



CHARITY BRIEF

Yellowknife Discussion Circle

ABOUT

On 4 June 2025, the LCC hosted a discussion circle at the [Yellowknife Public Library](#) with representatives from the following charitable organizations:

- Arctic Indigenous Wellness Foundation
- NWT Literacy Council
- Yellowknife Women's Society

LIVING CHARITY

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

- Role and function of charities
 - Charities are often performing essential services. Charities' wide-ranging functions are ones which many would think the government could, or should, be delivering. Charities are faced with immense pressure to play these vital roles.
 - Even where there are government programs operating within a particular sector, charities often act in support or reinforcement.
 - In some circumstances, such as service delivery, charities are expected to function as an extension of government and held to a strict standard. In other circumstances, such as operating expenditures, charities are expected to function like small businesses.
- Operations of charities
 - People working in the charitable sector often wear multiple hats and are frequently required to perform many roles at once.
 - Charities cannot and should not rely only on the work of volunteers. Charities need full-time employees in order to meet their full potential.
 - The programs administered by charities would not be possible without the support of other organizations and donations from individuals; government funding is not sufficient by itself.





PURSUING CHARITY

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

- Funding
 - Certain activities which are core to the operation of a charity – such as outreach, social media, compliance reports, and even celebrations – often lack the requisite funding. It can also be difficult for charities to fit the programs of the charity within the stipulations offered by funders, akin to fitting a square peg into a round hole.
 - Many charities lack stability in their funding. Raising the requisite funding every year poses significant challenges and can lead to an inability to retain staff who are impacted by the lack of job security. Frequent delays with respect to the confirmation of funding can exacerbate this problem.
 - Funding volatility means that programs are frequently discontinued, then later reinstated. This volatility is harmful to the success and sustainability of such programs.
 - Funders often fail to understand the particularities of the Northern context. Although funders may be attracted to funding charities in Yellowknife, it can be challenging to convey the needs of Northern communities to non-local funders.
 - Without a diversified source of funds, a charity will struggle to be sustainable since vulnerable to changes in funders' priorities.
- Costs
 - To fulfil the wide-ranging roles that charities are tasked with, the operation of a charity demands substantial costs and investments.
 - From time to time, a charity may carry out a large transaction (e.g. purchasing a property) for the sake of reducing expenses in the long run. While these expenses may be viewed with skepticism or surprise given the financial resource implications, they can be hugely positive for the long-term health and efficiency of a charity.
 - Charities are often encouraged to spend down their funding within a given reporting period, which is problematic as funding is sometimes disbursed late in that period. The result can be that these funds are spent in a short period of time for the sake of spending down, rather than used strategically in the medium to long term.
- Competition
 - Competition for funding from national bodies can pit charitable organizations against each other.
 - This competition does not always reward organizations that are best positioned to succeed in delivering the programs and is harmful to the overall efficiency of the charitable sector.





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?

- Collaboration and partnership
 - Regulations and guidelines could facilitate collaboration between charities. Collaborations between charities can help open up funding opportunities.
 - Partnerships with Indigenous organizations have helped open resource funding and broaden the reach of charities' services.
 - Increased core funding could improve the ability of charitable organizations to collaborate with each other.

