Navigating the New Lobbying Rules: Avoiding Pitfalls and Accelerating Advocacy

Mary Barroll: Hi I'm Mary Barroll. In this episode of CharityVillage Connects, we'll explore Canada's new lobbying rules, their impact on organizations, the penalties for not complying and we'll talk to organizations who've successfully lobbied the federal government for tips on how to supercharge your government relations work.

But first, here's a word from our partner.

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Mary Barroll: Welcome to CharityVillage Connects. I'm your host Mary Barroll.

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That's the sound of a Hummingbird pollinating our world and making it a better place. The Hummingbird is CharityVillage's logo because we strive – like the industrious Hummingbird – to make connections across the nonprofit sector and help make positive change.

We'll offer insight that will help you make sense of your life as a nonprofit professional, make connections to help navigate challenges and support your organization to deliver on its mission.

Mary Barroll: As Canada's nonprofit sector navigates 2026, organizations are facing the dual challenges of declining charitable donations and funding cuts, alongside economic uncertainty driven by recessionary pressures and U.S. tariffs. Anticipating further government funding cuts across the sector, many nonprofits may be thinking about increasing their advocacy or government relations work or possibly engaging in it for the very first time.

But Canada's new lobbying rules, effective January 19th, 2026, have significantly changed the advocacy landscape for nonprofits and charities, requiring organizations to register as a lobbyist if staff spend just eight hours on federal lobbying in a rolling four-week period. Today, we explore exactly what these rules look like in practice, their impact on organizations doing this type of work, the penalties for non-compliance, and we'll hear from leaders of organizations deeply engaged in advocacy for their advice on best practices for influencing government policy and the law.

Joining us to unpack the new lobbying rules and what they mean for the nonprofit sector is Canada's Commissioner of Lobbying, as well as several nonprofit advocates, activists and experts in public policy and law.

Nancy Bélanger: Transparency is absolutely paramount because it is a pillar of a healthy democracy. And the Lobbying Act provides for the establishment of a registry, which is exactly the transparency tool for those who communicate with federal officials, as part of their work.

Gerald Chipeur: The most important thing that has changed is the interpretation given by the Commissioner. What hasn't changed is the statute or the regulations that are made under that statute. So, one is immediately faced with the question, if the statute didn't change, and if the regulations didn't change, does the Commissioner have the right to make law?

Tim Richter: We need to understand that a lot of the social issues that charities are responding to are the product of broken public policy or they can be solved by public policy. So, charities and nonprofit organizations actually have a duty to engage in the political and policy processes, in order to solve some of the challenges that we're tasked with responding to.

Jackie Neapole: I think the biggest thing is relationships, because we came together quickly, and right on the spot as the news was breaking we were able to connect with each other and talk honestly about what was going on and what the impacts might be and to have open relationships of trust, I think is what made us so much more responsive so quickly. I think if we had advocated as individual organizations, it would not have had the same impact. So together, we were stronger and it was completely grassroots getting together.

Barbara Cartwright: I would say that all government relations, all lobbying has to start with a strategy. Even if it's something that you weren't expecting, you need to stop and draft a strategy so that you know the direction that you want to go in. And of course, that's going to be very important when we talk about the threshold to register as a lobbyist.

Sean Moore: Lobbying itself has an unfortunate connotation, meaning people doing things for money or doing things for vested interests. Fact of the matter is almost every organization that's professionally run and competently and strategically run does some sort of advocacy.

SFX: News buzz

News clip
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gBjGLuk37j8
Canada's Lobbying Act: Explained and Amended for Compliance! New Age Planet, April 2024

"Okay, so eight hours a week, 32 hours a month, that's about it? That's too much lobbying that that does not require registration so, another pitch to amend the Lobbying Act, but everybody should know that I am looking at the interpretation bulletin around the word 'significant' part of duties and I am considering amending that threshold."

Mary Barroll: That was Canada's Commissioner of Lobbying, Nancy Belanger, in the spring of 2024, hinting at her intention to modify the interpretation of the Lobbying Act. In July of 2025 she did just that when the Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying Canada released a bulletin announcing a subtle but important change to the interpretation of section 7(1)(b) of the Act. Pursuant to this section, corporations and organizations are required to register themselves with the Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying of Canada, if their lobbying activities "constitute a significant part of the duties" of an employee.

What the Commissioner has changed is the interpretation of what constitutes a "significant part of the duties." Since 2009, organizations were required to follow what was known as "the 20% rule," referring to 20% of an employee's working hours. This allowed organizations to engage in up to 32 hours of lobbying activities, over 4 weeks, without needing to register with the Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying Canada, also known as OCLC.

As of January 19, 2026, this "20% rule" is no longer in effect. The original allowance of up to 32 hours has been greatly reduced, restricting organizations to only 8 hours of lobbying activities, over a rolling 4-week period, before requiring registration. As well, the 8 hours counted now include *any* time spent on lobbying-related activities, including conducting research and drafting and editing written communications and, as such, are not simply limited to time spent in face-to-face meetings with public officials.

What this means, in practical terms, is that a much larger number of organizations will be required to register as lobbyists. Failing to comply with OCLC registration can result in severe penalties, such as fines ranging from 50,000 to 200,000 dollars, and even 6 months to 2 years imprisonment. In other words, this change could potentially seriously affect hundreds, or even thousands, of nonprofits and charities in Canada, including many organizations that have never considered themselves to be lobbyists.

Joining us to explain the new interpretation to the rules is Nancy Bélanger herself, Canada's Commissioner of Lobbying, who oversees transparency and ethics in federal lobbying. Appointed in 2017 and reappointed in 2024, it was under her direction that these important changes were instituted last year. Since many charities and nonprofits may not even realize that some of their public policy or government relations work could be counted as lobbying, I asked Nancy Belanger to start by explaining *what* is considered lobbying and *why* transparency in lobbying matters.

Nancy Bélanger: Transparency is absolutely paramount and important because it is a pillar of a healthy democracy. And the Lobbying Act provides for the establishment of a registry, which is exactly the transparency tool for those who communicate with federal officials, as part of their work. We're not talking about volunteers here. We're talking about employees with an ask, in relation to a legislation, a regulation, a policy program, or even just to get a financial benefit. That's what's considered lobbying, and it's a legitimate activity. Let's be proud. We do know that our decision makers need the data, they need the information to make informed decisions, but it has to be transparent. In a nutshell, that's what the lobbying regime is all about.

So, what does lobbying mean under the Lobbying Act? It means communicating with federal officials. Those are public servants, ministers, Members of Parliament, senators, and their respective staff. Orally or in writing, as part of their duties for their work, it's really part of their job to be communicating with officials, or because you have a client. So, you're doing it for your boss or you're doing it because you've been hired by somebody from the outside to do it. About a regulated matter, which is an ask, either a development or an amendment to a legislation, a regulation, a policy, a program, or to get money, for example.

Mary Barroll: An important clarification here is necessary, especially since it is one that many nonprofit and charity leaders worry about. According to Nancy Belanger, there is a difference between giving your opinion in the public domain, or responding to questions from media about government policies, which are not considered lobbying, and actually directly addressing public officials with an ask in relation to legislation, regulation or the law, which is lobbying.

Nancy Bélanger: If you're simply reacting and providing an opinion in the public domain, that's not lobbying. But if you, in fact, communicate, you provide your opinion to officials about the budget, which is a bill, you would likely have to register, if it's part of your job to do that. That's really the element. You're actually communicating with an official about something you want changed, with respect to that bill. And who initiates the communication is somewhat irrelevant for the purposes of registration. The most senior person in an organization is the one that is responsible to enter the lobbying activities of its employees in the registry. And they have this obligation once they meet the threshold, they have 60 days to go and do a registration.

Mary Barroll: Since the new rules lower the threshold for when organizations must now register as lobbyists, it’s important to be really clear on what exactly this threshold is.

Nancy Bélanger: This significant part of duties threshold has been interpreted by previous commissioners to be 32 hours in a monthly period. That is a lot of lobbying that is occurring without transparency. And so, I've decided, and it's in my authority to do so, to reduce what that means, in order to meet the objectives of the Act, which is transparency of lobbying. So, the new threshold will now be eight hours in a four-week period. The Act requires that what you calculated is the collective lobbying of all of your employees. So, you need to look at who has, as their duties, to communicate with officials, and you add all of that up. And once it amounts to eight hours, you have to register. It used to be 32, now it's gonna be eight. The intent is to increase transparency of the lobbying of those conversations that clearly did not meet the 32 hours but might meet the eight.

Mary Barroll: To err on the side of caution, Nancy suggests that any organizations with staff who communicate with government officials as part of their jobs register themselves, regardless of how many hours they may plan to engage in this activity.

Nancy Bélanger: That would be my recommendation and that way you're on the right side of the law from the get-go and then you don't have allegations against you of whether or not you met the threshold.

Mary Barroll: I asked Nancy Bélanger to tell us what types of nonprofits or charities are most likely to be affected by these changes and what kind of work might now push an organization over the threshold, when it previously didn’t.

Nancy Bélanger: The law applies equally to all organizations, irrespective of their status. This is really going to affect those who were under the 32 hours, know for sure that they were under the 32 hours, but were doing about 20, 25. They will need to register. And one of the examples I can give is Lobby Days. The number of Lobby Days on the hill, for which the organizations are not registered, is quite high. And so, it's important that there be more transparency about the communications they're having.

Lobby Days is when there's a sector, an organization, an association that choose to spend a number of hours in a day, and they've got a targeted day on the Hill, to meet with as many parliamentarians as they can about their issue. The Lobby Day is the perfect example because if you send two or three employees for four or five hours, you probably were okay to stand or 32 and not register. Now you'll clearly meet the threshold.

So, to me, that is the perfect example. Others could be if there is a push with respect to a budget and you're doing one month of lobbying and away you go and it's really an extensive activity, that would probably bring you over the threshold as well, while in the past it wouldn't.

SFX: News buzz

News clip
https://www.cpac.ca/headline-politics/episode/cupe-holds-lobby-day-on-parliament-hill--february-24-2026?id=ab0293ed-e7d7-4f60-ba8f-ad4c284bca45
CUPE Holds Lobby Day on Parliament Hill – February 24, 2026, CPAC

"We represent more than 800 000 workers from coast to coast to coast, delivering frontline public services all across the country. Healthcare workers, childcare workers, education workers, municipal workers, library, or transportation workers, the people who keep our communities running every single day. Today, hundreds of CUPE members are here on Parliament Hill from every region across the country. They're here to meet with Parliamentarians. They're here because Canada is navigating a period of global uncertainty, economic pressures and geopolitical tensions and instability beyond our borders are very real."

Mary Barroll: Most nonprofit organizations that hold Lobby Days on Parliament Hill are well known to policy makers and bureaucrats and are already registered as lobbyists. But other nonprofits and charities may well have avoided the need to register under the old 20% rule but will now be caught by the new threshold. And some believe that was the whole point. Sean Moore is the founder and principal of Advocacy School and one of Canada's most experienced practitioners, writers and teachers on public policy advocacy. He says these guidance changes were prompted by complaints made by some who believed that, compared to the for-profit sector, the nonprofit sector was getting off too easy.

Sean Moore: It was a complaint of not only some politicians and bureaucrats but from some in the private sector thinking the nonprofit sector was getting a free ride and being able to do what they want and not having any particular requirements to register. But more importantly, the bureaucrats who are involved in this have been arguing for this for a long time. We need to have one set of rules for both nonprofit and for-profit and stop making the distinction between the two, all in the interest of greater transparency. And when you see the announcement by the Lobbying Commissioner last summer, it was her main line was her belief that a lot of nonprofits in particular and associations which also fall under the nonprofit list, were not lobbying in a way that reflects their real activity.

Mary Barroll: Although Nancy Belanger says that she has the authority as Commissioner to change the interpretation of Section 7(1)(b) of the Lobbying Act, some legal experts believe that the Lobbying Commissioner has in fact exceeded her authority. Gerald Chipeur is a lawyer providing representation for business and government organizations in Canada. He's a leading advisor and advocate for Indigenous governments, professional associations, charities, and lobbyists and he teaches negotiation of Indigenous rights at the University of Calgary Faculty of Law. Gerald Chipeur co-authored an article analyzing the Office of the Commissioners' bulletin about the new, lowered registration threshold. He questions the Commissioner's legal authority to make changes that effectively make new law, with the new interpretation of what constitutes a "significant portion of an employee's time" referenced in the Lobbying Act that did away with the 20% rule.

Gerald Chipeur: The most important thing that has changed is the interpretation given by the Commissioner. What hasn't changed is the statute or the regulations that are made under that statute. So, one is immediately faced with the question, if the statute didn't change, and if the regulations didn't change, does the Commissioner have the right to make law?

When this law was first brought into force, Parliament decided that they would use the term "significant portion of an individual's time being devoted to lobbying" would be the threshold so that you wouldn't have to register, if it was a de minimis interaction with government. But they decided not to define that term, either by regulation or within the statute itself, within the interpretation section. They left that uninterpreted and the Commissioner took up that responsibility and published an interpretation for the public. And the interpretation adopted was 20% of one person's time during a rolling four-week period, which would be approximately 32 hours if you were going to be working 40 hours a week. That was very clear and it was a very bright line for both businesses and charities to follow, when they went through the process of analyzing what they did. The Commissioner came to the conclusion that this was too high a bar and it should be lowered. The Commissioner went to Parliament, asked Parliament to act. Parliament did not act. The Commissioner decided, well, if the Parliament won't, then I will.

I take the position and others have taken the position that that is not within the jurisdiction of the Commissioner. Now the other side will argue that Parliament has given the Commissioner the ability to publish interpretations, and I would agree with that, and it's because of that section that the courts have the jurisdiction to review these kinds of interpretations that have been published.

Mary Barroll: Gerald Chipeur says that the Commissioner's new interpretation has so dramatically changed the rules that it is effectively making new law – something that is beyond the authority of a regulator because it does not meet the "rational or reasonable test" set down by the Supreme Court.

Gerald Chipeur: The Supreme Court of Canada said, in Vavilov, that when a decision is made by a regulator like this, the regulator must act rationally or reasonably. So, if significant means eight hours, or it could easily mean 32 hours, how could both of those interpretations be reasonable? One of them must be unreasonable or we must accept that the Commissioner has the right to make the law.

So, my view is one or the other is true. Either the Commissioner is making law and doesn't have that authority, or the Commissioner has acted unreasonably, irrationally, in changing the interpretation that had been given. The proper way to change this is, once an interpretation has been given, it is for Parliament to change that. In my view, we are now at a point in time where those kinds of actions are not consistent with the constitutional requirement of the rule of law. And therefore, it is my view that the courts should be intervening to tell commissioners and regulators, once you decide to interpret a law one way, your hands are tied, you can't change your mind unless you do so reasonably and rationally. In my view, in this case, it is not reasonable or rational to move from 32 to eight without a change in the legislation.

Mary Barroll: According to Gerald Chipeur, in order for a legislative review of this change to take place, it will likely require someone to bring a claim before the courts.

Gerald Chipeur: My guess is that if this is going to be challenged, it will be challenged when a person makes a mistake, doesn't keep track of their lobbying activities. It would typically, in my view, be someone in the for-profit sector that is facing charges.

Now, I think that this is a case where a court might intervene, ahead of time. But what they said was, if the interpretation is wrong, the proper approach is wait for an enforcement action and then we'll test the waters. Now, that's very unfair to those who are regulated, because they don't know what the law is. They don't know where to go. And of course, the default is you're going to obey the more restrictive interpretation, in order to not be wasting money and time on lawyers, fighting the bureaucracy over whether or not the regulations have been breached.

Mary Barroll: And that brings us to the doctrine of “legal certainty”. It’s fundamental principle of the rule of law requiring that legislation be clear, predictable, stable, and accessible, allowing individuals to foresee the legal consequences of their actions. Gerald Chipeur says the Commissioner’s new interpretation inevitably leads to uncertainty, since every Commissioner is eventually replaced by another person appointed to that role, who could interpret it differently than her predecessor.

Gerald Chipeur: That's why it's irrational. The next Commissioner could say, no my view is that it should be 50 hours, not eight, or it should be zero hours and then there's no communication that can ever be done. Certainly, it would be irrational to say significant means anything other than zero, but who knows what a future Commissioner might say, with respect to this matter.

Mary Barroll: Whether Gerald Chipeur’s suspicion that the new rules will face a legal challenge in the courts or a legislative review remains to be seen. For the time being, the Lobbying Commissioner’s new interpretation applies to all those organizations that seek to influence federal government policy and law. So, what *do* leaders of nonprofit and charities, that are deeply engaged in advocacy, think about the new rules? And how will they impact their work?

Barbara Cartwright: My first reaction was this is a good thing. It creates more transparency, requires more people to be registering, and not just from the charitable and not-for-profit sector but also the corporate sector, which we depend on understanding who is also lobbying on issues that we're concerned about. So, bringing more people into the registry to me is a good thing.

Mary Barroll: That's Barbara Cartright, CEO of Humane Canada that is the national federation of SPCA's and Humane Societies in every province and two territories, working together to end animal cruelty, improve animal protection, and promote the humane treatment of all animals.

Barbara Cartwright: It also reinforces the role and the credibility of charities in Canada and that we do play a very important policy role. And it is a very important part of what the charitable sector provides to government. So, I'm pleased to see that more charities will be registering.

SFX: News buzz

News clip
https://www.ctvnews.ca/winnipeg/article/winnipeg-pair-sentenced-to-12-years-in-prison-on-animal-cruelty-charges-follow-for-live-updates/
Winnipeg pair sentenced to 12 years in prison on animal cruelty charges, CTV News, February 11, 2026

"A Winnipeg man and woman who admitted to torturing and killing 90 animals, and then selling videos to their crimes, face the consequences of those actions today. A judge sentenced the pair to 12 years in prison and banned them from ever being near an animal again."

News clip
https://winnipeg.citynews.ca/2026/03/02/sale-animal-cruelty-videos-legal-canada/
The sale of animal cruelty videos is legal in Canada. A Manitoba animal advocacy group wants that changed, City News, March 2026

"Earlier this year, two Winnipeg residents were charged, following graphic videos surfacing showing acts of animal abuse. And while the cruelty itself is illegal, under Canada's Criminal Code the case is raising questions on whether distributing or selling these kinds of videos should be considered against the law."

Mary Barroll: In delivering the precedent setting sentence, the judge read from the community impact statement from the Winnipeg Humane Society, with the support of Humane Canada, that is also at the forefront of an advocacy campaign to amend the Criminal Code to make the distribution and sale of videos depicting animal cruelty illegal.

As CEO of Human Canada, Barbara Cartright has deep experience and knowledge of policy and public affairs, securing many animal protection amendments to federal legislation. I asked Barbara Cartwright to explain what advocacy work actually looks like in practice, across a typical week or month.

Barbara Cartwright: So, in a typical month at Humane Canada, we're doing multiple different pieces of work towards government relations and lobbying. We're preparing policy docs, on a regular basis, in order to support our different positions, whether it be the government or our members. We're responding to comment periods. We're communicating with officials.

We might be communicating with them about existing bills, proposed bills, legislation that's already been passed, that we want to change, reports, and even funding, because we are funded by Women and Gender Equality for some of our programmatic work that is not lobbying. We might be doing briefing calls, for specific areas that impact humane societies and SPCAs. We work in coalition with our members and with other partner organizations. So, we do a number of those kinds of calls. And then of course, preparing our communications, whether that's a call to the public, to write to their parliamentarians, or a call to our members, or just providing information about what's happening.

Mary Barroll: Advocacy involves many different kinds of work, including drafting emails, preparing data, making coalition calls, attending meetings, coordinating follow-ups. It can be tricky to realistically track and calculate time spent on these activities without it becoming yet another administrative burden. Barbara Cartwright's advice is to be very clear about your organization's strategic approach to this type of work.

Barbara Cartwright: It definitely comes down to that aggregation of roles. The clarity of roles, the aggregation of roles. So, the three main folks that do this work are doing it close to full time or they're doing it half time, in which case it's far beyond the eight hours. So, we don't need to track. What we do need to track though is when we're having our meetings, because that's what you're putting into the lobby registry is meetings or communications. And so, we have to be consistently tracking those.

Fortunately, ours, from an administration perspective, are not that heavy that we can't track it simply. I can imagine much larger organizations that might be having tons of meetings, 20 meetings a month. That's going to be more difficult. That's not our organization. But I think it's that clarity of what is your strategy? What are you doing and who's doing it? And then, are you anywhere close to that eight hours, go ahead and register. I believe all leadership should know when their organization is engaged in any kind of government relations.

Mary Barroll: For some of the concrete, practical changes that will be required, coming out of the guidance, whether in tracking time, coordinating staff, or planning advocacy campaigns, Barbara Cartwright says that timing is key.

Barbara Cartwright: For maybe people who are thinking about this and thinking about how to do this tracking, the definition of lobbying hasn't changed, but it's when organizations are required to register and that threshold is lower. That's really the difference. What I would say is practically, for other national organizations that may not be registered yet, and are thinking about it, is that they just need to be very intentional about that aggregation and coordination and knowing when their advocacy is about to ramp up beyond the eight hours in a rolling four week.

I'd say that's one of the things that I don't like. It's that idea of a rolling four week. That's probably, in my opinion, an unnecessary qualification. I liked it better when it was within a month, because a rolling four weeks, that administration could be difficult for somebody if they're already on the edge, right? Are we doing 10 hours? Are we doing eight hours? In my opinion, I would register. I found that registering is of no burden whatsoever, to be honest with you. You just have to file your reports. They're very simple to file. So even if you think you might be coming up to the eight hours, go ahead and register.

Mary Barroll: Is it possible that the lowered threshold might actually be easier to track? The Commissioner, Nancy Bélanger, thinks it might be, at least for some organizations.

Nancy Bélanger: Some people have told me it's going to be easier to track eight than it was to track 32. Because 32 hours in organizations that are spread around the country, it was difficult to go about it and then try to find out who had done what and if you met the 32.

Chances are now you won't have to do much tracking that you'll meet the eight hours. So, for some it's going to be easier, I think. But for certain, when an organization starts to think about doing advocacy work that meets the requirements of the Lobbying Act, they should start documenting who's working on this, when did they start? And at the time that they actually do the communication, so, at the time they actually write their letter, or that they have their meeting, they then should go back and say, okay, in the last four weeks, have we met these eight hours? And then decide whether or not they need to register and they've got 60 days to do that.

Mary Barroll: Sean Moore suggests that organizations should simply accept lobbying registration as a part of their work because when it comes to advocacy, any organization serious about it is sure to cross the new 8-hour threshold.

Sean Moore: You need to know that with this thing of eight hours, on a rolling basis, over four weeks, there are very few organizations that have any ambitions at all at social change and innovation and public policy that won't cross that threshold. I tell them to get over it, move on. It's an important part of any organization that's trying to take their advocacy seriously.

To me, there are too many reasons why you should register. Being more visible, secondly, not having that difficult conversation with an ADM you've been trying to get on the phone with for months, only to have them start off by saying, you are duly registered, aren't you? And if the answer is no, they'll end the conversation. It happens all the time. They don't want to get burned by having it said that they talk to people who should have been registered.

Mary Barroll: But what happens if an organization unintentionally crosses the threshold or fails to register? Nancy Belanger's advice is to come forward and register, and better late than never.

Nancy Bélanger: Lobbying while not registered, lobbying while you're prohibited from lobbying are offenses under the Lobbying Act. But I tell people, put yourself in compliance. We have never refused someone who calls us and says, oh my goodness, I should have registered six months ago and I wasn't. We encourage people to call us. I'm not into gotcha moments. This is all about transparency and putting organizations and corporations and consultant lobbyists in compliance with the Lobbying Act.

Mary Barroll: Though the Commissioner of Lobbying's stated goal with these new rules is only to increase transparency about everyone's lobbying activities, Gerald Chipeur says that they can put certain organizations at a disadvantage. He describes an example where a nonprofit or charity might now require registration under the updated interpretation, when it did not need to in the past. He suggests the new interpretation favours those who are geographically located closest to Ottawa.

Gerald Chipeur: Let me give you one example. If I lived in Vancouver and I wanted to go meet with the Prime Minister to talk about an important amendment to the, let's say, the Income Tax Act, and I was the CEO and I spent a couple hours preparing. And then I had one of my staff members spend a couple hours preparing. Then, I traveled five hours to get there, then traveled five hours back. I'm now 14 hours, and then of course there's the meeting itself. So maybe I'm at 16 hours that I've spent on this.

In the past, that would not be enough to register because 32 hours would be the threshold. But now, immediately, once you've gone over that eight hours, and it's interesting that if an individual who was a CEO in Ottawa did the same thing, they would be under the eight-hour threshold. So, in a sense, this kind of measurement discriminates against you, depending upon whether you live in Vancouver or in Ottawa.

Mary Barroll: Another issue that Gerald Chipeur points to is that there is no precise definition of what constitutes "time spent." He advises organizations doing any communicating with federal government officials to register, out of caution.

Gerald Chipeur: There's no definition other than the publications from the Commissioner and the Commissioner says any time that you spend on this, including travel time and time meeting and time preparing, writing, studying, having meetings about it, anything that you might be doing is going to be covered by this need to keep track of what you're doing.

I don't think there's anything you can do to stay under that eight-hour limit now. So effectively, by choosing eight hours, any communication is going to be caught. I would recommend that anyone who is communicating with a federal cabinet minister, deputy minister, anyone, on any of the issues that are covered by the legislation, I would recommend that you register. In the past, you could keep track and you could try to stay under the 32-hour, rolling four hours, and many charities did and it was a strategy one could follow. But today, if you have someone who doesn't like you, and I know that there are think tanks and activists out there that say, we don't like charities and we're going to complain about them, every time they interact with government, because we think it's in the public interest. You would then be at risk of having someone complain about you if, for example, and this happened to a pharmaceutical company, they had a well-known sportscaster meet with the Prime Minister, on a completely different matter, but they noted that this person was also doing advertisements for a particular pharmaceutical product, so the competition complained.

Hey, is this guy registered? We've looked it up and he's not registered. Yet, he's hanging out with the Prime Minister. He's probably talking about that pharmaceutical product. And although he was cleared because he hadn't been, just the fact that he was in the public sphere, in the news with the Prime Minister and not registered, it led to a complaint. So, if I were a CEO, I would just register, out of an abundance of caution, so that if my competition or just someone who doesn't like charities, came to see what I was doing and check the lobby register, they would see that I was in compliance with the law.

Mary Barroll: Gerald Chipeur also recommends that charities should be careful when they're invited by government officials to a private meeting.

Gerald Chipeur: There's no doubt that the biggest issue is that charities are going to find that they cross the threshold when government reaches out to them, because it would never occur to you that when the government asks you to come and talk to them, that you are then going to need to register for that privilege. It just wouldn't occur to most charities. All charities need to understand that if you are communicating with government, the only time you can communicate with government and not register is when your communication is public.

So, if you're going to a public hearing, before the Senate or the House, or there's a public roundtable that's going across the country, where the roundtable is typically recorded, and the proceedings are recorded, and what everybody said at that roundtable is available, then you don't need to worry about registering. But if you're being invited to a closed-door session with a senior ADM or Deputy Minister, you're going to need to register if you cross that eight-hour threshold. There is simply no exclusion unless, again, you make sure that your responses do not in fact ask for anything and do not encourage changes in policy. But again, I can't imagine a Deputy Minister taking the time to travel across the country to consult, if they weren't doing it for the purposes of changing policy, regulations or statutes.

SFX: News buzz

News clip
https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/toronto-housing-advocates-demand-accessibility-safety-in-plea-to-city-1.7641479
Toronto shelters 'dehumanizing,' say advocacy groups pushing for urgent accessibility fixes, CBC News, September 2025

“Everybody deserves to live with dignity. Disabled or not. Members of Toronto’s underhoused and homeless union coming to City Hall Tuesday, asking for better treatment and more accessible shelters for those with accessibility issues who need them.”

Mary Barroll: As founder, President and CEO of the Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness, and Co-Chair of the National Housing Council, which provides advice to the Federal Minister of Housing, Tim Richter has spent years working with governments to advance solutions for homelessness at municipal, provincial, and federal levels. He strongly believes that charities and nonprofits have a duty to advocate for and engage in the political process for the people affected by these social issues.

Tim Richter: We need to understand that a lot of the social issues that charities are responding to are the product of broken public policy or they can be solved by public policy. I think that charities and nonprofit organizations actually have a duty to engage in the political and policy processes, in order to solve some of the challenges that we're tasked with responding to.

For us, in the homelessness world, we know for example that homelessness is a housing problem. And so, we have to engage in a housing policy if we're hoping to solve it, really. Otherwise, we're just papering over broken public systems with donor funding and there's not going to be enough philanthropic money, in the world, to solve this crisis. I think frankly, we have a duty to represent people experiencing homelessness that don't have another voice in these issues. So, I think, certainly for homelessness, but for a lot of charities working on social issues or environmental issues, I actually think we have a duty to engage in the political process.

Mary Barroll: As someone who engages in government relations work, as a central part of his organization’s mission, Tim Richter does not see the Lobbying Act’s new rules as anything particularly challenging, scary or restricting. In his view, the new rules simply create more transparency around lobbying activities. He suggests that there are greater battles to be fought than the registration of lobbying activities.

Tim Richter: I've been a registered lobbyist for over 20 years, and so I haven't really had to adjust anything particularly. And I can't advise on how to stick to the Lobbying Act, but what I can tell you, as someone who's been in this process for decades, there’s nothing to be afraid of. There's a code of conduct that requires you to record certain communication, with elected officials, designated public office holders, they call it. But really, it's not that onerous a process. It doesn't restrict what you can talk about. It doesn't restrict, in my view, the kind of engagement you have. It doesn't impair at all a charity or a non-profit's ability to engage in government. It just creates some transparency around lobbying activity.

I think it's good to have the transparency. I honestly don't see that it creates a significant burden. It's a bit of a pain. Every month, I have to enter lobbying activities or communication reports. We have to maintain our registry and be clear about what kind of things we're lobbying the federal government to do. But, from a workload point of view, I can tell you that it is far less onerous than probably 100% of the funder reporting we have to do. It's very, very similar. There's just a monthly communication report and it takes minutes to do and we're very active, in Ottawa. So, honestly, I wouldn't be afraid of it if I were a charity just starting into this work. I don't want to dismiss people's real worries, but honestly, it's really, really, really not, in my view anyway, a big barrier.

Mary Barroll: According to Tim Richter, the most effective advocacy does two things: it engages with government officials by sharing expertise and it engages in actions that affect and move public opinion.

Tim Richter: When you think about what it takes to succeed in policy advocacy, I think there's a few really important ingredients. One is that frontline expertise that charities can bring to the conversation. More often than not, governments are faced with a problem to solve. Look at housing: they're not really sure what to do about it. Having good, smart policy ideas and understanding the solutions to the problems that the charities are uniquely positioned to understand, I think is the first step. A lot of charities get engaged in the policy conversation, but don't get engaged in the policy advocacy conversation. And there's two parts to the advocacy conversation, in my view. One is the direct government relations, so that is talking to members of Parliament, talking to officials, talking to ministers.

That is part of that engagement and that's really what we're talking about today. But the second part of that engagement is public opinion. If we think about charities, you have your donors, you have your supporters, you have your volunteers, you have your staff, you have your clients. Charities are actually really uniquely positioned to move the public opinion environment around an issue too. And so, if, we want to be really good at advocacy, we want to look at understanding the issue, defining the issue, having the solutions, engaging in that direct lobbying or advocacy, but also moving the opinion environment to support those changes in policy.

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Mary Barroll: The reality is most nonprofit and charitable leaders who engage with policy makers and government representatives are doing so precisely because they *want* to influence policy, have impact, and make positive change that supports their mission. It's baked into the DNA of most charitable organizations. And in times like these—when economic uncertainty is tightening budgets and stretching missions, many nonprofit organizations and charities are starting to ask a question they may never have seriously considered before: *Should we be doing advocacy?* For groups focused on direct service, speaking up on policy can feel unfamiliar, even a little intimidating. Where do you start? What's allowed? And how do you make your voice heard without losing focus on your mission? For organizations navigating that very moment—curious, cautious, and unsure of the path forward—Sean Moore has some practical advice on how nonprofits can begin engaging in advocacy in a thoughtful and effective way.

Sean Moore: I always argue that people should do aerobic listening before they start any advocacy. Try to understand where the individual or the department or the government is coming from, before you develop your ask. I suggest a process called strategic inquiry, in which you select the bureaucrats, political staffers, maybe MPs, not so much ministers, but the people who are advising the government on things and make contact with them. You can do it on email, ideally you do it maybe on Zoom or maybe go see them and spend all your time asking questions. Too early to start positing your point of view. Find out how they view the issue that's important to you. Who else in the government is involved in the issue? How are they framing the issue? What's the nature of the problem that they're trying to solve? There's a variety of questions. I won't get into my long epistle on it right now. But to me, the more you know about the political ecosystem around which your decision is being made, the more influential you can be. But that's work. That's research. That's before you start lobbying. And I don't know how to do it outside of that. I spent 40, 50 years doing this. People come to me say, how do we sell our idea? And I'd say, well first, have you tested that idea? Who thinks that idea is a good idea? Is this just your idea? Does this correspond at all to how government or other organizations see the issue? But way too often, they see something adverse happening out there, they see an opportunity out there, and they want to pursue it, and they only make their argument.

Mary Barroll: I asked Tim Richter to draw on his experience, working with federal officials on homelessness policy, and share any specific engagement approaches that have generated the most responsiveness from government.

Tim Richter: One of my rules for lobbying was just don't be a jerk. We're engaged with people, but I think one, one of the things important for people to understand is, governments are trying to solve problems. And they don't understand your work. I think you should assume that they don't understand your work. They don't understand the issues necessarily, and they don't understand the solutions. And so, in a lot of ways, you're doing officials a favour, by helping them solve a problem that they have in front of them. They may not even know they have a problem when it comes to things that charities are dealing with.

But the other thing, where I think charities can actually be a whole lot more influential than industry, than the private sector, is because I think there's higher levels of trust.

Mary Barroll: Tim Richter recalls a moment when his advocacy work led directly to a policy win impacting people across the country.

Tim Richter: A couple of years ago, as the housing crisis was raging, we formed a partnership with some folks in the private sector and released something called the National Housing Accord, which was really a plan for the federal government to address the rental housing crisis. And it became clear, very early, that the government knew they had a problem, but they really had no idea what to do about it.

And so, we were able to bring together partners in the private sector, investors in housing, people that build housing, people that own housing, people that do community housing, social housing, supportive housing, together come up with this National Housing Accord, which the federal government used. And that moved probably $65 billion in federal investment into housing. And if you see across the country, if you look at the housing starts and housing completions in Canada, we're in a rental housing boom like we haven't seen before, or certainly in recent memory. And that's down to a coalition and advocacy that we helped lead.

Mary Barroll: When engaging government, there are many charities that work through coalitions, networks, and joint campaigns. I asked Tim Richter to tell me how collaboration has worked for him. He encourages organizations to work in coalition, and he offers what he sees as the key ingredients to success.

Tim Richter: The key ingredients are good policy options, direct advocacy and moving public opinion, it's hard for individual charities to do, even the very biggest charities. I don't have in-house policy people. I rely on partners, consultants, others to do. It's so much easier to move in each of those three domains, if you move together. But even from a resource point of view, you can cover so much more ground. And if you look at your issue and the change you want to create, one of the things you do in government relations is defining the problem very clearly, defining the policy change that you need, but then looking at the policy change and thinking through, okay, well, is that legislation? Is it regulation? Is that funding? So, who's in that decision-making process? And how am I gonna influence? Nine times out of 10, having influence in that is gonna be based on relationships, but reach, as well. And so how do you build enough political support for a really big change, like a change in the federal budget, for example. That is a very big lift. And so, you need allies because even the biggest charities typically can't do it alone, right? And it's from a resource point of view, from a reach and influence point of view, from policy options. I mean, I'm a homelessness guy. I've never owned a real estate income trust. I'm not entirely sure what goes into investing in those. So, I need to bring the investors, I need to bring the builders, I need to bring the owners together to try and answer those questions. But I know I needed more rental housing construction. Again, I think some of these coalitions are really essential.

SFX: News buzz

News clip
https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/video/9.6703805
Reinstate federal minister for women, gender equality and youth, say northern organizations, CBC News, March 28, 2025

“YWCA Nunavit joined nearly 400 signatories to a letter, demanding Prime Minister Mark Carney reinstate the Minister for Women and Gender Equality. Yukon Women's Organizations were at a UN Forum on the status of women, with the former WAGE minister, Marcy Ian. That's when the cabinet shuffle news came down. Ray Lemash, the executive director for Yukon Status of Women Council, says it sent shockwaves through the gender equality sector. This is not a symbolic loss. This is not simply a reshuffling of ministerial responsibilities. There was really important work in relationship building in advocacy being done at this level, and it does feel very disheartening.”

Mary Barroll: Last spring, Canada saw what successful coalition-led advocacy looks like in action, when a broad coalition of 400 women’s rights and labour organizations pushed back against the federal government’s decision to eliminate the dedicated Ministry for Women and Gender Equality and Youth or WAGE position and cut its budget. Supporters of this coalition argued that dissolving WAGE into a broader cabinet role and slashing its resources would undermine national efforts on gender-based analysis and systemic equality work. This coordinated advocacy called for the portfolio to be reinstated as a standalone ministry and their efforts proved successful when the federal government reversed its decision and restored the Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth (WAGE) as a standalone cabinet position, later that spring.

Jackie Neapole is Executive Director of the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women or C-R-I-A-W and since 2013, has been involved in the organization's multi-year projects with feminist researchers, including leading projects funded by Women and Gender Equality Canada. Jackie Neapole and CRIAW played a key role in the coalition of organizations that advocated for the reinstatement of the WAGE Ministry. I asked her to look back on the 2025 coalition and tell us what she sees as the biggest factors behind its success.

Jackie Neapole: I think it’s probably a combination of a bunch of things. The biggest thing is relationships, because we came together quickly, right on the spot as the news was breaking that the ministerial position was no longer a dedicated cabinet position, we were able to connect with each other and talk honestly about what was going on and what the impacts might be and to have that open and relationships of trust, I think is what made us so much more responsive so quickly.

Mary Barroll: The success of this large coalition, with so many different members, was due to its ability to maintain alignment on its priorities and messaging, all while respecting the differences within its membership.

Jackie Neapole: What also made it so successful was that organizations were allowed to be autonomous. They were allowed to actually communicate about the impacts on their organizations. The key message was that we don't want this position cut and that it's an important position. But otherwise, organizations were able to take that basic premise that the Ministry has been cut but then also apply it to how it would impact their organization. So, none of that was controlled centrally. It was a really organic process.

Mary Barroll: Jackie Neapole explains the most challenging part of presenting a united front in the reinstatement of WAGE, was keeping the discussion at the right level, a level that was detailed enough to communicate the potential impacts, but not so detailed that the coalition became bogged down and unable to move forward.

Jackie Neapole: I think the biggest challenge was just making sure that we didn't end up writing a hundred-page statement on all the impacts because there are so many impacts. And then maybe the second one, I would say, was we were getting so many emails to sign on that it was just logistically challenging, and we were updating the list once a day because people really wanted to be part of it. And it kind of just spread like wildfire once it got out there and people wanted to sign it and share it. And then, it just exponentially kept growing.

Mary Barroll: When it comes to how the updated guidance affects coalition-based advocacy, distributed across many organizations, Barbara Cartwright believes if organizations are clear about their roles, when working together in advocacy, it's simple case of each organization being responsible for tracking its own lobbying hours registering.

Barbara Cartwright: I'd say that coalitions are essential to social change, right? We work better together and things are just getting more and more collaborative out there, which is really, really important. And we work with other partners in animal welfare. We work with other partners, across multiple different sectors, when it comes to our work, on things like the links between animal violence and human violence and gender-based violence. So, we work with social groups, we work with medical groups, we work with different agencies. I don't think the guidance changes that. Each organization, from our perspective, is responsible for their own registry. Just because we work in a coalition doesn't mean we're responsible to be tracking Charity Village's, for example, registry, or how many hours you're putting in or not putting in. I think what it does do though is reinforce that we need to be clear about our roles, when multiple groups are working together and advocating. With our members, for example, we would expect that each of them, that are participating in government relations municipally, provincially and federally, when they're working along side us, they come to a meeting, for example, or provide any kind of reporting, we would make sure that they're registered, through their own organization and tracking their own registry.

Mary Barroll: Gerald Chipeur also has advice about what organizations engaging in coalition work need to be mindful of.

Gerald Chipeur: Do both the coalition and the members need to register? And the answer to that is maybe. Everybody is required to keep track of their activities, on their own, in a coalition. If it has a separate identity, in a separate team, it must, in fact, keep track of its activities, because what you will find in the legislation is that you are not allowed to hide behind a coalition. The coalition must divulge the members and who's, in fact, funding the activity, who benefits from the activity, who's involved. And then you can't divide yourself up into so many different groups that you're all under the eight hours. They're just not going to let you either divide yourself or organize yourself in a way to avoid the public disclosure.

There's three different ways you might act together. One is through a loose association. That's the most difficult because it's very difficult, with the red tape, to keep track. But if you incorporate an association, for example, the Canadian Association of Charities, then it's only that Canadian Association of Charities that has to keep track of things. You just pay your dues, you come together and talk about what your policies are going to be, and then that organization does all the work. That's one way to do it. The other way is to have a coalition hire a third-party lobby firm. And again, that third party lobby firm does all the work and then you don't have to worry about it. So, there are ways to simplify things, but for the most part, they're fairly expensive to put together the infrastructure for an association or to hire a lobby firm.

Mary Barroll: Barbara Cartwright advises that a small organization that wants to join a coalition should always think about registering as a lobbyist.

Barbara Cartwright: Out of the precautionary principle, I would register as a lobbyist before you get caught out and didn't realize that you were spending more time. People can perceive it to be a scary or difficult or overburdensome thing, I don't find it that way. And anytime I've ever had to ask a question of the person who manages our registry, it's always quick, responsive and kind and caring. So, don't be afraid to register.

Mary Barroll: And for Sean Moore as well, it all comes back to one simple thing – just get registered.

Sean Moore: First, you have to assume that probably the individual members of the coalition are registering themselves. And if they're not, someone needs to tell them that this work they do in coalition counts for advocacy work. And that is one of the challenges here. It's more important than ever to understand that registerable activity is not just being in a phone call with a political staffer or being in a meeting with a politician. It is all the preparatory work for that too. They've expanded that in a number of nuanced ways, in terms of what is calculable as registrable time. And it's virtually everything. So, it's a waste of your time to be thinking about how you dodge this thing. You need to think why it seems to be so important for you not to register.

Mary Barroll: Nancy Bélanger says one of the benefits of the Lobbying registry is that in addition to increasing transparency, it could also become a useful place to find other like-minded organizations, making it easier to find partner organizations with whom to collaborate for advocacy work.

Nancy Bélanger: The registry has quite a bit of information and you can see who else is lobbying on the same types of issues that you are lobbying in a vote. And nothing would stop anyone to reach out to someone else who's registered on the same issue. They could look at everyone else that's registered, either federally, but also provincially. There are provincial registries as well, that have different thresholds and requirements for registration. But absolutely, they can find people to collaborate with.

Mary Barroll: When it comes to the lobbying registry, Sean Moore agrees with the Commissioner that it can be a useful tool for organizations.

Sean: It's all public information. It should be one of the key research elements you undertake when you're working on a public policy issue. Let's say it's charity governance reform. You can just type that into the lobbyist registry, and you'll get a list of all the people who are registered to lobby on that. So, that gives you a sense of who you're either collaborating or competing with. Secondly, also in this registry will be information on who, specifically, many of the registrants have dealt with in government if they want to have a sit-down argument with designated public office holders, which under federal law, in a couple of provinces, that's the most senior level. That's everything from, even MPs and senators now, and bureaucrats from the ADM, level up. That gives you a sense of who everyone else is lobbying or who the important people are. So, these are not irrelevant bits of information that are freely available in the lobbyist registry.

Mary Barroll: Sean Moore also adds some important context around the Commissioner’s comments related to provincial registration requirements, which is an important aspect that nonprofits and charities must consider along with the federal rules. In fact, he highlights some interesting changes that have happened provincially and some future changes that, if they come into force, may have a big impact.

Sean Moore: I have spoken twice to the Council of Lobbying Commissioners. And much of what they wanted to talk about is harmonization, using other words. The fact that the federal government is basically -- the Commissioner, she refers to it as kind of registration by default. Assume everyone has to register unless there's a good reason they don't. And that, in fact, is happening. They get together once or twice a year and compare their experience with enforcement and compliance. And there's a general tendency to do more, not less, in this.

Mary Barroll: An additional item for nonprofits and charities to be aware of is the potential for the Lobbying Act to undergo a full review in the near future. Since this hasn’t been done since 2012, and the federal government is supposed to review the Act every 5 years, the review is long overdue. Sean Moore sees more change on the horizon and recommends that organizations stay informed.

Sean Moore: Here are the ones that were possible changes to the Act that I predicted last year. One was to amend the in-house lobbying threshold, eliminate the 20% rule. That's what we're talking about here. Harmonize registration time limits. They've done that now too. Deem members of boards of directors to be employees of the organization that they are working for. I think that could be very important in the nonprofit sector because they sign up to be board members. They don't sign up necessarily to be registered lobbyists. So, we'll have to keep an eye on that. That will definitely be, I think, applied in the private sector, whether they make a distinction for directors of associations, don't know, but they've implied that. Expand the requirements for monthly comms reports. If you are having to do a monthly communications report to the government, which you would normally do if you're dealing with designated public office holders, there's going to be a demand or a move anyway to make that information more publicly available. There's always a push by some organizations like Democracy Watch to see financial reporting. How much are you paying your employees that do this work? How much you’re paying consultants to do this work. And then there's a number of things having to do with enforcement that would likely be included. But all of those, as the Commissioner pointed out in her report, require legislative change, either that or some specific regulatory changes to the Act. How best to deal with future changes? These are big issues and these are classic issues that the nonprofits umbrella organization should do. Maybe Charity Village is one of them. But certainly, Imagine Canada, that tries to act as the voice of the nonprofit sector.

So, if you have time or energy or resources to put into dealing with this issue, I would suggest doing them in that direction rather than trying to take on the load of your own independent movement thing. There's this endless variety of ways to do that. But I would say try to go broad in terms of the constituency that you're speaking for rather than just your own.

Mary Barroll: For anyone feeling discouraged or intimidated by these new rules about engaging in public policy or advocacy work, Nancy Bélanger wants to reassure them that the only thing that’s changing is an increased transparency, and what she believes are clearer rules that are easier for nonprofits and charities to follow

Nancy Bélanger: I don't believe that there are stricter rules. I think they're actually clearer and I think they're actually easier to apply. The Lobbying Act was meant to regulate those who have, as a profession or as part of their job, to communicate with public officials. Lobbying is a legitimate activity, but it has to be transparent.

Opening an account takes five minutes. Entering the information in the registry, for the most part, are drop down menus. You indicate which departments you're planning. Is it about a bill? Is it about a policy? And then there's a few lines that you need to explain your details of what it is you want to lobby about. Once that's done, you're done. You only need to go update if you need to go update. And then there's monthly requirements. So, there's some monthly reports, if you end up having an oral and arranged and advanced communication with senior public officials. We call them designated public officials. And we're here to help people navigate that. But once you've registered, you're done. And so, this might be a half hour of your time for transparency, for visibility, which to me is an extremely small price to pay for transparency, which again, is one of our pillars for healthy democracy.

Mary Barroll: As nonprofits and charities adjust to these changes, Nancy Bélanger encourages them to communicate with the Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying Canada, if they have any questions.

Nancy Bélanger: We've got a great advisory team that will help anyone who's new to this to navigate the system, in the registry. On our website, we've got all sorts of information that we update, I wouldn't say daily, but very close to. We have a great landing page, right now, that's just recently been uploaded to help people. We're doing a lot of outreach activities. I have not said no to any requests for outreach sessions. We invite people to communicate with us. I really want people to know that we're here to support them. It is a big change. They need to understand the rules. And if they're in doubt, to call us. Really, that's my biggest advice.

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Mary Barroll: There's clearly a lot to consider as organizations navigate these changes to the Lobbying Act—and what they mean for how nonprofits and charities show up in advocacy and government relations. At a time when many in the sector are facing economic uncertainty, funding pressures, and growing demand, stepping further into advocacy can feel daunting. But as we've heard throughout this conversation, it's also an opportunity.

An opportunity to increase your organization's visibility. To build trust. To engage more meaningfully with decision-makers—and ultimately, to help shape the policies and laws that affect the communities that you serve. Because advocacy isn't separate from your mission—it's an extension of it.

And importantly, it's not about having all the answers or getting everything right from the start. It's about taking that first step—building relationships, listening, collaborating, and approaching advocacy with both intention and openness. So, as you think about what this moment means for your organization, we'll leave you with some final words of advice and inspiration from our guests.

Nancy Bélanger: When I came out with this new bulletin, I knew that this was going to be a big change for organizations and charitable organizations. But what I have heard that has been very positive is that people have said it increases their visibility. So, I think we need to look at this as a positive change.

Gerald Chipeur: This legislation is enabling and is, in my view, positive in the sense that it provides transparency for the public. One should not be afraid of registering. There may be some exceptions, but this legislation does not condemn, does not make the lobbying activity illegal, does not in any way disparage those who communicate with the government.

Tim Richter: I think lately, our political discourse has become Twitter and Instagram, that's not real life. And I think it's easier for us to be angry and ~~at~~ pound tables and to get exercised and to shout at each other. But I think if you're really interested in moving the dial on an issue, it comes down to engagement. We have to be ready as charities to step out of our ideological worldview. Because you're trying to build that mutually beneficial outcome. You're trying to understand who's across the table from you and figure out how to give them what they need to get what you want. And that's a discourse, that's a conversation.

Jackie Neapole: I think the most important thing is to have relationships of trust with other organizations within your ecosystem where you can work together for an end goal that's bigger than your own organization.

Sean Moore: Seven reasons organizations fail in their advocacy. And the first one is they ask for the wrong thing. They thought they had it all thought through but they never talked to anybody in government about this. They never looked at others, how others might view that. They ask for the wrong thing, and they don't really understand, in many cases, how decisions get made. So, they immediately start meeting with MPs who have nothing to do with it. The most important people to talk with, in government, are political staff in ministers' offices and the bureaucrats who provide the advice, provide the background on issues. That's the place to start.

Barbara Cartwright: If you're stepping into advocacy, I still have a very strong democratic belief that the best way to do that is to call your local MP. Start there. Just develop a relationship. Calling and saying, I'm Barb Cartwright. I'm from the local SPCA. I'd love to come in and tell you more about what we do. Would that be OK? So, you're not asking for a bill. You're not asking for regulation. You're not asking for any change at all. That is not lobbying. You do not have to register if you're just giving out information and developing relationships. So, if you haven't started, you could start there. And then, once you start to engage in any kind of conversation about, now I want change, that's when you have to register. If you're sending out messages to your local population, or your constituents, to write a letter to Parliament, that is part of the lobbying registry. So, once you start to get active, then you have to register. But for me, the more charities that can be active with parliamentarians, the better outcome we're going to have for Canada, in the long run.

Mary Barroll: So, perhaps the question is—what does it mean for your organization to meet this moment? At a time of economic uncertainty, growing community need, and global instability, advocacy is one way your mission can show up beyond your organization—helping to shape decisions, influence systems, and contribute to meaningful change. When you use your voice, you help ensure the communities you serve are heard where it matters most. And if the new lobbying rules are causing you concern, as you step up your advocacy work, the Commissioner of Lobbying wants you to know her office is there to help.

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Thank you to all our guests for their keen insight and wise advice. Be sure to visit our website and our show notes for more information on the resources, reports and programs mentioned in this episode. If you'd like to hear more of what our guests have to say, check out our full video interviews on our website. CharityVillage is proud to be the Canadian source for nonprofit news, employment services, crowdfunding, e-learning, HR resources and tools, and so much more. Please take a moment to check out our website at charity village dot com. We love to receive your feedback about our podcast and your ideas for stories you'd like to hear about, so please follow us, like and comment wherever you get your podcasts.

In our next episode of CharityVillage Connects, we explore how AI is reshaping the way nonprofits work, plan, and support their teams. But with opportunity comes important questions. What does responsible AI adoption really look like in the nonprofit sector? We'll dive into the impact on employee wellbeing alongside critical issues like ethics, privacy, data security, governance, and organizational readiness. Our guests share practical insights on how leaders can embrace innovation while harnessing the power of AI for social good -- responsibly and ethically. We'll explore the key questions every organization should be asking before scaling AI tools within their workplace.

That's in our next episode of CharityVillage Connects. I'm Mary Barroll. Thanks for listening.

Theme music

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