



As part of our campaign on creating welcoming workplaces, we're exploring what it means to go "Beyond Decent Work" in the Community Impact Sector. IONS is developing a series of "Possibility" Briefs to highlight key challenges facing organizations and ideas for building more just, equitable workplaces.

Land Acknowledgement: As beneficiaries of ongoing colonialism, we recognize the privilege in being able to build a life here in Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded land of the Mi'kmaq People. This territory is covered by the Peace and Friendship Treaties. This land is also the birthplace of Black heritage and culture in what is now known as Canada following the forcible displacement of people of African descent. We are committed to carrying out the long overdue, vital reconciliation and anti-oppression work.

POSSIBILITY BRIEF: IMPROVING TOTAL COMPENSATION IN THE COMMUNITY IMPACT SECTOR

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“F”

Nova Scotia was the only province to receive an “F” on the Poverty Report Card (Food Banks Canada, 2023).

Nova Scotia has some of the least generous entitlements and labour standards in Canada, including the longest working week (48 hours), only three days of sick leave (unpaid), and a minimum wage around \$10 lower than the living wage (Saulnier, 2023).

Nova Scotia’s cost of living is growing quickly and comparable to Ontario and British Columbia (Saulnier, 2023) and people are spending over 66% of their income on fixed costs other than housing (Food Banks Canada).

NO PAID SICK LEAVE

54% of Nova Scotia workers have no access to paid sick leave (Saulnier, 2023)

There is a heaviness across Nova Scotia. In the past three years, we have experienced environmental catastrophes like Hurricane Fiona, wildfires and flooding; a mass shooting linked to gendered violence; anti-2SLGBTQIA+ protests; immense strains on our healthcare system; a social infrastructure collapse in housing; skyrocketing inflation and unaffordability; and mental health crises.

In a province burdened by these state of emergencies, Nova Scotia’s current labour policies aren’t doing enough to mitigate the damage and ensure people have adequate supports. The Community Impact (Nonprofit) Sector continually rises to the challenge, often relied on to distribute materials, resources, and critical services – but how are we caring for the carers?

The Issue:

Current funding structures perpetuate undervalued labour, overwork, and burnout. Many people in the Community Impact Sector don’t have adequate pay, benefits, and supports – and the diverse makeup of the sector means that racialized women are disproportionately harmed.

Why It Matters:

- Impact organizations (nonprofits and charities) provide critical services and community leadership. Chronic undervaluing of this work deepens the equity divide for women, newcomers, racialized people, and equity-deserving groups. If staff aren’t adequately compensated, we risk losing our ability to generate equitable solutions and provide essential community supports.

The Possibility:

- Providing holistic compensation packages begins to address inequities and enables people to have a better quality of life. This increases the potential for welcoming and empowering diverse talent in the Community Impact Sector, allowing impact organizations to be leaders of transformative change.

TOTAL COMPENSATION: Financial compensation is just one piece of the total compensation package. Additional factors like workplace culture, benefits, time off, and flexibility play a major role in attraction and retention. This includes but isn’t limited to:

- Traditional benefits (healthcare, dental, vision)
- Voluntary benefits (disability, wellness accounts, Employee & Family Assistance Programs)
- Annual leave (vacation) and paid time off (parental leave, sick leave, culturally significant days, bereavement)
- Retirement plans
- Work-life balance (hybrid/ remote work, sabbaticals)
- Professional development

THE CONTEXT:

Though offering competitive salaries is a systemic challenge, organizations often have flexibility in additional perks and can be creative with the makeup of a total compensation package – which would impact the 19,000 people employed by the sector in Nova Scotia. Of 7,500+ organizations, about 1,500 of these are focused on providing critical social services.

IMPACT ORGANIZATIONS EMPLOY APPROXIMATELY 19,000 PEOPLE IN NOVA SCOTIA

(IONS, 2022)

Did you know?

- According to Statistics Canada, the average annual salary for those working in nonprofits is \$38,716, compared to \$57,137 in the economy overall. (Imagine Canada, 2022)
- Hourly wages in the Community Impact Sector in Nova Scotia are about 20% lower than in other parts of the country (IONS, 2022).
- 72% of people employed by impact organizations identify as female (Statistics Canada, 2023)¹.
- 89% of organizations have a staff team of less than 30 people (IONS, 2022).
- More than half of organizations (53%) do not offer a health/dental plan for staff, only 24% have a retirement savings plan for staff, and only 6% offer a parental leave top-up (IONS, 2022).

Since 2020, IONS has conducted several sector surveys that revealed heavy workload and burnout are top issues, second only to concerns related to current funding models. Demand for services is increasing, while staff and volunteer attraction and retention are becoming increasingly difficult. In the spring of 2023, IONS surveyed 224 organizations about labour market trends and heard that:

38%

Are expecting their workforce needs to increase this year.

37%

Are having difficulty finding qualified local talent.

43%

Are finding it difficult to meet expectations related to wages and benefits in their recruitment efforts.

This challenge becomes even greater when trying to retain staff (reported by 68%).

29%

Expect between 10-25% of their current staff to retire in the next 2-3 years.

60%

Around 60% are experiencing competition from other sectors in staff retention efforts.

29%

Difficulty accessing childcare/elder care was a retention issue cited by 29% of organizations

25%

Lack of transportation and housing pose barriers for nearly 25% of organizations.

CALL TO ACTION:

Organizations need to respond to burnout and pay inequity by updating their policies and practices to increase employees' total compensation packages, so they better reflect the value of work and improve quality of life for new and existing staff.

These trends are happening alongside societal shifts related to increased desire for work-life balance and an unwillingness to tolerate unhealthy workplace cultures. More and more people are making employment decisions driven by personal values. As labour shortages continue to feed a competitive market, exploring non-financial measures for recruitment and retention is an important area for the sector to engage in.

¹Statistics Canada data collection for this information is limited to binary gender identities (male/female). We currently do not have accurate data for nonbinary identities but acknowledge that not everyone falls into these categories.

A JUSTICE AND EQUITY LENS

In a sector that relies on underpaid labour from women, Black, Indigenous, racialized, disabled and 2SLGBTQIA+ staff, we must make efforts to prioritize equitable solutions. Nearly **50%** of organizations surveyed don't have strategies to attract and retain people from equity-deserving groups. And though we know inclusive practices and policies are essential for nurturing welcoming workplaces, only **17%** of organizations have made justice and equity part of their strategic goals (IONS, 2022). When we think about organizational policies and labour standards, we need to

consider the justice and equity implications – this will begin to build the foundation for centering people in the work and fostering inclusive, accessible spaces. It's not just about representation and fairness, but removing barriers for community-led solutions and uplifting diverse leadership to make space for new ideas. The knowledge exists, but we must create the conditions for transformation. Below are some ways we're connecting the dots between our current context and how the justice and equity implications have affected our recommendations going forward:

WHAT WE KNOW

Women represent the vast majority of people employed in the sector (72%).

- Work traditionally viewed as “women’s work” continues to be undervalued and underpaid.
- Men disproportionately hold leadership roles in the sector: the higher the seniority level, the higher the proportion of male employees (Imagine Canada, 2022 & Charity Village, 2023).
- Men working in the sector earn on average 13% more than women (IONS, 2022).
- Many in the sector are caretakers and guardians, and childcare and eldercare are large expenses for households.
- Unpaid parental leave has a disproportionate effect on the sector.

Black and Indigenous women and people are employed more in the sector than in any other industry.

- An employee in the sector is 27% more likely to have Indigenous status than in other sectors (Imagine Canada, 2022).
- Black and Indigenous people face barriers to employment, have difficulty attaining job stability, and are paid less than their white peers.
- Black-led and Indigenous-led organizations are underfunded (Pereira et al, 2020).
- Wage equity gaps continue in the sector - racialized employees earn 10% less than their white colleagues (Imagine Canada, 2022).
- Black and Indigenous workers are underrepresented in leadership roles and have less power over their salaries and benefits.
- Black and Indigenous employees often take on extra equity work and emotional labour within workplaces.
- Black, Indigenous, and racialized employees are subject to experiencing microaggressions and tokenism in the workplace.

Nearly 50% of organizations don't provide health benefits.

- Equity-deserving groups are particularly vulnerable to experiencing poor physical health and mental illness (Food Banks Canada, 2023a).
- Race-based health inequities disproportionately affect Black, Indigenous, and racialized communities (College of Physicians & Surgeons of NS, 2022).
- Black Canadians are less likely than white Canadians to have access to a family doctor (Pereira et al, 2020).
- Despite being more likely to have a post-secondary degree, racialized Canadians are less likely to find jobs that offer benefits at the start of their careers (Food Banks Canada, 2023a).

The unaffordability crisis in Nova Scotia doesn't affect everyone equally.

- Disabled people experience disproportionate levels of hardship due to the greater costs of healthcare needs compounded by rapid inflation (Food Banks Canada, 2023).
- Black and Indigenous communities are disproportionately affected by unaffordability crises and increased cost of living (Byard, 2023).
- Nova Scotia has the highest proportion of trans and non-binary people in Canada. 13% of trans men, 12% of trans women, and 21% of non-binary people lived below the poverty line (Food Banks Canada, 2023a).
- Racialized (38%) and Indigenous people (46%) report that their mental health affects their ability to find employment and to work effectively (Food Banks Canada, 2023a).
- Racialized people disproportionately experience inadequate access to work (including a living wage), housing, social services, and health services.
- 42% of racialized people have a hard time paying their rent (Food Banks Canada, 2023a).
- Women are most likely to be food insecure and they face higher rates of poverty (Food Banks Canada, 2023).

IDEAS AND IMPLEMENTATION

Increasing the total compensation package within the Community Impact Sector means valuing women and gender diverse staff – especially racialized women, newcomers, and disabled people. We have the potential to model advancement of justice and equity within Nova Scotia. For these reasons and more, IONS recommends organizations consider the following practices and policies:

Call to Action	Impact on Justice and Equity	Organizational Impact
<p>1. Pay at least a living wage and offer cost of living increases annually.</p> <p><i>The average living wage rate in Nova Scotia is: \$24.82 (Saulnier, 2023)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Better quality of life and health outcomes. ● Decreased need to have multiple jobs. ● More food secure and poverty reduction, including child poverty. ● Increased ability to fully participate in society, which reduces stress, strain, and mental illnesses (Food Banks Canada, 2023a). ● Supports equity-deserving peoples' mental health and ability to find jobs and stay employed (Food Banks Canada, (2023a). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increased loyalty and productivity, less absenteeism, decreased turnover. ● Cost savings on recruitment and onboarding. ● Greater ability to attract younger talent leading to organizational sustainability. ● Lower rates of burnout and overwhelm.
<p>2. Support hybrid and remote work.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increased access to work and employment for disabled people, neurodiverse people, and people with mobility issues. ● Decreased microaggressions faced by employees from equity-deserving groups in the office. ● Greater flexibility for caretakers. ● Decreased commuting costs for those disproportionately affected by the unaffordability crisis. ● Decreased carbon emissions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Greater ability to attract talent from diverse backgrounds and geographic locations. ● Cost savings on physical space/ more collaborative space sharing. ● People are better able to balance life demands and have more energy for work.
<p>3. Provide employee health benefits.</p> <p>a. Offer benefits upon employment start date.</p> <p>b. If able, cover 100% of benefits costs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increases access for disabled people to enter the sector (often people are forced to stay in harmful workplaces because jobs that a new opportunity doesn't offer benefits and/or doesn't offer benefits until after 6 months). ● Increased access to people in the sector who disproportionately need these services. ● Provides health supports for people where there are gaps in universal healthcare. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Employees are healthier, happier and more productive at work. ● Higher attraction and retention. ● Greater ability to attract diverse staff.
<p>4. Trial a reduced hour work week.</p> <p>a. Increase hourly rate by not prorating salary</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increased access to employment for disabled and neurodiverse people. ● Enables space and rest for people to attend to other needs in their life including care taking and healing. ● Increased pay value of jobs in a typically underpaid sector. ● Allows people to take on other work if needed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Less burnout and turnover. ● Higher retention. ● Less absenteeism and sick days used. ● Improves employers' ability to increase hourly rate and value to employees without increasing costs. ● Becomes attractive to people in and outside of the sector.
<p>5. Provide more than the minimum leave and additional Paid Time Off (PTO)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recognizes culturally significant days and supports diverse staff. ● Supports people in being able to spend time connecting with community. ● Enables people to spend time healing and resting. ● Allows more travel time for newcomers or people whose family lives elsewhere. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Generous vacation and PTO allow organizations to be more competitive. ● People can spend time doing things that re-energize them and come back to work fresh. ● Time off can help manage the pace of work for an organization.



In Summary:

Workplaces that provide compensation packages that prioritize fair and equitable pay, flexible work arrangements, healthy work-life balance, and generous time off create value for potential employees, off-setting lower industry salaries. All these aspects of compensation support healthier, happier people and access to a better life.

Of course, the ability of the sector to implement these calls to action rests heavily on access to sustainable, predictable funding. There is still a long way to go to ensure that organizations providing critical services are adequately resourced in ways that support operational costs over longer time horizons and IONS is committed to continuing to raise awareness of these systemic issues.

Helpful Resources:

- [Sector-wide Employee Group Health Benefits](#)
- [Employee & Family Assistance Program](#)
- [Blog “Off the Clock: Exploring Our Relationship with Time and Work”: September 2023](#)
- [Blog “People, Power, and Picket Lines: Where is our Collective Voice?”](#)
- [Imagine Canada Equity Benchmarking Project](#)

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