Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations

Transforming the Non-Profit Community in Edmonton

PHASE 1

Identifying Myths, Trends, and Areas for Change

We have a responsibility to mobilize around shared imaginations of transformation, so that we might improve the lives of the human and non-human beings our organizations aim to serve.

About this report

The desire to transform the non-profit community emerged early on during the COVID-19 pandemic, and came from a group of leaders who saw the need to reimagine how non-profit organizations operate. They proposed the idea of a non-profit Beveridge Report (a report that was published in Britain in 1942 and provided the foundation for the welfare state) and asked the Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations (ECVO) to lead the work.

This report provides an overview of the first phase of reimagining. Specifically, it outlines the non-profit sector's past and present, documents some of the current myths and trends that exist across the sector, and introduces a model for change that aims to address the questions at the heart of this work:

- How can the non-profit community begin to address the historical injustices that have been magnified by COVID-19?
- How can we use the knowledge of these historical injustices to imagine and develop new non-profit structures and practices: ones that transcend our status quo and bring us closer to our desired future?

The information presented throughout this report is not meant to be prescriptive, nor is it considered a full account of the work that needs to be done. Instead, we offer some initial ideas so that we might begin to imagine some of the collective actions required to move toward a more just future. Furthermore, the information in this document in no way directly supports or opposes any political party or candidate. Instead, it highlights how past policies and practices (e.g., colonialism, immigration policies, neoliberal practices) have varyingly contributed to how the non-profit sector currently operates and forces us to consider what new policies and practices might be needed.

Our ability to invent new futures not only depends on our willingness and capacity to critically examine both our past and present; it also requires that we remain open to the possibility that the world could be very different if other power constellations were in place. It is, therefore, our intention that this document will not only begin a process of generous critique, but that it can also support members of the non-profit community to locate themselves at the intersection of politics and philosophy, and begin the never-ending process of reflection and intervention.

About ECVO

The Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations helps organizations build and sustain their voluntary programs and services through resources, networking, and skill development opportunities. It is a member-based non-profit organization serving the Metro Edmonton community.

To learn more about the Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations visit **ecvo.ca**

Acknowledgements

We begin by acknowledging our location on Treaty 6 territory, in the place known as Edmonton or Amiskwaciwâskahikan. Treaty 6 is the traditional territory of the Papaschase, and the homeland of the Métis Nation. As settlers on these lands, the staff and board members of the Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations are committed to ensuring that the spirit of Treaty 6 is honoured and respected. As such, we want to be held accountable for the ways our practices and programs contribute to the ongoing injustices of colonization.

Thank you to the members of our advisory committee, the preliminary design team, as well as everyone who took the time to speak with us over the past few months. Your strategic guidance, advice and generous critiques have been invaluable throughout this process.

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Executive summary

No executive summary has been drafted for this document. We feel strongly that reducing this report to three pages would lead to potential misinterpretation of the information included due to a lack of context and loss of nuance. We invite you to read the document in its entirety and look forward to future engagements related to its content.

Introduction

The first Canadian case of the novel coronavirus was reported by Health Canada on January 25, 2020, and since that time, we have witnessed, in a multitude of ways, how our current institutional structures are ill-equipped to deal with our existing realities. Not only has the pandemic revealed the magnitude of our society's systemic injustices, it has also emphasized our interdependence at local, regional, national and global levels.

These revelations about the inadequacy and interconnectedness of our institutional structures are forcing us to re-examine the relationship between states, markets and civil society. A return to 'normal' (i.e., pre-2020 governance and economic systems) is not only becoming increasingly unlikely, actions and investments that serve to reinforce the status quo are continually being positioned as socially, economically, and environmentally irresponsible. The result is a growing demand for healthier and more just societies.

The [COVID-19] pandemic has demonstrated the fragility of our world. It has laid bare risks we have ignored for decades: inadequate health systems; gaps in social protection; structural inequalities; environmental degradation; the climate crisis…. COVID-19 has been likened to an x-ray, revealing fractures in the fragile skeleton of the societies we have built. It is exposing fallacies and falsehoods everywhere: The lie that free markets can deliver healthcare for all; The fiction that unpaid care work is not work; The delusion that we live in a post-racist world; The myth that we are all in the same boat. Because while we are all floating on the same sea, it's clear that some are in super-yachts while others are clinging to drifting debris.

- SECRETARY GENERAL OF UNITED NATIONS

What does this mean for Metro Edmonton's non-profit community?

As members of the voluntary sector, we have an important role to play in strengthening and democratizing both our state and non-state structures. More specifically, given the nature of our work, we have a responsibility to mobilize around shared imaginations of transformation, so that we might improve the lives of the human and non-human beings our organizations aim to serve.

Our ability to engage with these shared imaginations of transformation not only lies in our willingness to embrace the principles of collective resilience, collective resistance, and collective action, it also requires that we acknowledge the historical conditions that have created the institutions and organizations that continue to stabilize and legitimize the maldistribution of life chances.

As Paul Batalden has famously said, "*every system is perfectly designed to get the results it gets*."[5]

Alberta's non-profit sector is no different. Over the past 150 years, the sector has seen a number of ideological shifts, financial restraints, and operational changes – each of which has contributed to the many challenges non-profit organizations are currently experiencing. Due to the instability created by the pandemic (e.g., reductions in funding, online delivery methods, staff burnout), many organizations are increasingly concerned about their ability to support core organizational functions and operate programs and services (whether they are focused on poverty relief, animal rescue, conservation efforts, recreation programming, or the maintenance of historical sites), which is further reducing the supports and services available to those most disserved by society's ever-growing wealth divide.

In this present moment of instability, we must therefore ask ourselves the following questions:

- How can the non-profit community begin to address the historical injustices that have been magnified by COVID-19?
- How can we use the knowledge of these historical injustices to imagine and develop new non-profit structures and practices: ones that transcend our status quo and bring us closer to our desired future?

The Non-Profit Sector: A Brief Timeline

While transformation requires focusing on a desired future, it is first important that we understand some of the historical conditions that have shaped our present-day reality. An examination of history is therefore the necessary starting point in preparing for transformational work. What follows is a brief timeline – between the late nineteenth century to present day – to provide important context and help guide future conversations. The events listed in the timeline do not offer a complete history of Canada's non-profit sector. Instead, the particular pieces that have been included demonstrate how seemingly unrelated elements of our past have shaped our present.

1880s – early 1940s

- **Population management** became a concern/activity of the political and social elite.[13, 29]
- A network of charitable organizations emerged to increase **the health and fitness** of the Western European population, while the Canadian State simultaneously **dispossessed and eliminated** (physically, culturally, and administratively) Indigenous people and non-European immigrants.[29]
- Through this combination of racist Indigenous legislation and immigration policy, the Canadian government developed a **comprehensive legal framework intended to ensure the population remained almost exclusively white**.[29] The success of this framework, as noted by Danielle Peers is "evidenced by population percentages of European descent increasing from 97%, to 97.5%, and 97.7% in the 1911, 1921, and 1931 censuses respectively."[22]
- Members of a 'philanthropic elite' developed and ran social reform efforts primarily for the children, widows, and those considered the 'deserving' poor. There was **minimal state involvement**.[31]
- It could be argued that these social reform efforts (what we would now call social services) were less segmented and therefore more varied than they are today. For example, the National Council of Women of Canada (one of Canada's first charitable associations) was heavily involved in the development of supervised parks and playgrounds, a variety of public health campaigns, early community-based research efforts, and women's suffrage.[29, 31]

Mid 1940s – 1970s

- Canada's first **Citizenship Act is introduced in 1947**. The act sought to bridge the differences between European ethnicities by creating a new category for Canadian citizens. This objective was noted by Paul Martin Sr. when he introduced the Act: "*no matter where we come from or what our origins, French, English, Scandinavian, Scottish, Ukrainian, Irish, or whatever else, one thing at least we can all be, and that is Canadians*."[29]
- The year the Citizenship Act was introduced, **80% of Canada's population was of British or French ancestry**.[29]
- Post WWII resulted in an **increase in state-supported safety nets** like welfare and public housing.[1, 20]
- Rather than primarily focusing on the implementation of survival services (because the government was also doing this) **the non-profit sector became a critical vehicle for the acquisition and expression of rights**. [1, 20]
- Non-profit organizations became more segmented. Instead of being considered part of the broader social reform movement, non-profit organizations were beginning to align themselves with scientific disciplines (e.g., recreation and sport, arts and culture, social work, educational services).[1, 20]
- Some non-profit organizations began advocating on behalf of citizens and making **political demands based on shared experiences of injustice** (e.g., women's rights, Indigenous rights, civil rights).[1, 20]
- Values such as inclusion, participation, and social justice drove the interests of many community organizations.[1, 20]
- The welfare state supported, through core funding, non-profit organizations **representing particular segments of society**.[1, 20]
- Key policy changes during this welfare state era included the **elimination of overtly racial classifications** in immigration policies and increased **enfranchisement for previously excluded groups** (e.g., women gained the provincial vote in Quebec in 1940, Asians were granted the federal vote in 1948, and Indigenous people were granted the vote in 1960).[29]
- In the 1960s, immigration legislation was no longer intended to "keep Canada White." Instead, they began to emphasize the labour market needs of the country. Preferential treatment for British subjects was removed and **a point system was introduced that weighted the education, occupation, language, and skill levels of all prospective immigrants**.[29]

Mid 1940s – 1970s continued...

- 1971 Trudeau **announced multiculturalism as an official government policy**. The announcement was a response to the fear that, in seeking to sustain their culture and continuing to fight for sovereignty, particular groups (primarily French and Indigenous people) would undermine national unity. The policy was, therefore, introduced to neutralize these claims to sovereignty by focusing only on interpersonal tolerance (e.g., accept your neighbour discourses) and ignoring institutional power and racism.[21,29]

1980s – 1990s

- In response to **economic decline**, governments adopt **a number of neoliberal policies** in an effort to reduce costs (see Appendix A for an overview of neoliberalism).[1, 17, 20, 25]
- Neoliberalism provides the ideological opposition required to undermine the voluntary sector, which was increasingly positioned as disproportionally engaging in **identity politics** (e.g., working towards a more just society).[1, 17, 20, 25]
- Within this now dominant ideology, all of our life circumstances (e.g., health, employment) and the costs associated with them are positioned as the **responsibility of individual citizens rather than the responsibility of a collective society**. Poverty, addiction, etc. are viewed as moral failures rather than structural or institutional failures.[17, 25]
- Through a combination of fiscal restraint and the introduction of New Public Management, the not-for profit **governance system shifted to a contract-based funding regime**.[1, 17, 20, 25]
- Governments moved away from long-term, core-funding to **short-term, project-based funding**, outsourcing public service delivery to community organizations.[1, 17, 20, 25]
- A new relationship between the government and community organizations was created – one that was built solely around **organizational capacity to deliver public services**.[1, 17, 20, 25]

1980s – 1990s continued...

- The ability to advocate on behalf of citizens and achieve transformative demands eroded, creating what has been called the **non-profit 'advocacy chill'**.[1, 17, 20, 25]
- The overall result was not only an **underfunded non-profit community**, but also a substantial increase in the number of people **left without the basic safety nets required to ensure a (quality) life**.[17, 25]

2000s – 2010s

- The growing need for services designed to assist society's most vulnerable created a **new elite group of non-profit professionals**. Unlike many of the grassroots non-profits of the 60s and 70s – which were often run by community members and focused on the redistribution of wealth and power – this new group of university-trained professionals, influenced by neoliberal ideals, became focused on **individualized services and running their organizations 'efficiently'**.[1, 17, 20, 25]
- The sector saw a continuing shift away from advocacy to **professionalism and corporatization**.[1, 17, 20, 25]
- Many organizations grew to value **capitalist business values**, which in some cases jeopardized their **social justice values**.[1, 17, 20, 25]
- Decreased public resources resulted in increased **competition between groups for scarce resources**. It has also made the non-profit sector increasingly dependent on corporate funders and foundations.[1, 17, 20, 25]
- Organizations became even more **segmented in narrow areas** (e.g., seniors, Indigenous peoples, arts and heritage, active living, community sport) and their activities have tended to be limited to one strategy area (e.g., programs and services, education, policy reform). This has **undermined collective change efforts** and the ability to target intersecting harms (e.g., racism, sexism, xenophobia, transphobia, homophobia, ableism, ageism; see Appendix B for an overview of how these harms intersect in varying ways).[1, 17, 20, 25]

2020

- Canada is the **most diverse** it has ever been.[29]
- Alberta ranks the highest for **income inequality** among all Canadian provinces.[26]
- The **first Canadian case of the novel coronavirus** was reported by Health Canada on January 25, 2020.
- A number of **cracks in our social, political, and economic systems** are revealed by the pandemic.[4]
- The racialized and gendered nature of underpaid care-work is highlighted by the pandemic.
- **Systemic inequity increases the risk of COVID-19** for marginalized populations.[4]
- The majority of Alberta's non-profit organizations are expecting at least some decrease, and in many cases, a significant **decrease in overall revenues**. This includes revenues from private individuals and corporations, various levels of government, foundations, and sales and fees.[2]
- Due to this decrease in overall revenues, the majority of Alberta's non-profit organizations are concerned about their ability to support core organizational functions and operate programs and services, **further reducing the essential supports available to those most displaced by the ever-growing wealth divide**.[2]
- Members of Edmonton's non-profit community increasingly call for mechanisms to **address growing inequality**.

2020s – 2030s

- This piece of history is yet to be written. As such, we can determine what these bullets points will say.

Thinking and Acting Differently

Recognizing that the systemic injustices made visible by COVID-19 existed long before the pandemic began, the uncertainty that we have experienced over the past months have made authentic change – that is, change that aims to fundamentally alter our social, political and economic systems – seem both possible and urgent. It is for this reason, that the Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations (with the support of other stakeholders) has started a multi-phase process intended to mobilize people around shared imaginations of transformation. Built around the notion that innovation, cooperation, and collaboration are more important than ever, this process aims to increase critical reflection, system-wide connectivity, and community accountability in the hopes that we might identify new ways of distributing our collective wealth, protecting our environment, providing social programs and services, and preparing for and responding to future challenges.

Guided by the principles outlined in ECVO's *Strategic Framework 2020-2022*, we developed a strategic engagement process that was meant to create opportunities for purposeful dialogue about the non-profit sector's past, present and future. As part of this process, we engaged in a series of exploratory conversations to determine how to best facilitate a 're-imagining' of the non-profit community. The purpose of these conversations was threefold:

1. We wanted to begin the process of critical reflection by discussing the ideological shifts and operational changes outlined in the aforementioned historical timeline (individuals were sent an earlier version of the timeline, along with six questions, prior to the conversation).

2. We wanted to gather information about how our current ways of thinking (and, therefore, doing) could be transformed so that we might improve both individual and organizational circumstances.

3. We wanted to ensure that individuals working in the sector were not only supportive of this work, but also ready and willing to collectively engage in an ongoing process of generous critique.

A total of 24 individual conversations were held with Edmonton-based knowledge holders (i.e., Executive Directors, Board Members, Funders, Academics, and Community Members). Each conversation lasted approximately one hour. Information was also gathered through five separate group conversations at ECVO's annual general meeting. A total of 58 people participated in these group conversations. Both the individual and the group conversations were audio recorded and transcribed. Using thematic content analysis, data from the transcripts were coded, categorized, and synthesized into themes. These themes provided the foundation for the three sections of the report:

- Section One: Myths about the Non-Profit Sector
- Section Two: Trends within the Non-Profit Sector
- Section Three: A Model for Change

These three themes compromise the main body of the document, and collectively address the previously identified questions at the heart of this work:

- How can the non-profit community begin to address the historical injustices that have been magnified by COVID-19?
- How can we use the knowledge of these historical injustices to imagine and develop new non-profit structures and practices: ones that transcend our status quo and bring us closer to our desired future?

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SECTION ONE

Myths about the non-profit sector

For the purposes of this document, myths can be understood as widely held, yet largely inaccurate, beliefs and ideas. There were six myths that were revealed during our strategic engagement conversations.

1. The myth that the non-profit sector is truly voluntary.
2. The myth that non-profit organizations are flexible and responsive.
3. The myth that non-profit organizations operate as representatives of the community.
4. The myth that the non-profit sector is apolitical.
5. The myth that non-profit programs are fully data-driven and evidence-based.
6. The myth that the non-profit sector is truly altruistic.

Each myth, although specific to Edmonton, has been framed using the work of academics analyzing the non-profit sector.[1, 3, 17, 19, 20, 23, 25, 27, 33, 34, 35] An overview of each myth, along with some supporting quotes, are provided in the following pages.

Non-profit organizations have not only become vulnerable to many of the bureaucratic limitations that plague all levels of government, many have adopted a 'corporate' mindset focused on programmatic accountability and efficiency at the expense of responding to ever growing calls for systemic change.

Most non-profit organizations tend to rely on quantitative research and evaluative data to measure and justify their programs and services within a neoliberal context that demands 'accountability'.

While we cannot deny that the individuals who develop and run charitable foundations are well-intentioned, it might be time to ask if the legislative structures surrounding charitable foundations provide one more way for wealthy people to not only avoid paying taxes, but also advance their personal and ideological agendas.

THE MYTH **that we are truly voluntary**

Recognizing that we do indeed rely on voluntary action and philanthropic support, it is important to emphasize that many non-profit organizations (primarily due to the nature of their funding) could be characterized as semi-public entities. In many respects, governments have turned to the non-profit sector to pursue much of its social, health and educational policy. Therefore, while volunteerism (whether that comes from voluntary labour or voluntary donations) is a vital part of the sector, it is important to recognize how government funding, and the accountabilities that come with it, largely determine what work is to be done and in what ways.

Quotes supporting the notion that we are semi-public entities

"I think there's two different strains: there are non-profits that deliver services on behalf of government and then there are non-profits that receive no government funding that are actually filling a community-identified gap."

"Most governments don't even consider themselves funders…They're outsourcing to the non-profit sector."

"Government has downloaded to the not-for-profit sector. The social services and other activities that you would think should be done by the government."

THE MYTH **that we are flexible and responsive**

Without denying that the non-profit sector has the ability to adapt and respond to community needs, it is important to recognize that as our non-profit organizations have grown—in both scale and complexity—they have been forced to find ways to strengthen their institutional capacities in order to respond more effectively to the needs of governments. In doing so, non-profit organizations have not only become vulnerable to many of the bureaucratic limitations that plague all levels of government, many have adopted a 'corporate' mindset focused on programmatic accountability and efficiency at the expense of responding to ever growing calls for systemic change.

Quotes supporting the notion that being responsive is difficult

"I think we're accountable to a lot of different people. It is exhausting being accountable to that many people. We're accountable to our clients. We're accountable to our accreditation standards, whatever they may be. We're accountable to our funder, which in most cases will be the government. We're accountable to our board of directors. We're accountable to our auditor. There's so much oversight that it makes our work stifling and very difficult to be responsive."

"We have a way of being, we have a way of working. We have a system, we have protocols and procedures, and even right now, while we're having conversations about transformational change, we're still doing it the old way."

THE MYTH **that we operate as representatives of the community**

Although the non-profit sector can play a vital role in advocating for the social and economic needs of the community, it would be inaccurate to describe all organizations as community-led entities. A large number of non-profit organizations, due to the current nature of their funding, are primarily accountable to pressures from above (i.e., government policies and funding), and outside (i.e., private sector motivations and donations). Furthermore, because most boards—the one mechanism that is intended to provide community accountability—are largely made up of members of the professional class, they tend to support a paternalistic decision-making process that enables community outsiders to make decisions on behalf of the communities they intend to serve. Therefore, despite having an undeniable relationship with community members, most non-profits have very few mechanisms to ensure there is direct community accountability, which brings into question the commonly held belief that non-profits are direct representatives of the community.

Quotes supporting the notion that there is a disconnect between organizations and the communities they serve

"I would say the non-profit structure isn't necessarily accountable to the community. I mean, the argument would be that the board, as a representative of the community should reflect the diversity of the community…but obviously you and I both know that, especially when you come into a poverty context, it's not like you have people on boards who understand poverty."

"It's ridiculous, the whole notion of a board being able to understand the context of a community that they're not part of… on top of that a board is supposed to have skills in law and communications. The skills required for a board are not the same skills that would give you insight into a community."

"I guess more sort of profoundly, what function does the board play? …the issues that we're dealing with are complex, can a volunteer who kind of swoops in for two hours a month actually govern an organization that's dealing with these kinds of issues?"

THE MYTH **that we are apolitical**

Despite the desire of many non-profits to remain outside the realm of politics, all non-profit programming—whether through action or inaction, intentionally or not—either challenges the dominant political ideology or reinforces it. For example, even if an organization chooses to avoid advocacy (in the traditional sense) there is no such thing as an apolitical non-profit organization. If an organization provides temporary housing and does not fight for permanent housing, or institutionalizes emergency food and does not advocate for living wages, it reinforces the notion that it is normal for a society to (re)distribute its resources in such a way that some people

will inevitably be homeless or not have enough to eat. And while this form of service provision is technically outside the political sphere, it does not mean the work is apolitical. Choosing to focus on the provision of services while avoiding strategic discussions about distributive justice is a political statement of its own.

Quotes highlighting the political nature of non-profit work

"I think it is problematic that…we don't put a lot of energy into eliminating poverty and getting to the root causes. So many not-for-profits don't stop to think about the reasons they are in business and how they might be contributing to the problem."

"At the end of the day, all we really offer are band-aids … if we just increased financial benefits, our programs probably wouldn't be needed as much…but because we refuse to give people a basic income – one that's actually livable – we have to create the services to support them to live in poverty. Yet we choose not to put that in our grant applications. We don't say, "yes, we can deliver the service for you, but there is a better way to fund this issue, one that eliminates the need for the service."

"You have to acknowledge the power and the politics involved in the sector. We tell ourselves a story that we're this "do good" sector and that we don't contribute to oppression because we're not a corporation and we're not government, and that's simply not true."

THE MYTH **that we are fully data-driven and evidenced-based**

Despite the ever-growing claim that non-profit programming is data-driven and evidence-based, the majority of organizations only engage with a small fraction of the 'evidence' that has been generated. More specifically, most non-profit organizations tend to rely on quantitative research and evaluative data to measure and justify their programs and services within a neoliberal context that demands 'accountability'. The privileging of this type of data – deemed objective and thereby indisputable – is rooted in the history of the post-secondary institution, which has positioned the randomized control trial as the 'gold standard' in scientific research (another myth that is beyond the scope of this document). In doing so, it has marginalized the work of critical, feminist, Indigenous, racialized and other anti-oppressive scholars. Reflecting this pattern, the forms of research and evaluation that are considered valuable in the non-profit sector have tended to focus primarily on individuals (for whom programming is intended) or on the programs themselves (and the extent to which they are worthy of funding). As such, systemic injustices and how these are reproduced in everyday practices and policies generally remain unexamined. Furthermore, this has led to an abundance of data to justify the development, implementation, and maintenance of individualized programming, data that often perpetuates the stigmatization and marginalization of certain individuals and communities.

Quotes that highlight the types of evidence we choose to use and choose to ignore

"So much of our work is based on trying to fix individuals which means we're pathologizing humans all the time. The notion is that there's something wrong with the individual, therefore, we're providing them with an evidence-based service that we claim will fix them. Instead, we should be suggesting that there's something wrong with the system, there's something wrong with capitalism…., but this is not by accident, it's by design. It's the design of the people who have power and can dictate what the Sector actually does."

"Oh, we have enough data. And we still have data consortiums where we're trying to figure out how to collect better data and share better data…people are really busy trying to get more data, but to what end? I was in a meeting around data collection and it was someone around the table, I can't remember what organization she was from, but she said something that just stayed with me. She said, "we're sitting here trying to figure out how to collect better data, how to share data, and people are dying. Like seriously, what the hell are we doing?"

THE MYTH **that we are truly altruistic**

While it is clear that many non-profit organizations contribute positively to the lives of a large number of individuals, unquestionably accepting the altruism of an entire sector masks the real need to examine the ways the non-profit sector has played an active role in Canada's colonizing history and continues to perpetuate these harms in current day. There is subsequently a need to avoid reproducing altruistic narratives (for example, the notion of 'giving back') that serve to draw attention away from the real structures and policies that reinforce systemic injustices. Furthermore, due to the 'tax exempt' status granted to charities, some charitable organizations and foundations are funded with dollars which, if it were not for the charitable deductions allowed by existing tax laws, would become public funds to be allocated by the government in ways that could benefit the public as a whole. Therefore, while we cannot deny that the individuals who develop and run charitable foundations are well-intentioned, it might be time to ask if the legislative structures surrounding charitable foundations provide one more way for wealthy people to not only avoid paying taxes, but also advance their personal and ideological agendas.

Quotes that highlight how the sector perpetuates inequities

"One of the common critiques of the non-profit sector is that we sustain inequality because we're sort of band-aid services, right. So, we address symptoms as "good-hearted" people instead of addressing the root problems…There's always going to be a need for some immediate supports and solutions, there's no way around that. Some people need food, some need shelter. I think there's always going to be a space and a need for that… I guess my question is, "Is anybody doing more than band aid solutions right now?"

"The way the non-profit sector is organized really highlights the colonial nature of our communities and of the sector. The goal of the sector, even when achieving other things, is to keep those currently in power in power. You know, keeping white European folks in the positions that they're in."

SECTION TWO

Trends within the non-profit sector

For the purposes of this document, trends have been defined as general patterns or themes that have emerged since the introduction of neoliberalism (circa the 1980s; see Appendix A for a complete overview of neoliberalism). A total of six trends were discussed during our strategic engagement conversations.

1. Short-term, contract-based funding
2. Venture philanthropy
3. 'Business-like' practices
4. The organization as the primary unit of analysis
5. Outdated board structures
6. Individualized programming of subsectors

All six trends, although specific to Edmonton, have been explained by drawing on broader trends discussed in the academic literature.[1, 3, 17, 19, 20, 33, 34, 35] An overview of each trend, along with some supporting quotes, are provided in the following pages.

Short-term, contract-based funding

The heightened emphasis on the market that occurred in the early 1980s has forced non-profit organizations to reconfigure their operations to meet competitive, performance-based contract requirements. This emphasis on competition means that many non-profits have not only seen compromises in their missions due to a need to secure particular contracts, it has also created an environment where, rather than building cooperative networks and working toward social justice, organizations are increasingly forced to compete with one another other for short-term contracts that can be measured and documented, but that do little to address structural inequities.

Quotes outlining the nature of contract-based funding

"It is completely program funding…We don't fund organizations, we fund programs."

I think we've seen many organizations engage in mission creep. We've started chasing money, taking us away from our actual missions. I also think we see… less collaboration when money gets tight and the government downloads onto the sector."

Venture philanthropy

Reductions in operational funding has resulted in a number of new partnerships between non-profit organizations and corporate entities. Increasingly, however, the corporate sector desires a way of giving that is consistent with their own values and outcomes. This new form of philanthropy attempts to contribute to social change by applying the principles of venture capital to the practices of charitable giving. Specifically, for every dollar spent on social or community programs corporations want to see a return on investment, whether that is a financial return (FROI) or a social return (SROI). This not only forces non-profit organizations to adjust their programming so that it aligns with the goals of the corporate elite, it also positions the owners of these large corporations as socially conscious philanthropists while simultaneously ignoring many of the exploitative labour practices they reinforce.

‘Business-like’ Practices

In conjunction with the rise of venture philanthropy – and shaped again by decades of neoliberal politics – the non-profit sector has evolved into a professionalized, career-based system that models itself on corporate structures. Expected to prove their worth with increasingly fewer resources, non-profit organizations have increasingly embraced market values and methods that were previously associated with the business sector. Using the language and skills of corporations, organizations attempt to advance the material wellbeing of their members or clients by becoming more ‘competitive’ members of the market place. Such practices have included marketing and branding, fee-for-service models, and the move towards social enterprises (among others). The sector also has an increasing number of CEOs running non-profit organizations, which further increases the wage gap between those at the top of the organizational hierarchy and those at the bottom. Although not inherently harmful, there is a need to weigh up the overall effects of these ‘business-like’ practices, and try to make the best decisions for the communities in which we serve.

Quotes outlining the role of social entreprenurship in the non-profit sector

“That competitive [entrepreneurial] spirit has been driven deep down into the not for profit sector…We almost don’t have a choice if we want to continue to exist.”

“We came into the sector really conscious that we did not want our funding to define us. We didn’t want to be dependent only on governments...[our diversified funding approach is] deliberate.”

The organization is the primary unit of analysis

As individual entities, non-profit organizations tend to be evaluated by two primary criteria: programmatic outcomes and fiscal responsibility. As a result, success tends to be measured only at the organizational level. This not only increases the competition between individual organizations, reducing the likelihood of groups coming together to make strategic decisions related to the sector as a whole; it also creates an environment where mission drift becomes a normalized part of organizational survival. Additionally, because the organization remains the primary unit of analysis, the non-profit sector is often understood to be a piecemeal network of diverse organizations rather than a coordinated system that touches all aspects of society.

Quotes outlining how success is measured at an organizational not a societial level

“I think our lack of collective action is because we confused vision and mission with organizational viability.”

“Organizational survival should not be our objective. Our objective should be to execute our mission and vision. But for too long it has just been about our organization’s survival. It is about getting the next grant. It’s about writing a better grant than your competitor.”

“I think since 2005 to now, it’s been a lot more about how do organizations set up, how do organizations get structured, put their processes and systems into place…As a result, we have ended up looking a lot like business structures and government structures…I’m not suggesting that these things are bad. I am suggesting that they have limitations to them.”

Individualized programming of subsectors

A large percentage of non-profit services provide individual health, social, recreational, cultural and/or educational services. The provision of these services is absolutely essential but limiting activity to developing and implementing 'client centred' programs does not leave much room for advocacy or social change efforts. Furthermore, by providing individualized services that target particular categories of people (e.g., LGBTQ2S youth, seniors, people living in poverty, people with disabilities), non-profit organizations tend to ignore the ways systems of oppression (i.e., racism, ableism, heterosexism, exploitative labour practices) operate in relation to each other (see Appendix B for an overview of how oppression intersects in varying ways).

Quotes highlighting the narrow focus of non-profit services

"We also need to look at some of those basic assumptions or basic values that we are imposing on others…maybe they no longer fit. When I think about the outcomes we're trying to achieve, a lot of them are very focused on the individual…it's all very individualistic. But what about the community perspective and our societal goals? How are we supporting groups who are, in fact, achieving those broader goals?"

"Our mandates are often programmatic. Maybe this is because when we are talking to the Minister of Labour, discussing individual programs and services is a lot easier than discussing the need and value of a living income…"

Out-dated board structures

Given the various layers of accountability that exist for non-profit organizations (i.e., funders, boards, community), it is no surprise that questions related to the purpose, benefit and diversity of boards are increasingly being asked by individuals working in the non-profit sector. The current models are increasingly being criticized for being predominantly white, paternalistic structures that tend to prioritize organizational needs over community outcomes. Additionally, as was highlighted by some Executive Directors, it is common for board members to lack the skills needed to govern organizations effectively. As a result, some Executive Directors find themselves building the capacity of their board, rather than receiving the strategic advice and support they could be receiving from this organizational mechanism.

Quotes highlighting the monolithic nature of boards

"The majority of non-profit organizations have a largely white staff and largely white boards. I mean, that's just the reality. I think there's probably been improvement in many organizations when it comes to discussing diversity and inclusion over the last five years, but the reality is most organizations are still largely white."

"I wonder how effective boards really are. I mean, they are meant to provide oversight and long-term strategy, but sometimes it takes a couple of years for a board member to really get up to speed or really understand the organization, its values and even the types of programs. So, I sometimes question their actual value."

"Sometimes I think that boards are both the strength and the Achilles heel…at a local level they are just too disconnected to be helpful and meaningful in a tangible way."

SECTION THREE:

A model for change

How the sector evolves will depend in large part how the myths are understood, and how the sector responds to trends that have been identified. Because of this, ECVO is introducing a model for change that takes into account each of the aforementioned trends and myths using four pillars of non-profit action.[25]

Developed by the Miami Workers Center, the four pillars model is intended to demonstrate how four seemingly separate areas of work (service provision, consciousness raising, policy advocacy, and distributive justice) are intertwined, complementary and essential parts of the non-profit community.[25] We offer our own version of the model with the hope that it might be used to coordinate and mobilize members of the non-profit community in ways that will ultimately increase the quality of life of everyone living in Edmonton. The information presented is not meant to be prescriptive, nor is it considered to be a full account of the work that needs to be done. Instead, we offer some thoughts in each of the four pillars in an attempt to move towards some collaborative actions.

If we are ever going to address the pervasive and intersecting structural barriers that negatively affect us all, we must discover new ways for organizing our resources, our services and ourselves.

If our goal is to contribute to a more just community, it only makes sense that our practices and processes are centred on shared community values rather than institutional rules or protocols.

If we are truly committed to transformative social change, we need to stop discussing how our non-profit organizations centre whiteness and do something to change it. This will require giving racialized people more than just a seat at the table.

The pillar of service

There is no denying that non-profit services are an essential part of our social, political and economic fabric. As the economist Armine Yalnizyan has argued, our economy can only thrive when our planet is healthy and we are taking care of human security and development – both key functions of non-profit organizations.[30] It is for this reason that all non-profit services – regardless of whether they are focused on poverty relief, conservation efforts, recreation programming, or the maintenance of art and historical sites – should not only be recognized as being a fundamental part of our social, political and economic fabric, but these essential services should also be funded as such.

The goal within the pillar of service is, therefore, to ensure that programs and activities are not only well funded, but that this funding is used in the best interests of our society and the environment. Recognizing that there are inadequacies in how our non-profit organizations are currently funded, as well as questions to be asked about the adequacy of some of services, we believe we could strengthen the work in this pillar if we collectively engaged in the following activities:

1. Shift our focus from organizational relief to structural transformation by articulating a 50-to-100-year vision for Edmonton's non-profit community.

We cannot iterate our way out of this crisis. The inequalities exposed by COVID-19 are historically embedded in both our institutions and ourselves. We therefore need to think beyond the traditional 3-5 year planning cycles and collectively imagine the future in which we aspire to live. It is only after we have collectively determined what it is we – as a holistic non-profit community – want (and what it is we don't want) that we can begin to make transformational decisions about the services we offer, how we structure our organizations, how funding is distributed, how we engage with governments and businesses, and most importantly how we remain accountable to the community.

As Robin Kelley has stated, in order for social change to be effective it must "*do what great poetry does: transport us to another place, compel us to re-live horrors and, more importantly, enable us to imagine a new society.*"[18] Thus, if we are truly committed to transformational change we will commit to a process that allows us to collectively imagine a new, and more just, future to which we can all aspire.

"We as a community don't have any sort of a long-term strategy. So trying to make it through today while talking about tomorrow can be really difficult for a lot of people. Those conversations – [about a community vision] – are long overdue."

"I think sometimes we get really pulled into the weeds and [we] need to step back. Yeah. I'm just basically like, why do we do this? You know, why is it important and what do the people want? What's going to help them?"

"I really do believe the last 20 years has been building structures. And now I think we're in a place where we're saying, how will that get us where we're hoping to get to?"

"We need to really spend some time thinking about the end game here, and… the things that we need to get to that end game?"

2. Reframe how we organize and deliver services, while de-centring the organization.

The challenges and injustices we face in current day society are vast and interconnected, without any clear or straightforward solutions. This complexity makes a collective approach to addressing structural challenges – through which the organization is no longer the primary unit of analysis – absolutely essential. If we are ever going to address the pervasive and intersecting structural barriers that negatively affect us all, we must discover new ways for organizing our resources, our services and ourselves. To do so, we might look to frameworks such as the social and physical determinants of health (see pages 36-38 for an overview of these determinants of health) and organize our resources, our services and ourselves according to the work that needs to be accomplished in each area (e.g., food security, housing, climate change, leisure opportunities). We might also look to emerging governance models for examples of how to mobilize our collective efforts through shared leadership and decision-making models that stretch across organizations and institutions. Whatever structure is decided upon, it is the hope that we can put our individual egos and agendas aside to move beyond our organizational limits and begin to collectively act in ways that purposefully reflect the transformational change we are seeking.

"I do ask myself the question often, if we were starting today what would the sector look like? And I don't think it would look like it does."

"There is some lack of logic to every organization having a board, having an accountant, and so on."

"There could be something like a super board, where you've got some people that really can think of the systems level and are really skilled."

"I mean part of it is actually exploring what an ED does. This position is ridiculous. Who would want to be the ED of a not-for-profit the way it exists right now? Nobody would put all those functions in one position outside of the not-for-profit sector and expect somebody to do it and do it all well. And with minimal support… So, I mean it's thinking differently about what that organizational leadership looks like…. What do we even mean by the leadership of an organization?... Is it an executive director? Is it different kinds of executive directors?"

"What would really excite me is if we actually start to think about the not-for-profit sector as a system and not as 27,000 non-profit organizations…I absolutely believe that if we are going to ensure that citizens have access to what they need in the way that they need it, it's not just about programming."

3. Stand behind the value of the work, while seeking new funding arrangements.

For far too long, we have been thought about as the third sector (as in the last sector). Considered by many to be less important than the private sector and thought of as a cost-effective arm of the government, non-profit organizations have become increasingly undervalued and, subsequently, chronically underfunded. A large part of this can be attributed to the neoliberal policies that were introduced in the 1980s (see Appendix A for an overview of neoliberalism). Focused on reducing public expenditures by trimming the 'unproductive' costs associated with health, education, and other welfare programs, these neoliberal policies not only diminished the ability of non-profit organizations to provide services, they stripped away basic securities for the general population to such an extent that non-profit services are now more vital than ever.[17, 25] It is therefore essential that we begin to collectively advocate for the essential services that can only be provided by a strong non-profit sector. This will require that we simultaneously challenge the ways funding

has been allocated in past decades by demonstrating how these project-based, short-term contracts have undermined the vitality of the sector; and explore the possibly of new funding options through strategic conversations with governments, foundations, corporations, and community members (e.g., creating a localized and circular movement of money that serves the Edmonton community, or developing new accountability measures).

"I think we, as funders, need to be able to provide core funding, step back, and give organizations the flexibility they need to serve peoples' needs."

"Within the not-for-profit sector, you could be offering no service or really crappy service, but write a really great proposal and get some funding. We need to have those hard discussions about funding."

"I would try to change the entire discussion around administrative costs…putting an artificial limit on admin costs is very counterproductive. Good administration still costs what it costs, and…an artificial limit will just force you to either pay staff less or pull money away from actual programs and services."

"I would argue that diversity is really important in funding structures for an agency like ours. If you are only fundraising or you are only earning revenue, or you are only getting government contracts, you are more vulnerable."

The pillar of power

In an essay titled Social Service or Social Change? Paul Kievl wrote, "*we need to engage in battles against specific kinds of exploitation, exclusion, marginalization, discrimination and violence while simultaneously engaging in a longer-term redistribution of wealth and power.*"[19] While this statement serves as a significant reminder of the magnitude of the work ahead, it is important that those working towards transformational social change do not conflate the terms wealth and power. Unlike wealth, power is something that is exercised between individuals rather than materially possessed.[10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15] Thus, dominant individuals, organizations, or institutions may exercise dangerous forms of power through various laws, policies, and practices, but they do not own power. As such, anywhere power is exercised, counter-power (in the form of opposition) is always possible.[10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15]

The goal in the pillar of power is, therefore, to exercise a counter-power by de-stabilizing Eurocentric paradigms and (re)distributing the wealth within the sector. The work within this pillar aims to fundamentally change our non-profit organizations in ways that increase community engagement and autonomy, ensure community accountability, and actively invest in those most directly impacted by interpersonal, institutional, and systemic harms. We have outlined four possible strategies that might contribute to a (re)distribution of wealth in the non-profit community.

1. Authentically engage with and remain accountable to the community.

Authentic engagement requires us to ask, *how do we relate to one another?* If our goal is to contribute to a more just community, it only makes sense that our practices and processes are centred on shared community values rather than institutional rules or protocols. This process of de-centring our organizational protocols will not only require that we abandon our traditional notions of who is invited to participate and speak (e.g., professionals, experts), it will also require

us to reconsider how we connect with community members. One way we might begin to reimagine how we are in relation to each other could be to adopt new knowledge systems (e.g., Indigenous clan system teachings, seventh generation principle) and hire those who are familiar with these knowledge systems to create new forms of place-based infrastructure; forms that support authentic participation, value relationships over efficiency, profitability, and other quantitative metrics, and recognize that different communities will require different forms of action.

"How do we make sure the voice of community is represented in a way where they can take action and become partners in the whole process and benefit from the outcomes? Rather, than just extracting knowledge from community, which is the traditional approach."

"It doesn't matter if our streets and sidewalks are great. It doesn't matter about our physical infrastructure. If we don't have a strong social infrastructure base, then we are screwed. And in order to get to that place of strong social infrastructure, strong community, we need to have strong relationships. And I see the role of the not-for-profit sector as being really strong in forming those relationships."

"I think that you should have people who are representing Indigenous and newcomer groups participating in a meaningful way…we need diversity as part of the conversation, that's age diversity and cultural diversity."

"You cannot deny the fact that there are differences within the populations and groups that we serve. For example, you talk about racism. But can you lump together all the experiences of racism and discrimination and neatly explain it? No. So when we talk about communities that we serve, we need to be mindful of the diversity of experiences and needs of certain populations that we serve."

"Organizations have to be really honest with themselves and do an exercise of looking inward. Who do we serve? How might we be oppressing the people that we serve?"

2. Stop discussing the lack of diversity of our leadership positions and do something about it.

Most people working in Edmonton's non-profit community would likely say they value diversity. But when you examine the make-up of our boards and senior leadership it becomes clear that valuing diversity has not resulted in much diversification. As a result, we have numerous decision-making bodies that do not adequately reflect the communities they are intended to serve. The reason for this, as described by Tene Taylor, a fund advisor at the Kendeda Fund, is that "*we still trust white folks to tackle black folks' problems*."[28] Thus, if we are truly committed to transformative social change, we need to stop discussing how our non-profit organizations centre whiteness and do something to change it. This will require giving racialized people more than just a seat at the table. It will require that the non-profit community invest in the solutions that racialized folks are proposing, and trust them to lead the work being proposed.

"If you look at organizations that serve, let's say immigrants, and look at their front-line staff many of them are newcomers or immigrants. But the people in positions of power, CEOs and executive directors, the norm is white middle-class folks…The diversity of the population they serve is not reflected in their leadership."

"The non-profit sector is largely white. The philanthropy sector is hugely white. The government sector is largely white. So, it is a challenge to respond to the needs of racialized communities when almost all the institutions in society from top to bottom are still largely white."

"We keep talking about having diverse boards, but we don't pay them…[So] you need to be in a place of privilege to afford sitting on two, three different boards. And then people are like, "why don't racialized folks want to be on these boards?" Well, because they are running around and trying to make ends meet. But we want their voices, we want their perspectives, but we want them for free… it's fundamentally problematic."

3. Train and hire those impacted by interpersonal, institutional, and systemic harms.

Systems that aim to meaningfully effect social change require careful and reflective strategizing about to how to build the leadership and governance capacity of community members directly impacted by interpersonal, institutional, and systemic harms. One way non-profit organizations can do this is to offer financial bursaries for community members to enable them to participate in learning opportunities of their choice. Another way is to provide tiered programming to allow for low-commitment entry points to encourage community members to become more committed to learning opportunities as their knowledge and confidence grows. A third approach might be to eliminate higher education requirements from particular job postings and provide professional development for employees rather than requiring them to already have a particular skill set to be considered for the position.

"Invest in leaders of colour… and try to build their skills and contribute to a social change agenda in some kind of way."

"Invest in progressive leadership in some kind of way. And maybe it's specifically racialized leaders or [people with] other social identity factors."

"I look across the not-for-profit sector at the leadership structure, both at the governance and senior management level, and neither of them are populated by that same kind of diversity as we see in our communities. And that's one of the things that needs to be attended to in the shorter term, rather than the longer term. We need to make our organizations look like the communities that we support and we're not great in that regard yet. That's work that we need to do."

"I think there's a real opportunity, both for philanthropy and for government to invest more in black led organizations, for example, indigenous led organizations, organizations led by other people of colour. There could be quite deliberate and even programmatic schemes to invest more in those communities to allow them to develop their own leadership in their own organizations."

4. Address the inequities in workforce practices.

It would be a mistake if, in pushing for increases in diversity and community accountability, we did not also consider workforce policies and practices in the non-profit sector. The non-profit sector in Alberta hires approximately 176,000 people and is one of the biggest employers in Canada.[32] Despite this, many non-profit employees are paid significantly less than their government counterparts, and tend to lack the same level of health and pension benefits. Furthermore, given the growing corporatization of the sector, those on the lower end of the organizational hierarchy make significantly less than those in positions of senior leadership. As such, the non-profit sector serves to perpetuate some of the harms it acts to work against. Moving away from this trend will require a level of intentionality and resistance to many of the structures identified in previous sections (e.g., inadequate funding). It may also require us to examine minimum wage, explore the possibility of flattening pay scales, and discussing the feasibility of a non-profit benefits package that is available to all employees.

"I should have a position and get paid with benefits, a whole package to do the work that I do"

"When people leave organizations, we close down our relationship with them, and then they go to a new job and they have to begin a brand-new 'relationship'. And when I say relationship, I'm talking about things like pension, I'm talking about things like benefits. I'm talking about things like years of service, but if you are inside government and you go from the department of labour to the department of education, your pension goes with you, your years of service go with you….

So we've never created mechanisms for this integration. We keep talking about it, but we have limited ourselves to thinking about organization by organization, as opposed to thinking about the sector as a system."

"We've got to stop under paying staff just because they're good-hearted people (and will do the work for less). We need to pay living wages to people who work in the non-profit sector and we need much better benefits and pension plans, so that for the people working in the sector this can be a proper career."

The pillar of consciouness

Consciousness, as defined within this pillar, means being aware of the social, political and economic forces (both past and present) that have shaped our present-day reality; while simultaneously recognizing that none of these forces are 'naturally' existing, meaning that there are many possibilities for change. Within the non-profit community, work within the pillar of consciousness therefore requires an awareness of our individual, organizational and institutional decisions and the disproportionate impacts these decisions have had on the lives of individuals. It also requires an understanding of the socially constructed systems of knowledge that have supported and justified each of these decisions.

Simply defined, a system of knowledge can be understood as a network of true and false statements that are used to guide our thoughts, decisions, and behaviours.[10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15] In a social context, these truths and fallacies are not just 'out there' waiting to be discovered. Rather, as Karen Potts and Leslie Brown have noted, the truths and the fallacies that make up our social, political and economic realities are socially constructed. That is, they are "*produced through the interactions of people, and as all people are socially and politically located with biases, privileges, and differing entitlements, so too is the knowledge that is produced socially located and political.*"[23]

Take Canada as an example. There is no denying that Western Europeans developed almost all of our Canadian institutions. It is for this reason that the truths and fallacies used by members of these institutions have been (and continue to be) part of a Eurocentric system of knowledge; a system of knowledge that centres the 'objective' truths proposed by white people (predominantly men, and those that think and act like them).[27] However, the prominence of Eurocentricity in Canada's history does not mean we have to continue to centre this dominant way of knowing (and the associated ways of being). By acknowledging that our social, political, and economic realities are socially constructed, we can begin to introduce different knowledge systems into our institutions – systems that reflect, and benefit, the diversity of people that live in our communities.

The goal within the pillar of consciousness is, therefore, to increase the awareness of both dominant and non-dominant knowledge systems and build the social justice muscle needed to transform the non-profit and, in turn, the broader community. This includes increasing awareness of the physical,

cultural, and administrative harms that are the result of over 200 years of Eurocentric policies and practices, and providing opportunities to explore how alternative systems of knowledge (e.g., Indigenous knowledge systems, feminist knowledge systems, anti-oppressive knowledge systems) might be used to challenge Eurocentric ways of structuring our organizations. It also includes activities that communicate the value of the work of the non-profit community, positioning us as an essential element of our social, political, and economic fabric. We have outlined four areas of work that could be useful in this pillar.

1. Build the social justice competencies of the non-profit community.

Canadian histories have tended to suggest that the creation of the state can be attributed to the pioneering adversity of the Europeans who settled a cold and vast territory.[29] What gets lost in this revisionist account is the racialized violence that ensured the settling of these (already occupied) lands. Until this colonizing history is widely and fully understood – including the specific ways it has shaped and continues to shape non-profit legislation, organizations, and everyday practices– it will be difficult for us to dismantle many of the colonizing structures that perpetuate many of the harms the non-profit community seeks to eradicate. However, with an increasing number of resources from which to learn about Canada's colonizing past (and present), the work of developing our political consciousness can begin immediately. It might also be useful to create additional educational opportunities through which professionals in the sector can collectively learn how this knowledge applies to them and the work they do, while collectively working to identify areas for change.

"Why couldn't we give people the language they need to talk about the structural issues that exist to challenge the way that we're organized as a sector, the way that we're funded, the way legislation limits our abilities to create meaningful change? We need to give people the language they need to start normalizing those types of conversations. As you know, language shapes culture more than culture shapes language."

"I don't have the training and expertise around the structural stuff. And until our sector really acknowledges the structural stuff it's just going to be the same old hamster on the wheel."

"I suppose the first one is maybe a series of position papers or a series of get togethers, you know educational opportunities to help the not-for-profit sector. We need to really understand the larger forces that are at play and how we arrived at this place today. If we don't understand root causes of why we've arrived at the place we're at today, it's not very likely we'll ever get to the place of solutions. So that's a really important piece of education that needs to be done and not just with the not-for-profit sector, but with community members and elected representatives. And if we had the right resource materials, I suppose it would be helpful for those kinds of conversations, not just at election time, but ongoing everyday conversations."

2. Value the need for structural change and fund the mechanisms required to generate it.

As noted previously, there has been a tendency for individual non-profit organizations to focus on specific programming for segmented groups of the population, rather than the sector working collectively towards structural change that would benefit multiple groups (and ultimately, entire societies). As such, there is a need for a collective recognition that longer-term structural changes

(changes that are supported and enhanced by knowledge generation that is justice-oriented and draws upon multiple worldviews and ways of knowing) are essential for transformation. It is only after the non-profit community has recognized the need for these structural changes that we will be able to collectively create (and fund) the mechanisms required to coordinate this work.

"I'm not sure, as a sector, we are prepared to pay for the thinking that we need to be doing. And as long as we're not prepared to pay for that it means that the funding that is available is available within the constraints of what's important to that funder."

"Non-profit leaders and board members don't have the space and time to analyze these issues. It's unfunded work, it's probably very purposefully unfunded work…There might be pockets of this analytical work happening, but we don't have a strong advocacy mechanism working on behalf of the non-profit sector to expose the root causes of inequality. I think if we did it would actually shift the dial for everybody across all of these mandates."

"The missing mechanism is people seeing how they're united in the root cause analysis. It's not that we're all the same, but how do we all play a role in a de-colonial mandate? How does that effect homelessness? How does that affect early childhood? How does that affect the immigrant serving sector? There's a lot of potential, but the missing piece is like the systemic analysis."

3. Introduce new knowledge systems into our decision-making processes.

The majority of research and evaluation used by (and therefore shaping) the non-profit sector aligns with, and supports, a Eurocentric worldview in its epistemology, methods, and processes.[17, 27] It also tends to draw on (purportedly) 'objective' methods to describe or explain various phenomena. However, the world we live in is far too complex to be adequately described or explained by these methods. Further, these forms of knowledge tend to reproduce Eurocentric policies and practices at the exclusion of alternative knowledge systems.[7] Among a range of consequences, this has limited the ability of the non-profit community to expand its thinking and begin to strategize in ways that fundamentally contribute to distributive justice.[17] That being said, there are many individuals within the non-profit community that could introduce new approaches to knowledge generation – approaches that look to embrace subjectivity and interconnectedness as a valuable means of learning and working towards social justice. As Susan Strega and Leslie Brown have said, "*…cognitive justice is an essential requirement for social justice. The ability to think against dominant knowledge requires forms of knowledge creation that are grounded in diverse ontological and epistemological theories [meaning a number of different paradigms]*".[27] An expansion in the systems of knowledge available to us – in combination with active attempts to increase our political consciousness – should lead to improved decision making that is more in line with the desires of communities.

"I feel like it's refusing to continue to do damaged-centered work, which means saying no and potentially giving up funding."

"We know we know how to end poverty. I believe we actually do know how to end poverty. We talk about evidence-based action and it's like, actually all the evidence tells us to be doing other things other than what we're doing."

"Oh, we have enough data. And we still have data consortiums where we're trying to figure out how to collect better data and share better data…people are really busy trying to get more data, but to what end? I was in a meeting around the around data collection and it was someone around the table. I can't remember what organization she was from but she said something that just stayed with me. She said, "we're sitting here trying to figure out how to collect better data, how to share data and people are dying. Like seriously, what the hell are we doing?"

4. Collectively position the non-profit community as an essential element of our social, political, and economic fabric.

As previously discussed, for far too long the non-profit sector has been thought about as the third sector (i.e., the last sector). Considered by many to be less important than the private sector and thought of as a cost-effective arm of governments, much of our work has come to be undervalued and underfunded. Therefore, in addition to collectively advocating for the essential services that can only be provided by the non-profit sector, we must begin to shift this dangerous narrative by intentionally positioning the non-profit community as an essential element of our social, political, and economic fabric. This will likely require both coordinated messaging (that is, speaking with one voice instead of multiple organizational voices) and a dedicated group of individuals with and awareness of business, government and non-profit relations, as well as skills in policy analysis and public engagement.

"As a sector, we've got to get better at speaking with one voice and demonstrating to Albertans and governments the value of our work and what we do to address society's problems."

"This is bigger than just not-for-profits and government. This is about people. And as long as companies, the private sector, or just citizens at large are uninformed about the bigger systemic issues, the non-profit sector won't get the support it needs."

"Fundamentally it's about shaping a narrative, being clear about what we are trying to accomplish and then creating more public perception, like more awareness and potentially have a greater influence."

"We're seen as always having our hands out. That has to change. Because we are the sector that ends up working with the most vulnerable people in the community and also providing many of the public services that increase our quality of life…like arts."

The pillar of policy

As the non-profit community has become increasingly dependent on short-term project grants, many organizations have been forced to prioritize direct service delivery at the expense of advocating for the policy changes that would improve how they deliver these same services.[17,25] Furthermore, those organizations that have continued to work in the policy sphere have primarily directed their efforts towards a single vector identity (e.g., Indigenous people, people living in poverty, LGBTQ2S youth) rather than acknowledging the intersecting oppressions people experience and seeking to address system-level issues that work across these identities (see Appendix B for a more in-depth explanation).[17,25] As a result of these piecemeal advocacy efforts, we have seen a proliferation of neoliberal policies that have decreased social and educational spending, limited labour unions (resulting in an increase in temporary employment and a decrease in workers wages and benefits), increased criminalization, and supported an upward distribution of wealth, leaving a great many people without the security nets necessary to ensure a (quality) life. [17,25]

In order to begin to reverse some of the negative impacts of these policies, academics studying the non-profit sector have emphasized the importance of "*giving citizens the knowledge and techniques they need to deal with public policy issues and providing an open and non-threatening forum for deliberation and decision-making*."[6] They go on to suggest that non-profit organizations

are essential to this endeavour because of their ability to act as "laboratories of democratic citizenship."[3] In other words, given their place within civil society non-profit organizations can act as a forum where individuals can discuss the issues that impact them, while simultaneously exploring ways these issues might be addressed by the enactment of new, more just policies. It is, therefore, within the pillar of policy that the non-profit community can begin to increase awareness about the importance of non-profit services, while also developing the strategies needed to challenge (and hopefully change) the legislative and institutional practices that negatively impact their lives. It is also within this pillar that members of the non-profit community can explore the legislated limits that shape their organizations (e.g., Societies Act, Lobbyists Act, Income Tax Act). We have outlined four areas of work that could be useful in this pillar (also see Appendix C for relevant information related to advocacy).

1. Develop a system-level framework for advocacy and awareness.

Just as we should be looking to coordinate our resources and services, we should also be looking to coordinate our advocacy efforts. One way we might go about doing this is by adopting an advocacy framework that presents some of the overarching and prominent issues that could be addressed by a coordinated non-profit community. This framework could allow us to identify new connections between seemingly unrelated areas of the non-profit community (e.g., policies that impact both youth sport programs and disability services) and develop the mechanisms needed to advance shared goals. The social and physical determinants of health provide one example of a framework that could be used. By referring to the societal and environmental factors that contribute to the overall health of Canadians (and the unequal distribution of these factors), it provides some examples of public policy areas around which the non-profit community could coordinate. To date there have been a number of conceptualizations of these determinants (e.g., Ottawa Charter, Health Canada, World Health Organization, Centres for Disease Control). For the purposes of this document, we have adapted Denis Raphael's list of social determinants to highlight how the non-profit community could strategically organize around these particular determinants and work towards more concerted advocacy efforts that affect greater numbers of individuals.[24]

"I think some of the work that we should be doing is actually advancing society, not just the sector. If we fight for a minimum wage or a basic income, that's not about the non-profit sector, that's about a better society."

"We have to look at advocacy as this broader ecosystem. Different groups will play different roles. You need the thorny bush and you need the nice flower…so there are different not-for-profits that will play different roles in the advocacy ecosystem."

"I think it all starts with fighting for economic security for the people we support."

"I think we need to move our advocacy up to the policy level and being able to identify where policy needs to change."

"This goes to the heart of our public engagement program…We have to try and educate the general population about what's going on…We need to try to make sure that the average Albertan understands the impact of the things that are potentially going to happen."

Determinant	Examples of Public Policy Areas We Could Mobilize Around
Early childhood development	• Quality childcare • Early Education • Policies and supports for primary care givers (which tend to be women)
Education	• Literacy initiatives • ESL programs • Public spending on Education • Curriculum development • Tuition policy
Employment and working conditions	• Labour laws/policy • Support for union organizing and collective bargaining • Anti-discrimination laws
Income and its equitable distribution	• Minimum wage • Taxation policy • Social assistance (e.g., basic income/AISH)
Food security	• Poverty reduction policies • Minimum wage • Social assistance (e.g., basic income/AISH)
Public health/social services	• Public health care funding • Sport and recreation grants • Libraries funding • Grants for Arts and Culture
Housing	• Affordable housing / social housing • Rental controls • Minimum wage • Social assistance (e.g., basic income, AISH)
Social Exclusion (Racism, (hetero) sexism, ableism, ageism)	• Anti-discrimination laws • Pay-equity legislation • Indigenous sovereignty
Natural Environment	• Emissions regulations • Lake and River protections • Green space requirements • Public parks protection and maintenance
Built Environment	• Accessibility laws • Building codes • Urban design

2. Collectively invest in a mechanism to do the research required for proper advocacy.

As mentioned previously, knowledge generation plays a prominent role in supporting the work of the non-profit community, and this is particularly true in the area of advocacy. This knowledge can be generated through collective dialogic processes, high quality and relevant research processes, as well as other practices. Existing and new partnerships with academic institutions (i.e., community-university partnerships) can support this work when authentic, mutually beneficial relationships are developed. It might also be necessary to develop new infrastructure to fill existing gaps in community-based knowledge generation and ensure the non-profit community is fully supported in its advocacy and knowledge mobilization efforts. A specific example in this area could be the development of an academic partnership to explore the legislated limits that shape non-profit organizations (e.g., Societies Act, Lobbyists Act, Income Tax Act).

"I just, I think that we need to be more well thought out in how we approach our advocacy. We need to be more strategic and research has to be a big part of that."

"We need to be collecting that information now and developing the ideas so we will be able to pivot to that narrative when it's needed."

"Maybe what we need is a long-term think tank for the not-for-profit sector, which is the policy driver. There are lots of other like policy think tanks, but maybe we need a local one which translates what we can learn from those other places and acts as a bridge."

"It would help if we had an independent, not funded by government, mechanism that solicits feedback from the organizations and the people who are on the ground, not just not-for-profits, but also frontline staff, people who kind of have a really good pulse on what's going on… so an independent group that can then do really good research and has a mandate to be an advocate and to push the needle on some big issues."

"The sector has very little money research and development…. As a result, they continue to deliver yesterday's solutions for tomorrow's problems. And so, we see a massive underinvestment in infrastructure… it's like filling potholes instead of rebuilding roads. The unwillingness to invest in administration, infrastructure, and in research and development, it's all counterproductive."

3. Be brave enough to fund advocacy efforts.

As a result of four decades of neoliberal policies, the ability and willingness of the non-profit community to advocate on behalf of the people they serve and the environments they protect has been eroded. Whether this is a general fear of compromising funding relationships, or a misunderstanding of legislation relating to political activity, there is a cultural resistance and reluctance from non-profit organizations to engage in advocacy efforts. Further, there is little (if any) funding available to organizations for this work, making advocacy an additional activity (once the 'real' work is done), even for those who have the motivation. However, as Roger Gibbons, a senior fellow at Max Bell Foundation, has stressed, policy advocacy is an inherent part of the charitable mission and, therefore, a moral imperative.[16] It is therefore essential that, not only are the needs of communities advocated for (from programs through to policies), but that non-profit organizations also enable communities to advocate for themselves in the political system.

"Advocacy is like the dirty word, right? Not everyone in the non-profit sector understands how we can inform or use our experiences and our knowledge to help inform policy and policy changes."

"It is both a strategic question and a resource question. How much of its limited resources will the non-profit sector spend on advocating for change?"

"The challenge of course is that most non-profit sector organizations have even fewer resources now than they did before. And particularly on the social or human services front. They also have more demands for their services than they did before. So there's not a whole lot left over for advocacy."

What is the next step?

Our ability to invent new futures not only depends on our willingness and capacity to critically examine both our past and present; it also requires that we remain open to the possibility that the world could be very different if other power constellations were in place. It is, therefore, our intention that this document will begin a process of bottom-up mobilization for transformative change. As Dean Spade has pointed out, any such work "*must contend with questions of infrastructure: how to devise methods of participation and decision-making, build and sustain leadership, create shared political analysis, and generate and manage resources to feed the work.*"[25] We therefore invite you to take this document and use it to build new forms and methods of participation, decision making, leadership, and resource distribution. It is by altering our everyday processes that we can build new infrastructure and in doing so, construct alternative futures.

“

By acknowledging that our social, political, and economic realities are socially constructed, we can begin to introduce different knowledge systems into our institutions – systems that reflect, and benefit, the diversity of people that live in our communities.

”

APPENDIX A

What is neoliberalism?

Simply defined, neoliberalism is a political rationality that aims to increase efficiency, accountability, and profitability in all areas of Western society.[17, 25] Introduced in Canada in the late 1970s, neoliberalism was intended to roll back the expenditures of the welfare state by reducing the number of publicly funded programs and services. Neoliberalism has been a rationality used by most of our dominant public institutions (e.g., universities, hospitals, governments, recreation facilities, museums) for the past four decades.

As a kind of framework for political decision-making, neoliberalism has shaped all areas of our lives.[17, 25] To demonstrate exactly how it has done this we have developed a table that outlines some of the rhetoric used to justify neoliberal policies, the meaning that underlies this language, and some of the impacts of this neoliberal governance.

"The need for/to..."

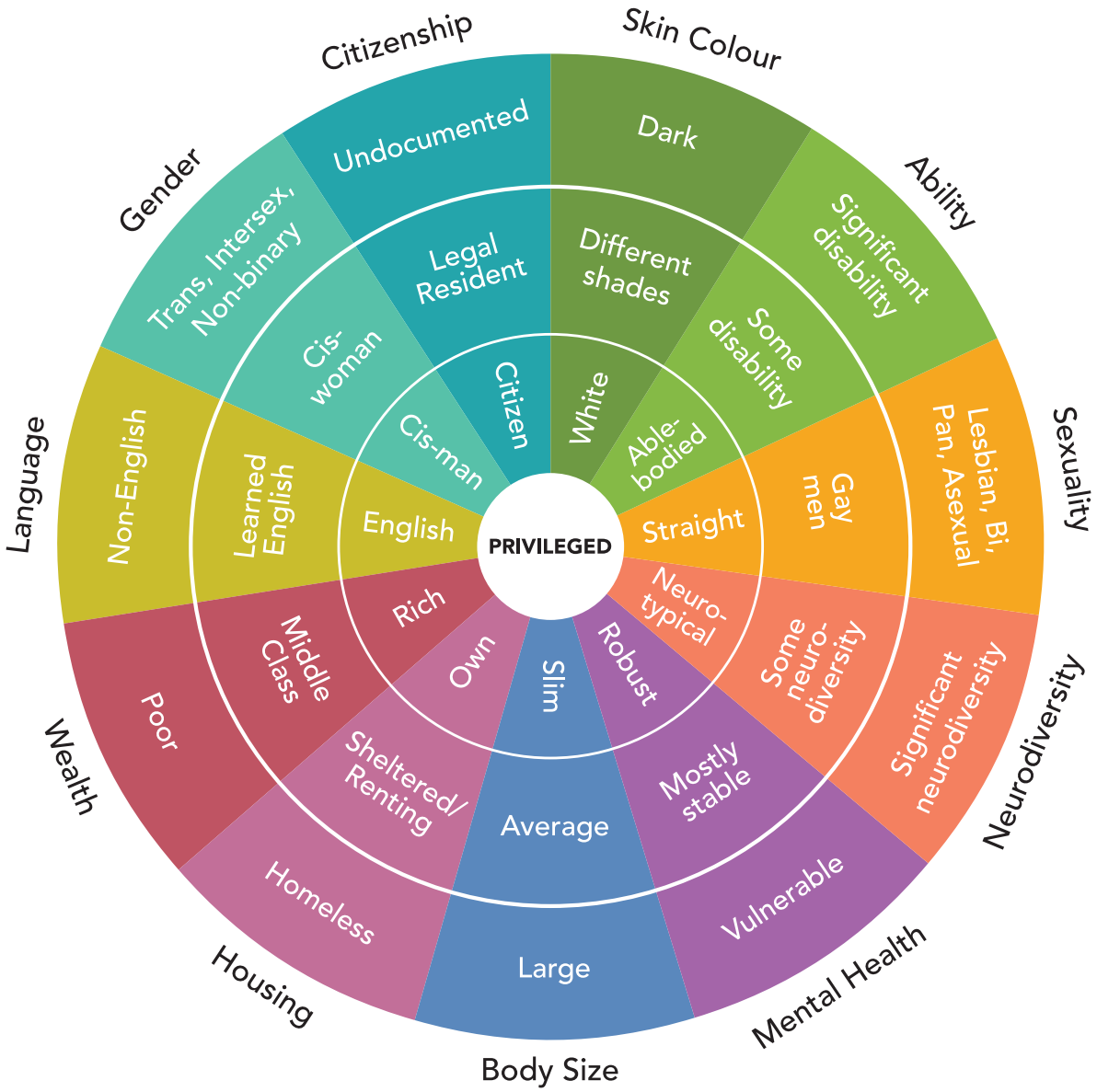
What this actually means	The Impacts on the non-profit community	The Societal Impacts
BALANCE THE BUDGET Reduce 'unnecessary' government expenditures by cutting costs in health, education, and other social areas (e.g., recreation, culture, social services). [17, 25]	• Non-profits become a primary delivery mechanism for public services.	• Upward distribution of wealth (increases in the wealth gap).
DECENTRALIZE PUBLIC SERVICES Privatize public services in order to further reduce government expenditures, while simultaneously increasing corporate profits.[17, 25] Examples include Alberta Government Telephones (Telus), Air Canada, Canadian National Railway, Petro-Canada.	• Shift from long-term, core funding to short-term, project-based grants.	• Rise of precarious employment. • Reductions in living wages.
REDUCE RED-TAPE Remove some of the regulations intended to protect people, animals, and the environment.[17, 25]		
STIMULATE THE ECONOMY Lower the corporate tax rate and invest in corporations (through bailouts, grants, or other programs) with the promise that these actions will create jobs (i.e., trickle-down economics).[17, 25]	• Competition for scarce resources, undermining collective efforts.	• Diminishing social security.
INCREASE EFFICIENCY Use profit as the primary decision-making metric for all public institutions.[17, 25]	• Increasingly dependent on foundations and corporations for funding.	• Decline of labour unions and therefore labour protections.
INCREASE ACCOUNTABILITY Social and human activity is thought to be most effectively organized when it is brought within the structure of the capitalist market (e.g., competitive, efficient). The 'success' of social organizations and institutions is thereby determined by their 'products' (in relation to inputs), and demonstrated on the basis of quantitative and standardized measures.[9, 17, 25]	• Organizations are measured on their efficiency (I.e., how well they use their finances).	• Dismantling of public services and programs. • A new form of public management modelled after corporate management.
GOVERN ACCORDING TO THE 'FREE' MARKET To reduce (or end) their investment in health, education and social services, governments move to marketize these services, which results in an increase in both the privatization of public services and an increase in fees for the public services that still exist.[17, 25]	• Professionalization of staff, resulting in greater gaps in organizational wages.	• Increases in criminalization.
INCREASE INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY All of our life circumstances (e.g., health, employment) and the costs associated with them are the responsibility of individual citizens rather than the responsibility of a collective society. Poverty, addiction, etc. are viewed as moral failures rather than structural failures.[17, 25]	• Time and resources for advocacy are reduced.	• Increases in privatization. • Excessive resource extraction.
PROMOTE INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS Privilege the rights of the dominant segment of society (largely middle to upper class white men, and to a lesser degree women) at the expense of those who have been situated on the margins (primarily racialized, disabled, transgendered, gay, and poor people).[17, 25]	• The entire non-profit community is continuously being asked to do more with less.	• Diminishing environmental protections.[17, 25]

APPENDIX B

How do harms such as racism, sexism, xenophobia, transphobia, homophobia, ableism and classism intersect?

In order to understand how various harms intersect, we must first recognize that society privileges or centres particular people and characteristics, while marginalizing others (see image). People who exist close to the centre of the diagram are those who possess the characteristics that are deemed the most valuable and desired by society and thereby experience greater privilege; that is, white, male, middle to upper class, able-bodied, straight, neuro-typical, cis-gendered, slim, and English speaking. The further away from the centre an individual is situated the less privilege they have. Furthermore, the more categories of marginalization an individual experiences the more structural harms they are likely to face.

In other words, the further you are from the centre the more likely it is that your wealth and well-being are only marginally secured and protected by our social, political, and economic institutions. Conversely, the closer you are to the centre the more likely it is that those institutions that have normalized this centre will secure and protect your health and wellbeing.



Adapted from @syliviaduckworth
Wheel of Power/Privilege

APPENDIX C

For real transformation, the non-profit community will need to more readily engage in policy advocacy. However, neoliberalism has undermined the political engagement of non-profit organizations, along with potential confusion with legislation around what is deemed acceptable political activity.

The information below – adapted from a toolkit developed by Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations in January 2019 – provides an overview of two key regulatory areas that relate to non-profit organizations in Alberta:

1. Canada Revenue Agency's Regulations
2. Lobbying

For more information about lobbying and tips on how to avoid partisan engagement during your advocacy efforts visit https://www.calgarycvo.org/ccvo-blog/rules-of-engagement-for-nonprofit-advocacy

Canada Revenue Agency's Regulations

Non-profit organizations that are federally registered as charities must adhere to the Income Tax Act regulations, as interpreted and applied by the Canada Revenue Agency. Non-profit organizations that are NOT registered charities do not need to adhere to these regulations.

Recent Amendments to the ITA now allow registered charities to engage in unlimited public policy dialogue and development activities (PPDDAs), so long as these activities are:

1. Related to and support the organization's stated charitable purpose(s)

   PPDDAs generally involve seeking to influence the laws, policies or decisions of a government, whether in Canada or a foreign country. In light of the new changes, charities must still be created and operated exclusively for charitable purposes.

2. Nonpartisan (this includes a ban on both direct and indirect partisanship).

   A charity can publicly agree or disagree with a decision or position of government, but cannot directly or indirectly support or oppose any political party or candidate for public office. Thus, a charity's communications should focus on policy issues and should not refer to any candidate or political party.

   Non-partisanship does not mean non-participation. There are many ways that registered charities can engage in nonpartisan election-related activities.

   Furthermore, as Canadian citizens, staff and volunteers have a right to participate in the democratic process. This means, as individuals, they are not bound to nonpartisan dialogue – as long as they are not acting in their official capacities as representatives of a registered charity.

Lobbying in Alberta

The Alberta Government defines lobbying as communication with a public office holder in an attempt to influence matters relating to:

- Legislation (including legislative proposals, bills, resolutions, regulations and orders in council).
- Programs, policies, directives, or guidelines.
- The awarding of any grant or financial benefit.
- Decisions by the Executive Council to transfer assets from the Crown or to privatize goods and services.
- In the case of consultant lobbyists, arranging a meeting between a public office holder and any other individual; or communicating with a public office holder in an attempt to influence the awarding of a contract.

Non-profits are exempt from the Alberta Lobbyists Act and therefore are not required to register as lobbyists, except for:

- Non-profits that are constituted to serve management, union or professional interests.
- Non-profits that have a majority of members that are profit-seeking enterprises or representatives of profit-seeking enterprises.

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There are many individuals within the non-profit community that could introduce new approaches to knowledge generation – approaches that look to embrace subjectivity and interconnectedness as a valuable means of learning and working towards social justice.