



PRISM

Community Impact
Company Network

IMAGINE
CANADA

Bridging Perspectives

Nonprofit Views of Corporate Social Impact in Canada

2024



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Imagine Canada
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Acknowledgements

Imagine Canada is a national, bilingual charitable organization whose cause is Canada's charities.

Through our advocacy, research and services, we help strengthen charities, nonprofits and social entrepreneurs so they can better fulfill their missions. Our vision is of a strong Canada where charities work together alongside business and government to build resilient and vibrant communities.

This study was made possible thanks to the ongoing, generous support of RBC Foundation, YourCause from Blackbaud, and our national partners.



Foundation



Thank you to the team at Imagine Canada for their review of this study, including Alex Pryse, Bruce MacDonald, Chaerin Kwon, Eeman Khan, Jodene Baker, William Harper, Émilie Pontbriand and to Steve Ayer of Common Good Strategies for his in-kind advice and support on the research design.

We would like to acknowledge and thank the over 900 individuals who completed our survey as part of this project. The opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those quoted, acknowledged, or otherwise supporting the research.

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Foreword

The relationship between the corporate and nonprofit sectors has never been more crucial. Financial support from business is vital for the sustainability and growth of the charitable sector, with an estimated 23% of donations historically coming from Canadian companies.

However, the potential for meaningful impact extends far beyond financial contributions. When corporations and nonprofits unite in collaboration, they unlock tremendous opportunities to tackle the challenges we are facing across Canadian communities through developing social innovations, advocating for social change, and sharing expertise on global issues such as climate change, social inequality, and public health crises.

This survey delves into the voices, perspectives, and expectations of nonprofit organizations, highlighting barriers and pathways to stronger, more effective partnerships with the corporate sector in Canada. By fostering mutual respect and understanding, corporations and nonprofits can leverage their unique strengths and work together more effectively to create profound and lasting change.

We know there is a lot of work to be done. The results from this study highlight a need for education and convening across sectors, forums for dialogue, and tools for ongoing insights and evaluation. We believe that the knowledge, community building, and resources in the new PRISM Community Impact Company Network will be a focal point for this work in Canada, and we invite you to join us on the journey ahead.



Bruce MacDonald
President & CEO, Imagine Canada

Imagine Canada. 30 Years of Giving in Canada: The Giving Behaviour of Canadians (1985–2014). Toronto, ON: Imagine Canada, 2018.

Available at: <https://www.imaginecanada.ca/en/30-years-giving>.

Methodology

Approximately 16,000 potential survey participants were emailed a link to a survey instrument that was described as a ten-minute exercise.

Potential participants were sourced from Imagine Canada's network of nonprofit organizations, including product users, members, and newsletter subscribers. Of that list 941 participants fully completed the survey on-line, on behalf of their organization, in May 2023.

Responses were weighted to be representative of the nonprofit sector.

Using publicly available tax filer data, revenue was appended for close to 400 of the 941 completed surveys. The remaining surveys utilized the stated income levels. The location of 379 participants was identified using publicly available data, and the remainder utilized stated location. Using these two markers, the team was then able to weight the data by income and region to ensure that the survey results being analysed aligned with the charitable sector on these two dimensions. Religious institutions (such as places of worship, congregations, and other bodies whose purpose is to advance or promote a faith) were not included in the survey results or weighting.

Seven in ten of the study participants say they are personally involved in soliciting corporate partner funding.

Questions that related to corporate partnerships (slide 21 to 31) were only asked to this group. On average, participants estimate that 21% of their revenue is from corporate support. Some (14%) estimate that most of their revenue comes from corporate support.

Imagine Canada designed and administered the survey via Qualtrics.

Ignite processed the data and weighted the sample to reflect known population proportions provided by Imagine Canada. Open ended question themes were coded using AI.

Highlights / Perceptions



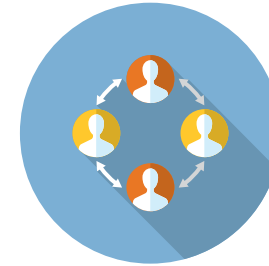
Nonprofit professionals want the **corporate sector to commit to higher levels of income contributions** over the coming decade. Despite the need for increased funding, **69% indicate that there are certain companies or industries from which they would not accept donations.**

► Slides 16 and 24



There is a level of confidence in the corporate sector to have a positive impact, with **70% of respondents citing moderate trust in companies to make communities better.** Notably, this trust level varies by industry, and improves significantly among nonprofit professionals that receive corporate support.

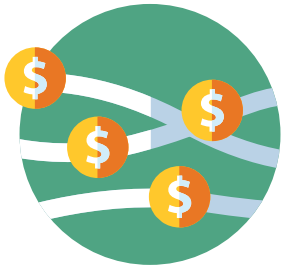
► Slides 9 and 10



When it comes to their corporate partnerships, nonprofits **value strong relationships with individuals (81%) and long-term corporate relationships (79%),** significantly more than the total amount of financial support provided (49%).

► Slide 27

Highlights / Aspirations



Receiving unrestricted, core, and multi-year financial support from their corporate partners was highlighted as a practice that has significant impact on a nonprofit organization's ability to achieve their mission.

► Slides 27, 30 and 32



Where higher levels of trust exist, there is **a stronger desire to collaborate and act as partners**. Nonprofit professionals that trust the corporate sector would like to see **more social advocacy and leveraging of nonprofit expertise to advance social change**.

► Slide 19



The health sector wants the corporate sector to **leverage their networks to catalyze philanthropy, placing high value on employee and consumer philanthropy initiatives** nearly as strongly as they do direct financial support from companies.

► Slide 18

SECTION 1

Perceptions of the Corporate Sector



Nonprofits have limited confidence in the corporate sector's ability to positively impact communities

When asked if they trust business to make Canadian communities better:

6%

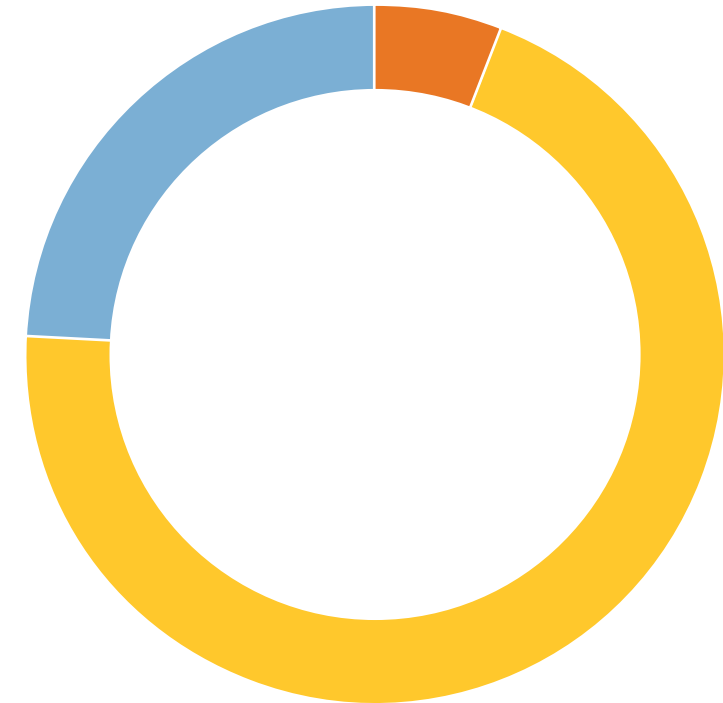
Indicated **high trust**

70%

Indicated **moderate trust**

24%

Indicated **low trust**



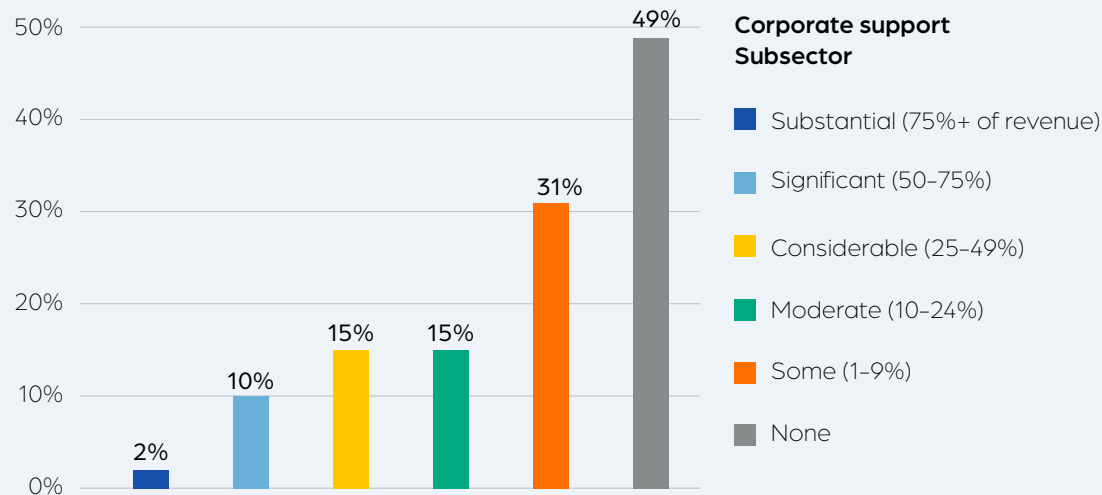
◀ **Question asked:** How strongly do you trust Canadian companies to make Canadian communities better? [Where 0 is not at all, and 10 is complete trust]. Responses of 0-4 were considered low, 5-8 considered moderate, and 9-10 considered high.

"Canadian companies have demonstrated leadership and commitment throughout the Pandemic."

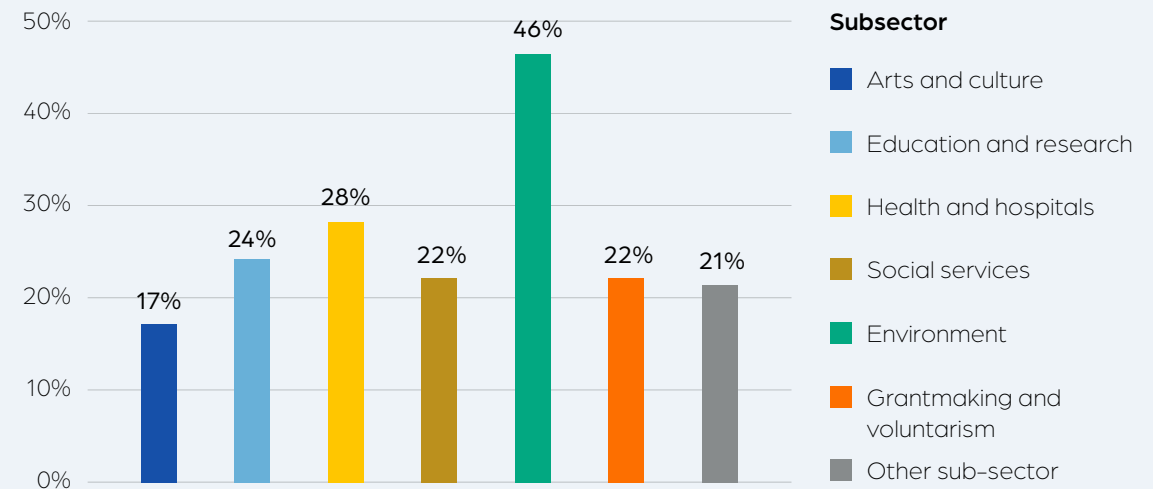
"Most Canadian companies still adhere to shareholder value as the single bottom line."

Trust is lowest among organizations that have no corporate funding and that represent environmental causes

Respondents with **low trust** for companies to improve communities, by level of corporate support:



Respondents with **low trust** for companies to improve communities, by subsector:



▲ Respondents were asked: How strongly do you trust Canadian companies to make Canadian communities better? [Where 0 is not at all, and 10 is complete trust]. Responses 0-4 were considered low, 5-8 considered moderate, and 9-10 considered high.

Nonprofits that trust the corporate sector to have a positive impact say uplifting communities ultimately benefits companies

Top reasons cited for **high trust**:



#1

There is strong internal motivation for companies to improve communities

“Companies are made of the people who work with those firms. These people are living in the local community, and prosper along with the community. Canadian companies striving to improve communities are acting to their benefit, and will work towards solutions to issues that may affect their employees.”



#2

Companies have a proven history of supporting nonprofits

“Canadian companies are the backbone of funding for some charities.”



#3

Companies are managed by Canadians, and Canadians have a very strong sense of community

“It’s the Canadian culture to be kind and caring.”

▲ Respondents were asked: How strongly do you trust Canadian companies to make Canadian communities better? [Where 0 is not at all, and 10 is complete trust]. Those who cited low trust or high trust were then asked an open-ended question: Please explain why your response is low/high. Response themes were coded by AI and the most frequently cited themes are included above.

Low expectations for social impact are driven by perceptions of profit-first motivations

Top reasons cited for **low trust**:



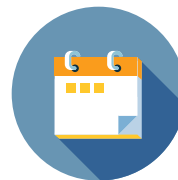
#1 Companies are driven by profit

“At the end of the day, a company’s primary responsibility is to its shareholders. Sometimes shareholder interests align with the broader public – however when they don’t, we frequently see the balance tip towards profit.”



#2 Lack of commitment or sufficient action

“The amount that corporations give is embarrassing to the nonprofits who barely make their annual revenues in delivering their programming.”



#3 Causes are short term marketing initiatives

“Corporate giving is mainly a communications and public relations exercise. Few people who manage corporate giving programs even have nonprofit or philanthropy experience.”

▲ Respondents were asked: How strongly do you trust Canadian companies to make Canadian communities better? [Where 0 is not at all, and 10 is complete trust]. Those who cited low trust or high trust were then asked an open-ended question: Please explain why your response is low/high. Response themes were coded by AI and the most frequently cited themes are included above.

Financial institutions and telecommunications firms stand out as having positive impact

Respondents most frequently named these companies as ones that have a positive social, environmental, or economic impact:



BCE (Bell Canada)



Canadian Tire



Desjardins



TELUS



TD Bank Group



Royal Bank of Canada (RBC)

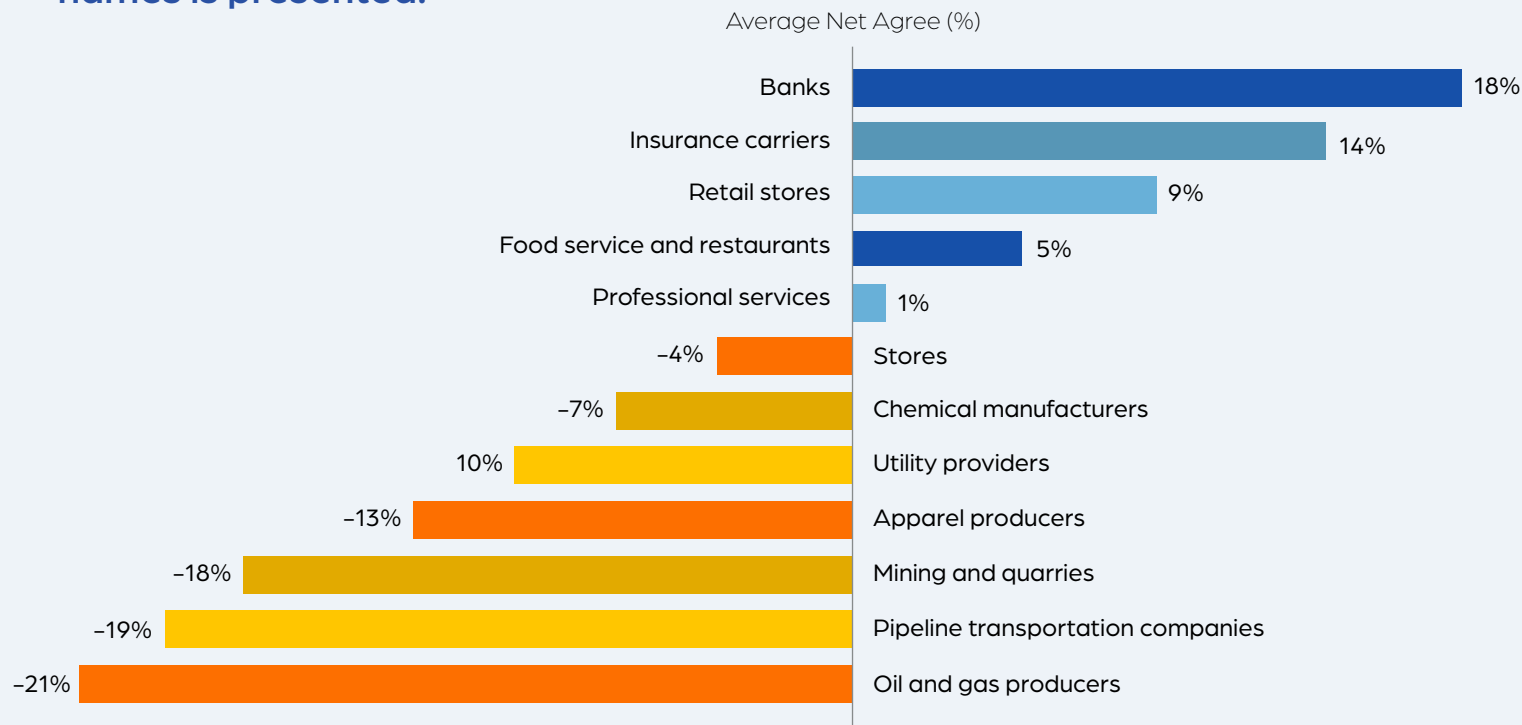
▲ This slide presents responses from an open-ended and unaided question. The most common answers will represent companies with greater awareness among Canadians.

Respondents were asked: When you think about companies that have a positive social, economic, or environmental impact on the Canadian communities where they operate, what is the first business that comes to mind?

Included above were companies that received mentions from at least 3% of respondents, presented in alphabetical order.

Nonprofits generally agree that finance and insurance companies have a positive impact

Percentage who agree, minus percentage who disagree, that companies in the sector have positive impact on community. The average of the specific company names is presented.



Note

A fuller set of insights resulting from this question, including perception of specific Canadian companies, is available to participants in the Imagine Canada PRISM Network.

▲ Respondents were shown the names of specific companies, which have each been linked by Imagine Canada to their industry category (e.g., Scotiabank included in Banks).

Respondents were shown 20 companies at random from a list of 60 possible choices. The 60 choices represented Canada’s largest companies by domestic employees, brand power, and revenues.

▲ **Question asked:** Listed below are some of the largest employers in Canada. Would you agree that these companies have a positive social, environmental, and economic impact on Canadian communities? (Choices = Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Unsure).

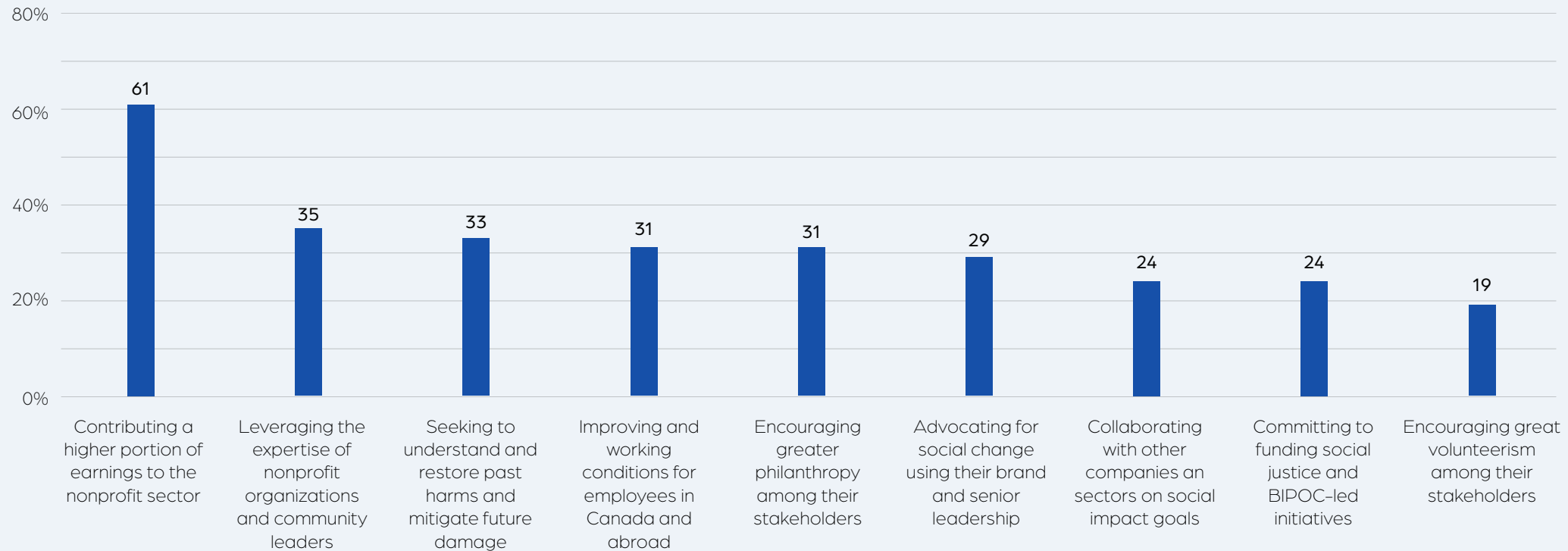
SECTION 2

Aspirations for the Corporate Sector



Respondents agree financial support for nonprofits should be prioritized in the coming decade

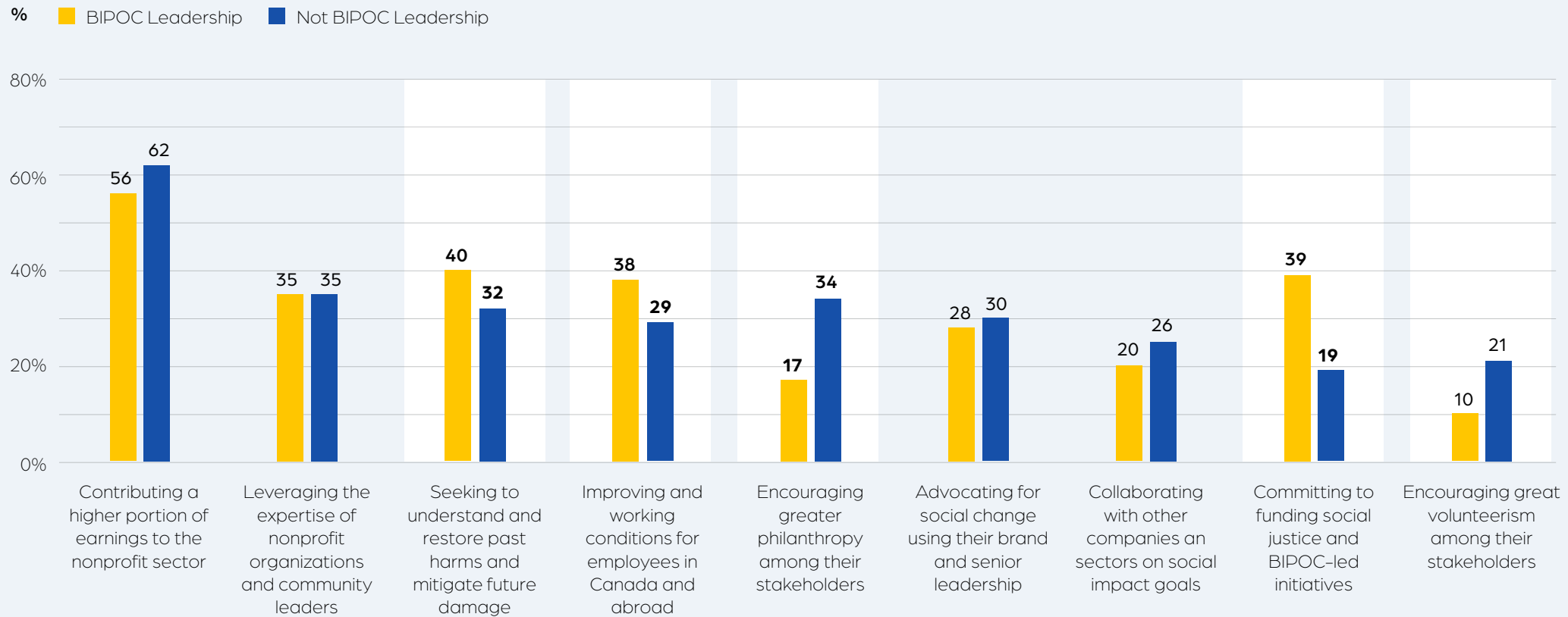
When asked what actions they would most like to see from business, respondents selected:



▲ **Question asked:** In order to collectively advance social impact in Canada, which of these actions do you most wish to see more of from businesses in the coming decade? Select no more than 3.

BIPOC-led organizations prioritize funding for social justice initiatives

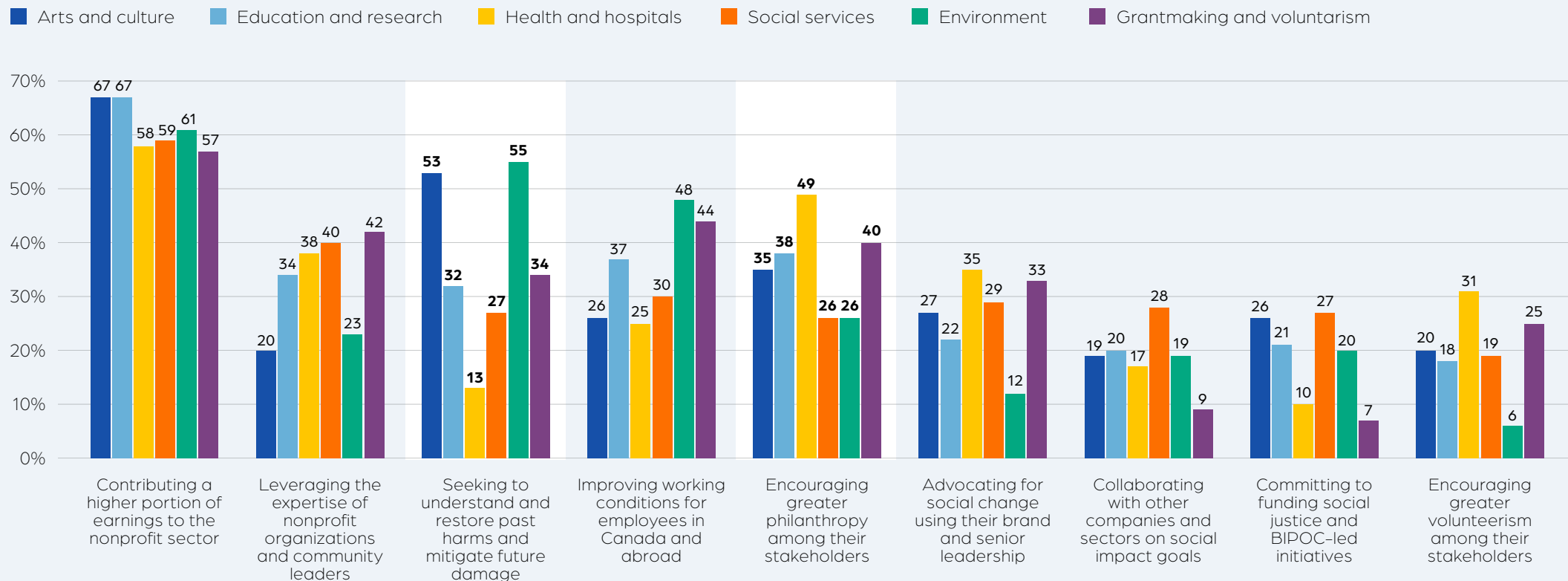
When asked what action they would like to see most from business, BIPOC-led organizations selected:



▲ **Question asked:** In order to collectively advance social impact in Canada, which of these actions do you most wish to see more of from businesses in the coming decade? Select no more than 3.
 BIPOC organizations were self identified through the following question: Would you consider your organization to be BIPOC-led? In other words, is a significant fraction of the senior leadership made up of people who are Black, Indigenous, and/or of other non-white backgrounds?

Arts and environmental groups want corporate harm to be acknowledged and mitigated, health organizations prioritize stakeholder giving and volunteering

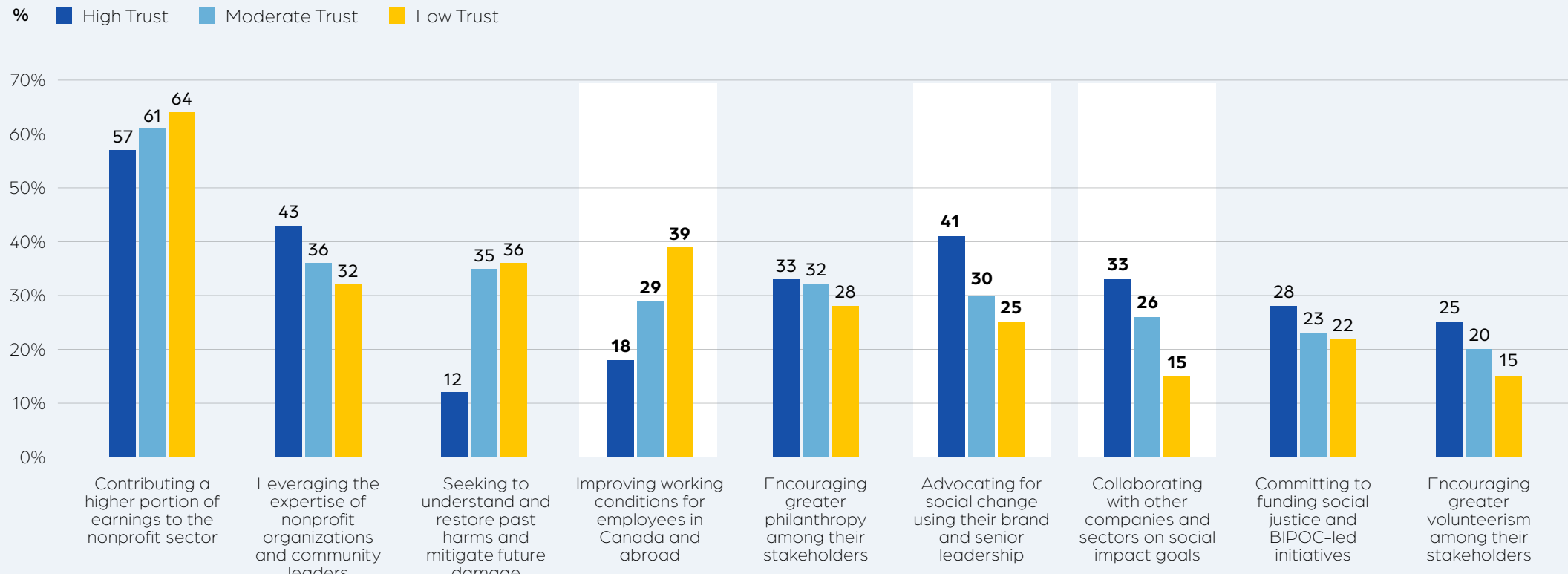
When asked what action they would like to see most from business, sector specific organizations selected:



▲ Question asked: In order to collectively advance social impact in Canada, which of these actions do you most wish to see more of from businesses in the coming decade? Select no more than 3.

Organizations that trust companies want to see more corporate social advocacy

When asked what action they would like to see most from business, respondents with high trust (slide 9) in the corporate sector selected:



▲ Question asked: In order to collectively advance social impact in Canada, which of these actions do you most wish to see more of from businesses in the coming decade? Select no more than 3.

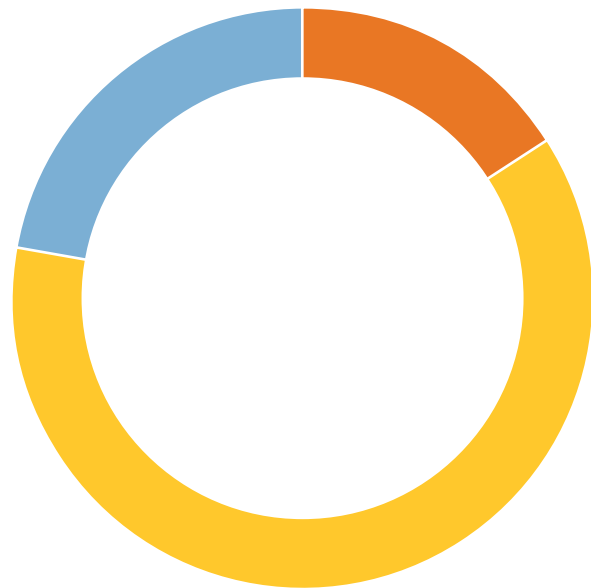
SECTION 3

Views on Companies as Partners



There is an opportunity to foster community knowledge between companies and nonprofit partners

When asked if their corporate partners understand the needs of the community they serve:



"Part of the reason [our corporate partner] is so amazing is the time they spend at our conferences finding out more about the issues... So many corporations look at narrow research and metrics and then assume they understand the issues. This is particularly the case around centering DEI in the program development or strategy."

16%
Indicated a **high** community understanding

62%
Indicated a **moderate** community understanding

22%
Indicated a **low** community understanding

"Most companies don't spend the time to understand the issues, or hire people with lived experience. ... It's only the employees who have worked in the sector for decades that understand the challenges charities face."

"[They] get involved to raise their profile and increase profits, which is understandable, but only a few [companies] really take the time to really dig in to what a community needs."

▲ **Question asked:** In general, do you believe that your corporate partners understand the needs of the community served by your organization? (Where 0 is not at all, and 10 is complete understanding)
Responses of 0-4 were considered low, 5-8 considered moderate, and 9-10 considered strong.

Companies demonstrate understanding of community needs through their knowledge, values, and actions

Top reasons cited for **high** understanding:



#1

Strong internal understanding of the community and the partner

“Our business partnerships are locally-based and we are both striving to work within, support and benefit the community.”



#2

Active partnerships (e.g., volunteering, in-kind support)

“They have integrated systems with us at every level to help ensure the delivery of [food] to agencies all over the country including more remote communities.”



#3

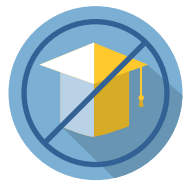
Sharing of similar values

“We share the same values in terms of supporting the basic human needs, and eradicating poverty through economic development.”

▲ **Question asked:** Please explain why your rating is high or Please explain why your rating is low.
Response themes were coded by AI and the most frequently cited themes are included above.

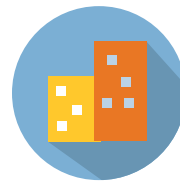
Some nonprofits perceive companies to be uninformed about the needs of community

Top reasons cited for **low** understanding:



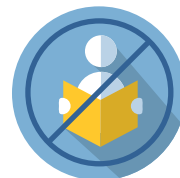
#1 Lack of internal knowledge of community or nonprofit sector

“When meeting potential corporate partners for the first time, virtually none have any understanding of why non-profits exist, how they operate, or how they provide benefit to the community.”



#2 More concerned with company

“Corporates mostly contribute as per their brand image and not as per the needs of the community.”



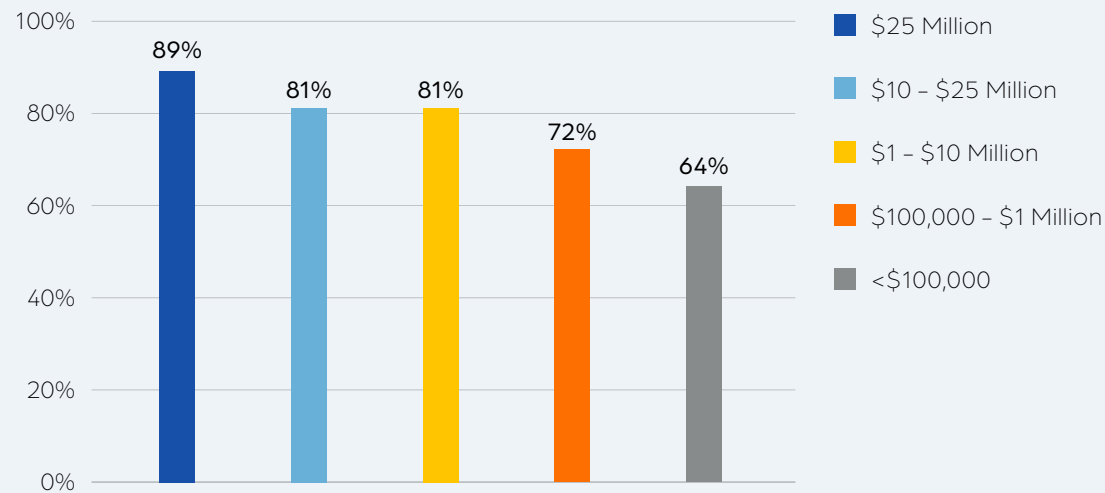
#3 Lack of interest or effort to learn

“They want to help, but I don’t think they take the time to learn about the organizations they support.”

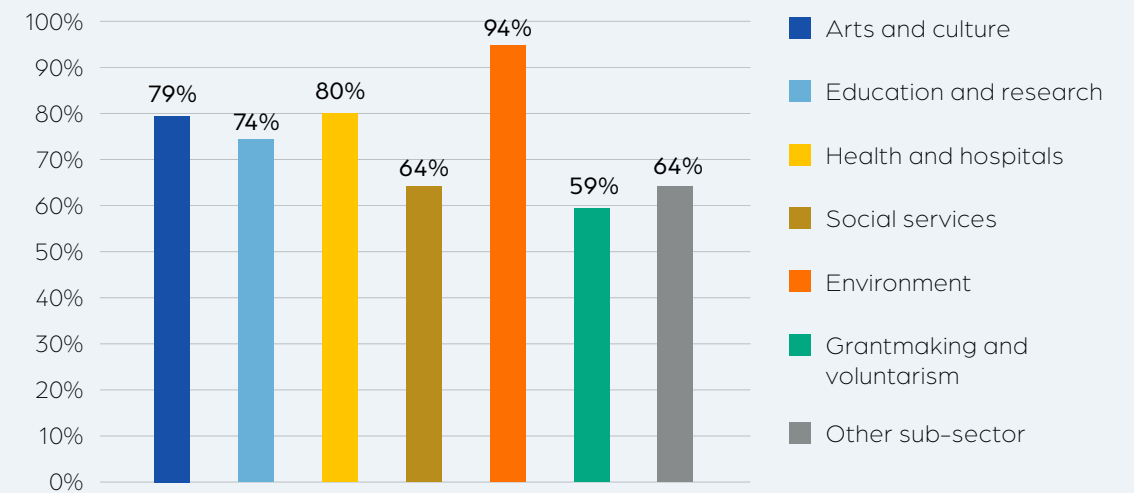
▲ **Question asked:** Please explain why your rating is high or Please explain why your rating is low. Response themes were coded by AI and the most frequently cited themes are included above.

Most nonprofits (69%) say there are companies that they would not partner with

Percent who say there are companies they would not partner with, by size of organization (annual revenues):



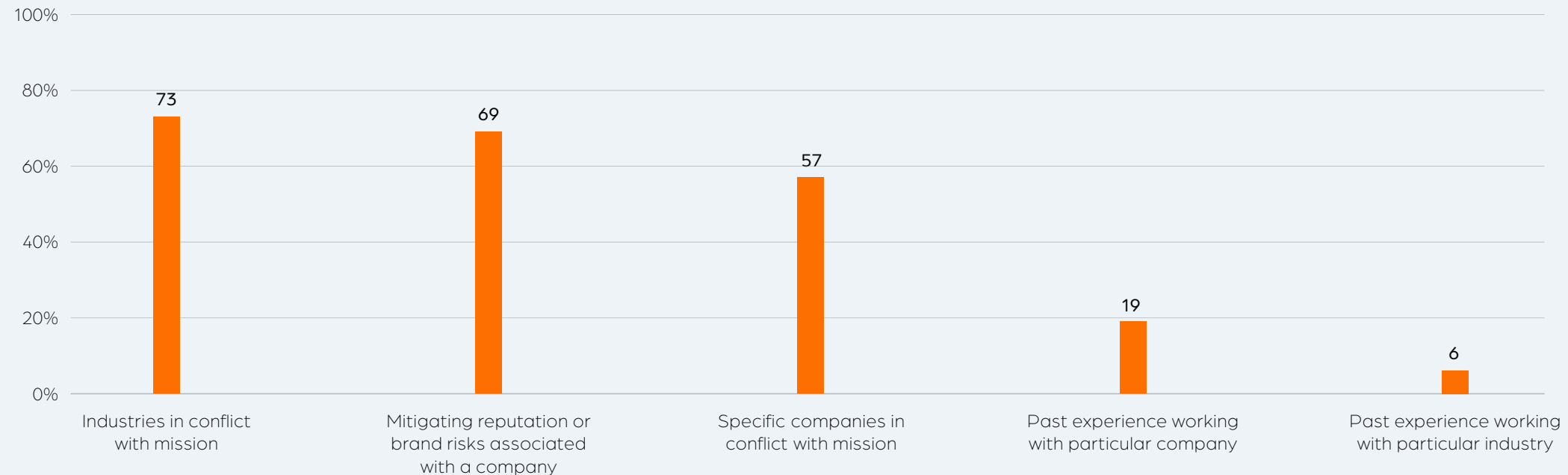
Percent who say there are companies they would not partner with, by sector:



▲ **Question asked:** Are there any companies or industries that your organization will not partner with?

The nature of certain industries presents a barrier to partnerships

Percent of those that said they would not partner with a company indicated:



▲ **Question asked:** If you are comfortable, please indicate why your organization will not partner with certain companies or industries. Check all that apply.

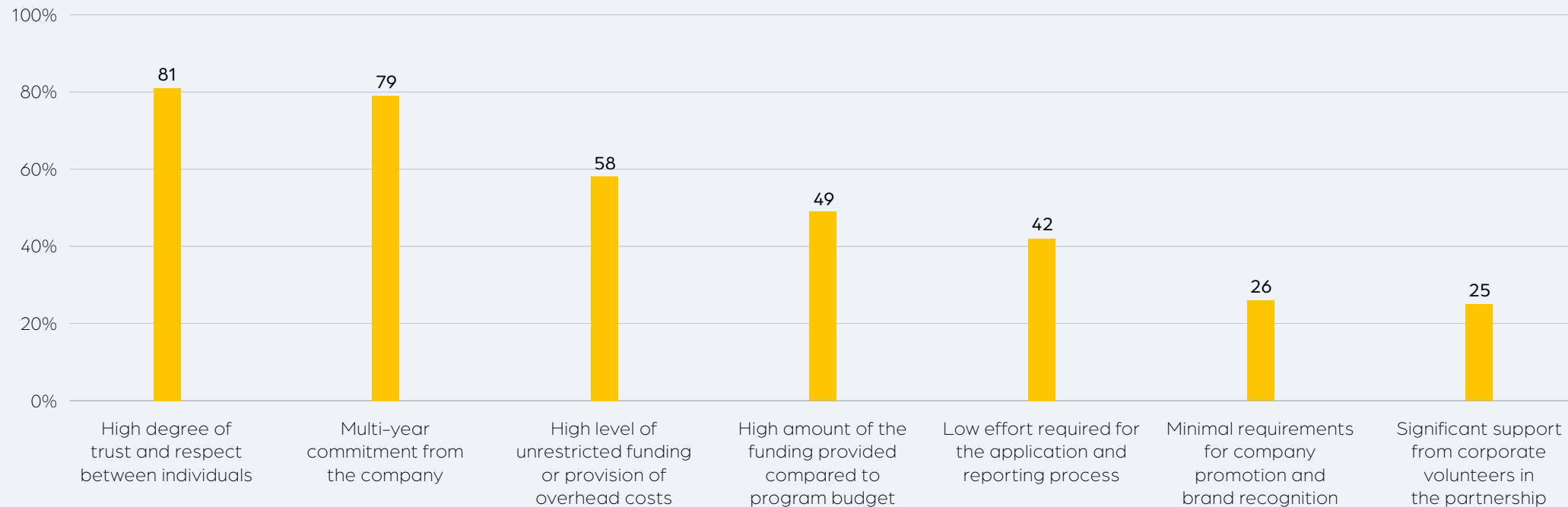
SECTION 4

Desires for Corporate Partnerships



Long-term, mutually respectful relationships are highly valued

When asked what characteristics are highly valued in corporate partnerships, respondents selected:

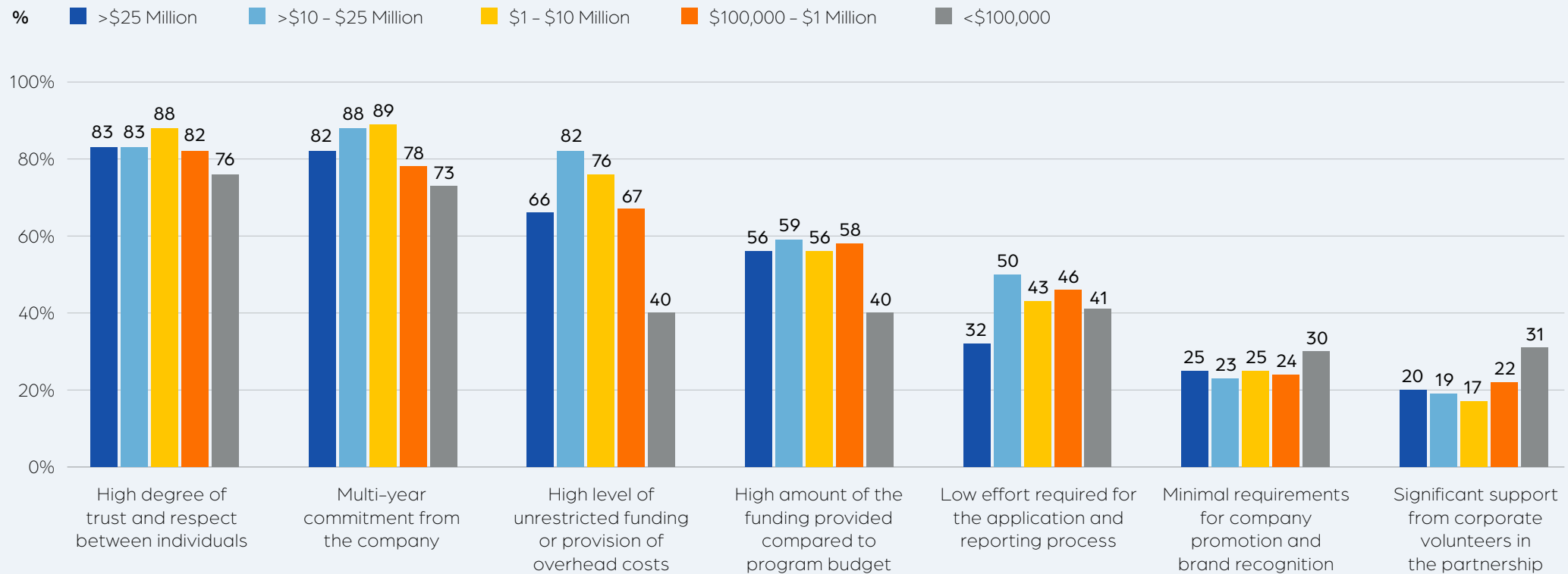


▲ **Question asked:** In your view, which of these characteristics are valuable to your organization when developing or renewing corporate partnerships? [choices = Very valued, moderately valued, valued, somewhat valued, not at all valued].

Shown above are percentages of respondents who selected "Very valued" for each item.

Value of long-term relationships high regardless of organization size

When asked what characteristics are highly valued in corporate partnerships, respondents selected:



▲ **Question asked:** In your view, which of these characteristics are valuable to your organization when developing or renewing corporate partnerships? [choices = Very valued, moderately valued, valued, somewhat valued, not at all valued].

Shown above are percentages of respondents who selected "Very valued" for each item.

Financial institutions stand out as being strong nonprofit sector partners

Nonprofit professionals most cited these companies as having significantly impacted their ability to achieve their mission:



Desjardins



Royal Bank of Canada



TD Bank Group



Scotiabank



Saputo

▲ This slide presents responses from an open-ended and unaided question, where the most common answers will represent companies with a greater number of partnerships with Canadian nonprofits.

Question asked (open ended): In the last two years, which corporate partner has most significantly impacted your ability to deliver on your mission?

Included above were companies that received the highest number of mentions from respondents, displayed in alphabetical order.

Significant and ongoing financial support enables nonprofit organizations to deliver on mission

Top reasons cited for corporate partnerships with **significant impact** on mission:



#1

Generosity of support

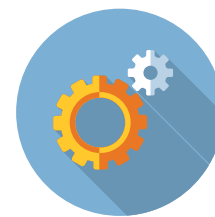
"They made transformational change by making the largest gift in our organization's history. They also use their extensive network to promote our work."

"Large companies [that] provide one-time gifts are very significant, but companies that give continual unrestricted gifts that are around \$25K make the biggest difference to our work."



#2

Repeat and consistent funding



#3

Value of non-cash support

"[They] support our Government Relations activity through their external relations expertise and connections and increase our capacity through learning and network building opportunities."

"They provide support to the overall program, and do not micromanage how the funding is spent... completely flexible."



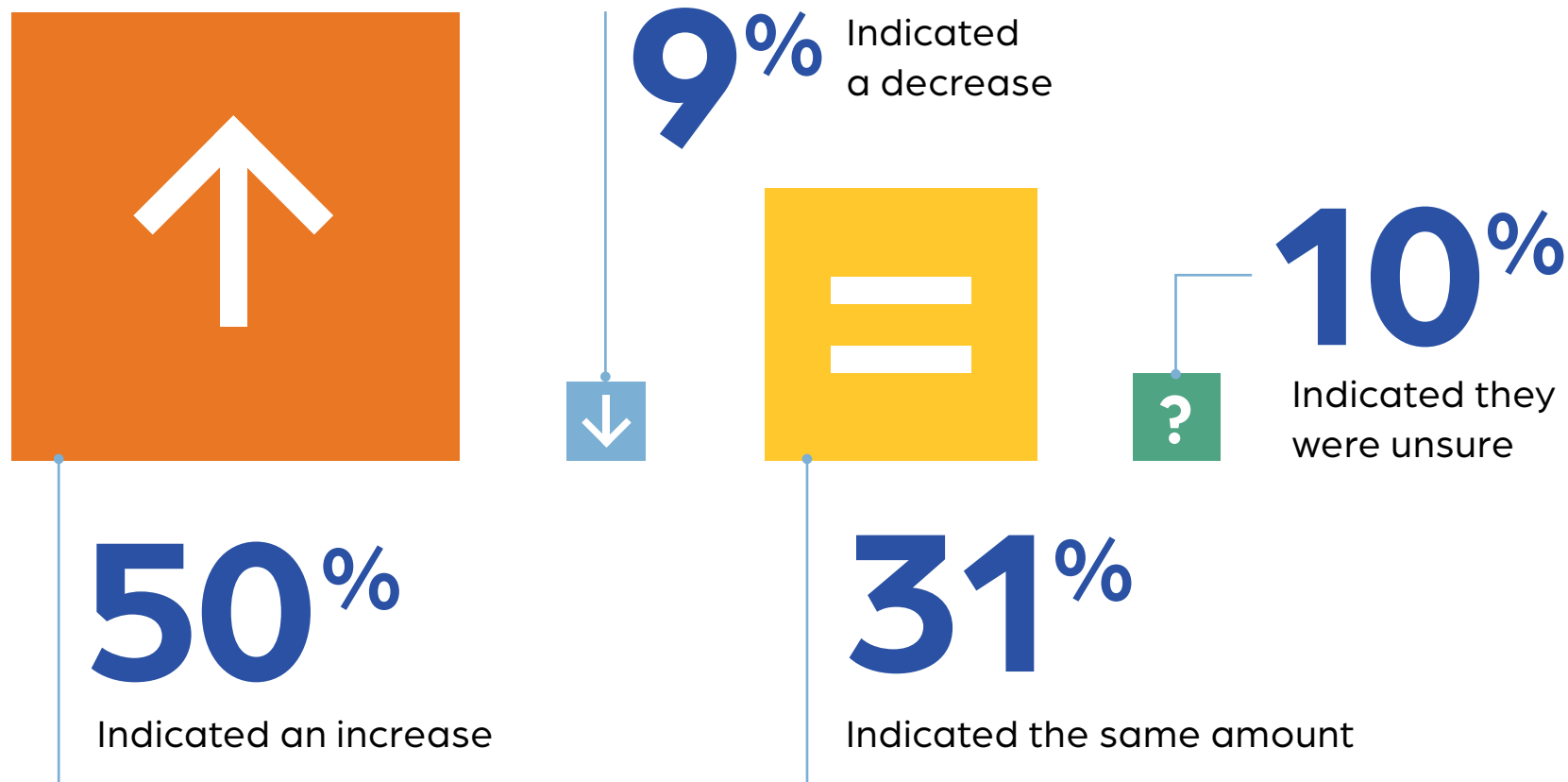
#4

Easy to partner with

▲ **Question asked:** Please explain. [In reference to the question: In the last two years, which corporate partner has most significantly impacted your ability to deliver on your mission?] Response themes were coded by AI and the most frequently cited themes are included above.

Nonprofit organizations foresee future increases in corporate support

When asked if they expected their revenues from corporate donations will change in the next three years:



▲ **Question asked:** Do you expect more or less of your organization's revenues will come from corporate donations and sponsorships in the next three years?
[Choices: Significantly more, Slightly more, About the same, Slightly less, Significantly less, Unsure].

Nonprofits are asking for more reliable, trust-based funding

When asked if they could change one thing to improve corporate partnerships, respondents highlighted:



#1

Unrestricted, core, and multi-year funding

“Non-profit organizations need stable operating funds. Most [companies] are interested in single-year projects, which makes us less efficient and therefore reduces our social impact. The amount of time I spend applying for, administering, and reporting on small single-year grants, sponsorships, etc., is an absolute waste.”



#2

Widespread support from the corporate sector

“The dream would be to have all companies make a financial commitment to annually provide philanthropic support to Canadian charities.”



#3

Deeper partnerships and collaborations

“The one change I believe would have the greatest impact is for companies to truly partner with the charitable sector. To allow the people who actually do the work to support and influence the decisions companies make regarding their philanthropic giving and decision making as it relates to the social sector. ”

▲ **Question asked:** Lastly, if you could make one change to the policies, practices, and beliefs of companies, what change would have the greatest effect on your ability to achieve social impact and deliver on your mission? Response themes were coded by AI and the most frequently cited themes are included above.

Nonprofits are asking for more reliable, trust-based funding

When asked if they could change one thing to improve corporate partnerships, respondents highlighted:



#4

Promotion and advancement of equitable practises

"Give back to communities who have been wronged."



#5

A focus on understanding and dialogue

"Companies need to understand that it takes money to impact social change, but more than that, it takes each individual contributing some of THEIR time, intelligence, personality, time to be a listening ear, to physically and emotionally and spiritually interact with others."



#6

Streamlined application and reporting processes

"There are often funding opportunities that we don't pursue because the application and reporting processes are onerous and miss the mark in the what is actually being measured."

▲ **Question asked:** Lastly, if you could make one change to the policies, practices, and beliefs of companies, what change would have the greatest effect on your ability to achieve social impact and deliver on your mission?
Response themes were coded by AI and the most frequently cited themes are included above.

Practice Recommendations



Think

- Reflect on the assets your company has at its disposal that may be of value to your community partners – beyond cash donations – such as services, expertise, or networks.
- Focus on the long-term outcomes of community partnerships rather than short-term gains or projects, thinking about how sustained support can create lasting impact.
- Consider how your company can learn from the expertise and experiences of nonprofit partners, and where there may be opportunity for deeper collaborations.



Say

- Foster informal interactions and open dialogue through casual check-ins or social gatherings, helping to build rapport and trust on a personal level.
- Encourage open and honest communication, and invite feedback from your nonprofit partners on how the relationship and partnership outcomes can be improved.
- Actively promote your nonprofit partners in public forums and company communications to elevate their work among your leadership, employees, and customers.



Do

- Support the long-term sustainability of nonprofit partners and projects by investing in organization capacity-building initiatives, such as research or infrastructure development.
- Publicly pledge a percentage of profits or resources to the community, and join a Certification program like PRISM or 1% for the Planet to reinforce your company's commitment.
- Provide staff training on the challenges and opportunities facing nonprofit organizations and the communities you serve, recognizing not all will have the same expertise or knowledge.

PRISM Community Impact Company Network

We help leading Canadian companies further their community impact by providing resources and third-party validation of corporate support. By setting benchmarks and sharing best practices, we aim to strengthen business-nonprofit partnerships, catalyze Canadian philanthropy and volunteerism, and ensure resources flow more equitably to nonprofit organizations and communities.

Established in 1988, the Imagine Canada Certification awards a Trustmark to companies that donate at least 1% of pre-tax profits to the communities where their employees live and work. Beyond Certification, we offer custom assessments, specialized learning, and partnership support to help companies enhance and communicate their social impact and community investment strategies.

Imagine Canada provides companies in the PRISM Network exclusive survey insights from Bridging Perspectives, including company-specific data where available.

For more information, contact us at prism@imaginecanada.ca.

Visit us at imaginecanada.ca/prism.

Exclusive Insights

Imagine Canada provides additional survey insights to companies in the PRISM Network. This includes the dataset on slide 14 disclosed and including data points on additional companies. We also offer specific insights related to individual companies named in the study, provided there is sufficient data to support analysis.

For more details, contact us at prism@imaginecanada.ca.





Imagine Canada Certified Companies

Access Communications Co-Operative Limited
Alberta Blue Cross
Alectra Inc
BCAA
Bombardier Inc.
Canada Life
Canadian Tire Corporation
CIBC
Co-operators
Ecclesiastical Insurance
Federated Co-operators Limited
First West Credit Union
GreenShield
Harvey McKinnon Associates

Humanity Financial Management Inc.
IGM Financial
Innovation Federal Credit Union
Johnston Group
Loblaw Companies Limited
Mawer Investment Management Ltd.
Medavie
Metro Inc.
N2X Process Solutions
Partnership Group - Sponsorship Specialists
PearTree Canada
Power Corporation of Canada
Proof Strategies
Prospera Credit Union

Royal Bank of Canada
Rogers Communications Inc.
Sandstone Asset Management Inc.
Saskatoon Co-op
Scotiabank
Selectpath Benefits & Financial Inc.
Smith's Funeral Homes Limited
Starbucks
Suncor Energy Inc.
TD Bank Group
WFCU Credit Union
Woodbine Entertainment Group

▲ As of 2024, the above companies were all Certified by Imagine Canada for their contributions of at least 1% of pre-tax profit in support of the community.



Putting Business at the Heart of Community