

# COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS OF CANADA

## Investing in your own climate journey before helping others

- **Country:** Canada
- **Number of staff:** 40
- **Year of incorporation:** 1992
- **Type:** Community foundation
- **Endowment:** Yes
- **More info:** [communityfoundations.ca](https://communityfoundations.ca)

The Community Foundations of Canada (CFC) is the national leadership organisation for Canada's 206 local community foundations. Founded in 1992 as an association, CFC has been actively leveraging its role as an intermediary to build partnerships and movements that help drive sustainable local and national development.

Two examples of ways in which CFC works with partners to advance well-being in communities are the Indigenous Peoples Resilience Fund – an Indigenous-led effort to build community resilience that supported 384 community leaders through the pandemic in 2020<sup>1</sup> and the Equality Fund – a partnership to advance gender equality across Canada which, in its first round, distributed a total of CAD 3.4 million to projects impacting more than 20 communities<sup>2</sup>.

As a philanthropy support organisation, CFC began studying ways to support foundations on their climate journey. A small group of staff benchmarked other businesses' sustainable work and was inspired to start the Green Team that later became a Sustainability Committee, with just two staff members, to learn how to

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<sup>1</sup> "Indigenous Peoples Resilience Fund", Community Foundations of Canada,  
<https://communityfoundations.ca/initiatives/indigenous-peoples-resilience-fund/>

<sup>2</sup> "Communities For Gender Equality", Community Foundations of Canada,  
<https://communityfoundations.ca/initiatives/national-efforts-to-advance-gender-equality/>

‘walk the talk’ and deepen the climate discussions inside the organisation. During an internal workshop where the Green Team discussed with other CFC staff which aspects of their daily work needed to change from an environmental perspective, most flagged travel as one of the most unsustainable CFC practices.

In early 2020, the Green Team interviewed all CFC staff about motivations and barriers to sustainable behaviours. They understood that the constraint was not rooted in a lack of information or willingness to act, but that deeper behavioural change was required. Once insight had been collected, the Green Team met weekly to strategise. They wanted to base their recommendations on solid research, evidence, and a deep understanding of the organisational culture. The Green Team found it effective to link issues that people really care about – like prioritising their health – with sustainability practices. The Covid-19 pandemic hit as momentum for this internal conversation was building. The organisation’s full attention was redirected to supporting non-profit organisations<sup>3</sup> that were serving vulnerable communities during the crisis<sup>4</sup>. Knowing that, once the peak of the pandemic subsided, sustainability would again be a fundamental issue for their constituencies, the Green Team continued its data collection and desk review on procedures and methods to become more sustainable in their operations. They decided to rely on the expertise of Ottawa’s Green Business Program to measure CFC’s carbon footprint for the first time, using 2019 as a baseline year. In the process, they realised that most of the calculating standards targeted businesses and that these needed to be readjusted for the reality of philanthropic organisations.

## Adopting meaningful travel practices

The investigation confirmed that most of CFC’s emissions were scope 3<sup>5</sup> emissions and, more specifically, came from one activity: travelling, which accounted for approximately 84% of all CFC emissions. Acknowledging the limitation of their capacity to tackle travel-related emissions and the importance of travel for a national network with members all across the country, they decided to host a staff workshop to present the key results of their

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<sup>3</sup> “COVID-19 | Map: Community Foundations who Participated in the ECSF”, Community Foundations of Canada, 2020, <https://communityfoundations.ca/covid-19-community-foundations-participating-in-the-ecsf/>

<sup>4</sup> “Emergency Community Support Fund”, Community Foundations of Canada, 2020, <https://communityfoundations.ca/initiatives/emergency-community-support-fund/>

<sup>5</sup> Scope 1, 2 and 3 is a way of categorising the different kinds of carbon emissions an organisation emits in its own operations, and in its wider value chain.

Scope 3 Frequently Asked Questions, Greenhouse Gas Protocol, 2022, [https://ghgprotocol.org/sites/default/files/standards\\_supporting/Scope%203%20Detailed%20FAQ.pdf](https://ghgprotocol.org/sites/default/files/standards_supporting/Scope%203%20Detailed%20FAQ.pdf)

data collection efforts and discuss possible solutions. They needed a set of guiding principles to ensure more strategic and sustainable travel and give staff the opportunity to adopt meaningful travelling practices.

CFC invested in boosting the technical capacity of the Green Team and strengthening sustainable governance practices. When the CFC team began travelling again in 2021, they were better prepared to do so more sustainably. They realised that most of the team's travel was linked to core activities, such as local membership engagement, which could be done by road or rail instead of flying. While the alternatives to flying would take longer, they would consume fewer carbon emissions and still be feasible.

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*“The message we developed was: every tonne counts.”*

— DANA DECENT, CFC DIRECTOR OF PARTNERSHIPS

CFC senior management approved a climate action plan and set an operational target to reduce 40% of the organisation's carbon emissions by 2024, using 2019 as the baseline. As the organisation grows, every year it may evaluate whether this target is still achievable and what other measures it can adopt to take climate action. The organisation also invested significantly in a data-collection system, monitoring process and budget. A Sustainability Committee was formalised to report CFC's climate progress to its board. The committee produced a sustainable travel guide and now monitors all travel quarterly, making projections and re-evaluating their sustainable strategy. An edited volume of the sustainable travel guide will be released to the public in 2023. CFC also adopted more practices to constantly engage its team in climate decisions, like inviting them to vote for top Gold Standard<sup>6</sup> carbon offset projects<sup>7</sup> that would compensate for the emissions that CFC cannot reduce.

<sup>6</sup> Gold Standard, <https://www.goldstandard.org/>

<sup>7</sup> “Foundant is CFC's first Carbon Offset Partner”, Community Foundations of Canada, 2020, <https://communityfoundations.ca/foundant-is-cfcs-first-carbon-offset-partner/>

## Pushing climate action forward externally

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*“We cannot just get caught up in individual or organisation carbon emissions without looking to other climate action pillars: what are we saying about climate, how we are influencing our peers, how we are showing up in spaces, and all of that is important.*

*I think the work we are doing as a national philanthropic organisation talking about climate is very important. For example, the sustainability statement on our webpage was really big as we had never published something like this before. It sends a very strong signal that we take climate seriously.”*

— DANA DECENT, CFC DIRECTOR OF PARTNERSHIPS

CFC decided to publish a sustainability statement<sup>8</sup> on their website because they felt it was important to give visibility to their efforts. After understanding climate issues better, they also decided to work on their members' engagement on climate change. In 2021, CFC became one of the coordinators of the Canadian Philanthropy Commitment on Climate Change – a joint initiative with The Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada, Environment Funders Canada and Philanthropic Foundations Canada. In addition, in September 2022, CFC launched a learning cohort for community foundations about climate action: Communities for Climate Resilience. Twenty-two community foundations are participating in the 2022-2023 cycle.

Learning how to stay accountable to their climate pledge and avoiding the silos approach is an experience that CFC is eager to share. Their journey shows that climate action needs to be embedded into strategic debates and staff participation is the key to better buy-in. Most people find it hard to deal with an existential crisis like climate change if they do not know how they can directly contribute to solving the problem, even if it is a small step. As we know, every carbon emission tonne counts.

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<sup>8</sup> “Sustainability at CFC”, Community Foundations of Canada, <https://communityfoundations.ca/sustainability-at-cfc-1/>

<sup>9</sup> “Press Release: Canadian Philanthropy Commitment on Climate Change opens for Signature”, Community Foundations of Canada”, 2021, <https://communityfoundations.ca/press-release-climate-change-pledge/>