



Philanthropic Foundations
Canada

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Trump 2.0 and US Philanthropy:

Reflections and Actions for Canadian Philanthropic Foundations

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Abstract

Philanthropy is more than money—it is an expression of values, relationships, and responsibilities. As the US navigates the return of Donald Trump’s presidency, the philanthropic landscape faces profound uncertainty and transformation. This briefing uses a social sector and civil society lens to understand the impact of rapid policy shifts, exploring the implications of executive orders, budgetary priorities, and the devolution of social policy to state control. The research captures a sector caught between urgency and uncertainty, drawing on emerging insights from US philanthropic leaders to reveal a field in flux—where hesitation meets quiet adaptation, where funders scramble to make sense of shifting realities, and where nonprofits are forced into survival mode, reconfiguring their operations in the face of new political and financial risks.

Canadian philanthropic leaders, this is not a distant concern but one requiring both reflection and action. The final section of the briefing outlines clear steps for leaders to define their role in civil society, use data to guide decisions, provide a continuum of support, and openly share philanthropy’s impact. At its core, this briefing calls for moral citizenship of care¹ – a reminder that in moments like these, philanthropy must decide whether to retreat, adapt, or rise to meet the moment.

1.0 Introduction

Philanthropy is not merely the transfer of resources; as Paul Schervish reminds us, it is deeply rooted in the aspirations, beliefs, and relationships that define human generosity.² This briefing takes that human dimension seriously, examining the complex factors shaping the US philanthropic landscape under a Trump 2.0 administration. It asks how the policy priorities of a second Trump administration are impacting U.S. philanthropy and what the potential consequences and responses for Canadian foundations are.

Using the lens of the social sector and civil society, Section 2 explores impacts on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), foreign aid, and federally protected rights. Sections 3 and 4 provide an overview of the US philanthropic context and a "pulse check" with US philanthropic leaders. Section 5 offers a forward-looking perspective for Canadian philanthropic leaders with practical reflections and actions for effectively engaging with emerging challenges ahead.

2.0 The Trump 2.0 Effect

The Trump 2.0 administration's policy agenda—marked by tax cuts, federal funding reductions, and a rollback of social welfare programs—has reshaped the role of government in supporting civil society. This administration's approach has been defined by speed, ideological clarity, and a transactional mindset. Many perceive a focus on short-term political gains, measured by stock market performance and base approval ratings. However, some argue that there is a longer-term strategy to revive US manufacturing and strengthen national security, making it difficult to discern the true approach.³

This section examines three key components of the administration's strategy—executive orders, budgetary shifts, and the devolution of social policy to states—and their collective impact on civil society. Understanding these dynamics is essential for anticipating philanthropy's evolving responsibilities and long-term implications for social impact.

2.1 The Mandate for Leadership (Project 2025)

The Mandate for Leadership report (Project 2025)⁴ outlines the policy priorities of the contemporary conservative movement. Designed to ensure the success of a second Trump administration to enact conservative policies, the document is endorsed by over 100 conservative organizations and co-created with 400 conservative scholars and policy experts. The goal was to ensure that a new administration would “enter office on January 20, 2025,” fully prepared with vetted personnel and ready policies. As Heritage Foundation’s introduction to the project put it, they aimed to gather “an army of aligned, vetted, trained, and prepared conservatives to go to work on Day One to deconstruct the Administrative State.”⁵ This level of preparation included drafting executive orders, model regulations, and staffing lists so that a president could execute significant changes immediately upon taking office.

Project 2025 builds off the Heritage Foundation’s Mandate for Leadership, which was influential in the Reagan administration, and its website includes a fact-checking section for what is included in Project 2025 and what is not. Four “broad fronts”⁶ are presented in the forward which the mandate seeks to advance:

1. Restore the family as the centerpiece of American life and protect our children.
2. Dismantle the administrative state and return self-governance to the American people.
3. Defend our nation’s sovereignty, borders, and bounty against global threats.
4. Secure our God-given individual rights to live freely-what our Constitution calls “the Blessings of Liberty.”

Many ideas outlined in Project 2025’s Mandate for Leadership blueprint have found their way into Trump’s early executive orders, sometimes with language lifted nearly verbatim.⁷ The Mandate is urgent, noting only a two-year time horizon and one-shot to implement these policies before the next mid-term elections.⁸ The project has treated the administration’s first days as a critical window to implement an ideological vision, using the machinery of executive power to its fullest extent.

2.2 Executive Orders

Executive orders (EO) offer new presidents an immediate tool to reshape federal policy and agency prioritiesⁱ. They do not require congressional approval. In 2017,

ⁱ Executive orders (EO) are tools for managing the federal government’s executive branch. By design, EOs primarily bind federal agencies and employees, not private citizens or companies. They do not create new laws or have the force of law for anyone outside the executive branch. A president cannot directly order a private business or a state government to do something via executive order if the business or state lies outside the federal executive’s purview. However, EOs can indirectly affect the private sector by leveraging the federal government’s significant purchasing power and regulatory oversight. For example, a president can instruct federal agencies to impose certain conditions on the companies they contract

President Donald Trump exemplified this strategy by signing numerous executive orders in his first week, covering issues from immigration restrictions to regulatory freezes. His chief strategist, Steve Bannon, explicitly framed this as a tactic to "flood the zone" with rapid executive actions, overwhelming media and opposition responses: "Every day we hit them with three things. They'll bite on one, and we'll get all of our stuff done... we've got to start with muzzle velocity," he said, emphasizing speed and volume.⁹ Trump 2.0's early presidency has followed suit. While using EOs is not unique to Trump, presidents from both parties have used early executive orders, his administration has embraced it as a deliberate political strategy.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)

President Trump's 2025 executive orders on DEI illustrate the dynamic of federal action on the private sector. One of Trump 2.0's early EOs terminated DEI programs within the federal workforce outright, within the president's authority to manage executive branch agencies. Another EO, however, reached the private sphere: it told federal contracting officers to halt affirmative action enforcement and required contractors to certify compliance with new limits on DEI.^{10 11}

Private businesses that are federal contractors suddenly had to worry about their internal diversity programs being deemed "illegal" under these new rules. Companies without direct government business felt the indirect pressure. When an EO conditions federal funds or partnerships on specific behaviours, it blurs the line between public and private sectors, extending the president's influence into corporate boardrooms, university offices, and philanthropic foundations. Yet it's important to remember that such influence is mediated through the federal agencies: an EO might trigger agency investigations or alter who gets federal contracts, but it doesn't outright outlaw activities in the private sector without backing from legislation.

The broad concern about the DEI executive orders is their "chilling effects," especially on voluntary programs within private organizations. Companies, universities, and philanthropic foundations scrambled to interpret the new directives and, in some cases, put diversity programs on hold pre-emptively, even before any enforcement. The EOs were a deterrent to organizations' behaviour. Given this context, the effect of the executive orders poses a risk of reversing progress that isn't only social but also economic. If firms scale back mentorship programs for underrepresented employees, or if universities pause efforts to foster inclusive campuses, the loss isn't merely abstract – it could translate into lower innovation, lost talent, and weaker competitiveness over time.^{12 13}

with or to prioritize (or deprioritize) enforcement of regulations in specific ways. Through these mechanisms, an EO can influence private organizations' behaviour without directly regulating them.

While an administration may believe that specific initiatives are undesirable, pursuing that philosophy via executive order must be done with precision and caution. Vague edicts can backfire, generating confusion and court challenges rather than swift policy victories. The case of DEI evidences this situation, as numerous judicial reviews are underway. In the US, the [National Council of Nonprofits](#) actively monitors Trump 2.0 executive orders and related developments, making it an essential resource for staying informed.

2.3 Legislative Budgetary Process

Alongside executive orders, the US federal budget is shaped through a critical annual legislative processⁱⁱ beginning with the President's proposal, followed by Congressional negotiations. This process often involves partisan conflicts over spending priorities and tax policy.

In late February 2025, the House of Representatives, with a narrow Republican majority, passed a budget proposal calling for significant spending cuts alongside extending tax cuts—approximately \$2 trillion over ten years, predominantly targeting healthcare programs like Medicaid—to offset up to \$4.5 trillion in tax cuts and increase the debt ceiling.^{iii 14 15} Conversely, the Senate proposed a more modest approach, with limited immediate cuts and deferring broader debates on taxes and social spending.^{iv 16} This divergence indicates that any extreme cuts in the House plan will face challenges in the Senate.

The scope of cuts in the House plan is far larger than any recent retrenchment of the social safety net. By one estimate, the average congressional district would lose about \$2 billion in federal funding, and the cuts would likely increase poverty and

ⁱⁱ The legislative budgetary process begins with a President's proposal and requires Congress to pass a budget resolution setting spending and revenue targets. The House and Senate draft separate resolutions, which are reconciled into a final framework. This framework can trigger reconciliation, allowing budget-related bills to pass the Senate with a simple majority, bypassing the filibuster. Afterward, Congress enacts detailed funding through appropriations and other legislation.

ⁱⁱⁱ The House budget resolution would permit up to \$4.5 trillion in tax cuts (to extend the 2017 tax law) and raise the debt ceiling by \$4 trillion. To offset costs, the plan targets roughly \$2 trillion in spending cuts over the next decade – including at least \$1.5 trillion in mandatory spending reductions. The House plan instructs the Energy & Commerce Committee to cut \$880 billion in spending, which is expected primarily from healthcare programs like Medicaid.

^{iv} The Senate proposed a smaller reconciliation bill addressing defence and immigration funding (~\$342 billion over 4 years) fully offset by cuts while deferring debate on tax cuts and broader social spending to a later bill. The Senate's instructions for social programs were more modest – for example, only about \$1 billion in health savings over 4 years was sought, suggesting minimal immediate changes to Medicaid.

uninsured rates.¹⁷ The trade-offs of cutting social welfare spending include more people without health insurance, reduced access to medical care, higher out-of-pocket costs for low-income families, and strain on local governments and providers who must pick up the slack. These impacts would be felt nationwide, but low-income individuals, children, and seniors reliant on these programs would be hit the hardest.

Recently, Republican lawmakers have encountered significant backlash during town hall meetings across the United States, primarily due to proposed budget cuts targeting Medicaid and other social programs.¹⁸ Constituents, including many from traditionally conservative districts, have strongly opposed these cuts, fearing the loss of essential healthcare services. This growing backlash reflects deep-seated anxieties among voters about reductions in vital social services, signalling challenges ahead for lawmakers advocating for such budgetary measures and lowered base approval ratings.

2.4 Delegating Social Issues to the States

Under the Trump administration and in alignment with Project 2025's vision, many social issues have been steered back toward state and local control. This approach emphasizes traditional institutions – family and community – in guiding policy rather than federal mandates. In practice, this vision has translated into a push for states' rights on key social issues, including abortion, gender identity, marriage and sexual orientation. As states assert more control over social issues, some are directly challenging the limits of federal law, potentially teeing up constitutional challenges.

For example, same-sex marriage is one area where federal law, via Supreme Court precedent, currently prevails – yet states' resolutions are signalling open defiance. If a state were to refuse to recognize gay marriage or if an official denied a license citing a state ban, it would squarely conflict with *Obergefell* (and now the Respect for Marriage Act), prompting lawsuits. While no state has outright defied the ruling, the political groundwork is being laid for a possible future constitutional confrontation on marriage equality.¹⁹ The flurry of state resolutions provides test cases and rationales for revisiting precedents. If enough states present similar challenges, the Supreme Court may feel compelled to grant review and possibly redefine federal constitutional rights in these areas.

The trend of devolving social issues to states has profound implications for American federalism. On the one hand, it represents a revival of “states' rights” in areas that, for the last half-century, were often governed by federal judicial mandates (e.g. abortion under *Roe*, marriage under *Obergefell*). Proponents argue that this allows policies to reflect community values and religious traditions better and that local governments are more accountable to the people for moral and cultural questions. On the other hand, this shift raises concerns about inequality and fragmentation of citizens' rights.

Basic personal freedoms – the ability to marry the partner of one’s choice, make healthcare decisions about one’s body, or have one’s gender identity recognized – may now depend on state lines. This patchwork deepens national polarization and challenges the federal government’s role as a guarantor of individual constitutional rights.

2.5 Impact on civil society

The cumulative effects of Trump 2.0 policies have signalled profound shifts for the social sector. Historically, US nonprofits were viewed as mediating structures, with increased government funding seen as a way to sustain and expand the welfare state while addressing government inefficiencies. However, from a populist perspective, foundations and nonprofits are increasingly perceived as operating within an insular sphere—shaped by elite priorities and disconnected from the everyday experiences of most citizens.²⁰ These sentiments underpin the executive orders, particularly those targeting DEI initiatives. The budgetary decisions, marked by deep federal spending cuts, and the devolution of social policy responsibilities to local governments are part and parcel. Each risk fragmenting civil rights protections and widening disparities in access to essential freedoms and social services.

These tensions are central to ongoing debates about the role of civil society in democracy. Proponents of progressive philanthropy argue that foundations and nonprofits play an essential role in addressing systemic injustices that markets and governments fail to correct. Critics contend that an increasingly activist philanthropic sector risks sidelining democratic deliberation and reinforcing a form of governance that lacks public accountability. The broader question of philanthropy’s legitimacy and limits in shaping societal change is at stake in this debate. The structural shifts underway will have long-term consequences, redefining the roles of government, the private sector, and philanthropy.

3.0 Effects on the US Philanthropic Sector

While the philanthropic sector is no stranger to adjusting to political transitions, the magnitude and pace of change in the early days of this administration present distinct challenges, conditions of limited information and perceived heightened risk. This section highlights key contextual factors shaping the philanthropic sector - a

changed atmosphere from Trump 1.0, DEI under scrutiny, and seeking commonality amid polarization. It raises the critical question: who will fill the gaps?

3.1 Contextual Setting

A Different Feeling from Trump 1.0

During the Trump 1.0 administration (2017–2021), there was a mix of open defiance from progressive funders, strategic adaptation by more centrist institutions, and enthusiastic alignment from a subset of conservative donors.²¹ In the first Trump term, philanthropy often mobilized in direct opposition to federal actions on climate change, immigration, healthcare, and racial justice.²² There was also a significant uptick in individual donations driven by opposition to policies perceived as regressive, what some called a period of ‘rage giving.’²³ This outpouring signalled public support for nonprofits as bulwarks against policies seen as hostile to marginalized groups and causes. Foundations found themselves in the dual role of reinforcing civil society defences while also experimenting with new modes of rapid response grantmaking, policy advocacy, and coalition-building.

This time, something feels dramatically different. While some funders are again mobilizing, early indications suggest a more complicated reality. The sheer volume of policy changes and executive orders has created a mass of information—some conflicting, some deliberately vague—making it difficult for foundations to anticipate next steps. There is concern and critique that funders have not been vocal enough at this time.²⁴ Instead, media and pundits are working to understand what little verified information is emerging. At the time of writing, some philanthropic leaders have begun sharing their plans and experts believe others will begin to do so.²⁵ This relative quiet starkly contrasts the more vocal stance of philanthropy during Trump’s first term, raising questions about how the sector will ultimately choose to respond in both words and actions.²⁶

DEI Under Scrutiny: Foundations as Political Targets

As philanthropic leaders attempt to make sense of these shifting dynamics, a significant development in the philanthropic landscape under Trump 2.0 is the heightened scrutiny of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives described in Section 2. The executive order on DEI presents a particularly complex challenge for philanthropic foundations with assets exceeding \$500 million—not because it is settled law, but because of the uncertainty it creates. A list published by the

Chronicle of Philanthropy identifies 346 foundations that may be subject to investigation under Trump's new executive order targeting DEI policies.²⁷ The implications of such scrutiny are far-reaching, raising concerns about regulatory compliance, reputational risks, and potential legal challenges.

While the order is being contested in the courts and may not withstand judicial scrutiny, its mere existence has a chilling effect. Given their visibility and financial influence, large foundations may feel compelled to pre-emptively adjust their DEI initiatives to avoid political scrutiny, even without clear legal mandates. This chilling effect could lead to more cautious grantmaking, shifts in funding priorities, or legal maneuvering to insulate existing programs. At the same time, some foundations may choose to leverage their resources to challenge the order's implications, positioning themselves as defenders of philanthropy's role in advancing equity.

More in Common

Despite the deep divides in political discourse, research from organizations like More in Common suggests that Americans share more common ground than is often assumed. A recent report, *The Priority Gap: Insights on the 2024 Election Outcome*,²⁸ found that inflation was the top concern across all demographics, with the economy and immigration ranking second and third. Many Trump voters in 2024 were politically disengaged rather than ideologically devoted conservatives, suggesting a more complex political landscape than rigid partisan divides might indicate.²⁹ Additionally, Populace research,³⁰ as reported in the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, showed that Biden and Trump voters shared key priorities, including access to high-quality healthcare, community safety, criminal justice reforms, support for the middle class, and modernized infrastructure.

These findings suggest that philanthropy should focus on shared interests rather than perceived divisions to create opportunities for bridge-building. Research warns that media narratives, political rhetoric, and the ideological wings of a party often amplify divisions beyond what polling data suggests.³¹ While polarization remains a reality, the philanthropic sector must be aware of its role in fostering constructive dialogues or exacerbating divisions.

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3.1 The Big Question: Filling the Gaps

The return of the Trump administration brings renewed concerns over significant cuts to social welfare programs and civil society infrastructure, reviving the long-standing debate, highlighted in the [PFC 2024 Landscape Report](#), over whether philanthropy should complement or substitute for government functions.³² The tension is not new.

Historically, philanthropy has operated in the gray space between public and private responsibility, with some arguing that foundations play a crucial role in supporting marginalized populations during periods of government retreat, while others caution against philanthropy legitimizing or enabling government withdrawal. The debate is particularly pronounced in moments of crisis or transition, where foundations are often celebrated as rapid responders but also critiqued for their scale, accountability, and long-term sustainability limitations.

While silence is a mentioned theme, there are examples of how philanthropists have and are stepping forward. Michael Bloomberg provides one of the most notable examples of a billionaire philanthropist stepping up to fill federal funding gaps. His Bloomberg Philanthropies pledged to fulfill US financial and reporting commitments to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) after Trump withdrew the United States from the Paris Agreement in 2017. The US typically covers about a fifth of the UNFCCC budget, amounting to roughly \$7.4 million in 2023. Bloomberg's intervention demonstrated how private wealth can be leveraged to sustain global commitments, but it also underscored the limitations of relying on philanthropy to replace governmental obligations.³³

Similarly, early signals from major US foundations suggest an emerging and increasing commitment to giving in response to federal pullbacks. The MacArthur Foundation³⁴ and the Freedom Together Foundation³⁵ have publicly discussed expanded grantmaking strategies. These announcements are already being met with both celebration and critique. The extent of what the foundation sector will be asked or expected to do remains unclear. But the calls for philanthropic support have started.³⁶ The broader question isn't whether philanthropy can step in but how it should, given its lack of democratic accountability and the risk of legitimizing government disengagement. As Inside Philanthropy's David Callahan noted on LinkedIn,³⁷ the money is there, but how much gets unlocked for a "resistance redux" depends on how bad things get and whether progressive groups present compelling strategies for responding.

USAID

Through Executive Order 14169, "Reevaluating and Realigning United States Foreign Aid," issued on January 20, 2025,³⁸ the Trump 2.0 administration mandated a 90-day suspension of all US foreign development assistance programs to conduct a comprehensive review, arguing that the existing foreign aid framework was misaligned with American interests. As a result, USAID's foreign aid contracts were slashed by over 90%, cutting approximately \$60 billion in funding and terminating nearly 10,000

grants—severely impacting health and development programs worldwide.^{v 39} The impact of this order on USAID operations, programs, contracts, and grants has been immediate.

Other major donor nations have also reduced their commitments in 2025. The United Kingdom, under Prime Minister Keir Starmer, reduced its foreign aid budget from 0.5% to 0.3% of gross national income, redirecting £6 billion toward increased defence spending—a move widely criticized by development organizations.⁴⁰ Meanwhile, the Netherlands cut its official development assistance by 30%, prioritizing projects that serve national interests.⁴¹ These shifts signal a broader realignment of global development priorities, raising concerns about the future of humanitarian efforts, particularly in regions already struggling with conflict, poverty, and climate crises. Data is emerging on the most affected regions and sectors to ensure funding is efficiently directed.⁴²

In response, collaborations between philanthropic organizations and local actors are well-established and continuously evolving as stakeholders work to bridge gaps and maximize impact. Existing efforts, such as the [Network of Engaged International Donors](#) (NEID), established in 2008, provide donors with guidance on navigating international philanthropy. Similarly, [Unlock Aid](#), in collaboration with several partners, launched the [Foreign Aid Bridge Fund](#) to address immediate funding shortfalls. Other initiatives, including the [Network for Empowered Aid Response \(NEAR\)](#), [Founders Pledge](#), and [GlobalGiving](#), are actively mobilizing resources and expertise. Meanwhile, ongoing research efforts, such as those led by The Bridgespan Group and the Gates Foundation, which has been tracking [philanthropic collaborations](#) since 2001 and updated its database in February 2025, continue to shape and inform emerging partnerships. These established networks and new alliances will be crucial in adapting to policy changes.

As international aid funding declines, ongoing debates continue about who should fill these gaps and how alternative funding mechanisms should be structured.⁴³ This situation is one example of the reignition of the role of philanthropy in filling these

^v USAID was established under President Kennedy through the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 to advance US foreign policy, security, and national interests. It has long been considered a pillar of US soft power. It historically played a role in halting the spread of communism and facilitating the transition of Central and Eastern Europe to market-based democracies.

The policy recommendations behind this executive order, rooted in Project 2025, seek to align USAID more closely with conservative priorities and US foreign policy objectives by scaling back its budget to pre-COVID-19 levels, reintegrating it within the Department of State, restructuring civil rights oversight, and renaming the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment office to reflect conservative values. Additionally, Project 2025 positions these restructuring efforts as critical to countering China's Belt and Road Initiative, while separately praising the effectiveness of programs such as PEPFAR as models for future USAID initiatives. While legal challenges and court rulings continue, the situation remains unclear, leaving a gap in global aid efforts.

funding gaps. Kathleen Enright, CEO of the *Council on Foundations*, has emphasized that philanthropy cannot compensate for the US government's foreign aid cuts. She noted that US foundations contributed \$8 billion to international causes, compared to the \$49 billion previously allocated by US foreign assistance. “That’s a math problem,” she stated.⁴⁴

4.0 Pulse Check from US Philanthropic Sector Members

To better understand how US philanthropy is responding to this evolving context, PFC conducted a pulse check—an exploratory research effort designed to capture emerging trends and strategic shifts and confirm sector-wide themes. This research offers a snapshot of philanthropic discourse in the United States from late February to early March. Insights were gathered from twelve philanthropic practitioners, including representatives from private, community, and corporate foundations, donor-advised fund (DAF) holders, and grantees. Given concerns about publicly sharing views, all input was provided confidentially, without attribution, and no direct quotes are included. As such, this analysis synthesizes key themes rather than presenting individual perspectives, offering an early-stage understanding of the sector’s response in this period of uncertainty.

4.1 Three Themes

The findings reveal a philanthropic sector navigating uncertainty and strategic silence, evolving donor strategies, and the ongoing impact on nonprofit resilience and adaptation.

Uncertainty and Strategic Silence

A recurring theme among participants is the pervading fear of the unknown and a sector gripped by uncertainty. Political donors, in particular, expressed nervousness about the current climate, unsure of how their election contributions might be perceived. Donors and foundations appear overwhelmed, struggling to assess how and where they can have an impact in such an unpredictable environment. Participants observed that while past global crises prompted quick public statements from foundations, the current moment has not elicited the same level of engagement. Communications teams do not seem to be proactively shaping narratives or issuing

statements, contributing to a sense of silence from institutional philanthropy. Instead, several philanthropy participants perceived that it is nonprofit leaders—the individuals with the most at stake—who are speaking out.

Another view is that foundations are putting their houses in order. Behind the scenes, individual and institutional donors are checking in on their nonprofits and grantees, asking for what is needed and planning the course ahead. They are closely monitoring the situation but are not always sure when to step in. Some considerations for their action include whether it aligns with the organization's mission, supports the nonprofit sector, and/or reflects general allyship. Some foundations are also sense-making that while their political ideologies align with the current administration, they also have been giving to areas now being cut, such as humanitarian aid and social service. For these foundations, there is a question of whether they will use this voice, publicly or privately, to advocate to the administration on the depths of these cuts.

How Donors and Institutions Are Responding

Participants have indicated that there remains a wait-and-see approach both individually and institutionally. One reason is that it is hard to identify the primary and most pressing problems. Donors are trying to assess how to have an impact in this climate, leading to not significantly changing their giving as of yet. There is an indication that this behaviour may be emerging, with advisors and intermediaries being asked to curate lists of nonprofits with the greatest need. Donor Advised Funds (DAFs) have been mentioned as of interest in their ability to offer anonymity in a politically sensitive climate. Several participants mentioned a possible reversion to funding in more neutral areas, such as hospitals and non-controversial community initiatives. On the institutional side, universities and corporate donors are also responding with caution, particularly around DEI initiatives and political affiliations.

The question of where to give is a hurdle, compounded by the lack of evidence of field-level initiatives on how to give. Collaborative funding models, such as giving circles and pooled funds, were mentioned as playing a role in resource distribution, but also mentioned were the signs of collaboration fatigue as funders navigate competing priorities and prolonged crises. Philanthropic practices, such as strategic versus trust-based philanthropy, impact measurement, and accountability, were highlighted as needing assessment in this rapidly evolving landscape. Participants noted that, with limited field-level evidence, it is not easy to claim a 'best' approach. Reflecting on COVID-19 strategies, such as oral reporting or experimental grant spending, may offer valuable insights as the sector balances previous models with innovation.

Nonprofit Impact and Adaptation

There was concern among participants about the overall impact on nonprofits, particularly beneficiaries. Participants were somewhat surprised and dismayed that some nonprofit organizations continue to operate without reserves. Nonprofits with undiversified revenue streams, particularly those reliant on government grants or a small donor base, are experiencing the most increased financial instability. Still, there is evidence that work is being done to build different funding sources. For example, some international nonprofits were asked to fill gaps in local communities where US foreign aid was reduced.

Operationally, nonprofits are adjusting their language by adapting their external communications about their programming and even wordsmithing within internal communications. Law firms are collaborating with nonprofits to determine whether, where, and how to engage with the DEI executive orders. One participant shared that organizations are strategically cutting programs to preserve core operations and not completely abandon beneficiaries. The participant emphasized that nonprofit leaders are primarily concerned with their beneficiaries' well-being rather than their organizations' sustainability.

While many participants are considering various options, one was explicit about the limits of philanthropy: it can step in temporarily, but its impact will only be marginal. There simply is no structure in place, churches, charities, and communities, equipped to fully replace government support. Ultimately, without adequate government involvement, the sentiment conveyed was that people will suffer.

4.2 Analysis

Overall, the philanthropic sector is in a state of reassessment rather than immediate action. While some donors and institutions have started responding to emerging needs, the sheer scale of human suffering reveals a profound gap—one so immense it defies easy comprehension. Despite intense media scrutiny and pundit speculation on philanthropic interventions, hesitation, uncertainty, and structural constraints suggest there will be many emergent and urgent needs to be met, and many will remain unmet. Vulnerable communities face devastating consequences if these gaps persist. By carefully analyzing these early signals, Canadian funders can better anticipate potential ripple effects, seize opportunities for cross-border collaboration, and ready themselves for similar challenges in their own contexts.

5.0 Reflections and Actions for Canadian Philanthropic Foundations

From economic disruptions, including tariffs on Canadian goods, to broader geopolitical shifts, the ripple effects of Trump 2.0 will be felt deeply. But beyond policy and politics, this moment is about humanity—about the real lives impacted by these changes and the moral responsibility to respond with generosity and solidarity. Paul Schervish reminds us of the moral citizenship of care⁴⁵:

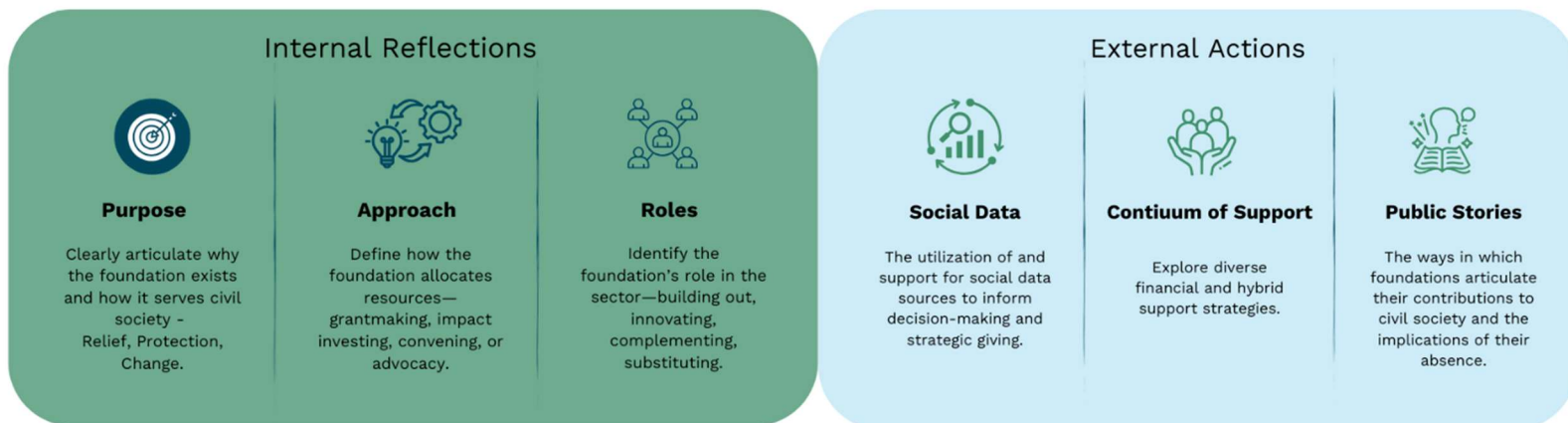
Participation in the dynamic of receiving and giving is an inner faculty belonging to all individuals. This faculty is the capacity to digest suffering and evil and to produce love; and to digest love and goodness in a way that amplifies them...Instead of speaking of individual and community as if they were two realities that must be integrated, our task is to explain at every turn just how they are already integrated—despite how we may think, feel, or speak otherwise.

Canadian foundations have long been at the forefront of supporting communities in times of crisis, and now, more than ever, that commitment is being called upon. The PFC 2024 Landscape Report⁴⁶ highlights Canadians' generosity and resilience, and this spirit must guide philanthropic action in the face of growing challenges. Whether it is ensuring stability for vulnerable populations, strengthening civil society, or reaffirming Canada's role as a compassionate global actor, the philanthropic sector has the capacity and the care to lead. This is a moment to reaffirm the values that define Canadians and to respond with creativity, courage, and conviction. The ideas below offer reflections and actions to discuss how Canadian Foundations might prepare to meet the moment.

5.1 From Reflections to Action: Considerations for Canadian Philanthropic Foundations

The silence we currently hear in the US isn't inevitable—it's a result of choices about how and whether to share the work being done. By engaging in reflection and action, foundations can contribute to a stronger, more visible narrative about their role in civil society.

This section offers suggestions on how foundations can engage in reflective practices and take actionable steps to navigate their role in supporting civil society.

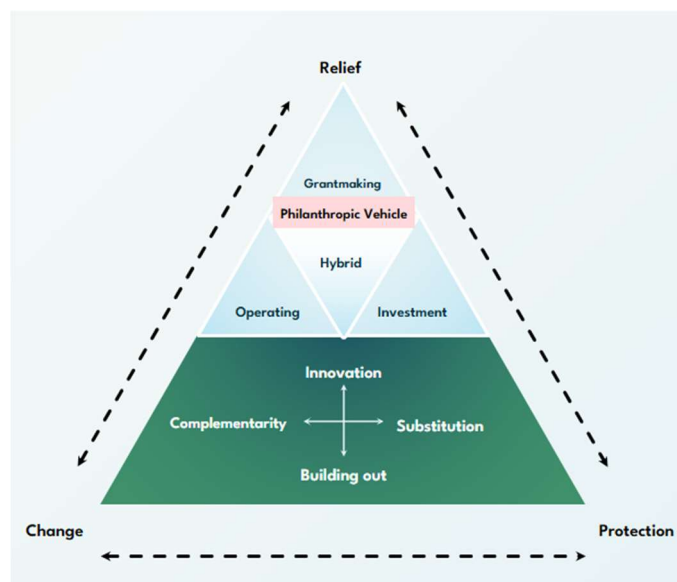


Reflections

1. Internally, be clear on how your foundation supports civil society

To effectively support civil society, each foundation should clearly understand how it operates and why. The Foundation Triangle is a tool that helps foundations explore and articulate how they use their institution as a mechanism for social good. It provides a structured way to assess and communicate a foundation's Purpose, Approach, and Roles in the sector.

Initially highlighted in [Chapter 2, PFC's 2024 Landscape Report](#), the Foundation Triangle was applied to understand broader shifts in the philanthropic sector. However, it is equally valuable at an individual organizational level, offering foundations a framework for internal reflection and external communication. It can be used with board members, staff, and stakeholders to refine existing strategies, make changes, or deepen self-awareness, this tool fosters more intentional and transparent philanthropy.



Using the Foundation Triangle, each foundation can define its:

- Purpose – Clearly articulate why the foundation exists and how it serves civil society, reflecting on relief, protection, and change.
- Approach – Define how the foundation allocates resources— such as through grantmaking, operating programs, convening, using DAFs, capital transfers, socially responsible investing, impact investment, and advocacy.
- Roles – Identify the foundation’s role in the sector—building out, innovating, complementing, and substituting.

Example Statement:

"Our foundation focuses its strategy on alleviating poverty (relief) and inequity in education (change) (Purpose). We achieve this through multi-year, unrestricted grantmaking and some early impact investments. We also hold a DAF for more anonymous and also, place-based giving (Approach). We are focused on building out proven solutions in poverty and innovating in education, and we strive to complement the government roles in both of these areas (Roles)."

By using the Foundation Triangle as a reflective tool, foundations can better explain, evaluate, and refine their work—ensuring that their philanthropic efforts align with internal values and civil society's evolving needs.

Actions

2. Get comfortable with social and economic data sources: use them and support them

We have seen firsthand in the US how fragile nonprofit data infrastructure can be—when key data sources are suddenly pulled offline, foundations and researchers lose essential insights into sector trends, funding flows, and community needs. In Canada, we must ensure that the data vehicles we rely on remain accessible and robust. This means using them strategically, advocating for their continued availability, and investing in efforts that enhance nonprofit sector data.

Consider how your foundation engages with data sources such as:

- [Statistics Canada](#) provides demographic, economic, and sectoral dashboards that can help foundations align funding with community needs.

- The [Charity Insights Canada Project](#) at Carleton University collects real-time data on nonprofit organizations, providing a unique lens into how charities operate and adapt.

PFC actively monitors both data sources, and below, we have thematically aggregated relevant Statistics Canada data to inform strategic giving. By leveraging this work and engaging with key datasets, foundations can make better decisions, identify gaps, support advocacy efforts, and contribute to a stronger nonprofit sector overall.

Demographics & Population Trends	Income, Employment & Compensation
Canada's Population Clock Annual Demographic Estimates (Interactive Dashboards): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Census Metropolitan Areas & Census Agglomerations • Economic Regions • Census Divisions • Rural & Small Town / Functional Urban Areas Population Projections for Canada, Provinces, and Territories Rural Canada Non-Profit Dashboard (Biz Count, Revenues, Employment)	Income of Men and Women Sources of Family Income Gender Pay Gaps Among Executives in Canada The Assets, Debts, and Net Worth of Canadian Families, 2023 A Look at Income Sources of Racialized Individuals 65 Years and Over in Canada, 2020 Quarterly Survey of Financial Statistics
Cost of Living, Inflation & Consumer Trends	Health & Well-Being
Average Retail Food Prices Shrinkflation Consumer Price Index Data Visualization Tool Canadian Economic Tracker	Mental Health-Related Disabilities, 2022 Changes in the Health of Canadians and Access to Health Care Visualizing Mortality in Canada
Equity & Social Indicators	Arts, Culture & Language
Quality of Life Indicators Poverty Rates of Older Women	National Cultural Indicators Arts and Culture Data Viewer

Quality of Life Indicators by Census Subdivision Selected Indicators Quality of Life Racialized Post-Secondary Students	Language Diversity in Canada Non-Official Language Speakers: Immigration Status and Period of Immigration
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3. Think of a continuum of support

Based on our findings, some of the observed silence may reflect foundations pausing to consult with their grantees. A critical action step is regularly checking in with your grantees to understand their perspectives and needs. Following this, consider developing a continuum of support—from listening and amplifying grantee voices to providing targeted resources to actively engaging in joint advocacy.

Think about the work of your endowment. The debate between perpetuity and spend-down models is limiting. Instead, foundations should consider a spectrum of available financial and giving strategies. This allows for tailored and creative approaches, such as:

- Allocate spending into a portion of the endowment for a specific cause or a certain timeframe (e.g. Trottier’s commitment to climate change⁴⁷)
- Target capital transfers to underserved communities, as demonstrated by Laidlaw Foundation, Inspirit Foundation, and McConnell Foundation in the Indigenous Peoples Resilience Fund.⁴⁸
- Consider the total portfolio impact of a foundation’s approach as both grantmaking and investment. Remember that the disbursement quota (DQ) is a floor. Consider and communicate how your investments also make a difference.

4. Externally share why your philanthropy matters and what would happen if it wasn't there

Philanthropy plays a role in addressing systemic challenges, but its contributions are often overlooked. In the *More Than Money*⁴⁹ podcast, US policy expert Sara Barba highlights how democracy works from the field up—stories from communities, when brought into district offices, shape policy conversations and demonstrate the value of philanthropy and philanthropic foundations. Foundations are part of communities. Rather than remaining silent, foundations can use storytelling to articulate their roles

and impact in their local, national, and global communities in ways that resonate with policymakers.

Foundations can consider:

- Develop at least one case study illustrating how their funding addressed a local, national, or global challenge.
- Share these stories with their federal and provincial representatives to provide real-world examples of philanthropy's role in supporting civil society.
- Collaborate with PFC to map and aggregate stories across Canada, offering a broader narrative of philanthropic contributions.

A one-page summary from each foundation, delivered to policymakers' offices, when amplified across the country, spreads a clear and directed message of the impact of Canadian philanthropy.

6.0 Conclusion

In an era characterized by rapid dissemination of information and opinion, certainty remains elusive. This briefing captures an assessment at a specific moment, fully recognizing that conditions, priorities, and policies will inevitably evolve. The research examined the priorities of Trump 2.0, focusing on a smaller administrative state, shifting ideological directions, and opposition to perceived elitism while assessing their implications for U.S. philanthropy. These priorities put foundations under increased scrutiny, deepen federal funding gaps, and pose a crisis for civil society infrastructure, as explored through consultations with American philanthropic colleagues.

Additionally, the reflections and recommended actions provided for Canadian foundations emphasize the importance of clearly articulating, internally and externally, how they support civil society and the consequences if that support were absent. Beyond this briefing, PFC remains committed to supporting foundations in skill-building, convening meaningful conversations, and actively engaging in policy discussions to ensure preparedness for upcoming changes. Echoing Paul Schervish's notion that philanthropy is as much about shaping culture as distributing resources, PFC seeks to foster a philanthropic environment attuned to both the practical and expressive dimensions of giving.⁵⁰

We look forward to your perspectives⁵¹ and continued partnership as we advocate collectively for philanthropy's role in meeting the moment.

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