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Working in Canadian Foundations

2026

Putting People First:

Foundation Staff, Roles, and Practices

Authored by

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2026 Working in Canadian Foundations

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**Philanthropic
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About PFC

A registered charitable organization, [Philanthropic Foundations Canada \(PFC\)](#) is Canada's national philanthropic network, working together towards a more just, equitable and sustainable world.

Our membership is comprised of foundations, charities, corporate giving programs, donor-advised funds, and nonprofits whose primary function and activity are grantmaking. In partnership with its diverse membership, and in collaboration with civil society, business, and government, PFC advances the common good, through network capacity building, collaboration initiatives, and policy & research.

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Welcome from the President & CEO

Welcome to *Working in Canadian Foundations*. For too long, conversations about philanthropy in Canada have relied on assumptions, anecdotes, and data from elsewhere. That is beginning to change. One of PFC's most important investments has been to build Canadian philanthropic research capacity through a dedicated research role, partnerships with academic institutions, and a commitment to generating evidence that reflects the Canadian context.



This report is a transformational step in that journey.

For the first time, we have a clearer picture of the people working inside Canadian foundations, including their roles, experiences, challenges, and contributions. In a period of profound change for philanthropy, understanding the human capacity behind this work matters. Strong institutions are built by people, and stronger philanthropy requires a better understanding of the people who shape it every day.

This report is another important step in PFC's ongoing commitment to advancing a more Canadian story about philanthropy. One grounded in evidence, informed by practice, and focused on the possibilities ahead.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J-M Mangin'.

Jean-Marc Mangin

President & CEO

Philanthropic Foundations Canada

Thank you from the Lead Researcher

This report builds on decades of inquiry into foundation work rather than beginning anew. *Working in Canadian Foundations* draws on earlier studies, including *The Foundation Administrator* (Zurcher and Dunstan, 1972) and *Working in Foundations* (Odendahl et al., 1985), extending this line of inquiry into the Canadian context.

It also benefited from a first-time peer review process that strengthened the report in important ways. I am especially grateful to Andre Williams, Bruce Lawson, Caledonia Mathieson, Laetitia Gill, Teresa Marques, and Dr. Tim Mueller, who said yes to the unknown. Their thoughtful feedback, support, and encouragement made this report stronger.

Understanding foundations begins with understanding individual experience. Twenty years after falling into foundation work, I am grateful for this research opportunity.

My sincere thanks go to everyone who contributed through surveys, interviews, and feedback.

I also thank the leadership and team at Philanthropic Foundations Canada for their commitment to a people-and-practice research agenda and for their ongoing support.



A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "M. Fugiel Gartner".

Michele Fugiel Gartner

Lead Researcher,
Philanthropic Foundations Canada

Executive Summary

Working in Canadian Foundations is an inaugural report that examines the roles and practices of foundation staff, who play a vital yet often overlooked part in Canadian philanthropic foundations.

Using data from CRA T3010, PFC's Foundation Staff Survey, PFC Salary and Benefits records, and the Charity Insights Canada Project (CICP), it offers the most comprehensive overview available of foundation staff and experiences influencing their work across Canada. This report serves as the baseline for ongoing evaluations of philanthropic workplace cultures, which are continually evolving.

This report is for foundation staff, board members, individuals interested in working in foundations, charities, and nonprofits, as well as researchers, students, and the general public.

What This Research Reveals

The findings that follow show how individuals, organizations, and field dynamics shape foundation work in Canada.

A Small but Growing Workforce

The Canadian foundation workforce has grown significantly over time but remains concentrated rather than widespread. Between 2000 and 2023, the number of Canadian public and private foundations reporting at least one employee increased from 1,355 to 1,895, while the total number of reported staff positions rose from 11,481 to 23,526. Despite this growth in workforce size, staffing remains concentrated rather than widespread. In 2023, fewer than one in six Canadian public and private foundations reported at least one employee.

The majority of Canadian philanthropic foundations operate without formal staffing structures.

The Individual

Diverse Entry and Preparation

Foundation staff are highly educated and enter the sector through diverse pathways, most commonly from the nonprofit and charitable sector. Entry continues to be shaped by relationships and networks, though more formal recruitment methods are becoming more common. This produces a workforce with strong capabilities, but without a standardized professional pathway or shared set of core competencies.

Career Progression: A Structural Constraint

Career progression remains one of the clearest areas of tension. Staff report generally positive experiences of compensation and workload, but less clarity around advancement. On average, respondents rated the availability of career pathways below neutral (2.77 out of 5), and many report uncertainty or lack of access to progression opportunities. Structural factors, including small or flat organizational hierarchies, limit upward mobility, while informal practices further constrain advancement.

Career pathways are not absent, but they are often unclear and structurally constrained.

The Organization

Organizations: Increasingly Formalized, but at Different Stages

At the organizational level, foundations have become more formalized over time, particularly in staffing structures, benefits, and professional development, although foundations remain at different stages of this transition. This is also reflected in governance, with some foundations operating through highly formalized structures while others rely on more informal approaches. While many organizations now offer expanded benefits, flexible work arrangements, and learning supports, human resources practices and career pathways remain widely inconsistent.

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion: Progress with Gaps

Equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) is an area of both progress and ongoing challenge. Many foundations have embedded EDI into their mission, values, and programming, and staff report efforts to incorporate equity into practice. However, gaps persist between policy and implementation, particularly in leadership representation and accountability.

EDI is widely expressed in principle, but less consistently embedded in everyday practice.

The Field

A Field Under Pressure

While foundation work is often seen as rooted in privilege, the reality for staff is more nuanced, shaped by competing expectations and greater accountability to communities. Staff members perceive their roles as purposeful and interconnected with community impact, personal learning, and autonomy. However, they also encounter significant pressures from rising demands, limited resources, and the necessity to address complex systemic challenges. Common obstacles include strain from heavy workloads, governance constraints, and fragmented collaboration efforts.

Staff are navigating rising expectations without a corresponding increase in capacity or coordination.

The Role of Sector Infrastructure

Organizations such as Philanthropic Foundations Canada (PFC), Community Foundations of Canada (CFC), The Circle on Philanthropy, and Environment Funders Canada (EFC), along with shared spaces and networks, deliver targeted support for connection, learning, and coordination. These infrastructures reduce isolation and facilitate knowledge sharing. Still, participation remains optional, practices often emanate within organizations, and presence is irregularly distributed across the country.

A Sector Shaped by Its People

The strength of Canadian philanthropy depends not only on its financial resources, but also on the people who interpret and carry out its work.

Strengthening the sector will require ongoing reflection on how the field balances the flexibility and relational qualities that have long shaped foundation work with growing pressures for greater structure, consistency, and formalization.

The strength of Canadian foundations rests on the people doing the work and the conditions that support them.

Working in Canadian Foundations sheds light on both the achievements and shortcomings in understanding foundation work across Canada. It highlights a field that is expanding but remains inconsistent and under-researched, particularly regarding how roles, skills, and practices develop. It positions foundation staff as a visible and valuable part of Canada's philanthropic story. It serves as a point of departure for further research and interest in studying foundations, their people, and their practices.

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Introduction

The People Behind Foundation Work

Philanthropic foundations are often described in terms of assets, endowments, strategies, and grant portfolios. Less visible, but central to philanthropy's operation, are the people who carry out this work. Foundations rely on a range of actors, including the board of directors, volunteers, consultants, investment advisors and staff, each playing distinct roles in shaping decisions and practice. This report focuses on foundation staff, full-time and part-time.

Foundations are also often perceived as operating from positions of significant financial and institutional privilege, raising questions about power, distance from communities, and accountability. Missing from much of this discussion are the staff who translate board intent into practice, interpret community needs, design and manage grantmaking processes, steward relationships, and ensure accountability. Working at the intersection of governance, community, and institutional systems, they carry forward much of the knowledge that foundations accumulate over time. While not all Canadian foundations employ staff, understanding who they are, what they do, and how they experience their roles offers important insight into foundation work.



This report addresses a longstanding gap in Canadian philanthropy research by centring the foundation staff. While the sector has grown in visibility and policy attention, there has been limited empirical attention to the staff themselves. Philanthropic Foundations Canada (PFC) is well-positioned to undertake this work. As a national member association with sustained engagement in foundation practice, it brings together sector reach, conceptual framing, and practical insight. Two research questions guide this exploratory study:

- What can be learned about the nature and composition of work within Canadian philanthropic foundations through available data, survey responses, and practitioner experiences?
- How do current staffing patterns, professional trajectories, and institutional practices reflect broader trends and tensions in the Canadian philanthropic sector?

Findings are presented across three interconnected levels—individual, organizational, and field—to reflect how philanthropic practice is shaped by people working within institutional and sectoral contexts. The report concludes with practical actions to strengthen foundation work and support the people who carry it out.

Literature and Conceptual Approach:

Studying Foundation Staff and Work

Research on foundation staffing offers important insights into how foundation work has evolved. Much of this literature is episodic, largely U.S.-focused, and oriented toward leadership or organizational development rather than the day-to-day work of staff. As a result, while there is a longstanding recognition that staff matter, there is no cohesive, empirically grounded understanding of the foundation work, particularly in Canada.

US Historical Development of Foundation Staffing

Interest in the people working within foundations is not new. In the 1970s, scholars noted that understanding foundations requires an understanding of those who manage and operationalize them.¹ Early 20th-century foundation staff, sometimes described as “philanthropoids”, acted as intermediaries between donors and communities. Over time, staffing evolved alongside the sector's growth and formalization. Research has identified four broad phases: early philanthropoid intermediaries (1925–1950), administrative expansion (1950–1975), managerial professionalization (1975–2000), and the contemporary foundation professional (2000–present).² These shifts reflect increasing expectations for staff expertise, accountability, and strategic capacity and intersect with broader critiques of philanthropy as a field shaped by concentrated wealth and influence, where foundation work can be perceived as privileged.

Staffing has been closely tied to questions of legitimacy. Regulatory developments, particularly in the United States, contributed to the expansion of specialized roles, including legal, financial, and programmatic staff, linking internal capacity to external accountability.³

1. (Zurcher & Dustan, 1972)
2. (Fugiel Gartner et al., 2023)
3. (Frumkin, 1998)

By the late 20th century, foundation staff were increasingly understood as professionals responsible for strategy, learning, and engagement, not only for administration.⁴ Professional staff brought strategic planning and subject expertise, formalizing how foundations identified needs and worked with grant recipients.

The growing professionalization of foundation work has also generated ongoing debate. While professionalization can strengthen expertise and consistency, it may also introduce bureaucracy or distance from communities.⁵ Staffing has remained a site of tension between flexibility and formalization, discretion and standardization.⁶ Together, previous research has established that foundation staff are central to how philanthropic institutions function. It stops short of providing a systematic understanding of their roles, identities, and experience of foundation work.

The Canadian Context: A Limited Evidence Base



While the broad contours of foundation staffing and work have been studied chiefly in the U.S., far less is known about staffing in Canadian philanthropic foundations. Canadian philanthropic foundations tend to be fewer in number and often smaller in scale compared to their U.S. counterparts. Many Canadian foundations have traditionally operated with minimal or no paid staff. PFC's 2019 Staffing in Foundations⁷ report notes that most foundations in Canada start with only 1 to 3 employees. Often, a family foundation may rely on volunteer trustees or borrow capacity from a family's business office for functions such as accounting or legal, rather than maintaining dedicated foundation personnel. Those foundations that do grow more complex, for example, by running their own charitable programs or establishing formal grant application procedures, tend to hire foundation staff as needed.

4. (Frumkin, 2006)

5. (Gardner, 2017; Horn & Gardner, 2006; Smith, 2007; Stauber, 2010; Walker, 2010).

6. (Deep & Frumkin, 2001; Frumkin, 1998, 2004)

7. (Philanthropic Foundations Canada, 2019)

The result is a very diverse landscape: some foundations are entirely volunteer-driven, while others employ modest teams, and a few outliers have very large staff. Recent data illustrate this variation. Within a sample of approximately 70 participants in PFC’s 2025 Salary and Benefits Report, Canadian foundations with staff employ an average of about seven people, with a median of four, suggesting that a small number of larger organizations raise the average.⁸ Moreover, when considering all registered foundations in Canada, including many small private foundations, the majority have no staff at all.⁹

Beyond practical tools such as PFC’s staffing guide and periodic member surveys on compensation and benefits, little research has examined the roles, career pathways, or workplace practices of Canadian foundation staff. Important contextual dimensions, including regional variation, regulatory conditions, and career pathways, remain underexplored.

As a result, Canada lacks a system-wide, empirical picture of who foundation staff are, how their roles are evolving, and how they experience their work.

This gap is not simply descriptive. Without a clearer understanding of the workforce, discussions of effectiveness, legitimacy, and accountability overlook the individuals through whom foundation work is enacted.

From Organizations to Individuals: A Conceptual Shift

The limitations of the existing literature reflect a broader tendency within philanthropy research to analyze foundations primarily as organizations or institutional actors, seeing them as relatively unified entities defined by their missions or approaches. This is seen in research on governance structures, funding flows, strategy, and policy environments. Less attention has been paid to foundations as workplaces shaped by people and everyday practice. As a result, foundations are often treated as organizational “monoliths”.¹⁰

While this perspective has generated valuable insights, it can obscure the human work through which foundations operate. Decisions are not implemented automatically; they are interpreted, negotiated, and enacted by individuals working within specific organizational and field contexts.

8. (The Portage Group, 2025)

9. (Fugiel Gartner, 2024)

10. (Fejerskov, 2018)

Both the U.S.-based *The Foundation Administrator*¹¹ and *Working in Foundations*¹² studies are examples of early efforts to describe who foundation staff were, how they entered the field, and how roles were shaped by institutional culture. More recent scholarship tracing a century of staff development in U.S. foundations likewise documents how staff roles expanded from administrative support to include strategy, evaluation, learning, and community engagement.¹³

The microfoundations perspective offers a way to address this limitation. Emerging from institutional theory, it emphasizes that institutions are enacted through the actions, interactions, and interpretations of individuals within organizations.¹⁴ Applied to philanthropy, this perspective helps explain why foundations with similar structures or stated goals may behave differently in practice. It highlights how variation emerges through everyday decisions, role interpretation, and relational dynamics, and why formal strategies do not always unfold as intended. Rather than viewing foundations as static entities, this lens foregrounds the people who reproduce, adapt, and, at times, challenge institutional norms.

11. (Zurcher & Dustan, 1972)

12. (Odendahl et al., 1985)

13. (Fugiel Gartner et al., 2023, 2024)

14. (Fugiel Gartner, 2024b; Hwang & Colyvas, 2019; Powell & Colyvas, 2008)

Findings:

How Foundation Work is Carried Out

To better understand foundation staff and their work, findings are presented across three interconnected levels: individual, organizational, and field. This structure recognizes that foundation practice is shaped not only by organizations and systems, but also by the people working within them, whose decisions, relationships, and experiences both influence and are influenced by broader institutional and sectoral contexts. Methodological details are referenced throughout the report and described more fully in the Appendix.¹⁵



The Individual

Behind the assets and grantmaking of Canadian foundations is a workforce that is both modest in size and varied in composition. The available data show that staff are distributed irregularly across organizations, enter through multiple pathways, and bring a wide range of skills that influence how philanthropic work is carried out.

15. This report draws on multiple data sources and methods, including survey, administrative, and secondary data analysis. Key methodological details are introduced within relevant sections, with full documentation provided in the Appendix.

a) Staffing in Canadian Foundations

The broadest view of foundation staffing in Canada comes from the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) T3010 Registered Charity Information Return, which captures full-time and part-time employees across all public (A) and private (B) foundations.¹⁶ In 2023, 1,895 foundations reported at least one employee. The combined FT/PT reporting count was 2,679, reflecting foundations that reported full-time employees, part-time employees, or both. Foundations reported 23,526 positions, including 14,904 full-time and 8,622 part-time roles (Table 1).

Table 1 Foundation Full and Part-Time reporting (2023 T3010; Author's own analysis)

2023 Foundation Employee Reporting Category	All Public (A) + Private (B) foundations	Public foundations (A)	Private foundations (B)
Foundations reporting at least 1 employee	1,895	1,260	635
Foundations reporting full-time employees	1,533	1,067	466
Foundations reporting part-time employees	1,146	788	358
Foundations report both full-time and part-time employees	782	594	188
Combined FT and PT employee reporting counts	2,679	1,855	824
Total foundations (2023)	11,309	4,718	6,591
Percentage of foundations with at least 1 employee	16.8%	26.7%	9.6%

Note: Foundations may report full-time employees, part-time employees, or both. As a result, the combined FT/PT reporting instances exceed the number of unique foundations reporting employees.

16. This report uses “staff” as the general term for people working within foundations. “Employees” is used when referring specifically to CRA T3010 reporting categories (full-time and part-time employees).

Among staffed Canadian public and private foundations (A+B), most foundation employment remains outside MUSH-affiliated philanthropy (Museums, Universities/Schools, and Hospitals).¹⁷ Approximately 23% of staffed foundations were identified as affiliated with hospitals, educational institutions, or museums and heritage organizations, representing roughly 4,600 reported employees, or about one-fifth of all reported foundation employees. Most of this staffing was concentrated in health-related foundations, which accounted for 336 organizations and more than 3,600 employees (80% of all MUSH-related employment). Educational foundations represented 85 organizations and 761 employees, while museums and heritage foundations represented a much smaller share, with 19 organizations and 159 employees. MUSH-affiliated foundations were also overwhelmingly public foundations, accounting for 421 of the 440 identified MUSH organizations, and nearly all reported employees within the group.

Staffing in MUSH vs non-MUSH Foundations

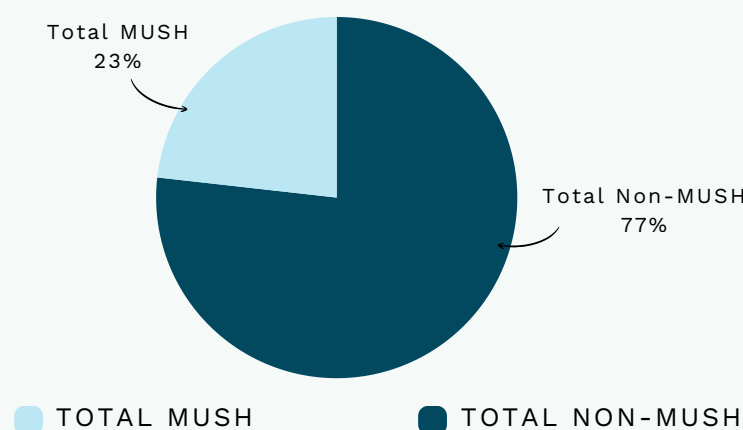


Figure 1. Staffing in MUSH vs. non-MUSH Foundations (n = 1895)

The MUSH analysis sits between the broader foundation sector and the more concentrated staffing profile of PFC members. PFC members, 81 of 147¹⁸ organizations reported having full- or part-time employees. Of these, 76 members reported full-time and 42 reported part-time, with some overlap between the two groups. In total, member organizations reported 1,414 full-time and 207 part-time employees. A sizable number of PFC members (48) reported zero or did not report employees in 2023.

17. MUSH-affiliated foundations were identified using CRA category and sub-category classifications, supplemented by institutional name reviews for foundations listed in more generic categories. These classifications should be interpreted as emergent and approximate rather than definitive organizational types.

18. For PFC Member calculation, members as of March 2026 were included (n=147), based on their 2023 CRA data. There are a small group, two foundations, that were not incorporated in 2023. Four members did not require compensation schedules by CRA, and twelve did not have CRA business numbers reflecting PFC's evolving network.

Part of this reflects foundations without staff, but it also points to reporting gaps in CRA data, especially where staff are employed through family offices or secondments, or where foundations do not consistently report staffing information.

Between 2000 and 2023, the number of Canadian public and private foundations increased by approximately 50%, rising from 7,523 to 11,309. Over the same period, the number of foundations reporting at least one employee grew by approximately 40%, from 1,355 to 1,895 (Table 2).¹⁹ As foundation growth outpaced staffing growth, the proportion of foundations with employees declined modestly, from 18.0% to 16.8%. These findings show that employment remains concentrated within a minority of foundations, despite overall sector growth.

Table 2 Canadian Public and Private Foundations with at least one employee, 2000–2023 (T3010; Data from Nathan Grasse, Carleton University)

Year	Foundations with At Least 1 Employee	Total Public & Private Foundations	% with At Least 1 Employee
2000	1,355	7,523	18.0%
2001	1,457	7,786	18.7%
2002	1,526	8,022	19.0%
2003	1,648	8,219	20.1%
2004	1,688	8,387	20.1%
2005	1,738	8,698	20.0%
2006	1,734	8,951	19.4%
2007	1,758	9,234	19.0%
2008	1,785	9,499	18.8%
2009	1,700	9,753	17.4%
2010	1,723	9,887	17.4%
2011	1,753	10,043	17.5%
2012	1,758	10,187	17.3%

19. This number is still likely underreported, as foundations that have staff associated with parent organizations, family offices, or secondments are not always reported in foundation employment data.

2013	1,760	10,264	17.1%
2014	1,739	10,355	16.8%
2015	1,736	10,404	16.7%
2016	1,779	10,443	17.0%
2017	1,807	10,536	17.1%
2018	1,797	10,646	16.9%
2019	1,803	10,771	16.7%
2020	1,795	10,893	16.5%
2021	1,821	11,025	16.5%
2022	1,868	11,244	16.6%
2023	1,895	11,309	16.8%

While the share of foundations employing staff remained relatively stable, the scale of staffing within employing foundations changed considerably over time (Figure 2). Total reported staff positions increased from 11,481 in 2000 to 23,526 in 2023, a rise of approximately 105%. By comparison, the number of foundations reporting at least one employee increased by approximately 40% over the same period. This suggests that staffing growth occurred less through staffing becoming more widespread across foundations and more through growth in staffing capacity within foundations already employing staff.

Scale of foundation staff reported since 2000

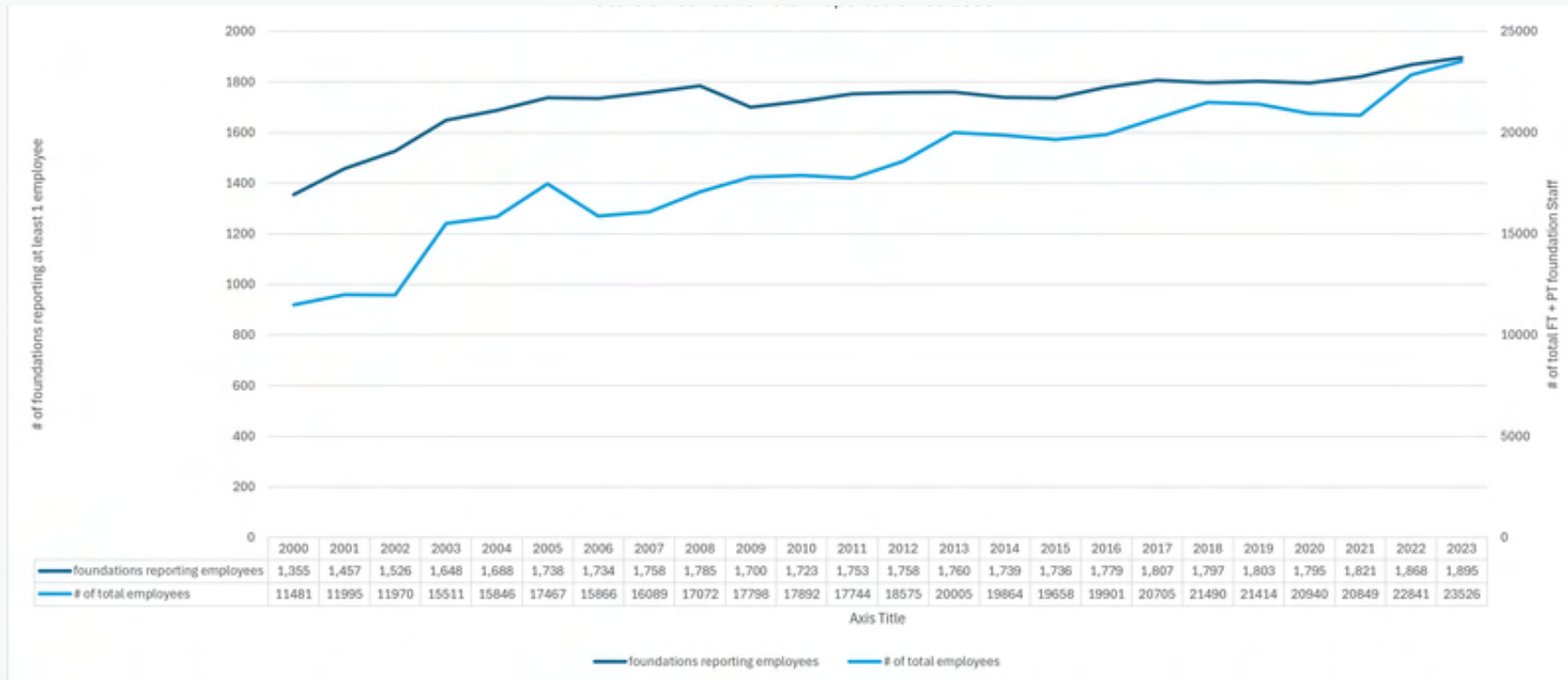


Figure 2 Scale of foundation employment since 2000
(T3010; Data from Nathan Grasse, Carleton University)

Foundations have long been interested in what constitutes the “right level” of staffing, yet there is no single formula for determining it. A historical rule of thumb suggests approximately one staff member per \$1 million in annual grantmaking, though this benchmark is largely anecdotal and lacks empirical grounding. In practice, staffing needs vary widely depending on mandate, size, governance structure, and operational model. To better understand employee patterns across the Canadian foundation sector, T3010 data were analyzed by asset size (Table 3) and gifts to qualified donees (Table 4).²⁰ While the T3010 provides broad sector coverage, it offers less contextual detail about staffing roles, responsibilities, and organizational structure.²¹

Table 3 Staffing patterns among staffed Canadian foundations by asset size (Line 4200) (2023 T3010; Author’s own analysis)

Asset band (4200)	# of Foundations	Mean employees	Median employees	Total employees	Total assets	Employees per \$1M assets
<\$1m	605	4.8	2	2,888	\$187.0M	15.44
\$1m–\$5m	485	8.4	4	4,075	\$1.26B	3.23
\$5m–\$10m	217	9.2	5	2,003	\$1.55B	1.29
\$10m–\$25m	255	14.1	7	3,603	\$3.97B	0.91
\$25m–\$50m	104	31.0	13	3,227	\$3.70B	0.87
\$50m–\$100m	82	36.7	18	3,009	\$6.01B	0.50
\$100m–\$250m	63	31.8	13	2,004	\$10.16B	0.20
>\$250m	49	52.8	17	2,586	\$87.18B	0.03

Note: Foundations may report full-time employees, part-time employees, or both. As a result, the combined FT/PT reporting instances exceed the number of unique foundations reporting employees.

20. PFC’s Salary and Benefits Reports provide insight into staffing among its members, while T3010 administrative data provides a broader picture of the sector.

21. MUSH and non-MUSH foundations included in Table 3 and 4.

Table 4 Staffing patterns among staffed foundations reporting gifts to qualified donees (Line 5050) (2023 T3010; Author's own analysis)

Gifts to qualified donees (5050)	# of Foundations	Mean employees	Median employees	Total employees	Total gifts to qualified donees	Employees per \$1M in gifts to qualified donees
<\$500k	565	5.8	2	3,301	\$91.6M	36.0
\$500k–\$1m	213	6.7	3	1,430	\$152.2M	9.4
\$1m–\$5m	322	11.0	5	3,527	\$705.3M	5.0
\$5m–\$10m	80	16.3	12	1,300	\$574.0M	2.3
\$10m–\$25m	70	30.0	18.5	2,101	\$1.08B	1.9
\$25m–\$50m	29	49.3	40	1,431	\$951.9M	1.5
\$50m–\$100m	10	85.4	67	854	\$650.9M	1.3
\$100m–\$250m	9	101.8	73	916	\$1.20B	0.76
>\$250m	2	312.0	312	624	\$1.06B	0.59

Note: Analysis includes only foundations reporting employees and positive gifts to qualified donees (Line 5050 > 0). Staffed foundations with zero or missing reported gifts are excluded. Results for the highest gift band should be interpreted cautiously due to the small number of organizations.

The asset analysis shows that average staffing size increases with organizational scale, though staffing does not rise proportionally with asset holdings. Larger foundations employ more people in absolute terms but staffing intensity declines as asset size increases. This likely reflects economies of scale and the fact that larger asset bases do not necessarily require proportionally larger staff teams.

Similar patterns appear among staffed foundations reporting gifts to qualified donees. Average staffing size increases with gifting volume,

while employees per \$1 million granted decline as annual disbursements grow. Smaller staffed foundations often exceed the commonly cited benchmark of one staff member per \$1 million in annual grantmaking, while larger foundations generally operate at or below that threshold. These findings suggest that staffing does not scale linearly with grantmaking volume. Larger foundations appear able to distribute substantially more funding per employee, while staffing growth may reflect increasing organizational complexity and functional specialization rather than simple increases in headcount.²²

22. These findings should be interpreted cautiously. T3010 employee reporting captures paid employees, but not necessarily all forms of labour capacity, such as shared institutional staffing, outsourced administration, or family office support. Similarly, gifts to qualified donees reflect one dimension of foundation activity, but do not capture all operating models, particularly for organizations that combine grantmaking with other charitable functions. Even with these limitations, the data suggest that staffing expansion often occurs in stages, as organizations add specialized operational, communications, finance, or program functions rather than increasing headcount linearly.

From a different view of qualified donees, in 2023, Canadian public and private foundations²³ reported approximately 349,000 gift records to qualified donees, of which only approximately 93,000 were associated with foundations reporting employees, roughly 27%. Among these staffed foundations, operating models vary widely: some organizations make relatively few grants with larger teams, while others manage high volumes of gift relationships with lean staffing. The data also show that much of the gifting activity occurs through foundations that do not report staff on their T3010 filings. While many of these are likely lean or volunteer-operated private foundations,

the pattern also highlights the limits of administrative staffing data, which may not capture shared institutional staffing, outsourced administration, donor-advised fund infrastructure, or other non-payroll operating arrangements.

Staffing patterns also vary geographically across Canada. Examining staffing by province highlights a strong concentration of foundation employment in Ontario and Quebec, which account for the largest share of both staffed foundations and total employees (Table 5).²⁴

Table 5 Distribution of staffed foundations (2023 T3010; Author's own analysis)

Province	Foundations reporting any full-time employees	Foundations reporting any part-time employees	Number of Foundations by Province
AB	146	115	1197
BC	199	178	1751
MB	86	78	611
NL	29	23	221
NB	17	12	72
NS	38	34	342
NT	3	1	8
ON	549	423	4683
PE	9	8	43
QC	409	247	1998
SK	45	24	361
YT	1	1	8

Note: Foundations may report both full-time and part-time staff.

23. MUSH and non-MUSH

24. These figures are based on the province of foundation headquarters reported in T3010 filings and cannot accurately discern the geographic distribution of employees.

Looking beyond the distribution of organizations to that of employees, a similar concentration emerges:

the largest numbers of foundation staff are reported by foundations headquartered in Ontario and Quebec (Table 6).

Table 6 Total number of staff by province (2023 T3010; Author's own analysis)

Province	Total number of full-time employees	Total number of part-time employees	Sum of the number of full- and part-time employees
AB	1,477	988	2,465
BC	2,113	1,576	3,689
MB	678	504	1,182
NL	141	197	338
NB	98	74	172
NS	258	137	395
NT	104	2	106
ON	6,357	3,310	9,667
PE	39	37	76
QC	3,178	1,529	4,707
SK	457	265	722
YT	1	1	2

While larger provinces lead in absolute staffing numbers, staffing intensity, understood as staff per foundation, varies across jurisdictions. Quebec and Newfoundland report comparatively higher staff-to-foundation ratios, suggesting larger staffing complements within foundations. British Columbia and Alberta report relatively higher proportions of part-time staff, which may reflect differences in staffing models or organizational structure, though the underlying drivers are not captured in T3010 data. In the Northwest Territories, a very small number of foundations account for a relatively large share of reported employees, though

these results should be interpreted with caution given the small number of organizations.

These findings show that staffing varies considerably across Canadian foundations by size, activity, and geography, pointing to a sector in which human capacity is unevenly distributed. While T3010 data allow foundations to be analyzed in many ways, this report focuses specifically on employees to better understand the people working within foundations and the organizational contexts that shape their practice. Such differences

influence how foundations operate, make decisions, and engage with communities, reinforcing the importance of bringing foundation staff more centrally into philanthropic research and analysis.

b) Pathways into Foundation Work



People come into foundation work through a wide range of routes, bringing varied careers, training, and ideas. Understanding who works in Canadian foundations and how they arrive there offers important insight into how the sector functions in practice. While T3010 data provides a system-level view of staffing, PFC's Foundation Staff Survey²⁵ adds depth on educational backgrounds, entry pathways, and core competencies, helping to show how individuals shape day-to-day work. From the results, foundation staff are highly educated, with half of the respondents having a postgraduate degree (Figure 3):

Highest Level of Formal Education

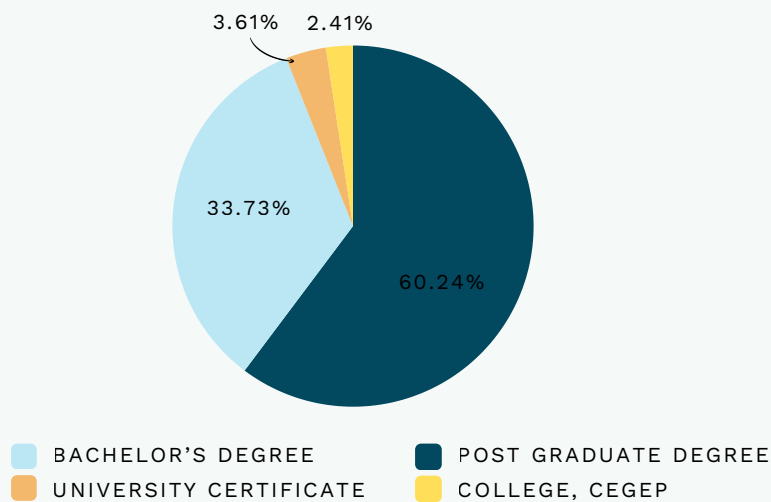


Figure 3 Foundation staff education levels (PFC Foundation Staff Survey, n=83)

25. 83 individual respondents filled out the survey in December 2025. For full methodology, see the Appendix.

When asked if this formal education prepared respondents for their work in foundations, with 5 being “yes, it did” and 1 being “no, it did not”, the average response was 3.58. At least half of the respondents felt their formal education prepared them at least moderately well or better for their foundation employment.

Nearly half of respondents reported entering foundation roles through personal networks, including previous work, underscoring the continued importance of relational pathways into the sector (Figure 4). However, the prominence of external job postings and, to a lesser extent, executive recruiters, suggests a gradual shift toward more formalized hiring practices.²⁶ Family connections appear less influential in Canadian foundations. Taken together, these patterns point to a sector in transition, where traditional network-based entry persists alongside emerging recruitment approaches that may broaden access through an equity, diversity, and inclusion lens.

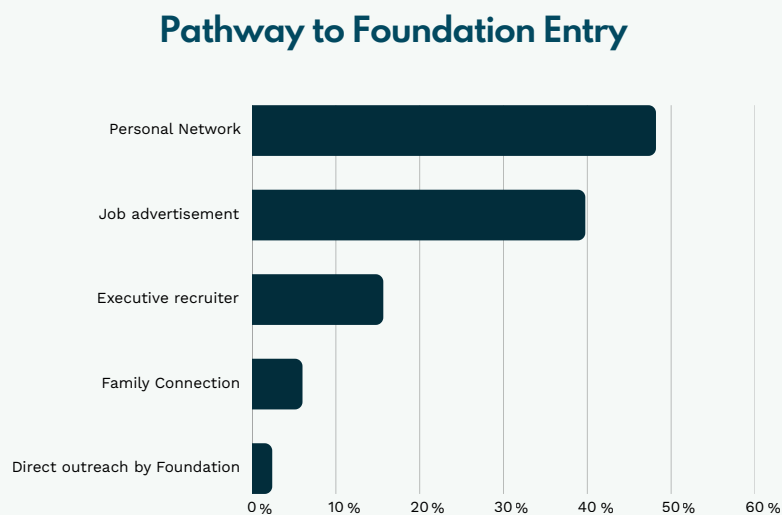


Figure 4 Foundation entry pathways (PFC Foundation Staff Survey, n=94)

Note: Participants could select multiple responses; therefore, totals reflect % of selections and exceed the number of respondents.

Respondents reported diverse prior work experience, most commonly in the nonprofit or charitable sector, with relatively few coming from other foundations (Figure 5). Backgrounds in the public and private sectors were represented roughly equally, whereas academia and higher education, which were often prominent in U.S. historical data, were the least common. These patterns could suggest a distinct Canadian profile or evolving hiring practices. Prior sector experience matters because it shapes the influences, perspectives, and norms that individuals bring to foundation work.

26. (Fugiel Gartner, 2024)

Work prior to entering Foundations

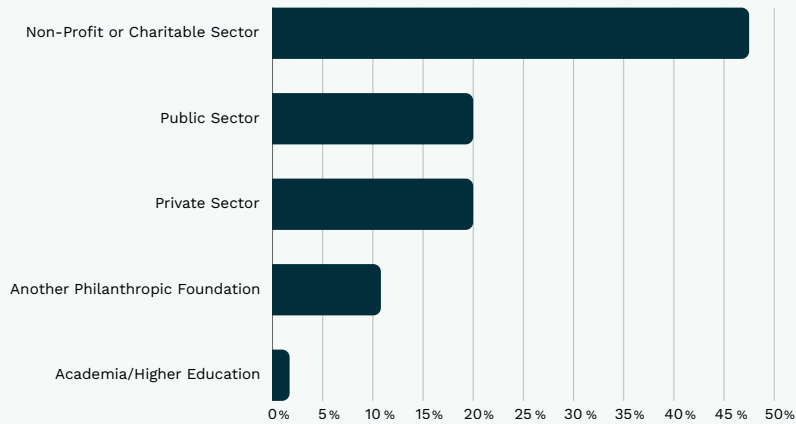


Figure 5 Work prior to entering foundations (PFC Foundation Staff Survey, n=120)

Note: Participants could select multiple responses; therefore, totals reflect % of selections and exceed the number of respondents.

Given that foundation staff enter their roles through a variety of pathways, it is useful to understand which skills and training from their previous roles they bring to their foundation roles (Figure 6). Respondents to PFC's Foundation Staff Survey identified a wide range of technical, relational, managerial, and strategic competencies that inform their current roles.

Staff skills when entering Foundations

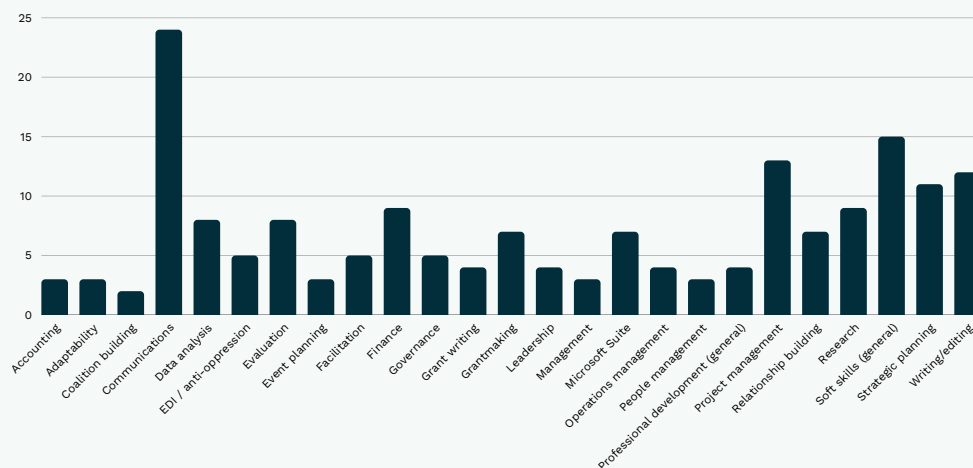


Figure 6 Skills or training when entering foundation work (PFC Foundation Staff Survey, n =178 mentions)

Note: Individual participant responses were aggregated into thematic categories; multiple selections were allowed.

No single or standardized skill profile emerged from the findings. Respondents instead described bringing broad, often hybrid skill sets into foundation work.

This reinforces the idea that foundation roles are learned through practice and experience rather than through a defined professional pathway. Frequently cited areas included communications, project management, strategic planning, writing and editing, and general soft skills, alongside more technical competencies such as evaluation, finance, governance, and grantmaking.

Communications was the most frequently cited skill area, though respondents used the term broadly and often beyond formal communications roles. Responses referenced strategic communications, stakeholder engagement, media relations, facilitation, public-facing engagement, presentations, and visual or digital communication practices. Writing and editing also appeared as distinct areas of expertise. Several respondents further connected communication-related skills to relationship-building and to translating complex information across stakeholders. In this context, communication appears to function not only as a technical skill but also as a relational and strategic practice that supports coordination, trust-building, and knowledge mobilization.

Foundation work also appears to be boundary-spanning. Respondents described moving across organizations and sectors while drawing on different forms of expertise depending on the situation. Communication and facilitation appeared alongside technical knowledge, strategic thinking, and operational experience. This pattern suggests that foundations often value people who can adapt across roles and contexts, rather than those with only a narrowly specialized background.

c) Individual Checklist

Foundation work depends not only on formal qualifications, but also on how individuals apply their skills and experiences in practice. The diversity of pathways into the field brings important strengths, while also revealing differences in preparation and support across roles. The reflective questions in the Individual's Checklist are intended to help staff consider their own pathways, skills, and development needs. Organizational conditions also shape many of the opportunities and pressures identified by participants. The next section examines the organizational context of foundation work, including HR practices, compensation, diversity, and professional development (Figure 7).



Individual's Checklist: Working as a Foundation Professional

- Have I reflected on the skills and influences that I've brought into foundation work from my previous work? What are they?
- Have I identified my key skill gaps? What skills or experiences do I need to move forward?
- Where am I relying on informal learning rather than structured development?
- How am I making intentional use of available supports?
- Where do I need more guidance or structure in my learning?
- Do I have a clear sense of what progression looks like for me in this role? How would I articulate it to myself and my organization?
- What strategies am I using to manage my workload and pace?
- What boundaries or priorities do I need to clarify to sustain my work?

Figure 7 Individual's Checklist: Working as a Foundation Professional

The Organization



Within foundations, staff work inside structures that define roles, set expectations, and shape access to resources such as compensation, benefits, and professional development. These conditions influence how work is organized and how sustainable and equitable it feels in practice. While much of the existing research examines workforce trends across the broader charitable sector,²⁷ this report focuses specifically on foundations as a distinct organizational context. Drawing on PFC’s Salary and Benefits data and Foundation Staff Survey, as well as Carleton’s Charity Insights Canada Project (CICP), this section examines six areas: roles and role structures, governance, benefits and wellness, professional development, equity, diversity, and inclusion and career progression.

a) Roles and Role Structures

Foundation roles and staffing structures determine how strategy turns into action, including decision-making processes and work distribution, especially in small, informal organizations. As foundations expand or priorities change, roles evolve, making clarity and alignment crucial.

Table 7 draws on titles reported through the 2001–2025 PFC Salary and Benefits Survey and illustrates the range of titles across role families. Only the most frequently occurring titles are included, as the diversity of titles across the survey period is extensive. This variation is notable given how few foundations employ staff overall, as shown in the T3010 data. Despite the relatively small workforce, there is little consistency in how roles are named across organizations. This suggests that many titles and responsibilities are emerging from the internal needs and structures of individual foundations rather than from standardized roles or widely shared professional norms across the field.

27. (McWhinney, 2025; Nguyen, 2024)

Table 7 Foundation Role Family and Titles, 2001-2025 (PFC Salary and Benefits Data)

Role Family	Most Frequent Titles
Administrative & Support	Administrator; Office Manager; Assistant Executive Director; Executive Associate; Secretary; Secretary-Treasurer; Receptionist
Chief Staff Officer	Chief Executive Officer; Executive Director; Directeur General; President & CEO; CEO & President; Executive Director and Secretary-Treasurer; President; Manager
Communications & Marketing	Communications Director; Manager, Communications; Communications Specialist; Communications Officer; Senior Communications Advisor; Communication & Special Projects; Coordinator, Marketing; Communications Officer
Donor Relations & Development ²⁸	Director, Development & Donor Services; Vice President, Development & Donor Services; Fund Development Officer; Director, Donor Relations; Donor Associate; Donor Manager; Donor Relations Officer; Donor Services Manager
Evaluation / Research / Knowledge	Director of Evaluation and Knowledge Management; Director, Grants & Research; Manager, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning; Director of Evaluation and Learning
Finance & Investments	Vice President, Finance; Finance Manager; Chief Financial Officer; Financial Administrator; Chief Accountant; Senior Accountant; Controller; Director, Finance & Administration; Chief Investment Officer; Senior Accountant; Accountant
Operations & HR / Governance	Chief Operating Officer; Director, HR and Operations; Governance Manager; Operations and Governance Coordinator; Manager, Grants and Operations; Chief Operating Officer; Operations Manager
Program & Grantmaking	Program Manager; Senior Program Manager, Program Officer; Senior Program Officer; Program/Grants Manager; Program Director; Program Coordinator; Grants Manager; Programme Manager; Grants Officer; Grants Coordinator; Grants Administrator
Emerging	Senior Director for Programs and Learning; Head, Indigenous Programs; Manager, Strategic and Granting Projects; Community Investment Specialist ²⁹

28. Reflective of 2014 and 2016 when PFC and CFC did joint salary and benefits reports.

29. Community Investment Specialist is emerging due to the nature of PFC's changing network, which includes corporate foundations

Looking at the period between 2001 and 2025, Table 8 shows a clear evolution in foundation staffing roles. The evolution can be interpreted as reflecting the sector's gradual formalization and diversification over the past two decades. In the early 2000s, roles were largely centred on executive leadership, program delivery, and administration, with finance and communications beginning to emerge. By the late 2000s and early 2010s, staffing diversified to include more specialized functions such as communications, finance, donor relations, and early evaluation roles. From the mid-2010s onward, clearer functional leadership tracks developed, particularly in finance, communications, and operations, alongside more differentiated program roles.

Current patterns reflect a broad mix of executive, functional, and emerging roles aligned with evolving foundation priorities.³⁰

Table 8 Key role developments (2001-2025) (PFC Salary and Benefits data)

Time Period	Key role developments
2001-2006	Leadership (ED/CEO), program, and administrative roles dominate; finance and communications begin to appear as organizations formalize internal functions.
2008-2014	Diversification accelerates: communications, finance, donor relations (at community foundations), and early evaluation/knowledge roles become visible.
2016-2018	Clear functional leadership tracks emerge (Finance/Investments, Communications, Operations/HR) alongside more segmented program leadership (e.g., Program Directors, Senior Program Officers).
2018-2020	Broad coverage of leadership and functional roles; stronger prevalence of HR and benefits roles aligns with continued formalization.
2020-2025	Confirms a mix of titles across executive leadership (Executive Director/CEO/President), specialized management roles (Finance, Operations/Human Resources, Communications), and emerging areas driven by foundation requirements (e.g., Indigenous programs, strategy and research).

Note: Survey data were not collected every year. Time periods are grouped to reflect broader patterns in role development across available survey years.

30. Patterns should be read with caution. Variations in survey tools, participation, and role categories mean the timeline reflects role evolution rather than precise counts, and titles may follow consultants' reporting conventions rather than consistent sector definitions.

The roles and role structures point to a field that has expanded in complexity without becoming fully standardized. With a relatively small workforce, roles evolve in response to the priorities, resources, and operating styles of individual foundations rather than through widely shared professional pathways.

b) Governance as Context

While this report did not directly investigate governance structures or board practices, participants' responses suggest that governance remains an important part of the organizational context shaping foundation work. Governance was experienced less as a formal structural issue and more through day-to-day relationships, decision-making processes, and role expectations.

Staff working in family foundations often described governance dynamics that differed from those of other foundation types. They reported closer relationships with board members, a stronger focus on relationship management, and more direct involvement with donor intent and family decision-making. Respondents in family foundations also more frequently described limits to career advancement, particularly in smaller or flatter organizational structures where family governance shapes leadership roles and progression opportunities.

The next section highlights how the absence of organizational clarity can shape staff experiences, particularly when mission, direction, or decision-making expectations are unclear. This points to an important governance role that extends beyond fiduciary oversight alone. Boards also play a strategic and generative role in helping foundations articulate priorities, direction, and organizational purpose in ways that support staff in their day-to-day work.

These observations align with findings from PFC's 2024 Landscape Report,³¹ in which foundation CEOs described "holding the middle" or operating between protection and change.

CEOs described navigating tensions between founders and future generations, governance and staff, and established and emerging philanthropic practices (e.g. trust-based philanthropy and impact investing). Future research should examine board–staff relationships with greater nuance, especially how CEOs and other foundation leaders work with boards as foundations change over time. T3010 data is unlikely to capture these dynamics, making qualitative understanding important for interpreting how roles, authority, and organizational practices evolve within foundations.

31. (Fugiel Gartner, 2024)

c) Benefits, Wellness, and Workplace Supports

Compensation, benefits, and workplace support shape how sustainable foundation work feels in practice. Over the past two decades, these elements have become more formalized, alongside broader expectations of professionalism across the sector. Drawing on PFC's Salary and Benefits data, this section (Table 9) traces the evolution of HR practices and pairs this with wellness and stress data from PFC's Foundation Staff Survey.

Benefits and HR practices in Canadian foundations have expanded and formalized significantly over time, though not uniformly across the sector. In 2001, benefits were largely introductory, focused on core health coverage, RRSP contributions, and vacation, with limited consistency in areas such as disability insurance, sick leave, or professional development. Flexibility, remote work, and structured HR policies were minimal or absent, and many practices were informal or not well-documented.

Table 9 Foundation benefits and wellness, thematic changes between 2001 and 2025 (PFC Salary and Benefits data)

Theme	2001	2025
Core health & dental	Mentioned as part of “full benefits”; emphasis on basic coverage.	A significant majority of organizations report offering health benefits alongside other employee benefits.
Disability/life insurance	Sporadically referenced; less consistently described than health/dental.	Commonly included in benefit descriptions; appears within broader, standardized plans.
Retirement (RRSP / pension)	RRSP contributions present but variable (described as a % range); not universal.	Retirement plans reported by a clear majority; RRSP remains the dominant form.
Vacation	No defined sector standard; typical references are around 4–5 weeks, which are often linked to service.	Vacation reporting ranges from 3 to 6 weeks, but there is no clear standard. There are more standard, documented rules (carry-over) set in formal policies.
Fringe benefits (e.g., conference, dues, devices)	Not consistently described as a category.	Widespread and explicitly listed (e.g., laptop, conference registration & travel, professional dues, cell phone).
Flex hours	Limited mentions; emerging language on flexibility appears later in the decade.	Standard practice alongside flex days/personal days; clearly codified in many orgs.
Work from home	Not typical / not documented as a common offer.	Near-universal by 2025; formalized across staff levels.

Sick leave	Occasionally referenced; less formalized in wording.	Clearly documented sick-leave policies are common.
Overtime	Typically, not spelled out.	Frequently documented (time off in lieu is the dominant practice).
Maternity / Parental Leave	Mostly framed as statutory adherence; top-ups not in common use.	Formal policies are widespread; top-ups are common.
Professional development (PD)	Present anecdotally; not consistently structured.	Near-universal support (defined budgets and/or guaranteed PD time) is documented.
HR policy presence	Written policies present in some orgs; Manuals uncommon.	Almost all orgs report HR policies; HR manuals reported by a majority (not universal).
Overall characterization	Foundational benefits with limited formal HR infrastructure.	Substantially more structured benefits and policies, but not fully uniform across the sector.

By 2025, most foundations report a broader, more standardized suite of benefits. Health, dental, disability, and retirement plans are commonly offered and clearly described. Workplace practices such as flexible hours, work-from-home arrangements, sick leave, and overtime policies are now widely formalized. Professional development support and parental leave top-ups have become nearly universal, and many organizations report having established HR policies and manuals. Still, variation remains. Areas such as vacation entitlements lack a clear sector standard, and not all organizations maintain a fully developed HR infrastructure (e.g., roles, handbooks, onboarding, policies). The trajectory reflects a shift from loosely structured practices to more comprehensive, formalized approaches for supporting staff.

These organizational policies provide one view of workplace conditions, but they do not fully capture how staff experience foundation work. The PFC Foundation Staff Survey offers a complementary perspective, capturing how these conditions are experienced in practice. On average, staff report high levels of satisfaction with compensation (4.0 on a 5-point scale) and generally positive views of workload (3.88), with approximately three-quarters indicating they are satisfied or very satisfied.

Participants were then asked how often they experience stress at work, on a scale from 1 (not stressed) to 5 (very stressed). The median score report was 3.1. The range was highest between 3 and 4, with a notable one-third of participants at level 4, indicating frequent but not universally high stress. When asked about sources of stress (Table 10), participants most frequently pointed to issues related to capacity and work cadence, including workload pressures and board-driven deadlines.

Stress was also associated with governance and relationship dynamics, particularly management, trustees, family interactions, and a lack of clarity around communication and deliverables.

*Workload. Volume of Work. Outdated systems.
Bottlenecks. A lot of work with one staff member.
High workloads leave little room for strategy*

Table 10 Sources of foundation staff stress (PFC Foundation Staff Survey, n=80 mentions)

Theme	Share of mentions (%)	Participant Comments Regarding Stress
Workload volume & capacity	27.50%	Workload. Volume of Work. Outdated systems. Bottlenecks. A lot of work with one staff member. High workloads leave little room for strategy.
Governance, board & family dynamics	22.50%	Presentations to the board. Being on multiple committees and boards while managing my day-to-day job. The Trustees, how will they react / what will they say. Family dynamics (working for a family foundation). Organizational reputational risk.
Poor planning, prioritization & processes	16.20%	Unclear deliverables and/or deadlines. Not being given full responsibility for certain tasks. We have so many ambitions and not enough time/capacity. Sometimes it is hard to set priorities and see them through, as new issues emerge. Inconsistent communication from senior leadership on priorities and developments.
People, management & organizational dynamics	11.20%	Top-heavy structure, so my work is micromanaged/held up. Lack of understanding of my skills, so I am underutilized.
Personal pressure, uncertainty & wellbeing	11.20%	I'm the only staff, so sometimes not having anyone else to collaborate with and discuss with. I am a one-person team, so I don't have a superior's guidance to support me.
Sector demand & external pressure	11.20%	Feeling like there are more grant requests than we can fund and that we aren't doing enough. Difficult conversations with/declining organizations doing great work, and the mental toll this takes, can go unacknowledged. Closing grant partnerships due to new funding directions.

Note: Themes were identified from staff open-text responses. Because respondents often raised multiple issues, individual responses may be reflected across more than one theme.

The survey also asked foundation staff what would help them manage stress or feel better supported at work (Table 11). Responses pointed less to a single solution than to a series of practical organizational conditions that shape day-to-day work. Participants frequently emphasized the importance of team connection and collaboration, including retreats and opportunities for peer interaction, alongside requests for greater flexibility through remote work, schedule autonomy, reduced hours, or clearer boundaries around after-hours communication.

Many responses also focused on organizational capacity and clarity. Staff asked for additional administrative support, clearer communication and expectations, stronger prioritization practices, and more consistent internal processes, such as templates or standard operating procedures. Requests related to board engagement and decision-making protocols further suggest that uncertainty and ambiguity within organizational systems contribute meaningfully to workplace stress.

Compensation and benefits remained important, though they appeared alongside requests for professional development, coaching, mentorship, and wellness supports such as counselling, wellness stipends, or additional time off. The disaggregated micro-themes help show that staff concerns are not only about compensation levels but also about how work is organized, supported, communicated, and resourced in practice.

Table 11 Foundation staff suggestions for managing stress and supporting staff (PFC Foundation Staff Survey, n=79 theme counts)

Micro-themes for Supporting Staff	Theme counts
Team retreats / connection / collaboration	10
Flexible schedule / remote	9
More staff / assistant / admin support	5
Communication / expectations	5
Wellness budget / stipend / gym	4
Templates / processes / Standard Operating Procedures	4
Benefits / retirement / insurance	4
Pay / salary / compensation	4
Board engagement / support / decision protocols	4
Coaching / mentorship / peer networks	4
Professionals budget / time / conferences	4

4-day week / reduced hours	3
Time off / vacation / personal days	3
Mental health / EAP / counseling / sabbatical	3
Workspace / environment / equipment	3
After-hours / email norms / tech boundaries	2
Prioritization & workload planning	2
HR function / performance management	2
Meetings / deep work / focus time	1
Leadership / manager training	1
Technical upskilling (finance, systems, CRA, etc.)	1

Note: Themes were identified from staff open-text responses. Because respondents often raised multiple issues, individual responses may be reflected across more than one theme.

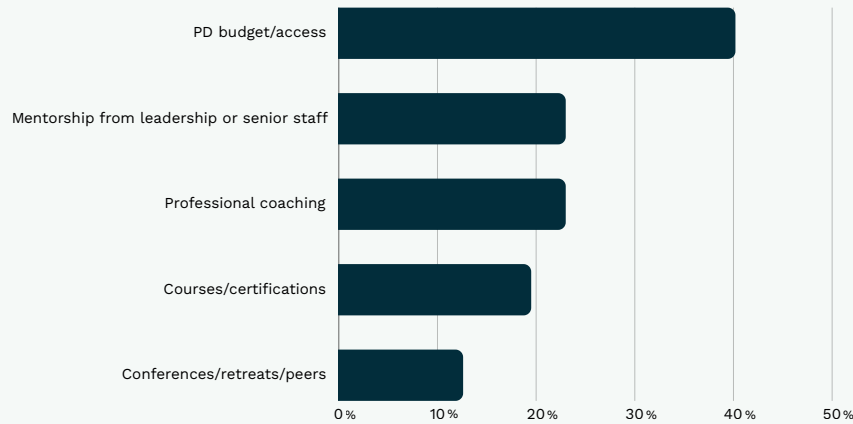
Compensation, benefits, and workplace supports have become increasingly formalized within Canadian foundations over the past two decades. Still, staff experiences suggest that formal policies alone do not determine how sustainable foundation work feels in practice. Workload, organizational clarity, staffing capacity, and workplace culture all shape day-to-day experiences of stress and support. As foundations continue to formalize, greater attention to management practices and organizational design may help support staff well-being and sustainability.

d) Professional Development

Professional development (PD) within Canadian foundations has also shifted from an informal, inconsistently documented practice to a more established and expected component of organizational support. Earlier patterns described limited structure, but foundations have increasingly introduced performance evaluations, allocated resources for learning, and begun to treat professional development as a standard element of human resource practice. Across PFC's Foundation Staff Survey, roughly seven in ten staff report being offered some combination of mentorship, coaching, or professional development in their philanthropic foundation roles.

When analyzing how staff access professional development, the most reported delivery mode is offering PD access, including annual budgets and time to use PD allocations (Figure 8). This is followed by professional coaching and mentorship from leadership or senior staff. Courses, certifications, and conferences are also available but are reported less frequently.

Professional Development Delivery Modes



**Figure 8 Delivery mode of professional development
(PFC Foundation Staff Survey, n=103)**

Note: Percentages reflect the proportion of respondents referencing each professional development delivery mode. Responses could include multiple modes.

These results reflect the decentralized nature of professional development in foundations. Staff are often expected to identify and navigate their own learning pathways rather than follow coordinated training programs. Respondents described drawing on a mix of conferences, webinars, certificates, sector programs, coaching, and informal mentorship to build the knowledge and skills needed for their roles. A small portion of respondents reported little or no formal training, instead learning primarily through experience and day-to-day practice. Overall, the findings suggest that professional development is increasingly supported across foundations, but direction and structure differ across organizations.

In addition to describing how professional development is delivered, participants also identified the areas of knowledge and skill they are developing through their work in foundations. The most frequently identified content areas were (Figure 9):

Professional Development Content

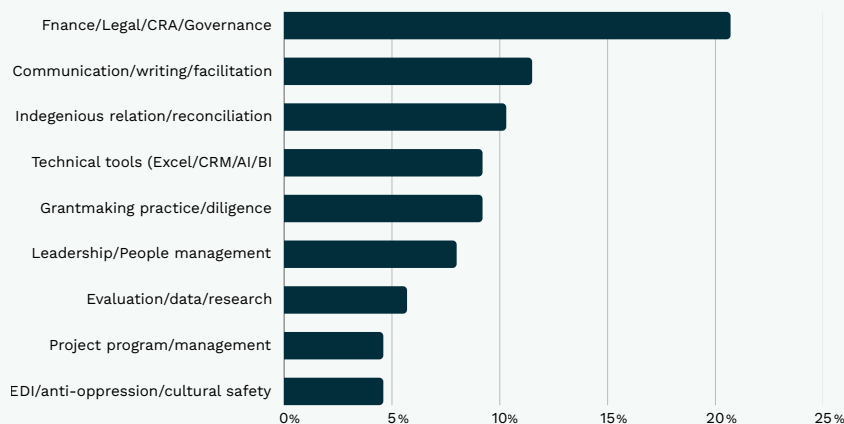


Figure 9 Thematic content of professional development within foundations (PFC Foundation Staff Survey, n=73)

Note: Themes were derived from open-text responses regarding professional development. Not all survey participants provided a substantive response to this question.

Much of the technical and institutional knowledge required for foundation work is developed on the job. Earlier findings showed that many respondents entered foundations with transferable, broadly generalist skills, such as communication and project management. In contrast, professional development within foundations appears more focused on building organizational and sector-specific knowledge, including governance, grantmaking practices, evaluation, finance, regulatory requirements, Indigenous relations, and operational processes.

Foundations often rely on workplace learning to develop the specialized knowledge required for the role. Professional development is both skill enhancement and a mechanism for socializing staff into the norms, practices, and expectations of foundation work. Respondents suggested that the knowledge and expertise developed through professional development are not always matched by clear opportunities for advancement or expanded responsibility within organizations. As one respondent noted:

I am given a budget, and I have sought out courses, training, and certification. There is no pathway for advancement, no mentorship or coaching available to me. I actually don't feel that my technical skills are appreciated or nurtured, which is why I have spent my PD on finding those elsewhere.

The mismatch is a broader pattern, discussed further in a forthcoming section, in which staff develop significant technical and operational expertise, often without clearly defined pathways for internal progression.

e) JEDI in Foundations

Justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) within foundations can be understood through both organizational policy and staff experience.³² This analysis draws on Carleton University's Charity Insights Canada Project (CICP) data to examine how equity, diversity, and inclusion are understood and enacted across organizations. Given variation across survey waves, findings are interpreted thematically to identify recurring patterns. These findings are considered alongside PFC's Foundation Staff Survey, which reflects how EDI commitments are experienced in practice.

Across the CICP datasets, foundation engagement appears active, though commitment and implementation vary. The strongest areas of implementation were organizational policy development, human resource attention, and grantmaking. Organizations report that EDI improves talent attraction, strengthens community relationships, and promotes healthier workplace cultures.³³ In the earliest dataset,³⁴ while a majority reported some level of EDI engagement in the foundation, a consistent minority remains unengaged, unsure, or unable to translate EDI values into concrete actions. The tension was particularly evident in financial and strategic decision-making, suggesting capacity gaps and a reluctance to embed EDI into core organizational systems.³⁵

Common challenges include limited financial, human, and time resources, alongside uncertainty about how to proceed, insufficient training, and internal resistance.³⁶

Although some progress is evident in operational areas, such as hiring and communications, measurement remains limited: over half of organizations do not track EDI outcomes, and only a small number use formal tools such as surveys, KPIs, or audits.³⁷

Staff and volunteer involvement in EDI policy development varies widely, ranging from leadership-driven approaches to more collaborative models with staff, though high levels of shared decision-making are less common.³⁸

32 PFC is committed to JEDI principles (justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion), which are reflected in the section headers. Because the data in this report are based on earlier EDI measures, the findings use that language; future research could examine justice more directly.

33. (CICPY2+Wk37)

34. (CICPY1+Wk05)

35. (CICPY2+Wk29)

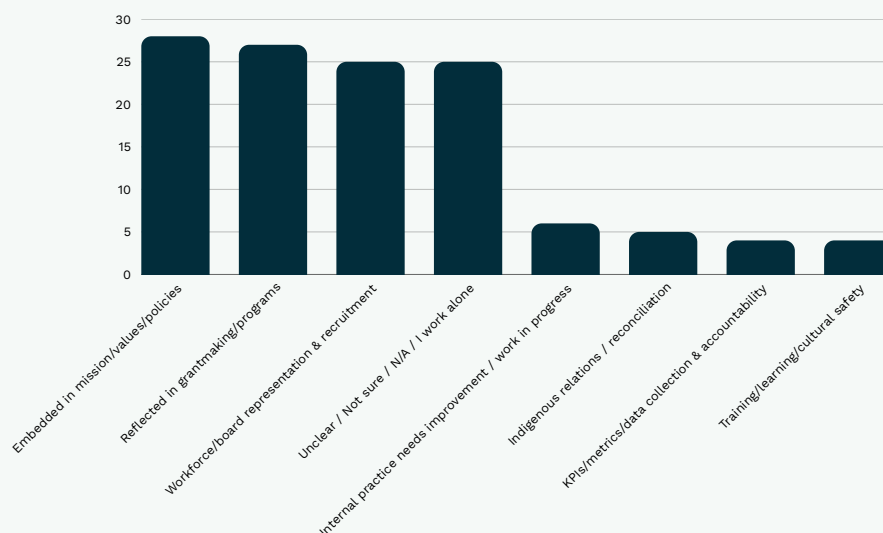
36. (CICPY2+Wk37)

37. (CICPY2+Wk29)

38. (CICPY2+Wk37)

Recent pulse data, based on a small sample of foundations³⁹, suggests limited movement in progress. Most report EDI priorities as unchanged, with only modest activity in areas such as policy development, training, recruitment, or partnerships. An important signal for the specific moment in time, there was little evidence of significant expansion or retrenchment.

How are EDI principles reflected in your organization's mission and everyday work?



**Figure 10 Staff perceptions of EDI principles in their organization
(PFC Foundation Staff Survey, n=124)**

Note: Individual participant responses were aggregated into thematic categories, and participants could make multiple responses.

Figure 10 complements the CICIP data by providing insight from the PFC Foundation Staff Survey on how staff perceive EDI principles within their organizations. Similar to the CICIP findings, the picture is mixed. Many foundations have made meaningful strides in embedding EDI, while others are still translating their commitments into everyday practice. The most common theme, cited in over a third of responses, describes EDI as formally “embedded in mission, values, and policies.”

Nearly as frequently, staff pointed to EDI in grantmaking and program design, including “grantmaking decisions led by community panels with diversity embedded,” signalling efforts to shift decision-making power. Representation also featured prominently, with some noting that “diversity of team and board meets or exceeds that of the community,” while others identified gaps

39. (CICPY3+Wk07)

in leadership representation. Some highlighted Indigenous-led approaches, reconciliation efforts, and OCAP/UNDRIP-aligned practices, as well as training, cultural safety, and data-driven accountability.

At the same time, there are limits in visibility and implementation. Nearly one-third of respondents were unable to identify concrete day-to-day examples of EDI within their organizations or described working alone, making it difficult to assess organizational practices. Others characterized EDI efforts as still evolving or incomplete, describing them as “piecemeal,” “minimal,” or “a work in progress” in everyday practice. Others pointed to a gap between policy and practice: “We say they are policies, but they are not, as layoffs disproportionately impacted racialized and LGBTQ folks.”

EDI is increasingly present within the formal language, priorities, and practices of Canadian foundations, particularly in areas such as mission development, grantmaking, and organizational learning. Nevertheless, questions of representation, accountability, organizational culture, and everyday practice continue to shape how EDI is experienced by staff within foundations.

f) Career Progression

Career progression within foundations differs from professional development. While staff may have access to learning opportunities, mentorship, or technical training, advancement pathways are often less clear. Progression is frequently shaped by organizational size, internal structure, and the availability of defined roles, making career development less visible and less standardized than in many other sectors.

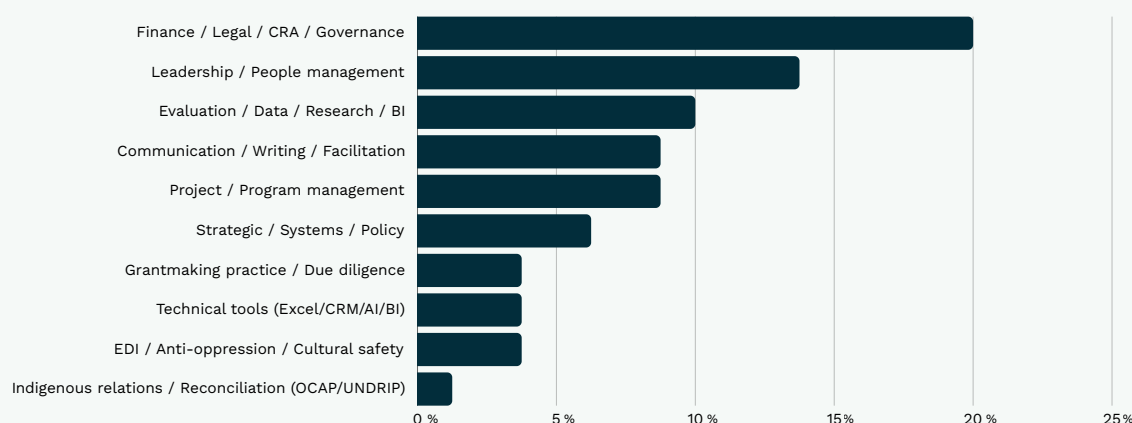
PFC’s Foundation Staff Survey asked participants to rate the availability of internal career advancement opportunities on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = none; 5 = clearly defined pathways).

The mean score of 2.77 indicates that respondents generally do not perceive clear progression pathways within foundations.

While this may partly reflect the small size of many foundations, it also indicates a lack of clarity around advancement. When asked whether they have access to progression opportunities where they exist, respondents reinforced this pattern: 41% reported having access, 30% were unsure, and 29% reported no access, suggesting constrained opportunities and/or a lack of transparency.

Thematic analysis highlights several recurring barriers. Most commonly, respondents cited small or flat organizational structures, where there is “nowhere to grow” within “small teams, small budgets (and) short-term contracts.” Others identified EDI-related constraints, including the need for “more diversity, more cultural safety,” as well as barriers tied to “language skills” and “ageism.” Precarity also emerged, with contract-based roles limiting long-term progression. Some pointed to governance or structural constraints, “(lack of) advancement due to the current structure of the foundation”, while others described informal, relationship-based cultures “dictated by cliques” and “gatekeeping.”

Desired Skills for Career Progression



**Figure 11 Career Progression desired skills and training
(PFC Foundation Staff Survey, n=64)**

Note: Individual participant responses were aggregated into thematic categories, and participants could identify multiple skill areas they believed were important for career progression.

Figure 11 highlights several areas where staff perceive stronger training and development as important for career progression within foundations.

The strongest concentration was in finance, legal, CRA, and governance knowledge.

This builds on the previous findings showing that staff are already developing these areas through professional development, while continuing to identify a need for deeper knowledge. Foundation staff often work in proximity to compliance, fiduciary responsibilities, board processes, and organizational risk without necessarily entering the sector with formal preparation in these areas.

Leadership and people management also emerged prominently, underscoring that advancement in foundations often involves moving from programmatic or technical roles into positions requiring supervision and organizational coordination. Other responses point to the operational and relational nature of foundation work. Skills related to evaluation, project management, communication, and facilitation reflect the need to coordinate work across organizational priorities while maintaining relationships with boards, applicants, and communities.

Lower-frequency responses, including EDI, technical tools, and grantmaking practice, may reflect areas that are either role-specific, assumed as baseline competencies, or less clearly connected to advancement pathways within organizations. The overall pattern suggests that career progression in foundations is associated less with narrow specialization and more with gaining broader organizational, managerial, and institutional capacity.

Since the Foundation Staff Survey was conducted in December 2025, artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as an additional area of growing interest within foundation practice and professional development discussions. Through PFC affinity group conversations, staff have explored AI's potential to support efficiency in drafting, analysis, and administrative work, while also emphasizing the importance of ethics, accountability, and human oversight. Discussions point to strong demand for guidance, shared learning, and sector-wide approaches that address concerns related to privacy, transparency, reputational risk, bias, and the possible erosion of professional skills. While interest in AI continues to grow, organizations remain cautious about how these tools align with foundation values and responsibilities.

The desired skills identified by respondents point to a broader tension between professional development and career progression within foundations. Many of the areas staff want to strengthen, particularly governance, finance, legal knowledge, leadership, and organizational management, are closely tied to responsibilities that emerge as roles expand over time. Gaining these skills does not necessarily correspond to clearer advancement pathways within organizations.

The Foundation Staff Survey showed that most respondents had worked at their current foundation for seven years or less, although this reflects survey respondents rather than the sector as a whole (Figure 12). The concentration of respondents in the one- to seven-year range is surprising, given the longstanding perception that foundation staff often remain in organizations for extended periods. It may be that this moment in time captures movement into and out of foundations, the creation of new roles within organizations, and leadership transitions as long-serving CEOs retire.

Tenure in Current Foundation

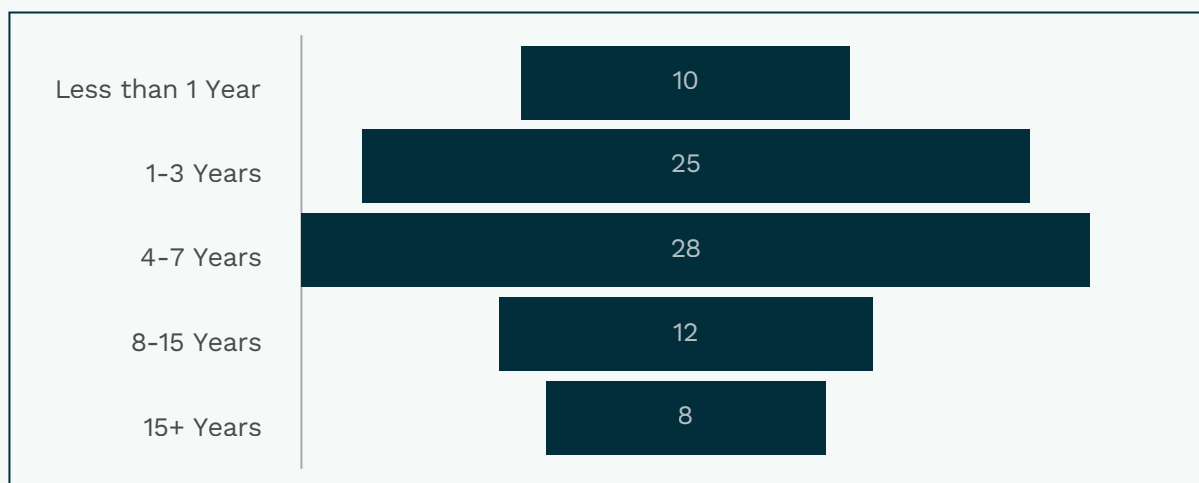


Figure 12 Tenure in years at current foundation (n=83)

A longstanding anecdote within philanthropy suggests that staff often needed to leave one foundation to gain experience before advancing into more senior roles elsewhere. Professional development may support movement across organizations and sectors as much as progression within a single foundation. More research is needed to better understand how professional development relates to tenure, retention, and career mobility within foundation work.

g) Organization Checklist

Looking at individuals' experiences of their organizations shows that foundation work is shaped not only by individual skills but also by organizational structures, workplace supports, and growth opportunities. While foundations are increasingly formalizing practices related to compensation, benefits, professional development, and EDI, implementation remains varied across the sector. Staff continue to navigate fluid roles, informal structures, and unclear advancement pathways, while identifying growing needs for continued support in governance, leadership, finance, and operations. Figure 13 provides reflective questions for organizations seeking to strengthen their workplace practices and supports.



Organizations' Checklist: Strengthening Foundation Practices

- Has Board leadership clearly defined CEO roles, responsibilities, and expectations within the current structure?
- Has the CEO and Senior Leadership clearly defined staff roles, responsibilities, and expectations within the current structure?
- Have the CEO and Senior Leadership assessed whether staffing levels and workloads are sustainable?
- How are human resources and leadership supporting staff wellbeing, flexibility, and recovery?
- What structured learning, mentorship, coaching, or professional development opportunities are available to staff?
- How are professional development opportunities aligned with the skills staff identify as needed?
- Can leadership show how performance, learning, and progression are connected?
- Where do organizational structures or informal practices limit advancement opportunities?
- How are JEDI commitments reflected in hiring, leadership development, workplace culture, and decision-making?

Figure 13 Organizations' Checklist: Strengthening Foundation Practices

The Field



Foundation work does not occur in isolation. It also operates within a broader field of practice, influencing how staff learn, connect, and carry out their roles. Staff both contribute to this field through their day-to-day work and operate within the conditions it creates. This section looks at that interaction from three angles: how staff perceive foundation work, how EDI is unfolding across the field, and the role of sector supports, or Philanthropic Intermediary Organizations (PIOs), in strengthening the sector’s collective capacity.

a) Staff Perspectives on Foundation Work

The PFC Foundation Staff Survey asked about both the most rewarding aspects of foundation work and its greatest challenges, offering insight into what sustains staff in their roles and where tensions or constraints emerge. Staff point to a strong sense of purpose within foundation work, with many describing the ability to contribute to meaningful, tangible improvements in people’s lives. The most prominent theme, raised by nearly 60% of respondents, is a strong sense of community impact and purpose.

Staff value “being able to positively impact people and causes” and speak about “helping support the broader good in the community” as both motivating and grounding.

Many describe the privilege of doing work that “makes a direct impact on the ground” or helps “make life easier for frontline workers or people managing organizations that are supporting their communities.” These responses suggest that foundation work is often experienced less as administrative or transactional work and more as relational and values-driven practice. The ability to connect institutional resources to visible community outcomes appears central to how many staff understand the meaning of their roles.

This sense of purpose is closely tied to learning. Around 20% of respondents describe philanthropy as a rich learning environment where they “learn from like-minded interesting people,” encounter new ideas, and deepen their understanding of community issues. Working across sectors, engaging with grant recipients, and navigating complex social challenges contribute to ongoing professional growth, making the work intellectually engaging as well as personally expansive. These findings underscore the extent to which foundation work depends not only on technical expertise but also on curiosity and relationship-building.

Staff also highlight the structural features of philanthropy that allow for longer-term thinking and strategic work.

Several respondents note the value of focusing on impact rather than revenue generation, with one describing the “stability provided by an endowment” as “incredibly valuable,” and another appreciating “not having to fundraise for our operations.” This stability is viewed as creating space for reflection, systems thinking, and more predictable support for communities. Respondents value the “long-term orientation of philanthropy,” the opportunity “to be strategic,” and the chance “to contribute to change at a systems level.” Staff understand that foundations are uniquely positioned to work differently from other parts of the nonprofit sector, particularly through their ability to take longer views, absorb risk, or focus beyond immediate organizational survival.

Flexibility and autonomy also emerge as important features of foundation work. Respondents frequently reference “flexibility” and “a flexible and challenging work environment” that enables both creativity and focus. These elements—purpose, learning, stability, strategic orientation, and autonomy—help explain why many staff experience foundation work as deeply meaningful and sustaining. They also create tensions. Staff describe an environment that is becoming more demanding and less predictable. A dominant thread is the mismatch between mission and capacity, where staff are asked to respond to entrenched systemic issues without sufficient tools or resources:

We are being asked to solve problems we don't have enough resources to tackle. Even if philanthropy deployed all its assets, we need the government to acknowledge the need.

These dynamics complicate common perceptions of foundation work as inherently privileged, revealing a context in which staff operate within resource-rich institutions while simultaneously experiencing constraints, expectations, and responsibilities that are not fully visible from the outside.

The sentiment is an important tension within contemporary philanthropy: the role of complementing or substituting the government.⁴⁰ Staff speak about the challenge of trying to “keep up” amid “political and social environments that add weight to the work,” particularly as philanthropy is increasingly expected to respond to gaps left by public systems. Staff are “grappling with how to make systematic change, rather than simply addressing the symptoms of a problem.” The aspiration to create large-scale change can therefore become both motivating and burdensome.

Respondents point to high workloads, compressed timelines, and the emotional weight of declining funding requests, particularly as demand for support continues to outpace organizational capacity. One respondent captures this contradiction clearly: “Poor project management and planning create urgency. I am underutilized yet also overwhelmed.” Staff are navigating emerging field-level norms and expectations about what philanthropy should look like and how it should operate. As one respondent reflected,

Outside pressures end up pressuring organizations to be a certain way or fit a certain mold that doesn’t take into consideration realities; it can feel very idealistic.

Staff are impacted by a field still negotiating its identity and practice, particularly as ideas around trust-based philanthropy, systems change, equity, and public accountability continue to evolve.

Challenges related to foundation identity and governance further complicate this work, particularly within family foundations or smaller organizations where strategic alignment, role clarity, and decision-making pace may be inconsistent. References to “family dynamics,” “tight board control,” and “lack of timely communication” point to how governance structures and organizational culture shape staff experience and influence whether individuals feel empowered, trusted, or aligned in their work.

Importantly, respondents also point to broader field-level fragmentation beyond their own organizations. Several describe a sector that struggles to collaborate or move collectively on shared priorities. One respondent reflected:

40. (Fugiel Gartner, 2024)

The tension between collaborating with other foundations to drive impact and delivering on each organization's specific mission, values, and strategies can hinder progress.

Others noted “limited efforts to connect and build a professional philanthropic staff other than for the CEOs.” These comments suggest that while philanthropy is increasingly operating as a field, its professional infrastructure remains nascent, particularly for staff outside executive leadership roles or in smaller foundations. The findings point to a sector where professional identity, peer learning, and shared practice are still developing and are not experienced equally across organizational contexts.

Staff remain deeply committed to the work and its possibilities. Their experiences also reveal the strain of operating within intersecting organizational, structural, and societal pressures that continue to reshape foundation practice.

b) JEDI Across the Field

These strengths and tensions also shape how JEDI is experienced across the field. While PFC Foundation Survey respondents overwhelmingly report feeling trusted within their own organizations, confidence becomes somewhat more tentative when staff consider the broader philanthropic sector. Fewer respondents strongly agree, and neutral responses increase, suggesting a field in which relationships, norms, and shared expectations are only partially developed across organizations. Perceptions of representation reflect a similar pattern. While nearly three-quarters of staff feel represented by their leadership, only one-third strongly agree, and a meaningful minority do not or are unsure. This softer intensity and the meaningful minority who do not see themselves reflected in decision-making structures point to a wider sector-level issue: leadership across Canadian foundations do not fully mirror the diversity, identities, and lived experiences present among staff and the communities they aim to serve.

Broader field data reinforce this picture. CICP findings indicate that senior and operational staff are perceived as less representative of the communities they serve than boards, volunteers, funding recipients, or collaborators.⁴¹ This suggests a sector-wide misalignment between staff demographics and community realities, likely shaped by structural and recruitment barriers. Representation of racialized individuals, persons with disabilities, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit individuals, and 2SLGBTQI+ communities remains limited and inconsistently reported, suggesting continuing structural and recruitment barriers across the sector.⁴²

41. (CICP Y1+Wk05)

42. (CICP Y2+Wk05)

Progress across specific dimensions of EDI is not smooth.

Gender representation is relatively strong at the board and general staff levels, but less aligned in leadership roles.⁴³ Organizations most commonly advance equity through flexible work arrangements and inclusive language, while deeper structural interventions, such as pay equity reviews, bias training, and mentorship, are less widely adopted.⁴⁴ Accessibility practices show similar variation. While some organizations report comprehensive measures, others remain in early stages or are uncertain about their status. Efforts tend to focus on basic approaches such as using plain language, with limited adoption of more resource-intensive practices, including accessible technologies (e.g., closed captioning, screen readers), alternative formats (large print, braille, audio), or language interpretation.⁴⁵

Recent pulse data suggest that momentum on EDI in the field remains fragile. Most organizations report little change, and relatively few describe significant progress. While these findings are directional, they align with a broader pattern across the field: strong stated commitment, less clear implementation, and limited capacity to embed EDI consistently in practice.⁴⁶ This field-level picture highlights a gap between intention and experience and points to the need for stronger field-wide supports, shared learning, and sustained investment to advance JEDI across Canadian philanthropy.

c) Sector Supports

As foundations in Canada operate within a relatively small, decentralized, and lightly institutionalized field, the sector lacks many of the formalized systems, data infrastructures, and professional pathways found in larger jurisdictions.⁴⁷ Philanthropic Infrastructure Organizations (PIOs) play a critical role in convening, shaping norms, generating knowledge, and supporting the development of practice across the field.

PIOs such as Philanthropic Foundations Canada (PFC), Community Foundations of Canada (CFC), The Circle on Philanthropy, and Environment Funders Canada (EFC) provide this connective and interpretive function.

43. (CICP Y1+Wk22)

44. (CICP Y1+Wk22)

45. (CICP Y1+Wk31)

46. (CICP Y3+Wk07)

47. (Pearson, 2020)

Alongside these national organizations, place-based infrastructures such as Foundation House (see vignette) and Maison Philanthropique Notman (see vignette) add a relational layer of support, enabling connection, peer learning, and collaboration among staff who might otherwise work in isolation. This ecosystem is further complemented by academic and field-building initiatives, including Carleton University MPNL and PhiLab, as well as a growing number of nonprofit management certificates and executive education programs.⁴⁸ Together, these supports contribute to a still-evolving infrastructure for professional development in Canadian foundations, one that has expanded considerably, but where gaps in access, coordination, and depth of training remain.

This report is part of that infrastructure role. By examining the people and practices within foundations, this study addresses a longstanding gap in understanding how foundation staff enter the field, develop skills, and experience their work. For example, Figure 14 aggregates three PFC Foundation Staff Survey questions – staff skills at entry (Figure 6), within foundations (Figure 9), and still desired (Figure 11) – to show how staff skills shift across a foundation career, from what skills are brought in to what skills are still desired.

The bandwidths reflect where skills are most concentrated, and movement from left to right highlights how demands expand once within foundations. Staff typically enter with strengths in communication and facilitation, alongside some leadership and program management experience. Inside foundations, the profile broadens quickly to include finance, legal and governance, evaluation and learning, and grantmaking practice, areas not fully developed at entry. As responsibility grows, structured learning does not always keep pace, leaving ongoing gaps in leadership, governance, and data-informed practice.

By making the evolution of skills across foundation careers visible, the report helps clarify where more intentional investment is needed.

This includes the development of courses and certificates, apprenticeships and mentorship models, and more coordinated continuing and executive education offerings. In this way, the report contributes not only to understanding the current state of the field but to shaping how the next generation of foundation staff is supported and developed.

48. There are both established and emerging examples that engage with Canadian philanthropy from different perspectives, including gift planning courses and the Master Financial Advisor in Philanthropy (MFA-P) designation offered by the Canadian Association of Gift Planners (CAGP), the Family Enterprise Advisor (FEA) designation through Family Enterprise Canada, and the newly launched Microprogram in Contemporary Philanthropy at HEC Montréal.

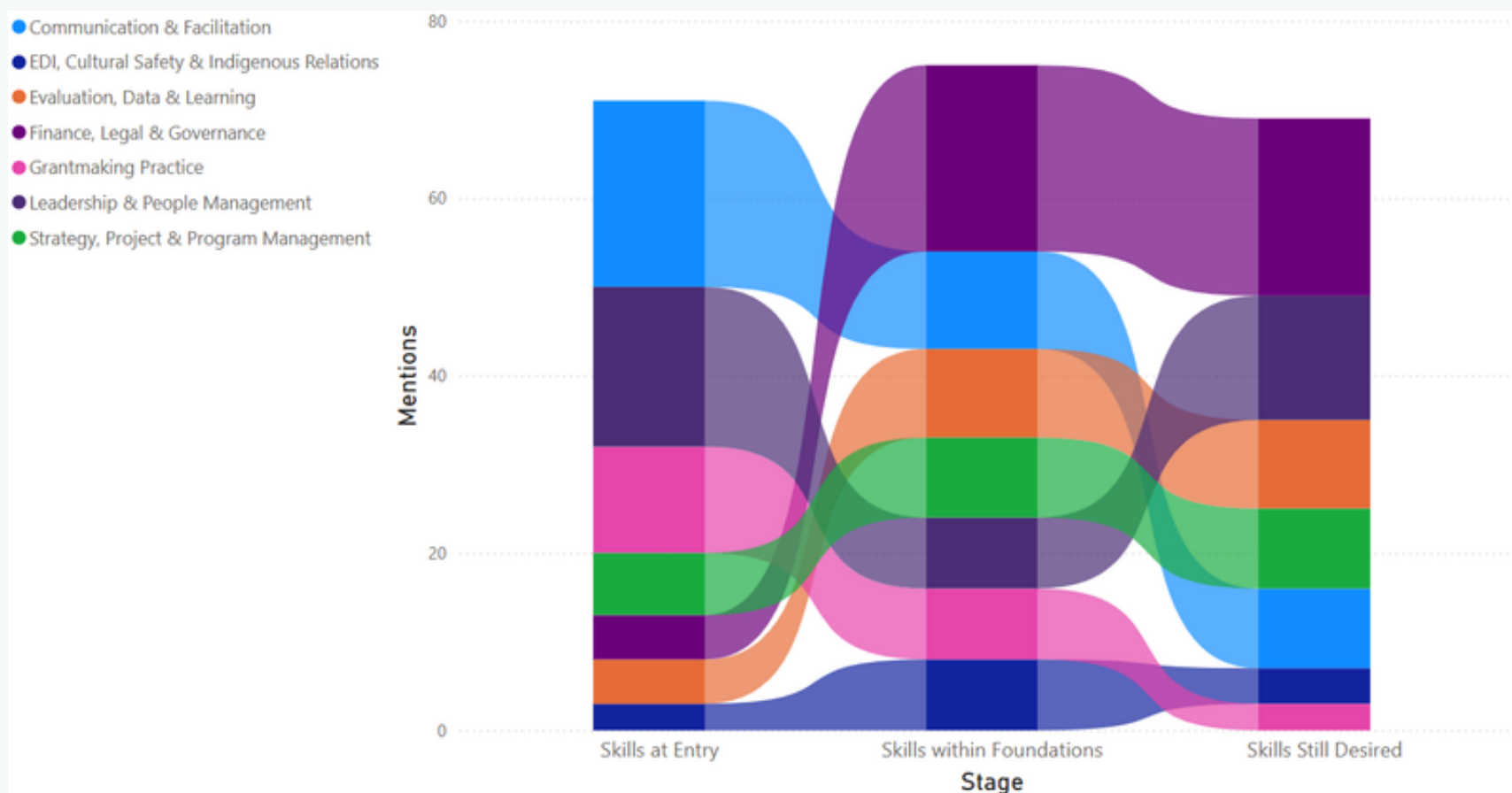


Figure 14 Foundation staff skills: entry, development, and ongoing gaps
(PFC Foundation Staff Survey, Author analysis) ⁴⁹

49. Finance encompasses all references to financial skills. A key element in foundations is understanding investments, as endowment management is vital for the organization. Nonetheless, investment skills and knowledge were not frequently mentioned across any stage to warrant a separate category. In the breakdown, 2 out of 83 respondents reported having investment skills before joining foundations, 4 mentioned acquiring them during their foundation experience—2 specifically related to impact investment, and 2 expressed a desire to develop such skills. Results point to an additional need to understand investment skills within foundation work and for foundation staff, which PFC will explore in its forthcoming Investment Survey



**Foundation House vignette – Interview with Bruce Lawson,
Special Advisor, The Counselling Foundation of Canada**

Since 2016, Foundation House in Toronto has served as one of the foundation sector's influential infrastructures. Designed as a shared home for small- and mid-sized foundations and sector support organizations, it has consistently facilitated connections among foundations and their staff.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, Foundation House operated as a community where chance encounters routinely became professional opportunities. The lunch table served as an informal learning hub, a “proverbial water cooler”. Staff from different organizations compared challenges, swapped advice, and built relationships that erased the hierarchies common in more siloed environments. As Bruce recalled, “We never had to social-engineer it; people simply sat down next to each other and started talking.” Such interactions were particularly meaningful for staff who would otherwise be isolated in small teams or solo roles.

That pre-existing trust proved invaluable when COVID-19 hit. While office life paused, the Foundation House network did not. CEOs began meeting weekly for a peer-support call that became a coordinating body for sector responsiveness and, ultimately, a catalyst for the rapid creation of the Indigenous Peoples Resilience Fund. As Bruce noted, “We actually talked more to one another during COVID, because we already knew each other well.” Relationships seeded in the House became the groundwork for collective action in a moment of crisis.

Today, Foundation House is reimagining its role again. It is renovating its space, animating new cross-organizational programming, and offering shared services and professional development. Its core conviction has not changed, even as the work environment has evolved; collaboration is a practice rooted in connection. This connection requires places where people can show up, see one another, and build something together. Foundation House's contribution to the sector is a platform that continues to evolve, reminding the field that collaboration is easier, richer, and more human when people share a home.



Maison Philanthropique Notman vignette – Interview with Laura Butler, Chief Operating Officer, Trottier Family Foundation

Maison Philanthropique Notman was built upon the value that proximity fosters impact. Through continuous, everyday interactions, people and their organizations cultivate meaningful collaboration, trust, and innovative practices. Moreover, the project has been guided by a shared sense that philanthropy should exemplify its core values, such as sustainability, accessibility, and authentic community engagement, in its own operations.

From these principles, the Notman concept began to take shape. Laura shared that in Montréal, “while philanthropic networks are strong, there was no dedicated shared space where organizations could work alongside one another daily”. The success of Toronto’s Foundation House served as a reference point, but the intention was not to replicate it. It was to create a distinctly Montréal-based model that would bring organizations into closer proximity, embed environmental responsibility through the retrofit of a heritage building, and ensure the space was sector-facing and locally rooted.

As the project has moved from concept to development, co-creation has become central. Rather than designing the model in full, a group of early partners helped shape how the space would function. Laura describes the “roomies”, philanthropic and values-aligned organizations, not just as tenants but as active contributors to the culture, norms, and collaborative practices that will define the Maison. Relationships with community partners and neighbours have been built alongside the construction of Notman House, reinforcing the intention for the space to operate as a community asset rather than a closed professional hub.

Although the building is still undergoing its transformation, the trajectory is clear. Maison Philanthropique Notman is evolving into both an infrastructure project and an example of how philanthropy can organize itself differently, more accessibly, more sustainably, and more closely connected to the communities it serves.

d) Field Checklist

The field plays a crucial role in supporting foundation work, though this support is often fragmented and irregularly experienced. PIOs provide connection, shared learning, and practical infrastructure that individual foundations, especially small or single-staff organizations, often cannot build on their own. To strengthen foundation work, the field may require more credible and predictable supports. This includes regular training on common professional development needs, clearer pathways to trusted resources, and more consistent opportunities for peer learning, particularly where trust across the field remains weaker than trust within organizations. Given the diversity and decentralized nature of philanthropy, the field may not require a highly standardized response. Instead, lightweight scaffolding may offer a practical starting point (Figures 15 and 16).



Field's Checklist: Building a lightweight scaffolding for foundation work.

- How can PIOs better support learning in CRA compliance, regulation, legal obligations, and governance?
- How can PIOs reduce professional isolation through peer learning and networks?
- What practical tools or guidance could PIOs provide to support more consistent practice?
- What funding is needed to sustain the field-building role of PIOs?
- How can funders better invest in philanthropic infrastructure?
- What investment is needed in philanthropy research and sector data?
- How can PIOs evaluate whether their supports are making a difference?

Figure 15 Field's Checklist: Strengthening the Foundation Field

As a PIO, Philanthropic Foundations Canada is committed to reflecting on how sector infrastructure can strengthen shared learning, reduce isolation, and promote more consistent practices across the field. The following questions are intended to support our own ongoing reflection and commitment to action.



PFC Checklist: Role of Philanthropic Foundations Canada

- How can PFC strengthen its role as a trusted hub for connection, learning, and support?
- How can PFC better reduce professional isolation, especially in small or single-staff foundations?
- What role should PFC play in professional development on governance, regulation, and foundation practice?
- How can PFC strengthen shared tools, guidance, and sector infrastructure?
- What investment is needed to strengthen PFC's field-building role?
- How can PFC advance practical and credible JEDI support across diverse foundations?
- What role should PFC play in building trust, shared norms, and professional identity across the field?

Figure 16 PFC Checklist: Role of Philanthropic Foundations Canada

The individual-, organizational-, and field-level findings in this report point to a philanthropic sector whose day-to-day functioning is shaped less by formal structures than by the people who interpret, negotiate, and operationalize its work.

At the micro level, individuals describe navigating relational, adaptive, and often loosely defined roles, reflecting the sector's long-standing informality. This informality has historically given staff considerable discretion and flexibility, but it also places weight on personal judgment, interpersonal skills, and tacit knowledge. In a small-staffed sector where most foundations employ only a handful of staff, and many operate with just one person, individuals' interpretations play an outsized role in shaping organizational practice.

Discussion:

What the Findings Mean for Practice

Bringing these findings together helps answer the study's research questions and identify implications for practice. The discussion begins by returning to the two central research questions and drawing together insights presented throughout the report.



The first research question asks:

What can be learned about the nature and composition of work within Canadian philanthropic foundations through available data, survey responses, and practitioner experiences?

Foundation work in Canada is relational, adaptive, and heavily dependent on individual discretion. Most foundations operate with very small teams, which places significant weight on individual judgment, discretion, and interpersonal skills. Staff enter the field through varied pathways and develop much of the technical and regulatory knowledge required for the role through practice rather than formal training. As a result, roles tend to be broad and fluid, with work shaped as much by relationships and internal trust as by formal processes.

This raises important considerations for practice. How do individuals navigate roles that are intentionally flexible but often loosely defined? Where is greater clarity needed to support consistent decision-making, and where does flexibility remain essential? The results suggest that stronger shared and clearly visible

structures could help support greater consistency, clarity, and coordination across the field. The task is to add lightweight scaffolding, enough structure to reduce friction and bias without overprofessionalizing in ways that further narrow entry pathways.

From a microfoundations perspective, these dynamics matter because individuals interpret strategy, navigate ambiguity, and translate organizational goals into action. In small teams, these personal interpretations are the key mechanisms through which philanthropic practice is carried out. This means that variation in practice emerges not only from organizational differences but from how individuals understand, prioritize, and act within their roles.

The second research question asks:

How do current staffing patterns, professional trajectories, and institutional practices reflect broader trends and tensions in the Canadian philanthropic sector?

The foundation sector is navigating growing pressures for professionalization alongside longstanding traditions of informality, all while responding to rising community expectations and increasing complexity in philanthropic work. Over the past 25 years, role diversification has expanded, and HR systems have matured, yet job titles, expectations, and operating practices continue to vary widely across organizations. Staff experience meaningful flexibility and purpose, but also report stress linked to limited capacity, unclear expectations, and governance ambiguity.

Foundation work, therefore, operates through a hybrid model. Clearer roles, policies, and structured processes are increasingly present across the sector, but informality remains deeply embedded in practice. Roles are often loosely defined, policies are interpreted through management discretion, and organizational culture strongly shapes how work is carried out. Staff navigate both clarity and ambiguity, with decisions shaped by official procedures as well as relational and situational judgment.

These findings also complicate assumptions about foundation work as uniformly privileged. While foundations are embedded in systems of financial and institutional advantage, the day-to-day work of staff reflects a more uneven and tension-filled reality. Staff operate within structures of power while often lacking full control over resources, direction, or decision-making, requiring them to mediate between institutional priorities and community expectations. Understanding this distinction is critical for interpreting both the potential and

the limits of foundation practice.

This pattern extends beyond individual organizations. Foundations develop their own approaches, some of which spread informally across the field through peer relationships, networks, and shared learning environments.

Because organizations remain the primary site of practice, these approaches are adopted without a stronger shared infrastructure. The result is a field that is innovative and adaptive, but also fragmented and inconsistent.

Philanthropic infrastructure organizations (PIOs) therefore play an important role in building connections, shared norms, and practical supports, particularly for staff working in small or isolated settings. To fulfill this role more fully, sustained and consistent investment in infrastructure is needed.

The findings suggest that this tension does not require an either-or response. The challenge is how the field can preserve the valued flexibility, informality, and relational qualities that many staff see as strengths, while also strengthening the formal structures that support effectiveness, consistency, and impact. At present, there is limited discussion of how to balance these dynamics thoughtfully. Instead, the field often moves toward greater professionalization without fully considering its unintended consequences or what may be lost in the process.

Staff Voices Vignette: “If you could change one thing...”

Foundation staff were asked a simple question with revealing answers: “If you could change one thing about foundation work, what would it be?” (Figure 17). The responses point to specific, practical shifts that could make the work more effective, equitable, and sustainable. Individual reflections focused on relationships and perceptions. Organizational concerns centred on governance, funding practices, operations, and access. Field-level observations emphasized shared learning and supporting infrastructure. These responses illustrate that opportunities to strengthen foundation work exist at all three levels.

Figure 17 If you could change one thing about foundation work, what would it be?

Level	Theme	Core Issue	What Staff Are Experiencing	Suggested Direction
Individual	Rebalancing Power	Persistent power imbalances	"The power imbalance between those who give money and those who receive money."	Introduce mechanisms that shift participation and decision-making power.
Individual	Reframing the Narrative	Perception of philanthropy as closed or opaque	"Philanthropy can feel like a 'closed circle.'"	Increase transparency and openness to strengthen trust and legitimacy.
Organization	Aligning Processes Across Funders	Duplication and inconsistency in grantmaking	"Due diligence practices vary and are very siloed."	Develop shared expectations, common metrics, and pilot aligned approaches across funders.
Organization	Modernizing Governance	Board dynamics affecting pace and clarity	"More input from the family." / "Many families might not have experience being board members."	Improve onboarding, clarify roles, and establish predictable decision rhythms.
Organization	Clarifying Access	Unclear eligibility and communication	"More transparency & clearer communications."	Create simple, upfront tools to help applicants assess fit and reduce wasted effort.
Organization	Shifting Funding Practice	Over-deliberation and short-term funding	"Larger funding envelopes and multi-year grant sizes." / "We spend more time pondering as opposed to acting."	Move toward multi-year, higher-trust funding with more decisive action.
Organization	Improving Work Design	Misalignment between workload and governance cycles	"We're on a 1- to 3-year funding ask cycle."	Align decision timelines with operational realities and increase flexibility.
Field	Strengthening Learning	Unstructured and informal learning	"More transparency in the sector and more peer-to-peer learning."	Build shared learning spaces and peer exchange opportunities.
Field	Navigating Regulation	CRA complexity and risk aversion	"To be less restricted by the CRA." / "Have a more supportive CRA."	Provide clearer, practical guidance to enable confident interpretation of rules.

Staff are acutely aware of the power and privilege associated with foundation work, even as they navigate its practical and ethical constraints. They are actively seeking ways to strengthen philanthropic practice despite the absence of standardized approaches and the diversity of foundation contexts. They highlight opportunities for greater clarity, coordination, transparency, and shared learning, without strict standardization. Many of these challenges extend beyond individual organizations, pointing to the importance of field-level collaboration and stronger organizational practices. Addressing these areas could reduce friction and strengthen foundation work while preserving flexibility and professional judgment.

Conclusion:

Building on What We Know

This report offers one perspective on foundation work by focusing on the experiences and realities of foundation staff. There are important limitations to the research. It does not capture the perspectives of board members, founders, families, or other actors who profoundly shape foundation practice, nor does it reflect the full range of foundation types or the variation across regions and jurisdictions. There are opportunities for future research to extend this work by incorporating additional stakeholders, exploring governance dynamics, and comparing staffing realities across different foundation models and provinces. It will also be important to examine grant recipients' and governments' expectations of foundation staff, as well as what is needed for effective partnerships, given how strongly these relationships shape practice and outcomes.

Foundations operate within systems of institutional privilege, while the people working within them navigate a range of constraints, expectations, and responsibilities in practice. Both of these conditions are true at the same time.

Studying staff makes it possible to see how foundation work is carried out and shaped in practice.

Their experiences illuminate where the sector is working, where it is strained, and where change is most needed. Continuing to centre their voices will be essential to building a more effective, equitable, and responsive philanthropic sector in Canada.



Methodology

To tell the story of Working in Canadian Foundations, several datasets were created and combined, and the analysis varied depending on their content. This section describes the data used, its value, and its limitations. Transparency in the methodology guides this section, particularly regarding proprietary data not currently publicly available.

a) T3010 Data

This report draws on data from the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) T3010 Registered Charity Information Return for public (A) and private (B) foundations, with charitable organizations (C) excluded to maintain comparability across foundation analyses. Philanthropic Foundations Canada (PFC) requested the CRA data in August 2025 and received the files in September 2025. The 2023 dataset reflects CRA records current to July 31, 2025, and was treated as the complete reporting year for this analysis.

To analyze staffing, organizational identity records were combined with compensation data from the T3010. Employee counts were derived from Line 300 (permanent full-time employees) and Line 370 (permanent part-time employees). Foundations reporting values greater than zero on either line were classified as having paid employees. Lines without any values were also excluded. Total reported employee positions were calculated by combining full-time and part-time employee counts. Financial data from Section D and Schedule 6 were incorporated for supplementary analyses examining staffing patterns by asset size (4200) and gifts to qualified donees (5050). Qualified donee gift transaction records were also used to explore the relationship between reported employees and gifts to qualified donees.

Two organizations were excluded from staffing analyses due to anomalous reported employment values that would materially distort results: The Dunamis Palace (reporting more than 4,000 full-time employees) and Fondation Santé Baie-des-Chaleurs (reporting more than 88,000 part-time employees). Additional reporting anomalies or keystroke errors may remain in the underlying administrative data, although these are unlikely to materially alter overall sector-level patterns.

Historical trend analysis (2000–2023) was developed using a comparable longitudinal T3010 dataset provided by Nathan Grasse, Associate Professor, Carleton University, with the 2023 results cross-checked against PFC's independently assembled CRA dataset.

The two 2023 counts aligned within a narrow range for foundations reporting staff and overall staffing numbers, and the PFC 2023 figure is used throughout this report. In the historical series, foundations were included when public or private designation was identified and when reported staffing values were greater than zero, with anomalous values excluded using the same thresholds applied in the current-year analysis.

To better understand staffing variation across different parts of the Canadian foundation sector, a supplementary analysis identified foundations plausibly affiliated with MUSH institutions (Museums, Universities/Schools, and Hospitals). This analysis was limited to public and private foundations reporting at least one employee in 2023, using the same staffing exclusions described above. MUSH organizations were identified using a combined classification approach based on CRA category and subcategory codes, supplemented by bounded name-based validation within generic foundation categories.

- Educational foundations were identified through categories 15.1, 15.2, and 11.8, with additional review of generic foundation categories (210.1 and 210.2) using education-related institutional name terms.
- Health-affiliated foundations were identified through hospital auxiliary and hospital support categories (110.10 and 110.16), supplemented by review of generic foundation categories using health-related institutional terms.
- Museum and heritage foundations were identified through relevant public amenities categories (200.2, 200.3, 200.9, and 200.12), along with a review of generic foundation categories using museum- and heritage-related institutional terms.

Ambiguous cases were manually reviewed before final classification. All remaining staffed public and private foundations identified and reviewed by MUSH were classified as non-MUSH foundations.

This approach does not capture all institutional philanthropic entities in Canada. It does not include fundraising organizations registered as charitable organizations rather than foundations. As a result, the MUSH findings should be interpreted as representing staffed public and private foundations plausibly affiliated with these institutional sectors.

b) PFC Salary and Benefits Survey data

PFC's salary and benefits survey began in 2001 and has run in multiple years, including 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018, 2022, and 2025. The report has been written by various consultants over the years, with The Portage Group (formerly the Association Resource Centre) producing it since 2014. As raw data was not available, a data set was created to aggregate all data across several indicators: Year, Role titles, Definition of titles, Compensation Structures,

Benefits, Staffing Levels, Performance Reviews, Professional Development, HR Policies, Other Information, Board Information (only available in some years), Collaboration, Title, Author, and Organization.

Survey questions, sample sizes, and analyses varied across the years, and qualitative thematic analysis was conducted to understand and present key changes over time and to aggregate role titles, benefits, wellness, and professional development.

c) Charity Insights Canada Project (CICP), Carleton University

CICP collected pulse check data from across the charitable sector. Working with the CICP team, particularly Tuan Tu Tran, Data Specialist, an EDI dataset was created from seven surveys over three years. The data was segmented into Public (A) and Private (B) foundations, with the Charitable organization (C) removed (Table 12).

Table 12 CICP Surveys included in the report

Survey Name	Survey Shorthand	Sample Size of Public and Private Foundations
Populations served (1.1.5)	Yr1+Wk05	49
Gender in the sector (1.5.22)	Yr1+Wk22	48
Accessibility and inclusion (1.7.31)	Yr1+Wk31	38
Representation (2.02.05)	Yr2+Wk05	37
Implementing DEI (2.08.29)	Yr2+Wk29	25
EDI Action and Initiatives (2.10.37)	Yr2+Wk37	26
Shift in EDI Movements (3.03.07)	Yr3+Wk07	9

Public and private foundation participation constituted a smaller subset of the larger CICP datasets, and the sample size for each survey is listed. As the sample sizes involved different participants and sample sizes, the analysis was thematic and indicative of direction rather than definitive.

d) PFC Foundation Staff Survey

To supplement the datasets above and gather input from foundation staff, PFC developed a Foundation Staff Survey. The survey was created with feedback from members of the Programming and Grantmaking Staff Affinity Group (PGSAG) and the Leaders of Colour Affinity Group. The survey was administered by PFC and shared via email, newsletter, and LinkedIn. It was open from November 17 to December 8, 2025. Participants confirmed they were full- or

part-time staff members of a Canadian public or private foundation engaged in grantmaking, and the data were cleaned to ensure valid responses. In total, 83 responses were included, and Tables 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17 show the demographic breakdowns of respondents.

Table 13 Respondents by Role (83 Responses)

Title	Count	Percentage
Chief Staff Officer (e.g. CEO or Executive Director)	22	27%
Management (e.g. Director of Program or Operations, Finance)	31	37%
Non-Management (e.g. Program Officer, Administrator, Specialist)	30	36%

Table 14 Respondents by Foundation type (83 Responses)

Type of Foundation	Count	Percentage
Private	58	70%
Public	25	30%

Table 15 Respondents by Years in Current Foundation (83 Responses)

Years in Current Foundation	Count	Percentage
Less than 1 Year	10	12%
1-3 Years	25	30%
4-7 Years	28	34%
8-15 Years	12	14%
15+ Years	8	10%

Table 16 Respondents by Province/Territory of Foundation HQ (83 Responses)

Province/Territory of Foundation HQ	Count	Percentage
Ontario	41	49%
Quebec	19	23%
Alberta	14	17%
British Columbia	7	8%
Saskatchewan	1	1%
Nunavut	1	1%

Note: Other provinces and territories had zero respondents.

Survey respondents were invited to describe their identity in their own words. Those who did provided insight into how individuals understand and articulate their identity beyond fixed survey categories. Several respondents identified themselves using familiar descriptors, such as “white/Caucasian,” “white male,” “white female,” and “straight white woman.” Others located themselves more explicitly in relation to social context and power, describing themselves as “cisgender, middle-aged settler,” “white settler,” or “white, female, 5th-generation settler,” sometimes extending this to include class background or education.

A small number emphasized migration or generational status, identifying as “Canadian,” “white Canadian,” or “1st generation Canadian,” while others described themselves through race or racialization, such as “East Asian descent” or “visible minority.” There were also more full intersectional descriptions, “queer, white, first-generation immigrant” and “university-educated, middle class.” This self-identification approach adds depth and context to the demographic data presented below, highlighting aspects of lived experience that standard categories do not fully capture (Table 17).

Table 17 Demographic data of survey responses (Response numbers vary)

Language spoken most often at home	English	67
	French	6
	English & French	4
	Other / blank	7
Age group	25–34	27
	35–44	24
	45–54	22

	55–64	18
	65 or older	6
	Prefer not to answer / blank	3
Gender	Woman	63
	Man	14
	Non-binary / gender diverse	2
	Prefer not to answer	3
Sexual orientation	Heterosexual	63
	Bisexual / pansexual	7
	Gay / lesbian	3
	Queer / other	3
	Prefer not to answer	8
Person with a disability	No	69
	Yes	6
	Prefer not to answer	7
First Nations, Métis, or Inuk (Inuit)	No	77
	Yes	5
	Prefer not to answer	4
Race (check all that apply)	White	63
	Black	5
	Indigenous	3
	East Asian	4
	South Asian	5
	Southeast Asian	3
	Latin American	1
	Prefer not to answer / not specified	6

Note: Responses were optional, and not all categories will tally to the full sample size of n=83.

e) Interviews

Two semi-structured interviews were conducted with leaders in the foundation sector. The vignettes were then analyzed through the lens of philanthropic intermediary organizations and their impact on foundation staff at the field level. Data were collected through a recorded, transcribed virtual interview with one participant and a written email response from another.

f) Approach to Analysis

As this study was exploratory, the analysis was primarily qualitative and thematic, guided by the research questions and the microfoundations framing. Where numerical counts and percentages are reported, they are presented cautiously and in context. Co-Pilot AI was used to check data equations and, in some cases, to support qualitative comparison across large datasets; the author verified all AI outputs. Any remaining errors are human.

This report draws on datasets created for different purposes and using different definitions, samples, and timeframes. For that reason, results from one source should not be directly compared with results from another. Differences may reflect methodology rather than real-world change. The report therefore interprets each dataset on its own terms and synthesizes them to describe an overall story of foundation work in Canada. Future research should strengthen comparability by building harmonized datasets and applying additional quantitative and qualitative analyses to test and deepen the patterns identified here.

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