



PHILANTHROPIC  
FOUNDATIONS  
IN CANADA

LANDSCAPES,  
INDIGENOUS  
PERSPECTIVES  
AND PATHWAYS  
TO CHANGE

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Dedicated to our dear  
friend and colleague  
Jack Quarter  
1942–2019

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# Introduction

Peter R Elson,  
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An understanding of the history, role, activities and impact of grantmaking foundations in Canada has never been more important. With media attention on the policy influence of foundations, the growing number of mega-foundations and the recent release (in 2018) of the shackles on non-partisan political activities, observers are starting to ask some very important and pertinent questions about grantmaking foundations. The story of these foundations, as profiled in this book, reflects, in our view, a turning point in the life-cycle of Canada's philanthropic landscape. There is still much to learn about grantmaking foundations in Canada, but there is now a considerable amount that is known, and this book is a testament to the new and ground-breaking knowledge that reflects a distinct Canadian foundation sector.

Within these pages you will hear the fresh voice of younger people who are part of the foundation ecosystem as well as the seasoned voice of experience. Although this book has been nurtured in an academic context, it is dominated by authors who are active, engaged and thoughtful practitioners. As such, they have much to share, and do so with enthusiasm and skill, and with the desire to share what they have learned with their fellow foundation leaders, academics and grant recipients. We are delighted to have contributions from foundation leaders and community-focused academics who bring an openness, candour and reflexivity to their writing – some of the most challenging questions come from within the sector itself. Grant recipient partners and other contributors provide an in-depth analysis of some recent trends in the foundation sector which are as interesting as they are challenging.

The contributors to this book speak from different academic disciplines and worldviews, a variety of foundation experiences, very distinct practitioner experiences and with important and diverse perspectives. Their concerns and questions about the role and relationship of philanthropy in general and foundations in particular are wide ranging, and they include probing questions about the democratic nature of the role of foundations in public policy and society

at large (Reich *et al.*, 2016). Carla Funk, for example, through her profile of donor-advised funds (Chapter 4), explores the extent to which the assets of foundations are a means of private tax avoidance or enhanced public benefit. Roberta Jamieson (Chapter 7) challenges the very source of this wealth, its cost, and the exploitive practices that underlie the creation of foundations. The Circle (Chapter 6) and Berthiaume and Lefèvre (Chapter 9) also explore the role of foundations, and their founders, and the generative nature of social inequities and environmental degradation, both as exploiter and mitigator. These issues are directly connected, in our view, to the opportunity Canada currently faces to take responsibility and make reparation for its historic and on-going position as a settler-colonial state. These are also some of the issues authors in this book raise, and thus challenge foundation leaders and policy makers alike to ask themselves. Each chapter ends with three key takeaways the authors want readers to apply to their philanthropic or foundation policies and practice.

This book will appeal to policy makers and foundation leaders who want to understand the history of foundations in Canada and how that legacy continues to influence foundation formation and practice today. For foundation staff, this book provides new insights into the nature and growth of donor-advised funds, corporate foundation funding models and the complex nature of accountability and reporting. For students of philanthropy, there are inspirational examples of foundation collaboration and cooperation, locally, regionally and nationally. Instructors and researchers will find not only insights through case studies but also inspiration for future research founded in community practice. There is not just a nominal nod to, but what we hope is a substantive profile of, the relationship between foundations and Indigenous people and communities in Canada. Each of the three chapters written by Indigenous authors, in their own way, challenges foundations to re-examine their colonial and exploitive history (and its current manifestation in Indigenous relations) and operational and funding policies.

Climate change, social and economic inequalities, and a chronic disconnect between resource and land exploitation and economic growth are all issues that Canada is not alone in finding both divisive and connecting. There are no “correct” solutions for these typically complex issues or “messy problems”, all of which require the exercise of significant judgment and involve multiple stakeholders with conflicting goals (Hester & Adams, 2017). Can foundations play a role in addressing some of these issues? In one context it would be easy to think that they can, and are. Foundations, after all, are uniquely placed to make a difference: they may be sanctioned and regulated by the federal government, but they operate with considerable autonomy. Foundations, by definition, are registered charities with independent (non-market) resources and a mandate to provide quasi-public goods affiliated with education, health, poverty reduction and other state-designated public benefits (Anheier, 2005).

At the same time most, although certainly not all, foundations are place-based, providing a range of supports to a particular location or region. Most foundations are not large operations with full-time staff and ambitious mandates. We note this because the expectations of foundations



in general are often projected from the activities of a few, large and ambitious foundations. Foundations can, however, and should, be part of the solution whenever action is taken with respect to the environment, the restitution of First Nation, Inuit and Métis lands and sovereignty, and social and economic inequalities. Part 3 of this edited book is dedicated to providing profiles of foundations that are doing just this.

To date, the story of foundations in Canada, with very few exceptions, has been told by the foundations themselves, through media profiles of gift award events, or by organizations linked or associated with them. The history of foundations and their founders has largely been theirs to tell, and the dominant narrative has been one of benevolence and good works, particularly in the areas of education, health and social services (Philanthropic Foundations Canada, 2017). As the number, and particularly the size, of foundations increases, as the potential transfer of massive wealth from aging baby boomers looms, and as foundations take a more active role in non-partisan political activities, different questions start to emerge. Yet only recently have a number of researchers and writers started to move beyond profiling the nature and size of foundations grants to ask significantly different questions about the role of foundations in society.

In Part One the emphasis is on profiling the foundation landscape in Canada: its history, the emergence of a voice for the philanthropic sector, the growing importance of transparency and accountability, the complex and mercurial world of donor-advised funds, and the underpinnings of corporate philanthropy. In Part Two, Indigenous voices speak to their own history and the challenges and opportunities associated with foundation–Indigenous relations, particularly in connection with the calls for action by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Roberta Jamieson provides a poignant and pointed challenge to build new relations by decolonizing philanthropy. The Winnipeg Boldness Project profile provides an insight into balancing Indigenous ways of being, feeling and doing in relationship with foundation partners.

Part Three, *Pathways to Change*, highlights the innovative and empowering ways foundations engage with youth, poverty, local communities, public policy – and each other. Community foundations provide insights into the complex web of mobilizing place-based foundations within a federally funded mandate. The Vancouver Foundation reveals the implications of making intimate connections with youth. The Collective Impact Project investigates the inside story behind a five-year collaborative partnership; and the Foundation House profile walks us through the principles and practical operational issues in a place-based foundation-to-foundation relationship.

The focus of this book is on foundations, but it has been written within the broader context of philanthropy. Philanthropy is not just an individual choice and a moral commitment. Philanthropy is also a collective issue, because the actions of foundations affect all spheres of society (e.g. health, poverty, culture, education, environment). Foundation resources come from the accumulation of private resources but, critically, also from public contributions – through tax

credits – and thus these philanthropic resources constitute a collective venture capital that society as a whole has built.

The core need for all sectors of society to address the ecological crisis and growing inequalities requires philanthropists to critically examine their motives and priorities. The exponential accumulation of private capital and its placement in a financial market that feeds a productivist and extractivist economic system are simply not compatible with the need for a socio-ecological transition. This is the societal context, and the social licence that is a fundamental challenge for foundations. Foundations, in our view, are destined to profoundly change their donation practices, their use of their economic capital, the scale and impact of their actions, and the collaborations they weave. This book is intended to feed that reflection and support the practices of a philanthropic sector in full transformation. We hope that the diversity of insights and voices in this book will foster a deeper and more connected relationship with, and between, foundations, grantees, communities and Canadian society.

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