
Sector News Digest - December 17, 2019

Canadians continue to respond enthusiastically to Giving Tuesday appeals. A new Ontario program cuts red tape for the non-profit sector. And reaction to the next chapter in the federal Liberals' big housing strategy.

Giving Tuesday is still giving

More than 23,000 Canadians donated over \$5 million to 6,400 charities during this year's Giving Tuesday campaign – a 50% increase over 2018, [according to the CanadaHelps website](#).

Many appeals demonstrated the imagination that's come to characterize the day. In Atlantic Canada, the [Nova Scotia Gives More](#) campaign encouraged do-gooders to participate in activities such as drinking craft beer with Alfie, an African grey parrot, at Halifax's Propeller brewery, with \$2 from every pint sold donated to the [Cobequid Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre](#). The [Cole Harbour Rural Heritage Society](#) hosted a \$20-a-pop (or dollop) Cream Tea, offering apple pies to anyone who donated more than \$100.

Giving Tuesday began seven years ago as a U.S.-based campaign initiated by New York City's 92nd Street Y and the United Nations Development Programme to claim a day at the beginning of the holiday season for philanthropic- rather than consumer-based spending. It has become a global phenomenon, with an estimated US\$1.97 billion donated on a single day in December.

Sixty countries, from Rwanda to Estonia to Argentina, put hashtags such as [#UnDiaParaDar](#) and [#Annetamistalgud](#) to work, harnessing what the Giving Tuesday website [calls](#) "a global spirit of generosity."

CanadaHelps described the occasion as the "biggest day on the nation's charitable calendar" in a [2018 press release](#). CEO Marina Glogovac predicts that Giving Tuesday will become increasingly important as charitable giving continues its decade-long decline. For smaller charities especially, she says, Giving Tuesday has become "indispensable." The 2019 tally represents a 1,247% increase compared to 2012, Canada's first Giving Tuesday.

Cutting red tape for non-profits

Ontario's Progressive Conservative government in late November announced a series of administrative reforms that will make the lives of Ontario's non-profit agencies a little easier. Peter Bethlenfalvy, president of the Treasury Board, unveiled the Transfer Payment Consolidation Smart Initiative at the Ontario Investment and Trade Centre in Toronto. "The move is a long time coming for agencies," Bethlenfalvy said in a speech [reported by the Toronto Star](#).

Cathy Taylor, executive director of the Ontario Nonprofit Network (ONN), celebrated the move, stressing that Ontario's non-profits can now focus more on service delivery than paper pushing.

"Every hour that a nonprofit spends filling out cumbersome application forms, or trying to fit their

budget numbers into program templates that differ from one to the next, is an hour they are not spending delivering services to people,” she wrote in an [ONN blog post](#).

Last winter, the 58,000-member ONN called for a “red-tape reduction initiative” in its [2019 Ontario Pre-Budget Submission](#) prepared for the Standing Committee on Finance. One section of the 13-page report notes that “inconsistent application processes, budget categories, and reporting requirements across programs and ministries means more red tape for nonprofits, less efficient services, and data inconsistencies and gaps.”

Bethlenfalvy says that part of the provincial government’s [strategy](#) is to streamline procedures and processes that “have been operating largely unchanged and unchallenged” for decades, [according to CBC](#).

Simplifying how service providers receive government funding, cutting back on what the Ontario government’s [news release](#) describes as “duplicated effort and wasted time,” is not only less frustrating for the non-profit sector; it also saves taxpayer dollars.

For example, by streamlining reporting requirements for the Employment Service, Youth Job Connection, Literacy and Basic Skills, and Canada-Ontario Job Grant programs, the province estimates that 1,000 fewer reports will be generated in 2019/20. Other initiatives will reduce by 65% the nearly 35,000 transfer payment agreements Ontario currently manages.

Housing is job one for the new social development minister

With the swearing-in of the Liberal minority government, Toronto MP Ahmed Hussen, the new minister of families, children and social development, has taken on the housing agenda, which not only holds out the promise of improved affordability for thousands of low-income Canadians, but also touches dozens of non-profits.

In their first term, the Liberals launched a \$40 billion National Housing Strategy (NHS), but much of that funding has yet to be allocated.

Sean Gadon, executive director of the [City of Toronto’s Housing Secretariat](#), applauds the choice of Hussen, noting that several non-profits and cooperative housing projects operate in his riding of York South–Weston. Hussen himself once lived in social housing, Gadon adds. “I expect him to be quite a friend and a champion for what we need to do in Toronto.”

Across Canada, more than half a million families live in subsidized housing, but nearly 300,000 remain on waiting lists, according to data [released](#) by Statistics Canada on National Housing Day.

“Nobody is escaping,” says Andrea Adams, executive director of [St. Clare’s Multifaith Housing Society](#), a Toronto non-profit developer. “It’s not limited to people who are couch surfing or living under bridges... I’m a housing provider that cares very much about housing and homelessness, but I can’t pay my staff enough to be securely housed in a reasonable geographic radius of my business.”

Adams says the federal government needs to build the capacity of the non-profit housing sector by ensuring that resources invested in affordable housing stay in affordable housing. “The

private sector is not going to ride in and save us if we incentivize them enough,” she says.

“This is a really important moment,” Gadon adds, noting the [NHS](#) represents an approach that recognizes the right to housing. He says the housing affordability crisis requires a “whole-government approach” that provides more open-ended and easy-to-access programs for non-profit developers.

Some funds are already flowing. Habitat for Humanity Canada [received](#) a financial commitment of \$32.4 million from the NHS co-investment fund in August. Mark Rodgers, Habitat’s president and CEO, sees the funding as proof “of a focus of housing as a human right.”

Going forward, Rodgers wants Hussen to get to know the nation’s affordable-housing providers and bring them together. “No one provider, Habitat or any other organization, can tackle the issue of affordable housing in this country by themselves,” he says. “The issue is too large; the crisis is too big and too urgent.”