SPUR CHANGE | Capacity-Building & Knowledge Sharing for Small and Medium Organizations (SMO)

NEEDS ASSESSMENT REPORT

The capacity building needs and knowledge gaps of Canadian small and medium organizations, and appropriate learning methods.

inter-council network Provincial & Regional Councils for International Cooperation

March 2020

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Furthermore, we would also like to acknowledge with much appreciation the crucial role of the Spur Change staff involved in the program and that of the members of the steering committee for the Spur Change program (ACGC, ACIC, NCGC, OCIC), who contributed with stimulating suggestions and encouragement.

inter-council network Provincial & Regional Councils for International Cooperation

The Inter-Council Network (ICN) is a coalition of the eight Provincial and Regional Councils for International Cooperation who are committed to global social justice and social change. These independent member-based Councils represent more than 350 diverse civil society organizations (CSOs) from across Canada. The ICN provides a national forum through which the Councils collaborate for improved effectiveness and identify common priorities for collective action. Rooted in communities across Canada, we are leaders in public engagement at local and regional levels and are recognized for bringing regional knowledge and priorities to the national level.

SPUR CHANGE | Capacity-Building & Knowledge Sharing for Small and Medium Organizations (SMO)

The Spur Change program is a five-year initiative, operated by the Alberta Council for Global Cooperation, funded by Global Affairs Canada, aiming to increase the effectiveness of Canadian small and medium organizations (SMOs) in delivering sustainable results in support of Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy and the Sustainable Development Goals set forward by the United Nations. The main outcomes of the program are to increase the engagement of Canadian SMOs in international development and to increase the engagement of Canadians, particularly youth, as global citizens.

Canada

Program undertaken with the financial support of the Government of Canada provided through Global Affairs Canada.

ACIC CACI Atlantic Council for International Cooperation / Conseil atlantique pour la coopération internationale

aqoci Association québécoise des organismes de coopération internationale

OCIC Ontario Council for International Cooperation

MCIC Manitoba Council for International Cooperation

SCIC Saskatchewan Council for International Cooperation

ACGC Alberta Council for Global Cooperation

NCGC Northern Council for Global Cooperation

BCCIC

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report addresses questions about the capacity building and knowledge sharing needs of Canadian small and medium organizations (SMOs) working in international cooperation. What are their organization's ambitions? What are key priority areas for learning and capacity building for their organization to achieve its ambitions? What are their preferred learning methods? What is their level of knowledge and understanding of the Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)? Some questions also aim to gather information regarding the youth engagement and global citizenship component of Spur Change programing, for example by asking about their level of interest and experience in engaging with schools, educators, and students.

The report is based on 252 responses from over 150 SMOs across Canada through an online survey (63), in-person roundtables in five Canadian cities (39), online post-activity surveys, and an in-person consultation/validation at the Spur Change annual conference (80). The findings in this report are significant for Canadian SMOs aiming to increase their impacts, the Spur Change team planning a comprehensive capacity building program for Canadian SMOs, and Global Affairs Canada, who works closely with funded SMOs. This needs assessment provides insights into the strengths of SMOs and how SMOs can achieve their ambitions. The report also highlights SMOs' preferred adult learning approaches.

The report highlights six central findings:

01. Resource mobilization is the most important area of capacity building for Canadian SMOs.

Resource mobilization came out from our consultation as the most important priority. Within the resource mobilization categories, three subcategories particularly stood out: 1) fundraising, 2) institutional funding, and 3) innovative financing. This priority was confirmed in a validation session held at the Spur Change annual conference in November 2019 with over 80 SMOs. Program and project development was identified as the second priority. The third priority, which rated very low compared to the two others (78% anglophone and 100% francophone respondents reported either resource mobilization or program and project development as their first priorities), was identified as external relations. When asked about their second-highest priorities to help build their organization's capacities, program and project implementation was slightly more important in the anglophone survey (23%), and all the other capacity building categories (resource mobilization, project and program development, organizational development, and sectoral knowledge and expertise) were rated at the same level of priority (18%).

02. There is a need to differentiate between donor-driven and organization-driven capacity building needs.

Resource mobilization and fundraising were confirmed by all participants as priorities. Some other priorities related to donors' requirements were identified as very important such as results-based management (RBM) (including theory of change), a project implementation plan (PIP), baseline study, gender analysis, risk assessment, and donors' financial requirements. These pressing needs are instrumental to the growth and sustainability of many organizations, but they should not hide other capacity development areas to improve the quality and effectiveness of SMOs' programing in the long term. In fact, respondents highlighted capacity building needs closely related to SMOs' organizational development such as knowledge management (documenting best practice, managing learning), networking and partnership with other CSOs, effective governance, and organizational policy development.

03. Integrating a gender-lens emerged as a strong theme cutting across all capacity building areas.

SMOs identified the need to increase their capacity to integrate a gender-lens in all phases of a project cycle from project and program design (gender-based analysis), organizational development (PSEA policies), and program and project implementation (gender transformative programming and measuring gender empowerment).

04. Knowledge of FIAP and SDGs is high amongst SMOs.

Overall, knowledge of Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations were self-assessed as quite high by SMOs answering the survey. The level of understanding across their organizations of both the FIAP and SDGs was equally high according to respondents. A better understanding of the FIAP's action areas was identified as the most important capacity building priority in terms of sector knowledge. The level of knowledge and understanding of the SDGs' indicators was slightly lower compared to that of the SDGs' goals and targets.

05. SMOs' strengths and weaknesses are diverse, which calls for flexibility and variety while choosing learning opportunities.

The strengths of Canadian SMOs significantly vary from one region to another and within provinces. Cross-cultural communication, volunteer mobilization (national and international), and contextual analysis / gender-based analysis are identified as the main strengths in some provinces

and as weaknesses in others. Different factors such as the size, location, number of staff, number of years since the organization's creation, presence of communities of practice, and thematic provincial government funding opportunities could affect each organization's capacities. There is not a "one-size-fits-all approach" while designing capacity building opportunities for SMOs. An illustration of that diversity in terms of needs is that what some SMOs perceive as their strengths is perceived by other SMOs as their weaknesses.

06. Preferred learning methods are not always the most effective methods for consolidating learning.

The preferred learning methods identified by respondents in the needs assessment are not necessarily the most effective (evidence-based) approaches to consolidate learning. SMOs raised the importance of having meaningful learning methods that allow long-lasting engagement and networking opportunities. At the same time, the preferred learning methods of survey participants tended to prioritize short-term, individual, and online methods. This contradiction could be a consequence of the limited time and resources SMOs may be able to allocate to these learning opportunities that require more commitment.

ACRONYMS

ACGC	Alberta Council for Global Cooperation
ACIC	Atlantic Council for International Cooperation
AQOCI	Association québécoise des organismes de coopération internationale
BCCIC	British Columbia Council for International Cooperation
CSO	Civil Society Organizations
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
FIAP	Feminist International Assistance Policy
GAC	Global Affairs Canada
GBA	Gender-Based Analysis
GE	Gender Equality
ICN	Inter-Council Network
IT	Information Technology
MCIC	Manitoba Council for International Cooperation
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
NCGC	Northern Council for Global Cooperation
OCIC	Ontario Council for International Cooperation
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PSEA	Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
PTL	Project Officers at Global Affairs Canada
SCIC	Saskatchewan Council for International Cooperation
SMO	Small and Medium Organization
RBM	Results-Based Management
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal

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INTRODUCTION

A study commissioned by the Inter-Council Network of Provincial/Regional Councils for International Cooperation (ICN) in 2016 found that SMOs play a crucial role in international development and public engagement across Canada.[1] Specialized, well-connected, and flexible, SMOs directly reach and engage with Canadians.

Key findings from SMOs' study commissioned by the ICN in 2016

- SMOs raise significant resources for development cooperation
- Small and medium organizations were dramatically affected by the change towards an exclusive call-for-proposal funding mechanism in CIDA in 2010
- SMOs are the main avenue to reach Canadians with an SMO direct presence in many cities and communities across Canada
- SMOs are strongly represented in the 25 priority countries for Canadian ODA

They operate in our cities and communities, and their impact stretches beyond our borders to reach the most vulnerable in our world. SMOs make up the majority of the more than 800 Canadian nongovernmental organizations and charities directly involved in international development, and their collective financial contribution is substantial. While widespread and effective, SMOs operate with smaller funding envelopes, disqualifying them from meeting the criteria for large calls for proposals from Global Affairs Canada. There is a clear need for SMOs to get better guidance and support, including further training, capacity building workshops, and webinars. The Spur Change program aims to respond to this need and provide continuous support through this pilot program to reinforce their capacities.

The Spur Change Theory of Change assumes that people learn better when they are given the opportunity to identify their own needs, when they participate in the design process, and when learning is tailored to their specific context. Therefore, at the beginning of the program, the Spur Change team conducted a comprehensive needs assessment to identify the capacity building needs and knowledge gaps of SMOs, and the appropriate learning and content delivery methods that work best for them.

[1] Tomlinson, Brian. Aid Watch Canada. Small and Medium-Sized Canadian Civil Society Organizations as Development Actors: A Review of Evidence. April 2016. Found at http://icn-rcc.ca/small-medium-sized-canadian-civil-society-organizations-development-actors/

Through this needs assessment, topics for in-person and distance learning opportunities have been determined. The national training program includes multi-day in-person workshops tailored to the needs of SMOs. These workshops will take place across the country, in both English and French, in partnership with the Inter-Council Network of Provincial and Regional Councils for International Cooperation (ICN). Distance learning opportunities including webinars, online courses, and micro-learning sessions are also going to be developed for continuous learning. The aim of Spur Change is to reduce the number of barriers as much as possible in order to encourage maximum attendance of participants across the country.

The findings presented in this report are informing our training calendar and priorities along with our learning approaches.

Definition of small or medium organization (SMO) :

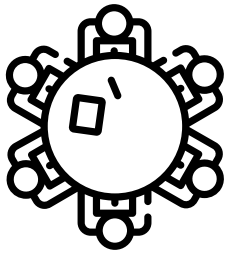
The consolidated revenue in your organization's financial statements is equal to or less than $10 million (this limitation does not apply to educational institutions) and your organization does not have annual overseas expenditures exceeding $2 million in development assistance (i.e. projects administered with the promotion of the economic development and welfare of developing countries as their main objective (regardless of the funding source)).

If you are an educational institution, you are not required to have consolidated revenues equal to or less than $10 million, but you are still required to submit a signed Canadian SMO attestation form. However, in order to be considered a SMO, an educational institution cannot have annual overseas expenditures in development assistance higher than $2 million.

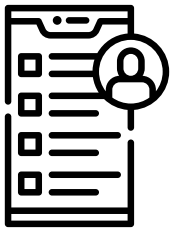
Global Affairs Canada. Canadian Small and Medium Organizations for Impact and Innovation - Development Impact Window - 2017 Call for Preliminary Proposals. URL : https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/funding-financement/smo_call-2019-appel_pmo.aspx?lang=eng

METHODS

The needs assessment process was comprised of two formal and anticipated methods: the online needs assessment as well as regional roundtables. It also included three other forms of consultation: post-activity surveys, a call with the sub-group of funded SMOs through the first call of the Development Impact Window, and a validation session at the Spur Change conference. Thirty-nine participants from thirty-three organizations attended one of the five roundtables (Saskatoon, Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, and Edmonton) organized in September and October of 2019. Almost three-quarters of the organizations were affiliated with one of the provincial and regional Councils, and civil society organizations were largely represented compared to private organizations, educational institutions, and social enterprises. The online survey gathered responses from 62 respondents across the country, from which nine out of ten were civil society organizations (registered charities and not-for-profit).



Roundtables
(39 participants)



Online Survey
(62 participants)

Validation Session
(80 participants)

The formal needs assessment process also included the development and launch of an online survey that was available in both official languages and included questions that would determine the participating organizations' knowledge gaps about Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as well as their general capacity building needs for effective program implementation, evaluation, and reporting. The survey was sent out on September 30, 2019, to SMOs who had signed up to be on the Spur Change ListServ and to organizations through the Provincial and Regional Councils for International Cooperation mailing lists. The deadline for completion of the survey was October 31, 2019.

The second component of the formal needs assessment process was the preparation of lesson plans and processes, and the actual facilitation of in-person roundtables across Canada. Five roundtables were conducted in 2019 in Saskatchewan (September 14), Ontario (September 18), Québec (September 25), British Columbia (October 3), and Alberta (October 5). The roundtables that were conducted facilitated participation of SMOs that were rural and remote by providing them with compensation for travel expenses.

In addition to these data collection methods, Spur Change also conducted two post-activity surveys that asked participants about their capacity building needs and the best method to address those needs. The survey included specific and open-ended questions, as well as opportunities to prioritize, compare, and rate different needs and methodologies. SMOs are also encouraged in every communication from Spur Change to directly contact the Spur Change staff team with their needs via email or phone. This informal invitation to share needs has led to more in-depth discussions and feedback, all of which has been recorded and noted by the Spur Change team for consideration in program design and planning.

Furthermore, the Spur Change team, in response to what was flagged as an emergent and time-sensitive need, also consulted and engaged in a needs assessment process with the sub-group of SMOs that was approved for funding through the first call for preliminary proposals of the Development Impact Window of the initiative for SMOs for Impact and Innovation. Invitations were sent to the 21 SMOs, resulting in nine participants. The results of these consultations, coupled with the results of a consultation with the GAC project officers responsible for these 21 organizations, indicate that Spur Change might need to conceive of a process to assess and address the needs of this sub-group of SMOs in particular in conjunction with the pre-planned programing.[2]

Survey results and the results of the other needs assessment processes were analyzed. Preliminary findings were presented at the Spur Change annual conference in November 2019 in Edmonton. A participatory activity involving conference participants allowed validation of key learnings and also brought forth new themes that were not captured in the needs assessment processes. An online needs assessment will be conducted again midway through the Spur Change program to see how the needs have changed (see Annex 2 for a detailed timeline).

[2] Results from these consultations have not been included in the current report.

LIMITATIONS

The online survey was conducted in English and French rather than offered as one bilingual survey. Having separate surveys rather than a consolidated version limited the analysis as it created two sets of data instead of one.

Roundtable needs assessments were not hosted in every region that the ICN serves (the Northern Territories, Manitoba, and the Atlantic provinces were excluded). In consequence, there is an unequal representation between provinces and regions.

Roundtables were decentralized and led by Spur Change implementing partners, which in turn created slight differences in the questions posed during the roundtables versus the questions from the online survey. This variation limited the ability to triangulate data for a few of the questions.

CAPACITY BUILDING AREAS

Regional and Provincial Council staff who delivered the roundtables were given a facilitator guide and a few additional tools to guide the consultation. Participants were invited to respond using predetermined capacity building categories but also open-ended questions that allowed participants to go beyond these categories. The online survey also reflected a mix of predetermined categories and open-ended questions.

Participants were invited to choose their priorities among six predetermined categories (see Figure 2):

- **External relations**
- **Sector knowledge expertise**
- **Resource mobilizations**
- **Program and project implementation**
- **Program and project development**
- **Organizational development**

Figure 1. Capacity building areas pyramid [3]

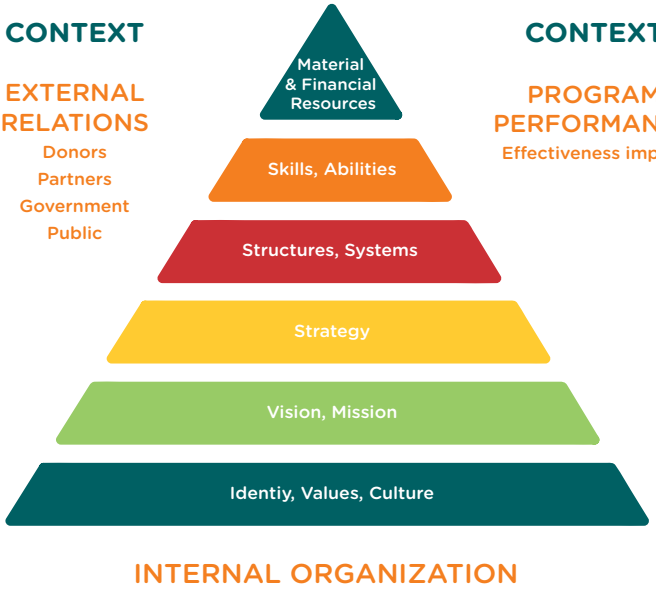


Figure 2. Table of capacity building areas for NGOs

UN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Capacity to align organization's programs to the Goals

Global Citizenship Education

Public Engagement

RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

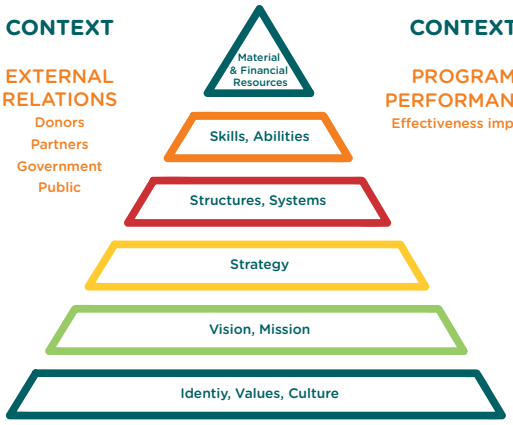
Fundraising
Institutional Funding (governments & multilaterals)
Innovative Financing
Corporate Social Responsibility (private sector)
Volunteer Mobilization (national and international)
Other: Setting up high-impact projects

PROGRAM AND PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

Contextual Analysis / Gender-Based Analysis
Stakeholder Analysis
RBM: Theory of Change, Logic Model, and Tools
Proposal Writing
PIP Development
Grant Management (contract, M&E, finance)
Concept Notes

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Government Relations
Networking
Donor Relations
Fundraising
Stakeholders Engagement
Private Sector and CSR
Advocacy
Public Engagement and Global Citizenship



FEMINIST INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE POLICY ACTION AREAS

Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls
Human Dignity: Health & Nutrition, Education
Growth that Works for Everyone
Environment and Climate Action
Inclusive Governance
Peace and Security

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Governance and Board Development
Management
Strategic Planning
Risk Management
Financial Management
Human Resources Management
Security Management
PSEA and Safeguarding Policy
Knowledge Management and Sharing
Volunteer Management
Communications, IT, Social Media
Cross Cultural Communication

PROGRAM AND PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION

Partnership Development and Management
Project Cycle Management
Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
Participatory Approach and Tools
Rights-Based Approach and Social Inclusion
Advocacy
Other: Financial and Security Management

EMERGING TRENDS IN SECTORS AND SUB-SECTORS

Education
Health
Economic Development
Natural Resource Management
Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship

[3] Figure 1 and Figure 2 : Adapted from Holloway, Richard. 1997. An Overview of Capacity Building for Southern NGOs. Lusaka: Pact Zambia.

DATA FROM ROUNDTABLES AND SURVEY

01. PARTICIPATION OVERVIEW

The most frequently represented results from each category are highlighted. Thirty-nine participants from thirty-three organizations attended one of the five roundtables held between September 14 and October 5, 2019 (Saskatoon, Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, and Edmonton). Participants of the roundtables and survey were mostly female (roundtables: 64%; survey: 56%) and between 36-64 years old (roundtables: 15%; survey: 55%). Most participants represented civil society organizations (roundtables: 52%; survey: 77%) (see Figure 3), and a majority of them worked for small (micro) organizations with a total consolidated revenue of less than $100,000 (roundtables: 28%; survey: 39%) and less than $100,000 of annual overseas expenditures (roundtables: 52%; survey: 76%).

Figure 3. Type of Organization

Data Source	Type of Organization						
	Civil Society Organization (registered charity)	Civil Society Organization (not-for-profit)	Private Corporation (or other for-profit)	Educational Institution	Social Enterprise	Other	Total Responses
Roundtables	17 51.5%	9 27.3%	2 6.1%	1 3.0%	3 9.1%	1 3.0%	33
Survey (EN)	43 75.4%	8 14.0%	0 0.0%	2 3.5%	2 3.5%	2 3.5%	57
Survey (FR)	4 80.0%	1 20.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	5

Figure 4. Size of Organization

Data Source	Size of Organization (international) [4]							
	< $100K Organization (registered charity)	$100,000 to $500,000	$500,000 to $1,000,000	$1,000,000 to $5,000,000	$5,000,000 to $10,000,000	Over $10,000,000	No Response / Unsure	Total Responses
Roundtables	6 24.0%	6 24.0%	2 8.0%	3 12.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	8 32.0%	25
Survey (EN)	23 40.4%	17 17.0%	5 8.8%	7 17.5%	4 7.0%	1 1.8%	0 0.0%	57
Survey (FR)	2 40.0%	1 20.0%	0 0.0%	2 40.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	5

A majority of organizations who participated in the in-person consultation had more than 15 employees in Canada compared to between 1-3 employees in Canada for online respondents (Figure 5). Most of the organizations had either no employees abroad or between 1-3 employees abroad (Figure 6). A vast majority of participants (roundtables: 73%; survey: 76%) were affiliated with one of the eight Councils of the ICN. Of those participants affiliated with Councils, a majority held this affiliation for more than 10 years.

Figure 5. Number of employees (domestic)

Data Source	Number of Employees (domestic)							
	None	1 - 3	4 - 6	7 - 10	11 - 15	> 15	No Response / Unsure	Total Responses
Roundtables	3 12%	6 24.0%	3 12.0%	3 12.0%	1 4.0%	7 28.0%	2 8.0%	25
Survey (EN)	11 19.3%	22 38.6%	9 15.8%	3 5.3%	5 8.8%	7 12.3%	0	57
Survey (FR)	0	2 40.0%	0	2 40.0%	1 20.0%	0	0	5

[4] Annual overseas expenditure in CAD as of 2019

Figure 6. Number of employees (abroad)

Data Source	Number of Employees (abroad)							
	None	1 - 3	4 - 6	7 - 10	11 - 15	> 15	No Response / Unsure	Total Responses
Roundtables	10 40.0%	2 8.0%	4 16.0%	2 8.0%	1 4.0%	2 8.0%	4 16.0%	25
Survey (EN)	30 52.6%	13 22.8%	5 8.8%	1 1.8%	0 0.0%	8 14.0%	0 0.0%	57
Survey (FR)	5 100.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	5

02. PRIORITY AREAS FOR CAPACITY BUILDING

2.1 STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

Participants of roundtables were asked to report on skill sets (see Figure 2 for all options) in which they felt their organization had strengths and those that were weak and in need of improvement. They collectively decided which skill sets were priorities.

The **most recurrent strengths** among provinces and regions were identified by participants as follows (not in order of importance):

Cross-cultural communication

Volunteer mobilization (national and international)

Contextual analysis / gender-based analysis (GBA)

The following strengths were identified in one province and/or region (not in order of importance):

- Strategic planning
- Fundraising
- Networking
- Monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL)
- Project cycle management
- Participatory approach and tools

The **most recurrent weaknesses** were identified by participants as follows (not in order of importance):

- **Communications, IT, social media**
- **Monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL)**

The following weaknesses were identified by at least two provinces and/or regions (not in order of importance):

- Governance and board development
- Knowledge management and sharing
- Volunteer mobilization (national and international)
- RBM: theory of change, logic model, and tools
- Donor relations
- Private sector and CSR
- Proposal writing
- Fundraising

The strengths and weaknesses of SMOs vary among provinces and regions. These variances could also be quite important within the same region. Attendees identified different and sometimes opposing strengths and weaknesses. For instance, volunteer mobilization, MEL, and fundraising are identified as strengths in some provinces and weaknesses in others.

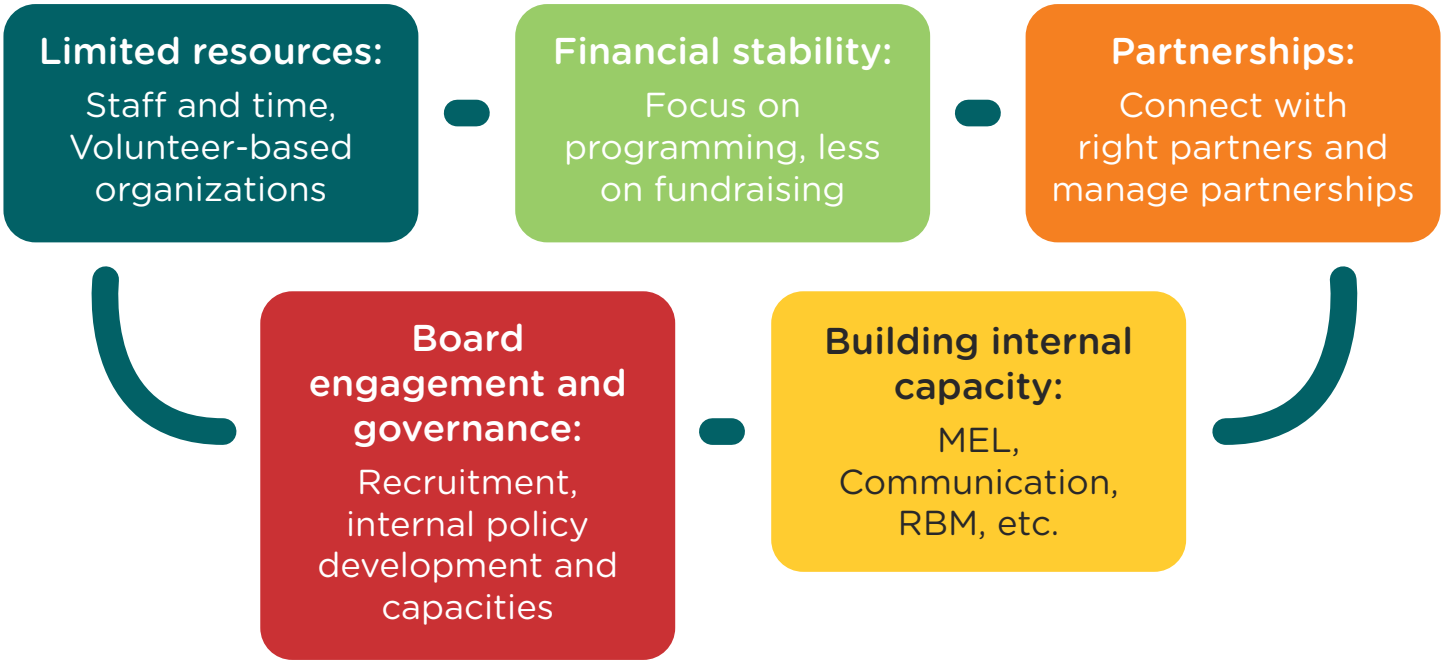
> "This program needs to remember how diverse the NGO community is, and try to bring options to people and organizations that are urban, rural and remote. Also remember that each organization can offer something the rest of us need to learn - we are learners and teachers at the same time."
>
> - Online survey participant

Different factors such as the size, location, number of staff, number of years since the organization's creation, presence of communities of practice, and provincial government funding opportunities could affect the capacities of each organization (see Figure 7 Key Challenges). For instance, in Québec, the Gender in Practice community of practice (CoP)[4] led by AQOCI might have an impact on capacities around gender programing for SMOs located in Québec. This community of practice, which has existed since 2009, brings together many SMOs. In Ontario, a Monitoring and Evaluation Capacity-Building Program implemented by the Ontario Council for International Cooperation (OCIC) with funding from the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration from 2015-2017 provided blended learning for 200 Ontario-based organizations, and a MEL Community of Practice (CoP), formerly funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), with participants in Ontario, Québec and Manitoba, continues to meet at least four times per year for peer-to-peer learning. These examples could explain a disparity of strengths and weaknesses among Canadian provinces and regions. Each Council developed their own capacity building programs and tools.

There is not a "one-size-fits-all approach" while designing capacity building opportunities for SMOs. An illustration of that diversity in terms of needs is the SMOs' perceptions of their strengths that are sometimes the same as other SMOs' weaknesses. This initial trend demonstrates the importance of adopting a flexible approach through the Spur Change capacity building activities as needs vary not only amongst SMOs but also between provinces and regions. Mapping existing resources will be an important starting point.

Figure 7. Key challenges

The key challenges faced by SMOs to achieve their ambitions according to the online survey are as follows:



> **"We have many partners with our new upcoming project and there is not much information available about how to effectively manage those partnerships."**
>
> **- Online survey participant**

2.2 PRIORITIES BASED ON SURVEY RESPONDENTS

Respondents to the survey were also asked to rank the capacity building areas in order of priority. The list of themes and subthemes is the same list that appears in Figure 1 and Figure 2. Resource mobilization came out as the most important priority for both anglophone (63%) and francophone[5] (75%) respondents. Within resource mobilization, priorities were fundraising, institutional funding, and innovative financing (see Figure 8). Program and project development was identified as the second priority for both anglophone (15%) and francophone (25%) respondents. Within this category, results-based management (RBM), context analysis, gender-based analysis plus (GBA+), and proposal writing were the most pressing needs.

[5] The number of respondents to the French survey is very low, so these responses have been triangulated with the responses from other sources in order to obtain a more accurate portrayal of the situation.

Figure 8. Capacity building priorities in English and French based on survey responses

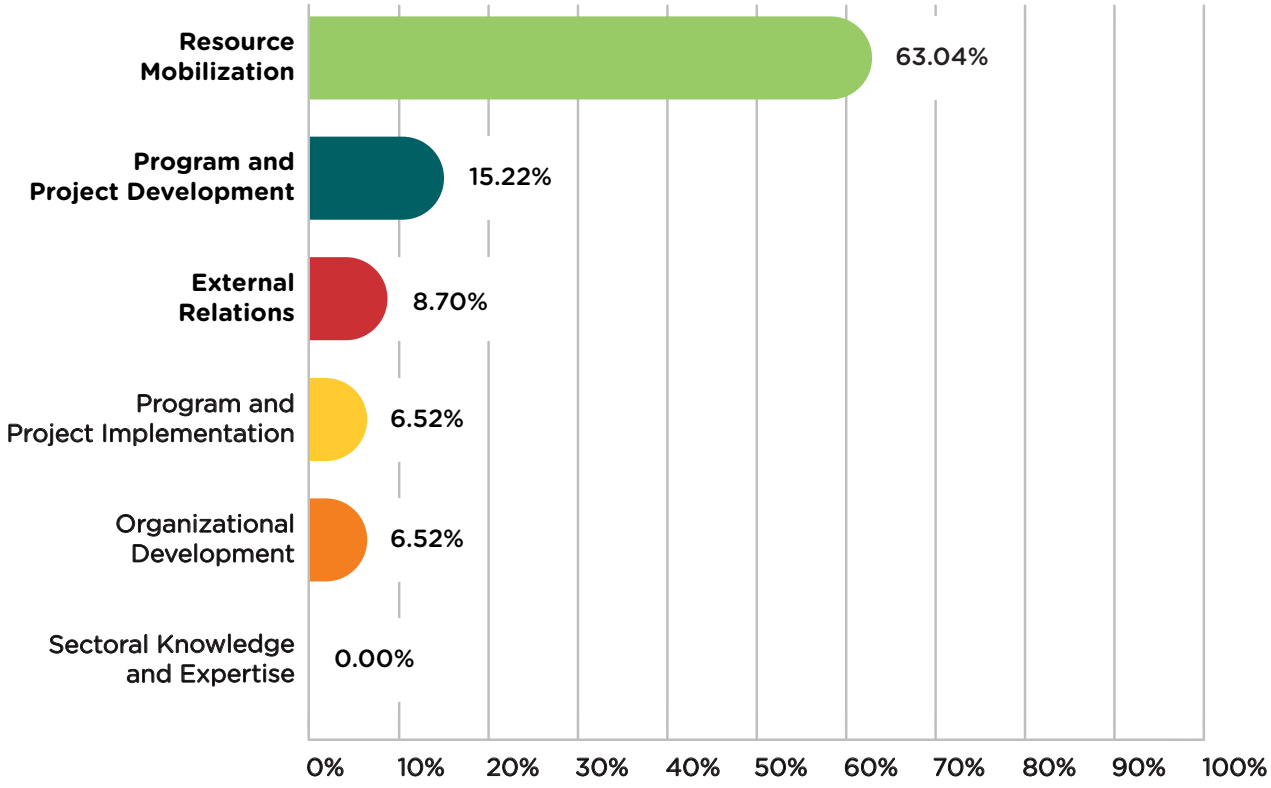
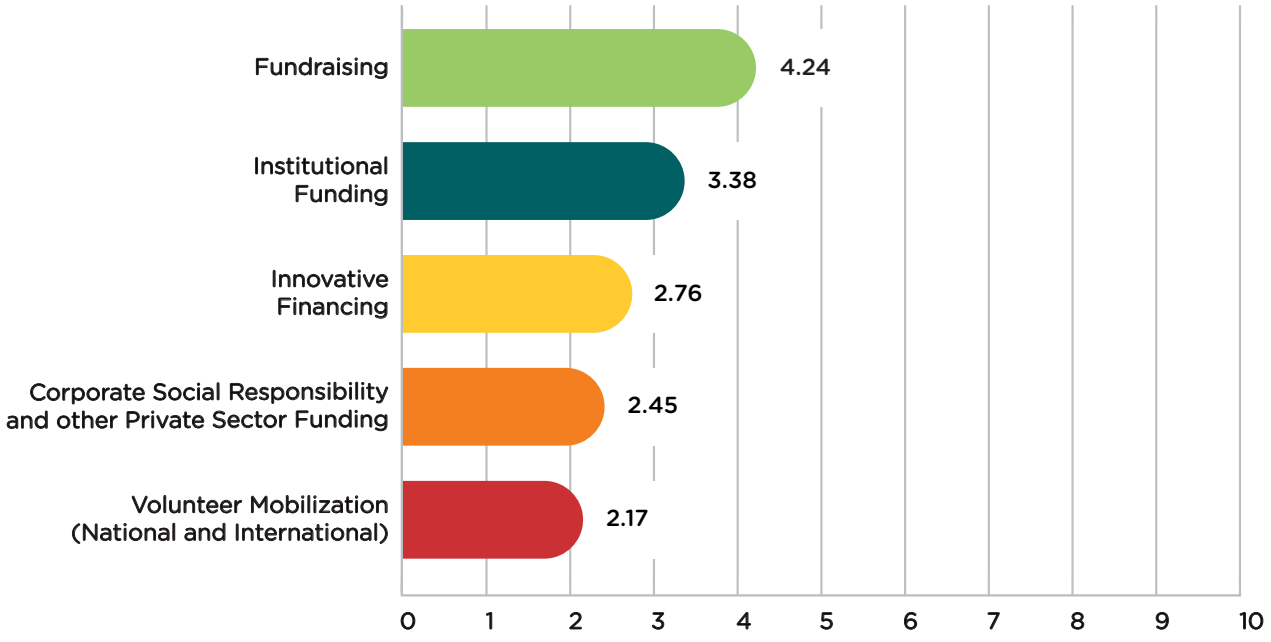


Figure 9. Resource mobilization priorities in English and French surveys



When asked what their second highest priorities were to help build their organization's capacities, program and project implementation was slightly more important in the anglophone survey (23%), and all other areas of capacity building (resource mobilization, project and program development, organizational development, and sectoral knowledge and expertise) were at the same level of priority (18%). This question reveals the equal importance of several capacity building dimensions as soon as resource mobilization is no longer an option. When asked for their third highest priority, program and project implementation came out again as the most important area. These findings aligned as well with responses to the open-ended questions, which tended to focus on similar themes as presented below.

> "Our key priority areas are learning more about fundraising and financial sustainability as a small organization, monitoring and evaluation, and financial compliance with GAC standards."
>
> - Online survey respondent

The survey asked less structured questions in order to compare responses to open-ended questions about the capacity building categories listed (Figure 1 and Figure 2).

When asked to identify their key capacity building priorities, participants focused on three broad themes[6]:

01.

Fundraising (resource mobilization, financial sustainability, diversifying funding)

02.

Monitoring and evaluation (measuring impact, M&E for GE and empowerment)

03.

Integrating gender equality in programing (gender analysis, measuring GE, gender transformative programing)

[6] These were open-ended questions and participants were invited to identify their needs using their own vocabulary. The analysis shows the emerging themes.

Other priorities were identified—but by a less significant number of respondents (these priorities were recurrent themes even if they were mentioned slightly less often than the top three stated above):

- Governance (effective governance, board development)
- Networking and partnership with other CSOs
- Communication and public engagement (social media, communication strategy, etc.)
- PSEA (policies and procedures)
- Knowledge management (documenting best practices, manage learnings)
- Volunteers (manage, attract)
- Organizational policy development
- RBM (PIP, baseline studies, risk assessment, GAC and other donors' financial requirements)

Fundraising and resource mobilizations were again identified as key priorities. Monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) issues were also identified as a main priority, while they were not identified as the most pressing needs in the more structured questions. Among responses to open-ended questions related to MEL, questions around measuring impact and measuring women's empowerment were repeatedly raised. If MEL was identified as a subtheme of the project and program implementation category, integrating gender equality into project design or measuring women's empowerment were spread across different categories and might not have received the attention they should have based on the categorization offered in both the survey and the roundtable. This example illustrates some blind spots from the structured capacity building areas used in the needs assessment.

Many priorities are related to donors' requirements such as results-based management (RBM), baseline study, gender analysis, risk assessment, and donors' financial requirements. These pressing needs should not hide other capacity development areas identified by respondents to improve the quality and effectiveness of SMOs' programming in the long term such as knowledge management (documenting best practice, managing learning), networking and partnership with other CSOs, effective governance, and organizational policy development.

2.3 VALIDATION ACTIVITY: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION AT SPUR CHANGE ANNUAL CONFERENCE

These preliminary findings were presented at the Spur Change annual conference in November 2019 to over 80 SMOs. Following the presentation, the Spur Change team invited participants to complete three activities in small groups in order to validate the needs assessment findings. A facilitator was assigned to each table to facilitate the activities.

01.

Validate findings: Do you have the same capacity building needs? What is missing?

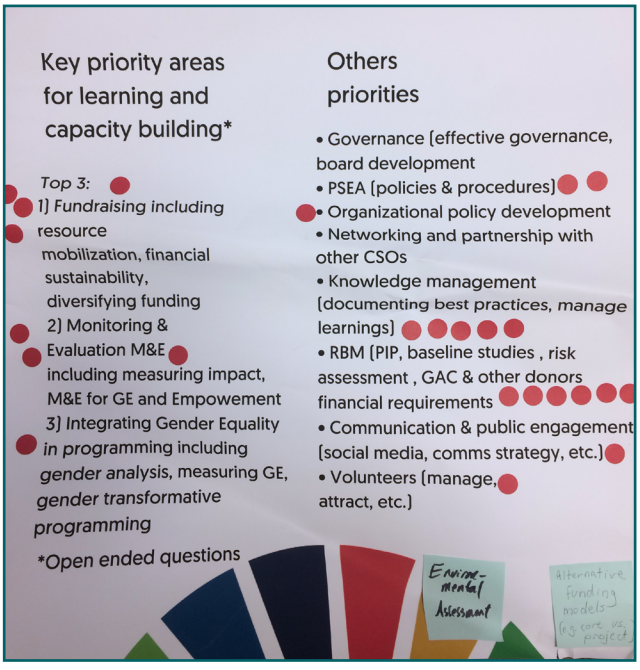
02.

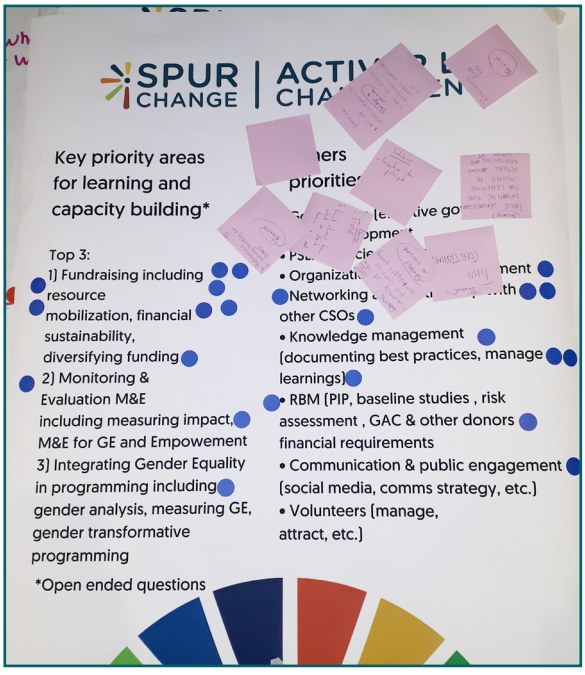
Reflect on learning methods: What have been your most successful learning experiences and your individual and organizational constraints to attending trainings?

03.

Visioning exercise: What does success look like? In five years from now...

Examples of the materials provided to participants in this validation activity.





These exercises helped the Spur Change team validate some of the preliminary findings but also provided a richer diversity of contexts and needs. Resource mobilization and fundraising were confirmed by participants as priorities. However, some other priorities were identified as very important such as knowledge management (documenting best practice, managing learning), RBM (baseline study, risk assessment), networking and partnership with other CSOs, effective governance, and organizational policy development. Strategies will be identified by the Spur Change team while developing the training program to address these priorities. The training program will be designed to address the diversity of needs. For instance, the main priorities will be addressed via the national in-person training, but priorities that are not shared across provinces and regions can be addressed via an online training series or micro-learning sessions.

When we combine all consultation methods (roundtable, online survey, and validation session), the triangulation of results confirms the importance of resource mobilization and MEL (including measuring impact and feminist MEL) as the top priorities. These are followed by governance and board development, knowledge management (including managing learning and identifying best practices), organizational policy development (including PSEA), RBM, networking and partnering with other CSOs, and communication (including public engagement, IT, and social media).

2.4 KNOWLEDGE OF FIAP AND SDGS

The Spur Change program initiative is part of Canada's approach to meeting Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and engaging Canadian SMOs in international assistance aligned with the Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP). Increasing capacity of SMOs to deliver inclusive, sustainable, innovative, gender transformative, best-practice programing that advances FIAP action areas and contributes to effective implementation of the SDGs is the main goal of this program. In this context, participants in the survey and at the roundtables were asked to assess their knowledge and understanding of the Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) and the SDGs.

The self-assessments of their level of knowledge of both the FIAP and SDGs were quite high. The level of knowledge of the FIAP within their organizations was assessed as high or very high by 47% of the anglophone respondents and 50% of the francophone respondents. The number of respondents who reported knowledge and understanding of the six FIAP action areas (see Figure 9) was significantly lower at 36% for anglophone respondents and 0% for francophone respondents. The level of alignment of projects and programs to the FIAP was 64% for anglophone respondents and 50% for francophone respondents.

Figure 10. FIAP six action areas and SDG wheel [7]

The level of understanding and knowledge of the SDGs and their targets within the organization was quite high, as more than 55% self-assessed as having a high understanding. The level of alignment of their project with the SDGs was also very high (more than 65% self-assessed their alignment as being very high).

[7] Global Affairs Canada. Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy Six Action Areas.
URL: https://www.international.gc.ca/gac-amc/publications/odaaa-lrmado/sria-rsai-2016-17.aspx?lang=eng
and United Nations. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) communication materials, SDG colour wheel.
URL: https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/news/communications-material/

03. LEARNING METHODS FOR CAPACITY BUILDING

3.1 LEARNING METHODS' ATTRIBUTES

At the roundtables, learning methods were suggested and participants were asked to identify which of these methods they viewed as necessary and aspirational to building capacity within their organizations. Then, participants outlined the attributes they felt underpinned these methods and could effectively enhance learning (see Appendix 2 for a detailed list of attributes suggested by participants).[8] The following methods were presented to participants: individual learning (e.g., listening to podcasts or videos), one-on-one individual coaching and mentoring, online webinars and courses, short in-person workshops (up to 3 hours), communities of practice, and seminars and conferences. Based on participants' responses, we identified some of the key takeaways across the different learning methods and the differences between them.

Accessibility and flexibility

Some of the key takeaways from this exercise were the importance of flexibility and accessibility for these learning opportunities, including making resources available and accessible (in different languages, with public and free access, etc.) and also providing access to trainers and experts.

Participatory approaches

SMOs highly value the use of participatory and problem-solving approaches. Participants emphasized the need to focus on real-life engagement and solution-oriented training. Developing and making accessible useful handouts should follow the learning opportunities.

Peer learning

SMOs also strongly value peer-to-peer learning opportunities that allow the sharing of best practices. These learning opportunities should also be an opportunity to network as individuals who work for SMOs tend to be more isolated from the rest of the development community and do not always have opportunities to network with their peers. This also emphasizes the importance of creating opportunities to connect more intentionally with those doing similar work. Sharing participants' contact information, for example, is an easy way to reinforce networking and peer learning. Gaining access to a database of professionals to consult with if they need coaching, mentoring, or short-term support is also an avenue to explore.

[8] This activity was not documented at the Québec roundtable.

In-person and distance learning

While asking SMO participants what they thought of coaching, communities of practice, and short workshops, many participants raised the importance of having mixed approaches: both meeting by distance and in person. For instance, in regards to individual coaching, participants mentioned the importance of online tools but also that these must be followed by meeting in person to receive feedback and develop next steps. The costs (especially in terms of time) for some organizations to join in-person learning opportunities should also be considered.

Continuous engagement

Planning continuous engagement and follow up after trainings was identified as a good way to consolidate learning and build a network. Offering follow-up materials to take home after trainings (and materials prior to the training) or follow-up activities a few weeks following the training, and an opportunity to access the trainers or experts following learning opportunities as new questions arise, allows for the development of a deeper understanding and an integration of learning. Supporting a community of practice could also sustain the relationship between SMOs and build capacity over the long term as it creates a support system among organizations facing similar challenges.

3.2 PRIORITIZING LEARNING METHODS

Respondents of the survey were asked several questions regarding how they would prioritize learning methods. In-person training workshops, webinars, and online courses were the top three priorities according to the consultation (the full list in order of priority is presented below).

01. Training Workshop (in person)

02. Webinar

03. Online Course

04. Coaching and Mentoring

05. Peer Learning and Support

06. Action Learning Process[9] (small groups working on actual challenges)

07. Communities of Practice

08. Technical Assistance

09. Conference and Seminars

> "The person-to-person interaction with an active learning component is highly effective for us as an organization to get involved with other organizations and participate in joint development processes."
>
> – Online survey participant

[9] Action Learning solves problems and develops leaders simultaneously because its simple rules force participants to think critically and work collaboratively. Action Learning is particularly effective for solving complex problems that may appear unsolvable. It elevates the norms, the collaboration, the creativity, and the courage of groups. Source: World Institute for Action Learning (WIAL). URL: https://wial.org/action-learning/

Online learning opportunities are some of the preferred learning methods based on the needs assessment results. Because of SMOs' needs for flexibility and accessibility as raised previously, it is logical that these more virtual options are popular. There are less constraints when attending online learning opportunities. From the triangulation of online survey data with that collected in the roundtable, it seems like participants of the online survey are more inclined to prefer online learning methods, which is not a surprising finding. That being said, in-person workshops remain the preferred option.

According to the roundtables' findings and the need for practical problem-solving approaches, the action learning process should have been much more popular, but these types of approaches require a higher level of commitment that is not always possible for SMOs who do not always have dedicated staff. The network needs that were identified earlier could result in more engaging peer learning, but individual learning methods such as webinars, online courses, and coaching are in fact more popular than conferences, peer learning, and communities of practice. Time commitment and accessibility might also be decisive factors for SMOs wanting to build their capacities while struggling with their financial capacities and minimal resources (time, staff, etc.).

The results of the most popular learning methods are not necessarily based on the most effective methods for adult learning. For example, online learning opportunities and in-person training are not necessarily the most efficient if they are not tied to follow-up activities.[10] In addition, some of the most effective adult learning methods to strengthen organizational capacities, such as the action learning process,[11] require a high commitment from both participants and facilitators. Moreover, one of the most critical factors for success is the timing of learning opportunities and the immediate use of these new tools or approaches in the work of SMOs.

[10] Martin, Harry. 2010. Improving training impact through effective follow-up: Techniques and their application. 10.1108/02621711011046495, *Journal of Management Development.*

[11] Universalia. 2018. Evaluation of IDRC's Contribution to Building Leading Organisations. Final Report. URL: https://idl-bnc-idrc.dspacedirect.org/bitstream/handle/10625/57462/IDL-57462.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE SPUR CHANGE PROGRAM

01. Mixed Approaches – Use both online and in-person learning opportunities to encourage participation, accessibility, and equity.

The Spur Change program should develop a mixed approach by organizing national in-person training across the country and also meaningful online opportunities such as a webinar series and an online course.

02. Follow up – Always embed follow-up activities or opportunities with asking questions of an expert.

Each learning opportunity should be followed by an online session to ask questions to our trainers or to pursue dialogue among participants. Participants should receive hand-outs and materials designed to be used and adapted to their own context and needs.

03. Timing – Determine with funded SMOs (both GAC and FIT) a training schedule based on the implementation of their activities.

The Spur Change team will work collaboratively with Global Affairs Canada's Development Impact Windows secretary and FIT's director to design timely capacity building opportunities based on the needs of SMOs. These capacity building opportunities should provide the organizations with the support to successfully implement their projects.

04. Participatory Design – Design learning opportunities using participatory approaches.

Each learning opportunity should be designed with the end users in mind. As part of the Spur Change team, a learning content designer will work with trainers and consultants to design participatory trainings. Spur Change learning opportunities will be designed using multiple participatory approaches.

05. Collaborative learning – Offer opportunities for peer learning and build a learning program on participants' knowledge and experiences.

The Spur Change program will build on the expertise of SMOs and larger organizations to design its learning opportunities. Spur Change's training will be designed to encourage peer learning. For instance, our conference programing is built on participants' expertise as they are the ones leading most sessions. In-person training will be preceded by pre-training surveys to gather participants' experiences and inform the training content. Champions in the sector (small, medium, and even large organizations) should be invited to contribute to a webinar series dedicated to specific themes. These organizations will then contribute to building SMOs' capacities to collectively raise the impact of our sector.

06. Accessibility – Make training materials publicly available afterward.

The Spur Change program should build an online library along with an online multimedia platform (video, podcasts, handouts, etc.) to share all resources developed as part of the program. The Spur Change program should also collect and share existing resources through this library.

07. Equity – Offer learning opportunities across Canada and outside large cities.

The Spur Change program should organize training opportunities outside Central Canada. Rather than asking SMOs to travel, the trainers should replicate the same training in several locations in French and in English. With an approach to bring the training to the participants instead of the other way around, the program will reduce inequitable access for rural SMOs. The national training program, which will happen once to twice a year, aims to be replicated across the country. The Spur Change annual conference will be hosted in different cities across Canada each year, and participants will receive subsidies to attend.

08. Evidence-based approach – Develop capacity building opportunities informed by evidence.

The Spur Change team should inform its decisions through consulting the evidence. The Spur Change program should refer to the literature of adult education to select learning methods. The SMO studies, along with the initial and mid-term needs assessments, should guide its programing.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1. LEARNING METHODS' ATTRIBUTES FROM THE ROUNDTABLES

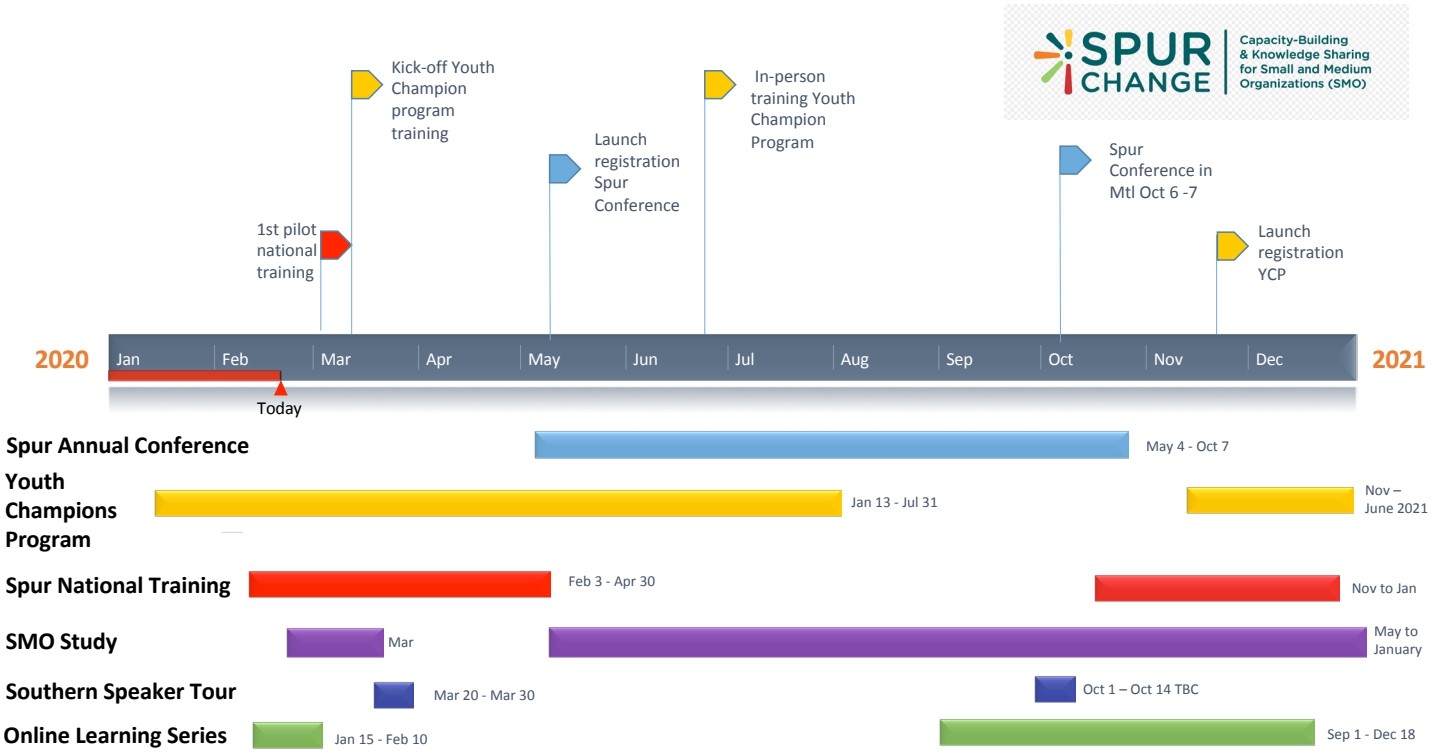
Learning Method	Attributes
Individual Learning, Listening to Podcasts	Results in knowledge from the podcast being brought into practice Accessible for 24-hours and free, with no additional downloads or need for multiple devices Centralized access to multiple resources with the same login The podcast covers a single topic over a series of episodes, whereby there is opportunity to build upon the last episode
One-on-One Individual Coaching and Mentoring	Makes use of peer learning Focuses on real-life engagement and is solutions oriented Builds leadership skills Makes use of peer learning Online tools are important but must be followed by meeting in person to receive feedback and develop next steps Flexible hours Participants can choose who they want to meet, rather than random pairing Opportunity to connect more intentionally with those doing similar work Database of professionals willing to share knowledge Commitment to two to three sessions (1-2 hours each) No specific educational requirements/pre-requisites in order to partake

Online Webinars and Courses	Offers mixed-method modules Allows for access and sharing between participants of relevant and related learning resources Interactive and engaging as opposed to one-way dialogue Max 1.5 hours per session Share contact info of participants Opportunity to network A maximum of two presenters who have contrasting approaches to discuss with an active moderator At least one presentation illustrating an example/case study Use to build on/connect/follow up with and for face-to-face learnings, short workshops, and mini-conferences Be sure that other courses do not already exist elsewhere
Community of Practice	Learning done through a group that is longer-term Transcends sector trends and usual voices to bring in diverse opinions Online and in-person (according to needs or goals) Inviting other stakeholders that are not usually included Integrating our partners so we can strengthen our capacities together Sharing our unintended impacts (both positive and negative) Inviting other types of experts into the conversation Online member engagement platform Facebook group or LinkedIn to post articles, videos, and opportunities for networking (contact details available) and knowledge sharing Clear goals and roles for members partaking An inventory of existing communities of practice in Ontario Sharing on-the-ground experiences, preferably by end users and clients Meetings in person or virtually with one or two 5-8-minute presentations on a topic, followed by a discussion

Short Workshops (up to 3h in person)	Hands-on approach that involves multiple small-group activities Allows space and time for networking Presents thoughtful content, expert speakers, and useful handouts Emphasizes participation and sharing of best practices Finishes with a plan for joint collaboration and next steps Information sessions on what needs to be achieved through the workshop so it can be developed accordingly Sharing of stories, especially via intergenerational activity Offers follow-up materials to take home after trainings Video-conferencing is second best to in person Small groups Inviting key stakeholders who are highly skilled Very direct presentations with problems and solutions Interactive and with opportunities for networking Opportunity for follow up, further learning Links to other resources that have been mentioned Option to dial in (virtual) Designed according to goals and needs Sending information before to participants so they can properly contribute Ensuring that participants put into practice what they have learned through follow-up sessions to keep track of progress
Seminars / Conferences	Breakout groups are structured Breaks after each session for networking and to avoid flooding participants with information Keep it interactive, moving around room Action-plan oriented and with clear objectives Next steps reached by end of the session (opportunities to continue engagement) Option to attend partial events and an effort not to overschedule

Others	Incorporates Indigenous approaches to learning Use of virtual reality, which is immersive, experimental, game-based, personalized, and adaptive Incorporation of relevant case studies Learning methods should always leave space for knowledge transfer, particularly from one volunteer to another Use blended/mixed-methods approach to learning to suit everyone and keep the focus Connect SMOs and other NGOs that work in the same countries for networking and knowledge sharing Connect SMOs that have offices in the same city

APPENDIX 2. NEEDS ASSESSMENT TIMELINE



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