

# *Pulse Check:* Community Conversation

On April 15th, 2025, the Community Foundation of Southeastern Alberta in support with the Medicine Hat & District Executive Director Network convened a Community Conversation involving non-profit organizations, government representatives, and funders to discuss the findings from the recent “Pulse Check Survey” conducted by the CFSEA. This survey aimed to identify the current urgent needs and priorities of regional organizations. The purpose of this conversation was to provide a platform to local non-profits to express challenges, foster collaboration among government, funders, and non-profits, advocate for policy and funding support, and build relationships through ongoing dialogue with decision-makers.

Participants engaged in discussions across six themes at six tables, rotating to share insights. A total of 50 individuals attended, representing a diverse array of community organizations, government representatives, funders, and volunteers. Participants collaboratively addressed the following three questions:

1. How can we (funders, government, and the nonprofit sector) work together to better address the challenges we share in the community?
2. What specific policies or funding options could better support our non-profit sector?
3. This roundtable is a good start but how can we make sure we (funders, government, and the nonprofit sector) continue to work together?

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## Pulse Check Survey Findings

In March 2025, the CFSEA carried out a pulse check survey to pinpoint the most urgent needs among community organizations in Southeastern Alberta. A total of 57 organizations participated, and their insights played a crucial role in shaping the community discussion. The prevalent themes that emerged from the survey are as follows:

- 1. Funding Security:** Organizations cite predictable and sustainable funding as their top priority, essential for maintaining core programs and adapting to rising operational costs.
- 2. Addressing Social Determinants of Health:** Many highlight interconnected issues like housing affordability, food security, and mental health support - recognizing their impact on overall well-being and community connection.
- 3. Staffing and Volunteer Support:** Recruiting and retaining qualified staff and attracting volunteers are significant challenges - impacting service delivery and capacity, especially in rural communities.
- 4. Collaboration and Awareness:** Several organizations emphasize the need for strengthened partnerships with other agencies, enhanced community engagement, and increased public awareness of their services.
- 5. Targeted Support for Vulnerable Groups:** Specific needs for newcomers (e.g., language classes, employment support), individuals with disabilities (e.g., transportation), and seniors (e.g., affordable housing) are frequently mentioned, indicating a demand for tailored programs.
- 6. Building and equipment repairs/upgrades:** Many facilities require updates to meet accessibility standards, enhance energy efficiency, and accommodate growing demand. Securing grants or partnerships for these upgrades is crucial, as outdated or inadequate facilities can hinder operational efficiency and client satisfaction.

## Common Themes & Action Items

### Enhanced Collaboration & Communication

Breaking down silos, increasing communication, fostering trust, and developing strong relationships between funders, government, and nonprofits. Moving beyond talk to action.

#### Action Items:

- Establish regular interagency meetings/forums.
- Share information (program parameters, data, reports, impact reports).
- Formalize partnerships and user groups.
- Utilize existing networks (e.g., ED network).
- Improve community awareness of services.
- Actively involve frontline workers in networking.
- Create an advocacy group to prioritize common needs.

### Flexible & Sustainable Funding

The need for long-term, flexible funding that covers operational costs and supports prevention. Dissatisfaction with short-term, project-based grants and complicated application processes.

- Provide 3-4 year funding for operational costs.
- Increase administrative funding.
- Decentralize funding decisions to the local level.
- Fund prevention programs to reduce crisis support.
- Offer unrestricted funding to be allocated where needed.
- Reduce requirements for matching funds.

### Streamlined & Transparent Processes

Addressing slow processing times, complicated grant requirements, and a lack of clarity around government policies and funding opportunities.

- Decentralize grant administration for faster processing.
- Clarify government grant policies and legislation.
- Streamline access points to support systems.
- Improve advertising for available funding.
- Coordinating capital infrastructure planning to get bulk discounts from vendors.

### Support for Staff & Volunteers

Addressing low wages, lack of benefits, and the need for more support for volunteer recruitment and coordination.

- Offer guaranteed employment and benefits.
- Establish a job-sharing policy.
- Provide specific funding for volunteers.
- Offer group benefits outside of existing structures.
- Explore tax credits for volunteers.
- Develop and invest in training.
- Share HR professionals/accountants.

### Data-Driven Decision Making & Impact Measurement

The importance of using data and reports to inform decisions, measuring impact effectively, and prioritizing evidence-based programs.

- Government should utilize existing data/reports.
- Improve measurement and communication of volunteer impact.
- Tie funding to impact.

## Common Themes & Action Items

### Addressing Systemic Issues & Promoting Innovation

The need to address public perceptions of charities, promote innovation, and ensure that vulnerable groups have access to the support they need.

### Focus on Action & Implementation

Moving beyond conversations and reports to concrete action.

### Action Items:

- Address the public perception that charities should operate with minimal resources.
- Support innovation (e.g., social enterprise).
- Reduce barriers to access for vulnerable groups.
- Make commitments and follow through.
- Develop solutions with timelines.
- Avoid working in isolation.
- CFSEA to continue facilitating collaboration on these types of events.

## Follow-up Questions

Participants were invited to answer four questions after the discussion, and a total of 17 individuals responded.

### Question 1: Did you find today helpful?

- Yes (17)
- No (0)

### Question 2: Who else needs to be at the table?

- Provincial government funders (**x3**)
- Corporate funding committee
- Chamber of Commerce
- Businesses and corporations
- BIPOC organizations

### Question 3: What short-term actions can we commit to, and what requires long-term action?

- Working group to create plan of action (*Short-term*)
- Sustainable funding from the government (*Long-term*)
- A local non-profit advocacy and information group to promote a unified voice (e.g., Nonprofit chamber organizations/networks) (**x3**) (*Long-term*)

### Question 4: Are you interested in joint staff and volunteer professional development opportunities?

- Yes (17)
- No (0)

## Let's Transform These Insights Into Action

We've identified key challenges, and, more importantly, we've uncovered actionable solutions. Now is the time to move beyond conversation and embrace a new era of collaboration. The Community Foundation can play a pivotal role by:

- Coordinating and facilitating leadership meetings focused on specific action items, collaborations, and priority areas.
- Educating and advocating with funders and charities.
- Linking organizations with shared causes during the grant application process.

Are you interested in sharing an idea or getting involved? Take action now! Reach out to Lauren at [vitalsigns@cfsea.ca](mailto:vitalsigns@cfsea.ca) or call us at 403.527.9038.