

Evaluating Impact

A recurring theme throughout the discussions about a New Narrative for our sector is the need to highlight impact. When Canadians evaluate charities and nonprofits they often focus on financial details — which of course are important — but sometimes do so at the expense of considering an organization’s impact.¹ During our consultations we learned that while some in the sector are expert at evaluating impact, others struggle to find the time, expertise and resources to do it well.

Given the diversity of charitable and nonprofit organizations it would be difficult to provide a ‘one size fits all’ measurement tool. Similarly, some aspects of our sector’s work — such as contributing to social change — make measuring impact a challenge. However, as we try to broaden public understanding of our work it is crucial that we are able to explain not just what we do but the difference we make.

Brian Emmett, Imagine Canada’s Chief Economist for the Charitable and Nonprofit Sector, will soon be working on a project designed to offer practical guidance on impact evaluation. To quote Brian, “Measurement of a lot of things charities and governments do is hard. It is hard for government with all their resources. It will be harder for charities. But it is inescapable. I think the way to square this circle is for charities to start off simple and get more sophisticated over time — don’t be paralyzed by complexity — start to do it and learn over time by doing.”

KEY EVALUATION TOOLS

The following Imagine Canada tip sheets provide information to help charities and nonprofits understand and use some key evaluation tools:

- [Project Evaluation](#)
- [Focus Groups](#)
- [Conducting Surveys](#)
- [Designing Questionnaires](#)
- [Knowledge Transfer](#)
- [Interviewing for Research](#)

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- [Project Evaluation Guide for Nonprofit Organizations: Fundamental Methods and Steps for Conducting Project Evaluation](#), Imagine Canada, 2006.
- [Mapping Progress with a Purpose](#), Maytree and Ontario Trillium Foundation, 2012.
- [Innoweave’s module on Impact and Strategic Clarity](#), The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation.

¹ For examples of our sector’s impact, please see the [Core Resource and Philanthropic Success Stories in Canada](#), Imagine Canada, 2007.

- [Measuring Social Impact](#), Stanford Social Innovation Review, 2013.
- [What's your Nonprofit's Impact?](#) Charity Village, 2012.
- [Inspiring Impact: The Code of Good Impact Practice](#), NCVO, 2013.
- [Introduction to mixed methods in impact evaluation](#), Michael Bamberger, InterAction, 2012.
- [Leap of Reason: Managing to Outcomes in an Era of Scarcity](#), Venture Philanthropy Partners, 2011.
- [Participatory evaluation essentials: an updated guide for non-profit organizations and their evaluation partners](#), The Bruner Foundation, 2010.

Imagine  Canada

*the
narrative*

A NEW CONVERSATION ABOUT
CHARITIES AND NONPROFITS

IMAGINECANADA.CA/NARRATIVE

Imagine Canada, as the next stage of its National Engagement Strategy, is working with a broad cross section of organizations to create a New Narrative about the role and contributions of the charitable and nonprofit sector in Canada. In addition to contributing to the fabric of society we are a significant economic force and our organizations have played a pivotal role in building and defining our nation. The sector reflects Canadians' values and helps to implement shared visions. Yet we have not always been successful in sharing this story with Canadians. For more information, please see the [Narrative Tool Kit](#).