
Sector News Digest — February 25, 2020

Title: Sector News Digest — February 25, 2020

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Published in: *The Philanthropist*, News Digest

ISSN: 2562-1491

Date: February 25, 2020

Original Link: <https://thephilanthropist.ca/2020/02/sector-news-digest-february-25-2020/>

Date of PDF Download: March 29, 2020

Philanthropic groups weigh in on Wet'suwet'en. A new type of "green philanthropy." And rapid pitching for charities.

Charities/foundations back pipeline protests

With Canada-wide protests in support of the Wet'suwet'en Nation growing, members of the philanthropic community have been adding their voices, highlighting the role such organizations can potentially play in Indigenous rights and reconciliation.

LEVEL, [a youth engagement initiative](#) of the Vancouver Foundation, [took to social media on February 11](#) to declare solidarity with Wet'suwet'en and the Indigenous youth "who are leading the disruption of power."

The same day, the [Catherine Donnelly Foundation tweeted](#), "As we transition from a lifestyle that recklessly strips resources from the earth, settlers need to learn more about the traditional knowledge and practices that keep these lands in balance."

Responding to the [February 10 arrests](#) of matriarchs at the Unist'ot'en healing camp, the [Canadian Women's Foundation tweeted](#) about the need for conversations regarding "colonial violence carried out by the state against Indigenous women, girls, and the land."

Such sentiments align with the [Philanthropic Community's Declaration of Action](#), signed by nearly 80 organizations committed to "using their philanthropic resources in service to reconciliation," according to the [Philanthropic Foundations Canada](#) website.

In recent years, however, some critics have accused the philanthropic community of not doing

enough to initiate such a shift, citing a conflict between these stated principles and the origins of the wealth underpinning the institutions making the declarations. In [Decolonizing Wealth](#), Edgar Villanueva doesn't mince words about what he describes as the "dysfunctional colonial dynamics at play in philanthropy."

While some charities are speaking out on behalf of the Wet'suwet'en, others have sought to embed reconciliation into their day-to-day operations, including land acknowledgements, more grants to Indigenous organizations, and partnerships.

The cannabis industry's ways of giving

What Canadian media [dubbed](#) the "green rush" in 2018 has been causing some soul-searching in the philanthropic community. A report [published](#) by Bloom Non Profit Consulting Group and NATIONAL Public Relations earlier this month examines the relationship between charities and philanthropy linked to the cannabis industry.

What to do if an industry, worth more than \$8.6 billion [according to Statistics Canada](#), wants to share a little of the high?

"This is a contentious area that many charities are struggling with," one of the 77 survey respondents noted.

While the majority don't oppose cannabis usage from a "philosophical standpoint," less than half support accepting sponsorships or donations from the cannabis industry.

More than 50%, however, lack any kind of policy for guidance and plan to treat cannabis much like other "controversial" donors, such as tobacco, alcohol, and gaming, making decisions on an "ad-hoc, as-needed basis."

The cannabis industry, according to the report, is just as hazy about giving. The cannabis producers surveyed all said they either don't know which charities to support or don't have frameworks in place to guide their choices.

While the report lists a few charity-cannabis partnerships – [between Canopy Growth Corp. and the Canadian AIDS Society](#), for example – these ventures pale in comparison to what's happening south of the border.

The US cannabis sector is creating its own philanthropic community. Stating that its mission is "to foster equity, encourage health and promote philanthropy in the cannabis industry," the [Sublime Foundation](#), among others, isn't just blowing smoke.

Perhaps Canada's charitable sector will sample that tempting-looking brownie next time someone offers.

Dragon's den for charities

While Cupid did the rounds this past Valentine's Day, a group of Manitoban charities tried to pierce a few hearts of their own. The 12 finalists of the Winnipeg Foundation's [Fast Pitch 2020](#) participated in the [#FastPitchWpg](#) preliminary, their first chance to take to the stage before the

February 26 Showcase and convince an audience to vote for their cause.

With \$26,000 in prizes up for grabs, Fast Pitch contestants have three minutes to make “powerful, high-energy cases for support,” according to the Winnipeg Foundation website. What the [CBC calls](#) “a *Dragons’ Den*–like competition for non-profits” regularly sells out, with tickets for the event, hosted at The Met, going for \$25 apiece.

Ken Opaleke, executive director of [West Broadway Youth Outreach](#), and last year’s grand-prize winner, expressed his gratitude for the competition in the fall 2019 issue of the Winnipeg Foundation’s newsletter, [Working Together](#).

“I am shocked, thrilled and thankful beyond measure for Fast Pitch,” Opaleke said after winning \$10,000 for his organization.

Fast Pitch, now in its fifth year, is designed to encourage charitable-sector members to develop the skills needed to “articulate their organization’s impact to potential donors in the form of a pitch,” according to *Working Together*. The event pairs each charity with coaches from the business sector for two months of weekly sessions.

The 2020 Showcase will feature a diverse range of organizations, including Ndinawemaaganag Endaawaad Inc., [African Communities of Manitoba](#) and The WRENCH, which teaches youth how to transform old parts into bicycles.