

Give the Gift of Capacity

Blog

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The holiday season is a critical time for charities and not-for-profits. According to Imagine Canada, we receive almost 40% of our funding between now and the end of December. This is the time that our fundraising machines kick into action and we reach out to potential supporters to share our stories of impact, improvement, and positive change, hoping to garner more financial support for our programs, services, and research.

I'm suggesting that we start asking for a different kind of support. Let's ask our donors for the gift of capacity. What exactly is capacity? **It is impact. It is resilience. It is sustainability.** It is taking the time to invest in professional development for the people in our organizations.

Essentially, capacity building is our ability to effectively deliver on our mission - now and in the future. It is an investment in the improved performance and sustainability of our organizations. Recent research from [Imagine Canada](#), [Ignite NPS](#), and Vantage Point's own evaluation outcomes prove that investing in capacity increases overall organizational performance in areas such as fundraising, program outcomes and employee engagement and retention.

What does an investment in capacity look like? Funding that supports our internal operations. It can include professional development that improves staff leadership competencies, board governance training that enhances board effectiveness, or technology that improves customer and donor relations.

As not-for-profits, we are reluctant to ask for funding to invest in ourselves. There are many reasons for this. Funders traditionally support new programs. Donors have specific requests where they want their donations applied. We are too busy to do professional development or don't feel we can allocate budget for training. We often think of the short-term when deciding on expenditures or ways to save.

This is scarcity thinking, and it is putting our organizations, and indeed, our sector at risk. If we want high performing organizations that achieve results, and a robust and sustainable sector that provides a satisfying career, we need to change our mindset from one of scarcity to one of abundance and potential. And that change needs to start now.

Fortunately, the public dialogue is beginning to shift. The most recent BC Charitable Giving Insights Report shows an 11% decrease in the public's perception that charities are spending too much money on "administration." The overhead "myth" is increasingly being revealed as such, allowing us to begin to think differently about our ability to invest today, with long-term sustainability and impact in mind.

And what is required to achieve long-term sustainability? An investment in capacity. So, I encourage you to start having conversations about how capacity supports and creates impact and relevance. Organizations - talk to your supporters about what administrative expenses really are. Board members - be open to discussions and decisions about longer term investments. Funders - ask your grantees about what operational resources are required for their continued success.

This year, ask for the gift of capacity and imagine what this will make possible for our sector.