



South Asian Philanthropy in Ontario

In January 2013, the Association of Fundraising Professionals Foundation for Philanthropy – Canada hosted a conference that brought together charity leaders, donors and volunteers to explore the philanthropy of the South Asian community in Ontario. Here is a collection of insights from the conference and beyond.

AT A GLANCE

- 2 000** Number of ethnic groups of South Asian origin
- Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Marathi, Punjabi, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu** Most common South Asian languages
- Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism and Sikhism** Most common South Asian religions
- 1 600 000** South Asian population in Canada
- 4 100 000** Estimated South Asian population by 2031
- Toronto, Brampton, Mississauga and Markham:** Cities in Ontario with the greatest concentration of South Asians

TERMINOLOGY

South Asia: The cluster of countries including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. South Asian diasporas come directly from these and many other countries throughout the world.

CASE STUDY

In an effort to build bridges with the growing Sikh community in Brampton, in 2007, the William Osler Health Centre Foundation opened its doors for Akhand Paath, an event that involves the continuous recitation of the Sikh scriptures. Over 1,500 people attended the 48-hour ceremony, surpassing everyone’s expectations. This event marked the beginning of a long-term engagement plan that reflects the needs of the local community in a meaningful way. Since then, the hospital has held a number of fundraising events, raising almost \$200,000 from over 10,000 attendees, the cornerstones of an unprecedented \$2.5 million commitment from members of the Punjabi and Sikh communities.

WISE WORDS



“The South Asian community is one of the largest cultural groups that make up Canada’s “minority majority.” It makes sense, then, that a growing number of non-profit leaders are taking an active interest in learning about the charitable motivations of this diverse community. However, many of the speakers at the South Asian Philanthropy Conference highlighted an important fact: with all of the historical, cultural and linguistic dimensions of the community, fundraisers must avoid the temptation to develop one overarching strategy to engage and solicit South Asian donors. Giving is a very personal act, motivated by one’s faith, professional networks, family, financial capacity, and so on. While this can be said of every community, the countless definitions of “South Asian” underscore the importance of taking the time to build deep and meaningful connections rather than creating a monolithic engagement plan for fundraising. This is a significant lesson, especially as emerging donor groups continue to offer up their energies and resources to solve some of the most pressing issues of our time.”

— Aditya Jha, C.M., LL.D (Hon), Philanthropist and Chair, South Asian Philanthropy Conference

BACK IN TIME

THE FIRST KNOWN RECORD OF SOUTH ASIANS IN CANADA DATES BACK TO 1903.

Punjabi Sikhs arrived in British Columbia seeking employment opportunities. While they continued to immigrate, negative feelings by whites towards South Asians began to develop. In 1914, the Komagata Maru sailed into Vancouver carrying 376 passengers from Punjab, India. Although everyone had British citizenship, only 24 were admitted to Canada; the remaining passengers were not allowed to land and

the ship was forced to return to India. This significant event highlights the discriminatory practices designed to keep out immigrants of Asian origin. In the 1960s, formal racial restrictions were removed from Canada’s immigration policies resulting in the exponential growth of the South Asian community. The South Asian Canadian community grew from just 6,774 to 67,925 between 1961 and 1971.

During the first decade of the 21 century India remained the second largest source of immigrants (and the second largest source of foreign students in Canada). Pakistan was also among the top ten sources of immigrants to Canada.

In December 2001, the Government of Canada declared May as South Asian Heritage month and events marking this occasion can be enjoyed across Canada.

INSIGHTS FROM THE EXPERTS

Conference presenters and participants shared many great examples and tips about giving within the South Asian community. Here is what we heard:

EVERY FAITH HAS A CHARITABLE TENET.

PRINCIPAL OF ISLAM: ALL THINGS BELONG TO GOD, WEALTH IS HELD BY US IN TRUST.

THE CULTURE OF GIVING IS NOT JUST ABOUT DONATIONS, IT'S ALSO ABOUT GIVING TIME, ENERGY AND SPIRITUALITY.

SOUTH ASIANS ARE DRAWN TO GIVING CIRCLES.

OFTEN SOUTH ASIANS GIVE TO BACK HOME AND TO RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS (TEMPLES OR MOSQUES).

"DANNA" IS A FORM OF ALMS. BUDDHISTS BELIEVE THAT GIVING WITHOUT SEEKING ANYTHING IN RETURN LEADS TO GREATER SPIRITUAL WEALTH.

DONORS WANT TO GIVE WHEN AN ORGANIZATION REFLECTS THEIR IDENTITY.

TO ATTRACT SOUTH ASIAN DONORS MAY TAKE DECADES AND REQUIRES PATIENCE.

THE NEXT GENERATION TENDS TO GIVE TO "MAINSTREAM" CHARITIES.

OLD WAY OF THINKING: IT'S THE JOB OF GOVERNMENT TO SUPPORT PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS.

CHARITY HAS EXPANDED BEYOND HELPING THE NEEDY AND SUFFERING; IT IS ABOUT GIVING TO YOUR "EXPANDED-SELF".

IT'S ABOUT LEADERSHIP: THINK ABOUT THE TOP 10 LEADERS IN THE COMMUNITY.

THE GOVERNMENT MAY PROVIDE BUT MONEY FOR SOCIAL CAUSES NEEDS TO COME FROM OTHER SOURCES TOO.

SOCIAL MEDIA ALLOWS YOU TO TAP INTO THE EVER-CHANGING INTERESTS OF DONORS.

PHILANTHROPY IS THE PRIVATE AND PUBLIC COMING TOGETHER TO COME UP WITH INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS TO COMPLEX PROBLEMS.

"SEVA" IS A SANSKRIT WORD MEANING SELFLESS SERVICE.

PHILANTHROPY IS ABOUT OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES: IT'S ABOUT TRANSFORMATION.

FOR A FULL LIST OF REFERENCES, VIDEOS AND RESOURCES, PLEASE VISIT:

www.afpinclusivegiving.ca

The South Asian Philanthropy Conference was part of a series for fundraising professionals, donors, and volunteers to develop a greater understanding of the giving traditions and charitable interests of several diverse communities in Ontario. Organized by the AFP Greater Toronto Chapter and the AFP Ottawa Chapter, this initiative was generously funded by the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration's Partnership Project and the AFP Foundation for Philanthropy – Canada.