

IONS Impact Report 2023/24

Shaping our strategy, deepening our commitments to justice and equity.





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'kmaw 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. As an organization and as people, we are committed to carrying out the long overdue, vital reconciliation and anti-oppression work.

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Welcome



Shaping our strategy, deepening our commitments to justice and equity.

2023 was the year of growing into our identity as IONS as we explored who we are and the impact we want to make. Our scope of work grew and our team nearly doubled as we leaned into new values-aligned activities and projects.

IONS has been on a journey since 2020 in response to massive changes in the world resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, confronting systemic racism, reconciliation with Indigenous communities, accelerating polarization, rising costs of living and homelessness, and mounting climate and geopolitical crises. We can no longer ignore the fact that current systems and ways of working are not serving us. The Community Impact Sector is not well – demand for services is increasing, and work overload and burn-out are being felt everywhere. Without healthy staff and volunteers in this sector, we won't be able to provide the support needed to care for others.

We are committed to changing how we work at IONS to center equity and justice, so we can share what we learn and inspire others to experiment too. We developed four accountability filters to help us make decisions that are responsive to sector needs, center reciprocity and relationships, and reimagine new possibilities.

Over a six-month period, IONS staff and board members worked with coaches to examine our intended impact and outcomes. Instead of one-way information sharing, we are leaning into interactive learning spaces to build relationships. We know that many organizations are struggling to attract and retain diverse staff and volunteers. We launched our Beyond Decent Work campaign to offer inspiration and resources for those seeking to support their

people more holistically. We shared stories about our own journey in the hopes that it would give others confidence to try as well.

In 2023 we worked with several provincial government departments including Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage (CCTH), Labour, Skills and Immigration (LSI), the Office of the Status of Women, and Seniors and Long-term Care (via a partnership with Community Links). Through targeted projects we facilitated community engagement and research to deepen understanding of the community-based senior-serving sector, youth employment, the field of gender-based violence, and employment and adult learning services.

We also played a role in stewarding the Nova Scotia Non-profit Coalition, a group of 20+ provincial organizations committed to raising awareness of issues facing the sector, offering solutions, and informing policy. By working with the provincial government and the Coalition, IONS is better positioned to affect systems change.

Overall, the year was filled with deep conversations, new relationships, and renewed drive for helping people move toward new systems and ways of working that center well-being, justice and equity. We are even more passionate about the work being done across the sector and the impact people are seeking to make in the world. Together, we can find ways to strengthen community belonging and quality of life, despite the crises we're facing.

Annika Voltan, Executive Director

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "A. Voltan".

Our Strategy and Ways of Working

This year, we launched our [2023-2026 Strategy and Action Plan](#), which outlines the core elements that guide our work, our accountability filters, and our intended outcomes.

Long-Term Outcomes

To get to the change we want to see, in the long-term we are working toward:

- Policy decisions that reflect priorities, needs, and ideas generated by impact organizations.
- Funding and resources for impact organizations that are adequate, keeps pace with rising costs, and are equitably distributed.
- Workplaces that are accessible, healthy, safe, equitable and inclusive.
- Activating community-led change through connecting people, deepening relationships, and spurring collaboration.

Medium-Term Outcomes

We'll know we're on the right track if over the next 4–5 years:

- The Community Impact Sector is at the table shaping public policy.
- Individuals and organizations have the knowledge, skills, networks and resources to activate community-led change.
- More impact organizations are committed to implementing practices that center justice and equity.
- People in the sector are tackling big challenges through coordination and collaboration.

Four Main Elements | Design Principles

Our strategy is grounded in four main elements based on our intended impact, the unique role we play, our strengths, and the needs of communities. We treat these elements as design principles for all the work we do.

- Model change from the inside out
- Practice justice and equity in all our work
- Create spaces for connection and generating new ideas for action
- Connect the dots to someplace new

Filters for Accountability

Inspired by the Mi'kmaw concept of “Netukulimk”, we seek to use values of sustainability and stewardship to guide decisions related to our work. Our “4 Rs” provide a lens for reflection and accountability.

- **Relational:** We create spaces and opportunities to connect that intentionally build trust, alignment and mutual care.
- **Reciprocity:** We make sure that information, opportunities, and impact flows in both directions.
- **Responsive:** We seek to deepen our understanding of what people need and act on it with our networks.
- **Reimagining:** We look inward and outward to spark new ideas for change that meets what we need now, and what we need to create a just future.

Our Activity Areas

- Building Community Capacity for Change
- Research and Advocacy
- Living Our Values

ACTIONS | Seasons of Activity

2,500

people reached through events and programming

1,200+

new followers across social media platforms

150,000

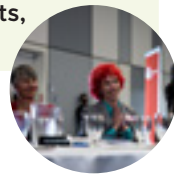
impressions on LinkedIn posts

Research and Advocacy

Living Our Values

Building Community Capacity for Change

Exploring Sector Needs for Gender-Based Violence Prevention	~100 people, 3 facilitated sessions, 20 interviews and focus groups, and survey
Strengthening Community-Based Senior Serving Organizations	~550 people, 8 facilitated sessions, 15 interviews, 7 focus groups, and survey
Ethical Story Building for Narrative Change	146 registrants, 2 sessions



Digital Transformation Community of Practice	40 participants	20 organizations
Pathway to Actions		25 interviews with sector leaders
Strategy and Action Plan		
Atlantic Social Impact Exchange Summit	35 attendees	

Spring | April to June 2023

Summer | July to September 2023

Funding Community Impact Series	147 registrants	2 sessions
ED Connections	119 registrants	3 sessions
Social Impact Leaders: Discover Benefits for Your Organization	20 registrants	
Community Impact Sector Day of Recognition	315 registrants	179 attendees
Living JEDDI Lab	IONS staff	



50%

average open rate on newsletters

50+

resources published



Launched Beyond Decent Work Campaign	3 new resources focused on policy, 2 new blogs, a “Possibility” Brief, and media engagement
AISC Conference	60 attendees
Association of NS Museums Keynote	150 attendees
Pathway to Actions (continued)	Two-day design sprint 13 participants
Good Governance Project	19 interviews, 57 survey respondents

Good Governance (continued)	
Pathway to Actions Community engagement	
Launched the 2024 IONS Exchange gathering registration	
Launched IONS 2024 Reimagining Work award	

Fall | October to December 2023

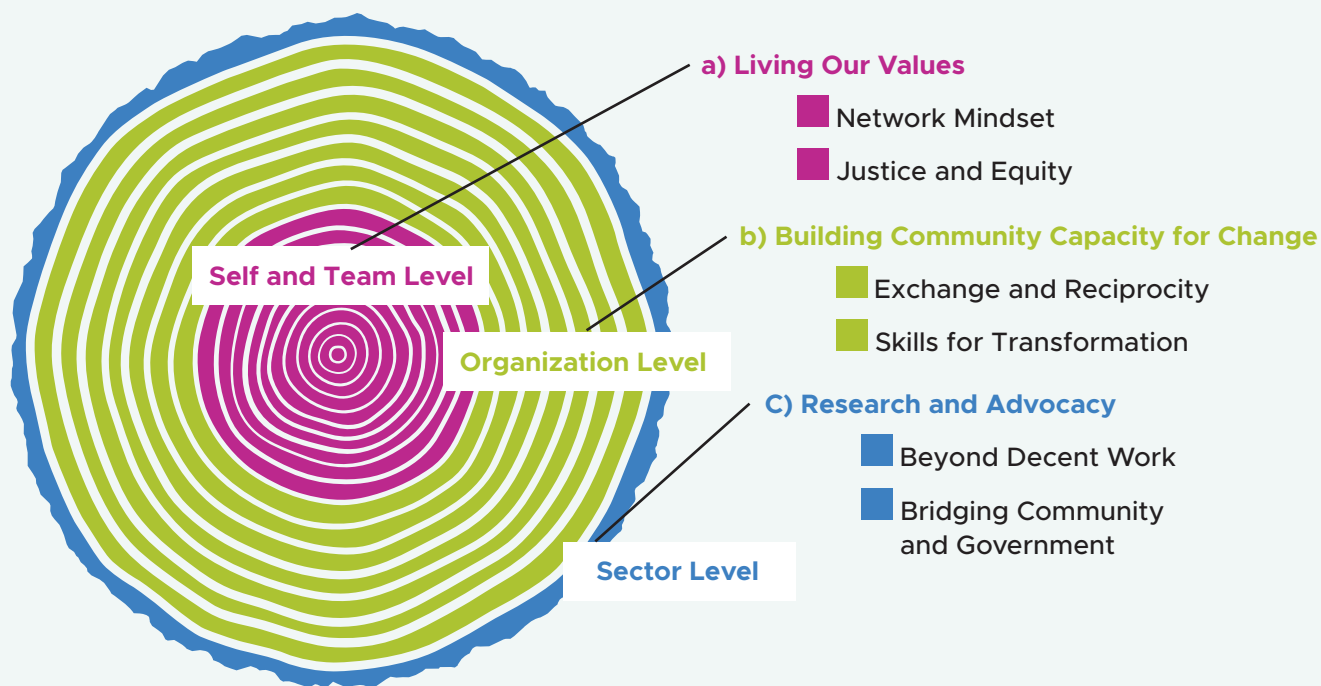
Community Conversations: Equitable Policy	2 sessions	50 registrants
Canadian Federation of Nonprofit Networks gathering		
Board-Staff Retreat		
Nova Scotia Nonprofit Coalition Retreat	15 organizations represented	
Sector Holiday Gathering	66 registrants	
ED Connections (continued)	60 registrants	3 sessions
Digital Transformation (continued)	3 sessions	

Winter | January to March 2024

Beyond Decent Work Campaign	Possibility Brief, 3 new resources, 2 new blogs
National and Provincial reach with presentations	6 presentations 325 attendees
ED Connections Group coaching sessions	77 registrants, 3 sessions
Digital Transformation	3 sessions



Reflections | Stories of Impact



Network Mindset | Living Our Values

Putting relationships first and connecting the dots between people, sectors, and ideas.

We often talk about IONS as a “network of networks” and the importance of collaboration in our work. By distributing leadership, looking outward, seeing our work – individual and collective - as part of a larger web of activity, we strengthened our capacity for systems change. Here are some of the ways that the IONS’ team is part of a larger ecosystem of change.

What does a network mindset mean to you? It’s about seeing the bigger picture – the system lens – and the interconnections between people and ideas, and then facilitating new connections and relationships to bring ideas to life.

Why is a network mindset important and how does it show up in your work? No one group or organization can solve complex problems on their own. More than ever, we need to work together for a better future and networks are critical to making this happen. It shows up every single day – whether I’m introducing people to each other, forming partnerships with other organizations, or connecting the dots of knowledge and ideas in meetings I’m in.



[IONS Ideas Blog](#)

[CTV News Atlantic Feature](#)

[Leaders weigh in on Canada’s 2024 Federal Budget](#)



ANNIKA VOLTAN (she/her)
Executive Director

[Future of Good Feature](#)

[CBC Radio Feature](#)



Community affiliations outside IONS: I’m on the board of Research Nova Scotia, the national Federation of Nonprofit Networks, the Association of Industry Sector Councils (and their Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility committee), and the Atlantic Social Impact Advisory Committee. I’ve also been doing some volunteer work to support Circulate Community, a community sauna enterprise in the valley.



Globe and Mail Feature

Philanthropist Journal Writing Fellowship

Urgency Culture Series



2024 Young Impact Leader

Upskilling Series Workshop



LYDIA PHILLIP (she/they)
Content Strategist

Community affiliations outside IONS:

I am a writing fellow for The Philanthropist Writing Fellowship for Black and Indigenous Writers, I was named a 2024 Future of Good Young Impact Leader, I have served on numerous community boards, and am heavily involved with the air cadet program.

What does a network mindset mean to you?

I think it's more than just a mindset, but the actuality that we are in relationship with others and the land. We can shape, mobilize, empower, and ideate from our individual spheres.



ALISHA CHRISTIE (she/her)
IONS Board member

Community affiliations outside IONS:

I am a coordinator of the lead team for the Homeless No More Initiative and I work for the Town of Kentville as the Housing and Community Partnership Coordinator. I am also a committed member of local theatre organizations, Women of Wolfville and the Fezziwig Society.

What does a network mindset mean to you?

A community asset-based approach drives a network mindset and results in resiliency. Operating from the lens of collective impact, our network mindset can create a web of community resources, skills, knowledge, and connections, allowing the sector to continue moving the work forward while the capacity of organizations in the sector shifts and flows.

A time when my work at IONS influenced my other roles in community:

As a board member, I had the unique opportunity to collaborate with IONS staff in hosting policy workshops in rural Mi'Kam'ki (Nova Scotia). Rural service providers, particularly those working in response to the homelessness crisis, are on the frontlines. Their work is often in immediate response, leaving little room for long-term policy development. By partnering with IONS, Homeless No More (HNM) brought policy resources into the community. The sector responded by feeling supported and understood by IONS staff and recognized the value of a network mindset in enhancing and amplifying our sector's work.



LISA FIAMELLI (she/they)
Executive Assistant

Community affiliations outside IONS:

I am a relief youth worker at Phoenix Youth Programs. I work at Phoenix Youth Shelter, a 24/7 emergency shelter, and at Phoenix Centre for Youth. I also volunteer at Women AWARE, co-facilitating a support group for women & non-binary folks. I am also a board member at this organization.

A time when my community affiliations influenced my work at IONS:

Being a front-line worker at a community impact organization in Halifax has influenced my work at IONS, because it really helps me understand the needs and realities of the community impact sector in Nova Scotia firsthand. The challenges of the sector, that we have heard many folks share (through questionnaires, conversations and other sources) are realities I have noticed and myself experienced. For example, when working on the Welcoming Workplaces Toolkit that I am working on with other team members at IONS, I have been able to contribute what should be included in this as a front-line worker myself, something that I would like to see and that would be helpful for organizations.



BERNADETTE MELITA (she/her)
IONS Board member

Community affiliations outside IONS:

I work in government, and I am an Indonesian with Chinese ethnic identity. I am deeply connected to the Indonesian Nova Scotian community and have active trusting relationships with the African Nova Scotian community.

What does a network mindset mean to you?

To me, a network mindset is the understanding that you are only a part of something bigger, which is all interconnected. Everything that you are and that you do influence and will be influenced by others and your environment.

A time when my community affiliations influenced my work at IONS:

I am part of a transformative leadership circle that centers BIPOC leaders at its centre. Being in that circle has shown me how powerful active listening can be. There is so much that people say. Bearing witness to people is deeply profound and it really puts you in a vulnerable space--perfect starting ground for a beautiful relationship. I have applied this in how I show up at IONS and it has served as a fertile ground for budding relationships.

Justice and Equity | Living Our Values

Reimagining new ways of working and modelling the change from the inside out.

We know that practicing ways of knowing, being, and doing that center justice and equity are critical to addressing systemic challenges. This year, we walked the talk by adjusting our organizational design, experimenting with new practices, and sharing our learnings with the sector.

LIVING JEDDI LAB AND TEAM COACHING

The Living JEDDI Lab was an internal learning process supported by a consultant to strengthen JEDDI (justice, equity, diversity, decolonization, and inclusion) in our work. We held regular team sessions throughout the year to explore topics around decision-making and agency, self-leadership, feedback, pay transparency, leave and flexibility, and growth and recognition. These conversations led to policy and process changes that increased collaboration, distributed leadership, and feelings of autonomy. Alongside the lab, we participated in individual and team coaching to develop generative conflict and psychological safety skills.

“I was treated as a whole person, not just as a candidate, throughout the entire process. From beginning to end of the hiring process, I felt that there was an intentional and thoughtful approach in being inclusive, and that is so important for me when choosing an employer.”

- Lisa Fiamelli, Executive Assistant, IONS

EQUITABLE AND INCLUSIVE RECRUITMENT

We consciously iterated our ways of approaching the recruitment of staff, board members, and even the procurement of suppliers and service providers – all with the goal of shifting power dynamics to support a more relational approach. For example, we:

- Shared salary range and features of the work culture in job briefs
- Provided a ‘What to Expect’ document to candidates
- Provided interview questions in advance
- Provided multiple time options for interviews and ability to self-select times
- Provided an honorarium to job interviewees
- Offered reverse reference checks
- Published explicit statements about our justice and equity commitments in hiring

OPERATING RHYTHMS AND FOUR-DAY WORK WEEK

We explored our relationship to time and implemented a new operating rhythm of seasonal cycles to combat urgency culture. The new rhythm includes regular reflection seasons to create the space for rest, the four-day work week, annual board-staff retreats, and a culture of care practices.



Sharing Our Learnings

We shared our justice and equity journey in our blogs and are making our policies and practices public through our Beyond Decent Work campaign.

Blogs

- [A Leader's Perspective on Reconnecting with Our Creative Selves through Seasonal Work Cycles](#)
- [Quiet Quitting or Loudly Advocating? A Gen Z's Guide to Knowing Your Worth](#)
- [Welcome Aboard: How Organizations Create Belonging for New Hires](#)
- [Put Your Oxygen Mask on First: Discussing Health Benefits in a Caring Sector](#)
- [Off the Clock? Exploring Our Relationship With Time and Work](#)

Media

- [IONS Strategy Launch](#) (CTV Atlantic)
- [Diversity beyond HR: Applying a DEI lens to procurement](#) (The Philanthropist)
- [Why 'urgency culture' in the workplace is failing everyone](#) (Globe and Mail)
- [The new non-profit workplace: Considerations and solutions](#) (The Philanthropist)



KNOWING MY WORTH AND MAKING CHANGE

Haley Moriarity (she/they), IONS Communications Coordinator

Pay isn't always easy to talk about, and it can be hard as a young person entering the workforce to navigate these conversations. A few months after I started at IONS, I was feeling strained financially and felt it was time to ask for a cost-of-living adjustment. During this time, as a team we were also having conversations about growth and recognition through the Living JEDDI lab. Compensation is an important topic as there's different needs for different family situations (single-income households, childcare, people working multiple jobs, housing, etc.).



Read Haley's story [here](#) or scan QR

"[The Living JEDDI Lab] has contributed to new policies, practices, and processes that have not only made the work feel better, but also equip us to better help the sector."

- IONS team member



LEADING WITH A MINDSET OF ABUNDANCE AND GROWTH

Janet Barlow (she/her), IONS Board Chair and Executive Director of Hike Nova Scotia

Shortly into my time with IONS, I was browsing the 2022 State of the Sector report when I noticed the comparisons of average salaries of various positions in Nova Scotia and Canada. I realized that at Hike NS, our salaries were lower than the provincial averages – which were already lower than other parts of the country. And when I look at the impact of our organization, it's clear we are doing great work. I thought, "We ought to be compensated better!" I looked at our budget, and we had some flexibility, so... why not?

I took this information to my board and made a case for salary increases given Hike NS's strong performance and the rising cost of living. Fortunately, our board is excellent and thoughtful – and they said yes! Soon after the raises, we also got approval for a health benefits plan.



Read Janet's story [here](#) or scan QR

Exchange and Reciprocity

| Building Community Capacity for Change

Creating spaces for connection and reciprocal flows of resources and impact

We believe that people learn and innovate better when they are in spaces that are engaging, generative, and relational. This year, we strengthened collaboration across the sector through communities of practice, network building, and community gatherings.

ED CONNECTIONS

We continued to host regular ED Connections sessions to engage sector leaders in peer learning around a range of topics, including decolonizing board governance, board diversity and inclusion, resilience, boundaries, recruitment, and creating welcoming workplaces.

“Thanks to IONS for the opportunity to meet, learn and share with other EDs across the province and across sectors. The value of networking with others who get what I do cannot be overstated. In a sector where the budget for professional development opportunities for staff is very small, sessions like this make a big difference in my organization’s growth and development.”

- Laurie Gillis, Executive Director, Atlantic Presenters Association

COMMUNITY IMPACT SECTOR DAY OF RECOGNITION

In partnership with United Way Halifax and the Province, we held the annual Day of Recognition for the Community Impact Sector on May 12, 2023. This event brought together sector staff, volunteers, supporters, and elected officials from all three levels of government. It featured workshops on storytelling and media, performances by African Nova Scotian and Mi’kmaw artists, and the announcement of the Invisible Champions Awards. Through a partnership with CBC Radio Information Morning, award recipients were featured each day leading up to the event. By far, attendance at the 2023 Day of Recognition was the largest in the event’s history.

179
attendees

20
Invisible Champion Awards

“Day of Recognition”
proclamation by the Government of Nova Scotia



Recognizing NS' Invisible Champions 



Scan the QR code or click the audio link above to listen.





POSSIBILITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES AT ED CONNECTIONS

Mary Pat Mombourquette, Executive Director, Cape Bretons Miners Museum

As the ED of a small museum in Glace Bay, I am always looking for ways to maximize our limited resources. **IONS has been a lifblood for me. They understand our needs and challenges, provide ways to connect around exceptionally relevant topics, and offer ideas and resources that actually work for organizations like ours.**

That's why I make time for the monthly ED Connections. It re-energizes me to connect with others and share

ideas, especially in the small breakout groups. After these sessions, we all go back to our desks thinking, 'We can do this!'. It's time well spent.

Our museum shares the history of coal mining in our region, and the ED Connections session on equity, diversity, and inclusion helped me see how we could tell more than a white man's story. We were in the middle of our exhibit renovations at the time, so I went back to the design team and said, 'We have to be really intentional here.' We hunted for stories of people from all around the world who had come to work in the coal fields. The new exhibits are now going up and we hope more visitors will see themselves reflected in this region's story.

The ideas that IONS shares feel possible for a small organization like ours. I am now using their resources to create a more welcoming workplace and to be a better coach and listener for my staff. The sector is so diverse, yet IONS' work is consistently relevant, helping us serve our communities best and take care of ourselves.

This is absolutely essential work.



“This award is very special to me. Sometimes it is hard to look back and recognize the work that we accomplish. I sometimes describe the work as soul crushing, something very challenging to negotiate and this award allowed time to truly think and look back on the triumphs and successes over the last decade.”

– Julie Slen, Shelter Nova Scotia

Skills for Transformation

| Building Community Capacity for Change

Generating new ideas and activating sector transformation

Our conversations with impact organizations often reveal the need for practical support and ready-to-use resources and templates. This year, we developed tools and training opportunities around two trending topics: equitable policy development and digital transformation.

“IONS pays attention to the needs of the not-for-profit sector in Nova Scotia and provides practical opportunities for those working in the sector to address a range of challenges.”

- Carolyn Whiteway, Executive Director, Atlantic Region Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies

EQUITABLE POLICY DEVELOPMENT

In partnership with Homeless No More, we held in-person workshops in Digby and West Hants to dialogue and share resources around equitable policy development. Using a World Cafe facilitation style, we gathered input from community that will inform a future resource called the “Welcoming Workplaces Toolkit”.

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

This year, we launched the Digital Transformation Community of Practice, which guided 20 organizations in a 12-month journey to improve their capacity to navigate digital transformation, adopt technology in their organizations, and respond to tech challenges as they arise. In partnership with The Human Stack, this program included access to the Digital Driver’s Ed course, monthly

sessions, weekly student hours, and subscriptions to additional services. The program ends in June 2024, but we are already hearing that it has demystified the work and helped leaders and staff identify tangible ways to improve digital systems and culture.

“I enjoyed hearing everyone’s stories, ideas, feedback and getting to meet new people!”

- Workshop participant



FEEDBACK FROM EQUITABLE POLICY DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS

Event met expectations	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	(4.9/5)
Content was useful	★ ★ ★ ★ ☆	(4.5/5)
Learned something new	★ ★ ★ ★ ☆	(4.5/5)
Strengthened skills	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	(4.7/5)
Created a new connection	★ ★ ★ ★ ☆	(4.2/5)





PEELING BACK THE CURTAIN ON DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

Bonnie MacDonald, IT Technician Team Lead, Employment Solutions Society

I applied for the Digital Transformation program for our organization hoping it would help us measure how we were doing digitally and learn new strategies to bridge the skills gap between our staff and the population we serve.

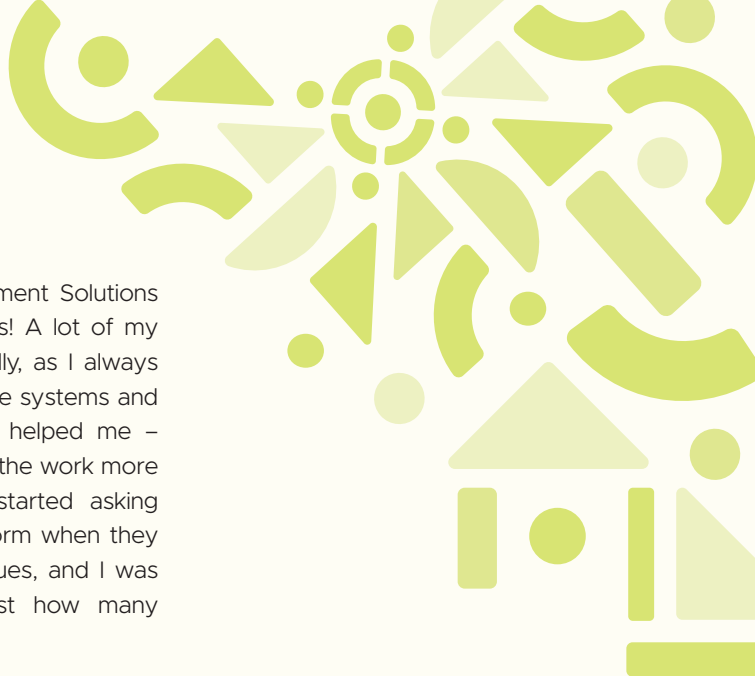
We are nine months in, and if someone considering the program were to ask me about it today, I'd say, 'Do it!' in a heartbeat.

As the only tech person at my organization, I haven't always had many people to confer with. By attending weekly student meetings, I realized that I'm not alone and that there are others out there experiencing the same IT barriers whom I can reach out to for support.

I've been at the Employment Solutions Society for over 22 years! A lot of my work is done automatically, as I always look for ways to automate systems and tasks. This program has helped me – and my colleagues – see the work more clearly. For example, I started asking staff to fill out a digital form when they had tech requests or issues, and I was shocked to discover just how many requests I was getting.

I also hadn't realized that we had more than 21 tech systems until we were asked to write them down. That's a lot of tech for anyone to learn, let alone new staff. This program is changing how I approach onboarding and tech support. We just hired a summer student, and instead of simply handing over a fully set up laptop like I used to, I invited her to be part of the device setup process. Many times during that two-hour session, she said to me, 'I didn't know that this was how much work it takes to get me a computer to work with.'

When you get used to a certain way of doing things, it can be hard to adopt new systems. I'm realizing that the more people see and understand what IT looks like behind the scenes, the less intimidated they are. This program has taught me to always be mindful of the human component to any technology – it's probably your biggest hurdle and supporter. I want to stay approachable so that my colleagues reach out to me with their issues, and we keep solving problems and growing together as an organization.



WHAT HAS BEEN YOUR FAVOURITE PART OF THE DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION COHORT?



Welcoming community, good entryway.

Student hours and monthly sessions, it keeps me accountable to scheduling the time to work on data management and systems.

The community itself - student hours, and the message boards.

The support from everyone in the program, the vibe of the community, and the actual experiences shared in the meeting.

Carpool hours, co-working helps me schedule the time to focus on data management.

Getting to learn from folks in other sectors.

Seeing my team grow and get excited about this program.

Student hours!!

The tips people post in the community, I have used resources posted there and attended webinars shared there.



Beyond Decent Work | Research and Advocacy

Responding to community and advocating for a more just and equitable sector



This year, we launched our first communications and engagement campaign “Beyond Decent Work” around building just, equitable workplaces.

Focusing on the subtheme of “Welcoming Workplaces”, we published our version of a “policy” brief, resources, templates, and blogs around implementing people-centered strategies that attract and empower staff in their work.

We continued to offer critical services to the sector, including our online sector job board, sector database and network map, Sector-Wide Employee Group Benefits program, and the Employee & Family Assistance Program.

Resources

- Possibility Brief: [Improving Total Compensation in the Community Impact Sector](#)
- [IONS Pay Scale Policy](#)
- [Shifting Power Dynamics in the Hiring Process](#)
- [Understanding Team Working Styles](#)
- [Creating Values-Based Policies](#)
- [Interview Package](#)
- [Bias Reflection Checklist](#)
- [Creating Space with Seasonal Work Cycles](#)

Media

- [Beyond Decent Work: How to improve working conditions for NS nonprofits](#) (CBC Information Morning)
- [Burnout and Pay Inequity Burden Nonprofits](#) (All Nova Scotia)
- [Perspective: Reduced-hour work week feasible for some](#) (Saltwire)
- [Retaining employees at non-profit agencies easier with benefits: IONS](#) (Atlantic Business)

Shared services

- [Sector-Wide Employee Group Benefits](#)
- [Employee & Family Assistance Program](#)

Examples of Impact

- [Mental Health and Seasonal Work Cycles at SeaChange CoLab](#)
- [Deepening Impact through Seasonal Breaks at Vantage Point](#)





MAKING THE LEAP TO THE FOUR DAY WORK WEEK

Genea Teskey, Executive Director, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Colchester

For years, I had been following the research on Four-day Work Week (4DWW) with keen interest. But with the many in-person activities we run at Big Brothers Big Sisters of Colchester, I wasn't sure if it would work for us and left it on the 'maybe someday' list.

During a staffing crunch at the end of last year, it became clear that we needed to try something new. I thought, 'Why don't we give the 4DWW a try?' It could help our staff feel supported in their wellbeing and see that their contributions are valued.

When I brought it up with our staff and board, most were enthused but for some, this was a brand-new idea and there was some trepidation. Important questions were raised, like 'How will this work?' and 'What impact will this have on our activities?'

Having participated in IONS' ED Connections and Learning Journeys in the past, I knew that IONS had already been experimenting with the 4DWW. I reached out with my questions and - lo and behold! - I was gifted with invaluable advice and resources, including policy and agreement templates. It gave me and my board confidence to know that other organizations had successfully implemented the 4DWW and that we wouldn't have to start from scratch. IONS made it easier to give it a try.

We began piloting our 4DWW in January 2024... and it has been amazing! It has brought our team closer together, team members are more willing to be flexible with their time because they feel their time is being valued, and it has not had any negative impact on our service delivery. I'm proud to share that we are now making the 4DWW permanent at our organization.



IF YOU WANT TO GO FAR, GO TOGETHER

Lori Burke, Executive Director, Cape Breton Centre for Craft and Design

Having been an ED for 10 years, I can safely say that it can be an isolating and lonely role. IONS' ED Connections sessions have been incredibly valuable - they remind me that I'm not alone in how I am feeling and provide a space where I can be vulnerable about the challenges we are facing - not unlike therapy, if I can be honest!

It was through these connections with other EDs that the four-day work week at Unama'ki Cape Breton Centre for Craft & Design took root. We had previously experimented with flexible schedules to manage burnout, but it wasn't until we got together with IONS, Ecology Action Centre, and New Dawn Enterprises, and started meeting monthly about the four-day work week that it really flowed. Having this sounding board and community of practice was instrumental in our success.

When IONS released their Total Compensation Possibility Brief this year, I forwarded it directly to our funders' program officers. The role that IONS plays in researching and advocating for a better funded sector is vital. We need to engage funders and help them understand that some of their restrictions (e.g. how much can be spent on salaries) hamper the important work we are trying to do and create unhealthy cycles for the whole sector.

The Community Impact Sector is so crucial to the country, yet so many organizations are in crisis and experiencing severe burnout. We need practical supports more than ever. I have found the policy templates that IONS has been releasing helpful, even for well-established organizations like ours. And as the Chair of the Culture Sector Team on Unama'ki, I have been actively sharing resources and policy templates with other organizations. Let's level the playing field and strengthen the culture sector on Unama'ki as a whole.

Bridging Community and Government

| Research and Advocacy

Building cross-sector collaborations for community impact

Our sector is stronger and more influential when we work together. This year, we strengthened collective impact and advocacy by supporting the work of the Nova Scotia Nonprofit Coalition, leading research to inform government policy, and bringing government partners and impact organizations together to co-design better programs and services for the sector.



NOVA SCOTIA NONPROFIT COALITION

Stewarded by a working group consisting of IONS, United Way, and Community Foundation of Nova Scotia, the Nova Scotia Nonprofit Coalition is a network of provincial organizations working collectively to strengthen the sector by raising awareness of the opportunities and challenges in the sector and sharing experiences with government. This year, we developed a three-year strategy which will soon be launched. We also connected with similar coalitions in Ottawa, St. John's, Scotland, and Wales!

“Already have strengthened relationships – we’ll be having [member organization] support us through improving our sustainability plan.”

- Nova Scotia Nonprofit Coalition
Retreat participant

INFORMING POLICY THROUGH SECTOR RESEARCH

We engaged in research projects focused on two subsectors:

Community-based senior-serving organizations (in partnership with Community Links) to better understand the context of the groups and organizations helping people to age in communities.

Gender-based violence and women’s serving sector to gather input for the Nova Scotia – Canada Action Plan to End Gender-Based Violence.

Through in-depth community engagement including surveys, interviews and in-person sessions across the province, we assessed the current state, needs, challenges, and opportunities within these subsectors. Recommendations for strengthening the subsectors were shared directly with funders and supporters, including the need for increased, long-term core funding and systems shifts to address inequities.

HUMAN-CENTERED DESIGN FOR EQUITY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

We integrated design thinking methodologies into two projects that brought government funders and community organizations to the table to co-create new capacity building opportunities for the sector:

Pathway to Actions: In collaboration with the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism, and Heritage (CCTH), we explored how we might provide organizations with pathways to navigate tools to increase knowledge, confidence and action for equity-centered action.

Good Governance: In collaboration with the Department of Labour, Skills, and Immigration (LSI), we explored how we might strengthen the governance capacity of organizations providing employment and adult learning programs and strengthen relationships between LSI and service providers.



Access tools to create more inclusive, equitable workplaces here:
www.pathwaytoactions.ca





“I want to thank you for inviting me to be part of your design sprint. It was very engaging and uplifting. I feel I also gained a lot from it to bring back to my own organization and board. I look forward to seeing what the results are!”

- Pathway to Actions design sprint participant

ADVANCING EQUITY AND INCLUSION THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

Aja Joshi, Director of Community Outreach and Inclusion, Nova Scotia Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism, and Heritage (CCTH)

At CCTH, we fund community organizations across the sector from arts to culture and heritage, to sport and recreation, and more. Some time ago, we launched an initiative to review our funding programs and to ensure we embed an equity lens throughout the process. Advancing equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility (EDIA) is very important to us. We talked to many organizations and heard that they need support in their own EDIA journey. But how do we proactively

provide EDIA tools and resources that are relevant, scalable across the province?

This question sparked our partnership with IONS on the Pathway to Actions project. Working with IONS made sense – they are recognized as a sector council by community and had already delivered learning journeys around Indigenous reconciliation and anti-Black racism.

Instead of the typical funder-grantee relationship, we approached this project as a co-partnership. IONS formed a design team with CCTH and community organizations, and together, we participated in hands-on sessions to co-design a tool that would be helpful for the sector.

Everyone was able to share their unique perspectives across the many rounds of feedback.

This co-creative and inclusive way of working has been refreshing. It has been insightful for me to see how intentionally IONS approaches this work. They really take the time to listen to a wide range of feedback, making space for different ways of participating, and not jumping to solutions. We hope it might inspire more partnership relationships between government departments and the Community Impact Sector. We also hope community finds this tool helpful to support their EDIA work and can't wait to hear their feedback!

“It was interesting to hear different organization’s perspectives. People pointed out features that I wouldn’t have considered. I didn’t feel like IONS was leading or taking over the conversation. It was really collaborative and there was a lot of space for people to talk and provide input. Conversations about equity and justice can get intense, but IONS created a very positive and relaxed atmosphere that facilitated a lot of good thought and reflection.”

- Michelle Lincoln, Health Promotion Advisor, Healthier Tomorrow Foundation, Pathway to Actions prototype testing participant

Our 2024-2025 Action Plan

In the spirit of responsive and iterative planning, IONS focuses on one-year Action Plans that are updated on an annual basis in alignment with our strategy and the evolving context we're working in. The Action Plan timeframe commences in September each year and spans 12 months. We are aiming to complete the following by September 2025:

1 – BUILDING COMMUNITY CAPACITY FOR CHANGE

This year we seek to develop our Learning Networks team so we can do more to support learning, relationship development, and communities of practice. We will aim to develop resources and training opportunities that are informed by the needs of the Community Impact Sector.

Deliverables include:

- Launching and promoting the Pathway to Actions self-assessment tool and resource hub for individuals and organizations to advance their commitments to equity and justice.
- Finalizing our Good Governance project in partnership with the Nova Scotia Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration, including sharing learning and recommendations for evolving governance practices.

- Developing and launching a welcoming workplaces toolkit comprised of resources for organizations to create accessible and inclusive workplaces.
- Adding a consultants directory to our web site so people in the sector can find contractors to support their work.
- Launching online courses focused on equitable human resource management practices, evaluation and storytelling.
- Absorbing the Association of Volunteer Management Professionals Nova Scotia (VMPNS) and supporting a community of practice for volunteer managers.

support knowledge and resource sharing for advancing public policy strategies.

- Developing an overview of IONS' approach to communities of practice and launching new groups in response to sector interests.
- Hosting a series of regional gatherings focused on nurturing welcoming workplaces.
- Continuing to host and support ED Connections, a peer group of sector leaders.
- Hosting sector socials in December and June.

- Partnering with United Way to





2 – RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY

This year we will continue our “Beyond Decent Work” campaign, which we plan to wrap up in spring 2025 prior to moving to a new campaign theme. The goal continues to be to highlight challenges and inspire change related human-centered policies and practices for recruitment and retention. We will also tie the advocacy efforts of the Nova Scotia Nonprofit Coalition to IONS’ communications more intentionally in our shared efforts to advance policy change.

Deliverables include:

- Launching the IONS podcast.
- Supporting the release and promotion of the NS Nonprofit Coalition strategic priorities.
- Updating our web site to better align with sector priorities and make information easier to find.
- Publishing two new possibility briefs, including one based on a series of interviews with the sector on labour market conditions.
- Publishing new blogs and editions of our newsletter.
- Providing information and resources for the sector to engage their networks to vote in the provincial election.
- Conducting a new State of the Sector survey and report.
- Updating our online interactive sector map and dashboard.

3 – LIVING OUR VALUES

This year we will continue to advance our work related to fostering a welcoming, accessible and inclusive culture and IONS that aligns with our commitments to justice and equity. This includes continuing to adjust our organizational design, experimenting with new practices, and sharing our learnings with our network.

Deliverables include:

- Taking an online course on Generative Conflict as a full team.
- Continuing to implement reflection seasons intentionally designed with space for project debriefs, team learning and individual reflection.
- Sharing IONS’ policies and practices as part of the welcoming workplaces toolkit.
- Welcoming new board members with a values-driven orientation process.
- Continuing to develop and implement our approach to impact assessment and producing an annual impact report.
- Examining how governance is done at IONS and exploring how community relationships can be more intentionally integrated into our governance structure.
- Developing an accessibility guide for IONS.



Sector Love

And when we ask why you do it you say simply, because
 Because no one should exist as though they are invisible
 Because caring for each other is what makes this life liveable
 Because in this rich country some water's undrinkable
 Because love is a word that takes only one syllable
 Because sometimes a smile is enough when you're miserable
 Because all of us together are damn near invincible
 Because for you, not to help is something unthinkable

...

But every life that we touch is a seed that we plant
 When they say it's half empty you fill up the glass
 And it's you that guides all of us onto new paths
 And then someone comes back and shows the life that you've touched
 And all of those struggles they crumble to dust
 Though so much of what you do stays silent and hushed
 Trust in your heart that it's more than enough
 And we see the result when we do what we must
 Because humanity's work is a labour of love.

- El Jones, excerpt from spoken word poem written for the
 2023 Community Impact Sector Day of Recognition



IONS is...

AUTHENTIC SUPPORTIVE OPEN TO DIFFERENT IDEAS
 VITAL RELEVANT CHEERLEADER
 ESSENTIAL NECESSARY
 CRITICAL REVITALIZING
 ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY
 INNOVATIVE HIGH-LEVEL COMMUNITED
 COMMUNITY-MINDED
 PASSIONATE
 BRANDED CREATIVE



If the sector didn't exist...

...people would fall through the cracks of society, wouldn't know where to go or where to turn.

- Shannon Gumbs, Bryony House

...our province would be so broken.

- Jarah Gregory, Couch of Hope

...our quality of life would be totally different.

- El Jones, Mount Saint Vincent University

If IONS didn't exist...

"My job would be a lot harder. I would really feel the lack of connection with other organizations." - Genea Teskey, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Colchester

Where would the resources for organizations trying to make change within the organizations and within the community be held?

- Sara Burgess, Veith House

There would be a lack of forward thinking research for the community sector. - Lori Burke, Cape Breton Centre for Craft & Design

There would be a gap in community leadership. - Aja Joshi, Nova Scotia Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage

The Community Impact Sector is...

ESSENTIAL COMMITTED DEDICATED IMPACTFUL LEADERSHIP
 REVITALIZING CREATIVE
 RELEVANT PROBLEM SOLVERS LEAD BY EXAMPLE PASSIONATE ENGAGING NECESSARY COMMUNITY-MINDED
 ADVOCACY, IN CRISIS VITAL
 CRITICAL

Acknowledgements and Thank You



In closing, we would like to extend our heartfelt appreciation to the IONS team and board (past and present), partners and service providers, and our extended team members for their passion, energy, and wisdom. In addition, we would like to express gratitude for our funding partners - Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage (CCTH), Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration (LSI), Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women, Association of Industry Sector Councils (AISC), Community Services Recovery Fund (via Red Cross), and Community Links.

Together, these contributions have helped shaped IONS into who we are today and how we show up in the sector. We have the privilege of working on meaningful endeavours and engaging with community stakeholders toward a more just, equitable future. We look forward to what's next and building upon the strong foundation we all co-created.

2023-2024 IONS Team

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Thank you to our past team members:

Christopher Phillips (Summer Student)
Jody Nelson
Reg Manzer

2023-2024 IONS Board of Directors

Janet Barlow (Chair)
Sylvia Parris-Drummond (Vice Chair & Co-chair of HR & Gov committee)
Bryce Cross (Treasurer)
Sally Ng (Co-chair of HR & Gov committee)
Rebecca Slaunwhite
Gurmit Kaur
Schuyler Smith
Alisha Christie
Bernadette Melita
Navdeep Parmanand
Kelly Bennett

Thank you to our past board members:

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