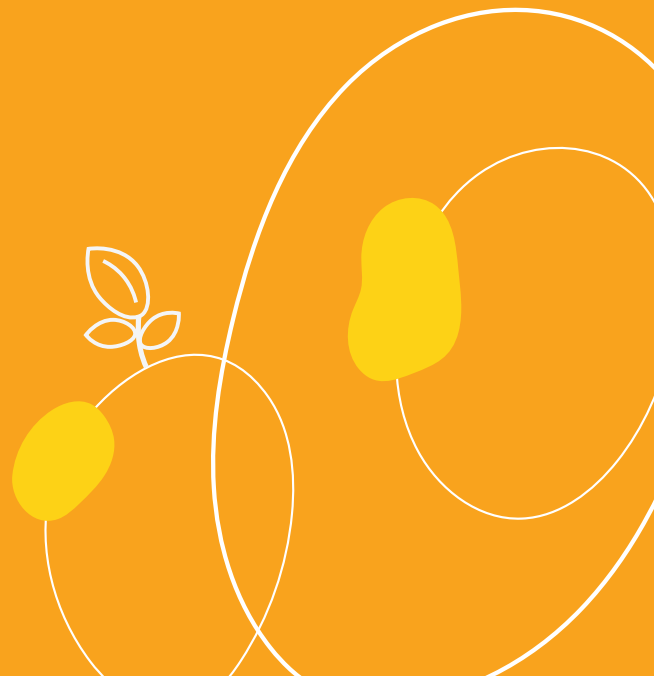


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# Community Prosperity Now

A Blueprint for  
Community Recovery



# Acknowledgements

CCVO would like to recognize and thank the team of staff who worked diligently to create this report.

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## Thank You

CCVO would like to express a sincere thank you to Calgary Foundation for providing the support necessary to complete this project.

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We honour and acknowledge the traditional territories in  
Alberta of the many First Nations and Métis,  
whose footsteps have marked these lands for centuries.

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# PATH TO COMMUNITY RECOVERY

## PROJECT TIMELINE: 2020

### Summer 2020

In March 2020, as the world confronted the start of the COVID-19 global pandemic, CCVO, like many organizations, businesses, and governments across the country, identified the need for and took action on measuring the real impact of the pandemic on the nonprofit sector. CCVO set the foundation for the conversation in Alberta through an analysis of this impact. This was done by drawing from data collected in our Alberta Nonprofit Survey 2020, and from surveys by the Alberta Nonprofit Network, Imagine Canada, and partner organizations across the country. The analysis in the report, *From Emergency to Opportunity: Building a Resilient Alberta Nonprofit Sector After COVID-19*, published in July 2020, shows us that the effects on the nonprofit sector have been magnified through increased service demand, decreased revenue, and diminished organizational capacity coupled by delays in support and inadequate recognition for the leadership role that the sector is being called upon to play.<sup>1</sup> From this initial report, CCVO outlined the need for a community prosperity strategy that recognizes and supports the role of nonprofits in rebuilding the community and our economy.

The report made detailed recommendations for this strategy that include the nonprofit sector, and community champions from the private sector, as well as other stakeholders.

**initial work on draft 'Community Prosperity Strategy'**



**'From Emergency to Opportunity' report release**

**pandemic impacts research & analysis**

### Fall 2020

In Fall 2020, CCVO continued its work on developing a draft strategy for Community Prosperity, built on the report we released in Summer 2020, *From Emergency to Opportunity*, where CCVO committed to supporting the nonprofit sector in making the COVID-19 crisis an opportunity. Draft recommendations were reworked and published in a blog series, and later compiled into a discussion paper that was shared broadly in January 2021.

**input from community on draft recommendations**

**rework of draft recommendations**



**blog series and discussion paper release**

# PATH TO COMMUNITY RECOVERY: PROJECT TIMELINE: 2021

## Winter 2021

In March 2021, CCVO consulted with the community and its leaders across the province, holding conversations across ten stakeholder sessions, with a total of 89 participants, to gain insight from Alberta community leaders on CCVO's draft recommendations for a community prosperity plan. Session participants included leaders from the nonprofit sector, private sector, the provincial government, funders, and other stakeholders. *Throughout this report, we've included quotes from some of the participants who've engaged in our work.*



**stakeholder  
consultations  
begin**

**89**

**participants  
from across  
Alberta**

**10**

**sessions, 6-13  
participants per  
consultation**

## Spring & Summer 2021

From the research conducted in the summer of 2020, to the multiple drafts and the province-wide consultations, we have now produced this report, which will lead to a collective advocacy effort for Community Prosperity Now. This Summer, CCVO will be building a platform that supports the nonprofit sector and other stakeholders with the tools to advocate. The platform will further unify the nonprofit sector among other sectors with a foundation to talk about the nonprofit sector's impact in our local communities.



**'Community  
Prosperity Now'  
report release**

**finalize blueprint  
for Community  
Prosperity**



**launch of advocacy  
platform for the sector**

# COMMUNITY PROSPERITY NOW

## A Blueprint for Community Recovery

Community prosperity goes beyond economic prosperity – it centres community in recovery plans for a more resilient and equitable future – one where we reject a return to the status quo and emerge stronger and more robust. In a crisis, like the one we are in now, nonprofits are essential to the health and vibrancy of our communities – communities depend on nonprofits – and right now, this is even more evident.<sup>2</sup>

This blueprint is for all of us – nonprofits and community champions – who want to see a community-centred approach to recovery; it has been built over the last year, starting in the spring of 2020 to now, with input from people in all sectors across the province (see Path to Recovery for more detail). By the nature of the work that nonprofits do in supporting strong communities, the nonprofit sector has a pivotal role to play in centring community in Alberta's recovery.

“ *Community Prosperity is all of us.* ”

The COVID-19 pandemic will have lingering impacts on our communities for years to come. This moment is an opportunity for the nonprofit sector to take the lead in building back better in our communities. We have seen the resiliency of the sector during this mass disruption; with many organizations stepping up and providing supports where they are most needed.<sup>3</sup> The nonprofit sector has been front and centre of this pandemic, and this is a chance to further focus our efforts on the impacts on vulnerable populations, the health of our environment, and the vibrancy of our communities.

This blueprint asks that:

- the nonprofit sector, the private sector, the provincial government, and funders and stakeholders work together better with re-framed thinking of the nonprofit sector;
- the nonprofit sector be bold;
- the nonprofit sector creates more possibilities by focusing on select key priority areas;
- governments and community champions support an investment in social infrastructure.

Let's find our collective voice, do more of what is already working, and recover together, now.

“ *The nonprofit sector underestimates the power and the loudness of our voice if we work collectively together.* ”

## WORK TOGETHER

Partner more. Take a multi-sectoral approach. Go further together. These are common refrains but what is it that gets in the way of the nonprofit sector working together more effectively with other sectors? Consultations across the province provided some insightful guidance. While nonprofits can and do often partner effectively on projects, many called for the sector to re-frame the way we think of ourselves and for other sectors to re-frame their thinking about the nonprofit sector as well. Putting community front and centre in recovery from the pandemic needs a collective effort, and each sector has an integral role to play in approaching that task.

### THE NONPROFIT SECTOR: TAKE THE LEAD ON COMMUNITY PROSPERITY AND RECOVERY

While there is no doubt that this is a critical time for the nonprofit sector, the sector does not need to be saved, but parts of the community do. At the beginning of the pandemic, there was a rallying cry that “we’re all in this together.”<sup>4</sup> However, we now know that many communities and groups are affected much more than others. Literature and research from across the country have shown that social inequalities were created and exacerbated by the pandemic across intersectional identities, such as women, racialized people, and Indigenous people.<sup>5</sup> Communities will need support to improve the outcomes for many vulnerable citizens, community vibrancy, and the environment.

The nonprofit sector – the people who work, volunteer, and access services – are an integral part of society. We are contributors to vibrant communities, vital services, and economic success.<sup>6</sup> Too often, however, the sector downplays its considerable experience, expertise, and knowledge. The nonprofit sector must show up as equals in partnerships with other nonprofits, the private sector, and governments, as the essential part of a cohesive society that we are, in order to lead a community-centred recovery.

While nonprofits often fill the gaps left by the public or private sectors, they cannot replace well-funded public or private sector services. Nonprofit services and programs need to be adequately supported, as they are often intended to complement – not substitute – the important role of other providers. There are three fundamental reasons why this is the case:

1. On its own, the sector cannot generate sufficient resources to provide the level of programs and services required to meet the needs of all citizens.
2. Nonprofits tend to focus on and serve specific groups. The fact that nonprofits do not serve all people at all times makes it important for government to act as the ultimate safeguard, ensuring the safety and security of individuals, families, and communities.<sup>8</sup>
3. Some nonprofits are funded privately, which would pose a risk of a disproportionate amount of power resting in the hands of those with the greatest private resources.<sup>9</sup>

Nonprofits are a fundamental part of the solution, working with governments and the private sector to help meet the needs and demands of the broad community. Particularly in the months to come, many jobs may not be revived after the pandemic<sup>10</sup> and there will be greater reliance on nonprofit organizations that provide the support for individuals battling a loss of income coupled with other needs – such as mental health supports.<sup>11</sup>

“*In a small rural community, we become a catch-all for everything. Because nonprofits are caring and collaborating, we end up being a catch-all for all the woes for all our locations and we do it humbly, without funding.*”

## FUNDERS & OTHER STAKEHOLDERS: TRUST THE NONPROFIT SECTOR

The pandemic has called on many funders to shift their practices in an effort for greater collective impact in communities across Alberta.<sup>12</sup> Many grantmakers and investors took risks during this time with innovative solutions and a return on their investments. This boldness will need to continue in community recovery and beyond the pandemic, as nonprofits enter a new reality where community recovery is primary.

“ *If we can be at the table, it might take some pressure off us to feel we need to advocate on behalf of the sector. We need validation that we’re a group that knows what we’re doing.*

*We are beholden to funders. We need some support and validation to be trusted that we know what’s best for the sector.*

Funders can continue putting community first in their support of nonprofits with:

- Altered traditional funding procedures that remove spending restrictions on existing grants.<sup>13</sup>
- Support for operational costs that recognize an increase in demand for services, where nonprofits will need to be able to take care of their staff as they are supporting their clients.<sup>14</sup>
- Adjusted assumptions and expectations about costs that go into a project that can create unrealistic pressures on organizations to keep their administration costs as low as possible.<sup>15</sup>

“

*Funding for administration and human power of these organizations is so light and so stretched that we have never been able to do so much with little. But if we had a little more investment in administration of these nonprofits, we would be able to work on a lot more.*

***Without the funding to expand your administration more than your typical 10% of your operations, I don’t see it in being that successful. There are incredible skills in the leadership of nonprofits but they need to be able to expand their capacity, and that needs to be funded.***

”



## THE PRIVATE SECTOR: CHAMPION THE NONPROFIT SECTOR

In the face of the pandemic, the private sector can play a leadership role by raising the importance of the nonprofit sector as essential players in the recovery of our communities, particularly in rooms we are not in and tables we are not at.

“ *The health of the community is integrated with our businesses.  
The health of one is contingent on the health of the other.* ”

The private sector can play a significant role in the recovery of our communities by using its influence to advocate for the nonprofit sector and our necessity in community recovery for private sector success by strengthening communities:

- Studies have shown that distressed urban neighborhoods have fewer nonprofit organizations than more affluent communities.<sup>16</sup> Other studies have shown that community poverty is related to low private (and public) support for human service providers and relatively fewer human service providers.<sup>17</sup> Studies have also shown that wealth is an important determinant for the size of all sectors, with wealthier communities having more for-profit as well as nonprofit entities.<sup>18</sup>
- Support and recognition for nonprofits is in the best interest of society as it is to the benefit of the community at large. Showing up for nonprofits and supporting our work will result in creating jobs and revive the economy, which in turn will have benefits for local businesses and commerce in the community.<sup>19</sup>
- Nonprofit organizations provide the kinds of community support that is needed by the private sector for a thriving environment that attracts investment and talent.<sup>20</sup>

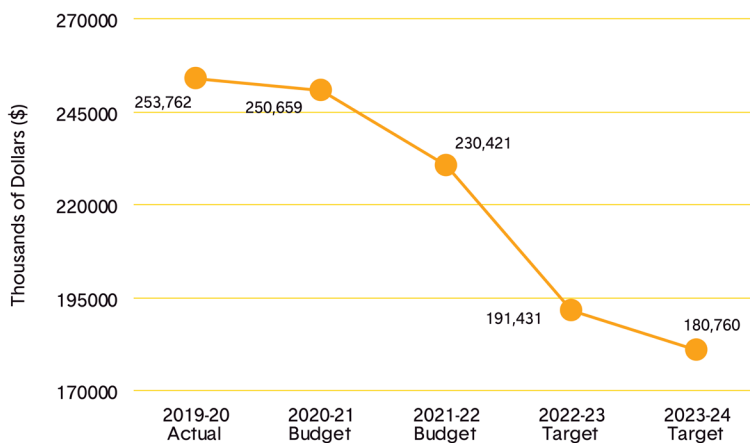
“ *A company doesn't attract good employees unless there are good services in their community – good day cares, recreational opportunities, churches and all those things that the nonprofit sector do.* ”

## THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT: VALUE THE NONPROFIT SECTOR AS ESSENTIAL TO RECOVERY

The Government of Alberta’s Recovery Plan intends to drive economic activity within the province in response to the devastating impacts of COVID-19. The Recovery Plan has four core themes: protecting people and businesses through fiscal programs, creating jobs, building infrastructure, and diversifying the economy.<sup>21</sup> The plan, originally released in June 2020, does not prioritize vulnerable populations, nonprofits that support these communities, or the long-term impacts that will linger in our communities.<sup>22</sup> At the time of release of the Recovery Plan, and still now, high unemployment rates,<sup>23</sup> lack of childcare availability,<sup>24</sup> and economic hardships exist. Although the Recovery Plan provides assistance and support for some industries, the nonprofit sector is not considered.

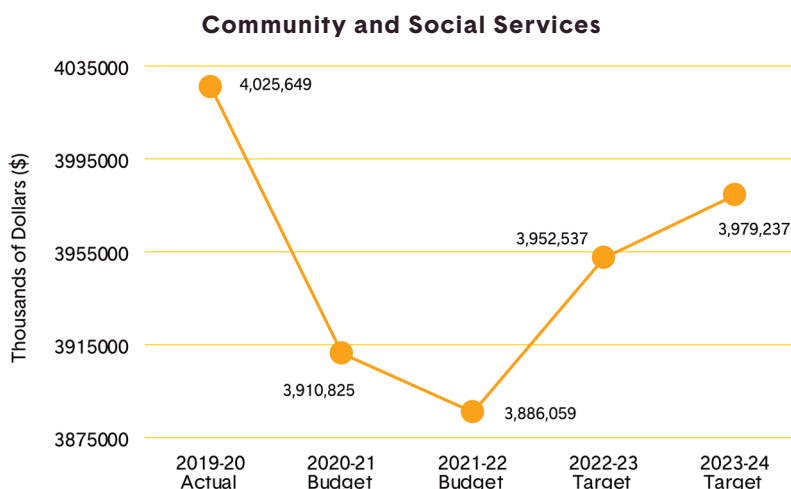
The Recovery Plan and Budget documents outline government plans for the next two years by “protecting lives and livelihoods”. Many programs that the community relies on within the Ministry of Community and Social Services and the Ministry of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women. The Ministry of Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women has programs that support nonprofit organizations across Alberta. These same organizations run a variety of programs and have facilities that support community and voluntary support services such as sporting events, cultural industries, arts & French-speaking Albertans, heritage, sport, physical activity and recreation, and women and multiculturalism. This ministry has been experiencing budget cuts since 2019. The ministry is expected to receive \$230 million for 2021-22 – a total \$20.2 million cut from Budget 2020-21 and a \$23.3 million cut from the 2019 Actual. According to government targets for 2022 and 2023, the ministry will continue to see reductions – an allocation of \$191 million in Budget 2022 and \$181 million in Budget 2023.

**Culture, Multiculturalism and Status of Women**

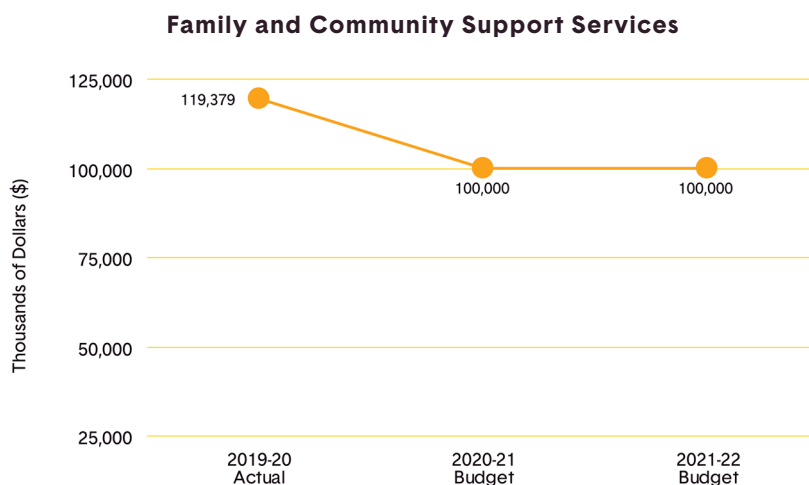


“ I have a real desire to see a more integrated approach to recovery – one that has some equal weighting to this [nonprofit] sector which is fundamental to the health and wellbeing of the province.

The COVID-19 support for the Ministry of Community and Social Services included a total of \$72 million in spending for homeless and women’s shelters and critical worker benefit for essential workers.<sup>25</sup> There are no plans to increase the budget for this ministry within the next two years that amount to the 2019 budget level.<sup>26</sup> Those left vulnerable will need this support and these programs cannot be left underfunded and undervalued.



Within this same ministry, the Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) funding did not see an increase for 2021. FCSS-funded programs provide support for individuals, families, and communities through preventative social programs and services, which benefit Albertans experiencing vulnerabilities. In light of the detrimental impacts of the pandemic on communities across Alberta, nonprofits have seen an increase in demand for services, and funding that does not address the rising demand presents more challenges for the sector and the individuals and communities it serves.



Although there are some positives we can draw from the Recovery Plan, it does not have a concrete plan for women, racialized people, or the nonprofit sector. Additionally, this plan does not utilize an equitable approach that addresses the gendered division of COVID-19 impacts, and it does not represent marginalized groups and communities across Alberta. This impact is significant within the nonprofit sector, which employs many women and people from marginalized groups. Without an approach to addressing women and marginalized groups in the economic recovery process, Alberta’s economic activity is at risk. The provincial government must value the nonprofit sector in its recovery plans, and in its budget, in order to fully realize the potential of the nonprofit sector in community recovery.

## BE BOLD

Assuming a leadership role in Community Prosperity means nonprofits need to be bold, to think big, to broadcast our contributions. The nonprofit sector is crucial to help build society and recover from the pandemic, and it is essential that we advocate not only for communities but also for the sector – and that we share those stories. Now is not the time to shy away from advocating for what the sector needs, to not only ensure that the sector continues to operate in these difficult times, but to ensure a post-COVID-19 era is one that is more inclusive, more just, and more equitable. Funders and organizations in the private sector want nonprofits to be partners and collaborators to solve the inequities uncovered by the pandemic. To solve these issues, there is no one-size-fits-all for the sector – nonprofit organizations will need to be even bolder to be included in a recovery that leverages the strengths of nonprofit organizations in our communities.

“ *We should stop being treated as someone with our hands out and come forward with our hands in front of us and say we are here, we are helping and we're all a part of this together. You cannot manage your ministry and you cannot deliver government and build the society we need without us. We are too invisible.* ”

## ADVOCATE

When there is no cohesiveness and a collective voice among the sector, it often gets missed by those in decision-making roles. The nonprofit sector must advocate for the communities that it serves as well as for the sector.<sup>27</sup> Historically, nonprofit organizations have neglected advocacy and focused primarily on program delivery.<sup>28</sup> The lack of advocacy is primarily due to access to tools and resources; many organizations do not have access to tools to advocate for the needs of the sector – and the pandemic has not made this any easier.<sup>29</sup>

Nonprofit organizations can start now by:

1. committing to advocacy, a long-term commitment that requires persistence and dedication while working towards desired outcomes;<sup>30</sup>
2. raising awareness about a specific issue or cause; and
3. setting a policy agenda – a set of issues or problems aimed at gaining the attention of policymakers and decision-makers – sometimes known as a “policy ask”.<sup>31</sup>

“ *Be bold enough to say no to money from governments and funders if they are not meeting your demands or are not willing to negotiate with you on what you need to complete your project.* ”

The diverse nature of the nonprofit sector with different types and sizes of organizations allow for a multitude of ideas that can be utilized to advocate for sectoral issues.<sup>32</sup> The diversity of the sector allows for a number of people to come together and mobilize community members to call on issues and policies that impact all sectors. A united sector where organizations advocate collectively for the needs of the sector holds weight.<sup>33</sup>

## TELL OUR STORIES

Nonprofit organizations are invaluable assets to communities. Their impact on communities goes beyond the provision of programs and services, and the number of people served; it is the value that they bring to the community that is harder to decipher. The lasting impact goes across multiple levels including economic stability, and filling in a gap in services not otherwise provided by government or private businesses, in the areas of health, education, and arts and culture. Too often, the value of the nonprofit sector can be lost, in part because nonprofits are so focused on the work that we neglect to share our important stories of success.

Nonprofits can promote awareness on the value of the sector by:

1. investing in communications expertise;<sup>34</sup>
2. reporting on outcomes and impacts (long and short-term impacts) through meaningful indicators that can be easily understood and easy to use,<sup>35</sup> and
3. focusing on storytelling.<sup>36</sup>

“

*I have worked with the profit side, but I kept finding myself being pulled back into the nonprofit sector because this is where the passion lies.*

***When you look at what makes a community function, what makes life worth living, in many ways, where challenges are solved and where people thrive, it's the nonprofits that meet those challenging needs.***

”

## CREATE POSSIBILITIES

Success of community recovery depends on the success, and survival, of many nonprofit organizations and there are several key priority areas that will need organizational attention and investment: diversity, equity, and inclusion; youth engagement; mental health; and digital transformation.

“ Nonprofits always have to operate out of the box, it's how local issues get solved.

## DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

Nonprofits are diverse and enrich the social and cultural experience of Albertans in a number of areas such as: sports and recreation, social services, religion, environment, arts and culture, education and health, among others.<sup>37</sup> From organizations in large urban centres to rural areas, what brings the sector together is the desire to serve communities. When we start from this viewpoint, the nonprofit sector's diversity becomes a strength because we know that the rich multidisciplinary knowledge and expertise held across the sector significantly enhances the value to public policy dialogue. Within the diversity of the sector, there is also strength in the diversity of clients the sector serves, and the employees that work for the sector.<sup>38</sup>

Nonprofits are well equipped to take the lead on addressing inequities (e.g. by gender, income, race), as this is an area where we hold experience and expertise, even though the sector itself still has work to do in these areas. All orders of government and the private sector look to the nonprofit sector to lead on providing knowledge of first-hand experience, analysis of trends, and interpretation of the research on inequities.<sup>39</sup> Nonprofits are well-positioned to make sense of the impacts on communities that have been created through unaddressed inequities.

“ The sector is great at addressing inequities, but without additional resources that's difficult to do.

The most successful nonprofit organizations are thoughtfully composed of individuals with diverse backgrounds, skills sets and leaderships styles. While female employees dominate the Alberta nonprofit sector, Statistics Canada dataset displays that their annual wages and salaries remain considerably lower than their male coworkers.<sup>40</sup>

To take action now, nonprofits can:

1. make a formal commitment to racial equity, collect and report on disaggregated data, and implement hiring practices to increase diversity;<sup>41, 42, 43</sup>

2. understand and report on the gendered impacts of COVID-19; and

3. advocate for a Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+) of all recovery strategies.<sup>44</sup>

A recovery that leverages the strengths of all Albertans is imperative. It is our responsibility as a sector to create space for marginalized Albertans to be heard, and to be a voice for marginalized people who cannot participate in advocating for an inclusive recovery.

## YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Millennials (ages 24 to 39 in 2020) and Generation Zers (ages 5 to 24 in 2020) are the largest living generation in Canada.<sup>45</sup> This pandemic has had a significant impact on many young people, and young women in particular.<sup>46</sup> The youth unemployment rate in April 2020 was at 16.8%, which is recorded to be the highest in more than two decades.<sup>47</sup> Engagement can be done in many ways but recognizing that the sector needs to prioritize this in the long term will be essential in recovery efforts.

“ *Nonprofit jobs are just as important as the energy and oil and gas sector. The next generation will want to work in a vibrant community where there are lots of different kinds of jobs. We are at the heart of that.*

Younger generations, like Millennials and Generation Zers (Gen Zers), have not been afraid to speak out on issues they care about – they are thoughtful and political. They stay up-to-date with current events and political issues that impact them and those around them, and they are quick to make a difference.<sup>48</sup> The younger generations are also tech-and media-savvy, which mobilizes them to reach out to several people at once and are more likely to be on top of current issues. Nonprofits should support strategies that better connect them to these generations, including:

1. Increasing social media use and leveraging this to appeal to younger audience members.

2. Being transparent and building trust. Young people care about the organizations they support and what they stand for, efforts to fulfill the organizations' mission, and the results of those efforts.<sup>49</sup>

3. Embodying a culture of diversity and inclusion. This is important for all nonprofits regardless of their intent to engage the younger generation or not. Millennials and Gen Zers expect this to be second nature to organizations.<sup>50</sup> Nonprofits should adopt this lens and have strategies in place, such as diversifying an organization's workforce, governance, culture; creating a safe space for conversations on anti-racism, diversity and inclusion; and understanding the complexity and intersectionality of identities and experiences.<sup>51</sup>

“ *We have given internships and permanent jobs to dozens of young people over the last few years – some of whom still work for us and many of the others went on to get good career related jobs.*

***We took advantage of various programs that offered some subsidies so we could hire these people and get them trained. I think it's a really great investment for the government.***

## MENTAL HEALTH

Statistics Canada surveyed 46,000 Canadians, of which 52% of participants indicated that their mental health was either “somewhat worse” or “much worse” since the beginning of physical distancing restrictions.<sup>52</sup> The realities of the COVID-19 pandemic have also impacted the mental health of many nonprofit employees due to an increase in economic stress, anxiety, social isolation; additional responsibilities such as child care and an increase in workload; loss of job security due to organizational financial loss, layoffs of colleagues, remote work, and COVID-19 related losses. While nonprofit employees are busy providing for many people in our communities, it is essential that their needs are also being met.

“ *Mental health requires a cultural shift within the sector – not considering workers needing to be “tough” to do this work.* ”

Organizational impacts of the crisis include significant layoffs, contributing to a loss in human capital and competency, challenges with working remotely, a rise in demand for programs and services, and health and safety risks for individuals working on the frontline.<sup>53</sup> Additionally, many nonprofits have had to face cancellations of fundraising and other types of events, which have impacted their finances and their ability to network and connect with peers from other nonprofit organizations.

“

*Our sector often gets the table scraps and we're told we should feel grateful for that. Yes, we need infrastructure, but the things we support and provide matter, such as mental health. These are the building blocks of society.*

***We deserve to be at this table, and we deserve more. We struggle to meet the increasing demands of the pandemic, and until we invest in these social services, then our recovery will be a lot slower.***

”



To take action now, nonprofits can:

**1.** Lead by example. At this time, and post-COVID-19, staff will look to leadership to see how they are taking care of themselves, their organization, and their employees.<sup>54</sup> Organizations need to implement strategies that increase employee satisfaction and motivation through clear and concise communication, recognition and rewards, and training and development opportunities.<sup>55,56</sup> During this time as we all work from home, leaders can begin by building a culture of communication through regular check-ins, offering work flexibility, modelling behaviours for self-care, and being inclusive – all of which can help improve the mental health of employees.<sup>57,58</sup> Modifying policies and practices concerning the pandemic and measuring your staff’s needs can also contribute to a mentally healthy workplace.<sup>59</sup>

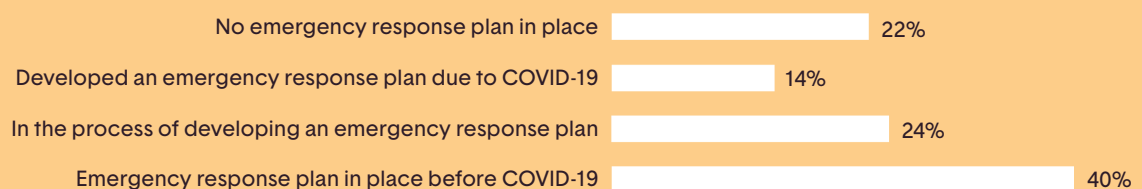
**2.** Encourage open communication. Since the onset of the pandemic, nonprofit leaders have had to make several difficult decisions quickly.<sup>60</sup> Additionally, leaders are faced with a huge responsibility in responding to the demands placed on them. As a result of decisions that require urgent action, nonprofit leaders may not always engage their employees, which can consequently give rise to employees feeling disempowered due to the lack of information that may impact them.<sup>61</sup> Working from home has also played a significant role in further disengaging employees with their managers and other employees. Disengaged employees are more reluctant to communicate any concerns, including safety,<sup>62</sup> more likely to leave the organization, and are less productive.<sup>63</sup>

**3.** Invest in disaster preparedness. Organizations that invest in workplace disaster preparedness are associated with better employee well-being.<sup>64</sup> More specifically, promotion such as social capital increase, prevention such as organizational disaster preparedness, and treatment of well-being issues such as employee assistance programs are beneficial for employees. Emergency preparedness is flexible and nimble and meant to be catered to an organization’s operations and programs.<sup>65</sup> It provides nonprofits with tools to respond appropriately during times of uncertainty.

Of the respondents to the 2020 Alberta Nonprofit Survey (ANS):<sup>66</sup>

- only 40% indicated they had an emergency plan for health emergencies or natural disasters before COVID-19;
- 14% indicated they developed a plan due to COVID-19; and
- 46% are creating a plan or still do not have a plan in place.

**Nonprofits with an emergency response plan**



## DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

The pandemic has forced many organizations to rethink their strategies for how they operate and provide services. It created a growing dependence on current and reliable technology, not just as a luxury but as an essential component for effective operations. A survey of charities by Imagine Canada shows that 42% have created new programs and 54% have transitioned in-person programs to an online format since the beginning of the pandemic.<sup>67</sup> In addition to transitioning programs and services online, nonprofits have made the same transition as other workplaces where possible and have shifted to remote work.<sup>68</sup> These shifts are likely to be permanent in many cases, with some but not all work and services returning to in-person formats post-pandemic.

In the past, in-person meetings and interactions allowed for informal conversations and networking. Online meetings are more structured and do not allow for informal interaction, which hampers communication. These informal conversations were a place for organically fostering the sharing of ideas, resources, needs, and collaborations. There are limited funding opportunities to create infrastructure of this kind, and historically, nonprofit organizations have been a low priority in terms of receiving funding.<sup>69</sup> The nonprofit sector will need tools to support organizations as they make this transition to an increasingly online era.

*“The greater conversation and the next conversation is the transformation of our sector vis-a-vis technology...and if we can get to that, it would transform how we work, how we deliver service, and have greater impact.”*

Modernizing technology infrastructure is not the only step in digital transformation. Digital transformation is “a way of seamlessly connecting people, processes, and technology to increase productivity, innovate to serve more people, and achieve a high level of trust and transparency with constituencies.”<sup>70</sup> Digital transformation can also help with: automating manual tasks that reduce costly human errors; more robust data security to prevent costly breaches; data insights that enable strategic decisions such as deploying people and assets in a natural or human-made disaster; utilizing cloud-based services to reduce IT staffing overhead; and improving collaboration and productivity by using digitally-connected technologies that result in more efficient and effective nonprofit programs.<sup>71</sup>

To take action now, nonprofits can:

1. Move beyond focusing on technology and devote time and effort to develop new leadership skills and comprehensive digital technology capabilities;<sup>72</sup>
2. prioritize digital transformation as a necessity; and
3. invest in technology infrastructure.

## SUPPORT INVESTMENT IN SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Social infrastructure are assets to society that support the quality of life of a nation, region, city, or neighborhood. Assets include programs and services, amenities, relationships, and structures that go beyond economic functions to make a community an appealing place to live. These assets support us to create a more resilient, just, equitable, and sustainable society. Support for the nonprofit sector is support for community recovery in Alberta. It is therefore critical to maintain current investment for the nonprofit sector, to grow funding levels in existing programs to keep pace with growing need and inflation, as well as to support new investments in social infrastructure in four core areas: diversity, equity and inclusion; youth engagement; mental health; and digital transformation.

“ There are a few key basic ingredients that make a vibrant city regardless of where you are. For me, the main ingredients are about affordability and flexibility – can someone afford to live in a city with their loved ones how they want to? A vibrant city also has the amenities people want – from public transit, to arts and culture, to schools and post-secondaries. Those are the table stakes for every big city.<sup>73</sup>

- Karen Ball, CCVO President & CEO

## SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

### The Things We Build for the Future We Want for Everyone<sup>74</sup>

CCVO made a submission to the provincial government pre-budget consultations requesting an investment of 3.5% of Alberta's Recovery Plan budget (\$350 million) towards a Social Infrastructure Fund. CCVO will continue to advocate for this investment with the support of the nonprofit sector and community champions. In order to support the nonprofit sector, both within their organizations and within the communities they serve, we recommend four priority areas for investment that will: foster Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, engage and retain youth, support mental health, and lead digital transformation.

#### 1. Foster Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

A robust social infrastructure investment will look to promote diversity, equity and inclusion, both within nonprofit organizations, which employ many women and racialized people, and for nonprofits that promote diversity, equity and inclusion among vulnerable populations. Diversity not only brings fresh perspectives, but also improves the quality of decision-making.<sup>75</sup> Studies have also shown that a diverse workplace, with a diversity of race, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation, causes and enhances financial performance, and promotes hard work and creativity.<sup>76</sup>

Additionally, diversity at work can drive innovation because it fosters a culture of openness and cooperation among employees.<sup>77</sup> Better data on the nonprofit sector has been a priority of the nonprofit sector for years. There has been progress in the past year with the release of data from Statistics Canada regarding the composition of nonprofit boards, and human resources data for charitable and nonprofit organizations in Canada.<sup>78</sup> The most recent data released by Statistics Canada displays nonprofit employment statistics by demographic characteristics such as visible and non-visible minorities, Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees, immigrant and non-immigrant employees, gender, age, and level of education.

This type of data offers opportunities to make intersectional-based analysis for the nonprofit sector and provides statistical evidence for the pressing reasons why robust and inclusive policies are required to address gaps in employment indicators between gender, race, Indigenous and non-Indigenous employees, and immigrant and non-immigrant workers in the nonprofit sector. It is now more important than ever to take steps toward data collection commitments in order to understand and improve the quality of life of our communities.

“Lack of knowledge about how to locate, collect, link, analyze, and communicate data hinders non-profits every day: in their ability to deliver programs and services, advocate for change, obtain and deploy funding, plan for workforce needs, demonstrate their impact, or make strategic decisions about virtually any aspect of their operations.”<sup>79</sup>

- Cathy Barr, Vice-President, Research & Strategic Relationships,  
Imagine Canada

## 2. Engage and Retain Youth

Social infrastructure investment should also prioritize funding programs that promote organizations and support young people to join the workforce. Many young people are struggling to find employment and are concerned about their future careers as they graduate from university or college.<sup>80</sup> Investments that expand student capacity and opportunity through job grants to organizations contribute to a strong foundation of graduates that help build the future. A social infrastructure investment that prioritizes students and young people will drive our economy and help retain young people.<sup>81</sup>

## 3. Support Mental Health

An investment in social infrastructure recovery plan should also prioritize the mental health of community members and nonprofit organization staff. Organizations should be provided with support to take care of their employees as they are dealing with uncertainty and drastic changes that they have to make. Many nonprofit employees are becoming as vulnerable as the clients that they are serving.<sup>82</sup> In particular, there are increased mental health concerns for youth; parents – mothers in particular, as they are experiencing challenges with school closures and lack of child care; and communities of colour, as they deal with job loss and economic constraints.<sup>83</sup> There are also many nonprofits delivering mental health supports to vulnerable communities through direct services but also through community building and support. These efforts will become even more important as Alberta recovers from the effects of the pandemic.

## 4. Lead Digital Transformation

Social infrastructure investments should also look to provide extra supports for nonprofit organizations that require the use of technology to increase the reach and scope of their programs and services. The pandemic increased the need for technology and the importance of providing support for people with technology. As we move forward, this is an area that will increase efficiency, scale impact, save costs, bridge the knowledge gap, provides organizations with core support and flexibility, and enables better data collection on impact.<sup>84</sup>

# COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC RETURNS OF SOCIAL INVESTMENT

## 1. Creates jobs

Productivity returns to social infrastructure investment are comparable to those of capital investment in physical infrastructure.<sup>85</sup> An investment in social infrastructure creates more jobs than similarly sized capital investment in physical infrastructure like construction and will address the decline of women in the workforce.<sup>86</sup> For example, a \$350 million investment for social infrastructure will create approximately 4,800 jobs while the same dollars in construction would create just under 2,000 jobs.<sup>87</sup>

“ *Job creation – the nonprofit sector does a better job of creating permanent jobs. It also supports more jobs for women. Nonprofits can access support to hire students. There is a tie to economic development – you can’t have this without supporting social infrastructure, and you won’t have social infrastructure without economic development.* ”

Nonprofits are essential job creators that can deliver services efficiently and effectively. Alberta nonprofits employ 450,000 people, totalling approximately \$18.4 billion on salaries and other compensation.<sup>88</sup> The nonprofit workforce is increasingly staffed by paid professionals holding specialized expertise and advanced education degrees.<sup>89</sup>

## 2. Invests in local community efforts

Preparing for community prosperity with social infrastructure investment has many benefits including social capital, trust, sense of belonging/community, volunteerism, participation in community activities, safety, and wellbeing.<sup>90</sup> Communities that lack nonprofit organizations, libraries, community facilities are often places most likely to suffer from crime and violence.<sup>91</sup> Investment in social infrastructure boosts local skills, increases community resilience during a disaster, and bridges the divide between diverse sections of a community.<sup>92</sup> Investing in local and rural communities provides an economic pathway for rural Alberta and an investment in community economic development, such as tourism and arts and culture, will be an asset to local economic recovery. Providing opportunities to young entrepreneurs in rural Alberta will help bring in investment projects that will benefit current and future generations. Investing in local communities can also address the declining numbers in volunteerism and support voluntary initiatives that enable society to work effectively.

“ *I think it’s an extremely fair ask, and I think anyone could argue that the ask could be even much bigger. I always ask myself ‘who drives things in communities?’ And let’s be honest, it’s not politicians and it’s not the private sector generally either. The root of community is not-for-profits who deliver services to the most important people.* ”

### 3. Attracts future investment in the province.

Creating a Social Infrastructure Fund will allow organizations to invest in social innovators – people who can increase nonprofits’ entrepreneurship and have particular insight into how the province may be best positioned to take advantage of the \$755 million **Investment Readiness Program and Social Finance Fund** locally.<sup>93</sup> Investing in the social finance sector is a big opportunity for the Government of Alberta to lead the way and leverage funding from the private sector and donations from citizens.<sup>94</sup>

*“ We are seeing massive investments in other areas, but social investments in child care, transit, and senior care were very much highlighted by the pandemic. In a time when we have a right yellow highlighter over these issues, is that enough investment [referring to \$350 million for social infrastructure].*

Building social infrastructure is just as urgent as building physical infrastructure – such as roads, sidewalks or bridges. We can strengthen both social infrastructure and physical infrastructure simultaneously, without the detriment of the other. As a community, we should prioritize areas for investment that will strengthen nonprofits and tackle critical community issues in recovery by focusing on efforts that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion, engage and retain youth, support mental health, and foster digital transformation.

“

*Social infrastructure touches everyone and everything. This will contribute significantly to how we come out of COVID-19 and how we continue to be prosperous.*

*In my mind, I don't think there has been a bigger value proposition in the past.*

”

# LEVERAGING COMMUNITY PROSPERITY FOR COMMUNITY RECOVERY

**What would happen if the Government of Alberta centred community prosperity on a provincial government agenda?** Through the collective efforts of CCVO and our partners, including this report, we are asking them to do so. Collectively, the nonprofit sector and community champions have the power to present a unified front and ask the provincial government to create a \$350 million Social Infrastructure Fund as a core to community recovery. A Social Infrastructure Fund that addresses the diversity of the nonprofit sector, the mental health of community members, support for technological advancement, and engaging Alberta youth to be the leaders of our communities.

This blueprint requires sectors to work together, for the nonprofit sector to take the lead, for funders to trust the nonprofit sector, for the private sector to champion the nonprofit sector, and for the provincial government to show that they value the nonprofit sector's role in Alberta recovery.





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