

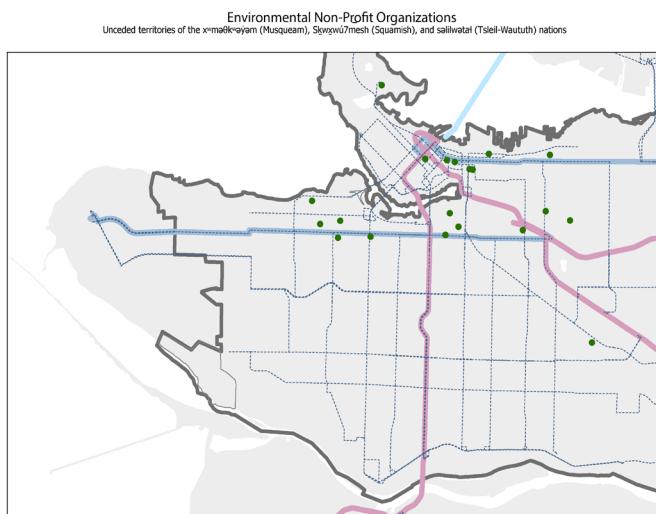
ENVIRONMENTAL NON-PROFITS

JULY 2020



This brief summarizes the impact of COVID-19 on Vancouver's environmental non-profit sector. It is a compilation of key excerpts from several surveys, reports and key informant interviews. Highlights have been thematically arranged to provide: an overview of the sector across Vancouver; a brief description of the role and contribution of sports and recreation non-profits; an outline of key issues, needs and barriers; and innovative and resilient responses adopted by the sector that show promise moving forward.

The Environmental Non-Profit Sector in Vancouver: Overview



Locations of 38 Environmental organizations in Vancouver
Data Source: BC211 service directory list accessed April 2020 and ACCS community non-profit partners inventory.

Note that locations may reflect an organization's office location rather than where programs and services occur

- Environmental non-profits include organizations that promote and provide services in environmental conservation, pollution control and prevention, environmental education and health and animal protection.
- These organizations tend to specialize in fields such as research, training, public education, information dissemination, acquisition and management of protected areas, convening of stakeholders in environmental conflicts or advocating governments for policy change.
- In a national study of environmental organizations, Charity Intelligence calculated that there are approximately 300 large environmental charities in Canada, with a combined revenue of over \$750 million. Furthermore, in 2010 there were approximately 1,155 charities registered with the Canada Revenue Agency that listed significant environmental programs.

- Multiple studies have highlighted a growing annual investment in environmental charities given increased awareness about climate change and environmental issues over the last few years.
- Following the International Classification of Non Profit Organizations (ICNPO), Vancouver has five types of environmental organizations:
 - Pollution abatement and control. Organizations that promote clean air, clean water, reducing and preventing noise pollution, radiation control, treatment of hazardous wastes and toxic substances, solid waste management and recycling programs.
 - Natural resources conservation and protection. Conservation and preservation of natural resources, including land, water, energy and plant resources for the general use and enjoyment of the public.
 - Environmental beautification and open spaces. Botanical gardens, arboreta, horticultural programs and landscape services; organizations promoting anti-litter campaigns; programs to preserve the parks, green spaces and open spaces in urban or rural areas; and city and highway beautification programs.
 - Animal protection and welfare. Animal protection and welfare services; includes animal shelters and humane societies.
 - Wildlife preservation and protection; includes sanctuaries and refuges. Veterinary services. Animal hospitals and services providing care to farm and household animals and pets.

Contribution of Environmental Non-Profit organizations in Vancouver

- Environmental organizations are active in international issues supporting efforts such as treaty negotiations and wildlife protection programs. These organizations also contribute to the process of innovating policy alternatives, bringing expertise in policy development and economic

analysis of environmental costs and benefits.

- A number of organizations either formally or informally promote environmental education and sustainable development:
 - Environmental education aims to increase peoples' knowledge and awareness about the environment; develop the necessary skills and expertise to address environmental issues; and fosters attitudes, motivations, and commitments to make informed decisions and take responsible action.
 - Teaching sustainable development focuses on empowering people to change the way they think and work towards a sustainable future, while empowering people to change the way they think and work towards a sustainable future considering the environmental, social and cultural implications of our actions. (UNESCO, 2020)
- Through the Greenest City Grants, the City of Vancouver awards a maximum of \$250,000 annually towards non-profit organizations or registered charities to work towards establishing, testing or building on ideas and actions that support the Greenest City targets. Between 2012 and 2018, the City has dedicated approximately \$2.75 million to over 1,000 projects including 885 Greenest City Neighbourhood Small Grants (in partnership with the Vancouver Foundation) and 119 Greenest City Grants

Impacts of Covid-19 on Environmental Non-Profit Organizations in Vancouver

The COVID-19 pandemic has created greater operational, financial and workforce challenges for the sector and the individuals who use and support environmental programs and services

Operational Challenges: Shifts in the sector and the effects on impacted communities

- Moving online: Several organizations identified that they had to cancel programs or move them online. Reasons for this move include concern for the safety of staff and clients. Virtual platforms are not always suitable for the needs of clients, but are necessary given the staff and tools available. For organizations normally focused on providing hands on activities (environmental education, habitat restoration, hands on cycling education, waste reduction and repair services), making the switch to providing services online is not simple – nor is it always as an effective experience for participants. It may take several iterations to get it "right" and/ or new models of operation may need to be considered.
- Coordinating with online learning: Several environmental groups work with schools to hold in-classroom events or educational performances. These have been difficult to move to a virtual setting, and organizations have been forced to coordinate with teachers as they shifted to

online learning.

Financial Pressures

- Funding concerns: Several organizations noted that funding is the number one concern in the sector, they noted that there is real concern that many organizations may close and not reopen. Organizations constantly reiterate that they need funding to help them grow their operations, as opposed to funding tied to a specific program or service.
- Cancelling grants and other programs: Several organizations mentioned that they were forced to cancel grant programs, with their focus shifting to their own financial survival.
- Concern with shift towards frontline funding: Several organizations noted concern that they may lose long-term funding if funders decide to focus on emergency grant streams instead of funding environmental engagement efforts. These granters have not yet made their decision, so it is yet to be seen whether funding will continue as expected.

Workforce and Human Resources

- Concern for safety: Several organizations mentioned their concern for the safety of staff and volunteers. This has meant either cancelling in-person events or limiting the number of volunteers they employ.
- Loss of volunteers: Several organizations noted that volunteers have left and may not be able to return or may choose not to return.

High Level Supports Needed

- Core operating funding free from onerous requirements.
- Additional staff in specific roles that have seen increased need post-COVID. Roles include support with online sales and skilled volunteer coordination.
- Flexible funding that leads to greater resiliency; specifically allowing grantees to put funds towards operating costs.
- Grants to support growing operations, rather than grants for new programs or innovations.

The City's role and requested support for the sector

The City's support was requested in the following areas

- Advocate for a federal wage subsidy that doesn't exclude charities based on their funding models.
- Ask the BC government to hold steady or increase support given to non-profits through BC gaming grants. Either

offer a grant to non-profits directly, provide wage subsidy programs, or support with fundraising.

- Provide access City-owned buildings, which could be shared with like-minded organizations, that would inherently allow for increased innovation through cross sector pollination, and possibly relieve financial pressures on organizations.
- Core operating grants
- Centrally locate a food hamper project that other agencies could feed into, in order to scale up service reach in appropriate places of need.

Resiliency in the Environmental Sector: Innovative responses to the crisis and positive outcomes

Despite these challenges, the sector has found ways to innovate through the crisis..

- Organizations have been forced to adapt and shift to online systems, this has encouraged these organizations to be innovative in how they deliver programs. More demand for online programming in schools will help these programs expand provincially.
- While the onset of the pandemic has starkly impacted financial and operational capacity, it has also pushed organizations to delve into internal efforts that are finally moving beyond conversations in order to activate organizational transformations.
- Some organizations noted strengthened partnerships with municipal funders.
- One agency developed and delivered a new "Home Edition" format of their program, achieving a similar collective experience as in-school programs, despite kids participating individually from home. The program has positive results for both children and their families.
- One organization noted an increase in demand for their Bike Friendly Business services, advising developers and municipalities about creating exemplary cycling facilities.
- Through the pandemic organizations noted better knowledge and relationships with local small business neighbours.
- A few organizations took the opportunity to acquire additional transportation, noting it was a good time to expand given the increased need for food and food distribution.

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