

J5

Fractional Supports Service

Recommendations for
Next Phase of Piloting

NOVEMBER 2025



Project Background

The Fractional Supports Service Pilot was developed in response to ongoing capacity challenges across Bow Valley non-profits. The idea originated through the Leadership Table, where organizations and municipal partners identified shared issues in finance, HR, legal compliance, and governance capacity and capability. With small teams, frequent turnover, and increasing administrative demands, leaders questioned whether shared professional services could reduce operational strain and improve organizational stability.

The Banff Canmore Foundation engaged J5 Design to research this validity of this concept and set up a potential Phase 2 of piloting.

The hypothesis driving this research suggested that professional services, shared across multiple small nonprofits as fractional support, could significantly strengthen both individual organizations and the broader community ecosystem.

Initial Research Insights

The first phase of research through interviews revealed a nonprofit sector in the Bow Valley facing widespread capacity challenges. Organizations struggled with financial management, HR compliance, and legal and governance support, issues intensified by the region's tourism-driven volunteer turnover.

This initial research also found that traditional capacity-building approaches focused on training and education failed to address a more fundamental gap: the time and resources needed to get the work done.

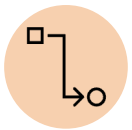
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I'm drained on attending workshops... You still have to do [the task] at the end.



The findings pointed toward a clear need for execution-focused services delivered through consistent relationships with trusted professionals who understand the unique Bow Valley context.

“One-Time” vs. “Ongoing” Support

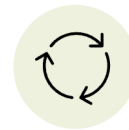


ONE TIME

Specialized expertise for specific tasks with clear beginning and endpoints.

Organizations need discrete, high-stakes tasks completed by experts in areas such as legal documentation, compliance filings, and policy creation.

These are triggered by external events (government notices, grant deadlines) where mistakes have serious consequences.



ONGOING

Consistent relationships providing continuous operational and strategic guidance.

Beyond routine needs like monthly bookkeeping, organizations want reliable access to handle unexpected challenges.

The value isn't just task completion but institutional memory. Someone who knows their history and provides continuity through staff transitions.

Where to Focus: Building Stage

While a future version of this service may support Bow Valley non-profits at all stages, creating the first pilot around **Building Stage** organizations is recommended.

This type of organization sits at the cross section of need and readiness.

BUILDING STAGE PROFILE

This profile represents the optimal target for fractional support services based on readiness, capacity, and demonstrated need from prototype testing.

CORE CHARACTERISTICS

Has 2-5 paid staff	Emerging role specialization but significant overlap
Has basic systems and processes	Systems are inconsistent, undocumented, or inefficient
ED delegates tasks	Still maintains oversight over everything

LOW READINESS
not quite established

HIGH READINESS
fully established



Recommendations

In addition to focusing on **Building Stage** organizations, the primary goal of the next phase of piloting should be to:

- **Test realistic pricing and models** that balance organizational affordability with service sustainability. **The ability to allocate funding towards fractional supports drives what supports are used and how.**

The fractional supports service should:

- **Create a hybrid delivery model:** complete urgent tasks while providing templates, documentation, and basic training for ongoing maintenance.
- **Assign dedicated support** to organizations rather than rotating providers.
- **Build in flexibility** to shift between intensive project support and lighter guidance as needs change.

High-Level Organizational Profiles

FOUNDING STAGE

Solo EDs operating in crisis mode, trying to do everything themselves with no documented systems. They know they need help but default to "I'm the cheapest option" thinking. Board members fill operational gaps rather than governing.

CORE NEED

Immediate execution of high-risk tasks (compliance, legal, financial) they cannot afford to get wrong, survival support (not skill-building).

BUILDING STAGE

These organizations revealed they can't choose between "do it for me" or "teach me how" as they need both simultaneously. Whether a task overlaps with someone's role emerged as the strongest predictor of support preference. They want to understand work well enough to manage it, not necessarily do it themselves.

CORE NEED

Hybrid support that completes urgent work while building their capacity to maintain and oversee it, delivered through consistent relationships rather than rotating experts.

SCALING STAGE

Well-resourced with specialized staff and documented processes but facing sophisticated challenges beyond internal expertise. They emphasized needing co-creation for strategic work.

CORE NEED

Strategic advisory and specialized expertise for complex situations, partners for high-stakes decisions, not basic execution support.

TRANSITIONS

Transitions between stages occur when organizations identify a need for more capacity, system improvement, resourcing, or other specialized services that support growth.

These are often trigger points for requiring external support.