

The Great Lakes Waterscape:

Assessing the needs of the Ontario water community



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Table of Contents

<u>Executive Summary</u>	1
<u>1.0 About the Assessment</u>	4
<u>2.0 Methods</u>	4
<u>3.0 Assumptions</u>	5
<u>4.0 Results</u>	5
4.1 Participants in the Needs Assessment	5
4.2 The Ontario Great Lakes Funding Community	6
4.3 Ontario Great Lakes Water Issues	7
4.4 The Value of Networking & Collaboration	8
4.5 What can be Achieved Together?	10
4.6 The Canadian and US Divide	11
4.7 Making the Most of Limited Resources	12
4.8 Reconnecting Policy With On-the-ground Work	14
4.9 Fostering Relationships Between Non-profits and Government	15
4.10 Missing... a Great Lakes Constituency	16
4.11 Bringing the Water Community Together	17
<u>5.0 Recommendations & Conclusions</u>	19
5.1 Recommendations	19
<i>1. Building a Cohesive Approach to Great Lakes Water Work</i>	19
<i>2. Increased Canadian and US Collaboration</i>	20
<i>3. Closing the Gap Between the Grassroots and Larger-scoped Non-profits</i>	20
<i>4. Strategic Approaches to Limited Capacity</i>	21
<i>5. Building and Finding Efficiencies in the Funding Community</i>	22
<i>6. Connecting Existing and New Dots to Build a Great Lakes Constituency</i>	23
5.2 Conclusions	24
<u>Appendix A – Examples of Networking and Capacity-building Organizations</u>	25
Working in the Ontario Great Lakes Basin	

Table of Figures

Figure 1: Non-profit participants in the online survey and interview	6
Figure 2: Funding organizations interviewed by type	6
Figure 3: Percentage of non-profits addressing Ontario Great Lakes water issues and funding organizations supporting those issues	7
Figure 4: Ontario Great Lakes water issues being addressed by 40% or more of non-profit groups	7
Figure 5: How non-profit groups value networking with other non-profit groups	8
Figure 6: How non-profit groups rate their ability to collaborate with other non-profit groups	9
Figure 7: How non-profit groups prioritize internally versus collaboratively	10
Figure 8: The funding community's perspective on whether they see clear overarching strategic direction for the Great Lakes water community	10
Figure 9: Non-profit groups knowledge of and collaboration with US groups	12
Figure 10: Overall capacity for non-profit groups	12
Figure 11: Non-profit skill level in a variety of capacity areas	13
Figure 12: Non-profit priorities for assistance in building capacity	13
Figure 13: Non-profit understanding of laws and policies versus their ability to develop and maintain relationships with politicians and key-decision makers	15
Figure 14: Non-profit skill level and benefit of assistance in relationship development and management with politicians and key decision makers	15
Figure 15: How non-profits rate their skill level and the benefit of assistance regarding communicating locally and more broadly	16
Figure 16: Benefit of a regional gathering versus national gathering according to non-profits	18

Executive Summary

The Ontario Great Lakes Need Assessment was an effort to explore how well the water community is working together, building on the recent national assessment documented in the report: “The Canadian Waterscape: Assessing the needs of Canada’s water leaders”. The current assessment was an opportunity to test the findings of the national assessment within the context of the Great Lakes, a unique freshwater region within the Canadian freshwater landscape.

The assessment was conducted by Freshwater Future and the Canadian Freshwater Alliance, with support from The Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation, Joyce Foundation, Tides Canada, and WindsorEssex Community Foundation.

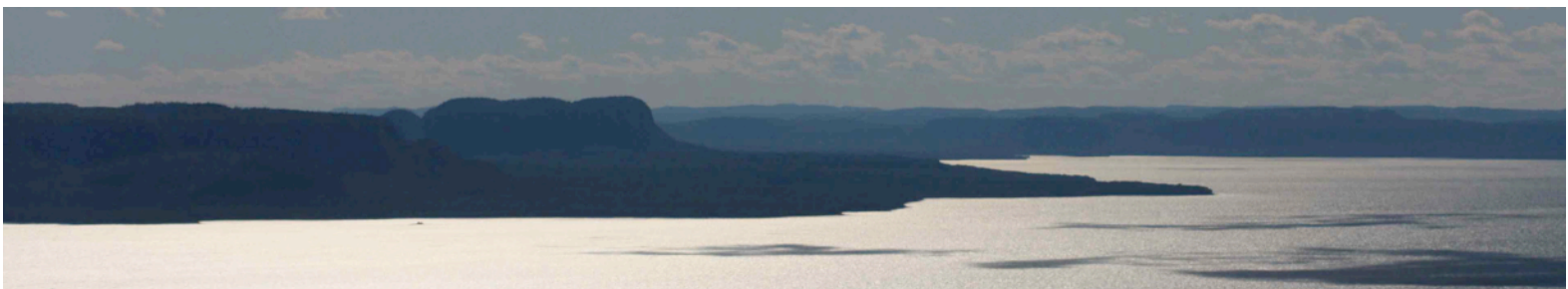
Five assumptions related to networking, collaboration, organizational capacity, government relations, public engagement, and cross border efforts framed the assessment. An online survey and interviews were used to hear from organizations that address Ontario Great Lakes water issues and from those who financially support Ontario Great Lakes water efforts.

A number of themes were revealed from the results of the survey and interviews. They include:

- The value of networking and collaboration
- Working towards collective priorities for the Great Lakes
- Canadian and US collaboration
- Limits to organizational capacity
- The role of grassroots groups in policy
- Building relationships with government
- Developing a Great Lakes constituency
- Coming together as a water community regionally and nationally

Key findings from the themes include the following:

- Time, funding and the complexity of the Great Lakes are recurring barriers that are not easily overcome.
- The disconnect between urban and rural communities is paralleled in the disconnect between grassroots groups and groups working at a larger scale. This disconnect is seen in a number of areas including networking, collaboration, policy, and public engagement.
- Personal relationships serve as the foundation for successful networking and collaboration. Relationships are currently limited between grassroots groups and larger groups as well as US and Canadian groups.
- Inequity in support and funding from government and private sources between the US and Canada is contributing to the lack of cross-border collaboration.
- The current piecemeal approach to addressing Great Lakes water issues is resulting in lack of clarity on whether real progress is being made on the health of the Great Lakes. Collective priorities will help to strengthen the Great Lakes water community by moving towards a cohesive and proactive approach.
- Existing coalition efforts in both Canada and the US have been valuable but tend to be reactive and issue-focused. Lack of sustained funding and leadership has contributed to this piecemeal and inefficient approach.
- Grassroots groups are struggling the most with organizational capacity when compared to other groups. Their priority is “doing” rather than “planning”. This is exacerbated by the fact that there are limited funding



opportunities for grassroots groups within the existing funding community.

- The exclusion of grassroots groups in the policy process is limiting the impact of policy on the ground.
- Public engagement tends to appeal to those that share the same values as environmental non-profit groups, neglecting a significant

portion of the larger public who do not consider themselves environmentalists. Efforts to reach out beyond the traditional environmental community are limited but a high priority for the funding community. This has an important role to play in building a Great Lakes constituency.

The report includes six recommendations intended to make progress on the highest priority areas while limiting the demands on stretched non-profit groups. They are summarized in the table below.

Recommendations	Challenges	Opportunities
<p>1. <u>Build a Cohesive Approach to Great Lakes Water Work</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a coalition focused on identifying collective priorities that engages the funding community and grassroots groups • Use a regional gathering to lay the ground work for a coalition that includes financial support for grassroots groups to participate • Use working groups to guide the implementation of priorities led by those with the greatest expertise • Create small-scale coalitions to build local networks to deal with priorities not reflected in basin-wide perspectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Piecemeal approach to Great Lakes water issues • Limited time, funding, and expertise • Inefficiencies related to a reactive approach to addressing issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cohesive approach to Great Lakes water work • Alignment of non-profit and funder priorities • Build on the experience of past and existing coalitions • Make the most of existing expertise
<p>2. <u>Increase Canadian and US Collaboration</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share successful experiences in Canadian and US collaboration to provide best practices for other non-profit groups • Use the knowledge of bi-national networking groups to suggest opportunities for successful cross-border collaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of knowledge around what US groups are doing • Lack of relationships with US groups • Complexity associated with the number of jurisdictions • Lack of capacity for collaboration within Canada let alone the US • Inequity in funding between Canada and the US 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High priority within the funding community • Supports a cohesive approach to Great Lakes water work • Supports the development of a Great Lakes constituency
<p>3. <u>Close the gap between grassroots groups and larger groups</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic networking and collaboration that builds personal relationships between grassroots and larger groups and allows for sharing of expertise • Reflect the grassroots in policy development by engaging them in the process from the start and including them in the implementation process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disconnect between grassroots groups and larger-scaled groups • Lack of on-the-ground perspective in policy development • Limited expertise related to areas like policy within grassroots groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability of network groups to create a bridge between grassroots groups and larger groups • Interest from groups with expertise to share it with others • Ability of grassroots groups to understand the impacts of policy on the ground

Recommendations	Challenges	Opportunities
<p>4. <u>Strategic Approach to Limited Capacity</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for non-profits to strengthen their capacity for sustainable funding and public engagement • Support, particularly for grassroots groups, to conduct strategic planning to make the most of limited funding • Find opportunities to reduce the administration burden for grassroots groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of capacity at all levels re. communication and fundraising • Limited funding available, particularly for grassroots groups • Lack of capacity at the grassroots level for administration and strategic planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability of strategic planning to help prioritize efforts • Groups in place to provide administrative support and strategic plan training
<p>5. <u>Build and Find Efficiencies in the Funding Community</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore the potential for funding organizations to streamline their process through a joint or pooled fund and/or increased networking and collaboration within the funding community • Promote and develop opportunities for grassroots funding • Promote opportunities to engage non-traditional environmental funders • Promote opportunities to expand the level of engagement within the community foundation network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited ability for existing Great Lakes funders to expand their support • Amount of time spent by non-profits seeking funds from a number of different funding organizations • Lack of grants to support grassroots groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interest from funding organizations in collective priorities • Existing opportunities for small-scale granting for grassroots groups • Growing interest in environmental funding from community foundations • Ability for water issues to connect with other sectors
<p>6. <u>Connect the dots to build a Great Lakes constituency</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Foster connections between existing pockets of support by, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ sharing communication expertise to build messages that resonate with a range of communities ○ taking advantage of the grassroots ability to engage local media ○ using existing networks to disseminate messages to a large number of groups • Build new pockets of support by, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ learning from groups that are successfully engaging diverse communities ○ learning from funding organizations that support other sectors on opportunities for partnerships with non-environmental groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Size of the Great Lakes and complexity of the public that live, work and recreate within the basin • Lack of collaboration on public engagement efforts • Lack of communication expertise, especially in grassroots groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing pockets of support based on the work of existing organizations • Communication expertise within some of the larger groups • Existing networks to disseminate messages widely • Potential for new pockets of support by engaging diverse communities • Support from the funding community for partnerships with non-environmental groups

1.0 About the Assessment

The purpose of this needs assessment is to identify strategies, tools, and techniques to improve the effectiveness of individual organizations and the Ontario Great Lakes non-profit water community as a whole.

The project builds on the recent national assessment that was designed to identify the experiences and needs of groups working on water issues across the country. The current assessment tested a number of the findings from the national assessment, "[The Canadian Waterscape: Assessing the needs of Canada's water leaders](#)", within the context of the Great lakes.

The Great Lakes basin represents the largest group of freshwater lakes in the world, holding 21% of the world's surface freshwater. As a result, it presents some unique challenges within the Canadian freshwater landscape. The Great Lakes basin includes significant ecological and human diversity - two countries, two provinces, eight states, some of the largest cities in North America, and countless rural communities combined with a diversity of ecological communities, species and habitats.

The results from this study are intended to serve a number of functions.

1. The results will help to inform the activities of networking and capacity building organizations supporting freshwater groups in the Ontario Great Lakes region. Although the study was co-sponsored by Freshwater Future (FF) and the Canadian Freshwater Alliance (CFA), the report is intended to inform and benefit all networking groups active in the region. Examples of networking and capacity-building groups that are currently active in the Ontario Great Lakes community, including FF and CFA, are provided in Appendix A.

2. The results are intended to help organizations working on water issues in the Ontario portion of the Great Lakes understand their work in the context of other groups, so they can work more effectively together to achieve mutual goals and interests.

3. The results provide the funding community with tangible ideas to inform their giving practices by:

- a. better understanding the current needs and gaps within the Ontario Great Lakes water community; and
- b. targeting their support in ways that will best support the community.

2.0 Methods

Information for this assessment was collected through a four-step process.

1. Review of previous needs assessments

A review was completed of the recent national assessment of the freshwater community in Canada and a regional assessment conducted for the Lake Winnipeg water community. Both were reviewed to inform the methodology for this assessment and to identify assumptions to test within the Ontario Great Lakes context.

2. Non-profit survey

A survey was developed and distributed to the non-profit freshwater community¹ that actively supports freshwater projects in the Ontario portion of the Great Lakes basin. Groups working at a variety of levels were invited to participate ranging from local stewardship groups to national and international groups that include Great Lakes water work in their programs or projects.

Prior to distribution, the survey questions and invitation list were reviewed by a working group of non-profits. The survey was an opportunity to collect general information about the non-profit water community on the Ontario side of the Great Lakes and to test the assumptions guiding the assessment.

The list of non-profits included those working in Ontario on Great Lakes water issues that were

¹ Non-profit groups are defined as non-government organizations working on water issues within the Ontario portion of the Great Lakes basin.

invited to participate in the national assessment as well as groups identified through existing networking groups like the Ontario Environment Network and Freshwater Future. Over 220 groups were sent a direct invitation to participate and networking groups were asked to circulate to their members.

3. Funding organization interviews

Interviews were conducted with 22 funding organizations that have provided financial support to water projects within the Ontario portion of the Great Lakes basin. The development of the participant list and interview questions was reviewed by a working group of funders.

The questions were developed in parallel to the survey questions for the non-profit community, including both the collection of general information and questions testing the assumptions guiding the assessment.

4. Non-profit interviews

Interviews were conducted with eight non-profit organizations, representing grassroots, Great Lakes wide (including those that work in both Canada and the United States), provincial and national levels. Interviews were conducted with those that completed the survey and those that did not. The interview questions were used to provide qualitative information to add to the quantitative data collected from the survey.

3.0 Assumptions

The needs assessment tested a number of assumptions identified by the recent national needs assessment summarized in “The Canadian Waterscape” report. The non-profit working group helped to determine which were most relevant within the context of the Great Lakes.

The assumptions tested were as follows:

- The need for increased networking and communication amongst groups, particularly between grassroots groups and those working at a regional (Great Lakes wide), provincial or national level.

- The need for increased capacity, including coordinated funding and skills development in areas such as effective communication and public engagement, particularly for grassroots groups.
- The need for increased coordination to identify priority actions for the Great Lakes and provide input on policies, acts and regulations impacting the Great Lakes.
- The need for increased public and governmental awareness of the importance of the Great Lakes at both a local and national scale.
- The need for increased networking between Great Lakes water groups and those active in other regions in both Canada and the United States.

4.0 Results

This section provides an overview of the non-profit and funding participants. It then summarizes the results from the survey and interviews around eight major themes:

- Networking and collaboration
- Collective priorities for the Great Lakes
- Canadian and US collaboration
- Limits to organizational capacity
- The role of grassroots groups in policy
- Relationships with government
- Developing a Great Lakes constituency
- Bringing the Great Lakes water community together

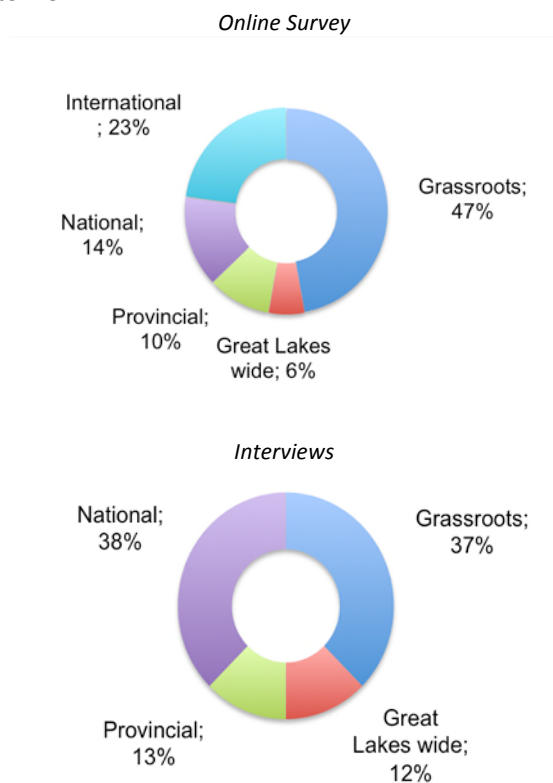
4.1 Participants in the Needs Assessment

Of the more than 220 organizations sent a direct or indirect invitation to participate in the survey, 71 partial or complete responses were received. Of the participants, grassroots² groups made up just under half of the respondents (47%) followed by

² Grassroots groups are defined by those that work at a local or community level.

international³ (23%), national (14%), provincial (10%) and Great Lakes wide (6%) groups⁴. Eight non-profit organizations were also interviewed by phone. Of those interviewees, grassroots and national groups made up 37.5% each, followed by provincial and Great Lakes wide groups, which made up 12.5% each.

Figure 1: Non-profit participants in the online survey and interview



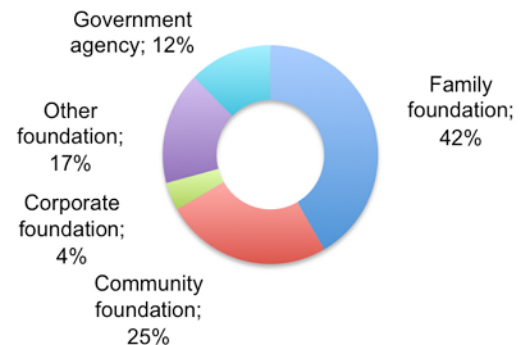
Twenty-two funding organizations that support Ontario Great Lakes water projects were interviewed including a variety of foundation types and government granting agencies in Canada and the United States (US). About half of the funding organizations interviewed indicated that their organizations place a priority on supporting Great Lakes water projects, often part of a broader

³ Includes groups addressing Great Lakes issues in the United States except those working exclusively within the Great Lakes region, which are included in the Great Lakes wide level.

⁴ Scope is based on the highest scope level identified by the respondent (e.g. provincial would include those that identified as provincial and/or regional and/or grassroots but not those that identified as national or international).

freshwater or environmental program. That being said, most do not have dedicated funds exclusively supporting the Great Lakes. Funds supporting Great Lakes water work often makes up a small percentage of the total funding budget of these funding organizations, ranging from a high of 27% to less than 1%.

Figure 2: Funding organizations interviewed by type



4.2 The Ontario Great Lakes Funding Community

The Ontario Great Lakes funding community represents a portion of the larger environmental funding community including funding organizations from Canada and the US. With the exception of community foundations and a few others, grants are typically geared towards larger-scaled organizations (those working at a Great Lakes wide, provincial, national or international level). While many indicated funding is generally project driven, most funding organizations said they would support efforts related to the themes covered in this study around networking, collaboration, public engagement, collective priorities, and a gathering, as long as they are framed in the context of the funding organization’s priority areas.

While there was strong support from the existing Ontario Great Lakes water funding community for increased funding, the fact that there is limited funding available for environmental work in general suggest that it an increase in Great Lakes funding is unlikely. In 2007, charitable gifts to environmental causes made up only 2% of the total charitable gifts in Canada⁵. The strong desire for

⁵ Source: Statistics Canada, *Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating, 2007*.

increased funding is echoed by the non-profit community, which listed funding as a primary barrier for many of the themes discussed further in this report.

4.3 Ontario Great Lakes Water Issues

Of the issues being addressed on the Ontario side of the Great Lakes, water quality is clearly a strong focus, particularly for grassroots groups. Seventy-seven percent of all groups surveyed indicated that they work on water quality, which increased to 90% for grassroots groups. The funding community also identified water quality as the most common issue they support; 81% of those interviewed indicated that they provide support for this type of work.

For non-profit groups working at a higher scale, policy was the most common issue that they work on (69%) followed by water quality (62%). Other common issues for the larger-scale organizations include water management/efficiency (52%) and land use/planning (51%).

Many other issues were identified beyond the list provided in the survey. The most popular were urban development, stormwater management, toxics and pollutants, and climate change.

In addition to environmental issues, issues related to capacity were also identified from comments and interviews, which are discussed further in the themes to follow. These include:

- lack of government commitment to Great Lakes water work in Canada;

Figure 3: Percentage of non-profits addressing Ontario Great Lakes water issues and funding organizations supporting those issues

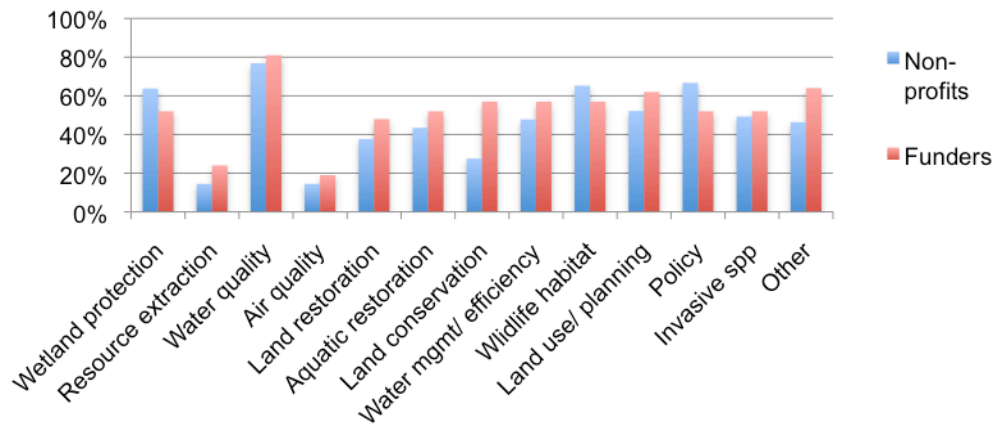
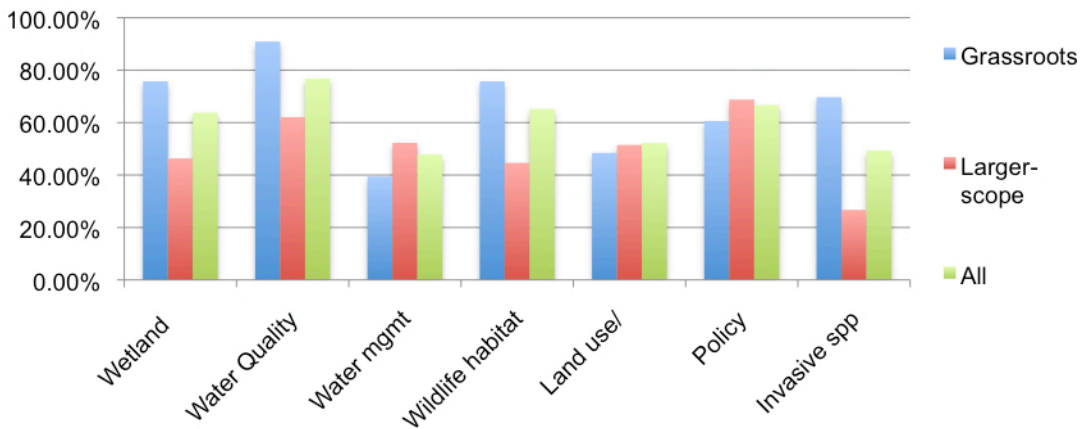


Figure 4: Ontario Great Lakes water issues being addressed by 40% or more of non-profit groups



- limited funding, particularly for the implementation of policy; and
- lack of public engagement⁶ and the disconnect between the public and the Great Lakes.

4.4 The Value of Networking & Collaboration

One of the assumptions tested by this study was the need for increased networking and communication amongst groups, particularly between grassroots groups and those working at higher levels. Both the non-profit and funding community agree that networking and collaboration is beneficial and more is needed. The question that arose is how to do that in a way that considers the limited capacity of non-profit groups and is inclusive of those working at all levels.

Networking, for the purposes of this study, is defined as: activities, formal or informal, that increase awareness about what other groups are doing and allows for regular communication. In contrast, collaboration is defined as: bringing one or more groups together to create tangible results towards a mutually agreed upon outcome(s). Despite the differences, the two are clearly linked, with strong networks supporting good quality collaboration.

Those surveyed indicated that existing efforts to

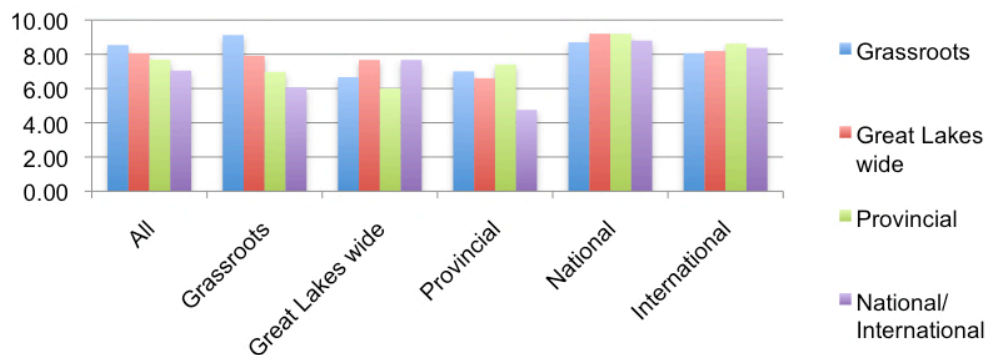
network and collaborate were only being done “adequately”. Comments from interviews also expressed concern that in some cases collaboration is being driven by funding organizations who often give preference to collaborative projects. Of the funding organizations interviewed, 65% give preference to proposals with two or more groups.

There was concern expressed from both the funding and non-profit community that for networking and collaboration to be valuable, there needs to be a clear purpose beyond just networking or collaborating for their own sake. Having a clear focus could include tackling common issues or helping to build capacity. This becomes particularly important given that time and staff capacity are major barriers to networking and collaborative efforts. This is especially prevalent for grassroots groups that typically have small staff or rely entirely on volunteers.

Despite those caveats, the non-profit and funding community clearly value networking. The non-profits surveyed rated networking as very valuable (average rating of 7.8 out of 10) across all levels and the funding community was almost unanimous in their support for increased networking. When asked what benefits networking provides, the responses were vast, with the most common being:

- awareness of what others are doing and subsequently avoiding duplication;

Figure 5: How non-profit groups value networking with other non-profit groups
1- not useful; 5 - somewhat useful; 10 - extremely useful



⁶ When using the term “public engagement”, it does not assume engagement of the entire public.

- creating a stronger and louder voice; and
- sharing and leaning on each others' expertise, often leading to collaboration.

The networking disconnect between grassroots and other groups

The assumption that there is minimal networking and collaboration between grassroots groups and larger-scoped groups was validated in the assessment. Grassroots groups rated networking with other grassroots groups and regional groups more valuable than networking with provincial, national, and international groups. Furthermore, grassroots groups rated themselves the lowest in their ability to collaborate on joint issues, except when it comes to collaborating with other grassroots groups.

When asked about barriers to vertical networking and collaboration the following challenges were identified:

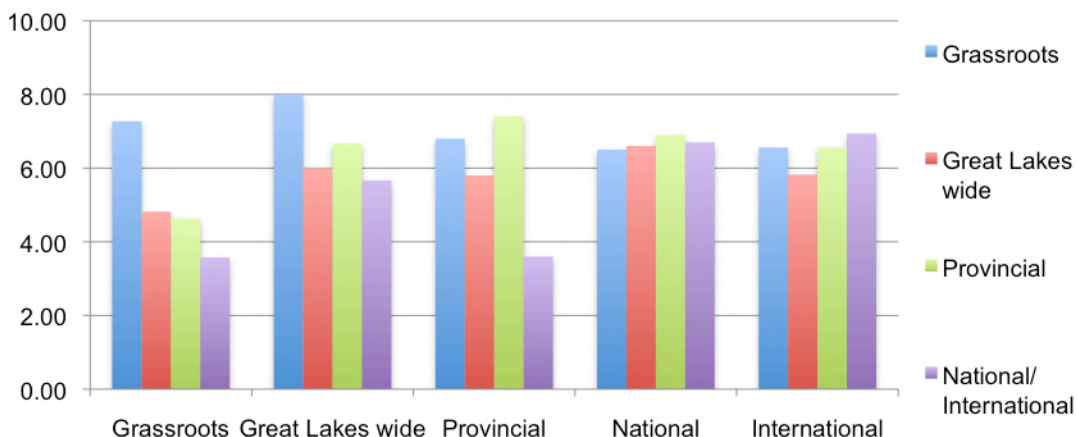
- time, the primary barrier for most people;
- differences in goals and priorities, particularly when groups work at different scales;
- inequity amongst the voices, with grassroots groups often feeling less valued or included;
- balancing “doing”, their real priority, with reaching out to others; and
- lack of consistent operational funding forcing local networking to take priority over networking with other groups.

Through interviews, non-profit groups identified personal contacts and relationships as the best way to achieve effective networking. These relationships allow people to reach out to others and ask for help when needed. Developing those relationships is a challenge when going beyond a group's own scope. Although technology was identified as a tool to address capacity limitations, concern was expressed that an increasing reliance on technology is preventing personal connections from establishing. This increased reliance limits the quality of the networking and in turn, the potential for good quality collaboration.

Participation in coalitions, symposiums, and similar types of gatherings that bring groups together to address issues or discuss policy were also identified as valuable, but difficult to attend if funds and staff or volunteers are stretched. Many also referenced the fact that coalitions often receive start-up money but that usually dries up after a year or two. Once that happens, the networks established are typically not maintained.

Given these challenges, it is not surprising that grassroots groups choose local networking and collaboration over other types. Most of the larger scoped groups are city-based whereas many of the grassroots groups are located in smaller cities, towns and rural areas, creating geographic divides. The limited capacity of grassroots groups makes it difficult, if not impossible for them to travel beyond their local community to attend meetings

Figure 6: How non-profit groups rate their ability to collaborate with other non-profit groups
 1 – my organization does this poorly; 10 – my organization is an expert in this area



and gatherings that often take place in urban centers. Reciprocally, the larger urban-based groups indicated limited funds to travel and spend face-to-face time with groups working in communities outside of urban centers.

The reality of limited funds also affects networking and collaboration by creating a competitive atmosphere. This limits the level of engagement and sharing of ideas and resources when the groups participating in networking or collaborative efforts are competing for the same funds. Furthermore, funding is often provided to a single group to lead a collaborative effort, which can create tension when other members have limited capacity to participate and are asked to volunteer their time in support of the collaborative effort.

4.5 What can be achieved together?

This study confirmed that increased coordination, moving beyond strategic networking and collaboration, is both needed and desired for the Great Lakes community. For the purpose of this study, increased coordination focused on setting priorities collectively, a concept that received almost unanimous support from the funding community. The non-profit community was less definitive in their support due to a number of barriers.

Currently, setting collective priorities is occurring but only to address issues as they arise and not in a cohesive or pro-active manner. For example, several non-profit groups referenced positive collaborative efforts related to the development of policy, including the Water Opportunities Act and the Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement. However, those collaborative efforts lacked an accountable organization with funding to sustain the collaboration beyond policy development. Furthermore, the collaborative efforts lacked the ability to connect with the grassroots, touched on further in section 4.8.

This speaks to a concern expressed from both the non-profit and funding community that Great Lakes issues are being addressed in a piecemeal manner.

The result of this piecemeal approach is lack of clarity around whether real progress is being made on the health of the Great Lakes. For many, that lack of clarity is motivation to work towards a more cohesive approach that mirrors the interconnectedness of the ecosystem they are trying to protect.

The non-profit community was asked how well they are currently prioritizing both internally and collectively. The survey results show that non-profit groups believe they are prioritizing collectively relatively well but slightly less than they prioritize internally. This is in stark contrast to the funding community where most of those interviewed indicated that they do not see clear overarching direction amongst groups working on Ontario Great Lakes water issues. This suggests that if collective priorities are in place, the funding community has not been involved in their development and they are not well understood.

Figure 7: How non-profit groups prioritize internally versus collaboratively (1 – my organization does this poorly; 10 – my organization is an expert in this area)

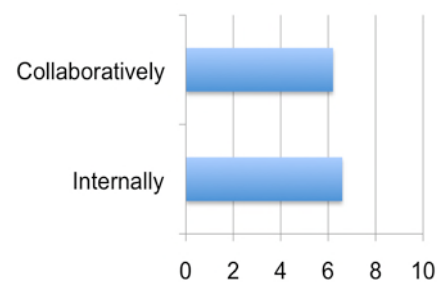
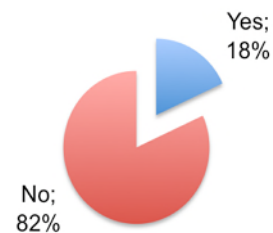


Figure 8: The funding community's perspective on whether they see clear overarching strategic direction for the Great Lakes water community



Organizations working at a larger scale tend to address the Great Lakes as an entire region. As a result, they were more likely to express an interest in collective prioritization when compared to grassroots groups who take a local approach.

Grassroots groups were more likely to engage in a collective prioritization effort if it was clear how those priorities met their local priorities.

Barriers to collective priorities

Capacity limits, a recurring theme throughout the assessment, was identified as a barrier to engaging grassroots groups in setting collective priorities. While some might question whether the grassroots perspective is required to develop collective priorities, excluding their on-the-ground perspective fosters the existing disconnect between efforts taken and seeing real progress in the health of the Great Lakes.

Not surprisingly, funding was identified as a primary barrier to achieving collective priorities. As is the case in networking and collaboration, participants in collective priority setting are often competing for limited funding. As discussed in section 4.4, this can create a competitive atmosphere and deters efforts to work together.

A critical element in addressing the funding barrier is including the funding community in the process of setting collective priorities. Without commitment from the funding community to financially support the implementation of collective priorities, many recognized that it is unlikely that the non-profit community will be in a position to address the priorities effectively.

Currently, funding organizations have different priorities and processes from one another. Non-profit groups must adjust how they present their proposal to appeal to those different priorities and processes. Given the limited funding available, many suggested that the priorities of the funding organizations would likely take precedent over

addressing collaborative priorities set by non-profit groups if they do not align.

In addition to funding, time was another barrier identified by groups that contributes to the lack of clear collective priorities. For those priorities to be effective, a critical mass of non-profit decision-makers must be involved including grassroots groups, as well as government agencies and academics. That requires a significant investment of time on a lot of people's part, taking them away from the work of their organization or agency. This is unrealistic for many organizations, especially the grassroots given how stretched they already are.

Finally, the complexity of the Great Lakes and consequently, the diversity of issues, regional variances, number of active groups, various jurisdictions, political systems, policies, regulations and governing bodies, was referenced as a major deterrent to achieving collective priorities. This challenge, more than any, speaks to the difficulty in establishing a strong Great Lakes constituency discussed in section 4.10.

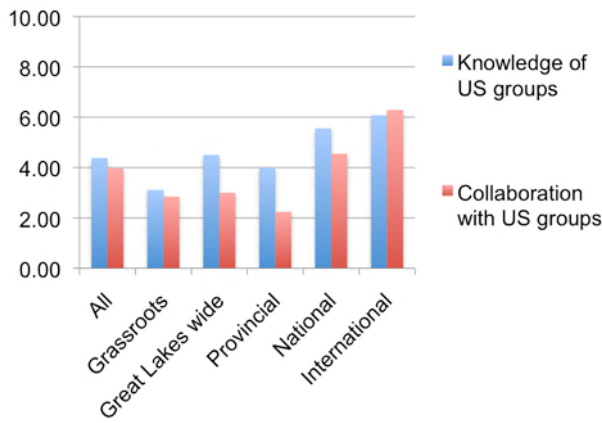
4.6 The Canadian and US divide

When it comes to working with US based groups, non-profits indicated that they have limited understanding of what US groups are doing and infrequently collaborate across the border. Although their level of knowledge and collaboration increased with the scale of the organization, the average rating was less than adequate across all scales. When asked how beneficial assistance would be for increasing knowledge and collaboration with US groups, the non-profit response was moderate. When probed further through interviews, many barriers were



identified that affect the desire of groups to invest in this area.

Figure 9: Non-profit groups’ knowledge of and collaboration with US groups (1 – my organization does this poorly; 10 – my organization is an expert in this area)



Similar to the funding community’s strong support for overarching goals for Great Lakes water work, they were unanimous in their desire to see increased cross-border collaboration. Although they do see some cross-border collaboration happening, funders felt more could be done. Suggestions included building on networking and collaborative efforts that are occurring within the US such as the Healing Our Waters (HOW) coalition. This coalition was also identified as an example of how a large number of groups can work together to coordinate priority setting. Other coalition examples that were suggested as opportunities to build upon in support of both cross-border collaboration and collective priorities include the Great Lakes Blueprint, the Blue Group, and Saving our Great Lakes.

Barriers to US and Canadian collaboration

Funding, as was the case for all themes, came up as a barrier to collaborating with US groups. In this case the funding barrier related to a difference in the funding available in the US when compared to Canada, including both government funding and private funding from foundations and individual donors. Groups felt this created unequal footing for collaborations to establish given a real or perceived notion that US groups are able to spend more time on “doing” compared to Canadian groups.

When it comes to reaching out to US based groups, time is also an issue. Groups indicated that they lack relationships with US groups, a critical factor identified for successful networking and collaboration referenced in section 4.4. Given that time is a limiting factor for effective networking and collaboration with Canadian groups, it is not surprising that there is even less time available for those activities to occur with US groups.

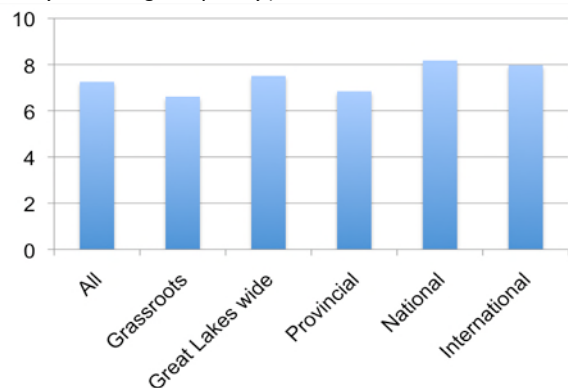
A final barrier, which was also identified in the case of collective priority setting, is the complexity of the various jurisdictions within the Great Lakes basin. As discussed in section 4.8, the level of understanding around policies and regulations varies substantially. As a result, it is unrealistic for all groups to be familiar with the ever-changing landscape represented by these many jurisdictions. This makes it difficult for groups in the US and Canada to work together. In addition, the policies and regulations that impact their work are so different, requiring different approaches to tackle what may otherwise be similar issues.

4.7 Making the Most of Limited Resources

Sufficient organizational capacity is what all non-profit organizations strive for and something that is difficult to attain. As a result, for most organizations, they must determine how to make the most of limited resources.

The results from the survey indicate that overall capacity is adequate or just above adequate, with grassroots groups rating the lowest amongst the various scopes.

Figure 10: Overall capacity for non-profit groups (1 – low capacity; 10 – high capacity)



When asked about their skill level for specific capacity areas, non-profits rated fundraising and communication amongst the lowest along with connecting with non-environmental groups.

Funding organizations aligned closely with the non-profits' perspective. Fifty-five percent of those interviewed indicated that sustainable funding and public communication/engagement are the highest priorities for building non-profit capacity. The funding community put a special emphasis on public engagement over general communications including a need for better dissemination of information and more creative campaigns to engage the public.

Partnerships between environmental and non-environmental groups also ranked as a high priority for funding organizations with 45% indicating they would provide support for this area. In contrast, connecting with non-environmental groups was

neither a high nor low priority for non-profits when asked about priorities for increased capacity support. This area is further explored in section 4.10.

When comparing the skill level of non-profits in the various capacity areas with their priorities for increased capacity support they did not always align. For example, despite the fact that grassroots groups identified organizational administration areas such as strategic planning, issue strategy, and fiscal management as weaker than larger organizations, these areas are not a high priority for assistance when compared to all other capacity areas. Their priorities aligned closely with other groups, who ranked fundraising, access to information and communications as the highest priorities for assistance.

This difference suggests that grassroots groups are less likely to seek support for core organizational

Figure 11: Non-profit skill level in a variety of capacity areas
 1 – my organization does this poorly; 10 – my organization is an expert in this area

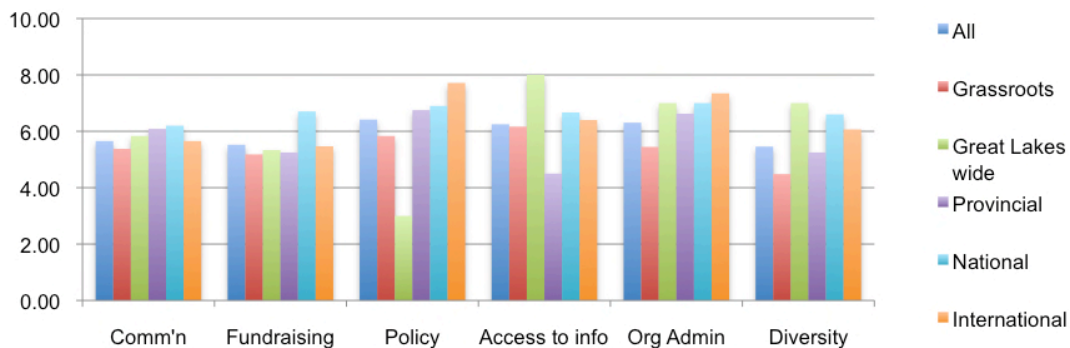
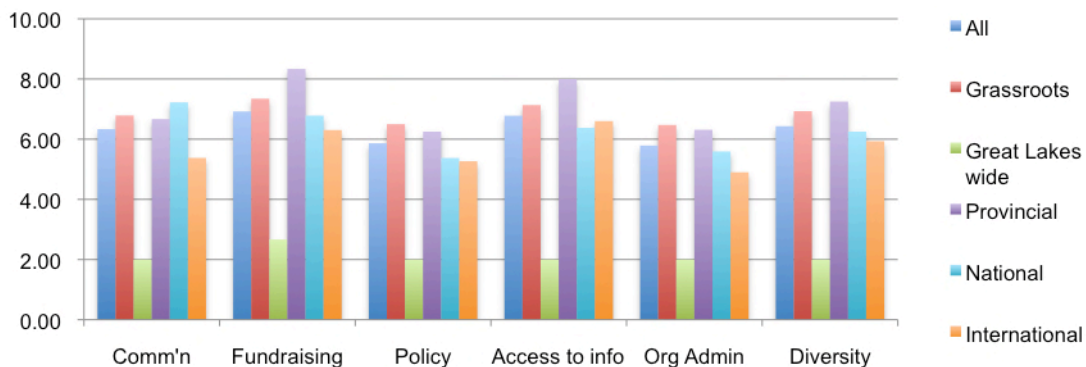


Figure 12: Non-profit priorities for assistance in building capacity
 1 – not useful, 10 – very useful



needs, even if they are struggling in this area. Furthermore, these capacity areas were also rated the lowest priority for funding organizations to support suggesting a gap in capacity support for grassroots groups.

For groups working at all levels, a common issue related to capacity was the amount of time spent looking for funding. This takes time away from other priority areas such as public engagement and communication further confirmed by the fact that time is a common barrier cited in other themes.

Larger groups identified strategic planning as a tool to make efficient use of their time, focusing on what is achievable in the context of the funds available. Strategic planning was an area that grassroots groups rated lowest in suggesting that they are less likely to be strategic around how to use their limited funding, contributing further to their limited capacity.

When non-profit groups were asked how capacity issues could be addressed, the following ideas were most common:

- collaborations and coalitions to avoid duplication and share expertise;
- sharing of administration needs and costs or working with models such as Tides Canada Initiatives; and
- longer-term funding to reduce the burden on raising funds annually.

4.8 Reconnecting Policy With On-the-ground Work

Working in partnership with the government, particularly when it comes to setting policies and regulations that impact the Great Lakes, continues to be a priority for both the non-profit and funding community. While a variety of groups need to be engaged, efficiencies can be achieved by having those with expertise take a leadership role so long as they incorporate the perspectives of grassroots groups. The grassroots perspective was identified as a major gap in past policy development initiatives, affecting the ability of policy to result in positive impacts on the ground.

The greatest level of understanding of policies, acts and regulations typically corresponds with the scope of the organization; international groups generally have the greatest level of understanding while grassroots and Great Lakes wide groups generally have the lowest.

For grassroots organizations, their highest level of understanding is with those policies, acts, and regulations that affect the level of scope at which they work. This corresponds with their ability to access and develop relationships with politicians and key decision-makers working at those levels.

Tools to support policy understanding

When asked about how non-profit groups access information related to policy and its impact on their work, a number of tools were explored and identified.

Roundtables that bring groups together to discuss specific policies or the relationship between policies were seen as a useful tool to engage the non-profit community. A caveat to this is the need to address a number of variables to ensure their effectiveness. Those variables include:

- transparency from the government agencies involved;
- accessibility to a range of groups and perspectives, particularly grassroots;
- good facilitation;
- clear goals; and
- buy-in from those responsible for making the final decisions.

Technology was also identified as a useful tool by many including sites such as the Environmental Registry in Ontario (EBR) and e-Laws. Participating in advisory committees was also considered valuable. The challenge is that those opportunities are by invitation only and typically do not include groups that do not have a policy focus.

Given the complexity and ever-changing landscape of Great Lakes policy and regulation, it is unrealistic to expect all groups to have the expertise in-house to stay up to speed. As a result, the key is ensuring those with the expertise are accessible to others who have knowledge that can contribute to policy

development and implementation. For groups lacking policy expertise, knowing which groups are focused on policy and ensuring open lines of communication including access to experts, briefings and other similar information, was identified as being the most helpful.

4.9 Fostering Relationships Between Non-profits and Government

When it comes to building political awareness to ensure that politicians and key-decision makers in government are familiar with the work of non-profits, groups tend to develop and build relationships with municipal politicians and key-decision makers best, followed by provincial and then federal politicians and key decision-makers.

Not surprisingly, at the municipal and provincial level, non-profit groups working at those levels are best at forming those relationships given the proximity of their work. At the federal level all organizations are struggling. Despite that, assistance in developing and maintaining relationships at all levels of government is considered very useful by all organizations.

For those groups that are effective in developing and maintaining relationships with politicians and key-decision makers, they all acknowledged the need to keep those relationships positive and to focus on what is achievable rather than taking a combative approach. Many also acknowledged the need to appeal to what motivates politicians to act, in particular voters and the economy. This can be achieved by ensuring that their work is framed in a

Figure 13: Non-profit understanding of laws and policies versus their ability to develop and maintain relationships with politicians and key-decision makers

1 – my organization does this poorly; 10 – my organization is an expert in this area

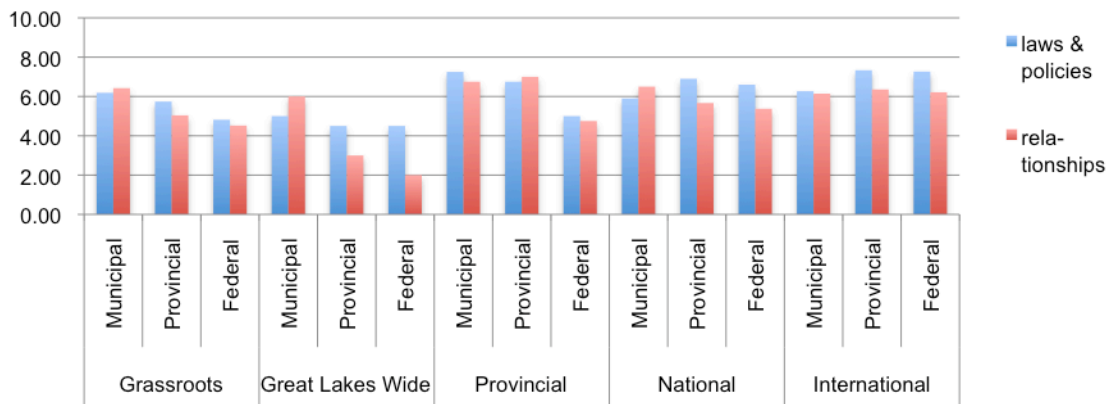
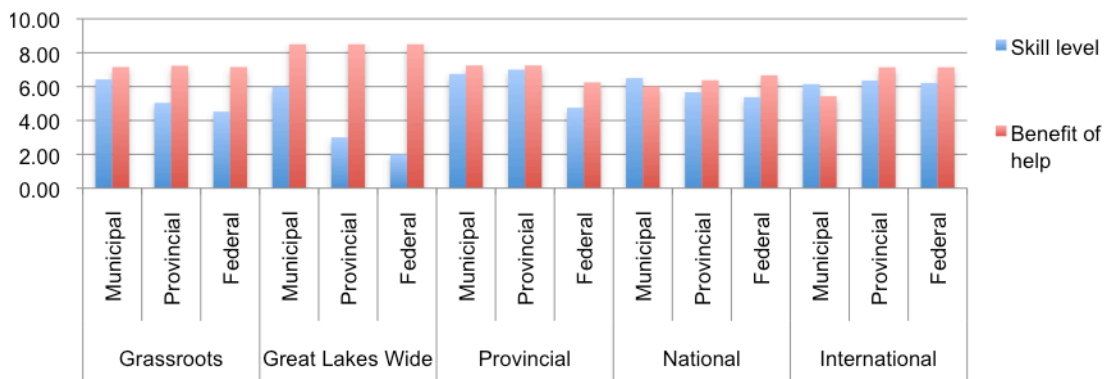


Figure 14: Non-profit skill level and benefit of assistance in relationships with politicians and key decision makers

1 – my organization does this poorly/ not useful; 10 – my organization is an expert in this area/ extremely useful



way that clearly identifies the implications to the public and the economy and engaging groups like landowner associations who effectively mobilize their local community.

The inability of non-profits to appeal to the public, discussed further in section 4.10, has significant implications on attracting support from government at a variety of levels, particularly provincial and federal.

Barriers to government relationships

Non-profit groups identified many barriers that are preventing relationships from being established or maintained. The most common include,

- regular turnover of both politicians and staff;
- potential conflicts of interests;
- access to contacts;
- a sense that there is little transparency in government;
- a sense that there is little interest from the government in engaging non-profits;
- lack of training on how best to approach politicians or key decision-makers; and
- the siloed nature of government and number of agencies involved in water issues.

4.10 Missing... a Great Lakes Constituency.

Despite challenges related to capacity for public awareness and engagement, both remain a high

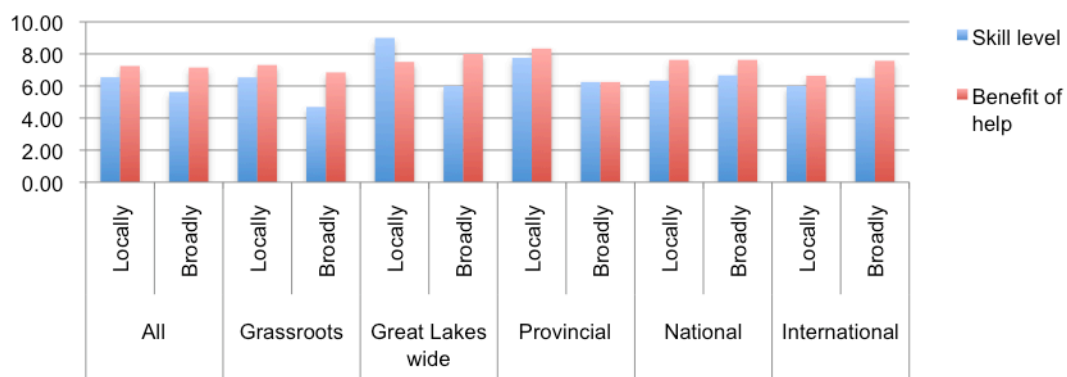
priority for the non-profit and funding community. Non-profit groups felt they were “good” at communicating with their local communities but their skill level decreased slightly when asked about communicating more broadly. On average, broad communication was only considered “adequate”. The exceptions to this were national and international level organizations. Their larger scope means there is little, if any distinction between local and broad communication.

Assistance for local and broad communication was rated very useful by all non-profit groups. This matches the results in section 4.7 that indicate assistance in building capacity for communication is important for all levels of scope.

The issue approach

Through the interview process, groups indicated that public engagement tends to occur on an issue-by-issue basis, also recognized by the funding community. Non-profit groups struggle to find time and expertise to engage the public effectively and consistently, especially given the size and complexity of the people living, working and recreating in the basin. This issue-by-issue approach matches the approach taken by the non-profit community around networking, collaboration and collective priority setting described in sections 4.4 and 4.5.

Figure 15: How non-profits rate their skill level and the benefit of assistance for local and broad communication
 1 – my organization does this poorly/not useful; 10 – my organization is an expert in this area/extremely useful



On a number of occasions both non-profit and funding organizations expressed concern regarding the lack of a Great Lakes constituency and its implications. Many groups indicated that they struggle with how to engage people beyond the environmental community. This remains true despite the fact that water is recognized by many as an issue that has the ability to engage a broad range of people and sectors because of its critical role in areas such as health and poverty.

Barriers to the Great Lakes Constituency

So why doesn't a Great Lakes constituency exist?

Lack of communications expertise was cited as a challenge. Existing efforts to communicate tend to appeal to those that share the same environmental values, neglecting a significant portion of the larger public that does not consider themselves environmentalists. Reacting to a specific issue or crisis was one example where environmental groups have been successful in engaging a broader audience but many found that level of engagement fell off when the issue or crisis dissipated.

When asked about how well non-profits connect with groups outside of the environmental community and the value of assistance in that area, the results were mixed. In contrast, 45% of the funding organizations interviewed indicated an interest in supporting partnerships between environmental and non-environmental groups, rated second highest, behind public engagement and sustainable funding.

When probed further through interviews, about half of the non-profits indicated they are actively attempting to engage diverse communities, including a variety of cultures, First Nations, youth, and other sectors. Those non-profits that are not currently engaging diverse communities are interested in doing so. Lack of engagement is often related to uncertainty on how engaging diverse communities will benefit priorities. As a result, making progress on specific outcomes takes precedent.

In addition, many groups struggle to engage diverse audiences because their own organizations

are not diverse. Without personal connections or relationships with other communities or groups, non-profits are not sure how to begin. The siloed nature of the non-profit community contributes to this challenge, making it difficult to bridge different sectors like social justice, health, and the arts, even though water is often relevant to their priorities.

Another challenge in creating a Great Lakes constituency is that the groups with the greatest capacity for communications tend to be urban-based. This leads to a disconnect with rural communities in the Great Lakes basin. At least one group indicated that they do partner with locally-based groups to help disseminate messages to those communities. However, challenges in connecting grassroots groups with larger groups in areas like networking and collaboration suggests that partnerships for the purposes of communication rarely exist. Furthermore, limits to time and funding often prevent groups focused in one community from visiting other communities to hear their unique perspective so it can be reflected in messages to various audiences.

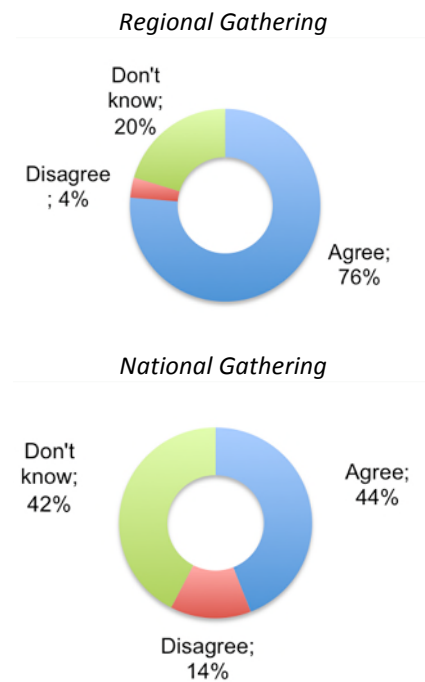
4.11 Bringing the Water Community Together

The desire for increased networking and collaboration combined with strong interest in a cohesive approach suggests that the Great Lakes water community needs to find ways to come together.

In the "Canadian Waterscape" report one of the major findings was strong support for a national gathering of freshwater groups to bring the Canadian water community together.

To explore that within the Great Lakes context, both the non-profit and funding community were asked about the benefit of a Great Lakes wide and national gathering. For the non-profit community, there was a clear benefit to a regional gathering, with 76% of those surveyed responding favourably. When asked about the benefit of a national gathering there was less certainty with 44% seeing a benefit and 42% uncertain of the benefit.

Figure 16: Benefit of a regional gathering versus national gathering according to non-profits



Funding organizations also responded favorably to a gathering with 81% expressing support so long as it focused on capacity-building and action. One caveat was ensuring that grassroots groups are able to participate.

Similar to the non-profit community, some funding organizations saw greater value in a regional gathering over a national gathering. Funding organizations based in the US identified existing conferences and webinars to connect with that are already underway such as HOW, Great Lakes week, and River Rally.

To understand the preference for a regional gathering over a national gathering, interviews with non-profit groups asked whether they agreed with the findings in the survey and if so why. There continued to be greater interest in a Great Lakes gathering over a national gathering. This was due to a desire to focus on regional issues where there is more synergy and greater potential to make significant progress. Groups interviewed also shared the concerns of the funding community around the ability for organizations to attend, particularly if it was a national gathering given the costs associated with travel.

That being said, several organizations saw a benefit to both gatherings in that they serve different purposes. A national gathering was seen as an opportunity to develop a unified voice on national water issues and policies such as the Fisheries Act.

There were a number of suggestions from the non-profit community on workshops of interest to be addressed at a potential gathering. The most popular suggestions include:

- Issue-based workshops to share information and build collaborative strategies (e.g. climate change, invasive species, etc.)
- Access to and sharing of science and experts
- Participating in and engaging the public around policy development
- Fundraising including membership development and collaborative funding
- Sharing of staff resources
- Public engagement and communication.

5.0 Recommendations & Conclusions

5.1 Recommendations

Based on the results outlined above, six recommendations have been identified. These recommendations are aimed at working towards a more cohesive Great Lakes water community that can achieve real progress on the diverse and complex issues facing the basin.

1. Build a Cohesive Approach to Great Lakes Water Work

Building a cohesive Great Lakes water community requires a concerted effort on behalf of the non-profit and funding community to function more like the Great Lakes ecosystem they are trying to protect.

The issue-by-issue approach to addressing Great Lakes water work has struggled to successfully address the challenges facing the Great Lakes basin. This approach makes inefficient use of limited funds and people available to do the work. Many non-profit and funding organizations spoke to the success of coalition efforts related to policy development in Canada and the HOW coalition in the US. While those efforts have largely focused around a specific issue, they have resulted in additional benefits contributing to a more cohesive community.

It is recommended that the non-profit and funding communities consider a coalition that takes a broader approach by setting collective priorities for the Great Lakes water community. In addition to bringing the community together to identify mutual areas of concern and interest, it may also support efficient responses to emerging issues and opportunities as they arise. A regional gathering can play a role in laying the ground-work for building such a coalition.

Three areas are key to building and sustaining a successful coalition.

A. Participation from the funding community

Ensuring that the funding community is an active participant in the process is critical to a successful coalition. The funding community needs to be invested in collective priorities so that they are in a position to provide financial support for their implementation.

B. Participation from the grassroots community

To see the impact of the collective priorities on the ground, the grassroots perspective must be included from the start. For grassroots participation to occur, financial support must be provided given their limited funding and staff capacity.

Networking groups⁷ that work closely with the grassroots can also assist by identifying which groups are in the best position to participate given their alignment with the priorities. Where it is impractical to have direct grassroots participation, networking groups can help represent the grassroots perspective to ensure it is included in the decision-making process.

C. Limit the capacity needs of the coalition itself

Given that organizations are already stretched, the coalition needs to provide a direct benefit to the organizations participating by supporting their work rather than just adding to their workload. The coalition must also remain lean in its capacity needs to avoid taking significant time and funding away from the groups participating.

Working groups are recommended to assist in this regard. These working groups would take a leadership role in determining how best to address and oversee the implementation of individual priorities. They could be led or co-led by those with the greatest expertise, who are most likely to see the greatest benefit to their participation.

Finally, for issues that are not reflected in the basin-wide priorities, networking groups can support collective approaches on a smaller scale.

⁷ See Appendix A for examples of networking groups.

For example, issues that affect a local region within the Great Lakes such as a new development or toxic spill that may not affect the entire Great Lakes basin can still benefit from a coordinated approach. Networking groups can bring groups together that are impacted by these smaller-scale issues to foster increased capacity through strong local networks and collaborations.

2. Increase Canadian and US Collaboration

Cross-border collaboration is currently limited due to the lack of personal relationships between groups working in Canada and the US and the complexity associated with the various jurisdictions. Despite these barriers, cross-border collaboration remains a high priority for the funding community and key to building a cohesive approach to Great Lakes water efforts.

Groups that are currently effective at cross-border collaboration can encourage others to explore new opportunities. By sharing their experiences with others they can provide tips and tools for groups interested in moving forward with cross-border collaboration.

Bi-national networking groups that serve groups working on both sides of the border can also play an important role in fostering these connections. Being aware of what groups are doing allows bi-national networking groups to suggest the most likely opportunities for successful cross-border collaboration. This reduces the time associated with understanding what groups on the other side of the border are doing by determining how well their issues and challenges align.

3. Close the Gap Between the Grassroots and Larger-scoped Non-profits

Key to a cohesive Great Lakes water community is bridging the gap that exists between grassroots groups functioning at the local level and larger-scoped groups that tend to be urban-based with greater capacity and expertise. This gap was identified around a number of themes. The areas where specific bridging efforts are recommended are discussed below.

A. Strategic Networking and Collaboration

It is clear that there are more issues and challenges than can possibly be addressed by individual groups. When combined with the reality of limited funding and time, barriers to all themes discussed in this report, efficiencies achieved through networking, collaboration, and sharing of resources and information becomes essential.

Two factors were identified from the assessment that have a significant impact on the quality of networking and collaboration.

1. Groups have little capacity to address their core activities leaving even less time to coordinate their efforts with others, except where it contributes to short-term goals on specific issues.

2. Strategic networking and collaboration requires strong personal relationships. Having these relationships in place makes it possible for groups to efficiently connect with one another to share expertise and knowledge.

Given the limited capacity for networking and collaboration and the need for strong personal relationships to be in place, current efforts typically occur between groups working in close geographic proximity. This fosters a disconnect between grassroots groups, which are typically rural or small community-based, and larger groups, which are typically urban-based.

Groups working at all levels can contribute to efforts towards more strategic networking and collaboration.

For grassroots groups, support is necessary to allow them to invest time in developing relationships with larger groups. Networking opportunities such as gatherings, workshops and meetings that explore specific issues or build capacity should pay special attention to ensuring balanced participation from the grassroots community and those working at a larger scale. In addition, efforts should be made to host a portion of those events outside of urban centers to make it more accessible for grassroots groups to participate. Funding

organizations can also assist by including financial support for grassroots participation in grant requests associated with these types of gatherings.

A key component of strategic networking and collaboration is understanding the distinct roles and expertise of groups to determine the best opportunities for exchange. The survey indicated that larger groups tend to have greater expertise in areas such as policy when compared to grassroots groups. Given the challenges in keeping current with policy and other areas that require expertise in house, support is needed for larger groups so they can share their expertise efficiently with others.

Finally, organizations that focus on supporting networking and collaboration are in a unique position to foster connections between grassroots and larger groups. Their focus allows them to be held accountable for ensuring that networking happens and happens with a purpose. Ways in which networking-focused groups can help include:

- Recommending potential networking and collaborative opportunities for grassroots groups and supporting their participation.
- Representing grassroots groups in networking or collaboration opportunities where grassroots participation is not possible including passing on information related to those opportunities so the grassroots can remain current and feel engaged in the outcomes.
- Supporting efforts to share expertise between grassroots and larger groups in an efficient way.

B. Reflect the grassroots in policy development

A critical omission in policy development efforts is the lack of incorporating the impact and effectiveness of policies on the ground, including how they are implemented and monitored. To date, there has been minimal participation by the grassroots community in the policy development process despite the fact that they are in the best position to understand the impact of policy on the ground. Furthermore, grassroots groups can often provide creative solutions based on practical experience. Without their support and buy-in to

both the design and development of policy, the ability of policy to be effective comes into question.

To date, there has been little funding to sustain collaborations related to policy beyond the passing of legislation. This results in little attention and effort around monitoring the impact of policy and whether implementation is occurring as intended. Including grassroots groups early in the process will help to bring more attention to the implementation piece. In addition, grassroots groups can play an important role in monitoring the effectiveness of policies by serving as an “early warning system”, providing updates or alerts to groups or agencies on whether they are seeing positive or negative change.

Given the number of grassroots groups and their limited capacity, it is unrealistic to get all of their participation in policy development. Network-focused groups can assist by identifying grassroots groups that are in a position to best contribute to the policy process and/or participating themselves to represent the voice of the grassroots when they cannot be at the table themselves.

4. Strategic Approach to Limited Capacity

Capacity limitations are a reality in the non-profit community and the Great Lakes water community is no exception. Despite that, strategic efforts can be made to help reduce the impact of those capacity limitations. Three recommendations related to strategic approaches to capacity are outlined below.

A. Capacity support & training for fundraising and communications.

All non-profit organizations, regardless of what scale they work at, struggle with capacity in areas related to fundraising and communications. The funding community also identified these areas as priorities for non-profit capacity building, specifically sustainable funding and public engagement.

Given the impact fundraising and communications have on the ability of non-profit groups to address the themes covered in this report, assistance in

these areas needs to become a higher priority for building organizational capacity.

Both funding organizations and non-profits focused on capacity-building have a role to play in ensuring these areas are given particular attention including financial support and training. In doing so, they contribute to other recommendations including 5.6, building a Great Lakes constituency.

B. Strategic planning to prioritize efforts

The funding limitations within the existing Great Lakes funding community are not likely to change in the near future. Non-profit organizations can help to make the most of the funding that is available by incorporating strategic planning and good fiscal management in their work. These types of investments help groups understand what can realistically be achieved with the funding available.

In many cases, larger-scoped groups are beginning to achieve this well, while grassroots groups continue to struggle. Grassroots groups ranked themselves the lowest in their skills in fiscal management, strategic planning, issue strategies, and technology. Despite that, these areas were not high priorities for them when it comes to capacity support compared to other areas such as fundraising and communication. Funding and capacity-building organizations can assist by encouraging grassroots groups to make these a priority by providing both financial and training support.

C. Reduce the administration burden for grassroots groups

Finding opportunities to share administration needs with others, particularly for grassroots groups, can reduce the burden associated with areas such as fiscal management. These types of efforts should be encouraged as well as programs and groups such as Tides Canada Initiatives who provide assistance in administration for new initiatives.

5. *Build and Find Efficiencies in the Funding Community*

Funding was identified as a barrier in all of the themes explored in this study. Despite funding support for Great Lakes water issues from existing foundations and agencies, there is a strong desire to build the funding community. The challenge is there are few opportunities to expand the funding available from existing organizations.

Three recommendations have been identified to help find efficiencies and build the Great Lakes funding community.

A. Find efficiencies in the existing funding community

Several of the funding organizations interviewed suggested exploring the development of a joint or pooled fund. This would allow non-profit organizations to avoid submitting multiple requests and reports to a number of funding organizations, each with their own priorities and processes. This recommendation aligns with recommendation 1, which suggests collective priority setting that incorporates the perspectives of the funding community. Reducing the time spent seeking funds by non-profit groups frees up time, which can then be used to support priority areas for both non-profits and funders such as public engagement.

The challenge is balancing the individual interests of funding organizations with collective priorities. Increased coordination within the funding community could help by identifying which funding organizations are in the best position to support collective priorities based on how those collective priorities align with their own priorities.

If a joint or pooled fund is not possible, there are other opportunities to create efficiencies. Examples include:

- Foundations that support similar areas can work more closely together to align their process for submitting proposals and receiving reports on progress.
- Funding organizations can pass on applications to other funding organizations that they think

may be interested in providing support for projects they have received.

Granting programs that focus on small grants to many grassroots groups can also increase efficiency. Grassroots groups often do not have access to foundation or agency grants. Exceptions to that include community foundations, Small Change Fund, Tides Canada, Freshwater Future, community foundations and the HOW coalition. These groups help to reduce the burden on larger funders who are not in a position to administer many small grants while streamlining the process for grassroots groups looking for funding opportunities at a local scale. Support for these opportunities should be encouraged and expanded.

B. Expand the funding community

Given that existing funding organizations have limited ability to expand their own support, two opportunities have been identified to expand the Great Lakes water funding community from other sources.

i. Reach out to funders that support other charitable sectors.

Water, more than many other environmental issues, has the ability to appeal to a broad range of sectors including health, social justice, and arts and culture.

Existing Great Lakes funders can assist in expanding the funding available by exploring opportunities for funding partnerships with colleagues within their own foundations or by reaching out to other funding organizations. These types of partnerships not only expand the funding available but also help reach out to diverse communities discussed further in recommendation 5.6.

ii. Engage the community foundation network.

Further expansion of the Great Lakes water funding community is also possible by working with the community foundation network. This network represents 50 communities in Ontario. As discussed above, this opportunity is especially valuable for grassroots groups that work at a community level where community foundations are distributing

their funds. Gaining community foundation support could be achieved in two ways.

- Community foundations that currently support Great Lakes water projects can increase the profile of Great Lakes water work by promoting the projects they have supported and encouraging others to support similar projects in their own community.
- A partnership could be formed between community foundations and a network-focused non-profit that helps build relationships between community foundations and grassroots groups that work in the same communities.

C. Build a cross-border funding community

Finally, inequity in funding available in the US versus Canada was identified by both the funding and non-profit community as a concern. There was particular concern related to the significant difference in the level of government support between Canada and the US.

Funding support that includes both sides of the border, including government agencies, is critical for a more cohesive approach to Great Lakes water work. It also supports increased Canadian and US collaboration discussed in recommendation 3.

6. Connect Existing and New Dots to Build a Great Lakes Constituency

The lack of a Great Lakes constituency has far reaching implications. This is especially true when it comes to increasing public and government support for the Great Lakes. Public engagement is an area that all groups struggle with due to lack of expertise and time. In addition, the sheer size and complexity of those living, working and recreating in the Great Lakes basin, makes public engagement difficult. As a result, engaging the entire Great Lakes public is not realistic. There are however opportunities to build a constituency by connecting existing, emerging, and new pockets of support with a focus on targeting specific audiences.

A. Connect the existing dots

When you consider the impact of joining the communication efforts of all of the groups successfully engaging their local communities, the concept of a Great Lakes constituency begins to emerge. The challenge lies in the current disconnect between grassroots groups and larger groups. This disconnect prevents collaboration around public communication and engagement from occurring.

Groups working at all levels can assist in breaking down the barriers that contribute to the lack of a Great Lakes constituency in the following ways:

- i. Groups with capacity and expertise in communication can assist by sharing their expertise with others in an effort to build strong messages that appeal to both urban and rural communities.
- ii. Grassroots groups, given their ability to engage traditional media, can ensure those messages get out to local communities and not just urban centers.
- iii. Networking focused groups can ensure the connections are occurring by disseminating the messages to their network to reach the broadest audience possible.

The key is finding a consistent message that appeals to a range of communities so groups can commit to delivering the messages to their own community. Marketing tools such as polling and focus groups along with lessons learned from coalitions like HOW can assist in that regard.

B. Build new dots

Engaging a greater diversity of communities is the best opportunity to build emerging and new pockets of support within the Great Lakes basin.

When asked which capacity areas funding organizations are most interested in supporting, partnerships with non-environmental groups ranked third highest. Given that level of interest, the funding community can play a leadership role by encouraging and funding non-profits that reach

out to others impacted by Great Lakes water issues.

Engaging funding organizations that support other sectors like health, social justice, and arts and culture can also help by suggesting opportunities for partnerships between traditional water groups and others likely to have an interest in water-related projects.

Bringing new funding and non-profit organizations together with traditional water groups also provides opportunities to develop shared message and values around water, encouraging further collaboration.

Finally, non-profit groups currently engaging diverse communities can also help by sharing their experiences in an effort to teach others how they can engage new groups and audiences.

5.2 Conclusions

The results of the assessment identify opportunities to increase the impact of Great Lakes water efforts. The key elements to seeing those impacts throughout the Great Lakes basin include the following:

- Taking a cohesive, pro-active approach to Great Lakes water work by working more closely together and sharing expertise and capacity.
- Being inclusive of the funding community, grassroots community, and those working outside of the traditional environmental sector so those perspectives are embedded in priorities and activities affecting Great Lakes water issues.
- Focusing on the similarities rather than the differences between rural and urban communities, Canada and the US, and environmentalists and non-environmentalists.

Appendix A:
Examples of Networking and Capacity-building Organizations
Working in the Ontario Great Lakes Basin

	<p>The <i>Canadian Freshwater Alliance</i> (CFA) is an emerging initiative, under Tides Canada Initiatives, committed to serving the needs of Canada’s diverse freshwater community.</p> <p>In its inaugural year the Alliance will be piloting a suite of capacity programs that are designed to support and elevate the efforts of water leaders, organizations and collaborations across Canada. This includes co-hosting a Living Waters Rally with World Wildlife Fund - Canada to bring together representatives from Canada’s water community for a weekend of shared-learning, skills-building, and networking.</p>
	<p><i>Freshwater Future</i> works to ensure the healthy future of waters in the Great Lakes region by supporting the needs of community-based groups and actions working to protect and restore Great Lakes land and water resources.</p> <p>Freshwater Future has helped thousands of community-based groups and individuals, providing support in such areas as grant funding with nearly \$2 million awarded in over 750 grants, locally targeted resource toolkits (topics such as wetland protection, restoration, communications and climate adaptation), and both training and consulting services including such areas as fundraising, fiscal management, strategy development, organizational capacity building, and board development.</p>
	<p><i>Great Lakes United</i> (GLU) provides a unifying voice for ensuring a healthy and vibrant future for the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River ecosystem. For the past 30 years, GLU has been tackling emerging concerns, and setting frameworks for action based on prevention approaches. Its members span a diverse spectrum of organizations and individuals from both Canada and the U.S. Some of the issues that GLU works on include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pollution and toxics - cleaning up old pollution and ensuring emerging chemicals of concern stay out of water before our toxic history repeats. • Water quality – ensuring issues are addressed across an international border and providing leadership to programs that ensure a clean and healthy Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River ecosystem. • Water conservation – supporting efforts to prevent long-distance diversions and promoting water use reduction practices and technologies. • Invasive species – advocating programs to prevent the introduction of invasive aquatic species through ships’ ballast water and the deliberate importation of potentially invasive species as food supply, etc.

	<p>The <i>Ontario Environment Network (OEN)</i> supports the efforts of Ontario’s environmental non-profit organizations by facilitating group activities, knowledge and information sharing, and identifying and connecting expertise on environmental matters. The OEN offers many services including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A central referral service for anyone seeking environmental information • Workshops and conferences • Training and education • Strategic planning, work planning, and project development • Published resource materials • Facilitation of issue-specific caucuses • Maintenance of a database of Ontario environmental groups as well as a delegate database for public consultations • Access to on line platforms for meetings, document storage, and knowledge sharing for members • First Ontario Time Bank
	<p>The <i>Sustainability Network (SN)</i> helps Canadian environmental leaders and builds stronger nonprofit organizations by helping them increase their capacity to lead, manage and strategize. The SN works with environmental non-profits to make them more effective and efficient. By improving management and leadership skills and fostering organizational development, they help to strengthen the environmental community. SN helps environmental NGOs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • professionalize: training and management skills development • collaborate: work together more effectively and engage allies • diversify: to better reflect the communities being served <p>Current programs focus on building skills and peer networks (Good to Great, public forums, webinars & workshops), building bridges to partners and allies (Boreal Learning Network) and helping environmental NGOs better embrace diverse communities (Environment & Diversity Project). The SN works predominantly with staffed, small to medium sized environmental NGOs but occasionally engage larger national organizations.</p>

