

## Executive Summary

The Goldie Company and BNP Strategies, in association with Collis & Reed Research developed and administered a survey to query non-profit and charitable organizations from across Canada on the degree to which they perceived themselves as being sustainable. The main objective of this project was to develop an understanding of how these organizations define sustainability and based upon their own criteria, the extent to which they consider themselves to be a sustainable organization.

A total of 146 non-profit and charitable organizations from across Canada took part in the survey. Seven percent were located in Eastern Canada or Quebec, sixty-six percent were from Ontario and twenty-seven percent of participants were from Western Canada.

### Defining sustainability

There were 50 questions of various types. Responses to 22 of the 35 rating questions resulted in significant *differences* in sustainability ratings. The questions which received the lowest ratings were those that asked respondents to rate key, specifically worded principles associated with non-profit organizations.

For example, only twenty-eight percent of respondents solidly agreed that their organization had achieved the following principle:

*We have a fully integrated fundraising program where annual, special events, major gifts and planned giving programs effectively work to provide the best possible donor experience. (Question 27)*

Those respondents who agreed that their organization reflects this statement provided an average sustainability rating of 4.8 (somewhat agree), whereas those who disagreed gave an average sustainability rating of 3.3 (somewhat disagree).

Given that 22 out of the 35 rating questions were associated with significant differences in sustainability ratings, this suggests that the majority of the principles rated in this study are indeed related to sustainability and that the survey has *met the objective* of having participants define and evaluate sustainability based on their own criteria.

As a result, although there is no single accepted definition of sustainability, this survey does offer a unique insight into the concept of sustainability in the non-profit sector. In particular, the survey highlights beliefs and attitudes towards sustainability, and draws attention to the prerequisites and challenges faced by non-profit organizations as they endeavor to become more sustainable.

### Predicting sustainability

Three of the principles measured in this survey, when combined together, are a particularly strong predictor of the respondents' sustainability ratings. These are:

1. *The strategy to cultivate donors for future gifts is having measurable positive results.*
2. *We have a fully integrated fundraising program where annual, special events, major gifts and planned giving programs effectively work to provide the best possible donor experience.*
3. *We have a coordinated and active media communications program in place.*

Since those participants who agreed that their organizations were sustainable rated all three of these

principles highly, we can conclude that an organization that is achieving sustainability employs three fundamental best practices. The first is the framework of a strong *fundraising plan*. The second is *donor stewardship* for the purpose of cultivating future donations, and the third is a consistent and effective *communications program* that highlights the importance of the organization.

On the other hand, since there were a significant number of respondents who graded their organizations on the low end for sustainability when rating these principles, it is important to reflect on the common themes among respondents who commented on *why they disagree* that their organization meets the three principles noted above. These are:

1. *Under-developed plans.*
2. *Staff and volunteer competency issues.*
3. *Lack of resources to properly implement plans or programs.*

These comments suggest that for many respondents, their organization's culture does not currently support the key best practices required for sustainability. Overall, it suggests that a culture of negativity and pessimism is prevalent in this sector.

The implications of these findings are discussed in the "Concluding Remarks" section of this report.

### Characteristics of the Survey

The survey was administered as an online questionnaire that could be accessed from May 11<sup>th</sup> to June 14<sup>th</sup> 2012. Participants were informed about the survey via an e-mail that included a link that could be clicked on to directly access the survey.

The survey consisted of 50 questions, which included multiple choice, check off, rating and open-ended questions. It began by querying respondents about the perceived strength of their organization:

- Case for support
- Team (including fundraising committees, the Board and staff)
- Fundraising development and activities
- Communication strategies
- Organizational characteristics

The next section of the survey focused on the concept of sustainability. Given that there is not a single accepted definition of sustainability, and the respondent's criteria of sustainability will likely vary considerably, the survey asked respondents to provide their own interpretation of what sustainability meant to their organization. Further, based on their own definition of accessibility, to what extent had their organization achieved sustainability.

The final section of the survey queried respondents about the characteristics of their organization (i.e., type of organization, type of fundraising they do, their size and approximate amount of annual revenue required.)

## Survey Response

A total of 146 non-profit and charitable organizations from across Canada took part in the survey. Seven percent were located in Eastern Canada or Quebec, sixty-six percent were from Ontario and twenty-seven percent of participants were from Western Canada.

## Data Analyses

Statistical analyses were conducted to help summarize the results for each question on the survey. The type of analysis performed depended on the format of question asked.

For multiple choice formats, where respondents selected a single response option from a fixed list, the percentage of respondents that chose each option was calculated. In addition, for some questions of interest, the results were further broken down by a demographic variable (for example: location, or type of organization).

When respondents were provided with the opportunity to select more than one response option that applied to their situation, the percentage of respondents that chose each option was also calculated. In addition, the average number of response options chosen was also reported. In the case where respondents were given a small number of response options to choose from (for example, three options), a frequency chart of all combinations of responses selected was provided.

For open-ended questions that required respondents to provide numeric estimates, either the average or median is reported (the appropriate measure is selected depending on the characteristics of the distribution of data). In addition, the range of values received is also reported.

For open-ended text questions, the main themes of the responses are summarized in the report.

For questions that required respondents to provide **scale ratings**, the following analyses were conducted and reported:

- The overall mean (average) rating for the question.
- The percentage of respondents that gave ratings below neutral, at neutral and above neutral.

Responses to each rating scale question were also divided by respondents who considered their organization to be sustainable or not.

When demographic breakdowns are provided, it is of interest to state whether there is a true or significant difference between the groups and that these observed differences would also apply to organizations that did not participate in the survey. Typically in research, inferential statistics are used to make these determinations. However, accuracy of these statistics is dependent upon specific criteria that survey data usually do not adhere to. The accuracy of these measures becomes even more of a problem when applying these statistics to survey data with less than 100 participants per group.

An alternative approach is to use a more descriptive-derived statistic called **Effect Size**. The accuracy of this statistic is not as strongly associated with the strict criteria required by inferential statistics. The Effect Size statistic is a measure of the strength of the difference between two variables. It is derived from the average difference between the two variables and the width of the distribution of ratings (standard deviation). Taking these two factors into consideration, the Effect Size statistic enables one to ascertain whether a difference is small, medium or large. In this report, effect size is used to ascertain whether ratings for demographic groupings are different from each other. The Effect Size criterion applied to this study is a

Cohen D statistic of .5 or greater, which is equivalent to a medium or larger effect size difference.

With respect to identifying the demographic differences between frequency percentages, confidence intervals for both percentages are calculated; if these intervals do not overlap, the two percentages would be considered different. The narrower the intervals, smaller differences between the percentages would be needed in order to classify these as different. Two factors impact the width of interval: the number of responses that comprise the percentage and the extent to which the percentage deviates from fifty percent.

All demographic variables that meet either of these criteria are noted in the text of this report and highlighted again in the concluding remarks.

## Survey Demographics

The following is a snapshot of the organizations that took part in the Sustainability 2012 survey.

SIZE OF ORGANIZATION*	LARGER	SMALLER
Frequency	67	58
Percentage	54%	46%

Larger organizations were defined as organizations requiring over \$1,000,000 annual income.

TYPE OF ORGANIZATION	Community & Social Services	Education	Health Care	Recreation & Culture
Frequency	57	17	50	18
Percentage	40%	12%	35%	13%

LOCATION OF ORGANIZATION	EAST	ONT	GTA	TORONTO	WEST
Frequency	9	13	40	26	33
Percentage	7%	13%	32%	21%	27%

It is interesting to note that no demographic differences were observed when survey questions were split according to the above demographic variables. Differences were observed when survey questions were split according to whether respondents considered their organization to be sustainable or not. Therefore, only the sustainability differences are reported in the results section of this report.