



Funding Decent Work Futures: A Toolkit

September, 2021

Introduction

Fair, stable, and productive work for all

What is decent work? Decent Work is a term coined by the [International Labour Organization \(ILO\)](#) to describe what good work looks like - fair, stable, and productive. The term inspires both movement building around good work and actions across various levels - organizational, network and policy - to make decent work a reality. Decent work specifically ties together the goals of social protection, economic security, thriving businesses and community well-being. It is not just about meeting minimum requirements, but that good work is important for everyone in our communities to thrive.

Although the ILO has many measurements for decent work, there are seven key indicators that [ONN has determined](#) align well with the nonprofit and charitable sector: employment opportunities, fair wages, health and retirement benefits, stable employment, opportunity for development and advancement, equality rights at work and culture and leadership. An intersectional lens on these indicators illuminates how decent work impacts diverse workers, which is of particular importance since [80 percent of the nonprofit sector's workforce](#) across Canada consists of women. Although there is a lack of data on worker demographics, anecdotally we know that many of them are Black and immigrant women.

The concept of decent work is values-based which is why it resonates well with nonprofits. Just as equity, inclusion, collective, and well-being values underpin the sector's missions, they also underpin decent work so that the pursuit of work does not come at a social and economic cost for some. Rather, it is a source of dignity for everyone. Decent work is a critical pathway to gender equity, racial justice, and reconciliation in the nonprofit sector. When our sector's women-majority and racialized workforce can access decent work it ensures that not only do the marginalized communities they serve get the best care, but historically discriminated against workers have



economic security as well. In this way then, the sector can move alongside gender equity, racial justice, and reconciliation movements.

Decent work is a global movement. The International Labour Organization's ongoing emphasis of decent work has certainly pushed it and so has its embeddedness in the [UN's Sustainable Development Goals](#). Goal number 8 is a universal call for "Promotion of sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all". In Canada, the decent work movement spans sectors and industries. [SHARE](#) encourages a dialogue between shareholders and companies about the link between decent work and long-term value, the [Decent Work & Health Network](#) advocates for decent work as a social determinant of health, the [Better Way Alliance](#) consists of business owners who support decent work and see it as part of their bottom line, and the [Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council](#) is looking at what decent work means for Indigenous peoples and Indigenous-led nonprofits.

The Ontario Nonprofit Network (ONN) has been building a decent work movement in Ontario's nonprofit sector for almost a decade and is supporting its expansion across the sector in Canada. ONN's work is grounded in its [Shaping the Future](#) and [Change Work](#) reports, which highlight challenges and opportunities related to decent work in the sector. ONN has developed a [Decent Work Charter](#), [Decent Work Checklist](#) and a [guide on reducing the gender wage gap](#) in both French and English for organizations to begin their decent work journey. ONN has also created and launched sector-wide [employee benefits](#) and [pension](#) plans and is now working on a [parental leave benefits top-up fund](#) for employees who become new parents. Moreover, employment standards are the backbone of decent work and so ONN continues to advocate for raising the employment floor for everyone.

Decent work promising practices

At the outset, the concept of decent work might feel idealistic or sound like a cookie-cutter approach for a diverse sector and labour force, but it's not. There are many ways nonprofits can begin implementing and championing decent work in their organizations, big or small, community-facing or not. It's all about creating the best decent work environment for your employees, which can differ from organization to organization.

Below are the seven decent work indicators ONN has identified that align well with nonprofits and promising practices to implement them. Many of the indicators and their examples overlap, for instance employment opportunities are connected to fair wages and stable jobs.



DECENT WORK	
DECENT WORK INDICATORS:	PROMISING PRACTICES:
Employment opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Everyone has access to high quality jobs - Recognize the impact of being a woman-majority sector on quality of jobs in the sector when recruiting and retaining employees
Fair wages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Living wages - Equal pay for equal work - Pay equity (equal pay for work of equal value) - Pay Transparency - Contained ratios between the highest and lowest earners in organizations - Paid sick days
Health and retirement benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Health, dental and vision benefits - Pension plan or other retirement benefits - Parental leave benefit top-ups - Benefits extend to all workers, regardless of employment status
Stable employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Predictable hours of work and scheduling - Employment protections - Limited use of short-term contracts and primarily for short-term projects and initiatives
Opportunities for development and advancement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learning organizations with a culture of growth - Focus on development of employees - Formal and informal training, learning and advancement opportunities made available to employees
Equality rights at work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Right to organize and speak up about workplace concerns - Safe and accessible reporting and dispute resolution mechanisms for harassment and discrimination that are consistently implemented - Codes of conduct, especially for sexual harassment



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Policies on diversity, equity, inclusion, anti-oppression, and anti-Black racism - Accessible accommodations
Culture and leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Gender parity and diversity in staff and leadership composition - People-focused leadership norms - Management styles that trust and support diverse employees - An open, learning and flexible work culture - Inclusive, creative, collaborative and safe workplace culture - Governance models that align and further organizational mission - Challenging gender roles in organizations



Why is decent work good in all sectors - private, public and nonprofit? Because people work better when they're paid well, have paid sick days, pensions. Productivity and employee morale is raised when the working conditions are right.

As a sector driven by people, we all benefit from decent work

We all benefit from nonprofits that invest in decent work. As employees, we excel when we experience fair working conditions that improve our quality of life. As employers, we attract and retain high-calibre staff (and save money!) by offering good jobs. As funders, our investments move the needle on complex social issues and there is increased value for the funding dollar. And as a nonprofit sector, we are better able to achieve our missions in our communities because decent work builds a stronger, more resilient sector. The sector's biggest asset and vehicle for serving communities is its labour force and if they are treated well, our communities will receive the best care.

Community foundations are a critical and unique part of the nonprofit ecosystem as they play multiple roles: they are nonprofit employers, community leaders and critical funders. Be cautious of compartmentalizing these roles because in doing so you can risk [working against your mission and values](#). For decent work to be sustainable and have longevity, as well as to reap its rewards, it needs to be a value integrated across your roles.



Community Foundations as Employers

Community foundations are most often employers and so need to be a decent work employer as well as a decent work funder. Whether it is a two-person team or multiple departments, full time or part time staff, or contractors, there are people paid to deliver on the missions of community foundations across Canada. “Walking the talk” is key because if you are talking about decent work in the community, or with your grantees, they will ask you about your own decent work practices.

Key questions to ask yourselves

- Is our own “house in order”? For example, does our organization have a commitment to decent work, and how are we doing with respect to the decent work checklist and indicators?
- What are the barriers to providing decent work within our organization?
- What opportunities do we have to provide decent work within our organization?

Start here: review the [Decent Work Charter](#) and [Decent Work Checklist](#). What are you doing well? What can you improve? Take the opportunity to spark conversation with board members and staff about what it means to have decent work in your workplace. Form a committee, create a plan with actions and timelines, and start with “[low hanging fruit](#)” opportunities. Remember that not every promising practice is going to add to the organization’s budget, some decent work practices might be more affordable than you think and may even bring the organization cost savings. More importantly, this is not a linear journey and it may take time and planning to implement decent work actions to get them right over time and as the organization changes.

Community Foundations as Community Leaders

A community foundation’s commitment to decent work must also be integrated into their role as community leaders. Community foundation staff and board members often are called upon to attend and speak at events, meet with elected officials, support community initiatives, move the needle on complex social issues in communities, and so much more. Your role as a leader is an opportunity to further decent work in the community as well. For example, are there conversations in your community about a living wage? Minimum wage and employment standards? Flexible work from home arrangements? Participate in those conversations! Convene those conversations!

Tip: Share your learnings about decent work and the Sustainable Development Goals. Seek opportunities to integrate your commitment to decent work in the conversations your community



foundation is having. Especially with other funders - for example, are you part of a local funders network? Share your experiences, learnings and bring others along.

Consider your role as an advocate - pay attention to government policies, legislation and regulations that affect the working conditions of nonprofits and charities - the sector you support. Lend your voice to issues and campaigns that align with your mission.

Community Foundations as Funders

While there are many nonprofit employers and community leaders, community foundations are part of a rather small group of funders in the sector. Particularly, local grassroots, nonprofit and charitable organizations rely on community foundations to implement projects and initiatives that speak to their missions and are carried out by talented staff. For this reason, it is more important than ever for community foundations to be decent work funders.

Many nonprofits are doing what they can to offer decent work but they also need funders to step up. Over and over again, we have heard loud and clear that nonprofit organizations are stifled in their attempts to provide decent work because of conditions that funders may impose on them. For instance, it can be difficult for organizations to offer decent work when the funding agreement is for a short period of time and many employment-related expenses are not eligible.



Across urban and rural Canada, nonprofits play an essential role in job creation, volunteer engagement, and programs and services that support the well-being of Canadians. The sector generates more than 8.1 per cent of the country's GDP, employing 2.4 per cent of the workforce -- of whom 80 per cent are women, making us a women-majority sector. As a sector, nonprofits receive less than half of their revenues from governments. Nonprofits reinvest all surpluses in their missions and leverage government revenues through private grants and donations, the sale of goods and services, and volunteer efforts to create additional value for the communities they serve. Through their job creation and local spending activities, nonprofits generate considerable economic impact above and beyond the extensive social, cultural, and ecological value they provide to Canadians.



Funding a future for decent work in nonprofits

Funding decent work is in the best interest of community foundations

By integrating decent work into funding models, community foundations can:

- Drive high-performance organizations and stronger outcomes by supporting organizations to attract and retain passionate, driven employees.
- Generate the best value from funding dollars by reducing staff turnover and HR costs, two factors that take resources away from program delivery.
- Forge a pathway for the next generation of emerging leaders to enter and thrive in the nonprofit sector through enhanced opportunities, and healthy and diverse workplaces. The nonprofit sector needs to attract aspiring young changemakers!

Now, it is more important than ever for the nonprofit sector to continue to deliver innovative and timely services and programs, so the nonprofit sector can continue to contribute to the creation of an inclusive and compassionate society. The sector needs its greatest asset - its people - to be inspired, committed, talented, and also well managed and compensated.

Begin by making a commitment to decent work as a pillar of your funding relationships

As a philanthropic practice, a commitment to decent work can guide funding in a way that recognizes and values the expertise and leadership of the people in your community, and the organizations that they work for.

Recognize that accountability is still important - for your foundation, for the grantee. Funders do need to be accountable for the grants they support and grantees need to be accountable for the dollars they receive. Committing to decent work does not mean reducing or impacting your accountability or even straying from your mission.

Funders can fund decent work even in the context of project based funding; recognizing that core funding is not the only solution (but it's a good one if you can do it!).

Key Principles:

- Good relations: The core of decent work is the funding relationship between the foundation and the grantee.



- Reciprocity: Listen to the decent work hopes and needs of your grantees. Learn from them.
- Action oriented: Progress may not be linear. Continue to move forward, take action. Every step matters.
- Learning is paramount: Identify what is working, what needs to be improved. Share your learnings with others.

Funding decent work advances gender equity, racial justice, reconciliation

Many reports over the years have articulated Canada's philanthropic community's shortcomings in investing in and moving forward gender equity, racial justice, and reconciliation movements. For example, the Network for the Advancement of Black Communities [Unfunded](#) report highlights that despite the clear case for investment, Canadian philanthropy has largely been absent in supporting Black people in Canada. The Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada is filling the gap between philanthropy and [reconciliation and decolonizing wealth](#).

Alongside funding the issues and priorities that matter most to Black, Indigenous, and women and gender-diverse led organizations and the communities they serve, funding decent work writ large in the sector but particularly in such organizations is critical. It allows for their workforce, who are also predominantly Black, Indigenous, and women and gender-diverse folks, to carry out their organizations' missions well so communities receive the best care. Moreover, those historically discriminated against workers have economic security themselves. Decent work funding can be a critical pathway to advance gender equity, racial justice, and reconciliation.

Out of seven feminist funding principles, one is about funding decent work: "We aim to provide lasting, sustainable funds that cover administrative/ core costs, are flexible and predictable, and last for multiple years. We do not provide only short-term funds that can only go to "direct service expenses". We will work toward building the longer-term capacity of organizations through multi-year grants that can partially be applied to administrative costs. We also provide financial support for things many funders do not always like to fund: capacity-building, leadership development, networking, childcare, accessibility costs, meals, and so on. This is sometimes called a "grants plus" approach"

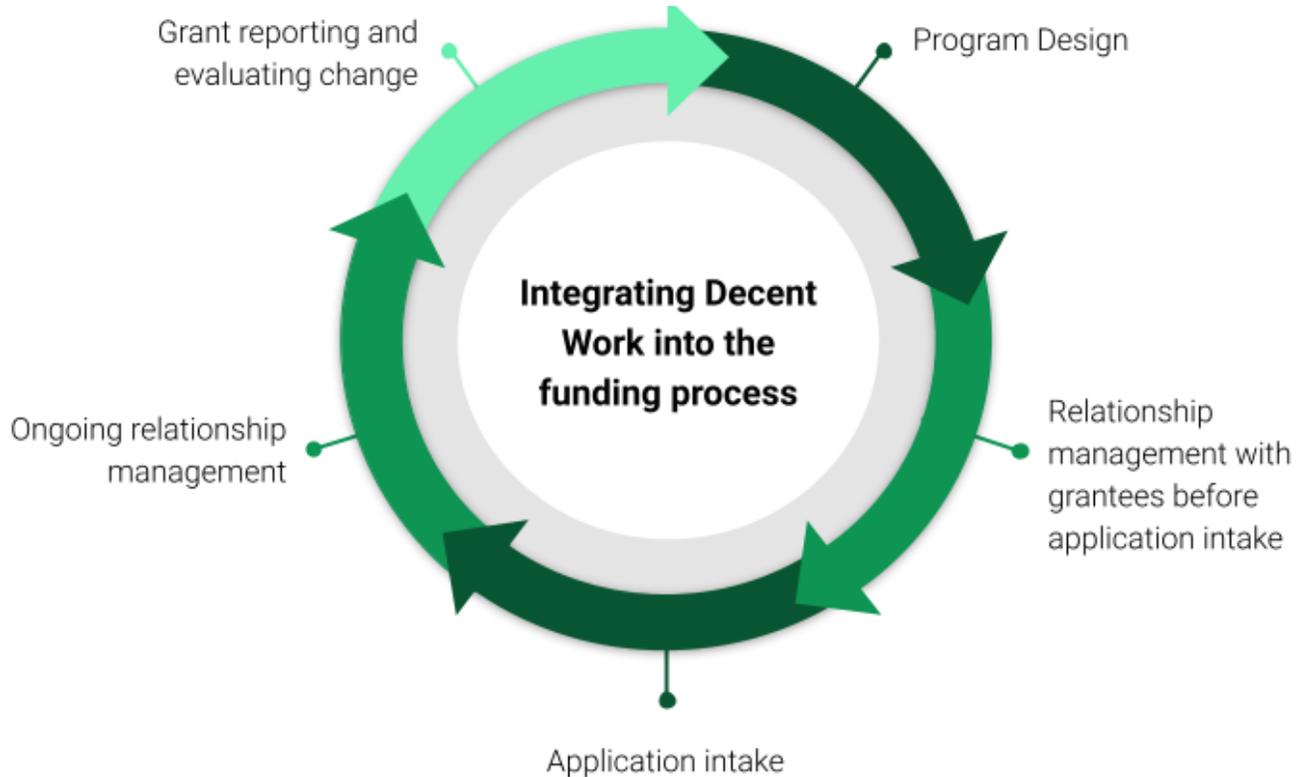
[Feminist Funding Principles](#)



Integrating decent work into the funding cycle

The funding process is ripe with opportunities to integrate decent work

Across community foundations, there is a general cycle to grantmaking, beginning from initial program design to post-grant reporting and evaluating impact. At each step in the cycle, there is ample opportunity to integrate a commitment to decent work into the funding process - whether decent work is a principle of program design, an initial conversation with potential grantees, incorporated in the application budget lines, a check-in question throughout the grant cycle, or part of evaluating impact. By capturing many of these opportunities, community foundations will achieve the outcome they want - to be a decent work funder that facilitates decent work in nonprofits. The risk of taking an ad-hoc approach or integrating decent work into only one part of the process is that decent work will not be sustainable or have longevity and thus have limited results.





To spark conversations on decent work, consider the following overall questions:

- What are our aspirations for our grantees? (tip, it is likely not to spread out the money so thin, grantees are paying poverty wages!)
- How are we strengthening organizations so they can do what they need to do? (Funders want to see organizations ‘punch above their weight’ and take care of their workers. There is a way for funding agreements to be more thoughtful, mindful of their impact on workers.)
- What are the barriers within your foundation to discussing decent work practices AND providing decent work to grantees?
- What funding policies and processes in your organization can be improved to include a decent work lens?
- Who do you need to bring along in your organization to support decent work? For example, board members, committee members, program staff? What information, examples, etc. do you need to build your internal case for support?

Decent Work Funder’s Questionnaire

Although not all community foundations are the same, the following questionnaire is broad enough to help foundations of all shapes and sizes to integrate decent work into their funding processes. At each step of the funding cycle, this questionnaire points out critical questions to ask yourselves, why they are important, and how to integrate decent work.

Tip: The goal is not to do everything at once but to start doing something and build on it over time with a plan!

Review funding policies and written (including unwritten!) processes and ask yourselves - does this policy or process have any impact on what the grantee does to provide decent work in their organization? Could our policy or process be improved to more clearly indicate our support for decent work? How can we adjust our policies and processes to be aligned with the decent work indicators?



QUESTIONNAIRE			
PHASE	QUESTIONS TO ASK	WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?	HOW CAN YOU TAKE ACTION?
<i>Program/Grant Design</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Have you considered offering general operating support to organizations you have developed trusting relationships with? How do you understand what's being done with general operating funds? How would you tell that story of impact to board or donors? - Have you considered offering multi-year funding to provide greater job stability? - Do you allow professional development, pensions and health/dental benefits as an eligible cost in your budget template? - Are eligible budget lines that boost decent work communicated clearly to your grantees? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Longer-term and more flexible investments allow grantees to focus on the outcomes of their work/projects and spend the resources where it is most needed. People on the ground know what they need to do to get the work done. - One year (or less!) funding to an organization means that your grantees can only offer a one year contract. Shorter term contracts are harder to recruit for, and usually mean that employees are not eligible for benefits, pensions or professional development. Even a 2-3 year commitment makes a huge difference in terms of employee recruitment and retention! - In order for particular groups to apply for 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Invest in a few multi-year grants that expire at different times - Experiment with a portfolio that combines both general operating support and targeted, annual grants. Create an evaluation plan so you can determine what works. - Often, funders do not deny eligible expenses like benefits, pensions and professional development but they don't specifically list them as eligible. Communicate clearly! - Consider setting aside funds for 'emergencies' that might crop up for grantees related to decent work e.g. hiring a new leader, professional development, opportunity to join a benefit plan, etc.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Have you strategically included decent work design elements that will elicit grantee applications from groups you are particularly interested in supporting (e.g., gender equity, racial justice and Indigenous-led initiatives?) 	<p>funding, barriers to their application must be addressed in the program design phase.</p>	
<p>Relationship management with grantees before application intake</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Have you connected with grantees to ensure you are aware of any organizational concerns? (e.g., staff turnover, upcoming vacancies, budget concerns?) - Have you talked to your grantees about their Decent Work practices and goals for their organizations? - Have you asked your grantees what barriers exist to them to provide decent work to their employees? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Building mutual respect and trust allows for greater spirit of collaboration and a “big picture lens” that can be brought to the work of the organizations that you support. - Will lead to a better understanding of your grantees and achieve a more holistic view of the organization and the context in which they work - Early and often decent work conversations make it easier for both funder and grantee to initiate conversations on the topic and share 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Make your commitment to funding decent work clear on your website and in all communications. - Kick-start the Decent Work conversation with grantees during all conversations (one-on-one meetings, information sessions, etc)



		opportunities and concerns as they arise.	
Application Intake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are we supporting decent work in this application? - Does the proposed staffing structure provide stable employment or are you contributing to a cycle of short term contracts? - In terms of the scope of the project being proposed and the job responsibilities, are the wages and salaries aligned with the expectations and realistic? - Are they paying a living wage, appropriate in your community? - Are you clearly communicating expenses such as professional development, pension premiums, and health benefits are acceptable? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Grantees often underestimate their staffing costs and operate from a scarcity mentality because they think that's what funders expect and funding applications are very competitive. Ask them for the real cost of doing the work - what will it take to meet their goals? <p>It is important for funders to play a leadership role by reflecting back to grantees - e.g. Tell them a minimum wage salary will not allow them to recruit a manager level employee and encourage them to consider a more appropriate salary range.</p> <p>For example: Is this the level of responsibility likely to happen with the wage you're paying? You want a manager at a coordinator salary? (Is the</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Specifically state your commitment to supporting decent work on materials for grantees - such as grantee information packages and application forms. - Learn by asking questions of your grantee and how they plan to provide decent work, and ask them to identify opportunities and barriers. - Be clear that eligible expenses could include all related staffing costs, such as benefits, pension/retirement benefits, professional development. Tip: Consider not setting a limit (such as a specific percentage of salary costs) the first few granting cycles so you can see the real cost. - Structure your budget for decent work. E.g.



		grantee devaluing the work?)	<p>Allow for year over year increases in staffing budgets to account for cost of living, for example.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consider setting minimum salary levels, such as a living wage. Encourage organizations to seek out relevant salary surveys so they don't "undervalue" their costs. - Consider a second round budget submission. If you like the grant proposal overall, but the budget needs work, support them to revise the budget. Provide samples and coaching where possible.
Ongoing relationship management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are your points of influence with your grantee organizations? Every foundation will have different types of relationships. How do you work within those points of influence? - Do you think your 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure decent work practices are part of your conversations with the grantee. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Let grantees know that if their staffing circumstances change, you are open to learning what that means for them. - Consider designating a point person at your foundation that can be a



	<p>grantees will reach to you if they have an issue or opportunity related to providing decent work? If not, why not? What barriers exist that you can tear down?</p>		<p>support for grantees with decent work questions.</p>
<p>Grant reporting and evaluating change</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What indicators would be meaningful to you to know that you have invested in decent work? (such as an increase in percentage of budgets spent on staffing, or grantees applying for new eligible expenses, like pensions?) - What conversations are you having with grantees that have influenced or changed your communications or policies? How are you keeping track? - Are you talking about investing in decent work amongst staff meetings, at board meetings? Have the conversations changed over time? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The old adage - you pay attention to what you measure holds true! - Integrating decent work indicators and learnings into the existing grant cycle of reporting and evaluation is the best way to capture qualitative and quantitative data. - A note to make sure grantees know ahead of time what they are responsible for tracking and reporting on. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Add decent work questions/indicators to grantee check-in meetings, report forms, grantee surveys, etc. - Continue to ask your grantees open ended questions about opportunities to support decent work and barriers to providing decent work. - Consider a policy that allows for 'bridge funding' for grantees that have one project ending, another in progress so that they can continue to employ staff without an interruption/layoff.



Case Studies

Brief snapshots of community foundations practicing decent work

<p>Vancouver Foundation is committed to the principles and practices of inclusive, equitable and just employment processes.</p> <p>They are especially interested in communities which are structurally marginalized based on race, colour, religion, nationality, social or ethnic origin, sex, age, disability, gender identity and/or expression, domestic partnership status which is representative of the communities we work with. Vancouver Foundation encourages applicants from all communities.</p> <p>In 2020, Vancouver Foundation pledged to do better. They made five commitments to racial justice as protests in support of Black Lives Matter and other movements spread across the globe. Against this backdrop, they stepped up efforts to shift and share power — particularly with people who are most affected by issues in their</p>	<p>London Community Foundation believes that with a strong foundation, anything we dream is possible, together. London Community Foundation strives towards the vision for a community working together to enrich the quality of life for all.</p> <p>London Community Foundation’s social impact fund provides community and nonprofit groups access to funding that they typically couldn’t get from a bank, so that they can further their mission more efficiently and effectively.</p> <p>In 2020, London Community Foundation created the Affordable Housing Fund, allocating up to \$20 million from the Social Impact Fund and dedicating it to the development of affordable housing. To date, LCF has supported the creation of 440 affordable housing units in Southwestern Ontario. Affordable housing and decent work go hand in hand as rising income inequality and high</p>	<p>Community Foundation of Nova Scotia is committed to building strong, vibrant and diverse communities throughout Nova Scotia by enabling and inspiring effective philanthropy.</p> <p>In 2020, Community Foundation of Nova Scotia continued their work on the Investment Readiness Program (IRP) and pivoted as needed to allow for organizations affected by the pandemic to address changed circumstances and accommodate the new realities of COVID-19 on social enterprises, nonprofits, and charities.</p> <p>Community Foundation of Nova Scotia also joined the Nova Scotia Nonprofit COVID-19 Coalition to provide support to front-line nonprofit organizations and to serve as a voice to government for the sector.</p>
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community.	housing costs pose a significant financial burden for low-income workers.	
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Conclusion

The worldwide pandemic that we are all experiencing has taught us to be much more flexible, as funders, employers, organizations. We don't have to be rigid, we can pivot and do things differently!

Committing to - and investing in - decent work in the nonprofit sector is one way you can lead the way.

Further reading and resources list

Community Foundations Canada ["HR Guide"](#) (2021)

The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID). ["Toward a Feminist Funding Ecosystem."](#) (2019)

Nonprofit Quarterly. ["Trouble in Paradigm: Foundations' Bargain with the Devil."](#) (2021)

Ontario Nonprofit Network. ["Change Work: Valuing decent work in the not-for-profit sector."](#) (2016)

Ontario Nonprofit Network. ["Funding Decent Work: Best Practices and Key Insights for Supporting Nonprofits."](#) (2021)

Ontario Nonprofit Network. ["Funding Decent work in the Nonprofit Sector."](#) (2021)

Ontario Nonprofit Network ["Shaping the Future: Leadership in Ontario's Nonprofit Labour Force"](#) (2013)