

Community Integration of Non-Profit Organizations: A Study of Nova Scotia's Employment Services Ecosystem

by

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ABSTRACT

COMMUNITY INTEGRATION OF NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS: A STUDY OF NOVA SCOTIA'S EMPLOYMENT SERVICES ECOSYSTEM

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Nova Scotia contracts non-profit organizations to deliver the majority of its public employment services system - Nova Scotia Works. This study asks how non-profit employment service providers in Nova Scotia integrate into their communities and promote place-based policy, programs, and services to address labour market needs. The goal of this research is to: understand the Nova Scotia employment services ecosystem, understand contracted non-profit service providers, determine the relationship between these organizations and their constituent communities, and explore whether non-profit employment services providers offer, or contribute to the development of, place-based employment services to the individuals they serve. Key informant interviews and qualitative data analysis tools were used in this study. The findings present a conceptual framework highlighting connecting, being present, internalizing, and operationalizing activities as ways for non-profit Nova Scotia Works contract holders to integrate and promote place-based services in their constituent communities. Contributions to non-profit theory and practice are made.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACOA	Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency
CBDC	Community Business Development Corporation
CEI	Centre for Employment Innovation
CJF	Canada Job Fund
DCS	Nova Scotia Department of Community Services
EI	Employment Insurance
ENS	Employment Nova Scotia
ILO	International Labour Organization
ISANS	Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia
LAE	Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Advanced Education
LMA	Labour Market Agreement
LMPWD	Labour Market Agreement for Persons with Disabilities
LMDA	Labour Market Development Agreement
NES	National Employment Service
NS Works	Nova Scotia Works
NSCDA	Nova Scotia Career Development Association
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PES	Public Employment Service
REN	Regional Enterprise Network
TIOW	Targeted Initiative for Older Workers
UI	Unemployment Insurance
WDA	Workforce Development Agreement

1 Introduction

1.1 Overview

This chapter provides an overview of the research process underpinning the thesis *Community Integration of Non-profit Organizations: A study of Nova Scotia's Employment Services Ecosystem*. The following sections summarize the research's rationale, problem statement, goals and objectives, methods, and significance. An outline of subsequent chapters is also provided.

1.2 Rationale

The third sector, an intermediary space between the public and private sectors, is vital to the delivery of social services in Canada. Non-profits, co-operatives, and social enterprises play an important role in the delivery of employment services in many provincial jurisdictions. The provision of a well-functioning *public employment service* (PES) is a core element of the modern Canadian welfare state as it assists underemployed and unemployed Canadians achieve their employment and skills training goals. This is true in Nova Scotia where the provincial government contracts a large portion of its employment services to non-profit organizations (Wood, 2018). Evidence in the popular press indicates these service providers work within their communities, partnering with other community-focused organizations, to address specific needs and opportunities in their communities (Ahern, 2019; Cooke, 2018; MacInnis, 2019; Martin, 2019; Starratt, 2018). This is especially important at a time of great change in local Nova Scotian economies as the type of employment offered locally shifts and the skills required to attain work evolve in an increasingly global world (Nova Scotia Commission on Building Our New Economy, 2014).

The literature on the third sector reveals this segment of the economy and social life to be a contested space. There is much debate as to what is included in the third sector, its development over time, and the role it plays in modern affairs. As well, the

relationship between the organizations of this sector and the members of the public and private sectors is often coloured by the ideological underpinnings of the public and private sectors at the time of analysis. A more fulsome discussion of these arguments will take place as part of a review of the literature.

While understanding this research takes place in a contested space, the researcher contends that successive Canadian federal and provincial governments have adopted neoliberal policies and practices that have curtailed the welfare state (Berkes & Davidson–Hunt, 2007; Halseth, Markey, Reimer, & Manson, 2010; Jaffe & Quark, 2006). This has led to the devolution of some areas of the federal welfare state onto lower levels of government (Wood, 2018) and the expansion of the third sector through the contracted delivery of government programs and services (Baines, 2006, 2010; Shier & Handy, 2016, 2019). One such area of government that has experienced both devolution and contracting out is Canada’s PES. In Nova Scotia, the process of contracting out federal employment services and subsequent devolution of these services to the province necessitated a full *Transformation* of how these services would be delivered to residents of the province. Following Transformation, all employment services were collectively branded Nova Scotia Works (NS Works). The relationship between non-profit employment service organizations and their constituent communities, especially the evolution of this relationship in a post-Transformation context, is the focus of this research.

1.3 Problem Statement

A review of relevant literature, personal communication with members of the Nova Scotia employment services ecosystem, and the researcher’s experience working with and within organizational members of Canada’s PES indicates there is a lack of research and understanding of the role non-profit organizations have in the delivery of employment services throughout Canada at local, provincial, and federal levels. This is concerning as several provinces, including Nova Scotia, rely on non-profit organizations to deliver employment programs and services to various client groups. As well, there

does not appear to be an in-depth understanding of how these non-profit organizations, and the third sector more broadly, are able to utilize these employment related government contracts to meet the needs of their constituent communities and address opportunities to create place-based solutions to labour market challenges. To address these issues this research study asks: *How do non-profit employment service providers in Nova Scotia integrate into their local communities and promote place-based policy, programs, and services, to address labour market needs?*

1.4 Research Goals and Objectives

In addressing the research question, this study identifies the following research goals, each with their own respective objectives. These include:

1. Understand the Nova Scotia employment services ecosystem.
 - a. Understand Nova Scotia's PES history, function, and objectives.
 - b. Determine the government departments/agencies, institutions, and organizations core to the functioning of Nova Scotia's PES.
 - c. Determine the role of employment service providers in developing and delivering components of the Nova Scotia PES.
2. Understand the contracted non-profit employment service providers.
 - a. Establish the mission, vision, and values of the organizations under examination.
 - b. Determine the primary stakeholders of the organizations and determine their relationship with each.
 - c. Determine the community partners of the organizations and determine their relationship with each.
 - d. Understand the organizations' rationale for delivering the NS Works program.
 - e. Understand the story (history, reason for organizing, and the like) of each organization.
 - f. Determine other programs, services, and activities, contracted and otherwise, offered by the organization beyond NS Works.

3. Determine the relationship between non-profit employment service providers and their constituent communities.
 - a. Understand the role of the employment service centre in the local community's labour market, economic development, and social life.
 - b. Understand the way in which stakeholders are engaged and involved in each organization's governance.
 - c. Understand how stakeholders are engaged in the development and delivery of programs and services provided by each organization.
 - d. Determine the relationship between the NS Works contracted services and other activities undertaken by each organization.
 - e. Determine other employment and labour related services that may be offered in the community.
4. Explore whether the non-profit employment service providers offer, or contribute to the development of, place-based employment services to the individuals they serve.
 - a. Compare, contrast, and analyse the way in which each organization engages its stakeholders in daily operations and service delivery.
 - b. Compare, contrast, and analyse the programs, services, and activities each organization engages in outside of its NS Works activities.
 - c. Compare, contrast, and analyse the way in which each organization engages its community partners in daily operations.
 - d. Highlight instances where place-based approaches to employment services have been attempted or delivered and the way in which these were made possible.

1.5 Methods

Qualitative key informant interviews were used to address the research question and goals outlined above. Twelve interviews were held with members of Nova Scotia's employment services system. Nine of these interviews were conducted with

representatives of non-profits operating NS Works Centres. Three interviews represent other non-profit organizations active in the field. All key informant interviews were completed via telephone, recorded, and then transcribed manually by the researcher. Coding and analysis of the interview transcripts was aided with the use of NVivo software. Individual codes were grouped into thematic areas for presentation and discussion. The research process was informed by *The Long Interview* and *Five Stages of Analysis* as described by McCracken (1988). Additional guidance was sourced from Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2020).

1.6 Importance and Significance of the Research

The delivery of a well-functioning PES which meets the needs of all citizens is a core component of the Canadian welfare state. Nova Scotia, a region experiencing massive social, cultural, and economic change (Nova Scotia Commission on Building Our New Economy, 2014), offers a unique context where programs and services relating to employment and skills training will have increased relevance. The ability for Nova Scotia's employment services ecosystem to be able to address the needs of the province's residents now and in the future is necessary for the system to maintain its relevance in a changing world.

This research offers key insights on Nova Scotia's employment services system. Of note is an understanding of how non-profit organizations contracted to operate NS Works programs and services adapt these initiatives to address identified needs in the local labour market. It also highlights the collaborative relationship held between contract service providers and other members of the employment services ecosystem to harness a collective and systematic approach to labour force development and inclusion in the province. This study presents an overview of existing actions being undertaken by actors in the Nova Scotia employment services ecosystem and offers a conceptual framework to support continued action and development of NS Works programs and services to address issues of local and provincial concern.

Existing literature on employment service providers, especially non-profit organizations engaged in this work, is expanded through this study. Much of the existing research on employment service delivery organizations in Canada is focused on urban settings in central Canada. This research provides an Atlantic Canadian perspective on this area of interest while giving increased voice to rural contexts. While this research focuses on the delivery of employment services, learnings from this experience may be relevant to other human social service delivery organizations operating in Nova Scotia or in similar contexts.

1.7 Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into several chapters. The present introductory chapter has offered an overview of the project's rationale, problem statement, goals and objectives, and methods. It has also offered an overview of the importance and significance of the findings discussed in later chapters.

Chapter two offers context to the research study at hand. This includes the historical development of employment services in Canada, funding model, and role within contemporary welfare state development. In line with the location of this research study, a discussion of employment service development in Nova Scotia is then offered. The present NS Works employment services system is explored including key component organizations and recent shifts to local service delivery.

Chapter three details the methods used in this study. An overview of the researcher's epistemological perspective and position is offered. This is followed by specific elements of the research design, data collection process, analysis of the dataset, and validity, reliability, and limitations.

Chapter four offers a comprehensive review of relevant literature identifying four key areas of interest. The first section grounds this project within the wider third sector research community by offering different conceptualizations of the sector and their relation to the present study. Neoliberalism's influence on the relationship between non-

profits and government is then discussed with attention given to the Canadian context. The third section of the literature review provides an overview of non-profit organizations and their relationship with their constituent community. Finally, ways in which non-profit organizations take action in their community are discussed including place-based approaches to policy development and partnership creation.

Chapter five represents the findings of this research. Four thematic areas are identified that provide the framework through which the data collected in this study are best understood. In response to the identified research question the researcher presents *connecting, being present, internalizing, and operationalizing* activities as means through which non-profit employment service providers engage their communities and address local needs. Each of these four thematic areas manifest through component activities explored deeply in this chapter.

Chapter six provides a discussion of the research findings. A conceptual framework is presented that offers insights into the interdependent relationships between the four thematic areas presented in the research findings. It also relates the findings to three streams of literature previously reviewed. Contributions and implications for practice are noted.

Chapter seven offers a conclusion to this thesis. In concluding the study, the chapter reviews the rationale and guiding question, known elements, the research process undertaken, new learnings, and directions for future research.

2 Context

2.1 Overview

Assisting individuals attain a full and sustainable livelihood is a core element of the modern welfare state. One approach taken by national governments to achieve this goal is the provision of a national PES. While each country's PES will be constituted differently depending on their national context, the primary role of the PES is to engage in activities that keep unemployment rates low and overall employment participation high. To do so, the service will seek to match labour market supply with labour market demand through access to information, placement of the unemployed, and provision of services and programs to allow for integration or transition within the labour market (Wood, 2018).

This chapter will first explore an international understanding of the PES including its role and function within a developed economy. Once an international understanding has been formed an overview of Canada's national PES will be provided highlighting its history, funding structure, and governance at the national, provincial, and local levels. Specific attention will be given to the study's focus jurisdiction, Nova Scotia, and this region's journey through devolution and transformation of employment services. A final overview of the NS Works employment services system will be provided.

2.2 Public Employment Service

The role of a nation's PES is well defined by several international conventions developed by the International Labour Organization (ILO) of which Canada has ratified. The ILO has identified the following five duties of a PES (Wood, 2018):

- Assist in labour market exchange where workers may find suitable work and employers find suitable workers. In recent decades, this role has focused more heavily on employment equity with respect to vulnerable populations or identified groups.

- Facilitate occupational and geographic mobility such that workers can travel or move to areas where employment opportunities better reflect their abilities and goals. This is especially true in a time of intranational and international mobility and migration.
- Collect, analyze, and report on labour market information and its evolution over time. This includes specific sectoral or geographic details and sharing this information with relevant stakeholders.
- Co-operate with the administration of employment insurance and similar relief measures. The PES will be engaged in various initiatives to bring the unemployed into the labour force by enhancing their employability.
- To assist public and private bodies with social and economic planning for a favourable employment environment. Again, marginalized and under-represented groups in the labour market are of particular concern.

A well functioning PES is key to the development of the modern welfare state and contributes to the overall performance of a country's labour market and policy towards unemployment (Wood, 2018). An individual's economic participation in society forms a key determinant of their overall health and well-being (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010), not least social exclusion (Wood, 2018), and achievement of a full and abundant life (Coady, 1967). It is for this reason that governments throughout the world are preoccupied with the proper functioning of their public employment services.

Canada, having ratified the relevant ILO Conventions, has developed a national approach to public employment services in line with the above tenants. Additionally, the Canadian PES has taken more active measures to promote labour market adjustment and transition. This has created a spirit of life-long learning to assist employers and employees adapt to changing global market conditions (Wood, 2018). A more thorough discussion of the Canadian PES will take place in the following section.

2.3 Canadian Public Employment Service

Canada's national PES has been greatly influenced by the country's history and formation as a developed nation. This section will explore how the historical development of the country's PES has shaped the system over time and how changing ideological patterns have shaped a modern approach to these services. An overview of the present-day national PES will also be provided.

2.3.1 Historical Development

Employment services operate in a contested jurisdictional space between provincial and federal control. Provinces, with a constitutional responsibility for education and training, have historically exercised a degree of control over the provision of employment services. Similarly, the federal government's interest in national economic well-being incentivised it to support an efficient and productive workforce. These mutually supportive objectives, as well as concerns arising from demobilization after the First World War, resulted in the creation of the *Employment Service of Canada* a national employment service delivered by the provinces and supported through federal grants (Wood, 2018).

Social and economic challenges arising from the Great Depression and the lead up to the Second World War enlivened a national discussion on the creation of a federal *Unemployment Insurance (UI)* program. In learning from the experience of the Britain, Canada recognized a need for a national PES to support the rapid reintegration of federally supported unemployment insurance beneficiaries. A constitutional amendment solidified the newly formed national UI program as a federal responsibility. In agreement with the provinces the previously provincially administered *Employment Service of Canada* was nationalized ushering in an era of direct federal control of Canada's PES (Wood, 2018).

Initially, both UI benefits and employment services were administered by the *Unemployment Insurance Commission*. The Commission was governed through various

committees and boards under the principle that the operation of this program should be a co-operative effort between labour, employers, and government. Street-level offices were located across the country, branded the *National Employment Service (NES)*, and operated as a subordinate organization to the Commission. The overall scheme reported to government through the minister responsible for labour while also operating at arms-length to reduce political interference and improve sustainability. Concerns over the ability of NES Centres to deliver employment services beyond processing of UI claims and the ratification of the previously discussed ILO Convention of National Public Employment Services necessitated the separation of the NES from the UI Commission. Eventually NES Centres were combined with immigrant services to form *Canada Manpower Centres* which reflected the role employment services, skills training, and immigration had in forming a productive Canadian labour market (Wood, 2018).

Under the influence of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in the 1960s, Canadian employment policy increasingly adopted the neoliberal paradigm of *activation* (Grundy & Laliberte Rudman, 2018; Wood, 2018). Activation reflects a policy change away from passive income support measures as these are thought to further perpetuate unemployment within the labour force. Activation policy often entails the retrenchment of income support offered through UI programs including the value of benefits and the time for which a person can continue to collect these benefits to encourage re-entry into the labour force. A second element of activation policy supports interventions that reform individuals making them more employable. This involves job search requirements, skills training, job counselling, among other activities that promote the neoliberal values of entrepreneurialism, labour flexibility, and personal responsibility (Grundy & Laliberte Rudman, 2018).

In the Canadian context UI was reformed in 1971 to enlarge the program to a range of occupations previously excluded, broaden benefits, change financing, and link benefits to the economic and labour conditions of the beneficiary's region. This eventually led to the use of UI funds to support developmental activities such as job creation and skills training. Governance reforms also saw the UI Commission integrated more heavily into

government reducing its initial autonomy and increasing political influence (Wood, 2018).

Changing societal attitudes in the 1970s existed beyond the transition to neoliberalism. Increasing attention was given to employment equity and the expansion of employment supports to disadvantaged groups. The newly created *Department of Employment and Immigration* began offering outreach programs to women, persons with disabilities, visible minorities, indigenous peoples, and youth. These specialized programs were delivered not by the newly renamed *Canada Employment Centres* but were contracted out to community-based training organizations and paid for by general government revenues. Provincial governments also began to offer programs to non-UI recipients at this time in an effort to fill an identified gap in federal government programming (Wood, 2018).

The 1980s saw neoliberalism become the dominant political paradigm in Canada with many implications for the country's PES. The federal government increasingly relied on the market to allocate labour for those with high-demand skills. Under this approach the federal government became more concerned with addressing the needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. In line with a neoliberal approach to service delivery, an increasing number of programs and services were contracted out to community-based delivery agents. Often these agents were non-profit organizations having a specific mission of serving marginalized groups attain employment goals. Notable is the fact that the federal government chose these agents to act at the community level as opposed to provincial authorities. This selection was made to strengthen the overall community non-governmental fabric and to avoid federal-provincial jurisdictional tensions over education and training (Wood, 2018).

The late 1980s and early 1990s also saw increased coordination of federal UI and provincial social assistance programs including reforms to funding streams to further entrench activation policies in both activities (Wood, 2018). These would come to be

only a handful of the overall reforms that came to transform Canada's social safety net and PES.

2.3.2 Devolution of Canada's Public Employment Service

As the previous historical overview indicates, the Canadian federal government sought to maintain the national UI and PES schemes under its jurisdiction. However, a move toward decentralization, welfare reforms, and challenges to Canadian federalism soon pushed the federal government to devolve its responsibility for the national PES to the provinces (Wood, 2018).

By the time of devolution in 1996 the federal government was operating over 500 Canada Employment Centres offering client facing services to Canadians. This was in addition to numerous community-based organizations delivering employment related programming on behalf of the federal government. While the offices operated at the local level, the overall system was heavily centralized in regional offices and at the departmental headquarters in Ottawa. This degree of centralization was criticized by the OECD which recommended increased localized control and flexibility of employment services to better achieve desired goals. The OECD recognized that employment services operated in unique circumstances that required localized solutions to expressed challenges and that doing so required there to be greater participation from regional and local actors (Wood, 2018).

In the early 1990s the newly formed *Human Resources Development Canada* undertook an in-depth review of the nation's social security system to increase overall efficiency and effectiveness of many citizen serving programs including those related to UI and the PES. This was augmented by the 1995 budget that changed a number of income support, health, and employment related spending programs. Notable was the overhaul of the UI program – renaming it *Employment Insurance (EI)* and separating the program into two parts. Part I reflects income support benefits while Part II contains employment benefits and supports (OECD, 2015). Reductions in overall spending

ended specialized employment support programs for women, social assistance recipients, visible minorities, and older workers while programs for youth and indigenous peoples were retained (Wood, 2018). Such massive changes to the foundation of EI and Canada's PES were completed amidst a much larger backdrop of further welfare state reform to curtail mounting budget deficits at the federal level. The organizational and political landscape following these changes was ripe for the formation of new relationships and approaches to social service delivery in Canada.

As noted by Wood (2018) Canadian federalism was also changing in the 1990s. Two failed attempts at constitutional reform and a resurgence in Quebec separatism, culminating in the 1995 referendum on Quebec sovereignty, led the federal government to pursue administrative-political federalism. This was matched by the Alberta government's increased protection of provincial authority in matters of its provincial jurisdiction.

Each of these issues, a need for decentralization, a transformation of the EI system, and a renewed relationship between the provinces and the federal government created fertile ground for the devolution of federal responsibilities for the PES to the provincial governments. Beginning in 1996 the federal government offered all provinces an opportunity for broad elements of the nation's labour market development activities to be devolved. This included the NES, training initiatives, and front-line staffing. These components would be supported financially through defined agreements funded from EI premiums. Components of the existing federal employment and training scheme retained by the federal government following devolution included "EI income support, labour mobility, labour market information, pan-Canadian initiatives, and employment services for Aboriginal people and youth" (Wood, 2018). The agreements that governed this newly devolved system for employment and skills training were signed individually with each province from 1996 to 2009. A series of co-management arrangements were signed with provinces that did not initially accept devolved responsibilities. Under co-management the provinces had a newly defined role in influencing the activities of the federal scheme through joint committees (Wood, 2018). The existence of devolved

Labour Market Development Agreements (LMDAs) in some provinces and not others created a dual implementation system throughout the early 2000s for numerous employment and skills training programs.

The early 2000s saw the continuation of program development and delivery in areas maintained under sole federal jurisdiction. This included programs for older workers, youth, Indigenous people, foreign credential recognition, and some programs specifically designed for persons with disabilities. Some programs were delivered via separate agreements with the provinces to ensure equality of program and service availability while respecting the devolved and co-managed agreements with the provinces. The contracting out of employment related services by the federal government increased in co-managed jurisdictions with this local delivery overseen by *Service Canada* after its creation in 2005 (Wood, 2018).

In 2008 a series of *Labour Market Agreements (LMAs)*, later renamed *Canada Job Fund (CJF) Agreements*, were signed with provincial governments (OECD, 2015). These agreements provided funding to support the employment of non-EI eligible individuals who were excluded from programs offered through the LMDAs and was funded from general government revenues and not EI contributions (Wood, 2018). Over the following years the federal government would also devolve program responsibility for persons with disabilities and older workers through the *Labour Market Agreement for Persons with Disabilities (LMAPD)* and the *Targeted Initiative for Older Workers (TIOW)* respectfully.

In 2017 and 2018 the federal government reaffirmed its LMDAs with the provinces for an additional six years. These updated LMDAs expand EI funded programs and services and offers more Canadians the ability to access services. This also expands services available to a number of under represented groups (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2020a). In addition to the reaffirmed LMDAs, the federal government also signed *Workforce Development Agreements (WDAs)* with each of the provinces and territories. This new agreement for devolved programs and services

combined and replaced the CJF, LMAPD, and TIOW agreements. The WDAs complement the EI funded activities supported through the LMDAs and provided expanded services to those who otherwise may be ineligible for programs under the latter. Additionally, the WDAs offer additional supports for persons with disabilities, and underrepresented groups including Indigenous peoples, youth, newcomers to Canada, and older workers. Specific funding is also available for employers to assist in employee training activities (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2020b). Together these agreements govern the present relationship between the federal government and the provinces and territories.

Before 1996 the programs and services offered as part of the NES were largely the same throughout Canada as it was a federally managed initiative. Once responsibility for employment services and related programming started a process of devolution to the provinces the way employment services operated in Canada greatly reflected the province under consideration. The following section provides an overview of employment services in Nova Scotia, the province where this study takes place.

2.4 Nova Scotian Public Employment Service

Nova Scotia is one of Canada's four Atlantic provinces. With a population of over 970,000 residents it is the most populous province in the region. Throughout its history the province's economy has been shaped by manufacturing, resource extraction, and the public sector. Today, the service sector leads the economy and makes a sizable portion of total exports. Primary industries, such as agriculture, fisheries, and forestry continue to play an important role in the overall economy, especially in rural areas. This is particularly important given that the number of urban and rural residents are roughly similar (Nova Scotia Commission on Building Our New Economy, 2014). Historically, the province has had high rates of unemployment, low labour market participation, and above average dependence on the employment insurance system. Unemployment rates for Indigenous and African Nova Scotians are persistently high due to marginalization and discrimination. The province also experiences an aging

demographic having one of the highest median ages in Canada (Group ITN Consulting, 2015; Nova Scotia Commission on Building Our New Economy, 2014; Wood, 2018). The *Nova Scotia Commission on Building Our New Economy* (2014) cautions that unless these economic and demographic indicators are ameliorated the province risks entering into a period of long term decline. These challenges pose great opportunity for a provincially managed employment services system to address localized concerns and be an active force in the province's economic change and transition.

This section will explore the Nova Scotian context in which devolution took place, the period of post-devolution Transformation, and the resulting NS Works employment services system.

2.4.1 Devolution

Wood (2018) notes that Nova Scotia was initially reluctant to take on federally devolved programming when first offered. The province was cautious in participating in agreements that were led by the federal government or were devolved following substantial federal reductions to funding. Given the province's fragmented social services delivery system in the late 1990s, and challenging economic conditions, Nova Scotia opted for a strategic partnership rather than a co-managed agreement. This partnership placed concern over labour market transition and employment rates firmly in the responsibility of the federal government, shifting any public disapproval away from provincial officials. The province participated in the agreement through only a small committee focused on issues of co-operation and collaboration.

As part of this strategic partnership the federal government continued to contract out service delivery to community-based organizations. Over time, federal officials transitioned from delivering front-line services to clients and became contract managers for these front-line services. Contracted organizations often applied for provincial funding to supplement their work in community. In 2007 the federal government moved to transition provinces with a co-managed/strategic partnership agreement to the

existing LMDA model. Nova Scotia had not asked for this devolution to take place but nonetheless accepted an agreement that saw 65 service contracts and over 100 federal staff move to provincial jurisdiction in 2009 (Group ITN Consulting, 2015; Wood, 2018).

To manage the devolved LMDA, TIOW, LMAPWD, and newly created LMA programs the provincial government formed the *Department of Labour and Advanced Education (LAE)* to coordinate the province's employment, skills, and adult education activities. Employment services for social assistance recipients was retained within the *Department of Community Services (DCS)*. Within LAE, *Employment Nova Scotia (ENS)* was developed to manage client serving activities and approve programming for individuals. ENS took over the management of existing Service Canada contracts through its four regional and 13 local offices (Wood, 2018).

By 2014 the province had done little to alter the community-level activities of the province's PES. Aside from rebranding the community points of service as *Careers Nova Scotia Centres* the 52 contract holders previously devolved from the federal government still operated a mix of generic and specialized services under the terms of their previous agreements (Group ITN Consulting, 2015; Wood, 2018). The process of devolution had left a complicated patchwork of services throughout the province without a common approach to service delivery, among other challenges. It was broadly recognized within government that the employment services sector of the province needed to be fundamentally *transformed*.

2.4.2 Transformation

From 2014 to 2016 LAE, through ENS and numerous stakeholder groups, engaged in a process of transforming Nova Scotia's employment services landscape. This was prompted by a strong need for change, development of a new system of employment services, and a coordinated implementation approach. It is recognized that this process of Transformation impacted several community-based organizations in the province and reshaped much of this sector's operations. Given the implications of this process, and

with feedback from key informants, the researcher uses capitalization in referring to Transformation to denote its importance and reference to an overall process. A diverse set of opinions regarding Transformation are held by those affected by the process. For context, this section seeks to provide a neutral overview with additional discussion provided in later chapters.

Before devolution, Service Canada and its predecessor offices began a process of contracting out employment related services to community-based organizations. These contracts were managed within Service Canada and often allowed the contracted organization to have a wide degree of discretion in the way programs and services were developed and delivered (Wood, 2018). Following devolution it became clear that while there were many contracted service providers operating in the province, these efforts over-served some areas and under-served others. The sheer number of organizations operating contracts was also quite large given the size of the province. Each organization operated its own set of services with little consistency across the province in terms of service offerings, competencies, accreditation, or common scope and service areas. Concern also existed that the current delivery system had been designed for the labour market of the 1990s and had not kept pace with changing economic dynamics and challenges (Group ITN Consulting, 2015). In addition to structural elements of the employment services delivery system a number of economic and societal shifts necessitated a paradigm shift in the way employment services were offered in the province (Nova Scotia Commission on Building Our New Economy, 2014). As outlined in the final report of the *Career Nova Scotia Transformation Project* these include (Group ITN Consulting, 2015, p. ii):

- Looming demographic challenges which have significant implications for labour market supply.
- Changing work patterns, including more part-time and project-based work and greater mobility among workers.

- Rapid and relentless technological change with the half-life of new knowledge becoming exponentially shorter.
- Job displacement at the same time that the knowledge economy continues to grow and demand new skills, aptitudes, and higher-level qualifications.

Taken together, it appears provincial authorities responsible for employment services recognized that the delivery of services needed to be transformed to address the apparent weaknesses in the status quo and better prepare Nova Scotians for the future.

Limited literature exists on the exact process of Transformation undertaken in the Nova Scotia employment services delivery system by LAE and related organizations. What is known is that LAE engaged in its own in-house research processes while seeking out consultant services. This process included a period of public engagement and feedback from stakeholder groups, a review of relevant literature, and a jurisdictional review of other areas in Canada and around the world that have significantly changed their employment services for similar reasons (Group ITN Consulting, 2015). The preparations for Transformation concluded on July 1, 2016 with the release of the *NS Works* employment services delivery system. This approach to employment services appeared very different from the previous delivery of services and, lest a few minor revisions, provides the present context in which this study takes place.

2.5 Nova Scotia Employment Services Ecosystem Today

Key informants in this study often used the term *ecosystem* to describe the elements of the Nova Scotia employment services delivery system. This term seems appropriate as it is more inclusive of the role supporting organizations and partners have in the delivery of employment services beyond the contracted delivery non-profits. Within this expanded ecosystem view, four core *pillars* appear key to the overall success of the system including the LAE/ENS, NS Works contract holders, Centre for Employment Innovation (CEI), and the Nova Scotia Career Development Association (NSCDA).

2.5.1 Department of Labour and Advanced Education/Employment Nova Scotia

The Department of Labour and Advanced Education was created in 2008 by integrating skills and learning responsibilities of the Department of Education, labour programs, and responsibility for federal programs into a new department (Wood, 2018). LAE is responsible for various activities including workplace safety, apprenticeships, adult education, and employment services. This is carried out through a number of agencies, boards, and commissions under the purview of the Department (Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Advanced Education, 2014). The Skills and Learning Branch of LAE is of particular importance to this research as it encompasses areas regarding adult education, apprenticeship, and employment services in the province, including *Employment Nova Scotia* (ENS) (Nova Scotia Department of Labour and Advanced Education, 2019). ENS was established in early 2009 to “manage the delivery of training and skills development programming funded by the Canada-Nova Scotia Labour Market Development Transfer Agreements which are, as of 2018, the Labour Market Development Agreement and the Workforce Development Agreement” (Employment Nova Scotia, 2018). Offices are located throughout the province and are at times co-located with Service Canada locations (Employment Nova Scotia, 2018). In effect, ENS represents the federal component of labour market programming that was devolved to the province in 2009 including staff and the majority of contracts, funding, and other related components.

2.5.2 Nova Scotia Works Contract Holders

Most client-facing services offered through the Nova Scotia employment services ecosystem are offered through NS Works Centres. NS Works is the common brand, suite of services, and delivery of employment services to emerge from the Transformation process. These centres offer services to job-seekers and employers to assist clients in achieving their specific career, labour, or skills development needs. Nova Scotia, in following a previous federal norm, contracts the operation of these centres to third party providers – the majority of which are community-based non-profit

organizations (OECD, 2015; Wood, 2018). As of January 1, 2020 - 17 contract holders operate over 50 service locations as either main locations or itinerant offices. Contracts for these locations are managed through regional ENS offices.

NS Works services are standardized throughout the province and include job search, career coaching, access to computers, workshops, short term training activities, wage subsidies, among other services funded through the relevant federal-provincial labour market agreements. The Centres offer services to those who are and are not EI eligible. Specific programs may require additional approval from ENS – often skills training programs, job creation programs, or other funded activities. As these Centres are operated by third party organizations additional programming outside of the NS Works suite of services may be available based on organizational partnerships and separate funding agreements with government and community entities.

NS Works contract providers are the focus of this research project. As such a further description of the activities these organizations engage in will be discussed subsequent chapters.

2.5.3 Centre for Employment Innovation

The Centre for Employment Innovation was created as part of the 2016 Transformation process. The CEI is funded through an agreement with LAE/ENS and is hosted within the St. Francis Xavier University Extension Department. The CEI works collaboratively with the other three pillars of the NS Works ecosystem along with community partners, post-secondary institutions, and industry to ensure employment services in the province meet the needs of employers and employees. Through applied research, pilot, and demonstration projects the CEI contributes to the development of person-centred, evidenced-based, and high quality employment services (Centre for Employment Innovation, 2020a).

Four key pillars guide the work of the CEI and the role it occupies within the wider employment services ecosystem. These pillars include (Centre for Employment Innovation, 2020b):

- Research and innovation. To conduct an evidence-based research agenda to be implemented through a network of community-based organizations. This includes the exploration of exemplary practices to be shared across employment sectors and to spur innovation throughout the overall system.
- Collaboration and engagement. To build strong relationships with stakeholder groups and promote a spirit of collaboration across regional, national, and international stakeholder groups. This includes connecting with representatives of systems and services that work in parallel with employment services to create a robust and resilient system.
- Capacity building and training. To build capacity within employment services providers that recognizes and expands existing strengths. This includes the creation of a common suite of services to be made available throughout the province. The CEI aspires to draw on the values Antigonish Movement through its relationship with the St. Francis Xavier University Extension Department and the Coady International Institute.
- Governance and leadership. To develop an organizational governance model that is robust, inclusive, and strengthens the leadership capabilities of partners. Additionally, the CEI positions itself within the St. Francis Xavier University context to leverage connections throughout academia.

The CEI pillars of work provide a common foundation on which all of the organization's work is grounded. These items also position the organization within the wider Nova Scotia employment services ecosystem.

2.5.4 Nova Scotia Career Development Association

The Nova Scotia Career Development Association is a non-profit organization representing career development professionals throughout Nova Scotia. The organization boasts 500 members and seeks to strengthen career development as a profession through guidance, training, certification, and representation of members at the provincial and national levels. NSCDA members represent various occupations and work in a variety of settings. Over two thirds of the membership work within NS Works Centres with the remainder working for Indigenous, post-secondary, and non-governmental organizations or the private sector. A core function of the NSCDA is the certification and maintenance of Certified Career Development Practitioners (CCDP). The CCDP designation is a provincially mandated requirement for all case management professionals working at NS Works Centres (Hornberger, 2019). Additionally, as part of the Transformation process funds for training and professional development, previously provided directly to NS Works contract holders, are now centralized within the NSCDA. The NSCDA thus has a strong role in the overall training and capacity building functions of the sector as well as staff working in contracted centres.

2.6 Summary

The historical development of employment services has seen responsibility for these initiatives transition from the provincial to federal governments and back to the provinces through devolved agreements. Of note in this process is the central role the national EI program has held in funding employment services and programs in addition to income support activities with uninsured or marginalized groups often requiring supplemental programs. Over time it is possible to see the influence changes in government approach and ideology have had on service offerings and delivery methods. This includes a gradual reliance in some provinces on third-party organizations, especially non-profit groups, for service delivery.

Nova Scotia has recently taken responsibility for employment services through devolved agreements with the federal government. The devolution process, as well as localized provincial opportunities, provided an environment ripe for Transformation and the creation of a unified NS Works approach to employment services. Transformation solidified four key pillar groups at the centre of the NS Works ecosystem working in partnership with a variety of other stakeholder groups and organizations. Working together, this ecosystem seeks to address the needs of Nova Scotian jobseekers and employers as they seek to address their labour market goals and needs.

The NS Works ecosystem provides an excellent case through which to understand the relationship between members of the social sector and their relationship with government. As service delivery partners, NS Works contract holders occupy a unique space in mediating the relationship between individuals and the state. By operating in community there is also an assumption that the individual centres are able to engage with the local community and integrate localized approaches into their service delivery model.

3 Methods

3.1 Overview

A qualitative approach was used in this exploratory study to address the identified research question, goals, and objectives. This chapter provides an overview of the epistemological perspective and positioning of the researcher as well as specific elements of the research design, data collection process, analysis of the dataset, and validity, reliability, and limitations.

3.2 Epistemological Perspective

This research is informed by a constructivist view of knowledge formation and understanding. Constructivists understand knowledge to be produced by the knower from their existing experiences and beliefs (Airasian & Walsh, 1997). As Airasian and Walsh (1997) indicate under a constructivist worldview:

All knowledge is constructed and consists of what individuals create and express. Since individuals make their own meaning from their beliefs and their experiences, all knowledge is tentative, subjective, and personal. Knowledge is viewed not as a set of universal “truths”, but as a set of “working hypothesis” (p. 445).

A constructivist viewpoint will influence how a researcher seeks out, develops, and understands the knowledge they hold. Constructivists believe that people create meaning from their experiences and these meanings are multiple and complex. As such, the researcher relies on the views of participants and teases out these views through open ended questioning to allow the participant the opportunity to construct their meaning through discussion (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To social constructivists, the context in which events take place is very important as it results from the participant’s social and cultural setting. While the intent of the researcher is to understand the meanings made by their participants of the world in which they interact,

the researcher's own background will shape their interpretation of the data. In this case the researcher's own personal, cultural, and historical experience will influence how they make sense of the data collected and guide their interactions with participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). For this reason, a discussion of positionality will take place in a subsequent subsection.

3.3 Qualitative Research Design

Qualitative approaches to research allow for data collection to take place in natural and uncontrived settings with an emphasis on the interviewee's personal experiences with the subject matter. Such approaches are also strongly local, permitting the local context to be included in the research process and shape the resulting findings (Miles et al., 2020). Additionally, in line with a constructivist approach, qualitative approaches place an emphasis on the meanings participants make of the issue at hand (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A qualitative approach is well suited for contexts that experience complexity and a high degree of interconnectedness across multiple categories. This broad field of vision in a particular area permits multiple perspectives to be taken into consideration (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; McCracken, 1988).

Non-profit organizations, especially employment resource centres, operate in a highly personal and personalized setting. Work in these environments is emotional and is influenced by the local context and the lived realities of clients who seek services (Baines, 2010). The question guiding this research is interested in learning how small non-profit organizations, working with and within the community, are able to adapt contracted services to their local context. With these considerations in mind it was determined that a qualitative approach would be most appropriate for this study.

The specific qualitative research design for this study was heavily influenced by The Long Interview technique as described by McCracken (1988) along with its associated Four Step Method of Inquiry. The Long Interview offers researchers a form of data collection that provides an abundance of rich and manageable data. The Four-Step

Method of Inquiry encourages the researcher to exploit their familiarity with the subject culture such as to create appropriate questions and be more attune in the analysis of their results. It also assists these same researchers in moving beyond familiarity as not to lose their ability to think critically about the subject matter. A discussion of the Long Interview as a data collection tool will be discussed in a subsequent section of this chapter.

The Four Step Method of Inquiry divides the research process into two axes. The horizontal axis separates analytic and cultural data from one another while the vertical axis separates review and discovery processes. Moving between the resulting four quadrants one will pass through the following four steps in the research process (McCracken, 1988):

1. Review of analytic categories and interview design
2. Review of cultural categories and interview design
3. Interview procedure and the discovery of cultural categories
4. Interview procedure and the discovery of analytical categories

The first step, consisting of a literature review is discussed below. The remaining steps in this analysis, and their utilization in this study, will be reviewed in other areas of this chapter.

McCracken (1988) suggests the first step in any qualitative interview process is an exhaustive review of the literature. This is done such that the researcher is well informed by others who have completed similar work while connecting them to a broader scholarly community in which to relate their findings and results. A literature review also assists in the development of the interview questionnaire by guiding the formation of research questions and organizing the research goals and objectives.

An initial review of relevant literature was completed on topics related to the third sector, social enterprises, non-profit and community relations, partnerships, and employment services. Specific contextual information on Nova Scotia's employment services sector

and the Canadian policy environment was also gathered for review. Following the data collection period additional literature relating to governance and New Public Management were reviewed and incorporated into the formal literature review included in this text.

3.4 Researcher's Role and Reflexivity

Qualitative research comprises a series of personal and interpretive investigations. In using qualitative interviews the researcher themselves becomes the research instrument. As such, it is important for the researcher to be reflexive in their thinking and approach to data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; McCracken, 1988). As part of reflexive practice it is important for the researcher to acknowledge their position within the research context as well as their lived experiences that may influence their research activities.

In recent years, the researcher has been fortunate to work within, and take part in programs offered by, organizations that are members of their province's employment services ecosystem. To this end the researcher held a summer position with Nova Scotia's CEI in 2018 and completed an eight-month internship at a WorkBC Employment Services Centre in British Columbia in 2019. The researcher has also taken part in skills training and work experience opportunities offered through SkillsPEI and an employment service provider in Prince Edward Island. These varied experiences as an observer, staff, and client in different provinces has informed the researcher's approach to this study and will likely influence the meaning-making process undertaken in this analysis.

In approaching this research as a knowledgeable outsider the researcher reviewed the methodological opportunities and challenges offered by Chavez (2008). After reviewing her research practices when conducting fieldwork on her own family, Chavez (2008) compares advantages and disadvantages of insider status on the topics of positionality, access, data collection, interpretation, and representation. With respect to the present

study, the researcher's positionality as a knowledgeable outsider offered a nuanced perspective for interpreting the conversations held in interviews and assisted in gaining legitimacy in their field. Access to participants was aided by collaborating with members of the system to be introduced to potential interviewees. In terms of data collection, having previous knowledge did help in understanding some of the complex organizational history as well as language used in the field under study. Conversely, there is potential that previous knowledge or interactions could add additional bias to the research, constrain the researcher's ability to conduct research, or influence participant perceptions or relationships. The methods used in this study, discussed in subsequent sections, sought to address some of these positionality concerns.

With respect to managing and incorporating the researcher's own experience in the research study, Wilkinson & Kitzinger (2013) offer four strategies:

- Minimizing: Ignores and makes no attempt to incorporate the experience in the research - essentially deleting the researcher from the study.
- Utilizing: Uses experience in a strategic way, to gain access to research groups, guide the design of the research itself, or making contacts while in the field.
- Maximizing: Where one studies their own experience such as an autoethnography.
- Incorporating: Includes the researcher as one of the participants and treats this data equally to that collected in other means.

It should be noted that these categories are not mutually exclusive and can be incorporated together depending on the research being conducted (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2013). For the purposes of this study the researcher has adopted a *utilizing* strategy for incorporating personal experience into the research process. In practice, previous experience and relationships were used to gain access to the interviewee pool and influenced the selection of data collection methods. This will be discussed in further sections.

The review and acknowledgement of the researcher's lived experience aligns with the second step in McCracken's (1988) Method of Inquiry. In this step, the researcher first begins to utilize the "self as instrument" (McCracken, 1988). Here the researcher becomes much more familiar and attains an appreciation for their personal experience including the assumptions, incidents, and associations present in the mind of the investigator. The three purposes of this cultural review include planning for interview construction, prepare for "rummaging" (McCracken, 1988) that will occur through data analysis, and to establish distance between the researcher and the topic under consideration. Through the review of cultural categories the researcher is both familiarized and defamiliarized with the topic to attune interpretation while maintaining an open mind (McCracken, 1988).

As noted above, the researcher's previous experience as a staff, observer, and client of employment service partners was used strategically in the research process. This included reflecting on the context under investigation and the ways in which the research could build on existing literature while being practical in its application. This experience guided the first exploratory elements of the literature review and initial drafts of the interview questionnaire. Potential responses and anticipated challenges to the research process were considered and necessary action taken to address these issues in advance. A process of familiarization took place as the researcher corresponded and spoke with personal connections working in the field of employment services across Canada. This was done to better understand the field under investigation as well as narrow down specific research goals. A similar process of defamiliarization took place between the submission of the study to the University of Guelph Research Ethics Board and the beginning of data collection where no new research or review was completed regarding the study. Only elements regarding interview logistics were reviewed in this time.

3.5 Data Collection and Recording

Key informant interviews guided by McCracken's (1988) Long Interview approach were selected as the data collection method for this study. A review of the literature and cultural categories identified NS Works Centres, NSCDA, CEI, and LAE/ENS as the key organizations working in the Nova Scotia employment services ecosystem. For the non-government organizations it was determined that executive directors or a designated person would be approached to complete an interview. For a government representative, professional connections were used to identify a potential interviewee.

Potential respondents represented two groups. The first group was made up of organizations, the majority of which were non-profits, contracted to operate NS Works Centres and deliver a suite of associated programs and services. A second group represented associations and institutions that play a role in the overall operation of the system. As such, two interview questionnaires were developed. These questionnaires were similar in their approach but were written with their specific audiences in mind.

To invite participants to take part in this study the researcher collaborated with the CEI wherein a staff person sent out a personalized email to a representative of each of the NS Works contracted organizations as well as other system pillars. This email copied the researcher and introduced him and the research he intended to conduct. The researcher then replied to this email with a formal explanation of the research project and invitation to participate letter. If a potential interviewee expressed interest in participating a copy of the interview questionnaire, highlighting only the grand tour questions, was also provided. Interviewees had the option to participate via an in-person or telephone interview although preferences of interviewees and travel concerns transitioned all interviews to telephone means.

Telephone interviews were coordinated via email with interested participants. At the time of the interview the researcher phoned the participant at their requested telephone number. After initial pleasantries, the interviewer reviewed the invitation to participate

document with the participant and asked if they had any areas they would like to clarify or questions pertaining to the interview or the study. Once these items were addressed the researcher asked if he could begin the formal interview and start audio recording. Once permission to begin recording the interview was granted the interviewee was then asked to verbally consent to participate in the research as well as send an electronic copy of the consent form via email if it had not been done so already. The researcher then began the formal interview questionnaire. Following the formal interview the researcher thanked the participant for sharing their insights on the selected subject matter. Audio recording ceased and the telephone call was ended. The audio recording was transferred to an encrypted laptop for secure storage. A backup of the file was completed on a secure server. Audio files were transcribed manually and verbatim by the researcher using Microsoft Word. In addition to audio recordings the researcher took handwritten notes to capture comments, thoughts, and themes as they arose throughout the interview. These notes were retained following the interview and stored in a secure location.

A total of twelve interviews were completed with members of the NS Works ecosystem. Interviews took place from November 25, 2019 to February 27, 2020. Nine interviews were held with representatives of NS Works contract holders from a potential pool of 18 organizations. Each participant from this pool represented a single organization and held senior management roles such as executive director or operations manager. These participants were physically located throughout the province with seven representing NS Works Centres outside of the Halifax Regional Municipality and Industrial Cape Breton. Three participants representing non-government organizations participated in the study and held management positions. Interviews ranged in length from 30 to 75 minutes and all respondents were female. Attempts at gaining a government representative's participation in this study were unsuccessful.

The third step in McCracken's (1988) Method of Inquiry offers various insights into the development of the interview questionnaire. Most notably this includes the development and use of grand-tour questions, floating prompts, and planned prompts. These grand

tour questions are open and non-directive in nature and aim to be as unobtrusive as possible, permitting the interviewee to “tell their story in their own terms” (McCracken, 1988, p. 34). Floating prompts elicit further detail from the interviewee by exploiting elements of their speech and diving deeper into shared stories. When categories that emerged in literature and cultural reviews do not appear in the initial discourse it is then possible to employ planned prompts that directly ask the interviewee to discuss a specific item.

The researcher made use of grand tour questions in the creation of the interview questionnaire and structured it such as to first build rapport with the interviewee before discussing more sensitive subject matter. Floating prompts were used to guide the interviewee to explore areas of specific interest or to probe unexpected responses. A series of planned prompts were used to explore areas of interest that did not emerge in previous conversation to that point.

3.6 Data Analysis

McCracken’s (1988) fourth step in the inquiry process reflects the discovery of analytic categories through Five Stages of Analysis. The Five Stages of Analysis guides the researcher in transforming written transcript data into reportable themes and findings. In the first step the researcher reviews individual utterances to create an observation. The second stage takes each observation and develops it by examining it individually, in comparison to other observations in the transcripts, and then in relation to previous literature and cultural categories. In the third stage the researcher examines the interconnectedness of each developed observation to each other and to the wider literature and cultural categories. A fourth stage takes these observations, now detached from the written transcript and subjects them to collective scrutiny for inter-theme coherence and consistency. In the final fifth stage the previous conclusions are gathered into themes. At this point the data has transitioned from the particular to the general and is no longer the view of the individual interviewee but the way in which the world is constructed from the analyst’s perspective.

The data analysis process used in this study followed the Five Stages of Analysis as outlined by McCracken (1988) but was supplemented using techniques described by Tesch (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This included reviewing the dataset as a whole and then individual interviews to develop a listing of potential codes and themes. A number of first cycle codes were developed as part of this process including descriptive, concept, and sub codes while also using general themes for extended sections (Miles et al., 2020). NVivo 12 software assisted in coding the completed transcripts. Codes were reviewed and compared to one another before being grouped into thematic areas. In some instances codes supported more than one thematic area resulting in a second review of some coded data for re-coding. Final thematic areas form the foundation of the findings of this research.

3.7 Validity and Reliability

Qualitative validity references the accuracy of the findings from the perspective of the researcher, participants, and research audience (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Two strategies for strengthening the validity of this study's findings were undertaken. The first strategy involved a rich description of the accounts shared using direct quotations from participant interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This allows for the comparison of shared experiences among participant accounts to provide a rich picture of the events under consideration. The ability to examine direct quotations adds to the validity of associated findings and discussion. A second strategy used to increase validity in this study includes a recognition of potential bias in the research and the reflexive characteristics interwoven into data collection, analysis, and reporting (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Examples of this include the notion of positionality and use of experience explored earlier in this chapter.

Reliability in qualitative research reflects the consistency of the research across the complete study as well as across other similar studies (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this study transcripts were reviewed to check for errors in their composition ahead of data analysis. Written notes taken during the interview were also examined for

consistency in the emphasized areas. A common coding list was also maintained throughout the coding process to limit the risk of coding drift from their intended definitions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Qualitative key informant interviews, as used in this study, appear commonplace in the social service non-profit literature as well as those studies completed on employment services (Baines, 2010; Shier & Handy, 2016, 2019; Shier, Jones, & Graham, 2011). Research protocols used in this study are informed by the Long Interview, a well regarded approach to key informant interviews in the social sciences (McCracken, 1988).

With respect to the Long Interview, McCracken (1988) offers *symptoms of truth* that should be present and interwoven with findings coming from a qualitative study. These are summarized below in that the findings:

- Must be exact, so that no unnecessary ambiguity exists
- Must be economical, so that it forces us to make the minimum number of assumptions and still explain the data
- Must be mutually consistent, so that no assertion contradicts another
- Must be externally consistent, so that it conforms to what we independently know about the subject matter
- Must be unified, so that assertions are organized in a manner that subsumes the specific within the general, unifying where possible, discriminating when necessary
- Must be powerful, so that it explains as much of the data as possible without sacrificing accuracy
- Must be fertile, so that it suggests new ideas and opportunities for insight

Symptoms of truth offer a common set of standards from which qualitative researchers are able to align their findings and discussion of results. Such elements, having been integrated in this study's findings, contribute to the overall validity of the study and its reliability in comparison to similar projects.

3.8 Limitations

Users of the research findings presented in this thesis should be aware of its limitations. Participants in this research study self-selected to take part in formal interviews. While the sample size for non-profit contract holders is quite high, with nine out of a possible 18 contract holders participating, there may have been voices that opted to not participate and so may hold views not represented in the project's findings. An interview with a representative of the Nova Scotia government was not attained as part of this research despite multiple attempts. Therefore, this perspective is not included in the overall research findings. While it is known that males occupy leadership positions within the NS Works ecosystem none chose to take part in this research study. The implications of this are unknown.

Interviews took place over a short three-month period in which a new contract agreement was signed with contract holders operating NS Works Centres. The impact of this new contract was not immediately clear to interviewees and so has had a limited influence on the research findings. Additionally, data collection concluded before widespread public health action was taken in Nova Scotia in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Public health measures adopted to address COVID-19 have created a new economic and employment context in Nova Scotia, and globally, which continues to unfold. It is expected that the changing economic and employment context of the province as a result of COVID-19 will influence the application of research findings presented in this thesis.

3.9 Summary

This chapter has described the qualitative research process undertaken in this research study to address its research question, goals, and objectives. It also offered the reader an overview of the epistemological perspective and positioning of the researcher. A description of the research design, data collection, and analysis process were provided followed by a discussion of validity, reliability, and limitations.

4 Literature Review

4.1 Overview

The completion of a thorough literature review is a core component of the Four Step Method of Inquiry described by McCracken (1988). As noted in the methods section of this thesis an initial reading of relevant literature was completed to inform the research proposal and crafting of the interview questionnaire. Following the qualitative and exploratory nature of this research additional qualitative categories emerged through the completion of key informant interviews. These two processes form the foundation of an expanded literature review provided in this chapter. This literature review is composed of four sections highlighting various conceptualizations of the third sector, neoliberal policy influence on third sector organizations, non-profit organizations, and non-profit organizations' work in community.

4.2 Conceptualization and Development of the Third Sector

This study is firmly sited within third sector research literature. The third sector is an evolving space with porous boundaries. General discussions around the third sector focus on non-profit organizations as constituted in their local contexts. Additional space is given for co-operatives, mutuals, social enterprises, and other institutional bodies (Bode & Brandsen, 2014; Brandsen & Pestoff, 2006; Defourny, Grønbjerg, Meijs, Nyssens, & Yamauchi, 2016; Elson, 2014; Knutsen, 2016; McPhee-Knowles & Boland, 2016; Salamon & Sokolowski, 2016). These organizations operate in an environment that is not fully reliant on the market such as commercial enterprises in the private sector or the government operated entities in the public sector. Instead, the third sector, sometimes referred to as the social sector, occupies a unique space that is somewhere in between (Evans, Richmond, & Shields, 2005; Knutsen, 2016). Various authors understand the third sector to lack clear and consistent boundaries with regard to what is *in* and *out* of the sector (Knutsen, 2016; Salamon & Sokolowski, 2016). As Knutsen (2016) notes, evolutions in the research literature have challenged the notion that there

truly is a *third sector* that is organizationally distinct from the other two sectors of the economy. In this view, the relationships between the third sector members and those of the public and private sectors are too closely intertwined to be independent of one another. This gives rise to the blurry boundary view of the third sector, one where there is no strict delineation between the third sector and the others. Additional theorizations of the sector include an intermediate welfare space as noted by Evers, Billis' focus on hybrid organizations, and Quarter's development of the social economy in the Canadian context (Knutsen, 2016).

From the above it is well understood that the third sector has various conceptualizations and that these conceptualizations are informed by local contexts, culture, and schools of thought (Knutsen, 2016). This research study places an emphasis on non-profit organizations involved in the delivery of human services through agreements with government actors. As such, the researcher finds a blurry boundary conceptualization of the third sector to better align with the research context. It also appears to be the viewpoint taken by many other researchers who study the third sector's role in state welfare provision (Bode & Brandsen, 2014; Brandsen & Pestoff, 2006; Cornforth, 2012) especially in Canada (Baines, 2010; McPhee-Knowles & Boland, 2016; Shier & Handy, 2016).

Salamon and Sokolowski (2016) follow a blurry boundary understanding of the third sector while describing common characteristics of the organizations that make up the core of the "loose and baggy monster" (Knapp & Kendall, 1995) that is the third sector. As noted in the following definition, core organizations are not defined by any one organizational form and are made up of other organizational and operational characteristics. Salamon & Sokolowski (2016) propose that the third sector is made of formal or informal organizations that are private in nature and not controlled by government. These organizations are also self-governing in that they can hold financial assets and exercise financial autonomy while also controlling the selection of their management and governance team. Participation in the organization's activities should be free of compulsion and not be mandated by law or through family or other coercion.

Finally, these organizations have a limit on the distribution of their excess revenues or assets. This ranges from a total limit on the distribution of profits in non-profit organizations to significant limits for co-operatives, mutual organizations, and various forms of social enterprise (Salamon & Sokolowski, 2016). This characterization of the third sector appears to have general support within the field with some areas of critique as noted by Defourny et al. (2016). In addition to organizational characteristics, specific operational activities characterize the third sector. Of relevance to this research is the creation of public benefit through consistent activities over time (Salamon & Sokolowski, 2016).

The third sector has enjoyed a recent surge in research interest among academics and practitioners. The reconceptualization of the third sector, as offered by Salamon and Sokolowski (2016), offers an updated viewpoint of a space that has been influencing public life for over a century. Contested, in this sense, is a reference to the varied understandings of the sector's origins and the role it fulfills in society. As noted earlier, the third sector is understood to be a realm of organizations and activities that are separate from the state (public sector) and market-based enterprises (private sector). As a separate area of the economy the third sector interacts with both the public and private sectors as part of its regular operations and may even engage in partnerships with organizations within and across sectors to further mutual organizational goals (Cornforth, 2012; Cornforth, Hayes, & Vangen, 2015; Rathi, Given, & Forcier, 2014; Shier & Handy, 2016). Partnerships between third sector organizations and the other two sectors appears heavily weighted toward interactions with the public sector and relationships with the state (Evans et al., 2005; Shier & Handy, 2016). As a result, the research literature appears to tie the origin and development of the sector to the actions, needs, or developments in the public sector (Salamon & Toepler, 2015), especially in regard to human services (Baines, 2010; Bode & Brandsen, 2014; Brandsen & Pestoff, 2006; Cornforth, 2012; Evans et al., 2005; Fanelli, Rudman, & Aldrich, 2017; McPhee-Knowles & Boland, 2016; Shier & Handy, 2016).

Salamon and Toepler (2015) offer various theories for the origin and development of the social sector. These include demand-sided theories of market failure, supply-side theories of entrepreneurialism, voluntary failure, and New Governance Theory.

4.2.1 Market Failure

The market failure notion of the third sector, as developed by Weisbrod (Salamon & Toepler, 2015) posits that the market is incapable of providing public or collective goods for society as they cannot be individually bought and consumed. As such, these goods become the responsibility of government through intervention efforts. A challenge arises in that government is only capable of responding to the collective goods demanded by a majority of the population and does not concern itself with marginal goods that are not required by all citizens but must still be produced collectively. This includes recreation, religious, and artistic activities, among others. Under this view non-profit organizations emerge to fill the gaps between what can be offered by government and the market however, the role of the non-profit is seen as separate from the other two sectors and does not lend itself to collaboration, partnership, or other forms of boundary blurring (Salamon & Toepler, 2015). In later writing Weisbrod acknowledged the ability for non-profit organizations to interact with members of the public and private sectors but that reliance on government to provide public goods would encourage these organizations to adopt more commercial practices in line with the private sector (Knutsen, 2016). A demand side approach recognizes the existence of a third sector and the ability of these organizations to fill the gap between what is offered by the public and private sectors. Further developments in this theory also offer opportunity for the boundaries of the third sector to be blurred and the creation of hybrid organizations to adapt to changing conditions in the other sectors.

4.2.2 Entrepreneurialism

The supply side theory of third sector development emphasises entrepreneurship and the beliefs and values of the organization's founders. Salamon and Toepler (2015) note

this may be a result of religious competition wherein organizations aim to attract or expand their base of followers, ideologues, or moral entrepreneurs. Non-profits operating as social enterprises are mission driven organizations with management and staff committed to fulfilling the identified public benefit (Dees, 2001; Kickul & Lyons, 2012; Steinerowski & Steinerowska-Streb, 2012). Insights from the social enterprise literature show that the supply of third sector organizations is related to their need as created through overall economic demand and that this demand is often the result of market failure (Buchanan, 2017; Kulothungan, 2017) or social change efforts on the part of the founders (Curtis, 2017; Dees, 2001; Kickul & Lyons, 2012; Praszkie & Nowak, 2012). The supply side rationale for the development of the third sector provides a response to the demands and opportunities created through market failure in a much more personal way.

The previous two theories of the third sector focused on economic understandings of the sector's formation. Both place a focus on third sector organizations, primarily non-profits, as filling the gap in the provision of public goods or promotion of a defined mission for social action and change. These theories do not leave excessive room for blurred boundaries between sectors or for the development of partnerships with sector members and public or private entities (Salamon & Toepler, 2015). However, relationships between third sector members and the public and private sectors are well documented in academic literature. This includes partnerships between third sector groups and the private sector (Dentoni, Bitzer, & Schouten, 2018; Gutiérrez, Márquez, & Reficco, 2016; Ryan & O'Malley, 2016), public sector (Janzen, Stobbe, Chapman, & Watson, 2016; Meinhard, Lo, & Hyman, 2016; Shier & Handy, 2016), as well as between all three sectors (Rathi et al., 2014; Shumate, Fu, & Cooper, 2018). To explain this expanded view of third sector development Salamon and Toepler (2015) acknowledge both voluntary failure theory and New Governance Theory. Both of these theories explore the blurred boundary and intersection of the third, public, and private sectors in line with the overall objectives of this research study.

4.2.3 Voluntary Failure

Voluntary failure theory refocuses responsibility for social problems on non-profit organizations operating in the third sector. Salamon and Toepler's (2015) previous economic theories posited that the third sector was designed to fulfill the gaps created by government and/or market failure in the provision of public goods. Under this theory the third sector is responsible for public goods and, when challenged, leans on public actors to address its failures. This provides theoretical support for the cross-sector relationships noted in earlier literature as well as the notion of blurred sectoral boundaries (Cornforth, 2012; Knutsen, 2016; Salamon & Sokolowski, 2016). As discussed in the demand side approach, governments are often challenged to provide all public goods, especially those which may not be demanded by the majority of the population. Governments may also be challenged by their bureaucratic nature to respond to social problems as they arise and mobilize in a short period of time. Through their organizational nature third sector members are often more nimble and incur fewer transaction costs in mobilizing individuals for the collective good (Salamon & Toepler, 2015).

The strengths of the third sector in addressing social problems are also met by inherent weaknesses. As noted by Salamon & Toepler (2015) "voluntary failure" is marked by:

- Philanthropic insufficiency or the inability for organizations to raise necessary funds to deliver on their mission through private donations alone. This includes the availability of donations when they are most in need.
- Philanthropic particularism or the tendency of third sector organizations to work in confined geographic areas or address specific needs. This causes disparity in the availability of public goods across jurisdictions.
- Philanthropic paternalism or the challenge of organizations to establish rights to benefits as opposed to benefits being a privilege and trouble fostering empowerment and self-worth among recipients.

- Philanthropic amateurism or the lack of experience and professionalism often found in the voluntary sector to address complex social problems.

Under this theorization, members of the third sector engage with government, work in partnership, and partner in activities that address the flaws of their foundational models. For example, government may provide supportive funds from taxes to support a third sector organization provide a public good in a manner that would be unconventional for government to do (Salamon & Toepler, 2015). The notion of voluntary failure gives rise to the need for further interaction between the third sector and government and exposes contention as to if and where boundaries between the two sectors lie.

The relationship between the state and the third sector is context specific and influenced by political and economic development and change in the constituent country. Brandsen and Pestoff (2006) acknowledge third sector organizations as having integral roles in the provision of public services and overall welfare state development in the Netherlands and Germany. In other countries, especially those in the Anglo-sphere (Baines, 2010), the relationship between third sector organizations and the state have been shaped by neoliberal policy trends. In many ways the integration of the third sector into the the state's provision of public welfare has been accepted as "business as usual" (Bode & Brandsen, 2014). The economic notion that the third sector is completely independent of the public and private sectors should be rejected in favour of models that promote the co-dependancy and interaction of the three sectors.

The relationship between the state and the third sector and the role of the third sector in the provision of public welfare is contentious. Bode and Brandsen (2014) note that some understand the integration of third sector organizations into state welfare provision as a part of a modern society and that such relationships are needed to address the complexities of the modern welfare state. The third sector may also have a comparative edge in the provision of welfare services as it is capable of mobilizing individuals for collective good and better address localized needs. This includes being nimble, innovative, and non-bureaucratic (Bode & Brandsen, 2014; Evans et al., 2005;

Salamon & Toepler, 2015; Wood, 2018). Conversely, the move toward further third sector integration has also been viewed as a way to reduce overall government spending or purposeful control over additional areas of social life on the part of government (Bode & Brandsen, 2014). To Evans et al. (2005) such strong influence precipitates the creation of the third sector as a *shadow state*.

Both Najam (2000) and Coston (1998) offer insights into the varied typologies of state and third sector relations. Of interest to this research are more marketized relationships including an increasing trend toward outsourcing and contracting of government services to non-profit organizations. Such activities influenced by a neoliberal political orientation as expressed through New Public Management (Baines, 2010; Bode & Brandsen, 2014; Brandsen & Pestoff, 2006; Evans et al., 2005).

4.3 Neoliberalism

The provision of services on the part of government and state actors has gradually declined throughout much of the Western world since the late 1970s (Kulothungan, 2017). This reduction has been a part of a wider restructuring of political and economic relationships between states and citizens and global industry and consumers. These relationships have been altered to place emphasis on the privatization of state owned enterprises, deregulation of industries, increased individualism, and a reliance on market mechanisms for the allocation of resources (Jaffe & Quark, 2006). Young (2008) argues that neoliberalism has been integrated into the present policy environment over time, through both destructive and creative processes. Neoliberalization is destructive in its dismantling of many institutions established by the Keynesian welfare state. Yet, it has also created a new policy environment and reshaped individual relationships in an increasingly globalized world. Evans et al. (2005), borrowing from Hood, notes that neoliberal governance, inclusive of all state administrative institutions and bodies, has fundamentally reconstructed the state in a number of ways. This includes the increased role of management and performance in the public sector and a decline in the creation of corresponding policy, an emphasis on fiscal restraint, inclusion of private sector

practices including the creation of competition in the public sector, and increased marketization of regulated or public services (Evans et al., 2005).

The adoption of neoliberal policies has dramatically changed the relationship between state and third sector organizations in many countries. In the Keynesian era, non-profits were viewed as offering supplemental services to the central role of the state in welfare provision. Under this model the state provided long term and stable core funding that permitted the organization to fully institutionalize itself in community (Evans et al., 2005). The agreements guiding the relationship were also much less formal with less reliance on contracts (Bode & Brandsen, 2014; Evans et al., 2005). As neoliberal policies moved beyond government to the governance institutions of the state the relationships between non-profits and the state also changed. Previous informal partnerships and core funding models have given way to competitive contracting for the delivery of specific programs. Under this new model non-profits are challenged to meet the independent goals of their mission and vision while being asked to increase their provision of social welfare in the communities they serve. As a result, many non-profit organizations are forced to become more entrepreneurial and adopt practices of the market based private sector. This model of governance is known as New Public Management (NPM) (Baines, 2010; Bode & Brandsen, 2014; Cornforth, 2012; Evans et al., 2005; Fanelli et al., 2017; Salamon & Toepler, 2015).

4.3.1 New Public Management

NPM assumes that government inefficiency, bureaucracy, and other shortcomings can be ameliorated through the imposition of the management techniques dominant in the business sector (Fanelli et al., 2017). These include “strategic planning, management by objectives, evidence-based decision-making, and incentive-based reward systems” (Salamon & Toepler, 2015) with the purpose of continuously improving efficiency and centralized decentralization through devolution and marketization (Cornforth, 2012; Evans et al., 2005). The NPM paradigm necessitated the streamlining of government’s

internal operations and the marketization of many government activities by outsourcing to non-state actors in the third and private sectors (Salamon & Toepler, 2015).

Government outsourcing common under NPM has two material impacts on the third sector: the creation of a contracting regime and a shift in operational accountability (Baines, 2010; Cornforth, 2012; Evans et al., 2005; Fanelli et al., 2017; Salamon & Toepler, 2015). Outsourcing of activities to non-government entities, and the transfer of required funds, has been facilitated through the signing of formal contracts. These contracts allocate funding for specific activities and define outputs to be completed by the contracted organization. Project-based funds do not often provide the same level of support to the organization offering the contracted services in the same way core-funding traditionally supported the backbone of the organization. This is especially challenging for non-profits operating in the social and human services sector that are especially reliant on government funding. Project-based funding challenges the organization to balance its own mission and vision with the expectations in contracted funding agreements. Under the NPM contracting regime accountability for project spending and achievement of outputs is also transferred to the contractor. For non-profits, this challenges the diverse set of stakeholders the organization is already accountable to in favour of only being accountable to government via the prevailing contract (Baines, 2010; Cornforth, 2012; Evans et al., 2005; Fanelli et al., 2017).

4.3.2 New Governance Theory

Despite its prevalence, strict adherence to NPM is contested in the research literature. While remaining within a neoliberal framework, Salamon and Toepler (2015) offer New Governance Theory as a critique of NPM. New Governance Theory accepts much of NPM's foundation but differs from it in three areas. The first area of difference notes that NPM's notion of a highly insulated public sector that does not work in the public interest is not reflective of many developed countries where NPM has been implemented. The authors contend that the public sector has embraced a variety of tools, such as regulations, loans and loan guarantees, insurance programs, among others, to guide

private and third sector actors toward the promotion of public welfare. These have been especially present in the development of welfare state partnerships in Europe (Salamon & Toepler, 2015). This critique supports the belief that government bureaucracies were not as inefficient as previously thought and methods of outsourcing or externally facilitating public welfare goals have existed in many nations long before NPM.

New Governance Theory's second critique of NPM is that the practice of outsourcing government activities greatly complicates the management of the modern welfare state. This theory shifts the focus from government bureaucracy and agencies, as found under NPM, to the specific tools or instruments increasingly used for public action. As noted by Salamon and Toepler (2015), each instrument, whether contract, guarantee, or voucher, "has its own operating procedures, its own skill requirements, its own delivery mechanism – indeed its own 'political economy'" (p. 2166). In this way, each instrument has its own influence on the programs, services, or organizations it encounters. The core elements of ministerial duty and control over state activities are not lost using these instruments. Instead, it is "the exercise of discretion over the use of public authority and the spending of public funds" (Salamon & Toepler, 2015, p. 2167) that is transferred outside of government through these instruments. Rather than streamlining government this process of externalizing government activities further complicates the existing welfare state. Instead of supervising government staff, much energy is placed in creating the necessary contracts that govern relationships with external parties (Evans et al., 2005; Fanelli et al., 2017). Government managers become important players in the balancing of public welfare in new and complex relationships.

Finally, while NPM places a heavy reliance on the market to perform former government activities New Governance Theory places focus on the role of non-profit organizations in fulfilling these tasks (Salamon & Toepler, 2015). New Governance Theory understands the nonprofit sector as having a number of strengths in delivering public services over the market mechanism alone. Non-profits are recognized for being flexible in their operations (Bode & Brandsen, 2014; Evans et al., 2005; Wood, 2018) with governing boards that are close to the site of service delivery (Brown, 2002; Cornforth, 2012; Guo

& Musso, 2007; Leardini, Moggi, & Rossi, 2019; Rossi, Leardini, Moggi, & Campedelli, 2015; Salamon & Toepler, 2015). Stemming from their ability to fill gaps and address needs quickly these organizations also often have existing institutional structures in areas of government interest that predate any government involvement. Additionally, non-profits are often small organizations with diverse services that permit tailoring to individual client needs (Salamon & Toepler, 2015). Another advantage of these organizations offering government services is that they often work within collaborative networks (Cornforth et al., 2015; Shier & Handy, 2016) that allow the organization to work across functional areas, break down silos, and leverage additional private or voluntary resources to fulfill their social mission. Finally, the lack of profit maximization permits non-profits to “deliver human services at a human scale” (Salamon & Toepler, 2015, p. 2168) and have a staying power, as opposed to private enterprise, that weathers dips in funding when services are drawn on heavily. As noted earlier, the coordination of the public and third sectors appears to balance each sector’s weaknesses and strengths to promote a provision of public welfare that no sector could provide on its own (Salamon & Toepler, 2015).

The dominance of NPM or New Governance Theory is contested within the literature. While Salamon and Toepler (2015) argue there has been a consistent transition away from NPM in favour of New Governance Theory since the early 2000s Bode and Brandsen (2014) argue that “the old NPM is anything but dead in practice” (p. 1060). In the context of Canadian human service non-profits NPM appears to have greatly influenced the present make-up of the employment services sector in some provinces (Baines, 2010) while continuing to be common practice in other areas of welfare provision (Evans et al., 2005; McPhee-Knowles & Boland, 2016). One cannot dispute the plethora of literature discussing NPM and its impacts reshaping the third sector in Canada and throughout the developed world. However, New Governance Theory offers a helpful critique through which to understand new developments in the sector and the evolving relationship between third sector organizations and the state.

4.3.3 Neoliberal Policy in Canada

Previous discussion of third sector development, relation to the state, and the influence of neoliberalism has been focused on the global level with North American and European examples. Canada is not an island and has experienced a transition away from a Keynesian welfare state through the adoption of neoliberal policies. This includes the adoption of NPM and this system's influence on relationships between the state and non-profit organizations (Baines, 2010; Evans et al., 2005; Fanelli et al., 2017; McPhee-Knowles & Boland, 2016; Wood, 2018). In time with other nations, Canada's federal and provincial governments have engaged in the out-sourcing of various public activities to private and third sector organizations. This has worked to reshape the Canadian non-profit sector especially as approximately 60% of its revenue is sourced from various levels of government (Evans et al., 2005). In the Canadian non-profit literature there appears to be a greater focus on the use of contract-based funding as opposed to core funding models. Under the contract model the contract itself becomes the main regulatory mechanism governing the public services provided rather than the state (Fanelli et al., 2017; McPhee-Knowles & Boland, 2016). New Governance Theory does not appear to be well explored in the Canadian literature under examination. However, there is a recognition that the devolution of state activities does often create the need for more state intervention with respect to managing many of the state's tools for shaping external activities (Fanelli et al., 2017). A further discussion of the non-profit sector, and non-profit organizations' relationship with local communities, is offered in the following section.

4.4 Non-Profit Organizations in Community

The utilization of non-profit organizations for carrying out and actualizing government objectives has been well discussed in the previous literature. Factors supporting non-profit organizations' ability to carry on government programs and services include pre-existence, flexibility, and mission-driven intentions (Bode & Brandsen, 2014; Evans et al., 2005; Salamon & Toepler, 2015; Wood, 2018). As such, they are often engaged by

government to address public sector weaknesses. This section will provide an overview of non-profit organizations, define community, and discuss the concept of stakeholders, representation, legitimacy, and governance within the context of this study.

4.4.1 Non-profit Organizations

Non-profits make up an overwhelming portion of the third sector as previously conceptualized in this literature review (Baines, 2010; Evans et al., 2005; Fanelli et al., 2017; Wood, 2018). Non-profit organizations are formed to pursue a public good rather than the maximization of profit (Brown, 2002; Cornforth, 2012; Legal Information Society of Nova Scotia, 2007). While these bodies are permitted to make excess revenues over expenses (Hopkins, 2013) the profits generated cannot be distributed to members of the governing body or members of the association. Instead, profits are to be reinvested in activities designed to achieve the organization's stated purpose (Legal Information Society of Nova Scotia, 2007). Non-profit organizations may be informally organized or choose to become legally incorporated entities. Unincorporated non-profits normally engaged in small-scale activities with limited or no monetary transactions. In contrast, incorporated non-profits are their own legal entity and are able to take on an additional set of activities including holding assets in its own right and the ability to engage in contracts and agreements with other legal entities (Legal Information Society of Nova Scotia, 2007). Given their increased ability to engage with government and prevalence in this study, incorporated non-profit organizations will be given increased attention in this review.

Formal non-profit organizations are generally incorporated under the laws of the province in which they are formed while some may be formed under federal statutes (Legal Information Society of Nova Scotia, 2007). In contrast to for-profit organizations, these organizations do not have owners and are instead governed by a board of directors entrusted to oversee the operations and activities of the non-profit in line with its public benefit purpose (Cornforth, 2012; Hopkins, 2013; Legal Information Society of Nova Scotia, 2007). Community-based non-profits are considered democratic

organizations that effectively belong to the community in which they exist and are tangible manifestations of that community (Brown, 2002; Leardini et al., 2019; Rossi et al., 2015). The relationship between non-profit organizations and community is complex and includes a number of intersectional attributes. This includes the notion of community, stakeholders, non-profit governance, legitimacy of non-profit organizations, and ways in which non-profit organizations actualize on their mission-driven purpose.

4.4.2 Community

Community is an ambiguous concept (Rossi et al., 2015). The term *community* can mean either a collective or group defined by geography or spatial boundaries or by a set of common beliefs and understandings. Newby defines community as a “set of citizens joined by geography, interaction or identity” (Rossi et al., 2015, p.25). Bellah and associates offer a less geographic sense of community in that community is “a group of people who are socially interdependent, who participate together in discussion and decision-making, and who share certain practices together that both define the community and are nurtured by it” (Guo & Musso, 2007, p.310). Regardless of whether a community is constructed on the basis of physical or emotional constraints, Nair (2004) highlights four qualities of communities; a smallness of scale, homogeneity of activities and state of mind of members, self-sufficiency across a broad range of needs and, through time, a collective consciousness of distinctiveness. It is these elements that help to organize individuals into collective systems that operate within larger social systems (Berkes & Davidson–Hunt, 2007). While not bound to operating in a specific geographic space, the notion of *service area* is normalized among the participants of this research. For this reason, the study will embrace a more geographic sense of community to capture a sense of people within a place. Geographic understandings of community also appear to be the dominant sense of community expressed in stakeholder studies (Rossi et al., 2015).

4.4.3 Stakeholders

By their nature non-profit organizations are not owned or controlled by any specific individual or group. Instead, these organizations fulfill their organizational purpose or mission on behalf of their stakeholders. Stakeholders in this sense are “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the corporation’s purpose” (Freeman, Wicks, & Harrison, 2007, p. 6). Freeman et al. (2007) understand organizations to be developed around a set of relations with these groups and individuals with each stakeholder operationalizing and executing its relationship in a different way. Non-profits have multiple stakeholders who often exhibit conflicting interests (Chen, Harrison, & Jiao, 2018). Organizations, groups, and individuals who have a more direct *stake* in the focal organization are often referred to as primary stakeholders in the stakeholder literature while those with more periphery interests are known as secondary stakeholders (Freeman et al., 2007).

Stakeholder Theory, as developed by Freeman et al. (2007) among others has primarily been used to understand commercial enterprises in the private sector. In line with more commercial thinking the authors identify communities, customers, employees, suppliers, and financiers, as well as shareholders as primary stakeholder groups. Competitors, special interest groups, consumer advocacy groups, media, and government are also identified as secondary stakeholders (Freeman et al., 2007). As each non-profit organization has its own set of stakeholders there is potential for each of these groups to also be present for some or all non-profit organizations.

With specificity to the non-profit health and education realm Chen et al. (2018) have identified government, institutional donors, individual donors, employees, volunteers, and clients as the main stakeholder groups that exhibit competing interests non-profit managers must negotiate in the human services field. Taking from Mitchell and colleagues, Chen et al. (2018) explore “the degree to which managers give priority to competing stakeholder claims” (p. 814) measured through the stakeholder’s possession of power, urgency, and legitimacy. Clients and government appear to be the most

salient stakeholder groups (Chen et al., 2018) reinforcing the tension experienced by non-profit organizations as a result of neoliberalist policies (Baines, 2010; Evans et al., 2005; McPhee-Knowles & Boland, 2016; Salamon & Toepler, 2015). The emergence of clients as the most salient stakeholder group for non-profits supports the notion that these organizations are still able to achieve their mandate with respect to the provision of public goods. Government as another strong stakeholder exemplifies the major role government has as funder and regulator within the non-profit sector throughout the developed world (Chen et al., 2018; Evans et al., 2005). It also supports concerns held by many authors (Baines, 2010; Evans et al., 2005) that non-profits are at risk of losing their independence and becoming an arm of government (Chen et al., 2018) through contracts that devolve responsibility and accountability for government programs onto the sector (Baines, 2010; Cornforth, 2012; Evans et al., 2005; Fanelli et al., 2017; Salamon & Toepler, 2015). The balance between the interests of clients and government may also speak to the representative role played by non-profit organizations in the third sector.

4.4.4 Representation

The focus of this literature review, to this point, has been the top-down relationship between government and the non-profit organizations of the third sector. It has emphasized the way in which non-profit organizations mediate the relationship that government has with its citizens. However, non-profits operate in a dynamic space and can also be thought of as democratic manifestations of the community or communities they serve. In this way they also have representative functions, on behalf of their community members, to the state (Guo & Musso, 2007; Leardini et al., 2019; Rossi et al., 2015).

Guo and Musso (2007) note a tension in the literature surrounding democratic role of non-profit organizations. One stream of non-profit research recognizes these organization as mediating structures in society. As mediators, non-profit organizations express the interests of individuals to societal mega-structures such as large

corporations and government. The notion that non-profit organizations give individuals a voice in the democratic operation of modern society is criticized as being overly ambitious given the capacity constraints experienced by these groups. Others also question the ability of these organizations, who are often governed by unelected community members, are able to truly represent the interest of their constituents in community (Guo & Musso, 2007).

Building on the work of Pitkin (1967), Guo and Musso (2007) offer dimensions of non-profit representation that reflect non-profit concerns of legitimacy and capacity. This *dimensional* framework assists in understanding how non-profit organizations interact with their constituent communities and mediate the relationship between these individuals and societal megastructures. With respect to the research under consideration, this framework assists in understanding how non-profit organizations integrate into their communities, learn from members, and address concerns through the way in which contracted services are implemented in the respective region. Additionally, this framework offers insight into how a non-profit organization may learn from or integrate information collected from the community into its operations. A summary of Guo and Musso's (2007) framework is provided below:

- Legitimacy: Substantive Representation – occurs when an organization acts in the interest of its constituents, in a manner that is responsive to them.
- Legitimacy: Symbolic Representation – occurs when an organization is trusted by its constituents as their legitimate representative.
- Capacity: Formal Representation – occurs when formal organizational arrangements establish the ways in which the organization's leaders are selected by its constituents.
- Capacity: Descriptive Representation – occurs when leaders of the organization mirror the politically relevant characteristics of its constituents.

- Capacity: Participatory Representation – occurs when there is a direct, unmediated, and participatory relationship between an organization and its constituents.

The dimensions of representation framework offered by Guo and Musso (2007) has been applied in both the Chinese (Guo & Zhang, 2013) and Italian (Leardini et al., 2019; Rossi et al., 2015) contexts. In both instances further research has expanded the understandings of individual dimensions while confirming the utility and applicability of the framework to non-profit research more broadly (Rossi et al., 2015). Legitimacy and governance practices emerge from the above framework as key elements of non-profit and community relations and will be discussed in the following section.

4.4.5 Legitimacy

Legitimacy is a complex concept that lacks a formal definition within the literature (Leardini et al., 2019). Borrowing from Suchman (1995), legitimacy “is a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (p.574). In essence, legitimacy is achieved through the organization’s alignment with the “rules of the game” (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983) as attributed on the part of organizational stakeholders (Leardini et al., 2019; Stenholm & Hytti, 2014). Discussions of legitimacy vary within the research literature depending on the context under review. In the interest of clarity a discussion relating to non-profit organizations will be pursued.

As noted earlier, non-profit organizations can be conceptualised as community-based democratic institutions that mediate the relationship between the state and individuals as well as the individual and the state. Such a position in social life can only be achieved through legitimacy from all stakeholders. With respect to the non-profit sector, Leardini et al. (2019) identify a set of legitimizing elements non-profit organizations should attain. These elements include the alignment of organizational values and

actions with those desired by the relevant stakeholder groups, complying with legal requirements and agreements, having sufficient governing capacity to achieve goals the community cares about, and leadership that is representative of community constituents (Leardini et al., 2019). As legitimacy is a status accomplished through relations with all stakeholders (Leardini et al., 2019; Suchman, 1995) it is inherent that non-profits operating as mediators adhere to these elements with both individuals and government in mind. As mediating entities these organizations must balance the expectations of their stakeholders. Yet, as manifestations of community, governance approaches act as avenues through which community members at the local level remain capable of managing these various expectations.

4.4.6 Governance

Cornforth (2012) understands governance as concern for the overall direction and control of the organization under focus and ensuring a reasonable expectation of external accountability. Research to date on governance in non-profit organizations has focused mainly on board governance in unitary, single level, organizations. This includes board composition, roles and responsibilities, board-staff relations, and accountability to stakeholders, among others (Cornforth, 2012). Work by Rossi et al. (2015) further compliments Cornforth's (2012) assessment of the non-profit literature and confirms that research to date on non-profit governance has been narrowly focused and should be expanded to include multi-level governance through trade associations, federations, or other avenues that reflect more complex organizational landscapes (Cornforth, 2012). Despite this call for a wider scope of non-profit governance research, the focus organizations of this study are generally unitary, single-level organizations. This area of the literature review will explore how governance mechanisms of non-profit organizations support the cultivation and integration of community interests in organizational activities.

Incorporated non-profit organizations have various instruments to guide the governance of their activities. At their core, articles of incorporation and organizational bylaws set

out the purpose of the non-profit and provide guidance on the organization of the entity. The formation of an organization's board of directors is informed by its bylaws with members being selected to act as the "operating mind" (Legal Information Society of Nova Scotia, 2007, p.44) of the organization. In some small organizations a board may be quite hands on in the daily fulfillment of the non-profit's affairs. More commonly, boards will adopt a policy governance model in which board members guide overall operational policy carried out by staff (Legal Information Society of Nova Scotia, 2007). As directors of overall organizational policy, non-profit boards have the ability to engage with their constituent communities and represent the interests of stakeholders in overall organizational activities (Rossi et al., 2015).

The need for representation of stakeholders in non-profits has already been explored in this review, however, it will be revisited here with respect to the organization's board of directors. The work of Freiwirth suggests that non-profit boards can be established along a continuum of community engagement from community-consultative boards, governance partnership with the respective community, through to constituent-led boards (Rossi et al., 2015). Freiwirth's continuum of community engagement suggests that boards of directors occupy a unique space that straddles the boundary of the non-profit – being both *inside* and *outside* the organization (Rossi et al., 2015). By being both in the community and part of the organization the board members offer insights that are representative of community interests. These insights can be attributed to the boards' information gathering activities (Brown, 2002), member selection activities (Brown, 2002; Guo & Musso, 2007; Leardini et al., 2019; Rossi et al., 2015), fostering stakeholder engagement in policy decisions (Brown, 2002; Leardini et al., 2019; Rossi et al., 2015), increasing board member diversity across a wide spectrum of socio-demographic characteristics (Buse, Bernstein, & Bilimoria, 2016; Leardini et al., 2019), and promote an organizational culture that is both inclusive and embodies the community focused activity the organization seeks to address (Buse et al., 2016; Duncan & Schoor, 2015). The need for boards of directors to be inclusive and reflective of the communities the organization serves, for both legitimacy and the exercise of good

governance, is exhibited by a number of authors (Buse et al., 2016; Guo & Musso, 2007; Leardini et al., 2019). However, Brown (2002) cautions that governance boards, in their pursuit of representation, should not only be made of stakeholders and should still recruit board members that fulfill necessary capacity gaps within the organization. To do otherwise may challenge the board to attain the necessary resources required to address the identified needs of stakeholders and implement their suggestions (Brown, 2002). To address this concern, Cornforth (2012) suggests that non-profits develop consultative bodies that include members, users, or other relevant stakeholder groups that can be integrated into the organization's overall governance model. This permits the non-profit to balance its need for stakeholder representation with the need to engage outsiders for needed organizational capacity to fulfill its organizational mission and purpose.

4.5 Taking Action

Previous sections of this literature review have lauded third sector organizations, especially non-profit organizations, as having a strong foothold in the communities they serve, being mediators between the state and individuals, and balancing stakeholder expectations. Mechanisms for understanding external practices have been discussed but there has been little exploration of how these expectations are addressed through the actions of the organization. The ways in which a non-profit goes about actualizing its mission are about as numerous as the missions and purposes these organizations address. However, two broad approaches to non-profit mission attainment include the creation of place-based policy and collaboration between organizations in the third and other sectors of the economy.

4.5.1 Place-Based Policy Development

Neoliberal policies have contributed to the present challenges facing local communities in Canada and have sparked renewed interest in place-based approaches to development and service delivery (Halseth et al., 2010; Lauzon, Bollman, & Ashton,

2015; Markey, 2010). Place-based policy seeks to complement and contextualize the current emphasis on space within local and regional development. This policy acknowledges the importance of understanding the global systems of which all localities are a part, no area is completely isolated. Yet, there is a need to see each local place as being a unique system nested within the larger global space. In this way, characteristics and complexities that are unique to the specific place will not be lost in the generalization to the regional, national, or global system. These qualities are used to address local needs while thinking of the larger system in which the place is a part. Markey (2010) offers a summary of place-based development in the following passage:

Place-based development, in contrast to conventional sectoral, programmatic or issue-defined perspectives, is a holistic and targeted intervention that seeks to reveal, utilize and enhance the unique natural, physical, and/or human capacity endowments present within a particular location for the development of the in-situ community and/or its biophysical environment (Markey, 2010, p. 1).

Here, place-based approaches to development are positioned to take a holistic view of the locality and include the unique natural, physical, and human capital components of the community to address social, economic, and environmental challenges. This perspective focuses on the capacity of a place and its ability to develop itself. In doing so it seeks to tap the local knowledge of the place and build upon the existing expertise of the local people and include them in the development process and not just the process' outcomes (Lauzon et al., 2015). Many non-profit organizations appear to use their governance models to integrate the skills and expertise of the local environment into their operational activities. Another way in which non-profit organizations may fulfill their locally spirited purpose is through collaborative partnerships.

4.5.2 Partnerships

Non-profit organizations often work to address complex social, political, economic, environmental, or other problems in the public domain. Often these are *wicked problems*, and “emerge from complex systems in which cause and effect relationships are either unknown or highly uncertain, and have multiple stakeholders with strongly held and conflicting values related to the problems” (Dentoni, Bitzer, & Pascucci, 2016, p. 36). It is difficult for non-profit organizations to address these issues alone and so many rely on the synergies created through interorganizational partnerships with other actors to create desired solutions (Rathi et al., 2014).

Non-profit organizations have a propensity to engage in partnerships in an effort to increase societal value through the sharing of information, knowledge, activities, capacity, and resources relevant to the shared goal at hand (Dentoni et al., 2016; Rathi et al., 2014; Shumate et al., 2018; Yan, Lin, & Clarke, 2018). Addressing wicked problems often requires solutions considered socially innovative (Shier & Handy, 2019). Leaders of non-profit organizations with proficient interest in addressing wicked problems often have a positive orientation toward collaboration and partnerships. This includes actively pursuing partnerships with other organizations and individuals that have needed expertise and supports a holistic approach to problem amelioration. Once these partnerships are formed it is also important that the relationship be maintained appropriately by engaging partners at appropriate times, recognizing the role of each partner, and sharing information, power, and control over the activities being conducted (Shier & Handy, 2019). Non-profits must also create organizational cultures and structures that are supportive of staff engagement and input with leaders being available and supportive to the needs of their staff. In line with external relations, leaders must be open to new ideas and shared decision-making among staff while keeping and hiring staff that align with organizational operations (Shier & Handy, 2019). For partnerships to be successful there needs to be a sufficient level of support for the relationship held within all levels of each partnering entity.

Partnerships are also characterised by their directionality and formality (Rathi et al., 2014). Directionality speaks to how knowledge, resources, and the like are shared and transferred in the relationship. Uni-directional partnerships permit only one-way transfer between the non-profit organization and the partner or vice versa. The partnerships are more passive in nature and do not lend themselves to widespread collaboration. Bi- and multi-directional partnerships are active relationships in which transfers occur between the non-profit organization and either one or multiple partners and are fruitful ground for collaboration to take place (Rathi et al., 2014). Formality speaks to how the sharing relationships between organizations are acknowledged. Formal partnerships are sanctioned and well documented, potentially through a contract or other legal agreement. Partnerships that are pre-arranged, prescribed as part of an existing process, or authorized internally are considered semi-formal. Finally, informal partnerships may occur ad hoc or serendipitously through in-person or online interactions (Rathi et al., 2014). Regardless of whether partnerships are formed to address operational concerns or wicked problems these common attributes do inform interorganizational partnerships.

Interorganizational partnerships involving non-profits take a variety of different forms. A non-exhaustive list of those mentioned frequently in the literature includes “alliances, agreements, consortia, coalitions, joint-ventures, licensing, non-profit business alliances (NBA) and sponsorships” (Rathi et al., 2014, p. 868), collaborative windows (Cornforth et al., 2015; Yan et al., 2018), and cross-sector social partnerships (Shier & Handy, 2016; Shumate et al., 2018; Yan et al., 2018). Each of these partnership forms is relevant to specific contexts, and develop from various internal and external pressures (Shumate et al., 2018). For this reason, partnerships that form within sectors, across sectors, and with community are of special interest to this research.

Intra-sector partnerships occur when non-profit organizations partner with other members of the third sector. Sharing in this form of partnership can be passive, such as observation, or more active wherein the organizations party to the relationship engage in sustained interactions. These actions often evolve around perceived organizational

synergies to achieve shared goals (Rathi et al., 2014). Intra-sectoral partnerships also exhibit elements of co-opetition in that while members of the partnership will often have individual goals and ambitions that compete with one another they will still come together to achieve their shared interests and increase overall public benefit (Kickul & Lyons, 2012).

Inter-sector, cross-sector, or cross-sector social partnerships are grounded in a well-developed literature. These partnerships are created when collaborative arrangements are developed between members of the public, private, or third sector (Shumate et al., 2018). Non-profit organizations wish to engage in these arrangements as they support large scale social change (Yan et al., 2018) when working in intersectional and complex environments (Dentoni et al., 2016; Shier & Handy, 2016). While there is potential for non-profit organizations to increase their capacity by participating in these partnership arrangements, Shumate et al. (2018) find little evidence for overall capacity growth at the meso-level from sustained engagement in cross-sector partnerships. However, there is potential for small internal capacities to be created within organizations relevant to working with the selected partners. For instance, learning to work within government frameworks and requirements (Shumate et al., 2018). The real benefit to accrue to non-profit organizations from their participation in cross sector partnerships appears to be their ability to actualize on their public benefit purpose through the mobilization of additional resources and capabilities. This is completed through a variety of enabling, coordinating, and facilitating roles (Yan et al., 2018) that help guide the partnership in the achievement of shared goals that also align with the mission of the non-profit partners.

Reflective of their role as public benefit providers (Cornforth, 2012; Leardini et al., 2019; Rossi et al., 2015; Salamon & Toepler, 2015) and as manifestations of community (Brown, 2002), non-profit organizations engage with groups or individuals that are not represented by any other formal mechanism. These organizations require community oriented knowledge to offer relevant services to their constituents (Yan et al., 2018) and maintain legitimacy (Guo & Musso, 2007; Leardini et al., 2019). Community

relationships can exhibit all three forms of formality depending on how they are developed or organize their desired structure of engagement (Cornforth, 2012; Yan et al., 2018).

This review indicates that non-profit organizations have a variety of tools to actualize their mission in the public domain. This includes the development and operationalization of place-based policy and actions as well as the formation of partnerships with a wide variety of relevant actors. These actions are complementary to one another with place-based policy being informed and informing the development of partnerships with the same being true for the relation between partnerships and place-based policy. Place-based policy and partnership development are well discussed in the non-profit literature and align well with wider discussions and conceptualizations of the third sector. This is especially true when the material implications of neoliberal practices are considered.

4.6 Summary

This literature review has explored key topics related to the third sector in Canada and this economic sector's relationship with the state. Of specific interest has been the role that non-profit organizations play in the provision of public welfare and mediate the relationship between individuals and the state at the community level. A comprehensive review of the literature has been provided and has included four key sections. Topics covered include the conceptualization of the third sector, neoliberal policy influence on third sector organizations, non-profit organizations, and non-profit organizations' work in community. This review of relevant academic literature has informed the development of this research study and aided in shaping an understanding of the data collected and the resulting research findings. These will be discussed in the following chapter.

5 Findings

5.1 Overview

This chapter presents the findings of this research study *Community Integration of Non-Profit Organizations: A Study of Nova Scotia's Employment Services Ecosystem*. After careful consideration of the collected data, the researcher suggests that non-profit employment service providers in Nova Scotia integrate into their local communities and promote place-based policy, programs, and services to address labour market needs by engaging in *connecting, being present, internalizing, and operationalizing* activities. Each of these four thematic areas is composed of several attributes. An overview of themes and attributes are provided in Table 1 and described in detail in subsequent sections.

Table 1: Thematic Overview

Theme Area	Activities
Connecting	Networking and Relationship Building Staff Board Members Convening Community
Being Present	Tangible Intangible Understand
Internalizing	Niche Internal Integration
Operationalizing	NS Works Suite of Services Auxiliary Services Beyond NS Works Role of NS Works in Community

5.2 Connecting

Connecting describes the ways in which non-profit employment service providers reach out beyond their organizational boundaries to gather insights and new information relevant to the services provided, foster relationships with other organizations, form partnerships to expand organizational mission fulfillment, and participate in community

life among other activities. This thematic area places an emphasis on the ability of the non-profit organizations that deliver the NS Works program to reach out beyond their organization in a way best suited to their context and local circumstance. Other organizations, individuals, and community entities are also welcomed to engage in their own connecting activities with the contracted service providers. This indicates that non-profit employment service providers have porous organizational boundaries that permit the bi-directional flow of information between the organization and its constituent community. In doing so these organizations promote the reduction of silos that often occur within the delivery of public services – improving client interactions with enhanced fluidity and adaptability in service provision. *Connecting* activities directly support the integration of non-profit employment service providers into their communities and manifest through networking and relationship building, leveraging the assets held within staff and board members, and hosting events.

5.2.1 Networking and Relationship Building

Interviewees representing management of non-profit employment service providers indicated that these organizations participate in networking activities at the meso-level of groups, organizations, agencies, and local institutions. It was noted that these networking activities are useful to managers as they permit the sharing of formal and informal information and the early development of partnerships and further collaborative efforts. NS Works Centres operate within a wider employment services ecosystem. As such, a distinction is made between the meso-level interactions between members of this ecosystem and those who are not as contextual factors and expectations differ between these two groups.

Nova Scotia's employment services ecosystem is made up of four pillars including the NS Works Centres, CEI, NSCDA, and LAE. As a result of Transformation there is a renewed sense of collaboration as opposed to competition among service providers and that collaboration among Centres and pillar organizations is necessary to achieve the shared goals of the system. Within the system, networking and relationship building is

an inferred expectation. Representatives of pillar organizations meet formally in person twice per year and via technology twice per year. These gatherings permit the transmission of formal information amongst members as well as informal networking to take place. Outside of formal gatherings representatives of NS Works Centres report reaching out to their colleagues to discuss shared challenges, practices, receive guidance and advice, and maintain good working relationships to support future collaboration.

Non-profit employment service providers also engage in networking activities and form relationships with non-pillar organizations. These include provincial government departments and agencies, such as DCS and Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, First Nation governments, Regional Enterprise Networks (RENs), Cape Breton Partnership, Halifax Partnership, provincial and federal corrections facilities, and province-wide specialized service providers, such as Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS). Each of the entities holds a stake in the overall Nova Scotia employment services system but is not a core system pillar. Many of these organizations contribute to career development, promote a skilled and productive labour force, or assist specific populations prepare and participate in the labour market. As system partners it is in the best interest of NS Works Centres to network and form relationships with these entities. The process of network and relationship building with system stakeholders appears less formalized and at the instigation of either party. Unlike with pillar organizations, there is no formal or regularly scheduled mechanism to bring these groups together to engage in connecting activities. Instead, it is up to each NS Works contract holder to engage with stakeholder organizations at the meso-level or be open to engagement initiated by other organizations.

Networking and relationship building between NS Works Centres and these meso-level groups exhibit a number of bi-directional forms and varied organizational investment from either party. At times, representatives of NS Works Centres may attend meetings

and gatherings hosted by DCS as they pertain to program delivery and service changes or specific project interactions. As Interviewee 3 notes:

I was just at a DCS transformation meeting last week because they have introduced a standard household rate and talking about the last big initiative they did.

In other instances, representatives of these stakeholder organizations may reach out to the NS Works Centre to form an initial relationship that could result in a more formalized partnership or project in the future as Interviewee 6 acknowledges:

Actually, Corrections [Canada] had contacted us and [...] they want us to do some employability workshops for inmates who are getting close to getting released. So we are in discussions with them.

Networking and relationship building are not always quick and seamless processes. This is especially true when working with marginalized groups or with groups and individuals who have experienced discrimination and injustice on the part of the federal and provincial governments and their partner organizations. The relationship between NS Works contract holders and First Nation governments is varied and highly contextual. Interviewee 5 reported having frequent interactions with First Nation employment centres and developing service-based partnerships on areas of common concern:

I have worked with their employment officer. I have gone down there to do workshops, so we'll share that information [...] We have a good partnership with our local [Name] First Nation for both youth and older. The youth have programs there for summer employment so our staff will go there to [Name of First Nation] and help them with their resumes because they all have to have a resume to apply for a summer job in the First Nation area.

Conversely, Interviewee 3 acknowledges that some NS Works contract holders are still seeking to establish relationships built from trust and common vision:

[...] that service provider is making in-roads and that is what we aspire to do, we are just not there, and sometimes struggling with how to get there. And a lot of it is about relationship building and trust and you know, I think when we first met with them, they said well we don't need any more lip service but that is okay. It is okay to start out with an honest, you know, kind of talk about where we are and that. So I am really hopeful that we can find either funding opportunities or find ways to partner and try to make things happen.

In the main it appears that NS Works contract holders frequently reach out to their meso-level stakeholders to communicate information of interest or to foster relations needed to collaborate and work together in the future. NS Works Centres are also open to connections instigated at the request of the stakeholder and engage in more formal partnerships and agreements as the relationship develops. Regardless of who is initiating the interaction, a porous organizational boundary, and an organizational culture supportive of networking and relationship building plays a key role in maintaining the collaborative spirit of the overall system. It is important to note that an organization's culture is dependent on the members who create and perpetuate this culture. In this way the staff of an NS Works Centre play an important role in connecting activities.

5.2.2 Staff

The staff of non-profit employment service providers play an integral role in the connecting activities undertaken by the organization. Many roles within NS Works Centres have the potential to partake in connecting activities including executive directors, operations managers, and employer engagement specialist positions.

As in many non-profit organizations, management level staff have a diverse job description that is shaped by the capacities and constraints of the organization overall. Each NS Works Centre has its own unique organizational structure. Yet, whether the

Centre is a stand alone non-profit or a project of an existing organization, each will have its own senior leadership staff person or team. In the collected data these individuals occupied the role of executive director or operations manager. For these individuals, connecting activities took place through professional networks, attending meetings, and introductions made by past colleagues active in the sector or periphery.

The role of employer engagement specialist is new within the NS Works system and appeared as a result of the Transformation process. The employer engagement specialist is responsible for liaising with local employers, identifying their potential human resource needs, assisting with job postings, and working internally with NS Works staff to communicate job opportunities to clients and potential applicants. Interviewees report that their employer engagement specialists often work with chambers of commerce and other business organizations to gain access to potential employers. It is also noted that word of mouth is frequently used within the employer community to discuss employer related services available from NS Works and that employer engagement specialists are often quite occupied through community-based leads and networking. Employer engagement specialists also play an important connecting role within and between non-profit employment service provider organizations. As noted by Interviewee 8, employer engagement specialists often work together across offices and organizations that share a common labour and employer pool to share information, improve employer service, and reduce redundancy:

So we work collaboratively with our employer engagement specialist in [Location], in [Location], and our employer engagement specialists work very collaboratively as a team on initiatives for employers so that they're not each going to an employer and saying this is what we can offer you. And that has worked fairly well for the last three and a half years.

When thinking of staff in the context of the local it is important to recognize these individuals as not only employees but also as members of the community they are seeking to serve through their work. In this way staff act as connectors in their roles as

community members outside of regular working hours just as much as they fulfill a connecting function during regular service hours.

Staff of the NS Works Centres included in this study appear well connected to the communities they serve and active in community life. This takes the form of membership in service clubs or groups, previous employment by local businesses, being a previous client of other community service providers, and participation in local governance initiatives. Staff are members of the communities they serve and so have a vested interest in the overall well-being of their friends, families, and neighbours. The strong dedication to place by staff members is exhibited by Interviewee 3:

But it is because they are all [Local Demonym], and they believe in their communities, and they don't want to leave it.

NS Works Centres encourage their staff to participate in their local communities as it acts as an important entry point for information to enter into the organization about the local context, assisting in the identification of challenges and opportunities present in the local area. As Interviewee 7 notes:

[...] many of my staff, or pretty much all the staff sit on committees where they live. And as well, I do, and so that's another, I really like that because we really get to know what's needed out there. The other things are volunteerism, I'll volunteer on various other things and events that are going on. And again that would be a very big piece of how we get to know what is going on out there and what is needed from us.

It appears that community participation on the part of Centre staff is voluntary. Notably, many NS Works Centres often encourage their staff to engage in these activities and support them in fulfilling this role. As Interviewee 4 indicates:

[...] we encourage our staff to sit on any number of boards and committees within the county and sometimes they run across an idea or a need they see

in a certain area whether it is related to the labour market or just raising the profile of certain segments of the population.

NS Works Centres encourage their staff to participate in the community both to support overall awareness building for the organizations or causes involved but can also lead to deeper relationships or partnerships that support mission fulfillment. As Interviewee 3 notes, there is potential for these staff relationships to increase the ability of the Centre to address the needs of their clients in a way that would be unattainable through existing funding channels:

There's two staff here that sit on that so they bring us back the information from what is going on in the Community Health Boards and complete grants with them to fund hygiene kits or things we think people need.

Staff also volunteer and are active in spaces where a formal representative of the organization may not be commonplace or accepted. One instance of this is within a school population where the local NS Works Centre had not traditionally had a working relationship with school staff or easy access to the student population. As indicated by Interviewee 7:

Yes, for example, one of my staff sits on the advisory committee for the local school. Although we don't have an exact presence in the schools, we want to serve youth. We've made an effort to be in the schools. Bring the information about who we are, what we do into the schools and she sat with the committee and they developed the first youth engagement with employers event last September, and it was a huge event that was strictly 10s, 11s, and 12s, and the feedback - one of the big feedback pieces was that the youth said why hasn't this been done before. It was amazing.

Additionally, staff participate in several employer-focused groups operating locally including chambers of commerce as employers represent an important client group for NS Works Centres.

5.2.3 Board Members

The staff of NS Works Centres participate in their community by attending meetings, becoming members of social organizations, and at times holding positions on other organization's boards of directors. Non-profit employment service providers are also governed by voluntary boards of directors made up of local community members who themselves possess the ability to engage in connecting functions. Members of these voluntary boards are often staff or volunteers with other social service non-profit organizations or are involved with community-based initiatives to improve resident quality of life. It does not appear that these individuals are specifically sought out, rather that they choose to take on board membership out of personal interest and being a member of the local community and not to formally represent the organization they may work for or are otherwise involved. Having individuals such as these brings valuable knowledge to the board table and helps to inform governance decisions for the organization. There is also potential for these interlocking memberships to promote collaboration or forms of partnership development between the NS Works Centre and those who's staff or volunteers are present at the board table. As Interviewee 5 notes:

[...] we have a good board, they're involved in different organizations. Some of them work for other non-profits so they already have that "oh maybe we will try you guys and see if you whatever".

From this anecdote it is clear there is an increased propensity of NS Works Centres to interact with the organizations and interests that may be represented on their board. It is also inferred that having NS Works staff volunteer in similar groups throughout the community would include a similar level or propensity for engagement.

5.2.4 Convening Community

As indicated throughout this section, the non-profit organizations operating NS Works Centres have deep connections within their local communities and networks of other non-profit organizations. These non-profit employment services providers often plan,

host, or contribute to events and gatherings that convene a wide cross-section of community. These events are not necessarily a part of an NS Works Centre's regular suite of services but sometimes result from the independent interest of the non-profit organization with a view of weaving the organization into the overall community fabric. These events may be one-time ventures or a recurring activity on a monthly, quarterly, or annual basis and may or may not have strong affiliations with other NS Works programs and services.

Several NS Works Centres reported hosting job fairs on a semi-regular basis to assist job seekers in their job search activities and employers in filling vacant positions. Job fair events are closely connected with other NS Works programs and services and help bring awareness of the suite of services to employers and job seekers who may otherwise not have been exposed to an NS Works Centre. This is especially true for marginalized communities where the location of the job fair and attending employers may be more suitable and attractive for some groups. As job fairs are often resource intensive activities many NS Works Centres will host these events in partnership with other Centres or with other organizations and entities active in the labour market, business, and community development space. This offers material outputs of the organizational network and relationship building discussed previously. Events such as job fairs offer a means for NS Works Centres to connect with attending employers and job seekers to assist in facilitating transitions to or within the labour market. They also raise the profile of the NS Works Centre and partnering organizations among an expanded audience that goes beyond normal walk-in, phone, or online interactions.

As will be discussed in later sections of this chapter, the non-profit organizations operating NS Works Centres have additional organizational roles in their communities. As such, these organizations often engage in community centred events that may not have an explicit connection to employment services but offer unique ways for the non-profit to interface with community and for the profile of NS Works to be raised among attendees. Several non-profit employment service providers support the integration of newcomers to their communities – especially newcomers to Canada. Centres support

these individuals by hosting or assisting with international potluck initiatives or multicultural festivals. Other Centres plan and deliver events to recognize individuals for their acts of service to both geographic and socio-cultural communities. While not directly related to employment or career development these initiatives introduce the non-profit organization to a wide array of community members and help the organization connect with individuals and organizations that are outside of their regular realm of interactions. As Interviewee 7 indicates, these events do translate into increased use and awareness of NS Works related services:

[...] I mean we garnered so many new employers out of that too that we hadn't been able to get to yet.

5.2.5 Summary

This section has explored various ways in which NS Works Centres, and their non-profit contract holders, move beyond organizational boundaries and interact with individuals, organizations, and other entities in their constituent community. These connecting activities promote a porous organizational boundary by leveraging network and relationship building, staff, board members, and convening community. Together these attributes assist these non-profit employment service providers develop a culture of collaboration – one that is acutely aware of its presence in community.

5.3 Being Present

Being present captures the way in which the non-profit employment service providers contracted to operate NS Works Centres manifest in the physical, digital, and psychological space they occupy. Upon reviewing collected data it is clear these organizations are a part of the social fabric of their constituent communities and are known and utilized resources for many job seekers and employers. These organizations are also embedded within the local networks of non-profit entities that make up localized third sectors across Nova Scotia. Finally, non-profit NS Works Centres have a material

existence in physical and digital forms. This includes in-person office spaces dedicated to the delivery of services as well as digitally mediated communications.

The notion that a non-profit employment service provider can *be present* is rooted in the assumption that for an organization to connect with those it seeks to serve and understand these individuals and organizations, it must undertake actions to respond to its purported mission. It must also hold a legitimate presence in the space it claims to operate in. NS Works Centres taking part in this research study exemplify the ideals of *being present* via tangible, intangible, and emotional actions.

5.3.1 Tangible

One way in which NS Works Centres are tangibly present in their communities is through their geographic location in the communities they serve. Non-profit employment service contractors operate three forms of NS Works Centres including main, satellite, and itinerant offices. Distinctions between these office types are identified in the respective contracts between the NS Works Centre operator and ENS and indicates the availability of specific services at each location. Main and satellite locations are operated by the contract provider alone while offering services during regular business hours throughout the work week. Itinerant offices often operate on certain days of the week with scheduled appointments being offered by staff members supplied by main or satellite office locations. Itinerant offices may also be provided in conjunction with another non-profit or community serving organization such as a library or other public space.

All contracted service providers included in this study operate more than one location and use a mix of main, satellite, and itinerant offices to ensure that services remain accessible to clients. In both urban and rural areas of the province contract holders offer services across wide geographic spaces with some points being well over 100 km from each other. As many clients of NS Works Centres experience a lack of transportation having Centres located in localized service points is important for many individuals to

access these services. Additionally, having locations dispersed across the province places staff directly in the life-worlds of job seekers and employers and contributes to connecting activities described earlier.

Most contract holders did not operate varied locations over dispersed geographic spaces prior to Transformation. Through organizational mergers and changes to funding contracts many of the present contract holders came to occupy locations operated by predecessor organizations. In many areas of the province contract holders operate NS Works Centres almost exclusively along contiguous geographic or political spaces. Examples of this include being the sole contract holder within a county or within what some may consider to be a localized labour pool or economic region. In other instances several contract holders may operate within a county or localized labour pool. This can be attributed to the population density of the region, as in large urban centres, or the way in which the Transformation process was negotiated at the local level. NS Works Centres or the contract holders that operate them do not hold exclusivity to service any region, zone, or client. All Centres are general service and offer the same suite of services to all clients province wide. As well, residents of Nova Scotia are able to access services at any NS Works location regardless of their address. While there is no territorial component to the NS Works system there is an unwritten norm among Centres that clients who live closer to another NS Works Centre should be reminded that there may be a closer option for them to access services. There is also a norm that contract holders should collaborate on initiatives that take place within shared labour markets or in an area equidistant to more than one Centre.

The built environment in which an NS Works Centre operates also speaks to the tangible presence of the Centre in community. Centres can be located as standalone offices, within a cluster of other relevant service providers, or in conjunction with other government agencies or service providing non-profit organizations. Several Centres report being co-located, or located near existing Service Canada, Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA), Community Business Development Corporations (CBDCs), or RENs. Being co-located, or close by these government services and

agencies is considered an asset to the non-profit contract holders as they can easily refer clients to these entities when needed or have clients referred from the partners. This is especially true for Service Canada which administers the EI program and so has many shared clients with NS Works Centres. Additionally, some CBDCs are contracted to deliver a self-employment program on behalf of LAE which requires clients to be referred and case managed by NS Works. Many RENs also engage in a connector program which assist newcomers and new professionals establish professional networks and leverage these networks for career or business development. At times participants in this program utilize NS Works services to build resumes or gain interview skills to support future networking. CBDCs and RENs also seek to support business start-up, operations, and expansion and so act as gatekeeper organizations for local employers and would be apprised of these employer's human resource needs. Some NS Works Centres are operated as separate functional areas or departments of larger service providing organizations and so are located within the facilities of these larger organizations. This is discussed in further detail in later sections.

The footprint an NS Works Centre occupies also influences how it offers services to clients, the potential of client interactions, and client perception of Centre activities. As part of the standard suite of NS Works programs and services Centres must have adequate space to conduct the services required under contract. In many locations this includes private office space for consulting with clients, computer space, and an area to facilitate training and workshops. In some instances interviewees reported space constraints that limited the number of individuals taking part in training sessions. Space limits may also reduce the ability for a Centre to engage in training programs that span several weeks as this would take from more frequently offered workshops.

Accessibility and inclusion as expressed in an NS Works' office space was discussed by several interviewees. Interviewee 5 noted how one Centre embraced accessibility for individuals experiencing a physical disability over time and through an office move:

We were located in, [...] just picture an old school [...] So an elevator was built in the school. So it was limited in who came into the centre in a sense because if you were a person with a disability you had more challenges to get into our building. So when the decision was made to move here to our location now, its fully accessible. Elevator and parking that's provided, its just in walking distance to downtown whereas our previous location was like I said an old school up a very steep hill. So it limited some people to even get in there. So I think you know, the move was to our advantage for our accessibility too to reach all members. That was back in 2009 we moved here, and we are still making changes. One thing that we do take a lot of advantage for sure is our accommodation. Like I am just looking at my desk for example and it is perfect for anyone in a wheelchair whereas some of the other desks we are changing because of the things we learned. Because now we have two staff that are in chairs and so we didn't notice it before. At the desk level as far as accommodation. So these are things that evolved over time and over the years. So that is one thing that we take a lot of pride in, in terms of how successful we are. And people have commented on that too. Stairs and elevator, and parking that is available and that type of thing.

In addition to being physically accessible to all potential clients efforts have been made in some locations to be more inclusive of diverse expressions of gender and sexuality as highlighted by Interviewee 2:

[Local Organization], they advocate on behalf of the LGBTQ community and allies so we were, we were very fortunate that they wanted to work in collaboration with us. [...] we created some safe space signage that was specific to us. All our name tags, we have our pronouns on all of our name tags [...]. They helped us develop signage, [...] for our gender-neutral washrooms.

While not expressed in all interviews it appears that efforts to embrace meaningful change to physical spaces to promote diversity and inclusion, as well as become more representative and responsive to clients, is underway at a number of Centre locations.

Communicative inclusion is promoted through office location or physical tools. For example, some Centres indicated that their location alongside specific service providers and location may infer attributes of their services. For instance, that their services are only available in either French or English when in fact they offer bilingual service to all clients. Another Centre indicated it is working to adapt its computers to function in Arabic in addition to English and French to better reflect the changing linguistic profile of the community served. Adaptation in this form is completed through new multilingual keyboard layouts.

For NS Works Centres, being present in a tangible sense includes characteristics of the contract holder's geographic spread of locations as well as the way in which these Centres are designed to promote a welcoming and functional space for the delivery of services. This supports wider efforts to improve diversity and inclusion within the NS Works System while also improving and encouraging access of NS Works programs and services to all Nova Scotians.

5.3.2 Intangible

NS Works Centres are also present in intangible forms including social media channels and websites. Centres remarked that their organizations often made good use of social media to communicate with their clients, potential clients, and community members. Often this took the form of Facebook pages designed for either the organization as a whole or for specific Centre locations. These pages have been curated post-Transformation and experienced a steady growth in audience membership. Websites are also used by non-profit employment service organizations to interact with and provide information to community members. Each website is maintained by the contract holder and reflects programs, services, and other activities offered by that organization.

In some instances the websites reflect information for the whole organization beyond that of NS Works. For other organizations, their website only reflects their NS Works engagement and does not discuss other aspects of the contracted organization.

5.3.3 Understand

Non-profit employment service providers are grounded in the communities they serve. These organizations come from community and are established to achieve missions that bring about public benefit. To reflect community interest these organizations must first understand the people and places they seek to serve. NS Works Centres understand the communities they serve by recognizing the unique labour market contexts in which they operate and the barriers and challenges experienced by job seekers and employers. NS Works Centres recognize the unique labour markets in which they work in a variety of ways. Many forms of information gathering have already been explored through *connecting* activities. This includes staff being active in the community, board members coming from the local area, as well as partnership and networking activities. Supplemental to this is information gathered through purposeful research, client interactions, and general talk in the community.

NS Works Centres make use of provincial and federal labour market information. This includes statistical information on employment and participation, job and career trends, skills and training opportunities and programs, and trends in industries that greatly impact the local economy. Special focus is given to information that pertains to individuals and groups considered marginalized from the labour market to better inform the actions undertaken by the organization and track impact of present initiatives that aim to create a more inclusive, diverse, and welcoming employment landscape. This type of information is often sourced through provincial and federal statistical bureaus, academic research, and at times, special purpose data collection commissioned by the organization.

Client interactions also provide the organization an opportunity to understand those they seek to serve. For job seekers this often takes the form of personal meetings with the individuals, building rapport with the client, and establishing a pathway and plan for the client to achieve their employment or skills training goal. Through this process personal information about the client's story is gathered. As this process repeats staff are able to build an understanding of those they interact with including common experiences, challenges, and barriers faced while simultaneously creating a repertoire of tools and strategies to assist clients meet their needs. Interactions with employers provide a similar opportunity to understand the needs of businesses large and small and provide insight into the health of local industries. Again, this information is used to help shape the thinking of staff and the organization as a whole and informs how the organization will engage with the employer to meet their expressed needs as well as those that arise throughout the engagement process.

As an organization centred in the community, the NS Works Centre and its staff also experience many of the same factors operating in the business and employment environment as job seekers and employers. Through this common experience the organization as a whole is influenced and participates in the general talk of the community. General talk is analogous to *the grape vine* or other forms of word of mouth information. While not necessarily reliable this level of access to a community provides information to the organization that may not otherwise be known through formal meetings or supplied data. Examples of this include small businesses experiencing challenges with their human resource needs but have not reached out to the NS Works Centre or learning of the many job openings that are not formally advertised.

5.3.4 Summary

By serving both job seekers and employers the NS Works Centre is uniquely positioned within its local labour market. NS Works Centres can view this space through multiple perspectives while blending a number of formal and informal sources of information to gather a fulsome picture of what is happening in their regional economy. Such

information, when made available, is internalized by the organization to inform future action.

5.4 Internalizing

The previous two thematic areas of *connecting* and *being present* represent ways in which people, information, and practices cross between the organization and its stakeholders in community. While there is a component of self and organizational reflection inherent in these actions there is still a need for the organization to consider information and contextual factors before it can take action in its daily practice.

Internalizing reflects this process.

Internalizing represents the way in which non-profit employment service centres operating NS Works Centres makes sense of their environment, think critically about their role, and design strategic actions for future implementation. Two areas arose from this research initiative that reflect *internalizing* actions and activities including niche and internal integration.

5.4.1 Niche

The field of employment services is a complex space. With respect to strict employment service provision the largest player in Nova Scotia is the NS Works System. Additional employment services are offered to individuals experiencing intellectual disabilities as part of residential or community living support organizations. As employment intersects with many other facets of economic participation in society a number of other health, business, and educational organizations offer employment related programs to complement existing in-house services. To be successful and effective in their role, the non-profit employment service providers contracted to deliver the NS Works Centres across Nova Scotia must find and act upon their niche within the wider environment.

As noted previously, interviewees acknowledge there are no true service areas or boundaries that limit contract holders from carrying on services to the public. However,

there are agreed upon norms of certain regional spaces, such as counties or municipalities that one service provider may be better located to serve. In other instances several service providers may be located in a common labour pool, in the same municipality, or across the street from one another. In these cases closely located Centres, and the organizations that operate them, appear to work with one another to limit unnecessary duplication and collaborate to build overall service capacity in the shared space. Some of this involves having staff communicate to align employer engagement activities or sharing staff to offer job fairs or staff information kiosks at trade shows and community events. While these are done internally, there is also a certain degree of awareness building and education of the public that is needed to better inform the public about the system post-Transformation. As Interviewee 1 notes, it can be difficult to communicate how the NS Works system works, and the role each contract holder plays.

You know what people do sometimes, this whole NS Works idea is fairly new. Before we all had our own identify. And I mean we still do to some extent. But we are all part of the NS Works system. I don't think people actually know what the NS Works System is. So there might be a community event and someone might invite [NS Works Centre], they might invite [NS Works Centre], and they might invite [NS Works Centre] and we all show up when we all essentially could have been at one booth and shared the staff right? As opposed to setting up our own booth. I don't think people understand that whole model yet.

In this example the general public is not aware that individual organizations are a part of the NS Works system and that the vast majority of core services are the same for all organizations. As organizations are named "NS Works *Contract Holder*" there may remain an identity of a separate organization that may cause the public to differentiate service providers from one another. This is especially the case in times of personal crisis such as a mass lay off as shared by Interviewee 2:

[...] the call centre that closed. And so, in the media they were like go down to your local NS Works and make sure that they have your information we are potentially, going to put on a training program that you could be subsidized for. So people come to us and then goes to the other NS Works or goes to the other NS Works and comes to us. So that is a challenge like navigating that and having us best leverage all of our expertise to kind of, you know, pull together challenges.

These examples highlight how organizations contracted to deliver NS Works Centres must navigate their own organizational identity to maintain historical relationships with the public and differentiate from other service providers. It must also find ways to ensure that they are still welcoming new clients to their Centre for whom it is convenient and the best location without appearing competitive. Contracted organizations appear to leverage different organizational attributes in order to maintain a level of distinction within the provision of their contracts. This may be location, such as being close to clients, language, such as offering bilingual services on-site or adapting some services to better meet newcomers or developing an internal capacity to provide training and workshops that are in demand locally.

Several interviewees indicated that the first four years of the NS Works program following Transformation were about removing the competitive forces that were at play when so many individual offices were offering services. Four years were spent transitioning this competition into collaboration among system partners and members. On January 1, 2020, a new funding contract was signed between the contracted service providers and ENS. Interviewees acknowledge it is too soon to see how this contract will impact their day to day operations or overall system characteristics. One important item to note is that in addition to organizational core funding this new contract provides for incentive-based funds offered for the successful attainment of new targets and program goals. It is still too early to know how this new funding arrangement may impact inter-organizational collaboration. There is some anxiety that such a change could disrupt the present feelings of collaboration between contracted organizations and

institute a degree of competition. The addition of incentivized funding to a system that already experiences challenges communicating organizational identity and system awareness encourages individual organizations to find their own niche within the NS Works system – one that is collaborative in spirit but continues to support the long term sustainability of the contracted organization.

NS Works organizations must also establish their niche within the crowded field of employment services and employer human resources support programs that exist throughout the province. Interviewees reported that RENs, organizations responsible for economic growth and business development outside of the Halifax Regional Municipality, operate several business support programs that assist with hiring new employees and filling labour shortages. The Halifax Partnership and Cape Breton Partnership are two other economic development organizations operating within Halifax and Cape Breton. RENs and Partnerships also offer programs designed for newcomers and professionals to aid them in networking locally to find employment. The Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia (ISANS) offers employment services to newcomers to Canada throughout the province. Several shelters and organizations that support survivors of family violence also assist their clients achieve their employment goals. Each of these activities attracts audiences, job seekers and employers, that could be considered shared with NS Works. Despite this overlap each organization offers a different value proposition to their client groups and so true duplication or overlap is minimized based on self-selection of the client. Given the intersectionality of employment, at times it is more appropriate for an individual who is already receiving specialized services not offered by the NS Works system to continue working with their specialized provider for employment rather than transition to a new organization. This reduces the risk of the client ceasing interaction while allowing the initial service provider to continue addressed client needs in a holistic manner. Similar rationale differentiates organizations that assist individuals experiencing intellectual disability. Often these clients require supportive employment opportunities with support directly in

the workplace. Direct workplace support, or providing employment for clients, is outside the scope of NS Works programs and services.

Participation in specific programs and service on the part of clients appears to be made based on the initiatives' value proposition to the client. Specifically, what works for the client, or through specific program criteria as established by a funder or from the sponsoring organization. Several interviewees reported that each organization recognizes the individual strengths and niche of others working in their operational environment. As such, NS Works Centres may work with other social service non-profit organizations and agencies to deliver specific training or employability workshops or sessions. Interviewees also report asking representatives of these organizations to come and deliver programming within the NS Works Centre that fills a need the Centre may find challenging to address internally.

In some cases non-NS Works related organizations do apply for, and deliver, employment related programs that NS Works organizations apply for as well. This includes some employment programs retained by the federal government, including those for youth. This can create a need for the organization to find its place in its local context both to avoid duplication and to maintain a cohesive value proposition in the minds of clients and potential clients. As Interviewee 2 explains:

Just exploring that relationship, like should we do it all, should we not do it all? Kind of like Skills Link for example in [Region] we have the [Economic Development Organization] that offers Skills Link, we have the NS Works service providers, so I'm just trying to feel out where does it fill the gaps and where does it not.

The above example illustrates an example of a contracted organization looking to offer additional employment programs for a specific target audience. The provision of auxiliary programs and services to core NS Works offerings will be discussed in a subsequent area of this thesis. However, some NS Works contractor organizations must

find a strategic position for themselves in the community to maintain relevance and meet the needs of their client groups. At times this externally focused strategic alignment is influenced by internal factors.

5.4.2 Internal Integration

The non-profit organizations contracted to deliver NS Works Centres espouse a variety of different organizational forms. Despite this diversity there is a core distinction that forms two main groups of contract holders – those who's sole purpose is to operate NS Works Centres and those that operate NS Works Centres as a component of other social service activities. Additionally, Transformation resulted in the merging of organizations and of functional areas of involved organizations. This indicates that the management of internal organizational dynamics is of importance to mission fulfillment for NS Works contract holders.

Several NS Works non-profit contract holders exist solely for the purpose of supporting job seekers of various forms achieve their employment and skills training goals. In recent times this has come to include employers and their specific needs. Some organizations were initially specialized service providers contracted by Service Canada to deliver programing for specific groups. For those initiated to serve the African-Nova Scotian population these organizations were formed by community members at the request of the federal government as noted by Interviewee 4:

I guess the federal government announced a program called the new relationship principles and this was prior to 2000 and they wanted the Black communities in Nova Scotia to mobilize, form a board and look at how they could increase the capacity of the communities. So at that time it was just loose numbers of people right across the province doing that. Those became known as Black Employment Offices and we were about 11 so then when the federal government said now we are going to look at the wider community and how do we download the employment side of the Service Canada then I

can't remember what it was called. Anyway they downloaded that particular service and the Black Employment Offices got to do employment services and then they created Career Resource Centres for the rest of the community.

Other stand-alone organizations report forming in similar ways to address youth summer employment and persons with disabilities. These standalone organizations primarily only operate NS Works Centres in their region, both as main, satellite, and itinerant locations. While they do engage in other contracted services or funded programs these primarily relate to employment but can include some cultural or community development related activities. The majority of organizational activities do reflect employment as expressed in the mission and purpose of the group.

Other contracted organizations operate a variety of diverse services in addition to NS Works Centres. Examples include community-focused wellness organizations involved in recreation, childcare, and youth programming or regional business and economic development organizations operating NS Works Centres. For these organizations, the NS Works Centres allow the organization to expand its mission fulfillment in their community. These organizations recognize employment as being an important component to overall well-being. This can be envisioned through a social determinants of health lens where employment supports other attributes of physical and community health. Other organizations view employment as an important support for economic growth and development. Despite there being a clear connection between employment and the other activities offered by the non-profit organization many interviewees note that difficulties in integrating these various services or the need to do a better job of leveraging these organization's resources for the betterment of clients and community. In some instances employment services are offered off-site from the organization's primary activities and so the connection between staff, client groups, and even community can be limited. At other times functional areas are kept separate to keep clear boundaries between fund allocations and reporting metrics to funders. For organizations hoping to improve their leveraging of internal programs the perceived

barriers are related to aligning different client groups or finding a way to balance fully funded areas, such as NS Works, with those that operate on a fee-for service or subsidized basis.

Internal dynamics for both sole operations and component part organizations have also been shaped by recent events. The Transformation process involved the merger of several existing contract holders. In many instances this resulted in offices and staff being combined into new organizations. This has meant that staff teams, operations, as well as the organization's footprint in the community has been altered. Interviewees note that while this was initially a challenge, time has helped the organizations become more cohesive, adjust to change, and bolster their capacity. As Interviewee 5 indicates, despite being newly brought together, and located in different towns, the staff teams are able to work as a cohesive organization that shares its capacity throughout each office with each location acting as a continuation of another:

Like I said we knew of each other and that type of thing. But three years ago we were, I don't like to use the word forced, as if it was a negative way. But we were forced to work together [Organizations Merged] [...] like I can call [Name] in [Location] and ask her if she can get the holiday poster ready for the Facebook page and its ready and its sent to me. There's no, it's like walking down the halls in one of our own locations. So that's what I like about it. That we are able to do that. Or even when we had our Christmas party a few weeks ago – each office has their own individual party, of course due to location and whatnot but we were able to send staff there from our office and they were able to send staff here so we could work in each other's office and everything is a nice smooth way to go.

In this example the staff person feels as though all locations of their standalone NS Works organization are integrated as one place of work seeking to service a shared clientele following Transformation.

5.4.3 Summary

Internalizing reflects how the non-profit organizations contracted to deliver NS Works Centres position themselves within their operational environment and how these organizations have adapted their internal affairs post-Transformation. In doing so these organizations build internal strength and capacity and leverage the strengths of other groups to adequately address the needs of all community members. This is done to encourage diversity in the social services realm that meets the needs of various community members while also promoting organizational sustainability. By making sense of their environment, thinking critically about their role, and designing strategic actions for future implementation NS Works Centres are well positioned to create place-based employment services in their areas of operation.

5.5 Operationalizing

Operationalizing represents how NS Works Centres actualize on their organizational mission and purpose. This actualization is informed by the internalization of relevant contextual factors and contractual and organizational realities. Together these promote the proper execution of the NS Works contract as agreed with ENS through a localized lens. It also encourages the organization to undertake activities that may be outside the realm of the NS Works contract to support local priorities and realities. This section will explore the NS Works suite of services delivered uniformly across the province as well as ways in which these common programs have been adapted to meet local needs. It will also discuss alternate activities offered by Centres that work to address local needs as well as the role of these organizations in their communities of service.

5.5.1 NS Works Suite of Services

Each NS Works contract holder is responsible for offering a core suite of services to both job seeking and employer clients. These services are available throughout the province at each Centre. Some itinerant offices may have limits on service offerings dependent on scheduling of staff, hours of operation, or the facilities in which these

offices operate. For job seeking clients each main NS Works Centre operates a general resource area. This includes public computers with internet access, job board, career information relating to the local labour market, labour market information, and resource staff to assist in explaining and navigating available services. Each contract holder also maintains a website that provides links to numerous online job listings, resources to assist in job searching, and provides specific information about the regional job market. Workshops and training programs are also offered by NS Works Centres and are highly varied between Centres. Subject matter is often dependent on the needs of clients and may be seasonal in nature. Many Centres offer workshops on resume and cover letter writing, interview skills, and complete mock interviews. Specialized offerings may include first aid training, traffic control, or custom programs for specific groups to enter local industries. Many of these service offerings are available to self-serve clients who may wish to complete their job search independently. Case managers and career counsellors are available to those who may need additional support in career planning. Oftentimes clients will need to meet with a case manager or career counsellor to be referred to a training or wage subsidy program or to access self-employment funding and training.

For employers NS Works Centres offer a number of services. Many Centres offer job postings on their own websites and job boards in addition to assisting employers post their job advertisements on other online platforms. Staff also offer advice on crafting job descriptions and may be able to match existing clients to job openings while helping to guide the transition into the new workplace. Employers may be able to receive wage subsidies when hiring new staff dependent on the criteria of the funding available. Examples of wage subsidy programs include student positions, hiring recent graduates, or for others who may wish to gain work experience in a particular field. Events such as job fairs help employers fill existing positions and help those organizations grow in addition to working with employees in times of business closure or mass lay-off. When there is a mass labour market disruption NS Works Centres will often engage in what is known as *Code Pink*. During this time, the NS Works Centre often partners with Service

Canada and other government and community agencies to meet with impacted staff and provide information on programs and services that may help with career transition.

Each NS Works contract holder offers a core suite of services that are common throughout the province. These programs and services are outlined in the NS Works contract and supported through relevant funds appropriated through ENS with the goal of assisting job seekers and employers achieve their employment objectives. Delivering the NS Works suite of services offers one means for contract holders to achieve their organizational mission and purpose in the community they serve. Many Centres also engage in additional activities to achieve their organizational mission beyond NS Works whether these are employment specific or focused on overall community development.

5.5.2 Auxiliary Activities Beyond NS Works

Non-profit employment service providers engaged in this research project had varied organizational missions and purposes. Yet, these organizations share common interests in assisting job seekers and employers attain positive employment outcomes. In fulfilling this broader interest many contracted non-profit employment service providers engaged in practices and activities outside of the NS Works system to address the identified needs of clients and community members. This includes accessing alternate funding opportunities to address identified client or community needs, embodying sought after employer practices, and embracing an expanded view of the organization's role in community.

Many organizations engaged in this research project report applying for and receiving funds from non-ENS sources to expand the reach and impact of the organization. Often organizations for which NS Works is a part are engaged in wider operational pursuits. In some cases these additional avenues are used to support community objectives such as cultural promotion or welcoming newcomers to the community. Funds to support these activities may be accessed through government grants such as the Department of Canadian Heritage or through other government and non-governmental agencies

responsible for arts and culture. This practice is often found in organizations who have limited organizational units outside of the NS Works Centres as those who have additional lines of business or operating areas normally administer these additional programs as part of other units. For the organizations that have a limited number of functional areas these additional areas are often informed by their previous roles as specialized employment service providers or being one of the few social service non-profits working in a selected area.

NS Works contract holders also utilize additional non-ENS related government employment programs to adapt their services to better meet the needs of their clients and community members. Several interviewees report receiving funds through Employment and Social Development Canada to deliver targeted programs and services to address identified community needs. This may be specific youth programming or programs that assist people experiencing disability to better enter the labour market. Several NS Works contract holders also note relationships with DCS to develop specific employment, skills, and personal development workshops and programs. These activities are created specifically to meet the needs of clients who are in receipt of the Department's income and employment support programs. In each of these instances the NS Works contract holder is able to leverage these additional program avenues to expand what would normally be possible – addressing identified needs for marginalized groups and reaching an expanded client base.

As organizations working in the community each NS Works contract holder is also an employer. Many of these employment service non-profits use their position as employers within the community to embody positive employment practices in their community. For some organizations this means continuously working to create an inclusive workspace and team by hiring individuals representative of all community members. Here attention is also given to ensure the workplace is accessible for those who experience a physical disability and to make sure the workplace promotes a safe and healthy environment from the perspective of occupational health and safety. NS

Works Centres are mandated to assist employers create safe, supportive, and inclusive workplaces as expressed by Interviewee 1:

I feel we have always been advocates for you know, various diversity groups and I feel that we lead by example. I mean it is not something new that we have done in terms of advocating to employers about different things. You know, but I don't know, I feel that is more the people that are involved as opposed to the process. And this will be happening in all the NS Works, it is supposed to happen in all the NS Works.

As noted above, efforts to embody the best in positive employer practices is an opportunity for the NS Works Centre to lead by example in their local community.

NS Works contract holders often view themselves as having a role in the development of future employees by supporting youth and recent graduates attain job experience and increase their employability skills. Often this is actualized by hiring summer students to fulfill needed roles within the organization or deliver specialized programming that aligns with their term of employment. Throughout the system there appears an eagerness to hire staff and deliver programs that expand on current offerings to grow the organization's reach. In some instances, the non-profit organization's contracted to deliver NS Works Centres operate employment social enterprises that integrate work experience into existing training programs or are able to hire clients in an effort to build workplace skills in select areas and contribute to the individual's employment history. Here the goal is to provide participants with relevant work experience and training within a workplace environment to assist them in transitioning to the wider labour market.

5.5.3 Role of NS Works Centres in Community

Some non-profit employment service providers reported a strict adherence to their NS Works informed mission and purpose in their community. For some this was simply the way in which the organization operates in relation to its funders while others may have seen other functional areas of the organization focusing on wider pursuits beyond

explicit NS Works activities. A selection of responses relating to an employment-centric view of these organization's role are included below.

Interviewee 10:

Well our role as NS Works, our role is to help job seekers to obtain and maintain employment and to help employers in regard to the recruitment and retention of employees.

Interviewee 2:

Well I feel like our responsibility is essentially [to] close the labour gap. Yeah it sounds very broad, but I mean, I think we were operating previously, like I said the last 15-20 years [...], status quo, like okay people come in and do their resume you get them a job okay you mark it off. But I think it is broader than that in that we have to know our broader demographics, we have to know the labour market information. We have a very important role in [...] educating employers to create welcoming workplaces, educating employers to diversify their staff we have a core role in educating job seekers and making sure they are pursuing roles that are actually going to, that have positive labour market outcomes. So its basically working it from both ends to essentially narrow the labour gap. So that may be too generic but I feel like we, in collaboration with our government partners [...] see a palpable difference in the labour market for our specific geographical area.

Interviewee 3:

Well I think primarily it is the place people know where you come for help with your resume you come for interview skills you know, you want to go back to school and apply for funding. I think primarily that is still what all [Number] centres are. [...] I think that is still how each of the organizations are focused. Or thought of as in their communities.

The above three excerpts illustrate how some organizations view their role in community as being closely or exclusively linked to the provision of employment services to support positive employment outcomes for job seekers and employers.

Alternatively, some organizations represented in this research activity view themselves as having an expanded role in the communities where they operate. As noted earlier, some organizations view their role in community as that of storyteller and being closely integrated into local cultural promotion for an ethno-cultural minority group. Others conceptualize themselves as having a broad role in the communities their organization operates in. Interviewee 5 notes that beyond simply providing employment services their organization has a role in providing hope to all clients and supporting them through their labour market transitions:

I think just providing that sense of hope for those that may be struggling for employment purposes of course. Maybe they are losing their job or maybe they are wanting a change in career. Or maybe their education is not where they want it to be or the business is closing – that type of thing. But it is that sense of hope that we provide and encouragement to clients.

Other respondents indicate their organization, through the NS Works Centre, contributes to changing the overall economic narrative of the community and contributes to the resilience of the community in the face of economic hardship. As Interviewee 7 shares:

Mindsets need to change somewhat I think in this area. Because we need to do things differently than what we did before and that is coming around, that is coming around. And then we need to change the talk because you still have the people that are the doomsday talkers. And you'll have that anywhere but I think you know we need to try harder to change that talk sometimes. [...] I see us as the organization standing strong, that we are the organization that is helping to turn the economy around here.

Finally, Interviewee 8 expresses that their organization works to act as a connecting hub in ways that move beyond what the NS Works contract requires of service providers:

It's really to help connect people who may be vulnerable in the community, who may not have connections to empower people to be connected and to have their best life. So our vision and mission goes well beyond what the government mandated services that we deliver are. So I really see us as a connecting hub to some degree.

Of note is that many of the organizations indicating an expanded role in community beyond strict adherence to closing labour market gaps are non-profit organizations whose sole function is to deliver employment related services to community members and is not a functional area of a larger social service or economic development non-profit. As well, many of these same organizations have historical roots as specialized service providers that pre-Transformation would have offered services primarily to African Nova Scotians or persons experiencing disability.

The idea that some organizations hold an expanded view of their role in community, beyond that of strict employment service provision, and a more wholistic view of community health, well-being, and development is in line with wider shifts being experienced within the NS Works system. Representatives of pillar organizations indicate that government funders wish to maintain the community-centred focus of non-profit employment service providers. This is done by allowing more autonomy to be had within the system when it addresses key priorities. As noted by Interviewee 3:

[...] the government is setting what the vision is. What they want to happen in this province but they are giving us the power to come up with the solutions. And so, what I mean is that they set up the parameters around accountability and service delivery and all of those things. In an effort to make sure that we are doing what we should be doing. But they're asking us to collaborate in our communities and find solutions because we are struggling and we need

to do things differently and I feel that they're – this is the most grassroots that I have felt being involved with government because it is actually making me look at. I think it is making our whole staff team look at things differently. Yeah and so I really believe that because I think other people would see this as the government being heavy handed, again and they are making us do this and I know that's the mood around some of the executive director table [...] I come with a bit of freshness without the baggage and so I really do feel they're going "hey, make something happen, try something new." [...] I think in the past, maybe had the power to do it. But it wasn't I think, it wasn't guided in the way that it needed to be. So with this call for concepts that came out – providing us with the goals it really, you know, it shapes and, and then providing us with the goals but then giving us the outcomes they want in more detail. I think it just forces you to think things, challenge the status quo. I don't think it's allowing you to maintain the status quo. But it is not giving you what you need to do right? It's giving you what the outcomes, giving us the power to make it happen. So whether you want to think about working with other people and making things happen. That could be, up to each individual leader to see what they want to do.

It appears the system is supported in cultivating its members at the grassroots and that government allows the learnings from these activities to permeate its own decision-making process and inform future action. The way in which contract holders and pillar organizations resolve to interact and develop relationships also informs the way in which government interacts with the system and thus it comes to embrace a more grassroots attitude and approach to employment services in the province.

An expanded view of NS Works Centres in their community supports a wider paradigm shift that appears to be taking place in the NS Works system. While not the focus of this research it appears contract holders and pillar organizations, along with government, via funding programs, are working to create an employment services ecosystem that embraces tenants of social innovation, sees employment as a key component of

personal and community health and well-being, and seeks to walk alongside under-represented or marginalized groups to achieved shared objectives in appropriate ways.

5.5.4 Summary

The non-profit organizations contracted to operate NS Works Centres engage in a number of operationalization activities. This is done by delivering the suite of NS Works employment services common to all centres, engaging in auxiliary activities by leveraging additional funding sources and acting as a leader in employer practice, as well as assuming a flexible and evolving role in the communities they serve.

Acknowledgements by representatives of NS Works Centres and pillar organizations indicate attitudes within the system are shifting and that there is a spirit of change toward a new employment services paradigm better suited to address present-day challenges in the labour market and the future of work.

5.6 Summary

This chapter explores the findings of this research study through four theme areas. The researcher suggests that non-profit employment service providers in Nova Scotia integrate into their local communities and promote place-based policy, programs, and services to address labour market through *connecting*, *being present*, *internalizing*, and *operationalizing*. Each of these thematic areas have been explored through discussion, comparison, and the inclusion of interview excerpts collected through the interview process. A discussion of the relationship between these thematic areas and topics discussed in earlier areas of this thesis will be the subject of the following chapter.

6 Discussion

6.1 Overview

This chapter offers an interpretation of the research findings both in practice and in relation to existing literature. A conceptual framework that aids readers in understanding *connecting, being present, internalizing, and operationalizing* activities and their relationship with one another is presented in this chapter. Following the conceptual framework the contribution of this research to wider academic literature and professional practice is offered. This includes contributions relating to the conceptualization of the third sector, neoliberalism, and non-profit organizations.

6.2 Conceptual Framework

This research has uncovered four thematic areas through which to understand how non-profits contracted to deliver NS Works Centres integrate into their communities and promote place-based approaches to employment services. These four thematic areas represent activities that work interdependently to support organizational mission attainment and the promotion of services best suited to meet stakeholder groups.

6.2.1 Connecting

Connecting includes a number of activities including networking and relationship building, staff participation in community life, board governance, and convening community through events and service provision. Each of these activities act as a tool through which non-profit employment service providers are able to reach beyond their organizational boundaries and gather insights and information that contribute to future action while simultaneously building awareness of the organization among stakeholder groups. This includes the formation of bi-directional flows of information between the organization and its constituent community. *Connecting* activities achieve this by promoting interactions between groups, organizations, institutions, and agencies at the meso-level. Networking and relationship building work to place the organization within

its operating environment and establishes an initial framework of inter-organizational interaction and connection to stakeholders. This is needed to support activities associated with *being present* in that organizations cannot exist on their own and must be placed within a context that frames their work, supplies resources, and supports the achievement of its stated mission. Having staff active in the local context and having a governance system dependent on the participation of community members works to legitimize the context the organization operates within while allowing it to influence and be influenced by other relevant actors in this environment. By convening community *connecting* begins to weave the local context in which the organization can then *be present*. The information flows provided by network and partnership building supply the information and connections that are later *internalized* and inform the actions *operationalized*.

6.2.2 Being Present

Being present represents the ways in which NS Works Centres manifest in the physical, digital, and psychological space they occupy. Tangible expressions of the NS Works Centre, such as its physical location and space, act as a conduit through which personal interactions, such as *connecting*, can occur. Organizations are nothing without the people that bring them to life, yet physical structures provide the space and tools wherein organizations can *internalize* and *operationalize* actions in the pursuit of mission fulfillment. This effect can also be recreated in intangible online spaces such as informational websites, social media platforms, and the potential of online digital communication. Understanding community context draws from connecting activities in that personal connections facilitate informal knowledge gathering while simultaneously offering direction on where connecting activities may be targeted in the future. Understanding also supports the formation of the organization's *internalized* niche and informs the Centre's *operations*.

6.2.3 Internalizing

Internalizing offers an opportunity for non-profit organizations to reflect and consider information, leverage networks, and interpret contextual factors that will influence their future action. An organization's niche is developed through consideration of its mission and purpose in relation to the local context of its work. It is also informed by the actions of other individuals, organizations, and institutions that compete with or support the main objectives of the Centre. *Connecting* and *being present* activities offer the relationships and information needed to establish the existing organizational environment in which the niche develops while *operationalizing* acts upon the niche in practice. Internal integration is influenced in some ways through connecting activities, but as an inward-looking function of the Centre, is not directly shaped by external happenings aside from sweeping changes to the operating environment as seen in Transformation. *Being present* has a much larger influence on internal integration as tangible attributes of the Centre, and the programs and services delivered, impact how the organization functions. Internal integration has strong linkages to *operationalizing* activities as it is the diverse basket of programs, services, networks, staff teams, and other mission fulfilling elements that are being integrated to provide value in the communities served.

6.2.4 Operationalization

Operationalization describes how NS Works Centres actualize their mission and purpose in practice. This thematic area is perhaps the most inter-connected with the other three themed activities. It represents the primary outputs of the organization as shaped, shifted, and influenced by all other activities. The NS Works suite of services is largely outlined by contractual arrangements between the contract holder and ENS yet there is an ability for these services to be adapted for implementation in localized areas. These adaptations are often completed after information gathering and relationship building, found in *connecting* and *being present* have been *internalized*. For some NS Works Centres the ability to offer auxiliary services comes as a result of additional

functional areas operated by the contract holder and so are strongly shaped by the *internalizing* activities of internal integration and niche as well as the tangible attributes of *being present*. *Connecting* activities are still relevant to auxiliary services but more so for contract holders that are sole operators of NS Works Centres. For these groups, the addition of auxiliary services is often done through partnerships with other organizations established through networking and relationship building at the organizational and personal levels. While these thematic areas do not form a linear process, the role of a non-profit employment service organization in their community is very much the embodiment of how the organization integrates into its community of service and creates place-based approaches to employment services. Therefore, the role of an NS Works Centre in their community is a function of the other activities working alone and interdependently.

6.2.5 Summary

The four thematic areas used to explore the findings of this research project present a conceptual framework through which to understand how non-profit employment service providers in Nova Scotia integrate into their communities to promote place-based approaches to employment services. While not a linear process, activities described function alone and interdependently producing a chain of events that are conducive to community response.

6.3 Conceptualization of the Third Sector

Nova Scotia continues the federal government's precedent of contracting out the delivery of client-facing employment services. Most contractors are non-profit organizations with a community focus either solely on the promotion of employment, skills, and economic development or as a component of wider community health and wellbeing objectives. The delivery of the NS Works program offers an opportunity to explore the conceptualization of the third sector as well as the relationship between the third sector and government as this is a government program delivered under contract

by mostly non-profit organizations. This section will first understand employment services as a public good before exploring various conceptualizations of the third sector identified in the literature through the lens of the NS Works program in Nova Scotia including market failure, entrepreneurialism, voluntary failure, and the integration of non-profit organizations into state functions.

6.3.1 Employment Services as a Public Good

Inclusive employment services, as offered through a national PES, are public goods. Employment services help jobseekers find work while addressing the human resource needs of employers therefore promoting a robust economy. When viewed through a much more social lens, employment services help guide individuals in integrating work related activities into their overall participation in society in a way that is appropriate for the person and their circumstances. Both macro level economic efficiency and individual wellbeing accrue benefit to society that cannot be exchanged through a market mechanism. As such, employment services are considered a public good with private enterprise and the market unable to address this societal need on their own.

There is a complication, however, in that employment services are not required by all members of society or at least not on a consistent basis. Some individuals prefer to manage their own career development. These people may experience very few barriers to employment and so may not feel the need to access employment services as offered through NS Works. However, jobseekers may include less explicit forms of government support in their job search including a review of local labour market data to determine what sectors are growing in opportunity or looking at government sponsored job-posting websites. Additionally, some private organizations operate professional talent firms or staffing agencies that address specific labour market needs of employers who pay for this service. Private career development services and human resource firms are only able to address the needs of a small niche area of jobseekers and employers. Viewing employment services as a public good that not all citizens choose to use or require for full participation in society opens the potential for these services to be delivered through

a number of organizational forms and funding structures including non-profit organizations and members of the third sector.

6.3.2 Market Failure

As employment services are public goods the market mechanism alone is incapable of offering fair distribution or access to this good. However, as noted earlier, not all societal members necessarily require or utilize employment services as they may choose, or be able, to, transition within the labour market without external influence. They may also choose to access private means. As such, one could view employment services as a marginal public good wherein public benefit organizations, such as non-profits and members of the third sector, fill the gap between what the public and private actors are able to provide. This could explain why some social purpose organizations, especially those with wide views of community health or economic development, seek to address issues relating to local employment.

A strict market failure view of third sector development does not adequately explain how non-profits work within the NS Works system. Findings presented earlier show that non-profit contract holders do have strong relationships with members of the public and private sector and are not held within a third sector silo. Additionally, even with a more recent view of Weisbrod's (Knutsen, 2016; Salamon & Toepler, 2015) theorization of the third sector it does not appear non-profit organizations in Nova Scotia are able to offer employment services without funding from the provincial and federal governments. It is beyond the scope of this study to determine to what extent this government funding may cause the non-profit to take on private sector attributes. Yet, it is known in the context of NS Works contract holders that competition, a hallmark of the private sector, between organizations is actively dissuaded.

6.3.3 Entrepreneurialism

Organizations represented in this study each have unique formation histories. In some instances, existing non-profit organizations identified employment services as a need in

the community and sought necessary funding to address this opportunity. In other cases, groups formed in response to government requests for communities and social groups to mobilize and provide specialized employment services or deliver programs on behalf of government in community. Under the entrepreneurialism view of third sector development individual entrepreneurs or organizations respond to an identified need or opportunity and muster resources to create solutions to social concerns. In the case of NS Works Centres, and their predecessors supported by Service Canada, an enabling environment was created through available funding programs. These programs encouraged the formation of employment serving organizations or the addition of employment services to existing organizations. Therefore the creation of employment service centres through government devolution was not as *supply* focused as what third sector literature suggests. Through time changes to the existing system were created upon the request or demands of funders and were not necessarily spurred organically within the system. In sum, the formation of NS Works contract holders was based in community and supported by countless volunteers while guided as part of wider devolution activities undertaken by government. Therefore, entrepreneurialism, as a theory of third sector development, does not address the formation of Nova Scotia's employment services ecosystem.

6.3.4 Voluntary Failure

Voluntary failure theory suggests that non-profit and other third sector organizations should be responsible for addressing social problems with government support. In Canada, employment services had been a core government responsibility until a process of contracting out began in the 1980s. Presently the federal government retains responsibility for the efficient operation of the nation's PES through the constitution, statutes, and international agreements. Responsibility is devolved to each province to deliver these services via mechanisms of their own design. In Nova Scotia, these services are contracted out to organizations in the communities where they are offered. Given the amount of influence and control retained by government actors it is not practical to think that government has shifted responsibility for social problems related

to employment to the third sector. Instead, it appears the Nova Scotia government sees members of the third sector as being valuable partners in the delivery of employment services with government and non-profit groups leveraging each partner's strengths and addressing the weaknesses of the other.

In Nova Scotia final responsibility for employment services still rests within government but service delivery, staff training, capacity building, and elements of program and service design have been shifted to external partners centred in the community. In this case voluntary failure theory offers some insight into how the relationship between government and non-profit organizations could be structured. This includes the strengths and weaknesses each organization brings to the relationship and why the Nova Scotia government may view continuing the contract relationship started by Service Canada pre-devolution as having a value-add to the delivery of employment services. One potential reasoning for this could be that the province acknowledges the complexities of administering this area of the modern welfare state and does not wish to replicate or integrate an existing system within government. Instead, the province continues to use non-profit contract holders to deliver services while shaping their relationships with these organizations through processes like Transformation and contracts. Interviewees reported that their relationship with government was good with some feeling government was quite supportive of the grassroots level of the NS Works system while others felt their actions were restricted by various program and funding requirements.

6.3.5 Summary

In the view of Salamon and Toepler (2015) three paradigms shape the conceptualization of the third sector. This includes demand focused market failure, supply focused entrepreneurialism, and voluntary failure. This section has explored the development of the present NS Works system and the relationships held between government and non-profit organizations to operate these Centres through the lens of these three conceptualizations. No conceptualization appears to fully address the

formation of the NS Works system as presently constituted. However, elements of each conceptualization offer insights into the system's development while the system itself contributes to wider thinking of these theories in contemporary practice.

With respect to NS Works, government should be viewed as holding responsibility for these services and working with non-profit organizations on their successful delivery to client and stakeholder groups. There is a grassroots component of the system that is nurtured by government and influences the system's objectives while government leads the overall direction. This is done through the selection of contract holders, funding allocations, and the contents of specific contractual agreements. This will be discussed further with respect to the effects of neoliberalism on government relations with non-profits.

6.4 Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism has been shaping Canada's policy environment since the 1970s. Most relevant in this policy transition has been the increased contracting out of government services under the tenants of NPM. The federal government had begun contracting out employment services throughout the country to non-profit service provider agencies in the 1980s. Initially this was for specialized services that would complement the general services offered through federally operated employment centres. As the federal government moved to devolve these services to provincial governments the process of contracting out services offered in-house by federal officials accelerated. Nova Scotia was one of the last jurisdictions to have its employment services devolved and so almost all client-facing services were offered by community organizations at the time of devolution. Interviews held with members of the NS Works ecosystem indicate an initial wave of non-profits taking on these services in the late 1980s with a subsequent wave of service providers forming in the late 1990s and early 2000s. These actions are consistent with the adoption of NPM by governments embracing neoliberalism.

6.4.1 New Public Management

The contracting out of employment services by the federal government and Nova Scotia's choice to continue this practice post-devolution supports the notion that NPM has shaped the policy context of the province. The presence of the NPM paradigm emerges from interview responses through discussion of the NS Works contract. During the interview period a new series of contracts were signed with organizations delivering the NS Works program. Interviewees noted that the NS Works contract does outline the programs and services that are offered, the locations where, and hours when these are offered, among other attributes. As part of the contract NS Works Centres are to adhere to a common suite of services, common brand, and exhibit a level of consistency across Centres. Accountability was not discussed explicitly in the interviews but it was clear that government acts as the funder of these services and so the contract holders are accountable and responsible to government for ensuring services are delivered according to the agreed upon terms. Some viewed this responsibility as being more rigid than others – especially with respect to leveraging other funding sources. This may have to do with the structuring of the organization and the alternate sources of funds available to it.

While the current NS Works contract does exhibit some tenants of NPM it also differs from the NPM paradigm in two key ways. First the present NS Works contract offers core-funding to organizations operating NS Works Centres. Centres are allocated staff based on negotiations between the contract holder and government in relation to available data that expresses the community's need for service. These positions, and the resources to fully operationalize them, are then allocated to the contract holder. As a result of Transformation, new positions were added to contracted organizations increasing front line staff availability. Core-funding may run counter to the tenants of NPM but it is important to recall that contract holders are delivering what would otherwise be offered by provincial staff. Instead these activities have been fully outsourced with the understanding that this is the purpose and function of many contract holders. While some contract holders may operate other departments or

services the efficient and effective delivery of the NS Works Centre is the focus for ENS. Project based funds are still common within the NS Works ecosystem but are often done with the intention of supplementing core services. These supplemental funds are used to offer auxiliary services to clients or to expand the organization's mission fulfillment beyond strict NS Works functions.

A second departure of the NS Works model from strict NPM adherence is the promotion of collaboration within the system and a willingness to cultivate learnings, adaptations, and change to the system from the grassroots level. The NPM paradigm normally promotes competition among contracting firms to reduce cost and promote efficiency – essentially the imposition of private market forces into a public system. A degree of competition was exhibited as a result of the Transformation process in which organizations attempted to retain funding and remain independent or did not take part in mergers to reduce the total number of contract holding organizations. Post-Transformation there have been substantial efforts made to curate a collaborative spirit between NS Works contract holders and between all pillar organizations. Under the adopted NS Works model, collaboration is the key to maximizing results and outcomes of funds allocated and services provided. As noted in an earlier chapter there is potential for the sector to experience competition as a result of the new contract that came into effect January 1, 2020. Interviewees indicated that it was still early days to determine if this would be the case and its material result on their operations. In this instance potential competition could result from attempts to bring in new clients and increase interactions and engagement with individuals identified as being part of groups under-represented in the local labour market. Here contract holders may be competing with one another for clients and the resulting benefits of meeting contract goals and targets. There does not appear to be a concern that competition based on cost or value for money are at play in this new contract.

The above analysis indicates that while NPM, as a component of neoliberal practice, has influenced the policy environment in which the NS Works system operates. However, the NS Works system does not exhibit strict alignment with the NPM

paradigm and has been shifting away from NPM practices over the past few contract iterations. As such, it makes sense to interpret the NS Works system through the lens of New Governance Theory.

6.4.2 New Governance Theory

New Governance Theory is an alternative to NPM that remains within a neoliberal framework. New Governance Theory agrees with many of NPM's tenants but differs in three areas: view of the public sector, government outsourcing, and reliance on market mechanisms. NPM views the public sector as highly insulated and inefficient and does not serve the best interest of the public. New Governance Theory counters that this is not the case in many of the countries where NPM has been instituted and that alternative tools and mechanisms have been embraced by the public sector to improve flexibility and efficiency (Salamon & Toepler, 2015). The internal functioning of the public sector in Nova Scotia is beyond the scope of this study. However, the choice in having core-funded organizations deliver the NS Works program is an example of how contracts can be used to span across internal silos and promote a more open and flexible public service.

The second departure of New Governance Theory from NPM is that outsourcing complicates the management of the welfare state. Contracting the NS Works program out to community-level organizations does place a large pool of staff resources and expertise outside of government. In this case the provincial government places a great deal of effort into the development of management contracts, implementing these agreements, and looking after their daily execution. The level to which these arrangements complicate the functioning of Nova Scotia's welfare state is unknown. An interview with a government representative was not attained as part of this study and so the impact of multiple contract holders delivering a common service is unknown. It does appear though that the Transformation process was completed in part to simplify the employment services system in Nova Scotia both for government and clients using these services. This study agrees with Salamon and Toepler (2015) in that the use of

contracts does not weaken ministerial duty or state control over the activities being contracted out. NS Works contract holders note that the provincial government is still very much leading the way when it comes to the direction of the NS Works Centres. Salamon and Toepler (2015) note discretion over the use and spending of public funds is outsourced through contracting. In the NS Works context interviewees note their contracts as having specific budget elements that must be fulfilled when it comes to staffing or program delivery which limits their ability to exercise full discretion over funds. This includes having a set staffing complement and offering specific services and funding programs as outlined in the contract. However, there did appear to be an opportunity for contract flexibility in terms of how some activities were carried out. This includes partnering with other community groups, completing the work in house, or leveraging other organizational capabilities.

The third departure from NPM is that New Governance Theory emphasizes the contracting out of government services to non-profit organizations as opposed to the private sector. NS Works contract holders included in this study are all non-profit entities. While they did not participate in this study there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that some contract holders may be incorporated as for-profit entities yet operate their NS Works Centres as non-profit functional areas. Despite the potential for some NS Works organizations to be incorporated as for-profit firms they all appear to espouse tenants consistent of social-purpose enterprises and would exist on the blurred boundary of the third sector. It appears the Nova Scotia government, following the lead of federal predecessors, has a preference toward the provision of employment services through non-profit organizations. As noted in the earlier presented findings non-profit NS Works contract holders do offer government additional value added that may not be present through a solely private delivery model. This includes the non-competitive attitude of system members, collaboration, existing networks with other social services organizations, and a genuine interest in community wellbeing espoused through the organizations' mission and vision statements and voluntary, community-focused governance system.

6.4.3 Summary

Learnings from Nova Scotia's employment services ecosystem indicate NPM has been, and continues to be, present in the Canadian policy environment. While NPM may not be explicit, its longstanding influence on Canada's policy environment has shaped the present context in which NS Works Centres operate. New Governance Theory offers an alternative lens through which to understand the existing policy choices of the Nova Scotia government in its relations with NS Works contract holders. This theory provides an updated response to why governments may choose to outsource some of their service delivery responsibilities to non-government actors and why non-profit organizations have become so crucial to the operation of NS Works Centres. While not its primary objective, this study does add to the existing NPM literature and supports some of the critiques of this paradigm promoted by New Governance Theory.

6.5 Non-Profit Literature

This study is grounded in discussions of the third sector in Canada with specific interest in the work of non-profit service delivery organizations in rural regions of the country. This study has highlighted the various models adopted by NS Works contract holders to operate NS Works Centres as well as the diversity of spaces these Centres occupy in both a physical and metaphorical sense. As such, this study offers contributions to Canadian non-profit literature regarding stakeholder engagement, community representation, legitimacy, and organizational governance.

6.5.1 Stakeholders

NS Works contract holders are aware of their stakeholders and the unique relationships held with each. Consistent with non-profit stakeholder literature interviewees indicated clients, job seekers and employers, and government funders as being their primary stakeholder groups. NS Works Centres sit as mediators between their two largest stakeholder groups. Government is seen as the funder for employment services and the activities that take place within the Centre. These programs, services, and activities take

place in line with government objectives and seek to address government's policy goals that intertwine with available funds. On the other side, client groups wish to receive service and take part in programs available through the Centres to better understand and then address their employment related needs. NS Works Centres play a mediating role between these two stakeholder groups and, as acknowledged in the literature, manage conflicting demands and pressures exhibited by these two groups. This includes the recommendation of clients to take part in funding opportunities, or the allocation of staff time and space for training opportunities. Centres also relate information collected at the grassroots level through to system partners, including government, to inform future decisions relating to clients.

There is also an expanded view of organizational stakeholders in that many interviewees identified members of the community at large as stakeholders. In their eyes, the non-profit organization's role in the community touches all residents through the promotion of an efficient and effective labour market. This supports the notion that non-profit organizations are manifestations of the communities in which they emerge and are therefore responsible to the community as a whole for their work in addressing a stated purpose. Considering an entire community as stakeholders poses a risk that the organization may seek to be too many things to too many people and experience mission drift. The NS Works contract held between non-profit employment service providers and government limits mission drift as it provides a clear scope for what NS Works programs and services are and provides a base from which auxiliary services can be leveraged. The formation of an organization's niche, as shaped by internal and external forces, supports the differentiation of NS Works contract holders from government and creates a framework to inform the work undertaken.

6.5.2 Representation

In exercising their function in community, NS Works Centres often see themselves as working for the community and in the best interest of their clients. The choice of working for clients as opposed to the funder is rooted in the nature of non-profit organizations as

being democratic manifestations of community (Guo & Musso, 2007; Leardini et al., 2019; Rossi et al., 2015) and as such working for community members above other mega-structures present in local society. To work in the best interest of the community it is viewed by interviewees that the organization should be diverse, inclusive, and be representative of the people and places it serves. The representative qualities of NS Works contract holders can be explored through Guo and Musso's (2007) representative framework. Each contract holder is its own incorporated body and will differ on mission, purpose, bylaws, and other foundational elements. As interviewees represent the organizations under evaluation this does not seek to be an accurate depiction of how community members view their local NS Works Centre. Instead, it offers insight into how these organizations address these issues.

NS Works Centres report strong substantive representation in that the organization acts in the interest of clients and community members to promote overall wellbeing. For some organizations this is limited to closing the labour gap between unemployed persons and job vacancies. Other contract holders have an expanded scope of work that includes recreation facilities, cultural promotion, and business development. In either circumstance interviewees report a dedication to helping clients meet their needs to the best of the organization's ability using the resources, tools, and opportunities available at the time of service. By their nature NS Works Centres hold a high level of symbolic representation as only NS Works Centres and a small group of other non-profits, such as youth or immigrant serving organizations, are able to access ENS funded programs and services or hold such a direct relationship with government. In this case clients of NS Works would see their service provider organization as their legitimate representative regarding ENS programs.

Formal, descriptive, and participatory representation are largely influenced either by general trends in the non-profit sector or by the formation of specific organizations. With respect to formal representation, the executive directors of NS Works Centres are generally hired by the board of directors to perform their duties. The same is also true for many positions at the managerial level. Constituents do not have input into the hiring

of staff at NS Works Centres beyond participation in the board of directors. None of the interviewees indicated there being a direct, unmediated, and participatory relationship between the organization and its constituents consistent with participatory representation. Board membership appears to be the strongest way in which constituents are able to influence the decisions of the non-profit contract holder. Despite a lack of formal participatory pathways NS Works Centres do gather the insights and input of constituents through feedback forms, surveys, informal conversations with clients, as well as networking with other community organizations.

Descriptive representation is perhaps the most timely element of Guo and Musso's (2007) framework. Throughout the research process interviewees from both NS Works Centres and pillar organizations noted a renewed focus on diversity and inclusion within the NS Works system and that in order for the system to achieve its goals it is important to incorporate a diverse array of lived experience and worldviews. Interviewees noted that board membership is not predicated on any specific demographic characteristics but that the board should be made up of people who are from the community and who embody social, economic, and demographic characteristics that are reflective of the wider community of operations and the people who use the organization's services. The same can be said of staff who work in the organization and deliver services to clients. It is important to the interviewees that those providing the services can relate to clients in meaningful ways to create a place of openness, respect, understanding, and support. The NS Works system identifies several groups as being under-represented in the Nova Scotia labour market including Indigenous Peoples, African Nova Scotians, women, older works, and individuals on income assistance. In developing programs, services, or other initiatives for people in these groups it is important that the development process includes these individuals and that, when possible, the process is also led by these individuals. In doing so NS Works Centres and pillar organizations are working toward building descriptive representation in the NS Works system.

6.5.3 Legitimacy

NS Works contract holders appear to gain their legitimacy from three sources: community members, government, and other service providing non-profits. Contract holders gain legitimacy from community members through many of the ways highlighted in the literature (Leardini et al., 2019). This includes adhering to the social expectations of a non-profit organization, having a mission and vision that aligns well with the needs and opportunities present in the community, and having appropriate governing capacity to manage the affairs of the organization, among others. Beyond the legitimacy gaining activities in the literature it should also be noted that the possession of an NS Works contract in and of itself is an act of legitimacy as it officially sanctions the organization to operate NS Works Centres on behalf of the province. Finally, it appears contract holders attain legitimacy from their interactions with other social service non-profits operating in their area. In this way, interactions, partnerships, and network participation give legitimacy to the contract holder from its organizational peer group. As has been noted in the research literature, organizations gain legitimacy through their relationships with stakeholder groups. In the context of the NS Works environment these relationships are held with clients and community constituents, government, and other non-profit organizations working in the social service area.

6.5.4 Governance

The findings of this study support Freiwirth's (Rossi et al., 2015) notion that non-profit boards of directors are both inside and outside the organization. *Connecting* activities exemplify how volunteer members of the board are drawn from the wider constituent group and offer their insights into the overall governance of the organization. These individuals are within the organization for the purpose of governance and influencing policy yet normally exist outside the organization – working or contributing to other areas of community life. Each NS Works contract holder chooses its governance framework and the composition of board members does not appear linked to the contract itself. Some organizations seek to gather a diverse representation of the

community in which they operate, while others are more strategic in their selection of board members and see them as a way to bring in needed expertise to the non-profit's operations.

As noted in an earlier section, some organizations do use their boards of directors as representative tools. This appears to be self-imposed as no interviewee indicated specific criteria for board composition only that they aspired to have boards that reflected the make-up of the community they operate in and of the people who use their services. The process of Transformation has altered the boards of directors for almost all organizations interviewed. For instance, many organizations were formed as the result of mergers which simultaneously merged the existing boards. Some directors left the board while others remained in an expanded board of directors until their terms expired. For areas that cover wide geography it is important that individuals come from all corners of the region. Interviewees indicated that they have had to alter their bylaws to adapt to the changing context in which they operate. This includes removing specific quotas or designated seats that may have been common at the time of incorporation or when the organization held other service agreements.

Special attention should be given the role of boards of directors within the NS Works system. Directors are community members who volunteer their time to contribute to the good governance and strategic operation of the non-profit NS Works contract holders. This also adds an additional layer of community influence and direction to the allocation of government funding within communities. It also increases the total number of provincial residents that are engaged in the development and operation of the employment services system. While Transformation did reduce the number of contract holding organizations, and thus the total number of engaged board members, it is possible for there to be over 170 Nova Scotians volunteering in this system. In Nova Scotia this is notable as the provincial government has moved to centralize administration of its healthcare system through one provincial health authority (Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness, 2018). The same has also been done with the province's school system, eliminating elected trustees in favour of an appointed

advisory board (Alphonso, 2018). Within this changing context it is notable that 17 individual boards of directors have remained in place to provide community input and guidance over the allocation of employment related funds. While employment services have a much smaller budget than provincial health or education spending the role of non-profit boards in the NS Works system contributes to wider discussions in the literature around the role of community in the neoliberal state.

6.5.5 Summary

The NS Works system depends on non-profit organizations to operate NS Works Centres and deliver the common suite of services. This research highlights the importance of stakeholder relations in the daily operations of non-profit organizations. Included here is the ability of NS Works Centres to mediate between job seeking and employer clients and the state in areas of employment services. This mediating role is supported through the representation of constituent groups as a form of democratic action at the local level. Organizational legitimacy acquired through relationships with stakeholder groups is required for the non-profit to operate effectively and with the trust and support of its community. Not only should legitimacy be attained from individuals but from funders and other partner organizations. Finally, governance has been reviewed in this section with special attention given to the role and make-up of boards of directors within the NS Work system.

6.6 Summary

The discussion presented in this chapter develops a conceptual framework from the research findings. Of importance is the interdependent relationship between the different sets of activities NS Works contract holders use to engage and respond to community. The influence of neoliberal policy on the formation and operation of the NS Works system is apparent. While NPM does not appear to have total influence over the system some tenants of the paradigm appear to be present. New Governance Theory offers a refreshed lens through which to understand the relationship between the Nova

Scotia government and NS Works contract holders. Many macro-level elements of non-profit literature appear active within the Nova Scotia landscape of non-profit employment service providers. Of special interest is the role of voluntary governance boards and their potential as a constituent engagement mechanism and shaper of government action.

7 Conclusion

7.1 Overview

This chapter concludes *Community Integration of Non-profit Organizations: A Study of Nova Scotia's Employment Services Ecosystem*. It reiterates the rationale and question that guides this study. Known elements, reflecting the context and literature in which the research was situated, are reviewed. A reflection on the research process, specifically the methods used in this study, is offered including the limits placed on presented findings. New learnings from this study are shared that detail findings and the relation of these findings to known elements. Finally, directions for future research are offered.

7.2 Rationale and Guiding Question

Non-profit organizations and other members of the third sector have emerged as key elements of the modern Canadian welfare state. These organizations work with government, the private sector, and the local community to address issues of common concern and produce public benefits that are enjoyed across all elements of society. In recent times governments at all levels have sought to leverage the strengths of the third sector, especially non-profit organizations, to deliver elements of public welfare. Nova Scotia enters into contractual agreements with a number of non-profit organizations throughout the province to operate NS Works Centres and deliver related programs and services. NS Works Centres form the major client-facing element of the province's PES and works with job seekers and employers to create an inclusive and resilient labour market.

Despite recent developments in the Canadian and Nova Scotian PES context there is a dearth of research understanding the role non-profit organizations have in the delivery of employment services at the local, provincial, and national levels. To address these concerns this research asked *how do non-profit employment service providers in Nova Scotia integrate into their local communities and promote place-based policy, programs,*

and services to address labour market needs? In addressing the research question, this study explored elements of the Nova Scotia employment services ecosystem, examined contracted non-profit employment service providers, determined the relationship between non-profit employment service providers and their constituent communities, and discovered how non-profit employment service providers offer, or contribute to the development of, place-based employment services in the communities they serve.

7.3 Known Elements

When seeking to understand the relationship between government and non-profit organizations in Canada it is important to realize that the relationships and structures found today are informed by decisions taken in the past. Following the Second World War Canada solidified employment services and responsibility for labour market development under the jurisdiction of the federal government. A national unemployment insurance scheme was also developed that would provide income support to the unemployed and support programs and initiatives to assist in their re-entry into the workforce. Employment services were offered through federal government offices exclusively until the 1980s. At that time, the ideals of neoliberalism began to influence the PES and the federal government began to outsource some employment services to non-profit community groups. In the 1990s the federal government also embarked on a process of devolution in which responsibility for the PES was devolved to provincial governments as agreements were developed. The process of contracting out services accelerated over this same time. In 2009 Nova Scotia's PES was devolved to provincial jurisdiction including responsibility for over 50 service provider organizations.

Following the 2009 devolution of Nova Scotian employment services the province initiated a process of Transformation to innovate and consolidate services in the province. This culminated in the 2016 launch of NS Works by LAE. A new approach to employment services in the province included a reduction in contract holders through a process of mergers and re-alignments. Transformation also allocated training funds to the NSCDA and bolstered this organization's role within the overall system to support

certification, training, and advancement of the career development profession. The CEI was also created during this time through a contract with St. Francis Xavier University's Extension Department with the aim of supporting the system in the areas of research, collaboration, capacity building, and governance. Together NS Works Centres, LAE/ENS, NSCDA, and the CEI form the four main pillar organizations responsible for employment services in the province.

In addition to providing context this study identified four areas of literature relevant to the investigation of non-profit employment service providers in Nova Scotia. The study expands these research streams to new areas not previously explored in the Nova Scotian employment services context. Literature streams included the conceptualization and development of the third sector, neoliberalism, non-profit organizations in community, and the ability for non-profits to act through place-based policy and partnerships. These areas of literature informed the research process undertaken in this study and guided subsequent findings and discussion.

7.4 Process Undertaken

In addressing the research question this study used qualitative, personal interviews with leaders of NS Works pillar organizations. Interviews were held over the phone to accommodate scheduling concerns with prospective participants. A formal introduction from a trusted member of the NS Works system added legitimacy to the research project and added to the building of trust between the researcher and interviewee. As the researcher has had previous work in the NS Works ecosystem rapport between the researcher and interviewees was created easily through email and telephone communication. Interviews made use of grand tour questions and floating prompts which helped create a conversational atmosphere and allowed the interviewee to share insights openly and provide depth and detail to the items shared. Recorded interviews were then transcribed manually by the researcher. This allowed the researcher to gain an intimate understanding of the data set and increased overall familiarity with interview contents. Transcripts were reviewed to develop initial codes and themes. These items

were then placed into NVivo software as nodes. The use of electronic coding software helped in organizing the data and navigating passages to support rich description in the study's findings.

The researcher's personal experience working, observing, and taking part in employment centre programs helped guide the research process. Key informants were quickly identified and the language used by respondents was easily understood. Keeping participants to the level of management within their organization allowed for a high-level view of the organization's operations. At times, these managers had worked with the organization for a number of years and so were able to bring forward a deep sense of organizational history.

An interview with a representative of the Nova Scotia government could not be attained. Clients and other community members were not included in this study. As such, the contents of this study reflect the views of non-governmental pillar organizations only and does not address the views of primary stakeholder groups. The nature of the study's research design limits the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. However, findings presented in this study may offer insights into similar relationships between government and non-profit employment service providers, the nature of employment service delivery, and the third sector in Canada. It is important to note that this study does not include data reflective of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent public health measures.

7.5 New Learnings

Data collected as part of this research project was successful in determining how non-profit employment service providers in Nova Scotia integrate into their local communities and promote place-based policy, programs, and services to address labour market needs. In addressing the outlined research objectives this study presented an overview of the Nova Scotia employment services ecosystem including its history and purpose, core pillar organizations, and highlighting the way in which NS

Works contract holders develop and deliver programs and services. With special attention to non-profit contract holders this study reviewed guiding statements of the organization, its history and rationale for operating NS Works Centres, identified stakeholder and partner relationships, and explored the various programs and services offered by the organization as part of, or separate from, the NS Works contract. Once contract holders were better understood the relationship between these organizations and constituent communities was reviewed. This included the organization's role in community life, stakeholder engagement in organizational governance and program development and delivery, and the relationship of NS Works services to other activities undertaken by the organization or other groups in the community. Finally, this project determined non-profit employment service providers offer and contribute to the development of place-based employment services. This was done by comparing, contrasting, and analyzing stakeholder engagement in daily operations, non-NS Works programs and services offered by Centres, the engagement of community partners in operational activities, and expressed instances of place-based employment services being offered.

The core findings of the study were presented through four thematic areas. Each thematic area identified a number of activities undertaken by NS Works contract holders in the pursuit of offering place-based employment services. *Connecting* activities reflect ways in which the non-profit organization moves beyond its organizational boundaries and seeks information from its operational environment. It supports the notion that organizations have porous boundaries and take part in the bi-directional flow of information between the organization and its operating environment. In the context of the third sector, connecting activities provide a new way to look at organizational networking, how the organization convenes community, and the attributes of local board of director members and their mutual connections. Connecting activities also highlight a new way of looking at staff and the social capital and assets each staff member holds outside the general terms of employment. Given the rurality of many NS Works contract holders, these organizations should continue to examine the assets of their staff team

and leverage these assets in organizational practice. For the third sector, it is wise to consider the role organizational staff may have in wider community development initiatives and the potential for staff professional development to radiate outward beyond the immediate operations of the organization.

Being present reflects the way in which NS Works contract holders manifest in the tangible, intangible, and psychological arenas of community. These are all processes undertaken to weave the organization into the social fabric of its constituent community. The placement of NS Works Centres in the communities they serve as well as the physical space these offices occupy instills a visible connection for the community to work done in the Centre and promote it as a core element of the wider social service portfolio of the region. A strong online or media presence also contributes to the Centre's connection to community through websites, social media, radio, and print communication. Being present also entails being aware of what is going on in the community, understanding local dynamics, relationships, and the general social typography. Elements gathered through informal channels, available only by being in the community, add richness to information attained through formal means. Taken together, NS Works Centres leverage their existing footprint in the community to better inform the practice of employment services in their local areas. This is especially true for organizations that maintain multiple offices throughout a wide geographic space that offers an opportunity to meet people where they are and, in a format, personalized to their needs. For the third sector more broadly it is important for organizations to be intentional about the various spaces they occupy and how this will shape their availability, potential action, and scope of work.

Internalizing captures how NS Works contract holders process and understand the information, connections, and experiences made known through *connecting* and *being present*, and begin influencing its future actions. One identified way in which this is done is through the formation of an organization's niche. Through its niche the NS Works contract holder is able to establish itself in its community as the community's support for labour market development initiatives. It also helps to define the organization's scope of

work and informs its relationship with other entities operating in the shared space. Many NS Works contract holders operate NS Works Centres in addition to other recreational, business, and economic support initiatives. This indicates that some contract holders may be able to leverage additional resources from other functional areas to help support employment related initiatives. Additionally, as contract holders often operate multiple service locations, it is important that all Centres, including the staff and physical resources available in each location, are coordinated and leveraged to address the service needs of all clients. For NS Works Centres, the solidification of the organization's niche embodies the synergies created through the alignment of related services or the integration of diverse staff teams and capabilities. For third sector organizations more broadly this speaks to the need for organizations to define their scope and role in the community they serve and within the wider field the social challenge they seek to address exists. It also highlights the need for organizations that operate across multiple locations to align their core assets, including staff, to address the aspired mission.

Operationalizing reflects how NS Works contract holders achieve their mission and purpose in community. Specific to this research, a focus is given to the ability of these organizations to address the specific, localized, needs of clients through a combination of contract and non-contract functions informed by activities included in the previous three thematic areas. The NS Works suite of services forms the core program for all NS Works contract holders and provides uniformity across all Centres throughout the province. Core programs and services are often supplemented through auxiliary activities supported by alternate government funding streams, private funders, or through internal resource leveraging and partnerships with external groups. These together contribute to the overall role of the NS Works contract holder in their constituent community as shaped through employment's role in social and economic community development. Contract holders recognize the need for common services to be delivered throughout the province and promote consistency across all Centres regardless of the contracted organization. However, contract holders are influenced by

activities included in the previous three thematic areas that work to shape and shift the way in which these are delivered. A willingness and openness of doing so contributes to the richness within the system. More broadly within the third sector, non-profit organizations operating across communities, regions, or at the national level should note that while the mission and purpose of the organization can remain the same throughout all contexts, the way in which this is done may differ between locales. This encourages innovation and organizational dynamism and perpetuates the sector's envied flexibility.

Brought together, the research findings present a conceptual framework through which one can interpret a non-profit employment service provider's integration into the community to promote place-based programs and services. *Connecting, being present, internalizing, and operationalizing* all represent sets of interdependent activities. This model is not a sequence of events used to produce a single class of outputs. Instead, each thematic area has its own results, with each result interacting with other sets of activities that influence one another. A better understanding of these activities can help NS Works contract holders recognize the actions and processes they are already undertaking and see the impact occurring within their own Centres. With this series of activities expressed it is then possible to build upon areas of weakness with the potential of improving overall organizational results. This conceptual framework is not restricted to the NS Works system and can be generalized to other public benefit organizations operating at the community level. Non-profit and other third sector organizations whose major function is the delivery of government services may find enhanced value from this model.

With respect to the conceptualization of the third sector this study views public employment services as a public good key to the modern Canadian welfare state. As a public good the private sector is incapable of offering these services in a fair and equitable manner. These services are also closely intertwined with the national employment insurance scheme such that it is not fully up to the third sector to offer these public services alone. Instead, the delivery of employment services in Nova

Scotia is offered through a contractual relationship between the province and mostly non-profit organizations. Government provides funding, offers leadership, and outlines processes and targets to be undertaken and achieved. Contracted organizations use the acquired resources to deliver mandated programs and services. Together, government and contract holders address their inherent weaknesses to deliver this public good throughout the province. Recent contract renewals support the idea that the provincial government is supportive of maintaining the delivery of employment services via non-profit contract holders. More broadly this study highlights the role of public goods in third sector conceptualizations and the varied way different models have of explaining the formation of relationships between government and non-profit groups.

Government relations with non-profit groups have been influenced through the implementation of NPM. It was not the focus of this research to determine the influence of NPM on the formation and operation of the NS Works system. However, it appears that NPM and other elements of neoliberalism have influenced the policy environment in which the system operates. New Governance Theory offers a critique of NPM and helps to understand elements of the NS Works system as presently constituted. Specifically this theory helps to understand why government may choose to work with members of the third sector to deliver government programs and services. For NS Works Centres the notion of NPM and New Governance Theory helps contract holders in understanding the influences that shape government decision making. This research contributes to the third sector literature on New Governance Theory by applying it to the Nova Scotia context as well as to the provision of employment services.

This research brings non-profit literature to life with respect to organizations contracted to deliver employment service in Nova Scotia. If NS Works contract holders are to fully integrate into their constituent communities it is important they understand the role of stakeholders in their operations. NS Works contract holders occupy a unique space in-between government and clients and aids in mediating this relationship such that government and clients can achieve their desired employment objectives. The way in which stakeholder's themselves and their interests are represented within the contract

holder influences the lens through which services will be delivered. Stakeholder representation contributes to the organization's legitimacy in carrying out its function. The research findings suggest that legitimacy can also be achieved through relationship and partnership development with peer organizations in the operational environment and through the act of holding a desired government contract the exclusivity that comes with such a designation. Highlighted in this research is the role of voluntary boards of directors and the potential these small groups have in shaping employment programs and services in the province at the local level. NS Works contract holders should acknowledge ways in which stakeholder interests are represented in the organization and consider how these can be leveraged or expanded as the organizations work to address the needs of under-represented groups in the province's labour market. Generalized to other third sector organizations, this study supports the notion that voluntary boards of directors support overall mission fulfillment.

7.6 Directions for Future Research

In reflecting on learnings presented in this study there exists a number of future research directions that would benefit the NS Works system and further the Canadian third sector research literature. This research notes the unique role of voluntary boards of directors giving community voice into the implementation of government's employment service delivery. In a time where many provinces are reducing the size and scope of public boards and bodies and continuing to contract government services to non-profit groups the function of these voluntary boards within society may also be evolving. Future studies should review the role of these voluntary boards as sites of active citizenship and participation as well as their ability to shape and influence the actions of government.

Within this study staff were recognized as actively participating in their communities and contributing to social enrichment initiatives. Additionally, there is a push toward continued learning, skills development, and practical impact within the NS Works system. Staff of NS Works Centres should begin to see employment services as a

component to overall community development and the amelioration of local social problems. There is potential for continued research to be completed on the role of staff in their communities as pertains to community development. Focus should be given to the way NS Works contract holders can support the community development activities undertaken by staff, shape organizational culture to embrace a spirit of community development, and how the professional development undertaken within the NS Works environment can radiate outward into the wider community.

NS Works contract holders indicated a new funding agreement coming into place on January 1, 2020. This contract was similar to the previous post-Transformation agreement but with the inclusion of additional incentive-based funding aligned with new and expanded client targets. Interviewees were unsure how the addition of incentive-based funding would change the culture of the NS Works system or the way in which it would shape their daily operations. Future studies may wish to examine the impact of incentive-based funding for employment service contracts both in terms of achieving performance goals and impact on the collaborative nature of the overall system.

Finally, this research presented a conceptual framework through which to understand the integration of NS Works contract holders into their community and their development of place-based programs and services. Other jurisdictions in Canada also contract non-profit organizations for the delivery of employment services along with a variety of other public goods. Additional research should be completed to determine if the four thematic areas expressed in this study occur in other jurisdictions or in alternate public good applications. Research in this area may expand the generalizability of this conceptual framework or contribute to its future development.

7.7 Final Remarks

The Nova Scotia employment services ecosystem is a lively environment in which to study the third sector. This system sees community passion for an inclusive society and a well functioning labour market is matched with government interest in economic

resiliency. The changing dynamics of work, social progression, and economic disruption all pose unique challenges for NS Works Centres. These Centres are able to mitigate these challenges, and respond to emerging needs, through their commitment to community and the people and organizations that rely on their services.

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