

Futureproofing the Community Service Workforce

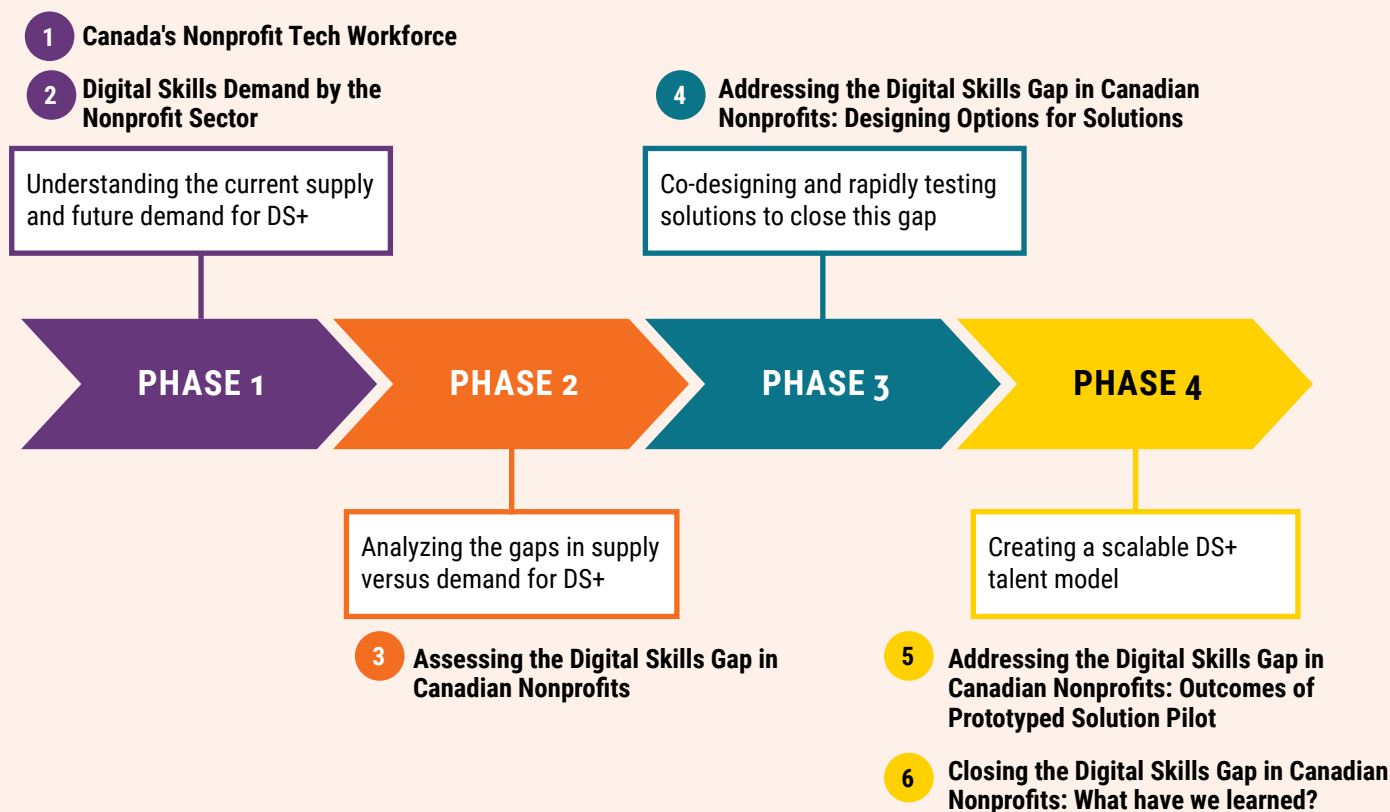
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Canada's nonprofit sector plays a vital role in supporting communities, but it faces a growing challenge in keeping up with rapid digital change. As technology evolves, so too do community needs and expectations—yet the sector's ability to respond is hindered by a significant gap between the digital capabilities nonprofits currently possess and those they require to meet emerging needs. At stake is the sector's ability to sustain its impact and relevance in an environment where digital fluency is becoming increasingly essential.

[Futureproofing the Community Service Workforce](#) was developed in response to this challenge. The project set

out to better understand and build the nonprofit workforce's facility with Digital Skills Plus (DS+). DS+ encompasses digital as well as adjacent skills that are often deployed in conjunction with digital tools, including communication, creativity, innovation, adaptability, and problem-solving skills.

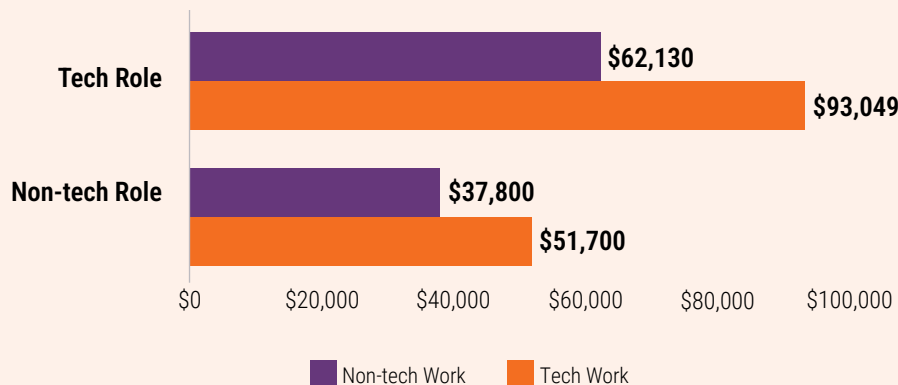
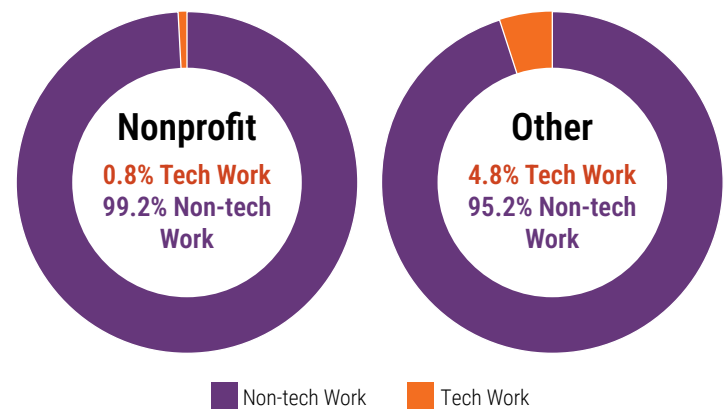
Over 17 months, this project assessed current and future DS+ needs, identified gaps, tested targeted solutions, and developed a scalable model to support upskilling the sector. Ultimately, it aimed to build a strong evidence base and practical tools to prepare the nonprofit workforce for a digitally driven future.



Nonprofits are under-resourced in tech talent—and struggle to offer competitive pay

Nonprofits are light on tech work—they have one-fifth of the tech workers that other industries have.

Less than 1% of workers in nonprofits are doing work that is classified as tech work, compared to an average of 5% of workforces in other sectors.

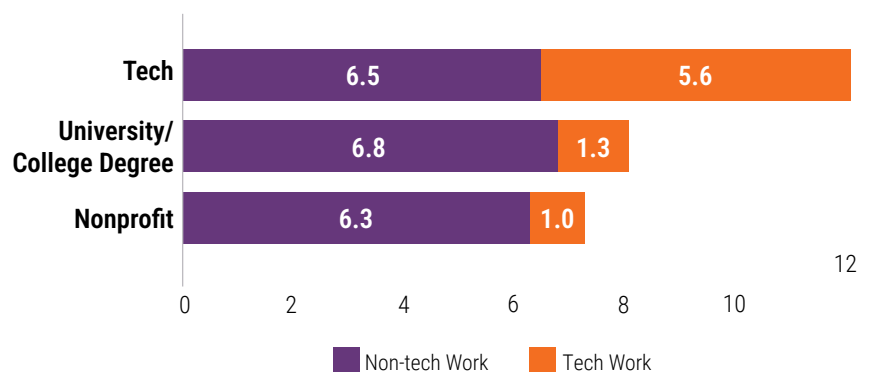


Tech workers in the nonprofit sector also earn less than tech workers in other sectors. On average, tech workers in nonprofits earn approximately \$30,000 less annually than tech workers in other industries. This represents **a pay cut of roughly 33% for tech workers who choose to work in the nonprofit sector.**

The nonprofit sector tends to be more diverse than other sectors when it comes to gender and Indigenous identity, including in tech work participation. However, Indigenous people, women, and visible minorities are all paid less for tech work than other workers, although the pay gap is smaller than among tech workers working outside of nonprofits.

Nonprofits prioritize people skills over digital skills

Compared to other jobs that require a college or university degree and compared to other tech jobs, nonprofit job postings on average demand a lower number of digital skills and contain a lower number of unique digital skills. Non-digital skills such as communication, teamwork and interpersonal skills are among the top skills that employers demand in nonprofit job postings.

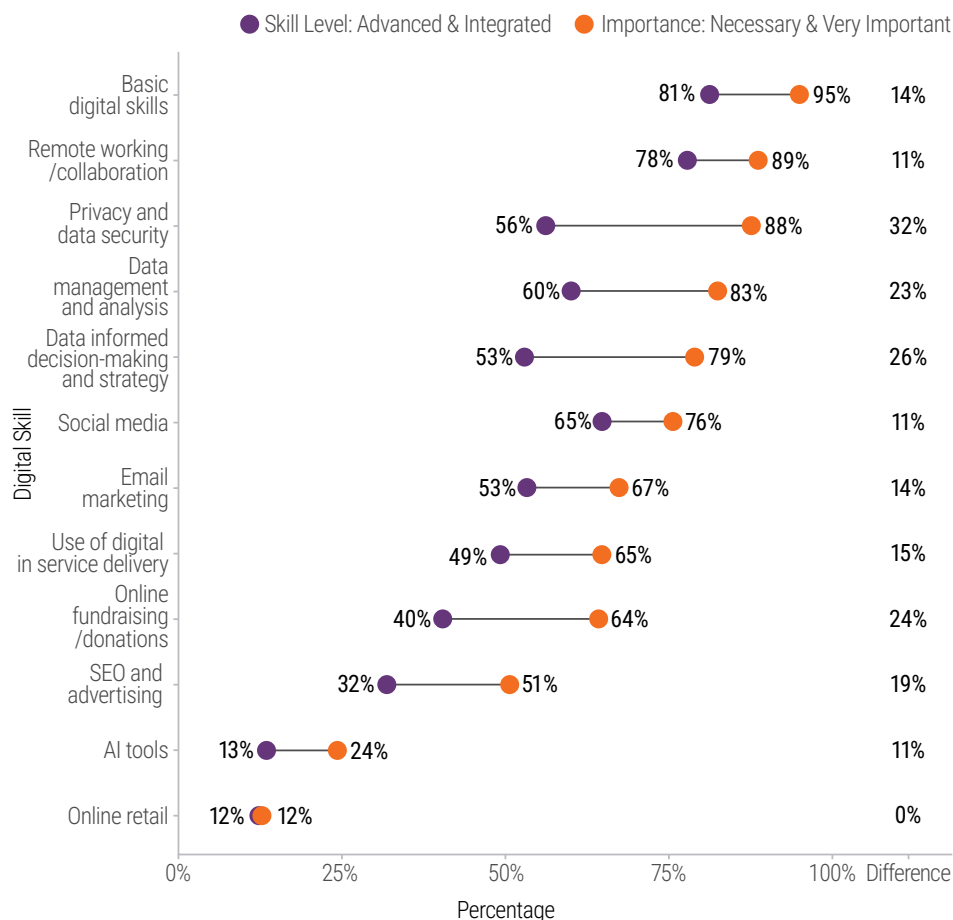


Gaps in data use, management and privacy challenge nonprofits

81% of 284 surveyed Canadian nonprofit workers view digital skills as crucial for their organization's mission and day-to-day work.

Basic digital skills (95%), remote work and collaboration (89%), privacy and data security (88%), and data management (82%) are viewed as most critical. Meanwhile, the largest gaps identified included privacy and data security (32% gap), data-informed decision-making and strategy (24% gap), online fundraising and donations (24% gap), and data management (23% gap).

Nonprofit organizations struggle to address these gaps, with most citing **financial** and **resource constraints**. Additionally, organizations struggle to articulate their digital needs and to navigate existing supports.



Co-creating solutions

Given our findings, we concluded that any prototype aimed at upskilling nonprofits should:

1. Be accessible, low-cost, and user-friendly to reduce resource constraints.
2. Address upstream challenges, like articulating skills gaps and identifying relevant training and funding opportunities.
3. Offer flexibility to support nonprofits of varying sizes and levels of digital development with a range of challenges.
4. Go beyond structured training modules and match nonprofits to resources and training tailored to their unique needs and challenges.

Developing the digital skills framework

To guide prototype development and support the articulation of digital skills that centre nonprofits, we developed a **Digital Skills+ Framework**.

This framework organizes digital skills into six broad skill areas (e.g., cybersecurity, office tools). For each skill area, we list specific skills organized by level of development (foundational, practical, and advanced).

Digital Skills+ Framework Summary

Office tools	Communication and collaboration tools	Marketing and website tools	Data management and analysis tools	AI tools (LLMs)	Cybersecurity and data privacy
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Word processing• Presentation• Spreadsheet	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Email• Video conference or chat• Sharing documents on the cloud• Whiteboarding and other collaboration tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Website management• E-mail marketing• Social media• SEO (Search Engine Optimization)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Data management (CRM and data systems)• Data analysis (spreadsheets and programming tools)• Data driven decision making and insights	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• AI literacy and usage• AI integration and workflow automation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cybersecurity practice• Data privacy and software assessment

For more details about the development and use of the framework please visit [Addressing the Digital Skills Gap in Canadian Nonprofits: Outcomes of Prototyped Solution Pilot](#).

Prototype development

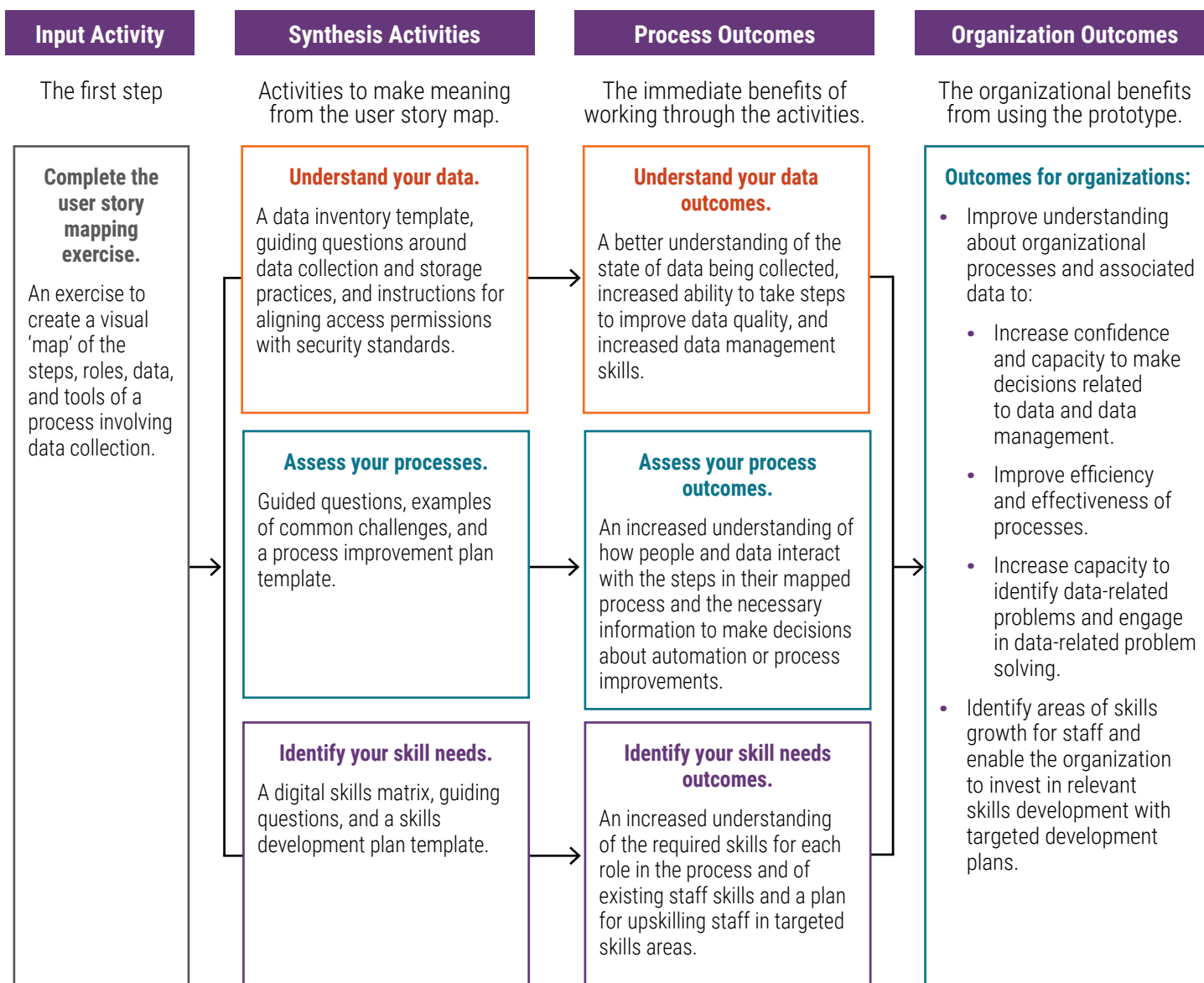
In partnership with eight nonprofits, we developed four prototype concepts, listed below. Each was designed to meet crucial digital skills gaps, as defined in our research and by our design partners.

1. Identifying digital skills needs across roles
2. Improving data management practices and processes
3. Empowering highly skilled staff to coach/mentor
4. Building data privacy and security IQ

Building Data Management Capacity Prototype

After a series of co-design workshops with our partners, we decided to combine aspects of different prototype concepts with a focus on **Prototype 2: Improving Data Management Practices and Processes**.

The resulting prototype contains a series of exercises and guiding questions designed to support nonprofits to better understand their data, data processes within their organizations, and the skills needed to enable those processes. The activities lean on internal expertise and build capacity and data skills to engage in data-related problem-solving and decision-making.



Testing Solutions

Over eight weeks, seven of our eight partners piloted the toolkit and we sought feedback on accessibility, efficacy and scalability.

- ▶ **Accessibility:** Despite limited capacity, most (**86%**) partner organizations found the prototype to be easy to use, and most (**71%**) found the prototype's instructions clear and easy to follow.
- ▶ **Efficacy:** All (**100%**) partners reported a better understanding of their data and increased confidence in tackling data-related problems; most (**72%**) gained clarity on digital skills required in their organization
- ▶ **Scalability:** Organizations applied the prototype's tools across various functions, and completed activities with little to no external support, suggesting the approach can scale across varied nonprofit contexts.

While most partners found the prototype easy to use and the instructions clear, some had suggestions for improved accessibility. We are incorporating their suggestions and will be making an improved version of the prototype available at futureproof.ccndr.ca



agreed that they learned something new and useful by completing the prototype.

Recommendations

For funders:

- ▶ **Offer flexible grants** targeted towards building digital skills capacity amongst grantees.
- ▶ **Include line items in grants** specifically for digital roles and digital skill development to incentivize grantees to create digital skills strategic plans and investments.

For the ecosystem:

- ▶ **Develop and adopt a consensus-based DS+ standard** across the sector, Curate a collection of existing digital skills-building opportunities that align with this standard and the needs of the sector.

For tools & training:

- ▶ **Develop digital skills training opportunities** that focus on digital tools and software most commonly used in the sector, emphasizing applications in nonprofit-specific contexts.
- ▶ **Develop and scale tools** that are 'upstream,' providing nonprofits with guidance on how to find and resource digital capacity-building efforts.

For more details about this project, the associated reports and its partners, visit futureproof.ccndr.ca

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Canada

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