



Advancing the Critical Role of T3010 and Civic Data in Community Building



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Building civic capacity matters because the communities themselves are critical assets. Civic assets are not only the physical infrastructure (roads, water systems) but include the community organizations, groups and institutions all around us. Knowledge about these significant civic organizations and their contributions in each city enables municipal leaders to better reach volunteers, enlist donors and engage the clientele they serve.

Knowledge as a community asset

Knowledge is often considered a form of power. The raw alphanumeric values of data become information when they are processed and organized to provide context. Knowledge is the application of actionable and relevant information for decision-making. Assigning meaning, information and knowledge enables both individuals and organizations to accomplish their goals.

In human society, we know that creating and sharing knowledge creates a more dynamic community. Newcomers arriving in a new community from the same city, the same province, another province or another country need to know what is available in that





community. They may be active and integrated in their community if they have learned what is available. Many civic projects invest in creating awareness of opportunities for people to participate in community life. For example, an organization may offer an opportunity for kids or adults to volunteer or learn about activities they are interested in, such as in the City of Ottawa, which [lists](#) a number of partners and community organizations representing a wide range of activities such as arts and culture, sports and leisure, community associations and groups, community resource centres, multicultural groups and seniors' clubs.

Knowledge needs the information that arises from data. This means that one of the challenges in creating or sustaining community depends on data management. At the moment, except for sporadic surveys, Canadian data about civic and cultural life needs improvements. In Canada, the primary civic data collector is the Canada Revenue Agency. Registered charities (organizations that can issue tax receipts for donations) are required to fill in a T3010 form every year. This return provides a range of information about Canadian charities and, by extension, the civic sector. As valuable as this is, it has some serious limitations. Recognizing this, the [2019 Senate of Canada report](#) on the charitable sector proposed a number of important recommendations. The problem is that there has been a slow response to those recommendations. Changes in the data related to the T3010 would improve both the charitable and not-for-profit sector organizations across the country. We urgently need to see those recommendations implemented.

There are a range of T3010 changes that need to be made. First, current data collection lacks information on diversity, geographic coverage and standards used to collect organizational data. Second, data collection would benefit from using existing online technology for prefilling forms and helping smaller organizations reduce the overhead burden of providing data. Third, data quality is always a challenge when forms are completed by respondents. This introduces many errors that need to be reviewed, cleaned and repaired. There is room for significant improvement in the collection and cleaning cycle. Finally, data needs to be easily available across long periods of time through easily used, open access pathways that could in turn support dashboards and APIs (application programming interfaces) that are widely used, putting this important data to work in improving the function of Canada's civic life.

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Policy actions

Multiple stakeholders (Senate of Canada, Imagine Canada, Ontario Nonprofit Network, academic researchers, think tanks) have commented on the need for improvements. In order to improve the civic data landscape, three specific policy actions could be taken.

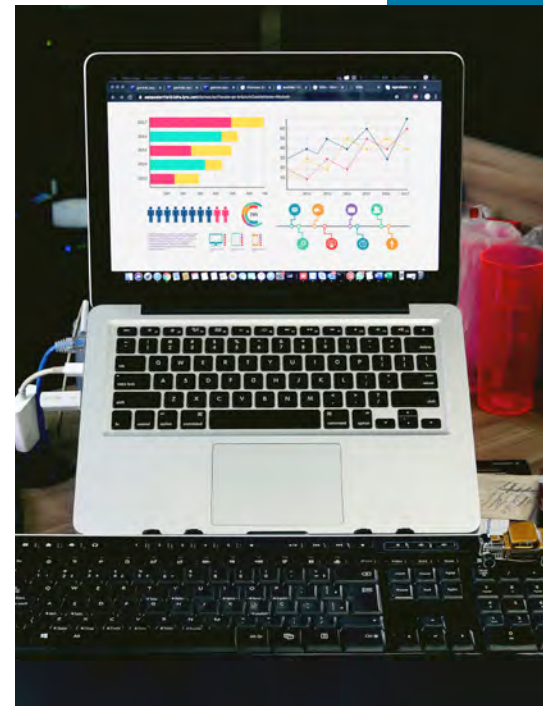
- **Action 1: Commit to better and expanded data collection**

There is value in the information already provided by the T3010 data. What we need is more work on refining data content, increasing data collection, improving data quality, expanding data dissemination and advancing data analysis. This effort needs to include all organizations in the non-profit sector, rather than just registered charities. There is a lack of information regarding non-profits, small community associations and unincorporated community groups. These groups provide many benefits in their communities that go unmeasured.

- **Action 2: Ensure better collaboration among governments**

Organizations have become accustomed to gathering all kinds of data for their various purposes. Governments are no different. However, there is a need to improve the way that federal, provincial and local governments collaborate on data collection and use. For example, there is currently no exhaustive list of registered charities, non-profits and unincorporated community groups. Information on registered charities is available but many other community organizations could be more clearly seen and understood with better cross-government sharing of data.

Existing organizations, such as Canada Revenue Agency, Statistics Canada and other government departments or agencies could readily integrate data resources for processing and wide use. It is important that we combine data collection and data management expertise for greater benefit to Canadians. Non-profits and small community associations are contributing to the dynamic vitality of the cities, but it is difficult to assess their contributions without proper knowledge.





- **Action 3: Increase the use of civic information in support of better policymaking**

Better data used well will lead to better research and more effective policy. Currently, a lot of the information collected is only for compliance purposes rather than insight. The COVID-19 pandemic crisis put a spotlight on the impact of the non-profit sector during times of social distress. Improved knowledge will lead to better policy development and improved service to communities.

The Downtown Kitchener Patio Program studied the effects of CUI's My Main Street revitalization program, which offered residents, new entrepreneurs and existing businesses a range of supports intended to develop economic opportunities for the main street community. The net result was a clear indication that these types of placemaking activities are effective. From among the 65 main streets that benefited from the program, Kitchener is held out as an example of the impact of this type of investment. From June 11 to September 30, 202x, the Downtown Kitchener Business Improvement Association saw a net spending of \$6.56 million. Of that amount, \$526 thousand, roughly 8 percent, was directly attributed to the patio program. In 2022, spending was increased to \$8.25 million, with \$761 thousand being directly attributed to the addition of street level patios, an increase of 45 percent from the year before.