

# PFC Learning Series

## tool 1

### COVID-19, social inequalities and foundations' response

**The COVID-19 crisis reveals and magnifies inequities. Although the virus does not see differences between people when it is moving through our communities, this crisis does not affect us all equally. Who is falling through the cracks? What about our society and culture is being revealed? What can foundations do in response?**

In a crisis, we need to both act fast and with depth of understanding. Can COVID-19 catalyze foundations to action, to move the needle on existing systemic inequalities in Canada? In emergencies, we take action in a context where we may lack time, reflection or knowledge. How can foundations avoid exacerbating problems with our crisis-time solutions?

In addition to this brief, Philanthropic Foundations Canada offers a list of resources to support foundations at this crucial moment.



Established in 1999, Philanthropic Foundations Canada (PFC) is a national member association of grantmaking foundations, charitable organizations and corporate giving programs. PFC seeks to promote the growth and development of effective and responsible foundations and organized philanthropy in Canada through the provision of membership services, resources, and advocacy.

To learn more, visit: [pfc.ca](http://pfc.ca)

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# Inequities are the cracks. Who is falling through them?

There are many populations at risk being further marginalized during the COVID-19 crisis. No one can be left behind.

## Women

- Violence against women has increased in many countries around the world during the pandemic. 1 in 10 women in Canada are very or extremely concerned about the possibility of violence in the home, in the face of COVID-19. Many shelters and domestic violence crisis lines across the country are experiencing an increase in calls from girls and women.
- The crisis has revealed how essential is the work of people in our retail, health and service sectors – jobs which tend to be both under-paid and over-represented by women and racialized people.
- How will the economic crisis created by the COVID-19 crisis affect gender equality – when women in Canada are already more likely to live in poverty, be paid less than men, be single parents, and have part-time or precarious jobs?
- School and daycare closures have added to the unpaid care work in the home, which tends to fall more heavily on women. The economic downturn could add even more to this burden. In the last recession, women in Canada took on increased unpaid work, more than men.

## Racialized people

- Statistics from the USA show that Black and Latino people are highly overrepresented among those dying of COVID-19.
- In Canada, federal and provincial governments have not released ethnic or racial data related to the virus.
- There are concerns that Canadians of African descent and other racialized people are at higher risk of contracting and dying from COVID-19 due to: higher rates of poverty; over-representation in low-paid essential work including delivery, retail and care professions; higher rates of chronic health challenges; and distrust of the medical system based on previous experiences of racism.
- The economic toll on racialized people during and after the crisis will likely be higher. Non-racialized people in Canada have more access to wealth than racialized people. earn more on average, and are over-represented in higher-paid jobs.

“ *Recovery must lead to a more equal world.* ”

— United Nations, The Impact of COVID-19 on Women

## Indigenous people

- Many Inuit, First Nations and Metis communities carry traumatic experiences of past epidemics, both historic and recent. Advocate Cindy Blackstock is concerned that “history will repeat itself” during the COVID crisis.
- During the first wave of the H1N1 crisis, Indigenous people were over-represented:



**25.6% of critically ill patients**



- Inequities created by colonization heighten risk for Indigenous communities during the COVID-19 crisis - including higher rates of poverty, chronic health problems, inadequate housing, and lack of water, electrical, sewage and health care infrastructure in many communities.
- COVID-19 is predicted to spark a recession. In the last recession in Canada, Indigenous employment rates were harder hit and slower to recover than non-Indigenous.

“ *The ability to provide or withhold medicine and rations in times of calamity have historically been used as ways of extending Canada’s political authority over Indigenous people.* ”

— Gina Starblanket and Dallas Hunt

## Low income workers

- Recent Canadian cell phone tracking data found that people with lower incomes were more likely to travel outside of their neighbourhoods during the pandemic. The main reason is likely that many people working in industries deemed essential, such as grocery stores, are low-paid and insecure – to keep their jobs, they have no choice but to show up for work.

*“In order for white-collar workers to be able to self-isolate and work at home, it requires that people with lower earnings and less benefits be out-and-about delivering our food and stocking our grocery store shelves... It really points to a clear divide.”*

– Sheila Block, economist,  
Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives

## Temporary foreign workers

- About 60,000 temporary foreign workers come to Canada every year to work in agriculture, food and fish processing. These workers often have little control over where they live (on-site housing is common) and face barriers to receiving public health care.
- There is a risk of COVID-19 spreading quickly, as shown by an outbreak at a plant nursery in Kelowna, BC, that is affecting 63 migrant and 12 local workers. Canada's new COVID-19 guidance places responsibility for foreign worker health on employers.

## Homeless people

- Many cities have realized the need to rapidly house homeless people to protect public health. But what will happen after the crisis?

*“As with so many other crises, the COVID-19 pandemic – and the economic recession that it's catalyzed – will hit Black, Indigenous, immigrant, refugee and working-class communities first and worst.”*

– Farhad Ebrahmi  
Founder and President, Chorus Foundation

## Detained and incarcerated people

- Advocates are asking for better conditions in juvenile detention facilities, prisons, immigration holding centers, and courthouses to help protect the health of detained people who often face “unsanitary conditions, close quarters, frequent physical contact, and underlying chronic health conditions.”
- Staff have tested positive for COVID-19 at some Immigration Holding Centers, including Toronto and Laval (where detained migrants went on a hunger strike over the risk of infection).
- There were 82 confirmed COVID-19 cases in Correctional Services Canada institutions on April 13, 2020. This includes several outbreaks in federal prisons in BC, ON and QC.

## Health: People with disabilities and chronic illnesses

- 6.2 million people live with a disability in Canada. Many children and adults with disabilities have lost access to support workers as well as educational and activity programs as a result of COVID-19 shutdowns. Seniors and people with disabilities who live in care residences are isolated from family and friends because of no-visitor rules.
- People with disabilities are more at risk of contracting COVID-19 for many reasons, challenges accessing health care and physically maintaining important prevention measures like social distancing and frequent handwashing.
- People with pre-existing health conditions, particularly respiratory illnesses, immune system illnesses, heart disease or diabetes, are more at risk from dying of COVID-19. People living on low income have higher rates of many illnesses including diabetes, cancer and cardiovascular diseases.
- As health care system resources are directed at the curbing pandemic, people with other health needs face serious disruptions to the services they rely on, for example, postponement of surgeries or cancer treatments.

# Advance equity and inclusion while responding to COVID-19: Tips for foundations

**Crisis can be a catalyst. Foundations can mobilize financial resources quickly to support urgent needs. And, rather than a return to normal, foundations can lend their funds and influence to push for a new normal: a more equitable society and sustainable economy post-crisis.**

Below are some action ideas for foundations seeking to improve equity while addressing the immediate COVID-19 crisis. These tips are organized according to the [five guiding principles](#) developed by Philanthropic Foundations Canada, Environment Funders Canada, Community Foundations of Canada and The Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples. [Click here for additional resources.](#)

## 1. Be flexible, pragmatic and proactive in grant-making

- Ask your grantees what their communities need. Perhaps create a task force or advisory role for people who hold community knowledge to guide the foundation during the crisis.
- Be willing to fund in a different way than you are used to. For example, fund advocacy or purchase of goods and equipment, if that is what grassroots groups say is needed.
- Seek out and support actions that reach populations who are often missed by the public health system, such as non-English or French speakers, foreign temporary workers, incarcerated people and homeless people.

## 2. Collaborate on or contribute to emergency funds

- Contribute funds to [Mutual Aid Networks](#) that assist community members who need extra support.
- Tap into existing structures instead of creating new ones that could cause confusion or increase burden on grantees. Channels often already exist for flowing resources during emergencies, for example, [community foundations](#), funder collaboratives, [United Ways](#), public foundations such as [Tides Canada](#) and [Canadian Women's Foundation](#), First Nations, and local governments.

## 3. Stretch and deploy expertise and funds to protect the capacity and resilience of grassroots groups

- Fund organizations that already have established and trusted relationships in the community to ramp up their work during the crisis.
- Support Indigenous-led organizations.
- Learn how to fund valuable initiatives, even if they are [not qualified donees](#).
- After the crisis, support community-based and advocacy organizations to improve their emergency planning and readiness – because there will be a next time.

## 4. Support advocacy

- Lend the Foundation's funds and voice to groups advocating for systemic solutions to inequalities. For example, health care access, income support, worker protections and other public services and programs.
- Fund advocacy initiatives by people with lived experience and deep roots in communities. Especially support groups led by feminist, low-income, newcomer, disabled, Indigenous, Black, racialized, queer, and non-binary communities.
- Celebrate and circulate information about grantees' advocacy work and campaigns to your networks.

## 5. Take the long view and stay engaged

- Fund initiatives that bring groups together across issues to organize themselves and make the most of this crisis as an opportunity for social and economic change.
- Use your networks. If you have relationships with influencers or decision-makers in the business or public sector, help connect them to community and advocacy groups with solutions.
- Post crisis, fund innovation and scale up of solutions that emerged that could reduce inequalities.
- In light of what was learned about equity and inclusion during the crisis, make long-term improvements to grantmaking practices, hiring, governance and operations.
- Commit to reconciliation in the long term. Learn about the [UN Declaration of Rights for Indigenous People](#), re-read the [TRC Calls to Action](#) and work to uphold these principles.

# Resources

## For foundations to advance equity and inclusion in a time of COVID-19

### Canadian articles on social inequities and COVID-19

[History will repeat itself if First Nations remain underfunded in the fight against COVID-19.](#)

Cindy Blackstock and Isadore Day. The Globe and Mail. April 8, 2020

[Canada Is Ignoring the Gendered Impacts of COVID-19 on Indigenous Women.](#)

Pam Palmater. Canadian Dimension. March 25, 2020.

[Black people already struggle to breathe in Canada. Ignoring us during this COVID-19 crisis will only make it worse.](#)

El Jones. The Halifax Examiner. April 3, 2020.

[We need to urgently consider equity in our coronavirus response.](#)

Dr. Kwame McKenzie. The Toronto Star. March 16, 2020.

[La pandémie des femmes.](#)

Julie Tremblay. Radio-Canada. April 6, 2020.

[The Difficult Economic Side-Effects of COVID-19 for Women.](#)

Jessica Hoard. Canadian Women's Foundation. March 24, 2020.

## Calls to action for foundations on social inequities and COVID-19

[Joint Statement on Collective Care in Response to COVID-19](#)

by The Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada, International Funders for Indigenous Peoples, and Native Americans in Philanthropy. March 30, 2020.

[What can funders consider when responding to COVID-19?](#)

Solome Lemma. Thousand Currents. April 13, 2020.

[COVID-19—Seven Things Philanthropy Can Do.](#)

Lauren A. Smith. FSG. March 2, 2020.

[Mandate for Philanthropy.](#)

The Movement for Black Lives. 2020.

## Useful tools

[List of grassroots movement organizations in Canada supporting communities during the pandemic.](#)

[List of mutual aid initiatives across Canada. COVID-19 Community Response Networks.](#)

[Toolkit for Canadian foundations](#)

seeking to support grassroots mutual aid efforts (includes information on funding initiatives that are not registered charities or qualified donees).

[Broadbent Institute: COVID-19 Resources and responses. List of initiatives and analysis with a social justice perspective.](#)

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“ This pandemic makes the case even more clear that we must support people to own the production and consumption of their food; that we need new economic systems that do not leave the majority of the world's population one crisis away from losing everything; and that we need healthcare that is available to everyone not just those with a formal job or who can afford it. Now is the time to invest in long-term resiliency and wellbeing so that our communities are better able to lead healthy lives and manage the next big emergency. Now is the time to fund climate, to fund feminism, to fund new economy experiments. Now is the time to make connections and fund the future we need. ”

— Lauren A. Smith, FSG