
Sector News Digest — March 10, 2020

Title: Sector News Digest — March 10, 2020

Author: Christopher Penrose

Published in: *The Philanthropist* , News Digest

ISSN: 2562-1491

Date: March 10, 2020

Original Link: <https://thephilanthropist.ca/2020/03/sector-news-digest-march-10-2020/>

Date of PDF Download: March 28, 2020

This week: infectious diseases, trust, and the place of philanthropy in both.

Philanthropy and the pandemic

COVID-19 has spread to at least 100 countries, with more than 60 cases across Canada, according to tracking provided by the [World Health Organization](#)'s [daily situation report](#).

In the face of a pandemic threat, [Inside Philanthropy](#) recently [asked](#) its readers what philanthropy is doing to combat the disease. American philanthropist Paul Karon outlines some of the responses and surveys examples of how the philanthropic community can contribute to slowing the spread and developing solutions.

Karon's list includes US\$14.5 million from Alibaba founder Jack Ma to support the development of a coronavirus vaccine, US\$1 million from the [Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#) (RWJF), £10 million from UK-based health funder [Wellcome Trust](#), and US\$110 million from the [Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation](#), in two tranches. The second, Karon writes, is of particular interest because it aims "to fund broader goals addressing detection, isolation and treatment, protecting at-risk populations in Africa and South Asia, and accelerating the development of new medicines."

Julie Morita, executive vice president of RWJF, echoes the importance of looking at the role the philanthropic community can play in addressing global pandemics through an equity lens. "Those who have problems with poverty or social marginalization are at higher risk."

Do charities and foundations have a trust issue?

Last month, [Edelman](#) Canada, a public relations and marketing consultancy, released its 20th annual [Trust Barometer](#). The survey found that NGOs still fare better than many other institutions in a period of declining trust.

Edelman surveyed 34,000 people from around the globe (including 1,500 across Canada), measuring levels of trust for four major institutions: business, media, government, and NGOs. The responses were broken down into three categories: “Informed Public” (top 25% income, higher education and higher-than-average media consumption), “Mass Population” (entire population, not including the Informed Public), and “Everyone” (a combination of Informed Public and Mass Population).

While charities proved to be the most trusted, they shouldn’t rest on their laurels. NGOs experience the highest level of trust across all populations, but when Edelman segmented its responses, the results showed that 75% of respondents considered to be members of the Informed Public trusted NGOs, while just slightly more than half the general-survey population did.

Lisa Kimmel, president of Edelman Canada, pointed to the “inversion of influence” in the result, with people in positions of authority increasingly regarded with distrust. The study assessed trust along two dimensions: “competency (can they do it?) and ethics (will they do it right?).” According to this framing, business is seen as the most competent and least ethical. NGOs are seen as the most ethical but least competent, and government is regarded as neither ethical nor competent. Media ranks somewhere in between.

According to Kimmel, the Informed Public cohort maintains higher levels of trust for institutions than the Mass Population, even though distrust is increasing across the board. Most concerning is that the steep decline in trust in the Mass Population has led to a growing gap between the two categories. “What we are seeing in this country is two different trust realities,” she said.

For business, government, and media, the gaps between Informed Public trust levels and Mass Population trust levels – 13%, 15%, and 12%, respectively – remain far narrower than with NGOs.

The relatively larger gap for NGOs raises important questions about why their work is connected to such a significant gap. The survey found, for example, that 53% of Canadians believe the system is failing them, 75% believe there is widespread injustice, and 47% feel capitalism is doing more harm than good. Three quarters of the respondents worry they’ll lose their jobs, and only one in three believe their families will be better off in five years. Waning confidence in institutions and the trust gap for NGOs should be a source of concern, in terms of why respondents from the Mass Population cohort doubt that NGOs can help Canadians navigate their most pressing challenges.

In regard to solutions for rebuilding trust, Kimmel pointed to the importance of partnerships. As an example, she said that trust in government could be increased by partnering with both business (high competency) and NGOs (strong ethics).

She added that mounting distrust in institutions had created pressure, and even incentives, for their leaders to think about operating differently. More vulnerability, cross-sectoral collaboration, and a deeper recognition of the interconnectivity of issues across institutions could bring a more

influential role for NGOs in meeting the challenges facing Canadians.