



CHARITY BRIEF

St. John's Discussion Circle

ABOUT

On 26 November 2025, the LCC hosted a discussion circle at the offices of the [Public Legal Information Association of Newfoundland & Labrador](#) in St John's, Newfoundland & Labrador, with representatives from the following organizations in the region:

- [Community Sector Council of Newfoundland and Labrador \(CSCNL\)](#)
- [Community Foundation, Newfoundland and Labrador \(CFNL\)](#)
- [Saunders, Collins and Loeb LLP](#)
- [First Light – St. John's Friendship Centre](#)

LIVING CHARITY

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

- A focus on "relief" alone is problematic.
 - There is a substantial need for structural solutions, in addition to addressing individual needs. in response to immediate circumstances.
 - If you fail to fund services and programs, for example, to prisoners while in prison, the costs are pushed down the road and amplified when individuals are released into the community.
 - The social health of a community requires long-term approaches and attention to root causes rather than stop-gap emergency responses alone.
- Funding for organizations is consistently insufficient.
 - Funding covers the bare minimum. It rarely covers key costs such as transportation and crucial activity supplies.
 - Funding agreements are almost universally short-term, which leads programs to frequently start up and shut down. This causes knowledge to be lost and undermines the effectiveness of the organization.
- The sector is characterized by significant competition for funding.
 - Charities often go where the money is, whether or not this is efficient or effective.
 - While there are significant efforts to organize and collaborate, there may still be multiple organizations applying for the same grant – with significant investment of resources by each even though only one organization will ultimately be funded.





- Organizations may engage in “mission creep” in order to access funding that might otherwise be outside their core mandate. The result is less expertise and redundancy as organizations transform themselves regularly to reach available funding.
- It is very easy to register a non-profit corporation and there are no clear parameters for what a “social enterprise” is. The result is inefficiency in the system. Some form of gate-keeping or enhanced coordination would promote optimal distribution of resources. A “mandate search” could be conducted to ensure limited overlap between entities.

PURSUING CHARITY

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

- Politics and polarization constitute a risk and a potential threat.
 - The experience in the United States of government dismantling charitable organizations should be a wake-up call for Canada. Is the Canadian charitable sector ready?
 - There is increasing polarization around cultural factors and this threatens to fracture the charitable sector.
- The sector is characterized by culturally narrow or inappropriate frameworks.
 - Funding and reporting frameworks do not reflect indigeneity, Indigenous concepts of relationships, and ways of being in the world.
 - There is a constant and debilitating act of translation required to transform Indigenous experience into non-Indigenous frameworks. For example, a sweat lodge is not a capital asset and an Elder is not a contractor.
 - Some funders are more flexible than others in allowing for alternative reporting formats and modes.
- Money frequently flows to the wrong place.
 - More funding goes to large established charities with developed expertise in managing funding applications and processes. However, these groups are not necessarily where the need is in communities.
- The sector is characterized by a lack of trust.
 - Reporting and monitoring processes are overly onerous and generally inconsistent with other government spending on social infrastructure. Governments should be comfortable with more risk.
 - For example, contractors building highways with government money in Newfoundland & Labrador are subjected to significantly more straightforward policies and processes than charities.
- Significant litigation risks hang over charitable organizations.
 - Despite increasing dependance on posthumous philanthropy, charities are ill-equipped to represent their interests when bequests in wills are challenged by family members, if the charities are even made aware. The costs are prohibitive, and the public relations considerations are disastrous, for charities involved in legal disputes.
 - Some accounting firms regularly advise against making charitable bequests in wills because of potential legal challenges.





- Data and information management represents a challenge for organizations.
 - It is very difficult to serve individuals when charitable workers do not have access to key information about those individuals. There needs to be discussions around the appropriate balance between privacy and disclosure required for services, and these discussions must be culturally sensitive, recognizing, for example, that “family” and “kinship ties” are very culturally specific concepts.
 - To organize and be optimally efficient, charities need sound data about the sector and broader Canadian needs, including point-in-time information and trendlines at a local level. That information is often not being collected or is released too late to be useful.

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?

- Charities are increasingly attempting to prioritize future generations.
 - Despite the challenges posed by short-term, patchwork funding designed to address immediate community needs, there is a concerted effort to consider the long-term impact of activities and programs on future generations. Actors in the sector recognize the importance of this approach, though they acknowledge that it is difficult within the current funding frameworks and operating environment of the charitable sector
- There is growing collaboration within the charitable sector in Newfoundland & Labrador.
 - There are now fewer instances of organizations operating alone “in their own lane” as different activities and programs feel increasingly “woven together”.
 - Actors in the sector in the province are getting better at self-organizing and sharing knowledge or resources between organizations. This is in part a result of better tools (some digital), and a generational shift in leadership that emphasizes values and outcomes rather than specific organizational mandates.
 - There is increasing recognition of the idea of “social health” founded on a holistic approach to the health of a community.
- Charities can become more creative about where and how they seek funding.
 - This is a period of immense wealth transfer between generations and significant philanthropic activity. There are conversations happening about how to release capital held in trust and other creative financing approaches that promise to free more money to flow to charities.
- Organizations would benefit greatly from a single home for charity in government.
 - Until recently in Newfoundland & Labrador, there was a designated Minister responsible for charities. This portfolio has now been folded into another Cabinet portfolio.
 - A dedicated agency in government should support a designated Minister at the centre of government to respond to cross-cutting social issues.

