

Belonging for All: Full Civil Society Impact Study Report



Fall 2025

Complete research report measuring the economic and social activity of the charitable sector in Greater Victoria

Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge with respect that this research was conducted on the unceded Coast Salish Territories, specifically of the Lək̓ʷəŋən (Songhees) and Xwsepsum (Esquimalt) Nations, the WSÁNEĆ Nations {WJOLEŁP (Tsartlip), BOKÉĆEN (Pauquachin), SĀAUTW (Tsawout), WSIKEM (Tseycum)} on the Saanich Peninsula and Gulf Islands, and to the west Sc'ianew (Beecher Bay), T'Sou-ke, and Pacheedaht, and MÁLEXEŁ (Malahat) and Pune'laxutth' (Penelekut) Nations. We recognize that these Nations have been caring for these territories since time immemorial, and their connection to these lands and waters continues today.

Executive Summary

The Greater Victoria Region is home to a thriving civil society sector that represents both a valuable community asset and a powerful tool for addressing the region's most pressing challenges - from housing affordability and social isolation to climate change and growing inequality.

What is civil society and why it matters?

Civil society organizations (CSOs) - *the nonprofits, charities, and community groups that operate between the public and private sectors* - form the connective tissue of thriving communities. These are the food banks, environmental groups and newcomer services, the arts organizations and advocacy groups that create the spaces where belonging happens. In the Greater Victoria Region, this sector generates \$5.4 billion in direct economic impact while providing essential social infrastructure: creating authentic belonging across four essential dimensions - *inclusion, emotional connection, community access, and equity*. When people truly belong, communities become more resilient, innovative, and capable of solving their most pressing challenges collectively.

A sector ready to scale

This follow-up to our 2018 impact study - *which found a sector bringing significant economic and social vitality to our region* - reveals organizations that have not only survived unprecedented challenges but have thrived, with **71% expanding services** despite mounting pressures. This isn't a struggling charity sector; it's a proven community asset with:

- **\$5.4 billion in annual economic impact**, supporting 60,600 jobs and over \$366 million in municipal taxes
- **with induced multiplier effects this is just over \$8.7 billion** - the equivalent of 110,000 jobs and just over \$666 million in municipal taxes
- **77% engaged in partnerships** - the collaboration essential for systemic change
- **86% implementing equity programs** that address root causes, not just symptoms
- **62% actively advancing BC's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA)** through Indigenous-led programming, collaborative relationships, and organizational transformation

The investment opportunity

While organizations face significant pressures - funding instability (64% severely affected), administrative burden (56%), and demand outpacing capacity (46%) - they also present exceptional opportunities for strategic investment. As Dan Pallotta argues in the film "Uncharitable," this sector's transformative potential is constrained by outdated funding approaches that prevent organizations from achieving their full impact.

The sector is ready to scale: 74% are interested in deeper partnerships, and 68% are seeking innovative funding models. Most organizations need modest additional funding of \$50,000-\$250,000 annually - with 100% of survey respondents indicating need for additional resources beyond their existing budgets. These funding needs reflect the realities of operating in Greater Victoria's high cost-of-living environment, where organizations must compete for skilled staff while working within constrained budgets that limit their ability to offer competitive compensation. These strategic investments could dramatically expand their capacity to deliver solutions to housing, mental health, environmental, and social equity challenges that government and private sector cannot address alone.

Our findings provide compelling evidence that strategic investment in core operations (89% priority), capacity building (64% need), and collaborative infrastructure will enable the systemic change our region needs.

Key recommendations:

For Policy Makers: Acknowledge the economic contributions of the sector. Consider expanding the social finance toolbox to invest in the sector's capacity. Establish core funding streams for organizational operations (89% priority) - the professional staff, strategic planning, and infrastructure that enable sustainable program delivery. Create *multi-year funding commitments* that reduce the administrative burden affecting 56% of organizations, allowing them to focus resources on impact rather than short term grant applications. Develop a *regional civil society strategy* that recognizes these organizations as essential community infrastructure delivering solutions to housing, mental health, and social equity challenges that government cannot address alone.

For Donors & Funders: Shift from traditional program funding to trust-based philanthropy that provides unrestricted operational support with streamlined applications and simplified reporting. This approach trusts organizations to allocate resources where they're most effective, reducing the administrative burden that affects 56% of organizations while maximizing impact. Beyond grants, consider impact investments that build long-term sector capacity and fund collaborative initiatives that address systemic challenges. By investing in core operations and cross-organizational partnerships, funders can dramatically expand organizations' ability to create belonging for all communities while tackling root causes rather than symptoms.

For Community Members: Join the 50% of organizations that have increased volunteer numbers since our 2018 study - whether serving seniors (67% of organizations), supporting youth (65%), or helping low-income families (62%). Beyond volunteering, share your professional expertise through skill-based contributions, join boards or committees, or use your purchasing power to support local social enterprises.

For Organizational Leaders: Continue strengthening core operations through strategic partnerships (77% already collaborate) while building the networks essential for systemic change. The sector's collaborative culture positions you to share resources, coordinate programming, and amplify collective voice with funders and policymakers. Diversify funding sources beyond traditional grants by exploring fee-for-service models, social enterprise opportunities, and individual donor development. Use this research to advocate for funding models that support core operations (89% priority) and multi-year commitments, positioning your organization's value as essential community infrastructure that delivers solutions to complex regional challenges.

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About the Partners

Victoria Foundation

Established in 1936, the Victoria Foundation is Canada's second-oldest community foundation and sixth largest of over 200 nation-wide. We manage charitable gifts from donors whose generosity allows us to create permanent, income-earning funds. The proceeds from these funds are then distributed as grants for charitable or educational purposes. Over the years, we have invested more than \$400 million in people, projects and charitable organizations that strengthen communities in BC and throughout Canada.

CIFAL Victoria and the University of Victoria

CIFAL Victoria is part of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) Global Network, hosted at the University of Victoria since 2022. CIFAL Victoria delivers training programs, conducts research, and facilitates partnerships that advance the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) through innovative, locally responsive approaches. The centre specializes in community-based participatory research, social innovation, and capacity building for civil society organizations, government, and private sector partners working to create more inclusive and resilient communities.

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About the Salish Sea Hub and CIFAL Victoria Partnership

This study exemplifies collaborative, community-led research through partnership between the Salish Sea Hub, CIFAL Victoria and the Victoria Foundation. Building on years of partnership between the University of Victoria (UVic) and the Victoria Foundation to address pressing local community needs, this work reflects a shared commitment to community-led research that advances the UN Sustainable Development Goals and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

The Salish Sea Hub, founded in 2018 through partnership between UVic, the Victoria Foundation, and the Victoria Native Friendship Centre, builds on the strong history of partnerships between local civil society organizations in the Salish Sea region - a collaboration with national and international recognition. As part of the Knowledge 4 Change (K4C) Global Consortium - a UNESCO Chair initiative connecting local training hubs worldwide - the Hub addresses pressing societal challenges through community-led knowledge creation that honors multiple ways of knowing

CIFAL Victoria, part of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) Global Network and hosted at UVic since 2022, delivers training, research, and partnerships advancing the SDGs and UNDRIP through locally responsive approaches. Together, the Salish Sea Hub and CIFAL Victoria create a partnership connecting UVic and community by designing and delivering training and research that is community-led and responsive to community needs.

This impact study – with a focus on Belonging For All - demonstrates the partners commitment to research that creates tangible community impact. This study was made possible by the generous participation of 66 civil society organizations who shared their time and insights through surveys, and three partner organizations - the Inter-Cultural Association, Transition Salt Spring, and the Good Food Network - who collaborated with UVic students on in-depth case studies. Through this partnership, the Salish Sea Hub and CIFAL Victoria supported student researchers to learn directly from community organizations, producing research grounded in lived experience and rooted in local context. Learn more at salishseahub.ca.

Introduction: The Power of Civil Society

Civil society organizations (CSOs) form the connective tissue of thriving communities. In the Greater Victoria Region, these organizations create profound social and economic impact by providing essential services to vulnerable populations, filling critical gaps in government programming, and fostering the sense of belonging that makes communities resilient and inclusive.

This impact assessment builds on our foundational [2018 study](#) to examine how the sector has evolved through one of the most challenging periods in recent history. The last seven years have brought unprecedented change: a global pandemic that reshaped community needs and service delivery, fluctuating funding landscapes, shifting government priorities, and growing demand for supports across all sectors of society.

The urgency to better understand our local context becomes even more evident when considered alongside concerning national patterns. Community Foundations of Canada's 2023 National Vital Signs Report "Reconnecting Communities" reveals a deepening crisis of social connection across the country. *"It is shocking to see the number of people who feel more isolated and less engaged in their community and the worrying trends around well-being."* A survey of a representative sample of 2,001 people in Canada aged 18 and over in all provinces conducted in 2022 also paints a stark picture: sense of belonging has declined by 12% since 2013, while 29% of Canadians report having no close friends in their community. This erosion of social connectedness extends to civic engagement, with volunteerism dropping by 12% since 2013 and charitable giving reaching historic lows – according to Statistics Canada (2024) only 17.1% of tax filers claimed donations in 2022, the smallest proportion ever recorded.

This national decline in belonging makes the work of local CSOs more critical than ever. As Community Foundations of Canada emphasizes: *"when people feel like they belong, they are healthier, happier and more engaged. And when people belong, communities flourish."* Yet the very organizations critical to tasked with creating belonging face mounting pressures that threaten their capacity to respond to growing community need.

Why Belonging Matters for Community Wellbeing

At the heart of civil society's impact lies belonging - the fundamental human need to feel valued, connected, and able to contribute meaningfully to community life. When people truly belong, they participate more fully, share their skills and knowledge, and help build the resilient neighborhoods that benefit everyone. CSOs serve as architects of belonging, creating welcoming spaces where diverse voices are heard, fostering deep relationships of trust and reciprocity, facilitating access to resources and opportunities, and working to dismantle barriers that prevent full participation in society.

Belonging also drives social and economic impact. Research consistently shows that people with strong community connections experience better mental and physical health, greater economic stability, and higher civic participation (Holt-Lunstad, 2023; Jordan, 2023). For communities, high levels of belonging translate into increased social cohesion, economic resilience, and collective capacity to address increasingly complex challenges.

A Sector Under Pressure

We know this sector faces mounting pressures. Volunteerism - the backbone of many charitable organizations - continues to decline. Workers increasingly face casual and unstable employment without benefits or security. Physical infrastructure requires significant capital investment just as land values rise and buildings age (Scale Institute, 2024). The 2024 report "Under Pressure: State of BC's Non-Profit Sector" captures the current reality: organizations feel *"needed now more than ever to promote equitable and thriving communities"* while simultaneously facing growing costs, decreasing revenue, and increasing demand for services. In the film "Uncharitable, filmmaker Stephen Gyllenhaal argues that outdated constraints on CSO operations prevent these organizations from achieving their full potential to "change the world."

Our 2018 baseline

Our study in 2018 found the sector to be a significant economic force worthy of celebration. Beyond the financial metrics (*just under \$7 Billion with induced multiplier effects*), we discovered a sector home to innovative leaders, decision-makers, and knowledge keepers who play vital roles in policy discussions and community-led solutions. These organizations provided meaningful employment that support local economies throughout the region while delivering services and building social connections that government and private sector alone cannot provide.

This study also builds from the Victoria Foundation's annual Vital Signs reports – which have long recognized the vital role of community organizations in measuring and improving regional vitality. Their approach to community check-ups - examining everything "from housing, to transit, to safety, the environment, the arts and gender equality" - provides important insights into quality of life at the community level.

Study methodology

Our methodology combined the most current data available from the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) 2023 assessment with empirical research to capture both economic and social impact. We sent a survey to organizations with publicly available contact emails from the CRA 2023 list (total 998 registered charities) and received 64 completed surveys between April-June 2025.

The responding organizations represent a diverse cross-section of the sector, including:

- Budget ranges from under \$100,000 to over \$5 million
- Establishment dates from 1891 to 2022
- Service areas spanning health, education, social services, arts, environment, and community development
- Geographic distribution across the entire Greater Victoria Region (13 municipalities)

The economic impact analysis was conducted by Dr. Brock Smith of the Peter B. Gustavson School of Business at the University of Victoria, following an approach developed for the Ontario Arts Council by Informetrica Limited and used in the 2018 charitable sector study. Reported is *total economic activity* which captures the GDP income, full-time equivalent jobs, and municipal taxes that are supported by the spending of charitable organizations, most of which is spent in the Greater Victoria Region.

Data for the econometric modeling was generated from three sources. First, the CRA provided revenue and expenditure data for all of the registered charities in the Capital Region who submitted a T3010 tax form. Second, a primary survey of those organizations was conducted with usable responses from 64 organizations. This data was used to determine the average number of employees and their wages, the average number of contractors and their wages, as well as the proportion of expenditures across different categories spent in the Greater Victoria Region. Average worker wage per week in 2024 (\$1371) was determined from BC Statistics and the average property tax paid per full time equivalent worker (\$6044) was calculated using information provided by BC Statistics and Statistics Canada.

Of the 64 organizations surveyed, about 20% did not have T3010 forms available online. These were mainly smaller organizations, so while the reported results are conservative, in that they do not reflect all of the charitable organizations in Greater Victoria, the missing data does not substantively impact the overall results.

The infusion of income into the Greater Victoria economy through *direct* organization spending has *indirect* effects on employment levels (full time equivalent jobs supported by that spending), and municipal taxes (the taxes paid by full-time equivalent workers). Economic activity also results from *induced* effects of subsequent “rounds” of the direct spending where money spent on goods and services from local suppliers is used by those suppliers to purchase other goods and services, and so on in a multiplier effect. Economic activity also results from *induced* effects of subsequent “rounds” of the direct spending where money spent on goods and services from local suppliers is used by those suppliers to purchase other goods and services, and so on in a multiplier effect. These figures are based on the total 2024 property taxes collected by the 13 CRD municipalities paid per full time equivalent employed person in the Capital Region in 2024.

The multiplier utilized in the analysis was 1.7. There are many methods for determining an appropriate multiplier, and many considerations, including industry, city size, and local economic conditions. A figure of 1.7 was chosen as the multiplier as 1.7 was used in the 2018 analysis and is consistent with multipliers used in other studies.

A number of assumptions were made to address missing or incomplete data. For example, less than 5% of organizations reported the number of employees on the T3010 form. An estimate was made using the employee and contractor data from 64 survey respondents, but larger organizations did not respond to the survey. Consequently, the average number of employees from the survey was increased by 30% to account for this missing data. This estimate is likely low, making the reported Local Employment Impact lower than it likely is and lower than the figures reported in 2018.

Our Impact Framework

Using our *"Belonging for All"* framework (figure 1), we measure impact across four interconnected dimensions that create belonging while also examining the financial health that enables organizations to sustain and scale their community impact:

1. **Inclusion:** How organizations create welcoming spaces where diverse voices are valued, fostering meaningful participation across different communities
2. **Emotional Connection:** The ways CSOs help build relationships of trust and reciprocity, enabling people to develop deep connections with neighbors and find support when needed
3. **Community Access:** How organizations facilitate access to resources, opportunities, and networks that help people fully participate in community life
4. **Equity:** The strategies CSOs use to address systemic barriers and ensure everyone can meaningfully contribute their unique gifts to community wellbeing



Impact Case Studies

As part of this study, we partnered with the University of Victoria's Community-based Participatory Research course led by the lead author Dr. Crystal Tremblay (Department of Geography). Our student research team conducted in-depth case studies with three organizations that exemplify the diversity and impact of the regions civil society sector:

- Inter-Cultural Association (ICA), which has served as "a cornerstone of the Capital Regional District for over 50 years" supporting newcomer integration through language, housing, and employment programs;
- Transition Salt Spring (TSS), a climate action organization building community resilience through a hyper-localized approach on Salt Spring Island; and
- the Good Food Network (GFN), a collaborative network of over 100 organizations working toward "a more equitable, healthy, and sustainable local food system."

Using a participatory methodology, the students and partners documented how these organizations create social impact through diverse partnerships, with ICA collaborating with over 500 partners, TSS working across multiple sectors to address climate change, and GFN facilitating collective action among diverse food system stakeholders. These case studies illuminate the themes that emerged from our broader survey: the critical role of partnerships in scaling impact, the importance of locally responsive programming, and the capacity of civil society organizations to address complex challenges through collaborative approaches that strengthen community belonging and resilience.

Advancing Global and Provincial Commitments

The work documented in this study extends far beyond local impact and contributes meaningfully to both the United Nations 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and provincial commitments to Indigenous rights and reconciliation. Our survey data, complemented by the student case studies, reveals a sector deeply engaged with advancing the UN SDGs and advancing BC's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA).

CSOs advance these goals in various ways, both directly through their operations and indirectly through the people they serve. Direct contributions include employment creation, volunteer engagement, and environmental stewardship programs. Indirectly, CSOs advance SDGs through their service delivery: 67% serve seniors (supporting SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being), 65% serve youth (advancing SDG 4: Quality Education and SDG 8: Decent Work), 62% serve low-income individuals and families (addressing SDG 1: No Poverty and SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities), and 56% serve people with disabilities (promoting SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities). This dual impact-through organizational operations and client outcomes - multiplies the sector's contribution to global sustainable development, with the 77% of organizations engaged in partnerships exemplifying SDG 17 while their collective annual economic impact demonstrates substantial progress toward multiple development goals.

Equally significant is the sector's engagement with BC DRIPA implementation, which provides the legislative framework for advancing Indigenous rights and self-determination in British Columbia. Direct contributions include Indigenous-led programming (30% of organizations), Indigenous staff hiring, and organizational policy reviews guided by DRIPA principles. Indirect contributions occur through serving Indigenous community members, supporting Indigenous-led initiatives, and building broader community understanding of reconciliation. Our survey reveals meaningful progress: 42% of organizations have specific programs supporting Indigenous peoples, with 62% actively building their understanding of DRIPA. The survey captured authentic approaches to reconciliation, with one respondent explaining: *"We don't want to check boxes in ways that perpetuate colonial harms."*

Organizations report supporting Indigenous governance (36%), protecting cultural rights (39%), facilitating economic participation (32%), and building collaborative relationships (62%) - all key elements of DRIPA implementation. Examples include co-facilitating parenting programs with Songhees Nation "at their request... they lead and direct the process," partnering with WSÁNEĆ Leadership Council on cultural initiatives, and conducting *"external, independent, third-party review of all policies and procedures on our pathway towards reconciliation and decolonization."*

Data Quality & Limitations:

- Self-selected sample may over-represent active/engaged organizations
- Organizations with limited capacity may be underrepresented

Economic Impact

Economic stability creates the foundation upon which belonging can flourish. When organizations have sustainable employment, fair wages, and financial security, they can focus on building the relationships and programs that create inclusion, emotional connection, community access, and equity. Our analysis reveals a sector that generates remarkable economic impact while creating the social infrastructure that enables everyone to participate meaningfully in society.

A Significant Economic Force in Our Region

The Greater Victoria Region's civil society sector creates substantial economic activity that directly supports community belonging. The total economic impact of registered charitable organizations in the region is \$5.4 billion in direct spending, rising to \$8.7 billion with multiplier effects. This level of economic activity supports the equivalent of 60,600 jobs directly and 110,000 jobs when including induced effects, generating over \$366 million in municipal taxes that fund the public infrastructure essential for community wellbeing.

This economic impact has grown since our 2018 study - from \$4 billion to \$5.4 billion in direct spending - demonstrating a sector that continues expanding its economic contributions alongside its social impact. This growth occurred despite facing challenges including a global pandemic, funding instability, and increased demand for services.

Charitable Sector of Greater Victoria

	Direct and Indirect Effect	Induced Effect	Total Impact
Local income impact (GDP)			
Net income impact	\$5,435,988,283	\$3,261,592,970	\$8,697,581,253
Local Employment Impact (person-year \$)			
Net Employment Impact	60,640.93	49,562.26	110,203.19
Local Tax Impact (Property Taxes)			
Net Tax Impact	\$366,556,850	\$299,589,467	\$666,146,316

Employment as Belonging Infrastructure

Meaningful employment creates the economic security that enables community participation in society. The sector provides diverse career opportunities from direct service work to program coordination, financial management to advocacy - employment that attracts people motivated by community wellbeing.

Our study reveals employment patterns that support belonging:

- Organizations employ staff across diverse roles that require local hiring and community knowledge
- Employment tends to be locally focused, with 90-100% of most organizations' work happening within the Greater Victoria Region

This local employment focus strengthens community ties. Workers live in the communities they serve, understand local needs, and contribute to the local economy through their spending. The sector creates jobs that keep skilled workers in the region while building their connections to community challenges and solutions.

Volunteer Engagement

Volunteerism represents both significant economic contribution and powerful belonging infrastructure. The sector engages thousands of volunteers contributing hundreds of thousands of hours annually - economic value that enables organizations to expand programming while creating meaningful pathways for community members to connect, contribute, and develop relationships.

Volunteer growth indicates community trust and connection:

- 50% of organizations report increased volunteer numbers since 2018
- Only 11% experienced volunteer decreases
- Organizations average substantial volunteer hours that multiply their capacity to serve community members

Volunteering creates belonging through multiple pathways: volunteers develop skills, build relationships, and gain deep understanding of community challenges. This engagement often leads to ongoing community involvement, advocacy, and civic participation that strengthens democratic participation.

Economic Impact Across Organization Types

The sector's economic contributions - \$5.4 billion of direct income - span diverse organization types that each contribute to community belonging. These organization types are classifications provided by the CRA.

Health & Wellness with \$3.38 billion (62% of total economic activity) from just 91 organizations - showing these organizations have significant economic impact

Education & Research contributes \$1.46 billion from 184 organizations - including major institutions like UVic

Poverty-focused organizations generate \$225 million from 127 organizations – demonstrating significant collective impact despite smaller individual budgets

Community & Public Amenities (\$167 million from 137 orgs) create gathering spaces and programming where belonging happens

Religious organizations (\$77 million from 234 orgs) demonstrate broad community engagement through high participation numbers

Arts Organizations (\$46.9 million from 58 organizations) provide venues for creative expression, and cultural celebration

“Other” Organizations (\$79.4 million from 117 organizations) include Environmental organizations, Advocacy groups, Professional associations, Emergency services and Sports and recreation. Together, these organizations contribute significantly to both economic vitality and community belonging through their focused approaches to specific populations and issues

		Total Direct and Indirect Expend	N
1	Poverty	\$225,271,035	127
2	Education & Research	\$1,455,160,781	184
3	Religion	\$77,618,767	234
4	Health & Wellness	\$3,384,457,549	91
5	Community & Public Amenities	\$167,210,763	137
6	Art	\$46,901,232	58
7	Other	\$79,368,157	117
	Total	\$5,435,988,283	

The sector's **\$5.4 billion in economic activity is an investment in belonging infrastructure** - the employment, programs, and community connections that make Greater Victoria a region where everyone can participate meaningfully in community life. This economic foundation enables the social impact documented throughout this report while demonstrating that belonging and economic vitality are mutually reinforcing.

Creating Welcoming Spaces

Inclusion creates the foundation for belonging by ensuring that all community members can access, participate in, and shape the programs and spaces that serve them. This dimension of our framework measures how and in which ways organizations create accessible, welcoming environments where diverse voices are heard, and meaningful participation becomes possible across different communities.

Our study reveals a sector with **strong commitments to inclusion**. Most organizations (83%) provide physically accessible spaces, recognizing that environmental barriers prevent participation. Gender-inclusive facilities are offered by 71% of organizations. We also wanted to know how organizations provide opportunities for client feedback and capacity building with community input driving program design for 62% of organizations, while 59% invest in staff diversity training to build cultural competency.

Inclusion Strategies in Practice

Organizations across the sector demonstrate creative inclusion approaches:

Multi-barrier accessibility: One respondent described providing "food with all programs; all programs except childcare are free," while another emphasized "patient and welcoming staff, adapting programming to clients' respective needs on their terms." Several organizations offer "reduced rates/full subsidies for Indigenous and equity-deserving groups."

Innovative service delivery: Organizations noted: "We do a lot online so that families can access materials as they are able" and "highly accessible program structures built with a disability centering approach." Transportation barriers are addressed through initiatives like obtaining "bus passes through the Community Social Planning Council."

Cultural competency: Organizations implement "GBA+ [Gender-Based Analysis Plus], trauma-informed approaches," "diversity in hiring," and maintain "diversity & inclusion statements on websites" to ensure welcoming environments for all community members.

Measuring Inclusion

The sector uses several approaches to track inclusion effectiveness. Our survey data shows 70% use participant feedback surveys, 65% monitor staff and volunteer diversity, and 59% track participant demographics. Community consultations guide 44% of organizations, while 41% measure return participation rates as an indicator of whether people feel welcomed and valued.

Only 30% report not formally measuring inclusion, acknowledging that inclusion requires intentional assessment and monitoring. As one organization noted: "*Length of participation - some people since 2018 - referrals*" demonstrates how inclusion success can be measured through sustained engagement and community word-of-mouth.

Diverse Populations Served

The diversity of populations served demonstrates sector-wide inclusion efforts:

- **67% serve seniors**
- **65% serve youth (14-29)**
- **62% serve low-income individuals/families**
- **56% serve people with disabilities**
- **44% serve Indigenous peoples**
- **42% serve LGBTQ2S+ community members**

This diverse service reach indicates that most organizations intentionally welcome multiple communities rather than serving narrow demographics, creating opportunities for cross-community connection and understanding.

Building Trust and Community Connections

Emotional connection through trust and reciprocity binds communities together. This dimension of our framework examines how organizations foster relationships, enable mutual support, build networks that strengthen community resilience and create lasting connections between neighbors, organizations, and the broader community. Our survey reveals a remarkably interconnected civil society sector built on strong, sustained relationships. An impressive 77% of organizations partner frequently with other community organizations, with 45% reporting long-term stable relationships, and 44% maintaining a strategic mix of long-term and short-term partnerships.

The quality of these partnerships is evident in their reported activities: 61% engage in information sharing, 59% share resources, 47% run joint programs together, and 48% maintain funding relationships. This multi-faceted collaboration helps to create resilience and ensures that partnerships continue even when specific projects end.

Some illustrative examples

Long-term collaborative relationships: Survey respondents shared powerful examples of sustained partnership. One organization described a 33-year partnership: "We have partnered with this organization for over 33 years. Responsiveness and adaptability to evolving needs is what is a cornerstone of success." Another noted how shared service delivery builds trust: "Share a contract for service provision with a similar community agency. Each agency's strengths fills gaps in other agencies... Multi agency approach means stronger voice with funder and with staff group."

Cross-sector innovation through trust: Organizations described how trust enables creative collaboration: "We work closely with the John Howard Society to provide employment training for our clients with brain injury. These clients are able to use these skills in running our Second Chance cafe." This example shows how trust allows organizations to combine expertise in ways that create new opportunities for community members.

Resource multiplication through networks: Trust enables resource sharing that multiplies impact: "We have a partnership with the Food Share Network through which we distribute rescued food to over 70 agencies." This demonstrates how individual organizational capacity is amplified through trusted networks.

The benefits of successful partnerships are tangible: 28% achieve more efficient resource use, 27% develop stronger community voice, 27% provide better service experiences for clients, and 26% gain broader community reach. These outcomes demonstrate that trust-building creates value for both organizations and the communities they serve.

Measuring Trust Through Multiple Indicators

Strong volunteer engagement indicates community trust in organizations. Our survey data shows 50% of organizations increased volunteer numbers since 2018, with only 11% experiencing decreases. The sector engages # volunteers contributing # hours annually - an average of # hours per organization. This sustained volunteer commitment suggests that community members trust these organizations enough to donate their time consistently.

Financial stability often reflects community trust and confidence. Survey findings show 59% of organizations improved financially since 2018 (27% significantly, 32% somewhat), while only 22% experienced decline. This positive trend, despite sector-wide challenges, suggests that communities continue to support organizations they trust through donations, service fees, and advocacy for government funding.

Perhaps the strongest indicator of community trust is service growth: 71% of organizations report increased numbers served since 2018. This expansion typically occurs through word-of-mouth referrals and community recommendation, indicating that people trust these organizations enough to recommend them to others.

The strong local focus of most organizations (90-100% serve Greater Victoria residents) also enables deep community embedding. This geographic consistency allows organizations to build reputation and trust over time, developing nuanced understanding of local needs and cultural contexts that strengthens community relationships.

Breaking Down Barriers: Access and Opportunity

Community access forms the bridge between needs and resources, ensuring that opportunities and services are available to all members of the community. This dimension measures how organizations facilitate full participation in community life by removing practical and systemic barriers that prevent people from accessing the support and resources they need to thrive.

Our survey reveals **a sector actively expanding access to services and opportunities** despite facing capacity constraints. An impressive 71% of organizations report increased numbers of people served since 2018. This expansion occurs across organizations of all sizes: from small groups serving 10-100 people annually to large organizations reaching 50,000-780,000 community members.

The scale of access is substantial: survey respondents collectively serve hundreds of thousands of Greater Victoria residents, with 90-100% of most organizations' clients being local residents. This strong geographic focus enables deep community embedding and responsive programming while ensuring that resources directly benefit regional communities.

However, this growth occurs alongside mounting pressures. Organizations also report holding waitlists due to increased demand, struggling with capacity limitations, and facing infrastructure challenges that limit their ability to serve everyone who needs support.

Removing Barriers

Organizations employ **multiple strategies to address economic barriers to access**. One respondent described providing funding *"through a 3rd party... open to anyone as long as they live in Victoria and meet our income threshold."* Others eliminate fees entirely: "Other than a one-time, lifetime membership fee of \$20, we have no fees." Several organizations noted helping clients access government supports: *"Many of the seniors in our community qualify for the City of Victoria LIFE grant. This helps offset costs."*

Organizations **actively address transportation challenges** through programs like obtaining "bus passes through the Community Social Planning Council" and providing direct transportation: "We give rides to neuro-diverse students who benefit from being out and interacting in the community." However, transportation remains a significant barrier, with multiple organizations noting that "Transportation to our location. Limited staffing" limits their ability to serve community members.

Organizations recognize the ***complexity of accessing government and community services***. One noted: "Our clients struggle with the amount of government applications required to access funding sources and services, and we currently do not have a systematic way of assisting them with these processes." This highlights both the barrier and the opportunity for enhanced navigation support.

Organizations demonstrate ***creative approaches to access***: "We do a lot online so that families can access materials as they are able" and "Highly accessible program structures built with a disability centering approach." These examples show how organizations adapt delivery methods to meet diverse access needs.

Major Barriers to Access

Financial Constraints	Financial barriers emerged as the most frequently cited access challenge. As one respondent noted: "Like most I think the largest barriers are the stress of everyday life living in poverty and the need to manage daily survival." This systemic barrier affects not just service fees, but transportation, childcare, time off work, and other costs associated with accessing support. Working families face particular challenges: "Financial barriers and time (full time working parents with children who have Down syndrome)" demonstrates how multiple barriers intersect to prevent access even when families desperately need support.
Capacity and Waitlists	Organizational capacity limitations create access barriers even when services exist. Organizations report: "We are experiencing more requests for service and are holding waitlists" and note geographic inequities: "availability, waitlists, trying to serve all of Saanich with one neighbourhood house when Victoria has 6 with less population and less area to cover." These capacity constraints reflect the gap between community need and available resources, limiting access despite strong demand for services.
Geographic and Infrastructure Barriers	Physical location and transportation create significant access barriers: "Transportation to our location. Limited staffing" and "Some parks and protected areas are uneven terrain and far from bus routes." These barriers particularly affect people with disabilities, seniors, and families without reliable transportation.
Systemic and Bureaucratic Barriers	Complex systems create barriers even when support exists: "Our clients struggle with the amount of government applications required to access funding sources and services." Cultural barriers also limit access: "stigma around adult literacy" and "Cultural barriers of the arts and arts spaces as seen as elitist."

Equity in Action

Equity moves beyond access to actively dismantle systemic barriers and create conditions where everyone can meaningfully contribute to society. This dimension measures how organizations address root causes of exclusion, transform institutional practices, and create change that enables all community members to participate. Addressing systemic barriers get to the root causes rather than just symptoms, ideally prompting change that prevents problems from recurring.

Our findings reveal a civil society sector **deeply engaged in equity work**, with 86% of organizations implementing specific programs to address systemic barriers. This commitment spans multiple approaches: 67% engage in cross-organizational collaboration for systemic change, 62% offer flexible service delivery that adapts to diverse needs, 59% provide access and inclusion programs, 39% implement transformative organizational practices, and 35% engage in advocacy and systems change work.

This equity focus is particularly evident in Indigenous engagement, where 42% of organizations reported having specific programs supporting Indigenous peoples, 30% offer Indigenous-led or informed programming, and 62% are actively building their understanding of BC's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA).

Some illustrative Examples

Organizations demonstrate a deep **understanding of reconciliation work**. One respondent described their approach: *"We have been doing deep dives and education with the team, as well as analyzing ways we can authentically implement activities that support DRIPA, UNDRIP and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action in a meaningful way. We don't want to check boxes in ways that perpetuate colonial harms."*

Organizations **support Indigenous-led programming**: "We co-facilitate parenting programs with staff from Songhees, on reserve, at their request. They asked for our support and we were happy to participate, but they lead and direct the process." Another noted: "Our organization, governance, and programs are for Indigenous people, by Indigenous people, and are open to all peoples!"

Organizations work to advance **Indigenous revitalization**: "We have partnered with the W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership Council and other Indigenous-led organizations to bring cultural presence and visibility into our settler dominated community. We have done this through collaborations for an ethno-botany garden, deer processing workshops and creating signage and courses in the SENĆOTEN language."

Some organizations undertake comprehensive **organizational change**: "External, independent, third-party review of all of our policies, procedures, messaging, public engagement, etc, on our pathway towards reconciliation and decolonization of our work."

BC DRIPA Implementation

Our survey data reveals organizations are working to advance the BC's Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, with many supporting multiple implementation areas:

- **62% focus on collaborative relationships** with Indigenous communities and organizations
- **39% work to protect cultural rights** through programming and advocacy
- **36% support Indigenous governance** by respecting Indigenous decision-making authority
- **32% address land rights** through environmental and territorial acknowledgment work
- **27% facilitate economic participation** by creating opportunities for Indigenous businesses and employment

62% of organizations reported actively building their understanding of BC DRIPA. Only 6% report that their work doesn't align with the Act.

Equity-Deserving Populations Served

The sector's commitment to equity is evident in demographics focused on equity-seeking groups:

- **62% serve low-income individuals and families**
- **56% serve people with disabilities**
- **44% serve Indigenous peoples**
- **44% serve newcomers**
- **42% serve LGBTQ2S+ community members**
- **33% serve Black people and people of colour**

Our findings demonstrate that most organizations intentionally center equity-seeking communities that address specific needs.

The Path Forward: seizing our region's greatest investment opportunity

Seven years after our first study, the Greater Victoria Region's civil society sector stands at exactly the moment Dan Pallotta describes in "Uncharitable" - organizations constrained by outdated funding approaches, ready for transformative impact if freed from scarcity-based thinking.

The evidence is compelling. Since 2018, 71% of organizations have expanded services despite unprecedented pressures, generating \$5.4 billion in direct economic impact while creating the social infrastructure that binds communities together. These aren't struggling charities waiting for rescue - they're proven community assets with strong partnerships spanning decades, and innovative leaders ready to scale solutions to housing, mental health, climate change, and social equity challenges.

The collaborative infrastructure already exists: 77% are engaged in partnerships and 74% eager for deeper collaboration, sharing resources and building networks that strengthen communities. The sector is partnership-ready for the systemic change our region needs.

The investment opportunity is accessible: 89% identify core operations as priority, with most needing just \$50,000-\$250,000 additional unrestricted investment annually - modest amounts that could unleash dramatic impact expansion. Instead of restricting overhead, we can invest in the professional management, strategic planning, and infrastructure that enables organizations to meet community demand, pay fair wages, and deepen collaboration.

What Our Region Needs to Act On:

- **88% need stable core funding**
- **45% need program expansion funding**
- **38% need physical space/facilities**
- **35% need additional staff positions**

Calls to Action: What is your role in creating communities where everyone belongs?

For Policy Makers: Acknowledge the economic contributions of the sector. Consider expanding the social finance toolbox to invest in the sector's capacity. Establish core funding streams for organizational operations (89% priority) - the professional staff, strategic planning, and infrastructure that enable sustainable program delivery. Create *multi-year funding commitments* that reduce the administrative burden affecting 56% of organizations, allowing them to focus resources on impact rather than short term grant applications. Develop a *regional civil society strategy* that recognizes these organizations as essential community infrastructure delivering solutions to housing, mental health, and social equity challenges that government cannot address alone.

For Donors & Funders: Shift from traditional program funding to trust-based philanthropy that provides unrestricted operational support with streamlined applications and simplified reporting. This approach trusts organizations to allocate resources where they're most effective, reducing the administrative burden that affects 56% of organizations while maximizing impact. Beyond grants, consider impact investments that build long-term sector capacity and fund collaborative initiatives that address systemic challenges. By investing in core operations and cross-organizational partnerships, funders can dramatically expand organizations' ability to create belonging for all communities while tackling root causes rather than symptoms.

For Community Members: Join the **50% of organizations that have increased volunteer numbers since our 2018 study - whether serving seniors (67% of organizations), supporting youth (65%), or helping low-income families (62%).** Beyond volunteering, share your professional expertise through skill-based contributions, join boards or committees, or use your purchasing power to support local social enterprises.

For organizational leaders: Continue strengthening core operations through strategic partnerships (77% already collaborate) while building the networks essential for systemic change. The sector's collaborative culture positions you to share resources, coordinate programming, and amplify collective voice with funders and policymakers. Diversify funding sources beyond traditional grants by exploring fee-for-service models, social enterprise opportunities, and individual donor development. Use this research to advocate for funding models that support core operations (89% priority) and multi-year commitments, positioning your organization's value as essential community infrastructure that delivers solutions to complex regional challenges.



This sector already creates belonging and delivers essential community solutions with limited resources. Imagine what becomes possible when we provide the investment they need to further thrive!

Feature Case Study 1 - The Good Food Network: Creating Belonging Through Food Security

The Good Food Network (GFN) is a collaborative network of over 100 organizations in the Greater Victoria Region working together to create a more equitable, healthy, and sustainable local food system through collective action.

Key Impact Metrics:

- 125+ network members
- \$500,000 distributed to network members and projects through shared funding
- 10 working groups and roundtables coordinating regional food security
- 1100+ home cooked meals/day to 23 schools and 3000+ students reached through the Kitchen Program
- 2800 servings per day of breakfast/snacks to 30 schools reaching 5000+ students through the Grocery Program - Food Aggregation & Distribution
- 19 school gardens supported reaching 4000+ students and 150+ teachers through the Food Literacy - Garden & Food Learning Support program
- 80 farmers, fishers, food processors and harvesters selling through South Island FarmHub
- \$1,279,000 in sales from over 70 Farms and Food Producers of the South Island FarmHub
- Over 81,000 people in the region served through the Foodshare Network
- 95,466 seedlings and 703 cubic yards of soil-building materials distributed to communities by the award-winning City of Victoria's Get Growing, Victoria! Program

Belonging for All in Action

Inclusion: Creating welcoming food access

The Good Food Network works to ensure that safe, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food reaches all community members through diverse programs including local farms, community gardens, educational programs, food distribution centers, and community kitchens. Organizations within the network specifically focus on equity-seeking groups, ensuring no one is excluded from food security.

Emotional Connection: Building community through food

During COVID-19, the GFN's leadership team met weekly to coordinate response efforts, creating a support network that sustained both organizations and community members. The South Island Farm Hub exemplifies this connection - when local farmers faced revenue loss, the network created an online platform allowing individuals and organizations to purchase fresh local produce, maintaining vital community-farmer relationships.

Community Access: Removing Food System Barriers

The network provides both emergency food services and long-term food system solutions. Through shared resources and collaborative funding, member organizations can offer free and low-cost food while building community capacity through programs like community kitchens, gardens, and food literacy education that enable ongoing food security.

Equity: Addressing Food System Inequities

The GFN actively works to protect, preserve, and restore traditional Indigenous food systems while supporting organizations that focus specifically on equity-seeking groups and minority communities. Their collaborative approach ensures that multiple barriers - financial, cultural, geographic - are addressed through coordinated programming rather than individual organizational efforts.

Advancing UN Sustainable Development Goals

The GFN's collaborative model advances multiple SDGs simultaneously:

- **SDG 2 (Zero Hunger):** Direct food provision and food literacy programs
- **SDG 1 (No Poverty):** Free and low-cost food reducing financial stress
- **SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities):** Equity focus for marginalized communities
- **SDG 11 (Sustainable Communities):** Supporting traditional Indigenous food systems
- **SDG 13 (Climate Action):** Sustainable and ethical food production
- **SDG 15 (Life on Land):** Sustainable farming practices and resource conservation

"Relationships are foundational to everything that we do" - Linda Geggie, CRFAIR Executive Director



As the Good Food Network transitions from their ten-year cycle, they continue prioritizing community relationship building and collective action. In facing climate change challenges, the network hopes to "create community, uplift one another, and work together to tackle these complex and interconnected issues."

Feature Case Study 2 - Transition Salt Spring (TSS): Building climate resilience through community trust

A non-profit organization addressing climate change through hyper-localized community building, trust, and resilience on Salt Spring Island.

Impact at a Glance:

- Only climate action organization on Salt Spring Island
- 50+ formal and informal partnerships across sectors
- Over 1,500 people joined Toy & Clothing Swaps
- Repair Cafés fixed 300+ items
- \$43,000 in rebates helped 58 households invest in rainwater systems and cleaner heating.
- Ecosystem restoration continued on Hwmet'utsun (Mt. Maxwell), along with community-wide wildfire prevention efforts
- Policy advocacy kept climate action on the agenda with local governments and agencies
- 177,835 views on TSS video reels

Belonging for All in Action

Inclusion: Creates welcoming spaces for climate action that move beyond fear and overwhelm. TSS invites communal change through encouragement and inclusion, with events like clothing swaps and repair cafes attracting hundreds of community members who might never attend traditional climate meetings.

Emotional Connection: Builds relationships founded on trust and care using the analogy that "the island's emergency preparedness kit is the cooperation and collaboration of its community members." Their "Lighter Living" series and community events create deep connections that strengthen collective capacity and connections.

Community Access: Removes barriers to climate action through accessible programming and diverse platforms including YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram. TSS makes climate engagement possible for all community members regardless of prior environmental knowledge or activism experience.

Equity: TSS works to dismantle competitive and hierarchical systems, building trust across the community while respecting Coast Salish People's teachings that "human beings and nature are one."

Systems Innovation

Hyper-Localized Approach: TSS demonstrates how place-based organizing creates strong community resilience, working within clearly defined geographical boundaries to build trust and collective action.

Partnership Integration: Collaborates across land use, food and agriculture, transportation, infrastructure, forests, and water sectors - showing how climate action requires cross-sector community engagement.

Cultural and Systems Change: Focuses on systemic and cultural change, using individual behavior modification as a starting place to help people climb the ladder of engagement into deeper political, cultural and systemic engagement.

Global Impact

Advances multiple UN Sustainable Development Goals: Climate Action (SDG 13), Quality Education (SDG 4), Clean Water and Sanitation (SDG 6), Sustainable Communities (SDG 11), Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (SDG 16), and Partnerships for the Goals (SDG 17).

"Change moves at the speed of trust. The opportunity to amplify the impact is greater when we work together." Darlene Gage, Executive Director.

Feature Case Study 3 - Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria: Creating Belonging for Newcomers

A cornerstone organization supporting newcomer integration into Canadian society for over 50 years through comprehensive programs and 500+ community partnerships.

Impact at a Glance:

- 1,200 workshops available annually
- 77% of clients found work in their employment field
- 80% of clients said that ICA had a positive impact on their settlement journey
- 44% increase in clients served last fiscal over the previous year
- 40+ languages spoken by ICA staff
- 3,500 clients supported in 2024/2025 through diverse programming
- 1378 community residents trained in Bystander Intervention last year (2024)

Belonging for All in Action

Inclusion: Creates welcoming spaces where newcomers can connect across cultural and faith-based communities through programs like Q Plus (weekly safe space for LGBTQ+ newcomers) and "Colouring for Calmness" that break down language barriers. Staff speaking over 40 languages ensures everyone can access services in their preferred language.

Emotional Connection: Helps newcomers build meaningful relationships that often turn into lifelines - roommates, colleagues, and lifelong friends who offer support during life's highs and lows. ICA fosters leadership and autonomy by encouraging participants to take ownership of programs and co-create initiatives that reflect their unique needs and experiences.

Community Access: Removes barriers through holistic support including employment assistance, language classes, help navigating daily tasks like public transit, and decentralized services across the region. During COVID-19, quickly adapted with online classes, virtual services, and blended learning to maintain accessibility.

Equity: Actively addresses the unique needs of immigrant women through specialized programming while amplifying marginalized voices in societal decision-making. Programs specifically support equity-seeking groups and ensure equitable access to resources and opportunities.

Systems Innovation

500+ Partnership Model: Connects newcomers to extensive networks of community resources, demonstrating how collaboration multiplies individual organizational capacity to support integration and belonging.

Adaptive Programming: Shows remarkable flexibility in meeting evolving community needs, from rapid COVID-19 pivots to specialized programming for diverse populations including seniors, families, and LGBTQ+ newcomers.

Holistic Approach: Goes beyond skills and knowledge to focus on relationship building, cultural connection, and community leadership development that creates lasting belonging.

Global Impact

Advances multiple UN Sustainable Development Goals: No Poverty (SDG 1), Good Health and Well-being (SDG 3), Quality Education (SDG 4), Gender Equality (SDG 5), Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8), Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10), and Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (SDG 16).

"ICA really believes in creating communities where everyone belongs and can thrive... Everything that we do reaches towards that ultimate outcome." Meghan Mergaert, Director of Impact and Innovation

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