Centre for Policy Innovation and Public Engagement

Newsletter

DECEMBER 2017

Dear Colleagues,

This is the first edition of our newsletter. Feel free to send it to your networks.

Our purpose here is to provide a means of keeping the policy innovation community updated on events and developments both here in Canada and abroad.

I invite you to bring any initiatives you are leading or special events you are organizing to my attention. We would very much like to profile your work for the broader community.

We would also like to hear from people who are interested in collaborating on a research project on policy innovation labs and hubs in both Canada and abroad. If this is something you would like to be involved in, please message me directly.

Thank you,

Prof. Bryan Evans, PhD.
Director, Centre for Policy Innovation and Public Engagement
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Rethinking the policy development process: Alberta CoLab

Albeta CoLab is part of Canada's growing community of government and non-government innovation labs. Established in 2014, the CoLab is part of the Government of Alberta's Department of Energy, but maintains a cross-government mandate.

Brent Wellsch, a Systemic Designer at the CoLab, describes the lab as a space, a team, and an approach.

A Space

The CoLab is a collaborative workspace that is open and curated for collaboration. As a bright space with whiteboards, foldable chairs, and foldable tables, the team can adjust the space to fit the needs of their work.

A Team

The CoLab team is made up of seven dynamic individuals, and while they each come from diverse backgrounds, they all share a common mind set to find future-fit solutions.

An Approach

Grounded in Systemic Design and Strategic Foresight, the lab adopts abductive logic and embraces complexity. Their approach values progress above perfection and challenges policy makers to think about 'what might be?' as opposed to 'what must be?'. For 'wicked' policy problems, there is not likely to be an obvious solution, and thus prioritizing a process of experimentation and exploration.

For Alberta CoLab, Systemic Design and Strategic Foresight have complemented each other to create pathways for thinking about solutions that address the uncertainty of future conditions.

Systemic Design, rooted in systems theory and human centered design, focuses on the relationships and interdependencies within a problem. Systemic Design also centers the end-user and human experience as a means of creating strategies and processes.

Strategic foresight, on the other hand, challenges the assumption that current conditions will largely persist in the future. By exploring a range of radically different possibilities, foresight sensitizes people to the irreducible uncertainty of the future. Through this process, the lab is able to develop and test strategies that better position decision-makers to adapt and shape the future, instead of simply reacting to it.

Ryerson University

The work at Alberta CoLab falls under their three main initiatives: projects, capacity building, and field building.

Projects

As a team, the Lab collaborates with policy makers on wicked policy problems. Having successfully created demand within the Alberta Public Service (APS), the lab has since had to limit its work projects to those within the energy sector - unless the team believes there is a learning potential in non-sector projects.

Capacity Building

The CoLab also builds capacity within the APS to enable a culture change throughout government. The Lab hosts a number of courses and workshops that provide public servants with the tools to bring in human centered, system based, and design-led approaches to the traditional policy and program delivery processes.

Field Building

Finally, the CoLab focuses on building a network within the field, collecting and sharing experience and knowledge with other practitioners.

Lessons Learned

Be flexible and adaptable. While its approach has been a useful tool in presenting potential solutions for their projects, the CoLab is not fixed to an approach nor business model. Over the last three and a half years, the Alberta CoLab has learned the importance of being flexible in order to remain relevant. Innovation labs are in their infancy, and being able to change on the fly is more valuable than being accountable to a single business model or innovative approach.

Champions, senior folks advocating on behalf of a labs work, are essential. Labs are largely new to Canada, and not everyone is necessarily on board. It is important to understand the value of champions within government. For the CoLab, endorsement and celebration by champions has been an important piece in implementing ideas and sustaining longevity.

Developing an understanding of the government system useful to embed new approaches into existing processes. Being able to 'hook' or embed an approach within the existing Government of Alberta processes and structures gives momentum to a larger cultural shift. With an understanding of the processes, the CoLab is able to positively agitate the APS by hooking its ideas into existing structures.

While there may not be a silver bullet solution to solving complex policy problems, the Alberta CoLab has carved a space within its government to utilize innovative approaches that have the potential for more robust and impactful outputs.

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Wrapping up 2017: Canada150 and the role of innovation in Truth and Reconciliation at the McConnell Foundation

2017 marked Canada's 150th year with nation-wide celebrations prompting an important dialogue focusing on Canada's treatment of indigenous people. Counter celebrations and hashtags like #Resistance150 were reminders of Canada's legacy of colonization and the lived ramifications of our history.

The pathway to enhancing Indigenous wellbeing has been clearly articulated in the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People's Report, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action. The McConnell Foundation believes that by using these documents as guideposts, and by supporting strength-based, community-driven solutions, Canada will become a more inclusive and resilient country.

The McConnell Foundation partners with Indigenous communities and other stakeholders to utilize innovative techniques to bring forward the social change necessary for the reconciliation economy.

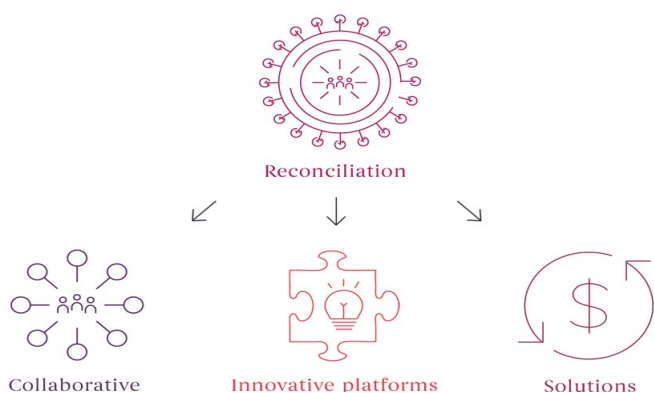## Collaborative Funding Models

Collaborative funding models bring together a variety of stakeholders to gather substantial resources in order to tackle persistent social challenges faced by Indigenous communities.

Innovative Platforms for Change

Innovative Platforms for Change bring together stakeholders of various backgrounds to test new ways to solve problems. Through Innovative Platforms for Change, the Foundation is able create opportunities for new and innovative ideas to be piloted by Indigenous communities in order to influence systematic levels of change.

Solutions Finance

Solutions Finance is a means of reducing the barriers to creating a reconciliation economy through an integrated approach to deploying financial capital and adapting financial models to catalyze and sustain scale systems transformation. This includes responsible investing, granting, impact investing, and financial innovation.

Reconciliation

Collaborative   Innovative platforms   Solutions

Essentially, the Foundation has carved their role as a funder, investor, and convener in bringing forth the reconciliation economy.

As described by the Reconciliation Initiative's Program Director Nicole McDonald, the approach of the Reconciliation Initiative allows for the McConnell Foundation to take on the initial financial risk, especially for projects that are typically avant-garde for risk averse governments. By taking this risk, the McConnell Foundation is able to invest in new ideas and innovative initiatives, eventually demonstrating to governments the social and economic value of these projects. While governments have a more substantial budget to support these projects, by taking on the initial investment, the McConnell Foundation provides a pathway to government, disrupting traditional processes of policy making and service delivery.

Social innovation works to change the basic routines, resources, authority flows and beliefs held within a specific social system. The foundation, collaborating with Indigenous communities, Indigenous organizations, funders, and governments alike gives a platform to the innovative projects that come from within communities themselves, changing policies and programs that govern Indigenous people.

Indigenous innovation looks back to old traditions to rediscover how these teachings show Indigenous communities the way forward. Indigenous communities have had to be innovative given their relationship to existing government structures. When called upon, the McConnell Foundation is able to support Indigenous innovation through the Reconciliation Initiative, gathering resources under the leadership of indigenous communities, to utilize innovation as a means of changing social systems to reduce inequality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians.

If you are interested in learning more about the Reconciliation Initiative and the projects that they support, check out the website at **https://mcconnellfoundation.ca/**

Contact Information

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Recently Published

The Labour Market Shift: Training a Highly Skilled and Resilient Workforce in Ontario
Institute for Competitiveness and Prosperity

Digital Literacy in a Digital Age: A Discussion Paper
Brookfield Institute

Field Notes: Insights from Practitioners on Growing Social R&D
Social Innovation Generation

The Pay for Success Opportunity: From Activities to Opportunities
MaRS Centre for Impact Investing

Did we miss anything? We want to hear from you! Please submit events and research publications.