



CHARITY BRIEF

Montreal Discussion Circle

ABOUT

On 30 January 2026, the Law Commission of Canada hosted a discussion circle at [McGill University](#) in Montreal, Quebec with representatives from the following organizations in the region:

- [Chez Doris](#)
- [Équiterre](#)
- [Montreal Community Cares Foundation](#)
- [Old Brewery Mission](#)

LIVING CHARITY

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

- Charitable organizations in the region play an essential role in addressing pressing social challenges.
 - Charities operate on the front lines of housing insecurity, youth marginalization, climate justice, and the well-being of vulnerable women, among other pressing issues.
 - The work of charities extends beyond emergency response or the delivery of individual services. They create spaces of dignity, cultivate relationships, and build resilient communities.
 - Their objective is not merely to manage symptoms, but to advance sustainable solutions and systemic transformation.
- Charitable organizations embody culturally appropriate models and act as trusted intermediaries.
 - The philanthropic models employed by these organizations are diverse and culturally sensitive. Approaches that prioritize systemic change and collective transformation – rather than particular individual outcomes – represent legitimate expressions of charitable purpose, even if they are sometimes misunderstood by funders operating with more traditional models.
 - Organizations function as trusted intermediaries between government and communities, enjoying high levels of community trust precisely because they are relationship-based and responsive to lived experience.
- The work of charitable organizations, and the broader charitable sector, spans multiple government ministries at all levels.
 - This requires sophisticated navigation of overlapping policies, shifting priorities, and frequently inconsistent accountability regimes.





- Political transitions present challenges for charities. Relationships must be rebuilt, new priorities understood, and organizational continuity maintained despite sudden shifts in government direction.

PURSUING CHARITY

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

- Rigid funding mechanisms create unsustainable pressure and growing inequality.
 - Government funding often remains static despite increasing demand for services and rising operational costs.
 - This structural misalignment generates a vicious cycle. As organizations expand to meet community needs, they must undertake increasingly costly private fundraising campaigns, diverting resources that would otherwise support service delivery.
 - Funding instability extends beyond core budgets. Emergency initiatives frequently receive generous but temporary funding; without long-term commitments or integration into permanent infrastructure, they consume organizational capacity without addressing root causes.
- Charitable organizations are tasked with non-core functions that should be shared with or provided by the state (principle of complementarity).
 - Many organizations operate as de facto property managers – a role poorly aligned with mission-driven governance and one that absorbs significant resources. They require stable, long-term real estate arrangements in order to plan effectively and invest in high-quality service spaces.
 - The expectation that organizations can do more with the same resources is fundamentally unsustainable. Delivering professional, high-quality services requires adequate staffing, training, coordination, and infrastructure.
- Organizations working in the environmental justice sector may face particular political vulnerability.
 - Some organizations have experienced challenges to their charitable status. Such episodes create ongoing uncertainty and a chilling effect on their public engagement.
 - Restrictions on advocacy activities, combined with differing regulatory regimes between Quebec and the federal government, create administrative burdens and uncertainty regarding permissible activities. This is especially problematic for organizations seeking to address systemic issues.
- The sustainability of the charitable workforce is threatened by wage expectations and burnout.
 - The public narrative that charities rely primarily on volunteerism obscures the reality that delivering complex, high-quality services requires professional staff, training, and institutional continuity.
 - High staff turnover – driven by the gap between funders' salary expectations and the professional expertise required in the sector – erodes institutional memory and constrains organizational capacity.
 - The emotional and psychological toll of frontline work, combined with resource constraints and political uncertainty, creates significant burnout risks that are exacerbated by inadequate funding for employee support.





- Complementary efforts within the sector are undermined by insufficient structural coordination.
 - Coordination across the health, social services, housing, and education sectors remains fragmented. Government agencies and municipalities often operate in silos, limiting the complementarity that could multiply the sector’s effectiveness.
 - Workers and organizations are strained by ad hoc demands and emergency responses that lack sustainable planning or integration into permanent policy frameworks.

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?

- Human relationships and solidarity are emerging as the foundation of collective action.
 - Charities increasingly recognize that collaboration is not simply a matter of occasional networking, but of strategic alignment around shared goals and values.
 - Trust-based relationships among organizations foster a sense of collective agency that amplifies the impact of individual charities.
- Tangible, visible change sustains hope in the face of systemic challenges.
 - Individuals who achieve housing stability, families who reconnect, youth who gain access to opportunity, and communities that advance toward self-determination all demonstrate that solutions exist and that deliberate action can produce meaningful results.
 - Tens of thousands of Canadians working in the charitable sector embody the values of solidarity and mutual aid, demonstrating each day that community-based care is both possible and necessary.
- Effective partnerships with government could replace transactional models.
 - Charities are calling for a “structured home” within government – an institutional anchor that coordinates across ministries, streamlines accountability requirements, and treats organizations as partners rather than mere service providers.
 - A partnership model, in which government collaborates with organizations to co-design policy and service delivery systems, could replace the current transactional and fragmented approach.
- The legal and conceptual framework of charity must evolve.
 - The laws and regulatory frameworks governing charitable organizations can be adapted to better safeguard their ability to engage in advocacy, systemic critique, and even civil disobedience without jeopardizing their legal status or government relationships.
 - Funding frameworks must recognize the legitimacy and value of approaches that prioritize relationship-building, trust, policy influence, and long-term systemic change over narrowly defined, quantifiable individual outcomes.
- Structural support for the sector requires reimagined investment.
 - Sustainable, long-term funding – adequately indexed and responsive to rising demand for service – would enable charities to shift toward strategic planning and institutional stability.





- Supporting professional development pathways within the charitable sector would strengthen workforce stability and institutional continuity.
- Mechanisms to reduce duplication, share infrastructure and expertise, and coordinate across organizational boundaries would enhance sector-wide effectiveness without requiring organizations to merge or relinquish their distinct missions.

