



# WHAT WE HEARD

A Facilitated Conversation between Non-Profit Leaders and the  
Mayor & Mayor's Office

STATE OF THE CITY FOLLOW-UP

Report prepared by the Edmonton  
Chamber of Voluntary  
Organizations

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## Acknowledgements

The facilitators would like to thank Robyn Tailor from the Mayor's Office for sharing her detailed notes from the session. This helped with filling in the gaps in our notes and gave us a more comprehensive starting place for the building of this report. Thank you!

## Background

This document summarizes what we heard discussed during a facilitated conversation between a group of non-profit leaders and the Mayor's Office. The conversation was framed as a follow up to the Mayor's [State of the City address](#), which he had given the week before. This specific session came about as a result of the Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organization's (ECVO) Executive Director approaching the new Mayor and his office and encouraging them to consider how they can work more closely with the non-profit sector going forward. From this request, the Mayor & Mayor's Office requested that ECVO facilitate a systems-level Covid recovery-focused conversation with non-profit leaders from organizations that primarily support seniors, cultural groups, and community volunteers<sup>1</sup>.

The **overarching goals** for the conversation, sought by the Mayor & Mayor's Office, were:

1. To provide opportunities for Mayor Sohi and his team to engage in dialogue (group and individual) with non-profit leaders;
2. For Mayor Sohi & his team to listen to the non-profit experience of the systemic inequities that Edmontonians were facing during the pandemic and continue to face (i.e., racism, gender discrimination, language and cultural barriers, ageism, etc.); and
3. To understand how the City and the Mayor's Office can support the non-profit sector with recovery going forward.

The facilitation team at ECVO received a list of questions from the Mayor's Office on possible questions to discuss that fell within the above goals. Given limited time, the facilitators consolidated the main concepts from this list into three questions and designed a session intended to meet three **process goals**:

- a) create spaces for one-on-one and group dialogue with the Mayor and his team;
- b) ensure participants had multiple ways to contribute to the discussion; and
- c) ensure every individual had the opportunity to speak.

The session was held on May 19th, 2022, from 2:15 p.m. to 3:30 p.m in the Councillor Board Room at City Hall. There were 15 non-profit leaders in attendance; the Mayor and 3 members of the Mayor's Office; and two facilitators from ECVO. Participants are

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<sup>1</sup> Note that the Mayor & Mayor's Office have dedicated a separate set of conversations to be had with organizations that work primarily with Indigenous communities.

listed in Appendix A; this list also includes regrets. The main activities of the session are listed in Appendix B.

## What We Heard

The following summary *interprets* what was shared by participants (both during the session and in feedback after the session) from the perspective of the facilitators that led the session. Given that discussion for each of the three questions at times overlapped, this section is organized with titles that chart the general progression of the discussion rather than by question.

### Did we interpret something incorrectly?

If we've made a material error in our interpretation of your comments, first – we apologize! Second, please let us know of the error by emailing: [emmaw@ecvo.ca](mailto:emmaw@ecvo.ca). Depending on the type of error, we will either add an amendment and redistribute the report OR bring it forward to the next facilitated conversation.

## A | Systemic inequities experienced by Edmontonians, further aggravated by the pandemic; seen through the lens of the non-profit sector

All 15 participants shared back one issue they had discussed in pairs with the group. The topics that emerged have been categorized and summarized below in order of most to least commonly mentioned:

### Community-level issues raised

1. **Racism** (e.g., antisemitism, Islamophobia, anti-Asian racism)
  - o **Compounded with gender-based violence** (especially on Muslim and Black Muslim women and ageism)
2. **Ageism** and its intersection with other systemic issues such as houselessness, elder abuse, social isolation, digital illiteracy, etc.

Covid disproportionately affected Black families because they were/are more often in higher risk jobs/frontline.

*-Paraphrased from a participant*

3. **Family violence** (including elder abuse) and lack of accommodations for victims, especially for immigrants/newcomers.
4. **Food/Income insecurity** - many grants for food insecurity were accessed during the pandemic.

*Domestic abuse towards women; the system wasn't built to help them – Nisa Homes was full during the pandemic for example; we had to send people back to live with their abusers.*

*-Paraphrased from a participant*

#### Organizational & Systems-level issues raised

5. **Supportive infrastructure was lacking** for the non-profit sector. For example:
  - **Supportive legislation and policies** for organizations during Covid (e.g, work-from-home policies, online AGM policies, etc. needed creating)
  - **Modern electronic infrastructure** that supports data mobility and data sovereignty (e.g., so clients don't have to retell their stories repeatedly)
  - **Training for digital literacy and online meeting facilitation**
6. **Limited translation services and interpretation personnel** available at crucial times potentially **leading to physical/mental/emotional harm**. For example:
  - **Police officers lacking sensitivity** due to language/cultural barriers after attacks on Muslim women.
  - **Counsellors not available** in many languages to support mental health
  - **Covid restrictions/supports only available in English** and non-profits not able to support all those that needed it with translation.
7. **Limited access to healthcare and mental health supports**
  - **Lacking harm reduction supplies**
  - **Counsellors** lacking cultural/religious sensitivity and therefore not an appropriate fit
8. **Non-profit funding resources were exhausted or not available**

*Most of the time, resources about COVID-19 needed to be translated for our clients. Though the translation supports are available, it isn't widespread and most of our clients listened to Covid restrictions from the radio or on TV, i.e, only available in English.*

*-Paraphrased from a participant*

- Non-profits struggled to support **grassroots groups**
- **Provincially and municipally** a limited response for **black families** disproportionately exposed to Covid
- No support of **community league infrastructure**

*Community Leagues didn't have the income to maintain their infrastructure (e.g., community centres, basketball courts). Some were effectively "closed" for a year.*  
-Paraphrased from a participant

9. **Private sector has too much influence over government** and especially negatively impacted families during the pandemic
- **Lack of affordable/suitable housing for newcomers**

*Property Managers/Owners target newcomers and international students. The cost of housing didn't go down even though more vacancy. Foreign equity firms need to be regulated to ensure housing is suited for families.*  
-Paraphrased from a participant

## **B** | How the non-profit sector came together during the pandemic to address systemic inequities

Participants shared several examples of **leveraging existing partnerships or creating new ones** to increase accessibility to services and supplies during the pandemic:

- HIV Edmonton provided a local Primary Care Network **a mobile healthcare site** on their property
- ESCC became a central hub for **PPE distribution** (e.g., mask distribution)
- ECVO helped other non-profits to **establish organizational policies** to support 'the new normal'.
- Organizations pursued **grant funding collaboratively** (e.g., to purchase devices for technology accessibility for at-home schooling)
- **More resourced organizations partnered with less resourced** but more community-embedded organizations/groups to **build network capacity** and **get funding out to those most in need**

## **C** | How it will continue to be challenging for the non-profit sector to support recovery

Ongoing and increasing challenges for the non-profit sector were discussed interwoven with broader systemic issues. An iceberg analogy helps to position the discussed challenges relative to one another, highlighting what is most obvious (out in the community) as the tip of the iceberg and what is more deeply seated (i.e., systemic issues) below the surface:

**In the community...**

**Increasing demand for non-profit sector services.**

Increased:

- Mental health
- Food insecurity
- Family violence
- Rent, fuel prices
- Extreme isolation
- Hate-based violence
- Complexity of need
- Inequitable access

**In the non-profit sector...**

**Increased staffing challenges**

- Turnover - low wages, burnout
- Need specialized training (e.g., trauma-informed)
- Hybrid arrangements

**Decreasing revenue streams and uncoordinated, inequitable access to grant funds**

- Less philanthropy
- Limited provincial support
- Project-based
- Competitive

**In systems...**

**Colonial systems that do not adapt, institutionalized racism**

- Lacking cultural, religious sensitivity
- Limited translation, interpreters, esp. in healthcare, public health
- Consultants without lived experience



## D | How the City and Mayor's Office can support the non-profit sector in recovery

Several ideas were proposed by participants, and they are grouped into two categories below that generally have to do **with improvements in practice, policy and funding structures at the Council and Administration levels**. Not surprisingly, they mirror many of the persistent challenges mentioned in the previous section:

### I. Enact more supportive practices and policies

- **Public policy** needs to better support the sector in doing its job (.e.g., more affordable housing options, more community-based care options)
- **Build relationships** with non-profit organizations such that the Mayor's Office is more willing to 'pick up the phone' and seek insight from non-profit leaders
- **Support fellowships** with Councillors and other Municipal Officials
- Establish **policies for data sharing/mobility** across organizations
- Establish **policies that diversify procurement** processes such that consultants hired are more likely to share the lived experience of those they are consulting in community engagements

### II. Enable more forward-thinking funding structures in City Administration.

- Prioritize **preventative social service funding**; funding that targets equity/takes a rights-based approach
- Provide funding for non-profit **staff wages that are on par with City staff equivalents** (e.g., social workers) and include benefits and pension
- Funding for processes that **facilitate collaboration** rather than block it
- Offer **participatory grant making/requests for proposals** so that non-profits can be responsive and nimble to community needs;
- Funding structures that provide room for **mid-course innovation/creativity**, agility/nimbleness, and a certain level of risk taking as the situation dictates
- Invest in **technology to support data sharing and real-time reporting**
- Reporting for grant funding should **value multiple ways of knowing**, for example, story-telling reporting options

## E | Outstanding questions to be answered by the Mayor & Mayor's Office

Beyond the ideas presented in the last section, participants had difficulty providing more tailored responses because it was not clear to them what control the Mayor & Mayor's Office actually has. This led to several questions posed both during the session and in the feedback evaluation:



- **What change is actually possible through the Mayor's Office?**
- **What is the scope of your influence**, and how much influence do you actually have to **effect systems level change**?
  - How effective can discussions with the non-profit sector be given recent budgetary and policy decisions that pull resources and focus away from socio-economic supports for the disenfranchised?

How can the Mayor & Mayor's Office tangibly work with the non-profit sector to tackle systemic inequities such as food insecurity, houselessness, education, seniors social isolation, mental health struggles, childcare, living wages, etc.?

*-Paraphrased from a non-profit participant*

- **What types of outcomes can come from these facilitated conversations?**
  - Can the Mayor, Mayor's Office and City Councillors act as levers on City Administration?
  - Can the Mayor's Office facilitate connections between non-profit leaders and key decision-makers?
- **What does the Mayor & Mayor's Office feel that the non-profit sector needs to do to support them in their actions?**
  - Are there ways we can put pressure on City Administration? If so, what are the levers we can use to do that?
  - Can we collectively create some key messages to advocate for social causes that we can all use?

## **F | Outstanding questions to be answered by non-profit leaders**

At the end of the session, the Mayor's Office shared some questions that they had:

- What is the **"low hanging fruit"** that the Mayor's Office can work on?
- **How does the City Administration need to work differently?**
- What are the **questions that City Council should ask?** / What should City Council **put forward as motions?**
- What are the **areas that the Mayor's Office needs to look into** and analyze more?
- What are non-profit leaders' **thoughts on social procurement?**

## G | If we meet again...

For context, all **non-profit leaders** who completed the follow-up evaluation (9/15) agreed that they **would be interested in participating in bimonthly (every two months) facilitated conversations** with the Mayor and Mayor's Office.

*"These events are critical and lend value to all sides. City Council and non-profit organizations both reap the benefits of working together and hearing each other."*

*-Non-Profit Participant*

That said, if these non-profit leaders were to meet with the Mayor's Office again, **they would want the Mayor and Mayor's Office to provide the following to ensure a meaningful engagement process** (paraphrased from the evaluation):

- Better framing of the **broader purpose** for engaging in regular conversations, i.e. what are the Mayor's **specific goals** for these meetings and **what would success look like**
- **Answers** to the questions posed **about what tools, levers, and influence the Mayor & Mayor's Office actually has** to respond to the issues raised by the non-profit sector (especially systemic issues)

*Collaboration is exhausting and the non-profit sector is exhausted from Covid; what will be the return on investment for the time that we commit?*

*-Paraphrased from a non-profit participant*

At the same time, **the Mayor's office also raised questions at the end of the session that would need to be addressed by non-profit leaders** in a future meeting. These were **listed in the previous section as 'outstanding questions'**.

*We can tell Administration about the changes you want to see but it's "the how" we need your assistance with.*

*-Paraphrased from the Mayor's Office*

### Suggested changes to the facilitation process

Also to consider if we meet again are the **suggestions made in the follow-up evaluation for future facilitation**. They include: more time dedicated to hashing out strategies for working together for systems-level change; more diverse facilitators<sup>2</sup>; inclusion of Indigenous serving agencies<sup>3</sup>; and better audio (facilitators were hard to hear likely due to masks)

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<sup>2</sup> This comment was interpreted by the facilitators as referring to visible diversity, such as people of colour to facilitate, given the inclusion of cultural organizations in this facilitated conversation.

<sup>3</sup> The Mayor & Mayor's Office have dedicated a separate set of conversations to be had with organizations that work primarily with Indigenous communities.

## Evaluation Results

The day after the session, an online evaluation form was sent out to all non-profit leader participants with an 11-day timeline for completion. The evaluation questions are included in Appendix C.

**NOTE:** Given the relevance of some of the evaluation topics to prior sections of this report (e.g. interest in future gatherings and outstanding comments), some of the evaluation results have already been included above, therefore this section focuses ONLY on impact of the session on participants.

### Evaluation Feedback from Non-Profit Leaders

Sixty percent (60%) of non-profit leaders that attended the session completed the evaluation form. Thus, the following results pertain to the 9 (out of 15) non-profit profit leaders that responded to the evaluation form.

Almost all non-profit leaders **somewhat agreed or strongly agreed that they had gained a communication pathway to the Mayor's Office** because of their participation in this event.



4.11 Average Rating



All respondents said this was their **first time having a sector-level group discussion with Mayor Sohi and his Office.**

For 67% (or 6/9) this was their **first time having this type of discussion with any Edmonton Mayor and their Office.**



When non-profit leaders were asked about what else was useful about the event:

**44%** found it **useful to learn about what others in the sector are doing to address systemic issues;**

**33%** appreciated the networking and potential partnering opportunities; and

**22%** spoke of how satisfying it was to finally reconnect in person again.

Finally, when asked if there was anything else they would like to add, the majority took the opportunity to express their appreciation for the opportunity and thanks for event.

## Appendices

### Appendix A: Participant List

Name	Affiliation
<i>Non-Profit Leaders representing Seniors, Cultural, and Volunteer organizations</i>	
Alphonse Ahola	Francophone Albertaine Plurielle
Angelica Quesada	John Humphrey Centre for Human Rights
Khaled Tarabain	Al-Rashid Mosque (Board President)
Catherine Broomfield	HIV Edmonton
Cindy Furlong	The Today Family Violence Help Centre
Gemma Dunn	Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations
Haidong Liang	West End Seniors Centre
Jann Beeston	Jewish Family Services Edmonton
Karen McDonald	Sage
Laura Cunningham-Shpeley	Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues
Laura Murphy	Edmonton Coalition on Housing and Homelessness
Noor Alhenedy	Al-Rashid Mosque
Omar Yacoub	Islamic Family & Social Services Association
Sharif Haji	Africa Centre
Sheila Hallett	Edmonton Seniors Coordinating Council
<i>Regrets</i>	
Renee Vaugeois (but Angelica Quesada came in her place)	John Humphrey Centre for Human Rights
Dunia Nur	African-Canadian Civic Engagement Council
Liza Bouchard	Drive Happiness
<i>Mayor's Office</i>	
Amarjeet Sohi (present for 1 <sup>st</sup> half)	Mayor
Helen Frost (present for 2 <sup>nd</sup> half)	Policy Director
Robyn Taylor	Policy and Research Specialist
Salem Alahmad	Director of Stakeholder Relations and Engagement
<i>Conversation Facilitators</i>	
David Feldman	Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations
Emma Wilkins	Edmonton Chamber of Voluntary Organizations

## Appendix B: Main Activities of the Session

### Opening Remarks and Land Acknowledgment

Mayor Sohi welcomed everyone and introduced his team to the group. Gemma Dunn, the Executive Director of the Edmonton Chamber of Volunteer Organizations (ECVO), gave a land acknowledgement.

### Three Discussion Questions

Participants were asked:

1. (In pairs) **Share one example of a systemic issue (i.e., an issue related to racism, antisemitism, gender discrimination, seniors isolation, houselessness, access to culturally appropriate supports, etc.) that your organization encountered especially acutely during the pandemic, and how your organization worked together with others in the non-profit sector to meet the needs of the communities you serve.**

*The Mayor and his team were invited to scatter among participants, so some could pair up with them. After 5 minutes of paired sharing, each pair shared their examples with the broader group.*

2. (Using post-it notes) **Considering the lingering effects of the pandemic on the non-profit sector and persistent inequities, write down the top 2-3 ways (1 per post-it note) that you anticipate it will continue to be challenging for the sector to support recovery in the communities you serve.**

*Participants were asked to post their comments on a sheet on the wall, looking for similar challenges that others also came up with. The facilitators then shared back with the group the main themes that emerged.*

3. (As a large group) **Now that we've identified some of the most prominent challenges you foresee in the non-profit sector, what can the City of Edmonton and Mayor's Office do to break down the barriers and make it easier for the non-profit sector to succeed in supporting an equitable recovery for Edmontonians going forward?**

*The facilitators took notes for everyone to see and facilitated the conversation with the Mayor and Mayor's Office.*

### Next Steps

The facilitators explained that a follow-up evaluation would be distributed via email to gather feedback on participants' impressions of the session as well as to capture any outstanding key comments participants had. Participants were then informed that a

summary of this feedback along with a summary of the discussion during the event would be compiled in a “What We Heard” Report and distributed to all participants.

**Closing Remarks**

Gemma Dunn from ECVO and Salem Alahmad from the City of Edmonton thanked everyone for coming, and both mentioned an interest to continue with future facilitated gatherings to further the conversation about how this new Mayor and Council, as well as City Administration, can support the non-profit sector going forward.

**Appendix C: Evaluation Questions Completed by Non-Profit Leaders**

Question	Response Option
1. This is my first time having a sector-level group discussion with Mayor Sohi and his Office	True/False
2. This is my first time having a sector-level group discussion with any Edmonton Mayor and their Office.	
3. I have gained a communication pathway to <b>the Mayor's Office</b> because of my participation in this event:	1 star = strongly disagree with this statement 2 stars = somewhat disagree 3 stars = unsure 4 stars = somewhat agree 5 stars = strongly agree with this statement
4. I have gained a communication pathway to <b>certain non-profit leaders</b> because of my participation in this event:	
5. Is there anything else you found especially useful about this event?	[Open field]
6. Would you be interested in participating in bimonthly (every two months) facilitated conversations with the Mayor and Mayor's Office?	Yes/Maybe/No
7. Given the discussion from this first event, what would the next meeting's discussion need to focus on for you to be motivated to attend?	[Open fields]
8. If a regular facilitated conversation were to occur, what would you like to see changed or improved about the process?	
9. ECVO will be writing a "What We Heard" report to summarize the discussion from this event. If there is anything else you wanted to share on the topics we discussed that you didn't have a chance to, please share it below. (These responses will be summarized and added to the report.)	
10. Is there anything else you would like to add about this event or future events like this?	