

Estimating Funding to Environmental Canadian Operating Charities 2000 to 2021

Prepared for:
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Abstract

This report uses T3010 Registered Charity Information Return (hereafter T3010) data to estimate the revenues of operating charities (charitable organizations - CRA designation code “C”) focused on the environment. The T3010 and related data from Environment Funders Canada (EFC) provide a few sources of information that are useful for identifying operating charities focused on the environment. However, each of these is only an approximation due to important limitations. Despite these limitations, we can use this data to examine the share of resources directed to charities likely to be environmental and the dollars of revenue going to these organizations in order to understand likely trends in the revenue and support directed to environmental charities.

Examining the percentage of total funding that might be going to environmentally-focused organizations (using the best of the measures available in T3010 data) indicates they received about 2% of receipted donations and about 2% of revenue from other charities in 2021 but that the total revenue of environmentally-focused charities was only about one half of one percent (0.5%) of the total revenue of all operating charities.

Data suggests increased revenue for environmentally-focused charities in Canada. When examining specific revenue categories, there have been substantial changes, including distinct fluctuations in revenue from other charities and receipted donations. For example, using the best measure available below and measuring in constant dollars, revenue from the category “funds from other charities” peaked in 2006 (about 295M in 2022 CAD) and is yet to return to this level (measured at about 173M in 2022 CAD in 2021).

Caveats

This report relies on multiple elements of the T3010 return and associated worksheets provided by the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) and a list of operating charities (hereafter charities or organizations) receiving funding from members of Environment Funders Canada (hereafter EFC). As the administrative data are generated for regulatory purposes, each is a limited and, therefore, imperfect way to identify the actual (and unknown) population of environmentally-focused charities and to estimate the resources they use for environmental purposes; some of the most fundamental limitations of each measure are described below. This report does not include the revenues of organizations that are unlikely to be primarily environmental (i.e. universities) despite the contributions of these organizations.

Data

This report covers the period from 2000 to 2021, using financial data provided by operating charities (in the T3010 Section D and Schedule 6 data), foundations' gifts to qualified donees (T3010 line 5050), and records of distributions provided by foundations (in the T1236 Qualified Donees Worksheet). The percentages and dollar amounts described in this report are totals for a group of organizations, and the trends identified should not be confused with the revenue trends of single organizations. All dollar values marked CAD 2022 have been inflation-adjusted using Statistics Canada Consumer Price Index data for comparability.

Except for inflation adjustment, the financial data used in this analysis are largely unmodified, outside of apparent errors, such as negative values in revenue categories that should only contain positive entries and replacing missing values with zeros, where appropriate. Also, this analysis utilizes **only the last tax record for charities with multiple filings in a tax year**, including corrections or updates made in later filings; it may also include partial filings containing only corrections to prior submissions and missing other data. **At this stage, data have not been analyzed for spurious observations or corrected in any other way (such as winsorizing¹ data to minimize the influence of outliers) due to the judgment that these adjustments may introduce more error in totals than they eliminate.** Norms or requirements for T3010 reporting may also have shifted during this period. These could include changes to charities' reports of revenues and foundations' reported expenditures on gifts to qualified donees.² As discussed below, norms and procedures for classifying charities within the CRA Charities Directorate also may have changed.

The revenue³ variables analyzed include total revenue (line 4700), the category "funds from other charities" (line 4510, receipted gifts (line 4500), sales of goods and services (line 4640), total government funding (either line 4570 in Section D or a combination of lines 4540, 4550,

¹ This involves setting the extreme values of a distribution to a specific value in that distribution; for example, setting all values above the 95th percentile (the 96th to 99th percentiles) to the value at the 95th percentile.

² Some changes seem likely. For example, the number of gifts included in foundations' disbursement to qualified donees worksheets changed dramatically during this period, even though the total amount distributed was more consistent; this may indicate sole listings aggregating multiple distributions by business number (BN) in early data and the presence of multiple listings for each recipient in latter years.

³ The term revenue is used to represent both revenue generated by the organization and support from the public or other charities.

and 4560 in Schedule 6, depending on the operating charities financial characteristics), unreceipted gifts (line 4530), and unreceipted gifts from fundraising (line 4630).

Classification

This report classifies organizations in two primary ways: using “program codes” from the CRA and with CRA “category codes;” it also relies on a list of charities funded by EFC members from 2000 to 2022. Substantial differences exist in the operating charities classified as environmental by each method. While these differences cannot be reconciled, counts are presented by each classification to highlight the difference in estimates using each technique. Variations in the counts produced by each classification method for the tax year 2021 are examined in Table 1 (below), while Figure 1 (below) displays the count of organizations over time. Results from the most consistent methods are examined for common trends.

Method 1: CRA Program Code

Program classifications are found in lines 1200, 1210, and 1220 in the T3010 data; environmental programs are represented by categories G1 (nature, habitat-conservation groups), G2 (preservation of species, wildlife protection) and G3 (general environmental protection, recycling services). Organizations were classified as environmental by program code if T3010 data indicated an environmental program in any year of the CRA data; from this, a list of recipients was generated and reviewed by EFC staff to identify any organizations likely to have primary purposes in other areas (such as animal welfare), indicating that about 11% (147 out of a total of 1315 charities with environmental program codes) of organizations classified in this way had other primary purposes. These operating charities were excluded from the results presented below.

Table 1, Panels A and B compare the differences between the 1,168 (row total “1” of Panel A, see “a”) organizations classified as environmental in this way and other methods of classification. For example, this measure only includes 238 of the 419 organizations classified as environmental (row total “1” of Panel A, see “b” and “c,” respectively) by category code (57%) in 2021. So, while it is impossible to estimate the number of organizations missed by this method, this indicates that the second measure identified 181 (see “d”) additional organizations as environmental in 2021.

One reason for the difference between this method and others is that program classification data availability has changed over time; it was prevalent in T3010 data before 2018 (approximately 72K records in 2017 for all charity types), fell off in that year (approximately 63K records), and declined rapidly thereafter (for example, approximately 15K records in 2019), so this measure may miss new organizations. This measure is also limited as it does not determine the percentage of operations dedicated to environmental programs, counting the entirety of each organization’s revenue as “environmental.”

Table 1. Comparison of Classification Methods, Operating Charities in 2021

| Table 1. Comparison of Classification Methods, Operating Charities in 2021 | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|---------------|------------------|--------------------|---|--------------|------------------|---------------------|--|---------------|------------------|--------|
| Panel A. Program Code and Category Code | | | | Panel B. Recipient of EFC Member Disbursement (in Any Year) and Program | | | | Panel C. Recipient of EFC Member Disbursement (in Any Year) and Category | | | |
| Program Code | Category Code | | Total | EFC Recipient | Program Code | | Total | EFC Recipient | Category Code | | Total |
| | 0 | 1 | | | 0 | 1 | | | 0 | 1 | |
| 0 | 72,061 | 181 ^d | 72,242 | 0 | 57,922 | 425 | 58,347 | 0 | 58,180 | 167 | 58,347 |
| 1 | 930 | 238 ^b | 1,168 ^a | 1 | 14,320 | 743 ^f | 15,063 ^e | 1 | 14,811 | 252 ^g | 15,063 |
| Total | 72,991 | 419 ^c | 73,410 | Total | 72,242 | 1,168 | 73,410 | Total | 72,991 | 419 | 73,410 |
| 1== Environmental by Classification Method, 0== Other | | | | | | | | | | | |

Method 2: CRA Category Code

Organizations were classified as environmental by category code if assigned to category “170” in the CRA T3010 Data from 2018 to 2022.⁴ This assignment was applied to prior years’ observations for each organization with a record from 2018 to 2022 but could not be applied to any organization without a record during this period.⁵ This method will, therefore, exclude observations from organizations that did not have status as a CRA-registered operating charity from 2018 to 2022; it also relies on the accuracy of the CRA designation and attributes all the revenues of these organizations as “environmental.” In 2021, 419 Organizations were in this category (as demonstrated in the total for column “1” of Table 1, Panel A, see “c”).

Method 3: Combination of Methods 1 and 2

Given the weaknesses of both methods 1 and 2, they were used in concert to identify organizations. Relying on a list of organizations classified as environmental by either method helps mitigate the shortcomings of each due to missing data, and it may limit some of the misclassifications present in either method. Still, it remains imperfect due to the limitations of each method.

Method 4: Operating Charities Funded by EFC Members

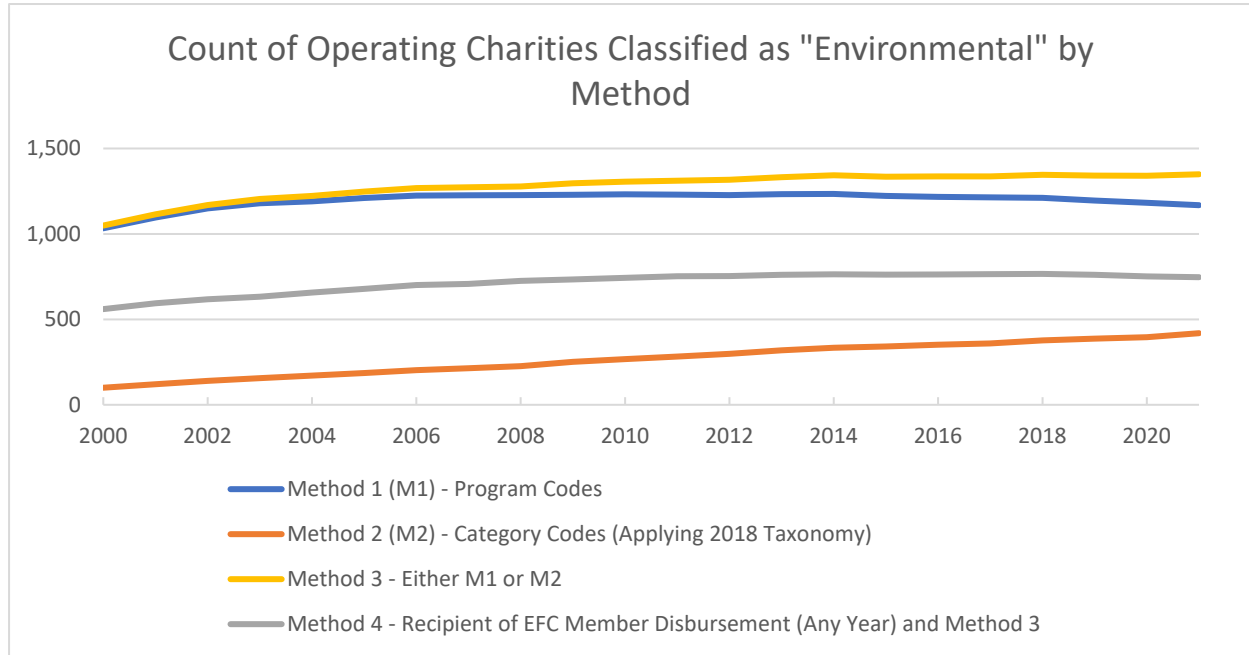
A final method used to classify charities as environmental if T3010 data indicated they received a gift from an EFC member foundation from 2000 to 2022. This classification relied on a current list of EFC members and used the history of their distributions to identify recipients. It is limited by the accuracy of the recipient business numbers on the qualified donee worksheet (T1236) and by many of the issues described for the methods above. The list identified 15,063 operating charities (“e” in Table 1, Panel B) that had received funding from an EFC member at any time between 2000 and 2022, and it included many organizations that were not primarily

⁴ 2022 was included in this classification but excluded from the analysis of revenues below as the 2022 tax data was incomplete when the panel was constructed (approximately 75% of observations were available). This was to be as inclusive as possible when identifying environmentally-focused charities.

⁵ The CRA Category Codes taxonomy did not include a category for environmental organizations prior to 2018.

environmental in purpose (such as universities). Therefore, it was utilized to check other methods but not to estimate the revenue available to environmental charities. Comparing this with the methods above revealed that 743 out of 1168 operating charities (“f” in Table 1, Panel B) classified environmental by program code had received funding from EFC members, while 252 of the 419 operating charities (“g” in Table 1, Panel C) classified by category code had received funding from EFC members.

Figure 1. Count by Method



Results

Results Approximating Environmental Charities' Revenue

The results presented in Figures 2, 3, and 4 below rely on charities' T3010-reported revenue from 2000 to 2021.⁶ These represent the first three methods outlined above. Each figure contains two panels presenting: A) the percentage of revenue directed to or earned by environmental operating charities out of the revenue of all operating charities, and B) the amount of “environmental” operating charities' revenue in constant dollars (CAD 2022). **The vertical scale varies in each figure to maximize readability.**

Results: Method 1 CRA Program Code

The percentage of sector revenue dedicated to charities identified as environmental using CRA-provided program codes is seen in Panel A of Figure 2 below; this ranged from .47% to .66% from 2000 to 2021 but was .55% in both the first and last years examined. The category “funds from other charities” varied as a percentage, changing from 1.79% to 1.99%, but substantially higher from 2002 to 2008. Total government funding and receipted gifts, the two most important sources of revenue in total dollars (Panel B of Figure 2 below), increased as percentages. Government funding went from .24% to .31%, and receipted gifts also grew from 1.31% to 2.33%. Despite this growth, receipted gifts fluctuated substantially, as will be discussed under Method 3 below.

Examining charities' revenue in constant dollars from 2000 to 2021 (Figure 2 below), it is apparent that revenues to the group of charities classified as environmental by program code have grown, an increase from 814M CAD in 2000 to 1.8B CAD in 2021 (growth of 221%; seen only in Panel A of Figure 2). Over the entire period, total revenue growth is largely a function of dramatic increases in funding from other charities, which has grown from approximately 7.1M (2000) to approximately 153M CAD (2021), a 2144% increase; receipted gifts, which increased from 137M (2000) to 250M CAD (2021), a 182% increase; funding from all levels of government, which increased from 208M (2000) to 749 M CAD (2021), a 361% increase; and in the sales of goods and services, which increased from 126M (2003) to 209M CAD (2021), a 166% increase⁷. However, as noted, some of these revenue sources have fluctuated dramatically.

⁶ In order to measure foundation disbursements, totals were also generated from foundations' disbursement to qualified donee worksheets, but these totals generally tracked the “funds from other charities” reported in the figures below (although lower) and are not included.

⁷ Sales of goods and services and unreceipted gifts from fundraising revenue not reported on the T3010 tax form until 2003 tax year.

Figure 2. Results Method 1 - Environmental Funding Classifying Operating Charities using CRA Program Code

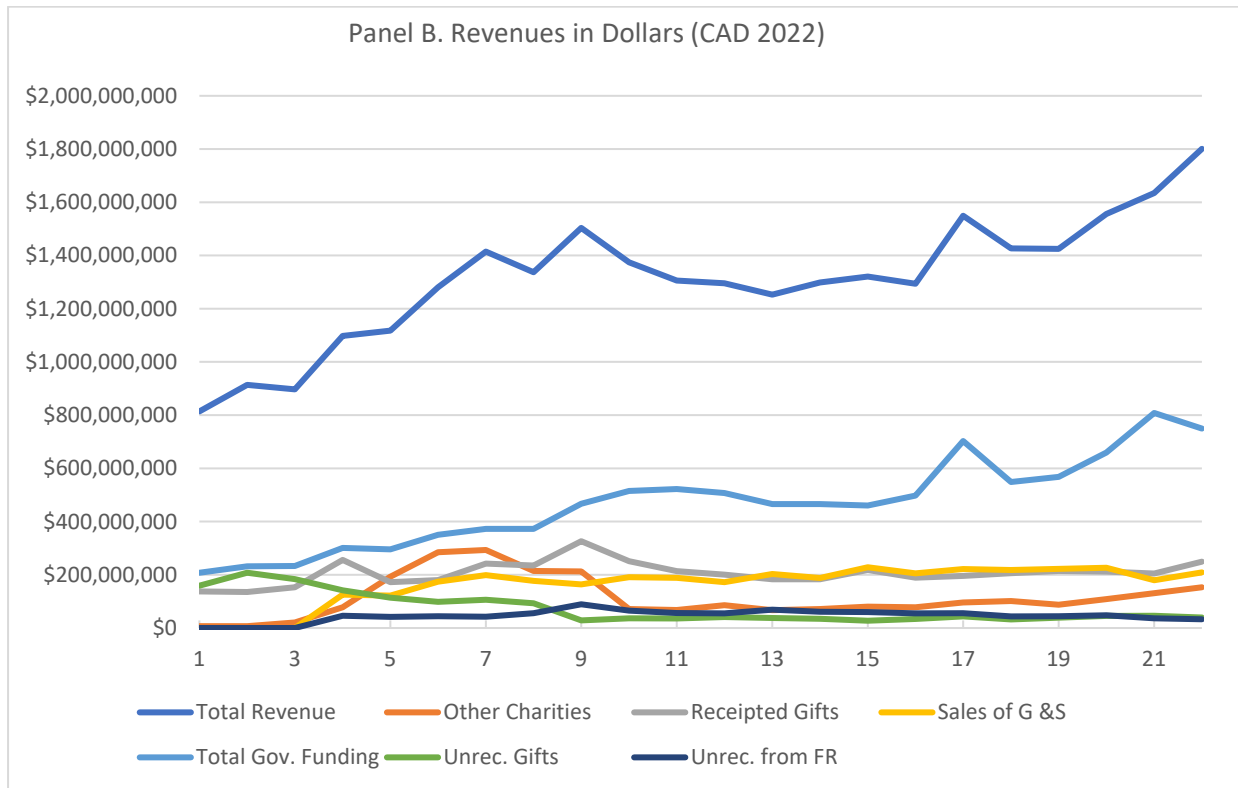
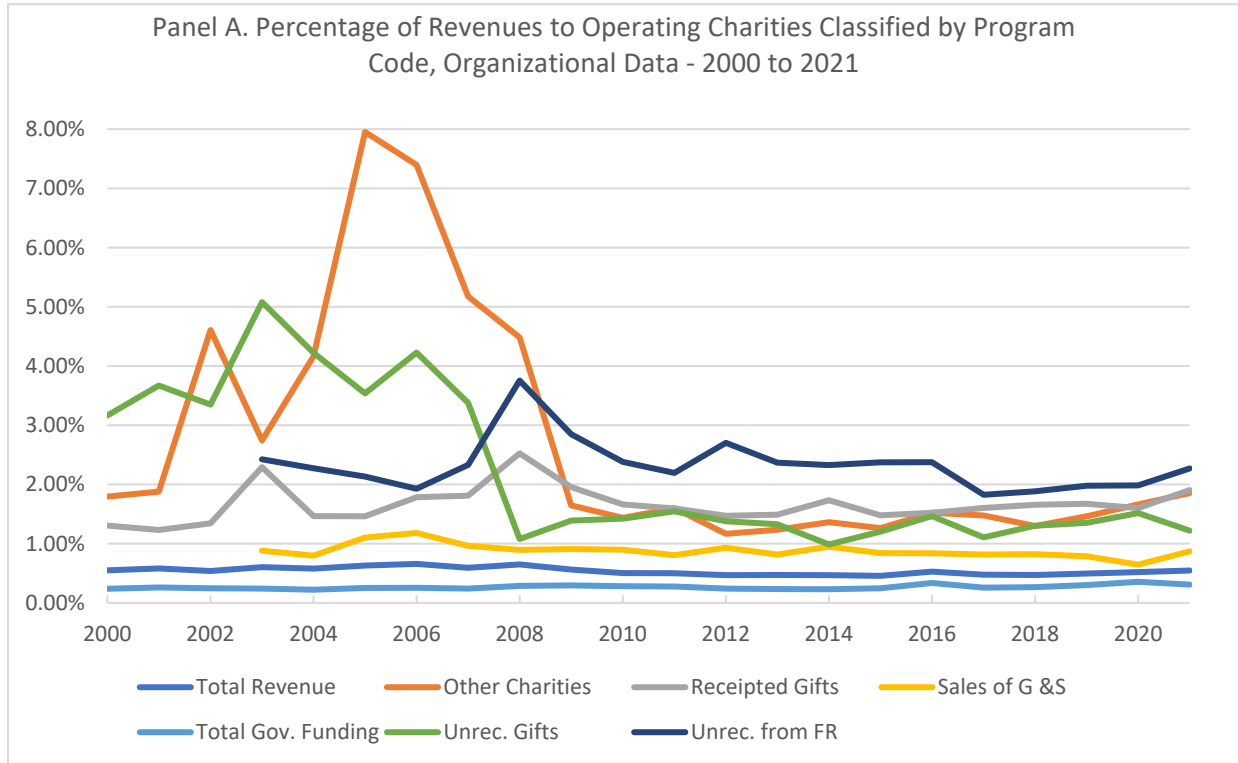
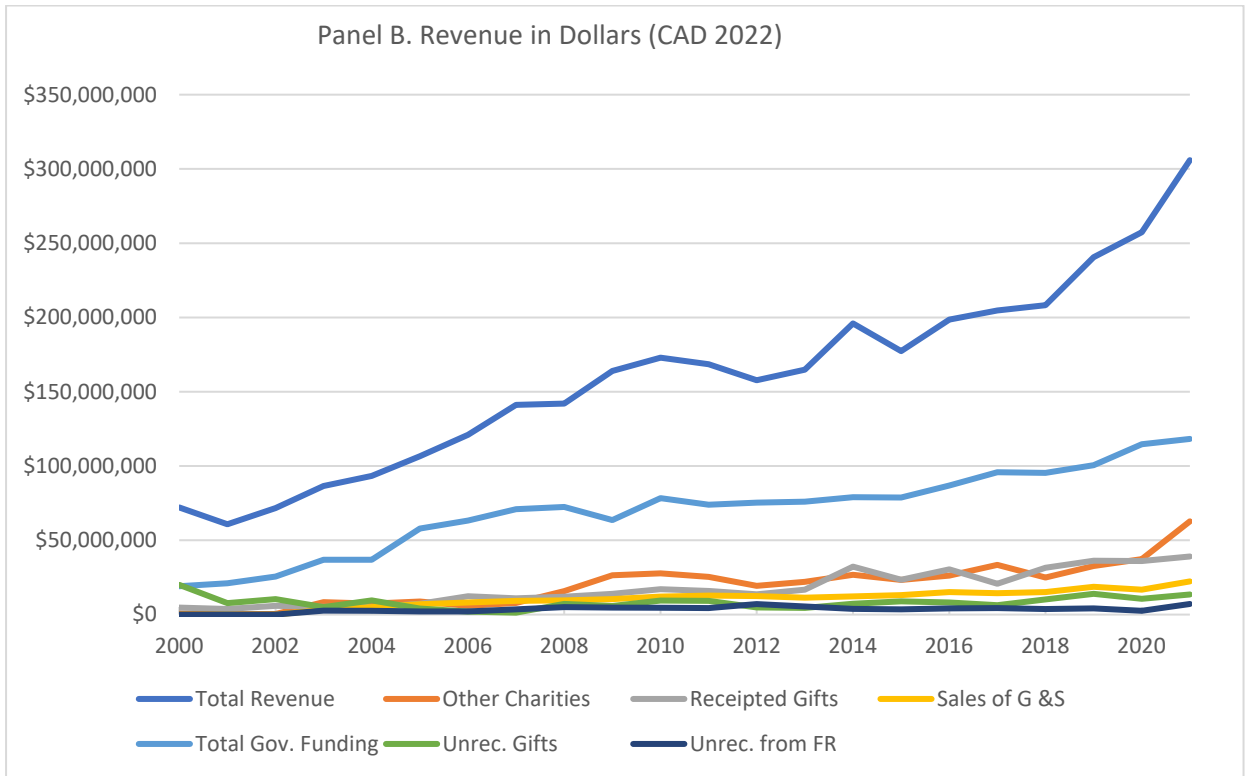
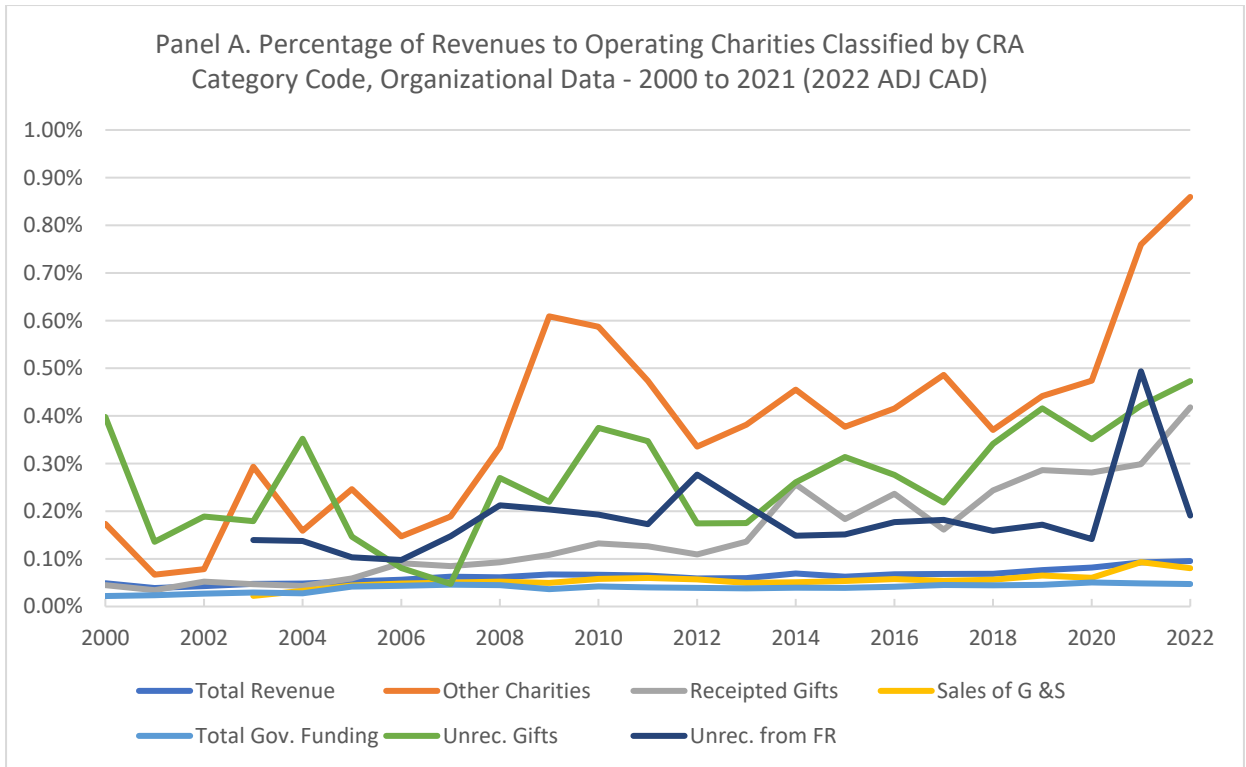


Figure 3. Results Method 2 - Environmental Funding Classifying Operating Charities using CRA Category Codes



Results: Method 2 CRA Category Code

Examining charities classified by category code (Figure 3 above) is very likely to undercount environmental charities before 2018, but it provides additional information on which operating charities might be environmental in purpose. This measure captures fewer charities and attributes a smaller percentage (Panel A of Figure 3) of the sector's total revenue to them. These percentages range from .04% to .09% and increase from 2000 (.05%) to 2021 (.09%). The percentage of revenue from other charities increased from .17% in 2000 to .76% in 2021, while receipted gifts increased from .04% to .42% by this measure.

Examining the revenue of charities classified as environmental by category code in constant dollars also suggests revenue growth. By this measure, total revenue grew 424% (72M CAD to 306M CAD) from 2000 to 2021 (Panel B of Figure 3 below). Revenue categories also grew dramatically by this measure. "Funds from other charities" increased from approximately 691K CAD (2000) to approximately 63M CAD (2021); receipted gifts, which increased from approximately 5M (2000) to 39M CAD (2021) funding from all levels of government, which increased from 19M (2000) to 118 M CAD (2021), and in the sales of goods and services, which increased from 3M (2003) to 21M CAD (2021)⁸. It is important to remember that this measure captures a smaller number of charities, is prone to exclude older charities, completely omits the revenue of charities not present in the data after 2018, and that both percentages and revenue totals likely underestimate the revenue of environmental charities dramatically, while growth may be overstated.

⁸ Sales of goods and services and unreceipted gifts from fundraising revenue not reported on the T3010 tax form until 2003 tax year.

Results: Method 3 (Combination of Methods 1 and 2)

Examining charities classified using a combination of the above methods is likely more accurate than either method alone, although it is also imperfect. This measure classifies an operating charity as environmental if it meets the criteria for either of the methods described above. Appendices A, B, and C present the revenues of charities classified by this method in more detail.

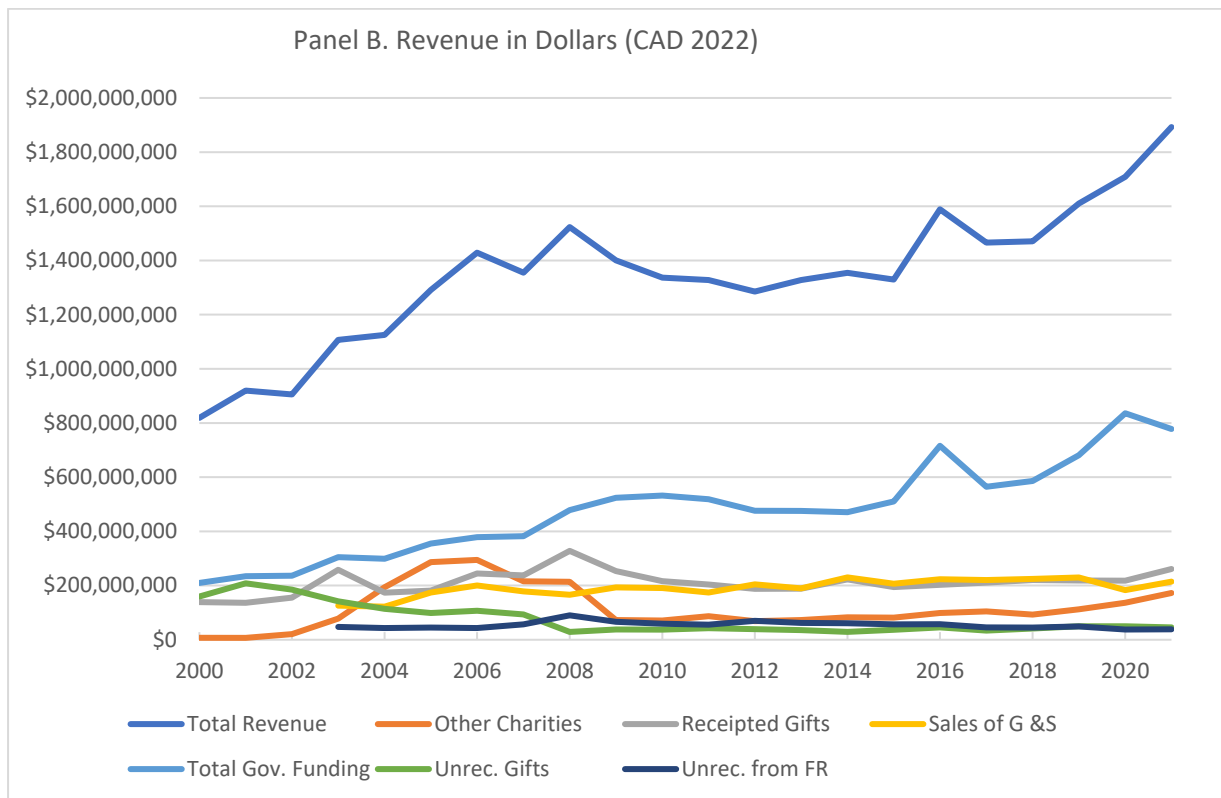
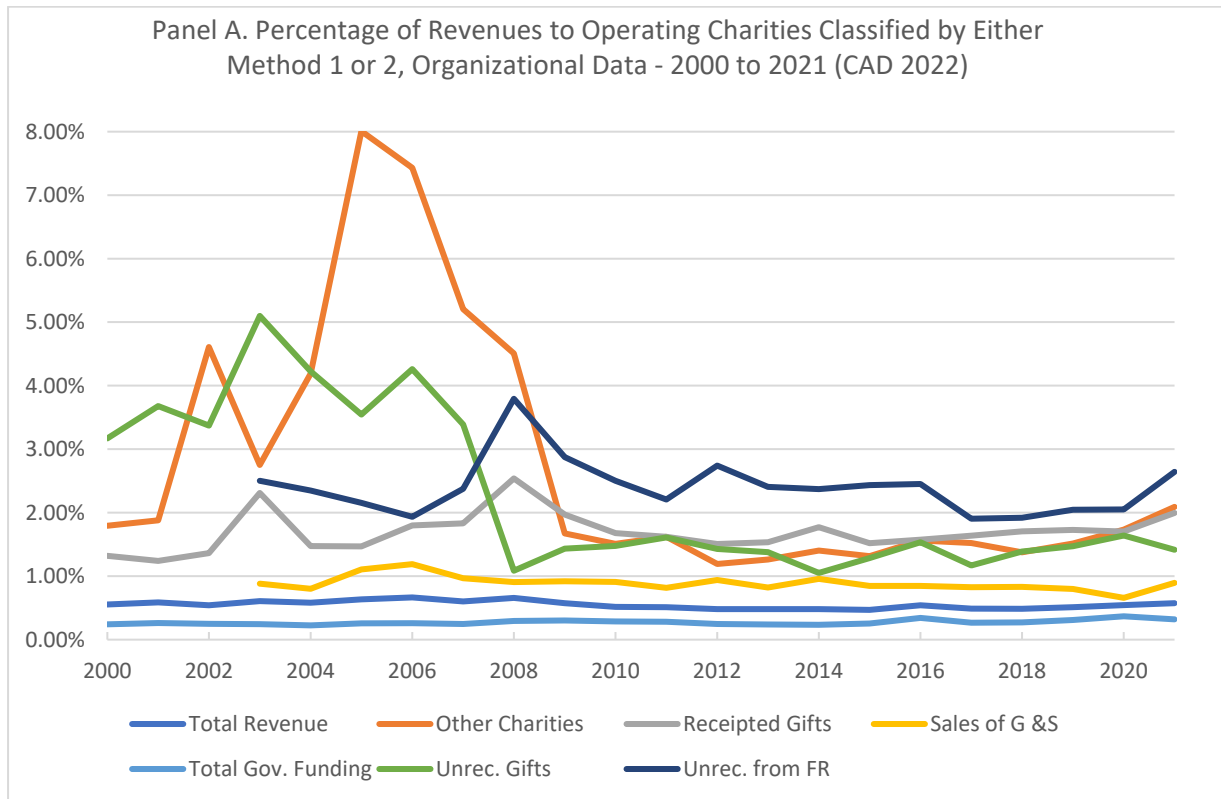
This measure attributes about .6% of total revenue to environmental charities, .55% in 2000 and .57% in 2021 (Panel A of Figure 4, below). Revenue from other charities fluctuated over this period, with relatively similar percentages in 2000 (1.79%) and 2021 (2.09%) but a peak from 2002 to 2008 in which each year's percentage was higher than any other year outside of this peak. This reflects a substantial change in the revenue structure of this subsector, as measured, and increases early in this peak correspond to the primary source of their growth in constant dollars from 2003 to 2005, although government revenue seems to drive their revenue growth afterwards (see Panel B of Figure 4). This percentage declined sharply in 2009 and only began approaching 2001 levels in 2021. The revenue category receipted gifts has also fluctuated, with peaks in 2003 (2.31%), 2008 (2.54%), and 2021 (2%). Appendix A includes an enlarged version of Panel A of Figure 4.

Examining revenue change in the years 2000 and 2021 in constant dollars indicates revenue growth, with results (Figure 4, below) closely following those generated with Method 1. By this measure, total revenue grew 231% (819M CAD to 1.89B CAD) from 2000 to 2021 (Panel B of Figure 4). Revenue categories also grew dramatically by this measure. "Funds from other charities" increased from approximately 7.1M CAD (2000) to approximately 173M CAD (2021), an increase of about 2418%; receipted gifts, which increased from approximately 138M (2000) to 261M CAD (2021), a 188% increase; funding from all levels of government, which increased from 209M (2000) to 776M CAD (2021), a 371% increase; and in the sales of goods and services, which increased from 126M (2003) to approximately 215M CAD (2021), an increase of 170%.⁹

It is worth noting that despite overall growth, there have been dramatic changes to some of these revenue categories over this period. For example, funding from other charities, as measured in the T3010 data, appears to have peaked in 2006 at about 295 M (2022 CAD) and has yet to recover, at about 173M in 2021 (2022 CAD); this highlights the potentially shifting nature of this source of revenue. Revenue from receipted gifts also seems to have fluctuated dramatically (with peaks in 2003, 2008, and 2021). These fluctuations suggest that government funding has likely been a critical source of revenue for environmental charities when the revenue categories "funds from other charities" and "public support" decline. Aggregating the revenue categories of receipted gifts, unreceipted revenue from fundraising, and unreceipted gifts suggests widely changing financial support from the public within this period despite overall revenue growth. This total has dramatically decreased in some years (-116M in 2004, -89M in 2009) while substantially increasing in others (107 in 2003, 70M in 2006, 59M in 2008). Appendix B contains an enlarged version of Panel B of Figure 4, with total revenues excluded to present revenue streams in more detail.

⁹ Sales of goods and services and unreceipted gifts from fundraising revenue not reported on the T3010 tax form until 2003 tax year.

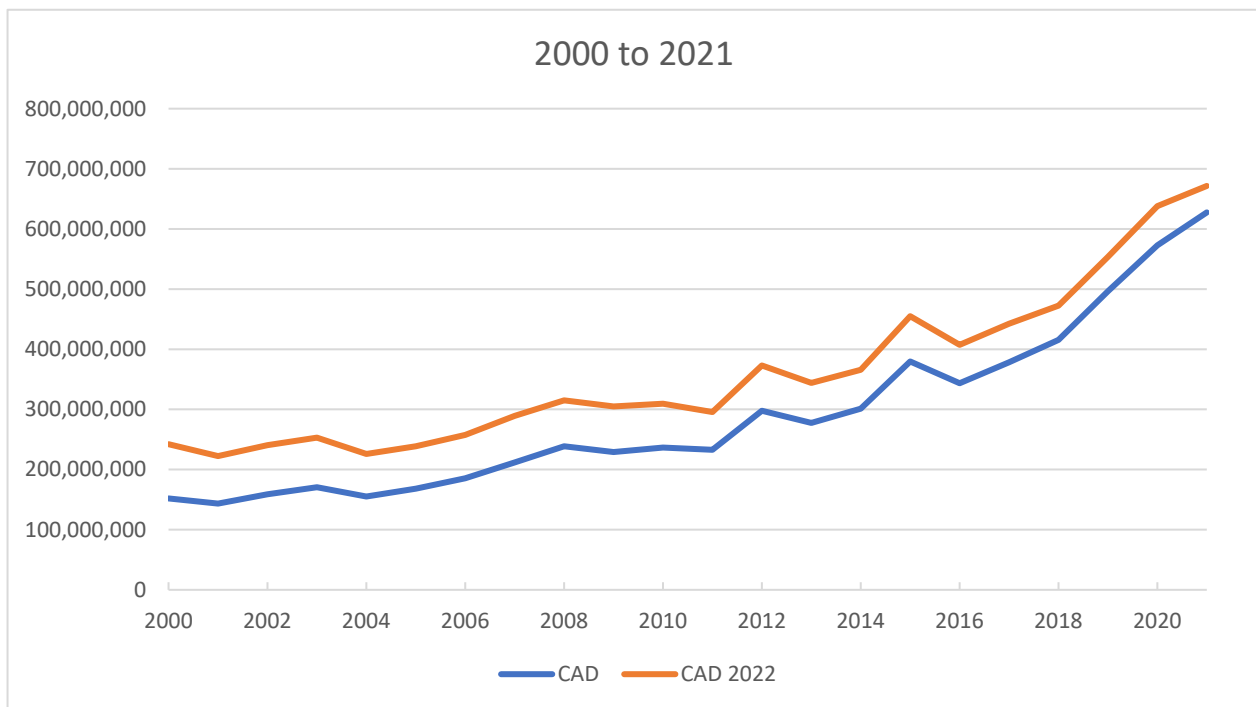
Figure 4. Results of Method 3 from 2000 to 2021



Results: EFC Member Disbursements

Another method that might approximate the change in funding available to environmental charities, but not the share of revenue they receive, is examining EFC members' disbursements to qualified donees from 2000 to 2021 (Figure 5). This measure includes operating charities that are at least partially focused on other causes, but it differs from those above in that it does not rely on the CRA classification of charities. Results suggest growth in available funding, which increased 277% in real dollars, from 242M in 2000 to 671M in 2021 (CAD 2022), and 413% in nominal dollars (152M to 628M). As EFC members fund other causes, this total should not be considered a reflection of the percentage of total distributions directed to environmental causes.

Figure 5. Disbursements to All Qualified Donees (T3010 Line 5050) by EFC Members



Summary

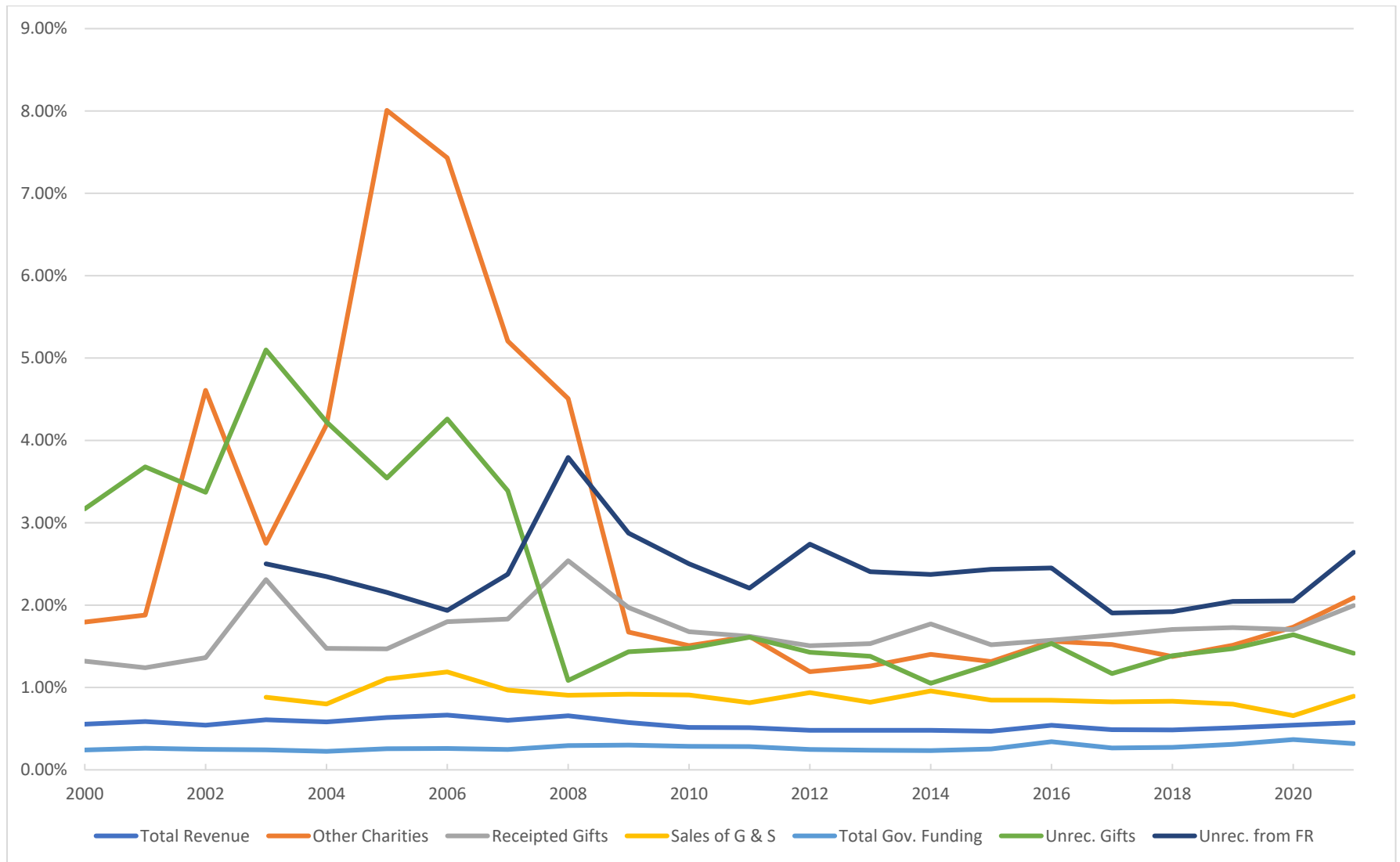
Revenue Growth for Operating Charities Classified as “Environmental”

Using multiple measures to identify charities and examining the disbursements of EFC member foundations, the percentage of revenue dedicated to environmentally-focused operating charities seems likely to have been relatively consistent over time. The best measure here, Method 3, indicates that about .5% (one-half of one percent) of total revenue has been directed to a group of operating charities that focus on the environment according to either CRA program codes or CRA category codes, with a peak of .60% or more from 2005 to 2008. Revenue from the categories funds “from other charities” and “receipted donations” are components of total revenue, and both have fluctuated. T3010 data indicates that revenue from other charities seems to have peaked from 2002 to 2008, while the revenue category receipted gifts has had three more isolated peaks (2003, 2008, 2021). At the same time, while small as a percentage of sector totals, growth in revenue from all levels of government has contributed to increasing total revenues for environmental operating charities. The T3010 data suggests revenue growth of over 200% from 2000 to 2021.

Despite relying on the most comprehensive data available for Canadian operating charities and foundations, each attempt to measure environmental funding has severe limitations that make it likely each both undercounts environmental charities and overestimates the percentage of this population’s programming focused on the environment, so no one measure should be considered an accurate representation of resources dedicated to environmental charities. **Instead, these estimates are better used to discuss likely trends in the revenue and support available to environmental charities.**

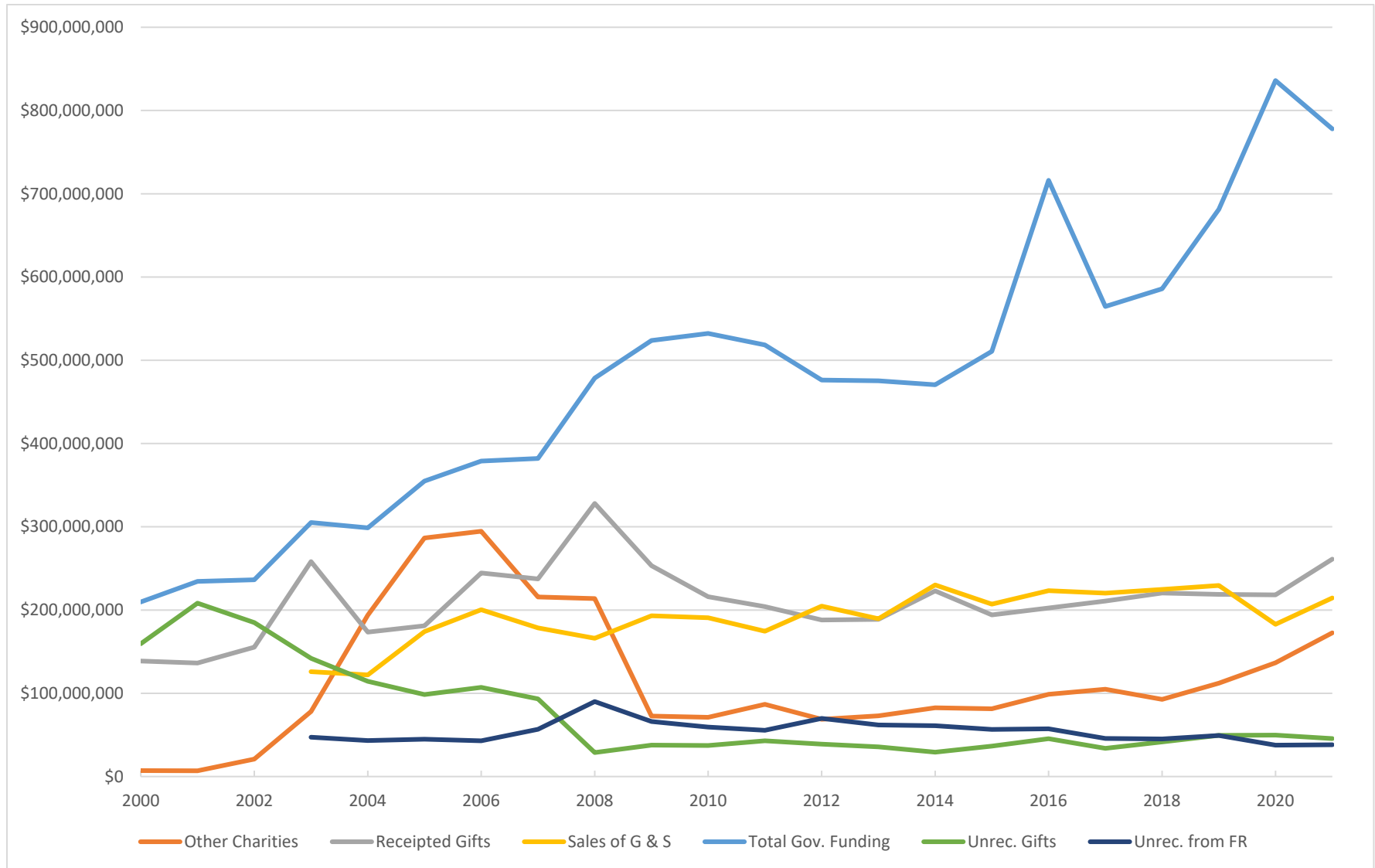
Appendix A

Figure 4 Panel A. Percentage of Revenues to Operating Charities Classified by Method 3, Organizational Data - 2000 to 2021 (CAD 2022)



Appendix B

Figure 4 Panel B. Revenue in Dollars Classified by Method 3, Organizational Data - 2000 to 2021 (CAD 2022)



Appendix C

Revenue in Constant Dollars (CAD 2022), Method 3 – Combination of CRA Program and Category Codes.

| Year | Observations | Funds from Other Charities | Receipted Gifts | Sales of G & S | Total Gov. Funding | Unrec. Gifts | Unrec. from FR | Total Revenue, Environmental Operating Charities* | Total Revenue, All Operating Charities* |
|------|--------------|----------------------------|-----------------|----------------|--------------------|--------------|----------------|---|---|
| 2000 | 1049 | 7,142,712 | 138,751,505 | | 209,715,925 | 159,581,911 | | 819,076,594 | 147,886,696,935 |
| 2001 | 1115 | 6,918,312 | 136,339,379 | | 234,374,998 | 208,269,904 | | 919,527,081 | 156,833,081,698 |
| 2002 | 1169 | 20,973,695 | 155,333,258 | | 236,264,496 | 184,944,657 | | 905,333,937 | 167,033,728,201 |
| 2003 | 1205 | 78,179,027 | 258,112,237 | 125,920,476 | 305,128,314 | 142,039,742 | 47,223,826 | 1,106,976,101 | 182,218,297,176 |
| 2004 | 1222 | 193,892,791 | 173,440,308 | 122,081,233 | 298,684,512 | 114,307,890 | 43,182,934 | 1,125,466,103 | 193,428,810,344 |
| 2005 | 1248 | 286,531,947 | 181,115,598 | 174,067,718 | 354,939,021 | 98,436,662 | 44,847,128 | 1,291,278,232 | 203,147,998,277 |
| 2006 | 1268 | 294,622,958 | 244,473,390 | 200,384,645 | 378,864,209 | 107,040,193 | 42,926,180 | 1,428,998,437 | 214,945,716,316 |
| 2007 | 1273 | 215,653,103 | 237,381,967 | 178,541,078 | 382,028,369 | 93,308,958 | 56,697,460 | 1,355,123,073 | 225,425,779,854 |
| 2008 | 1278 | 213,760,804 | 328,021,167 | 166,140,848 | 478,606,030 | 28,829,208 | 90,063,916 | 1,523,132,753 | 232,152,735,358 |
| 2009 | 1296 | 72,590,962 | 253,290,999 | 193,180,762 | 523,718,758 | 37,783,315 | 66,078,548 | 1,400,261,096 | 243,937,796,007 |
| 2010 | 1306 | 71,223,796 | 215,999,374 | 190,730,496 | 532,300,446 | 37,327,768 | 59,417,278 | 1,336,911,895 | 259,572,334,561 |
| 2011 | 1311 | 86,710,801 | 204,064,066 | 174,477,222 | 518,468,399 | 42,868,768 | 55,539,538 | 1,327,812,942 | 259,332,260,082 |
| 2012 | 1317 | 68,738,573 | 188,044,202 | 204,628,267 | 476,245,480 | 38,965,119 | 69,744,059 | 1,285,203,338 | 267,309,702,414 |
| 2013 | 1332 | 72,937,034 | 188,767,706 | 189,483,125 | 475,287,669 | 35,696,309 | 61,999,993 | 1,327,613,904 | 276,423,865,711 |
| 2014 | 1343 | 82,634,934 | 222,913,229 | 230,127,286 | 470,540,808 | 29,209,203 | 61,035,802 | 1,354,509,931 | 282,420,621,917 |
| 2015 | 1335 | 81,440,646 | 194,175,979 | 207,076,916 | 510,665,292 | 36,520,243 | 56,533,130 | 1,329,444,759 | 283,586,479,844 |
| 2016 | 1337 | 98,767,054 | 202,509,087 | 223,215,573 | 716,130,159 | 45,407,175 | 57,286,167 | 1,588,960,189 | 294,039,460,925 |
| 2017 | 1337 | 104,810,406 | 210,759,903 | 220,251,266 | 564,554,331 | 33,933,230 | 45,678,258 | 1,466,244,010 | 300,269,973,245 |
| 2018 | 1346 | 92,743,171 | 220,466,315 | 224,796,053 | 585,934,828 | 41,621,459 | 45,139,697 | 1,470,734,614 | 303,160,036,498 |
| 2019 | 1341 | 112,091,952 | 218,867,815 | 229,546,237 | 681,354,001 | 49,504,169 | 49,344,247 | 1,609,987,427 | 315,233,339,135 |
| 2020 | 1340 | 136,598,969 | 218,152,602 | 182,873,942 | 835,976,130 | 49,724,113 | 37,699,881 | 1,708,986,588 | 315,042,134,467 |
| 2021 | 1349 | 172,682,343 | 261,214,897 | 214,529,878 | 777,926,488 | 45,538,652 | 38,197,122 | 1,892,499,461 | 330,279,078,937 |

*Total Revenue Figures Include Other Revenues, Not Presented

About EFC

Environment Funders Canada is a national network of philanthropic foundations and other funders working individually and collectively to advance a healthy environment and a sustainable future for Canada. EFC catalyzes funders to respond to environmental crises with ambitious and innovative solutions. EFC members work with non-government organizations, community groups and other charitable organizations to support the development and delivery of programs that can make our communities healthier and more resilient, while protecting vital ecosystem services and the natural world.

About Nathan Grasse, PhD

Nathan Grasse is an Associate Professor, MNPL, at Carleton University's School of Public Policy & Administration. Nathan focuses on the governance of public-serving organizations, including associations between governance and financial management. This includes the study of revenue structures, the potential conditioning effects of organizational and environmental factors, and the implications of strategic choices on financial health and other organizational outcomes.

About DARO

DARO helps leaders systematize and successfully implement their learning, data and technology strategies. DARO are ruthless pragmatists that deliver real-world, impactful results. Fascinated by the design and development of innovative systems that power change for good, the team at DARO help social sector organizations take advantage of the new open data movement to increase their individual and collective impacts in the areas of Digital Transformation, Data Strategy & Governance, Open Data & Data Sharing, Data & Information Architecture, and Evaluation & Measurement services.



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