

Our Community



**Report on Vancouver Foundation's community consultations
Summer 2011**

vancouver
foundation

Introduction and Purpose



But at times I wondered if I had not come a long way
Only to find out what I really sought
Was something I had left behind.

~ Thomas F. Hornbein

Vancouver Foundation's vision and long-term objective is healthy, vibrant, and livable communities. Our mission is to mobilize the gifts of energy, ideas, time, and money to make meaningful and lasting impacts in communities.

As a community foundation, we recognize that many things go into creating strong communities. That's why, with our discretionary funds, we support a wide array of areas of interest: from arts and culture, to education and environment; from health and social services, to animal welfare, and children, youth and family issues. We are also a broad funder geographically, serving the entire province.

Our work in so many fields of interest and across such a broad geographic area with relatively limited discretionary dollars has meant that we have not made a significant impact in any one area. To use the old adage "we are a mile wide and an inch deep." So our broad approach as a funder is both an asset and our Achilles' heel.

In 2008 the Foundation did decide that addressing youth homelessness would be a priority. Some funds were dedicated to seeking out and supporting strategic projects to tackle the issue. No timeline was set on when the funding for this issue would end.

Other than youth homelessness, the bulk of our granting has been reactive. We support the community mainly through funding other charities to undertake the actual work. As well, in the last few years, we have seized opportunities to convene and incubate new projects (i.e., Streetohome; Immigrant Employment Council; Government-Non-Profit Initiative; Labour Market Partnership).

As the competition for philanthropic support has increased, and money has become scarcer, the need to not only address community issues effectively but also demonstrate the impact of our work has become more critical.

In an effort to address the changing needs of the community, and of the Foundation and its donors, the Board of Directors in December 2010 adopted a new five-year strategic plan. The plan contained the following guiding principles:

Collaboration: We recognize that no one entity or sector can address complex issues alone. We must work together to leverage our collective knowledge.

Community self-direction: We recognize that communities have the right and responsibility to identify and address their priority needs.

Focus: We target our efforts and resources to maximize our effectiveness.

Impact: Our work needs to make measurable, sustainable impacts in the communities we serve.

Power of giving: We recognize that philanthropy plays a powerful and integral role in strengthening communities.

Systemic approach: We address root causes of issues, focusing both on issues today and prevention of issues in the future.

A key theme of the new strategy was to focus the Foundation more, in order to increase its impact. It would achieve this in two ways:

While the Foundation would remain a broad funder - continuing to fund nine fields of interest - it would work to narrow down the funding priorities within each field.

It would also determine what one or two community issues the Foundation could place additional emphasis and resources on over the next 3-5 years within a narrower geographic area (i.e., metro Vancouver). Specifically, the question we needed to answer was “on what one or two metro Vancouver issues could Vancouver Foundation take a leadership role?”

This would involve not only funding but also undertaking value-added work on the issue(s) in activities such as research, convening, public education and engagement, partnerships, policy development, advocacy, etc. The Board wanted to explore where there were gaps, and where our foundation could make a difference.

With the strategic plan as its guide, Vancouver Foundation launched its priority-setting initiative in January 2011 with the following objectives:

- identify high priority areas that needed addressing
- identify those areas where there was a gap in support
- identify those areas that would be consistent with our mandate
- dedicate some of Vancouver Foundation’s unrestricted dollars to 1-2 key priority areas for the next few years in order to make a difference in that area
- go beyond focusing on grants and look at other ways the Foundation can support change in an area
- have our foundation recognized as a community leader
- to focus on metro Vancouver with the idea that starting in a smaller geographic area could help us maximize our impact, learn from our experiences, and build on our successes.

The purpose of Phase 1 of the priority-setting initiative, the Inquiry Phase, was to obtain a broad sampling of opinion across a wide variety of sectors. The goal was to identify what community issue(s) were of the most concern to residents of metro Vancouver and where they thought Vancouver Foundation should focus additional energy and resources.

Scope and Results of Consultations



And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
~ T.S. Eliot

Phase 1 of the priority-setting initiative involved broad consultations with a variety of audiences and stakeholders, including:

- the *2010 Vital Signs* report
- interviews with 106 community leaders
- an online survey of 276 non-profits
- six community conversations throughout metro Vancouver

1. Vital Signs 2010:

In the fall of 2010, Vancouver Foundation produced its fourth *Vital Signs for Metro Vancouver* report. The report combines both data as well as public opinion to create a snapshot of various aspects of community life in the region.

In preparation for the 2010 data collection, VF staff spoke with more than 120 people about what issues VF should explore in the report.

These interviews revealed a powerful yearning for stronger connections in and between our communities, and resulted in the focus on “belonging” in the public opinion survey that informed the *2010 Vital Signs* report.

Once all the data was collected, the often-cited issues were given low scores by the metro Vancouver residents who participated in the survey: housing, transportation, the growing income gap, and so on.

It was the other part of the 2010 survey, which included a few new questions on quality of life, that produced the most interesting results.

We discovered that people who rated themselves as “happy” and who rated their quality of life as high, were doing so not based on where they lived, their education, income level or ethnic background.

The biggest factors contributing to happiness and having a good quality of life were that the person felt a sense of “belonging” in their community and trusted their neighbour.

2. Interviews with community leaders:

Vancouver Foundation decided to find out what people cared about, and to do this in the old-fashioned way – by talking to them, and talking to them one-on-one rather than in groups.

People are more honest, and will allow their own vulnerabilities to show more easily in personal conversations. Our interviews proved that.

We approached about 120 people – community leaders – across a range of occupations, specialties and interests, including business, philanthropy, academia, the non-profit sector, media, thought leaders, and members of the VF “family.” Some people were young, others senior citizens; several came from non-white ethnic and cultural backgrounds (e.g., aboriginal, Asian, South Asian). Some of the interviewees were very wealthy, while others were struggling to pay their rent.

We were able to interview 106 leaders between April and July 2011, of whom 104 fully answered the questionnaire. *(See list in Appendix A)*

We wanted to know what they cared about personally, and so we asked them to remove their hats as CEO, university president, First Nations chief, executive director, or editor. The first question was always the same:

“You live here. You have family, friends, neighbours and colleagues. You talk to them about what worries you about life here. From that personal perspective, what issue in metro Vancouver concerns you the most?”

People would often pause at this point; realizing we were less interested in the official representation of their organization’s views than in what they personally cared about, what they talked to friends and family about, and what kept them up at night.

We went into these one-hour interviews anticipating that the community leaders might land on issues such as affordable housing or the impact of an aging population or issues around poverty, and certainly we heard about these concerns.

We also heard something else – a theme that came up spontaneously in one form or another in about 75 per cent of the conversations.

Community leaders from all walks of life overwhelmingly talked about isolation, its consequences, and the craving for connection. *(See Appendix B)*

Some described it as a lack of connection between the many diverse cultural and ethnic groups that now reside in metro Vancouver. Others framed it as not knowing our neighbours anymore, and feeling isolated as a result. Other leaders lamented the lack of civic concern and civic engagement that has slowly eroded our communities.

Some of the actual comments we heard were:

- *“Metro Vancouver is fragmented, disjointed, split along economic, ethnic, social, even geographic lines. How do we build a shared understanding of each other?”*
- *“What aches my heart is the feeling of all these divides.”*
- *“My number one concern is how people can live peacefully together and respect each other. We talk about building roads to connect people. We need to build social pathways to connect people.”*

- *“My concerns are less about the issues and more about the community in which I live. We have lost a sense of community and lost the concept of responsibility to contribute to building community.”*
- *“I worry about the lack of connection and how it propagates more divisiveness. We need to build social capital. We need to think of the interests of others, rather than only the family unit.”*
- *“The consequences will be the disintegration of our social fabric. There is nothing holding us together. We’re losing our values of tolerance and caring for our fellow citizens.”*

Many people said that with the exception of family and a handful of friends, they feel isolated within their own community – even in their own neighbourhoods. They work too hard and commute too long; they barely have time for their own children, never mind hosting dinner parties, volunteering or participating in community life. They feel they personally pay a price for this isolation, and that the whole community also pays a price.

It is worth repeating at this point that these comments were in answer to the first, open-ended question about what concerns people the most. These were spontaneously expressed personal views.

In each interview we went on to ask people for their top three community issues, and then we explored what advice they had for Vancouver Foundation in terms of where we should focus additional energy and resources over the shorter term (3-5 years) and the longer term (10+ years).

Top three community issues:

We showed the community leaders a list of 13 broadly defined community issues; issues VF’s own work in the community had identified as being important to people in metro Vancouver. (See Appendix C)

During the interviews, we acknowledged that these issues are complex and very difficult to separate but that we had separated them for the purposes of these consultations. We then asked people to select the three they cared about the most. Again, we asked them to make their selections based on what they personally cared about.

The 104 community leaders selected, as their top three issues: Belonging and Inclusion, Poverty, and Housing.

They ranked Belonging and Inclusion the most important, at 47.9 per cent. Poverty and Housing were the second and third choices, tied at 36.5 per cent each. (See Appendix D)

We asked the community leaders to speak about their choices. We wanted to be clear that we understood exactly what it was about Belonging and Inclusion, Poverty, and Housing that concerned them.

The hunger for social connections was prominent; the lament that people no longer know one another or trust one another, and their worry that they have become bad neighbours and bad citizens as a result, dependent on government or charities to deliver needed services, and unable to participate in the type of civic engagement that would improve their lives.

People talked about poverty with great sadness, as a blight on metro Vancouver and something to be mightily ashamed of. Even so, the people we interviewed also spoke about poverty with a kind of hopeless despair that it can ever be eradicated, and a rationalizing that there are many hundreds of non-profits, large and small, working in this area. It's worth mentioning here how a number of philanthropists spoke about donor weariness around large issues such as poverty and homelessness. As one philanthropist put it, "Donors are sick of being sold No Hope."

Homelessness was reported as less a concern than affordable housing. People are worried that their children will never be able to afford to buy a house in the city they've grown up in. People told us that the gap between rich and poor, shown most painfully in the cost of housing, is turning Vancouver in particular into a resort city for the wealthy. There is a fear that Vancouver is becoming, as one interviewee elegantly put it, "A gated community for those who live here in earned repose."

Of those interviewed, 13.6 per cent selected Other when asked to choose their top of mind issue. Those other issues included:

- urban planning, growth and sprawl
- populations of interest, for example single mothers, urban aboriginals, children under five
- problems with the charitable sector, for example antiquated regulations regarding charitable status and advocacy; length of grants

During the conversations about their top three issues, interviewees often spoke of the impact on children and youth. This was a strongly expressed theme; the worry that children and youth are particularly vulnerable and at risk from isolation, poverty, and homelessness.

3. Non-profit survey:

To ensure we obtained the opinion of a broad cross-section of stakeholders, we sent an online survey in June 2011 to 580 non-profits in metro Vancouver who were either grantees of VF and/or fundholders.

We recognized that this survey could not pull personal opinions in the way our one-on-one interviews could. We could not even be certain who in the organization might complete the survey. We also had to accept that the answers to our questions would likely reflect the interests of the non-profits.

With that in mind, we did not ask for personal impressions. Instead, we asked people to select the three issues where they believed VF could have a greater impact, through granting and beyond, for example by building partnerships, leading public education and engagement, convening, and so on.

We received 276 answers to our survey, which also asked for information about what category each non-profit fell into and what their annual operating budget was — information that would provide some context to their answers.

The majority of respondents were in the social services sector (28.4 per cent) and the arts and culture sector (27.2 per cent) and with annual operating budgets of \$250,000 to one million dollars.

The survey shows that the top three issues identified by non-profits were:

Arts and culture (42.8 per cent)

Education and training (37.5 per cent)

Belonging and inclusion (34.8 per cent) (*See Appendix E*)

In the comments section, a concern about children and youth emerged as a theme, in calls for greater support for at-risk youth, and services for families with children.

The survey reveals a general unhappiness in the not-for-profit sector about the length of grants. There is a strong appetite in the sector for longer term grants and greater transparency in the granting process.

The results also show that the sector would like more support from Vancouver Foundation through workshops on for example, building public awareness of non-profit issues, fundraising, effective collaboration and partnerships, and advocacy.

4. Community conversations:

A fourth source of opinion that informed the broad inquiry phase of the priority-setting exercise was a series of community conversations organized in June 2011 by Vancouver Foundation.

As noted earlier, one of the key findings to come out of the *2010 Vital Signs* report was that the biggest impact on how we rate the quality of our lives comes from the degree to which we feel connected to one another.

Following the *2010 Vital Signs* report, the Vital Signs Leadership Advisory Group, comprising leaders from across metro Vancouver, recommended a series of regional conversations to create opportunities for free public dialogues relating to the theme of belonging and focusing on specific issues of interest to the various communities.

Vancouver Foundation selected six communities for these conversations: Maple Ridge, North Vancouver, Richmond, White Rock, New Westminister, and Vancouver. Planning meetings with community leaders identified the top issues of concern in each community, all of which were viewed through the “belonging” lens.

So for example, while a community conversation might have been about housing or health or transportation, the discussion took place within a “belonging” frame.

Questions for discussion included:

- What do you love about your community?
- When you picture a healthy, connected community, what stands out?
- What is your community doing well? What is working?
- What are the opportunities for improvement?

- What action are you personally willing to take?

We took the opportunity these conversations provided to do a casual poll of participants. We used the same list of broad community issues we had shown to the people we interviewed, and asked participants to select the three they cared about the most.

Most people selected Belonging and Inclusion. However, as the events were framed as a discussion of how belonging and community engagement can build stronger communities, these results are not surprising. *(See Appendix F)*

What was notable was the enthusiasm for the theme of belonging and the role social connections has in community life, and the appreciation that Vancouver Foundation was on the ground in the communities, taking a leadership role in sparking this dialogue.

Some of the comments we heard were:

- White Rock: *I love this new direction Vancouver Foundation is forging. You are doing the “community” and that is a big missing piece. There are so many organizations already involved in every problem and issue but there is NO ONE who gets the community piece.*
- North Vancouver: *The session in North Vancouver was incredible, made all the more so by the participation of your Board members. Kudos to them for coming out. Their presence really indicates that Vancouver Foundation is ready to begin a new chapter. And I loved the focus on belonging that framed the evening. This is really the community piece that no one has tackled before. It’s a great role for Vancouver Foundation to take on because it represents the future of positive change. I’m happy to see this new direction for Vancouver Foundation.*
- New Westminster: *I loved the belonging angle. Even though it’s not as tangible as a lot of other community issues that seem to make it on the radar for community consultation, based on the way you approached this, I am thinking that this in fact is an incredible framework for community development that has been missing in our conversations for a very long time. I would like for Vancouver Foundation to continue this work - this has tremendous potential to impact the health of every community in B.C.*
- Vancouver: *Did not “get” the belonging piece prior to the session. After participating I am a “believer”. I see that perhaps this is the “missing piece” that we need to focus on if we are to find solutions in our struggling communities. And I am happy to see Vancouver Foundation step up to the plate and take this on. This could be a very exciting piece of work, not ever tackled by anyone before. I would contribute financially to this!*

These four sources of information – *Vital Signs*, the interviews with community leaders, the non-profit survey, and the community conversations, all revealed a hunger for the chance to build social connections, and an excitement that VF was in the community, talking to people about how we might all work together to make this happen.

What is ‘Belonging’?



We tell pollsters that we wish we lived in a more civil, more trustworthy, more collectively caring community . . . because we are right that the bonds of community have withered and we know this has real costs.

~ Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone*

What does belonging really mean, and how is it possible to address this need to strengthen social connections, build trust, and improve civic engagement?

About three weeks into our interviews, when we noticed this pattern emerging in our conversations, we knew we needed to investigate this issue.

We discovered there was a substantial body of recent research and literature on community social bonding. In fact, we uncovered a vast wealth of books and discussion papers that have been written about this issue, mostly over the last 10-15 years.

Perhaps the best known researcher in this area is Dr. Robert Putnam, a world-renowned Harvard professor who has chronicled the breakdown of community in the United States, and is a leader in the movement for civic renewal. Putnam offers reams of evidence on how we have become increasingly disconnected from each other, how our social structures are disintegrating, and the negative impact this has on us as individuals and citizens.

Not as much work has been done to measure the breakdown of civic life and community ties in the Canadian context but there are many similarities with what Putnam reports is happening in the U.S.

Putnam writes that, “Increasingly, we live alone, work late, and entertain ourselves by staring at television or computer screens. We spend less time in groups – with family, friends, neighbours or fellow club members. We are less trusting, less civic-minded, and less participatory in the affairs of public life.”

This disconnect has real consequences. Our fraying social connections have led to a breakdown of trust, a corrosion of caring, and diminished altruism. We don’t have the time or interest to interact with others outside of a handful of family and friends. We have become indifferent neighbours and unengaged citizens.

More and more of us can’t be bothered to vote, don’t know the issues under debate, and have no time or interest in volunteering. We are less able to work together to fix what’s wrong in our lives and increasingly dependent on government or charities to provide needed services.

In some cities, the fraying of social connections is exacerbated by an increasingly diverse community. Today, with rapidly changing demographic profiles in our communities, more and more people are confining themselves to their own ethnic and cultural groups.

These diverse groups, although living next to each other in a neighbourhood, have little interaction with others. We heard the silos also exist in schools and universities, across communities, and throughout metro Vancouver. As one member of the Asian community told us, “This is a diverse,

multi-cultural city but there are conflicts and anxieties between groups. I'm worried there isn't enough trust to work together to solve our problems."

In an increasingly pluralistic society, the need to create bridges and strengthen the connections between different groups becomes critical.

How we got to this point is the subject of much navel-gazing, academic study, political blaming, and economic and social theory. It's the consequences that we heard about loudly and clearly in *Vital Signs* and the other sources that informed the first phase of this broad inquiry.



"The truth is struggling neighbourhoods won't improve because of a federal grant or outside resource alone. Lasting change only occurs when people take ownership of their community and their own lives. We can pave the streets and paint the houses, but unless people care about each other and the future of their community, it won't be a truly great neighbourhood."

~ The Centre for Great Neighbourhoods of Covington

Indices of economic and social well-being

The 2010 *Vital Signs* finding that social bonds and trust are critical to an individual's well-being, mirror what's being found across the country and around the world. Cities and nations are recognizing the value of social connections and are beginning to measure the well-being of their citizens, not just economic wealth, as an indicator of prosperity.

The World Health Organization assesses the quality of life across several domains, including social relations, recognizing that the need to form bonds of trust is crucial to our individual and collective well-being.

The Satisfaction with Life Index in the UK connects well-being and quality of life to factors such as standard of living, freedom, and environmental health, all of which are seen as essential to economic well-being.

In June 2011, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development launched a *Happiness Index* to measure the well-being of its 34 member nations, in an effort to go beyond the GDP as a measure of prosperity.

The Legatum *Prosperity Index* includes social capital in its measurement of a country's ability to foster the drivers of prosperity. It defines social capital as "*social networks and the cohesion that a society experiences when people trust one another*" and recognizes this has a direct effect on the prosperity of a country.

The UK *Action for Happiness*, while having no political affiliation, is a 2010 initiative that dovetails with Prime Minister Cameron's 'Big Society' project, which seeks to nurture community bonds, civic activism and social capital.

Private enterprise is also acknowledging the trend. Healthways, a U.S. health care provider, has joined with Gallup to publish a *Well-being Index*, and advertisers – always leaders in identifying the trends to which they can tie their products – are on the community bandwagon.

Coke's 2010 *Happiness Poll* discovered that for the majority of people in 16 countries, feeling close and connected to friends and family was their number one source of happiness. The Keg restaurants give \$25,000 grants totaling one million dollars to community enhancement projects designed to re-engage people in civic life.

There is a world-wide trend to examine the importance of social connections to our individual and collective prosperity and well-being.

What's true all over the world is true here in metro Vancouver.

The consequences of fragmented community social bonds

As one interviewee told us, "I grew up here. We played on the streets. There were neighbourhoods. If you were in trouble, you could go to a neighbour's. I'd leave my bike on the lawn and it would still be there in the morning. As a community, what can we do to help families? It requires community. That is the soul of the city - tolerance, compassion, caring for each other. There's a need for a sense of belonging."

People told us of their worries for their children, how they wish families were more connected to each other in neighbourhoods, so that their youth were under the watchful eyes of an entire community.

People talked about high-rise buildings with no indoor or outdoor play areas for their children, without even a common laundry room where you can get to know your neighbours, where even if you did befriend a neighbour, you could not visit them because of the security measures that prevent the elevator from stopping on any floor but your own.

People talked about their worries that metro Vancouver's diverse ethnic communities, while strong and bonded, are in silos, reluctant to get to know other cultural groups and not trusting each other.

As is so often the case, anecdotal, personal experiences are ahead of what research ultimately finds. The research does confirm what people are experiencing, or at least, the benefits of what they told us they are missing:

- Epidemiological research shows that social connections decrease rates of suicide, colds, heart attacks, strokes, and cancer, and improve people's ability to fight or recover from these illnesses.
- Psychological research shows that social connections make people less prone to depression and more inclined to help one another.
- Sociology studies suggest that social connections reduce crime: in neighbourhoods where people know each other's names, there is less crime no matter what the income level of the area. There are also fewer teenage pregnancies, less child abuse, welfare dependency and drug abuse, and increased graduation rates.
- Economic studies show that social connections make workers more productive, firms more competitive and nations more prosperous.

Finding the right language

The unexpected theme of the interviews presented us with a dilemma. We had built a survey that would allow us to track the issues with the expectation that we would see clear choices emerge.

However, many of the people we spoke to were talking about an issue that we did not adequately anticipate in our survey list of broad community issues. We did include Belonging and Inclusion as an issue but we defined it this way:

“The need to support communities of people who may struggle to find opportunity in metro or use their skills – including new immigrants, people with disabilities, urban aboriginals, seniors and others.”

Our interviewees were telling us that this definition was too narrowly focused on particular groups of people, including newcomers, and marginalized or disadvantaged people. They were redefining Belonging and Inclusion as:

“The need to support people and neighbourhoods to create opportunities to work together to improve their lives.”

In other words, Belonging and Inclusion was a mirror in which they *wanted* to see themselves but could not.

The very choice of the words ‘belonging and inclusion’ presented a problem. This is too squishy a concept for many people; too much in the realm of self-help gurus. After all, doesn’t everyone want to belong and to feel included?

As interviewers, we confess some reluctance to acknowledge this seemingly soft and nebulous issue when it first arose but we could not ignore what soon became such a strong theme.

Of the 106 interviews we conducted, roughly 75 per cent talked, at some point in the conversation, about these issues of community connection or trust or civic indifference, even if they did not mark it on their list of top three issues.

We needed to acknowledge that while we have precise language to define, for example, poverty, homelessness and hunger, we have very little succinct language to describe our gut feeling that, as Robert Putnam writes, it’s people in relationships with one another who can reach goals that are far beyond the grasp of individuals in isolation.

The words are either too vague (community building), too academic (social capital), or too touchy-feely (belonging and inclusion).

To try to address this, we stopped using the words ‘belonging and inclusion’ and explored with the interview subjects who selected trust and community ties, what they thought strong community connections could accomplish, in their individual lives and in the lives of the communities in which they live.

The power of social bonds in neighbourhoods



“We must learn to view the world through a social capital lens. We need to look at front porches as crime-fighting tools, treat picnics as public health efforts, and see choral groups as occasions of democracy. We will become a better place when assessing social capital impact becomes a standard part of decision-making . . . ”

~ Lewis Feldstein, co-author Better Together

Our interviews told us that for too long, we have been focusing our resources on issues that are symptoms of the disconnect of communities and the isolation of residents. People told us that we need to find the courage to move upstream.

People saw the power of social connections at the community level to solve and even prevent many problems:

- *“You should focus on making youth feel like they are part of the community. When they feel this, there is less crime, less suicide, more graduation rates and less community dysfunction.”*
- *“Children are isolated in school. That’s why there is bullying - because children are disconnected and isolated.”*
- *“I worry about the isolation of seniors. We are disconnected from our neighbourhoods, communities, each other. If we can’t find ways of connecting people, then mental illness, disease, crime and poverty will increase. We can’t solve any of these if we can’t help people feel connected.”*
- *“There are whole groups on my street I’ve never talked to. The consequences are that people are more fearful about crime, their kids - there’s a fortress mentality.”*
- *“We need to find the glue that will stick it all together. We need to find common goals and common values, rather than rioting downtown after a hockey game.”*

People talked about creating shared values between ethnicities around an issue such as climate change, and how community arts projects can bridge chasms by teaching disparate groups about each other. Even food scarcity was identified as something community could address at the neighbourhood level with community gardens, where a shared activity builds bonds of trust.

Even people who did not select fraying community ties as an issue, who chose something else entirely, often saw their chosen issue through the community lens:

- Arts & Culture: *“It’s important for people’s well-being. It’s quality of life. It’s enriching and fosters diversity.”*
- Affordable Housing: *“People can’t volunteer or participate in community life when they are burdened by debt. It wears down the civic capacity to participate and eats away at the goodwill of the community.”*
- Transportation: *“Parking, traffic, a pathetic public transportation system means the core of the city becomes more and more exclusive, with a small community of people who can live downtown, and that means people don’t feel a connection to the city, and there is less sympathy or understanding when tough issues need to be addressed.”*

So what exactly do we mean when we talk about Belonging and Inclusion? It's difficult to find words to describe a condition that is still so new but we mean connections – between groups and individuals – that build trust, shared values, and understanding, so that we can work together to create a strong, inclusive, healthy and vibrant metro Vancouver.

Participants' Recommendations



The purpose of a community foundation is to build community and not to become yet another single-interest charity. The purpose of a community foundation is to harness the power within the community, the power of neighbours and friends to address what's wrong in their lives.

~ Ida Goodreau

While we sought a wide range of opinion, the greatest source of advice came from the interviews with community leaders. We specifically asked them what VF should focus on in the short term (3-5 years) and in the longer term (10+ years).

Their top of mind issue was the desire for social connections to bridge the silos in metro Vancouver – connections between generations, between cultures and religions, even between neighbours.

When we asked people to select their top three issues of concern, they chose Belonging and Inclusion, Poverty, and Housing.

People used various personal filters to make their choices. For example, someone might be inclined to choose poverty but feel satisfied there were many players tackling the issue. Others might start off wanting to select housing but then decide that homelessness was being adequately addressed, or that the high cost of housing was just an unhappy fact of life in metro Vancouver.

Occasionally, people selected issues that were close to them personally – a friend's mental illness or substance abuse, a special needs child with unique housing requirements, a personal enthusiasm for arts and culture.

The largest percentage (28.2 per cent) chose Belonging and Inclusion as the issue they believed VF should focus on in the short term. That went up to 32.7 per cent when people were asked for their long-term advice. (*See Appendix G*)

Interestingly, while the community leaders chose Poverty and Housing as their other two issues of top concern, they tended not to select either as issues Vancouver Foundation should focus on, in either the short or longer term. Only about 5 per cent of interviewees said VF should set Poverty or Housing as a priority.

A significant portion of those interviewed did not want to select just one issue, or chose an issue off the list. They gave a number of reasons for this:

- Focus on reforming the charitable sector, including the need for long-term grants.
- Don't focus at all; remain a broad funder.
- The issue matters less than the tactics; focus on grassroots projects, convening, advocacy.
- Some people could not select just one issue, speaking to the interconnection between issues.

- Issues chosen off the list included water, developing a national health care strategy, developing an aboriginal strategy, racism.

A large portion of people advised VF to focus on youth in both the short and longer term. We heard overwhelmingly that VF should focus on youth-driven change, develop youth leaders, and consider school-focused projects to inspire and engage youth.

People told us:

- *“Young adults are looking for a project. There is an emerging sense of a breach of trust around the Boomer legacy issues such as pensions, healthcare, the financial system and the environment.”*
- *“People 16-30 have an incredible social conscience and they want to serve. We need to use that compassion and drive.”*
- *“Who are the catalysts of change? Usually the young. For example, city planners, developers, NGOs are all trying to solve the affordable housing problem. Why don’t we ask young people how they want to live?”*
- *“You should do advocacy around participation in democracy, inclusion in society, and focus on children. Get them to vote, to volunteer. We need a youth-generated movement not orchestrated by adults.”*

The interviews also yielded information about Vancouver Foundation’s reputation. Opinions ran two ends of the spectrum: VF is elitist, a money manager and not visible in the community – to VF has the reputation, credibility, neutrality and resources to spark real and lasting change.

This latter opinion, expressed by one person as “You have no idea of your power”, led a number of people to tell us that VF should use its moral leadership to step up and do more advocacy. No one suggested VF board members chain themselves to the gates of the Legislature but they did send a strong signal that VF could become more publicly engaged in the big social debates.

People’s willingness to discuss at length what they cared the most about did not always result in concrete advice about what VF should actually do. People also questioned whether VF had enough money to “move the needle” on any of the big issues.

The majority of the advice was around VF’s potential role as a convener, an advocate for change, a natural leader to build community and social cohesion, with advice to do more at the grassroots level in small projects that are youth-focused and that inspire people.

Building social pathways, social connections, inspiring people to “get off the couch and get involved in the life of the community” was the most often given advice – for both the short and the longer term.

As always when interviewing people, some of the most profound reactions cannot be entered into a data bank and produced as a pie chart. This was particularly true when people offered advice about building community.

People would sit up, their eyes would sparkle, and they became excited, animated and optimistic about what VF could do – and what they could do themselves - to build the trusting relationships that would allow them to take more control of their lives and the life of their community.

They said:

- *“Build relationships, connections and strengths. Create real cultural change where people see themselves differently, as part of something bigger than their family or neighbourhood.”*
- *“Bring the community together. If you’re successful, you will create the resources to deal with many of our problems.”*
- *“There are so many organizations already focusing on issues relating to the environment, transportation, housing, poverty, etc. VF should focus on building community, building community knowledge like in Vital Signs, and local, neighbourhood-based projects.”*
- *“VF should not be so concerned about narrow interests but instead should create a campaign around neighbourliness. If people knew how to reach out, it would help create communities that are strong without always relying on government or philanthropy.”*

The advice was clear: Vancouver Foundation should muster its considerable reputation and resources to take a leadership role in creating the sustainable social networks that will spark civic engagement, rebuild bonds of trust, and harness the power of individuals and neighbourhoods in metro Vancouver to work together to improve their communities. This should be a long-term commitment, it should include small, grassroots projects that yield inspiring stories, and it should be youth-driven. As one interviewee said, “Who else works on that?”

Vancouver Foundation’s filters:



“What makes community building so complex is that it occurs in an infinite number of small steps, sometimes in quiet moments that we notice out of the corner of our eye. It calls for us to treat as important many things that we thought were incidental.”

~ Peter Block, Community: The Structure of Belonging

With the advice and guidance of the members of the VF Task Force, we developed a set of filters through which we could analyze the issues that Phase 1 identified as being the most important to the people we consulted.

When analyzing Belonging and Inclusion, which was the area the majority of people advised VF to focus on in both the short and long term, we asked ourselves if it is an issue:

- that is consistent with VF’s mandate
- that is identified as a concern by ordinary citizens, non-profits and community leaders
- where there is a deficit in philanthropic funding
- where there is an absence of a local philanthropic leader/advocate
- that can yield many tangible, inspirational stories to attract donors and partners
- where VF could form or expand partnerships
- where VF could demonstrate impact

- that would improve the quality of life in metro Vancouver
- that could raise VF's profile among ordinary citizens
- where VF can take a leadership role in the value-added initiatives
- that is an ongoing issue, current issue only, or emerging issue
- that is a metro-only issue or also affects other B.C. communities
- that VF already addresses in some capacity
- where other community foundations are involved in this work
- where other private foundations are involved in this work

For the most part, the answer to all these criteria is yes, with the exception of knowing for certain that there is a deficit in philanthropic funding and leadership, precisely how partnerships can be formed, and how to demonstrate impact. These are areas that require more investigation.

It is clear there is a strongly expressed need for connections and the opinion that this is an issue in which VF could take a leadership role. Single interest charities do not address this. Government certainly doesn't. There is a paucity of moral and practical leadership; a gap that VF could fill.

It would certainly yield the kind of inspiring stories people – including donors – told us they wanted to hear. VF is already funding several programs, including Neighbourhood Small Grants, and projects supported over the years through Grants & Community Initiatives that promote cross-cultural or intergenerational connections that tell the “stories of hope” people told us they want more of.

VF is well-positioned to be an effective leader in building social connections, or social capital, because it:

- has the monetary resources
- has some discretion in the use of those resources
- has a mission focused on the common good
- has a deep and broad knowledge of community issues and community resources
- has widespread credibility
- has personal relationships with leaders from almost every sector of the community

While the issue of building community connections is a good fit with VF's mandate and easily passes the filters, it is not without risk.

VF wants to select an issue with the potential of sustainable, measurable success. However, the issue itself has emerged in public policy debates relatively recently, and therefore clear measurements of success are hard to come by. You can only measure what you know. Vancity, which is reorganizing its own work around the principles of strong community, is addressing this issue through consultations with experts around the world. American, U.K. and Australian academics are also seized with finding ways to measure success in this area.

The other risk is that VF's own priorities will change in coming years. Addressing the need for

connections is not a short-term project. In fact, it is nothing less than a value change. It requires long-term commitment.

However, with its combination of mission, knowledge, credibility and resources, VF is in a strong position to motivate local residents and leaders around this change agenda.

Recommendations:

1. We recommend that we investigate how VF can take a leadership role in creating the sustainable social networks that will spark civic engagement, rebuild bonds of trust, and harness the power of individuals and neighbourhoods in metro Vancouver to work together to improve their own lives and the lives of their communities.
2. We recommend that we explore how VF can build on our current investment in youth to engage them in this change agenda, build leadership, and spark civic engagement and youth philanthropy.

Phase 2: Next steps:

1. Research

- What are other organizations (for example, community foundations, other funders, governments, think tanks, etc.) doing in these two areas? Where is the innovation and what is working well?
- What other organizations are interested in working in these two areas, and where are the opportunities for partnerships?
- What is VF already doing in these two areas, and where and how can that be strengthened?

2. Engagement

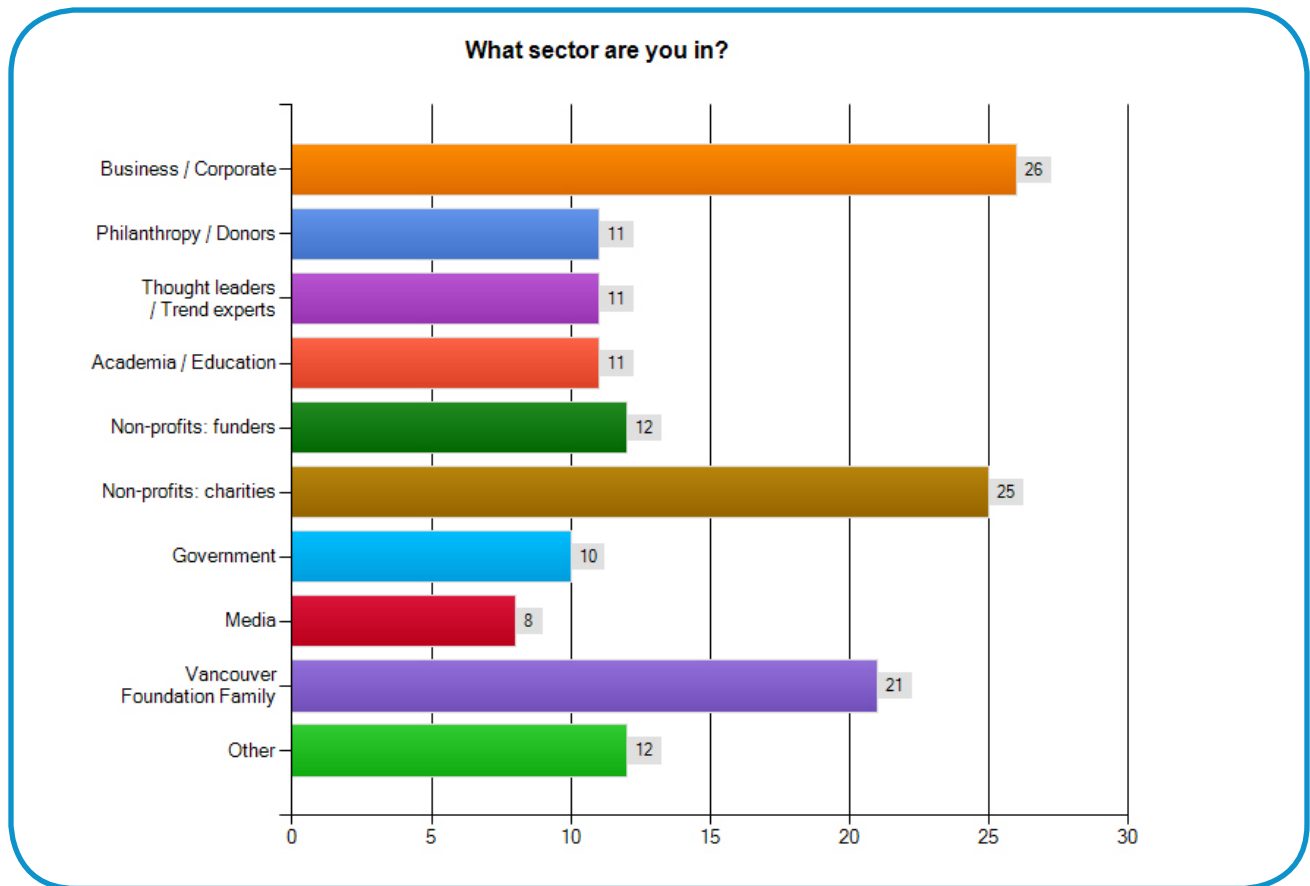
- Engage VF board members and staff in generating ideas and processes to add to and build on the many projects VF currently funds that build social capital and engage youth.
- Engage key community leaders in creating ideas and connections in the two priority areas.

The goal is to provide the October 27, 2011 Board Planning Session a range of ideas for what VF can do to begin to implement these priorities into all aspects of our work over the next 3-5 years.

We will, at the same time, see guidance on how the Board defines success in the area of building social capital.

We are aiming for a public launch in 2012 that will position VF as a leader in these priority areas, with the understanding that this is a work in progress and that it will take time to integrate this into VF's work, including grants, donor development, and so on. It's also important to leave room for the many ideas that will be generated by staff, the community and the organizations that we partner with: flexibility and responsiveness are critical to success.

Appendix A

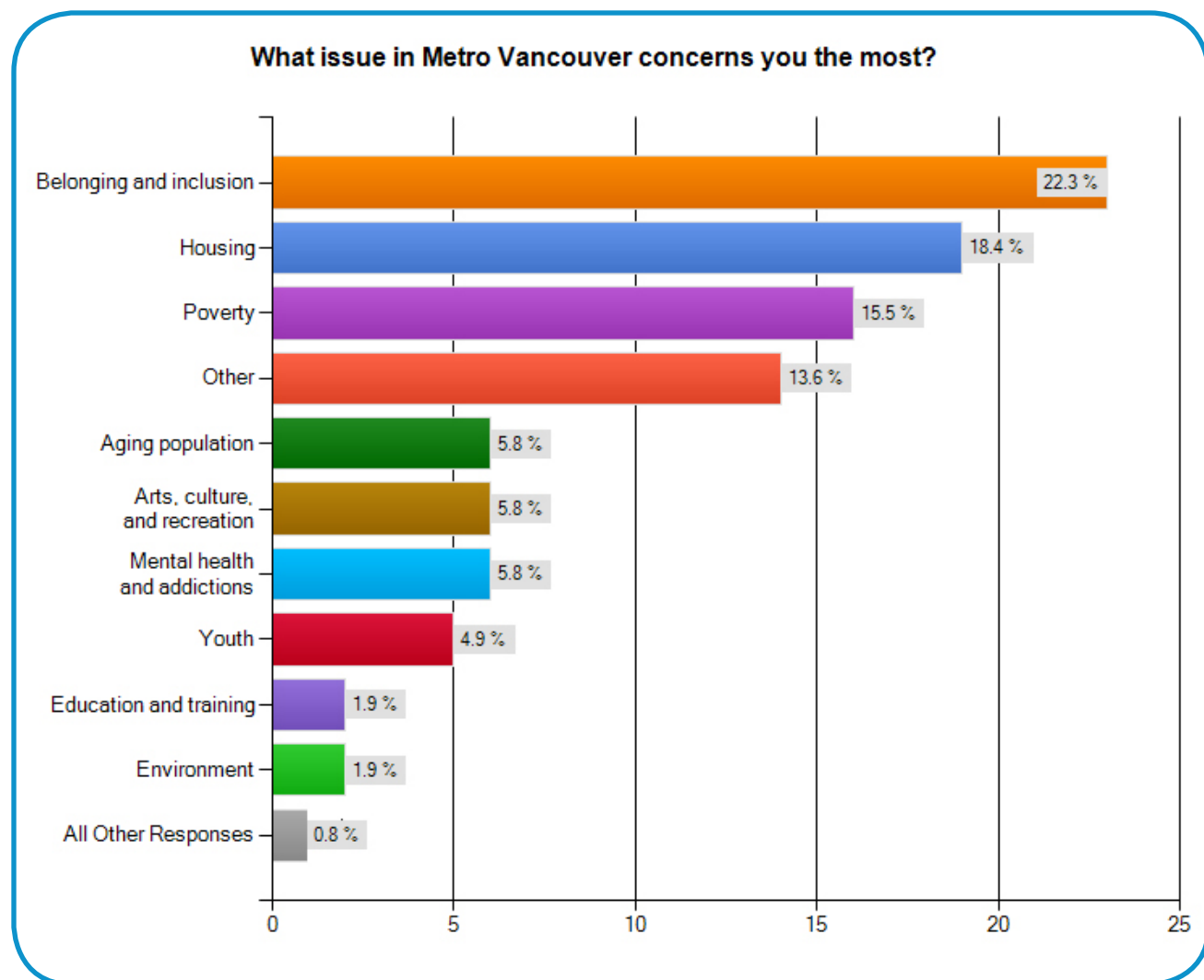


Note: Some interviewees appear in more than one sector.

Interview questions:

1. I'd like to start by asking you to take off your hat as (president/executive director/editor ...) and speak as a citizen. You live here. You have family, friends, colleagues and you talk to them about what it's like to live here. From that personal perspective, what issue in Metro Vancouver concerns you the most?
2. (If necessary) What aspect of (issue) concerns you the most?
3. (Select three issues from Broad Community Issues sheet) Let's go through these one at a time. Why did you select ...?
4. If you were to give us your opinion on what issue we should tackle over the next 3-5 years, what one issue would you choose?
5. What one issue do you think Vancouver Foundation could focus on over the longer term, say 10+ years?

Appendix B



Appendix C

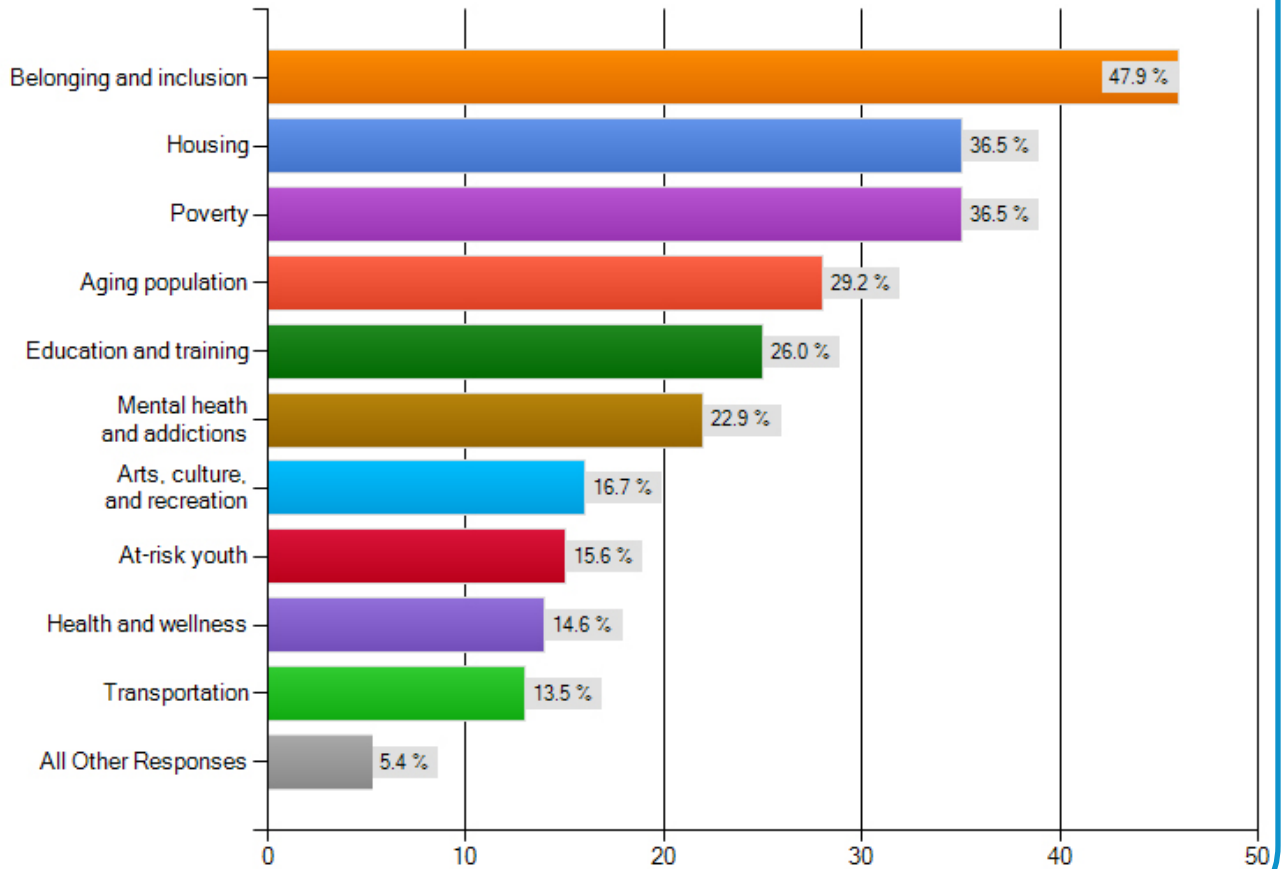
Broad Community Issues

	<p>Aging Population: The need to address the impact that a growing seniors population will have on Metro Vancouver - in terms of the need for various types of care, strain on families, costs on the health care system, isolation of seniors, and so on.</p>
	<p>Arts, culture and recreation: The need to ensure adequate support to create vibrant and accessible arts and culture, and recreational opportunities for everyone.</p>
	<p>At-risk youth: The need to find ways to support Metro Vancouver youth and young adults who may be at risk of homelessness, addiction, mental health issues and unemployment.</p>
	<p>Belonging and inclusion: The need to support communities of people who may struggle to find opportunity in Metro or use their skills – including new immigrants, people with disabilities, urban aboriginals, seniors and others.</p>
	<p>Education and training: The need to ensure open access to educational and training opportunities so that everyone can reach their potential and make a full contribution to our community.</p>
	<p>Environment: The need to deal with the growing concerns about climate change and other ways in which our environment is being negatively affected by human activity.</p>
	<p>Food: The need for all people, regardless of their income, to have access to abundant, local, fresh, nutritious food, available in a dignified manner.</p>
	<p>Health and wellness: The need to ensure easy access to programs and services that support our overall health and wellbeing.</p>
	<p>Housing: The need to address adequate housing both for those who are homeless and require social housing, but also for those for whom there is a lack of affordable housing options.</p>
	<p>Mental health and addictions: The need to improve the ways we address and support the needs of people who are suffering from mental health and/or addiction issues.</p>
	<p>Poverty: The need for support to help individuals and families who are living in poverty, including issues of access to adequate food and housing, employment, affordable child care, access to recreational and educational programs, and so on.</p>
	<p>Safety: The need to ensure that people feel and are safe in our community; in their homes and on our streets.</p>
	<p>Transportation: The need to be able to get around our region in a way that is both efficient and economical for everyone no matter where you live or what your income.</p>



Appendix D

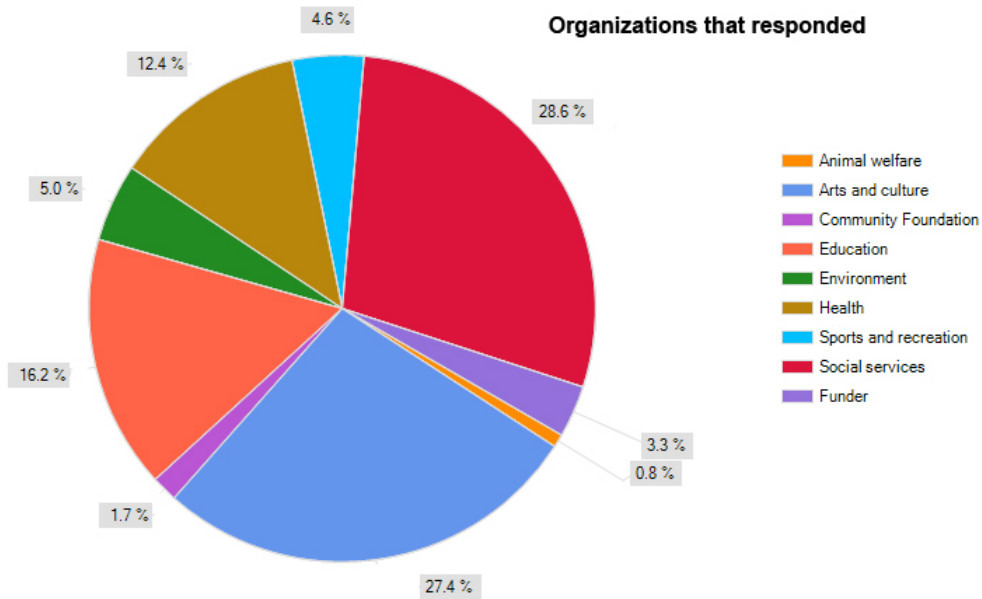
Which three of the following issues do you feel are compelling challenges for Metro Vancouver?



Appendix E

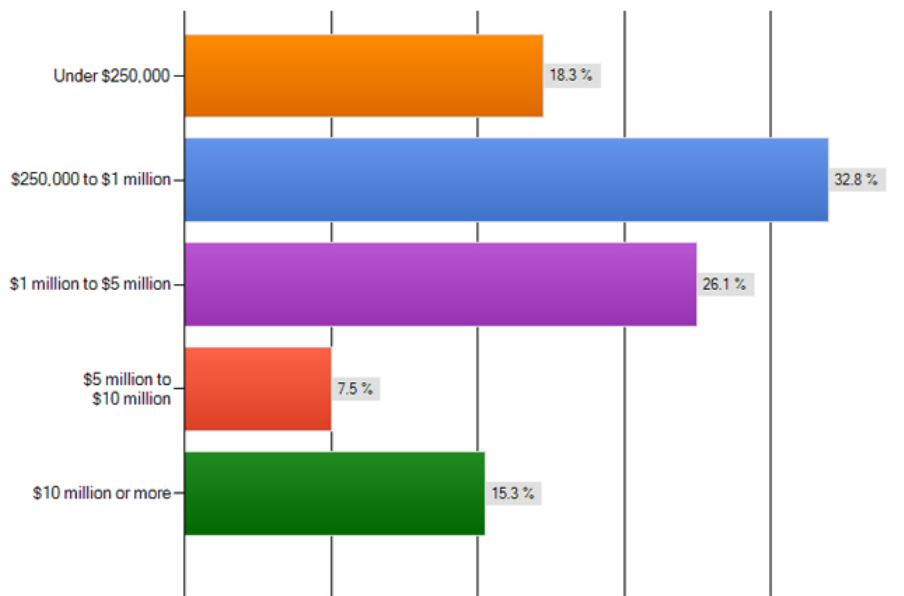
Non-Profit Survey

Organizations that responded



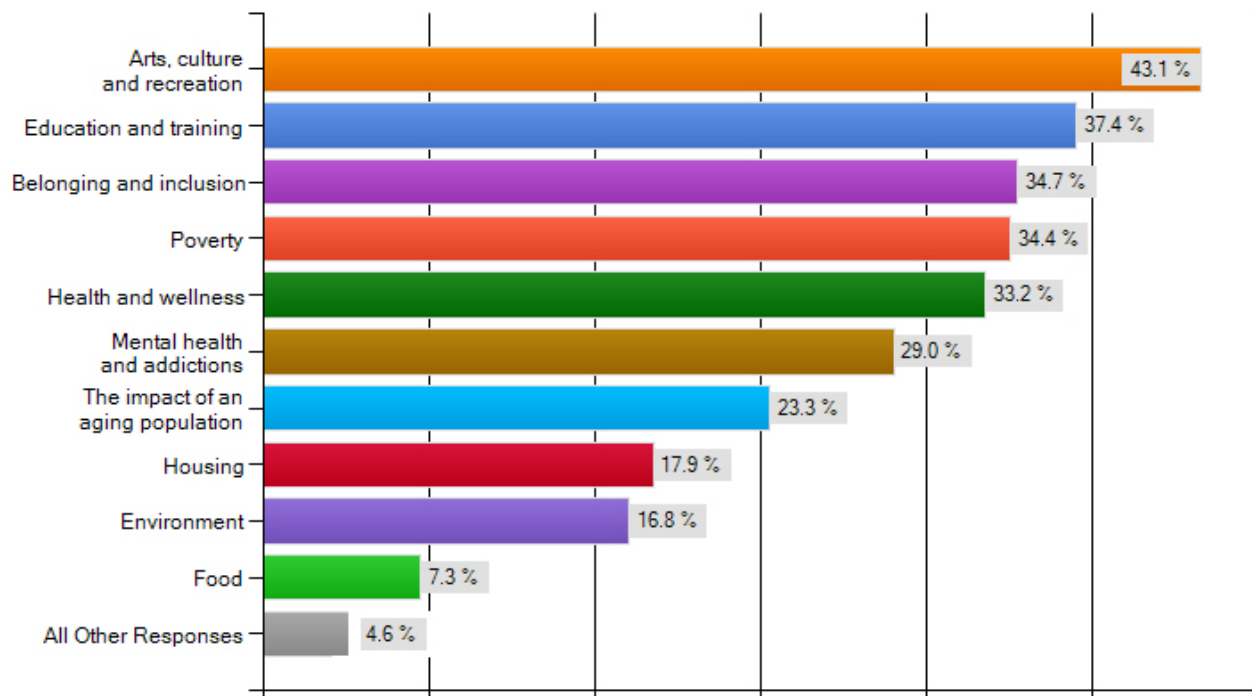
Non-profit Survey

Size of organizations that participated



Non-profit Survey

Which three of the following issues do you think
Vancouver Foundation should focus on to have a greater impact?

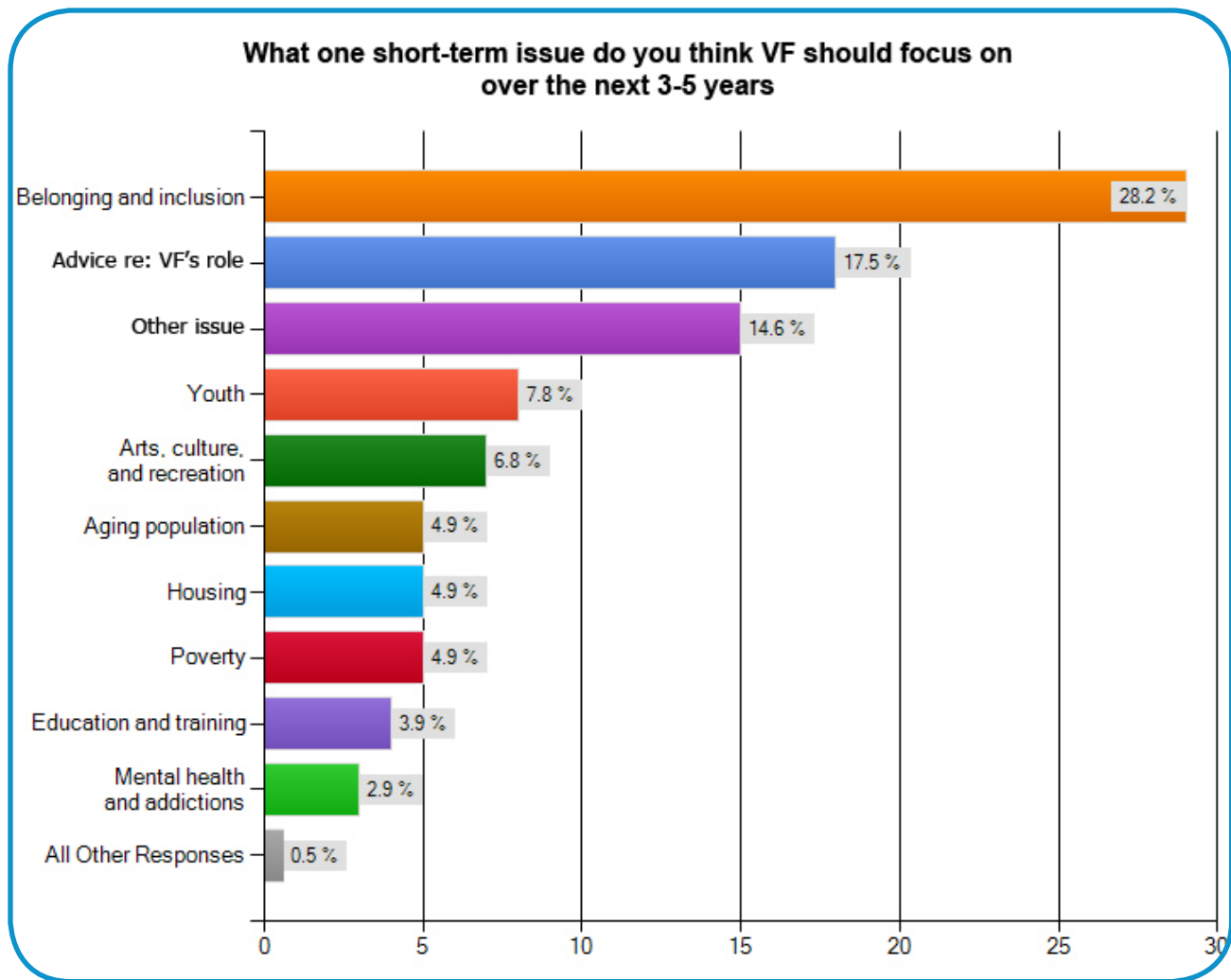


Appendix F

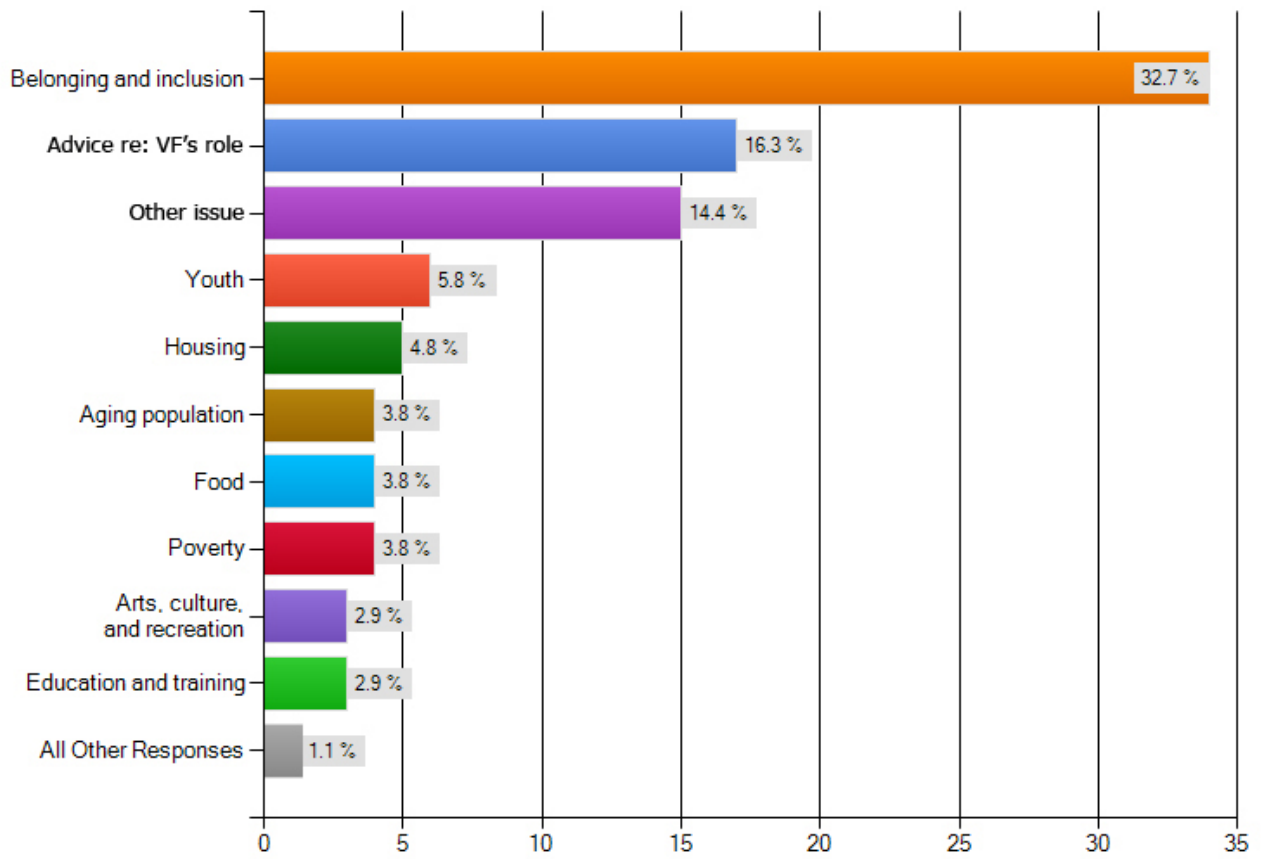
Dotmocracy

ISSUE	Maple Ridge	North Vancouver	Richmond	White Rock South Surrey	New Westminster	Vancouver	Total
Aging Population	11	5	7	9	15	12	59
Arts, Culture & Recreation	7	13	2	11	14	10	57
At-Risk Youth	12	5	5	6	8	9	45
Belonging & Inclusion	20	32	14	22	22	46	156
Education & Training	11	3	5	1	5	5	30
Environment	13	8	3	13	2	7	46
Food	10	11	8	8	5	14	56
Health & Wellness	3	7	3	14	14	8	49
Housing	8	5	21	9	3	24	70
Mental Health & Addiction	2	3	6	4	3	13	31
Poverty	5	4	8	13	18	12	60
Safety	2	3	1	2	2	3	13
Transportation	10	8	7	10	7	8	50

Appendix G



What one issue do you think VF should focus on over the next 10+ years





vancouver
foundation

**1200 - 555 West Hastings Street
Vancouver, BC V6B 4N6
604.688.2204**