

COVID-19

The impact of the pandemic on francophone organizations

Consultation by the FCFA of Canada

February 2021

The French version of this document is available in PDF format and can be obtained by contacting the FCFA of Canada at info@fcfa.ca.

© Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, 2021

Acknowledgments

The FCFA of Canada would like to recognize the financial contribution of the Government of Canada to this study.

The FCFA of Canada would also like to thank PRA Inc. for its support throughout the process.

Jean Johnson

A message from the FCFA of Canada President

There was never any doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic would have a significant impact on francophone organizations working in Canada, because no individual and no organization was spared.

To help support francophone organizations, the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada (FCFA of Canada) undertook broad consultations with nearly 250 stakeholders across the country. Our goal was simple: to understand in order to better respond. It was a matter of collecting data not only to understand the effects of the pandemic, but also, and above all, to better prepare for recovery and to strengthen the long-term stability of our organizations in a post-pandemic context.

I would like to thank all those who generously contributed to our efforts and made this study possible.

[signed]

Jean Johnson

President

FCFA of Canada

Contents

Understanding to better respond	5
Why consult francophone organizations?	5
Methodology	6
A network left reeling	7
Impact on activities and services	7
Budget impact	8
Impact on internal operations	10
Government assistance: critical support	12
Looking back on organizations' experience	12
Preliminary status report	16
The future: transformation and uncertainty	18
Embarking on the path to change	18
Needs identified	19
Conclusion	21

Understanding to better respond

Why consult francophone organizations?

Working in a minority situation is always a challenge, and francophone organizations across the country rise to that challenge every day. They provide activities and services that affect every aspect of the development and vitality of francophone and Acadian communities.

The pandemic has had and will continue to have a significant impact on this network of organizations. The FCFA of Canada wanted to better understand the various aspects of the effects of the public health crisis.

Study objectives

The study sought to:

- better understand the impact of public health guidelines on how organizations operate;
- document the results of government assistance programs; and
- determine priority areas for government action to support organizations during the second wave of the pandemic, as well as with the recovery phase and their medium- and long-term operational planning in a post-pandemic context.

Report contents

This report provides a summary of all the data collected during the study. It also identifies priority areas for public officials to take action.

That said, it is important to recognize that this report does not address the experience of all francophone organizations across the country, as many of them were unable to participate. However, nearly 250 people working on the front lines of francophone community development shared their views and contributed to an informed debate.

Methodology

During the months of September and October 2020, an online survey was conducted. In total, 247 organizations participated. These organizations work in all provinces and territories and in the arts, culture, heritage, community development, early childhood care, media, education, immigration, justice and economic development sectors. Some work specifically with women, young people or youth.

Survey of francophone organizations 247 respondents

During the months of November and December 2020, 25 interviews were conducted with survey respondents to gain an in-depth perspective on themes that emerged from the online consultations. Once again, stakeholders from all regions and sectors provided input. All interviews were conducted by phone.

Interviews with representatives from francophone organizations 25 respondents

During the months of January and February 2021, six discussion groups were held via videoconference. They discussed which strategies would be the most helpful to francophone organizations during the recovery phase. In total, 20 people participated in these discussions.

Discussion groups with representatives from francophone organizations 20 participants

A network left reeling

Impact on activities and services

Months-long slump

When organizations participated in the survey in September 2020, the second wave of the pandemic was ramping up. At that point, organizations had been struggling for six months already to offer their activities and services. Only 57% of survey respondents said their organizations could offer most or all of their services. The remainder could offer only a few of their activities and services.

“We’re going through a really difficult period, and our programming isn’t available like it usually is. COVID is zapping all of our energy. Before, we had the drive to do lots of things, but now our team isn’t on site, we’re all working remotely, and things are tough.”

All sectors have experienced a slowdown, but some are more affected than others. That is the case for organizations that provide services for seniors, who are often not as comfortable using the technology required for virtual interactions, and for organizations working with youth, which tend to offer in-person services, such as sports and artistic activities.

Other sectors, including francophone media outlets and early childhood services, have had no choice but to press on, making significant changes to how they operate.

<p>57%: Organizations offering most or all of their services Source: 2020 survey</p>

Volunteers: a limited resource

The significant drop in activities over an extended time has also affected one of the most important assets of the organizational network: volunteers. At the time of the survey, only 22% of respondents said their organization had most or all of its volunteers working. For many organizations, only the members of their boards of directors were still active, and all other volunteers had to stand down.

In the interviews and discussion groups, a number of organization leaders expressed concerns about the long-term effects of forcing volunteers to step back. Many were worried they would have to start from scratch and rebuild their volunteer base. However, some saw it as an opportunity to rethink volunteer recruitment and make it more representative of the community as a whole.

“Our volunteers can’t contribute as much either. Our organization is struggling as a result. People want to get out, but they are worried, too.”

<p>78%: Organizations operating with less than half of their volunteers Source: 2020 survey</p>
--

Budget impact

Most organizations lost revenue

Overall, 60% of organizations that participated in the survey reported lost revenues as a direct result of pandemic lockdown measures. Closer examination revealed a number of trends:

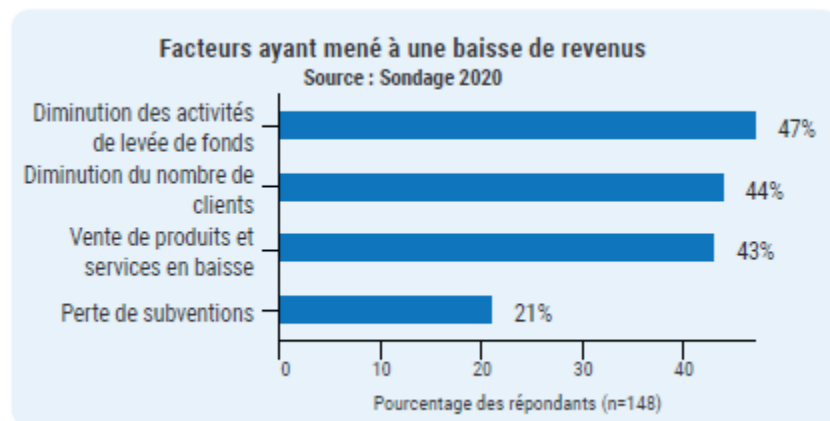
- Organizations operating at local and municipal levels were the most affected, with 81% indicating their organization had lost revenue.
- The provinces of Alberta (74%), British Columbia (71%) and New Brunswick (70%) had the highest proportions of organizations with lost revenues.
- Lastly, as regards the areas affected, the media sector (83%), community development sector (74%) and arts and heritage sector (73%) had the highest proportions of organizations reporting lost revenue.

60%: Organizations that lost revenue due to the pandemic
Source: 2020 survey

Organizations that did not lose any revenue tended to be those receiving core funding on an annual or multi-year basis, from various levels of government.

Lost revenues were mainly due to a drop in fundraising activities, a decrease in the number of clients or fewer products and services being sold.

Some organizations also indicated they had lost funding associated with specific projects and activities that had to be cancelled due to the pandemic.



Facteurs ayant mené à une baisse de revenus	Factors leading to loss of revenue
Source: Sondage 2020	Source: Survey 2020
Diminution des activités de levée de fonds	Decrease in fundraising activities
Diminution du nombre de clients	Decrease in number of clients
Vente de produits et services en baisse	Fewer products and services sold
Perte de subventions	Loss of funding
Pourcentage des répondants (n=148)	Percentage of respondents (n=148)

These organizations not only lost revenue, but also experienced significant setbacks, as they had already spent months planning and developing their activities and working with employees, volunteers and other community partners. In the interview stage, organization leaders described the frustration and helplessness they felt when all their efforts yielded no results.

“It takes months of work to create a special event for the community. The pandemic hit a few days before our last show. Everything came to a standstill. We had spent \$90,000 on planning it all. On top of that, we lost \$30,000 in revenue and sponsorships. It was a major blow for our organization.”

Many organizations faced similar unexpected and unprecedented losses in revenue.

Estimated losses

Many of the organizations that lost revenue due to the pandemic recorded significant losses. In particular, as of September 2020, close to 30% of survey respondents indicated that their organization's losses represented up to 30% of the annual budget.

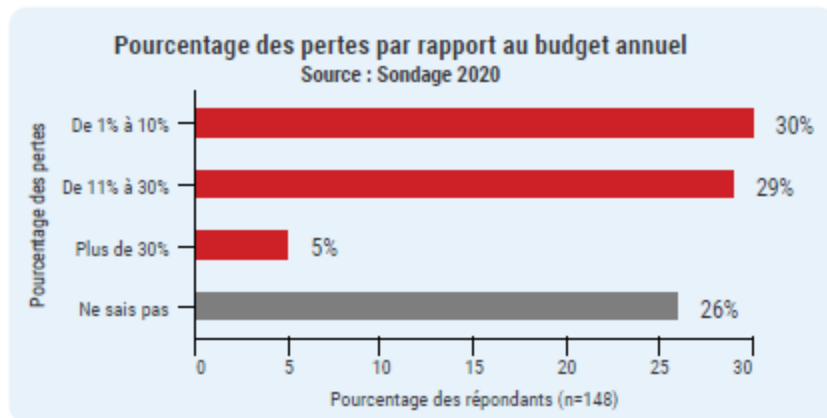
On closer examination, we noted the following trends (among organizations reporting losses):

- Respondents from local and municipal organizations reported the most significant losses, with 23% of them recording losses exceeding 30% of their annual budget.
- The largest proportion (38%) of respondents from regional organizations recorded losses of 11% to 30%.
- Among respondents representing provincial organizations, the largest proportion (44%) reported losses of 1% to 10% of their annual budget.

In concrete terms, these losses varied between \$25,000 and \$60,000, with wide disparities depending on the sector of activities.

In many cases, the organizations had to rethink their fundraising activities and get creative.

“We had to drop our main fundraiser at the last minute and turn it into an online activity, which raised only half of what we'd hoped for. But people did participate. It showed us that there are other options out there.”

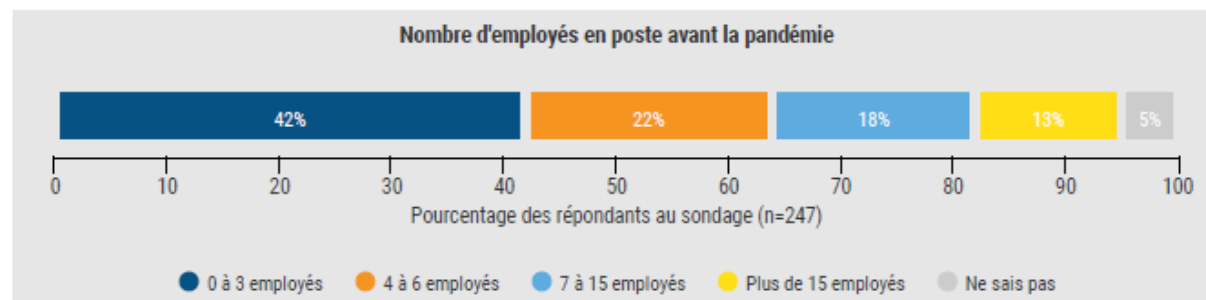


Pourcentage des pertes par rapport au budget annuel	Percentage of annual budget lost
Source : Sondage 2020	Source: 2020 survey
Pourcentage des pertes	Loss percentage
De 1% à 10%	From 1% to 10%
De 11% à 30%	From 11% to 30%
Plus de 30%	Over 30%
Ne sais pas	Don't know
Pourcentage des répondants (n=148)	Percentage of respondents (n=148)

Impact on internal operations

Learning new strategies

Like other organizations across the country, francophone organizations had to find new ways of carrying out their activities that complied with public health directives. It is worth noting that most francophone organizations participating in the survey (64%) had fewer than six employees when the first wave hit. Organizations with larger numbers of employees work primarily in the education, early childhood care and economic development sectors.



Nombre d'employés en poste avant la pandémie	Number of employees on staff before the pandemic
Pourcentage des répondants au sondage (n=247)	Percentage of survey respondents (n=247)
0 à 3 employés – 4 à 6 employés – 7 à 15 employés – Plus de 15 employés – Ne sais pas	0 to 3 employees – 4 to 6 employees – 7 to 15 employees – Over 15 employees – Don't know

When the survey was conducted, most organizations (88%) still had the majority or all of their employees on staff. Organizations working at a local or municipal level had higher proportions of respondents with a smaller percentage of employees working. In addition, most respondents indicated that their organization had implemented all (74% of respondents) or nearly all (13% of respondents) of the public health measures required to interact with the public.

Keeping teams working required unexpected technological adjustments. Many organizations did their best to go virtual within their limited budgets. As leaders mentioned during the interview stage, they had to listen carefully and treat their employees with compassion as they went through this transition, recognizing their individual circumstances and how the pandemic affected their physical and mental health.

"In March, we had to shut everything down and go home. It was really hard. Our organization's strategic plan already included increasing our digital capacity. But all of a sudden, deadlines moved from three or four years away to the next morning."

A high-pressure environment

These organizations not only had to change how they operate, but also encountered new challenges and added difficulties. For example, stakeholders working in early childhood care noted the negative impact of no longer being able to interact with parents in person on a regular basis. Social and community stakeholders noted an uptick in mental health issues and stress in the families they work with.

"Domestic violence is up and there is a lot of tension. We have been in high demand to work with women and in family conflict situations. The well-being of families has been affected. Mental health problems have also been identified within some families."

These organizations have had to reinvent themselves in trying and challenging circumstances in order to pursue their mission. The next section explores the role of government assistance.

Government assistance: critical support

Looking back on organizations' experience

The consultation gave us insight into francophone organizations' experience with the various assistance programs that governments offered and continue to offer. This section of the report outlines who applied for assistance, who received assistance, and how that assistance helped the organizations meet their needs.

Who received what?

Just over half of survey respondents said that their organization had applied for funding.

53% of survey respondents said their organization had applied for funding

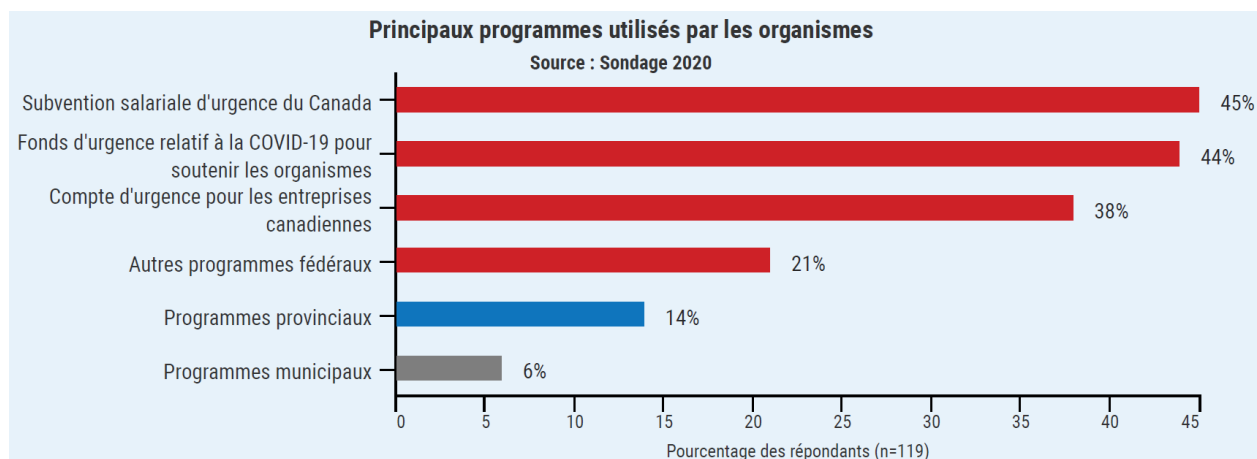
Why did some organizations not apply?

- Slightly more than half (53%) of survey respondents whose organization had not applied said that their organization did not need assistance. Most of these organizations were funded through a government grant or contribution that had not been affected by the pandemic.
- Another large proportion of respondents (37%) said that their organization was not eligible for government assistance.
- Only 5% of respondents said that their organization lacked the ability to prepare an application. This trend was more marked among local or municipal organizations.

The success rate among the organizations that had applied for financial assistance was very high. More than nine out of 10 respondents whose organization had applied said that they had received financial support.

91% of respondents whose organization applied for assistance said their organization had received financial support

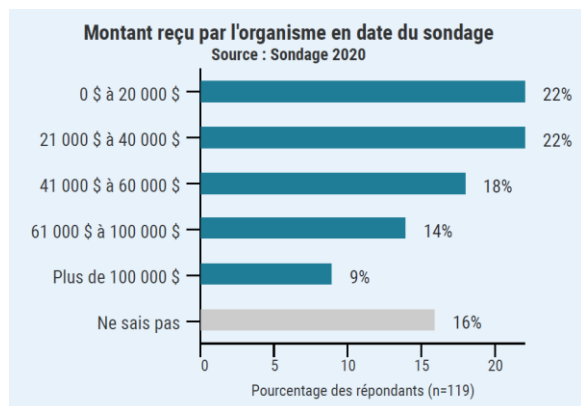
The bulk of the financial support that was granted came from the federal government, especially from key programs aimed at subsidizing wages or providing emergency assistance. A small percentage of respondents said that their organization had received support from their provincial or municipal government.



Principaux programmes utilisés par les organismes	Main programs used by organizations
Source : Sondage 2020	Source: 2020 survey
Subvention salariale d'urgence du Canada	Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy
Fonds d'urgence relatif à la COVID-19 pour soutenir les organismes	COVID-19 Emergency Support Fund
Compte d'urgence pour les entreprises canadiennes	Canada Emergency Business Account
Autres programmes fédéraux	Other federal programs
Programmes provinciaux	Provincial programs
Programmes municipaux	Municipal programs
Pourcentage des répondants (n=119)	Percentage of respondents (n=119)

Respondents from local or regional organizations, especially in Ontario, were most likely to be participating in programs offered by the provinces or municipalities. In interviews, some organization leaders noted that the Canadian Red Cross' COVID-19 Emergency Support to Community Organizations program had also played an important role, particularly in terms of securing enough personal protective equipment to comply with public health guidelines.

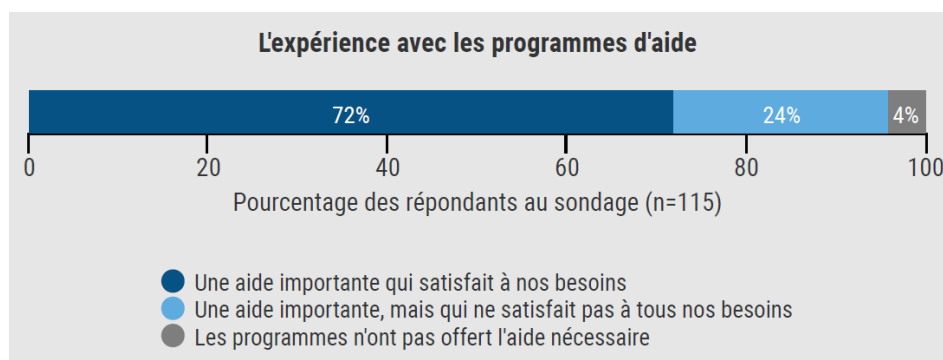
In terms of the amount of assistance received as of the survey date (September and October 2020), most respondents had received less than \$60,000. Of course, the amount received generally reflects the size of the organization and the amount of money lost due to the pandemic. For instance, local or regional organizations that had to cancel activities and events due to the pandemic often received higher amounts than provincial or national organizations that do not hold such activities directly.



Montant reçu par l'organisme en date du sondage	Amount received by organization as of survey date
Source : Sondage 2020	Source: 2020 survey
0 \$ à 20 000 \$	\$0 to \$20,000
21 000 \$ à 40 000 \$	\$21,000 to \$40,000
41 000 \$ à 60 000 \$	\$41,000 to \$60,000
61 000 \$ à 100 000 \$	\$61,000 to \$100,000
Plus de 100 000 \$	More than \$100,000
Ne sais pas	Don't know
Pourcentage des répondants (n=119)	Percentage of respondents (n=119)

Level of satisfaction with assistance received

Overall, organizations that had received government assistance were highly satisfied with the support that was offered. Specifically, more than nine out of 10 survey respondents from organizations that had received financial assistance said that they had been offered significant assistance that had met at least part of their needs. The interviews and discussion groups confirmed that trend.



L'expérience avec les programmes d'aide	Experience with assistance programs
Pourcentage des répondants (n=115)	Percentage of respondents (n=115)
Une aide importante qui satisfait à nos besoins	Assistance was significant and meets our needs
Une aide importante, mais qui ne satisfait pas à tous nos besoins	Assistance was significant but did not meet all of our needs
Les programmes n'ont pas offert l'aide nécessaire	Programs did not offer the assistance required

Several organization leaders who were consulted also highlighted the excellent support that their organization had received from Canadian Heritage officers, who provided guidance and advice to help them better understand the various programs offered by the federal government and how to access them.

The assistance that the organizations received enabled them to meet their ongoing obligations, avoid layoffs, purchase new equipment in order to operate virtually, renovate their premises as needed, and secure the equipment they needed to comply with public health guidelines.

However, not all organizations received the assistance they had applied for. In particular, small organizations with no full-time employees (instead run by contract employees, for example) or with very low operating expenses were forced to cancel projects or activities but were unable to secure government assistance.

Similarly, many artists were caught completely short. In response, some organizations held information sessions in French on existing programs that could provide some support so they could pursue their artistic endeavours.

“The federal government did a good job of responding to the financial challenges and constraints that organizations like us were the first to face. We came out okay thanks to the assistance and the flexible programs.”

“For the support program for museums, I thought the application process was terrific: the criteria were very clear, and it was direct and intuitive. The costs that this grant could cover were very clearly set out. It was really well thought out.”

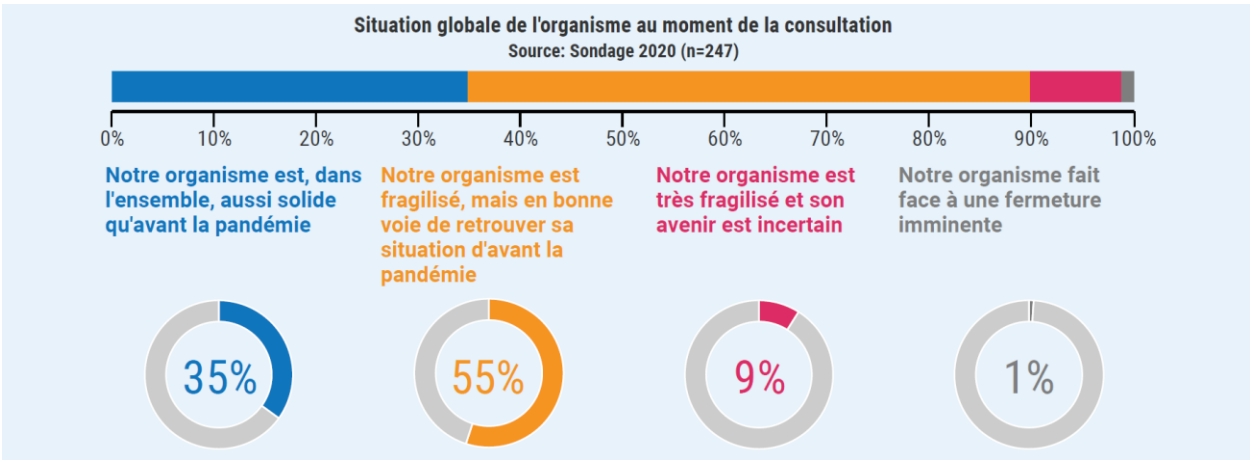
“So far, we haven’t found any programs we can request money from. Since we have no employees and I was hired on contract to run the organization, we can’t apply for the employee wage subsidy program. We also weren’t eligible for another program that offered rent relief. They asked if we had experienced revenue losses, but that’s not easy to calculate.”

Preliminary status report

Network took a hit but is focused on recovery

The stakeholders who were consulted were asked to provide a preliminary report on the general status of their organization. Overall, the results of the consultation show that the network has definitely taken a hit but continues to be focused on recovering and making the necessary adjustments in the short and longer terms.

Nine out of 10 survey respondents said that their organization was as strong as before the pandemic or was on track to return to its pre-pandemic state. However, the remaining 10% of respondents said that their organization was facing an uncertain future or was even facing imminent closure.



Situation globale de l'organisme au moment de la consultation	Organization's Overall Status at Time of Consultation
Source : Sondage 2020	Source: 2020 survey
Notre organisme est, dans l'ensemble, aussi solide qu'avant la pandémie	Overall, our organization is as strong as before the pandemic
Notre organisme est fragilisé, mais en bonne voie de retrouver sa situation d'avant la pandémie	Our organization has been affected but is on track to return to its pre-pandemic state
Notre organisme est très fragilisé et son avenir est incertain	Our organization has been severely affected and its future is uncertain
Notre organisme fait face à une fermeture imminente	Our organization is facing imminent closure

A closer look at the survey results reveals the following trends:

- In terms of geographic distribution, New Brunswick, Alberta and British Columbia had a higher proportion of respondents who stated that the future of their organization was uncertain.
- In terms of activity sectors, the youth, media and ethnocultural group sectors had a higher proportion of respondents who stated that the future of their organization was uncertain.

As organization leaders noted in interviews and discussion groups, the pandemic gave them a better understanding of both the vulnerability and the resilience of their organizations. It forced them to figure

out new ways of doing things, launch new collaborations and discover the new opportunities offered by going virtual.

However, at the time of writing, the dust was far from settled, as the second wave was in full swing across Canada, forcing organizations to plan for a future that is still very hard to predict or define.

“Planning for the long term is a challenge. Even short-term, I can look ahead to March, but no further. We normally have a longer-term vision, but right now, I just can’t imagine it.”

The future: transformation and uncertainty

Embarking on the path to change

The consultation made it clear that francophone organizations intend to rethink their methods, which may include making permanent changes.

More than three-quarters of survey respondents said that their organization had already changed its programs and activities in the long term or was in the process of doing so. Only 15% of respondents said that their organization was planning to resume operations in the same way as before the pandemic.

“Our organization is planning to resume all of its operations in the same way as before.”

15%

Source: 2020 survey

The main changes that francophone organizations have already made include:

- Offering all or part of their programming remotely, including direct services to individuals and families, community activities, and shows. Where needed, some organizations have created new content or resources to support this transition to virtual service delivery;
- Developing new procedures and policies that facilitate telework and virtual board meetings, volunteer committee meetings or annual general meetings; and
- For organizations offering in-person services, implementing policies on public health guidelines and providing the necessary equipment.

These measures may have helped the organizations continue operating at a certain level during the pandemic, but many questions remain about longer-term program planning.

During the consultation, organizational representatives were asked to identify their key needs for getting through the second wave and continuing to operate in the longer term.

“Looking ahead to the recovery, we can already foresee that our methods will go through a sea change. We’re thinking about what we’ll be able to do. We’re proactively considering solutions. We need to think positively about a future recovery. It’s a new approach to program development.”

Needs identified

Operational needs

As organizations continue to navigate the second wave of the pandemic, they desperately need various programs that will enable them to stay in business.

During the consultation, organization representatives mentioned the programs providing wage subsidies or emergency assistance for other operating expenses (e.g., rent, basic equipment).

They also noted that many organizations had experienced significant revenue losses, which have reduced their assets and left them in increasingly precarious positions. For that reason, they wanted assistance programs to cover losses that had already been incurred.

- Help with wages
- Help with other operating expenses
- Help with revenue losses

Support for future transformations

Aside from help with operating expenses, the stakeholders who were consulted identified needs related to change management—such as the development of new business, service delivery or governance models—as elements that would enable them to prepare adequately for the post-pandemic period.

They also noted that they were still in need of equipment, especially:

- Electronic equipment for remote work (for employees or volunteers) or remote governance (board members or other committee members). This includes laptops, cameras, faster Internet, and licences for remote work platforms (Zoom, Teams, WebEx, etc.); and
- Personal protective equipment (e.g., forehead thermometers, barriers, ventilation system upgrades).

In addition, they are in need of training in fields such as:

- Use of various remote communication platforms and effective use of social media;
- Production and distribution of digital content;
- Remote work, including virtual employee and team management, as well as health and safety for teleworkers;
- Management of the return to in-person work; and
- Mental health of employees and volunteers.

- Help with change management
- Help with installing new equipment
- Help with staff and volunteer training

“I’m worried about physically returning to normal with our teams, the partners, the organization of work and our clients. We’ll have to return gradually to make sure that the transition from virtual work to in-person work goes as smoothly as possible.”

Management of funding programs

The unprecedented upheaval caused by the pandemic, including the lockdowns, forced all organizations to adjust their operations and focus on the immediate challenges they were facing. As a result, the implementation of previously planned activities and programs had to be adapted and, in many cases, substantially modified.

During the consultation, organization representatives highlighted the importance of funding partners being flexible and understanding. They specifically mentioned the following:

- Funders must recognize that for many funded organizations, it is vital to be able to reallocate certain amounts in response to the urgent need to comply with public health guidelines.
- Funders must also be realistic about the achievement of the expected results. More time may be needed to achieve the results, or the list of expected results may need to be amended to take the pandemic context into account.
- Lastly, accounting standards must also be relaxed to reflect the constraints on organizations and the adaptations they have had to make to their internal management processes.

The consultations revealed that the organizations’ experiences in this area varied. While some representatives stressed their close collaboration with their respective program officers, others reported tensions arising from differing visions of program management during a pandemic.

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ability to reallocate funds• Adaptation of expected results• Flexibility in accounting standards |
|--|

“I think our funders are aware of the objectives that won’t be met because of COVID. Our program officers are completely open to that possibility, they’re flexible, and they fully understand that the blame lies not with the employees or organizations, but with the public health crisis.”

“Our funder is a program manager who hasn’t adapted to the crisis at all. We have to keep going as if there is no pandemic. Our funder isn’t showing any flexibility, empathy or openness.”

Conclusion

This report is intended to provide a better understanding of the pandemic's impact on many of Canada's francophone organizations. Most of these organizations have been able to stay in business in the short term, thanks to the determination of their teams of employees and volunteers and the assistance they have received so far from government authorities. However, it is equally important to point out that no less than one in 10 organizations that were surveyed is facing an uncertain future. This is a red flag that should be noted by all interested parties.

The biggest challenge that all the organizations face is planning their programs and activities over the medium and long terms. It is clear that the vast majority of organizations will not be going back to business as usual. A transformation is to be expected in their methods of operating, managing and serving their communities.

This will require concerted action and ongoing support. Based on the data collected during the consultation, the following recommendations are proposed:

Recommendation 1: That immediate support be offered to affected organizations that were unable to secure financial assistance.

While many programs were able to deliver the assistance that francophone organizations needed, the fact remains that the eligibility criteria used to distribute this funding excluded certain organizations that play a crucial role in francophone communities. It is critically important to explore new strategies for supporting these organizations.

Recommendation 2: That assistance programs be maintained until organizations recover their financial and operational stability.

This report clearly illustrates how instrumental the assistance programs offered by the governments, especially the federal government, have been for a large number of francophone organizations. There is no doubt that ending these programs would have a disastrous effect. To ensure that all of these investments and all of the work done so far to sustain the network of francophone organizations do not go to waste, it is vital that this support be maintained until the organizations have a chance to get their operations and finances back on a stable footing.

To that end, the federal government should establish a \$50-million recovery fund for francophone and Acadian communities. This fund would provide flexible assistance to meet the needs described in this report.

Recommendation 3: That the federal departments adapt their program management approach to account for the pandemic's impact on francophone organizations.

As important as the temporary assistance programs and emergency funds are, the future of francophone organizations lies in the implementation of programs and activities that will require financial support from the governments. That is why it is of paramount importance to recognize that the management of these programs will have to adapt to the post-pandemic reality. This report describes

the inequalities in the current situation: while some funders are being flexible, others have not adapted their approach, particularly with regard to expected results.

If organizations are to explore new approaches for supporting their community's social, cultural and economic development, funders will have to act as genuine allies.

Writing the next page in the development of the Canadian Francophonie

One discussion group participant used the analogy of a fracture that needs healing. This powerful image neatly sums up the challenge faced by francophone organizations. Community solidarity, cultural expression and linguistic vitality are dependent on collaboration and in-person interaction, yet every individual or family has basically been stuck in isolation for almost a year.

“Our mission hasn’t changed, but people are struggling and have spent 10 months apart, so there’s a fracture that needs healing.”

Organizations must therefore find their place in an environment that has been fundamentally transformed. They must rebuild much of their volunteer base, which is an essential component of community action. They must also rebuild their direct ties to the community, a task that will require imagination and perseverance in equal measure.

Financial support is imperative, but it is vital to acknowledge that a separation of more than a year cannot be fixed with a cheque. It is only by combining financial assistance and solid partnerships that governments and francophone organizations will be able to write the next page in the community development of the Canadian Francophonie together.