



# **Signposts to the future of Canadian philanthropy**

PFC Conference 2011 Report

**CHANGING  
PHILANTHROPY**  
*new visions, new voices*



# Overview

After his speech to the closing session of the Philanthropic Foundation of Canada's (PFC) conference, the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, Shawn A-in-chut Atleo, was asked if he would honour the conference delegates with a "sending forth" ceremony. After a moment's pause, Atleo broke into a song in the nuu-chau-nulth language of his community on Vancouver Island, the Ahousat First Nation, wishing the delegates well on their journey home.

Atleo's parting song to the conference was a moving - and very Canadian - moment. But it was only one of many highlights of PFC's 2011 national conference.

Over the course of three days in October 2011, more than 250 delegates and speakers convened in Toronto and engaged colleagues in conversations about trends, challenges and opportunities that are shaping the future of Canadian philanthropy.

This fourth biennial PFC conference was organized under the overarching theme *Changing Philanthropy: New Visions, New Voices*. Plenary sessions were complemented by a number of concurrent sessions structured along 4 main sub-themes: (i) *Working Together in New Ways* (ii) *Tackling Complex Problems* (iii) *Looking at the Big Picture in Philanthropy* and (iv) *Using Knowledge for Change*.

Conference participants were stimulated by a roster of speakers from Canada, the U.S. and the U.K. In addition to the formal conference sessions, delegates were also able to participate in visits to several sites around Toronto where the communities are working in partnership with Toronto foundations. And, for the first time, two pre-conference workshops were offered: *Essential Skills and Strategies for Grantmakers* and *Mission-Related and Impact Investing for Canadian Foundations*.

The **opening address** of the conference was given by the Governor General of Canada, the Right Honourable David Johnston, who has made the advancement of philanthropy and volunteerism one of the key **pillars** of his mandate.

The Governor General was followed by **Susan Raymond**, Executive Vice President of *Changing Our World*, whose speech **challenged Canadian foundations** to think in time and space, to be imaginative, in short, to follow Wayne Gretsky's recipe for success; "skate to where the puck is going to be".

Both the Governor General and Susan Raymond set the scene well for the discussions that were to follow over the next two days. And, reflecting on all of the comments offered during the plenary and concurrent sessions, at the coffee breaks, during meals and in conference blog postings, it was possible to discern **five recurring themes**.

His Excellency the Right Honourable David Johnston,  
Governor General of Canada

National Chief Shawn A-in-chut Atleo

Susan Raymond, Executive Vice President,  
Changing Our World (U.S.)

# Working Together

The nature of philanthropic relationships and, in particular, the imperative of collaboration and partnerships, was raised repeatedly throughout the conference.

At the outset, the Governor General put the issue of collaboration on the table when he spoke about the multiplier effects that result from working in collaboration with others. He argued that “leveraging through partnerships is key to extend the reach of giving and the reach of service”.

Mark Kramer, Managing Director of FSG Social Impact Consultants, also addressed this issue. In one of the concurrent sessions, Kramer built on a number of the ideas advanced in *Collective Impact* an article he co-authored and published in the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*.

Kramer pointed out that many foundations are tackling very complex societal problems. But the nature of these problems demands that multiple players be involved in their resolution. Achieving impact, therefore, requires collective action. It will not be achieved by the isolated and independent actions of a single player but by many funders, policy makers and community leaders working in concert, **said Kramer**.

*“When you are dealing with complex problems, no single organization can solve them. ... It leads you to having to think about working differently”*

– Mark Kramer

The imperative of partnerships applies to large and small foundations alike. Susan Raymond pointed to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which, even with billions in assets, has come to understand how little it can do by itself. Collaboration has become its new mantra.

One of the conference co-Chairs, Martin Connell, cited another example of foundation partnerships. As the former Chair of the Toronto Community Foundation (TCF), Martin noted the importance of the support of private foundations in making it possible for the TCF to stabilize its operations and then enter a period of significant growth. Private foundations have helped the community foundation movement grow in many parts of the country, seeing this as a promising way to collaborate on local community issues.

Chief Shawn Atleo noted that collaboration is a shared value of Canadians that dates back to the time of First Contact. He described the early treaties concluded between aboriginal peoples and the Crown as a vision shared both by aboriginal peoples and by the new colonists. He referred to this historical inter-connectedness as a source of collective strength.

His Excellency the Right Honourable David Johnston,  
Governor General of Canada

Mark Kramer, FSG-Social Impact

*Impact will not be achieved by the isolated and independent actions of a single player but by many funders, policy makers and community leaders working in concert.*

**- Mark Kramer**



Martin Connell, Conference Co-Chair

# Money isn't Everything

Tim Brodhead, former president, The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation

At the conclusion of his plenary talk, Tim Brodhead, former President of The J.W. McConnell Foundation, coined an acronym – PINJAM – that perfectly captured a view expressed time and again during the conference. In another memorable conference moment, Tim led the audience in a chant of PINJAM - Philanthropy is Not Just About Money.

*What are the assets you have not just the grants you make? That, I think, is the opportunity to punch above our weight” – Tim Brodhead*

The notion that philanthropy is about more than money surfaced during the **comments** made by **Susan Berresford**, former President of the Ford Foundation, at the pre-conference dinner. A number of delegates were struck by the fact that she referred to the Ford Foundation not as a funder but as a “resource”.

Susan Berresford, former president, Ford Foundation



Andrew Barnett, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (U.K.)

Susan Raymond concurred, noting that the amount of philanthropic dollars spent is an imperfect indicator of impact and that the development and nurturing of community leadership was an equally useful measure of philanthropic success.

In one of the concurrent sessions, Frances Lankin, former President and CEO of the United Way of Greater Toronto described some of the roles played by funders above and beyond grantmaking. “We can broker relationships with researchers to conduct community based research, we can fund research, we can convene broad partnerships – with innovators and implementers – and we can lend a voice to advocacy”.

**Andrew Barnett**, Director of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (UK), noted that the idea that the practice of philanthropy involves much more than money is not unique to Canada. He cited a report that had been publicly released in the U.K. just a few weeks before the PFC conference. *Beyond Money: A study of funding plus in the UK*, was prepared by the Institute for Voluntary Action Research. It chronicles the different ways in which U.K. trusts and foundations pursue their individual missions – above and beyond the provision of funding.

Of particular note is that this theme wasn't being mentioned only by funders at the conference; it was also suggested by those on the receiving end of foundation grants.

*Tim eloquently made the case for fulfilling philanthropy's unique role in convening civil society, gathering and sharing knowledge, creating networks and otherwise leveraging the ideas, contacts and assets of so many people engaged in organized philanthropy.*

**- Hilary Pearson, PFC**

For example, Nick Saul, Executive Director of The Stop, an anti-poverty community food centre that receives substantial financial support from foundations, illustrated the value added a foundation can provide beyond money, describing a meeting with the Premier of Ontario that had been facilitated by one of The Stop's foundation supporters. It was the foundation's network and contacts, not its money, which enabled a meeting that Nick described as being "invaluable."

Che Kothari, who works with Manifesto, a grass roots group in Toronto that promotes the arts as a vehicle for positive change, talked about their partnership with the Laidlaw foundation, crediting the "collaborative relationship" between Manifesto and Laidlaw as being one of the keys to their early success.

Susan Raymond pointed to the new players in philanthropy. She reminded everyone that a younger cohort of philanthropists often takes a very different view of their role compared to previous generations of philanthropists. "They want to use what's between their ears and not just what's in their wallets."

Chief Atleo returned to this theme in his remarks. He described what philanthropy has to contribute to the broader society, referring to "your voice, your networks, your advocacy and your vision". It was telling that the one thing he didn't mention was money.

## Trust

Throughout the conference, participants heard about the centrality of trust to the success of any philanthropic activity.

Susan Berresford argued that, at the end of the day, funders needed to have and demonstrate trust in the organizations they support.

Mark Kramer identified trust between all the players as being one of 5 factors for success of any collaboration or collective effort by funders.

Other aspects of the trust issue were raised during a concurrent session on the role of social media. Allison Fine, co-author of the book *The Networked Nonprofit*, argued that modern technologies were increasing the demand for more information with corresponding expectations of transparency. And, she said, in the era of Twitter and Facebook, trust is increasingly being generated and defined by transparency. Funders that are more open and transparent about their activities are likely to engender higher levels of trust.

In the same session, Marco Campano described efforts by Maytree to substantially increase their use of social media. In response to a question about whether foundations which use Twitter should vet the professional tweets of their staff, he said it all comes down to trust. "If you trust staff members to participate in external meetings, attend conferences etc. and speak freely as a representative of the foundation, why wouldn't you trust their professionalism to tweet?"

*The challenge is upon Canadian foundations not only to collaborate, but to recognize the changing societal landscape and be brave enough to take on more risk in pursuing impact investing. Do we have the fortitude to do this? I think we have to.*

**- Evan Wood,  
The Lawson Foundation**



Nick Saul, The Stop



Margaret Hovanec, The Lupina Foundation



# Knowledge and Information

A third topic raised repeatedly throughout the course of the conference was the way in which information and knowledge is being used to advance the work of philanthropy.

Allison Fine spoke about the changing impact of technology and social media, in particular, on the provision and sharing of information and knowledge. She argued that foundations unwilling to share their knowledge will quickly be viewed as antiquated relics –especially by those under the age of 35.

*The best and easiest thing that foundations can do with social media is to celebrate the work of their grantees” – Allison Fine*

Of course, sharing information about what works is not just helpful to grantees, it is also important to policy makers and even more so at times like these when government is so fiscally constrained. Matthew Mendelsohn, Director of the **Mowat Centre for Policy Innovation**, spoke in a concurrent session about the changing role of philanthropy vis-à-vis the public sector. A former provincial Deputy Minister, Mendelsohn said that “there has been a hollowing out of public service in its ability to generate policy directives. Philanthropy can provide support for evidence based public policy initiatives”.

Tim Brodhead reinforced Mendelsohn’s comments. While Brodhead argued that philanthropy should never be seen as a replacement for the public sector, governments themselves are trying to figure out how “to steer rather than row”. This may offer opportunities for foundations to work in partnerships with governments with the goal being to improve public services.

Foundations can also work directly with researchers to shape information gathering and to share their knowledge. **The Nuffield Foundation** in the U.K. has, as its explicit mission, the funding of applied, evidence-based research with the potential to change policy and practice in the foundation’s areas of interest. The foundation’s Director, **Anthony Tomei**, described their efforts to help academics “translate” their work into user friendly language that could be understood by policy makers and practitioners. As a further means to transfer knowledge, the Nuffield Foundation convenes meetings of academics, policy makers and practitioners where relevant research is shared and discussed. Tomei refers to this as “downstream” funding. Increasingly, however, Nuffield is involved in “upstream” funding where its support is used to help develop the actual research questions and methodologies.

Allison Fine, co-author of the book *The Networked Nonprofit*

Anthony Tomei, The Nuffield Foundation

*“As well as having discussions after the research is over ... you might also have discussions “upstream” about what questions should be asked, how they should be asked and what methodologies should be used”*

– Anthony Tomei

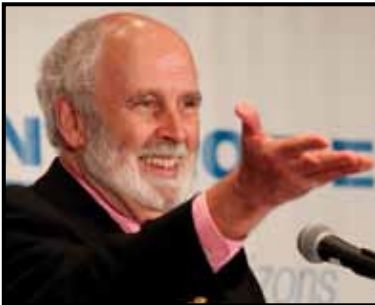




At the registration desk.

*"I was especially struck by Raymond's comment ... that the increasing focus on measurable impact that we all strive for could lead us to be more risk averse."*

**– conference blogger**



Peter Warrian



Sometimes the gathering of information by foundations can be a negative. Susan Berresford struck a chord with many delegates when she referred to the affliction of "excessive measurement disorder". As she reminded her listeners, foundations can have impact without always requiring detailed strategic plans with concrete and time-specific measurable outcomes.

Susan Raymond picked up on this issue, expressing her fear that "the constant mantra about impact" may actually lead foundations to becoming more timid when they need to be bold.

# Boldness, Risk Taking and Innovation

*"As charitable foundations, I think we should have big ambitions but we should convey them with modesty and respect" – Andrew Barrett*

Not surprisingly the current economic and market turmoil, and its impact on assets, was on the minds of many delegates. But they also heard throughout the conference that this turmoil was the very reason that foundations needed to be bolder and take more - not fewer - risks, and commit to innovation.

Susan Raymond, only half jokingly, suggested that every foundation should have a "Vice President of Blasphemy" to challenge traditional philanthropic conventions and norms. She also argued that the support and nurturing of a new and younger generation of leaders was perhaps the most important thing that foundations could do to spur innovation. An echo of this view was heard in Tim Brodhead's advocacy of a 40/40 formula for all foundations; 40% of foundation Boards should be comprised of people under the age of 40.

A number of other speakers suggested that foundations wanting to foster innovation and change should identify people outside of the mainstream who are advocating currently unpopular or edgy causes. In making this point, Mark Kramer talked about the need to identify the "unusual suspects". Another panellist referred to this group as "outliers".

Susan Berresford advocated that foundations allocate 35% of their grant making each year for unplanned initiatives with 10% being directed towards activities completed outside the foundation's stated field of interest. She also made the important point that boldness and risk taking are not the sole purview of large funders.

*"Foundations with modest assets don't have to settle for modest ambitions".*

**- Susan Berresford**

Calls for bolder action and more risk taking by philanthropy weren't restricted to the grant making side of the ledger, however. A concurrent session on Social Finance enabled delegates to better understand the range of options available to foundations wanting to invest their assets in ways that would further their philanthropic mission. Tim Brodhead and Allison Hewitt reiterated the recommendation from the **Canadian Task Force on Social Finance** that foundations should commit to investing at least 10% of their capital in mission related investments (MRI) by 2020.



## Conclusion

One of the conference bloggers remarked, in reflecting on the presentations and hallway conversations, that "today's philanthropist isn't yesterday's philanthropist." In retrospect, this phrase serves as a pithy summary of the conference as a whole.

"Cheque-book philanthropy" – the provision of grant funding – will always be essential. But we have also come to understand that the resources available to every foundation to pursue its mission can extend well beyond the amount of grant money provided.

We also have a better understanding that funders working in isolation and independently of others are unlikely to achieve lasting impact; most of the social challenges addressed by philanthropy will require the collective efforts of private, public and corporate funders as well as policy makers and community leaders. And, we have a better appreciation of the potential uses of knowledge and information to further our philanthropic missions especially in an era of constantly evolving information technologies like social media.

In particular, the complex nature of the challenges confronting humankind will require funders to be much bolder than we have been in the past. This means a much greater emphasis on innovation and risk taking and the need for funders to move out of their "comfort zone". Ultimately, however, the success of all that we do depends on the levels of trust that we develop with our philanthropic and other partners and the grantees and organizations that we support.

*"Today's philanthropist isn't yesterday's philanthropist"*

**– conference blogger**

# Thank You

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## Thank You to our Sponsors

