
Sector News Digest - October 20, 2020

Title: Sector News Digest – October 20, 2020

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Published in: *The Philanthropist* , News Digest

ISSN: 2562-1491

Date: October 20, 2020

Original Link: <https://thephilanthropist.ca/2020/10/sector-news-digest-october-20-2020/>

Date of PDF Download: November 17, 2020

This week: Bolstering recovery by learning from COVID-19; MakeWay says no way to Alberta's public inquiry; many fear that rent and mortgage relief may come too late for small businesses, non-profits, and charities.

211 goes national

All Canadians will soon have access to 211, thanks to a federal grant to [United Way Centraide Canada](#). The free, confidential information service connects people to critical government and community-based health and social services in their communities.

“By calling 211, people are connected with a real person who will ask questions about their situation and then suggest programs or services that can help,” says Dan Clement, president and CEO of United Way Centraide Canada. “Whether it’s through the phone, website, text, or chat, 211 will be there to help people connect to the services they need for themselves, their family, or friends.”

United Way Centraide created the 211 service to educate callers about available services and give them access to the help they need, when they need it. As part of its COVID-19 response, Ottawa will provide funding to increase the capacity of and expand access to 211 services across the country. Existing 211 services nationwide saw a surge of traffic during the first wave of the pandemic, according to a press release on United Way Centraide's site. Calls and website visits increased by 31% and 45%, respectively, between March and August.

WE affiliate investigated in Kenya

WE Charity is in the news again as Kenyan authorities look into asset and governance issues in

response to “new information and happenings” related to Free the Children, the charity’s Kenyan affiliate, according to [The Globe and Mail](#). The NGOs Co-ordination Board, the state agency that registers and regulates non-governmental organizations in Kenya, published a statement on Friday.

WE registered Free the Children in Kenya in 2008. The organization runs schools, health clinics, and a youth volunteer program. WE and its founders, Marc and Craig Kielburger, have ties to a number of private companies and real estate holdings in Kenya. Free the Children has also been involved in disputes with two Kenyans who were senior employees of the charity.

Last week, the federal Conservatives asked House of Commons standing committees to study the Canadian WE Charity controversy again. The Liberals delayed the attempt, but the Conservatives tabled a motion allowing them to raise the matter in the House.

Three House of Commons committees were investigating the government’s decision to award WE the now-defunct contract to administer the Canada Student Service Grant. The investigations ended when Prime Minister Justin Trudeau prorogued Parliament in August. In September, WE announced it would fold its Canadian operations and the Kielburgers would leave the organization.

Celebrate Small Business Month

October is Small Business Month and offers a reminder for non-profits and charities to work with those in their communities instead of big-box suppliers. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) employ more than 90% of the private-sector labour force, accounting for nearly 60% of all jobs in Canada.

The Institute for Gender and the Economy at the University of Toronto’s Rotman School of Management offers a range of resources for SMEs, non-profits, and charities. One noteworthy recent addition is a report entitled [Increasing Supplier Diversity in Canada](#). The Canadian Aboriginal and Minority Supplier Council defines supplier diversity as “a strategic business process where large organizations, in both the public and private sector, aim to provide businesses owned by diverse groups an equal opportunity to become their suppliers.” A supplier is considered diverse if it is 51% owned, operated, and controlled by historically marginalized groups, including women, visible minorities, Indigenous people, LGBTQ+ people, people with disabilities, and veterans.

What did we learn?

Alberta’s Premier’s Council on Charities and Civil Society consulted charities and non-profits in July to understand what lessons the sector had learned from COVID-19 and where there might be opportunity for recovery and capacity building. The resulting report, [Moving Forward: Charting a Path to a Civil Society Recovery](#), highlights the issues and opportunities for the yet-to-be-launched \$20-million Civil Society Fund.

The council identified several key opportunities for civil society recovery, including enhancing collaboration, coordination and integration of services; improving research and data; capitalizing on new and existing technology; strengthening civil society’s financial foundations; and strengthening social finance and social enterprise.

“Civil society is playing a vital role in supporting Albertans during the COVID-19 pandemic,” council chair Dr. Joel Christie writes in the report. “Despite significant investments by governments and other funders, the pandemic has posed significant and ongoing challenges for civil society, many of which may last well into the future.”

Once established, the fund will provide \$20 million over three years to expand the sector's capacity. The move suggests a slightly more conciliatory approach from Jason Kenney's government, which came into office [pledging an inquiry](#) into foreign financial influence in Alberta's charitable sector.

Thanks but no thanks

MakeWay, the organization previously known as Tides Canada, has declined an invitation to participate in Alberta's public inquiry into anti-energy campaigns because of outstanding concerns about the contentious exercise.

“We've moved on,” said Joanna Kerr, CEO of MakeWay, in a statement. “The world is moving on. It's time for our leaders to look forward – not back – towards solutions to the climate crisis, and an economy that provides well-being for nature and communities. That is where our focus is.”

MakeWay changed its name in June, in response to smear campaigns linking the organization to the U.S.-based Tides Foundation. Kenney had called the organization “anti-Alberta” when he launched the inquiry.

MakeWay releases donor information in its annual report and summarized all donations from U.S. sources in the [press release](#) when it declined to participate. “There's litigation underway led by Ecojustice, and just really looking into [the inquiry], we could see that it was very biased, it felt politically motivated, and there might be some predetermined outcomes,” Kerr [told CBC](#).

Rent and mortgage relief comes late

On October 9, the federal government announced that additional funding for small-business rent and mortgage relief will arrive in November. The previous program, known as CECRA, which required landlords to apply for relief in order to pass it on to tenants, ended in September

The new program allows small businesses, including charities and non-profits, to apply directly to the Canada Revenue Agency. It offers a sliding scale of rent relief; those missing 70% of their revenue can apply for up to 65% of rent or mortgage payments. Those with more modest losses can also apply, but the subsidy amount has yet to be approved. The measure will be backdated to include October payments, but it leaves many who were unable to pay October's rents by mid-month wondering what happens on November 1.

“It's really challenging,” Laura Jones, executive vice-president of the [Canadian Federation of Independent Business](#), told [CBC](#). “We've heard from businesses. They are putting it on their credit cards, they're borrowing from friends and family, they're going to the bank, but they're really uncomfortable taking on more debt.”

Power to the people

The City of Toronto and [Social Planning Toronto](#) have partnered to conduct consultations with 1,400 Torontonians on what the city needs to do to recover and rebuild from COVID-19. The process was led by residents, grassroots groups, and community organizations; it engaged Indigenous populations, equity-seeking groups, vulnerable individuals, and neighbourhoods with disproportionately high rates of COVID-19 cases.

The report, [Community Voices Pave the Road to Recovery](#), highlights the consultation's findings. More than 40% of those polled said they lost employment or income. A full 37% lost access to critical programs or supports, and just over a quarter visited a food bank or used a food-security program. Demand for access to income supports, affordable housing, and mental health services has nearly doubled since the pandemic began.

"For an equitable recovery," the report's summary states, "the city needs to commit to hearing these voices throughout our recovery. We will be following the city's efforts to ensure residents are heard."

Up and coming

- The Network for the Advancement of Black Communities (NABC), in collaboration with the Anti-Racism Directorate, the City of Toronto and other allies, will host a two-day virtual conference on October 21 and 22, focusing on strategies for advancing the cause of fighting anti-Black racism. Details and registration information [here](#).
- Community Foundations Canada is launching three new Vital Signs reports this month, all of them focused on issues of gender equality. "For a just recovery from the pandemic, it is more pressing than ever to invest in women, girls, Two-Spirit and gender-diverse people," the organization says. "From a lack of representation in political and decision-making positions to increasing wage gaps, economic inequalities and staggering rates of gender-based violence, it's clear that we have work to do." More details about the launch, scheduled for October 21, [here](#).
- On October 29, Charity Village hosts a webinar on creating and running crowdfunding campaigns in the context of COVID-19. Presenting is Daryl Hatton, CEO of FundRazr, an enterprise-class crowdfunding platform used by more than 5,000 non-profits. Participants will learn how to promote crowdfunding campaigns, tap into the fall giving season, and generate better results with crowdfunding technology. [Register here](#).
- From November 17 to 19, Philanthropic Foundations Canada hosts a three-day online conference called Fast Forward: Harnessing the Power of Philanthropy to Build a Better Tomorrow. Day one's theme is responding to anti-racism movements and features Senator Ratna Omidvar. Day two focuses on climate action and sustainable finance. Day three looks at reshaping the future of philanthropy. All sessions will offer simultaneous translation. [Registration](#) is \$100 for young professionals; \$200 for grant-makers; and \$300 for non-members.
- On November 9, the Rotman School of Management's [Institute for Gender and the Economy](#) will host a livestream of journalist and author Pamela Newkirk discussing her new book, *Diversity, Inc.: The Failed Promise of a Billion-Dollar Business*, with Sonia Kang, an associate professor of organizational behaviour and HR management and the Canada Research Chair in Identity, Diversity, and Inclusion at the University of Toronto Mississauga. In the book, Newkirk investigates how diversity is simultaneously a buzzword and a failed effort in the US. She will highlight success stories and share lessons about how other industries can match those gains. The [session costs](#) \$22.99

and includes a mailed paperback edition of Newkirk's book.