Max Bell Foundation

Looking ahead with eyes wide open

ANNUAL REPORT 2025

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Contents

01
Our Purpose

02
Message from the Board Chair

04
Message from the President

06
Our Work

Development Grants 07
Directors' Discretionary Grants 08
Ongoing Grants 08
Ongoing Development Grants 10
Ongoing Internal Programs 10

11
Financial Report

12
Directors & Our Team

MAX BELL FOUNDATION

Our Purpose

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.

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Message from the Board Chair

> In the face of turbulence, Canadian charities have found ways to continue to make tangible positive differences for their communities.
>
> — **Donna Miller** | Chair, Board of Directors

The term "public benefit" can sound arid and abstracted from the real lives of Canadians. But it's a crucially important principle guiding the work of Max Bell Foundation. That's because to qualify as a registered charity – as we and our partners all do – an organization's purpose must be directed to public benefit. In essence that means tangible positive differences are achieved for the benefit of the community at large.

Effectively making those differences requires many things. Among them is seeking to understand what's shaping, for better and for worse, the context in which charities do their work. An annual report is an opportunity to reflect on that context, and consider what it means for us at the Foundation as we aim to support tangible positive outcomes.

So much happened in 2025 across several domains that it's challenging to distill coherent themes. We witnessed major changes in the technological sphere, from the growth in the use of GLP-1 drugs to the increasing importance and far-reaching effects of AI tools. Economically, Canadians faced decidedly different effects of tariffs depending on their region; our population growth slowed significantly; and the gap widened between those in the top and bottom 40% of Canada' s income distribution. Our political discourse shifted too, from what David Coletto has called "scarcity to precarity," as the US President's words and deeds re-oriented how we as Canadians see ourselves and our place in the world.

The changes in each of these domains have had ripple effects, making our operating context highly dynamic and difficult (or even impossible) to predict. If there's one word that captures this state of affairs, it would be "turbulence."

In the face of this turbulence, Canadian charities have found ways to continue to make tangible positive differences for their communities. It's been our privilege to have many of them as our partners, as the pages below detail. How have we done it?

Part of the answer is building strong, trusting relationships. Time and again we hear about the policy advocacy success of an organization that prioritizes positive ongoing working relationships – both inside and

outside of government – over single, transactional encounters. Part of what makes for strong working relationships is keen organizational self-awareness – of strengths, limitations, and one's position in the broader ecosystem of civil society.

Many of our partners have succeeded in the face of turbulence by changing their program offerings or asks of government. Some have re-allocated their resources. Others have found new and mutually beneficial partnerships. In all cases, they've relied on a strength that seems essential to the moment: adaptability.

These characteristics, of course, are not just about the organizations themselves. They are fundamentally about the remarkable people who lead their organizations through their commitments to service.

Here at home with our Foundation, history reveals the Foundation has benefitted from many great leaders over the years, including that of Brenda Eaton, who served on the Board from 2006 to 2025 and was Board Chair from 2019 to 2025. We remain grateful to Brenda for her outstanding service to the Foundation. The Board is delighted to welcome David Morhart, of Victoria, British Columbia who will help to lead the Foundation into the future.

As to the leaders and organizations across civil society the characteristics they possess – relationships, self-awareness, flexibility – depend on the right support. Financial security is the essential base, but we've also seen the critical importance of culture, leadership, and expertise.

It's no small feat to bring all of these elements together, but our experience continues to be that Canadian society is served by many charities that do. If there was a single word to capture what they embody, it would be "resilience."

As a grant making foundation, we have the privilege of being inspired by many resilient organizations. Beyond inspiration, we're also committed to learning – both how to be more resilient ourselves, and how better to support resilience in our partners. Delivering public benefit in times of turbulence demands it.

Donna Miller
Chair, Board of Directors

Message from the President

> Many of the most challenging issues our society faces are being addressed in smart and courageous ways by leaders in civil society who remain eyes-open optimists.
>
> — **Allan Northcott** | President

Reflecting on 2025, I keep coming back to the following quote from the historian and economist David S. Landes:

> *In this world, the optimists have it, not because they are always right, but because they are positive. Even when wrong, they are positive, and that is the way of achievement, correction, improvement, and success. Educated, eyes-open optimism pays; pessimism can only offer the empty consolation of being right.*

Among the privileges of working for a grant making foundation – and the one that most affects me personally – is dealing day in and day out with optimists. Many of the most challenging issues our society faces are being addressed in smart and courageous ways by leaders in civil society who remain eyes-open optimists. Their energy is contagious and it's our honour to help support them.

During 2025 we completed our latest triennial strategic review. Included was an inquiry into whether our priority outcomes should be adjusted based on expert input. We made some small changes, which you can read about in the 2025 Strategic Review Report available in the "resources" section of our website. Also there, under "funding priorities," is the refreshed list of priority outcomes that orient our grant making.

As those who work in public policy know full well, there are always multiple possible ways to contribute to achieving policy outcomes. In 2025 we supported several that our volunteer expert reviewers believed show real promise. Our partners aim to:

- improve access to primary care by mobilizing evidence and showcasing case studies from other jurisdictions
- help management teams of long-term care and assisted living facilities ensure the mental health of residents receives the attention it deserves
- better understand the opportunities to improve policies that enable the community-based seniors services sector
- accelerate federal adoption and equitable implementation of automatic tax filing

- inform childcare policy by examining whether and how the current federal childcare program is meeting its objectives
- scale across multiple provinces a teaching practice that improves success for grade one and two kids struggling to learn how to read
- inform Alberta's electricity distribution policy with expert consensus bridging multiple sectors
- inform the engaged public and decision makers about the nature, consequences, and possible responses to the problem of wildfires
- inform enabling policies for and market adoption of construction wood re-use by developing evidence, best practices, and demonstration projects
- influence the modernization of seed regulations by developing regulatory proposals and mobilizing farmers
- chart a pathway toward tech regulation shared across jurisdictions outside of the US
- inform public and decision-maker conversations about how to strengthen democracy with credible survey data that compares Canada to peer nations
- inform federal public sector reform by developing and mobilizing a series of evidence-informed recommendations
- enable charities and foundations to better deliver public benefits by informing the regulatory regime governing them
- develop and launch a high-quality centre for research and teaching on how Canada can improve prosperity for Canadians

In addition to the projects listed above, Lana Wells at the University of Calgary became a Max Bell Foundation Senior Fellow. Her work will inform public policy, non-profit organizational strategies, and the thinking of attentive publics around ways to advance a prevention approach to gender-based violence.

In 2025, Max Bell Foundation invested $4.2 million in grants to our partners. We expended a further $300K delivering our own programs designed to educate and inform Canadians about public policy and policy issues. Included in our programs was the seventeenth 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 375 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. During 2025, the School continued to grow and enhance its already excellent reputation under the leadership of Professor Jennifer Welsh.

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.

We continue to look ahead with eyes wide open, and with optimism for what Canadians can achieve.

Allan Northcott
President

Our Work

The following new grants were initiated in 2025:

Generate Canada | Energy Futures Lab

Alberta's Energy Future | $360,000 over 35 months

Thoughtful engagement with a broad range of stakeholders will generate workable policy options for Alberta's electricity system

Toronto Foundation | Environics Institute for Survey Research

Public support for democratic values and institutions in Canada | $184,203 over 14 months

Effective policy responses to democracy-related concerns must be informed by an evidence-based understanding of public views

York University

Turning the aspiration of universal literacy into a reality in Canadian schools | $68,000 over 18 months

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

Philanthropic Foundations Canada

Policy reforms to strengthen philanthropy and increase the flow of capital | $90,000 over 36 months

Progress on a small number of policy issues could make a big difference for charities in Canada

St. Michael's Hospital Foundation

OurCare 2.0 | $370,500 over 37 months

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

Canada West Foundation

New Carbon Removal Industry | $14,500

Leadership Summit 2025 – BioEnergy with Carbon Capture & Storage (BECCS): Enabling Policy for a New Carbon Removal Industry

Centre for Media Technology and Democracy at McGill University

The Attention Forum on the Future of Digital Governance | $150,000 over 3 months

Together, the rise of AI and the post-U.S. election moment present an urgent opportunity for democratic leaders around the world to come together, defend past progress, and chart a unified path forward for tech regulation

Canadian Coalition for Seniors Mental Health

Translating Standards to Action: Mental Health and Wellness in Long Term Care across Canada | $74,500 over 7 months

Implementing a credible standard for assessing seniors' mental health in long-term care will improve integration and quality of care

United Way of Calgary and Area

Developing a policy roadmap for non-medical supports for aging seniors | $267,635 over 12 months

A provincial policy roadmap will help ensure consistent access to community-based non-medical supports

C.D. Howe Institute

From Promise to Practice: A Critical Review of the Federal Childcare Plan | $50,000 over 6 months

To make improvements, we first need to know how the Federal Childcare Plan is working

Generate Canada | Circular Economy Leadership

Support the Reuse of Wood in Construction | $149,971 over 24 months

Integrating reclaimed wood throughout the building lifecycle could divert tonnes of used wood from landfills, avoid tonnes of CO_2e emissions, reduce material costs, and generate billions in revenue and thousands of green jobs in Canada

Institute for Research on Public Policy

Capacity for Change: Designing a Public Service Built to Deliver | $61,500 over 10 months

Ideas from outside of government can play a critical role in building state capacity

University of Calgary – Faculty of Social Work

Lana Wells – Senior Fellow | $110,000 over 18 months

Advancing approaches to prevention of gender-based violence

Prosper Canada

Enabling Access to Benefits for Low-Income Canadians | $150,000 over 12 months

With equitable implementation, automatic tax filing will help close benefit access gaps

Seedchange

Farmer-led Policies for Climate-Resilient Seed Systems | $240,000 over 33 months

Improved seed regulation can lead to improved seed diversity, climate adaptation, reduced synthetic inputs, and greater farmer autonomy

Max Bell School of Public Policy at McGill University

A Growth Co-Lab for the Max Bell School of Public Policy | $332,000 over 24 months

Catalyzing economic growth in Canada

Max Bell School of Public Policy at McGill University

Public Policy Training Institute Master Class 2026 | $290,000 over 12 months

Policy advocates can be more effective with high quality professional development

DEVELOPMENT GRANTS

Sexual Assault Services of Saskatchewan

Tracking Impact: Community-Driven Indicators to Strengthen Sexual Violence Public Policy Advocacy | $36,000 over 6 months

Advancing a public health approach to sexual violence in Saskatchewan

DIRECTORS' DISCRETIONARY GRANTS

Barth Syndrome Foundation of Canada
$10,000

Canada West Foundation
$5,000

Edmonton Community Foundation
$10,000

Family Enterprise Foundation
$10,000

McGill University
$5,000

Phoenix Residential Society
$5,000

The Study School Foundation
$5,000

United Way of Winnipeg
$10,000

University of Alberta
$10,000

The University of Victoria
$10,000

Victoria Hospice and Palliative Care Foundation
$9,000

ONGOING GRANTS

The Foundation continued the administration of the following grants during 2025:

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

Some ways to price carbon to reduce emissions should be preserved and strengthened

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

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

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

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

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

Canadian Education Association

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

Islamic Family & Social Services Association

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

The Natural Step

Companies in Transition Research Project | $24,000 over 8 months

St. Boniface Hospital Foundation

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

ONGOING INTERNAL PROGRAMS

The foundation continued the administration of the following ongoing programs in 2025:

Max Bell Foundation

Public Policy Training Institute 2023-2026 | $623,800 over 4 years

Max Bell Foundation

Partner and Public Events | $368,200 over 5 years

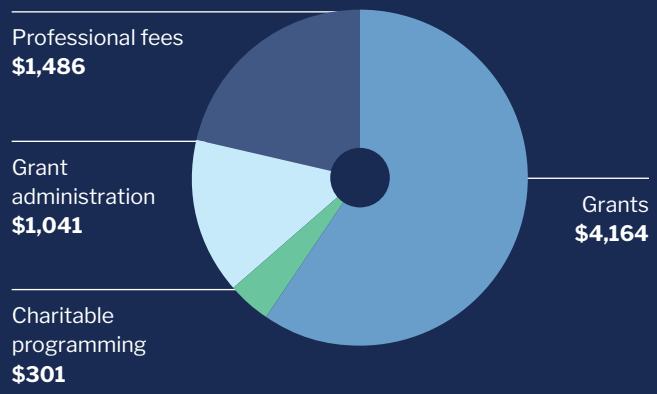
Financial Report

$4.16M
Disbursements in grants

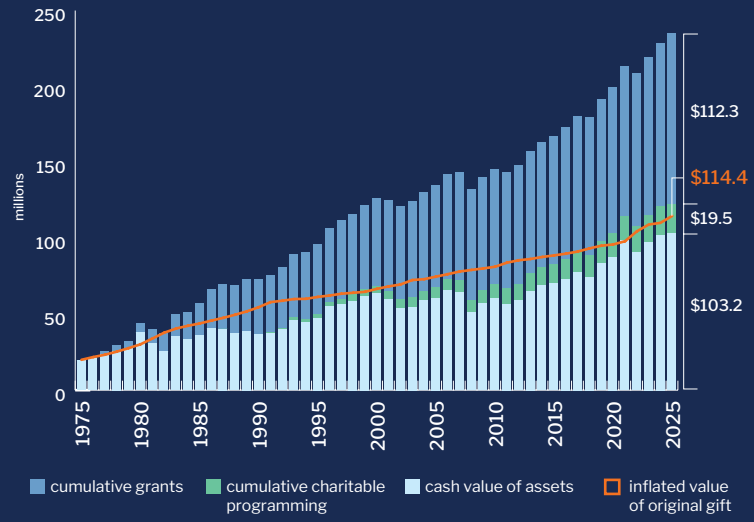
$301,000
Charitable programming

$6.99M
Annual total expenditure

2025 EXPENDITURES (000s)



Max Bell Foundation | Invested in the Community
1975 to 2025



In 2025, Max Bell Foundation made disbursements for grants totaling $4.16 million, and undertook charitable projects costing $301,000. Combined, these account for 64% of the annual total expenditure of $6.99 million.

2025 Expenditures (000s)

During calendar 2025, the Foundation's investments funded the expenditure categories above and their value increased from $102.2 million to $103.2 million. Had the growth of the Foundation's asset base kept pace with inflation since 1974, it would be valued at $114.4 million at the end of 2025.

Since the Foundation's inception, it has invested $112.3 million in grants to improve Canadian society, and has invested $19.5 million in identifying, helping develop, and administering those grants as well as directly delivering charitable programs.

DIRECTORS

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