definity. FOUNDATION



Impact and Learning Report

A Review of 2022-2026

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Message From The CEO

In 2022, we had the rare opportunity to shape a new foundation from the beginning. It was a privilege, and one we did not take lightly. We were entering a sector with much to learn from those who had come before us, at a time when the pandemic, growing economic insecurity, the climate crisis, and a global reckoning with systemic racism were exposing deep and persistent inequities.

From the beginning, we wanted to be thoughtful about what we funded, and also about how we showed up. **We developed our first Community Investment Framework around an ambitious question: how could a new foundation support community-led solutions that address the roots of inequity, not only its symptoms?**

We did not assume we had the answer. The framework reflected research, conversations with more than 60 philanthropic and nonprofit leaders, and a set of early hypotheses about how we could contribute. We believed in centering community leadership, working collectively, building long-term and flexible partnerships, learning rather than simply measuring, and bringing more than grants to the work.

We also knew those ideas would have to be tested in practice. Over the next three years, our greatest source of learning became the relationships we built – with community partners, networks, other funders and investors, and people across sectors. Those relationships challenged our assumptions, expanded our understanding, and helped us see both the possibilities and limitations of our early approach. Some of our learnings affirmed where we started. Others took us further.

This report is an account of the first phase of the Foundation's journey. It is not a catalogue of every grant or investment, nor an evaluation of our full strategic plan. It looks at what our Community Investment Framework made possible, what happened when we put our early hypotheses into practice, and what we learned about the work of addressing systemic

inequities. While we deeply value all our partners and have learned from each of them, this report includes only a few selected examples of organizations that we've worked with.

Ultimately, we confirmed that philanthropy can bring much more than grants to a mission – capital, relationships, convening, research, voice, and influence all have a role to play. We learned that systems change does not happen through individual initiatives alone, but through many actors playing complementary roles, supported by relationships and infrastructure that allow them to work toward change over time. And **as we followed the root causes of health, social, economic, and climate inequities, we came to understand more deeply how interconnected they are – and how often they lead back to questions of power, ownership, resource flows, and the ways we organize the economies that shape our lives and communities.**

Perhaps the most important lesson has been that serious systems change requires a willingness to keep learning and changing ourselves. Our understanding today is different from where it was in 2022, and it should be. The purpose of learning is not to prove that our original assumptions were right, but to allow experience to sharpen our understanding of where we can contribute.

The lessons in these pages are informing our next chapter, which will build on what we have learned, go deeper into addressing the systems and underlying conditions that shape inequity, and continue to ask how philanthropy can help create conditions for community leadership under which different possibilities take root and thrive.

Opening Word from the Evaluators

We have been Definity Foundation's external evaluation partner for the last three years. As evaluators that have worked with many Canadian foundations, we see the Definity Foundation's approach as exciting and innovative. We are grateful to have worked closely with the Foundation's staff team to document the impact of their work and produce this report.

We started by seeking to understand the Definity Foundation's intended contribution – what it meant to them to practice philanthropy in a way that advanced justice. We learned that it was about more than the approaches (flowing resources, building the field, and leveraging networks and experiences). It was also about their willingness to explore and extend the potential of these approaches in different settings and combine them in unique ways. It was about the deep questions or hypotheses that the team held open as it did this work – questions about how to live their values, how to shift power, how to focus on systemic factors, and how to uncover and address root causes. We sought to develop a way of synthesizing Definity Foundation's impact that honoured this way of working and aligned with it.

We also sought to align our evaluation approach with the Foundation's philosophy about learning, documentation and impact. The Foundation's commitment to letting the community lead informed an approach to developing project plans, tracking progress and checking in about impact that was relational and conversation-based. This approach was important and necessary, because partners were often experimenting with types of solutions that were new to them. Sometimes, they were finding ways to advance solutions that were deeply rooted in their communities and their history, but new to Definity Foundation and other partners, and not easily managed within traditional philanthropic structures and roles. Consequently, many partners developed unique approaches to documentation and learning that built from local wisdom, helped to translate this wisdom for new audiences, and equipped them to adapt to unexpected obstacles and opportunities when needed. Definity Foundation staff communicated frequently with partners, and logged what they learned in a way that was careful and systematic but also flexible and individualized, in order to capture the unique elements of each story.

When we came to the task of pulling all this evidence together and offering conclusions about the Definity Foundation's impact, we were left with a unique challenge. In addition to detailed tracking data about Definity Foundation investments and our own survey data, we had access to an incredibly rich and diverse set of stories and examples that was growing as we absorbed it, and continues to evolve even today in ways that are often surprising and important. Some of these stories are the Foundation's, but many are owned by their partners and best told by them.

We had to learn a little bit about things like social finance models, pooled funding, non-qualified donees and consensus-based[1] decision making. It was an exciting opportunity. We knew that there was an important overall story to tell about the Foundation's journey and the impact it achieved. We also knew it wasn't going to be easy to do justice to this story in all its complexity.

We looked for a way to synthesize and distill overarching messages while respecting the unique character and power of each story. Our solution had three basic elements. First, we sought to document and share the individual stories. One major section of this report reviews the types of solutions that were developed, the ways in which they were community-led, and the ways in which those solutions found traction, or enabled communities to (for example) take new kinds of action, form new connections, or access resources in ways that were locally owned and sustainable. We did not attempt to generate a list of the most impactful solutions, but instead tried to celebrate their diversity. From there, we used the six key conditions of systems change to highlight some of the common threads that ran through all that the Foundation had learned and all that it had achieved. This approach enabled us to focus on the ways in which the Foundation has consistently engaged with the macro-level systems it aspired to change.

Finally, we used Definity's seven key hypotheses to highlight what had been learned about practicing philanthropy in a way that advances social justice. Although this section appears early in the report, it was the one we completed last, and the one that points the way most clearly to Definity's next phase of work. It may also be the section of most interest to other funders that aspire to similar goals. We invite you to keep reading to discover what was learned.

- Andrew Taylor and Kamaria Francis, Taylor Newberry Consulting

TaylorNewberry
CONSULTING

[1] Consensus-based decision-making in Inuit culture is rooted in Aajiiqatigiingniq (ᐊᔨᔨᖏᑎᒋᓕᓂᖅ) – the traditional Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit principle of making decisions through collaborative discussion and consensus. Historically necessary for survival in the Arctic, this approach ensures every perspective is heard to build shared understanding, prioritize the group over the individual, and resolve conflict peacefully.

Executive Summary

This report looks back on the initial Community Investment Framework for Definity Foundation, from 2022 to 2026. This framework was designed to learn through action how a new foundation could support community-led solutions to address the roots of inequity.

The Definity Foundation mission is to advance community-led solutions that further climate, health, and socio-economic justice.

The Approach

- Three focus areas included Healthy People, Thriving Communities, and Climate Justice
- A broad approach to philanthropy includes grants, impact investments, convening, research, advocacy, thought leadership, and mentoring
- A commitment to learning guided by seven initial hypotheses
- A commitment to impact focused on advancing solutions that address systemic barriers, with a particular focus on those faced by Black, Indigenous, and other racialized communities
- An approach to evaluating impact that valued multiple ways of knowing, focused on the degree to which local solutions found traction, and took a systems lens.

The Journey

- 2018: Definity Insurance Foundation is incorporated and the members of the founding Board of Directors begin setting up the Foundation in anticipation of demutualization
- 2021: The Economic Mutual Insurance Company demutualizes, setting aside $100 million in seed money for a public foundation
- 2021: A distinctive partnership was established with Definity Financial Corporation. While the Foundation operates independently, the two organizations have collaborated on selected initiatives, combining philanthropic and corporate resources to increase their contribution to communities.

- 2022: Arti Freeman is hired as CEO in February. The Community Investment Framework is finalized in June. The first round of grants is issued in September, and the Foundation enters its first impact investing relationship that same year. The Board is expanded in October to enhance diversity.
- 2023: Reviews feedback from the first round of grants. An external advisors' table is set up in August. The first blended finance partnership (with Windmill Microlending) is launched late in the year. The 2024-26 strategic plan is launched.
- 2024: The first Senior Fellow is onboarded, as part of a program bringing together subject matter experts and thought leaders while providing an opportunity for connection and knowledge mobilization to advance community-led solutions. Definity Foundation is named among the Top 50 Equitable Funders in Canada by *Future of Good* and QuakeLab. First partner survey completed.
- 2025: An equity audit of the Foundation's portfolio and research about funding in the north are both completed. The Foundation receives CRA approval and amends its charitable objects to enable direct granting to nonqualified donees and to advance the field of social finance in Canada.
- 2026: The original Community Investment Framework is concluded, having committed approximately $34 million in grants to more than 90 different initiatives and developing an impact investment portfolio of 11 active investments totalling $7.25 million.

The Impact: Solutions that found traction

- Healthy People (increasingly focused on food security) saw movement from Food Security to Food Sovereignty
    - Definity Foundation invested more than $4.1 million in ten initiatives
    - Partners strengthened community-led food systems through pooled funds, micro grants to local communities, advocacy, and consensus-based approaches to grant decisions. These partners have given grants to hundreds of local community-led food initiatives.
    - Partners addressed the structural drivers of food insecurity by building networks and coalitions, conducting research and developing new grassroots strategies

- Thriving Communities
    - Definity Foundation committed to 36 grants and 14 impact investments, with a total value of approximately $24 million
    - Initiatives strengthened community self-determination by increasing local ownership, decision-making, and control over community assets
    - The Foundation supported innovative approaches to financing community ownership and stewardship, enabling communities to own and manage productive businesses and acquire and steward land
- Liveable Planet (increasingly focused on climate justice)
    - Definity Foundation invested in 17 grants and two impact investments, with a total value of $7.2 million
    - Investments in grassroots advocacy connected leaders, expanded access to resources and knowledge, and supported communication campaigns

The Impact: Addressing conditions of systems change

Partnerships contributed to six conditions of systems change:

- Resource Flows
    - 91.3% of all grant dollars had Black, Indigenous and/or racialized communities as the primary intended beneficiaries; for impact investments, 94.1% of investments and 92.9% of investment dollars met this same standard
    - 71.7% of grant dollars and 76.2% of impact investment dollars supported organizations led by or working in partnership with these communities
- Practices
    - Definity Foundation's support helped intermediaries to design and build new strategies for engaging with communities, including community forums, advisory councils, and new governance structures
    - Partners also developed new strategies for flowing resources, including micro-grants, community ownership of assets, and support for entrepreneurs and social purpose businesses

- Policies
    - Investments supported advocacy campaigns related to climate justice, food systems, employee ownership, use of heat pumps, and support for community finance
- Relationships and Connections
    - Definity Foundation worked collaboratively through pooled funds and other co-investments
    - Investments often supported coalitions, networks, and convenings
    - 81% of surveyed partners reported that Definity Foundation helped connect them to other funders or investors.
- Power dynamics
    - Investments supported Indigenous, Black, and racialized people to have meaningful voice or decision-making power in efforts to take action on issues that matter in their communities
    - 44.1% of dollars went to initiatives that were community-owned (i.e., individuals who self-identify as Indigenous, Black or racialized hold a majority of key decision-making roles in these initiatives)
- Mental Models
    - Definity Foundation worked to promote justice-oriented reframing of key social issues (including a shift from food access to food sovereignty), relational approaches to philanthropy, understanding of the connections between climate action, health, Indigenous rights, affordability, and power, and the role of social finance

Hypotheses: What was learned?

- Taking a racial equity lens enabled Definity Foundation to target efforts on the needs of Black, Indigenous, and other racialized communities.
    - It identified the specific communities and geographies it hoped to reach in a more focused way

    - It explored new investment vehicles including unrestricted and multi-year grants and grants to non-qualified donees
- By letting communities tell them what is needed and where good work was happening, Definity Foundation was able to support more impactful solutions
- By prioritizing opportunities that drove at multiple areas of concern/funding priorities, Definity Foundation was able to target root causes
    - This work required patience and flexibility
    - The issues are interconnected, and shaped by deeper systems
    - Over time, it ought to support interconnected action by multiple partners
- By offering long-term and flexible funding, Definity Foundation supported innovation, emergence, and impact
    - They often developed deep partnerships by supporting multiple, related initiatives over time
- Taking a relational approach to philanthropy reduced power imbalances
    - A relational approach includes flexible, conversation-based approaches to developing cases for support and reporting on project progress, and a commitment to show up in person for key meetings
    - Systems change requires multiple, complementary efforts
- Investing in capacity building and sector strengthening organizations, networks and infrastructure showed promise as way to strengthen the sector
- Experimenting with different funding models led to greater impact
    - Addressing complex challenges requires more than grantmaking; by September 2026, Definity Foundation's impact investing portfolio had grown to 11 active investments totalling $7.25 million (7.25% of the original endowment)
    - It was impactful for partners to receive a funding model (a loan, blended finance, or a grant, etc) that was aligned with what they needed, that addressed their barriers and aligned with their goals they sought to achieve.
    - Grants, loans, community bonds, and pooled funds offered different possibilities for expanding access to resources, strengthening ownership, and bringing additional investors into the work

What comes next?

Together, these insights have led Definity Foundation toward a more intentional ecosystem approach (i.e., one that strengthens the people, organizations, relationships, and infrastructure needed to shift systems), support of the enabling conditions for systems transformation; and recognition that communities are already demonstrating different possibilities for how different economies can be organized.

For more on what comes next, see both messages from the Definity Foundation CEO within the full report.

Introduction

Definity Foundation has a mission to advance community-led solutions that further climate, health, and socio-economic justice.

In 2026, the Foundation concluded its first phase, guided by an initial Community Investment Framework. This formative period of partnerships, learning, and adaptation generated insights that have informed an inaugural long-term strategic direction to be launched in 2027. Meanwhile, this report looks back at what the initial framework made possible, what was learned through practice and partnership and how those lessons shape the next chapter.

This report begins (in Section 2) with a descriptive and comprehensive overview of Definity Foundation actions, including various types of grantmaking and impact investing[2], as well as research, convening, advocacy, and mentorship work. Section 3 goes deeper into the thinking that informed the Foundation's approaches, by reviewing how seven key hypotheses translated to action. Section 4 looks at the impact of the Foundation's actions – first by describing initiatives supported in each of three impact areas, and then reviewing the degree to which Definity Foundation support enabled partners to implement community-led solutions that furthered climate, health and socio-economic justice. Section 5 explores another layer of impact by considering all the Foundation's efforts in a more holistic way and the degree to which six key conditions of systemic change were addressed. Throughout, this report identifies insights that have emerged and ways that learning enables Definity Foundation to be more impactful over time.

1. The starting point: Community Investment Framework and original hypotheses

[2] Impact Investing: This term refers to investments that are not grants, including investments made with the intention to generate measurable social, environmental, and economic outcomes alongside financial returns.

The Definity Foundation was seeded with $100 million from the proceeds of the 2021 demutualization of Economical Mutual Insurance Company, and began granting in 2022. Before making its first grants, the Foundation developed a Community Investment Framework to guide where and how it would invest.

At its core was a belief that addressing inequity required going beyond its symptoms to the conditions that create and sustain it. The framework focused on supporting community-led solutions to the underlying causes of health, social, economic and climate inequities, with particular attention to systemic barriers experienced by Black, Indigenous and other racialized communities.

The Community Investment Framework focused on three areas (Healthy People, Thriving Communities, and Liveable Planet) and established an early commitment to trust-based philanthropy[3] while building on evidence and insights from the community level, adaptation, and shared learning.

Like other investment frameworks, Definity Foundation's framework included desired outcomes, but it also included other, more unique elements. In particular, the team identified seven hypotheses about their own work, thereby demonstrating a commitment to ongoing learning and continual refinement. Rather than seeking out initiatives that had a high probability of achieving predetermined and narrowly defined results, Definity Foundation built partnerships that promised to advance an understanding of the hypotheses, deepen their knowledge about how to put these hypotheses into practice or even disprove a hypothesis.

Table 1: Definity Foundation's Hypotheses

Hypothesis	What the first phase tested
1. Take a racial equity lens to our work, enabling us to target our efforts to the needs of particular groups that systems are most failing and for whom the impacts are most inequitable	Did the Foundation centre equity-seeking groups?

[3] Trust-Based Philanthropy: An approach that reimagines the dynamic between funders and nonprofits by emphasizing authentic partnership, trust and service. In practice, it involves offering "support beyond the cheque," alleviating stress for nonprofit leaders, and replacing traditional, burdensome grant applications with collaborative conversations.

2. Choose areas of concern and let the community tell you what is needed and where good work is happening	Did the Foundation trust the solutions brought by community?
3. Prioritize opportunities that drive at multiple areas of concern/funding priorities	Was the greatest opportunity for impact where the three priorities intersect?
4. Offer long-term and flexible funding to allow organizations to allocate resources where they are most needed, making room for innovation, emergence, and impact	To what extent did the Foundation's funding give partners the stability and flexibility to direct resources where they were most needed, test new approaches, and respond to emerging opportunities?
5.Take a relational approach to philanthropy to gain a deeper understanding of the work, to reduce power imbalance and to take up less time	Was relationship building a priority for the Foundation? What changes did this practice of philanthropy lead to?
6. Fund sector strengthening organizations, approaches and infrastructure	Did the Foundation invest in organizations, networks, and infrastructure that strengthen the broader nonprofit sector, and did that contribute to greater equity and resilience across the sector?
7. Experiment with different funding models to facilitate learning, build trust and ultimately lead to greater impact	Did the Foundation test diverse funding vehicles, and did that lead to stronger outcomes?

Another distinctive feature of the Foundation's approach was its commitment to thinking beyond grants. Through a range of approaches and tools (including partnership grants, program-related investments[4], research, convening, and sector strengthening) Definity Foundation began exploring how its broader assets, relationships and influence could contribute to its mission.

From its first year of granting, Definity Foundation embedded learning in how it works. Through relationships with community partners, participation in networks and funder collaboratives, and ongoing conversations across the philanthropic and related sectors, the Foundation began to deepen its understanding of the issues it sought to address and the role it could play. This early learning informed the development of Definity Foundation's first three-year Strategic Plan, approved in October 2023. The plan articulated the Foundation's mission and an approach to achieving the mission and ultimate impact (see diagram below).

[4] Program-Related Investments (PRIs): A specific philanthropic financial tool used by foundations to make investments that primarily further a charitable purpose rather than seeking maximum financial return.



Following the Strategic Plan, the Community Investment Framework was refreshed to provide greater clarity, both visually and in words, about what the Foundation was investing in, with these areas reframed as "solutions".

The choice of the term solutions was important. A traditional investment framework might have identified concrete strategies that the funder intended to support (e.g., healthy eating workshops as ways to promote affordable and healthy food), but Definity Foundation committed to working with partners to find relevant solutions coming from communities that would increase their capacity to take action, enhance their control or influence, improve access to resources, or elevate their voices through advocacy.



2. Overview of the work to date

The purpose of this section is to provide a descriptive overview of the full scope of Definity Foundation's actions since it began its community investment work in 2022, while recognizing that the Foundation uses a holistic approach by bringing funding, relationships, knowledge, and influence to its work by using diverse tools such as grantmaking, impact investing, advocacy, thought leadership and convening.

Grantmaking: Between 2022-2026, Definity Foundation committed approximately $34 million in grants to more than 90 different initiatives. These grants directed capital, strengthened the field, and leveraged networks and expertise to support community-led solutions tackling deep-rooted challenges that disproportionately affect Black, Indigenous, and other racialized communities.

Table 2: Grants By Priority Area

Priority Area	# of Grants	Value of grants
Healthy People	14	$6,307,604

Liveable Planet	17	$6,470,450
Thriving Communities	36	$14,714,202
Sector Strengthening	11	$6,685,000
Total	78	$34,177,256

During this period, the Foundation also collaborated with other philanthropic actors, using a range of strategies including pooled funds and coordinated (but separate) investments. Since 2022, the Foundation has invested alongside other funders and investors. As of March 2026, reported co-investment totalled more than $145 million in grant funding and $251.93 million in impact investment capital.

Impact Investing: By 2023, the Foundation formalized its commitment to social finance by setting an initial target to allocate 1-3% of its assets to impact investing. By 2024, the impact investment portfolio had reached $3 million, representing 3% and diversified across three distinct asset classes. In the Fall of 2024, the Board of Directors approved an increased target of 10% and a Director of Impact Investing and Social Finance was hired, which gave the portfolio even more momentum. By September 2026, the impact investing portfolio had grown to 11 active investments totalling $7.25 million (7.25% of the original endowment).[5] As of March 2026, reported co-investment in impact investment initiatives totalled $251.93 million.

Table 3: Active Impact Investments by Priority Area

Priority Area	# of Active Impact Investments	Value of Active Impact investments
Liveable Planet	2	$750,000
Thriving Communities	9	$6,500,000
Total	11	$7,250,000

With that momentum, the Foundation also began funding alternative economic models designed to build community wealth, such as Employee Ownership Trusts and Entrepreneurship

[5] This information covers active investments as of Q3 2026. Total impact investment commitments, including investments not yet active, comprise 17 investments totalling $10.5 million.

Through Acquisition (see the "Direct Private Debt" category in the table below). Definity Foundation sees community wealth building as an approach to economic development that keeps assets, ownership, decision-making, and benefits closer to communities, especially communities historically excluded from mainstream capital and ownership systems.

Table. 4: Types of Active Impact Investments

Type	Definition	Number	Total investment
Private Equity / Venture Capital	Investing into social purpose companies with strong potential for scale and impact, with intent to realize a return.	4	$2,750,000
Community Bonds and Direct Private Debt	Acting as a lender providing community bonds, microloans or mortgages to charities, nonprofits, co-operatives, or entrepreneurs. Debt is issued to charities, nonprofits, and co-operatives to fund initiatives like affordable housing, renewable energy, economic inclusion (e.g., microloans for newcomers), and employee ownership or entrepreneurship through acquisition (where small and medium enterprises can be acquired and converted into inclusive, employee-owned entities).	3	$2,500,000
Private Debt Fund	Investing debt capital into social purpose organizations and projects that address social or environmental challenges.	2	$1,000,000
Outcomes Financing (Also called outcomes-based financing)	A collaborative funding model where investors provide upfront capital for social or environmental interventions (like health and climate solutions), and financial returns are tied to the successful delivery of specific, measurable, community-driven outcomes.	2	$1,000,000

Research, convening and advocacy: Definity Foundation has sought to offer more than financial support, including the use of its people, relationships, ability to convene, research, influence and investment capital alongside grantmaking. Over time, the Foundation became even more intentional in building an integrated model that connects philanthropy, blended finance[6], policy influence, and system stewardship. In practice, this has included:

[6] A financial model that combines different forms of capital, such as philanthropic grants and repayable impact investments, to mobilize additional resources, support skill-building and scale impact across regions.

- **Research and knowledge development:** The Foundation has commissioned and supported research to better understand where resources are missing and where opportunities for impact exist. Such initiatives include the *Analysis of Philanthropic Capital Flow and Relevant Social Outcomes*, developed in partnership with Data for Good, as well as tools and research developed with New Power Labs (including a sector-wide diversity report and the public-facing Diversity Geomap Dashboard). These kinds of projects have informed the Foundation's own approach, while also contributing to the broader sector.
- **Convening and field building:** The Foundation has used convening to bring diverse actors and voices together around shared challenges. Convening is seen as a form of field building – a way to create containers for conversations, relationships, and spaces where shared priorities and decisions can emerge. This has included bringing together funders, investors, community organizations, and other partners around issues such as northern philanthropy, community finance, food systems, and systemic finance – while also participating frequently in events planned by others.
- **Public policy and advocacy:** Definity Foundation has undertaken some sector-wide policy engagement, including federal pre-budget recommendations, contributions to the Canada Revenue Agency's guidance on program-related investments, collective letters on food insecurity and community finance, and participation in Imagine Canada's Rapid Response Network.
- **Advisory and capacity-building support:** When invited, Foundation staff have provided advisory, coaching, and technical assistance to partners – particularly in the development of social finance and community finance models. The organization's Senior Fellows Program has also supported thought leadership, policy analysis, systems innovation, and partner capacity-building. In 2026, the Foundation began connecting Senior Fellows directly with partners through curated mentorship engagements.

Taken together, these activities reflect an attempt at an integrated approach of philanthropy, which helps leverage capital strategically, influences sector norms, and supports systemic solutions that extend beyond individual grants.

3. Evaluating the approach: What was learned through the original hypotheses?

As a new foundation, Definity Foundation set itself up to learn and adapt in an ongoing way. Seven key hypotheses guided this learning and ensured staff remained open to having their mental models challenged by new ideas. This section evaluates the degree to which the Foundation acted on each hypothesis, and reviews what was learned in the process.

3.1 Did the Foundation center equity seeking groups?

The Foundation's racial equity lens reflected both a commitment to justice and a belief that communities most affected by inequity hold essential knowledge about those issues and the solutions. In practice, this meant asking who was being underserved or excluded, what barriers were contributing to those outcomes, and how the Foundation could direct resources and decision-making differently.

The premise: Did Definity Foundation take a racial equity lens?

The systemic barriers that have blocked these communities from accessing resources are complex, interconnected and not easily overcome. Consequently, one way that the Foundation explored this hypothesis was to commission research that furthered an understanding of where resources were missing and where obstacles existed. The Foundation also engaged in ongoing dialogue with partners through formal convenings and informal conversations. This work helped identify and address barriers to flowing capital, whether attitudinal (assumptions and practices), legal or policy-related.

One way the Foundation tested this hypothesis was by using research and data to better understand where philanthropic resources were, and were not, flowing. Research commissioned in 2023 identified significant underinvestment in Northern and other regions of Canada. This finding led the Foundation to make the North a more intentional priority. In 2024, the Foundation commissioned further research to understand how it could engage in the North in a way that was useful and respectful, and convened funders already working there to learn from their experience. This contributed to a more deliberate approach to building relationships and supporting Indigenous-led and community-led work in Northern communities

The result: Did the racial equity lens enable Definity Foundation to direct resources differently?

Between 2022 and 2026, 80.6% of grants, representing 91.3% of grant dollars, identified Black, Indigenous and/or racialized communities as primary intended beneficiaries. More importantly for understanding where decision-making and leadership sat, 71.7% of grant dollars supported organizations led by or working in partnership with these communities. In the same time period, the Foundation made grants for work in every province and territory in Canada. Of all grants, 23.3% focused on Northern communities: 8.2% supported work in the three territories, and 15.1% supported work in the northern regions of the provinces.

Table 5. Where work is happening, as of Q1 2026

Region	Number of active initiatives
National	44
Alberta	3
British Columbia	7
Manitoba	2
New Brunswick	1
Newfoundland & Labrador	3
Northwest Territories	5
Nova Scotia	1
Nunavut	5
Ontario	9

Prince Edward Island	1
Quebec	4
Saskatchewan	1
Yukon	5

In addition to this data, 26 of 32 respondents (81%) to an anonymous, third-party partner survey in 2026 reported that the Foundation had done well or very well in directing resources toward underfunded communities or regions.

Table 6: Compared to your initial expectations, how well has Definity Foundation Directed resources toward underfunded communities or regions (n=32 partners, July 2026)

Not at all	Not well	Unsure	Well	Very well
0	0	6	8	18

This response from a grantee partner explains how Definity Foundation used an equity lens while working to overcome systemic obstacles to investing in First Nations communities, including by adjusting approaches to reporting and by funding administrative support.

> *We, as an independent first nations, face systemic under-funding and over-reporting requirements. We tend to be funded about 30% of what non-Indigenous groups get to provide the same service. We also tend to get much lower allowances for administrative costs, putting a big squeeze on us from both sides. We continue to be tokenized and marginalized in our service areas, but that has been changing through supporters like Definity. Definity is one of the few funders that is directly intervening by supporting our administrative costs – much needed – and taking a constructive, supportive role. (2026 partner survey respondent)*

What was learned?

The Foundation learned that applying a racial equity lens requires more than directing funding toward particular populations. It also **requires examining the barriers that determine who can access capital, who makes decisions about it and on what terms.**

Data helped identify communities and geographies that had historically received less philanthropic capital and allowed the Foundation to become more intentional about where it built relationships and directed resources. But data alone was not enough. Legal and administrative requirements could still prevent resources from reaching grassroots and community-led organizations. In response, the Foundation worked through intermediaries and trustees and successfully changed its charitable objects to enable funding to non-qualified donees.

The Foundation also learned that shifting decision-making requires funders themselves to work differently. Participation in pooled and participatory funds, including the Arctic Indigenous Fund and Gaagige Zaagibigaa, reinforced the importance of adapting to community timelines and decision-making processes rather than expecting communities to adapt to those of the funder.

Finally, the experience reinforced that **how capital is provided matters alongside where it goes.** Flexible and multi-year funding can strengthen the capacity of Indigenous, Black and other organizations led by racialized community members to respond and adapt, while tools such as pooled guarantees can help community-based financial intermediaries attract additional capital.

Taken together, the learning moved the Foundation's understanding of racial equity from a focus primarily on who benefits from funding toward a deeper consideration of who has access to resources, who controls them, and who has the power to make decisions about their use.

3.2 Did the Foundation trust community to identify and shape solutions?

This hypothesis rests on the belief that solutions are more relevant and effective when the communities intended to benefit help define the priorities and shape the work. Their knowledge

and experience help identify the barriers, opportunities and solutions that may not be visible to those outside the community.

The Premise: How did Definity Foundation put community leadership into practice?

From the outset, the Foundation sought to support initiatives in which Indigenous, Black and other racialized communities had a meaningful role in shaping priorities and solutions. Over time, its understanding of what it meant to "trust community" became more nuanced. It was not only about listening to community perspectives or supporting solutions intended to benefit communities, but increasingly about who shaped the work, who made decisions and who controlled resources.

This learning also prompted the Foundation to examine its own practices. Conventional application processes can require organizations to translate their work into funder-defined priorities and formats, potentially making them more accountable to funders than to the communities they serve. In 2024, Definity Foundation removed the Letter of Expression and formal application stages from its process and moved toward a more relational approach. The partnership process now begins with an initial conversation to understand a potential partner's vision and values, the solution it is advancing, and its alignment with Definity Foundation's systems change focus. Where there is strong alignment, Definity Foundation staff work with the organization to develop a case for support, creating space for dialogue and refinement along the way. The process has surfaced many impactful initiatives that did not necessarily align with Definity's focus on upstream or systems-level change. Where the work was not a fit for the Foundation's mandate, staff sought (where possible) to connect organizations with other funders who might be better positioned to support it.

> *DF think quite a bit about how change happens and have very sober understandings of what it means and looks like to get to impact. DF has been very committed to being a relationship based funder. (2026 partner survey respondent).*

The Foundation also explored ways of moving decision-making closer to communities. Through support for intermediary[7] and participatory models, decisions about how resources were allocated could sit with people holding local relationships, knowledge and legitimacy rather than with the Foundation. For example, support for the Annaumakkaijiit Community Foundation in Nunavut (2023-26) to implement a consensus-based granting program has enabled Nunavut organizations to come together, share their work, and collectively decide how to distribute available funds among themselves – reflecting traditional Inuit decision-making.

The Result: Did this lead to more impactful solutions?

The Foundation's 2025-2026 internal equity audit provides one way of assessing the extent to which its investments reflected this commitment. The analysis found that 71.7% of grant dollars and 76.2% of impact investment dollars supported initiatives classified as community-driven, meaning the initiative was shaped and stewarded by Indigenous, Black or racialized communities (although decision-making power could be shared with another organization). The audit also looked at the higher threshold of community-owned, where individuals who self-identify as Indigenous, Black or racialized hold a majority of key decision-making roles. 35.7% of grant dollars and 69.0% of impact investment dollars met this threshold.[8]

Table 7: Findings of Definity's Equity Audit

[7] Intermediaries in the context of this report include organizations that do not provide direct service to community members but instead focus on strengthening the capacity of front-line organizations through training, convening, research, and resource development. Some intermediaries act as bridges between small local organizations and larger organizations or institutions like foundations or governments. Some intermediaries manage granting and investment from pooled funds, impact funds, or other social finance models.

[8] Other categories from the Foundation's equity audit include:
- Indirect Benefit: investments where communities may benefit, but are neither explicitly named nor engaged
- Community-Serving: investments where Black, Indigenous and/or racialized communities are the primary intended beneficiaries, with clear evidence of who benefits and how
- Community-Informed: investments where the recipient organization has structured and ongoing mechanisms for community input that meaningfully shape priorities, design, or strategy (e.g. advisory groups)

Category	% of all grant dollars	Number of grants	% of impact investment dollars	Number of impact investments	% of all community investments (by number)
Indirect benefit	2.5%	6	7.1%	1	8.9%
Community serving	91.3%	50	92.9%	16	83.5%
Community informed	89.8%	51	66.7%	11	78.5%
Community driven	71.7%	37	76.2%	13	63.3%
Community owned	35.7%	20	69.0%	12	40.5%
All four: serving, informed, driven and owned	32.8%	17	59.5%	10	34.2%

Note: Based on 62 grants and all 17 impact investment commitments, totalling $10.5 million in impact investments. Categories overlap, so columns do not sum to 100%. The final column uses all 79 grants and impact investments as its denominator.

The annual data show that community-driven approaches were present from the Foundation's earliest years, while the proportion of grants classified as community-owned remained more limited and varied from year to year.

Table 8: percentage of grants from each year coded to each category

	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Community-serving	80%	100%	79%	77%	80%
Community-informed	90%	67%	84%	77%	100%
Community-driven	70%	50%	58%	55%	80%
Community-owned	20%	33%	37%	23%	80%
Total grants	10	6	19	22	5

Partners also recognized the Foundation's efforts to support community-level decision-making. In a 2026 third-party survey, 26 of 32 respondents (81%) said the Foundation had done well or very well in this area.

Table 9: Compared to initial expectations, how well has Definity Foundation supported community level decision making? (n=32 partners, July 2026)

Not at all	Not well	Unsure	Well	Very well
0	0	6	10	16

What was learned?

Over time, the Foundation developed a more nuanced understanding of what it means to trust community. The equity audit helped distinguish between initiatives that serve communities, are informed by communities, are driven by communities, and are owned by communities. These are not interchangeable. **An initiative can benefit a community or incorporate community perspectives without shifting meaningful decision-making or ownership.**

The Foundation also learned that its most useful role is not always to enter communities directly. In many cases, working through local intermediaries, re-grantors and other organizations with established relationships, legitimacy and knowledge can be a more effective way to move resources and decision-making closer to communities.

Practicing relational philanthropy also required changes on the funder side. Removing written applications reduced the administrative burden on potential partners but did not eliminate the work; some of it shifted to Foundation staff through research, relationship-building, synthesis and co-development of cases for support. For a small team, this created a tension between the depth of relationships the Foundation sought and the number and diversity of partnerships it could sustain.

Ultimately, the Foundation learned that trusting community means more than listening to community perspectives or funding solutions that benefit communities. It requires paying attention to who defines priorities, who shapes solutions, who makes decisions and who controls resources. The distinctions between community-serving, community-informed, community-driven and community-owned helped the Foundation see more clearly where power actually sits.

3.3 Was the greatest opportunity for impact where the three priorities intersect?

The initial Community Investment Framework identified Healthy People, Thriving Communities, and Liveable Planet as three areas in which inequities were evident. It also sought opportunities to support work at the intersection of these priorities – for example, improving access to healthy food while strengthening local livelihoods and supporting climate action. The hypothesis was that working across these areas could help create opportunities for greater impact and help the Foundation get closer to the underlying conditions contributing to inequity.

The Premise: Was work supported at the intersection of the priorities?

Definity Foundation intentionally funded initiatives where their three priorities directly overlapped. For example:

- A collaboration between Metlakatla First Nation and Ecotrust Canada to create a Regenerative Ocean Farming hub in the waters of Northern British Columbia: this initiative has been designed to achieve change in local food systems in a way that protects the climate while creating new local employment opportunities and promoting Indigenous economic and food sovereignty
- The African Canadian Farmers Fund (2025-27) to provide equitable access to capital for African Canadian farmers to acquire farmland: this initiative is to increase sustainable, culturally-relevant agriculture and to create community wealth-building opportunities among Black Canadians
- Food First Newfoundland's Strengthening Food Systems in Newfoundland project (2024-28) for coordinating action on income security and transportation, in order to help people with low incomes achieve better access to healthy affordable food

These and other investments allowed the Foundation to test whether working across issue areas could both generate multiple benefits and reveal some of the underlying conditions contributing to inequity.

The Result: Did working across the priorities lead the Foundation closer to the root causes?

Feedback from partners suggests they saw an effort to support initiatives that drove at multiple areas of concern. When asked to choose a single word to describe Definity Foundation, one partner said:

> *Radical - in the true sense of the word, coming from the Latin radix, meaning root. In other words, trying to address root causes.*

Another partner said:

> *In our experience with Definity Foundation, it is clear that they understand that the root causes may not always be what grabs the headlines or turns heads of the big funders (like government) but that without addressing these root causes, people and communities are left further and further behind because instead of giving them the tools to change the cause of their situation they instead are left chasing funding to patch the symptoms. Definity Foundation clearly understands the hard and "uncool" work that goes into making real, lasting changes, that relationships and trust trump literally everything, and that people really do have the capacity to achieve if only their baseline and root barriers are addressed. Definity Foundation understands that real work takes years, and that real progress is being made, even if it feels slow.*

Partner survey results reinforced these comments: 27 of 32 respondents (84%) said the Foundation had done well or very well in supporting work that addresses root causes rather than only immediate needs.

Table 10: Compared to initial expectations, how well has Definity Foundation Supported work that addresses root causes, not only immediate needs (n=32 partners, July 2026)

Not at all	Not well	Unsure	Well	Very well
0	0	5	8	19

What was learned?

Over time, the Foundation developed a deeper understanding of the hypothesis. Initially, it looked for intersections primarily within individual initiatives, seeking opportunities that could advance several priorities at once. Through its work with partners, it came to understand more clearly that **health, socio-economic and climate inequities are not simply intersecting funding areas; they are interconnected in people's lives and often shaped by the same underlying conditions.** Climate impacts, for example, can quickly become health, housing, food and affordability challenges. Economic conditions can determine a community's exposure to those impacts and its ability to respond. Looking at these issues together therefore helped the Foundation move beyond individual outcomes and ask deeper questions about the systems and conditions producing the outcomes.

The Foundation also learned that **an individual initiative does not need to address every priority to contribute to systemic change.** Different organizations bring different expertise and play different roles. What matters is understanding how those efforts relate to one another and to the underlying conditions they are trying to change.

The hypothesis therefore evolved. The most important insight was not simply that greater impact occurs where three funding priorities overlap. Instead, following the connections among those priorities can reveal deeper systems and conditions shaping inequity across all three.

3.4 To what extent did the Foundation's funding give partners the stability and flexibility to direct resources where they

were most needed, test new approaches, and respond to emerging opportunities?

This hypothesis reflected a belief that addressing systemic barriers takes time, and that partners need stable, flexible funding to sustain their work and adapt as conditions change and respond to emerging opportunities. The Foundation therefore sought to provide multi-year funding where appropriate and to build flexibility into how funded initiatives were implemented.

The Premise: How did Definity Foundation put long-term and flexible funding into practice?

The Foundation put flexibility into practice by allowing partners to adjust workplans and timelines as circumstances changed. Staff worked with partners to understand changing conditions and adapt expectations, rather than treating the original proposal as a fixed plan. The Foundation also streamlined reporting processes and worked at the pace and on the terms of communities they were engaging, and coordinating with other funders to reduce burden. Importantly, flexible funding did not generally mean unrestricted operating support. Most funding was provided for an agreed purpose or initiative, while giving partners flexibility in *how* the work was implemented as circumstances and opportunities evolved. As one partner put it:

> *Definity really took the time to understand our organization, our work and direction. They have also been very flexible and gave us the room to figure out how to advance our work in a good way. (2026 partner survey respondent)*

And in the words of another:

> *The DF has been a great sounding board when it comes to talking through some of the challenges the project has faced. We have a project that had a very unpredictable timeline in the early stages and rather then interrogating the DF listened, asked questions, and tried to understand. This was extremely important as it gave the team the*

opportunity to breathe and think strategically about the ways to address the impacts. (2026 partner survey respondent)

The Foundation's experience with long-term funding was more mixed. An internal analysis found a mean grant term of 2.39 years, with individual grants ranging from one to five years. Two-thirds of the grants lasted 2 or 3 years. In some cases, the Foundation used a phased approach: an initial grant supported exploration or development, followed by further funding to implement or advance the work.

Our relationship has deepened over the last couple of years. We have gotten to know more of the team. We went from a one year gift to now starting at two year grant. This is huge in terms of building sustainability of the org and advancing our long term work. (2026 partner survey respondent)

A Case in Brief: Building Relationships Over Time

Definity Foundation's relationship with the Inclusive Prosperity Project began with a grant in 2023 to explore and develop a novel fund that addressed food security challenges faced by African Canadians. The research found that culturally relevant foods were inaccessible, and this was largely driven by the lack of land ownership and control by African Canadian farmers that would enable them to choose what to grow and how to market their produce. This led to the launch of the African Canadian Farmers Fund (ACFF), which provides equitable access to capital for African Canadian farmers to acquire farmland to increase sustainable, culturally relevant agriculture and to create community wealth-building opportunities among Black Canadians. The Foundation led an impact investment into ACFF and acted as a catalyst for other investors.

The Result: What did stability and flexibility enable?

Definity Foundation often built ongoing relationships with intermediaries who were well-positioned to support emerging work. For example, The Makeway Charitable Society and Makeway Foundation acted as a shared platform for multiple grants, such as the East Scarborough Storefront, the Northern Manitoba Food, Culture and Community Collaborative, and Gaagige Zaagibigaa.

Partner feedback provides strong evidence that the Foundation's flexibility was experienced in practice. Of 32 partners responding to the 2026 survey, 28 (88%) said the Foundation had done well or very well in using flexible funding tools appropriately.

Table 11: Compared to your initial expectations, how well has Definity Foundation Used flexible funding tools appropriately (n=32 partners, July 2026)

Not at all	Not well	Unsure	Well	Very well
0	0	4	13	15

Flexibility in implementation was rated even more strongly. Of 31 respondents, 27 (87%) were very satisfied and the remaining four were satisfied, with no respondents reporting dissatisfaction.

Table 12: How satisfied are you with the Foundation's flexibility in terms of supporting changes to how you implement your initiative? (n=31 partners, July 2026)

Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very satisfied
0	0	4	27

Partner comments on the survey help explain what this flexibility made possible. Partners described having room to work out how best to advance their initiatives, while longer commitments helped support organizational sustainability and work that takes time to develop. These findings provide strong evidence that the Foundation created space for adaptation experimentation, although they provide less evidence that longer-term impact can be attributed to funding flexibility alone.

What was Learned?

The Foundation learned that flexibility is not simply a feature of a funding agreement. It is a way of working. Partners need to be able to discuss uncertainty, revise plans and respond to changing circumstances without feeling that doing so will put their funding at risk. Listening, proportionate reporting and a willingness to adjust expectations helped make flexibility meaningful in practice.

The experience also reinforced the value of patient funding for work that takes time to develop. Partners described the importance of having space to deepen their work rather than continually expanding or developing new activities in response to funding opportunities. In its relationship with EntrepreNorth, for example, the Foundation saw how sustained, relational support could create space to deepen culturally responsive approaches and build longer-term networks.

At the same time, the Foundation learned that a sustained relationship is not the same as predictable long-term funding. An organization may receive successive grants over several years while still having limited certainty about whether funding will continue. With an average grant term of 2.39 years, the Foundation's experience suggests there is further opportunity to consider when longer commitments could provide greater predictability and reduce the time partners spend seeking continued support.

The learning was therefore twofold: **flexibility gives partners room to adapt how they work, while longer-term funding can give partnerrs greater confidence that they will have the time and resources to do that work**. Both matter, but they provide different forms of support.

3.5 Was relationship building a priority for the Foundation? What changes did this practice of philanthropy lead to?

This hypothesis reflected the belief that philanthropy is strengthened by genuine human connection between funders and the people carrying out the work. Taking time to understand partners' aspirations, knowledge and circumstances can build trust, deepen understanding, and create a more reciprocal relationship. Definity Foundation sought to make relationships central to how it works, with application and reporting processes supporting dialogue and shared learning.

The Premise: How did Definity Foundation put a relational approach into practice?

The Foundation sought to build strong working relationships with partners, in a variety of ways. They practiced "engaged philanthropy," by minimizing structured written application and reporting processes and instead investing staff time in annual check-in conversations, providing the option for oral reports, and being present for grantee partners in other ways beyond grantmaking. They structured these processes in such a way that the focus was not on holding the partner accountable to a foundation, but on learning together.

Staff sought to understand organizations' work, aspirations, and goals before exploring alignment and how a partnership could help advance shared goals. This approach is reflected in *How We Partner*, a guide that emphasizes deep listening, community self-determination, and relationships rooted in trust, collaboration, and shared purpose.

Conversations created space to understand the people and organizations behind an initiative: their motivations, experience, community relationships, and what they hoped to achieve. Check-in conversations and options for oral reporting provided further opportunities to exchange insights and learn together.

Staff also attended partner gatherings, participated in working groups, and joined discussions relevant to partners' work. Being present in these spaces helped them understand realities that formal proposals and reports alone could not convey. Being present also offered opportunities to contribute knowledge, make connections, and support partners' priorities beyond the grant.

> *[One word to describe The Foundation is] Relationship building. Definity makes an effort to understand the intentions, capacity and knowledge its partners offer and contributes both funds and an opportunity to build a relationship to share and support the work. (2026 partner survey respondent)*

The Foundation also worked through intermediaries with existing relationships and knowledge of the communities they supported. This allowed a small staff team to support grassroots-led work across more communities by trusting and building on existing relationships. These partners brought a deeper understanding of local priorities and connected the Foundation to learning from a broader range of community-led initiatives that would otherwise be difficult to

reach for a national organization. In some cases, staff also shared about their learning as a new foundation to other newly established philanthropic entities such as Annauma and Gaagige Zaagibigaa.

> *DF staff members have listened and tried to understand the holistic project from beyond just its impact. The result has been providing not just sustainable funding but also offer to make linkages with other funders, co-curating spaces and opportunities to share research and insights. To sum it up DF has committed to partnership model that seems to be centered around solidarity with a strong focus on understanding not just the proposed impact of a project but also the organizational needs that will help achieve the best results. (2026 partner survey respondent)*

The Result: How did partners experience the Foundation's relational approach?

Respondents to the 2026 partner survey gave high marks for the Foundation's efforts to work collaboratively and respectfully, and reported high levels of satisfaction with both the partnership process and their interactions with Foundation staff.

Table 13: Compared to your initial expectations, how well has Definity Foundation Worked in a collaborative and respectful way (n=31 partners, July 2026)

Not at all	Not well	Unsure	Well	Very well
0	0	1	6	24

Table 14: How satisfied are you with the partnership process (e.g., conversations, decision-making, the opportunity for feedback/advice? (n=32 partners, July 2026)

Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very satisfied
0	0	7	25

Table 15: How satisfied are you with the Foundation team's communication and interaction with you and your organization (n=32 partners, July 2026)

Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Satisfied	Very satisfied
0	0	4	28

The collection of survey questions summarized in the table below make it clear that Definity Foundation practiced its relational approach in a variety of ways with most grantees, but to varying degrees across initiatives. While more than a third of surveyed partners felt the Foundation had played a central role in helping them network, a smaller percentage saw them as highly involved in working groups or in amplifying their work.

Table 16: Beyond direct financial support, in what ways has Definity Foundation contributed to your work? (n=31 partners, July 2026)

	Played a small or supporting role	Played a moderately important role	Played a central role
Participating in steering committees or working groups to support the development of resources, tools or programs, etc.	3	11	6
Providing feedback on challenges or opportunities presented	7	7	11
Advancing issue areas through thought leadership (op-eds, research pieces) or policy/ advocacy activities (writing letters on your behalf, participating in policy conversations)	5	9	8
Helping us to amplify our work (e.g. promoting it on socials, inviting to speak at conferences, profiling us in their annual report)	11	9	5
Helping to form new networks and partnerships, or strengthening existing ones	8	9	11
Helping us to connect to other funders or investors	8	5	12

As mentioned earlier, a significant proportion of Definity Foundation investment was directed to initiatives that were community-driven and/or community-owned. This finding suggests that the Foundation's approach led to some shifts in power. This suggestion is supported by the survey respondent who, when asked to choose a single work to describe Definity Foundation, chose "Powershifting." They went on to say:

> *I think the foundation is doing an incredible job at shifting power and resources to underrepresented communities. (2026 partner survey respondent)*

Another respondent said:

> *They show up, are willing to jump into very specific and complex conversations and are interested in learning. As a funder they do not exploit their inherent power in a dynamic that often favours funders. (2026 partner survey respondent)*

However, shifting power can be a slow and challenging process.

> *Some of those who hold the power for decision making are not at the table as asset owners so need to think about how to engage them in the discussions about how to mobilize, distribute, invest capital in new and more equitable ways. (2026 partner survey respondent)*

Please see section 5 of this report for more discussion of the ways in which Definity sought to address power imbalances.

What Was Learned?

The Foundation experimented with a range of strategies for practicing engaged philanthropy, and learned about the resources required – and where they are most effective. For example, its conversational approach to developing proposals generally worked well, but some partners initially found it unfamiliar or were unsure what was expected. This approach also required substantial preparation and documentation by staff. Likewise, participation in partner events and gatherings helped build connection and deepen trust but required dedicated staff time.

The Foundation learned that a relational approach is built through the quality and continuity of interaction. Regular contact is useful only when it deepens understanding and serves a purpose for both partners. This approach also required openness to being changed by what partners shared. Their knowledge and experience challenged assumptions and informed the Foundation's understanding of where and how it could contribute. Working through community-rooted intermediaries reinforced the importance of respecting relationships and expertise that already existed.

Finally, the Foundation learned that **being relational is not the same as shifting power**. Warm interactions alone do not change who controls resources or makes funding decisions. A

more reciprocal relationship depends on transparency, respect for partners' autonomy and a willingness to examine how the Foundation's own practices shape the exchange, centering the voices of experts in community.

3.6 Did the Foundation invest in organizations, networks and infrastructure that strengthen the broader nonprofit sector, and did that contribute to greater equity and resilience across the sector?

This hypothesis was included in Definity Foundation's investment strategy to guide investments that were intended to "create the conditions needed for a vibrant and resilient nonprofit sector." While the Community Investment Framework focused on specific issues and outcomes, the Foundation also recognized that organizations working toward those outcomes depend on a stronger nonprofit sector; the "sector strengthening" theme supported organizations that seek to strengthen the entire nonprofit sector through research, convening, policy analysis and capacity-building work. Nonprofit networks help smaller organizations share knowledge and act together. Intermediaries help distribute resources to communities that funders may not reach directly. Research and advocacy give visibility to gaps in funding and can give organizations a stronger voice in decisions affecting their work.

The value of these activities is collective and develops over time, rather than appearing as the outcome of a single project. The Foundation saw an opportunity to support this often-underfunded work, recognizing that advancing justice and equity depends on a sector with the knowledge, connections, and capacity to act collectively.

The Premise: Did Definity Foundation invest in sector-strengthening organizations?

Definity Foundation invested $6.685 million across 11 sector-strengthening grants. These initiatives focused on building long-term organizational health, digital resilience, policy advocacy and shared sector infrastructure. As of March 2026, reported sector-strengthening co-investment totalled $19.4 million across 59 co-investments.

Sector strengthening grants were often designed to promote "strategic capacity" – investing in organizational infrastructure so networks have the long-term, adaptive capacity to navigate changing economic and political conditions. Partners in this work help create conditions for community organizations to be more effective by conducting research, building sector capacity, strengthening relationships, advancing public policy, convening networks, sharing knowledge, and improving access to funding and other resources. Examples include Imagine Canada, the Canadian Centre for Nonprofit Digital Resilience, the Ontario Nonprofit Network, and Philanthropic Foundations Canada.

Definity Foundation also supported newer, community-driven intermediary institutions that helped build capacity within parts of the sector that have historically had less access to philanthropic resources, such as:

- Foundation for Black Communities (2024-29): establishing a new fund intended to build the capacity of Black-led and Black-serving organizations
- The Circle on Philanthropy (2022-26): an Indigenous-led organization working with members to transform philanthropy by redistributing wealth, centering Indigenous wisdom and strengthening infrastructure in support of Indigenous peoples, organizations, communities, and nations
- Annauma Community Foundation (2023-26): built a new granting program for Nunavut that is employing a consensus-based decision-making model

- New Power Labs: produced research and tools that make patterns of representation and funding more visible to other funders and organizations

Definity also worked with other funders to support coordination among nonprofit networks. One example is the Charitable and Nonprofit Sector Infrastructure Collaborative Fund, providing multi-year, general operating support to nonprofit networks across Canada: a group of foundations[9] came together to strengthen the essential infrastructure of provincial networks, which gave the Federation of Nonprofit Networks more capacity to connect members, identify concerns across regions and amplify shared messages. Bringing funders together around this work also created a way to support the network without asking each participating organization to manage separate reporting relationships.

The Result: Did this investment contribute to greater equity and resilience across the sector?

When surveyed in 2026, partners rated Definity Foundation's overall impact positively.

Table 17: How positive or negative is Definity Foundation's impact on your sector or field? (July 2026)

	Strongly negative	Negative	Unsure or neutral	Positive	Strongly positive
Partners (n=31)	1	0	2	6	22
Wider network (n=176)	0	3	81	57	35

While these results indicate a positive perception of the Foundation's contribution, there is not yet sufficient evidence to determine whether these investments contributed to greater equity

[9] At the time of writing, others in this group included The Lawson Foundation, Catherine Donnelly Foundation, Benefaction, McConnell Foundation, The Counselling Foundation of Canada, Laidlaw Foundation, Meta, RBC Foundation, the Sonor Foundation, and Tiny Foundation.

and resilience across the nonprofit sector as a whole. Many of the organizations, networks and collaborations supported are still developing, and their broader effects will take time to emerge.

What was learned?

Through these investments, the Foundation came to understand the importance of investing not only in individual organizations, but also in the infrastructure that supports them. Organizations need capacity to carry out their missions, alongside relationships and spaces for shared learning, coordinated action, and collective influence – and that asks funders to recognize the value of work that develops over time, including the coordination, policy work and shared infrastructure that make broader change possible.

Investing in intermediaries, institutions and networks driven by members of Indigenous, Black, and other racialized groups can support leadership and decision-making rooted in communities that have been underfunded. Pooling resources can enable funders to support shared infrastructure that may be difficult for any one institution to resource alone, while reducing the need for sector organizations to manage multiple funding and reporting relationships.

3.7 Did the Foundation experiment with different funding models to facilitate learning, build trust, and ultimately lead to greater impact?

This hypothesis was guided by the belief that justice-oriented philanthropy is about much more than simply distributing funds. *How* a foundation deploys its resources is as important as what it gives. The Foundation sought to explore how different funding models could address barriers to access, strengthen community ownership, and bring additional resources into the work. Experimenting with these models offered an opportunity to learn alongside partners about the

forms of capital best suited to their goals, and to help other funders and investors participate in community-led solutions.

The Premise: Did the Foundation experiment with different funding models?

As outlined earlier, the Foundation used grants and impact investments alongside pooled funding and blended finance approaches to explore different ways of directing capital to community-led solutions. Approaches included: mortgage financing, community bonds, Indigenous outcomes financing, and support for intermediaries offering microgrants and funding to non-qualified donees.

Each approach responded to a particular barrier or opportunity. Offering a mortgage to Ulnooweg Education Centre supported access to land and space for culturally appropriate programming. Community bonds offered a way to mobilize investment for community priorities, while the Raven Indigenous Outcomes Fund (now called Otipêy) supported community-driven approaches to health and climate challenges. The Foundation also helped develop a pooled guarantee fund intended to reduce risk for investors and attract additional capital to community finance intermediaries, particularly those led by and serving racialized communities.

The Foundation's contribution extended to helping partners develop the models themselves. Through early funding, advice, collaboration and introductions to other investors, it supported emerging social finance initiatives to become viable investment opportunities. This work created opportunities to learn alongside partners about how financial tools might expand access to capital and sustain community-led work.

A Case in Brief: Experimenting with Different Funding Models

In 2024, Definity Foundation worked with Relèven to support capacity costs for the development of a $30 million transition Fund, a loan fund that would enable not-for-profits to acquire and repurpose faith properties across Canada, ensuring key infrastructure continues to be owned and operated as community spaces or affordable housing. In 2026, Relèven is pursuing their mission from two impact angles: being under the Otipêy platform enables

Indigenous leadership to steward the repurposing of faith properties, and Relèven's offering of the Social Purpose Real Estate Impact Investment Trust (SPREIIT) is pursuing their mission at scale seeking to attract $10 billion from institutional investors.

Pooled funding provided another avenue for experimentation and shared learning. By contributing to funds led by Black, Indigenous, and racialized communities, the Foundation supported funding decisions grounded in community knowledge and priorities. Working alongside other contributors brought additional resources into these initiatives and deepened the Foundation's understanding of participatory and community-led philanthropy.

The Result: What did experimenting with different funding models enable?

Experimenting with different funding models broadened the ways the Foundation could support community-led solutions. Grants helped partners explore ideas and develop new approaches, while loans, community bonds, and other investments provided financing suited to different needs. Combining these tools allowed the Foundation to accompany some initiatives from early exploration through to implementation.

Several models were designed to address barriers that conventional financing have left unresolved. The African Canadian Farmers Fund, for example, created a rent-to-own pathway to farmland ownership, supporting farmers' ability to grow culturally relevant foods and build community wealth. Financing for the Ulnooweg Education Centre supported land and space for Indigenous-led educational and cultural programming. Community bond investments provided another route for organizations to raise capital for priorities such as housing, renewable energy, and education. These examples show how the choice of funding model shaped what partners could pursue and who could participate.

The Foundation also acted as a thought partner to support emerging models, providing early support, advice and connections as initiatives moved toward investment readiness. Work on a pooled guarantee fund extended this approach, seeking to reduce investment risk and attract

more capital to community finance intermediaries, though longer-term results remain to be assessed.

Mobilizing additional resources was another important result. As of March 2026, reported co-investment totalled more than $145 million in grants and $251.93 million in impact investments. In 2025, for every $1 granted, $3.41 in co-investment from 90 partners was reported. Contributors included private, public, and community foundations, as well as governments and corporate partners.

What was Learned?

Through experimentation, the Foundation deepened its understanding of how different forms of capital could advance community-led solutions. The value lay in matching the funding model to the barriers partners faced and the goals they sought to achieve. Grants, loans, community bonds, and pooled funds offered different possibilities for expanding access to resources, strengthening ownership and bringing additional investors into the work.

The Foundation also learned that developing new financing models requires shared understanding and trust. Some partners needed time to consider unfamiliar tools, particularly repayable capital, and what they would mean for their organizations. Advice, co-design, and technical assistance became important parts of the work. These exchanges also helped the Foundation understand where a model needed to change to respond to community priorities and circumstances.

Early support and participation can help emerging models build credibility with other funders and investors. This reinforced the Foundation's potential to contribute as a catalyst: supporting exploration, sharing risk, and helping partners mobilize additional resources. However, attracting additional capital was only one measure of progress. Equally important were whose priorities shaped the model, who gained access to resources, and whether communities had greater ownership and influence.

Experimentation also required internal expertise and capacity. Structuring investments, assessing risk, and planning for disbursements placed different demands on staff beyond grantmaking.

Together, these experiences sharpened the hypothesis: different funding models create greater potential for impact when they are shaped around community goals, developed through shared learning, and supported by the capacity to put them into practice. Their lasting contribution to reducing inequities will become clearer as models mature.

3.8 Reviewing the hypotheses all together

Taken together, the seven hypotheses gave Definity Foundation a practical framework for testing its assumptions. The findings show that the Foundation put each hypothesis into practice to varying degrees, while learning more about what they enabled, where they fell short, and what was required to implement them well.

Ongoing reflection on the hypotheses has generated rich learning, and drove efforts to refine and strengthen the team's approach. Over time, holding these hypotheses led Definity Foundation into a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the obstacles that stand in the way of practicing philanthropy in a way that advances justice. They saw that the key ingredients needed to address obstacles include: **advancing equity requires attention not only to who benefits from funding, but also to who has access to resources, shapes priorities and makes decisions.** Trusting community requires more than consultation; it raises questions about ownership and control. Flexible and relational approaches create greater room for partners to adapt and for the Foundation to learn alongside. These ingredients show up repeatedly in the next section of this report, which describes initiatives that Definity supported and the ways that work led to the development of community-based solutions.

The Foundation's approaches also required more time and energy from partners and staff. In some cases, learning new approaches contributed to delays or workload challenges. This

reinforced the importance of considering the capacity and resources required alongside the goals of the initiative.

The hypotheses were most useful not as propositions to be proven or disproven, but as a way of learning through practice. In several cases, the Foundation found strong evidence that it had implemented the intended approach, while evidence of longer-term outcomes – such as shifts in power, greater sector resilience, increased innovation or greater impact – is still emerging. In other cases, the learning changed the Foundation's understanding of the hypothesis itself. Some of the hypotheses named broader or more ambitious results that take time and depend on the actions of many organizations and actors, not one foundation alone. In the sections that follow, Definity Foundation's impact in these areas will be explored in more depth.

4. Impact Achieved: Supporting community-led solutions to address priority outcomes

The Foundation's seven hypotheses shaped *how* it works with partners and guided ongoing learning and adaptation. This section examines *what* that approach helped make possible: the community-led solutions that partners advanced across three impact areas, the outcomes achieved, and what was learned along the way.

The original Community Investment Framework identified solutions linked to outcomes. These included strengthening community leadership and voice, supporting advocacy, and expanding communities' access to the knowledge, tools, and resources needed to act on their priorities. This section follows how those solutions took shape through individual initiatives, including new approaches that emerged as the work developed.

Evaluation findings and partner experiences help explore the progress achieved, the conditions that helped or hindered the work, and the contribution of Definity Foundation's support.

Importantly, the achievements belong to the partners and communities leading the initiatives; the focus here is on understanding where and how the Foundation supported their efforts.

While the investment framework included five outcomes across three focus areas (Healthy People, Thriving Communities, and Liveable Planet), this section focuses primarily on three of the five outcomes because they were the ones that saw the most significant investment by the Foundation and therefore resulted in enough data to aggregate and identify impact:[10]

- Affordable & Healthy Food (in the Healthy People focus area)
- Inclusive economic opportunities (in the Thriving Communities focus area)
- Climate Justice (in the Liveable Planet focus area)

This concentration of investment reflects how the Foundation's approach evolved through practice and learning. Within the parameters of the original investment strategy, the Foundation has also deliberately sought to advance areas of the strategy that were either under-invested or where they were seeing more traction from the community. Over time, investment became more concentrated on the outcomes and solutions where the Foundation saw the greatest momentum and opportunity for impact.

4.1 Healthy people: Affordable & healthy food – supporting community food strategies

Food connects health, community wellbeing, local economies, and the environment, connecting it to Definity Foundation's work across Healthy People, Thriving Communities, and Liveable Planet. Early grants supported community-led responses to food insecurity, particularly among Indigenous, Black, racialized, Northern and low-income communities.

Under Healthy People, the Foundation focused primarily on community food strategies, and supported some projects focused on public policy, advocacy, civic engagement and/or

[10] The other two outcomes in the investment strategy were Health and Wellbeing for Under-served Populations (within the Health People focus area) and Civic and Social Inclusion (within the Thriving Communities focus area).

grassroots mobilization. No active impact investments were recorded under this area, although investments elsewhere in the portfolio also supported food-related outcomes. The full commitment list (investments approved but not yet active) also includes an additional $500,000 impact investment commitment.

Table 18: Solutions supported in the Healthy People impact area

Solution	Total Number of Grants	Total Value of all Foundation Investments
Public policy, advocacy, civic engagement, and/or grassroots mobilization	4	$2,194,090
Community food strategies	10	$4,113,514
Total	14	$6,307,604

Learning alongside partners and conversations with food systems leaders have deepened the Foundation's understanding of the conditions shaping food insecurity: income, access to land, how food is produced and distributed, and who makes decisions about these systems. This learning reinforced the importance of supporting community leadership and local food systems alongside access to healthy food. The concept of food sovereignty[11] brought these dimensions together, emphasizing communities' ability to shape food systems grounded in their cultures, knowledge, and priorities. More recent learning also highlighted the potential of regenerative food systems to strengthen health, climate resilience, and local economies together.

Solutions that found traction

Strengthening Community-Led Food Systems

- Early grants to the Indigenous Peoples Resilience Fund (IPRF, 2022-2024), Gaagige Zaagibigaa (2022-2026) and the Northern Manitoba Food, Culture and Community Collective (NMFCCC, 2022-2025) focused on food security and food sovereignty. These

[11] Food security exists when a person, group or community has regular, affordable access to enough healthy and appropriate food, whereas food sovereignty goes a step further by including community control over how food is produced, distributed, and governed.

initiatives used pooled grant funds and capacity-building support to grassroots groups and individual families for initiatives like growing, hunting, and cultural reclamation. These initiatives used a variety of community-led grantmaking and decision-making approaches. In 2023, as an example, Gaagige Zaagibigaa had distributed 232 micro-grants grants to individual families for preserving (32% of grants), hunting (28%), gardening (15%), harvesting (4%), and fishing (20%). As of early 2024, the next round had 281 applicants from 76 different communities.

- Between June 2020 and December 2024, IPRF provided financial support to 530 Indigenous-led grassroots communities and organizations (from a $14 million fund supported by several contributors), used largely for food security and food sovereignty such as community garden projects, healthy food boxes, community kitchens, and traditional harvesting food programs.

The Foundation learned alongside these and other partners about the importance of strengthening Indigenous-led food systems through culturally-grounded approaches. This learning informed further investments. For example, in 2025 the Foundation supported a new pooled fund through Sîhtoskâtowin (2025–2027), which was designed to support community initiatives in Saskatchewan for growing, harvesting, hunting, food sharing, and cultural reclamation.

The Foundation also supported work that connected local initiatives and addressed barriers across the wider food system.

- The Indigenous Food Sovereignty Association (2026–2027) seeks to advance Indigenous-led food economies across Canada by building and connecting local food security and food sovereignty initiatives. Its broader contribution lies in strengthening relationships and shared learning across communities, helping individual efforts become part of a connected movement.
- Nourish Leadership's Food Systems Change Project (2025–2027) worked across sectors to strengthen the role of anchor institutions in supporting sustainable, healthy food, and local food systems – for example, addressing structural barriers to serving country food in healthcare institutions.

Through grants like these, the Foundation helped expand new pathways for directing resources to grassroots food sovereignty initiatives across Canada, particularly through Indigenous-led intermediaries and community-governed funding models. These investments strengthened local leadership, supported cultural revitalization, and increased communities' ability to determine how food is produced, shared, and sustained.

Addressing the structural drivers of food insecurity

As time went on, the Foundation increasingly supported organizations tackling the underlying conditions that shape food insecurity, leaning into approaches that integrated policy advocacy and deeper engagement in underfunded communities. This work included supporting the East Scarborough Storefront (2023-2026) to develop a sustainable, community-based response to systemic barriers to food security for Black, Indigenous, and racialized people in Kingston-Galloway-Orton Park in Toronto; supporting the launch and continued growth of Quebec's first food security coalition with 30+ members from urban and rural communities (The Depot (2024-2025, 2025-2027)); and supporting Food First NL in Newfoundland and Labrador (2024-2028) to explore the intersection between food systems, climate change, and other structural barriers. Conversations with food systems leaders also drew attention to less visible barriers, including gaps in processing, distribution, and access to markets. Strengthening local production requires the infrastructure and connections that allow food to reach communities and enable producers to sustain their livelihoods.

Through these initiatives, the Foundation helped strengthen the community-rooted infrastructure needed for local food systems to thrive. It supported partners in strengthening governance, planning, outreach, staffing, and organizational policies while helping several intermediaries attract additional contributors to pooled funding models.

Lessons learned about supporting equitable food systems

Definity Foundation learned alongside organizations (like NMFCCC, which hosts spaces for ongoing knowledge sharing and to strengthen collaboration) and deepened their understanding

of how food security and food sovereignty connect with health, climate, local economies, and Indigenous self-determination. As in other areas of its work, the Foundation increasingly recognized the importance of leadership, relationships, governance, and community infrastructure in lasting systems change.

A Case in Brief: The shift from food security to food sovereignty

The Sîhtoskâtowin program operates with a mission of increasing accessible funding for rural and remote Indigenous-led work in Saskatchewan. A central piece of this is enhancing Indigenous food systems, as they are a pillar of community health and wellness, pride and cultural reclamation.

Sîhtoskâtowin has observed how challenging it is to commit to cultural practices related to food; roles around hunting and gathering in families have become increasingly unclear and they feel there is a greater disconnect between food systems and the people nourished. They believe now is a critical time to revive practice and bring together Elders and youth for generational knowledge exchange. This program allows community the time to develop and revive traditional food practices.

Funding has been distributed to Onion Lake First Nation, where an individual was able to establish a community garden by partnering with dieticians at the local health centre. In the two years since receiving their financial contribution they have developed food education workshops, bringing together youth and Elders.

Support has also been provided to Home Away from Home, a boat-in camp for youth where they are immersed in cultural practices like learning to harvest medicine, hunt, and trap. The investments are simple, but the outcome is a revitalization of practices that contribute to Indigenous culture and self-determination.

Experience with Indigenous-led pooled funds also highlighted the importance of supporting governance and leadership continuity. Community-led approaches depend on relationships and collective decision-making that require time and care. The Foundation learned to respect these processes and consider the organizational support needed to sustain them.

Through NMFCCC and Sîhtoskâtowin, the Foundation saw how 2025 wildfires affected communities already facing interconnected pressures. This learning reinforced that food-related infrastructure, while important, needs to be supported alongside broader community priorities as it is deeply intertwined with environmental and economic conditions.

The Foundation also developed a clearer understanding of philanthropy's role alongside government, business and communities. Early funding, support for policy and advocacy, and spaces for collaboration offer ways to advance work that other actors may struggle to resource. Supporting networks and community voice is particularly important to ensure that smaller and historically underfunded organizations help shape the direction of food-system change.

Engagement with food systems leaders further expanded this understanding. Institutional procurement, regenerative agriculture, and community leadership emerged as important ways to connect healthier food systems with climate resilience and stronger local economies. These insights are shaping the Foundation's understanding of regenerative food systems as approaches that restore the health of the land while strengthening access to land, diverse ownership, and viable livelihoods for the people who steward it.

4.2 Thriving Communities: Community wealth, ownership and inclusive economic opportunities

The Foundation's work in Thriving Communities sought to expand access to decent work[12] and capital, while strengthening communities' ability to build wealth and shape their local economies. From inception, the Foundation recognized that communities have unique knowledge and lived experience, and are better positioned to shape solutions when they have the resources, ownership, and decision-making power to define their own futures. Whether creating jobs, improving access to capital, stewarding land, or strengthening local economies, lasting solutions are more likely to emerge when communities lead.

This insight shaped the Foundation's approach to inclusive economic opportunities. Early investments emphasized access to decent work, financial empowerment and opportunities for

[12] Decent work is a guiding principle for employment that ensures productive work, fair income, workplace security, social protection, and equality of opportunity for all. For more information, see the Decent Work Project by Ontario Nonprofit Network.

economic participation. As the Foundation learned alongside partners, it increasingly focused on the structures shaping those opportunities: who can access capital, who owns assets, who makes economic decisions and how wealth is built and shared. The Foundation explored how philanthropy could strengthen community wealth building by supporting community ownership, expanding access to capital, and developing financing models responsive to community priorities. It also tested how grants and impact investments could work together to support emerging ideas and help capital flow differently – particularly to Indigenous, Black, and other racialized communities that have faced barriers within conventional financial systems.

Table 19: Solutions supported in the Thriving Communities impact area (all grant and impact investment commitments)

Solution	# Grants	Value of Grants	# Impact investments	Value of Impact investments	Total Value
Communities equipped with the tools and resources to solve social challenges and implement change	9	$1,440,000	-	-	$1,440,000
Increase access to financial tools and services	8	$1,962,000	5	$4,000,000	$5,962,000
Mobilization of private capital for social good	11	$2,954,000	8	$4,750,000	$7,704,000
Other solutions, including supporting entrepreneurs, advancement of decent work, creation of green jobs, and more representative community leadership	8	$8,358,202	1	$500,000	$8,858,202
Total	36	$14,714,202	14	$9,250,000	$23,964,202

Solutions that found traction

Communities solve social challenges and implement change

In these examples, communities shape the priorities and solutions, while funding and collaboration provide the means to act on them.

- Strengthening Pathways to Decent Work: Through the Toronto Workforce Funders Collaborative (2022–2025), Definity Foundation supported a pooled approach to improving wages and job quality in the Greater Toronto Area. The Collaborative invested in the capacity of workforce development organizations, research, and shared learning to address persistent gaps between workers' skills, employers' practices and access to quality employment. This effort extended the Foundation's work on economic inclusion to the institutions and practices shaping people's working lives.

- Resourcing Community-Defined Priorities: The Foundation supported initiatives that strengthened communities' ability to identify shared challenges, develop solutions, and direct resources toward their implementation. Centraide du Grand Montréal's Collective Impact Project (2023–2027) pools resources to support neighbourhood plans developed through local roundtables with residents and community organizations. These spaces bring local knowledge into collective planning and help organizations coordinate their efforts around priorities identified by the people who live there. The Arctic Inspiration Prize (2022–2027) was offered support for a transition toward a fully Northern-led and self-determined governance model, while it also supported more than 30 local leaders as laureates between 2022-2025.
- Developing Collective Solutions to Shared Barriers: The Impact Guarantee initiative (2025–2026) emerged from relationships developed through Catalyst Community Finance and a series of design collaborations with dozens of diverse community finance leaders. Together, they developed a pooled guarantee model intended to reduce investment risk and attract capital to smaller community finance intermediaries serving communities excluded from conventional financial systems. Alongside advice and participation in the model's development, Definity provided development grants to support the creation of the pooled guarantee facility.

Expanding Inclusive Access to Capital

The Foundation supported innovative approaches to financing community ownership and stewardship. Enabling communities to own and manage productive businesses and acquire and steward land shapes who benefits from such assets over time. Community ownership enables community decision-making, strengthens the prospects of value being kept within communities, builds intergenerational wealth, and protects assets holding cultural, social, and ecological importance.

- Community Ownership of Assets: Supporting communities to access and use capital in innovative ways brings important assets into community ownership. Wasanay Mnis (2025–2026) explored the transfer of Wasan Island from private ownership to shared Indigenous stewardship, while an impact investment in the form of a 15-year, 0% mortgage for Ulnooweg Education Centre supports Asitu'lisk as a permanent place for Indigenous ceremonies, learning, and community development.
- Developing Financial Tools and Services Responsive to Community Needs: The Foundation also recognized that community leadership must be matched by access to appropriate financial tools and services. Many entrepreneurs, organizations, and communities continue to face systemic barriers to accessing conventional finance, limiting their ability to build assets and create economic opportunities. To address these barriers, the Foundation supported organizations developing financial tools tailored to the needs of underserved communities. For example: Jumpstart Refugee Talent's Refugee Impact Fund (2024–2026) is developing a new financing model for refugee entrepreneurs; Prosper Canada (2022–2026) focused on financial empowerment, hosting seven meetups in different communities and convening Black-led organizations and First Nations to discuss needs and barriers. Its work explored how services could better reflect community circumstances and priorities, recognizing that expanding access requires appropriate support alongside financial products.
- Demonstrating New Approaches to Expanding Access to Capital: Alongside these initiatives targeting specific obstacles, the Foundation also supported work that undertook more comprehensive or multi-pronged approaches to expanding access to capital. The African Canadian Farmers Fund (2025–2027) is expanding access to

farmland and financing for Black farmers, and the Black Opportunity Fund (2025-2027) combines capacity building, advocacy, and catalytic capital to advance Black community wealth-building. The Foundation also partnered with Employee Ownership Canada (2025–2027) to advance employee ownership as a pathway to more inclusive wealth creation and business succession.

There is ample evidence that initiatives supported by Definity Foundation have moved financial resources into the control of Black, Indigenous, and racialized communities. As outlined earlier, community-driven initiatives accounted for 71.7% of grant dollars and 76.2% of impact investment dollars, while community-owned initiatives accounted for 35.7% and 69.0%, respectively. For example, in 2025, the Foundation committed to invest $500,000 in launching EntrepreNorth's Sinew Impact Fund, expanding capital access to Indigenous entrepreneurs in the North, using tools like debt financing and revenue-based financing. This fund had a total of $4.5 million in investment by June 2026.

As of March 2026, reported co-investment across the Foundation's portfolio totalled more than $145 million in grants and $251.93 million in impact investments. Advancing community-led systems change requires an ecosystem of funders bringing complementary resources, relationships, and expertise – with their combined support enabling work that no single foundation could sustain alone.

A Case in Brief: Relational approaches to Accessing Capital

Beyond capital investments, Definity Foundation's approach to granting is often relational. When Afro-Caribbean Business Network (ACBN) was looking to grow, Definity Foundation provided financial support, as well as guidance to help them stretch existing resources. Definity Foundation was able to help the organization "future-proof" by moving away from a dependence on grants to diverse streams of funding.

ACBN received coaching to be "investor ready", as Definity Foundation attended meetings with ACBN and other funders to add organizational legitimacy and demonstrate funder confidence in the work.

Ultimately, ACBN is leveraging their existing resources to create an internal system of cyclical funding; using their existing Micro Loan Fund to raise money for housing projects, and having an internal revenue source from their part ownership of the homecare franchise "Just Like Family" so income can continue to flow without primary dependence on grants.

The mobilization of private capital for social good

The Foundation worked with partners to develop financing models and infrastructure that could attract a broader range of funders and investors to community-led work. Through early funding, relationships and a willingness to take risks, they helped partners develop models that other investors could assess and support – thus building the collective financial backing to advance initiatives beyond any single foundation.

- Ecosystem infrastructure: Definity Foundation is helping to build the systems, intermediaries, data, networks, and capacity supports that allow inclusive finance to function. Examples include field-building work with social finance partners, and investment readiness support. Catalyst Community Finance Initiative (2024-2026) is providing a range of supports (including the cultivation of local intermediaries) directly to rural, Northern, and other organizations led by equity-deserving groups so they can design, lead, and benefit from their own investment vehicles.
- Definity Foundation also supported the Outcomes Finance Summit held by Raven Indigenous Capital Partners in 2023, which brought together diverse perspectives and expertise from around the world to explore outcomes financing. The summit led to *The State of Outcomes-Based Finance in Canada*, highlighting the importance of collaborative partnerships and stronger support for service providers. This work connected practitioners and investors regarding the conditions needed to develop and implement outcomes financing models.
- Inclusive and community-led finance: This work has been expanding participation and ownership by supporting models where communities have greater voice in how capital is designed, governed, and used. Examples include the African Canadian Farmers Fund (with a bond maturing in 2035), which offers flexible financial support nationally for African Canadian farmers to acquire farmland; and the Raven Indigenous Outcomes Fund (now called Otipêy), which provides financial support to community-led projects where investor repayments are tied to the successful delivery of specific and measurable outcomes. Both initiatives engage community leaders as active collaborators in making decisions about how and where to invest.
- Culturally grounded finance innovation: Definity Foundation supported initiatives exploring how financing models can reflect communities' values and approaches to

ownership and accountability. As an example, Indigenous Tech Circle's Indigenous Venture Challenge (2025–2027) trained 77 Indigenous entrepreneurs, with five projects to be considered for investment. Alongside this process, it introduced Indigenous entrepreneurs and angel investors to financing tools aligned with Indigenous worldviews, connecting access to capital with culturally grounded learning. IslamicFamily's Shariah-compliant affordable housing fund (2025–2027) combined the development of an investment opportunity with efforts to deepen understanding of Islamic finance principles in the social finance sector. The Black Capital Infrastructure Fund is developing an approach to directing capital grounded in eight African-centred values and six capital pillars.

A Case in Brief: Mobilizing Capital

The Foundation's connection with Ulnooweg Indigenous Communities Foundation began in 2022 as an intentional effort to listen and learn about Indigenous funding approaches and proactively explore trust-based partnership opportunities, rather than imposing traditional, top-down grant structures. Definity Foundation approved a $450,000 multi-year Sector Strengthening grant to the Ulnooweg Education Centre, which they used to build their internal capacity to support Indigenous business development across Atlantic Canada. One important component of this work was the Building Bridges project, which offered legal guidance to help establish and support new Indigenous-led charities and other qualified donees.

The Foundation's relationship with Ulnooweg deepened when the Board and staff later took part in a site visit to an environmental and cultural learning centre run by Ulnooweg. Based in part on the insights from this visit, the Foundation issued a $1,500,000 private mortgage to the Ulnooweg Education Centre to finance Asitu'lisk. This was one of Definity Foundation's first blended finance and impact investing initiatives. By using a private mortgage instead of a conventional grant, the Foundation supported Ulnooweg to redirect resources to youth entrepreneurship programming.

Private debt can act as a highly effective, catalytic tool to secure community-owned physical space while simultaneously unlocking a sustainable stream of operational funding.

Lessons learned about building community wealth, ownership and inclusive economic opportunities

Sequencing Support for Greater Impact: The Foundation learned over time that any of these solutions is made more effective when complemented by and chained with another. In a number of cases, the Foundation began exploring social finance models with partners through grants and then assisted them to launch impact investing initiatives. For example, in early 2024, staff provided direct support to help EntrepreNorth develop a new blended finance approach to the point where it would be a viable impact investment opportunity.

Acting as an Early Catalyst for Sustained Innovation: The Foundation also learned the importance of being willing to support promising ideas before their path to scale is fully established. By providing early resources, flexibility, thought partnership, and confidence in partners' ambitions, the Foundation helped demonstrate what is possible and helped create the infrastructure for others to participate. This often meant staying engaged as an idea evolved from research and community engagement, through design and implementation, to impact investment and the mobilization of additional capital. For example, Definity's early support for Releven's transition fund helped it demonstrate traction and contribute to a larger vision for a $10 billion Social-purpose Real Estate Impact Investment Trust – a form of financial infrastructure intended to increase community ownership. Sustained support also helped the African Canadian Farmers Fund and EntrepreNorth Sinew Impact Fund develop financing models that strengthen community ownership and control over capital. For the African Canadian Farmers Fund, Definity worked alongside Dragonfly Ventures to develop the model, led due diligence, and proposed a pilot with McConnell Foundation and Dragonfly to reduce risk. Building on Inspirit Foundation's earlier support, it also helped refine the Afro-Caribbean Business Network's fund and led due diligence. In both cases, sharing due diligence with other prospective investors and coordinating investor presentations, legal work, and capital deployment helped turn emerging models into funded initiatives.

Identifying and addressing obstacles to economic opportunity: The Foundation has successfully moved beyond traditional grantmaking to help partners study, launch, resource, and manage a sophisticated range of financial instruments, including social finance options like community bonds, impact investments, repayable grants, and redeemable equity – as well as other approaches to grantmaking like microgrants and grants to non-qualified donees. Often, in the process, the Foundation helped to identify and address specific obstacles to these kinds of

work, by (for example) making impact investments accessible to non-accredited retail investors and addressing policy barriers to developing social finance models that are Sharia-compliant (with IslamicFamily) or consistent with Indigenous ways of understanding investment and partnership. All this work has helped to demonstrate the viability of different models of financial capital ownership and governance.

Connecting Initiatives to Strengthen Collective Action: The Foundation learned to look across its portfolio for opportunities to connect complementary work. It mapped relationships between funded initiatives and intentionally supported connections for partners to combine strengths, develop shared approaches, and advance community priorities. Examples included the relationship between Migr8 and Tribe, which merged to become Hidden Capital, and support for Tamarack Institute, Impact United, Social Innovation Canada, and SETSI to explore how community voices and priorities could inform investor education and, ultimately, investment decisions. The Foundation also created the Convening the Convenors group to help gatherings build on one another. By connecting organizers of various spaces, the Foundation enabled learning to be carried forward, collaborations to deepen, and conversations to advance across successive convenings. These experiences reinforced the importance of supporting relationships between initiatives, in addition to the initiatives themselves.

Taking a holistic approach: Rather than focusing solely on employment or income, Definity Foundation increasingly addressed the underlying drivers of financial inequality: who has access to capital, who owns assets, who makes economic decisions, and who benefits from economic growth. The Foundation explored how philanthropy could strengthen community wealth by supporting community ownership, expanding access to financial capital, and developing more inclusive economic institutions. It also tested how grants and impact investments could work together to help capital flow differently, particularly to Indigenous, Black, racialized, and other communities that have historically been excluded from conventional financial systems.

4.3 Liveable Planet: Climate justice

The climate crisis presents an existential threat to communities across Canada, yet political will and financial resources for meaningful action remain insufficient. Those most socially, economically and politically marginalized are, on average, least responsible but most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Despite the knowledge, relationships, and leadership within these communities, unequal access to funding, infrastructure, and institutional support constrains their ability to prepare, respond, and recover. The consequences are far-reaching and life-threatening.

Climate change disrupts food systems, transportation, cultural practices, and access to essential services – with far-reaching consequences for health and livelihoods. Yet Indigenous, Black, and other racialized communities continue to face barriers when it comes to influencing the decisions that shape climate responses.

Since inception, the Foundation has supported community-led climate action, recognizing that those closest to the issues bring knowledge and solutions grounded in local realities. This approach seeks to strengthen access to resources and decision-making power, supporting responses that connect environmental protection with health, culture, and local economic wellbeing.

Table 20: Solutions supported in the Liveable Planet priority area

Solution	# Grants	Value of grants	# Impact Investments	Value of Impact Investments	Total Value
Grassroots environmental advocacy	8	$2,545,100			$2,545,100
Indigenous-led climate action	4	$1,650,000	1	$250,000	$1,900,000
Just transitions to a low-carbon economy	4	$1,550,000			$1,550,000
Innovations at the intersection of climate and health	1	$725,350	1	$500,000	$1,225,350
Total	17	$6,470,450	2	$750,000	$7,220,450

As the Foundation's work evolved, its climate justice portfolio moved through several phases. Early grants focused on intermediaries and networks, research, and relationships – including Finance, Engage, Sustain (FES, 2022-25), Tamarack Institute's Community Climate Transitions initiative (2022-2025), Environment Funders Canada (EFC, 2022-23), the Community Climate Resilience Lab (CCRL, 2022-24) and the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (CAPE, 2023-26). These grants deepened the Foundation's understanding of the importance of flowing resources directly to people most affected by climate change, including Indigenous Peoples and young people. From 2024, the portfolio increasingly supported Indigenous-led and youth-led approaches such as Indigenous Climate Action (2024), Environmental Justice Research Alliance (2024), Ecotrust Canada (2024) and Youth Climate Corps (2024). The Foundation also acted on its research on underfunded geographies (see Data for Good report linked earlier) by developing more partnerships in provinces such Alberta (e.g., Iron and Earth, The Resilience Institute, and Calgary Climate Hub) and the Yukon (Reconnection Vision).

Across these investments, the Foundation increasingly recognized that lasting environmental progress depends not only on technical climate solutions, but also on who holds knowledge, influences policy, and has the power to steward land and communities. This learning led to an approach focused on strengthening the leadership, relationships, and civic infrastructure needed for equitable environmental action.

Solutions that found traction

Communities Equipped to Engage in Grassroots Efforts for Environmental Advocacy

The Foundation supported a set of complementary approaches to help communities build the knowledge, relationships, and organizing capacity needed to influence environmental decisions.

- Network Building and Leadership Development: The Foundation supported networks that connected community climate leaders with peers, practical guidance, and funding opportunities. Tamarack Institute's Community Climate Transitions initiative created a national network advancing locally-led climate solutions and produced guidance on

embedding equity in place-based collaboration, helping communities learn from one another's approaches. FES's Youth Harbour supported equity-deserving youth climate leaders to access resources and advance their initiatives. Beyond funding, the participants had opportunities to practice presenting their work and engage in conversations about navigating philanthropy. These investments reflected the importance of supporting the connections and skills that help community leaders turn their knowledge into action, share learning across places and secure resources for their work.

- Supporting Policy Analysis and Advocacy: The Foundation also explored how communities could play a greater role in shaping public policy. Working with the Community Climate Resilience Lab (2022-2024), the Foundation supported the development of Toronto's first Racial Justice Climate Resilience Framework through community engagement, and then funded the next phase of the work focused on implementation of the Framework in the City of Toronto and other municipalities. The Calgary Climate Hub (2025) equipped newcomers and other equity-deserving community leaders with evidence, knowledge and support to influence municipal climate policy.
- Movement and Organizing Infrastructure: As the Foundation deepened its learning, it consistently heard that building community power is one of the most effective – and underfunded – environmental strategies. This led to a partnership with Environment Funders Canada (EFC) (2025-2028) and its pooled fund for movement-building infrastructure, national organizing capacity, and cross-sector collaboration.

Taken together, these investments in grassroots advocacy connected leaders and expanded access to resources and knowledge. Several partners (e.g., Tamarack, FES, the Environmental Justice Research Alliance, and Indigenous Climate Action) created working or advisory groups involving people from equity-deserving communities to guide their work. As examples: between 2022-2025, FES/Youth Harbour had distributed more than $2.2 million through four different granting streams; Tamarack added at least 24 communities to its network, published a guide for advancing climate equity through place-based collaboration, and documented at least seven cases of local community leaders taking action to change policy after participating in the network; EFC created a database of more than 650 organizations advancing power-building

work and launched a mutual aid network bringing together partners from sectors including labour, food sovereignty, and refugee supports.

Indigenous-led Climate Action

Building on an early commitment to Indigenous leadership, the Foundation's learning alongside partners deepened its understanding of how Indigenous knowledge and worldviews connect the wellbeing of land, people, and economies. This reinforced their importance in shaping responses to the climate crisis.

- Indigenous Leadership Development: Definity Foundation supported Indigenous Climate Action (ICA, 2024–2027) to strengthen research, training, and resources that helped Indigenous Peoples shape climate policies and solutions. ICA's Climate Leadership Program connected climate science with Indigenous knowledge, sovereignty, and community health, while building a network of leaders advancing solutions in their communities. By February 2025, as an example, ICA reported having trained more than 200 Indigenous participants since the program's launch in 2021. Its policy research complemented this leadership work: *Land Back is Climate Policy*, released in June 2025, set out approaches grounded in Indigenous self-determination, relationships with land, and community-led governance.
- Indigenous-Led Research and Policy Influence: The Environmental Justice Research Alliance (EJRA, 2024-2027) supports Indigenous-led research and strengthens relationships between researchers, Indigenous climate leaders, and policymakers to advance decolonial climate policy. With support from Definity Foundation, EJRA connected Indigenous climate leaders to provincial and federal policymakers and to more than 100 volunteers with technical expertise – while also gathering and analyzing data to identify First Nations directly affected by federal climate policy. These initiatives created new relationships, knowledge, and pathways for Indigenous leadership to shape climate policy and action.
- The Foundation also supported work demonstrating that climate action and community health are deeply connected. Through the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (CAPE, 2023-2026), physicians, Indigenous communities, and environmental organizations documented the health and environmental impacts of fossil

fuel development and undertaking a solutions-oriented approach to climate and environmental justice and repair. CAPE built and strengthened relationships with Indigenous Peoples whose health is negatively affected by fossil fuel development, helping ensure this knowledge informs its broader network and public policy work. By connecting climate, public health, and Indigenous knowledge, the initiative broadened the conversation about why an equitable transition matters and created stronger links between lived experience, health evidence, and policy advocacy.

- Indigenous Worldviews and Narrative Change: The Foundation supported Reconnection Vision (2025–2027), an approach to climate action developed by 13 Yukon First Nations youth between 2021 and 2023. Its guiding principle, "Reconnection is Climate Action," identifies disconnection from ourselves, one another, and the land as a root cause of the climate crisis. It offers a vision of societal change grounded in restoring these relationships, connecting climate action with community wellbeing, and changes in education, governance, and economic life. Definity Foundation's grant supported workshops, strategy development and storytelling to bring this vision into practice in the Yukon and beyond.

Communities Equipped to Influence an Equitable Transition to a Low-Carbon Economy

An equitable transition depends on communities having a meaningful role in shaping the decisions that affect their lives. Beginning in 2024, the Foundation expanded its support for approaches that connected climate action with economic opportunity and local decision-making, helping communities develop solutions and bring their priorities into public debate and policy.

- Supporting Community-Led Transition: Ecotrust Canada (2024–2027) worked with Metlakatla First Nation to develop a Regenerative Ocean Farming hub in northern British Columbia, exploring opportunities and barriers to Indigenous-led, regenerative local economies. Iron & Earth (2025–2028) engaged fossil-fuel workers, Indigenous people, and communities historically dependent on fossil fuel industries to identify locally-relevant pathways to economic diversification, clean energy, and new employment opportunities. The Resilience Institute (2025–2027) strengthened community-led adaptation and mitigation in rural and Indigenous communities, primarily in Alberta and

elsewhere in Canada. The grant supported strategy renewal, expanded programming and funding for community solutions, and helps build the capacity to respond to climate impacts alongside longer-term transition efforts.

- Bringing Community Priorities into Public Debate and Policy: New Economy Canada (2024–2027) received support for a community-informed communications campaign to advance a clean economy in Canada. The initiative sought to connect that transition with economic opportunities for Indigenous and other marginalized communities, emphasizing Indigenous participation in clean energy projects, development, and policy. Urban Climate Leadership (2024–2026) worked with residents and municipalities to address barriers to equitable climate action, including residential electrification and heat pump adoption. In 2025, it hosted four formal dialogues on heat pumps in multi-unit buildings, engaging 250 leaders from government, businesses, and nonprofits. Iron & Earth also connected community engagement with municipal policy advocacy. In late 2025, it engaged 213 residents through five events in one Edmonton ward to inform a grassroots advocacy plan on local climate policy. These initiatives created opportunities for community experience and priorities to inform both the public conversation about transition and the decisions needed to advance it.

Lessons Learned About Climate Justice

Integrating Multiple Pathways to Change: Learning across the portfolio reinforced that community leadership, policy influence, public engagement, and practical demonstration each address different barriers to equitable climate action. Indigenous-led research brought different knowledge and priorities into policy discussions; community initiatives explored locally-appropriate economic alternatives; and communications and convening sought to build wider support for change. The Foundation's experience pointed to the importance of connecting these efforts: local solutions need policies, resources, and public understanding that enable them to endure, while policy and investment decisions need to be informed by community experience. This learning deepened the Foundation's understanding of its role in supporting the relationships and infrastructure through which these approaches could reinforce one another.

Connecting Climate, Economy, and Community: The Foundation's early commitment to community leadership was reinforced by learning alongside partners about how climate change intersects with livelihoods, health, culture, and relationships with land. Indigenous partners helped illuminate why these dimensions could not be treated separately. Climate action involved questions about how local economies functioned, who benefited from development, and whether communities had the resources and authority to shape their futures. Regenerative ocean farming, community-led climate adaptation, and worker engagement made these connections tangible: climate responses can support food sovereignty, culturally-grounded livelihoods, and locally-determined economic opportunities. These experiences broadened the Foundation's understanding of climate justice, highlighting how environmental degradation, economic precarity, and community wellbeing are shaped by interconnected systems.

4.4 Reviewing the priority outcomes all together

Definity Foundation knew that investing in narrow, programmatic interventions was low-risk, but had little chance of addressing the structural barriers that hold systemic inequities in place. So, the Foundation chose to support initiatives with the potential to generate innovative and locally-designed solutions to the underlying causes of injustice. They built a diverse and evolving toolbox of investment strategies, identified a number of hypotheses about how these tools might help, and made a commitment to learn in an ongoing way.

This section highlighted how successful Definity Foundation was at identifying and supporting a plurality of solutions rooted in specific communities. These solutions achieved traction, from building new knowledge about obstacles and ways to overcome them, to training leaders, to seeding advocacy efforts, to implementing new finance models and creating new networks. The findings also highlight some of the reasons for the Foundation's success. Although the solutions that emerged through this work were highly diverse, deeply grounded in local communities, and often experimental, it is easy to see they also related to Definity Foundation's hypotheses. The Foundation and its partners consistently applied a racial equity lens, followed community priorities, offered long-term and flexible funding, built relationships, strengthened the sector

and tested different funding models. This focus did not constrain the development of unique local solutions, but instead enabled innovation, emergence and impact.

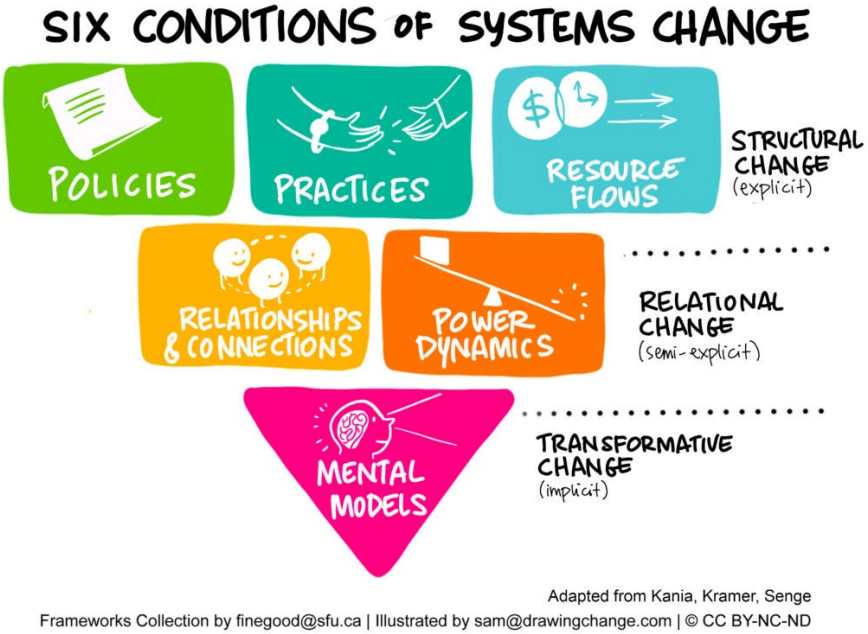
Furthermore, the partnerships that Definity Foundation developed and the initiatives they supported informed ongoing learning. While staff remained committed to executing the Community Investment Framework, there is evidence in all three priority areas that a deepening understanding of their hypotheses led them to act differently, and thereby achieve greater impact. For example, there was a clear gravitation toward solutions that focused upstream – on solutions that sat at the intersection of multiple priorities and engaged communities more fully as drivers or owners of the work. **Over time, there was also a shift toward building community-controlled economic and financial infrastructure that could shift ownership, control and economic decision-making toward communities.** The Foundation increasingly supported partners working across sectors to build the relationships and collaborative infrastructure needed for an equitable transition. These investments brought together Indigenous leaders, labour unions, municipalities, health professionals, researchers, businesses, and community organizations to co-create solutions that no single sector could achieve alone.

5. Contributions to systems change

Early on, Definity Foundation grounded its philosophy in a distinction between charity and justice: **a charity model looks at people and places that have suffered injustices as things to be solved; a justice framework acknowledges the realities that forced communities into oppressive situations**. The Foundation set out to fund work that could change the conditions holding inequities in place.

No single grant can change a system on its own, so the Foundation used the systems-change framework to assess partners individually and increasingly began looking across the portfolio at how their work complemented one another. Section 4 described the solutions partners pursued in each priority area. This section steps back to look across the whole portfolio and asks how partners lined up with the different aspects of systems change. Foundation staff mapped each

partner against six conditions of systems change described by Kania, Kramer and Senge. The six conditions sit at three levels:



In addition to these six conditions, authors of the framework make several points about the process of systems change:

- The six conditions are effective levers for making change to systems because they are also the forces that hold existing systems in place. All six conditions are important.
- Structural change (policies, practices and resource flows) is the most explicit and the easiest to see and measure.
- Relational change (relationships and connections, and power dynamics) is semi-explicit. It concerns who works with whom and who holds decision-making power.
- Transformative change (mental models) is implicit. It is the hardest to shift and to evidence, but it is what sustains change at the other two levels.
- Systems change requires understanding the relationships among the three levels and the six conditions, and change is more likely to be sustainable when coordinated change happens at all three levels.
- A single organization rarely does all of this alone. For Definity Foundation, this meant looking across its partners to understand whether, taken together, their work reached all three levels.

Staff coded each grant partner[13] in the Liveable Planet, Healthy People and Thriving Communities portfolios by the levels of change its funded work addressed. The results below draw directly on that mapping. Note: the mapping reflects staff assessment of each initiative's focus and activities, not independently verified outcomes.

5.1 The portfolio at a glance

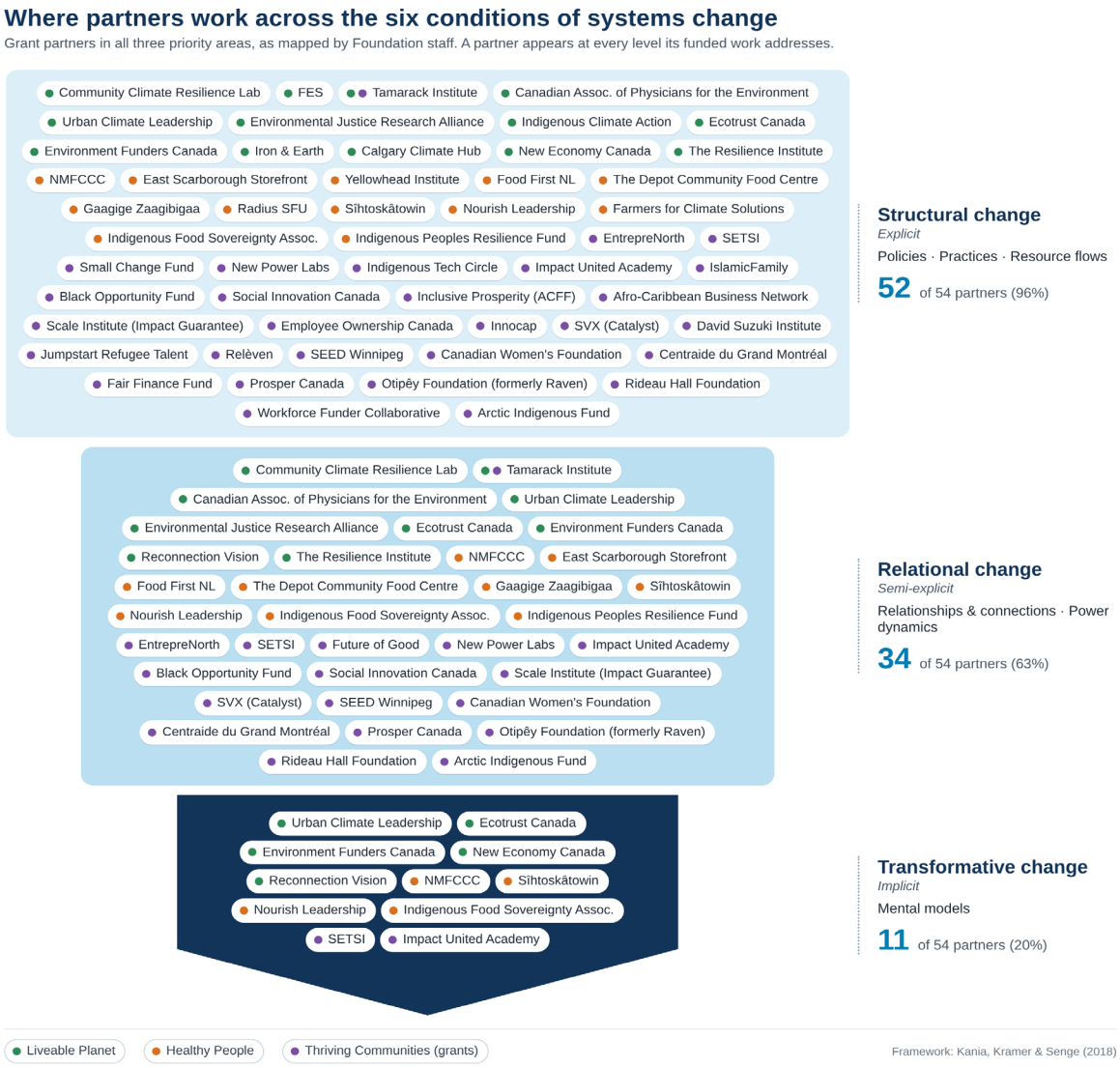
Fifty-four partners were mapped across the three priority areas. Almost all of them (52) worked on structural change. Nearly two-thirds (34) also worked on relational change, and eleven worked on mental models. Nine partners worked at all three levels at once.

Table 21: Number of partners working at each level, by priority area

Level of change	Liveable Planet (n=14)	Healthy People (n=12)	Thriving Communities (n=29)	All partners (n=54)
Structural	13 (93%)	12 (100%)	28 (97%)	52 (96%)
Relational	9 (64%)	9 (75%)	17 (59%)	34 (63%)
Transformative	5 (36%)	4 (33%)	2 (7%)	11 (20%)
All three levels	3 (21%)	4 (33%)	2 (7%)	9 (17%)

[13] Impact investments were not part of this exercise.

The following figure shows where partners work across the three levels of systems change. Partners were mapped by level, not by individual condition.



From the outset, staff mapped potential partners' work against the systems-change framework to assess which conditions were being addressed. Staff then built on these individual assessments to examine how partners' contributions complemented one another across the portfolio. This portfolio approach revealed that priority areas contributed to systems change in different ways:

- Thriving Communities partners mostly concentrated on structural and relational change: building the financial infrastructure, funds and networks that move capital toward Black,

Indigenous and racialized communities, and the relationships between community organizations, intermediaries and investors that this requires.

- Most of the portfolio's transformative work sat in Liveable Planet and Healthy People, where partners worked on how climate, food and health are understood.
- Within these focus areas, transformative work became common over time. None of the first three Liveable Planet partners were mapped to this level, for example, while five of the partners funded subsequently were.

These observations were helpful in understanding how different types of contributions happen across complementary strengths; these insights are less apparent when considering each partnership on its own. This learning contributed to the Foundation's growing understanding that systems change does not require every initiative to address every condition. Different organizations can play different roles, and relationships, shared infrastructure and coordination can help their contributions reinforce one another over time.

5.2 Structural change: reshaping policies, practices and resource flows

Structural change includes resource flows, practices, and policies.

Resource flows

Systems are sustained or changed through the ways that money, people, knowledge, information, and other assets are allocated and distributed.

In the case of Definity Foundation, partners moved money and other resources to communities that mainstream philanthropy and finance tend to miss. Indigenous-led pooled funds were among the most direct routes. In 2023, for example, Gaagige Zaagibigaa distributed 232 micro-grants to families for preserving, hunting, gardening, harvesting and fishing, and NMFCCC distributed $1.1 million to 47 local community food initiatives and 56 community-led projects. Since 2020, the Indigenous Peoples Resilience Fund has supported 530 Indigenous-led grassroots groups and organizations. In the climate portfolio, FES's Youth Harbour had

distributed more than $400,000 to about 90 equity-deserving youth climate leaders by November 2024.

Thriving Communities partners built new channels for capital. EntrepreNorth's Sinew Impact Fund had raised $4.5 million for Indigenous entrepreneurs in the North by June 2026. The African Canadian Farmers Fund is financing farmland for Black farmers, and the Impact Guarantee initiative designed a pooled guarantee to reduce risk and draw capital to smaller community finance intermediaries. Otipêy Foundation (formerly Raven Indigenous Impact Foundation) developed a first-of-its-kind Indigenous Communities Outcomes Fund, whereby governments pay for independently verified results, enabling investors to be repaid while communities retain the benefits. New Power Labs and Innocap's Canada Resiliency Project are working to unlock large pools of institutional and philanthropic capital for underserved communities. As one fund manager put it:

> *We think of systems change in the context of supporting emerging managers and new impactful innovations. The Foundation was able to build conviction in our approach and invested in the fund early, sending a strong signal to the market that our fund was institutional quality. This capital will then flow to deserving game changers who are developing solutions for a more sustainable, healthy and equitable future. (2026 partner survey respondent)*

Practices

For systems to change in a way that advances justice, Kania, Kramer and Senge argue that large institutions, coalitions, and networks need to change their normal or default ways of acting. This includes change in "activities" like programs, processes, and habits (both explicit and informal).

Definity Foundation has supported intermediaries to develop approaches to granting and service delivery that reflected community priorities. Community-led funding models used microgrants and participatory decision-making to reach grassroots groups and households, while financial empowerment initiatives worked with underserved communities to understand barriers and

adapt services. These approaches illustrate how intermediaries could change who informs their work, how support is designed and how people access it, as illustrated by the quote below:

> *At the heart of our approach is ensuring that the realities, experiences, and priorities of people living on low incomes are reflected in the systems and services intended to support them, particularly Indigenous Peoples, people with disabilities, and Black communities. With Definity's support, we were able to strengthen our approach to working with these priority populations and deepen our understanding of how our network could better respond to the needs of financially struggling households. (2026 partner survey respondent)*

In addition, several partners changed how institutions work. The Community Climate Resilience Lab developed Toronto's first Racial Justice Climate Resilience Framework, which embeds equity in municipal climate planning, and the City of Toronto is now putting it into practice. Nourish Leadership worked with healthcare institutions to remove structural barriers to serving food harvested, hunted or gathered by Indigenous Peoples. Impact United Academy runs courses and peer circles that help asset owners invest in Black, Indigenous, and other under-resourced communities, and Prosper Canada worked with Black-led organizations to adapt financial empowerment services to the needs of the communities they serve.

Policies

Policy is a third structural driver of systemic change, and includes legislation, other formal government policy, regulations, and policies inside organizations (including funders' policies).

Definity Foundation partners used research, advocacy and coalitions to influence public policy, and although this is long-term work, some can already point to concrete results:

- SEED Winnipeg, leading the Manitoba Financial Empowerment Network, secured changes that waive fees and simplify applications for replacement birth certificates for people living on low incomes.

- Employee Ownership Canada gathered a letter signed by 32 CEOs and association leaders, met senior federal finance officials, and saw the federal government recommit to an employee ownership tax incentive in its spring 2026 economic update.
- The David Suzuki Institute and Small Change Fund pressed for a national Youth Climate Corps, the 2025 federal government budget announced a commitment to fund a $40 million youth climate corps.
- Tamarack documented at least seven cases of local leaders acting to change policy after taking part in its climate network.

Other partners built Indigenous and community influence over policy:

- Indigenous Climate Action released *Land Back is Climate Policy* in June 2025 and linked earlier in this report.
- The Environmental Justice Research Alliance connected Indigenous climate leaders with provincial and federal policymakers and identified First Nations directly affected by federal climate policy.
- The Calgary Climate Hub prepared newcomer and other equity-deserving leaders to influence municipal climate policy, and Iron & Earth engaged 213 residents of one Edmonton ward to shape a local climate advocacy plan.
- Farmers for Climate Solutions is working to bring Indigenous, Black, racialized, women and youth farmers into the next Agricultural Policy Framework.

Through this work, the Foundation has supported change efforts where partners used evidence, advocacy, and coalitions to influence public policy choices. As one survey respondent noted:

> *Definity funded our work in advancing policy and institutional change to improve the financial well-being of low-income earners using a cross-sectoral collective impact approach. It is exceedingly challenging to find funding for this type of work. (2026 partner survey respondent)*

5.3 Relational change: what partners built

According to Kania, Kramer, and Senge, systems change requires changes in relationships as well. New connections across silos often need to be formed, and the power dynamics within

these networks also need to change. Such changes are often not addressed explicitly or strategically by those interested in systemic change, and often manifest in semi-explicit ways.

Relationships and connections

This condition focuses on the need for change in ways that actors communicate with each other, and in the quality of relationships.

Over half of Definity Foundation partners focused on the levers of relationships or power. Initiatives such as pooled funds, funder collaboratives, and embedded intermediaries created new connections across fields that are usually fragmented. The Foundation supported initiatives to bring grassroots leaders together from across the country or several different communities. For example:

- The Depot Community Food Centre helped launch Quebec's first food security coalition, which now has more than 30 urban and rural members.
- East Scarborough Storefront's Food for Good Network brought grassroots leaders and community organizations together around local food challenges, and every attendee reported a better understanding of the others' work.

Other initiatives also sought to form new connections between grassroots leaders and government policymakers, or between leaders from different sectors:

- Urban Climate Leadership convened 250 leaders from government, business and the nonprofit sector on heat pumps in multi-unit buildings.
- Centraide du Grand Montréal supports neighbourhood roundtables where residents and organizations plan together.
- NMFCCC held knowledge sharing calls every 6-8 weeks for community partners, funders, and collaborators to present their work and learn about community-led initiatives such as the Country Foods Program.

> *Especially in food security work, many funders want to fund our food access, people are slower to come around to understanding systems change work and so having this initial funding has been very important. Definity is changing conversations across Canada and*

beyond, I think that we will continue to see the benefit of this. (2026 partner survey respondent)

In Thriving Communities, partners worked to connect the two sides of the market. Tamarack Institute is building relationships between BIPOC-led and BIPOC-serving community organizations, intermediaries and asset owners, so that investors hear community priorities directly. SETSI is bringing actors in the Black capital ecosystem together around a shared Black Capital Infrastructure Initiative, and Future of Good convenes changemakers around systemic investing.

In the climate and health portfolios, Environment Funders Canada built a database of more than 650 power-building organizations, and the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment connected physicians with Indigenous Peoples whose health is affected by fossil fuel development.

Power dynamics

Kania et al. distinguish between changes in relationships and communication and shifts in power dynamics. Changes in the distribution of decision-making power, authority, and both formal and informal influence among individuals and organizations are a key dimension of systems change.

Across its portfolio, Definity Foundation supported initiatives that strengthened Indigenous, Black, and other racialized communities' voices and decision-making power on issues that mattered to them. Partners shifted decision-making in two main ways.

The first was community control of resources. Indigenous-led pooled funds such as Gaagige Zaagibigaa, the Indigenous Peoples Resilience Fund, and Sîhtoskâtowin put granting decisions in community hands, and the Arctic Indigenous Fund grew Indigenous-led philanthropy rooted in the self-identified goals of young Northern leaders. With Rideau Hall Foundation, the Arctic Inspiration Prize is moving to a Northern-owned and Northern-led model, and Social Innovation Canada laid the groundwork for transferring Wasan Island to shared Indigenous stewardship.

The second was community voice in the work itself through research, advocacy, and program design. Food First NL formed a Lived and Living Experience Advisory Group that takes part in its research and policy analysis, and Tamarack Institute and the Environmental Justice Research Alliance set up working or advisory groups of people from equity-deserving communities. Prosper Canada's project was co-led by representatives of equity-deserving communities. These examples illustrate different ways of bringing community knowledge into decisions, while recognizing that an advisory role does not confer the same authority as community control over funding or governance.

Partner feedback illustrated how they connected an understanding of systemic barriers with the development of community-informed solutions:

> *Definity are supporting work that is equipping us to uncover root causes of the barriers our communities face to accessing financing and the development of approaches and tools to bring community voice to the solutions to this challenge. (2026 partner survey respondent)*

The Foundation also supported efforts to bring perspectives that had been marginalized into broader discussions about systems change. As another partner explained:

> *The Foundation has supported our work by amplifying thought leaders and practitioners who have historically been pushed to the margins, helping bring underrepresented voices into the systems-change conversation. (2026 partner survey respondent)*

5.4 Transformative change: shifting mental models

To set the stage for systems change and to sustain it, deeply held mental models need to shift. Mental models refer to the beliefs and assumptions that are often implicit or taken for granted, shaping how actors in a system think, act, and communicate.

At Definity Foundation, 11 partners worked to shift these underlying beliefs and assumptions, including through the following approaches:

- Reframing the climate crisis: Reconnection Vision, developed by 13 Yukon First Nations youth, holds that "Reconnection is Climate Action" and treats disconnection from ourselves, one another and the land as a root cause of the crisis.
- Reframing food as sovereignty rather than access: NMFCCC and Sîhtoskâtowin support communities to revive traditional food practices and bring Elders and youth together, treating food as a matter of culture and self-determination. The Indigenous Food Sovereignty Association links local initiatives into a national movement, and Nourish Leadership's work with healthcare institutions on serving country food brings Indigenous food knowledge into how those institutions approach health.
- Reframing climate action and philanthropy: Urban Climate Leadership worked with residents and municipalities on the barriers to equitable climate action, including electrification and heat pumps. Environment Funders Canada's pooled fund resources movement-building and organizing as an environmental strategy, which asks funders to see community power as part of climate work.
- Reframing what regenerative economic models can look like: New Economy Canada ran a community-informed communications campaign tying the clean economy to opportunity for Indigenous and other marginalized communities. Ecotrust Canada works with Metlakatla First Nation on a regenerative ocean farming hub as a pathway for an Indigenous-led, regenerative local economy.
- Reframing who capital is for and how it is governed. SETSI's Black Capital Infrastructure Initiative is building a shared approach to directing capital grounded in African-centred values. Impact United Academy works with asset owners through courses and peer circles to change how they see investing in BIPOC and other under-resourced communities.

Shifts in mental models are slow and difficult to evidence, and this evaluation cannot yet show how far these efforts have changed thinking beyond the partners and communities directly involved.

5.5 Turning the lens inward

Kania, Kramer and Senge suggest that organizations seeking to change systems also examine how the six conditions show up in their own work, and Definity Foundation applied this lens to itself.

Resource flows were the condition the Foundation addressed most directly. Through networks and intermediaries, it found pathways to direct funding to groups serving or led by Black, Indigenous and racialized people. It used its research on underfunded geographies to steer grants toward the North and other overlooked regions (see Section 3.1), and moved a share of its endowment into impact investments serving the same communities.

Changes in practices were done in parallel: the Foundation created flexible and relationship-based approaches to applications and reporting, supported partners to adapt plans over time, explored a wide range of alternative forms of community investment, and used collaborative and ongoing engagement with partners to set priorities. **It also used policy as a tool, starting with its own rules.** Changing its charitable objects so it could fund groups without charitable status (Section 3.1) was the internal counterpart of the policy change it funded partners to pursue. Externally, it added its voice to advocacy efforts, most visibly through a 2026 open letter on community resilience signed by almost 500 people from 300 organizations.

Advancing a relational approach was one of Definity Foundation's seven hypotheses, and **cultivating reciprocal and respectful relationships to advance social justice has been a high priority**. The team worked hard to form relationships to advance the Foundation's mission and to support others to connect. Over time, the Foundation came to see more clearly the importance of connections between philanthropic actors and intermediaries, and among grassroots leaders and the broader social justice ecosystem. Survey respondents indicated that the Foundation played a moderate-to-central role in connecting its partners to new people and organizations. As one partner noted:

Definity has supported our organization in addressing systems change by investing in long term strategic collaboration with multiple partners, funders and stakeholders, allowing us to experiment, learn and pivot if needed.

On power dynamics, the Foundation **took steps to broaden representation and participation in its governance and decision-making** processes. Beginning in 2022, the Board of Directors started diversifying its membership to better reflect its priority populations through open recruiting calls. Such efforts have continued: in 2025, a new Director from Northern Canada joined the Board. Definity Foundation also experimented with other approaches to elevate diverse voices in its work. In 2023, an External Advisors Table was pilot-tested. When advisors expressed a desire for deeper engagement with overall strategy, rather than only vetting individual grant proposals, the Foundation shifted to a smaller advisory table. These efforts broadened whose perspectives were represented in the Foundation's work, although they did not necessarily shift where formal decision-making authority sat.

Change in mental models is difficult to prove, but there were meaningful shifts in how problems and solutions were understood within the Foundation itself. By reframing its work in the food security space to focus on food sovereignty, the Foundation began grappling with broader questions of income, culture, policy, self-determination, and the impacts of the climate crisis on access to food. Within the climate justice focus area, the Foundation deepened its understanding of how closely climate action is intertwined with issues that may initially seem separate, such as health, racial inequalities and affordability. It also increasingly understood social finance as a tool that can serve different purposes depending on how it is designed and governed. The Foundation recognized that social finance instruments can replicate extractive approaches from the dominant economy unless they are intentionally designed with justice in mind.

Learning with partners and peers, including through convenings, helped the team question established assumptions about philanthropy and deepen its understanding of the systems and conditions underlying the issues the Foundation was seeking to address.

5.6 Reviewing the portfolio all together

Taken together, Definity Foundation's partners worked on all six conditions of systems change, and **the portfolio reached further than any single grant could**. Most partners contributed at one or two levels, and looking across the portfolio revealed how their contributions complemented one another. In food systems, for example, Yellowhead Institute, Radius SFU and Farmers for Climate Solutions worked on structural change; East Scarborough Storefront, The Depot and Food First NL added relational change; and NMFCCC, Sîhtoskâtowin, Nourish Leadership and the Indigenous Food Sovereignty Association reached mental models.

Across the priority areas, different groups contributed in different ways: Thriving Communities partners did most of the work on capital flows and market relationships, while Liveable Planet and Healthy People partners carried most of the portfolio's transformative work.

The evidence of results is strongest where change is most explicit: resource flows, relationships and connections, and practices. Policy wins are fewer but concrete, such as Manitoba's changes to identification fees and the federal commitment on employee ownership. On power dynamics, the portfolio includes many advisory structures and a smaller set of initiatives where communities control funds or governance, mostly Indigenous-led pooled funds and Northern-led philanthropy. Transformative work is the least common level and the hardest to evidence.

The Foundation's own changes followed a similar shape. Its clearest shifts were structural: how it granted, where its money went and the rules that governed it. Its steps on power, through Board renewal and advisory structures, were real but more modest. Its thinking also moved: from food security toward food sovereignty and toward a more critical view of social finance, and those shifts in turn shaped which partners it funded. Inside the Foundation as across the portfolio, the explicit conditions moved first and the deeper ones more slowly.

6. Concluding thoughts from the evaluator

This report has presented a description of how Definity Foundation invested during its first phase of granting, and what impact was achieved. In its efforts to address systemic inequities experienced by Indigenous, Black, and racialized communities, the Foundation tried to direct resources to communities that had been under-funded, in order to support unique, community-led and often community-designed solutions that address the root causes of injustice.

This goal led the Foundation to listen carefully and think deeply about how to act. It led the team to build a diverse and evolving set of investment strategies, including a wide range of granting and social finance models, thought leadership, relationship building and convening strategies. Further, the Foundation did not use these tools in a pre-determined way. Instead, they built a set of hypotheses about how they might be helpful in different circumstances, and then formed connections to many kinds of partners in a range of settings where they saw potential for impact and learning. Listening often led Definity Foundation to adapt and to combine tools and other assets, while looking for opportunities to work alongside others with different strengths.

The Foundation held itself accountable for testing the validity of its hypotheses. By taking a racial equity lens, they were able to direct resources to the needs of groups that systems are most failing. By seeking opportunities to support initiatives that were community-led and drove at multiple areas of concern, Definity Foundation enabled real action on solutions that were impactful for the communities that designed them. Partners made measurable impact on the strength of community food systems and the underlying structural drivers of food sovereignty; they also expanded inclusive access to capital and mobilized it for social good. With Definity Foundation support, they acted as a catalyst for community-led climate action.

As a result of this approach, Definity emerges from its initial Community Investment Framework with a rich array of grounded stories and evidence-based insights about how to practice philanthropy in a way that advances justice. One useful way to synthesize what has been achieved is to consider how the Foundation's work advanced the six key drivers of systemic change in its efforts to advance socio-economic justice. As discussed in Section 5, the clearest signs of change within the Foundation are in how resources flowed and how relationships were

built: more than half of surveyed partners said the Foundation played a moderate or central role in connecting them to other funders and networks. Policy results are fewer but concrete. On power, the Foundation directed a significant share of resources to initiatives already led by Indigenous, Black and racialized people. Whether its support increased that power, or recognized shifts already under way, remains an open question.

This first phase was not always an easy path to walk; the Foundation and its partners often confronted unexpected obstacles. Some were external – like regulatory constraints or resource limitations. Others were internal; partners and staff sometimes struggled to manage the workload of bringing solutions to life in an impactful way and consistent with Definity Foundation values. It wasn't always easy to share the story of their journey in a way that might help others; even when there was real impact, it wasn't always easy to document (especially in early stages). The learnings are so rich and so diverse they can feel overwhelming, if one engages with them in the hope of finding a single metric to demonstrate impact or a simple, replicable recipe for success. Perhaps for this reason, the Foundation sometimes struggled to describe their approach to audiences most comfortable with these more traditional or colonial ways of thinking about social action.

Taken together, the findings presented in this report demonstrate the potential of a justice-focused approach to philanthropy – one that is responsive and trust-based in its commitment to supporting unique local solutions, while also remaining highly strategic in its focus on addressing the drivers of social change and tackling the deeply entrenched and interconnected root causes of injustice. As Definity Foundation moves into the next phase, its strategic direction will become more focused, but no less responsive, and no less ambitious. The first phase of their work has equipped them well for the challenges that lie ahead and this impact report suggests that they will continue to find success.

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7. Making sense of what was learned and looking toward the future: Reflections from the CEO

The previous section shares final thoughts from the independent evaluation team; below is a concluding message from the Definity Foundation CEO.

Since launching in 2022, the Foundation has learned at a fast pace. **We deliberately approached our first three and a half years as a period of experimentation and learning – testing our assumptions in practice, listening to partners, and adapting our approach as our understanding grew.** That experimentation took many forms. We tested different funding models, from microgrants to pooled funds; explored social finance and ways of mobilizing different forms of capital; built partnerships across philanthropy, government, business and the nonprofit sector; convened people around shared challenges; commissioned research; began using our voice and influence to advance issues connected to our mission. Across this work, we continued to deepen our relationships with communities and increase the extent to which resources and decision-making are rooted in communities most affected by the issues.

Viewed individually, our activities can appear wide-ranging. Viewed together, however, they tell a more coherent story about how our understanding of our role, of systems change, and of root causes has evolved.

The following three learnings bring that story together and have helped shape the direction of Definity Foundation's next chapter. We began with a broad mandate spanning climate, health, and socio-economic justice, and a commitment to address root causes rather than symptoms. Our understanding of what that requires has deepened considerably.

Addressing complex challenges requires more than grantmaking

From the outset, we believed that grants should be one tool among many. Over time, we developed a much deeper understanding of what that means in practice. We learned that the challenges our partners encounter are rarely confined to a lack of funding. An organization may have a promising solution but face a policy barrier. A community may have a viable economic opportunity but lack access to appropriate capital. A field may have strong individual organizations but lack the relationships and coordination needed to work collectively. An emerging idea may need research, evidence or a stronger public narrative before it can gain traction.

This learning shifted the question from "What can we fund?" to "What does this work need to succeed, and what role can we play?" Sometimes the role is providing a grant. At other times, it may be investing capital, convening, supporting research, helping mobilize other resources, contributing to policy change, or using our relationships and influence to help remove a barrier.

Through practice, we came to understand holistic philanthropy not simply as having more tools available, but as starting with what the work requires and bringing the right combination of assets, relationships, and capabilities to it.

Systems change requires multiple, complementary efforts

Early in our work, we assessed individual initiatives for their potential to contribute to systems change. We looked for initiatives that could influence several conditions at once – such as policy, resource flows, relationships, practices, and mental models. Over time, we learned this placed too much emphasis on what any one initiative could accomplish. Different organizations contribute to change in different ways. One may focus deeply on policy. Another may shift narratives and public understanding. Another may build community power or develop new

financial infrastructure. Networks and intermediaries may connect actors, move knowledge and resources, and strengthen capacity across a field.

We shifted our attention from asking whether an individual initiative was "systems changing" to considering how different efforts might work together to influence a system over time. We also came to better understand the importance of what sits between individual initiatives: relationships, trust, coordination, shared learning, and infrastructure that allows people and organizations to work together.

Systems change is collective. No single initiative, organization, or foundation changes a system on its own. **Lasting change depends on multiple actors making different but complementary contributions, and on conditions that enable those contributions to reinforce one another.** That learning has informed the approach we will take in our next phase, where we are becoming more intentional about supporting not only individual actors and initiatives, but the relationships, infrastructure, and enabling conditions that connect and strengthen our collective work.

The issues we fund are interconnected, and shaped by deeper systems

Over these first few years of working alongside our partners, it became increasingly difficult to treat climate, health, and socio-economic justice as separate issues. Climate, health, food, housing, energy, access to capital, and community wealth are deeply interconnected. A family affected by wildfire, for example, may suddenly face a health issue, a housing issue, a food issue and an affordability issue. For that family, these are not five separate issues or funding streams. They are one lived reality.

This learning challenged us to look beyond the categories through which philanthropy often organizes its work and ask a deeper question: What is our best opportunity to address inequities at the intersection of these issues?

Again and again, that inquiry brought us back to the economy.

I don't simply mean markets or economic development, but the broader systems through which we determine what we value, how resources flow, who owns, who decides, who benefits and who bears the costs. This was an important shift in our understanding of root causes. We began to see more clearly that many of the outcomes we care about are shaped by underlying economic choices and assumptions – including what counts as wealth, what economic activity is intended to produce, and how we understand the relationship between the economy, communities and the living world. And those choices are not fixed.

Around the world, including in Canada, communities are already experimenting with different ways of organizing economic life. Wellbeing economies, Doughnut Economics, solidarity economies and other approaches differ in important ways, but many begin from a similar premise: what changes when the wellbeing of people and the living world become the starting point for economic decision-making? The implications are significant. If wealth means only financial return, we make one set of choices. If wealth also includes healthy water, resilient ecologies, strong communities and what we leave future generations, we make different ones.

This learning has helped shape the direction of our next strategy: not abandoning our commitment to climate, health and socio-economic justice, but going further upstream to examine some of the systems and assumptions that shape outcomes across all three.

This is a deeper understanding of the same commitment. These learnings have not moved us away from where we started; they have deepened our understanding of what our original commitment to addressing root causes requires.

We learned that addressing complex challenges requires more than grants. We learned that systems change depends on many actors making different but complementary contributions. And by following the connections between the issues we fund, we were led to deeper questions about economic systems and assumptions shaping them. Together, these insights have shaped our inaugural long-term strategic direction, which we will share more about in 2027. We will take a more intentional ecosystem approach: one that strengthens the people, organizations,

relationships, and infrastructure needed to shift systems; creates the enabling conditions for change; and supports communities already demonstrating different possibilities for how economic life can be organized.

The destination has not changed. Our understanding of how we might contribute to getting there has. Perhaps most importantly, we would not be where we are without the partners doing the work in community. Thank you for everything you do and the values and vision that guide your work. Thank you also to the Board of Directors at Definity Foundation for supporting us to work in the ways that we have, and for learning alongside us. And lastly, thank you to Taylor Newberry Consulting for this report and the perspective it shines back to us about our work.

Appendix A. Report methodology

Definity Foundation has always taken care to ensure that its approach to learning and evaluation aligns with its values. Recognizing that rigid reporting and evaluation requirements have often been used to justify denying funding to organizations from Indigenous, Black, and other racialized communities, the Foundation has always taken a light-touch, flexible, and relationship-driven approach to grant reporting.

Internally, the Foundation staff and Board have been committed to ongoing learning, using tools like Before Action Reviews and After Action Reviews and learning syntheses.

Evaluation Questions

This report will address a number of specific evaluation questions.

Process

- What has the Foundation's action been?
- How did it engage priority populations?
- Did it flow funds to underfunded regions?
- How did it collaborate?
- How did it build ongoing relationships?

Outcomes

- What has been the impact of the Foundation's work with respect to the three priorities and five outcomes in its investment strategy? More specifically, to what degree has the Foundation successfully supported the concrete solutions identified in the Community Investment Framework and how is that designed to target the structural factors, relational factors, and mental models that sustain systemic oppression?

Learning and Adaptation

- How has the Foundation adapted in order to be more impactful?
- Have the Foundation's guiding hypotheses been supported?

Information Sources

This report draws on data from a number of sources, including:

- Structured notes from staff check-ins with partners at various stages of each project that include information about progress on planned activities, partnerships, outputs, outcomes achieved by grantees, and lessons learned.
- Reports submitted by partners, which provide more detailed information about project progress and outcomes achieved
- Interviews with staff that focus on cross-cutting themes in the Foundation's work
- Tracking data gathered by staff on Foundation's actions (i.e., grants, impact investments, pooled funds, convenings, research projects)
- Two surveys of grantees, conducted in 2024 and 2026, about their experience with the Foundation
- Various reports created by the Foundation as part of their ongoing organizational learning (e.g., Before Action Reviews, After Action Reviews, learning synthesis documents, Board reports) that document the evaluation of the investment strategy, high level lessons learned, and emerging questions

Appendix B. Selected list of reports and publications

Information reviewed for this report includes, but is not limited to, the following.

Research Reports and Knowledge Products

- "Analysis of Philanthropic Capital Flow and Relevant Social Outcomes": The Foundation's first official published research report, released in October 2024. Conducted in partnership with Data for Good, this report analyzed philanthropic capital flows across Canada to identify underfunded regions.
- Diversity Reports and Dashboard: In partnership with New Power Labs, the Foundation supported a Sector-wide Diversity Report (highlighting diversity patterns of 50+ organizations), an Organization-level diversity report (mapping DIF's internal and capital flow diversity), and a public-facing Diversity Geomap Dashboard released in early 2025.
- Northern Discovery Project Report: Research conducted by Lichen Consulting focused on the nonprofit sector, charitable activity, and intermediaries in Northern Canada, with a final report expected in mid-2025.
- Foundation Case Study: A planned case study detailing the formation and start of the Foundation, intended for publication and sharing with academic institutions like Phil Lab at UQAM and Carleton University's Master of Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership program.
- Spending pathways for foundations. A report from the Philanthropist commissioned by Definity Foundation (Nov 2023).
- Systemic Investment: Buzzword or Breakthrough? Blog Post by Wayne Miranda (April 2026)
- Voices of Impact Series: a Youtube video series dedicated to elevating the stories, leadership, and lived experiences of our partners and community changemakers.
- Reflections on Two Years of Engagement: Blog Post (May 2025)
- Mobilizing Capital for Good. Blog Post (Jan 2025)
- The Audacity of Justice. Blog Post (Nov 2024).

Op-Eds and Articles

- "Comment: Empathy is not a weakness, it's our only hope": A regional op-ed co-authored by CEO Arti Freeman and Saul Klein, published in the Times Colonist.
- "Acting with Courage and Clarity: Philanthropy's Role in Repairing a Fractured World": A published piece authored by CEO Arti Freeman reflecting on philanthropy's role in addressing global systemic challenges.
- We face a crisis of imagination. 'Building Canada Strong' gives us a shot at reinventing what comes next. An op-ed authored by Arti Freeman, published in the Toronto Star, January 2026
- Who will own Canada's Energy Future? An op-ed authored by Arti Freeman, published in Hamilton Spectator, June 2026
- Looking for 'the good way': Definity Insurance Foundation aims for systems-level change. Article in The Philanthropist, (Sept 2022)

Public Letters and Statements

- Food Security Open Letter (December 2023): Signatory on a full-page open letter in the Globe and Mail and Hill Times advocating for government commitments to reduce food insecurity by 50% by 2030.
- Net-Zero Aligned Finance Statement (2025): Signatory to a published statement led by the Trottier Foundation calling on Canadian financial institutions to commit to net-zero goals and science-based targets.
- Community Investment Advocacy Letter (2025): Signatory to a letter led by Catalyst: Community Finance Initiative calling on the Ontario Government to incentivize pension funds and create tax incentives for community investments.
- Pre-Budget Federal Advocacy Letter (2025): Submitted a joint letter with nine peer philanthropic institutions calling on the federal government to establish loan guarantees, tax incentives, and a Canadian accreditation system for community finance intermediaries.