

# CANADIAN INNOVATION IN AN AGE OF ACCELERATION



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# The Critical Role of Traditional Knowledge in Social Innovation

To build a brighter future for Canada, we need to learn from Indigenous communities and develop a new language of mutual understanding.

BY MELISSA HERMAN

**T**reaty 8 territory in Canada is home to the Dënesuṣṣiné and Cree people, the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, and Canada's largest oil deposits. The territory covered by the treaty, signed in 1899 between First Nations of Northern Alberta, northeastern British Columbia, northwestern Saskatchewan, the southwest portion of the Northwest Territories, and the queen of England, encompasses 840,000 kilometers. During the summer, berries grow in the northern boreal forest, not far from oil refineries, tailings ponds (where waste and by-products from the mines are captured by dams and dykes), and reclaimed land. There is a thin line between these two worlds. It is a line that many people on both sides of the divide tread, including myself. I am a Dënesuṣṣiné mother and daughter.

I sometimes feel like I am about to lose the delicate balance I keep. I am driven by a sense of duty, knowing that if I lose focus, the worlds will stay divided. For the past 12 months, I have been a fellow with the Alberta Social Innovation Connect (ABSI) initiative, a unique program seeking to identify and amplify social, economic, and ecological impact initiatives that are successfully challenging the status quo in Alberta. Specifically, I am working as the Northern Alberta Fellow, providing insights into the dynamics of Indigenous communities, both rural and urban. My mandate is to find and share local stories of Indigenous innovation, strengthen the capacity of Indigenous innovators and non-Indigenous collaborators, and look for emergent opportunities to support systems change. I have not had to look far: The desire for change in these communities is producing significant ideas and innovations at a grassroots level, rooted in traditional knowledge.

MELISSA HERMAN is the Alberta Social Innovation Connect (ABSI) Northern Fellow.

Creating new solutions to complex social problems is embedded in Indigenous people's way of life; we have always invented new ways to flourish in poor conditions. We are very communal. My mother always tells me, "If you have more than one, you have enough to share." We believe that what affects one person will eventually affect another, and we keep this in mind with every decision. I know that the rest of Canada, and the rest of the world, can benefit from a better understanding of these traditions. Social innovation has the potential to bridge Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures and create a brighter future for all.

I believe that the distance between Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of doing, being, and knowing is less one of geography or time than one of language. As an ABSI Fellow, I have been exploring the concept of social innovation with Indigenous elders in Treaty 8 territory. In Dënesuṣṣiné, social innovation translates to mean "to see from my position or perspective." In Cree, the connotation is "to change the way I see things." These translations reveal a depth of inherent understanding about social innovation often overlooked in Western-language definitions. Both the Cree and the Dënesuṣṣiné translations suggest that social innovation is primarily about relationships and understanding a different perspective, and less about the actual invention or implementation process. Social innovation is, at its heart, about changing how we live in the world together.

Canada is currently involved in an experiment to do just that. The proceedings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada were a first step toward shifting the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada. The TRC exposed the cultural genocide that took place over seven generations as Canada's residential school system removed

Indigenous children from their communities and pressured them to assimilate into Western culture. (The last school closed in 1996.) The potential for reconciliation in the relationship between Indigenous and Western people in Canada is enormous; in theory, such a reconciliation would put us on the path to resolving multiple current and complex challenges, such as broken treaties, missing and murdered Indigenous women, inaccessibility of clean water, inequitable access to mental health services, and the high number of Indigenous children in government care.

However, the Canadian government's history with Indigenous people has left us with a lack of confidence and a sense of mistrust in the health care, educational, and justice systems. To be successful, social innovation in these and other areas requires mutual respect and understanding; it cannot be a new imposition on us.

## FINDING PATHS TO WALK TOGETHER

Finding our way through the tensions will not be easy. During my fellowship, I have encountered two main challenges to bridging the divide between cultures and understanding:

One, it is part of Indigenous culture to pass on traditional knowledge orally. A common concern is that, when recorded, documented, and shared with exclusivity, traditional knowledge loses authenticity. Who tells what story is determined by the keeper of the story, often an elder. Elders decide who is fit to tell a story, to ensure that its moral is carried on. The concern stems from the possibility of a story being changed along the way by someone with intentions other than keeping the moral—sharing a story for profit, for example.

Two, language barriers make mutual understanding challenging. Outsiders commonly use the term "industry," for example, when consulting with Indigenous people in Treaty 8 territory about the use of the land. Natural resource companies go to communities to represent and discuss their "industry"—these consultations are a Treaty requirement. But in Dënesuṣṣiné, "industry" connotes "destruction, loss, and extermination," according to an elder from south of Wood Buffalo. A Cree elder who lives in the heart of the region's oil sands gave me this translation: "profit, progress, growth." These different translations create tensions when industry representatives try to consult and work with Indigenous people or develop solutions intended to respect their cultures, heritage, well-being, and livelihoods.

During my time as an ABSI fellow, I have wondered if a way to start building bridges would be to develop a common language through which we can build empathy with each other, find a common goal, and work toward it together—as urban and rural, Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. This common language would foster mutual understanding of significant words such as “success” and “justice.” To clearly articulate shared goals, such as bringing justice to the thousands of families of missing

not have an Indigenous translator, leaving Cree and Dënesuliné speakers caught up in the justice system frustrated and misunderstood. Following our joint outreach to the courthouse, the Fort McMurray Multicultural Association now provides a Dënesuliné translator at the courthouse, resulting in improved communications between defendants and the justice system, as well as several people being released from custody. In the process of reconciling and healing the relationships between the justice

Indigenous innovations and innovators like the ones I’ve been working with in Wood Buffalo. I learned how, without losing authenticity, our tradition of storytelling is being extended to digital platforms, such as Ryan McMahon’s *RedMan Laughing* podcast. I met an array of Indigenous people who balanced Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews with ease, who could hop back and forth, creating artifacts to help others hop with them and collecting and sharing emergent ideas. I was humbled to meet Paul

and Raven Lacerte, founders of the Moose Hide Campaign, a grassroots movement of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal men standing up against violence toward women and children, and was honored to bring the Moose Hide Campaign to Wood Buffalo to amplify the message that the power to reduce violence against women is in the hands of men.

## RELATIONSHIPS ARE TRANSFORMING

The hope for transformed relationships—between men and women; between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communi-



A man plays a drum at the 2015 Indigenous Innovation Summit, an annual event hosted by the National Association of Friendship Centres.

and murdered Indigenous women or what we mean by “high quality of life,” we need mutual understanding of the words we use. A common language would help restore trust and guide us on a path of reconciliation.

I have been encouraged by the social innovation conversation among Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people in Wood Buffalo. These people include Cheryl Alexander, who is Indigenous to Treaty 8 land and focuses her efforts on cultural awareness training for industry, and the team at the Fort McMurray Multicultural Association, which encourages Indigenous people to preserve their cultures. In its efforts to promote inclusion, the Multicultural Association reached out to me to discuss a shared realization: Indigenous people lacked a literal voice in the justice system. Until recently, the courthouse in Fort McMurray, the largest urban population center in Wood Buffalo, did

system and Indigenous people, jobs were created for Dënesuliné speakers, and two service providers—the courthouse and the Multicultural Association—deepened their understanding of the critical importance of language.

This is one example of social innovation. An expressed need, indicative of a systemic, complex challenge in Wood Buffalo, was heard and addressed by determining what in the system needed to change; what was needed of the system was determined by those whom the system is designed to serve. More of this type of innovation will help build empathy between non-Indigenous and Indigenous people.

## THERE IS MORE THAN ENOUGH TO SHARE

The 2015 Indigenous Innovation Summit, hosted by the National Association of Friendship Centres in Edmonton, exposed me to many more

ties; and across generations—is the guiding spirit behind many Indigenous innovations and my focus in Northern Alberta. It is inherent in how social innovation is understood in Dënesuliné and Cree. We must continue to explore how new words—including reconciliation—translate into Indigenous languages. We must continue to pursue a common, authentic language, where the voice of Indigenous people is amplified and respected; where we control our own narrative, reducing misunderstanding and instilling in ourselves a sense of pride and tradition. We must help everyone better understand the context from which each of us speaks. Only then can we start building empathy.

With a focused effort on shared understanding, Indigenous and non-Indigenous people can start having meaningful conversations and building trust. When trust is restored, collaboration becomes possible in unprecedented ways. ❌

# A New Model for CSR

BY VALERIE CHORT & HAMOON EKHTIARI

**T**he private sector has come a long way with regard to corporate social responsibility (CSR) since Milton Friedman's infamous declaration in *The New York Times* in 1970 that "The social responsibility of a business is to increase its profits." That said, many corporations still default to surface-level actions when it comes to CSR. They pay lip service, donate funds at arm's length to one cause or another, or relegate most CSR activities to a small task-force. That's not enough. What's needed is an exponential increase in the number of businesses that commit to closing the "say-do" gaps between their brand narrative and core business operations. More companies need to broaden their approach to CSR, with the goal of achieving both business outcomes and system-level social change.

This is the journey on which RBC—Canada's largest bank—has chosen to embark. When the bank announced RBC Future Launch—a commitment to invest \$500 million to help young people prepare for the future of work by 2025—its senior leaders, working with the global innovation company Audacious Futures, began asking how they might reimagine corporate philanthropy and build a model for CSR globally in the process. What follows is a summary-level look at the five areas that we believe must be reimaged for a large corporation to begin to truly move the needle on societal issues.

## 1. PURPOSE

We invested considerable effort in selecting an issue that supported our purpose of helping clients thrive and communities prosper. We recognize that Canadian youth are set up to fail in the new economy. But prosperity for all Canadians is directly linked to our ability to prepare these young people to succeed. Moreover, RBC depends on young people on both sides of our business. We need young talent with the skills and capabilities to help us reimagine and grow our business, and we depend heavily on young people as clients and their reliance on our products and services for the lifecycle of their financial needs. When young people succeed, we all succeed.

VALERIE CHORT is vice president of corporate citizenship at RBC. HAMOON EKHTIARI is the founder & CEO of Audacious Futures, a global innovation engine for executives and high-net-worth individuals interested in reimagining the future and bringing bold ideas to life.

## 2. OPPORTUNITY ASSESSMENT

As we began applying a systems change lens to RBC Future Launch, one of the first things we realized was that focusing on program areas (practical work experience, career development, and 21st-century skills) could be highly counterproductive in achieving our ultimate goal. Insights from the 15 cross-Canada Youth Forums we held showed us that young people don't think in terms of those three areas. They think in terms of the stages of the journey they must go through, from getting the education and skills they need, to discovering their passions and purpose, to finding a job that will serve them well (and hopefully that they love). We're now segmenting our target audiences accordingly, identifying key stages in a young person's journey, and encouraging our community partners to focus on solutions that provide end-to-end, customized supports.

## 3. LEVERS FOR CHANGE

Donations and grants alone are insufficient to achieve systems change. We have come to understand that what's needed is a more-than-money approach, and access to flexible funding.

The value we bring is often what "money can't buy": our employees' energy and skills, our capabilities as one of the country's largest employers, our research depth, our marketing and communications teams' creative capabilities, the reach of our branches and regional teams, and the technical capabilities of our digital, technology and innovation teams. Our new approach involves tangible, practical tools for employees to engage, an investment in shaping the narrative around important public issues, and regionally customized implementation plans that fit the needs of the various markets where we operate.

Additionally, we expanded our approach to funding beyond donations so that we could invest the right type of support (grants, sponsorship, fellowships, loans, equity) in the best solutions, regardless of whether they came from charitable organizations, social enterprises, businesses, or individuals.

## 4. GOVERNANCE

Citizenship efforts are too often viewed as the full-time job of a relatively small corporate citizenship team, with the rest of the organization

participating in sporadic activities. To change that paradigm at RBC, we have begun developing a model that includes dedicated resourcing for citizenship engagement across all major business (customer-facing) units and all functional ones (HR, procurement, etc.) to drive ownership and participation across the organization.

As we began to engage more internal stakeholders, we realized that the resources necessary to bring the strategy for RBC Future Launch to life were spread across the organization, managed by 10 directors, five vice presidents, and three senior or executive vice presidents. So we set out to create a "one team, one dream" model, whereby one senior leader is ultimately accountable for integrated decision making while managing the stakeholder relationships across the many business units that are essential for the strategy's long-term success.

## 5. MEASUREMENT

Traditionally, most of our measurement efforts were customized for each funded program and primarily focused on input and output numbers such as dollars spent, number of participants, and number of organizations supported. That approach, however, made it difficult to measure the impact of our programs on participants.

To address that problem, we developed a new Impact Measurement Framework (IMF) that measures the social economic, environmental, employee, business, and brand impact of our initiatives and investments. The IMF provides a consistent way of measuring our initiatives and investments across our portfolio and a more meaningful view of our holistic impact. To ensure that the IMF is aligned with other commonly accepted frameworks, we drew on global reporting guidance, including the Sustainable Development Goals. Applied to RBC Future Launch, our IMF includes beneficiary-level metrics to capture the sustained change in preparedness for the future of work achieved through education, skills, and training, and will be used with every young person who participates in a program supported by RBC Future Launch, regardless of its content, location, or duration. The IMF also includes portfolio-level metrics such as an efficacy rate (to help us monitor the effectiveness of program delivery costs per outcome/impact produced).

We believe that RBC's mind-set shift and emerging approach has great potential—particularly for purpose-led organizations. Purpose instills strategic clarity, channels innovation, drives transformation, unites people, and builds bridges. Making CSR core to your organization's purpose will lead to transformational change and social impact. ✕



# The Digital Future of Canadian Philanthropy

Why philanthropists should embrace digital innovation with a focus on social research and development.

BY ANIL PATEL

In fall 2016, Emmett Carson, CEO of the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, spoke at the Calgary Foundation's Annual Vital City event and shared his view of how philanthropy should be thinking about technology innovation and economic disruption. He talked about how technologies such as automation, machine learning, and artificial intelligence are ushering in the fourth industrial revolution. And he explained how these realities have influenced his foundation to make its donor engagement, advocacy, and grantmaking priorities both local and global in perspective and practice. Through the course of the speech, he repeatedly used the phrase "both/and" to highlight the benefits and unintended consequences that can result from rapid innovation.

Carson discussed, for example, how self-driving trucks are anticipated to eliminate thousands of long-haul trucking jobs. In this case, automation is *both* promising for the new firms creating self-driving fleets (e.g., Otto) and a cause of great concern, as it signals a massive labor force upheaval for the tens of thousands of truckers currently employed in North America. He also shared a story of a hands-free soap dispenser that dispenses for people with lighter skin but does not for those with darker skin because the infrared sensor was not properly calibrated before it was sent to market. This example highlighted the unintended, negative consequences that can arise from technical innovation and the importance of diversity on technology teams when designing and testing products.

Carson's perspective on the importance of understanding technology's opportunities and drawbacks informs several aspects of our social research and

development strategy here at GrantBook, a Toronto-based organization that helps grantmakers and impact investors develop digital strategies. In fact, over the past 24 months, motivated in part by Carson's words, we have been pursuing the following line of inquiry:

- What industries are undergoing substantial and rapid change?
- What kinds of companies/organizations are leading the disruption?
- How are these entities building/empowering their teams and attracting top talent?
- What kinds of job descriptions best reflect their innovative approaches and forward-thinking mind-sets?
- How can we apply a social lens to research and development/human-centered design techniques that can benefit philanthropy?
- Based on the above, what are the implications for philanthropy, and specifically for philanthropic leaders?

We encourage philanthropic leaders and social-impact investors to ask the same sorts of questions. In doing so, they may find, as we have, that other sectors are using digital in ways that the social sector can learn from and build on.

Consider, for example, Kabbage.com, a company that is reinventing how small business can apply for a line of credit, and Scotiabank, a Kabbage investor and partner.

Within five minutes of creating an account with Atlanta-based Kabbage.com, businesses can be approved for a credit line of up to \$100,000. The platform, launched in 2009, is a beautifully designed software application. It uses two powerful software concepts (APIs and machine learning) that securely connect online bank accounts, merchant platforms (e.g., Etsy, PayPal, and Stripe), and accounting software (e.g., QuickBooks, Xero, and Sage). Kabbage.com's value proposition is simple and compelling: "Spend time on your business—not paperwork." As of this writing, Kabbage is hiring over a dozen employees (data scientists, security architects, integration specialists, and more).

In October 2014, Canada's Scotiabank joined others in a Series E round of investing in the company, contributing to its current \$1.3 billion valuation. Scotiabank has also invested or partnered with other fintech startups, such as AlphaPoint (blockchain), DeepLearn.ing (artificial intelligence), NextAI (artificial intelligence), and Sensibill (machine learning and APIs). These startups are hiring and empowering small, highly collaborative teams with diverse skill sets. They employ agile project managers, consumer insight heads, user experience designers, and API developers to deliver services and products to meet users' needs in novel, useful, intuitive ways.

Scotiabank's external investment in this portfolio of organizations is concurrent with its own internal digital transformation. The focus of the Scotiabank Digital Factory, a 500-person innovation lab based in Toronto, is "moving Scotiabank forward through experimentation and reinvention." Additionally, Scotiabank is financing Canadian research and creation of new digital competencies via the Scotiabank Centre for Customer Analytics at Queen's University, Scotiabank Digital Banking lab at Western University, and Scotiabank Design Thinking Partnership at OCAD. Collectively, these substrategies signal that a large, generally slow-moving bank is ready for the future.

The return on investment? Scotiabank has made excellent progress advancing its digital strategy, as stated in its 2016 Annual Report and reported by the independent research firm International Data Corp. The bank's transformation strategy is rooted in both a strong risk assessment culture

REINVENTION IS ABOUT...	REINVENTION IS NOT ABOUT...
Investing in skills and capabilities	Investing in a product, service, or program
Enabling new team structures	Reinforcing traditional team structures
Seeking inspiration and ideas everywhere	Relying on sector-specific framing
Looking for patterns while avoiding misleading hype	Adopting every new technology
Tinkering and iteration	Building a perfect plan
Many small wins snowballing into big change	Big change resulting from one or two big wins

ANIL PATEL is cofounder of GrantBook.

and a decision to ensure the continued relevance of its business model through a diversified revenue mix and better products for customers.

## DRAWING ON OTHERS' METHODOLOGIES

Foundations, like banks, have strong risk assessment cultures. From their investment strategies to their granting approaches, most foundations have instituted policies and procedures protecting their assets while applying rigor to their grant application and reporting platforms. However, as documented by Project Streamline (an initiative of PEAK Grantmaking, a member-led organization of and for grantmakers), the process of applying for and reporting on grants remains very time-consuming and labor-intensive.

Despite the growing number of promising online technologies available to philanthropic groups, connecting software effectively and securely so that grantmaking and grant-seeking staff can focus on mission—not clerical tasks—remains a challenge. This is less a technological hurdle than a design and change-management exercise. A Kabbage-like platform approach in philanthropy—one that involves several concurrent investments and experiments—could vastly reduce transaction costs while producing considerably more useful information.

## MAKING THE CASE FOR DIGITAL STRATEGY

Digital reinvention for a philanthropic organization needs to include both internal and external transformation. With that in mind, here are a few questions that leaders can ask to kick-start a conversation within their organizations about how to prepare for the future:

- What are the new skills and novel partnerships we will need in order to take advantage of the wealth of data and information available to solve societal challenges?
- How can we empower small yet mighty teams to deliver programs and services that “surprise and delight” the most vulnerable people or communities?
- How can we modify and support office environments such that powerful machines support (not eliminate) talented humans and reduce redundant tasks?

With billions of existing dollars available for the purposes of social good, the economic case for philanthropic organizations to kick-start a digital strategy is strong. In fact, if philanthropic organizations want to make their programs

and services both effective and scalable, then creating a digital strategy that is aligned with their strategic plan is a governance imperative.

Economic, social, and environmental systems are already becoming more interconnected, facilitating the rapid evolution of products and services designed to meet the needs of the most vulnerable. Philanthropic organizations need to build digital muscle to respond effectively to the torrent of ideas and information.

## CANADA'S INCREASINGLY DIGITALLY ENABLED SOCIAL SECTOR

Billions of new dollars are pouring into Canada's big data, machine learning, and artificial intelligence (AI) industries. The mission of the Vector Institute (founded in 2015), for example, is to “promote and maintain Canadian excellence in deep learning and machine learning.” And the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research (CIFAR) soon will be administering a \$125 million pan-Canadian effort to attract and retain top AI researchers at our leading academic institutions.

These announcements, among others, have encouraged a number of Canadian civil society organizations to apply a social purpose lens to otherwise commercial pursuits of research and development. For example:

**InWithForward** is piloting a novel shared-service platform, available to several social service organizations that could not otherwise afford their own internal research and development (R&D)/innovation departments. InWithForward's rapid prototyping methodology includes an ethnographic approach to collecting small data—tiny clues that can help reveal large trends.

**Open North** has been leading Canada's nonprofit open data movement and has been a champion of the International Open Data Charter. Globally, Open North promotes increased government transparency and accountability and greater public participation in democracy.

**Powered by Data** is working with Canadian funders to open up their grant data in machine-readable formats. This service has a number of social purposes, such as reducing the reporting burden for nonprofits and increasing grant effectiveness.

**Code for Canada** helps bring government innovators and civic technologists together to make life better for Canadians. It runs a series of workshops and delivers fellow-

ship programs to improve technology and design capabilities within government.

**Community Foundations of Canada** is developing a data hub to better collect, curate, and share data and information with its members and as part of its movement building. This work includes partnering with other community foundations around the world on topics of inequality and reconciliation and mobilizing a network of domestic partners that are participating in Canada's rollout of the Sustainable Development Goals.

As these examples illustrate, Canada is a hotbed for social innovation. And that means that now is an excellent time for philanthropic organizations to further invest in a digital strategy for the purposes of more effective grantmaking and philanthropy that results in social change. The intersection of innovation, philanthropy, and the future of work (driven by big data, APIs, AI, and deep learning) presents as many philosophical questions as technical ones. These include:

- Do we allow commercial-driven companies to dominate the development of AI products and services, or do we find ways to participate in cocreation?
- Do we allow others to define data ownership, or do we help shape it?
- How do we reduce commercial innovation blind spots and unintended consequences?
- How do we attract and support a network of smart and passionate people to participate in social R&D?
- How can Canada establish a credible social R&D practice that can lead globally?
- With whom around the globe should Canadian social R&D practitioners be engaging?

Philanthropy is at a crossroads in Canada and around the world. As a sector, it can continue to operate as it does today, or it can invest in internal and external transformation that requires reinvention at the root.

At GrantBook, we're planning to expand our own social R&D (experimentation with human-centered design and APIs) while engaging with other like-minded practitioners. We want to see our individual and collective action produce *both* insights *and* capabilities to keep Canada at the forefront of innovation, philanthropy, and the future of work. Our doors are open to others who share that goal. ❌



# A Path to Community-Driven Food Innovation

BY ANNIE ANINGMIUQ & TRACY SARAZIN

**N**unatsiavut is a beautiful and unique part of Canada, a self-governing Inuit region within the province of Newfoundland and Labrador that is home to some 2,300 Inuit living along the coast. The communities are small and remote, but very close-knit, dotted between glacial rivers and picturesque mountains. For thousands of years, those living in Nunatsiavut have enjoyed being close to the land, where they have strong family, community, and cultural ties. But in one of the world's harshest climates, it takes a spirit of *qanuqtuurniq*—which means "innovation" or "resourcefulness" in Inuktitut, the Inuit language—to work together, draw on local knowledge, and overcome the hardships of living in this Arctic region.

Food insecurity is among these challenges. Nunatsiavut's five communities are inaccessible by road, making them highly dependent on deliveries for store-bought foods that must be flown or shipped to the region. The complex logistics and cost of that process significantly raise food prices. And there is no guarantee that food will be delivered at any given time. The risk of food insecurity increased earlier this year due to shipping delays.

With thinning sea ice and changing migration patterns, northern communities also are deeply feeling the effects of climate change, which exacerbates food challenges even for the most skilled hunters. Add to this the sharp decline in the George River caribou herd, which resulted in a recent ban on hunting caribou—a staple of the Labrador Inuit diet—and a crisis begins to emerge. In May of this year, the Nunatsiavut government released statistics from its "Household Food Security Survey" that indicated that 61 percent of households in the region are food insecure. In one community, the prevalence of household food insecurity exceeded 80 percent.

ANNIE ANINGMIUQ is an Inuk woman from Pangnirtung, Nunavut, and is engagement coordinator with Community Foundations of Canada.

TRACY SARAZIN is a consultant on Indigenous policy and research and is originally from Nunavut.

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## INNOVATIONS DRAWING ON OLD AND NEW

Today, community after community is meeting these issues with social innovation that draws on the old and the new, in efforts to give more people access to healthy, nutritious food. Nunatsiavut is turning to traditional Inuit ways of sharing and providing, as well as the values of *qanuqtuurniq*, to combat high food prices, food insecurity, and the effects of climate change.

One example is the introduction of modern community freezers, set up by the Nunatsiavut government and operated and supplied by the communities themselves. The use of these freez-



A woman fishes in the Nunatsiavut community of Nain, in Newfoundland and Labrador.

ers marks the resurgence of an idea that dates back to a time when Inuit were semi-nomadic. Hunters would collect food and bring it back to store in underground, permafrost freezers accessible by everyone in the community. People would take only the food they needed, leaving the rest for others. Today's freezers build on this past innovation. Each community decides how to stock its freezer, including what food to purchase or donate, and what provisions (gas, bullets, etc.) to give to hunters who supply food for the freezers. This practice opens up opportunities for trade between communities to help increase food diversity and also creates the conditions for food sovereignty.

Inventive initiatives are also under way to improve access to good food while protecting the region's biodiversity and animal populations. As

noted earlier, the recent hunting ban on caribou, put in place to curb the animals' decline, has had a significant impact on communities that rely on this food source. In response, the Nunatsiavut government's Department of Lands and Natural Resources has partnered with Parks Canada to allow Labrador Inuit to hunt moose in Gros Morne National Park on the island of Newfoundland, a three-hour flight south from Nain, one of the communities impacted. This solution has helped to replace a primary food staple, and also to reduce the overpopulation of moose, which have been damaging the park's vegetation.

## MENTAL, SPIRITUAL, AND COMMUNAL WELL-BEING

While these kinds of solutions to tackle food insecurity are vital to Nunatsiavut's vitality, others with a broader focus on physical, mental, spiritual, and communal well-being are having an equal, if not greater, effect. These programs—designed to be holistic, community-based, and culturally relevant—are producing seeding practices that can sustain these communities and carry Inuit knowledge and values through to new generations.

One example of this approach is a program called Going Off, Growing Strong, which connects Inuit youth with skilled hunters. Each participant is matched with a mentor who teaches hunting, fishing, and trapping skills, an experience that helps communities to become more food secure. Young Inuit also learn important cultural traditions, such as building a *kamutik* (Inuit sled) and constructing smokehouses to prepare the food they catch. The program not only transmits skills across generations and provides additional food to the community but also helps build resilience among youth facing widespread social, environmental, and cultural change.

Nunatsiavut is now developing a food security strategy for the region that builds on these innovations. But what's most exciting for Canada's future is the larger shift that's taking place to instill Inuit values and ways of life into local solutions. With the right kinds of support and investments around initiatives that are holistic, community-driven, and effective, there's no shortage of potential for others in Canada to build on the wealth of innovation already happening in Nunatsiavut. ❌

# Fighting Social Exclusion, One Encounter at a Time

BY NADIA DUGUAY & AGNÈS LORGUEILLEUX

**March 2, 2017, 6:30 p.m.:** At -20° Fahrenheit, it's a frigid winter evening in Montreal. Understandably, James doesn't feel like being outside, but he and Kevin are on duty with the van. They are a common sight as they criss-cross downtown in search of solitary souls. Unfortunately, homelessness doesn't take a break, even when it's bitterly cold. Tonight, many have gone "underground" and taken refuge in metro stations, so the two park and follow them there on foot.

At 7:50 p.m., they find George at the Bonaventure Metro Station. They talk with him, and George says, "I remember when I was at school, 15 years ago, and a teacher gave me a book but I never finished it. I'm still mad at myself for that today. The author was Illy something." Kevin takes a book out of his trunk and says, "Elie Wiesel? Was it this book, perhaps?"

At that moment, everything changes. An open, straightforward, real, and tangible exchange has become possible. A childhood memory, the joy of reading and discovery, and the pleasure of an unexpected connection are all linked. The world has changed for the better in one small way.

Welcome to Exeko's world, where social innovation is paired not only with inclusion and participation but also with poetry and philosophy. Exeko seeks to trigger such encounters, encouraging people to take the time to listen and create a space where we can discover who we are and seek answers together about what we know and don't know about the world.

**T**o build a resilient, inclusive, and innovative society, Canada will need to ensure that all of its citizens have opportunities to develop key skills, places where they can be heard, and the tools and spaces needed for social transformation. Yet the reasons for exclusion in all its forms (social, cultural, and intellectual), and the best ways to combat it, are not clearly understood. That's

why, since 2006, our organization, Exeko, has been pursuing two objectives—social inclusion and intellectual emancipation—to promote full citizenship, respect for human dignity, and diversity.

We specifically focus on valuing excluded speech in the public, institutional, and political spheres, and we hope that others might find this approach and our experience helpful for their own work.

## SUPPORTING CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL INCLUSION

Those who are the most excluded in our societies—the poor, members of indigenous groups, and others—are not only materially and institutionally but also culturally and intellectually marginalized. Their voices and thoughts are completely and legitimately heard in only a very few places. This type of exclusion is both a source and an effect of multiple forms of discrimination.

That is why we believe that encouraging artistic and intellectual creativity is an important part of an inclusive and emancipatory social transformation. We support this process through various means, including an "intellectual food truck" that has criss-crossed Montréal for five years, delivering books and art material and promoting discussions. We also run critical-thinking workshops at homeless centers and programs for artists-in-residence to cocreate artwork with citizens in the streets, such as murals, choreography, and poetry. We pursue research on exclusion and marginalization in which excluded citizens are co-researchers and not subjects; and we have created three social innovation labs: the Inclusive Culture Lab, the Inclusive Knowledge Lab, and the Inclusive Speech Lab. Finally, we operate a program called Libre-library, which offers a network of permanent libraries and mobile micro-libraries to hundreds of people experiencing homelessness. In 2017, 14 day centers and shelters in Montreal are hosting libre-libraries to promote accessibility and cocreation of knowledge. In addition to these

libre-libraries, we run two mobile libraries: Bibliocyclette and the idAction Van.

## BUILDING INCLUSIVITY THROUGH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

As underlined in Montreal's 2017 social development policy, most institutions in our society are recognizing that they need to shift their actions to become more inclusive. But we would ask: How can we take care of the special needs of those who suffer from social exclusion and marginalization if we fail to work with all citizens? Exeko is helping institutions from a variety of sectors to tackle this issue and aim at social change in a more targeted manner, deploying our activities to reach citizens who experience social exclusion but also to attract the attention of nonmarginalized citizens and cultural and political institutions. As of this writing, Exeko is working with more than 400 partners and collaborators who share this goal.

We believe that our activities and research are particularly relevant in an era of globalization in which issues are becoming more and more complex and many citizens feel excluded from political and social dialogue, even when it directly affects them. Our field experience reveals that marginalized communities feel this exclusion from the conversation especially keenly. Our society currently lacks not only a space for citizen expression but also an education system that provides us with key skills that would allow us to see ourselves as actors of change.

Art, culture, and philosophy can be important vectors for radical change, but not without an environment of sincere knowledge sharing. Therefore, far-reaching civic education must become part of the solution as well. That is why Exeko's programs are all based on critical and cultural literacy, cooperation, social analysis, and the ability to create and innovate. If we want to create a world that is more welcoming to all, we must profoundly transform the social norms that govern it, rethink the world by reorganizing what we know about it, and reflect above and beyond what we already know.

We must directly confront the hierarchy that supports predetermined roles. We must re-enchant the world by reinvesting in our ability to recognize, in a spirit of diversity, the possibility of a society in which we are all comfortable being learners—one where there are no preconceived notions of who should be teacher and who student, and one where no people are afraid of losing their own power when others do well. ❌

NADIA DUGUAY is cofounder and codirector at Exeko.

AGNÈS LORGUEILLEUX is innovation manager at Exeko.

Special thanks to Noémie Maignien, Exeko partnership agent and researcher.



# Supporting Women's Rights in Troubled Times

BY WARIRI MUHUNGI & ERIN E. EDWARDS

**F**or many community-level organizations led by women around the world, innovation is born of necessity. It is only by thinking creatively within systems—systems that have been designed to put them at a disadvantage—that they have been able to negotiate peace, access health care for LGBT populations, and ensure legal protections against rape and child marriage. These women and their organizations have developed an innovative reflex that enables them to approach challenges and advance human rights more responsively than most.

But at this juncture in history, women need the world of philanthropy to respond in kind. Canada has emerged as a counterbalance to some disturbing global trends for women and girls: growing populism, extremism, fundamentalism, and lines of conflict that are drawn and fought on women's bodies. With the stakes as high as they are, Canadian groups advancing women's human rights are going to have to do even more. We must match the courage and creativity of women at the front lines. There is no denying it: This work is political, and how we engage with it today will matter for decades to come.

Today, the hard-won gains that women have fought for are in question, and human rights movements are more restricted and more underfunded than ever. Women who lead organizations at the intersections of such movements often do so on less than \$20,000 a year. According to the "2017 State of Civil Society Report" by civil society alliance CIVICUS, civil society is "seriously constrained" in 106 countries. Between 2012 and 2016, governments the world over proposed more than 100 laws to restrict civil society organizations. What this means for many people on the ground is a moratorium on accepting international funds—and an inability to continue, at risk of imprisonment, providing vital services for women: family planning, protection from sexual violence, and advocacy to create and enforce legal protections.

It also means harassment, vilification, and sometimes murder of women human rights defenders, who are disproportionately targeted, particularly when they challenge long-held assumptions about women's bodies and behaviors. Refugees, lesbians, trans\* and gender nonconforming people, black women, indigenous women, women with disabilities, and human rights defenders face especially acute threats from regressive policies, damaging rhetoric, and often outright violence.

In response, the world has witnessed a massive swell of women's marches, protests, and digital campaigns. Women, trans\* people, and men are advocating for women's rights, designing new solutions, and mobilizing hundreds of thousands of new activists. Movements are working together to hold the line for women's rights, combining the tried and tested experience of established activists and organizations with the more experimental approaches of newer ones. One example is a group of Mayan women in Guatemala, working at the intersection of environmental, Indigenous, and women's rights, who have launched an ecotourism business that generates revenue and leadership opportunities for women who have survived decades of conflict and discrimination.

To help efforts like these succeed, social innovation funders need to recognize that the grantmaking best practices on which we've come to rely—such as focusing on long-term, core support—are not enough. We must also be responsive to ever-changing political contexts, take risks on emerging tools and ideas, and build relationships that position grantees as trusted advisors (not just as recipients of funding). Social innovation funders should not just push around money; they must push boundaries.

Canada's recently announced Feminist International Assistance Policy takes these needs into account, setting high expectations for treating women not only as beneficiaries but also as agents of change. Although we have frequently heard the call for women to participate and to lead, this has not always translated into funders trusting women to manage the very resources that are intended to address their causes.

Women's funds such as The MATCH International Women's Fund also aim to amplify the work of women and girls at the local level. Aligned with women's funds around the world that see investing in local groups as the key to transforming philanthropy, The MATCH Fund launched in 2013 to fund women-led social innovations. The women's fund model is, itself, an innovation: It mobilizes support and channels resources directly to the most effective grassroots groups that support women's creative breakthroughs to advance human rights and social movements. In the last 30 years, global, regional, and local women's funds have provided nearly \$1 billion to grassroots women- and trans\*-led groups, and today there are 168 women's funds on six continents. As Canada's only such fund, The MATCH Fund supports those at the center of the resistance—the women who are designing creative, nimble, and culturally cognizant approaches that change power dynamics.

In the last three years, the Fund has incubated women's organizations in 25 countries around the world. One example is Equifonía, a women-led group based in Veracruz, Mexico, where more than 500 women have been killed since 2010. Equifonía is part of a vocal network of organizations denouncing high levels of violence against women and advocating for women's sexual and reproductive health and rights. These groups employ a range of creative tactics: strategic advocacy, network and coalition building, the use of media, and targeted activation of legal frameworks. In 2015, they persuaded the Veracruz government to pilot a "gender alert" that declared a state of emergency and activated protective measures as the femicide rate reached record highs. In providing Equifonía with a web of support, The MATCH Fund fostered the kind of out-of-the-box thinking that will sustain and further women's human rights. Change can be slow to come, but flexible and responsive funding for these groups in their context is crucial to maintaining their creative resistance.

We believe that The MATCH Fund has created a model that can harness Canadian philanthropy and channel it directly to women seeding change at the grassroots. But to really see the scale of change we crave, Canada's progressive political brand and values must extend even further. The arc of the universe will only bend toward justice if we make it do so. At this moment, we must put money where it matters and not shy away from complexity, but, rather, invest in the courageous activists who have the most to lose. Alongside a courageous and creative women's movement, this effort may rewire the status quo. ✕

WARIRI MUHUNGI is manager for global programs at The MATCH International Women's Fund.

ERIN E. EDWARDS is senior communication strategist at The MATCH International Women's Fund.

# An Invitation to Explore Indigenous Innovation

BY KRIS ARCHIE & JESSICA BOLDUC

**A**s the year that marks Canada's 150th anniversary of confederation winds to a close, the country is experiencing a wake-up call about its past, present, and future. While the sesquicentennial has represented a time to celebrate and look forward for some, others, including many Indigenous peoples, have seen an opportunity to reflect back on a fraught history that includes the displacement of Indigenous peoples, forced assimilation, and the widespread destruction of languages and culture.

These timely reflections emphasize the value of the land's original social innovators. Indigenous communities that continue to occupy Turtle Island (today more commonly known as North America) have drawn for millennia on deep pools of knowledge characterized by a profound relationship with land, community, and spirit. And many of the leadership tenets that we consider most progressive today are rooted in this ancestral knowledge. In fact, collaborative leadership models, cocreation, appreciative inquiry, and mindfulness as tools for social innovation and transformation are inherent in Indigenous ways of knowing.

If Canada is to become a social innovator on the world stage, we need to recognize Indigenous peoples' contributions more explicitly, and reconcile these insights with the truth about our country's past. Canada's history of colonization, assimilation, and cultural genocide needs to be understood and acknowledged, because colonial legacies are anything but bygones. The ills of a shared history continue to create problems that in some Indigenous communities have led to states of outright emergency, including suicide epidemics, a growing risk of extinction for Indigenous language and cultural practices, and the need for countless "boil water" advisories in Indigenous areas without access to clean drinking water or proper infrastructure.

The realities of extreme wealth disparity, racism, and the resulting intergenerational trauma

call for restorative action between Indigenous peoples and settlers. Only after this happens can the potential of social innovation at scale be fully realized in Canada.

At the 2015 Indigenous Innovation Summit in Winnipeg, the Honourable Justice Murray Sinclair, chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), recognized this need. The TRC is an independent body created to document the stories of survivors, families, and communities affected by the Indian Residential Schools, which through much of the 20th century forcibly removed Indigenous children from their families with the goal of assimilating them. Sinclair noted, "Innovation isn't always about creating new things or creating new ways of doing." Rather, it "sometimes involves looking back at our old ways and bringing them forward to this new situation."

The 4Rs Youth Movement (4Rs) and The Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada (The Circle) are two organizations taking this idea to heart as they work to build relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The idea of relationship-building may not appear especially innovative in and of itself. What is new is the growing investment in intercultural, interpersonal, and intergenerational relationship-building for the purposes of social change. In many cases, the kinds of conversations that lead to positive relationships also display the hallmarks of Indigenous oral tradition, including intergenerational mentorship, participatory leadership, and holistic problem solving.

For the 4Rs Youth Movement (led by one of this piece's authors), building relationships is a first step toward larger systemic change. The organization hosts intimate face-to-face gatherings with Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth in community spaces, university campuses, and outdoor settings. The dialogues facilitate connections centered around the "4Rs" values of respect, reciprocity, reconciliation, and relevance. Through experiential training, gatherings, and workshops, the 4Rs brings together young people from different backgrounds to navigate the complexities of history and identity. These safe environments allow for and support even

the most uncomfortable conversations, help young people share their experiences, build understanding, and seed the kinds of respectful relationships that will hopefully lead to productive collaboration, trust, and friendship.

The Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples (The Circle) provides another example of a social sector organization promoting communication and relationships between different groups. The Circle (also led by a coauthor of this article) works to create space for relationship building, co-leadership, and innovation that enables positive change within Indigenous communities. The Circle emerged a decade ago through conversation between First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities interested in what reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people could mean for Canada's philanthropic sector, and for the country at large.

Since that time, The Circle has cocreated a number of programs through reciprocal learning and innovative approaches, from a decolonized method of grantmaking known as the Ontario Indigenous Youth Partnership Project (OIYPP) to the {Re}conciliation Initiative, aimed at promoting collaborations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists. The Circle is also the humble producer of the webinar series *The Journey to Reconciliation*, dedicated to increasing dialogue, awareness, and cultural fluency throughout the philanthropic sector. Recently, as part of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada closing events, The Circle and 20 other philanthropic organizations succeeded in cocreating a "Declaration of Action" that gives philanthropic organizations a platform to state their openness and willingness to strive toward understanding, dignity, respect, and reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

In an age of rapidly advancing technologies and accelerating communication, the 4Rs and The Circle are investing in the slow, time-honored tradition of face-to-face conversation as a way to foster empathy and leadership across cultures and generations. Our hope is that through this work, the people of Canada will be able to sit in difficult spaces and find strength and direction in the beauty of the relationships that we build with one another. It's an innovation that is at once old and new.

This is a moment of possibility for Canada. These organizations and others have extended an open invitation to consider how the deep evolution and innovations of Indigenous cultures can inform our ability to learn. Through growth, shared experiences, and cocreation, we have an opportunity to discover a new direction and move closer to equity, inclusion, and justice. ✕

KRIS ARCHIE, *Secewepmc te qelmucw from Tsq'escen and a settler*, is executive director of The Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada.

JESSICA BOLDUC, *Anishinaabe-French from the Batchewana First Nation*, is executive director of the 4Rs Youth Movement.



# Out of the Lab and into the Frontline

How embracing uncertainty can help cultivate Canada's social R&D ecosystem.

BY ALEX RYAN, SARAH SCHULMAN & VINOD RAJASEKARAN

**I**magine a society where people could access the best possible services and solutions. In that society, a newcomer settlement agency might have dedicated capacity to conduct frontline research on language service usage while also facilitating the settlement of refugees and generating new supports to enhance the settlement experience. A humanitarian organization might have in-house capacity to develop a platform that connects people who have been displaced, by, say, wildfires, with people who have extra space to house them—while continuing to bring aid to others more recently affected and establishing more agile internal processes along the way. That society might also have an organization working alongside adults with cognitive disabilities, and simultaneously developing and refining a platform for lifelong learning rooted in the latest research—enhancing the efforts of a network of agencies delivering social services.

These organizations already exist—in Halifax, Ottawa, and Vancouver, respectively. And they're not alone in their approach. In fact, a small but growing number of nonprofits and charities across Canada are delivering services *even as they research, design, develop, and deliver new practices and services*. These organizations are increasing design capacity, producing new knowledge, and creating new kinds of value. They are pursuing what, in the private sector, one would call research and development, or R&D. Given the social sector's chronic funding restrictions and adversity to risk, these are extremely bold steps.

## FOCUSING ON STRATEGIC INQUIRY

The words “research and development” conjure up images of scientists in white coats methodically running experiments in controlled laboratory environments. This quest for incontrovertible knowledge is what authors Ian Mitroff and Ralph Kilmann call operational inquiry. They contrast

ALEX RYAN is vice president of systems innovation at MaRS Discovery District.

SARAH SCHULMAN is a partner at InWithForward.

VINOD RAJASEKARAN is a fellow with Social Innovation Generation.



Children participate in an Escuela Nueva program in Colombia.

operational ways of knowing with strategic ways of understanding the world:

Where the operational scientist is governed by the need to break problems and issues down into their elemental parts, the strategic scientist is governed by his need to perceive problems as part of a larger global “whole” or framework. ...

Where the one believes in the search for a single best (optimal) answer to question, the other believes that there are multiple possible ways of posing and responding to any question.

Social R&D draws heavily on strategic inquiry. It can be described as the art and science of applying research and experimental processes on the frontline to generate new insights and innovations that transform services, products, organizations, and—ultimately—lives. It uses diverse methods, including behavioral science, randomized control trials, lean prototyping, positive deviance, and ethnography. The questions it seeks to answer are situated in the decidedly messy and evolving realm of human experience. How do we address growing social isolation and loneliness? How do we combat rising homelessness and opioid

deaths? Such challenges are by-products of complex systems; the unit of focus isn't simply the individual but the dynamic relationship between the individual and her environment. Because there are no singular solutions, the innovations that emerge from social R&D bear little resemblance to penicillin or the space rover.

Take Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) or the World Organization of the Scout Movement. Started in 1935 with two members, AA had some 2 million members and more than 100,000 groups in 2016. The Scouts, established in 1908 with 20 youth, now number about 28 million. Unpack each

innovation and what you have are roles, relationships, rewards, and routines. But AA isn't *the* solution to addiction; scouting isn't *the* solution to youth disengagement. Both innovations emanate from lived experience and continuous development. Alcoholics Bill Wilson and Dr. Bob Smith formed a peer-support group out of desperation. Far from undertaking an objective inquiry process in

a controlled environment, they learned through personal trial and error in a halfway house. And despite its reach, AA's efficacy is mixed. Randomized control trials are inconclusive. For a segment of users, AA is effective. For others, not at all. Far from bringing us certainty, much social R&D gives us opportunities to engage within uncertainty. It is the back-and-forth process of moving between lived experience and codified principles and practices within complex environments. It relies on connections with people and connections to systems.

## CONNECTIONS WITH PEOPLE

Tapping into lived experiences requires immersive kinds of data—what anthropologist Clifford Geertz has termed “thick description.” Thick description goes beyond big or hard data to explore *how* and *why* people interact in the world—their routines, habits, preferences, motivations, and aspirations. Such intelligence offers starting points for generating ideas and prototyping alternative responses *with* people. Indeed, where hard data can shed light on the nature of a problem (for example, changing demographics or low service utilization rates), thick data can help to elucidate the types of

solutions that are attractive to people and thus more likely to have lasting impact.

Increasingly, private sector companies such as LEGO and Disney are investing in thick data to develop products and services that better reflect user needs and desires. And yet, there has been no equivalent or concerted focus on the data capability of social sector organizations. Sectors such as education and health, however, offer a few helpful clues. For example, AltSchool, a Silicon Valley startup, has hard and thick data at its core. Its two-story buildings feature collaborative learning spaces on the first floor and research labs on the second. Designers, developers, engineers, marketers, and education professors work alongside teachers and students and empower them to capture their experiences, identify patterns and trends, and co-make and test new educational tools, interactions, and pedagogical processes.

### CONNECTIONS TO SYSTEMS

For local innovations to achieve impact at scale, they must engage with complex systems that operate at multiple levels of society. Complex systems are characterized by opaqueness (no one can understand the whole system), co-evolution (problems change in response to solutions), unintended consequences, and context sensitivity (similar conditions may lead to dissimilar outcomes). This means that existing solutions tend to become less effective over time, and copying best practices from one jurisdiction to another rarely works as intended. In short, complexity means we need to think differently about scale.

Based on a decade of experiments investing in social innovation across Canada, the McConnell Foundation has found that systemic impact requires a combination of three scaling strategies: scaling out, scaling up, and scaling deep. Scaling out includes replication and dissemination; scaling up includes changing policies, laws, and rules; and scaling deep includes changing cultural values and beliefs. By building an evidence base on what works, social R&D can help challenge entrenched assumptions, raise capital, catalyze social movements, and advocate for policy change. Systems change also requires an ecosystem of connected changemakers. Social R&D must be integrated with, not isolated from, the groups and institutions that manage the current system.

The success of the Escuela Nueva learning model illustrates the role of social R&D in addressing complex challenges. The program started in a single demonstration school in Pamplona, Colombia, in 1971 and today has reached more than five million children in 14 countries. By 2000, a UNESCO study found that the model's use

resulted in Colombian rural schools outperforming their urban counterparts in spite of deep structural inequalities. This achievement was made possible by disciplined social R&D over decades that built innovative new practices in tandem with a supporting evidence base in demonstration schools, field trials in the most deprived settings, and evaluation of educational outcomes both traditional (language and mathematics) and new (self-esteem and democratic behavior). Escuela Nueva cofounder Vicky Colbert rose to become vice minister of education in Colombia, where she made Escuela Nueva national policy implemented in 20,000 rural schools. In 1987, she founded the nonprofit Fundacion Escuela Nueva to continue to innovate and expand the model. How did Escuela Nueva create systems change at this scale? According to Colbert, the reason was simple: "We had evidence and results." Escuela Nueva cofounder Beryl Levinger adds, "If you're going to innovate, you have to embrace the idea that you don't know what the innovation looks like when you start."

### SEEDING AN ENABLING ECOSYSTEM

If we aspire to create an R&D-rich social impact ecosystem, where we can generate more innovations like AA, Scouts, or Escuela Nueva, it is insufficient to have pockets of skills or capital or knowledge scattered across Canada's vast geography. We cannot rely on exchanges of ideas and talents solely between disparate individuals. We must address systemic barriers to social R&D.

We may be early in the process of shaping a robust social R&D ecosystem, but the time to start is now. There is no single formula for doing this. But we have observed that our embryonic R&D ecosystem benefits when those of us involved let it flow from the bottom up, appreciate multiple ways of knowing and doing, connect people to pursue mutual gain, build tribes of trust, create informal feedback loops, and celebrate role models and peer learning. We are learning that there is a necessary interplay between "hard" and "soft" assets within ecosystems. Hard assets include *people* (including practitioners, grant-makers, academics, and end users), *infrastructure* (technology, equipment, financial capital, data, and physical space), *policy* (incentives, regulation, services, and matching funding), and *skills and competencies* (the theory, tools, and "street craft" of design, experimentation, and delivery). Soft assets include feedback and efficacy, motivation, recognition, norms and values, voice, and a sense of belonging.

We are also beginning to see three types of R&D clusters emerging: issue-based, craft-based, and policy-based.

*Issue-based clusters* pursue shared research and experiments to transform interventions in a specific domain, such as social services. These include Grounded Space, a cross-organizational R&D function focused on the social services sector. Grounded Space is itself an experiment, led by social design agency InWithForward. Frustrated with how hard it can be to implement ideas, Grounded Space recognizes that moving from problems to ideas to scaled innovations requires permanent infrastructure. Instead of relying on one-off grants, other organizations are pooling resources and sharing in the talent, data, and routines required to both develop and deeply embed new models and practices.

*Craft-based clusters* focus on strengthening the competencies and tools of R&D in social contexts. Labwise, a pan-Canadian network of practice, is one such cluster. It focuses on improving social innovation lab processes to help practitioners build capacity, integrate collaborative research, prototype solutions, embed continuous evaluation and learning in their work, and hone action-planning processes across traditional boundaries. Innoweave is an online learning platform for Canadian nonprofits and charities to learn about topics such as experimentation, developmental evaluation, collective impact, social innovation labs, and cloud computing.

*Policy clusters*, generally nested inside government or on the edge of government, have mandates around policy research, experimentation, and innovation. The Alberta CoLab, for example, is a research, design, and development team with the province of Alberta's Department of Energy. MaRS Solutions Lab works outside government but supports policy development for all levels of Canadian government and specializes in innovation for cross-sector challenges that transcend the government, corporate, academic, and nonprofit sectors.

Ultimately, we imagine a Canadian ecosystem of connected changemakers learning from peers and generating social innovation, with a supporting evidence base in multiple domains, from hunger to gender equality to literacy. There are many pathways to scale and spread social innovations from the frontline to change organizational routines, government regulations, and social behavior. The cumulative impact of community organizations is greater than the sum of their parts. The first bold step we must take is to more systematically and intentionally grow a thriving R&D culture, capacity, and practice in Canada's social impact sector that respects all three dimensions outlined above: a connection to people, a connection to systemic change, and a connection to an enabling ecosystem. ❌



# Crowdsourcing Refugee Resettlement

BY MUSTAFA ALIO & RATNA OMIIDVAR

**F**our decades ago, in the aftermath of the Vietnam War, hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Laotians fled their homes in rickety boats, seeking safety and opportunity. But as refugee camps became overburdened, several neighboring countries began to refuse safe passage, leaving many people stranded at sea. The world was confronted with an urgent refugee crisis, and after hard work by many individuals, but Canada stepped up. Between 1979 and 1980, the country resettled more than 60,000 of these refugees as permanent residents with a pathway to citizenship. Another 140,000 later joined them. Many arrived through the world's first Private Sponsorship of Refugees (PSR) program. In other words, Canada's response to the "boat people" took the form of a social innovation that was largely unique both nationally and globally.

The PSR program arrived with Canada's Immigration Act of 1976-77, and the aftermath of the fall of Saigon was the first opportunity to test it. With pressure from media, the public, provinces, and opposition parties, the Canadian government began to raise the number of resettlement spots. Thanks in part to the efforts of Operation Lifeline, 30,000 sponsoring groups (of five or more Canadians each) had formed across the country by 1980.

The PSR program is at its core a public-private partnership. By tapping into the resources, creativity, and connectivity of citizens, private sponsorship bolsters Canada's ability to accept more refugees than the government of Canada could alone manage. This idea is known as "additionality" and is a mobilizing force for sponsors. You could also call it crowdsourcing.

The program enlists private groups of citizens to act as sponsors and de facto guarantors for refugee families during the first year after their arrival. These private sponsors—once clustered in faith communities but now spreading to workplaces and book clubs—raise funds and develop resettlement plans prior to the refugees'



LinkedIn's Toronto office hosts a Refugee Career Jumpstart Project hiring event.

arrival. Afterward, they invest countless hours in planning the minutiae of resettlement, from trips to the doctor and the principal's office to weekend museum trips, late-night phone calls, and more. It is not uncommon to hear that sponsorship can be one of the most difficult community undertakings these groups have ever taken on—but also among the most rewarding.

Today, Canadians have privately sponsored more than 288,000 refugees from all over the world. Canada's PSR program remains an integral pathway—including, recently, for more than 40,000 Syrians and Iraqis. During the latest resettlement surge, a group of international partners led by Jennifer Bond, a law professor at the University of Ottawa, worked to export this innovation beyond its Canadian roots. Pilot programs are now developing in both countries familiar with resettlement, like the United Kingdom, and those new to it, such as Argentina and Chile.

Private sponsorship is considered a best practice within international immigration and refugee circles in part because of its track record in Canada. Refugees, private sponsors, and Canada as a whole have benefited immensely from the practice. Privately sponsored refugees have a built-in support network embedded in the local community, made up of people who are socially and economically established. As a result, they can experience a sense of belonging from the moment they arrive. What's more, program evaluations show that privately sponsored refugees are more likely to enter the Canadian

job market sooner and at higher income levels than those who enter as refugees outside of the PSR program.

PSR also has served as a pathway for refugee family reunification—an important if unintended result of the program. Many Canadians use private sponsorship to reunite family members who may have been separated as a result of armed conflict or oppression in their home country. In addition to other forms of social capital provided

by private sponsorship, family ties are one reason why privately sponsored refugees are less likely to rely on social assistance after their sponsorship period than their government-sponsored counterparts.

Finally, private sponsorship gives citizens a tangible way to contribute to alleviating the migration

crisis at a grassroots level. Enabling this personal engagement is one of the essential ingredients behind the program's success. It's good for sponsors who feel empowered to make a real impact, it's good for refugees who experience the expressions of inclusion, and cumulatively, it's good for communities big and small.

One of the less documented benefits of PSR is that a broader circle of citizens than just the sponsors participate in resettlement and integration. More than 250 communities in Canada have welcomed privately sponsored refugees, and any group of five or more sponsors is increased exponentially through the informal roles of extended family, friends, colleagues, local politicians, and others. Private sponsorship involves everyone: All have a stake. In that sense, PSR is truly a resettlement and integration program.

Images of tragedy in the Mediterranean and on overland routes through hostile environments continue to mirror the horror experienced several decades ago by the "boat people" from Southeast Asia. And the number of refugees globally is climbing each year.

As Canada continues to crowdsource a compassionate response to the plight of refugees, other countries ought to open the same channels. The pilot programs are a beginning.


This form of active engagement is not a unique capacity of Canadians. In different ways, citizens worldwide have shown the will and ability to welcome refugees as neighbors and friends. Governments should take their cue. ❌

MUSTAFA ALIO is the cofounder and project and development manager for the Refugee Career Jumpstart Project, based in Toronto.

RATNA OMIIDVAR is an independent senator for the Province of Ontario.

# Building a Canadian Social Finance Fund

BY STEPHEN HUDDART & TIM DRAIMIN

 In a hope-filled day in September 2015, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau joined 150 world leaders in New York for the proclamation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals—the global action plan to reach a sustainable and equitable future by 2030.

Today, the world is different. Just when we most need concerted action on issues such as climate change, income inequality, and international migration, the sad reality is that populism, cynicism, and insularity have taken over the political agendas of some of our closest allies. Meanwhile, Canada is facing its own challenges, such as the transition to a low-carbon economy, and economic reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.

Against this challenging global backdrop, however, Canada still has a unique opportunity to grow and share its capacity for social innovation by advancing its social financing capabilities.

Canadian social innovation and social finance have coevolved over the last decade. For example, from its inception in 2007, the collaborative partnership Social Innovation Generation (SiG) has fostered a culture of continuous social innovation in Canada, including a focus on impact investing. In 2010, the partnership initiated the Canadian Task Force on Social Finance to identify opportunities to mobilize private capital for public good. Among its recommendations: Philanthropic foundations should allocate at least 10 percent of their assets to impact investments by 2020. The Task Force also catalyzed the founding of the MaRS Centre for Impact Investing in Toronto, one of a growing number of intermediaries serving the financing needs of purpose-driven organizations.

Governments at the local, provincial, and federal levels also have taken noteworthy action. Following framework legislation and financial support, the Quebec social economy

has come to represent nearly 10 percent of the province's GDP. The Chantier de l'économie sociale, a civil society organization created by social movements, nonprofits, and cooperative enterprises, was an instrumental partner in this effort with global links.

Reflecting this level of activity, Canada ranked third in the *Economist's* 2016 global Social Innovation Index, after the United States and the United Kingdom. Building on what has been accomplished to date, the federal government is now working with practitioners and experts from across government, the private sector, civil society, and academia to cocreate a bold new social innovation and social finance strategy for Canada.

## DESIGNING A SOCIAL FINANCE SOLUTION

Several countries have recognized that injecting capital into the social finance market is a natural next step for enabling its success. Using unclaimed assets and investments from leading banks, the United Kingdom established Big Society Capital in 2012 to capitalize the world's first social finance wholesaler. Inspired by the British model, Japan will soon launch its own version of a social impact fund. Portugal used European Union Structural Funds to create Portugal Inovação Social, a financing wholesaler that will also support capacity building, match philanthropic and private investments, and support outcomes budgeting. Meanwhile, Impact Investing Australia and key stakeholders are developing Impact Capital Australia to use public funds to leverage capital from retail banks into the social sector.

A July 2017 meeting at the Global Steering Group on Impact Investing conference in Chicago brought together individuals from around the world to discuss plans to set up government-anchored impact funds. Canada is among the countries exploring options for structuring a fund, or funds, to address cross-cutting national challenges on the one hand, and locally determined priorities on the other.

A Canadian version of such a fund could forge multisector partnerships, structure blended

finance instruments, and—in association with existing intermediaries—provide complementary services. It could create impact investment opportunities, collaborate with innovation teams, and deploy tools to fit specific challenges—thematically, regionally, and nationally. It could also structure outcomes funds, incentivizing long-term results over short-term “outputs,” as documented and discussed in the recent book *What Matters: Investing in Results to Build Strong, Vibrant Communities*.<sup>1</sup>

Additionally, a Canadian social innovation grant fund, complemented by an open data strategy and enhanced capacity for outcomes measurement, would complement the work of a social finance fund by increasing deal flow and ensuring that solutions could scale bottom-up, top-down, and horizontally. It could align and expand on the current ecosystem of social purpose organizations, investors, intermediaries, social innovation labs, research institutes, and data centers, among other actors.

Beyond innovative financing, the fund could operate challenge platforms to find open-source solutions to social challenges, as the new Smart Cities Challenge proposes. Additional social infrastructure—social innovation labs, What Works Centres that support evidence-based decision making, research and development, open-source technology platforms, and other complementary capacities—would further contribute to a pipeline of investable solutions with transformative impacts.

## WHY NOW?

A social finance fund in Canada would stimulate innovation in the public service and bring new dynamism to the social sector, renewing the relationship between government, philanthropy, and the private sector at a time when meeting the UN Sustainable Development Goals demands an all-out effort. Transformative change will require not only collaboration within government and across sectors, but also new sources of capital, new approaches to managing risk, and new uses of data.

In Canada and around the world, social finance and social innovation are evolving rapidly and becoming increasingly networked. We have arrived at a threshold moment when we must take the work to another level of scale. Building on Canada's existing strengths, and learning from the experiences of others, affords us an opportunity to transform our challenges into opportunities for inclusive growth. ✕

## NOTE

<sup>1</sup> *What Matters: Investing in Results to Build Strong, Vibrant Communities*, Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco and Nonprofit Finance Fund, 2017.

STEPHEN HUDDART is president and CEO of The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation.

TIM DRAIMIN is executive director of Social Innovation Generation.

# Canada and the Sustainable Development Goals

BY ANDREW CHUNILALL & AJMAL SATAAR

**A**t the turn of the century, world leaders and the international community adopted the UN Millennium Declaration, uniting around a new global partnership to reduce extreme poverty by 2015. Among other actions, the Declaration committed “developing” countries to eight ambitious Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) focused on areas that had what they determined was the greatest potential to make significant progress toward achieving the overarching objective.

The United Nations’ 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which were adopted in 2015 and set goals for 2030, marked another bold leap forward in the fight to address poverty and protect the planet. These goals apply to all countries equally and focus more deeply than the MDGs on the root causes that hinder or prevent sustainable progress. The SDGs are not about halfway measures or Band-Aid solutions, but rather about working directly with the people and communities most affected by global challenges to create social change. We know from past experience that to be most effective, SDG solutions will need to be collaborative, holistic, and contextualized to specific countries, geographies, cultures, and social norms.

As Canada begins to set its own national goals and to contribute more broadly to the global SDGs, the country is at an interesting point in its own development. In the next 20 years, Canada’s demographic makeup will change significantly. By 2036, Statistics Canada, the country’s national statistical agency, forecasts that 30 percent of all residents will have been born outside of the country. Canada’s urban centers will also become larger, younger, and more diverse, with an increasing mix of visible minorities, Indigenous people, and newcomers.

These shifts are not isolated but rather reflective of a more globalized world that is changing at a rapid pace. Forces such as economic inequality, environmental degradation, human migration, and political conflict are no longer an ocean away. We are feeling them closer and closer to

home. And if these trends continue, as they are likely to, it’s safe to assume that the future will be even more complex than it is today, and that any hope of tackling global challenges connected to the SDGs will in turn require more innovative and community-driven solutions at home.

Fortunately, Canada is in a prime position to lead on such an ambitious agenda. With a diverse and educated population, strong social values, and an abundance of resources, the country can take an important leadership and facilitation role in achieving the SDGs. To do so, we must enable an ecosystem that allows for both large-scale and community-based innovation to flourish.

## LARGE-SCALE ACTIVITIES

Within Canada, a number of investments aimed at supporting the SDGs are already under way. Civil society and the federal government are currently working together on the country’s Social Innovation and Social Finance Strategy, with the goal of improving outcomes for vulnerable populations and creating more inclusive and sustainable communities. Community Foundations of Canada (whose CEO coauthored this article), the Canadian Council for International Cooperation, and a dedicated network of partners are leading the creation of an open SDG network to help mobilize public engagement, cross-sector collaboration, knowledge sharing, and institutional action. The Canadian government’s feminist international assistance policy to promote gender equality also will have an impact, through commitments including \$150 million over five years to women’s rights organizations in the Global South—the single largest investment of its kind to date from any country. All of these actions indicate positive signs of early leadership and innovation related to achieving the SDGs by the 2030 goal.

## THE LOCAL SCENE

But we know that these investments are likely to yield positive results only if they are complemented by innovative solutions that are locally led, designed, and implemented. One place where these solutions are being employed is

in Canada’s Arctic region, through the work of Inspire Nunavut, a social enterprise founded by this article’s other coauthor. Inspire Nunavut has been working closely with Inuit people through a social entrepreneurship training and mentoring program that helps young people create new businesses and take other actions to tackle community problems and improve their lives. The organization is purposeful about integrating Inuit culture into its offerings and has developed an infrastructure that fosters collaboration between various business and mental health support organizations in Nunavut, providing the territory’s entrepreneurs with all-encompassing assistance. This framework has been essential to the success seen so far in the first five communities in which it operates.

Community-based innovation is also abundant in Canada’s biosphere reserve regions, which have long been at the forefront of creating sustainable communities. On Vancouver Island, the Clayoquot Biosphere Trust, one of 191 community foundations across Canada, is promoting sustainable development by mapping local data and community knowledge to SDG targets through its annual “Vital Signs” report. In doing so, the Trust is able to benchmark progress against a set of global targets and better understand the community’s contribution to an international agenda.

These kinds of community-based innovations are reflective of a more contextualized approach to sustainability—one in which civil society has an important role to play alongside government and the private sector.

## SUCCESS MAY NOT BE SO FAR AWAY

The stakes for the planet have never been higher, and the SDGs rightly recognize that ending poverty and ensuring global prosperity must go hand in hand with strategies that build sustainable communities. Although global progress so far has been anything but uniform, and far from complete, the advancements that we as an international community have made in less than a generation suggest that achieving the moonshot goals of poverty eradication and global sustainability may not be as far away as they once were.

As we continue to take on global challenges at the local level, Canada has so much to contribute. With the right investments and support to help the engines of social enterprise and social innovation flourish, Canada can continue to demonstrate its leadership on the global stage—creating a fertile environment for change and a future that is better and brighter for all. ❌

ANDREW CHUNILALL is CEO of Community Foundations of Canada.

AJMAL SATAAR is the founder of Inspire Nunavut.



Canada's 150th anniversary is an opportunity to reflect on our country's history and actively engage in meaningful work toward reconciliation. The sesquicentennial is also a chance to consider what's needed to ensure that our communities will be inclusive, resilient, and sustainable for the next 150 years.

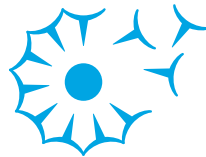


**COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATIONS  
OF CANADA**  
*all for community*

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DU CANADA**  
*ensemble pour tous*

**Community Foundations of Canada** is the national network for Canada's 191 community foundations. Together we are a philanthropic movement working across sectors to help Canadians invest in building strong and sustainable communities for the future.

**SiG**



**social innovation  
generation  
de l'innovation sociale**

**Social Innovation Generation (SiG)** is a collaborative partnership originally conceived in 2007 by The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation and developed in partnership with the University of Waterloo's Waterloo Institute for Social Innovation and Resilience (WISIR), the MaRS Discovery District, and the PLAN Institute. Our ultimate goal is to be a catalyst for supporting whole system change by contributing to changing the broader economic, cultural, and policy context in Canada to allow social innovations to flourish. SiG intentionally engages partners across all sectors to create a culture of continuous social innovation. SiG was created as a time-bound project that will end after 10 years in December 2017.

**McConnell**

**The McConnell Foundation** is a private Canadian foundation that develops and applies innovative approaches to social, cultural, economic, and environmental challenges. We do so through granting and investing, capacity building, convening, and cocreation with grantees, partners, and the public. We envision a Canada in which the economy and social systems advance the well-being of all people, and in which the natural environment is stewarded for the benefit of future generations and all life. We are committed to reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, and seek to unleash the resources and creativity of individuals and organizations from all sectors to solve social challenges.

This supplement was conceptualized, curated, and compiled by **Vinod Rajasekaran**, a fellow with Social Innovation Generation. He is also cofounder of Future of Good, a first-of-its-kind global summit in Canada rooted in the UN Sustainable Development Goals to explore forces shaping how we do good in the 21st century. Prior to this, Vinod was cofounder and executive director of Impact Hub Ottawa and founding managing director of Rideau Hall Foundation.