

LAIDLAW FOUNDATION STRATEGIC PLAN 2025-2030



TABLE OF CONTENTS

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS	3
EQUITY STATEMENT	4
INTRODUCTION	6
MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES	8
STRATEGIC PILLARS	10
HOW WE WILL LEARN ABOUT OUR IMPACT	12
EVALUATION	14

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

We are proud to reaffirm Laidlaw Foundation's commitment to investing in youth-led solutions and removing systemic barriers to equity. Our aspiration is that our Mission, Vision, Values, and Theory of Philanthropy will continue to guide transformative philanthropic practices within Laidlaw Foundation, and also inspire our partners and peer granting organizations to continue to evolve and effectively adapt to meet the most urgent needs of youth in our communities.

Laidlaw Foundation's strategic plan for 2025–2030 builds on the achievements made through our 2019–2024 journey. In many ways, this new strategic plan prioritizes the importance of continuing on our path as a learning organization, while also adapting our philanthropic practices to new and emerging opportunities for community investment and impact. We aim to continue to make significant strides in generating positive outcomes for youth, supporting our grantees, providing platforms for youth leadership, and implementing equitable philanthropic practices throughout our Foundation.

Strategic plans are dynamic and adaptable documents that inspire us to elevate our work while keeping us accountable to the ideas and commitments we share. Strategies also serve as guiding frameworks for organizations striving to fulfill their ambitions. Our aim with this strategic plan is to further strengthen Laidlaw Foundation's dedication to partnering with diverse youth-led community groups and investing in their ideas. In 2025, we look forward to expanding our

commitment to intersectional issues by complementing our Indigenous Youth Fund with a new fund for Black youth and a more explicit focus on youth-led climate action.

Laidlaw Foundation aims to be a partner in influencing and encouraging other grant-making foundations to adopt inclusive philanthropic practices. We hope that the impact we have made in the past five years will inform and influence our path over the next five years. As the Foundation's Board, we remain accountable to communities across Ontario, where our grantees operate. As well, we look forward to the many partnerships we will form as we travel the next five years together.



EQUITY STATEMENT



Laidlaw Foundation is committed to diversity, equity, inclusion, justice, and belonging and will not discriminate in any of its practices nor tolerate discrimination by its directors, members, employees and volunteers. We resolve to take practical and measurable steps that strengthen diversity, equity, inclusion, justice, and belonging in our granting approaches, governance principles, employment practices and communications.

We pledge to:

- Create opportunities to listen directly to the voices of communities, grassroots organizations, and young people.
- Open Board recruitment and the staff hiring pipeline to talented candidates from communities we work with.
- Integrate diversity, equity, inclusion, justice, and belonging into the orientation process for new Board members and the onboarding of new employees and volunteers.

We believe that racially and ethnoculturally diverse staff, Board members, and advisors are sources of enrichment and strength. The talents and contributions of Black, Indigenous, and racialized communities immeasurable social, economic and political assets. Laidlaw Foundation believes that diversity, equity, inclusion, justice, and belonging strengthen

philanthropy. The Foundation identifies and challenges inequity within the philanthropic sector to bring about the equitable distribution of resources and promote the work of marginalized communities.

Acts of discrimination create barriers to access or inclusion on the basis of race, colour, ethnicity, ancestry, gender, religion/creed, sexual orientation, socio-economic class, record of offences, citizenship, country of origin, mental health status, age, language, family status, health status, disability, or any other personal characteristics. In accordance with the Ontario Human Rights Code, the Foundation will not tolerate, and will address any intentional or unintentional acts of, discrimination against any individual or group of people in all aspects of its operations and at all levels of the organization.



INTRODUCTION



This document details Laidlaw Foundation’s priorities for the next five years. The plan envisions a mixed model that blends grant-making and direct activities including convening, advocacy, and research. The core of this plan is the Foundation’s determination to address funding gaps for young people who are leading change agents in creating thriving communities.

Over the next five years, the Foundation will deepen its focus on supporting youth-led community-change initiatives through direct grants, convening activities, research, and policy initiatives. This strategic plan maintains our focus on young people, building on past successes and reflecting on learnings and challenges.

How we laid the foundations for this strategy

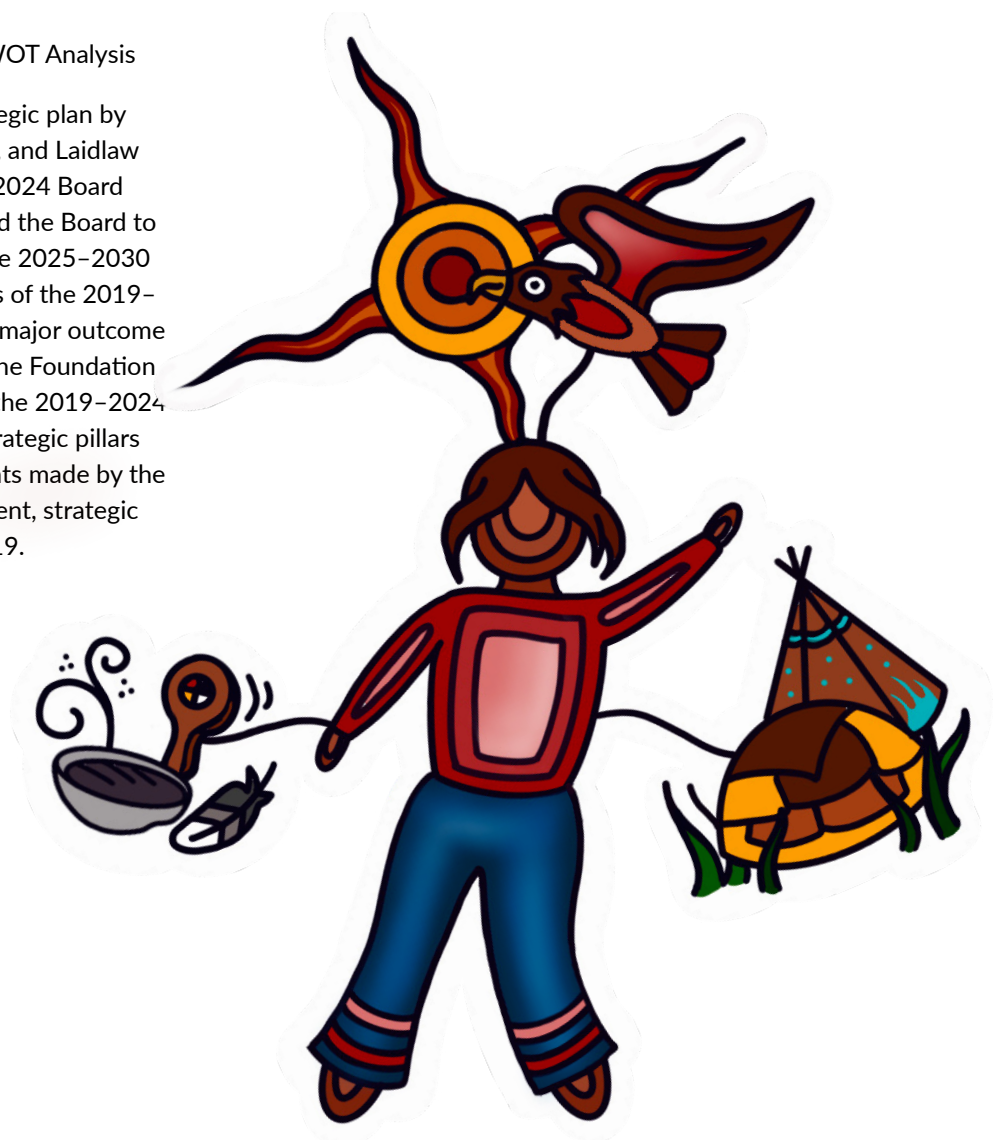
The basis for this strategy comes from three main sources:

1. *Impact of Laidlaw Foundation’s 2019–2024 Strategic Plan: A Summative Evaluation Report*
2. *The State of Black and Indigenous Youth in Ontario: An Examination of the Experience and Impact of Policing on Black, Indigenous and Racialized Youth*
3. Board and Staff Planning Retreat and SWOT Analysis

We began the process of developing the strategic plan by facilitating two days of executive, staff, Board, and Laidlaw family member discussions during the March 2024 Board and Staff Planning Retreat. This retreat allowed the Board to collaboratively surface strategic themes for the 2025–2030 strategic plan. Based on the recommendations of the 2019–2024 midway summative evaluation report, a major outcome of the retreat was the Board agreement that the Foundation would allow for continuity and refinement of the 2019–2024 strategic pillars. Therefore, the 2025–2030 strategic pillars are modelled on the learning and advancements made by the Foundation in the area of community investment, strategic philanthropy and strong governance since 2019.

Impact on current grantees

We recognize that no one has more stake in our new plan than existing grantees. All commitments to current grantees, including multi-year grantees, will be met. All payments will be made in accordance with the terms of the approved grants. However, applicants for new funding starting January 2025 will be assessed in accordance with this plan.



MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES

The plan reaffirms the Mission, Vision, Values, and Theory of Philanthropy that were refined as part of the 2019–2024 strategic plan.



Mission

Laidlaw Foundation supports young people marginalized by the **justice, education, and child welfare systems** to be healthy and engaged, by investing in innovative ideas, convening interested parties, advocating for systems change, and sharing learning across the sector.

Vision

An inclusive society in which all young people, especially those who are disproportionately marginalized by the justice, education, and child welfare systems, have the opportunity to achieve their full potential.

Values

The core values that guide the collective efforts of the Board and staff members at Laidlaw Foundation are as follows:

- **Reconciliation:** Our commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples is reflected in our operations, granting, and investment portfolios.
- **Engagement and Empowerment:** We commit to engaging and empowering young people in decision-making and governance.
- **Accountability:** We are accountable to our grantees, our Foundation, and the larger communities of which we are a member.
- **Equity:** We embed equity in all of our policies, practices, processes, and interactions.
- **Responsive:** We consult, engage, and work with youth on issues that matter to them, from ideas to implementation.

Outcome Framework

Focus

We are targeting our investments and activities to support young people who are disadvantaged by the **criminal justice system**, pushed out of the education system too early, overrepresented in the **child welfare system**, and facing **environmental racism**. We recognize that for young people caught in these systems to be healthy and engaged, change is needed in institutions, policies, behaviours of people in authority, and society as a whole.

Pillars

1. **Invest in youth-led solutions:** Support youth leadership for social change
2. **Dismantle systems barriers to advance equity:** Challenge the status quo
3. **Centre our Mission, Vision, Values, and Theory of Philanthropy:** Transform how the philanthropic sector operates

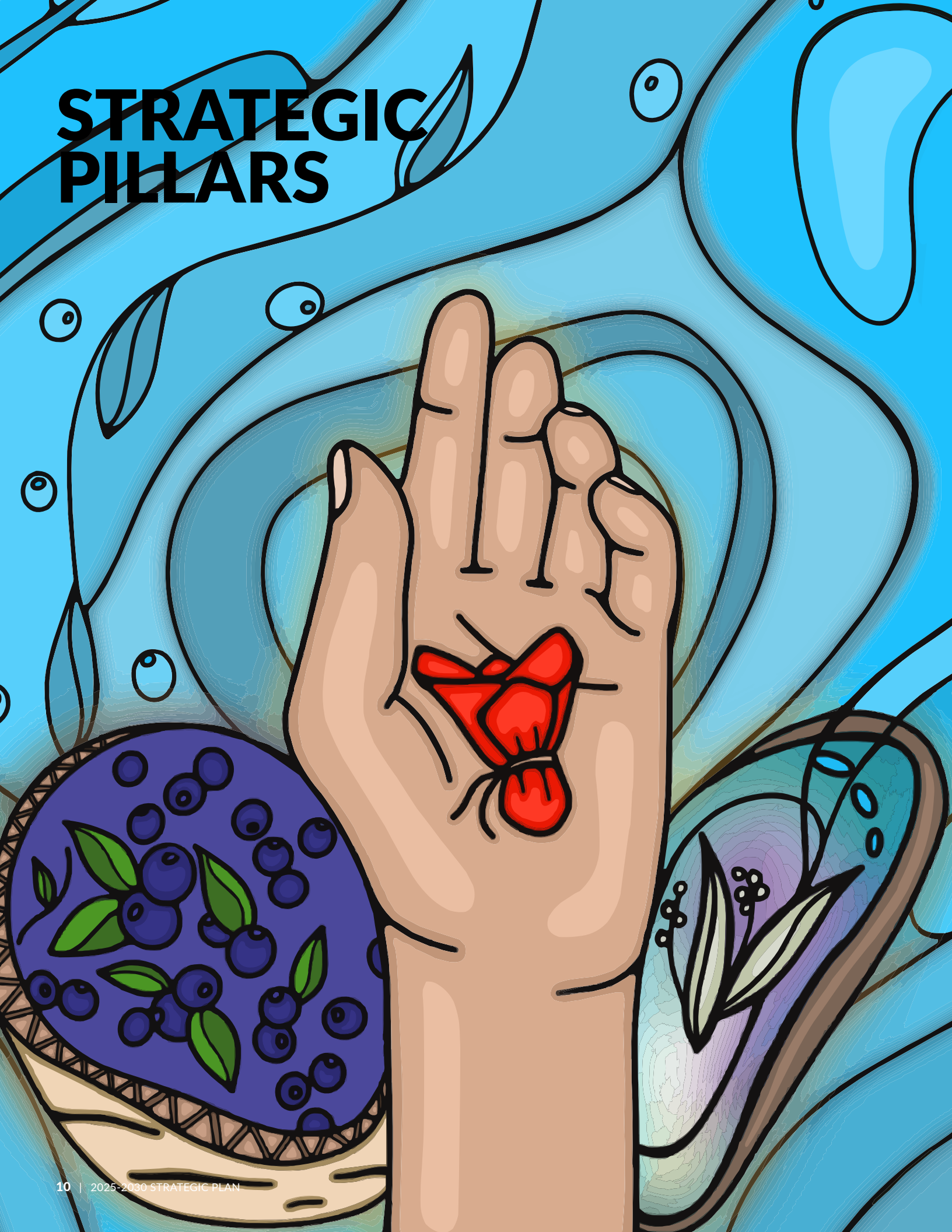
Key Outcomes

We are working towards positive impacts at different levels. At the end of five years, we will know we are successful when:

- **Black, Indigenous and racialized youth** with lived experience in the four issue areas, their families, and their communities have better outcomes.
- **Grantees** have the support they need to address issues they want to confront.
- **Institutions** elevate and incorporate young people into decision-making roles and positions.
- **Systems** change to address the unique needs of all young people.
- **Foundations and the philanthropic sector** enact more equitable practices to recognize all forms of leadership and contribution.

Our **Theory of Philanthropy** is influenced by theories and research in the philanthropic sector and the Foundation's commitment to positive youth development. Our guiding principle is the belief that all Ontario youth have something positive to contribute and that the Foundation plays a key role in promoting positive youth outcomes in their local communities. The Foundation recognizes that its impact is not always linear and is best realized and explained through its relationships. The Foundation belongs to a network of stakeholders striving for positive youth development and believes that all are better served when stakeholders elevate and amplify the voices of the youth they aim to impact. This relationship model, based on the Foundation's commitment to engaging and including youth, is embedded in the way we build capacity, engage our stakeholders, and advocate for change.

STRATEGIC PILLARS



This strategic plan promotes three strategic pillars. Each pillar will be supported by a combination of granting, convening, and researching activities to facilitate and expand impacts on communities we invest in and work with.

PILLAR 1.

Invest in youth-led solutions: Support youth leadership for social change

Laidlaw understands the importance of funding youth leadership to transform, advocate, and advance long-lasting improvements in the areas of criminal justice, education, child welfare, and environmental racism. Laidlaw Foundation remains a youth funder and continues to focus on Black, Indigenous, and racialized youth-led initiatives as they are often the most impacted by these systems, as demonstrated anecdotally and through evidence-based research.

PILLAR 2.

Dismantle systemic barriers to advance equity: Challenge the status quo

Laidlaw Foundation will continue to amplify and champion the work of grantees and those doing work on the ground. Storytelling is a major component of our work as we support grantees to highlight the impact of their work, which increases their access to funding and partnerships. The Foundation firmly believes in supporting youth direct action and organizing and we affirm our commitment to championing grantee-led and community-driven advocacy.

PILLAR 3.

Centre our Mission, Vision, Values, and Theory of Philanthropy: Transform how we operate

As a leader in the youth grant-making sector, Laidlaw believes that community and principles of public good should inform true responsive philanthropy. Ensuring we have strong governance that meaningfully centres Black and Indigenous leadership within our board, advisors, committees, volunteers, and social procurement is a priority for the next five years and beyond. Laidlaw affirms its commitment to fund grassroots and community-based organizations, advocate for funding of non-qualified donees, and dismantle racism within philanthropy.



HOW WE WILL LEARN ABOUT OUR IMPACT



Laidlaw's Mission, Vision, and Values will be operationalized and brought to life through the adherence to achieving specific and clearly defined objectives. These will serve as milestones to help us achieve our goals and will be followed through our core set of learning principles, approaches, and methods designed for Laidlaw based on leading practice.

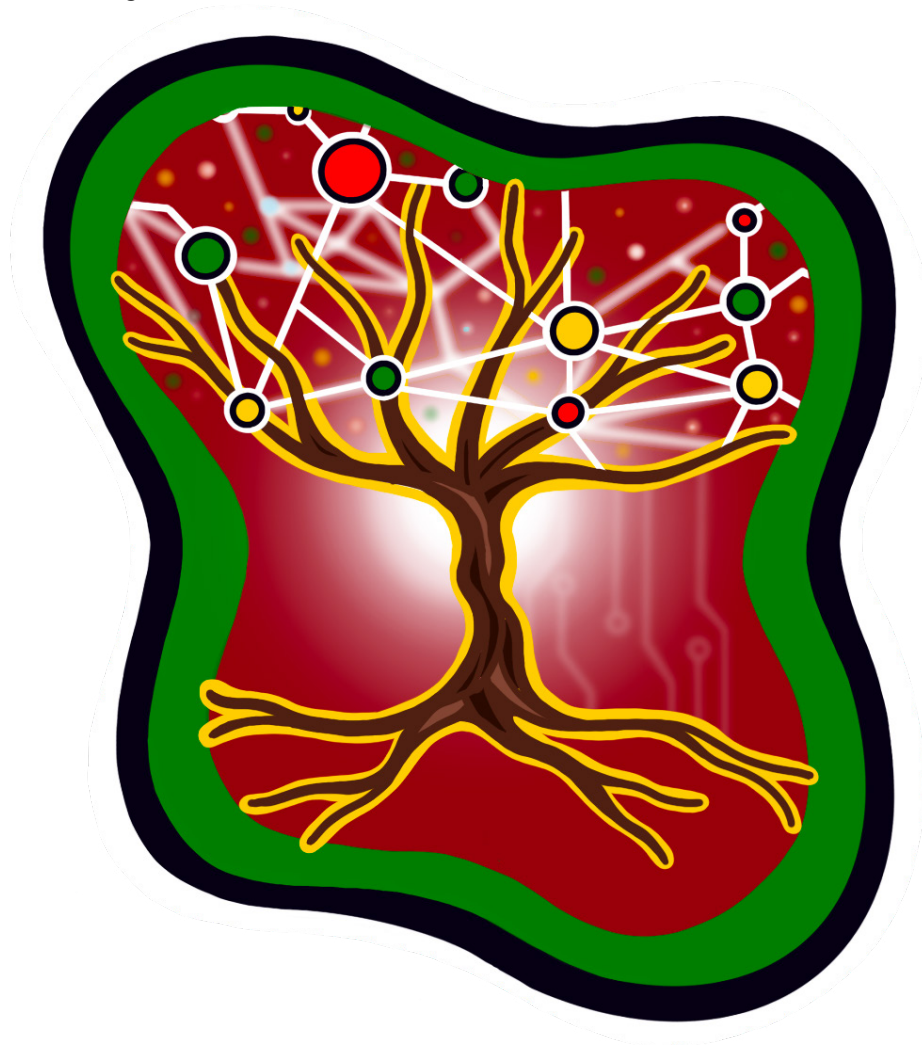
We see learning as a tool for development, as we craft responses and solutions to complex social problems, as well as a means to building momentum for change. We can only do this by continuing to create a culture of curiosity at all organizational levels through deliberate and enhanced funder-grantee collaboration.

We will know we are on the right course when we are:

- Seeing youth we work with realize their social, education, and economic potential because of their experience working with Laidlaw
- Fostering stronger relationships with grantees, alumni, government, and other partners
- Increasingly using robust community feedback to support advocacy efforts
- Engaging more young people at decision-making tables across the province, including our own

To deliver on this strategic plan, we will:

- Develop an implementation plan for operational activities
- Report to the board quarterly on key activities required to deliver on the strategic plan, for review and comment
- Conduct ongoing evaluations of the granting streams based on our current evaluation framework
- Review the strategic plan regularly to assess performance, and adjust the plan to respond to internal and external forces



EVALUATION



Impact stories are a useful way to systematically document anecdotal evidence that expected activities occurred, and the perceived results thereof. This approach is useful in contexts where M&E or research capacity is limited. This is also useful in contexts where there is limited documented results or lessons. The definition of 'Impact' in this approach may also include outcomes. Partners and stakeholders may verbally share their lessons learnt, personal experiences, or individual change stories. These might not necessarily happen at the wider societal level or contribute to the longer-term outcomes. Nonetheless, these are important stories of the changes that the project has influenced.

(Impact Story Toolkit, n.d.)



Specific measures will be developed in partnership with grantees to guide our impact and learning as we implement the 2025–2030 strategic plan. To support learning and evaluation objectives, we will adapt the Civicus Impact Story Guide as a learning tool. Civicus is a global alliance of civil society organizations and activists dedicated to strengthening citizen action and civil society throughout the world. The Civicus guide to creating impact stories supports a less rigid approach to impact, monitoring, and evaluation. This approach is built on methodologies for using stories to communicate impact.

We will borrow principles from the Civicus model and formally implement culturally informed Sharing Circles¹ and Roundtable Reflections² methodology to collect and share grantee stories that best demonstrate value and impact.

The application of the Civicus model will be guided by the work of grantees, grounded in field practice, and shaped by lived experiences of the communities involved. Our objective is to contribute to a broader understanding of effective practices, and we hope to achieve this by documenting and showcasing grantees' work on the ground. These insights

will spur collective learning and foster meaningful change across various sectors, including the nonprofit, public, and philanthropic sectors.

We are focused on important and often neglected problems. The centerpiece of the evaluation strategy will be an Impact Report, an annual learning and sharing document that places our actions within the proposed approach as well as align activities related to granting, convening, investing, and researching with strategic goals.

Useful Resources

Laidlaw Foundation. (2023). *The State of Black and Indigenous Youth in Ontario: An Examination of the Experiences and Impacts of Policing on Black, Indigenous & Racialized Youth*. [https://laidlawfdn.org/assets/executive-summary-state-of-black---indigenous-youth-in-ontario_nov-2023-\(final-copy\).pdf](https://laidlawfdn.org/assets/executive-summary-state-of-black---indigenous-youth-in-ontario_nov-2023-(final-copy).pdf)

Williams, B., & Chilakila, T. (2014, March 4). *Working Rigorously with Stories: Introducing the Impact Story Tool*. DGMT. <https://dgmt.co.za/working-rigorously-with-stories-introducing-the-impact-story-tool>

1 Sharing Circles are facilitated gatherings where outgoing grantees take turns sharing their experiences as a form of reporting but also mutual learning. This practice is rooted in Indigenous traditions and ensures that everyone has an equal opportunity to share their opinions and ideas.

2 Roundtable Reflections are conversations with individual grantees about their experiences implementing their projects and are used in lieu of written reports. This practice, inspired by the TODD Foundation in New Zealand, fosters stronger relationships with grantees, and promotes trust and transparency.

Acknowledgements

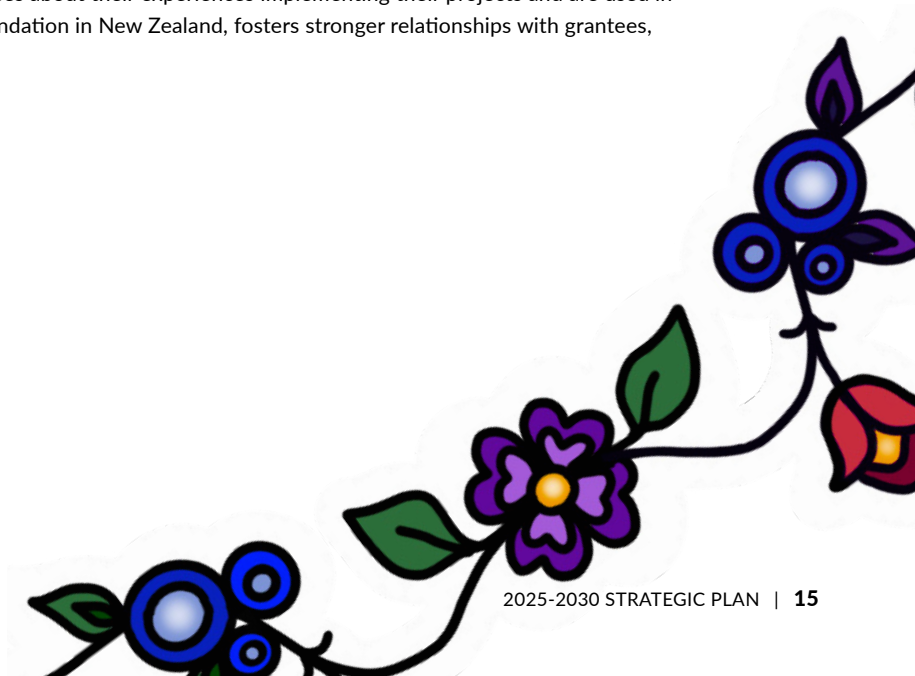
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