L'Année PhiLanthropique
The PhiLanthropic Year

Volume 6 | Printemps / Spring 2025

Credit: Tommy Trenchard

PhiLab

Coordonnées | Contact
philab@uqam.ca
www.philab.uqam.ca
514-987-3000 #8576

Directeurs de publication
Publication Directors
Elisabeth Robinot & Adam Saifer

Rédacteurs en chef | Editors in Chief
Elisabeth Robinot & Adam Saifer

Coordination de la rédaction
Edition Coordination
Laurence Croteau

Contributeurs | Contributors
Adam Parascandola
Adam Saifer
Alice Chipot
Amina Wazoumi Ignanoné
David Grant-Poitras
Diane Alalouf-Hall
Elisabeth Robinot
Éric St-Pierre
Fahad Ahmad
Hilary Pearson
Jean-Marc Fontan
Joey Mac Intosh
Jonathan Deschesnes
Joshua Newton
Karine Meaux
Katherine Lacefield
Laurence Croteau
Léo Bérenger Benteux
Michelle Riley
Peter R. Elson
Saouré Kouamé
Susan Philips
Sylvain A. Lefèvre
Taïeb Hafsi
Thierry Delvigne-Jean
Verena Gruber

Conception graphique | Graphic Design
Laurence Croteau

ISSN: 2563-3058
Dépôt légal - Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec, 2025.
Dépôt légal - Bibliothèque et Archives Canada, 2025.

À propos du PhiLab | About PhiLab

Le **Réseau canadien de recherche partenariale sur la philanthropie** (PhiLab) a été créé en 2014 dans le cadre d'une demande de financement « développement de partenariat » obtenue du Conseil de recherche en sciences humaines du Canada (CRSH). Ce financement a été reconduit en 2018 pour six années par l'obtention d'une subvention « partenariat » du CRSH. Depuis 2024, PhiLab profite de financements octroyés par différentes fondations dont la Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon et la Fondation Mirella et Lino Saputo. Le Réseau pancanadien constitue un lieu de recherche partenarial, de partage d'information, de mobilisation des connaissances sur la philanthropie subventionnaire et de formation à la recherche. Les activités de recherche conduites en partenariat valorisent les connaissances auprès d'une diversité d'acteurs sociaux, d'agences gouvernementales, milieux universitaires et petits et grands médias. La valorisation des connaissances, via des outils de communication novateurs et accessibles, permet une diffusion élargie des connaissances produites ou déjà existantes. 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) was created in 2014 as part of a "partnership development" funding application obtained from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). This funding was renewed in 2018 for six years by obtaining a "partnership" grant from SSHRC. Since 2024, PhiLab has benefited from funding granted by various foundations, including the Fondation Lucie et André Chagnon and the Mirella and Lino Saputo Foundation. The Pan-Canadian Network is a hub for partnership research, information sharing, knowledge mobilization on grantmaking philanthropy and research training. Research activities carried out in partnership promote knowledge among a wide range of social players, government agencies, academics and small and large media. The valorization of knowledge, via innovative and accessible communication tools, enables a wider dissemination of the knowledge produced or already existing.

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada
Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada
Canada

ÉDITORIAL | EDITORIAL

Credit : Michelle Riley

The Power and Responsibility of Nonprofit Photography

By Michelle Riley, *Lead photojournalist at Lens for Change*

Michelle Riley is a photojournalist and nonprofit visual storytelling expert who helps organizations use authentic photography to inspire action and drive social change. She spent 16 years at Humane World for Animals (formally called the Humane Society of the United States and Humane Society International), where she built and led the organization's first in-house photography team, and elevated the role of authentic imagery in advocacy, fundraising, and media outreach.

In addition to photographing hundreds of assignments herself and managing thousands of freelance photo shoots, she also created and implemented the organization's first photo ethics policy, ensuring all imagery was used truthfully, respectfully, and in alignment with its mission. Today, Riley leads Lens for Change, a consulting agency that helps nonprofits harness the power of ethical, authentic photography to build trust, mobilize supporters, and amplify their impact. She provides comprehensive photo shoot services, as well as training on ethical visual storytelling and nonprofit photography best practices.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Irene, many people we met had lost everything. Some broke down in tears. My job was to capture these moments, but each time I lifted my camera, something felt deeply wrong. I knew the images could help raise money for our relief efforts, but photographing someone's suffering—especially for fundraising—felt exploitive.

As a photographer for Humane World for Animals (formally called the Humane Society of the United States and Humane Society International), I was documenting a crisis for the first time. Each morning of that heartbreaking week in August 2011, our animal rescue team met with local North Carolina officials to identify the hardest-hit areas. We rescued stray animals, provided supplies, and offered temporary shelter for pets.

In most cases, I took the photos, but I couldn't bring myself to ask for permission to use them. Asking someone who had just lost their home to sign a legal release felt tactless and insensitive. I understood my role as a photographer, but I had to be a human first. And as a human, getting releases in this situation would have been unethical. So I didn't.

Instead, I turned my lens towards the work of our staff and volunteers. Rather than focusing on suffering, I captured our staff rescuing animals and providing aid to those in need. That experience shaped my view of photography in philanthropy during times of crisis. Images are powerful tools—they can inspire action, mobilize support, and raise millions for critical causes. But they also carry ethical weight. And how we capture

and use them matters.

This year, The PhiLanthropic Year has chosen to use photos instead of illustrations. Each of the images was carefully selected to illustrate the following principles that are at the foundation of ethical nonprofit photography.

The Need for Consent and Transparency

When disaster strikes or conflict erupts, cameras are everywhere. News photographers document unfolding crises to inform the public, while nonprofit photography inspires donations for relief efforts.

Those differences are critical. Journalists don't need consent to publish images, as their work is purely editorial. Nonprofit photography accompanies fundraising appeals—making consent not just an ethical obligation but a legal necessity. But sometimes asking for consent is neither appropriate nor ethical.

During the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, I oversaw the photography for Humane World for Animals' response at border crossings in Poland and Italy. Our teams provided pet supplies to refugees fleeing the war, and in some cases, helped them find shelter.

These individuals had just escaped unimaginable trauma. They were exhausted, frightened, skeptical, and often unable to communicate in the local language. In addition, our team's interactions with refugees lasted only minutes—in most cases, they distributed supplies and offered words of comfort before refugees moved on. Asking them to sign a document giving us permission to use their images for fundraising was out of the question.

So, how can nonprofits document their impact ethically?

Focus on your team offering assistance without photographing beneficiaries in an identifiable way. You can photograph beneficiaries from behind, showing the backs of their heads or shooting over their shoulder, and focus your shots on the faces of your staff and volunteers. This allows your images to authentically represent the people you're helping while still protecting their privacy and dignity.

If staff or volunteers interact with beneficiaries for longer than a few minutes and establish trust, you can consider requesting a signed release. But this should never be a condition of assistance, and it should only be considered when your organization helps significantly; e.g., by finding shelter versus simply distributing supplies.

Transparency is also key. If someone agrees to be photographed, they should know how their image will be used. Clear, direct photo release forms should explicitly state that images may be used for fundraising, marketing, and advocacy. Ethical storytelling requires honesty—not manipulation.

When disaster strikes or conflict erupts, cameras are everywhere. News photographers document unfolding crises to inform the public, while nonprofit photography inspires donations for relief efforts.

The Importance of Context

Lack of context can also mislead and manipulate audiences, putting your credibility at risk. Using outdated or unrelated imagery to evoke sympathy is a common but unethical fundraising tactic.

During the California wildfires earlier this year, several nonprofits used dramatic images—of animals silhouetted against fiery skies, or heroic rescues taking place—that were from entirely different years and locations. Even if captions disclosed real dates and locations, most people never saw them. They assumed what they were looking at was happening in

real time.

Similarly, organizations must avoid misrepresenting crises. A photo of a refugee camp in one country shouldn't be used to illustrate migration issues in another. Donors want to see authentic impact, not unrelated images designed to pull at their heartstrings.

The Better Business Bureau Wise Giving Alliance requires nonprofits to disclose the year when an image is more than three years old. People and circumstances change, so it's misleading to your audience to use the same photos repeatedly. For general fundraising purposes, I recommend using photos that are less than 1-2 years old to avoid misrepresenting your current work.

Equally important is avoiding what's known as "poverty porn"—those familiar, heartbreaking images of starving children covered in flies, staring directly at the camera with obvious pain in their eyes. While these photos undoubtedly evoke a reaction, they can dehumanize subjects and strip them of their dignity. When consent is given to photograph people in these situations, show them in an empowering and positive way that highlights their resilience and strength, instead of portraying helplessness. For nonprofit photography, an image of a child receiving food is just as powerful—and more ethical—than one of them suffering without it.

Why Authenticity Builds Trust

We live in an era of deep skepticism, where misinformation spreads rapidly and trust is fragile. Audiences crave authenticity, and nonprofits must meet that demand. Respecting the integrity of the photographic moment is essential. Nonprofit photography should document real moments, not staged performances. Photographers should never ask staff, volunteers, or beneficiaries to pose or reenact events to fit a specific narrative. Similarly, models should not be used to represent real beneficiaries or scenes.

Post-processing should also uphold the truth of an image. Do not significantly alter the images in Photoshop, such as by flipping, adding or removing elements, over-saturating colors, or making extreme crops that alter the context of an image. Only the established norms of ethical photo editing should be used, such as minor color and exposure correction and minimal cropping.

Organizations should also avoid stock photography as much as possible, and AI-generated images should never be used. Donors expect the truth and want to see real people in real situations. Using canned or fake imagery erodes trust, making people question whether the stories you tell are real.

Audiences crave authenticity, and nonprofits must meet that demand. Respecting the integrity of the photographic moment is essential. Nonprofit photography should document real moments, not staged performances. Photographers should never ask staff, volunteers, or beneficiaries to pose or reenact events to fit a specific narrative.

Crossing any of these ethical lines can lead to irreparable damage to organizational credibility and integrity. Donors will immediately ask: if you're lying about your photos, what else are you lying about? Have you altered your data? Exaggerated your impact? What about your use of funds? When credibility

falters, it's difficult to get it back.

To avoid these pitfalls, I recommend hiring a professional photographer to document your work. It is a worthwhile investment in your mission and brand, and it's often affordable, especially considering that a single photo shoot can provide a year's worth of compelling images. If that's not an option for you, have your staff take photos with their phones. An imperfect but authentic photo of your work will have more impact on your audience and your donors than a perfect stock photo.

How Photos Have Changed the World

Photography has long been a catalyst for change. A single image, captured at the right moment, can shift public opinion, influence policy, and even alter the course of future events. Some of the world's most iconic photographs didn't just document events—they forced people to confront uncomfortable truths and spurred action in ways that words alone could never achieve.

One of the most well-known examples is Napalm Girl, the haunting 1972 image captured by Nick Ut. The photograph shows a nine-year-old girl, Phan Thị Kim Phúc, running naked and burned after a napalm attack in Vietnam. The raw horror in her expression made the war's brutality impossible to ignore. Public outrage following its publication fueled anti-war protests and is widely credited with helping accelerate the war's end.

More recently, The Death of Alan Kurdi, captured in 2015 by Nilüfer Demir, reignited global conversations about the Syrian refugee crisis. The heartbreaking photo of the three-year-old boy's lifeless body washed ashore on a Turkish beach forced the world to confront the human cost of the crisis. Within 24 hours of the photo's publication, donations to refugee aid organizations skyrocketed, and world leaders faced renewed pressure to act.

Powerful images don't just expose suffering; they can also inspire legislative change. In 2005, after Hurricane Katrina, photographs of stranded residents—many refusing to evacuate because they couldn't bring their pets—sparked public outrage. Images of abandoned animals and their desperate owners played a key role in the passage of the Pets Evacuation and Transportation Standards (PETS) Act, ensuring that pets are now included in disaster response plans.

And then there are the images that fuel social justice movements. In 2020, Darnella Frazier, just 17 years old at the time, filmed the murder of George Floyd at the hands of a Minneapolis police officer. The footage ignited a global movement for racial justice, leading to widespread protests, policy reforms, and a reckoning with systemic racism that still continues today.

These images, and so many others, illustrate the undeniable power of photography. They remind us that visuals don't just reflect reality—they shape it. When used responsibly, photography has the power to expose injustice, mobilize communities, inspire donors, shape policy, and ultimately, change the world.

Photography as a Force for Good

At the start of my career, I was a news photojournalist. I had spent all of my teenage years wanting to be a news photographer, so my first job as one felt like a dream come true. But I quickly learned that shooting for news outlets has its limitations.

First, it often came with impossible moral dilemmas. You're trained to observe, not act. To stay objective, even in the face of unimaginable suffering. To document without stepping in, even when every part of you wants to help.

And, once the shutter clicks, the fate of the image is out of your hands. It's published, and what happens next—whether the photo sparks change or fades into the background—is up to the audience.

That's why I pivoted to nonprofit work. In nonprofit photography, you're not just capturing moments—you're leveraging them. You can guide the narrative, pair an image with a call to action, and directly connect what's seen to what can be done. A single photograph paired with the right messaging can educate people about a cause, rally supporters, raise funds, and inspire real change in ways journalism doesn't allow.

Nonprofit photography has immense power to create change—but only when used ethically, responsibly, effectively, and with respect for those it represents. Because when we show the world what's happening, we have the power to change the future.

Find out more about the photos selected to illustrate the featured sections of this edition of PhiLanthropic Year on page 116.

L'Année PhiLanthropique
The PhiLanthropic Year

PhiLab

Réseau canadien de recherche partenariale sur la philanthropie

Canadian Philanthropy Partnership Research Network

Université du Québec à Montréal
Pavillon Saint-Denis (AB), 10e étage.
1290, rue Saint-Denis
Montréal (Québec) H2X 3J7

Téléphone : 514-987-3000 #8576
Courriel : philab@uqam.ca

www.philab.uqam.ca