

L'Année PhiLanthropique The PhiLanthropic Year

Volume 3 | Hiver / Winter 2021



PhiLab

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Prochaine publication | Next Publication

Automne 2022 / Fall 2022

À propos du PhiLab | About PhiLab

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

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

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

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



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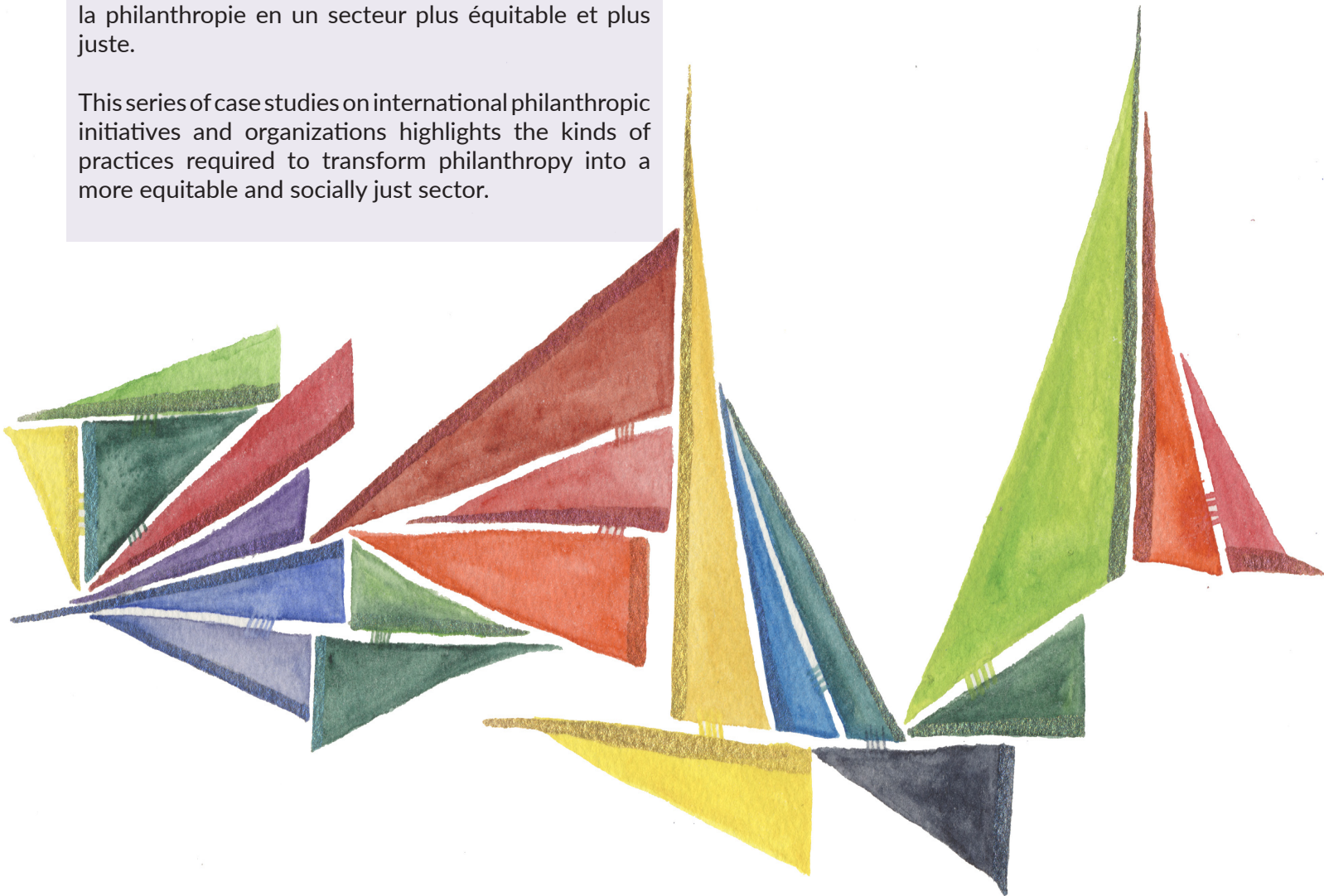
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DOSSIER SPÉCIAL | SPECIAL FEATURE

Cette série d'études de cas présente des initiatives et des organisations philanthropiques à l'international qui révèlent des pratiques contribuant à transformer la philanthropie en un secteur plus équitable et plus juste.

This series of case studies on international philanthropic initiatives and organizations highlights the kinds of practices required to transform philanthropy into a more equitable and socially just sector.



Artiste | Artist: Kai Yun Ching



INTRODUCTION

In its quest to better understand the Canadian philanthropic sector, PhiLab has been building relationships beyond the country's borders, sowing the seeds for international research units. Fostering international networks allows us to establish meaningful relationships with fellow philanthropy researchers and research hubs abroad, which are often studying very different contexts for philanthropy.

This Special Feature focuses on the work of PhiLab's colleagues around the globe. We have curated a series of case studies on philanthropic initiatives and organizations outside Canada that highlight the kinds of practices required to transform philanthropy into a more equitable and socially just sector. Covering organizations from North and South America, Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa and Australia, we hope this series offers insight into the diversity of alternative approaches to grantmaking that prioritize equity and community-led action.

Dans sa quête pour mieux comprendre le secteur philanthropique canadien, le PhiLab a tissé des relations par-delà les frontières du pays, semant les germes pour que se constitue une plus grande unité de la recherche à l'international. La création de réseaux internationaux nous permet d'établir des relations constructives avec des collègues chercheurs et des centres de recherche qui étudient la philanthropie dans des contextes très différents du nôtre.

Ce dossier spécial met l'accent sur le travail de collègues du PhiLab qui sont basés aux quatre coins du globe. Nous avons réuni une série d'études de cas portant sur des initiatives et des organisations philanthropiques hors Canada qui révèlent des pratiques contribuant à transformer la philanthropie en un secteur plus équitable et plus juste. Couvrant des organisations en provenance d'Amérique du Nord et du Sud, d'Europe, d'Afrique subsaharienne et d'Australie, nous espérons que cette série offrira un panorama de la diversité d'approches subventionnaires qui priorisent l'équité et l'action communautaire.

AUSTRALIA

Place-based and community-led: Australian case studies show how local, national and international philanthropy can connect to needs on the ground.



By Alexandra Williamson, Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the ACPNS

Gerlinde Scholz, Executive Officer of Australian Community Philanthropy



Alexandra Williamson is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Australian Centre for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Studies (ACPNS) in the QUT Business School at Queensland University of Technology (QUT). She holds a PhD and a Master of Business (Research) from QUT examining the accountability of philanthropic foundations, and a Master of Business (Philanthropy and Social Investment) from Swinburne University of Technology. Alex has more than a decade of prior experience working in private Australian philanthropic foundations.

Gerlinde Scholz is Executive Officer of Australian Community Philanthropy, the peak body for Australia's community foundations. She has held senior nonprofit sector executive and governance roles ranging from higher education and medical research to social services and environmental organisations. She has a Bachelor and Masters degree from the University of Melbourne and an Honours degree from LaTrobe University.

The COVID-19 pandemic has stripped back many invisible assumptions and exposed systems and institutions to the full gaze of the public in unprecedented ways. While the pandemic is ongoing and its social and economic impacts will endure for

decades, the disruptions caused by the global crisis have also created some positive changes. Such opportunities have surfaced in the work of Australia's community foundation sector.

COVID-19 arrived while some of the 2019/20 'Black Summer' Australian wildfires were still burning. Almost overnight, public debate about fires and climate crisis turned instead to the pandemic and the extraordinary public health measures put in place in response. As economic insecurity and fear took hold, community need was growing rapidly while fundraising became extremely challenging. Never was there a greater need for the connected, collaborative, and hyper-local approach that characterizes the work of community foundations.

This short article presents three 'bite-sized' case study snapshots from the Australian context to illustrate the point: authentic connection to community and a simple structure to enable anyone to contribute within their capacity are key to making community foundations such effective responders in times of crisis. One local, one national and one international philanthropic funder highlight variation in practices and scope, while retaining a shared focus on equity, effectiveness and innovation.

Community Foundation for Tumut Region (CFTR)

This small local community foundation serves a rural area in New South Wales that was severely impacted by the 2020 wildfires. The loss of built heritage, indigenous culture, and natural environment in the region was simply catastrophic - 183 homes lost, many more damaged, farm buildings, machinery, livestock and miles and miles of fencing lost, timber plantations burnt, and local wildlife decimated.



The Foundation, which has no staff and is entirely run by volunteers, had been inactive for a few years. “It was a terrible wake-up call”, remembers Louise Halsey, Chair of the Foundation Board. “But we were lucky to have the foundation structure in place and experience with fundraising, grant making, and the governance requirements behind us.”

CFTR’s bushfire appeal quickly raised over AU\$200,000. Much of this funding was distributed using a very lean application process to get support quickly to people who needed help. Affected families received vouchers and gift cards to purchase what they needed from local businesses, keeping the money in the community rather than bringing in goods from elsewhere.

CFTR is now involved with a series of “Fire Shed Fridays”. There are 28 fire sheds in their catchment area that serve as a local base for volunteer fire fighters. CFTR supports local community health services to visit a different fire shed each week, putting on a special lunch. Volunteers serve the meal while fire fighters, their families and other locals are invited to catch up with each other and relax. For some of the people who went through the trauma of the fires together, these lunches are the first chance to reconnect and debrief in the aftermath, as the pandemic has prevented in-person gatherings for many months. “Fire Shed Friday is a social gathering that is also a mental health intervention” says Louise. In late September 2021, Fire Shed Friday was announced as a finalist in the 2021 Mental Health Matters Awards. “As a community foundation, we look after our community in a holistic way, and that’s what we are doing.”

Ecstra Foundation

This national charitable foundation focuses on building the financial wellbeing and capacity of Australians within a fair financial system. Ecstra’s approach is relationship-based, outcome focused, places limited bureaucratic burdens on grantees, and adapts easily to changing circumstances.

In 2020, Ecstra invested a total of AU\$1 million in ten initiatives led by community foundations and delivered in partnership with local organisations, to build financial capability in the respective communities. The initiatives ranged from financial literacy education and resource development to research commissioned by a community group to better understand local levels of disadvantage and develop strategies to address this. A further AU\$50,000 supported the membership association Australian Community Philanthropy (ACP) to coordinate the program.

The grants were awarded at a time when recovery from the devastating 2020 wildfires [three recipient community foundations were directly impacted by the fires] had been pushed aside by the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns, which impacted everyone everywhere. Ecstra first adjusted the closing date for the grants while many communities were dealing with wildfires.



Then, during the pandemic, there was flexibility around project delivery milestones and reporting deadlines, recognising that all participating communities were struggling with unprecedented challenges. “Our grantees are best placed to determine their capacity and the timing of grant implementation to achieve tangible outcomes for their communities”, says Caroline Stewart, CEO of Ecstra. “This helps Ecstra and our grant partners understand what approaches really work in different settings, and just as importantly what may need to change to better meet community needs”.

GlobalGiving

International crowd funder GlobalGiving holds a special place among Australian communities that suffered in the 2019-20 wildfires (including Community Foundation for Tumut Region, see above). When those fires made international headlines, GlobalGiving started receiving donations from around the world into its Australia Wildfires Relief Fund (Project #44385). This Disaster Response fund aimed “to support immediate rescue and relief efforts for people and animals impacted by the fires and will eventually transition to funding long-term assistance to help residents recover and rebuild”.

GlobalGiving prefers to work through local nonprofits in its disaster response. Australian Community Philanthropy (ACP) contacted GlobalGiving and completed their due diligence process to qualify as a charity eligible to receive funding. ACP also ensured that all its member foundations that operate in fire affected communities had the opportunity to connect with GlobalGiving. Each of those community foundations and ACP itself received funding to boost their organisations’ immediate capacity to support communities on the ground. For some of them, GlobalGiving provided amongst the earliest funding received in response to the fires.



GlobalGiving operates based on trusted relationships and lean bureaucracy. Online processes for due diligence, funding applications, fund distributions, and reporting are straight-forward and well backed up with human support where needed. Decisions and payments are made quickly.

Distributions from the Australia Wildfires Relief Fund are expected to continue up to 2023-24 with a focus on capacity building and a high level of confidence on the part of the funder in the local knowledge of community-based beneficiary organisations.

Learnings for philanthropy at all levels

These examples illustrate that effective giving is an elusive concept, malleable with circumstance and context, morphing over time. Any form of fund distribution involves decision-making, and therefore decision-makers. At their heart, discourses around shifting the power in philanthropy involve a shift from one organisation or group to another. The value of the shift lies in bringing decision-making closer to those most immediately affected by the outcomes and impact of those decisions. Community foundations as funders are closer to those affected by their funding decisions than most other philanthropists. They are also ideally placed to act as intermediaries, connecting the wider philanthropy ecosystem to local, place-based needs, thus helping to shift power in funding relationships.

Yet money is not the only thing transferred between two groups of actors, and transfers of knowledge in both directions are an equally important but less frequently discussed dimension of any shift in power. As the three foundations are demonstrating, sharing lived experiences, learnings through failure, conceptual knowledge, and understandings of temporal effects are all vital for the chances of success for community-based actions and initiatives. It is a balancing act.

Communities benefit most from funding that is targeted in its purpose yet flexible in its application. In the next five to 10 years and beyond, the cycle of survival and resilience, from COVID-19 to climate change and economic recessions will be at the forefront of funders’ attention. Generating and distributing resources - money and knowledge - in participatory and equitable way is part of the vital work of community foundations.

As well as shifting power externally to community members, shifting a foundation’s power is also a matter of balancing age, gender, and cultural background within a foundation. Australian community foundations, and indeed the philanthropic sector nationally, broadly lack diversity of leadership. As today’s founders and leaders hand on their responsibilities to the next generation in the coming decades, there will be a realignment of power within the philanthropic sector. If community foundations can emerge from that transition as more inclusive and genuinely representative, they will be further strengthened as just, democratic, equitable and effective philanthropic institutions.

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PhiLab

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