The Larry & Gerry Wilson Family Fund

oakville community foundation

Why is Donor participation declining?

Oakville has a generous population. The median donation in Oakville has continued to rise steadily from $500 in 2020 to $550 in 2023.[1] In 2023, Oakville residents donated $115 million to registered charities.[2]

In Canada there are more than 170,000 charities and non-profit organizations,[3] and 7 in 10 Canadians think that local charities are important to Canadian society, while 3 in 10 think they are essential.[4]

However, the share of Canadian tax filers claiming charitable donations has dropped 43% from 29.5% in 1990 to 16.8% in 2023.[5] There were roughly 18 million tax filers in 1990[6] and nearly 30 million in 2023[7], meaning the number of Canadian donors declined by 270,000 from 1990 to 2023, despite significant population growth.

In Oakville the share of tax filers dropped 32% from 31% in 2009 to 21% in 2023.[8]

Why are the number of donors dropping and how can we reverse this trend?

The Foundation reached out to charity executives, leaders in Oakville and community donors to get their perspective on why they think the number of donors is lessening. Their responses revealed three main considerations:

1. Giving is concentrated among a declining aging generation.



"The donor base is aging, with younger Canadians giving less to registered charities and preferring informal or digital causes."

-**Ameeta Vijay**, OCF Board Chair

2. Community connectedness is weakening and fewer people are participating in activities that inspire lifelong giving.

"We see declines in attendance at places of worship, shrinking participation in service clubs and fewer people living in rural communities - all places that created strong connections between people."

-Bruce MacDonald, CEO of Imagine Canada



3. The rising cost of living and societal challenges are straining budgets, particularly among younger generations.



In discussion with her family on the topic, **Mags Shorey**, Fundholder and former OCF Board member, shared one of their comments, **"People are feeling less wealthy, the system is not working for the middle class... [and] home prices are eating into everyone's pocket book."**

Frances Pace, former Director of Fundholder Engagement at OCF, highlighted other barriers:

"In today's world, society feels unstable - from political tensions and economic struggles to social issues and environmental emergencies - many are feeling uncertain about the future. It's not just uncertainty that scares us, but also the feeling that things aren't working the way they should. When rules don't seem to apply to everyone equally, or when they're ignored, trust starts to break down - it seems like it's every person for themselves. That's when sense of community fades."



However, the decline in donors isn't as bleak as it may sound.

"This doesn't mean generosity has faded, but rather that it is taking on new forms. Economic pressures, demographic shifts, and changing expectations are reshaping how people choose to give."

-**Brad Park**, President & CEO
United Way Golden Horseshoe



The ways in which people give are evolving. New technologies, like person-to-person giving through GoFundMe, don't attract a tax receipt, but Canadians raised $1 billion through the platform in the past 5 years.[9] In 2025, 1.7 million Canadians gave through GoFundMe and Oakville ranked as their 15th most generous community.[10]

More people want to see the impacts of their generosity, perhaps because, in times of financial stress, it can be important for people to know that their contributions are making meaningful differences.

A 2018 Imagine Canada survey that looked at giving in Canada over 30 years found that just over a quarter of donors said they don't give more because they're unsure whether additional donations are being used efficiently or effectively.[11]



"Donor sentiment is transitioning from transactional to impact - donors want to be connected to the impact their gift is providing."

-**Andrew Chunilall**, CEO
Community Foundations of Canada

Why does connection to community spark generosity?

Feeling connected to or being affected by a cause is consistently cited across the literature on generosity as a top motivation for giving. The vast majority of Canadian donors give out of compassion for those in need.[12] Other incentives include feeling a duty to give and religious encouragement.[13]

However, statistics show that religious giving in Canada is declining.[14] In Canada, giving through religious outlets, including at church, through zakat, tithing, ma'aser, or daana, and giving directly to others are less common than charitable giving.[15] The total value of donations made to religious organizations in Canada fell by $1.4 billion from 2018 to 2023, coinciding with an overall decrease in participation in religious activities during the same period.[16]

As religious giving declines, so does teaching prosocial behaviours since the transmission of religiosity is correlated to the transmission of religious giving.[17]



"Peaceful collective family time has largely been replaced by often individual family members going off to different activities... Without specific discussions around supporting the broader community, active action is less likely to follow."

-**Lisa Helsdon**, longtime Fundholder at The Foundation

Building a culture of giving.

The number of donors is dropping, yet Oakville's generosity continues to achieve high levels.[18] What is inspiring Oakville residents to be increasingly generous and how can these donors pass down the tradition of giving?

Building a culture of giving is interdependent on the community it supports - generosity builds community and community supports generosity. We must continue to build local social infrastructure to bring community members together to support each other. It will be important to keep the momentum going to support urgent needs and lasting solutions.

For the love of our community, **please support our local charities and their important role in our community through the GIVE Oakville campaign.**

Endnotes

1 Oakville Community Foundation. Oakville generosity report: A generosity profile on local giving trends by the OCF. (2025)

2 Oakville Community Foundation. Oakville generosity report: A generosity profile on local giving trends by the OCF. (2025)

3 Community Ideas Factory. Charitable giving in the time of Covid-19: Using a behavioural lens to understand Canadian perceptions of the charitable sector and factors that inspire giving. (n.d.)

4 Charities Aid Foundation. World giving report: Giving in Canada, 2025. (2025)

5 Imagine Canada. 30 years of giving in Canada: The giving behaviour of Canadians: Who gives, how, and why? (2018)

6 Statistics Canada. Annual estimates for census families and individuals (T1 family file). (2013)

7 Statistics Canada. Table 11-10-0047-01, Summary characterisitcs of Canadian tax filers (preliminary T1 family file). (2025)

8 Oakville Community Foundation. Vital Signs: Perspectives. (2011); Oakville Community Foundation. Oakville generosity report: A generosity profile on local giving trends by the OCF. (2025)

9 BNN Bloomberg. Investor Outlook: Canadians raise $1B through GoFundMe platform. (2026, March 25)

10 To Do Canada. GoFundMe names Canada's Top 20 generous cities and towns for 2025. (2025, December 9)

11 Imagine Canada. 30 years of giving in Canada: The giving behaviour of Canadians: Who gives, how, and why? (2018)

12 Imagine Canada. 30 years of giving in Canada: The giving behaviour of Canadians: Who gives, how, and why? (2018)

13 Charities Aid Foundation. World giving report: Giving in Canada, 2025. (2025)

14 Imagine Canada. 30 years of giving in Canada: The giving behaviour of Canadians: Who gives, how, and why? (2018); CanadaHelps. The giving report: Trends in charitable giving 2018-2024. (2025)

15 Charities Aid Foundation. World giving report: Giving in Canada, 2025. (2025)

16 Statistics Canada. Volunteering and Charitable Giving in Canada, 2018 to 2023. (2025)

17 Wilhelm, M. O. et al. The Intergenerational Transmission of Generosity. (2008)

18 Oakville Community Foundation. Oakville generosity report: A generosity profile on local giving trends by the OCF. (2025)