

Everyone Gives to the Same Philanthropic Causes

Tout le monde donne aux mêmes causes philanthropiques

June 23, 2026 · By Daniel H. Lanteigne

This is an AI-generated English translation of Daniel H. Lanteigne's original French-language column, provided for reference. Read the original in French on Les Affaires → <https://www.lesaffaires.com/opinions/tout-le-monde-donne-aux-memes-causes-philanthropiques/>

A few days ago, on a Montreal terrace, I was talking philanthropy with women I deeply admire. Committed, experienced leaders who have devoted their careers to advancing important causes.

At one point, the conversation drifted toward a question as simple as it is uncomfortable. Why do certain causes always find funding, while others seem condemned to fight for their survival year after year?

No one around the table questioned the importance of the big, popular causes. But we all noticed the same phenomenon: some organizations have a more "favorable" capacity to mobilize donors, while others must constantly justify their existence and are perpetually running out of breath.

It was while going through the latest Trends in Philanthropy in Quebec 2026 study, conducted by Épisode, that this conversation came back to me. The data seems to confirm what many observers in the field have long noted.

Quebecers are especially responsive to causes involving children (65%), followed by seniors (43%) and people living with a physical disability (37%). Among SMEs, children also top the list of groups supported, ahead of youth and people living with a disability.

These results aren't surprising. They do, however, reveal a reality we rarely talk about.

In finance, when too large a share of investments flows into the same sectors or the same stocks, specialists call it concentration risk. So why, in philanthropy, wouldn't we apply the same thinking when most of our generosity flows toward a limited number of causes?

Because wherever there's concentration, there are inevitably blind spots.

Philanthropy's Winners

The most supported causes don't become that way by chance. They often share three characteristics in common: they're easy to understand, they trigger an immediate emotional reaction, and they let donors quickly perceive the impact of their gift.

Who could be against supporting sick children? Who would question helping people living with a disability, or improving health care?

These causes respond to real needs and fully deserve the support they receive. They have a propensity for generosity that works in their favour—an almost universal appeal that could interest just about everyone.

So the question isn't whether they're important. They are. The question is rather what happens to the others.

Who Funds the Orphan Causes?

By their very nature, some causes are destined to remain niche.

Even with the best spokespeople, the most polished campaigns and the most moving stories, they will never mobilize as many donors as the "big causes".

Not because they're less important, but because they're more complex, less consensual, or further removed from most people's daily lives.

Think of certain human rights organizations, social reintegration programs, or groups representing highly marginalized populations.

Their mission is essential. Their impact is real. And yet they will probably never have the visibility, the recognition, or the donor pool that the most popular causes enjoy.

That's exactly where the paradox lies. A cause doesn't need to be popular to be essential. But in today's philanthropic ecosystem, being popular helps enormously when it comes to survival.

So who will support the essential causes that will never enjoy that kind of popularity?

The Trap of Urgency

The study also reveals that more than half of SMEs feel the current economic context is negatively affecting their philanthropic commitments. Among those affected, many say they want to prioritize the causes deemed most urgent.

The reflex is understandable. But it creates a paradox.

The more we fund the emergency, the less we fund prevention. We respond to the immediate consequences of social problems, but we invest less in the interventions that could reduce them in the long run.

By constantly favouring whatever is on fire, we create a system where crisis is easier to fund than its prevention.

Diversifying Our Generosity

I'm obviously not suggesting donors abandon the causes close to their hearts. Children, health, youth, people living with a disability, and many other popular causes fully deserve the support they receive.

The question isn't about shifting donations from one cause to another.

The question is rather whether there's a small place left in our philanthropic portfolio for organizations that will never enjoy the same visibility, the same recognition, or the same mobilizing power.

Before making a donation, we could simply ask ourselves one more question: which essential cause around me risks never getting the attention it deserves?

In the business world, diversification reduces risk. In philanthropy, it reduces blind spots.

After all, the true value of philanthropy may not be to fund what everyone already supports. It's also to support what would disappear if no one else did.

Daniel H. Lanteigne · Indice philanthropique, Les Affaires · June 23, 2026