



RECONNECT 2023

COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS OF CANADA CONFERENCE

Report for ECFI prepared by

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**SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT GOALS**



Introduction

The Canadian Community Foundations' (CF) conference took place on May 30 - June 2, 2023 in Toronto, Ontario. The conference brought together a large constituency formed of professionals from community foundations in Canada and other parts of the world, as well as partners. The international participants included colleagues from over 20 countries, which made the conference a truly international event. Furthermore, the event put a light on the intercultural character of the Canadian communities by being an event in both French and English and by including in multiple ways the aboriginal / indigenous populations, acknowledging their history.



International CF practitioners present at the CFC 2023 conference

The conference took place under the title “Reconnect 2023” and touched upon several topics of interest for community foundations globally today. The program of the conference was varied and included discussion on CF management and business model, investment, grant-making, and the SDGs.

The conference was the first in-person meeting for the Canadian community foundations since the 2019 conference. The COVID-19 pandemic affected the ability of CF practitioners to meet and exchange. This aspect was well felt at the conference, as participants exposed an energetic and engaging vibe.

This paper presents key takeaways and highlights sessions attended by the author and considered to be relevant to European community foundations.

Key takeaways

The overall takeaway from the conference is that there is a lot of inspiration, energy, hard work, and good solutions for community challenges in the practice of community foundations, however, the frequency and format of meetings are yet to evolve to support practitioners be more connected to each other.

The conference offered the opportunity for many professionals to meet and exchange on community foundations-relevant topics. This occasion has been relatively rare since the COVID-19 pandemic started. Attending the conference enabled a multitude of engagements both with Canadian and international colleagues. Some general reflections for the European community foundations include:

- Meeting at such events is essential for building a feeling of belonging to a professional community of community foundations professionals. It is therefore essential to continue the practice of supporting international groups to attend at community foundation conferences throughout the world.
- The field experience of community foundations differs in every country, and indeed, in every community. Those differences are incredibly insightful to explore, both within Europe and across the continents. Managing to support community foundations professionals to engage with colleagues from different countries is one of the most powerful experiences that can lead to innovative practices in community philanthropy. More such exchanges should be supported and for longer periods of time.
- There are a growing number of community foundations conferences across the world. Some of the countries that hold community foundations national conferences include Australia, Austria, Canada, Germany, Italy, Serbia, UK, USA. Enabling larger international groups at all these events can expand the opportunity of connecting internationally to a larger number of CF practitioners. Within Europe, a group of the organisers of CF conferences could be convened to create a calendar so that these events do not overlap, and provide the opportunity to internationally connect from time to time. A European CF conference could also be organised.
- Furthermore, the format of community foundations conferences should be further explored. Support for testing innovative formats should be proved to organisers and participants. Formats that enable visits, longer periods of engagement around the conference itself, could make participation more meaningful.

- Innovative formats are needed in multiple directions. Community foundations could discuss more about the future and the impact of current global trends on local communities. Further discussions could revolve around solutions to current and future problems, departing from the SDGs and going beyond. Furthermore, substantive discussions and engagement with third actors on areas relevant for local communities, such as education, health, entrepreneurship, security, etc., could also be envisaged.
- Besides the community foundations, local communities and other local actors prove to be innovative and insightful. The occasion to connect to actors beyond community foundations when attending such events is equally important. Visiting local communities in a more comprehensive manner could bring additional insights for community foundation practices.

Pre-conference day: Transforming Capital Convening

The Transforming Capital Convening brought together on May 31, 2023 approximately 70 colleagues from community foundations, social enterprises, family foundations, CFSOs, corporate foundations, and other organisations. The event presented some of the innovative initiatives, such as the New Power Labs, Purpose Phil, and the Catalyst Community Finance. The discussions were centred on some of the following aspects:

- Decisions about capital remain concentrated with wealthy select few, not the marginalised. Due diligence & risk management unduly influence decision making,
- Social Finance Models & ROI,
- More democratic, participatory grant-making can be intensive, requiring coordination that can be hard to achieve at scale,
- Transformation involves disruption but boards and foundation leadership desire continuity over disruption,
- Short time frames and narrow indicators of impact are not aligned with the long-term nature of deep social change.

The above topics recur in CF conferences and events. A step further would be to bring together examples that manage to transform CF practices in the respective directions. Furthermore, future lab formats could further provide the space for generating change at the level of practices.



Plenary: Opening RECONNECT | Renewing our connections

The opening ceremony of the conference has been tremendously insightful. It touched on multiple aspects, from reviewing the development of the CFC network, to addressing diversity-related aspects, and to providing a deeply motivational perspective centred around the importance of resiliency and wellness. The insights presented by Dr. Robyne Hanley-Dafoe have set the stage for approaching the discussions at the conference with an open mind and an eagerness to further enhance welding in our local communities, while keeping ourselves in a space of resilience.



Looking Globally to Lead in Community with the SDGs with Leigha Mccarroll a PhD Candidate at Carleton University



Leigha Mccarroll presented how Canadian CFs connect to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Goals are growing in importance for the Canadian CFs, triggering more engagement at the level of indicators, developing voluntary local reviews, different types of activities on each of the goals. It is wonderful to see how the strategic thinking around sustainability is developing as Canadian CFs engage more substantively with the SDGs. The Goals are needed to foster sustainability in the Canadian communities. Leigha emphasized in her presentation several aspects regarding the connection of CFs to the SDGs, including that CFs are

natural champions of Agenda 2023, generating discussion on systemic change, localizing Agenda 2030, bridging the gap between a global agenda and local realities, and others. Out of the 201 CFs, 22% are estimated to engage with the SDGs. The potential benefits for CFs include attracting partners and donors, show impact, community leadership, mission-driven investment, impactful advocacy.

Plenary: Leadership Reflections and Annual General Meeting

The General Meeting of the CFC took place and was carried out in both English and French. The discussions centred around membership and governance matters.

Innovative Spaces for Dialogue with Lisa Schalla from CF Leads and Rebecca Petersen from the West Central Initiative Foundation in Minnesota

Lisa Schalla and Rebecca Petersen opened a space for collective discussions on difficult topics such as systemic racism, rural-urban tensions, political polarization, power imbalances, climate change, or migration and belonging. These topics were approached by different groups. The discussion on systemic racism underscored the importance of addressing blind spots and unseen biases in the way programs and organizations are operated.



Embedding Impact Investing in your Community Foundation with Kelly Gauthier from Rally Assets

Impact investing is in its early years when it comes to CFs' and foundations' practices. It is advancing faster as a practice in some areas and countries, rather than in others. The session presented a review of what impact investing is and how CFs can engage with it. Impact investment was defined as "investing with the intention to generate measurable positive social and environmental impact alongside a financial return." Given the significant size of the endowments that CFs

possess, it is important to consider impact investing as a practice that aligns investing policies with the core mission of community foundations.

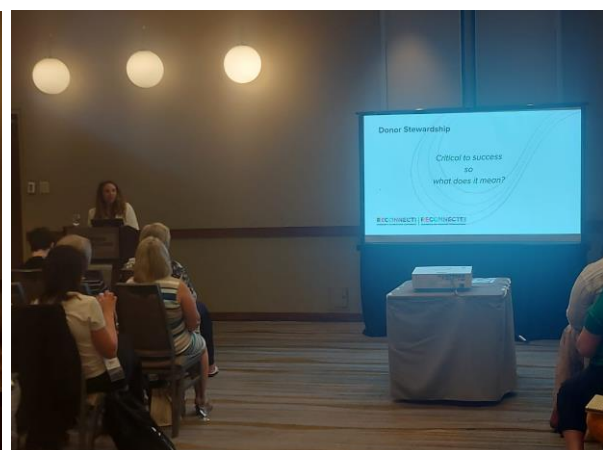
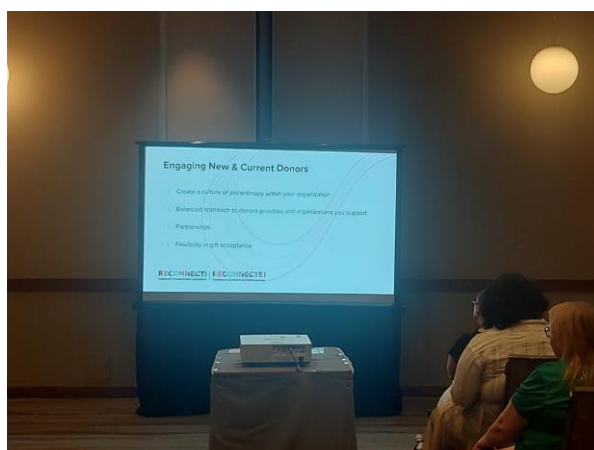
Plenary: Rethinking Belonging | What the Data Shows Us

Day two started with a discussion on belonging - a topic which became essential for Canadian CFs. CFC is looking at belonging indicators at a national level through a vital signs [study](#) and aims to raise awareness on the quality of citizen engagement in local communities.



Engaging Donors to Expand Your Impact with Mindy Stroet from the Prince George Community Foundation

Mindy Stroet focused in her presentation on how engaging donors can expand the impact of CFs. In doing so several approaches to donor engagement were discussed, such as establishing an ambassador program, talking directly to donors, writing letters, use meaningful communication tools, engage younger community members, build a permanent process. Key to success in Mindy's perspective relies on being genuine, focusing on the donor needs, and integrating stewardship in one's practice.

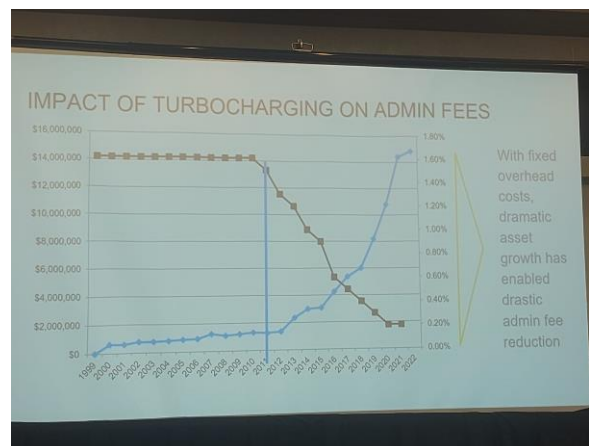


Reimagining Philanthropy: Sharing Power, Shifting Structures with Ruth Mojeed from Inclusion Project and Narinder Dhami from New Power Labs

Ruth and Narinder have explored how equitable is philanthropic funding in Canada, by looking at the gaps in access to capital and the extremely limited funding that goes to women-, black- or indigenous-led initiatives. 2% of VC funding went to women initiatives, 0.5% of charitable Canadian funds went to Indigenous groups, out of \$100 grant investments, between 7 and 30 cents go to Black-serving charities.

Turbocharging Growth for a Small Community Foundation with Michael Gordon and Chris Hazel from The Community Foundation of Orillia and Area

Orillia Community Foundation has grown significantly in financial terms in the last 11 years. That is based on significant work done by the Board of the Foundation as well as on a strict re-organization of the Foundation's operations which were outsourced. The Board engages with potential donors in multiple ways and puts an emphasis on developing donor directed, managed, and designated funds.



Plenary: RECONNECT Closing Celebration

The closing celebration included a beautiful connection to the history and present of Canadian communities - the indigenous populations and their traditions. Furthermore, Choir, Choir, Choir engaged all participants in singing and dancing, offering an artistic experience to close the conference activities.

