
Sector News Digest: August 25, 2020

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This week: Freeland's to-do list, recovery ideas from Alberta's non-profits, pandemic fallout for Indigenous artists, and making summer fundraisers work despite social distancing

Charity reform and the new finance minister

Senator Ratna Omidvar, who co-chaired the Red Chamber's committee on charitable reform, is calling on the new Liberal finance minister to move quickly on long-sought policy changes in the sector.

In a column in the [Toronto Star](#) this week, Omidvar argued that Chrystia Freeland needs to tackle a range of outstanding issues, from governance and diversity in the wake of the WE Charity scandal to the severe financial impact the pandemic has had on charities and non-profits.

"The minister of finance," Omidvar wrote, "will do well if she remembers that millions of Canadians need a thriving charitable sector to live their lives and that government is often only able to deliver its services through the sector."

WE update

The controversy surrounding the [WE Charity scandal](#) continues, although media attention may wane because Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's decision to prorogue Parliament halted scrutiny of the contentious arrangement.

Last week, during a Parliament Hill press conference, Conservative finance critic Pierre Poilievre noted all the blacked-out pages among the more than 5,000 documents released by

the Liberal government, as [reported by the National Observer](#). Nearly a quarter of the redacted documents were “essentially useless,” opposition parties complained, further fuelling accusations of a cover-up.

[Paul Alofs](#), former CEO of the Princess Margaret Hospital Cancer Foundation, [told The Charity Report](#) that the WE scandal was “the biggest and the most complex controversy” he’d ever seen in the sector.

Rural internet should be part of non-profit recovery plans

A [recent report](#) from the Ontario Nonprofit Network (ONN) and the [Assemblée de la francophonie de l’Ontario](#) (AFO) offers more evidence of the “devastating impact” of the pandemic on the sector. “Without financial support and investment from the government, we are going to see a very different Ontario,” said [Surranna Sandy](#), CEO of Skills for Change, at the ONN and AFO [virtual press conference on August 18](#).

The report proposes five solutions to “fix” COVID-19 supports, which had yet to reach the majority of the nearly 1,200 organizations surveyed in late June. One in five non-profits risk closing in six months. Revenue losses now amount to \$90 million. And non-profits located outside of the Greater Toronto Area and the East (such as Durham, Haliburton, and Ottawa) were two times more likely to say they could face closure within three months.

Proposed solutions repeat the call for a [non-profit sector stabilization fund](#), the creation of wage subsidy programs for non-profit business models, and investment in rural broadband. The AFO, which represents Ontario’s 744,000 francophones, many of whom live in the north, underlines the lack of reliable high-speed internet in these communities.

Alberta non-profits advocate collaboration for recovery

Drawing on experiences with two other emergencies – the 2013 Calgary flood and the 2016 Fort McMurray wildfires – and data collected in Alberta Nonprofit Network, Imagine Canada, and other partner organization surveys across the country, the Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations (CCVO) has also released a report focused on the importance of collaboration.

[Karen Ball](#), the CCVO’s interim president and CEO, says the recovery conversation should include “the things that are on the street and down the corner from us ... how our neighbours are able to put food on the table, where we go for our child care, who cares for our seniors, and how we get served when we are sick.”

Research conducted after the 2016 fires showed that non-profit organizations “do not exist in a vacuum; they are themselves vulnerable to, and often victims of, the disaster which impacts their community.”

This time, the report advises, partnerships should be “at the core of recovery.” The CCVO offers a [list of recommendations](#), such as pro bono services provided by the private sector, funders assisting with operational costs, and stable government funding. CCVO has asked for feedback [here](#).

Indigenous artists and the pandemic

Financial pressures created by the pandemic show that “reconciliation in Canada’s arts and culture sectors was little more than a temporary preoccupation,” a new report from Ryerson University’s [Yellowhead Institute](#) concludes. Entitled [A Culture of Exploitation: “Reconciliation” and the Institutions of Canadian Art](#), the study, by Lindsay Nixon, examines the experience of Indigenous arts communities and a history of exploitation since “the dawn of coloniality.”

Based on 15 interviews with Indigenous artists conducted between April and July of this year, the report concludes that the problems have been “amplified” during the pandemic. It provides a [15-point guide](#), called “Standards of Achievement for the Relationship Between Indigenous Peoples & Cultural Institutions in Canada,” and a call to action for conversation resulting in “meaningful and long-term change for our communities.”

Rebuilding Toronto equitably

Representatives from more than 50 non-profits, including [COSTI](#), Shakespeare in Action, and the Canadian Arab Institute, [signed a submission](#) to the Toronto Office of Recovery and Rebuild (TORR) with a goal to create a more equitable recovery: “Addressing Toronto’s deep inequities across multiple dimensions will be key to our ability to recover and rebuild, and to survive the impacts of future pandemics and natural disasters,” the submission states.

Dividing their recommendations into three main themes – economic prosperity, resident safety and well-being, and non-profit sector resilience – the signatories propose dozens of short- and medium-term actions targeted at specific areas such as pandemic preparedness, green jobs, and food security.

Food security and pandemic fallout in western Canada

With funding from the United Way, a Vancouver non-profit called FarmFolk CityFolk is launching a [Seed to Food program](#) aimed at redirecting farm produce to local kitchens and food programs. In an [open letter to the British Columbia government](#) released in July, the group calls for “transformative change” in the post-pandemic food sector.

An [article in Policy Options’ Coronavirus Pandemic series](#) echoed this sentiment, noting the pandemic has “exacerbated the high rates of food insecurity” among vulnerable populations in Canada, which imports 30% of its food and exports more than 50% of its food production.

While many of FarmFolk CityFolk’s outreach programs have been cancelled due to COVID-19, the organization hopes to dig in again next month after implementing new health and safety protocols. Meanwhile, a recent post [on winter gardening](#) offers tips to aspiring farmers on how to grow cold-hardy vegetables such as arugula, turnips, garlic, and cabbage.

Fundraiser workarounds

During these last days of summer, many organizations that rely on warm-weather fundraisers and events have found ways to adapt to social distancing policies.

In the Yukon, COVID-19 didn’t stop the roar of motorcycles for the 11th annual [Ride for Dad](#), a fundraiser to raise awareness for prostate cancer. This year, [face masks designed for the occasion](#) were also available.

An [article in Yukon News](#) noted that the Whitehorse event “may not be the biggest in the country, but what it lacks in riders, it more than makes up for in fundraising.” With a record for raising the most funds per capita, the [Yukon Chapter](#) beat out Montreal and Calgary, raising more than \$40,000 as of last week.

Specialized summer camps, in turn, have found new ways to sit around the fire. “Even COVID can’t stop camp!” insisted Ontario’s [Camp Ooch and Camp Trillium](#), hosts of the annual month-long [CampOut for Cancer](#) challenge – a 35-year-old fundraiser to support families and children affected by childhood cancer.

Instead of canoe trips and s’mores, kids and families are participating in “creative virtual camp programming.” Suggested activities include staging a sock puppet show, inventing a camp mocktail, and making DIY slime. Participants have until the virtual closing campfire on September 4 to join the fun. So far, the camps have raised \$30,000 of the \$50,000 goal.

East-coast campers are also finding silver linings. With space limited because of pandemic restrictions, New Brunswick’s [Atlantic Wildlife Institute](#) is hosting a [Wilderness Craft Camp](#) this week. Youth from 11 to 16 will construct willow “easyback” chairs and weave cattail leaves.

And in Newfoundland, Memorial University Botanical Garden and [Johnson Geo Centre](#) teamed up throughout July to provide a [virtual STEAM Quest summer camp](#) – an online science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics educational camp. “Although we need to be physically distant,” the groups noted online, “we can still be together socially, and learn together about this amazing planet of ours!”

Finally, in light of an “unprecedented drop in summer employment opportunities” for youth in Canada’s north, the [Yellowknife Community Foundation](#) has doubled its usual number of scholarships to 54, [announcing the largest single award](#) in its 27-year history. Students from across the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and Yukon will receive a total of \$104,000.

Pandemic reading

A [virtual event](#) hosted by the University of Toronto’s [Rotman School of Management](#), part of its Gender and the Economy speaker series, will discuss [a new book](#) about working, parenting, and living “in a world of impossible expectations.” Other recommended readings include “The Giving Economy: A Short History of Black Communities and Mutual Aid Groups,” by journalist [Vicky Mochama](#), in the September/October 2020 issue of [The Walrus](#). And last week, [Senator Ratna Omidvar tweeted](#) that *The Charity Report’s* article “[Growth of Donor Advised Funds: Charitable Boon or Parking Lot?](#)” is a “must read for those who are interested in charitable giving.”