeness of relationships helps with responsiveness - established relationships have set roles by default. When a crisis, like the pandemic, or a community emergency occurs, each organizational partner knows their role, and can immediately adjust in order to accommodate and meet community needs.

For some sub-sectors, centralization has allowed for better collaborations and more informality. Additionally, there may be a need to educate organizations on community development principles, and how they support communities as there may be lingering fears that innovation can lead to a redirection of funds.

COMPETITION

Competition belies the sector as organizations compete for limited funds and resources in order to deliver programs and services to their respective clients. It should be noted that participants spoke of "competition" as being both a positive driver for innovation, as well as a negative for collaboration. In particular, the competition associated with limited funds or resources makes it difficult for organizations to collaborate. Organizations that are reliant on mostly single-source funding were more likely to view organizations with similar client bases as "threats" - although, some participants noted that client base size was important to determining the level of competition. With larger client bases, organizations may wish to offer complementary services, or spread out their services to access as many clients as possible. However, client bases that are smaller or more specialized can sometimes contribute to the inter-organizational competition. Also, a few participants spoke about the competition amongst larger, more established organizations. The same group of established organizations have considerable power with funders, greater voices at decision-making tables, and often have the resources to attain different funding sources. In turn, this may block out some organizations, or limit their participation and connection to funding and resources.



RECOMMENDATIONS

FUNDING

- Invest in more administrative, core, and operational funding - including staff funding.
- Encourage and support organizational policy development, including offering financial and consultation support.
- Invest in grassroots and small organizations who may require support to develop suitable infrastructure.
- Support reserve funding, and allow for fund retention post-funding cycle.
- Continue to display unprecedented adaptability.
 - While this has been particularly useful throughout the pandemic, non-profits will require continued flexibility as they re-shift their programs and services to meet new demands.
- Clearly showcase non-profit needs and successes, and encourage openness and vulnerability about financial realities.



COLLABORATION AND INNOVATION



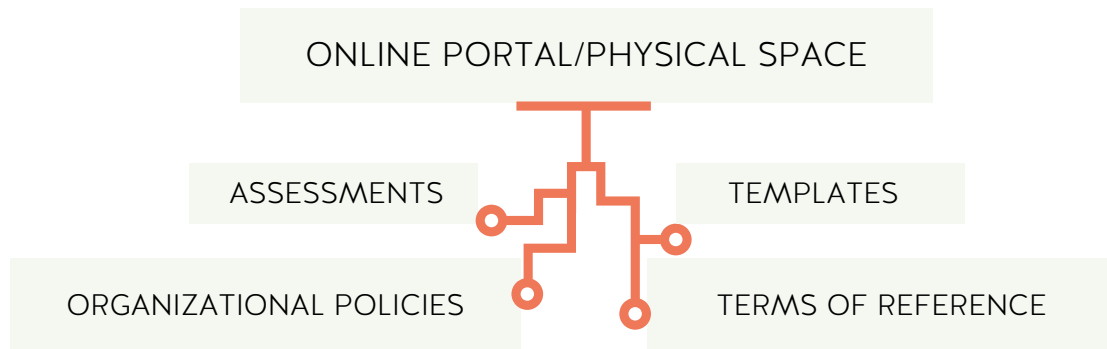
- Create Collective Impact Stream of funding that focuses on collaboration and planning for collective issues rather than program implementation - include salaried positions responsible for coordination [Funders].
- Introduce different models of collaboration and how it can be applied to the non-profit sector in Durham - participants noted that we need to collaborate outside of the immediate sector [General].
- Fund and host forums on collaboration with project partners such as:

EAST SCARBOROUGH
STORE FRONT

CONSTELLATION
MODEL (LIKE ONN)

HUBS

- Create a centralized location, like an online portal and/or physical space, that houses important shared resources such as needs and program assessments; organizational policies; terms of reference; and templates.



- The centralized, virtual location can provide current and future community projects with resources for collaboration and marketing. Also, there can be a location for shared data collection and learning.
- Encouraging non-profits to set aside organizational agendas, and create a "common agenda."

KEY POINT 3



Governments and private investors must intentionally find new ways to ensure non-profit engagement participation with a multitude of voices. Reliance on a small group of players will result in a stagnation of recovery effects.

Governments and private investors must intentionally find new ways to ensure non-profit engagement and participation with a multitude of voices. Reliance on a small group of players will result in a stagnation of recovery effects.

NETWORK BUILDING

Networks and network building was referenced directly and indirectly throughout the project activities. Participants emphasized that developing a meaningful network means creating opportunities to be involved in issue-focused, iterative, and proactive actions and discussions grounded in community priorities. This sort of network can be successful if organizations participate as a sector. Interestingly, most participants had similar responses to questions about non-profit networks. As a result, what emerged from participants' discussions around network building was less of a summary, and more principals required to garner non-profit participation in a network:

- While networks can be used to share information, there is desire for network(s) that address common issues - these issues should be the same or similar across sub-sectors. The idea of a "common agenda" was very prevalent across conversations on networks and network building - along with the idea that the non-profit sector and stakeholders (e.g., funders, levels of government) could be engaged to work together and tackle broad and complex systemic, or non-profit issues and develop strategies. This network would examine social issues - not individual organizational challenges.
- Networks can be used to host difficult conversations. Creating a safer space for difficult conversations would encourage deepening existing inter-organizational relationships, while encouraging new ones; joint problem-solving; and vulnerability. Participants notably emphasized that any new non-profit network should be aware of the power imbalances present throughout the non-profit sector.
- The design of the network has to be fluid - it should allow for different levels of collaboration, involvement, and consider organizations' various capacities and sizes.
- The network must offer real benefits, clearly defined expectations to network members, and understandable results. Expectations must include staff and in-kind time, or other resources.
- The network will thrive as long as organizations are building connections, learning, and are resolving its social issues. If any of those three principals are compromised, the network can lose its purpose.
- Part of the common agenda could include future thinking - including how to change the sector to build equitable partnerships or fit community needs.

- Ideally, there would be engagement from all staff levels. This could be accomplished by providing low-cost learning and networking events (e.g., front-line staff connecting with directors or leads from other sub-sectors).
- Diversity and equity must be one of the network's core values and ongoing efforts. Ensuring equity-seeking groups are the forefront of the network must be carefully considered - meaningless involvement and tokenism should be addressed in the network's principles and values statement.
- The network can choose to create a public narrative on the state of Durham's non-profit sector - it could be used to showcase impact to corporate and government sectors respectively.
- The network can be a space for shared resources - such as administrative resources that are difficult for some non-profits to obtain or retain (e.g., organizational policies and procedures); available programming spaces; volunteers; and other materials.

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE REGION

Durham non-profits have a unique relationship with the regional government. "The Region" as it is referred to, is seen as an established, influential, and strong funder that has a long history of providing organizational support to the non-profit sector. Participants spoke about the intimate connection between Durham's non-profit sector and the Regional government, and noted that it is a relationship that is built on mutual need and principles. Organizations, programs, and services that receive regional funding understand to carry out Regional directives - their programming fulfills regional mandates through improving the quality of life for vulnerable populations.

Nearly all participants strongly believe that the non-profit sector needs to be included and used in any Regional economic recovery plan. Some stated that they felt like "afterthoughts" in the economic recovery process which traditionally focuses on the business sector. The growing need for awareness of the economic and intrinsic value of the non-profit sector is a push for the regional government to bring together the non and for-profit sectors - which are both needed for the Durham Region's future.

While several participants reflected on the mostly informal nature between non-profits and the Region outside of funding agreements, there was also a strong desire to establish a formal, reciprocal relationship framed by policy. Non-profit members want to continue to have individual connections to regional staff; collaboration and joint-planning; and receive various levels of support for their agency. Also, there was praise for the Region's communication and information-sharing skills.

GRASSROOTS

Part of the project methodology included ensuring that organizations of different sizes and structures were included in the project activities. Despite these efforts, the ratio of registered non-profits to unregistered non-profits or grassroots groups was significantly disproportionate.

The summary below is mostly a reflection of established, registered non-profit sentiments about grassroots groups, and may not be echoed by grassroots organizations. Also, it reflects a more paternalistic understanding of the relationship between established, registered non-profits and grassroots organizations. Some participants spoke about the "role" of registered non-profits and what they can offer grassroots organizations - which would be mostly a one-way avenue. It is important to note that not all participants had the same perspective on grassroots organizations. Some participants felt that grassroots groups should merge with existing non-profits and services; and some participants felt that emergent groups are not knowledgeable about the sector or its provision, plus often duplicate services.

Considering the previous sections on 'Competition' and 'Collaboration,' some of these sentiments may more be reflections on the possible increase of funding competition than any supported fact. Additionally, the challenges of fundraising, partnerships, and other logistical obstacles may contribute to limited grassroots growth.

"I think our role as a sector is to make sure that we find ways to touch with [grassroots organizations], engage with them, help make sure that they're integrated into what we do. And I think our role is to guide [grassroots groups], not to tell them what to do or to stop them but to provide support."

Some grassroots groups may emerge in response to a particular need before dismantling once that need is met - particularly groups that are tied to policy reform. These groups can have different life cycles in comparison to established non-profits, and therefore further complicate service sharing agreements.

Other participants spoke about the grassroots groups' value - particularly their ability to garner strong volunteer bases. Also, there is a link between grassroots social movements, and the growth of those movements into grassroots groups or non-registered organizations. However, the advocacy and passion that grassroots groups bring can be oppositional to non-profit missions or values, and can make it difficult to form partnerships. Additionally, operational differences between grassroots groups and registered non-profits can contribute to developing funding partnerships. For example, grassroots organizations may not have traditional leadership models (i.e., executive directors) or administrative staffing. As a result, this can make it difficult to develop 'Letters of Partnership' or 'Letters of Understanding' between the two organizations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

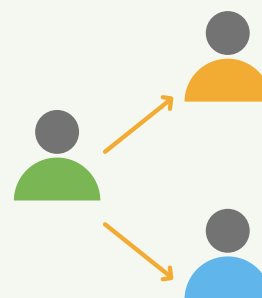
RELATIONSHIP WITH DURHAM REGION



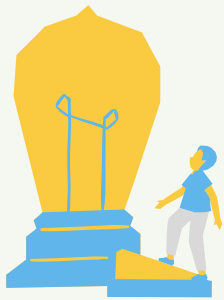
A formal relationship or framework on how the non-profit sector and the Region could work together can include the following elements [Government]:

- Change the narrative around the non-profit sector:
 - Too often, the non-profit sector is considered an after-thought or not thought of as a critical part of our social infrastructure.
 - Recognize the large contributions and value of the non-profit sector.

- Re-imagine the non-profit sector as part of various leadership tables:
 - The Region can demonstrate leadership by facilitating collaborations between sub-sectors; within the non-profit sector; and with other sectors, such as business.
 - Give non-profit members leadership roles at various tables - including an active, informed role in decision-making or developing policies.
 - Encourage diverse participation in order to allow newer input and voices from all sub-sectors.



- Establish a community of practice table:
 - There is acknowledgment that the Region because of its broad scope, does not always have the local expertise or knowledge held by non-profit members. Funding decisions should include an impartial review process in order to ensure that funding is offered to people who are currently working with particular populations.



- Keep an eye to the future
 - There is a mutual need to co-create Durham's future. Non-profits need to be supported with their future-thinking and sustainability beyond immediate funding. Understanding how non-profit goals align with Regional direction and strategies is important to non-profit-regional relationships - it can also build the foundations for future relations.

- Develop iterative processes with continual feedback mechanisms:
 - Any connections built with the non-profit sector should be sustained through continuous engagement. An engagement strategy, apart from surveys or requests for surveys, could encourage conversations between the Region and the sector. This would allow assessment of processes, as well as real-time problem-solving when needed.

GRASSROOTS

- Offer grassroots groups that are seeking formal registration as a non-profit under the Ontario Non-Profit Corporation Act the support needed to better understand the process of being registered, and what information is required for registration.
- Create more streams of funding for grassroots in a mentor or trustee model.
- Offer the following supports to grassroots groups and non-profits to establish better working relationships:

**SERVICE MAPPING &
INFORMATION SHARING**


**INFORMAL INTEGRATION
INTO SERVICE PLANS**





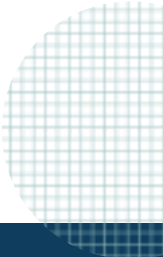

CONCLUSION

The societal inequities highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic has forced non-profits to consider their approach to issues that are heartbreakingly familiar and have heightened importance. Non-profits have a renewed commitment to diversity and equity following global social justice movements, and the sector's adaptability with technology has allowed for more accessible programs and supports. Additionally, through the sector's connections with its most vulnerable areas, the sector is confronting climate change.



Recently, with the increasing number of vaccinated individuals, conversations are shifting to a "new normal." There is fear that increased funding will abruptly end, or that non-profits will not have enough time to transition into a "new normal."

Throughout Durham region and echoed by every non-profit member we spoke to, it is clear that things cannot simply go back to "normal." For many of our participants, "normal" was barely sustainable. The devastation of the pandemic has allowed for some moments of inflection and pause - it allowed non-profits to re-examine their populations, re-imagine their services, and be brutally honest about their failings. This unprecedented vulnerability has created an opportunity for Durham's non-profit sector to emerge as a powerful entity under the united cause of making our societies better, healthier, and stronger than before.





Glossary

Administrative Fund/Reserve: the necessary funds needed for an organization to administer services and maintain daily operations.

Community Partner: an established partner from a local business, charity, non-profit organization, or religious institution.

Core Fund: funds that are spent on an organization's core functions that are not project-specific.

Diversity: any factor that can be used to differentiate groups and people from one another; the practice and state of including or involving people from a range of different cultural, physical, psychological, and social backgrounds.

Equity: the guarantee of fair advancement, access, opportunity, and treatment while working to identify and remove barriers that prevent the full participation of some groups.

Financial Reserve: liquid assets that organizations set aside to cushion unplanned events and expenses, or use on planned future needs.

Focus Group: a small number of participants who have common experiences or traits or who are demographically similar that have been assembled to participate in a guided discussion on a pre-determined topic.

Funder: a person, institution, or organization that provides financial support.

Grassroots Organization: an organization that is funded by individual donors – considered a bottom-up effort that uses local support to bring local, regional, national, or international political and/or societal change.

Key Informant: refers to a person who is participating in an in-depth interview – has established history and trust in the non-profit sector, holds knowledge on their own organization and the sector, and understands the local network.

Non-Profit Organization: a legal entity that organizes and operates for collective, public, or social benefit.

Organizational Policy: rules and regulations employees must follow to keep a business or organization running smoothly.

Operational Fund/Reserve: an unrestricted fund balance that is set aside to stabilize finances by providing a cushion against large unbudgeted expenses, losses of income, and unexpected events.

Orientation Informant: refers to a person who is participating in an in-depth interview – are important and responsive in the non-profit sector, but are not directly employed or practitioners in the sector.

Qualitative Data: non-numerical data that describes and characteristics and qualities that can be observed and recorded.

Quantitative Data: numerical data in the form of counts or numbers that can be compared or counted on a numerical scale.

Private Sector: the part of the economy that is owned by private groups, such as for-profit, as opposed to owned by the government.

Project Participant: the entities and professionals assembled by the researcher for the project.

Public Sector: the part of the economy that is owned by the government.

Social Enterprise: a business created to further a social cause in a financially sustainable way.

Social Entrepreneurship: an approach by entrepreneurs, groups, individuals, or start-up companies where they develop, fund, and implement solutions to further a social cause.

Stakeholder: a group or individual that has an interest in any activities or decisions made by an organization – including communities, government, groups, individuals, and others that have a direct or in-direct interest.

Sub-Sector: a sector or sub-category in the non-profit sector.

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Appendix

ORIENTATION INTERVIEW GUIDE

Hello, my name is _____. Thank you so much for agreeing to speak with us today! I am hoping to learn more about your thoughts and insights on the non-profit sector in Durham. Our goal is to support the development of a Non-Profit Recovery Strategy for Durham Region. This strategy will support non-profits in Durham in recuperating from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Just a reminder that anything you tell me will not be personally attributed to you in any reports that result from this interview. All of the reports will be written in a manner that no individual comment can be attributed to a particular person. We can also send you these questions so you can answer them via e-mail or to add any additional thoughts on this topic.

Do you have any questions before we start?

1. We wanted to speak to you because of your experience with, or knowledge of the non-profit sector in Durham. Can you describe your work and how it impacts Durham's non-profit sector?
2. In your work, have you noticed any trends, changes or shifts in Durham's non-profit sector over the past 5 years? What factors contributed to these trends, shifts, or changes? (Prompt for internal/external factors, shifts in funding, change in political scene, and changes in leadership.)
3. When you think about the non-profit sector in Durham, how would you describe:
 - Challenges to collaboration/collective action
 - Strengths of the sector itself (Possible prompt: are there strengths that are not being utilized to their full potential?)
 - Key observations
4. As we mentioned above, we are working on a Non-profit Recovery Strategy. What are some elements you would like to see included? What strategies would benefit the non-profit sector? (Refer to Question 3: what strategies would mitigate these particular challenges?)
5. We've heard from various stakeholders that Durham Region that the non-profit sector is unique due to its organizational networks; others may feel that these networks operate in sub-sectoral silos. Based on your experience, what are some considerations in developing a network that was structured to strengthen the sector while breaking down sub-sectoral silos? (Prompt for network-based best practices.)
6. Who else in the research community should we be talking to? (Follow-up: would you feel comfortable with doing an e-introduction to us?)
7. Anything else you would like to add.
8. Do you have any questions/comments for us?

End with thanking the informant again for his/her time!

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FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM

Community Development Council Durham (CDCD) is consulting with Non-Profits in Durham to better understand the immediate and long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The information gathered in this project will help draft a Non-Profit Recovery Strategy.

Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. If you decide not to participate, this will not have any impact on either the project or your current work in the Non-Profit sector. The focus group will take approximately 2 hours and 15 minutes of your time and will be recorded so it can be reviewed after it is complete. The facilitator will also be taking detailed notes during the discussion.

Benefits: There are no risks in your participation; however, benefit may come to you and many other Non-Profits through the Strategies proposed in the final report in identifying elements of a Recovery Strategy in Durham.

Confidentiality: Focus group discussion will remain confidential between you and the Community Development team at Community Development Council Durham. We are asking that you respect the confidentiality of the other participants and do not discuss what they said outside of the group.

Security: Only members of the Community Development Team will have access to raw materials such as recordings and summary notes. The final report will not identify any of the participants and once the report is completed any or all material written, taped or on computer will be destroyed.
If you have any questions or concerns about this focus group, please contact:

Nathan Gardner
Team Lead, Community Development
Community Development Council Durham
ngardner@cdcd.org

OR

Neemarie Alam
Social Researcher
Community Development Council Durham
nalam@cdcd.org

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

I, _____, have read the above information about the COVID-19 project being conducted by Community Development Council Durham (CDCD). I also understand that my participation is voluntary. I understand that I can choose not to answer any of the questions and that I can choose to leave the focus group at any time.

I agree to participate in the CDCD COVID-19 Impact on Non-profit sector focus group.

Participants Email: _____ Date: _____

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KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

Community Development Council Durham (CDCD) is consulting with non-profits in Durham to better understand the immediate and long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The information gathered in this project will help draft a Non-profit Recovery strategy.

Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. If you decide not to participate, this will not have any impact on either the project or your current work in the non-profit sector.

The interview will take approximately 1 hours and 15 minutes of your time and the facilitator will be taking detailed notes during the discussion.

Risks and Benefits: There are no risks in your participation; however, benefit may come to you and many other non-profits through the Strategies proposed in the final report in identifying elements of a Recovery Strategy in Durham.

Confidentiality: All key informant interview information will remain confidential between you and the Community Development team at Community Development Council Durham.

Security: Only members of the Community Development Team will have access to raw materials such as summary notes. The final report will not identify any of the participants and once the report is completed any or all material written, taped or on computer will be destroyed.

If you have any questions or concerns about this interview, please contact:

Nathan Gardner
Team Lead, Community Development
Community Development Council Durham
ngardner@cdcd.org

OR

Neemarie Alam
Social Researcher
Community Development Council Durham
nalam@cdcd.org

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

I, _____, have read the above information about the COVID-19 project being conducted by Community Development Council Durham (CDCD). I also understand that my participation is voluntary. I understand that I can choose not to answer any of the questions and that I can choose to end the interview at any time.

I agree to participate in the CDCD COVID-19 Impact on Non-profit sector project as a key informant interview.

Focus Group Email: _____ Date: _____

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COVID-19 PHASE II KI E-MAIL INVITE

To Whom It May Concern/Dear <Name>,

The COVID-19 Pandemic has deeply impacted the non-profit sector in Durham. Non-profits throughout Durham are grappling with the repercussions of possible revenue shortfalls, agency closure, as well as modifying their programs and services to meet the needs of clients and community members. With the Province and many non-profits prepare for the fall, Community Development Council Durham (CDCD) is interested in better understanding the impact of the pandemic on non-profits in Durham and developing a Recovery Strategy to support non-profits.

As part of the project, CDCD will facilitate key informant interviews with key stakeholders to map local non-profit networks and determine potential recovery actions.

We are requesting approximately 75 minutes of your time over the phone for this critical conversation. Ideally, these conversations would take place as soon as possible so feedback can be provided to the Region of Durham and other stakeholders in resourcing the Recovery Strategy.

Please let me know your availability for this conversation from Monday, September 14th to Friday, September 25th, 2020.

We deeply appreciate your participation and insight into this challenging situation.

Please contact me directly with any questions or concerns.

Thank you.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE

TARGET PARTICIPANTS

- Local stakeholders with long histories of service provision in the community
- Community leaders/advocates, both institutional and grassroots
- Individuals who can provide local and regional context
- Individuals that either have or currently operate a subsectoral network or umbrella organization (or have a prominent presence in these entities)

PREPARATION

Interviewees will receive a brief communication containing the consent form in advance of the interview. These questions can be emailed to interviewees upon request.

The questions may be modified depending on the participant's role in the community, e.g. service provider, community leader, etc.

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Hello, my name is _____. Thank you so much for agreeing to speak with me today! I am hoping to learn more about your thoughts and insights on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the non-profit sector in Durham. Our goal is to support the development of a Recovery Action Plan through engaging the non-profit sector, ensuring that their voice is central to the Recovery efforts.

Just a reminder that anything you tell me will not be personally attributed to you in any reports that result from this interview. All of the reports will be written in a manner that no individual comment can be attributed to a particular person. We can also send you these questions so you can answer them via e-mail or to add any additional thoughts on this topic.

Do you have any questions before we start?

1. You've been referred to us because of your experience with, or knowledge of the non-profit sector in Durham Region. Can you describe your work in the non-profit sector in Durham?
2. What drew you to the work you are doing?
3. Can you provide a brief overview of any network or inter-agency collaborative work you have done with the non-profit sector in Durham?
4. How would you describe the non-profit sector? (Prompt: is it well-connected? Are there a lot of formal/informal connections?)
5. What, if any, are some trends, changes or shifts you have witnessed or experienced in the nature of the non-profit sector over the past 5 years pre-pandemic? What factors contributed to these trends, shifts or changes?

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6. What are some unique challenges that the non-profit sector in Durham Region faces? (Prompt for comparison to other Regions or municipality-specific challenges.)
 7. Is the sector politically connected or drawn together for advocacy efforts? If yes, what are some examples?
 8. How has the pandemic changed the landscape of the non-profit sector in Durham?
 9. How has the pandemic impacted the following for your specific subsector or area of focus:
 - a) Service provision
 - b) Funding/revenue generation
 - c) Hiring/retaining staff
 - d) Developing/maintaining community connections and communication
 10. Are you or your organization members of an umbrella organization or subsectoral network? Do you host any member organizations or subsectoral networks?
 11. Since the pandemic how have you or your organization been engaged by umbrella organizations or subsectoral networks (or) how have your subsectoral network or umbrella organization engaged its members? (Prompt: Is there active participation from the membership? Do members sit on Boards or other committees?)
 12. What is the nature of the umbrella organization or subsectoral network? What is the foundational issue (or what issue drew your members together)?
 13. Based on your experience, what are some of the strengths of the non-profit sector in Durham?
 14. What are some challenges that your subsector (or area of expertise) is facing that may be unique to the subsector?
 15. How do these challenges effect member participation or collective efforts?
 16. What would draw organizations to join a Durham-wide network?
 17. What are some potential challenges or barriers you would anticipate with creating a Durham-wide network? What are some ways you would mitigate those challenges or barriers? What practices or ideas are important to keep in mind in building a Durham-wide network?
 18. What is the nature of the grassroots or informal networks in Durham Region? How would you propose engaging these informal networks?
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19. In your opinion, are there gaps in existing services and supports? If so, can you tell me more about them?

20. What role can the non-profit sector play in supporting Regional Recovery efforts?

21. What role can the Region of Durham or funders play in supporting non-profit recovery efforts?

22. We are looking for recommendations of other projects, research, or work in network development and non-profit engagement, especially specific to economic recovery. Do you have any suggestions/thoughts?

23. What are some strategies and recommendations you would like included in our final plan?

24. Who else should we be talking to? (Follow-up: would you feel comfortable with doing an e-introduction to us?)

25. Anything else you would like to add.

26. Do you have any questions/comments for us?

End with thanking the informant again for his/her time!

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FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

START TIME 0:00

BACKGROUND: 10 MINUTES

Hi everyone, my name is _____. I'll be the facilitator of our group discussion today. I am the [position/title] at Community Development Council Durham, and we are working to better understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the non-profit sector in Durham. This information will allow CDCD and its partners to gather information and data to identify barriers and resources for the non-profit sector, and will be used to draft our Non-profit Recovery Strategy.

Our discussion today will take about two hours and fifteen minutes. I understand that everyone is busy, and I will try to finish on time.

Firstly, I want to thank you all for your time and participation. The most important thing to remember is that every opinion is valuable and that we're not here to make judgments, but to hear everyone's opinion and voice.

There is no right or wrong answer. I'm not here to find out how much you know but to hear your opinion and experience - what you think and why you believe what you believe. And you can't be wrong about what your opinion is. Does this make sense? (Check group for signs of consent)

In discussion groups like this, some people have a lot to say and others are more shy. I'm here to make sure that we hear from everyone. I might call on you if you aren't speaking or I might not call on you right away so that we make sure that everyone has the opportunity to speak and share their opinions. Is that okay?

(Check group for signs of consent)

I also want to ask everyone to be respectful of each other. Even if you hear things that you disagree with, it is really important that we do not disrespect other peoples' opinions. Feel free to give a different opinion, but if we do not let everyone share their thoughts, we will be missing key information for our report. I'm going to be recording this discussion to help me remember what everyone has said. Please try and speak up and one at a time so that your voices can be captured clearly.

For this focus group, we are requesting that you turn on your camera so we can see you and you can see us. It will help me note any non-verbal cues which are really important in understanding responses to our questions.

The recording and my notes will not be shared with anyone outside of our project team, and no one individual will be identified in our report. I will also ask that what is said in this room stays in this room; we would like to respect everyone's privacy and confidentiality.

Does everyone understand our rules? (Prompt if necessary)

Before we start, I would like to know each of you a little better. Please introduce yourself by sharing your name, your organization, and your title. We'll go around so everyone can have a turn. I'll go first; as I said, my name is _____, I work at CDCD and I am a _____.

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Time: 0:15

GENERAL IMPACTS: 15 MINUTES

In this section, you are trying to create a bond with the participants, help them open up, and talk about the general impacts of the pandemic on their organization.

To start, we are going to talk a bit about how the pandemic generally.

1. Has the pandemic impacted your daily work? If yes, provide examples and how would you describe the impact?
2. What are you doing differently? Are there things that you are doing the same?
3. Did your work change significantly from the start of the pandemic to now? If yes, can you explain those changes?

Time: 0:30 minutes

CLIENT SERVICES AND PROGRAM IMPACTS: 20 MINUTES

In this section, you are trying to get the participants to describe the impact on their clients and their programs/services and their experience with providing services during the pandemic.

Now we will talk about how the pandemic has impacted your programs, services, and clients.

4. What are the steps you or your organization took in modifying your programs or services? (Prompt for: any new technology purchases or training, communication with clients/funders, developing new program materials, etc.)
5. How did your clients initially react to the changes in programs or services?
6. Are there elements of your new program or service delivery method(s) that your clients seem to like? What elements do they dislike?
7. Are there elements of your new program or service delivery method(s) that your staff or team members seem to like? What elements do they dislike?
8. What did you find frustrating or challenging about your current client service or program delivery method?
9. If you had to list the top 3 things that your clients are struggling with due to the pandemic, what would they be? Any service gaps you are coming across repeatedly? (Allow for as many responses as possible, noting any repeated responses or responses that generate a lot of nonverbal consent.)

Time: 45 minutes

STAFF IMPACTS: 25 MINUTES

In this section, you are getting the participants to describe their day-to-day realities and challenges.

Now we're going to talk about how the pandemic has impacted your staff teams or coworkers.

10. Have you noticed any significant changes in your interactions with your staff team or other coworkers? If so, can you describe them.
11. What are some internal factors contributing to the impact on staff? (Prompt: what are some things that staff are struggling with or finding challenging? What are some things that staff are perhaps enjoying or finding easier?)

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12. What kind of supports are available to the staff for program/service provision? (Prompt: tech support? Laptops? PPE?)
13. Please describe how the pandemic has impacted your staff team or organizational culture.
14. How has your organization supported staff development, team dynamics, or capacity building during the pandemic? (Prompt: has your organization hosted any virtual or in-person social events? Any team training?)
15. Thinking of September or the rest of 2020, what have been the predominant staff requests? (Prompts: Flexibility with schedule? Flexibility with work requirements? Leave of absence?)

Time: 70 minutes

LONG TERM/FUTURE IMPACTS: 25 MINUTES

In this section, you are getting the participants to describe their thoughts on the long-term or possible future impacts of the pandemic on their organization.

We're going to shift now to thinking about your organization's future and longer-term impacts of the pandemic.

16. Looking at the past 6 months, what do you wish you knew or had in place for your organization before the pandemic?
17. Thinking ahead to the end of 2020, what will your organization require to fulfill its mission or mandate? (Prompts: increased funding, more space, more technology, etc.)
18. In general terms, how has the pandemic impacted your organization finances (deficiency/surplus/no impact)?
19. If your organization is facing a possible deficiency, what would be required to create organizational stability?
20. How has your funders responded to your needs? Have they been generally receptive and flexible? Have they communicated more?
21. Is your organization planning to change or shifting its operations in anticipation of September? If yes, how is your organization preparing for September?
22. What external factors are impacting your September (or beyond) plans?
23. How plans are in place or what plans would you like to see in place in case of a second surge or outbreak?
24. What lessons, if any, do you feel you have learned through the pandemic that may lead to permanent change?

Time: 95 minutes

IMPACT ON YOU: 15 MINUTES

In this section, you are trying to get participants to describe the impact of the pandemic on their own mental health and well-being.

We've talked about the impact of the pandemic on your clients, staff, and organization and now we are going to briefly touch base on how you are dealing with the pandemic.

25. Has the pandemic impacted your mental or physical health? If you are willing to share, can you describe the overall impact?
26. Has the pandemic impacted your overall level of stress? What factors are influencing your stress level?
27. What, if anything, have you tried to mitigate stress or negative impacts on your physical, mental, or emotional health? What worked really well? What did not work at all?
28. Do you feel you have places for support in leading your organization (ie. Board of Directors, other networks, mentors, other leadership gatherings)?

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29. What advice would you give yourself if you could go back in time to the start of 2020? (Prompt: what personal resource do you wish you had? What plan/schedule/strategy/practice would you have in place?)

Time: 110 minutes

RECOMMENDATIONS/STRATEGIES: 20 MINUTES

In this section, you are trying to get participants to describe recommendations/strategies/final thoughts.

30. Has the pandemic caused any shifts in how your understanding of your organizational mission or mandate?

31. A lot of the current conversation is on developing the “new normal”. What do you imagine that “new normal” would entail or look like?

32. How has the pandemic impacted your future plans for you or your organization?

33. How else can the provincial or regional government support your organization right now?

34. How can the provincial or regional government provide long-term support?

35. Is there anything that you would like to see receive more funding? Or be better resourced? What would you like to see funded that is not currently being funded?

36. Are there any recommendations you would like to see reflected in our report?

Time: 130 minutes

CLOSING: 5 MINUTES

Is there anything else you think is important for us to know?

Thanks so much for participating. We'll be gathering all of this information together and bringing it back to you and the rest of the non-profit sector.

Time: 135 minutes

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