



CANADIAN FORUM ON INNOVATION & SOCIETAL IMPACT

SKILLS + KNOWLEDGE

Brief

Prepared for the Participants to
the Inaugural Meeting
12-13 October 2022
McMaster University





OUR PARTNERS



This brief benefitted from the invaluable input of **Geraldine Cahill** (Director, UpSocial Canada) and **Kelsey Spitz-Dietrich** (Vice President Innovation & Inclusion, UCS). A copy of their co-authored book **"Social Innovation Generation"** will be included with the material you will receive upon arrival at the Forum.



Table of Contents

BACKGROUND 3

- CANADA’S SOCIAL SECTOR 3
- KEY QUESTIONS. 4
- SHARED TERMINOLOGY..... 5

FOCUS. 7

- CHALLENGING MINDSETS, CLARIFYING COMMITMENTS TO SOCIAL INNOVATION IN NATIONAL POLICY 7

THEMES..... 8

- THEME 1. UNLOCKING THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF ALL SECTORS 8
- THEME 2. FOSTERING AN ENABLING CIVIC ENVIRONMENTS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE. THE ROLE OF MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT. 9
- THEME 3. OPENING UP THE ACADEMY 10
- THEME 4. SKILLS, TOOLS AND KNOW-HOW FOR SOCIETAL IMPACT 11



Background

Canada's Social Sector

Canada's social sector is vast, diverse and essential. It contributes substantially to the economy. Social sector organisations, sometimes called “not-for-profits” include hospitals, universities, colleges, and social purpose organisations offering basic provisions that range from community food services, community housing and emergency relief to religious organisations, advocacy, sports and recreation.

In 2020, healthcare made for 42.2% of the social sector, research and education 19.6% with social services organisations representing another 12.9% of the sector.

FACTS

- **170,000** organisations
- **9.0%** of Canada's GDP, when including government not-for-profits, 2.2% when excluding them (social services make for 1.4% of the total economy)
- **1 in 10** Canadian workers (most hold a college or university degree)
- total employees: **2.4 million**
- **77%** are women
- **48%** are immigrants
- **29%** are visible minorities
- **5%** are Indigenous
- nearly **23%** are 55yo or older
- Canadians give **+14 billion** to charities every year
- total volunteers: **13 million**

The pandemic has provided rich evidence for the role of a resilient social sector as part of healthy, civic and democratic infrastructure. 95% of social sector organisations report that innovation has played a role in maintaining programs and/or pivoting during the pandemic, with more than 70% describing innovation as central to the process.

Universities' Civic Mission and the Impact of Social Sciences, Humanities, and Arts

University-grown social and human research is increasingly geared toward social impact. In 2021 alone, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) awarded 376 grants worth \$72.2 million requiring applicants to work directly with community partners. SSHRC's investment in community-focused partnered research in 2021 however represented only 6.3% of its overall budget for that year (\$1,133.5 million), which is itself a

fraction of the overall federal funding for science and technology activities, an estimated \$304 billion.¹

As we move beyond the linear economic model of economic growth into a circular economy paradigm informed by Sustainable Development Goals and requiring high capacity for social innovation, universities are seen as central stakeholders in transformative societal change. As such, universities' community engagement and knowledge mobilisation mandates need to be informed by strategies that aim to make the institution an anchor of its community, contributing to all aspects of social and economic growth, and producing value for stakeholders on all sides.

What this means is that the mission of today's universities extends much beyond teaching and research: as anchors, universities are expected to create moral, cultural, political and economic value for their communities, region and society. In order to be part of the process, and lead it, change is needed in social and human science disciplines and programming. Commitments to community engagement need to move beyond individual strategy and be supported at the institutional level by initiatives that are informed by the needs, assets and constraints of communities, and a willingness to shift academic cultures toward imperatives driven by the creation of value in the social sector. In order to achieve this vision, all social sector stakeholders need to be part of the conversation and be aligned on what education, policy and practice looks like in the social innovation ecosystem.

Key Questions

- What are the needs around innovation in the social sector, and how could campus-community partnerships help address those?
- What does a shared, multistakeholder agenda for social innovation look like?
- What changes are needed, culturally and within postsecondary education to increase the social capital of universities in the social ecosystem?
- Social sector practitioners already deploy a number of effective methods to foster innovation processes: design thinking, sense-making etc. How can SSHA researchers be involved? How can SSHA knowledge and methods best support these processes?
- Are the social sector organisations with which researchers partner capable of absorbing the research that is produced?
- What/how do campus-community research collaborations contribute to innovation in the social sector?
- How successful are community-engagement strategies dedicated to building capacity for innovation in the social innovation ecosystem?

¹ Statistics Canada (<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=2710000501>)

Shared Terminology

Capacity: The level of an organisation's capability to deliver services, programs, and products according to its mandate or mission.

Experiential Learning (EL): The acquisition of knowledge and skills through practice and upon reflection of a period engagement, observation, and/or immersion. 'Experiential learning' and "work-integrated learning' are often used interchangeably.

EL-partnership: In the context of this brief, a community-based or community-focused collaboration between an organisation and an academic institution that revolves around the hosting, facilitating, and supporting of one or more students involved, for instance, in service or project delivery.

Foundational Skills: A broad range of abilities and knowledge understood to be essential to employability and citizenship, and generally associated with social and emotional intelligence as well as cognitive literacy. They include critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, self-management, intercultural awareness, and effective communication.

Innovation Process: A series of actions or steps designed to create, improve or implement ways of doing, framing, knowing or thinking and intended to create new value.

Knowledge Absorption: The ability of an organisation to assimilate information needed to support continuous and productive innovation.

Knowledge Mobilisation: Knowledge mobilisation is an umbrella term encompassing a wide range of activities relating to the production and use of research results, including knowledge synthesis, dissemination, transfer, exchange, and co-creation or co-production by researchers and knowledge users (SSHRC).

Reciprocity: A systems-level feature of collaborations and partnerships whose outcomes and impacts are balanced and mutually beneficial.

Research and Development (R&D): The planned creative work aimed at new knowledge or developing new and significantly improved goods, programs, and services which includes basic research, applied research and development. Research and practical experience is undertaken to produce new or significantly improved goods, programs, services or processes (Pearman 2019).

Resilience: The ability to effectively respond to and adapt to systemic change, seeking a balance of social, environmental, and economic needs.

SSHA: Social Sciences, Humanities and Arts disciplines. Statistics Canada groups all non-STEM disciplines together: business, humanities, health, arts, social science and education (BHASE).

Skill: An aptitude, competency, or ability, broadly construed.

Social Sector Organisation (SSO): A service or product provider or facilitator that operates for and is organised around societal support and betterment, such as not-for-profits.

Social Enterprise: A business model with the dual focus of social and economic gain.

Social Finance: A financial service type that utilises private funds to support social goals, address social problems, and/or facilitate social change.

Social Ecosystem: The collection of interconnected institutions and organisations through which the resources, talent, and information that supports, interacts with, and affects the social innovation flow.

Social Innovation: The phrase “social innovation” is used in multiple contexts to refer to a number of things. Here, it is used to refer to a collection of processes aimed at systems-level change, rather than as a type of product or outcome, which is the approach in some schools. This may include new ideas, services, processes, or frameworks intended to meet social needs and to do so by, at the same time, changing aspects of social organisations or relationships in the social impact ecosystem.

Social Research and Development (social R&D): The practice of acquiring, absorbing and/or utilising knowledge to create or improve processes, products and/or services in the social sector.

Social Sector: An umbrella term denoting the activities of organisations that identify and operate for the public benefit, including co-operatives, not-for-profits, registered charities, social enterprises/B corporations, or unincorporated grassroots or community groups; sometimes referred to as the “third sector”, in contrast to what has traditionally been labelled the private and public sectors. The recent emergence of, for instance, “social enterprise” as a for-profit business models embracing social goals tends to make boundaries between the three sectors more porous.

STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering and Math.



Focus

Challenging Mindsets, Clarifying Commitments to Social Innovation in National Policy

The vision for the Forum builds on a number of assumptions about the nature and structure of innovation in the social sector:

- Social innovation happens in an ecosystem.
- Social innovation is best fostered locally, but it often aims to be transformative at a systems-level.
- Social innovation happens through processes that are non-linear and iterative.
- Social innovation integrates all stakeholders and assets in meaningful ways.
- Social innovation happens on a variety of different scales.
- Social innovation happens on a spectrum.
- Social innovation requires knowledge absorption and knowledge process capacity.

These assumptions challenge standard economic understanding of innovation.

Likewise, Dan Breznitz's new book *Innovation in Real Places* challenges economic approaches to innovation that ignore crucial aspects of the innovation landscape, arguing that innovation-based economic growth needs innovation policy that recognises that incremental and process innovation can contribute to the flourishing of communities in substantial ways.

What does this mean for *social innovation* policy? Assuming that the announcement of the Social Innovation and Social Finance Fund in 2018 does reflect the needs and aspirations of the social innovation ecosystem, there is alignment between Breznitz's proposal and the 12 Recommendations for Advancing the Social Innovation ecosystem. In a conversation moderated by **Scott White**, Chief Editor of The Conversation Canada, **Andrea Nemtin**, Executive Director of Social Innovation, and **Dan Breznitz**, Clifford Clarke Economist of the Canadian Department of Finance and Munk Chair of Innovation Studies at the Munk School of Global Affairs, we will think about the needs and aspirations of the social innovation ecosystem.

Join us on 12 October 2022, 5-7pm. Followed by a reception:

Dinner will follow at the University Club for all Forum guests.

Themes



Theme 1. Unlocking the Contributions of All Sectors

Economists call ‘innovation’ any action that allows an enterprise to offer better products or services at current or lower costs. Generally speaking, innovation is unquestionably crucial to resilience and flourishing in any sector of industry, society and government. In general, Canadian universities manage to build strong innovation partnerships in the science, tech, and medical sectors and they benefit from federal and provincial subsidies of various forms, including sums specifically allocated to research internships, informed by the needs of these industries.

While R&D has been at the heart of Canada’s innovation strategy, growth can stem from incremental change or improvement to any aspect of an organisation’s activities. This is especially true in the social ecosystem where process and incremental innovation are ubiquitous: in the social ecosystem, impact, i.e., return on investment, rarely thrives on the creation of entirely new products or services. Process innovation and incremental innovation rest on iterative knowledge processes that lead to incorporating both modest, incremental, radical and revolutionary improvements in processes, services and product design.

Social return on investment, i.e., social impact, thrives on organisations’ capacity for “continuous innovation” in an ecosystem where capacity to absorb new ideas, approaches and processes is foundational. There are vast opportunities to build new kinds of knowledge partnerships between universities, social sector organisations and municipal government to better prepare future generations of social sector leaders and stakeholders to knowledge needs, knowledge absorption, and knowledge process capabilities. This is a territory in which social sciences, humanities and arts programming can be leveraged in creative new ways.

Catalyst Roundtable: Do we understand how to foster capacity for innovation in the social ecosystem? Speakers: Isabel Cascante, Ty Smith, Chelsea Gabel, James Stauch, Coryell Boffy, Luis Patricio, Nicole Longstaff, Wendy Cukier		
Workshops		
What is innovation in the social sector and how is it different from innovation in other sectors? Co-Hosts: Stephen Huddart & Sandra Lapointe	Why is engagement a methodology for knowledge mobilisation in the social sector, not a mere after thought. Co-Hosts: Rhonda Moore & Michel Pascal	What is the role of Indigenous knowledges and decolonial approaches in social innovation? Co-Hosts: Sheila Côté-Meek & Chelsea Gabel

Theme 2. Fostering an Enabling Civic Environments for Social Change: The Role of Municipal Government

As a feature of organisations and institutions in the social sector, innovation benefits from municipal policies designed to foster resilient communities that are more likely to attract investments. In 2022, the City of Longueuil in Quebec set aside a budget for a new chief science adviser to coordinate data gathering and statistical analysis within the city, and to support transparency through science communication designed to inform citizens.

Longueuil’s approach rests on the conviction that academic/research expertise increases government accountability and intelligence, which in turn supports innovation and growth. This is a fertile ground for municipal policy and decision-makers to create new partnerships with community organisations who can both contribute and benefit from the research. The nomination of a chief science adviser should also ideally lead to increased collaborations between municipalities, communities, and local university campuses.

In order to respond to a possible call to action from municipalities, the social and human research experts and the broader scientific community need a better understanding of the task at hand. Universities can support evidence-based policy, but they can also foster collaborations around increased capacity, both by mobilising expertise beyond traditional outlets and equipping students with the skills for a civic vocation.

Catalyst Roundtable: What is the role of local government in the social innovation ecosystem? Speakers : Kate Geddie, Sarah Lyons, Cyrus Therani, Louise Poissant		
Workshops		
How do we best support scientific advice in municipal policy and decision-making? Co-hosts: Julie Dirwimmer & Rhonda Moore	What would need to change in local government to support inclusive social innovation internally and in the community? Co-Hosts: Sara Lyons & Vanessa Parlette	What is key to building knowledge partnerships for a strong, inclusive social innovation ecosystem? Co-Hosts: Connie Tang & Ryan Conway



Theme 3. Opening Up the Academy

Over the last few decades, Canadian universities have adopted a range of new approaches to community engagement and knowledge mobilisation specifically geared at increasing the impact of social and human research in the social sector and beyond. Canadian research funders' concerted emphasis on impact has provided both more clarity on the outcomes, and potent incentives toward both cross-sectoral partnerships and interdisciplinary research to address societal challenges that include but are not limited to climate, health, and policy.

Research is a factor of impact in the social sector. But more research-partnerships might not be what is needed to increase the capacity of social sector organisations to innovate. This is especially true of the needs of social sector organisations that revolve around the iterative processes that drive knowledge absorption and change management in a constantly evolving ecosystem.

Other academic assets can drive campus-community partnerships dedicated to building a rich, capable, and resilient eco-system. A narrow understanding of the kind of campus expertise that can cater to needs of communities around innovation creates a gap, and reduces the relevance of the research mandate of academic institutions. Opening up academia will require innovative approaches that broaden what we understand to be the impact of academic activities.

Catalyst Roundtable: What does a campus-community relationship need to look like in the social innovation ecosystem? Speakers: Mark Patterson, Sue Lapierre, Rebecca Ellis, Rachel Parker		
Workshops		
How does public facing scholarship create impact? Co-host: Pari Johnston, Les Perreux & Scott White	What would academic and community funders need to change to create better conditions for impact-driven research and practices in the social innovation ecosystem? Co-Hosts: Sapna Mahajan & Ursula Gobel	How is the impact of SSHA in communities best measured and assessed? Co-Hosts: Coryell Boffy & Jerry Hurley



Theme 4. Skills, Tools and Know-How for Societal Impact

Key to innovation in the social sector are knowledge processes and approaches to change management that place high demand on both individuals who need to be skilled to adapt, pivot and continue to learn and on organisations that need to display capacity to manage change.

Federal, provincial and community-based programs are dedicated to upskilling the social sector workforce around social innovation techniques that future social sector participants should be able to navigate. However, social innovation skills, just like other important skills (e.g., digital, social and emotional) are not currently part of academic training. The long-term view would be for social sciences, humanities and arts programs to leverage the rich potential of their disciplines to cater to the social sector's vocational need by offering students the opportunity to build those skills without having to transform curriculum or dilute disciplinary training.

First and foremost, universities need to reassess their approach to experiential learning as part of SSHA-based vocational training. While experiential learning poses distinctive challenges for both SSHA students and social sector partners, SSHA programs are uniquely positioned to help current and future not-for-profit managers build the skills they need to contribute to innovation in the social sector.

<p>Catalyst Roundtable: What are the skills needed in the social innovation ecosystem? Speakers: Ian Wereley, Sarah Fairlie, Kamilla Karoli, Vivien Underdown</p>		
<p>Workshops</p>		
<p>What are the skills for inclusive innovation and partnerships in the social sector? Co-Hosts: Rachelle Taheri, Michelle Gorea & Rahina Zarma</p>	<p>What skills are needed to foster interdisciplinarity around human/social research and innovation. Co-Hosts: Thérèse DeGroote, Elizabeth Boston, Claudia Emerson</p>	<p>What does experiential learning need to look like to help build skills to address the social and municipal sector's human resources crisis? Co-Hosts: Candice Zhang and Wendy Cukier</p>





 **CANADIAN FORUM
ON INNOVATION &
SOCIAL IMPACT**
SKILLS + KNOWLEDGE