



Sell With Impact

Buy Social Canada Social Enterprise Snapshot 2023

\$4.7 Billion

Gross revenue in 2023



\$313.9 Million

Employee wages paid in 2023

\$4.5 Billion

GreenShield (one social enterprise) reported revenue in 2023



9,413+

Employees

3,690+

Employees facing barriers to traditional employment

73%

Say financial health is breaking even or better

82%

Intentionally provide wraparound supports to staff

Key Challenges Faced*

41%
Business Capacity

24%
Other Challenges

18%
Access to Finance

17%
Access to Markets

*Respondents could choose only one answer

This data represents 123 Buy Social Canada Certified Social Enterprises, from 106 survey responses.

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About Buy Social Canada

[Buy Social Canada](#) is a social enterprise with the mission to advance and grow social procurement. We believe that the purchasing of goods and services is much more than an economic transaction. Purchasing is a means to build community capital, the foundation of a healthy community, and to contribute to a local community's social and economic goals.

We bring together purpose driven purchasers and social value suppliers to build business relationships that generate social benefits for communities across the country. We work with community intermediaries and stakeholders, private sector companies, and governments to provide training and develop policy and resources. We offer a recognized, Canada-wide social enterprise certification program that opens the door to an emerging social impact network.

Contact and Feedback

For further information, please contact Buy Social Canada:
info@buysocialcanada.com



Certified Social Enterprise Le Chic Resto Pop

Executive Summary

Social enterprise is a powerful business model to tackle the challenges our economy and communities are facing today. Buy Social Canada sees the movement for social enterprise growing steadily as more people acknowledge that the future of business is social enterprise.

Social enterprises tackle many social and systemic challenges simultaneously, while running successful businesses and creating positive financial outcomes for their employees and communities. When you purchase from a social enterprise, you are using your purchasing to support businesses that put people and planet over profit maximization.

As part of the 2024 Buy Social Canada social enterprise re-certification process, we asked our [Certified Social Enterprises](#) to share updates and stories about their business and mission outcomes and impacts. We heard from 106 respondents, representing 123 Buy Social Canada Certified Social Enterprises operating across Canada.

We know the research presented in this snapshot doesn't capture all social enterprises in Canada. Buy Social Canada has certified 220 social enterprises, but there are many more. Some may not see themselves as a social enterprise or they aren't aware of what a social enterprise is.

A [social enterprise](#) is a business that sells goods and services, embeds a social, cultural, or environmental purpose into the business, and reinvests the majority of profits or surplus into their purpose.

This definition is internationally aligned with Social Enterprise World Forum, Social Enterprise UK, Buy Social Scotland, Government of South Korea, Social Traders in Australia, Social Enterprise Ghana, Social Enterprise Ethiopia, Buy Social USA, and others.

Social enterprises:



The responses from our 2023 social enterprise re-certification survey reinforce the value of the social enterprise business model. Survey responses show us that social enterprises create inclusive employment opportunities that improve people's lives; they divert waste from landfills; they create more inclusive and just communities; and they are changing the shape of the marketplace in Canada to put people and planet before shareholder wealth.

Shared challenges identified by the sector include access to finance, business capacity, and access to markets. The solutions to these challenges already exist, but require innovative policy changes, accessible funding and business capacity supports, and [joint advocacy](#) as a sector, to shift the culture and practices in the Canadian context.

Last year's [Sell with Impact: Stories and Research from the Canadian Social Enterprise Sector](#) report shares a more in-depth analysis of the current state of the social enterprise sector in Canada, but we are encouraged to see continued financial health and meaningful stories of impact in 2023.

We look forward to sharing more data and insights next year when we publish the next annual Sell with Impact update.

Buy Social Canada Social Enterprise Certification



Grow your business and verify your impact.

Buy Social Canada [Social Enterprise Certification](#) will showcase to your stakeholders, clients, and team that you put your money where your mouth is and exist to create community wellbeing.

Benefits of certification

- Be listed on the Buy Social Canada [Social Enterprise Directory](#).
- Use the Buy Social Canada Certified Social Enterprise Badge to verify your status and increase business opportunities.
- Be added to a supplier list shared with our [Social Purchasing Partners](#).
- Join a growing national network with suppliers and purchasers.
- Be a part of the social value marketplace revolution.

Build your capacity

You will have access to:

- Two hours of consulting support from the Buy Social Canada team.
- Invitations to Buy Social Canada events.
- Discounted rates for Buy Social Canada workshops, events, and courses.

Raise your profile and meet more purchasers

- Buy Social Canada regularly features Certified Social Enterprises in resources, reports, research, newsletters, and social media.
- Certification provides access to networking, promotional, and bid opportunities.

Get Certified

Not already certified? [Learn more and apply now.](#)

Key Findings



\$4.7 Billion

Gross revenue in 2023

\$313.9 Million

Employee wages paid in 2023

\$4.5 Billion

GreenShield (one social enterprise) reported revenue in 2023



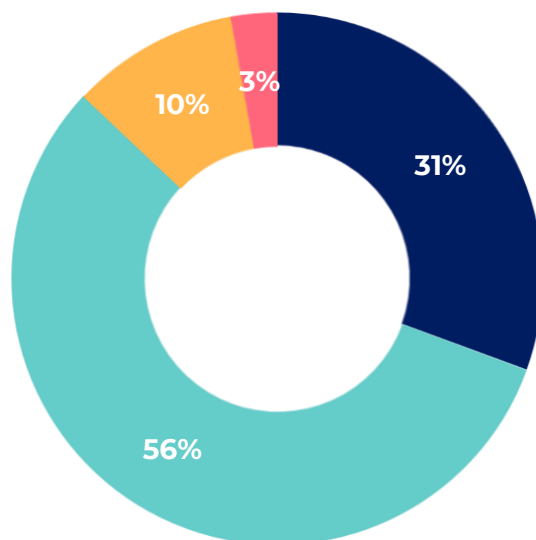
9,413+

Employees

3,690+

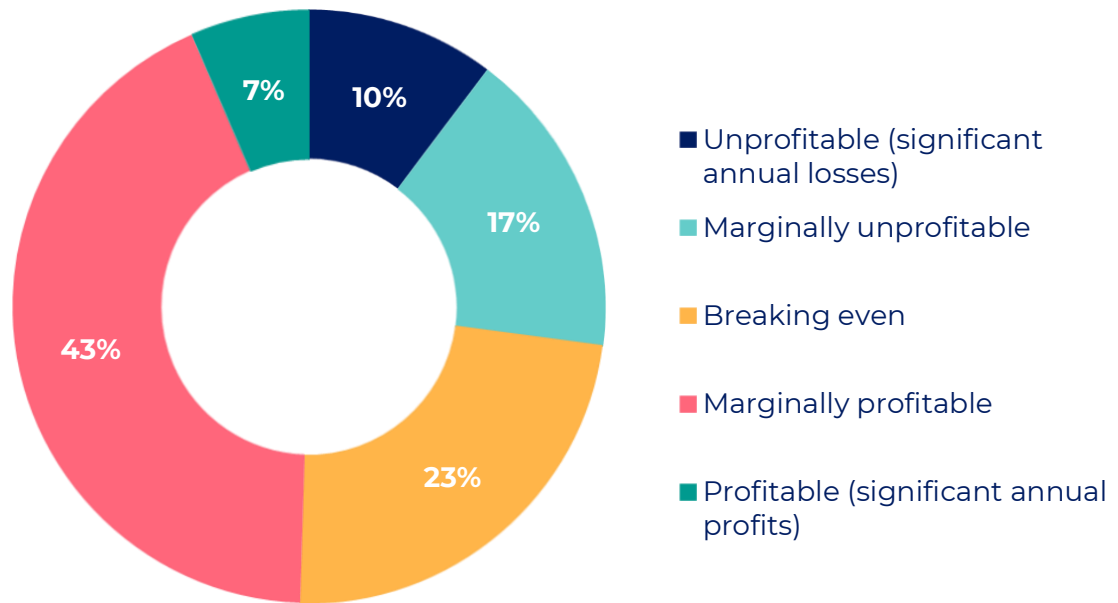
Employees facing barriers to traditional employment

Size of business

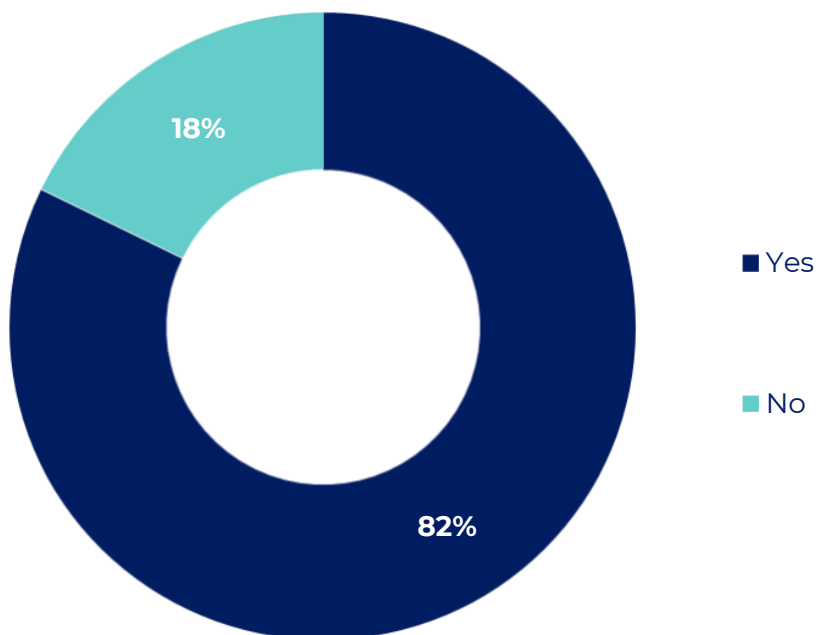


- Micro-business (1-9 employees)
- Small business (10-99 employees)
- Medium business (100-499 employees)
- Large business (500+ employees)

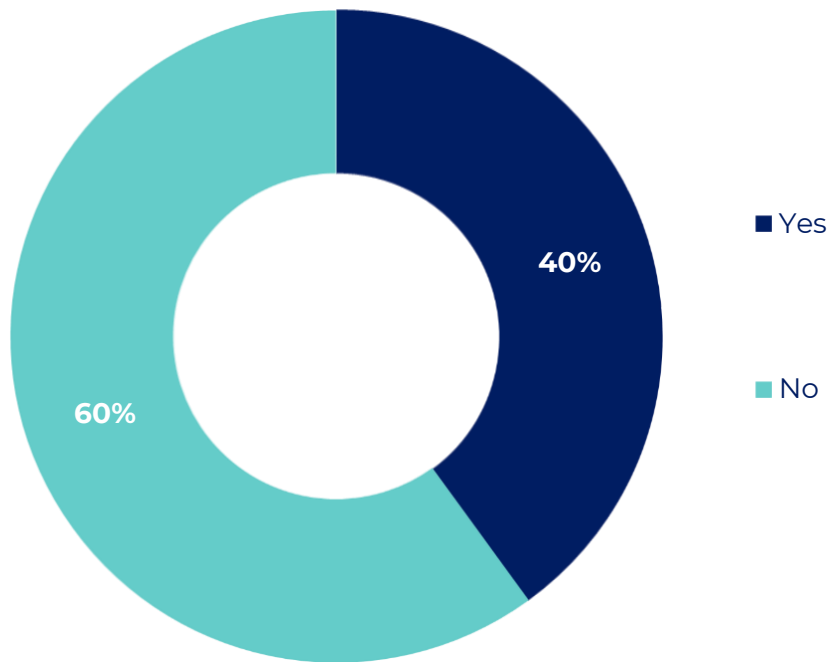
How would you describe your financial health?



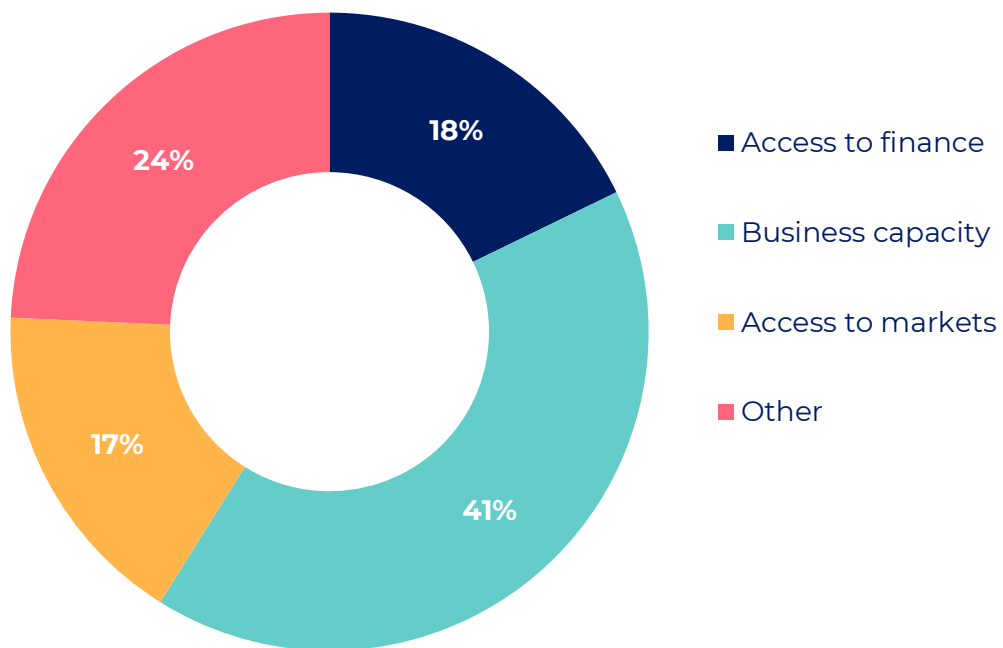
Do you intentionally provide additional wraparound supports for your employees to increase accessibility and inclusion?



Do you track the cost of these wraparound supports?



Key challenges



Stories of Impact

Construction social enterprises

As the movement to implement social procurement and community benefits in construction grows, we're seeing a similar increase in demand for construction social enterprises in the marketplace, and for job seekers.

A recurring theme that emerged from our survey of social enterprises was how many people they had to turn away because there weren't as many job openings as there were applicants.



Certified Social Enterprise Construct GTA

[Building Up](#), a Toronto-based enterprise, had 2,000 participants apply for 100 training spots, and [BUILD Inc](#) in Winnipeg had to turn 1,000 people away due to lack of funding for training. Both organizations are looking to scale their businesses or create new work opportunities. Building Up started a new insulation business in 2023 as one way to help meet the growing demand.

We heard that employment social enterprises in the construction sector are having a noticeable impact in the lives of their employees, and in the industry.

[Community Builders](#), near Barrie, has seen 89% success in moving trainees into meaningful employment or higher post-secondary learning opportunities.

“Several of our trainees have gone on to the unions and are working towards their Apprenticeships and Red Seal Certifications. The private sector has responded extremely positively to our programs and are actively coming to us to hire our graduates.”

– Community Builders

Over the past four years, [Construct GTA](#) has provided hands-on skilled trades training to over 500 participants through their 8-week program, and further provided real world work experience where participants can join construction project sites.

Inclusive employment

For many social enterprises, creating inclusive employment is their primary mission. At [Fleurish Botanical Goodness](#) in Barrie, for example, they run a Fresh Start internship program to support employees to re-enter the workforce or move on to further education and training.

"The Fresh Start program at Fleurish has changed me forever, and for the good! I can't believe I found such a wonderful place to gain new experience and skills for the workforce. I have been so lucky to join their team and work alongside them, growing my confidence and self-esteem along the way. At Fleurish I feel like anything is possible with such a safe and supportive environment. I will always look back at my time at Fleurish with a big smile and full heart."

– Sarah, Fresh Start Graduate

[Goodly](#), a BC-based social enterprise that sells food, saw a 238% increase in sales revenue in 2023 by focussing on healthcare food service. They used this sales growth to increase their number of employees by over 50%, which means more supportive labour and better living conditions for their team members.

[Out of this World Café](#) also reports on the impact that securing employment can have on their team members. One employee who started with them in February 2023 has moved from a respite centre to transitional housing, something they credit to their stable employment.

[Parkdale Green Thumb Enterprises](#) (PGTE) partners closely with Canadian Alliance for Mental Health to find employee participant staff. In the spring of 2023, one of those staff members came to PGTE and presented as selectively nonverbal.

"They elected to use text and handwriting to communicate with us. As the weeks and months passed, they became more comfortable with their crew members and managers. By the end of the year, they had become fully verbal with all of us and even with members of the public. This was a fantastic win for all of us and a highlight of our year."

– Parkdale Green Thumb Enterprises

Food security

In our 2022 [Sell with Impact: Stories and Research from the Canadian Social Enterprise Sector](#) report, 30 percent of social enterprises surveyed sold food or catering. In addition to creating employment opportunities and nourishing meals, some of those social enterprises have an additional mission to address food insecurity in their communities.

[Fireweed Food Co-op](#) brings fresh, nutritious local food into underserved communities in Winnipeg, all of which was subsidized at 50-100% in 2023 through the Veggie Van initiative. The co-op also increased the accessibility of local food for commercial buyers and households in 2023, which in turn generated over \$220,000 in sales that went directly to local small-to-medium scale producers.

[FoodReach](#) in the GTA saw an influx of food purchasing from food banks, which coincided with these programs experiencing a staggering increase in visits due to growing food insecurity in the city.



Certified Social Enterprise Fireweed Food Co-op

“As the shifting needs of our network became apparent, we reviewed how we source high-demand non-perishables. As a result, we leveraged growing volumes to secure better pricing and lowered the cost of seven key products by an average of 35% - a savings that is now available to the entire FoodReach network. This is our mission in action - when we consolidate our sector’s purchasing volume, our collective purchasing power allows us to foster a long-term food solution that serves us all. As our network grows, so do the possibilities for the future of food for our sector.”
- FoodReach

Environmental sustainability

Social enterprises are making real impacts to divert waste and improve environmental sustainability in their communities.



Certified Social Enterprise Compost Winnipeg

[Polished Cleaning Services](#) employs a team of ten individuals with diverse cognitive abilities at Red River College Polytechnic who empty and sort recycling bins across three campuses each week.

In 2023, [Compost Winnipeg](#) diverted 1,417,850 kg of organic waste from the landfill and sent it for composting.

[Jonnon](#) upcycled 400 street banners into 1300 bags, rescuing them from the landfill. [Free Geek Toronto](#) refurbished 244 laptops, 25% of which were either donated or sold for under \$100.

Equity and accessibility

Social enterprises use their business model to create more inclusive, equitable and just societies. [Smashing Good Pinatas](#) works with employees with developmental disabilities in the GTA to learn transferable employment skills, and [FSEAP](#) is using their social enterprise revenue to subsidize counselling sessions across the country.

[Untapped Accessibility](#) is a consulting social enterprise that supports organizations to improve their accessibility. To date, they've helped nearly 120 organizations to go beyond compliance and implement the Accessible BC Act, including food banks, small businesses, and public sector organizations.

In St. John's, [The Lunar Inn](#) is exclusively marketed to Indigenous people who are in the city for medical appointments, improving their access to healthcare.

“In one instance this year we were able to accommodate an individual who had been banned from every local hotel for three weeks without incident, allowing him to receive the medical care he needed while having a safe and supportive place to stay.”

- The Lunar Inn

Advance Social Enterprise with Buy Social Canada

Social enterprise is a vital component of the marketplace revolution. We can move away from profit for profit's sake and put people and the planet at the centre of our economy. We invite you to consider how you can get involved or continue to contribute to the social enterprise movement. Social procurement is part of this movement too, because it can increase market access for social enterprises. Together we can improve our economy to create additional social value and create healthy, vibrant communities.

For social enterprises

- Verify your impact with [Social Enterprise Certification](#).
- Tell your story.
- Access [free learning resources](#).
- [Connect](#) with other social value suppliers and social purchasers.

For purchasers

- [Build relationships](#) with suppliers.
- Purchase from [Certified Social Enterprises](#).
- Get support to design and implement social procurement as a [Social Purchasing Partner](#).
- Work with us for in-depth [consulting services](#).
- Register for [training](#).

For everyone

- Continue to advocate for, and raise awareness about, social enterprise.
- Read Buy Social Canada Founder David LePage's book [Marketplace Revolution](#) to learn more about the movement.
- Subscribe to the [Buy Social Canada newsletter](#) to stay up to date on the social procurement and social enterprise ecosystem.



**Buy and sell
with impact**

Work with Us

Buy Social Canada is ready to work with your organization to help you buy and sell with impact. Contact us to learn more.

info@buysocialcanada.com

Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the people and organizations who are working to advance social enterprise.

Special thanks to our Certified Social Enterprises who responded to the Re-certification Survey and took time to share additional stories and information with us. Your leadership and action on social enterprise are part of the marketplace revolution, creating positive change in our communities.

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