
Sector News Digest - October 6, 2020

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In this week's News Digest: Ontario non-profit reforms still alive, rural Canada's moment, and calls for better ESG reporting.

Reforming Ontario's non-profit laws

Ontario MPPs have voted to save the [Ontario Not-for-Profit Corporations Act \(ONCA\)](#) from an automatic repeal, with a new expiry date of December 2021. In the [session's transcript](#), Lisa Thompson, Minister of Government and Consumer Services, described the ONCA as a “modern legislative framework” to facilitate new and less burdensome ways of doing business for a sector that employs 16% of the province's workforce and accounts for \$50 billion in annual revenue.

The act revises regulations barely touched since 1953. An [Ontario Nonprofit Network \(ONN\) update](#) about the motion says the sector has been assured that the ONCA will be passed long before 2021, hopefully even by the end of this year.

Game of the Throne Speeches

Since Governor-General Julie Payette [delivered her Speech from the Throne](#) on September 23, the charitable sector has been sifting through the spoils.

In an interview with [The Philanthropist](#), Bruce MacDonald, CEO of Imagine Canada, wondered at the lack of recognition for a sector that's “a contributing part of a healthy economy and a protector of vulnerable communities,” especially now.

Imagine Canada's [statement about the speech](#) notes that 20% of the sector's organizations

might not see the end of 2020. While Imagine Canada applauded many of the speech's commitments, such as those related to childcare and housing, the group renewed its call for a [Sector Resilience Grant Program](#).

Some groups had a more upbeat assessment. In its [statement](#), the Canadian Women's Foundation (CWF) applauded the Action Plan for Women in the Economy, calling it an opportunity to "stop further backsliding on economic gains."

A [paper in First Policy Response](#) further examines the Liberals' national childcare promise, noting that "economists, activists and parents alike" now understand the economic and social consequences of women leaving the workforce. The authors warn that delaying the program will "hobble" economic recovery, "dragging Canada down." In Ontario and Alberta, only about 50% of childcare centres are currently open; those that are open are operating at a fraction of their capacity. "Without action," the authors say, "a bad situation is going to get worse."

Rural bright spots

New research by the [Rural Ontario Institute \(ROI\)](#) shows that small communities have fared better than their urban counterparts when it comes to [employment levels](#) during the pandemic. In a recent [interview on CBC Radio's Ontario Morning](#), Norman Ragetlie, ROI's executive director, called rural Ontario a "bright spot" in a world of dire COVID-19 impacts.

The [Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation's virtual conference](#), which took place October 1 and 2, examined the rural scene through a more national lens. Some of the topics covered this year: the impacts of COVID-19 on [rural mental health](#), resilience through green infrastructure, and rural Canada's digital divide.

Closing the digital divide

A study conducted by the Canadian Internet Registration Authority between April and June 2020 – [Unconnected: Funding Shortfalls, Policy Imbalances and How They Are Contributing to Canada's Digital Underdevelopment](#) – exposes a landscape of "underfunded, piecemeal, ad hoc and unorganized" efforts to improve connectivity across the country.

According to interviews and surveys, including with non-profit sector representatives, deep-seated systemic issues and funding gaps are preventing many Canadians from entering the 21st century.

"The broader philanthropic community in Canada is largely unaware of this digital funding gap," notes the report, which provides recommendations for how to provide more Canadians with broadband, high-speed internet access.

A report released by the Brookfield Institute, [Plugging In: Empowering Communities to Ensure Digital Literacy Access for Youth](#), provides a model for improving digital access and literacy across the country. In partnership with several organizations, including Toronto Public Library, Boys & Girls Clubs of Canada, the United Way of Toronto and York Region, and the YMCA of Greater Toronto, the pilot project included more than 2,400 youth from across Ontario from February 2018 to October 2019 in five different communities.

Working with existing youth-serving services, such as public libraries, in safe spaces outside the home proved key to the success of the program, and the vast majority of those who completed the program said they were keen to engage in more online learning.

Retooling training

The Metcalf Foundation last month released a study, [When Training Works: Promising Workforce Development Practices](#), calling on governments “to urgently rethink and shift our approach to how we provide support.” With more than a million jobs lost in just two months, as [reported by CTV News](#), Ontario has reason to take stock. The province’s workforce development systems, long deemed “generic” and “off-the-shelf” by numerous studies, need an overhaul, says the report, profiling four programs with the potential to shake things up.

Upping the quality of ESG reporting

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has released its [2020 Business and Financial Outlook](#), which includes a focus on environmental, social, and governance (ESG) investing. While this sector continues to grow steadily, ESG data has left investors scratching their heads.

An [article in Bloomberg Green](#) calls the “inconsistent and incomplete data” – tracking everything from workplace diversity to carbon emissions – a “quagmire.” Nevertheless, investors have “piled into ESG because they’re under pressure from clients, employees and the public to contribute to a fairer and greener society.”

Sustainable recovery from COVID-19 will herald “better and greener jobs,” says OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría, creating “more sustainable and resilient growth.”

A [recent article](#) in the *Harvard Business Review* notes how non-profits can provide fresh ideas in this quest, becoming “an unorthodox but powerful source of inspiration.” And *The Corporate Social Mind: How Companies Lead Social Change from the Inside Out* examines whether companies can “define their purpose in social as well as business terms,” according to [a review of the book in The Philanthropist](#). The answer, backed by much evidence, is a “strong yes.”

Muttart steps up

Alberta’s [Muttart Foundation](#) introduced new funding initiatives last week in response to the COVID crisis. One program, Restructuring, focuses on discussing mergers, creating new alliances, and supporting organizations that have ceased operations.

Another involves supporting charities with loans and lines of credit, something the Muttart Foundation has 25 years of experience administering. Alberta- and Saskatchewan-based organizations can find more details [here](#).

Events and updates

- The Saskatchewan Association of Rehabilitation Centres (SARC) will [host its annual conference](#) from October 26 to 30 on Zoom. Tune in for free workshops such as “More Alike than Different: Sexuality and Disability” and “Strategies to Approaching Later Life

Issues with People Experiencing Disability and Dementia.”

- Halifax-based [100+ Women Who Care](#), a “membership-based giving circle” practising “democratized philanthropy,” has launched its [2020 membership drive](#).
- Imagine Canada’s new social media campaign, #HelpTheHelpers, aims to spread a little love to organizations in the sector that are facing tough times. Available in French and English, the project [provides helpful example posts](#) and visuals.
- On November 16, the [McConnell Foundation](#) welcomes Lili-Anna Pereša, currently president and executive director of Centraide of Greater Montreal, as its new president and CEO.