

Canadian Sue Gardner one of the world's most powerful women: Forbes

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Wikimedia Foundation's executive director was the only Canadian to make the magazine's top 100 list, much to her surprise.



You might not recognize her on the street, but according to *Forbes* (<http://www.forbes.com/power-women/>) magazine Canadian Sue Gardner is one of the most powerful women in the world. To be precise, the 70th most powerful, placing her eight spots ahead of Harry Potter author J.K. Rowling and 56 behind Lady Gaga.

“I was completely surprised,” she says from San Francisco, where she’s executive director of the Wikimedia Foundation, a non-profit organization that operates several projects including Wikipedia. “Obviously, it’s an honour and I’m flattered. And my mother is very pleased.” Indeed, she was

the only Canadian to make the list of 100 women.

Forbes picked 45-year-old Gardner for having led a transformative increase in Wikimedia's fundraising revenue. When she joined in 2007, the organization had fewer than 10 employees and was raising less than US\$3 million annually. In 2011, Wikimedia raked in \$23 million, its donors having increased tenfold.

Still, she's not sure she deserves the honour, adding that she can think of numerous Canadian women she believes are more powerful. But power is a contentious notion, and while she may only be in charge of 120 people and a \$40-million budget, her role in maintaining the health of the world's biggest encyclopedia is pivotal—even if, as she points out, most Wikipedians have never heard of her.

Gardner grew up in Port Hope, Ont., a small town east of Toronto, and went to Ryerson University for journalism. Most of her career was spent at the CBC, where she began as an associate producer and finished as senior director of CBC.ca. She resigned from that post in 2007 and began consulting for Wikimedia. A few months later, she was hired as the foundation's executive director.

While certainly fond of her stateside job, Gardner says she misses living in Toronto. She still visits once or twice a year to see her mother in Waterloo. "When I come back now, I have this outside view coming from the states," she says. Canada "seems really stable and prosperous." While poverty certainly exists in our home and native land, it pales in comparison, she says. "Poverty is very visible in San Francisco. Streets are full of homelessness and drug addiction."

But that's where the job is, and Gardner really believes in what Wikimedia is doing. "I actually do write Wikipedia articles," she says, "but I do it as an ordinary person at night or on the weekends. It's not my job. I don't get paid

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for it.”

The encyclopedia is a testament to crowdsourcing. For that reason, “it’s sort of paradoxical that I’m on here,” she says about *Forbes*’s list. Central to Wikimedia is the idea that millions of people can do a better job than any one person—a list that glorifies individuals stands in stark contrast to that very premise.

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