

Canada's Social Innovation Ecosystem

Concertation Workshop

Hosts: Social Innovation Canada, The/La Collaborative

Wednesday May 17, 2023

9am - 12 noon

McMaster University, (University Hall, 312)

Lunch to follow at the McMaster's Faculty Club (The Buttery)



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Canada's social innovation ecosystem has been evolving since we entered the new century. Emerging from systems and resilience theory, its development was fed by new curriculum in universities and communities of practice in the social sector and government, as well as advocacy and experimentation from activists and entrepreneurs.

Social finance and social purpose business approaches entered into this ecosystem, boosting capacity in an era of declining grants and contributions and diversifying the ways people and organizations could engage. Definitional confusion and competition often led to a lack of clarity around areas of social entrepreneurship and social enterprise but nonetheless, development continued. After many years advocating for social innovation policy, in 2018, the federal government struck an advisory council and announced a significant pool of capital towards impact investment; but have stopped short of dedicated social innovation projects or programs.

Despite the forward momentum, much more can be done to support and make visible the innovation being realized in local communities, and better align resources towards projects, programs and policy that can make an impact at scale. As The/La Collaborative have found, *“less than half of social sector organizations agree their organization employs staff familiar with adequate knowledge of the types of routines, approaches and techniques associated with innovation processes and whose job it is to apply them. Knowledge mobilization that targets increased capacity for innovation in the social sector requires strategies and policies to support these activities, which are needed to create solutions that address the most pressing social and environmental problems.”*

Social Innovation Canada has entered this ecosystem asking if there is a role for a national body to elevate, invest in and accelerate viable social innovations across regions and localities, and to place social innovation at the centre of Canada's innovation strategy. Synergistically, The/La Collaborative's mission is to rally the university-based social and human research expertise needed to help build and sustain capacity in the social sector. Each is asking how best to place or steer resources as systemic challenges increase in intensity.

The aim of this workshop is to explore the amplification of a social innovation narrative for Canada and examine what organizational forms could help realize the impact we are all seeking. And then to investigate the role of universities within our social innovation ecosystem and scope how we can better support their contribution to this field.