

A FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION

Developing a Transformative Resilience Framework
for Non-Governmental Organizations



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Executive Summary

Non-profit and charitable organizations (NGOs) are traditionally dedicated to furthering a particular social cause or advocating a shared point of view. In economic terms, they are organizations that use the surplus of its revenues to further its objective, rather than distributing its income to the organization's shareholders, leaders, or members.

Essential characteristics of NGOs are accountability, trustworthiness, honesty and openness to every person who has invested time, money and support into the organization. NGOs are accountable to the donors, founders, volunteers, program recipients and the community. The more NGOs focus on their mission, the more public confidence they will have, and as a result, the better able they will be to reach their mandate. During times of disruption, it often becomes more clear the critical role that NGOs have in ensuring service provision to members of their community.

This document presents a *framework for action* to develop organizational resilience and to assist NGOs in assessing their current strengths but also identifying opportunities for growth and improvement. It is crucial that NGOs regularly self-reflect to ensure their ability to respond appropriately in the face of disruptive events. The process includes three phases that an organization can work through.

NGOs do not exist in isolation; they are not static. NGOs are components of a much larger dynamic ecosystem that makes up a community. At any given time, communities may experience a disruptive event — some are significant and result in substantial disruption of social services.

Often during times of disruption, the most vulnerable populations within a community are the most impacted. It is critical that NGOs are able to effectively develop response plans that enable program provision to continue uninterrupted and increase the long-term resiliency and sustainability of the organization and their community at-large.

To prepare for future disruptive events and increase organizational resiliency, NGOs must develop frameworks to enable them to respond in efficient and effective ways. Within these frameworks, temporal considerations must be included and planned for.

This document does not present a solution that guarantees organizational resiliency. Rather, this document is starting point. It will spur discussion, inspire change and help organizations reflect on their current practices to identify where there could be improvements to increase long-term resilience.

About This Document

This document does not offer solutions. This document does not have a silver bullet to guarantee organizational resilience during a disruptive event.

This document is a starting point.

This document is designed to assist an organization in identifying where their vulnerabilities are but also where opportunities exist during times of disruption. This is a flexible document that should inform an organization's long-term planning and help ensure uninterrupted service provision.

This document is designed to be completed regularly. During times of stability, it is recommended this document be updated yearly. During times of disruption, this document may have to be updated monthly, bi-monthly or on a frequency that reflects the changing environment.

Note: In order to be able to develop a framework for action, it is imperative that appropriate representatives from an organization participate in this process. It is recommended that a *Board of Directors* or *Senior Management* participate to ensure their experiences and breadth of knowledge enables a successful audit. Without participation from senior representatives of an organization, the legitimacy of the framework can be called into question.

DOCUMENT AT A GLANCE

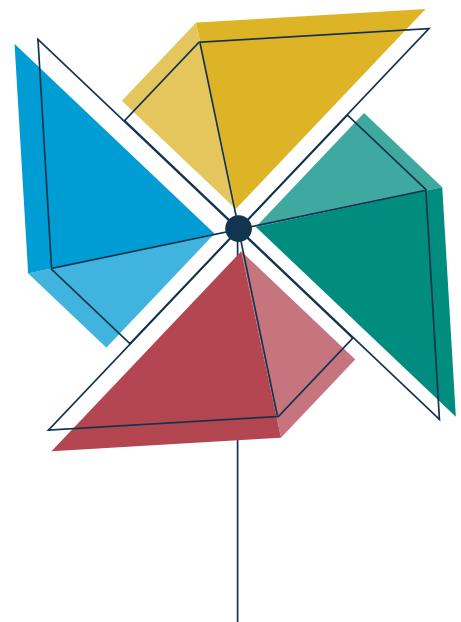
A high-level reference of the tasks outlined in this report:

Phase 1: Drivers of Organizational Resilience

Phase 2: Assessing Organizational Resilience

- External Audit
- Mission/Vision Statement
- Economic Resilience
- Social Resilience
- Governance Resilience

Phase 3: Developing a Framework for Action



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Rachel is currently finishing her Master of Science in the Rural Planning and Development program in the School of Environmental Design and Rural Development at the University of Guelph with a specialization in Indigenous Community Planning. Her primary research interests include rural resilience, rural land uses, rural community engagement and planning with Indigenous communities. Upon finishing her degree this winter, Rachel hopes to obtain employment within a municipal community planning or land use planning department.

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Amanda is the Administrative Associate with the Social Research and Planning Council and United Way Perth-Huron. Without Amanda's coordination and organizational skills, the initial KEYS workshop would not have been possible nor would countless details that she is responsible for.

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Glossary

Depth of impact:

the degree to which a disruptive event could impact the drivers of resilience and an organization's ability to achieve their mission.

Economic resilience:

the ability of communities and individuals to respond to shocks that may impact economic stability and well-being at the individual, household, business or market level.

External audit:

process of situating an organization within the larger community ecosystem to better understand who provides what, with what frequency and under what funding.

Governance resilience:

includes a community's long-term strategies, plans and policies—the formal and informal mechanisms adopted by governing institutions that highlight the importance of good governance, maintain long-term perspectives and advance community development, stability and diversity.

Long-term planning:

a process by which a particular strategic plan will be achieved. This process focuses on activities that start now and continue well into the future—typically 3–5 years.

NGOs:

non-governmental organizations including charities and not-for-profits.

Organizational resilience:

the ability of an organization to anticipate, prepare for, respond and adapt to incremental change and disruption in order to survive and prosper and include specific focus on economic, social and governance considerations.

Resilience:

the achievement of sustainability through community participation and the reconciliation of short- and long-term economic, social and ecological well-being.

Scenario planning:

a strategic planning method that some organizations use to make flexible long-term plans.

Social resilience:

the capacity of societies to cope with many kinds of challenges that impact well-being and an essential characteristic of what we call 'successful societies'—namely, societies that provide members with the resources needed to live healthy, secure and fulfilling lives.

Transformative resilience:

the ability of a system to adjust to new requirements imposed by internal and/or external shocks or change processes by learning, adapting, reorganizing and transforming its subsystems to take advantage of new opportunities.

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Introduction:

A Transformative Framework for Action

Non-governmental organization (NGO) leaders respond to the dynamic realities of various disruptive events to enable their organizations to continue to provide important services that community members depend on.

The NGO sector faces challenging times ahead; research has highlighted the impact that an external shock can have on the finances, viability and functioning of an NGO. While disruptive events are challenging, they often illuminate opportunities. The impacts of disruptive events force organizations to re-evaluate the role they play in response plan development, delivery and execution within and across the community they serve. The ability of NGOs to quickly respond to local challenges has demonstrated their importance to the provision of a strong social safety net, whether in healthcare, education or social services more broadly. Often, as communities recover from the impacts of a disruption, opportunities for an organization to reflect and develop a framework to increase their resiliency during challenging times exist. It is important that the NGO sector recognizes these opportunities to [re]demonstrate their impact and role in local health and well-being.

Communities are sustainable when they are resilient and are engaged and supported to thrive economically, socially, and maintain/support good governance. Communities build and sustain the necessary resources and partnerships to meet the basic needs and social wellness priorities of residents and to improve quality of life.

What is resiliency?

- The time required for an ecosystem to return to an equilibrium or steady state following a perturbation (Holling, 1973).
- It is the most often cited and in many instances is what informs long-term planning and response plans.
- The capacity of a community to anticipate risk, limit impact and bounce back rapidly in the face of change.
- The ability to reduce vulnerabilities and facilitate adaptation.
- Individuals and communities working together to meet needs, provide opportunities to reach potential and create social, economic and environmental inter-relationships.
- A community that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
- Achievement of sustainability through community participation and the reconciliation of short- and long-term economic, social and ecological well-being.
- Equitable, diverse, connected communities that provide a good quality of life.

Principles of resiliency:

- Residents have access to the programs and services required to meet basic needs: food, shelter and clothing. They can also access opportunities for education, personal growth development, recreation, arts and culture, employment and career development.
- Investment in preventative services—invest now to prepare for our future.
- Communities in the region acknowledge a shared responsibility and accountability in working together to increase the quality of life and social wellness in the region.
- Acknowledge and celebrate our history, successes and achievements. Work together to build pride and a sense of belonging for residents in our region.

Practices of resiliency:

- **Long-term.** Resiliency is not only about planning for the immediate future but also about developing mechanisms and processes to anticipate and prepare for future disruptions.
- **Holistic.** Resiliency is based on the [inter]connections between social, economic, and environmental considerations that affect communities and their members.
- **Connect.** Resiliency is about making connections and having positive relationships. These are critical to attaining and supporting resiliency. This includes relationships with and between agencies, between neighbourhoods and neighbours and between Municipal departments. It is essential to understand the connections and how we relate to each other and make decisions.

Organizational resiliency

During times of disruption, it is vital that organizations from within and across the NGO sector engage in the dynamic and complex system that exists in all communities. Within this system are components that are both *independent* and *interdependent*. In order for NGOs to respond both appropriately and effectively, they must be prepared for any unanticipated challenges; they must develop **organizational resilience**. Organizational resilience is conceptualized as the ability of an organization to anticipate, prepare for, respond and adapt to incremental change and disruption in order to survive and prosper and includes specific focus on economic, social and governance considerations (Denyer, 2017). Adopting a *transformative resiliency framework* is a technique that can increase organizational resilience and improve sustainability.

Transformative resilience: the ability of a system to adjust to new requirements imposed by internal and/or external shocks or change processes by learning, adapting, reorganizing and transforming its subsystems to take advantage of new opportunities.

In times of uncertainty, it is critical that organizations respond in appropriate and effective ways. Developing organizational resilience is an ongoing process. To develop a transformative resiliency framework, there are three phases an organization must complete.

Phase One: Drivers of Organizational Resilience

Phase Two: Assess Organizational Resilience

Phase Three: Framework for Action

It is important to note that this is not a prescriptive exercise; rather, this is a compass to assist organizations in reflecting on the challenges faced to help in the decision-making process.

Phase One


Drivers of Organizational Resilience

Organizations are dynamic and represent their community in their actions, missions and ultimately, their impacts. When an organization begins to develop their transformative resiliency framework, it is critical that ‘drivers of organizational resilience’ are included. Drivers of organizational resilience are ‘macro factors’ that impact how organizations function. There are three principle drivers of organizational resilience: economic resilience, social resilience and governance resilience.

Economic resilience

Economic resilience is the ability of communities and individuals to respond to shocks that may impact economic stability and well-being at the individual, household, business or market level. Emphasis is placed on ingenuity and resourcefulness during and after an event (shock) with specific reference to actions that increase resistance, robustness and recovery. Organizations should actively identify potential economic shocks and facilitate change to reduce vulnerability, not react passively in a “business as usual” manner in the face of economic stresses.

For NGOs, drivers of economic resilience are critical components that require continual [re]evaluation and [re]consideration. Within economic resilience are five focus areas that require attention:

ECONOMIC DRIVERS 	FOCUS AREAS	
	Funding	funding cycles, new or additional fundraising activities and leveraging funding opportunities
	Employment	industry synergies and opportunities to collaborate, skill advancement and transferable skills and training, volunteerism
	Productivity	relevance of activities and inclusion of online <i>and</i> in-person platforms
	Growth	reflection on internal process and time management, ability to adapt and respond to changes
	Communications	appropriate delivery of information, mobilization to community members

Social resilience

Social resilience is the capacity of societies to cope with many kinds of challenges that impact well-being and is an essential characteristic of what we call ‘successful societies’—namely, societies that provide members with the resources needed to live healthy, secure and fulfilling lives. Ensuring equitable and inclusive access to necessary resources prior to, during and after disruptive events is key to social resiliency. Social institutions such as community groups, religious organizations, schools and service providers play important roles in the social fabric of communities and should work together to coordinate efforts to advance community sustainability.

Within the NGO sector, drivers of social resilience are critical components that require continual [re] evaluation and [re]consideration. Within social resilience are five focus areas that require consideration:

SOCIAL DRIVERS	FOCUS AREAS	
	Service Provision	relevance and execution, adaptation to variable delivery modes (i.e. online, face-to-face)
	Knowledge Mobilization	education, awareness of services within the community-at-large, perception of quality of services, public relations
	Equity	fairness, equity versus equality, access (e.g. wait times)
	Partnerships	pre-existing partnerships with other social service providers, mergers, joint funding opportunities, duplication
	Capacity	human capital, ability to adequately provide context-specific services

Governance resilience

Governance resilience is a community’s long-term strategies, plans and policies—the formal and informal mechanisms adopted by governing institutions that highlight the importance of good governance, maintain long-term perspectives and advance community development, stability and diversity. Developing strategies, plans and policies that are adaptive and dynamic in the face of complex challenges requires collaboration, communication and engagement. Communities should develop strategies, plans and policies that are holistic in approach, flexible in application and transparent in terms of how their effectiveness is evaluated.

Within the NGO sector, drivers of governance resilience are a critical component that require continual [re]evaluation and [re]consideration. Within governance resilience are five critical focus areas:

GOVERNANCE DRIVERS 	FOCUS AREAS	
	Management	leadership, necessary skill-set, communication ability, board/senior management must represent community members and community partners
	Strategies	board member accessibility, relevant and reviewed policies, strong partnerships, empowering employees and clients, ability to complete mandate
	Community	community advisory group, visibility of the organization within community, trust, reputation, community involvement opportunities
	Human Capital	consider staff and volunteers <i>versus</i> staff and volunteer fatigue, reaffirm value of volunteers
	Board/Senior Management	continual training, transparent board decisions and board member hiring

Phase Two

Assessing Organizational Resilience

The ability of an organization to respond to dynamic and challenging conditions is critical to not only service provision but also its own long-term sustainability. It is critical that organizations prepare for future disruptions and continually critically reflect.

In Phase One of this document, three ‘Drivers of Organizational Resiliency’ and their focus areas were introduced. These are critical areas that must be included and continually assessed in order for any organization to be successful in their mission. However, it is important that each organization is contextually relevant; each organization is a component of a larger ecosystem that provides important services to the community and it is essential to have an accurate list of organizations within that ecosystem.

The first step of assessing organizational resilience is to prepare a list of all relevant organizations within the ‘community ecosystem’ as it is important to know how the services provided compliment and differ from the services provided by other organizations. Included in this list should be the organization name, point of contact, contact details, and organizational mission/vision statement. This list provides an opportunity for an organization to critically self-reflect, starting with their mission/vision statement.

An organization’s mission/vision statement formally explains to everyone in the organization why it is there, what it is doing and where it is going. It is critical not only for internal staff, but also for individuals external to the organization to be able to quickly and concisely understand what services an organization provides. By clarifying or developing an organization’s mission/vision statement, it helps ensure there is consistency within the organization about the overall purpose.

Once the external list is created and the mission/vision statement is discussed, the next step in assessing an organizations resilience is to further examine the context, except with specific focus on the internal context of the organization. *Organization-specific characteristics* exist within and across each organization and must be included within an organizational assessment. For example, staff and volunteer capacity varies and is critical to consider when making organizational policy decisions.

Take into consideration characteristics that are specific to your organization, such as:



Staff & Volunteer
Capacity



Training
Needs



Methods of
Service Delivery

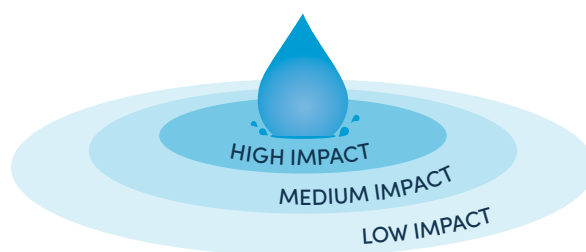


Transportation
Needs

Additionally, the *depth of impact* of a disruptive event varies across communities and within organizations. Depth of impact refers to the degree to which a disruptive event could impact the drivers of resilience and an organization’s ability to achieve their mission. Additionally, a disruptive event may impact the internal functioning of an organization and also have external impacts. It is possible that a disruptive event produces positive and/or negative outcomes and each will have a low, medium or high impact. An organization’s ability to assess these events enables preventative planning and policy to be developed to ensure long-term organizational resiliency and ultimately, enable organizations to provide **uninterrupted** and necessary services to their clients.

Furthermore, while disruptive events can present organizations with risks, for example around loss of a funding source, disruptive events can also present opportunities—for example recognition of a service area that an organization may be best qualified to deliver. During times of disruption, it is critical that organizations and organizational management are able to evaluate quickly where there are opportunities and where there are risks in order to respond in an effective and efficient manner. For each of the organizational characteristics that is developed, identifying whether it is a risk or an opportunity is an important step to being able to develop organizational resiliency.

Depth of impact refers to the degree a disruptive event could impact an organization’s ability to achieve their mission.



The table on the following page provides a list of the drivers of resilience and their related focus areas. The column for organizational characteristics is empty—it is critical that each organization tailors their resiliency framework to reflect their own realities and the community in which they exist. The depth of impact and evaluation (i.e. whether a risk or opportunity) are also empty; each organization must critically reflect on how a disruptive event might impact their service provision ability and whether that event may present a risk or an opportunity for the organization.

Resources

A how-to guide for completing an organizational resilience table and fillable Excel tables are available upon request. Please contact Joëlle at jlewis@perthhuron.unitedway.ca.



Double-click on the icon to the left for access to an Excel file with an editable organizational resilience table and organization list. Use the tabs along the bottom of the window to navigate between tables.

NOTE: For the best experience, select Enable Macros when prompted upon opening the file.

User Tips:

- Double-click cells to fill in “Yes”. Double-click to remove it.
- When the resilience table is complete, click the **Update** button in the top right corner (cell 2I)—this will automatically transfer relevant information to the Framework for Action table. Use the Update button to refresh any changes.

Organizational Resilience Table

	Focus Areas	Organizational Characteristics	Depth of Impact			Evaluation	
			Low	Med	High	Risk	Opportunity
ECONOMIC DRIVERS	Funding						
	Employment						
	Productivity						
	Growth						
	Communications						
	TBD						
	TOTAL						
SOCIAL DRIVERS	Service Provision						
	Knowledge Mobilization						
	Equity						
	Partnerships						
	Capacity						
	TBD						
	TOTAL						
GOVERNANCE DRIVERS	Board						
	Strategies						
	Community						
	Human Capital						
	Management [leadership]						
	TBD						
	TOTAL						
GRAND TOTAL							

Phase Three

Developing a Framework for Action— *A Resiliency Scale*

Once an organization has completed their organizational resilience table and external audit, they are ready to develop their Framework for Action. A Framework for Action is the final phase in the process of developing transformative resilience. The Framework for Action relies on the information collected in the previous phases to develop actionable outcomes and illuminate where on the scale of resiliency an organization is. In this final phase a durational scale is added (i.e. short, medium, and longer-term), enabling the organization to start focusing on critical areas identified in the previous phases as those with a high depth of impact, and includes opportunities and risks.

The Framework for Action is designed to inform an organization’s response planning. It is important to note that this is not the same as long-term or strategic plans. Rather, this framework is more flexible and able to be completed quickly—especially during times of disruption. This exercise will help an organization identify where they should focus their effort, both in terms of risks and opportunities. If the external audit responses or organizational characteristics are identified as a high depth of impact, an organization should concentrate their effort there. Outputs from this exercise should influence an organization’s long-term planning decisions and increase their long-term resiliency, their role in their community and their contribution to society.

Framework for Action Resiliency Scale

Organizational Characteristics	Evaluation (Risk or Opportunity)	Potential Actions									Anticipated Outcomes
		Short-term			Mid-term			Longer-term			
		Internal	External	Role & Task	Internal	External	Role & Task	Internal	External	Role & Task	



Resources

A how-to guide for completing a Framework for Action table and a fillable Excel table are available upon request. Please contact Joëlle at jlewis@perthhuron.unitedway.ca.



Double-click on the icon to the left for access to an Excel file with an editable Framework for Action table. Use the tabs along the bottom of the window to navigate between tables. **NOTE: For the best experience, select Enable Macros when prompted upon opening the file.**

User Tips:

- Double-click cells to fill in “Yes”. Double-click to remove it.
- High impact organizational characteristics and risk/opportunity data can be automatically transferred to this table. Click the **Update** button in the top right corner of the resilience table to import that information to the Framework for Action table. Use the Update button to refresh any changes.