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The 2025 Nonprofit Data Capacity Summit Brief

 **Future Skills Centre** Centre des Compétences futures

 **Purpose**
ANALYTICS

Blueprint

Acknowledgements

About the Future Skills Centre

The Future Skills Centre (FSC) is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to driving innovation in skills development so that everyone in Canada can be prepared for the future of work. We partner with policymakers, researchers, practitioners, employers and labour, and post-secondary institutions to solve pressing labour market challenges and ensure that everyone can benefit from relevant lifelong learning opportunities. We are founded by a consortium whose members are Toronto Metropolitan University, Blueprint, and The Conference Board of Canada, and are funded by the [Government of Canada's Future Skills Program](#).

About Blueprint

[Blueprint](#) is a nonprofit helps leaders use data and evidence to tackle complex public policy challenges across Canada.

We partner with government, community, philanthropic, and industry leaders to strengthen public systems and deliver better outcomes. We bring together policy analysts, evaluators, economists, data scientists, and implementation experts—people who know how to turn insight into action. Our work is grounded in deep subject-matter expertise, rigorous methods, and a real-world understanding of how systems operate and evolve. More than just an advisor, we're also partners in change. We provide key support at every stage of the policy and program lifecycle: from early strategy and design to implementation, evaluation, and continuous improvement.

As a consortium partner of the FSC, Blueprint works with partners and stakeholders to collaboratively generate and use evidence to help solve pressing future skills challenges.

About Purpose Analytics

[Purpose Analytics](#) is a nonprofit consultancy that helps charities and nonprofits understand, use, and harness the power of their data. Its services include reporting and visualization, digital transformation and tool selection, and data strategy and implementation. Purpose Analytics designs solutions that simplify processes, save staff time, and improve operational efficiency. Surplus revenue from its consulting work is reinvested into free, public benefit projects that strengthen the sector. To date, it has launched the Nonprofit Data Network and CensusAggregator.

The *2025 Nonprofit Data Capacity Summit Brief* is funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program.





About this brief

On September 18, 2025, **Blueprint** and **Purpose Analytics** co-hosted the first **Nonprofit Data Capacity Summit** with funding from the **Future Skills Centre (FSC)**.

This sold-out event convened over **170** nonprofit leaders, frontline staff, intermediaries, funders, and public sector leaders in downtown Toronto, Ontario. Attendees shared experiences, explored innovations, pinpointed where greater alignment and investment were needed, and built a broader vision for data-informed impact across the sector.

This 17-page brief highlights insights from the day's presentations and conversations, and closes, as the Summit did, with a collective call to action. It contains the following sections:

- 1. Background (pp. 4–5).** An overview of why nonprofit data capacity matters and how the Summit brought the sector together to address shared challenges.
- 2. Four key insights (pp. 6–12).** A summary of the main themes that emerged from sessions and discussions: what nonprofits, funders, and partners are learning about building data capacity.
- 3. Moving forward (p. 13).** A synthesis of what the sector needs next and a collective vision for strengthening data capacity.
- 4. Resources (p. 14).** Links to tools, initiatives, and supports that nonprofits and funders can use to advance their data capacity work.
- 5. Overview of sessions and speakers (pp. 15–16).** A condensed listing of the agenda, sessions, and presenters.



1. Background

Nonprofits are on the front lines of some of the most complex issues we face as a nation. In her opening keynote, [Wilfreda Edward](#), Executive Director of [CCNDR](#), observed that they play a unique role. They're trusted where other organizations aren't; they step in where others won't; and they reach communities that others can't. They also contribute significantly to the Canadian economy. As Imagine Canada outlines in [a 2025 report](#), nonprofits generate \$225.5 billion, or 8.2%, of our GDP; employ 2.7 million people; and produce \$369.3 billion in annual revenue.

◆ Why consider nonprofit data capacity?

Even the strongest efforts from nonprofits will be held back if they don't have the right data and can't use it effectively.

Across Canada, nonprofits face challenges gathering and using data to inform their work. Many have limited human and technological capacities. As we outline in our [Practitioner Data Initiative Design Report](#), what they do have is often focused on satisfying funder reporting requirements, including entering compliance-related data in a variety of platforms. What capacity remains is often insufficient: for collecting and managing data needed for strategic learning; for investment in systems and processes needed to ensure that data are high quality and reliable; and for finding funding sources that can help build that capacity. With increased pressures caused by automation and AI, nonprofits are pressed to gather and use data with minimal resources to support the work.

◆ Addressing the challenge: The Nonprofit Data Capacity Summit

We know that better data and evidence help nonprofits build effective policies and programs, understand their impact, and stay nimble as needs change during economic uncertainty. So addressing the challenges above could make a profound difference for both nonprofits and the individuals, families, and communities they serve.

Doing so will require a full community of actors. That's why, in September 2025, **Blueprint** and **Purpose Analytics** convened the sector at the inaugural **Nonprofit Data Capacity Summit**.

More than **170** leaders—from nonprofits, frontline teams, funders, partner organizations, and government—came together for this sold-out gathering in downtown Toronto. They compared notes on what’s working, traded new ideas, identified gaps that need further support, and sketched out a larger, shared vision for using data to strengthen results across the field.

Attendees dug into pressing questions around data, such as:

- What’s preventing nonprofits from building and using the data they need?
- What does strong data capacity look like?
- What innovative practices exist?
- What are the key gaps and opportunities to work toward change?

The event was also an opportunity for those working in the sector to reconnect, establish new connections, learn from each other’s experiences, and feel reinvigorated in their vocations. In the absence of opportunities for nonprofits to gather and discuss data outside of fundraising, the Summit filled a much-needed gap.

Below, we unpack **four insights** that emerged from the presentations and conversations throughout the day.



2. Four key insights



Insight 1

The sector agrees that data capacity matters. Nonprofits can start with fundamentals—like building a culture of learning and beginning with what’s already in hand—and proceed incrementally to use more advanced data-related tools.

In 2021, with funding from the FSC, Blueprint launched the Practitioner Data Initiative (PDI). PDI provided 15 community organizations with flexible funding, tech-related guidance, and neutral advice to help them build their data capacity—to learn how to collect, manage, analyze, and translate their data into compelling stories for their communities and funders.

[Read our PDI Design and Final Reports and case studies.](#)

We are extremely proud of the work our partners achieved. But we’ve come a long way since 2021, and we now have a better sense of what building data capacity requires. This is thanks to many other organizations driving the work forward. There are many parallel initiatives across the sector to support nonprofit data capacity, and these initiatives are evolving based on changing conditions and new knowledge from experts and stakeholders.

Below, we present insights the sector has collectively learned about data capacity over the past few years.

◆ **The sector now sees data capacity as a genuine problem worth solving.**

Recently, the concept of ‘data capacity’ has become more widely recognized as an area of focus and priority. Today, nonprofit leaders recognize it as a shared challenge, and the broad turnout at the Summit demonstrates the momentum around solving it. A wave of new initiatives has emerged to strengthen data skills across the field (see our **Resources** on **p. 14**), but funding still hasn’t caught up with need.

◆ **Building data capacity is about building a culture of collecting and using data, starting small and establishing basic data capacity fundamentals.**

We saw this early on with the PDI, but it’s now an idea that’s catching on more broadly.

- In the Summit session *Notes from the Field: Data Leadership*, [Rania Younes](#) from the [Immigrant Employment Council of BC \(IEC-BC\)](#) noted that building data capacity is about far more than just purchasing software and creating optimal dashboards.



It's more fundamental to instill good habits around data, shift staff mindsets, and lean into becoming a *learning* organization.

- In the same session, [Rami Alhaddad](#) from [Calgary Catholic Immigration Society](#) added that building data capacity depends first on supporting change management. Leaders and data champions need to help staff see the value in data and how to use it well.

◆ Nonprofits can begin their journeys where they are, with what they already have.

- As Blueprint's [Roua Aljied](#) shared in *Mapping the Nonprofit Data Journey*, some nonprofits assume they need new software before they can start learning from data. But we know from the PDI that they can start with whatever systems they have, and that the first step toward greater data capacity doesn't necessarily mean new tech. Nonprofits can discover which systems best suit their needs by taking these first crucial steps.
- Other nonprofits don't realize that the stories they know about their work are, in fact, data. *Stories are data*, but a better quantitative process can help name and communicate them. Roua emphasized that data capacity grows in cycles, through small 'proof of concept' steps, followed by reflection, trust building, and adjustments. To begin, nonprofits must collect what matters, engage with findings together, implement changes based on those findings, then observe the impact—returning, again, to the top of the cycle.
- In his session, *Ctrl+Alt+Mission: Building Your Nonprofit's Data and Digital Confidence*, [Daniel Liadsky](#) from Purpose Analytics shared that what matters is starting small: gathering right-for-now tools, building literacy over time, and incorporating continuous training and clear processes. Having all data in one place and having digitally literate staff are important, but the early steps of the journey are essential to reaching these goals.



Funders and nonprofits still have some distance to cover on data alignment, but new models are showing what better partnerships can look like.

We heard this clearly at the Summit: that funders often ask for data that do not match what nonprofits need to learn and grow. Across the sector, nonprofits face three challenges:

- 1. Mismatch in priorities.** What funders want to measure doesn't always fully capture what nonprofits believe matters for learning and improving services.
- 2. Pressure to report 'successes' only.** Because funders need to demonstrate results to boards and donors, grantees can sometimes filter what they share. This means failures, often essential for strategic learning, rarely make it into reports.
- 3. Fragmented reporting requirements.** Nonprofits financed by multiple funders have to juggle different frameworks, indicators, and templates, which can make reporting burdensome and limit the meaningful use of data.

As a result, a great deal of data gets collected, but those data don't always support the learning and improvement that both sides ultimately want.

Some funders are rethinking how they support data capacity.

A small but growing group of funders is beginning to invest directly in nonprofit data capacity, changing the type and nature of the data they collect from grantees. These funders tend to be larger and have more flexibility in their mandates, but they're showing the sector what progress can look like. At the Summit, we heard about the following promising practices:

- [The Ontario Trillium Foundation's Partnership Program](#) provides funding for sector capacity and co-designed approaches to data capacity with nonprofits.
- [The Region of Waterloo's Upstream Fund](#) provides funding for program delivery or capacity building, co-developed with grassroots and community leaders. It entails three steps: an open-call application, community decision-making on funding allocation, and grantees brought on in cohorts to learn together.
- [Mastercard Changeworks](#), through [CanadaHelps](#), delivers the [Charity Growth Academy](#), which includes an assessment tool and action plans for nonprofits to improve their use of technology, develop their data capacity and governance, and resource technology-specific skills.
- Both [RBC's Strengthening the Capacity of the Nonprofit Sector Pilot Program](#) and the FSC have funded Blueprint's data capacity work.

These models demonstrate a shift: funding data capacity as a core part of nonprofit effectiveness rather than an add-on.

◆ Better alignment on what gets measured can lead to better learning across the system.

When funders and nonprofits collaborate to decide on what kinds of data matter, results are more useful for all parties. In the *Funders and the Future of Data Capacity* session, speakers from funding organizations described efforts to move toward outcomes-based and learning-focused measurement:

- As [Kelsey McKibbon](#) described, [The Home Depot Foundation](#) now anchors its granting in a theory of change to focus on outcomes, not just outputs; the goal is to support strategic learning and help demonstrate the change investments are having.
- [Liz Forsberg](#) described how the [Ontario Trillium Foundation](#) has refined outcomes-based approaches for the last decade, using short, medium, and long-term outcomes to guide investments. The OTF is increasingly flexible about how grantees demonstrate progress.
- [Melanie Thomas](#) from [Community Foundations Canada](#) described using Vital Signs reports as community “health checks,” returning insights to local organizations so they can inform their work directly with findings.

Sector-wide efforts, like the [Common Approach](#), are also underway to encourage funders to align measurement requirements, reduce duplication, and enable clearer, shared learning.

◆ Creating space for shared learning, and failures, builds trust and produces better data.

Funders at the Summit acknowledged a key tension: when funders set the agenda and create incentives to report success stories selectively, they can unintentionally limit learning. But when nonprofits can help shape what gets measured, and can share failures without penalty, the data become more accurate, nuanced, and useful.

The Region of Waterloo’s Upstream Fund, noted above, is already modeling this approach by involving community members directly in agenda-setting, decision-making, and joint learning with grantees. This shift from *reporting* to *learning* creates the conditions for stronger programs, relationships, and evidence.



Even with scarce resources, nonprofits are driving real innovation in data capacity, and especially through data linkages and AI.

Insight 3

Many nonprofits want to understand their impact, strengthen services, and make evidence-informed decisions. Despite constraints, organizations across the sector are finding creative ways to advance data capacity.

◆ Nonprofits are tapping into national data resources in new ways.

Efforts to access and use rich, existing datasets, especially in ways that respect constrained resources, are important for supporting the full nonprofit ecosystem.

- In the *Future State of Nonprofit Data* session, [Benjamin McNamee](#) from [DARO](#) and [Cathy Barr](#) from [Imagine Canada](#) described the [Canadian Nonprofit Data Lab](#), or CaNDL. CaNDL was created after a research study on data capacity revealed gaps in the sector. Its goals are to expand nonprofit access to high-quality, public data from Statistics Canada and help organizations incorporate these insights into strategic planning. This kind of infrastructure makes reliable, population-level data accessible to organizations that previously had no way to reach them. CaNDL also stewards relationships between nonprofits, academia, and government to facilitate research.
- In the same session, Blueprint's [Max Palamar](#) joined Jimmy Kahn from [WoodGreen Community Services](#) to describe how they're leveraging [Statistics Canada's Social Data Linkage Environment \(SDLE\)](#) and linking WoodGreen's administrative data to longitudinal StatCan datasets in employment, justice, and health.



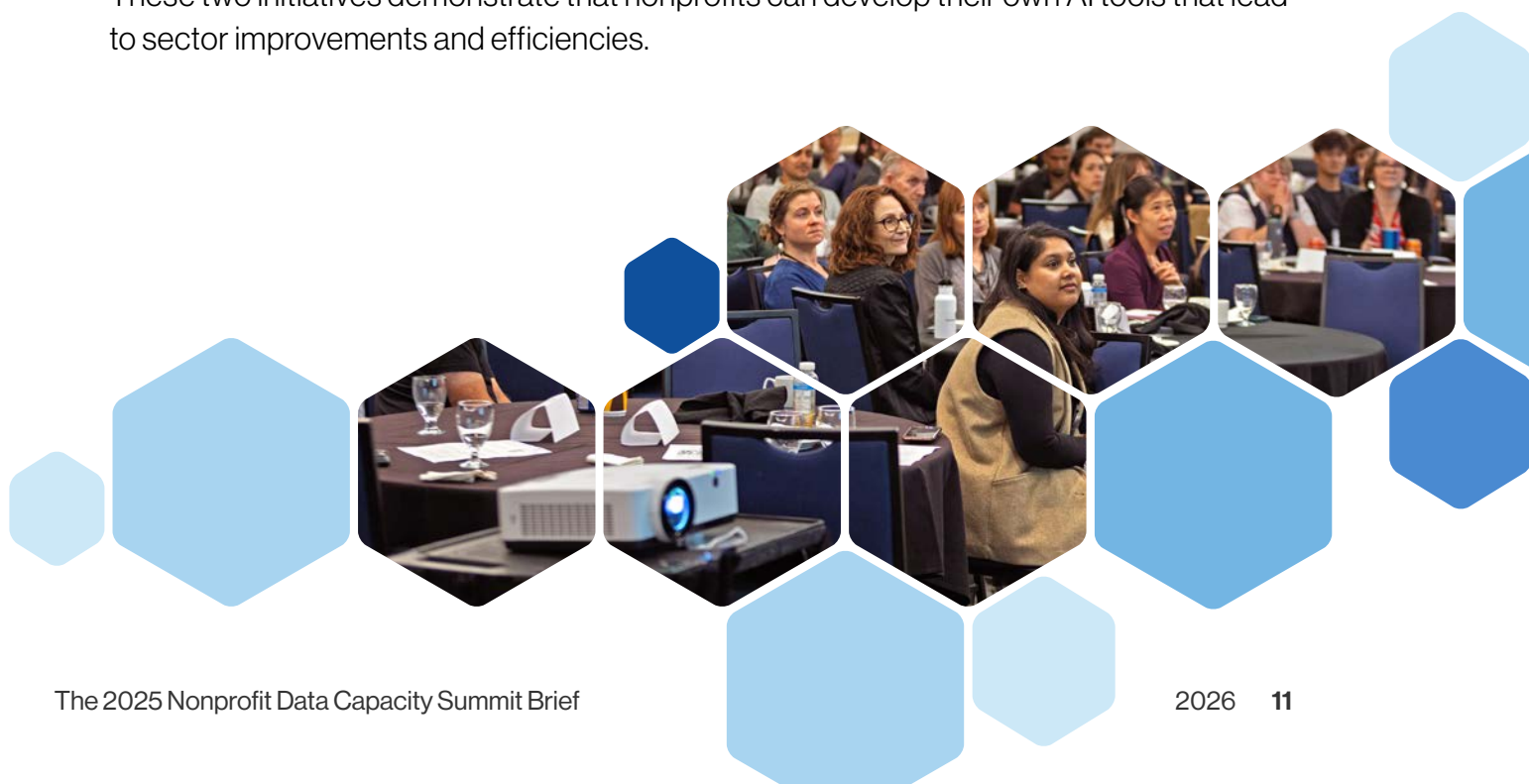
This work demonstrates whether individuals served by WoodGreen obtain or retain employment, how much they earn, and if they access social and health benefits; in other words, it shows if WoodGreen services actually lead to intended impacts. It unlocks the ability to conduct rigorous impact, cost-benefit, and return-on-investment analyses (methods that were previously out of reach for most nonprofits) and creates a model that other organizations can adopt as access expands.

◆ Nonprofits are making artificial intelligence work for their specific contexts.

AI is still new territory for many nonprofits, but Summit examples showed early, practical uses that are already helping organizations stretch limited capacity.

- In *AI in Practice: Promises and Pitfalls*, [Darcy MacCallum](#) from [Social Enterprise for Canada](#) explained how he created a generative large language model for credential recognition in the settlement sector. As a specialized electronic assistant, it scrapes the internet, pulls information about credential requirements for various industry roles, and monitors changes over time. This reduces staff time for administrative tasks and eliminates program waitlists.
- In the same session, [Sophie Lewelyn](#) from [LogicalOutcomes](#) shared her experience developing an [AI platform](#), leveraged as an evaluation-planning handbook she'd developed to help users create tailored evaluation plans. After experimenting, user testing, and navigating privacy and security risks, LogicalOutcomes has an app they are starting to share and test more broadly.

These two initiatives demonstrate that nonprofits can develop their own AI tools that lead to sector improvements and efficiencies.





Insight 4

Data capacity must centre accountability to the communities that nonprofits serve.

Collecting data can drive positive change, but proper community engagement is critical to prevent extractive practices.

Nonprofits and funders rely on data to understand impact, improve programs, and guide decisions. Many are also better understanding what it means to conduct appropriate community engagements through better alignment and relevance to community needs, turning data collection from an activity that can be extractive into a strength.

- In the *Funders and the Future of Data Capacity* session, [Fauzia Baig](#) of the [Upstream Fund](#) reminded attendees that data have historically been collected from communities without benefitting them, which sometimes causes harm. The Upstream model intentionally brings communities into granting and learning so findings return to the people directly affected.
- In *Equity at the Core: Reimagining Data Governance*, Jeff Hackett from [Shared Value Solutions](#) highlighted the history of data extraction from Indigenous Peoples and emphasized the responsibility nonprofits and funders have to rebuild trust and ensure accountability.

Collaborating with communities can improve data quality and address inequities.

Avoiding harm is essential. But community collaboration also strengthens data quality. When people don't trust the process, they may opt out of sharing information, or their perspectives may be overlooked entirely. This creates gaps and biases that distort the picture of what's really happening. Summit speakers shared practical examples:

- In the *Equity at the Core* session, [Cyril J. Cromwell](#) from [YouthREX](#) noted that funders often use measurement frameworks based on values that differ from those of the communities being studied, leading to inaccurate or incomplete findings. Sharing early data back with communities for validation builds trust and improves accuracy.
- [Annie Collins](#) from [Giving Tuesday](#) emphasized the importance of identifying what's missing. The Giving Tuesday team uses "data walks," which invite community members to review visualized findings and provide feedback. This helps surface gaps and reduce inequities in interpretation.

3. Moving forward: Imagining a future state

As we move forward, we are inspired by a question raised at the closing panel:

“Can we articulate what the future should look like so we can work towards it?”

Summit attendees raised several ways we could imagine a better future and move toward it through improved nonprofit data capacity. These centred around access, and specifically, access to:

- Fractional Data Analysts (i.e., part-time data professionals who combine expertise with cost-efficiency and flexibility);
- core funding and/or grants to build nonprofit data capacity, including funding for new tools, including AI;
- no- or low-cost advice to guide nonprofits on their data capacity journey and/or match them with the right services and investments;
- spaces for data-focused nonprofit staff to collaborate, share knowledge, and interact;
- shared infrastructure to support data management and shared measurement approaches for similar programs and services; and
- aggregate information from governments and/or funders on the nonprofit sector, its impact, and who is and isn't getting funded.

These ideas add up to a vision of a sector in which nonprofits have the tools and resources to collect and use learning-focused data. These tools and resources must be aligned with their impact goals and funder needs. They must also be resource-efficient, geared to the constrained funding environment nonprofits function within.

At Blueprint, we share this vision of a responsive, resilient, and reciprocal sector to serve communities. We look forward to continuing to work towards a shared vision of a future state where all nonprofits have the data they need to help them make the difference they are designed to make and tackle some of the most challenging issues Canada faces.



4. Resources

The Summit highlighted the importance of sharing and staying connected. To this end, we share some of the innovative work taking place across the sector that practitioners and funders can connect with:

- Nonprofit data capacity resources compiled for Summit attendees by Blueprint and Purpose Analytics: <https://buildingdatacapacity.ca/data-capacity-resources>
- Blueprint's Building Data Capacity workshop series: a free series of workshops for nonprofits looking to enhance their ability to collect, manage, and use data effectively: <https://buildingdatacapacity.ca/workshops>
- Blueprint's free toolkit for nonprofits to build data capacity, developed based on the PDI: <https://buildingdatacapacity.ca/toolkit>
- Purpose Analytics' [Nonprofit Data Network](#)
- CCNDR's [mailing list](#)
- The Canadian Nonprofit Data Lab (CanDLE): <https://www.nonprofitdatalab.ca/>
- LogicalOutcomes' Nonprofit AI Workspace: <https://www.logicaloutcomes.net/ai-lab>
- Charity Growth Academy: <https://charitygrowthacademy.org/>
- [Statistics Canada's Social Data Linkage Environment](#)
- Charity Insights Canada's [surveys on the Canadian charitable sector](#)
- Imagine Canada's overview of the [economic impact of the Canadian nonprofit sector](#)
- Mass Culture's [data and evaluation support for arts organizations](#)
- YouthREX's [evaluation toolkit for youth programs](#) and [data hub](#)
- Community Foundations of Canada's [Vital Signs](#)



5. Overview of sessions and speakers

Conference agenda

Time	Session
8:30—9:30 am	Breakfast
9:30—10:15 am	Welcome & Opening Remarks
Speakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Karen Myers Blueprint• Laura McDonough Future Skills Centre
10:15—10:55 am	Keynote
Speaker	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Wilfreda Edward Canadian Centre for Nonprofit Digital Resilience (CCNDR)
10:45—11:00 am	Break
11:00 am—12:00 pm	Funders and the Future of Data Capacity
Speakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Liz Forsberg Ontario Trillium Foundation• Fauzia Baig Region of Waterloo - Office of Reconciliation, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion• Kelsey McKibbin The Home Depot Canada Foundation• Melanie Thomas Community Foundations of Canada• Alberta Johnson (Moderator) Blueprint
12:00—1:15 pm	Lunch
1:15—2:15 pm	Equity at the Core: Reimagining Data Governance
Speakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cyril J. Cromwell YouthREX• Annie Collins Giving Tuesday• Jeff Hackett Shared Value Solutions• Roua Aljied (Moderator) Blueprint
1:15—2:15 pm	Future State of Nonprofit Data
Speakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ben McNamee DARO• Cathy Barr Imagine Canada• Max Palamar Blueprint• Jimmy Kahn WoodGreen Community Services• Zsuzsa Lindenmaier (Moderator) Purpose Analytics

Time	Session
1:15—2:15 pm	Notes from the Field: Data Leadership
Speakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jesse Kirkey WoodGreen Community Services • Rania Younes Immigrant Employment Council of BC • Rami Alhaddad Calgary Catholic Immigration Society • Samridhi Kundra (Moderator) Blueprint
2:15—2:30 pm	Break
2:30—3:30 pm	Ctrl+Alt+Mission: Building Your Nonprofit’s Data and Digital Confidence
Speaker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Daniel Liadsky Purpose Analytics
2:30—3:30 pm	AI in Practice: Promises and Pitfalls
Speakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sophie Llewelyn LogicalOutcomes • Darcy MacCallum Social Enterprise for Canada • Alex Tveit Sustainable Impact Foundation • Neil Price (Moderator) Logical Outcomes
2:30—3:30 pm	Mapping the Nonprofit Data Journey
Speaker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roua Aljied Blueprint
3:30—3:45 pm	Break
3:45—4:30 pm	Closing Panel
Speakers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wilfreda Edward Canadian Centre of Nonprofit Digital Resilience (CCNDR) • Liz Forsberg Ontario Trillium Foundation • Daniel Liadsky Purpose Analytics • Alberta Johnson Blueprint



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