
Chapter 1:

THE IMPORTANCE OF ADVOCACY AND THE ROLE NONPROFITS PLAY

We live in a world of budget and resource limitations, differing opinions and conflicting priorities. Engaging in advocacy is an opportunity for nonprofits to share their priorities with the public, represent communities, advance policies, and promote funding of meaningful objectives.

Nonprofits engaging in advocacy work bring benefits to communities at large but also bring benefits to the organization through opportunities of attracting greater attention and creating broader impact. To demonstrate the collective impact of nonprofits on Canadian society and the economy, this chapter also highlights three major contributions of the sector.

Why Advocacy?

Canadian nonprofits play a crucial role in communities across all provinces and territories. The nonprofit sector contributes significantly to society, the economy, and democratic participation across the country. For the upcoming 2019 federal election, it is essential for nonprofits to realize the vital role they play in influencing public policy.

Advocating as a nonprofit is an opportunity to share priorities with the public, represent communities, advance policies, and promote funding of meaningful objectives. Issues and challenges facing the nonprofit sector can be raised during this election in order to promote important policy decisions as nonprofits play an important role advocating for important policy objectives, often for the most vulnerable and underserved populations across Canada.

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Advocacy Benefits the Public and Nonprofit Sector

Nonprofits that are connected to causes can provide a bridge between the abstractions of public policy and the lived experiences of those for whom policies are designed. Although governments may have tools to determine levels of citizen satisfaction, organizations that deliver programs can provide more thoughtful feedback on the way policies and programs are experienced in practice.¹

Public consultations are a key element of effective policy making; without the advocacy work and input of nonprofits, policymakers would miss out on valuable contributions needed for evidence-based decision making. Additionally, nonprofits provide a platform for those with diverse interests and a voice to the most vulnerable and underrepresented in society, who may otherwise remain silent in the policy process.

Advocacy efforts have the potential to move the needle on longstanding challenges that have hindered a nonprofit's ability to move forward on its mission. Volunteers and donors may be drawn to support a nonprofit working on systemic issues because of the possibility for broader impact and the potential to attract the attention of policymakers, community leaders, and influential figures.

Advocacy work can strengthen the appeal (for example, public support and charitable giving) of a nonprofit as it works toward a more diverse and effective approach to achieving societal impact. It also creates opportunities to collaborate and build alliances with other organizations in order to provide a greater impact. When nonprofits come together, they can avoid working in silos and capitalize on the benefits of a network approach to achieve a greater impact.

Why Nonprofits Matter

1. Nonprofits Contribute to Our Social and Cultural Fabric

The nonprofit sector plays a vital role in contributing to the social and cultural fabric in our society. Nonprofits in Canada are incredibly diverse and enrich Canada's social and cultural experience through a variety of subsectors, including: arts and culture, sports and recreation, religion, social services, development and housing, environment, education and research, and health, among others.

Unique in their direct work with community groups, nonprofits serve diverse populations and geographical locations, harness insights and deliver solutions to complex societal challenges. With thousands of organizations providing much-needed services, nonprofits are significant contributors to the communities they serve, and the social and cultural makeup of our province.

2. Nonprofits Play a Critical Role Within Our Economy

Nonprofits play a critical role within our economy. Canada's nonprofit sector is the second largest in the world, employing 2.4 million people.² There are more than 170,000 nonprofit organizations in Canada that represent 10.5% of the labour force and 8.5% of Canada's GDP.³

In Alberta, the nonprofit sector is equally important to the economy and creation of jobs. Its impact has grown substantially in the last decade and continues to contribute to the economic wellbeing of the province.

In Alberta, the sector is comprised of:

- More than 26,000 nonprofits⁴
- Nearly \$10 billion in GDP annually⁵
- 450,000 employees⁶
- 262 million annual volunteer hours⁷

3. Nonprofits Are Crucial to Democratic Participation

Nonprofits play a vital role in democratic participation by bringing the voice of the communities they represent to public discourse. They work to increase awareness and understanding of issues by addressing policies, laws, and regulations relevant to their cause or the communities they serve and are well positioned to hold governments and decision-makers accountable.

Political candidates and parties seek out open dialogue with nonprofits in efforts to better understand and respond to the needs of their communities. This provides a platform for nonprofits to engage in advocacy relevant to their cause. Despite the importance of democratic participation, nonprofits have a longstanding hesitation towards policy advocacy, with some organizations even distancing themselves entirely to avoid risking their charitable status. Recent changes have been made in legislation to address these concerns and encourage nonprofit participation in public policy advocacy (chapter 3).

Policy advocacy should not be treated as an end destination. Your efforts should continue beyond election periods, with a continued focus on achieving your goal. Do not feel the weight of your advocacy strategy is on your shoulders alone – your advocacy work will continue even beyond your own efforts, building on the collective success of other nonprofits and policymakers. After an election, nonprofits have an opportunity to focus and prioritize their policy work and plan their advocacy efforts (chapter 7). If a specific policy proposal finds its way into a political party's election platform, it's often the result of a lot of hard work in the months, and even years, prior to an election.

Alberta's Nonprofit Sector



≈ **\$10 Billion**
in GDP contributions
to Alberta's economy ⁱ



262 Million
annual volunteer hours ⁱⁱ



46% of nonprofit
revenue is earned income ⁱⁱⁱ
(national figures)



450,000
nonprofit employeesⁱⁱⁱ
(211,500 full-time and 238,500 part-time)

Sources

ⁱGovernment of Alberta: Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Overview (2018)

ⁱⁱStatistics Canada General Social Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating (2013)

ⁱⁱⁱANVSI: Profiling the Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector in Alberta (2018)

[CLICK TO DOWNLOAD 'THE ALBERTA NONPROFIT SECTOR INFOGRAPHIC'](#)



26,000+

nonprofits across
Alberta represent several
subsectors, including:

