

Max Bell Foundation

Annual Report 2024



maxbell.org

COLLABORATION + INNOVATION + VISION

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Our Purpose

MAX BELL FOUNDATION

Max Bell Foundation is the living expression of its founder's aspiration to improve Canadian society.

We seek better educational, health, and environmental outcomes for Canadians. We pursue these goals by supporting innovative projects that inform public policy change.

We support civic engagement and resilient democratic institutions. We are non-partisan.

We value inclusion and the application of reason to evidence.

HEALTH
& WELLNESS

EDUCATION



ENVIRONMENT

CIVIC
ENGAGEMENT
& DEMOCRATIC
INSTITUTIONS

Supporting Innovation

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR



Brenda Eaton

Chair, Board of Directors
Max Bell Foundation

Since 1998, Max Bell Foundation has supported innovation in public policy.

We've developed granting programs with the aim of reflecting many of Canada's most pressing public issues: health and wellness, education, environment, and democratic institutions. Cross-cutting those programs is an interest in innovations to advance the well-being of Indigenous individuals and communities. We have cast a broad net across a diversity of issues.

As detailed in the pages below, our grants in 2024 reflect that diversity. At the same time, they have something important in common: most of the problems they seek to address are being profoundly shaped by the emergent boom in artificial intelligence.

Gaining perspective on AI is challenging for at least two reasons. First, while the fundamental science is decades old, we're still relatively new to the broad public availability and commercial use of the AI tools it enables. Second, the emergence of those tools has been accompanied by considerable hype that can cloud thoughtful analysis.

But clear analyses are emerging, and the consensus is we're on the cusp of major changes in multiple domains. AI has been called a general-purpose technology that, paired with big data, is precipitating a "fourth industrial revolution." That grand term is meant to imply the magnitude of the changes ahead will be comparable to the advent of steam power, the emergence of railways and electricity, and the appearance of networked computing.

Some changes will be clearly positive. Early innovations include improved medical diagnostics, better modelling of climate and ecosystems, and personalized adaptive education. Others, however, will be less so. Malicious users are combining AI with social media in mis- and disinformation campaigns. There are early reports from educators about declines in critical thinking skills as AI tools are increasingly used to find and synthesize information. More broadly, commentators are raising concerns about workforce displacements, declining social interaction, and biases being "baked-in" to AI tools.

**We remain committed to
playing our part, along with
our partners and many others,
in testing policy innovations,
advancing those that show
promise, and learning as we go.**

The combined pace and breadth of the implications of AI – for the economy, for national security, for social cohesion, for human rights and democratic institutions – mean profound challenges for public policy decision makers. How should governments respond when so many of the domains of policy action are subject to fundamental shifts?

At Max Bell Foundation we continue to look for considered, expert answers to that question. At the end of 2024 and looking ahead, the following principles seem a useful starting point:

- Because of its potential to generate structural changes in multiple domains that can overlap and multiply, the implications of AI cannot be managed *ex ante*. Policy makers must learn, adapt, and innovate together with firms and with civil society in real time. Policy experimentation and holistic approaches are likely to be most informative.
- Collectively, we must work to embed the values we want (e.g., fairness; inclusiveness; accountability) in both the new technologies themselves as well as the governance systems we create for them.

These principles underscore the value and importance of the kind of work Max Bell Foundation seeks to support. We remain committed to playing our part, along with our partners and many others, in testing policy innovations, advancing those that show promise, and learning as we go. We're convinced that in a time of profound change, the progress we want depends on collaborations, innovations, and vision.



Brenda Eaton
Chair, Board of Directors

Supporting our Partners

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



Allan Northcott

President
Max Bell Foundation

Each year when I set about the task of reporting on what Max Bell Foundation has done in the past twelve months, I include an annual review of news headlines. The overwhelming conclusion is that Canadians face many public problems. Of course that's true, but it's only part of the story. One of the greatest privileges of working for a philanthropic foundation is witnessing that Canadian civil society generates so many solutions. The ingenuity, resilience, and commitment to the public good of the dozens of organizations we get to meet each year is both humbling and inspiring.

In 2024 we were honoured to support the work of many partners, who collectively aimed to:

- make civic education more meaningful and memorable through immersive experiential learning
- reduce social isolation and loneliness through changes to land use, housing, and community planning policy
- protect vulnerable students of private career colleges, enhance the quality of education they receive, and create better pathways for them to successful careers
- improve the framework that supports construction of wildlife crossings in the Yellowstone-to-Yukon region
- share, with other jurisdictions, learnings from a BC-based initiative to coordinate different orders of government and stakeholders around wildfire risk mitigation
- strengthen the case for an industrial carbon price
- inform the implementation of mobile phone ban policies in a number of provinces
- develop actionable knowledge for stakeholders, policymakers, and service providers from a 10-year longitudinal study of vulnerable children in Newfoundland and Labrador
- identify and close gaps in drug treatment and transitional care for those leaving correctional institutions in Ontario
- integrate Indigenous knowledge and Western science to improve the governance of shoreline habitats
- provide support services to immigrants and refugees who are upgrading their skills and certifications to improve their success in the labour market

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In 2024, Max Bell Foundation invested \$3.4 million in grants to our partners. We expended a further \$606,000 delivering our own programs designed to educate and inform Canadians about public policy and policy issues. Included in those programs was our sixteenth annual Public Policy Training Institute (PPTI). The PPTI provides professional development to individuals employed by Canadian registered charities to help them more effectively contribute to public policy development. More than 350 individuals have now completed the PPTI.

When Max Bell created his Foundation, he stipulated that 30% of the gifts the Foundation makes go to his alma mater, McGill University. Over the years, the Foundation and the University have partnered in a variety of ways to realize Max's wishes. Since 2018, this gift has supported the Max Bell School of Public Policy. The School was launched and grown through its early years under the extraordinary leadership of Dr. Chris Ragan, who completed his term as Director in 2024. Following an international search, he was succeeded by Dr. Jennifer Welsh. Late in the year, the University and the Foundation signed a renewed agreement that will see Foundation support for the School continue through 2037.

In reviewing proposals for support, Max Bell Foundation relies on anonymous expert reviewers. We thank them sincerely for their outstanding voluntary contributions, which are invaluable to our decision-making.

There may be no shortage of public problems, but our experience shows that Canadians are up to the task. As always, we look forward to opportunities to offer support.



Allan Northcott
President



Our Work

GRANTS & PROGRAMS

New Grants

The following new grants were initiated in 2024

University of Western Ontario / Consortium on Electoral Democracy

Understanding and Advancing Youth Civic Engagement in Canada / [\\$124,540 over 12 months](#)

Improving youth civic engagement requires understanding and innovation

Simon Fraser University / Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue

Understanding and Advancing Youth Civic Engagement in Canada – Validation Workshops / [\\$34,978 over 12 months](#)

Improving youth civic engagement requires understanding and innovation

Momentum

Addressing Private Career College Risks for Vulnerable Learners / [\\$59,440 over 18 months](#)

Private career colleges can be improved

Simon Fraser University / Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue

Co-creating Policy for Socially Resilient Multi-Unit Housing / [\\$224,460 over 24 months](#)

The effects of isolation and loneliness can be reduced with innovative housing policy

Toronto Metropolitan University / Democratic Engagement Exchange

Max Bell Foundation Senior Fellow – John Beebe / [\\$100,00 over 16 months](#)

AI can be an essential tool in voter choice

McGill University / Max Bell School of Public Policy

Max Bell Foundation Senior Fellow – Paul Wells / [\\$100,000 over 24 months](#)

Informed public conversations are essential for a functioning democracy

The Dais at Toronto Metropolitan University Phone-Free Schools: Getting Implementation Right / [\\$150,200 over 16 months](#)

Implementation of phone ban policies in schools should be informed by evidence

The Dais at Toronto Metropolitan University

Screen Break Knowledge Mobilization Plan /

\$38,196 over 16 months

Implementing phone ban policies in schools should be informed by evidence

Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative

Safe Passage Infrastructure for People and Wildlife /

\$200,000 over 24 months

Both wildlife and motorists can be protected by better wildlife crossings

Simon Fraser University / Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue

Sharing Wildfire Policy Development Insights Across Jurisdictions / **\$67,072 over 10 months**

Different jurisdictions can learn from best practices as they mitigate wildfire

Janeway Children's Hospital Foundation

Knowledge Translation for Children at Risk Study /

\$138,757 over 25 months

Longitudinal study unlocks critical insights for children at risk

Living Lakes Canada

Collaborative Shoreline Assessments /

\$50,000 over 24 months

Smart assessment protocols can enhance the health of Okanagan lakes

Canadian Climate Institute

Preserving and Strengthening Large-Emitter Trading Systems / **\$175,000 over 12 months**

There are different ways to price carbon to reduce emissions

DEVELOPMENT GRANTS

Canadian Education Association

Effective implementation of policies to support the mental health of students / **\$31,600 over 6 months**

Supporting the mental health of students

Islamic Family & Social Services Association

Encouraging Civic Engagement Through Prison Religious Material Policy Mapping / **\$36,000 over 6 months**

Encouraging civic engagement through prison religious materials

Ontario Physical and Health Education Association

Changing the Game through School Sport /

\$27,000 over six months

Improving school sport experiences for all students

Physical and Health Education Canada

Canadian Healthy Schools Alliance – Ripple Effect Evaluation / **\$19,700 over 6 months**

Canadian Healthy Schools Alliance – Ripple Effect Evaluation

The Natural Step

Companies in Transition Research Project / **\$24,000 over 8 months**

Exploring global standards for corporate transition and to assess their relevance to Alberta's energy sector

Directors' Discretionary Grants

Barth Syndrome Foundation of Canada
\$10,000

Canada West Foundation
\$5,000

Family Enterprise Foundation
\$10,000

Indspire
\$5,000

McGill University
\$5,000

Nature Conservancy of Canada
\$5,000

Phoenix Residential Society
\$5,000

The Study School Foundation
\$5,000

United Way of Winnipeg
\$10,000

The University of Victoria
\$5,000

Victoria Hospice and Palliative Care Foundation
\$5,000

Ongoing Grants

The Foundation continued the administration of the following grants during 2024

Canadian Children's Literacy Foundation
A Path Forward for Early Literacy Advocacy /
\$141,700 over 15 months

Developing a “gold” standard for professional development related to early literacy is a key step to improving professional practice

Child Welfare League
Better Transitions to Adulthood and a Just Recovery for Youth in Care / \$127,453 over 18 months

Encouraging governments to adhere to a set of standards for equity will improve outcomes for youth in care transitioning to adulthood

Centre for Media, Technology & Democracy
Information Ecosystem Integrity and Citizen Resilience / \$312,570 over 12 months

Informed engagement with decision makers, system actors, and the public is necessary to help protect and build resilience within the Canadian information ecosystem

CIVIX
Ctrl-F - Improving Digital Media Education in Canada /
\$200,000 over 24 months

Wider use of an evidence informed teaching tool helps students get better at evaluating information online

The Dais at Toronto Metropolitan University
Job Pathways Project / \$125,000 over 12 months

A well-designed job transition model can aid in the development of pathways to help workers move from disruptive or declining jobs into promising or high-growth jobs

Farmers for Climate Solutions
Prairie Farmer & Rancher Forum /
\$100,000 over 12 months

Stronger collaboration with farmers and ranchers will result in better policy development to reduce emissions in agriculture

Institute for Research on Public Policy

Informing Policy Decision for Low-carbon Workforce Transition / [\\$160,000 over 24 months](#)

Better public policy related to low-carbon workforce transitions requires local and accessible community-level data on workforce vulnerability

MAP Centre for Urban Health Solutions at St. Michael's Foundation

Informing Primary Care Reform / [\\$300,000 over 24 months](#)

Primary care reform inevitably requires trade-offs, and those should be informed not only by experts and practitioners, but also by patients themselves

Martin Family Initiative

Early Years Cost Benefit Analysis / [\\$110,000 over 12 months](#)

Community-driven program models for Indigenous children and families respect sovereignty, can generate better outcomes, and can be more efficient

Ontario Nature

Building the case to permanently protect Forest Stewardship Council designated conservation lands / [\\$50,000 over 23 months](#)

Developing a policy pathway can make it easier to move voluntarily conserved lands to permanent legislatively protected conservation areas

Prosper Canada

Closing the Financial Help/Benefit Gap for People with Low Incomes / [\\$450,000 over 33 months](#)

Low-income Canadians should have barrier-free access to filing their taxes

Sage Seniors Association

Facilitating the Shift to Community-Based Senior Services in Alberta / [\\$200,000 over 24 months](#)

When seniors receive services in properly supported community settings, they can achieve better and more cost-effective outcomes

Simon Fraser University

Mitigating Wildfire: Resilient Futures for Communities & Forests in the Face of Climate Change / [\\$200,000 over 12 months](#)

Stronger collaboration between jurisdictions in BC will result in better policy development and implementation to mitigate catastrophic wildfires and their effects

Smart Prosperity Institute, University of Ottawa

Circular Economy Policies / [\\$260,000 over 24 months](#)

Circular economy approaches can improve the competitiveness and sustainability of Canada's critical minerals strategy

United Way Halifax

East Coast Public Policy Training Institute / [\\$30,000 over 7 months](#)

Providing professional development to leaders in non-profit organizations helps them become more effective public policy advocates

University of Calgary | Shift: The Project to End Domestic Violence

Moving Knowledge into Action: Policy Reforms for Primary Prevention of Domestic and Sexual Violence / **\$300,000 over 24 months**

Having developed a policy framework for prevention of domestic violence/sexual violence is the first step. The challenge now is to ensure it gets adopted and implemented

Windmill Microlending

Operating Support / **\$70,000 over 12 months**

When skilled newcomers are equitably integrated into the workforce, they're better able to contribute their expertise to Canada's economic and social success

York University

Implementing Policy for Universal Literacy in Canadian Schools / **\$180,000 over 39 months**

The ultimate success of good policy for improving literacy in schools depends on successful implementation

Ongoing Development Grants

Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada

Exploring a Canada Wide Before and After School Care System / **\$24,000 over 6 months**

An exploration of how a Canada wide before and after school care system fits into the Canada Wide Early Learning and Child Care Program

St. Boniface Hospital Foundation

Manitoba Acute Coronary Syndrome Network: Establishing 911 Emergency Service in Northern Manitoba / **\$45,000 over 6 months**

Improving outcomes for heart attack patients

ONGOING INTERNAL PROGRAMS

The foundation continued the administration of the following ongoing programs in 2024

Max Bell Foundation

Public Policy Training Institute 2023-2026 / **\$623,800 over 4 years**

Max Bell Foundation

Public Policy Training Institute Master Class 2024 / **\$238,150**

Max Bell Foundation

Partner and Public Events / **\$368,200 over 5 years**

Financial Report

\$3.39M

Disbursements in grants

\$606,000

Foundation-led initiatives

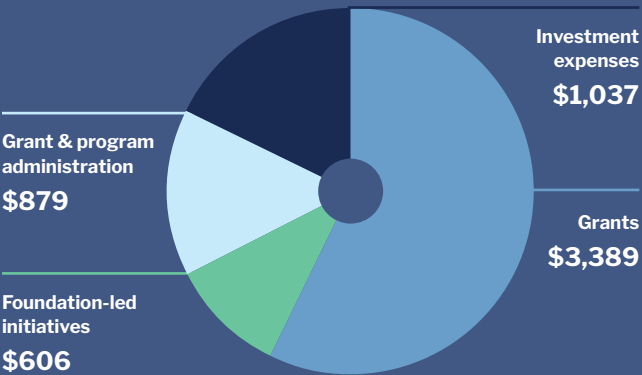
68%

Combined initiatives & grants of

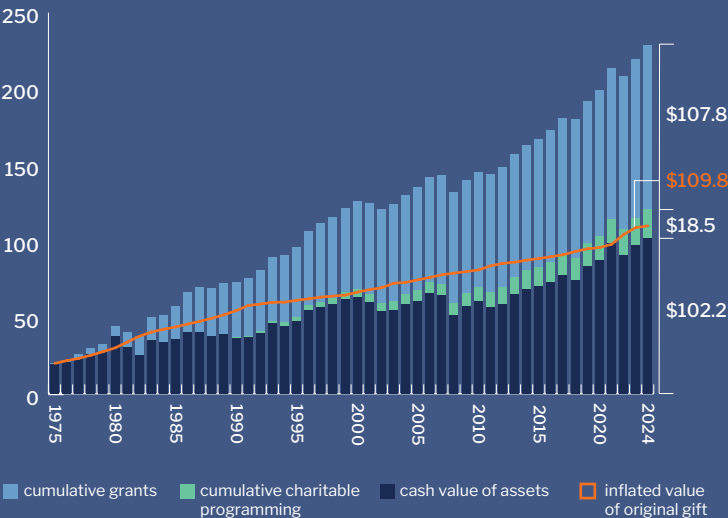
\$5.91M

Annual total expenditure

2024 EXPENDITURES (000s)



Max Bell Foundation | Invested in the Community 1975 to 2024



In 2024, Max Bell Foundation made disbursements for grants totaling \$3.39 million, and led initiatives costing \$606,000. Combined, these account for 68% of the annual total expenditure of \$5.91 million.

2024 Expenditures (000s)

During calendar 2024, returns on the Foundation's investments funded the expenditure categories above. Their value increased from \$97.7 million to \$102.2 million. Had the growth of the Foundation's asset base kept pace with inflation since 1974, it would be valued at \$1009.8 million at the end of 2024.

Since the Foundation's inception, it has invested \$107.8 million in grants to improve Canadian society, and has invested \$18.5 million in identifying, helping develop, and administering those grants as well as directly delivering charitable programs.

DIRECTORS

**Brenda
Eaton**

Chair

**Ken
Marra**

Vice Chair

Paul Boothe

Donna Miller

Doug Moen

Christopher Manfredi

Margaret-Jean Mannix

OUR TEAM



**Allan
Northcott**

President



**Jasveen
Brar**

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Program Officer



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