

Moving Forward: Charting a Path to Civil Society Recovery

Premier's Council on Charities and Civil Society

Community and Social Services, Government of Alberta

The Premier's Council on Charities and Civil Society

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Moving Forward: Charting a Path to Civil Society Recovery

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Executive Summary

Based on the direction from the Honourable Rajan Sawhney, Minister of Community and Social Services, the Premier's Council on Charities and Civil Society (the Council) launched a targeted engagement process in July 2020 to determine what lessons could be learned from the COVID-19 experience to date, and to provide advice on the sector's future recovery and capacity building opportunities.

This report includes three parts: 1) key findings from the targeted engagement 2) key areas of opportunity and high-level, directional advice on how to support recovery and build a stronger civil society and 3) advice on potential funding priorities for the Civil Society Fund, one of the government's commitments related to civil society. Further engagement will be required to determine specific steps forward for each opportunity area, and this work should be viewed as involving three interconnected levels: the overall civil society "system", civil society organizations and, ultimately, how these efforts impact individual Albertans, particularly those who require supports.

Results of the targeted engagement showed the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting civil society in several ways. These include an increased demand for services, the necessity for new approaches to service delivery, workforce challenges and financial impacts and revenue losses. Results also highlighted two important aspects of civil society's response to COVID-19: the ability and willingness to adapt and innovate in service delivery, and collaborations and partnerships that emerged were strengthened. The targeted engagement also showed several factors that have limited civil society's response to COVID-19.

Key opportunities for civil society recovery include enhancing collaboration, coordination and integration of services, improving research and data, capitalizing on new and existing technology, strengthening civil society's financial foundations and strengthening social finance and social enterprise.

The Council proposes the following broad priorities for the Civil Society Fund for consideration:

- System infrastructure: to enable the coordination, collaboration or integration of civil society efforts in the social sector.
- Civil society research and data: to advance priority research, data collection, analysis and sharing, with a focus on initiatives that can enhance cross-sector collaboration or build system-level capacity.
- Organizational transformation: to help organizations develop or extend innovative delivery models and build adaptive capacity for more collaborative approaches.
- Financial sustainability and resilience: to support innovation and capacity building in the areas of fundraising, social finance and social enterprise.

Message from the Chair

On behalf of the Premier's Council on Charities and Civil Society, I want to thank the Honourable Jason Kenney, Premier of Alberta, and the Honourable Rajan Sawhney, Minister of Community and Social Services, for establishing this Council and for the opportunity to listen to those supporting vulnerable Albertans during this pandemic.

Civil society includes a diverse and evolving array of organizations and individuals: the thousands of large, formally established non-profit/voluntary organizations (including registered charities), a range of informal groups or movements pursuing shared interests or values and, increasingly, a range of private-sector organizations and individuals pursuing social good.

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

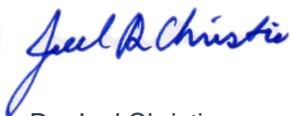
In May 2020, Minister Sawhney directed the Council to look forward to determine what lessons can be learned from the response and what opportunities exist to support an effective, lasting recovery.

The Council was eager to hear from civil society voices to understand the ongoing challenges as well as emerging opportunities. The pandemic is challenging civil society organizations to adapt, innovate and forge new partnerships to support Albertans and sustain strong communities. In many respects, civil society is meeting this challenge and has demonstrated tremendous strength. In other respects, the pandemic has highlighted important obstacles and areas for growth.

Overall, the Council heard a shared commitment to learn from the valuable lessons of the pandemic and to work together on recovery. The shared goal is to build a civil society that is even more resilient and collaborative, with increased capacity to address social challenges in our communities. The response to COVID-19 continues and recovery will take time. Ongoing engagement with civil society will be critical to success.

The Council is grateful to the many civil society organizations and experts who shared their insights and to the Council Secretariat for their support.

Thank you,



Dr. Joel Christie
Chair, Premier's Council on Charities and Civil Society

Background

Even prior to the arrival of the first cases of COVID-19, Alberta faced significant challenges. A global economic contraction combined with declines in energy prices posed major financial challenges for key areas of Alberta's economy. Many companies and communities were struggling. The public health measures introduced to limit the spread of the virus were necessary, but compounded some of these challenges. Impacts were felt across our society as businesses, schools, child-care facilities and other organizations had to close, scale back services or substantially adapt their operations. As a result, more Albertans were in need of support, and the needs of those who already faced challenges often became more severe or complex. Civil society organizations were on the front-line, creatively responding to these increased needs, at the very same time as their resources were declining and their operations disrupted.

In this environment, government's existing social and income support programs that provide for individuals' basic needs were more essential than ever. Additionally, all levels of government launched emergency funding measures to limit the impact of the pandemic to individuals, businesses and, critically, civil society organizations. For example, the Alberta government provided \$30 million in one-time emergency funding to help civil society organizations respond to COVID-19 and help support vulnerable Albertans. Similarly, the federal government announced the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy to help organizations maintain staff and operations.

In addition to providing valuable supports and services in communities across Alberta, civil society organizations are major employers. Generally, civil society organizations have been recognized and included in major programs designed to support the economy during the pandemic. This is a positive development. As we look forward, an effective, sustainable recovery for civil society will play an important role in Alberta's overall recovery.

Albertans continue to adapt to living with the pandemic, but are also beginning to focus on recovery and discuss what the future will look like after COVID-19. Civil society organizations are no exception. This report attempts to contribute to that discussion.

Council Mandate

The Council is part of the Government of Alberta’s commitment to harness the power of civil society to help address social challenges. This commitment builds on Alberta’s rich tradition of volunteerism, charitable giving and communities coming together to solve problems.

This vision of civil society is effectively captured in a 2018 speech by Premier Kenney: “Civil society addresses the bonds that people form around common missions and common goals. Government is at the service of, should be at the service of, a flourishing civil society.”¹

Civil society includes non-profit/voluntary organizations (including charities), as well as informal groups pursuing shared interests. It also includes individuals and organizations from the private-sector pursuing social good.

The Council was formally established in February 2020 to provide advice to government on its relationship with civil society organizations that are addressing pressing social issues in Alberta.

The Council is accountable to the Premier through the Minister of Community and Social Services. The Council is responsible for:

- engaging civil society organizations to explore how these organizations can be empowered in solving pressing social issues
- leading consultation on how government can help build civil society capacity
- providing advice regarding the ways the Government of Alberta influences and impacts civil society organizations
- advising government on how to support social enterprises
- developing a framework for government’s partnership with civil society

Council Membership

Dr. Joel Christie, Chair
Liz O’Neill, Vice-Chair
MLA Jeremy Nixon
MLA Martin Long
Wayne Chiu

Chris Christie
Fr. Raymond J. de Souza
Hyder Hassan
Saifa Koonar
Dr. John Lilley

Joanne Mason
Ashif Mawji
James McAra
David Mitchell
Michele Taylor

¹ “Peace, Order and Good Government? – Honourable Jason Kenney on Government, Civil Society and the Common Good” (Cardus, May 17, 2018, pp. 10-12).

Minister's Direction

In May 2020, the Minister of Community and Social Services requested the Council engage with civil society organizations to determine what lessons could be learned from the COVID-19 experience and provide advice on future recovery and capacity building opportunities. The goal is to build an even more effective and resilient civil society in the future. A key focus of the Council's advice is to identify opportunities to support the process of recovery with funding from the government's new Civil Society Fund.

Engagement Process

Based on the Minister's direction, the Council launched a targeted engagement process in July 2020. A discussion guide and questionnaire formed the basis of the engagement, which included three components:

- The Council held a series of focused conversations with civil society organizations and experts.
- Invitations to submit written responses to a questionnaire were sent to a range of civil society organizations, focusing on those in the social-service environment.
- Council members engaged organizations or experts from their own professional networks.

Overall, the Council held nine structured conversations and received over 60 written submissions to its questionnaire.

The conversations and questionnaire covered three areas: lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic (including challenges and opportunities for recovery); roles and responsibilities in supporting recovery; and funding priorities for the government's new Civil Society Fund.

The highlights of the input are presented below, and a comprehensive summary is included as an Appendix. Following these highlights, we present five strategic opportunities to advance civil society recovery. The final section offers our advice on funding priorities for the government's Civil Society Fund.

Engagement Highlights – What We Heard

1. Impacts of COVID-19 on civil society

Through targeted engagement, civil society stakeholders highlighted several major impacts of COVID-19 on civil society. Primary impacts included: increased demand for services, the necessity for new service models, workforce challenges and financial impacts and revenue loss. Recent reports from leading civil society organizations about the impact of COVID-19 in Alberta and Canada echo these same ideas.

Increased need and demand for services

COVID-19 has led to increased income and food insecurity, increased need for mental health and addiction support, an increase in family violence and isolation for many Albertans—seniors in particular. Some organizations are struggling to meet the demand as services have been disrupted, or due to service gaps that existed prior to COVID-19. This led to a loss of access to services for some clients.

While the pandemic has made some Albertans newly vulnerable, individuals or families experiencing hardship prior to COVID-19 are now faced with multiple or compounding challenges.

The pandemic also highlighted the importance of core programs and services that support vulnerable Albertans, such as Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) and Income Support. The availability of these core programs allowed civil society organizations to focus on addressing unique or emergent needs.

**“This crisis exposed and intensified vulnerabilities in communities.”
(YMCAs of Alberta)**

“Gaps in services and systems became painfully apparent. Challenges that have existed for a long time were exacerbated during the pandemic.” (REACH Edmonton Council for Safe Communities)

“Clients are presenting with increasingly complex needs that require additional resources and supports.” (Sagesse Domestic Violence Prevention Society)

Necessity for new approaches to service delivery

Public health guidelines led to changes in programming and the need to adapt service delivery approaches. Where feasible, organizations delivered services using online platforms or by phone.

**“Not all agencies, volunteers, clients and partners have the technological capacity to participate in virtual connections. As well, not all of civil society has access to the internet or devices required for this type of connection. Many individuals struggled with no face-to-face meetings and felt total isolation.”
(Community Foundation of Southeastern Alberta)**

This shift to online services posed challenges. Access to technology (for clients and organizations) was a key barrier, along with uneven levels of technological literacy or organizational capacity to use technology effectively. Reliable and consistent internet access (especially broadband) remains a barrier for many Albertans, particularly those who have low income or live in remote regions of the province. Supporting staff to use the technology effectively and work remotely were related challenges.

While some services translate quite well to an online environment, the inability to provide services in person was a challenge in certain situations or for certain clients. In-person connection and service delivery is still essential in certain circumstances.

Workforce challenges

Key impacts related to civil society’s workforce include the loss of staff or staff turnover, fatigue and burnout and absenteeism due to illness, self-isolation or a lack of childcare. These issues were layered onto pre-existing issues such as uncompetitive wages and benefits, short-term contracts (often tied to grant funding) and recruiting skilled front-line staff and leadership, particularly in rural Alberta.

COVID-19 also led to challenges in maintaining and managing the volunteer workforce, largely due to restrictions on in-person programming and distancing requirements. Seniors make up a large portion of the volunteer workforce, and many were encouraged or elected to reduce contact with others, scaling back their vital support for civil society organizations.

While COVID-19 led to many staffing and workforce challenges for civil society, it also showed the dedication of staff and volunteers.

Financial impacts and revenue losses

The pandemic posed profound financial challenges for many organizations, many of which continue. Some organizations will be forced to cease operations altogether.

**“Funding has been a huge issue for a vast majority of organizations.”
(FuseSocial Wood Buffalo Society)**

**“The inability to undertake large fundraising events will significantly impact the agency’s ability to develop programs and services in the short, medium and long term.”
(The Alberta Council of Women’s Shelters)**

**“In general, the non-profit sector has challenges with high turnover and staff burnout due to instable funding and high workloads. COVID has compounded stress for our employees who are now dealing with increased workloads, new programs and organizational changes, and are also trying to care for their own children and families.”
(Calgary & Area Child Advocacy Centre)**

The economic downturn had already impacted revenue streams like donations and earned revenue and, once again, the pandemic exacerbated these underlying challenges. Organizations who relied less on grants and more on earned revenue and fundraising were hit the hardest. Many civil society organizations had limited or no reserve funding, which meant they had little to draw on when traditional sources of revenue were reduced. The cancellation or postponement of (in-person) fundraising events led to a significant decrease in the fundraising capacity of civil society.

While some targeted funding was provided to civil society by government and non-government organizations during the pandemic, stakeholders noted a lack of grants to meet growing demand, evolving needs and the costs of required operational changes. Similarly, rigid funding agreements prevented many organizations from repurposing existing funds to address emerging needs.

2. Civil society's response to COVID-19

Despite the challenges, civil society demonstrated tremendous strengths that can be built on to support an effective recovery. In particular, civil society organizations were nimble and demonstrated significant adaptive capacity. All levels of government, foundations, corporations and businesses provided emergency funding to limit the impact of the pandemic on individuals and allow civil society organizations to continue providing needed services to vulnerable Albertans. Governments' policy responses generally put civil society organizations on a level playing field with businesses, which is noteworthy.

Adaptation and innovation in service delivery

COVID-19 has required organizations to find ways to operate and deliver services in accordance with public health guidelines. Heightened vulnerabilities for some Albertans and growing demand for services have necessitated the need to better understand and creatively address emergent needs.

In addition to supporting new models of service delivery, technology has been used to collaborate and share information and resources in real time. The increased use of technology also allowed organizations to extend the reach of their services.

Emergent collaborations and partnerships

COVID-19 appears to have generated a lessening of traditional competition among organizations and greater openness to collaboration. In some cases, there is openness to a deeper integration of efforts or even organizational mergers.

**“Civil society organizations have had to explore alternative ways to address social issues, which may in the long term provide a broader range of service delivery options.”
(Office of the Advocate for Persons with Disabilities)**

**“Organizations and government systems demonstrated that they can pivot quickly when needed, and barriers that seemed impossible could quickly be overcome in the right conditions. This was particularly impactful when bureaucratic barriers within government were overcome.”
(REACH Edmonton Council for Safe Communities)**

“Relationships with new collaborators and partners that had not traditionally worked together prior to COVID-19 [enabled] rapid response to new community needs. This includes new relationships within the non-profit sector as well as cross-sectoral partnerships with the business community.” (Vibrant Communities Calgary)

Even if driven by necessity, organizations reported an increased willingness to work together on common challenges. Network or “backbone” organizations were important facilitators, bringing partners to the table, sharing information and driving a collective or shared response to challenges. Philanthropic organizations and individuals were motivated and willing to address priority needs. In particular, leading funding organizations rapidly came together to share information and coordinate community investments.

The willingness to collaborate extended beyond traditional civil society groups, and included a strong interest from the business sector to deepen its involvement. Finally, it is noteworthy that a number of informal mutual aid networks emerged to support fellow community members.

Limiting factors for response

Although civil society has demonstrated an unprecedented ability to adapt and collaborate, the pandemic also exposed a number of challenges or limits to its capacity.

Constraints on collaboration and coordination:

Despite notable efforts, coordination and collaboration has been ad hoc. Formal “system-level” infrastructure and resources, including reliable data, is not consistently available. In some cases, new organizations emerged or existing organizations expanded their focus to address perceived needs, often resulting in duplication or dilution of available funding. Lack of awareness of viable partners and perceptions of heightened competition for funding may be limiting factors. The lack of more formal infrastructure or processes to facilitate coordination with the private or business sector is particularly evident.

“The COVID-19 response clearly demonstrated the serious limitations of siloed funding and operations. This pandemic has served to reinforce the need to remove barriers that create a siloed approach to serving vulnerable populations.” (Calgary Homeless Foundation)

“Many problems frontline workers deal with are a result of clients being declined or removed from a service (income support, subsidized housing, AISH, mental health/addiction programs, shelter, job support etc). If we focus on improving the way individuals flow and transition between programs, we can ease the burden on people and the sector.” (Calgary Seniors Resource Society)

Funding models: Many civil society organizations rely heavily on program grants and contracts, particularly from government. Despite some welcome shifts to longer term funding, some grants and contracts remain short term (one year) and inflexible (can only be used for specified programming). The current funding model can also reinforce competition among civil society

organizations – instead of encouraging greater collaboration. Organizations also noted that the application and reporting processes can impose administrative burdens and divert organizational resources from service delivery, building capacity or exploring collaborations. Despite noteworthy efforts, limited coordination among funders (e.g. municipal, provincial and federal governments, community foundations, private sector) continues to present a patchwork of funding opportunities, with inconsistent application and reporting requirements.

Technology: As noted above, technology remained a limiting factor in the COVID-19 response. Not all organizations have the financial or organizational capacity to rapidly move operations online. For Albertans in need of supports, not all have ready access to technology. The “digital divide” continues to impact many Albertans, particularly those in rural or remote communities.

Workforce challenges: As noted, low wages, absenteeism, burnout, turnover and reduced volunteerism were common factors that limited civil society’s ability to respond.

Recovery Opportunities – Building Capacity

The following opportunities provide a broad, forward-looking agenda. Capitalizing on each area of opportunity will require further dialogue with and among key partners.

1. Collaboration, coordination and integration of services

As noted above, amidst the challenges of the pandemic, a number of organizations came together to collaborate or coordinate their efforts. Building on these new collaborations – scaling them out – is the primary opportunity to advance the recovery of civil society and build its future capacity.

From siloes to system: Scaling out collaboration and coordination involves reimagining civil society as a “system,” and its relationship to government(s). This does not entail new, centralized governance structures. However, it should involve developing a clearer picture of the full range of civil society organizations and individuals in our communities, identifying common outcomes, assessing gaps and investing time, energy and resources to expand the capacity of the system overall. The Government of Alberta plays an important role in designing and funding social supports and is an essential partner in this work. Government ministries also need to continue their efforts to work more effectively and seamlessly together in support of the shift from siloes to a system.

Leveraging existing structures and organizations: A number of civil society organizations already take this systems-level view of civil society, including some whose mandates include building capacity at the organizational and system levels. These organizations provide an informal “backbone” for civil society, particularly the non-profit and voluntary sector. For example, ongoing efforts by organizations such as Volunteer Alberta and the online resource “Volunteer Connector” are helping mobilize and coordinate the energy of Alberta’s volunteers. The reach and expertise of

these types of organizations and resources should be fully leveraged to support recovery and advance the shift from siloes to systems.

Involving everyone: Many civil society organizations have capacity or expertise that is under-utilized or under-appreciated, including informal associations or groups of community-minded citizens. Connecting the energy and efforts of these informal groups to more formal efforts in the community has the potential to expand civil society's capacity. Further work may also be needed to fully integrate faith-based and cultural organizations or communities into collaborative work. Leveraging the growing interest and capacity of the private sector should be a priority. The Corporate Community Investment Council is one potential bridge to the private sector, and the Council was encouraged by other efforts to bridge this traditional divide.

All communities, all regions: The unique needs and capacities of all Alberta's regions and communities must be included in efforts to build overall system capacity. This inclusive approach must be reflected in the full range of complementary efforts below, including funding, research and data, and the deployment of technology.

A spectrum of approaches: Different organizations will find different ways to work together, consistent with their goals and mandates. This diversity and flexibility is one of the strengths of civil society and should be retained, even as coordination and collaboration in the "system" is deliberately expanded. Given the significant financial impacts on civil society organizations, some will determine they can't survive. In other cases, mergers between organizations may be sought. It is vital that organizations considering these steps are supported with information and expertise and that the needs of the Albertans these organizations support continue to be met.

Reducing red tape and streamlining process: The Government of Alberta must be a partner in this collaborative effort to unleash the potential of civil society. A key role for governments is to reduce unnecessary regulatory and administrative burdens, while assuring appropriate accountability and transparency. The proposed *Freedom to Care Act* and the ongoing work of the Non-profit Panel for Red Tape Reduction are strong signals of the government's commitment in this area.

2. Research and data

Timely access to information and data was important in civil society's response to the pandemic. Looking ahead, targeted research and good data is critical to civil society's recovery and long-term effectiveness in solving social challenges. Research and data can also support collaboration and help build the capacity of the system. The goal is not simply more data. The goal is better, more purposeful and timely data that can support organizational innovation and system impact. Civil society needs a research and data strategy.

Assessing needs and capacities: Gaining a better understanding of the diverse and evolving needs of Albertans is essential and research and data is the key. Additional research is also required to

fully understand the current strengths and gaps in civil society and to inform efforts to build new capacity. Leveraging existing organizations and experts with strong data and evaluation capacity should be a priority in this assessment and in future capacity building efforts.

Best practices and innovation: Collecting the right data is essential to inform best practices and drive innovation. The pandemic has shown how access to real time information about evolving needs can inform decision making. Organizations are eager to learn and share information and should be encouraged in these efforts. Existing organizations with capacity in this area can support this vital work.

Focus on outcomes: Our progress in addressing social challenges together must be measured against meaningful, measurable outcomes. In turn, outcomes-focused data can help to inform funding decisions, ensuring that funding generates real impact. As system infrastructure develops and new collaborations around common challenges emerge, identifying these shared outcomes should be a priority.

Towards a system-level data strategy: Despite promising signs of collaboration and coordination, civil society's efforts remain relatively fractured and siloed. Data collection and mobilization can play a key role in deepening collaboration and building capacity at the "system" level. As noted, we need to leverage the efforts of those already working in this area. Funders, including government and non-government organizations, are in unique positions to support system-level research and data collection efforts, as well as encouraging data sharing across organizations. The Government of Alberta is an important partner in this work as it collects and houses large amounts of data relevant to civil society and can help address privacy considerations. The Government of Canada (Statistics Canada) can also do more—in consultation with provinces and civil society—to support the timely collection of data on civil society, including the nature and scale of its activities and impacts.

3. Capitalize on technology

COVID-19 forced civil society organizations to use technology in unprecedented ways during the response to the pandemic. Some of these new uses of technology will become standard practice for organizations in the long term. Opportunities exist to continue utilizing technology as an enabler of increased collaboration, innovative service delivery and data collection and deployment.

Enable innovation in service delivery: Civil society organizations shifted many of their programs and services online in response to public health restrictions. Ensuring civil society organizations have the tools and capacity to operate in an online environment is a key opportunity to support recovery. This will require funders to support costs related to technology. Improving Albertans' access to reliable broadband is an equally important factor in enabling these innovations in service delivery.

Enable and extend collaborations: Technology also enabled civil society to deepen and extend its collaborative reach. Technology may be an area where organizations could explore shared services

or common platforms to reduce costs or leverage existing systems. As noted above, ensuring organizations can access and effectively use technology will enable collaborative efforts. Civil society organizations with provincial reach or capacity-building mandates can play a key role in supporting these efforts. The private sector could also play an important role in capacity building efforts and should be more engaged in the collaborative opportunities that technology provides.

Enable data collection and deployment: Technology is a key tool to enable the collection and dissemination of data and information. Investments in platforms to collect and share information and data across civil society should be explored. A promising example is the Collaborative Online Resources and Education (CORE Alberta) initiative. CORE Alberta is an online hub for organizations serving Alberta's seniors to share information and resources, promote best practices and enable connections and collaborations.

4. Financial foundations

Civil society organizations suffered significant financial impacts due to the COVID-19 pandemic, including declines in donations, fundraising revenue and earned income. As temporary government supports for the sector end, efforts are required to strengthen civil society's financial foundations. Over the long term, these efforts will be aided by government programs and services that meet the basic needs of Albertans, including income support, disability services, mental health and others.

Long-term, stable funding: There was strong support for continuing the shift toward long-term funding arrangements. Long-term funding provides a more stable basis for organizations to plan and deliver programs and services. Long-term funding may also reduce the administrative burden of application and reporting processes associated with funding agreements.

Flexible funding: During the pandemic, restrictions on funding in grant agreements or contracts posed challenges to organizations needing to adapt their services or respond to emerging needs. More broadly, overly restrictive funding can limit the ability of organizations to learn, adapt and innovate. Revisiting how funders can combine appropriate accountability with additional flexibility should be considered. Focusing accountability on *outcomes* rather than *activities or outputs* can support these efforts to increase operational flexibility.

Alberta Gaming, Liquor and Cannabis (AGLC) gaming model: The ongoing review of the AGLC charitable gaming model may offer opportunities to revisit current restrictions or barriers in the model, including funding eligibility, the use and distribution of proceeds, the value of volunteers and fundraising event regulations. Ensuring this model provides a strong source of revenue for civil society organizations may be particularly important in smaller communities and rural areas.

Organizational capacity and resilience: The pandemic highlighted that civil society organizations are stronger when they have the resources, including financial reserves, to weather challenges or adapt to changes. Part of the recovery process will involve organizations rebuilding appropriate levels of

financial reserves, something funders should support. Moving forward, organizations need the ability to invest in basic but essential functions (e.g. strategic planning, research and data, information technology, human resources) in order to be effective over the long term. Increased collaboration across organizations and sectors may allow existing resources and expertise in these areas to be leveraged more effectively.

System-level infrastructure/supports: Building capacity at the system-level—across organizations and sectors—requires resources. Targeted but sustained investment in system-level infrastructure is required to deepen collaboration and scale up innovations. Further engagement is required to identify priorities for this type of investment and determine who can provide support.

Incentivize collaboration: Finally, our engagement revealed that the current funding approach too often generates competition among organizations. Moving forward, government and other funders should explore opportunities to incentivize or encourage creative collaborations across organizations. This approach has the potential to drive innovation and maximize the impact of existing resources.

5. Strengthening social finance and social enterprise

Social enterprise is a broad concept, but at its most basic involves pursuing a social mission through for-profit or market-oriented activities. Non-profit and for-profit organizations, as well as individual social entrepreneurs, are increasingly turning to social enterprise to enhance their financial capacity and/or achieve social impact. More broadly, a variety of organizations, coalitions and individuals are working to expand the financial resources and tools available to pursue social purposes. Further strengthening this emerging social finance “ecosystem” and supporting the growth of social enterprises can help create a stronger civil society in Alberta.

Skills development: Civil society organizations looking to adopt social enterprise could benefit from expertise and capacity building support to ensure their operations and governance are set up to succeed. Leveraging the expertise of organizations already engaged in this work and building new relationships with post-secondary institutions and the private sector should be a priority. One promising initiative is the Alberta Social Innovation and Finance Strategy, led by a group of leading civil society stakeholders. Focused capacity building efforts may also enable civil society organizations to access federal social finance funding opportunities, such as the Investment Readiness Program.

Market development: Expanding public sector social procurement and encouraging companies to adopt community benefit agreements could help develop a stronger market for social enterprise products and services. These deliberate strategies can be particularly useful in supporting the early development of social enterprise. More broadly, developing a robust social finance ecosystem that offers improved access to resources and capital for enterprising organizations and individuals is

vital. There are a number of existing civil society organizations and experts active in this area whose efforts should be encouraged.

Targeted financing: A number of organizations, such as the Social Enterprise Fund, provide loans for start-up and expansion of social enterprises. Expanding access to financial support (including loans, grants, equity, etc.) can help advance social enterprise in Alberta.

Demonstrating the value of social enterprise: Understanding the benefits of social enterprises in Alberta is increasing but remains low. Additional efforts to showcase their impact can help grow social enterprise. The Trico Foundation's Social EnterPrize is one such initiative.

“The pandemic has reinforced our understanding of the potential of social finance tools, not only for stabilization of social purpose organizations, but in contributing to their ultimate recovery from the current crisis.” (Social Enterprise Fund)

Legislative and regulatory reform: Currently, both charities and non-profit organizations are limited – in different ways and to different degrees – in their ability to engage in for-profit or business activities in support of their social missions. Particularly in challenging economic times, modernizing existing federal and provincial legislation to more fully enable social enterprise activity can help civil society flourish, while creating stronger governance and ensuring full transparency and accountability.

Further engagement: The Council is charged with developing a Civil Society Framework to guide the government's partnership with civil society. This work will provide additional opportunities to engage civil society leaders on strategies to advance social enterprise and social finance opportunities.

Civil Society Fund Priorities

Once established, the Government of Alberta's new Civil Society Fund (the Fund) will provide \$20 million over three years to expand civil society capacity.

Based on direction from the Minister of Community and Social Services and input from the Council's targeted engagement, the Council has identified the following provisional criteria to guide the identification of priorities for the Fund:

- Avoid ongoing program funding: target one-time investments with lasting impact.
- Support transformation: support initiatives that build capacity in the sector to learn, adapt, innovate and better integrate and coordinate efforts.
- Seek system-level impact: support initiatives with the potential for system-level impacts.
- Avoid duplication: focus on initiatives where current funding does not exist or the need for additional funding is evident.
- Maximize impact: focus on areas where non-government support is unavailable or where funding can leverage additional funding and supports.

The Council believes the Fund should focus on a relatively small number of the most promising and high-impact initiatives, in a limited number of priority areas.

Funding priorities: The Council proposes the following broad funding priorities for consideration.

- System infrastructure: to enable the coordination, collaboration or integration of civil society efforts in the social sector. Initiatives may include:
 - development or expansion of cross-sector networks (including essential assessments or collaborative planning exercises)
 - development or deployment of technology (including hardware, software, database development, digitization, training)
- Civil society research and data: to advance priority research, data collection, analysis and sharing, with a focus on initiatives that can enhance cross-sector collaboration or build system-level capacity.
- Organizational transformation: to help organizations develop or extend innovative delivery models and build adaptive capacity for more collaborative approaches. Initiatives may include:
 - technology design and deployment
 - staff capacity development
 - business strategy development (e.g. collaborations, mergers, etc.)
- Financial sustainability and resilience: to support innovation and capacity building in the areas of fundraising, social finance and social enterprise. Initiatives may include:
 - developing new fundraising tools and capacity (e.g. online fundraising strategies)

- supporting organizational readiness or capacity for social enterprise
- increasing access for Alberta social enterprises to new investment capital
- scaling up existing social enterprises

Conclusion

The value of Alberta's civil society has never been more clearly demonstrated than in recent months. The collective leadership and community focus that Alberta's civil society has demonstrated is a testament to our community spirit and entrepreneurial drive. As the province charts a path to recovery, an effective and sustainable recovery for civil society must be an essential component.

The engagement process revealed significant challenges but also tremendous areas of strength, creativity and adaptive capacity in civil society. Moving forward, leveraging the collaboration and coordination emerging in civil society is critical to the shift from organizational siloes to a more robust civil society "system" that includes the full range of civil society actors pursuing social good. Engagement participants also communicated that the diversity and flexibility of Alberta's civil society needs to be maintained. Therefore, the shift is not about elaborate new structures or centralized processes. Instead, existing organizational structures, relationships and networks should be leveraged, strengthened, extended and open to ongoing innovation.

As we move forward, we hope the areas of opportunity identified in this report can provide a foundation for dialogue and collaboration. We look forward to this shared journey of empowering Alberta's civil society.

Appendix 1

Premier's Council on Charities and Civil Society

Findings from Stakeholder Engagement on COVID-19 Recovery

Engagement Approach

Civil society organizations and actors played a critical role in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and supporting Albertans. Many of these organizations and actors sustained major impacts to their revenues, operations and workforce (including volunteers). The Minister of Community and Social Services directed the Premier's Council on Charities and Civil Society (the Council) to provide advice on key strategies for a successful recovery, with the goal of building an even more effective and resilient civil society in the future. Specifically, the Minister requested the Council's advice on how the new Civil Society Fund might be used to support recovery.

To inform its advice, the Council developed a qualitative questionnaire, which formed the basis of a targeted stakeholder engagement conducted in late July 2020. This engagement included three components:

- A series of structured conversations with key civil society organizations and experts, focusing on those with province-wide mandates or broad, system-level perspectives;
- Council invitations to other civil society actors to provide written input; and
- Opportunities for Council members to seek input from organizations or individuals in their own networks.

The results of nine conversations and over 60 written responses to the questionnaire have been analyzed. Below is a summary of key themes for each question.

Section A: COVID-19 Lessons Learned

Question 1: What new opportunities, promising practices or learnings emerged from the COVID-19 experience (e.g. new approaches to communication or collaboration)?

Respondents shared many different opportunities, promising practices, and opportunities from the COVID-19 experience. Many of these related to the way civil society operates and works together.

A. Coordination and collaboration

- The most common opportunity/promising practice highlighted was coordination and collaboration within and between sectors to leverage resources, share best practices, and better meet the needs of clients.
- This included strengthening existing partnerships, and developing new, unique partnerships.
- Some mentioned the lack of infrastructure to support these collaborations, and the need for a network connector and a unified voice.

B. Technology

- The use of technology was another common opportunity/promising practice shared by respondents.
- This included utilizing technology for online/remote service delivery and collaborating with partners online.
- Respondents also highlighted the importance of access to technology (for clients and organizations) and the need for organizations to upgrade their hardware and software.

- Another key idea was how technology extended an organization's reach for both service delivery and collaboration.
- While use of technology has increased, respondents noted how in-person connection is still important.

C. Adaptability

- Respondents highlighted the importance of being able to adapt and innovate quickly to continue delivering services/operating.
- Unique approaches to service delivery/operation was a key idea related to adaptability. This idea included how organizations found unique ways to deliver services and meet the needs of clients. This theme relates to the increased use of technology in service delivery and collaboration.
- COVID-19 required organizations to examine their practices and do things more efficiently and effectively, requiring them to better understand the needs of clients and developing solutions to address those needs.
- Respondents noted how the sector is resilient, and has been able to adapt quickly, despite challenges.

D. Other

- Role of civil society: Respondents noted the importance of civil society and social services in a healthy and functioning Alberta. COVID-19 exposed some vulnerabilities and challenges in civil society and has also provided opportunity to re-examine or reframe the role of civil society.
- The importance of clear communication, access to information, and data.
- The need for flexibility in grants and funding agreements, so organizations can adapt to emerging needs.

Question 2: What challenges or barriers emerged for civil society during the COVID-19 response?

While respondents described opportunities that arose from COVID-19, they also outlined challenges that arose. Some of these challenges, such as collaboration and technology, mirror the opportunities above. Respondents also commonly described challenges at the individual or family level, rather than those of civil society as a sector or system.

A. Financial challenges

- The most common challenge noted by respondents was related to finances.
- Challenges included reduced fundraising, donations and earned revenue, loss of revenue because of closures, and a lack of grants to meet growing demand or required changes to operations (e.g. technology).
- Respondents also noted rigidity in funding (not being able to use grant dollars for emerging needs) as a barrier to the COVID-19 response.
- Respondents warned how some organizations may close due to these financial challenges.

B. Working together: relationships, collaboration & coordination

- While many respondents noted this was an opportunity, the lack of coordination and collaboration was noted as a major challenge for the COVID-19 response.
- Specific challenges included poor or limited collaboration between agencies and existing or heightened competition between organizations.
- Respondents also noted a lack of coordination within the sector (both with and within government) and across sectors.

C. Increased demand for services, decreased capacity to respond

- Respondents noted how COVID-19 brought an increased need for services from civil society and heightened or increased the vulnerability and complexity of clients' needs.
- Some respondents noted that there was insufficient programs and services available to meet the needs of clients (and emerging/growing needs) either because of closures related to COVID-19 or gaps that existed prior to COVID-19.
- Some also noted that there was a lack of capacity and expertise to meet the changing/emerging needs, including the inability to adapt, innovate, and pivot their services and practices.
- This lack of capacity also included challenges related to workforce and staffing levels (including staff fatigue and burnout, and due to a lack of childcare). It also included a decrease in volunteerism.

D. Other

- Technology: Respondents noted challenges related to accessing technology, moving staff and services online, working remotely, and costs of technology. Some also noted that shifting to remote service delivery and the inability to provide services in person was a challenge in certain situations.
- Lack of resources: Several respondents said there was not enough resources to meet the changing needs, mostly related to purchasing PPE, cleaning supplies, etc.
- Uncertainty, changes and confusion: A number of respondents described how the sector was unprepared for the speed of change, and how it was challenging to adapt to the uncertainty and unknown challenges.
- Individual/family challenges: Respondents often described challenges individuals/families were facing, such as low income, mental health, food security, and access to technology.

Question 3: Has COVID-19 changed the ability of civil society to address social issues in the long-term? If so, how?

Overwhelmingly, respondents stated that COVID-19 has changed the ability of civil society to address social issues in the long term. A few said it was too soon to tell or that it had not changed the ability of civil society to address social issues long term. Many respondents focused their answer on challenges for the long term and on opportunities or needs. Because of that, responses were often similar to other question in Section A.

A. Ongoing collaboration and coordination

- Respondents commonly stated the importance of ongoing collaboration and coordinating services within and across sectors to address social issues in the long term.

B. Financial challenges and survival of organizations

- Respondents also consistently expressed how the financial implications and challenges for organizations would affect their ability to operate long term. Some guessed that many organizations would close.

C. Shift to long-term thinking

- Respondents often explained how during the COVID-19 response, the focus was on meeting immediate, urgent needs of Albertans. They explained that to address social issues long-term, the focus must shift away from these immediate needs to addressing prevention and root causes of issues.

D. Increased demand for services, decreased capacity to respond

- Similar to the responses to question two, respondents noted how COVID-19 heightened vulnerabilities for Albertans and led to an increased demand for services.

- Some noted an inability to respond to these increased needs/demands, and explained how COVID-19 had heightened the vulnerability of organizations and highlighted gaps in services.
- Specific challenges related to program delivery included reduced programming, inability to deliver services, and challenges accessing clients.
- Respondents noted that challenges related to staffing, including turnover and burnout, will persist and affect civil society's ability to address issues in the long term.
- On the contrary, other respondents said COVID-19 had highlighted some of the strengths of the sector, including the ability of the sector to adapt and innovate and noted that positive changes to service delivery and the ability to adapt would be lasting.

E. Other

- Technology changes: Many respondents noted that changes to technology (for operations and service delivery) would be lasting.
- Civil society response and recovery: several respondents described some new tensions and pressure in the context of response and recovery. This included both positive and negative ideas such as increased trust in civil society, lack of voice for civil society in decision making, and an increased reliance on civil society. These new pressures require the sector and province to rethink the role of civil society.

Question 4: Looking forward, what are the key challenges to a successful recovery for civil society? What opportunities exist to address those challenges?

When shifting to describe the key challenges and opportunities for successful recovery of civil society, respondents noted very similar challenges and opportunities to those outlined for the COVID-19 response. As above, it was common for respondents to describe specific challenges for individuals and families. Key challenges include:

A. Financial challenges

- Financial challenges for organizations was the most common challenge noted.
- Financial challenges outlined by respondents included additional costs, reduced revenues, and inflexible or rigid funding sources.

B. Increased demand for services, decreased capacity to respond

- Respondents noted an increased demand for services, growing social inequities, heightened vulnerabilities and greater client complexities.
- Respondents described how organizations and the sector was not always able to meet these increased needs, because a lack of available programming or resources, (including staffing and workforce challenges related to childcare, low wages, and burnout).

C. Other

- Inability to change/adapt: Challenges adapting to new realities, innovating for the future, sustain collaboration.
- Long term planning and vision: too great a focus on short-term, immediate needs, not enough focus on long-term needs and planning.
- Technology: access to technology (for organizations and clients), issues with remote service delivery, and lack of in-person contact/connection.
- Individual challenges: income security, housing, access to technology, access to childcare, etc.

As with the challenges, opportunities are also similar to the opportunities, lessons learned and promising practice outlined above. Key opportunities to address these challenges include:

A. Coordination and collaboration

- The most common opportunity to address the challenges noted above was increasing collaboration and coordination within and between sectors, including developing new partnerships and strengthening existing partnerships.
- Respondents noted the potential for mergers/formal partnerships (based on mission rather than programming) to reduce duplication and leverage capacity and resources.
- Respondents also suggested opportunities to develop system level infrastructure and supports, for example, networks, information sharing, capacity building, and use and availability of data.

B. Funding/revenue generation

- The need for additional and ongoing funding to support civil society was a key opportunity.
- Respondents highlighted new funding models as an important opportunity. This included sustainable, predictable, long-term funding models and flexible funding agreements.
- Incentivizing and encouraging social enterprise and social finance were other opportunities related to funding/revenue.

C. Innovation

- Respondents described continued innovation as another opportunity for civil society. This included innovative approaches to programming and service delivery, and innovative approaches to operations (e.g. increasing efficiencies, doing more with less, recruiting).

D. Other

- Compensation for staff: Respondents suggested making jobs in the civil society and social sector more desirable, including improving workforce standards, increasing wages, and improving benefits.
- Technology: Respondents described opportunities to continue utilizing technology for service delivery and enhance collaboration between organizations.
- Diversity and Inclusion: Another opportunity that respondents suggested was to increase diversity and inclusion in the sector.
- Data driven decision-making: Respondents noted the need for more planning and decisions based on data and evidence.

Question 5: What steps should be taken to ensure the needs of vulnerable Albertans are addressed as part of civil society recovery and future capacity-building efforts?

When recommending steps to ensure the needs of vulnerable Albertans are addressed, respondents focused their responses on vulnerable Albertans themselves. Respondents highlighted many required programs and services but also the need to include vulnerable individuals in the planning and decision making process.

A. Listen to those with experience

- The most common piece of feedback provided by respondents was to incorporate the voice of people with lived experience in planning and decision-making. This also included ensuring policies and practices are person-centered.

- Respondents also noted the importance of including advice and contributions from organizations and individuals who have experience working with vulnerable people.
 - While respondents noted the importance of listening to those with experience, they also noted the need to have a clear shared understanding of the needs of vulnerable Albertans and the strengths and gaps in the sector. Respondents noted the need for reliable information and data to drive this context setting, decision-making and resourcing
- B. Adequate, stable and predictable funding
- Another common idea from respondents was the need for this work to be adequately resourced. This included the need for operational funding, increases to funding, and long term, stable funding.
 - While respondents noted the need for adequate funding, they also recommended more flexible funding and reducing red tape related to funding applications and reporting.
- C. Coordination and collaboration
- As mentioned in earlier responses, respondents suggested encouraging collaboration and coordination of services within the sector and across sectors, including data development and sharing.
- D. Other
- Address the root causes of issues, focus on prevention and long term outcomes.
 - Encourage innovation and risk taking in funding decisions, to develop new ways of supporting vulnerable people and addressing root causes of issues.
 - Utilize best practices, encourage evaluation and knowledge translation.
 - Increase accessibility to programs, including increased access to technology for clients.
 - Build capacity of sector and staff to address needs: This includes staff training and development for staff within the sector, and also increasing understanding of the needs of vulnerable people across government ministries.
 - Ideas for needed programs and services: respondents also included many suggestions for specific areas of focus for programs and services, including mental health and addiction, housing, supports for seniors, and employment/skills training.

Section B: Recovery – Roles and Responsibilities

Question 6: An effective and sustainable recovery will require efforts by many parties, including creative non-financial steps or strategies. What roles should each of the following play in civil society's recovery over the next 1-3 years?

Non-profit and charitable social service organizations (including faith-based and cultural groups):

A. Collaboration

- Increasing strategic collaboration (within the sector, across sectors, and with community) was the most commonly identified role in recovery for the non-profit and charitable social service organizations.
- This included working with and through networks and new strategic partnerships: long term options for mergers and short term options such program specific inter-agency collaborations and increased collaboration between formal and informal groups.
- Respondents suggested that increased collaboration across sectors would allow for better service delivery models, collective advocacy for policy development, addressing the lack of system planning and integration and information/resource sharing.
- Respondents also consistently noted how these organizations have inherent expertise on the sector and extensive knowledge of the needs in their communities. They should be consulted and included as subject matter experts in planning, priority setting, and decision-making.

B. Adaptability / Innovation

- A common response was the role of this sector to respond effectively to change and invest in innovation.
- This included or required investing in research and development and focusing on system level thinking.
- This also included the role of technology in innovation and the importance of evaluation and diffusion of innovative practices developed during the pandemic.

C. Program / Service Delivery

- Also commonly mentioned was the sector's role in being the first point of contact to vulnerable Albertans.
- Respondents highlighted the need to build flexible and coordinated service delivery models, reduced barriers to service access, and integrated program evaluation.
- Respondents noted the role organizations played in service delivery in suburban and rural areas.
- Respondents also noted how these groups should maintain focus on core mandates to provide quality service delivery, reduce duplication and enhance effective collaboration.

D. Sector research

- Respondents noted the need to develop a clear and evidence-based understanding of the needs of the sector and the impact of non-profits and charitable organizations.
- This included completing agency reviews to understand inefficiencies, identify and prioritize changing needs, and determine measures of success.
- This also included investing in research, future-focused strategic development and support for a nonprofit data strategy to guide decision-making and system transformation.

E. Capacity Building

- Respondents outlined the role of these organizations in building financial capacity through rebuilding financial reserves, diversifying revenue streams and encouraging investment with social impact financing.
- Respondents also noted the importance of organizational commitment to building capacity of their boards and staff through professional development, attracting and retaining talented and diverse staff, developing

strategies to increase diversity and inclusivity in volunteerism, supporting board members to work in the best interests of the agency and managing conflicts of interests.

Informal community groups, networks/coalitions, or individuals:

Information provided in this section often focused on *formal* groups (e.g. provincial network organizations) rather than informal groups or individuals. As a result, responses mirrored those provided in the non-profit and charitable social service organizations section.

A. Collaboration

- Respondents noted the extensive experience of networks as a convener/connector (and their role in voicing a collective voice) and how this role is essential to recovery.
- Respondents suggested these groups should work to increase collaboration, coordination and connection across civil society (including identifying partnership/merger opportunities) and particularly through collaboration with backbone organizations and government. They suggested these groups can help ensure a focus on collective action and impact instead of individual impact.
- Respondents also noted how these groups could play a role in information and resource sharing, engaging local community, and enhancing community connection.

B. Community and capacity building

- Respondents suggested the role of these groups was to continue to engage in community building, foster volunteerism, and encourage community action and organizing for social change.
- Respondents noted these groups should also support the community's capacity to invest in innovative prevention solutions and encourage investment with social impact financing.

C. Understanding needs

- Respondents suggested the role of these (informal?) groups should include building their own awareness and knowledge of social issues and existing formal supports in the sector so they can work to enhance service delivery and reduce duplication in the sector. This could include accessing learning/professional development opportunities.
- Respondents also noted the role of these (informal?) groups in identifying emerging needs in the community and communicating these to other stakeholders.

While these (informal?) groups play a role in meeting larger societal need, they are not a replacement for existing supports of formal entities and skilled support. Essential services should be provided by trained professionals, not volunteers.

Foundations and non-government funders:

A. Collaboration

- As with the previous two questions, the most significant role respondents identified for foundations and non-government funders was to support collaboration and a coordinated response.
- This included supporting mergers and acquisitions and addressing the fragmentation in the sector.
- Some other suggestions included ensuring transparent engagement, supporting better coordination in data collection, shifting the focus to collective impact instead of individual impact, supporting communities of practice and creating strategic partnerships with non-profits to initiate and evaluate joint ventures.

- Ideas related to collaboration also included improving coordination with other funders and engagement with philanthropic networks and the private sector to develop innovative, integrated approaches and in planning funding schedules.

B. Innovation and adaptability in funding

- Respondents also noted the important role foundations and non-government funders can play in enhancing innovation in funding practices. This could include re-examining funding criteria to ensure relevance, increasing flexibility in funding agreements, providing long term flexible funding (and increase funding from endowments), and reducing red tape related to reporting requirements.
- Respondents also suggested foundations and non-government funders should invest in innovative solutions, such as collective impact and long term resiliency, focus on outcomes rather than outputs, and change mindsets and practices around risk tolerance.

C. Capacity building

- Respondents suggested foundations and non-government funders have a role to play in building the capacity in civil society.
- This may include activities such as: investing in building sector knowledge to understand emerging needs, opportunities and challenges; increasing board capacity (learning/training); investing in organizations or innovative solutions with demonstrated impact; supporting information sharing on best practices; data and funding mechanisms; conducting reviews/assessment to determine internal and broader performance; and encouraging reliable reporting on metrics and key performance indicators.

Private Sector/Business organizations:

A. Funding

- Funding/financial support was the most significantly identified role in recovery for the private sector and business organizations.
- This included investing in innovation, collaborative approaches and lasting collective impact.
- Respondents also noted the private sector's role in creating investment strategies and establishing social impact finance models.
- Respondents also saw opportunity for greater integration of private sector and civil society, by supporting social enterprise models.
- Respondents also suggested specific areas the private sector could fund: capital and infrastructure requirements (technology/digitization) and directing funding to identified community needs.
- While respondents noted businesses should provide funding and financial support, some suggested they should not be involved in funding decisions.

B. Increase collaboration / engagement in sector

- As with the other groups above, respondents noted the role the private sector could play in cross sector engagement, partnerships and coordination with funders, nonprofits and government. Respondents suggested focusing on shared outcomes (including a shift to collective impact) and building an understanding of sector needs.
- Respondents also noted the private sector's role in information and resource sharing and participating in community engagement.

C. Internal practices

- Respondents also suggested changes to internal practices as a way for the private sector to support civil society recovery. This included providing a living wage and access to affordable childcare to employees, ensuring diversity/inclusion in hiring practices, updating community benefit agreements to reflect current needs, and focusing on their own recovery and support for employees.
- Respondents also suggested investing in and adopting social procurement policies and incentivizing or encouraging employee involvement in civil society.

Municipal Governments:

Respondents suggested that the most significant role for municipal governments is to foster cross-sectoral coordination, collaboration and service integration. This involves acting as a convener, partner and funder of civil society sector work. Respondents recognized role municipal government can play in ensuring diverse, inclusive and equitable communities.

A. Collaboration, coordination and service integration

- Most respondents identified municipal government's role as convener based on the proximity to the community. This includes collaborating with all levels of government and the sector in service planning, resource allocation and service delivery to improve the quality of life for individuals.
- Respondents suggested municipal governments increase their focus on preventative services and supports and community wellbeing such as addiction and mental health supports/services.
- There were also suggestions for municipal governments to use their funder role to drive sector collaboration, partnerships, efficiency and reduce services/program duplication and ensure alignment of outcomes. This includes mergers, acquisitions and partnerships with local universities to foster student engagement in community.
- There was a common request for municipal governments to provide leadership in addressing racism in communities. This would include increased diversity and inclusion in programs to ensure vulnerable individuals and minorities don't fall through the cracks.
- There were suggestions for the municipal government to share information, best practices and resources (technology and infrastructure) with the sector.
- Respondents also saw a role for municipal governments to encourage private and public partnerships to meet community needs.

B. Funding opportunities

- Respondents recognized municipal governments as a major funder. There were calls for flexible funding models and practices that encourage the sector to take risk and innovate in solving social issues. Innovative practices suggested include utilizing social procurement and community benefit agreements.
- Respondents also noted that municipal governments should provide clear communication and guidelines on available funding opportunities.
- Respondents identified the need to remove barriers to FCSS funding for community-based organizations. There were calls for the municipal governments to increase investment in the FCSS program while others recognized the impact of COVID-19 to municipal finances.

C. Support sector innovation and resilience

- Respondents suggested municipal governments should reduce administrative burden and regulations that impact the sector's work, for example permits for sector's events.

- Respondents identified the opportunity for the municipal governments to provide a range of in-kind supports to the sector such as sharing infrastructure, technology and staff time. Respondents also suggested municipal governments subsidize rent for sector organizations in leased facilities.

Government of Canada:

The most prominent roles respondents identified for the federal government related to incentivizing giving to charitable causes by individuals and foundations, supporting sector innovation and resilience, supporting the growth of the social enterprise sector, and leading efforts to ensure diversity, equity and inclusion in Canada.

A. Encourage giving

- Respondents identified the federal government's role in encouraging individuals and foundations to give to charitable causes. There were suggestions for increased tax incentives for philanthropies and changing regulations to allow foundations to give grants to non-charitable organizations. Others suggested flexible incentives to acknowledge tangible support to others (without being a registered charity).
- There were some suggestions for ethical grants as an alternative to gambling revenue – this appears to appeal to faith-based organizations.

B. Support sector innovation and resilience

- Respondents asked for reduced regulatory and administrative burden on the sector from the Government of Canada. For example, include a nonprofit sector code in the national occupation classification (this is related to utilization of funds and reporting on the work of charitable organizations).
- There were suggestions for the federal government to leverage its role as a funder to incentivize collaboration, partnerships and efficiency with the goal of encouraging mergers and reducing duplication.
- Respondents suggested the federal government could lead cross-jurisdictional collaboration in sharing information/data and best practices to ensure the quality of life for all Canadians, and require local collaborative funding tables and a focus on shared outcomes.
- Respondents also suggested the federal government provide flexible, sustainable and predictable funding to address priority sector needs such as workforce development and capacity building initiatives.
- There were suggestions for the federal governments to incentivize the growth of volunteerism in the communities including participation of young people. This included incorporating volunteering in CERB.
- Respondents also suggested the federal government could develop a national civil society sector strategy and create a home for civil society sector.
- Another suggestion was to mandate telecom companies to ensure quality services in rural and remote communities. Individuals and organizations in rural communities faced connectivity difficulties.

C. Social Enterprise

- Respondents suggested the federal government develop policies that support the growth of social enterprises in Canada. The Social Innovation and Social Finance Strategy was cited as an opportunity. Others cited implementing social procurement and community benefit agreements and including sector organizations in buying consortia to benefit from volume discounts.

D. Diversity, equity and inclusion

- Respondents suggested federal government take a lead in addressing systemic racism. This included reviewing legislation to ensure that it provides a framework for addressing social issues. There were also suggestions for the federal government to work with civil society to develop a systemic approach for addressing diversity, equity and inclusion in programs and within emergency and disaster frameworks.

- Within the context of COVID-19, respondents suggested the federal government review eligibility and benefits for vulnerable Canadians. Respondents noted that COVID-19 has increased vulnerability of individuals; some of these vulnerabilities are invisible, such as hearing and speech impairments.
- Recommit to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls to action.

E. Other:

- Other roles and responsibilities suggested by respondents included:
 - Create a strong economy to reduce social problems and increase giving/donation capacity.
 - Sustain critical COVID-19 response funding like wage subsidy.
 - Support Imagine Canada's call for a Sector Resilience Grant program.
 - Increase preparedness for emergencies that benefit all sectors of the economy.
 - Guarantee living income for Canadians.
 - Modernize the Canada Health Act to ensure comprehensive care for Canadians.

Government of Alberta:

Most respondents identified the GoA's role as enabling collaboration, coordination and networking, supporting sector innovation and resilience, and enabling the growth of social enterprises in Alberta. Other suggestions related to focusing on vulnerable individuals and investment in preventative programs as identified by communities and civil society sector.

A. Collaborate, coordinate and integrate services

- Respondents suggested the GoA should encourage cross-department and sector collaboration and ensure alignment for partners around shared outcomes for vulnerable individuals and communities. This could include broad, inclusive consultation on social investment decisions and sharing of information/data and best practices. There were also suggestions for the GoA to collaborate with municipalities, the sector, and beneficiaries (as co-designers) to create solutions to pressing issues including around affordable housing, low cost transit and provincial emergency preparedness plans.
- There were suggestions for the GoA to incentivize collaboration, networking, development of shared services and mergers through funding agreements with sector organizations. Others suggested requiring or encouraging local funding tables to support priority setting and decision-making.
- Respondents also suggested the GoA collaborate with the sector to develop a strategy for addressing diversity, equity and inclusion issues especially in emergency situations, use GBA+ lenses in program design, and funding decisions and recommit to Truth and Reconciliation process.

B. Sector innovation and resilience

- Respondents suggested the GoA's role should be to provide flexible multi-year funding to the sector and municipalities based on community needs. Respondents indicated that funding models should accommodate increased risk to allow the sector to innovate.
- There were suggestions to accelerate efforts to reduce and eliminate administration and regulatory barriers for the sector. This was specifically related to applications and reporting requirements and regulations governing social purpose organizations. There were a number of calls for regulation/legislation reforms including overhaul of the AGLC regulation to remove restrictions and allow greater use of proceeds for programs and services. Respondents noted that AGLC should not be the last resort funder but an important source of funds for community programs. Other actions include reviewing the privacy legislation to enable greater sharing of information about clients in a safe and secure manner.

- Respondents asked for funding and policies from the GoA that revitalize volunteerism in communities (such as fostering student engagement in the communities).
- Many respondents supported GoA funding for capacity building initiatives with potential for long-term and strategic impacts. This included connectivity for organizations in rural and remote communities.
- Also related to funding, respondents suggested action to enable ethical grants to charitable causes as an alternative to gambling revenue. This appears to appeal to faith-based organizations.
- There were suggestions for the provincial government to support Arts, Cultural, Recreational and community facilities. Respondents noted that these institutions are critical to community wellbeing and were the first to close due to COVID-19.
- Respondents noted that the GoA could enhance tax incentives to encourage individuals and philanthropies to give to charitable causes.

C. Social Enterprise

- Respondents suggested the GoA support the growth of social enterprises through funding and access to procurement opportunities, and utilizing social procurement and community benefit agreements. There were suggestions to include sector organizations in buying consortia to benefit from volume, and requiring community benefits in infrastructure funding.
- Respondents also provided suggestions for the GoA to establish legislation to support social impact investing and social enterprises in Alberta.

D. Other:

- Other roles and responsibilities suggested by respondents included:
 - Fund people-centred programs and supports based on their identifiable social outcomes that decreased costs for expensive public systems.
 - Invest in prevention programs and supports including FCSS.
 - Create a strong economy to reduce social problems and increase giving/donation capacity.
 - Support the PCCCS to advocate for sector needs and priorities.
 - Increase civic participation including consulting with communities on resources allocation and development of initiatives.
 - Use an inclusive definition of civil society.
 - Amend the Society Annual Return to capture annual information on workforce and revenues.

Section C: Government of Alberta (CSS) COVID-19 Funding Priorities

Question 7: The Government of Alberta’s new Civil Society Fund provides targeted, one-time funding (not operational or program funding) to support innovation and capacity building in civil society. To support an effective and sustainable recovery, what should the top 3 funding priorities be in this first year (2020-21)?

Respondents provided a variety of suggestions for year-one fund priorities. Suggestions ranged from specific to broad. While the prompt noted that the fund wouldn’t support operational or program funding, a significant portion of the responses included ideas for specific programs and services or operational funding. The ideas below have been grouped into priorities within and outside the proposed scope of the fund.

Within the proposed scope of the fund:

- A. Collaboration, coordination and integration of services
 - Respondents suggested the following priorities related to collaboration, coordination, and integration of services:
 - Activities related to increasing or enhancing collaboration and partnerships within the sector
 - Network stewardship and organizations that support civil society as a sector
 - Planning and coordination at the systems level
 - Activities related to mergers and acquisitions within the sector
- B. Capacity building
 - Respondents suggested funding initiatives that increase the capacity of civil society to address issues, innovate, and find diverse/sustainable funding (at organization and system levels).
 - This could include activities such as leadership development and staff training/professional development.
- C. Social enterprise and social procurement
 - Respondents suggested using funds to encourage/incentivize social enterprise and social procurement, including the skills and capacity necessary to shift to social enterprise models.
- D. Innovation in service delivery
 - Respondents suggested funding organizations to develop/test new ways of delivering services, running organizations, and working together.
- E. Research, evaluation and improving access to data
 - Respondents suggested funding projects and organizations who are working to improve data collection, analysis and sharing in the sector to allow for data-driven/evidenced-based decision making, and to better understand the needs resulting from COVID-19 (for individuals and for the sector).
 - Respondents also suggested providing funding for evaluation and knowledge translation activities so organizations can better share their learnings with others.
- F. Technology
 - Respondents suggested funding the costs of moving programs, services and operations online, including hardware, software, database development, digitization of records, and staff training related to technology.

Outside the proposed scope of the fund:

- A. Operations and non-programmatic work
 - Fund operational and administrative costs
 - Fund costs related to policy development, business/strategic planning, long term planning, recruitment, and fundraising.
- B. Bridge funding:
 - Short term funding to fill current gaps, to reduce closure of agencies and stabilize the sector.
- C. Other:
 - Wage subsidy/wage top up
 - Funding for capital projects
 - Supplies (mainly for PPE/cleaning)
- D. Specific programs and services
 - Stakeholders repeatedly suggested specific program areas that should receive funding, such as mental health and addiction, food security, housing/homelessness, education, and income supports.

Question 8: What should the top 3 funding priorities be in future years (to reflect evolving challenges or opportunities)?

Suggestions for funding priorities for future years were very similar to suggestions for the first year (Question 7). Several respondents noted that it was too early to know what funding would be needed in later years, or that future priorities should be focused on emerging issues and needs.

Within the proposed scope of the fund:

- A. Collaboration, coordination and integration of services
- B. Capacity building
- C. Research, evaluation and improving access to data
- D. Social enterprise and social procurement
- E. Innovation
- F. Technology

Outside the proposed scope of the fund:

- A. Operational funding
- B. Capital/infrastructure funding
- C. Wage subsidy

Unique funding ideas included:

- Fund pilot program/scale up successful projects
- Fund prevention
- Red tape reduction (reduce administrative burden for organization, ease access to funding)
- Fund projects that focus on community/local resiliency

- Fund projects that improve the system, and access to the system (i.e. system navigation)

Question 9: What specific design considerations should the Civil Society Fund include to maximize the funding's impact and support effective implementation (e.g. eligibility requirements; evaluation criteria)?

A. Eligibility:

- While there was some disagreement related to eligibility, respondents generally agreed that the fund should be available to a wide range of organizations or groups.
- Some stakeholders suggested specific criteria for eligibility, such as prioritizing known/trusted organizations, those with stronger financials, or those with demonstrated community support. Others recommended ensuring smaller groups or grassroots organizations be eligible.
- Several respondents also suggested tiered grant amounts for different size organizations/projects, or reserving funding for both larger and smaller proposals.

B. Sector involvement:

- Numerous respondents suggested that the community/civil society should be involved in setting criteria and reviewing applications. Several suggested utilizing participatory funding models.
- Some respondents suggested the fund should be administered by a third party group, and not by government.

C. Evaluation:

- Respondents consistently stated that evaluation should be an important component of the grant program.
- This included prioritizing projects that have a strong evaluation component, supporting organizations to build evaluation into their grant, and ensuring evaluation is focused on outcomes, not only outputs.
- On a related note, respondents suggested outcomes of the funding should be clear to all at the outset of the program and encouraged engagement of stakeholders and civil society in outcome setting.

D. Prioritize/incentivize collaboration:

- As noted above, respondents saw opportunity for collaboration and coordination within civil society and with partners in other sectors.
- Respondents suggested prioritizing applications that included collaboration and coordination and decreased competition between organizations.
- A number of stakeholders also suggested prioritizing strategic and systems-level investments.

E. Other:

- Long term funding: Respondents suggested funding should be longer term (2-3 years).
- Don't reinvent the wheel: Respondents noted that learnings and best practice should be utilized and prioritized, and local, national and international best practices should guide applications and funding decisions.
- Innovation: While respondents suggested utilizing best practice, others noted the importance of allowing and prioritizing innovation.
- Flexibility in funding: Ensure funding is flexible to allow organizations to adapt to emerging needs.
- Focus on long-term change and larger-scale impact: Respondents explained how the long-term impact of funding should be considered, and suggested prioritizing projects that have a larger impact (e.g. scalable projects, exponential returns, sustainable).

- Specific suggestions for programming/areas of focus: As with questions seven and eight, respondents suggested specific program ideas/areas of focus, such as mental health, basic needs, anti-racism work.

Question 10: Do you have any final advice to support an effective and sustainable recovery and a flourishing civil society sector over the long-term?

Generally, responses to this question were positive and optimistic. Respondents saw the opportunities for change and improvement to the sector and society. Many responses reiterated thoughts and suggestions from earlier questions.

A. Collaboration:

- Respondents noted how collaboration is the key to success and suggested encouraging/incentivizing collaboration and decreasing competition where possible.
- Respondents also noted the importance of avoiding silos and duplication within civil society, and suggested avoiding politics or partisanship when it comes to supporting civil society.

B. Involve/engage civil society in priority-setting and decision-making

- Respondents again noted how civil society should be engaged in planning and decision-making and should be consulted for ongoing advice.

C. Acknowledge the importance of civil society

- Respondents urged government to recognize and acknowledge the importance of civil society for Albertans, and its role in recovery for the province.
- Some respondents also noted how civil society is integral to the recovery of the economy (e.g. it is a major employer), and economic recovery should not focus solely on the private sector.
- Respondents also warned not to offload responsibility onto civil society.

D. Funding:

- Respondents again noted the importance of equitable and adequate funding to civil society. They noted how government should invest in civil society, and not rely on the private sector to fill gaps in funding.
- Respondents suggested leveraging existing resources and funding opportunities and incentivizing social enterprise and social investing.

E. Other:

- Innovation/adaptation: Several respondents discussed the ongoing importance of innovation and adaptation.
- Focus on long-term: Respondents noted how thinking and planning should be focused on sustainability and long-term change.
- Focus on/prioritize people: Respondents noted the importance of prioritizing people's health and safety before the economy, and focusing on the common good rather than on benefits to specific groups, sectors or individuals.

Appendix 2 – Organizations Submitting Input

This list includes organizations that provided formal input to the full Council. It is not a comprehensive list of all organizations invited to participate, and does not include all organizations engaged by individual Council Members.

Organization Name
AB SEED (Social Economy Ecosystem Development)
Alberta Chambers of Commerce
Alberta Council of Disability Services
Alberta Council of Women's Shelters
Alberta Disability Workers Association
Alberta Nonprofit Network (ABNN)
ALIGN Association of Community Services
Boys and Girls Clubs Big Brothers Big Sisters of Edmonton and Area
Boys and Girls Clubs of Calgary
Calgary Alliance for the Common Good
Calgary and Area Child Advocacy Centre
Calgary Chamber of Voluntary Organizations
Calgary Community Response Fund Stewardship Alliance
Calgary Homeless Foundation
Calgary SCOPE Society
Calgary SCOPE Society - Disability Action Hall
Calgary Seniors Resource Society
Canadian Red Cross Society – Alberta/NWT
Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton
Catholic Social Services
City of Grande Prairie
City of Lethbridge
Community Foundation of Lethbridge and SW Alberta
Community Foundation of Medicine Hat and SE Alberta
Edmonton Police Foundation
Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations
Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues
Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers
End Poverty Edmonton
Family and Community Support Services Association of Alberta (FCSSAA)
Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD) Provincial Parent Advisory Committee (PPAC)
Federation of Calgary Communities
FuseSocial Wood Buffalo Society
HRJ Consulting Ltd.
Homeward Trust Foundation
Imagine Canada
Inclusion Alberta

Inn from the Cold
Institute for Community Prosperity, Mount Royal University
IntegralOrg
Jewish Family Services
Max Bell Foundation
Momentum
Office of the Advocate for Persons with Disabilities
PolicyWise for Children and Families
Prairies Ismaili Muslim Community
Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities
REACH Edmonton Council for Safe Communities
Sagesse Domestic Violence Prevention Society
Sarah McLachlan School of Music
Social Enterprise Fund
Stollery Charitable Foundation
Suncor Energy Foundation
Trico Charitable Foundation
Ukrainian Catholic Episcopal Corporation of Western Canada (Eparchy of Edmonton)
United Way – Calgary Region
University of Alberta (School of Business)
University of Calgary (School of Public Policy)
Vecova Centre for Disability Services and Research
Vibrant Communities Calgary
Volunteer Alberta
Volunteer Centre of Calgary (Propellus)
Wellsprings Calgary
Wood Buffalo Community Foundation
YMCAs of Alberta
YWCA's of Alberta

Appendix 3 – Related Readings

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Premier Jason Kenney at CARDUS (2018). “Peace, Order and Good Government: Government, Civil Society, and the Common Good.” <https://www.cardus.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Peace-Order-and-Good-Government.pdf>

Senator Ratna Omidvar (2020). Webinar: “What is the COVID-19 Emergency Aid Revealing about the Social Impact Sector – Modernization Agenda?” <http://www.ratnaomidvar.ca/senator-ratna-omidvar-shares-four-priorities-for-charitable-sector-recovery/>