

L'Année PhiLanthropique

The PhiLanthropic Year

Volume 7 | Printemps / Spring 2026



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 Saifer
Afshan Paarlberg
Alicia Richins
André Pawan Vashist
Anne-Emmanuelle Birn
Bélinda Bah
Bernice Yanful
Charles Duprez
Daniel H. Lanteigne
Danielle Gibbie
David Grant-Poitras
Diane Alalouf-Hall
Ebony Davitt
Farnaz Zaredorahi
François Brouard
Gabriel Tremblay
Imoleayo Adeyeri
Jean-Marc Fontan
Joël Paré-Julien
Katherine Lacefield
Laurence Croteau
Luc Rabouin
Manuel Litalien
Michelle Fuko
Nadia Ahidjo
Rina Marchand
Sacha-Emmanuel Mossu
Sanjay Bindra
Simon Paradis
Tanya Hannah Rumble
Thémis Daraïche
Udloriak Hanson

Conception graphique | Graphic Design

Laurence Croteau

ISSN: 2563-3058

Dépôt légal - Bibliothèque et Archives
nationales du Québec, 2025.

Dépôt légal - Bibliothèque et Archives
Canada, 2026

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



À propos de L'Année PhiLanthropique



Par : **Elisabeth Robinot et Adam Saifer**

Codirecteurs du PhiLab

Codirecteurs de publication

L'Année PhiLanthropique est une publication spécialisée dans la diffusion de connaissances scientifiques et professionnelles dans le domaine de la philanthropie et plus précisément de la philanthropie subventionnaire. La revue répond au besoin de rendre disponible, en français et en anglais, des connaissances principalement produites ou mises en valeur par des activités scientifiques réalisées au sein du Réseau canadien de recherche partenariale sur la philanthropie (PhiLab).

L'Année PhiLanthropique publie des travaux de nature scientifique ou professionnelle répondant aux exigences de base de l'édition scientifique. La revue dispose d'un comité de lecture et de politiques éditoriales qui assurent un niveau de qualité certain aux textes qui y sont publiés. Ces derniers prennent différentes formes – articles, chroniques, comptes rendus critiques – et s'inscrivent dans un créneau qui se situe entre les publications scientifiques formelles et informelles. Il s'agit donc de textes qui, tout en respectant les normes éthiques de la production scientifique et professionnelle, se veulent plus courts – une dizaine de pages – et plus légers (moins grande emphase sur les dimensions méthodologiques et plus sur les résultats ou l'analyse) que la moyenne des productions scientifiques.

Produite une fois par année (hors éditions spéciales), chaque numéro de la revue est pris en charge par une équipe éditoriale différente rattachée au PhiLab. L'équipe, en mode direction, est chargée de la conception, de la production et de la gestion d'un appel à contribution.

En publiant L'Année PhiLanthropique nous nous assurons d'agir en complémentarité avec une offre de publications scientifiques, ou visant le grand public, déjà existante. En se voulant accessible en ligne et offerte gratuitement, la revue ouvre la voie à la diffusion de contenus générés par ou découlant d'activités de recherche majoritairement conduites en partenariat avec des acteurs de l'écosystème philanthropique.

L'Année PhiLanthropique s'inscrit dans la stratégie globale mise en place par PhiLab afin de mieux faire connaître les réalisations et enjeux de l'écosystème philanthropique canadien tout en ouvrant la voie à sa mise en comparaison avec des pratiques existantes ailleurs dans le monde. Enfin, rappelons que la création de notre revue n'aurait pas été possible sans l'appui du Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada (CRSH).

Elisabeth Robinot, de l'Université du Québec à Montréal, et Adam Saifer, de la University of British Columbia (Okanagan Campus), sont les codirecteurs du PhiLab. À titre de codirecteurs, ils veillent à la réalisation et à la coordination des activités de recherche et de valorisation des connaissances inscrites dans les programmes de recherche menés en partenariat et soutenus financièrement par le CRSH et les partenaires du projet. Elisabeth Robinot est aussi la cofondatrice de l'Observatoire de la Philanthropie, une cellule d'études et de veille stratégique en philanthropie qui associe des chercheur-e-s de l'ESG UQAM, de l'UQTR et d'autres universités internationales.

About The PhiLanthropic Year

By: Elisabeth Robinot & Adam Saifer
Co-directors of the PhiLab Network
Publication Co-directors

The PhiLanthropic Year is a journal that specializes in the transmission of scientific and professional knowledge within the philanthropic sector, and more specifically, grantmaking philanthropy. The journal meets the need of rendering available, in French and English, knowledge mainly produced by or highlighted by the scientific activities that take place within the Canadian Philanthropy Partnership Research Network (PhiLab).

The PhiLanthropic Year publishes scientific and professional articles that meet the basic requirements of scientific publication. The journal has a peer-reviewed committee as well as basic editorial guidelines that ensure a quality standard for the texts it publishes. These latter take on different forms - articles, chronicles, critical book reviews- and find themselves somewhere between formal and informal scientific articles. These texts, while respecting the ethical norms of scientific and professional publications, are shorter - a dozen pages or less - and lighter (less emphasis on the methodological aspects and more on the results or analysis) than your average scientific publication.

Published annually, each issue is taken in charge by a different editorial team that is connected to PhiLab. The team, from a management point of view, is responsible for the design as well as the creation and management of a call for contributions. By publishing The PhiLanthropic Year, we make sure to act as a complement to the existing offer of scientific literature and publications directed to the general public. By being available online and offered free of charge, the journal paves the way to the dissemination of content generated by or stemming from research mainly conducted in partnership with actors of the philanthropic ecosystem.

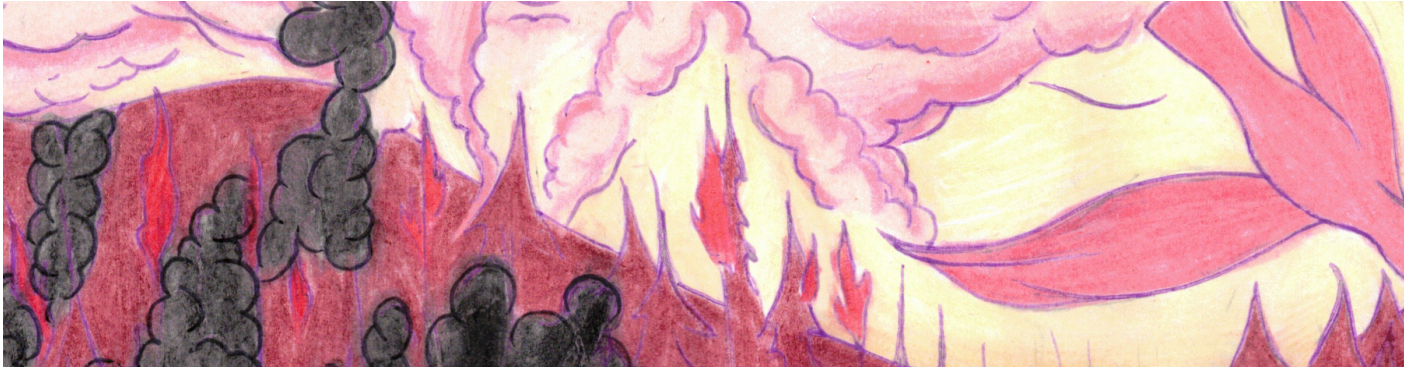
The PhiLanthropic Year is part of a global strategy implemented by PhiLab to spread awareness of the successes as much as of the issues of the Canadian philanthropic ecosystem while paving the way for comparisons with existing practices from around the world. Finally, let us recognize that the creation of our journal could not have been possible without the support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).



Elisabeth Robinot, from the Université du Québec à Montréal, and Adam Saifer, from the University of British Columbia (Okanagan Campus), are the co-directors of PhiLab. As co-directors, they oversee the implementation and coordination of research and knowledge dissemination activities included in the research programs led in partnership with and financially supported by the SSHRC and the project's partners. Elisabeth Robinot is also co-founder of the *Observatoire de la Philanthropie*, a philanthropy research and strategic monitoring unit that brings together researchers from ESG UQAM, UQTR and other international universities.

Justice socioenvironnementale : quand la crise exige justice | Socio-Environmental Justice: When Crisis Demands Justice





Sunsetting Foundations for Climate Action: New Pathways for Environmental Philanthropy

By **Sacha-Emmanuel Mossu**, *PhD Candidate in philosophy at Université Laval*



Sacha-Emmanuel Mossu is a doctoral student in philosophy at Laval University, jointly supervised by Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne University. His research focuses on the role of philanthropy in achieving social justice and the democratic issues associated with it. He is a student member of the Canadian Partnership Research Network on Philanthropy (PhiLab), the Institute of Applied Ethics at Laval University (IDÉA), the Institute of Legal and Philosophical Sciences at the Sorbonne (ISJPS), and the Political Philosophy Laboratory (LPP) at Laval University.

Introduction

Climate change is coming fast and is outpacing our efforts to fight it. As the need to strengthen mitigation efforts grows, institutional responses continue to fall short of the scale of the challenge. The scientific consensus is clear: we are nowhere near meeting our Paris Agreement commitments. Although climate policies and laws have expanded over the last decade, the greenhouse gas emissions projected for 2030 make it likely that global warming will surpass 1.5°C this century and significantly reduce the chances of staying below 2°C (IPCC 2023). In sum, we are acting too little and too slowly. This failure to act sometimes looks like it's rooted in the structural constraints of

existing political and economic institutions. On one hand, electoral democracies incentivize political leaders to prioritize short-term horizons dictated by electoral cycles and day-to-day issues. On the other, market competition tends to relegate environmental considerations to the background of corporate priorities, thereby hindering the energy modernization of the economy.

Is climate philanthropy efficient?

From this institutional perspective, the philanthropic sector appears – in theory – to be in a better position to respond to the climate crisis, precisely because it is freed from these constraints. As political scientist Rob Reich notes (2018), philanthropy benefits from a privileged institutional position that grants it relative autonomy from electoral and market imperatives. Possessing a structural advantage over the market and the state, philanthropy could easily operate on an extended time horizon to fund risky and pioneering projects. It would thus be able to avoid the “presentism” of democracy and the market, which are systematically oriented toward short-term projects due to financial and political constraints. Yet, in practice, most philanthropic foundations prove scarcely bolder than governments or businesses in climate action. Even liberated from the need to convince voters or

satisfy shareholders, they remain subject to their own institutional constraints. The most decisive among them is undoubtedly the principle of perpetuity. Many foundations are designed to preserve their capital over time, even ensuring its perpetual growth (Reiser & Dean, 2023). In theory, this structure could favor risky investments and long-term strategies. In practice, however, it tends to yield the opposite effect, which can be detrimental when tackling a cause like climate change.

As sociologist Francie Ostrower suggests (2011), perpetual foundations often develop an autonomous organizational identity, detached from their original purposes, and ultimately come to view their own survival as an “end in itself”. Capital preservation then becomes paramount, sometimes at the expense of the causes these institutions claim to serve—particularly when the amount of resources required to make a significant impact conflicts with the goal of perpetuity. In this context, foundations generally limit themselves to disbursing the mandatory quota imposed by the law, generally around 5% of the foundation’s capital. That pace is insufficient. According to a report published by the Royal Bank of Canada, the investment required to reach net-zero emissions in Canada is estimated at nearly \$2 trillion (2021). In the context of a climate crisis demanding rapid, large-scale, and risky responses to foster innovation, this logic of giving small sums year after year appears to be a major barrier to the effectiveness of environmental philanthropy.

Limited-life foundations: A strategic shift in climate action

That said, environmental philanthropy has not yet said its last word. Indeed, another model of foundation, often called “sunsetting” or “limited-life” foundations, is emerging with the promise of shaking things up in the philanthropic sector. Unlike perpetual foundations, these organizations commit to spending all their assets and ceasing operations at the end of a predetermined time horizon or after achieving specific objectives (Mossu & Grant Poitras, 2024). According to Ostrower (2011), contrary to “normal” foundations, the upcoming wind-up of these foundations ensures that organizational survival is no longer a priority. They thus become temporary “vehicles,” explicitly and rapidly oriented toward achieving the goals set by their founders or responding promptly to current issues. This institutional logic appears particularly suited to the temporal constraints of the environmental crisis.

Although the phenomenon of sunsetting foundations is slowly gaining popularity, it remains marginal, and few organizations of this type specifically focus on combating climate change. Three examples are nonetheless particularly illuminating. In the United States, the Beldon Fund, founded in 1982 by John Hunting to promote environmental policies, decided in 1998 to voluntarily liquidate its assets over a ten-year period, motivated by a strong sense of environmental urgency. This decision led the foundation to spend over \$100 million to maximize its political impact before its definitive closure (Beldon Fund, 2009). In Canada, the Ivey Foundation - one of Canada's oldest foundations created in 1947 by Richard G. Ivey and his son Richard M. Ivey - follows a similar trajectory.

“

Unlike perpetual foundations, these organizations commit to spending all their assets and ceasing operations at the end of a predetermined time horizon or after achieving specific objectives.

”

Among the country’s earliest environmental foundations, it progressively specialized in energy transition issues. In 2022, it announced its impending closure (Ivey 2022) and the end-of-life process was designed to accelerate Canada’s economic energy transition through its Economy and Environnement Program (2023). Finally, another compelling example is the MAVA Foundation, founded in Switzerland by Luc Hoffmann in 1994 to support the conservation of biodiversity around the globe. While climate change mitigation was a peripheral—though vital—objective compared to its core mission of protecting endangered species, its strategic logic and the motivations behind its closure in 2022 mirror those of the Ivey Foundation

and Beldon Fund. These initiatives, which reinterpret the temporality of philanthropic action, are expanding the scope of what environmental philanthropy can achieve and pointing toward a dramatic leap in the effectiveness of these institutions in fighting climate change.

It is interesting to examine why a planned closure would be attractive to these three environmental organizations. Despite the diversity of their trajectories, several common characteristics emerge from limited-life environmental foundations. First, sunseting offers financial flexibility that enables these foundations to better integrate the imperatives of climate urgency into their strategy. Since their institutional survival is no longer a concern, limited-duration foundations can spend far beyond the annual disbursement quotas. This allows them to allocate funds more responsively tailoring spending to on-the-ground needs and the actual resource demands of the cause they support.

From this perspective, deliberately spending down capital allows foundations to move faster toward their goals—achieving impacts that would otherwise be impossible under the constraints of minimum payouts. This allows them to dramatically increase the scale of resources deployed. In some cases, even a small boost in spending can unlock entirely new areas of action, enabling riskier but high-impact projects with substantial social returns. This is particularly true for these environmental foundations, which often adopt much shorter time horizons than the average limited-duration foundation — often set at twenty years or more (Mossu & Poitras 2024). The Beldon Fund thus opted for a ten-year liquidation period, while the Ivey Foundation chose a five-year horizon. This brevity enables concentrating considerable resources over a very short time frame, rapidly increasing the sector's capacity for action. To get a sense of the scale, the Ivey Foundation will spend, over five years, the equivalent of nearly eighty years of funding under a perpetuity scenario (Grant-Poitras & Mossu 2025 (TBP)). By renouncing capital preservation, it has multiplied its intervention power and invested massively where potential impact is deemed highest, thus creating real momentum around an issue long neglected in Canada. This allowed the foundation to accelerate the impact of its Economy and Environment Program and to strengthen the capacities of its partners such as Transition Accelerator, Clean Energy Canada, Clean Prosperity, Canadian Climate Institute, Efficiency

Canada, Environmental Defence Canada, New Economy Canada, and Pembina Institute. In the same way, the Beldon Fund consolidated its means to bolster environmental advocacy around key issues which lead to few important policy changes in the United-States. It notably engaged a lot of resources in key states such as Florida on regulating the use of toxic chemicals in consumer products and on environmental protection issues, including actions supporting the ratification of the Great Lakes Compact, a binding interstate agreement among eight U.S. states to manage the water supply more sustainably. (Cramer & Kehoe, 2014). In doing so, these foundations prove that strategic spending, rather than capital preservation, is a decisive lever for meeting the scale of the climate challenge (or other environmental issues)

“

Since their institutional survival is no longer a concern, limited-duration foundations can spend far beyond the annual disbursement quotas. This allows them to allocate funds more responsively tailoring spending to on-the-ground needs and the actual resource demands of the cause they support.

”

Beyond the numbers and the scale, the value of limited-life foundation also lies in the qualitative shifts it creates in the way they operate. A second distinctive trait of these foundations is often called “the focus effect” generated by planned closure (Ostrower, 2011). The foundation's end date instills a

sense of urgency and fosters discipline among staff and members, encouraging them to produce the best results and concentrate efforts on what matters most. The fact that the foundation's money is no longer perceived as a renewable resource translates into a concern to make optimal use of every dollar spent and maximize the organization's relevance for the time remaining (Riley, 2023). As Lynda Mansson (2018), the former director general from the MAVA Foundation put it, "there is nothing like knowing there is an end-date to sharpen discussions. Although there has always been a finite amount of funding to provide to partners, when there is a finite number of years for that funding, suddenly things change. Trade-offs become more apparent and the choices we make are more critical".

Conservation projects are highly complex and require sustained commitment across several dimensions—environmental, political, legal, and social. Achieving meaningful impact therefore relies on building partnerships with a wide range of stakeholders. Rather than dispersing resources across numerous scattered initiatives, foundations can be more effective by concentrating on a limited number of causes where a holistic approach can be implemented. For example, the Sea Turtle Partnership funded by the MAVA Foundation focused its efforts on a small number of priority projects in West Africa and the Mediterranean. By strengthening the protection of key breeding sites through collaboration between local actors, scientists, and governments, the initiative demonstrated how targeted, partnership-based action can generate stronger conservation outcomes (MAVA & FOS 2021). Seen this way, the certainty of imminent closure pushes leadership and staff to focus efforts on what truly matters. Unlike perpetual foundations, which can afford to disperse resources and attention across peripheral activities, limited-duration foundations are structurally compelled to prioritize the most efficient and strategic projects. In the case of the Ivey Foundation, this translated into tightening partner selection criteria, explicitly hierarchizing funding relationships, and refocusing on organizations most aligned with its energy transition objectives. This approach led to ending partnerships deemed insufficiently conducive to tangible progress, in favor of closer, more strategic collaborations (Grant-Poitras & Mossu 2025, TBP). Those experiences show the way that the closure of a foundation represents an opportunity to rethink approaches to environmental

action and to reconsider cooperation around this issue, in a manner that prioritizes effectiveness and innovation.

“

The fact that the foundation's money is no longer perceived as a renewable resource translates into a concern to make optimal use of every dollar spent and maximize the organization's relevance for the time remaining.

”

Finally, these experiences invite to think differently the very notion of sustainability in philanthropy. As we saw, perpetuity is often justified by the idea that it ensures durable, long-term impact, shielded from political and economic fluctuations. But as John Hunting of the Beldon Fund puts it: "Environmental problems can't wait." (Carlson & Lurie 2009). Put differently, while environmental challenges require a long-term vision, they also demand immediate action and strong mobilization right now. In this sense, those foundation's experience demonstrates that giving up perpetual existence does not mean forsaking a long-term vision. On the contrary, the prospect of closure encourages deep reflection on the future effects of actions undertaken right now. Their sunset is oriented toward fostering long-term systemic change at an institutional level. For Ivey, the foundation thus focused on its partners' capacity to continue their mission after its departure, strengthening their autonomy and skills. It also sought to structurally reinforce Canada's environmental philanthropy ecosystem by supporting innovative financing models, perpetual institutions, and nationwide collaboration

networks. This ecosystem revolves around another nonprofit, the Transition Accelerator, an entity that the foundation itself helped build, whose mission is to put 'Canada on a path to a strong, competitive economy in a world driving to reduce emissions to carbon neutrality'. The case of the Ivey Foundation demonstrates how the sunsetting process empowers the organization to pursue systemic change strategies and engage in field-building for the underdeveloped sector of energy transition. In the same way, prior to closing, the MAVA Foundation supported key partners in their organizational development to ensure they were well-equipped for the future. By strengthening these entities, the foundation aimed to guarantee the delivery of effective conservation efforts for years to come (Fintch 2023). For these institutions, the relationships and the infrastructure they helped build over the years prior to sunsetting will outlive their disappearance. Thus, contrary to common assumptions, closing a foundation may foster the integration of long-term and sustainability thinking into an organization's strategic approach, in a way that perpetuals foundations don't.

Conclusion

In sum, the greater financial agility, the strategic focus and the new approach to sustainability fostered by the closure make the model of sunsetting foundation particularly relevant for certain types of philanthropic activities. In the case of the climate crisis, it thus appears that the bet of limited-duration foundations—based on intensity, concentration, and speed of action—is potentially better suited than the incremental strategy favored by perpetual foundations. By renouncing perpetuity, these organizations equip themselves to act at the scale of the urgency. In this regard, if additional foundations follow the example set by the Beldon Fund, the Ivey Foundation and the MAVA Foundation, the philanthropic sector may emerge as a powerful accelerator of the energy transition and a leading force in climate change mitigation. Such examples can certainly serve as an inspiration for other organizations and foundations seeking solutions to urgent systemic problems, such as the climate crisis.

References

Boris, ElizabethT., Carol J. De Vita et Marcus Gaddy. 2015. « Trends Study: Results of the First National Benchmark Survey of Family Foundations ». National Center for Family Philanthropy. [Link](#)

Carlson, Neil, & Lurie, Theodora. 2009. Giving while living. The Beldon Fund Spend-out Story. Beldon Fund. [Link](#)

Cramer, Dan & Kehoe, Keiki. (2014). The Beldon Fund: Final Impact Assessment. Beldon Fund. [Link](#)

Finch, Catherine. 2023. MAVA Foundation: For people and nature 1994-2022. MAVA Foundation.

IPCC. 2023. Climate Change 2023: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. IPCC, Geneva, Switzerland, 184 pp.

Ivey Foundation. 2022. « A Letter to Our Friends and Partners on the Decision to Wind Up the Ivey Foundation and Distribute its Full Endowment by 2027 », november 29, 2022. [Link](#)

Ivey Foundation. 2023. Economy and Environment Program: Progress since 2013.

Mansson, Lynda. 2018, June 4th. The unexpected benefits of closing. MAVA Foundation. [Link](#)

MAVA & FOS (2021). Strategic Partnerships: MAVA's approach to scaling up conservation impact. MAVA Fondation pour la nature / FOS.

Mossu, Sacha-Emmanuel & Grant-Poitras, David. 2025. Limited-life foundations: anatomy of a philanthropic movement. PhiLab.

Ostrower, Francie. 2011. Sunsetting: A Framework for Foundation Life as Well as Death. Washington, DC:Aspen Institute.

Reich, Rob. 2018. Just Giving: Why philanthropy is failing democracy and how it can do better. Princeton & Oxford. Princeton University Press.

Renz, Loren, et David Wolcheck. 2009. Perpetuity or Limited Lifespan: How Do Family Foundations Decide? Intentions, Practices, and Attitudes. New York: Foundation Center.

RBC Thought Leadership. (2021, October). The \$2 Trillion Transition: Canada's Road to Net Zero. [Link](#)



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), 10^e étage.
1290, rue Saint-Denis
Montréal (Québec) H2X 3J7

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

www.philab.uqam.ca