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## Sector News Digest: July 14, 2020

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*In this week's News Digest: the widening WE-troversy, Atlantic Canada collaborations, new granting opportunities for Black-led groups, and COVID-related layoffs at Imagine Canada*

### **From WE to heat**

The steadily expanding controversy surrounding [WE Charity](#) and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau shows no sign of slowing. With Trudeau now [admitting he did not recuse himself](#) from a meeting in which the charity was awarded a \$912 million contract to administer the Canada Student Service Grant ([which comes with its own set of problems](#)), a *Globe and Mail* editorial [outlines](#) a history of family connections and describes the WE/Trudeau affair as “troubling from the day it was announced.”

The opposition Conservatives have called for a criminal investigation, while a successful NDP motion ensures that documents relating to the deal will surface at a parliamentary committee, as well as with the federal ethics watchdog. Critics have pointed out that the WE affair is merely the latest in a series of ethics violations by the prime minister, some of which have involved influential and wealthy acquaintances, such as the Aga Khan.

### **Alberta's offshore funding inquiry hedges**

The Government of Alberta's public inquiry into foreign funding of environmental groups, ordered up by Premier Jason Kenney in response to largely unsubstantiated allegations about the influence of foreign philanthropy with Canadian environmental groups, has been given more time to simmer. Alberta Minister of Energy Sonya Savage [announced](#) recently that the original July 2 deadline had been extended to October 30, 2020. She cited the economic fallout of the COVID-19 crisis as justification for the province's determination to “do whatever it takes to

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support one of Canada's most important industries.”

Philanthropic organizations questioned the intent of the inquiry from the get-go. In a [November 2019 submission](#), Edmonton's [Muttart Foundation](#) objected to “the mere establishment of the inquiry,” whose mandate to investigate whether charitable organizations have made false and misleading statements about Alberta's energy sector is, according to the foundation, “polarizing, hyperbolic and inappropriate in a democracy.” Muttart data from more than 80,000 publicly available 2016 tax returns filed by charitable organizations showed that less than 4% received foreign funding and that such funding accounted for less than 1% of revenue reported by all charities.

In February 2020, [CBC News reported](#) that major players such as the [David Suzuki Foundation](#) had not been contacted by the inquiry's commissioner, Steve Allan, for the January 31, 2020, interim report. The Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations, which [compared the inquiry](#) to a “special audit” of environmental advocacy groups that has created “advocacy chill,” notes that it remains unclear whether the extra time and funding (\$1 million) will be used to interview the targeted organizations. In a [recent \*Philanthropist\* article](#), Bob Wyatt, Muttart's CEO, expressed fears the inquiry could serve to “besmirch all charities.”

## Closures and cutbacks

The pandemic continues to cut a destructive swath across the charitable sector, and no one, from small local non-profits to large national charitable organizations, seems immune.

In late June, [CBC News referred](#) to the sector's struggle as a “do or die” moment, presenting a list of “casualties”—from [IMPACT Parkinson's Centre](#) in New Westminster, BC, to [Old East Village Grocer](#) in London, Ontario, to a 162-year-old YMCA in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia.

Tom Irvine, dominion president of [the Royal Canadian Legion](#), an organization at risk of closing down dozens of centres nationwide, recently [told the Canadian Press](#) they've written two letters to the federal government calling for help and have yet to receive a response. Owen Charters, president of the [Boys & Girls Clubs of Canada](#), warned of the dangers of ignoring such pleas, noting that “as these organizations disappear, the social safety net becomes a tax burden where the government needs to step in and provide those services directly.”

Imagine Canada, whose landing page [links to an open letter](#) calling for immediate sector-wide assistance, is also facing its own struggles. CEO Bruce MacDonald is planning to reduce the organization's workforce by approximately 25%. Layoffs have already begun, MacDonald told *The Philanthropist*, and Imagine, a charity that also operates a consulting practice, won't be filling any vacant positions.

## Making common cause in Atlantic Canada

With a mandate to bring together government and sector leaders to “activate resources [and] facilitate connections and knowledge,” the newly formed [Nova Scotia Nonprofit COVID-19 Coalition](#) founding members, including Chris Googoo of the [Ulnooweg Indigenous Communities Foundation](#) and Rustum Southwell of [Black Business Initiative](#), recognize that the murder of George Floyd in early June “comes on the heels of the pandemic that has disproportionately harmed Black communities.” Since June 16, the coalition has been hosting [virtual open forums](#)

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to discuss a range of topics, from labour laws and insurance issues to anti-Black and -Indigenous racism and sector reopening.

On July 14, [Engage Nova Scotia](#) will lead a discussion about the “power of collaboration, inclusivity and openness to change to transform Nova Scotia’s nonprofit sector.” Meanwhile, the Community Sector Council of Nova Scotia is aiming to turn sector challenges into personal stories and art. The project, dubbed [Storm Clouds & Silver Linings](#), includes Sylvia Parris-Drummond of the [Delmore Buddy Daye Learning Institute](#) and Levi Cliche of the [Clean Annapolis River Project](#).

### **Enterprising solutions for post-pandemic Canada**

After a three-month consultation involving more than 80 organizations across Canada, Impact Response, a network of social impact groups, released a [Community Call to Action](#) focused on helping Canada’s 25,000 “social purpose organizations” (SPOs), a group that includes non-profits, charities, social enterprises, businesses, and cooperatives that “advance social or environmental solutions while creating jobs and attracting local investment.” More than 100 supporters, including the [Centre for Social Innovation](#), Community Foundations of Canada, and the [Pillar Nonprofit Network](#), are advocating for “enterprising solutions” to generate inclusive economic recovery. The coalition’s goal is to create and maintain more than 10,000 jobs.

Over the next two years, Impact is pushing for an additional \$150 million from Employment and Social Development Canada’s [Investment Readiness Program](#) and wants Ottawa to speed up the deployment of the [Social Finance Fund](#) with a request for \$400 million in capital, including a \$50 million Indigenous Growth Fund.

### **Innovating community health**

BC’s [Raven Indigenous Impact Foundation](#), [Aki Foods](#), the [Lawson Foundation](#), and [Indigenous Services Canada](#) are launching a social investment project meant to address the prevalence of diabetes in remote northern Indigenous communities. In those communities, a 20-year-old Indigenous person has an 80% risk of developing the disease, [according to an account of the proposed project in \*The Hill Times\*](#). The partners say the [Indigenous Solutions Lab on Diabetes Reduction](#) has become even more timely because of COVID-19, a virus that disproportionately affects people with diabetes. The goal of the project, which will begin later in the year, is to create “community-centred tools” with a “culturally sound and trauma-centred approach” that can be replicated in Indigenous communities across the country. (*The Philanthropist* will have more detailed coverage of this project in the fall.)

### **New grants for Black-led organizations**

In response to mounting calls to confront systemic racism, the federal government has established a new grant focused on “[Black-led organizations’ workplaces and community spaces](#).” Black-led organizations—defined as groups where at least two-thirds of leadership positions are held by those who self-identify as Black—have until July 27 to apply for up to \$100,000. Grants can be used for renovations and retrofits or to finance equipment purchases, such as new computers, smart boards, or even kitchen appliances.

### **The kids need to be alright**

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A team of health researchers has released [a set of principles and practical guidelines](#) for kickstarting outdoor play for young children, especially those now attending early learning and child care centres. The report was backed by the Lawson Foundation. Acknowledging that ELCC programs are central to the recovery of both children and the economy, the authors lay out the positives of outdoor play, but also identify the considerable variability in how provincial public health agencies have approached this issue as the re-opening proceeds. The report includes four sets of recommendations directed at public health officials, educators and municipalities that lay out a framework for maximizing the availability of outdoor play in the coming months.