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THE CIRCLE LE CERCLE

ON PHILANTHROPY AND ABORIGINAL PEOPLES IN CANADA
SUR LA PHILANTHROPIE ET LES PEUPLES AUTOCHTONES AU CANADA



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À propos du PhiLab | About PhiLab

Le Réseau canadien de recherche partenariale sur la philanthropie (PhiLab), anciennement Laboratoire montréalais de recherche sur la philanthropie canadienne, a été pensé en 2014 dans le cadre de la conception de la demande de financement du projet développement de partenariat CRSH intitulé “Innovation sociale, changement sociétal et Fondations subventionnaires canadiennes”. Ce financement a été reconduit en 2018 sous le nom “Evaluation du rôle et des actions de fondations subventionnaires canadiennes en réponse à l’enjeu des inégalités sociales et des défis environnementaux”. Depuis ses débuts, le Réseau constitue un lieu de recherche, de partage d’information et de mobilisation des connaissances des fondations canadiennes. Des recherches conduites en partenariat permettent la coproduction de nouvelles connaissances dédiées à une diversité d’acteurs : des représentants gouvernementaux, des chercheurs universitaires, des représentants du secteur philanthropique et leurs organisations affiliées ou partenaires.

Le Réseau regroupe des chercheurs, des décideurs et des membres de la communauté philanthropique à travers le monde afin de partager des informations, des ressources et des idées.

The Canadian network of partnership-oriented research on philanthropy (PhiLab), previously called the Montreal Research Laboratory on Canadian philanthropy, was thought up in 2014 as part of the conception of a funding request by the NRCC partnership development project called “Social innovation, social change, and Canadian Grantmaking Foundations”. From its beginning, the Network was a place for research, information exchange and mobilization of Canadian foundations’ knowledge. Research conducted in partnership allows for the co-production of new knowledge dedicated to a diversity of actors: government representatives, university researchers, representatives of the philanthropic sector and their affiliate organizations or partners.

The Network brings together researchers, decision-makers and members of the philanthropic community from around the world in order to share information, resources, and ideas.



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À propos du Cercle | About The Circle

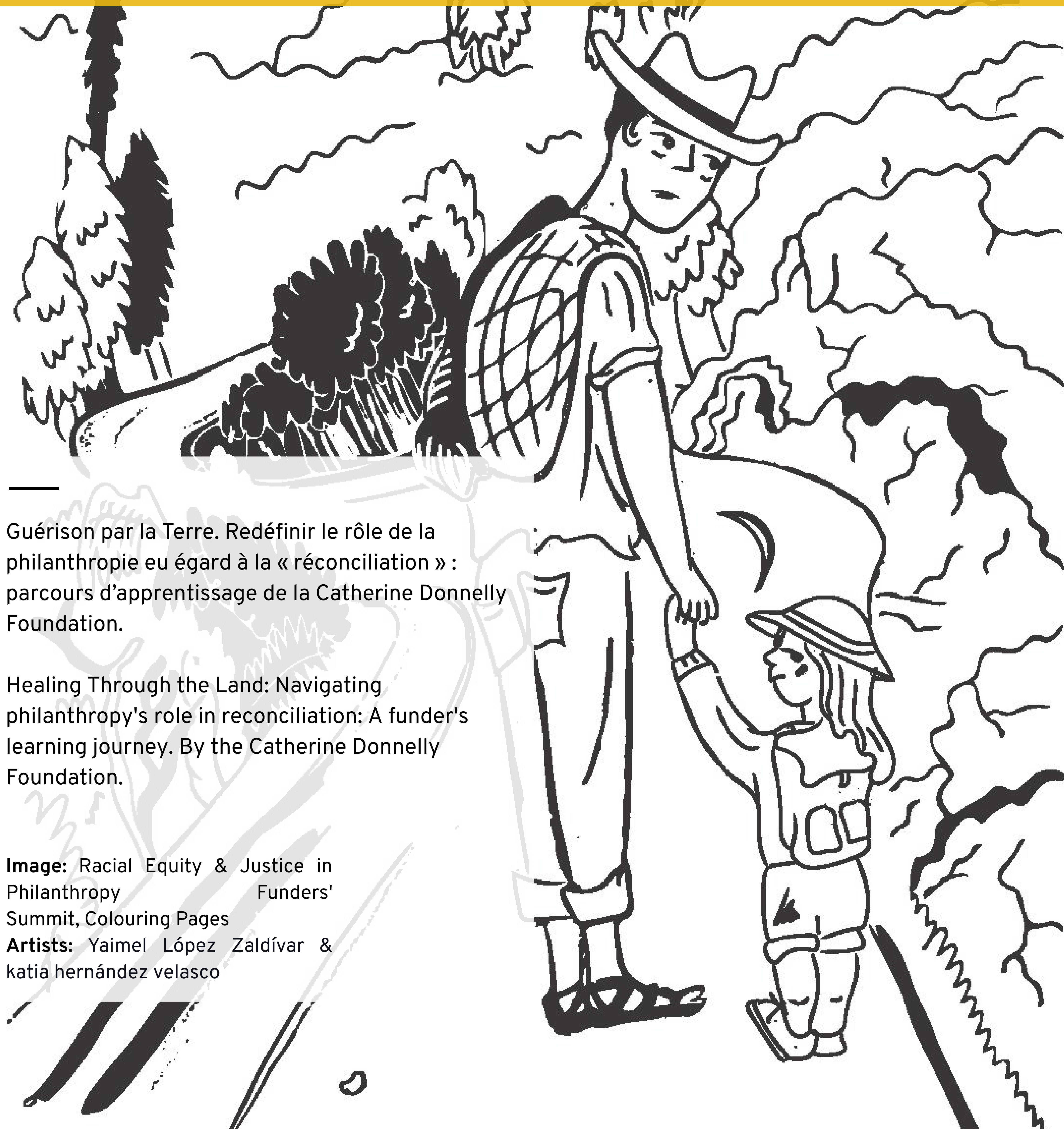
QUE FAIT LE CERCLE?

Le Cercle sur la philanthropie et les Peuples autochtones du Canada (le Cercle) transforme la philanthropie et contribue à mettre en œuvre des changements positifs entre la philanthropie et les communautés autochtones. Il le fait en créant des espaces d'apprentissage, d'innovation, d'établissement de relations, de co-création et d'action. Le Cercle travaille aux côtés d'organisations dirigées par des autochtones, d'organisations autochtones informées et d'organisations ayant des bénéficiaires autochtones. Nos membres et organisations philanthropiques signataires de la Déclaration d'action encouragent les individus et les organisations à se renseigner, à reconnaître, et à mieux comprendre la réconciliation et la décolonisation de la richesse.

ABOUT US

The Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada (The Circle) transforms philanthropy and contributes to positive change between Philanthropy and Indigenous communities by creating spaces of learning, innovation, relationship-building, co-creation, and activation. The Circle works alongside Indigenous-led organizations, Indigenous informed organizations, organizations with Indigenous beneficiaries, our members and philanthropic signatories of The Declaration of Action to encourage individuals and organizations to learn, acknowledge, and understand more about reconciliation and the decolonization of wealth.

DOSSIER SPÉCIAL | SPECIAL FEATURE



Guérison par la Terre. Redéfinir le rôle de la philanthropie eu égard à la « réconciliation » : parcours d'apprentissage de la Catherine Donnelly Foundation.

Healing Through the Land: Navigating philanthropy's role in reconciliation: A funder's learning journey. By the Catherine Donnelly Foundation.

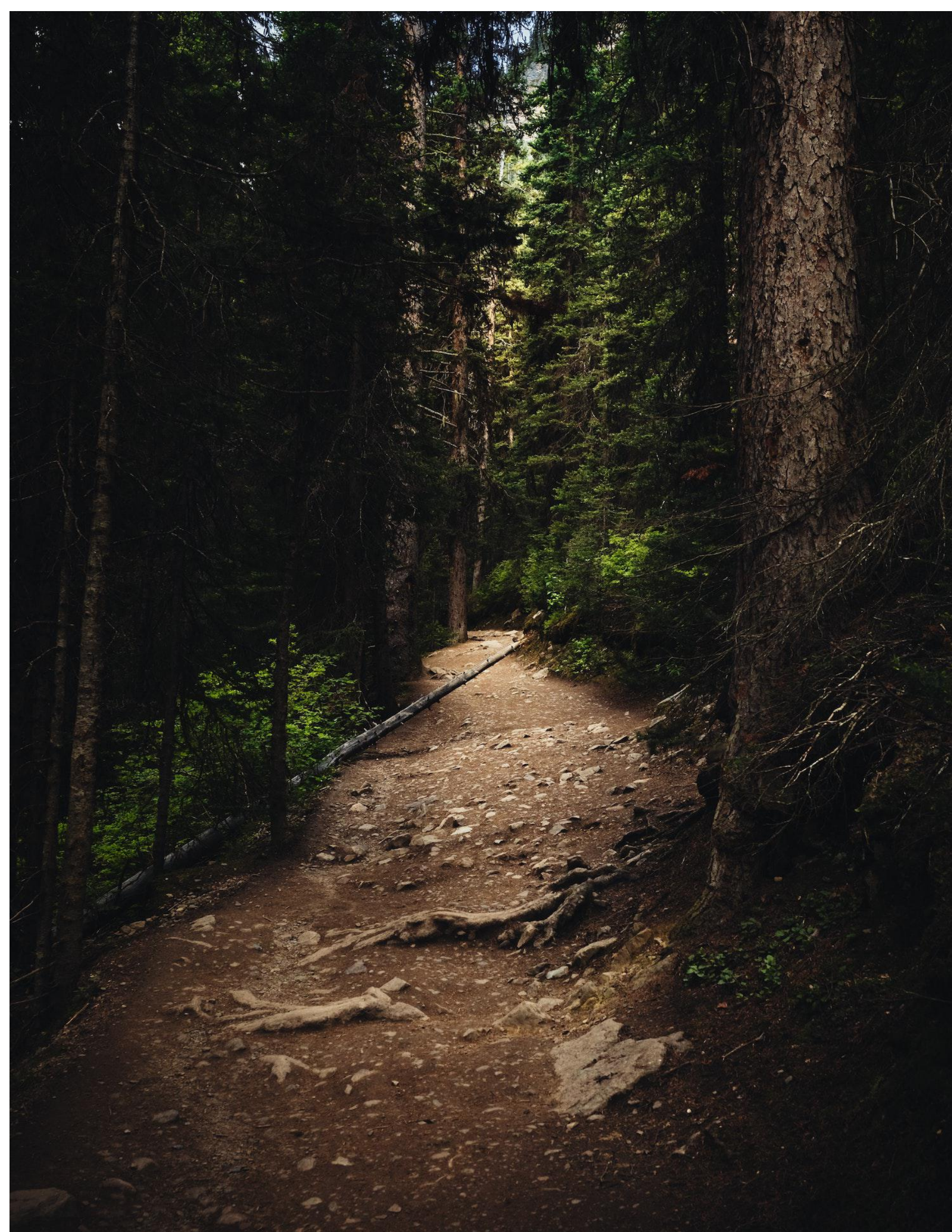
Image: Racial Equity & Justice in Philanthropy Funders' Summit, Colouring Pages

Artists: Yaimel López Zaldívar & katia hernández velasco

SPECIAL FEATURE

Healing Through the Land

Navigating Philanthropy's Role in Reconciliation: A Funder's Learning Journey



Par | By:

The Catherine Donnelly Foundation

The Catherine Donnelly Foundation supports bold and innovative initiatives that advocate and pioneer new strategies to advance the interests of those most marginalized in our society and/or that further ecological justice. The Foundation is committed to right relations by actively seeking to build mutually respectful relationships with First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples through proactively supporting creative initiatives in the area of Adult Education, Housing, the Environment, and Impact Investing.

Background

This article was co-written by staff at the Catherine Donnelly Foundation, including Valerie Lemieux (former Executive Director) and Anne Mark, Director of Programs with contributions from Claire Barcik, Executive Director, and Steve Brearton, Communications and Policy Officer. It arose out of the experiences, reflections, learnings, unlearnings, and ongoing collaboration with Indigenous leaders and community members who took part in the initial convenings, members of the Healing Through the Land Steering Committee, The Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples, as well as CDF board and committee members.

In the spring of 2016, the Catherine Donnelly Foundation (CDF) rolled out an environment funding strategy aimed at promoting climate justice and supporting initiatives that accelerate the transition to a post-carbon world. Our approach recognizes an inseparable bond between nature, justice for the marginalized, a commitment to society and reconciliation with Inuit, First Nations and Métis People.

In the fall of 2016, the Foundation also advanced a new housing strategy which prioritized learning from, building relationships with and ultimately providing support to Indigenous housing organizations and/or Indigenous-led initiatives. This direction responded to a noticeable gap in the Foundation's funding history.

As a result, over the past four years, the Foundation has been actively seeking out partnerships with actors, allies and funders currently engaged with Indigenous communities. The CDF's principal objective in convening Indigenous leaders and allies was to learn from and engage with Indigenous communities to explore how the Foundation (and other funders) could address holistic community capacity needs faced by Indigenous communities and people. Originally, our lens for these convenings was focused around what fits within a climate change and climate justice framework.

This shift in our Housing and Environment funding priorities built on what we had been learning from our Adult Education Righting Relations program partners. At the same time, there was learning emerging through many of our other granting relationships. The Foundation's decision in 2008-2009 to shift from only providing one-year project grants to building longer-term relationships (three to-five years) with program partners aimed at addressing big systems change initiatives laid the groundwork for reshaping our granting approach to be more community-led and community-driven. We have gradually been granting deeper – to share power.

Healing Through the Land (HTL) emerged from a two-year collaborative process between Indigenous community leaders and members from across the country and funders seeking to build relationships, support community capacity needs, and shift the philanthropic process.

Over the course of four facilitated convenings (November 2017, April 2018, September 2018, September 2019) : 3 in Toronto (1-2 days each) and 1 in Yellowknife (2 days), we have been building relationships with 27 people from both philanthropic and Indigenous communities.



Photo: Catherine Donnelly Foundation - Biennial Report 2018-2019
Transforming Power

Practices for building deep relationships

1. Flexible Approach to Collaboration

Reconciliation is an extremely complex issue. As funders, if we truly wish to engage in reconciliation and address decolonizing our funding approaches, we need to build deep and trusting relationships and be prepared to embody a flexible approach to collaboration. Adam Kahane, founding partner of Reos Partners, calls this “stretch collaboration [1]”, describing it as a new approach to collaboration that embraces discord, experimentation and co-creation. It is important to recognize the reality of a settler orientation in contrast with First Nation, Métis and Inuit peoples’ worldviews and own our discomfort and discord. It is only when all parties allow ourselves to be honest and open that we can begin to build shared solutions and move towards decolonization.

This willingness to be flexible has opened the CDF team to the wisdom of participants in our gatherings. As a result, the Foundation is committed to addressing capacity rooted in healing. We are learning that this initiative cannot just be rooted in environmental concerns, but needs to be flexible and

appreciate Indigenous worldviews of interconnectedness. This has led to the emergence and naming of the “Healing Through the Land” initiative by those participating in the gatherings. However, we did not define exactly what that meant but rather had a broad understanding of what it might encompass in a holistic and innovative way:

- Integrating and enhancing elements of community leadership
- Language and cultural revitalization
- Increasing energy efficiency (culturally appropriate, safe housing)
- Addressing issues of Indigenous homelessness [2]
- Creating renewable energy sources
- Localizing food (sovereignty)
- Supporting economic development/sustainability

It is important to note the difference between healing and therapy. It was understood that healing programs require more time, funding and support. That skillsets developed through on-the-land initiatives would build capacity that would empower participants to move beyond surviving, to building Indigenous knowledge and leadership and thriving.

2. Relinquishing Power – transforming our approach to grantmaking

Our desire as a funder is to shift and change how we engage with our grant partners, while understanding the continuing impact of colonization. In moving towards a decolonized approach to philanthropy, the Foundation seeks to promote a power dynamic different from the standard grantor-recipient relationship. We seek initiatives that promote community decision-making and control over community resources. Healing Through the Land is an opportunity to reshape our grantmaking approach, and to find a balance between openness to working differently and creating new collective ways to work together. To be prepared to relinquish power – to recognize the power dynamic – and understand what that means. To be really uncomfortable and to go into spaces where as a funder you feel uncertain, and to be okay with that. Also, at the same time, be prepared to learn with and from the communities you are engaging with. The CDF dug in deeply to reflect on what would guide this process of dismantling power models that continue to perpetuate inequity. We did so in order to ensure we were not a funder coming into a community and deciding what is needed because we have the resources.

As we gathered with First Nation, Inuit and Métis community leaders, open communication based on the principles of reconciliation helped bring their strengths forward. It was acknowledged early on, that in order to move from a conceptual idea to reality, Indigenous peoples needed to take the lead in design and implementation. The Foundation (and other potential funding partners) would not be leading the work, but instead would offer support with the understanding that decisions would be made by an Indigenous-led Steering Committee who in turn would be guided by the needs and concerns of Indigenous communities across the country.

3. Slowing Down To Go Fast

As funders we have the financial resources, staff, funding experience and a desire to meet our mandate, along with a deep sense of urgency to address issues such as climate change, homelessness and social justice. The CDF is now moving into the fourth year of dialogue and development for the Healing Through the Land Initiative. There has always been a tension as we gathered, between moving quickly to action - in terms of realizing the initiative - versus slowing down and taking the time to build deep relationships with those that are “walking the path with you”.

“Our desire as a funder is to shift and change how we engage with our grant partners, while understanding the continuing impact of colonization.”

Some of the significant developments include:

- Establishing/recruiting the Healing Through the Land (HTL) Steering Committee
- Co-creating Terms of Reference for the role of the HTL Steering Committee
- Convening land-based practitioners from across the country (First Nation, Metis, Inuit) to share best practices, network and help inform the HTL grant process.
- Partnering with The Circle to support the HTL Steering Committee and to mobilize and share knowledge that emerges through this initiative with the philanthropic sector.

At the forefront of all the developments to date has been a strong desire to maintain the principles [3] that have guided the work thus far in all that we do. To respect the process and be comfortable taking the time needed to arrive at the right decisions and not rush the work. A recognition that if we infuse these principles in our deliberations, in the relationships we seek to build, and in the philosophy behind the projects we seek to foster and support, then we are on the right track.

4. Exploring Limiting Beliefs to Grantmaking

A number of considerations came up as we began to envision how the fund would operate. We grappled with the administrative burden of running a fund and the constraints placed on philanthropy by CRA regulations. We also understood that significant funds would be required to start a new independent grantmaking organization. We recognized that there are existing Indigenous-led community foundations across the country that could receive funds and administer the Healing Through the Land Initiatives project. At the same time there was a real desire expressed by those who had been on the journey from the outset to ensure that the heart-centred “spirit” of what has been emerging through the gatherings be maintained.

“We recognized that if we were to breathe life into our commitment, we needed to reach out and build relationships directly with Indigenous-led initiatives.”

5. Getting the Board on Board

The Catherine Donnelly Foundation signed the Philanthropic Community’s Declaration of Action, in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action in 2015. However, as board and staff, we realized that although we were grounded in social justice activism, we were not certain how we would put this commitment to the Declaration into action. As a first step, we undertook an analysis of our funding history and discovered that 20% of our granting had been Indigenous-focused (this actually rose to 37% for the Environment stream alone). However, the majority of these grants were to NGOs who were working with or supporting Indigenous communities or partners, as opposed to being **Indigenous-led**.

We recognized that if we were to breathe life into our commitment, we needed to reach out and build relationships directly with Indigenous-led initiatives. We recognized that staff had opportunities to deepen their learning through their direct engagement with Indigenous-led projects. Volunteer board members, spread across the country however, did not have the same opportunity. Some of our board members had been engaged in reconciliation efforts in their professional lives, while others had not. We decided we would begin with some shared learning opportunities and invited KAIROS to a board meeting where we participated in the “Blanket Exercise”, a popular education learning exercise that builds “understanding about our shared history as Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada by walking through pre-contact, treaty-making, colonization and resistance” [4]. We also invited Kris Archie from The Circle to a board meeting and spent half a day exploring our connections to the land and our experience as settlers/newcomers and in the case of some of our board members, First Nations, in understanding reconciliation.

We reflected on the impacts of colonialism and came to understand that it was not an “Indigenous” issue, but rather a shared issue for all of us. We talked about the importance of self-reflection, connection to family, community, our colleagues and beyond to foster dialogue around reconciliation and decolonization. These were key building blocks for our learning. We encouraged staff and board to attend Indigenous-led workshops and other learning opportunities for dialogue and deep reflection. We also had board and staff participating in the convening with Indigenous community leaders and funders, providing another opportunity for learning and relationship-building as the Healing Through the Land initiative emerged. Open and sometimes uncomfortable conversations helped push us beyond our comfort zones and in turn allowed growth and understanding of how we might shift our funding approach to be guided by Indigenous worldviews.

6. Additional Guideposts

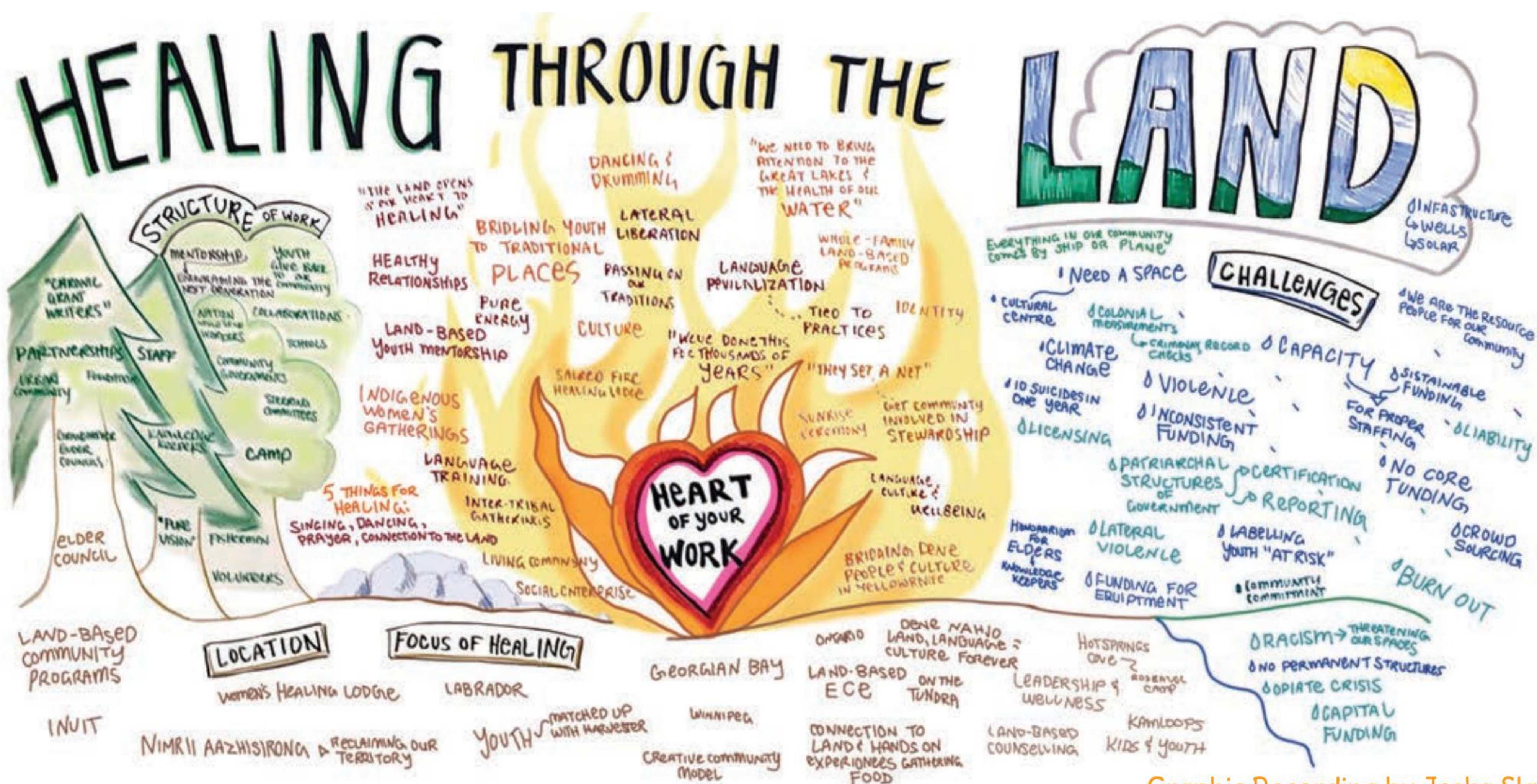
- **Check that your goals are actually aligned with the communities’ goals and/or needs.** The CDF began what is now the Healing Through the Land Initiative with a relatively narrow aim of addressing the use of diesel on First Nation reserves, in keeping with our goal to move towards a low carbon future. However, it became clear through the gatherings with First Nation, Métis and Inuit community leaders that we needed to adjust our goals as we came to understand the deep connection between language, land, and culture for the Indigenous communities we wished to serve. Framing a conversation in one stream (i.e. Environment) didn’t actually fit with Indigenous worldviews that all life human and non-human is interrelated. This led us to a muchmore complex and robust initiative, however, that in the end meant we could bring the “whole” of the Foundation’s funding priorities to the table, recognizing that our roots in social justice and in addressing homelessness were just as critical as an environmental context.
- **Multi-year funding is critical!** When the CDF began exploring how we would engage in supporting an Indigenous-led pooled fund, we framed it as a one-year pilot project. This ended up reinforcing an assumption held by participants that reconciliation and supporting Indigenous-led initiatives wasn’t important to funders. They needed to know that we were in it for the long haul. What they really wanted was a multi-year funding initiative that would provide operational support with no “strings attached”. The latter speaks to building trusting relationships and a shared agenda.

- **Owning that “good intentions” can lead to misunderstandings that trigger trauma.** In response to questions emerging from one of the gatherings, CDF staff compiled a “map” of land-based projects that we and/or other funders participating in the HTL gatherings had been/or currently were supporting. This led to a deeper discussion about the need for more information about the nature of these projects. Before making decisions about funding criteria and areas of focus, we needed to engage directly with on-the-land practitioners to hear from them what is most needed and how funding can best serve this need. Participants also spoke about the need for the development of this “landscape assessment” or “mapping” of Indigenous-led on-the-land initiatives to be developed and led by Indigenous peoples not by a “funder”. We agreed and this led to engaging The Circle to convene land-based Indigenous practitioners from across the country to deepen our learning.
- **Listen without getting defensive**
During our convenings there were several times when participants were critical of philanthropic practices, calling out assumptions that are often made by those in the grantmaking community. We heard feedback from our First Nations, Métis and Inuit advisors and participants that they appreciated our ability to listen to criticism, to take it constructively, and to shift course without becoming defensive.

- **Reciprocity** is central to this work and to these relationships. We have entered into the Healing Through the Land process hoping to test a decolonized approach to grant design and decision-making processes, as well as to mobilize knowledge from this learning for the philanthropic sector at large. There are struggles and bumps along the way and we continue to strive toward working effectively together. We welcome other funders to join us on this journey.

Notes

- [1] <http://reospartners.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Introduction-to-Collaborating-with-the-Enemy-4.0.pdf>
- [2] “Unlike the common colonialist definition of homelessness, Indigenous homelessness is not defined as lacking a structure of habitation; rather, it is more fully described and understood through a composite lens of Indigenous worldviews. These include: individuals, families and communities isolated from their relationships to land, water, place, family, kin, each other, animals, cultures, languages and identities.” Jesse Thistle <https://www.homelesshub.ca/IndigenousHomelessness>
- [3] Grandfather teachings sourced from: <https://unitingthreefiresagainstviolence.org/services/the-seven-grandfather-teachings/>; The Role of the Matriarch in Environmental Justice <https://nativenewsonline.net/currents/role-matriarch-environmental-justice/>; “The Four R’s of Indigenous Philanthropy” – Respect, Reciprocity, Responsibility and Relationships <https://internationalfund.org>
- [4] <https://www.kairosblanketexercise.org>



Graphic Recording by Jeska Slater

Photo: Catherine Donnelly Foundation - Biennial Report 2018-2019 Transforming Power

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