



CHARITY BRIEF

Calgary Discussion Circle

ABOUT

On 1 December 2025, the LCC hosted a discussion circle at the [National Music Centre's Studio Bell](#) in Calgary with representatives from the following local charitable organisations:

- [ActionDignity](#)
- [Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Calgary](#)
- [Alpha House Society](#)
- [Calgary Homeless Foundation](#)
- [Miskanawah](#)

LIVING CHARITY

What should the Canadian public understand about the nature and needs of charities and the charitable sector in general?

- Charities play a vital role in fulfilling basic human needs in the face of significant challenges.
 - Charities facilitate individual and collective dignity, and they create fairness and equity in the communities where they operate.
 - Organisations do so in environments defined by intense demand, limited infrastructure, structural inequities, and persistent instability.
 - Although the legal framework governing charities has remained largely static, the environments in which they work are fluid and rapidly evolving.
- Charitable organizations must navigate complex intersections with government(s).
 - The work of charities spans numerous departments and all levels of government. Charities operate in a multi-layered and frequently overlapping policy and regulatory contexts that require sophisticated navigation.
 - Given their multiple and significant intersections with government, political transitions can be particularly challenging for organisations, requiring relationships to be built anew in situations where political priorities can shift abruptly between administrations.
- Charities are an under-appreciated model of knowledge creation and relational practice.
 - Charities generate profound knowledge about surviving in tight resource environments, culturally grounded approaches to care, generating creative solutions in real time, and nurturing relationships as a foundation of change.





PURSUING CHARITY

What challenges do charities face in their work that might act as a barrier to achieving their mission?

- Charities operate in a fragile funding environment that causes sectoral strain.
 - Charitable organisations frequently rely upon a series of short-term funding agreements with inconsistent end dates and different reporting processes. This places a heavy administrative burden on charities and detracts from their ability to fulfill their core mission.
 - The relative scarcity of funds can fuel lateral violence within the sector, as organisations compete for finite resources and adopt a territorial or defensive approach to specific issues, groups, and services.
- Charities face acute difficulties with respect to the transfer of knowledge and the preservation of institutional memory.
 - Charities have long grappled with high rates of personnel turnover, stemming in part from the large disconnect between the wage expectations of funders and the professional skills required by individuals working in the sector. Some of the important impacts from these high turnover rates include challenges around documenting practices, strategic planning, and knowledge co-creation within organisations.
 - The period of COVID-19 accentuated organisational pressures with respect to knowledge keeping and transmission. It has been a struggle for many charities to re-build their capacity and institutional muscle memory in the post-pandemic context.
- Indigenous organisations face unique and steep obstacles which hinder their ability to offer solutions grounded in their own legal and cultural traditions.
 - Many Indigenous charities are confronted with capacity struggles that come from trying to function within multiple Eurocentric systems while appropriately integrating Indigenous worldviews.
 - Funding, reporting, and accountability frameworks leave little room for the guidance of Elders, oral traditions, and natural law, which can be experienced as a skepticism or devaluation of Indigenous practices and perspectives. Requirements such as “50% + 1 Indigenous board members” define Indigenous charities through externally imposed criteria, rather than leaving space for Indigenous organizations to define themselves.
- Effective advocacy is simultaneously essential to the work of charities and carries risks for individual organisations.
 - In a context where advocacy is taking on greater strategic importance, there is a lingering fear that certain forms of advocacy may compromise an organisation’s relationship with funders or its charitable status. This fear is compounded by the general vulnerability of organisations within the sector, which can have a chilling effect on the public interventions made by charities.
 - A chill on advocacy can have the effect of weakening the policy environment in which charities operate by creating a situation where policy is made *for* communities, rather than *with* communities.





RENEWING HOPE

What are the possibilities for the future in the charity sector and how should its importance be conveyed from generation to generation of Canadians?

- Relationships are emerging as the foundation of collective action.
 - Collaboration amongst charities in Calgary was historically reactive and disjointed, but it is becoming more intentional, strategic and relationship driven.
 - A sense of collective power is emerging as communities and charitable organisations build trust and align around shared goals. However, smaller, racialized, and Indigenous organisations remain frequently excluded from broader collaboratives, which can reinforce inequities.
 - Hearing stories directly from affected communities leads to the “*aha* moments” that can change hearts and shift policy directions.
- There are seeds of hope within the charitable sector’s constant changes.
 - Although charities work in an environment that is fluid and frequently unstable, this fluidity also creates opportunities. The sector’s resilience, creativity, and resourcefulness are powerful assets in helping organisations seize these opportunities.
 - Hope is also sustained by witnessing real change: individuals finding stability, families reconnecting, community members healing, and systems slowly shifting.
- There is an opportunity for Canada to reframe charity and reimagine charitable structures.
 - The term “charity” itself may be outdated, failing to capture the systemic, justice-oriented work that charities perform, the sector’s role in safeguarding human rights, and Indigenous models of care.
 - Laws and frameworks governing charities can be adjusted to better reflect modern realities, including the centrality of relationship and reciprocity, Indigenous worldviews, and the true cost of labour.

