

PATTERNS, PRINCIPLES, AND PRACTICES IN SOCIAL INNOVATION

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THE J. W. MCCONNELL FAMILY FOUNDATION

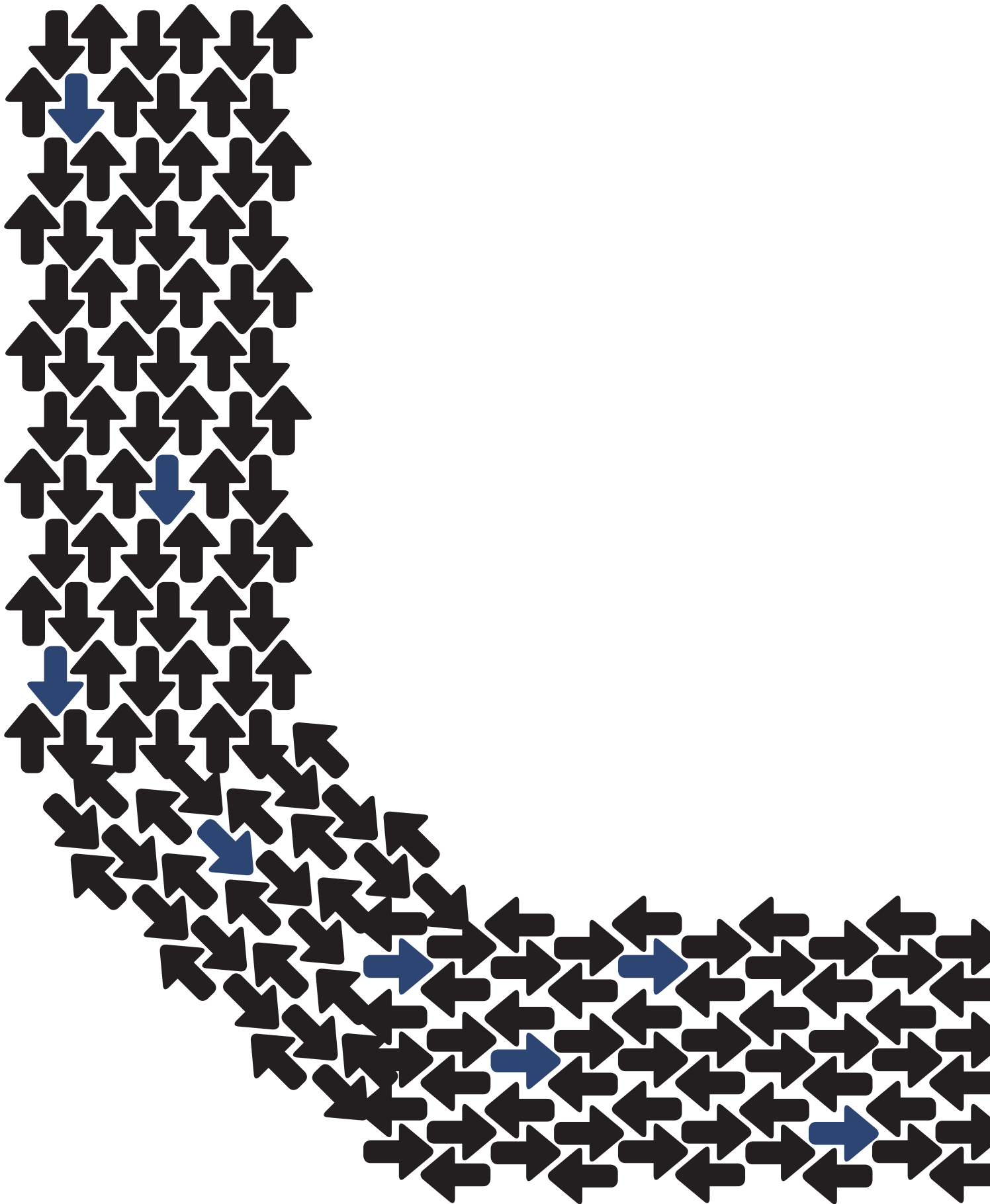
LA FONDATION DE LA FAMILLE J. W. MCCONNELL

“The greatest danger in times of turbulence
is not the turbulence;
it is to act with yesterday’s logic.”

- Peter Drucker, *Managing in Turbulent Times* (1980)

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INTRODUCTION

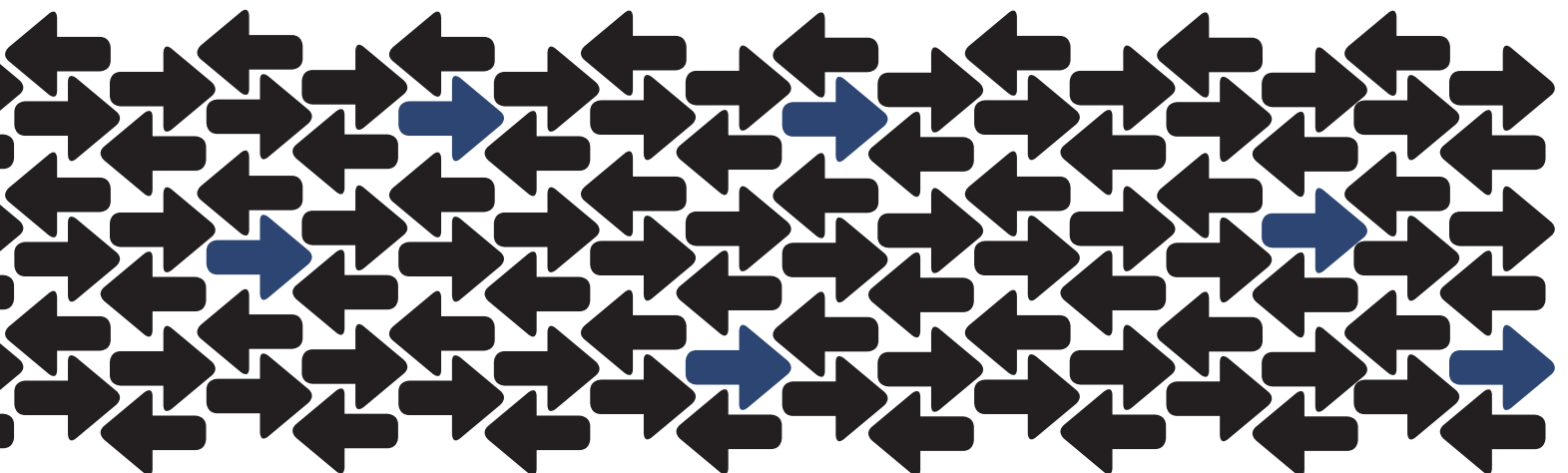


Social innovation opens up new approaches to addressing complex problems.

For most of the 20th century, work in the community sector consisted of “charitable activities,” that is, the alleviation of suffering and misfortune and the sustaining of worthy institutions like hospitals, universities, and symphony orchestras. Laudable and necessary though this was and continues to be, we have now entered a period of significant social, economic, and environmental adjustment. Our horizons and our responsibilities have expanded accordingly. To paraphrase Ashoka founder Bill Drayton, our response to hunger used to be to give people a fish, or teach them how to fish. Today we need to revolutionize the fishing industry (Drayton 2004). We need to emphasize philanthropy’s role as an engine of creative change.

As the range of articles in this issue of *The Philanthropist* makes clear, social innovation covers a lot of ground but is still taking shape. It comprises not only “new ideas that work” (Mulgan 2003) but also *new ways of seeing, thinking and working*. This article uses these as three vantage points from which to explore this emerging landscape.

The first section, Trends and Patterns, is an overview of several broad trends¹ and related social innovations that are, for the most part, Canadian. The patterns to be observed in the interplay between intervention and complex systems constitute a state of “continuous social innovation.” In the Principles section, we shift focus to outline three large-scale initiatives: in the environmental arena, the Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement; in the economic domain, the ALLIES program for skilled immigrants; and in the social sphere, the ArtsSmarts program. From these we propose 12 principles that shape thinking and guide strategy around social innovation. Finally, in the Practice section, we briefly review some new technological, social, and organizational development tools that are emerging to support this work.





TRENDS AND PATTERNS: FIVE COMPLEX ISSUES AND RELATED SOCIAL INNOVATIONS

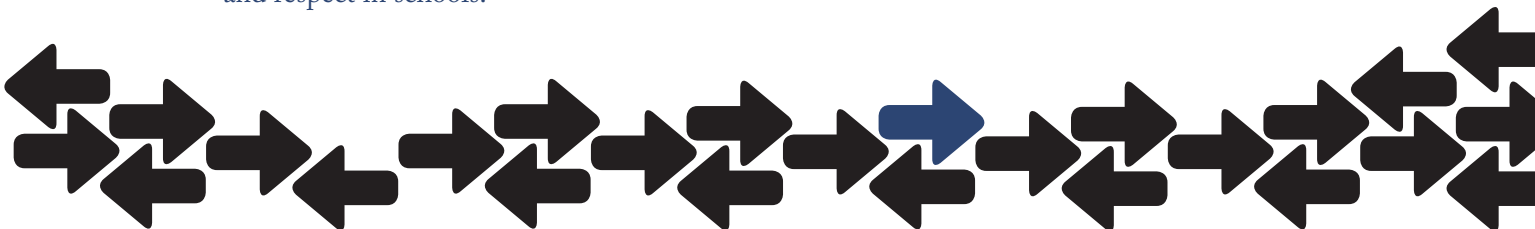
Examination of trends that are driving change in the work of the community sector enables us to see where innovation is needed and where it is occurring. As Heath and Heath (2010) point out, re-framing problems as directions with goals and emulating “bright exceptions” to the status quo generates momentum and impact. As the following trends and related patterns of change demonstrate, social innovation is not the exclusive province of the community sector. Instead, it frequently transcends boundaries and reshapes the “problem” as solutions continue to evolve.

Demographic problems are becoming “economies of engagement”

Demographers like to remind us that demography is destiny. Successive generations pose challenges to health and social services that can constitute self-reinforcing patterns of increasing dependency and mounting cost to society—problems like childhood obesity, an aging population with escalating health care needs, socially isolated immigrant communities, chronically poor families, and so on. Social innovation proposes shifts in the way that we view and engage with such challenges. The following examples illustrate how social innovation reframes a problem and realigns resources to more effectively address it.

Focusing upstream

Shifting attention and resources from treatment to prevention through selective and timely intervention is a common pattern in social innovation. Early child development (ECD) is a good example. Longitudinal studies² show that investments in ECD increase school completion rates, reduce crime, and generally make us more successful individually and as a society. The Early Development Instrument is a Canadian innovation that identifies needy neighbourhoods and vulnerable families so that resources can be directed where needed. Success by Six, HIPPY Canada, and similar programs offer high quality, research-based support to families so that pre-school children are readied for success. There is a deeper pattern observable here: developing empathic regard for the vulnerable. Roots of Empathy teaches the practice of care and sympathetic observation of babies to children, thereby contributing to a climate of caring and respect in schools.



From fat to fit

A generation ago, a social innovation called [ParticipACTION](#) moved millions of Canadians off the couch and into exercising, proving that prevention was cheaper and felt better than cure. Today more people volunteer for community sports than any other activity, and the field of sport for social inclusion has emerged. The [True Sport Foundation](#) directs micro-grants to thousands of voluntary associations, introducing the social and physical benefits of organized physical activity to vulnerable and excluded groups.

Exit this way

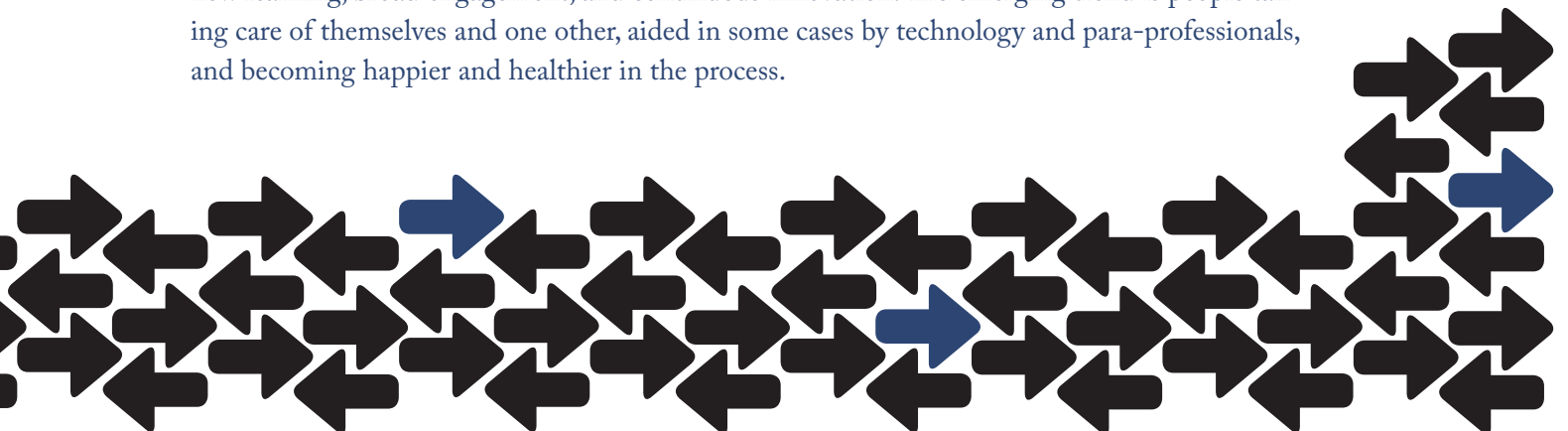
All efforts to stay healthy end eventually, and the annual death rate in Canada will increase 40% by 2026. While most Canadians would prefer to die in familiar settings surrounded by loved ones, 70% pass away in hospital wards, which are expensive and often less comfortable.³ A key innovation here is palliative medicine, developed and introduced to North America by Montreal's [Balfour Mount](#). [Hospice palliative care](#) extends this concept. The issue is no longer “how do we prolong life without regard to cost,” but “what is a good death?”

New economies of engagement = new opportunities

For the private sector, complex problems offer opportunities for “disruptive innovation”⁴. The first [Business of Aging](#) conference held at MaRS last year created an innovation marketplace for breakthroughs in products and services for seniors, and those who care for them. One such venture is [Tyze Personal Networks](#), a social media platform that enables friends, family members and medical professionals to set up private, secure, online networks to organize support and communications for vulnerable individuals. Tyze opens the border between formal health care systems and communities, extending care through informal networks and reducing reliance on professionals.

New patterns

In each of the above examples, we see how a complex problem has been reframed as a field for new learning, broad engagement, and continuous innovation. The emerging trend is people taking care of themselves and one other, aided in some cases by technology and para-professionals, and becoming happier and healthier in the process.



Technology-enabled social innovation is restructuring work and expanding human intelligence

The fact that we have wired the world to connect everyone in an interactive communications web is an epochal development. Information technology (IT) has created unprecedented capacity for collaboration and learning and, by linking many brains together, enables a quantum leap in human capacity to adapt to complexity. A great deal of social innovation is technology enabled and, as might be expected, this generates enormous potential along with occasional friction between old and new.

Networking work

The first pattern to note is that work is evolving to reflect the internet; it is becoming less hierarchical and siloed, and more open and networked. The distance between the CEO and front line staff, and between teacher and student, is collapsing, and layers of bureaucratic administration have become irrelevant. Nonprofits are quickly learning that they can collaborate across distance and scale at little expense.

Globalization of the community sector

Like mushrooms after rain, a new virtual global community sector has sprung up, enabling unimaginable tasks to be accomplished through the aggregate efforts of the masses while conferring immense power on the individual. Millions of people contribute knowledge to sites like [Wikipedia](#); hundreds of thousands are helping Hubble explore the universe by [categorizing galaxies](#); thousands write code to update open source software products like [Drupal](#); hundreds can update the world on a crisis with [Ushahidi](#) (developed during a period of civil strife in Kenya and applied in the aftermath of the Haitian earthquake); and a single whistle blower can command global attention via Wikileaks, which has a [page devoted to Canada](#). Powerful states and giant corporations alike have recognized that their actions are subject to scrutiny in this new global commons.

Glocalism

The combination of burgeoning IT capacity and fossil fuel shortages, soon to resume if peak oil theorists are right, foreshadows a re-localization of the economy. The term “[mass localism](#)” describes an emerging state where complex challenges are addressed by people working in globally networked communities.



New ways to be smart

A fifth pattern results when data coded in machine-readable form with open Applied Programming Interfaces (API's) enable “data mashups”—databases that combine information from diverse sources, supporting detailed analysis and maps of complex issues. A notable Canadian innovation in this space is [Social Actions](#), which “scrapes” the Internet to create a database of volunteering and donating opportunities that, in turn, drives volunteering and donations portals, such as film producer Participant Media’s [social action website](#). Another data-driven social innovation is the [Canadian Index of Wellbeing](#), which tracks things like our use of time and democratic engagement. Community Foundations of Canada’s [Vital Signs](#) is another example. The pattern we see here is one where information derived from a variety of sources provides a more robust set of criteria for understanding complex issues, for decision making, and for resource allocation.

Co-evolution with technology

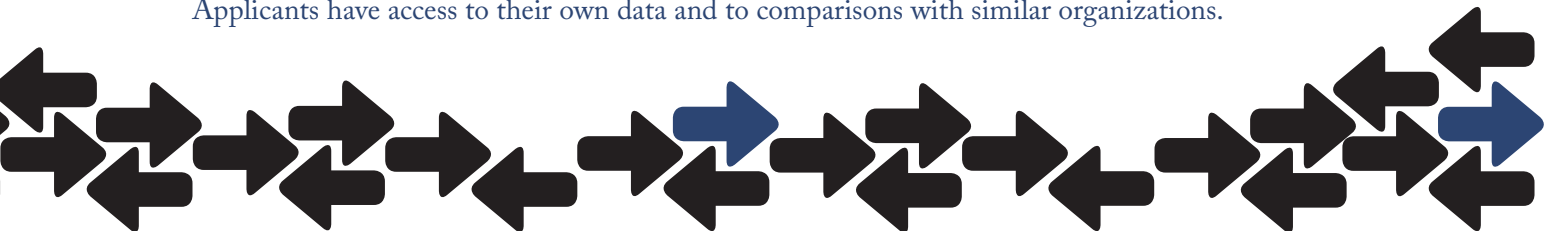
A final pattern to note is the co-evolutionary nature of technology itself. As Arthur (2009) observes, we are moving from an era when technology supported fixed purposes to one where it can be applied in different combinations for different goals. In short, it is moving from being monolithic to being generative.

Although Canada’s community sector can’t be described as an early adopter, we’ve come to depend on e-mail, Skype, webinars, and blogs, and have seen the emergence of a number of sector-specific innovations like the [Canada Helps](#) donation portal and social action sites like [TakingITGlobal](#).

Along with the power and promise of such tools, however, the following patterns have been a drag on progress:

- cumbersome proprietary products requiring expensive upgrades;
- learning curves that create differing capacities within and among organizations; and
- tools that are not inter-operable, requiring duplication of effort.

A new horizon beckons. [Cloud computing](#) reduces software costs and offers suites of complementary products with explanatory videos and user support groups. This in turn makes it practical and inexpensive to create domain-level collaboration platforms, enabling shared measurement and reporting. An early Canadian example is [CADAC](#), which hundreds of arts organizations use to apply to dozens of funding agencies in a single format, to a single source. Applicants have access to their own data and to comparisons with similar organizations.



Anyone can get started with cloud computing by creating a free [Google site](#) and inviting others to collaborate. Toronto's Framework Foundation makes liberal use of them and [Salesforce](#) (free to charities) to coordinate the work of hundreds of volunteers who stage its signature [Timeraiser](#) events across Canada, documenting all processes in wikis and capturing organizational learning from each event. Its formidable IT strategy and learning portal is viewable at <http://it.timeraiser.ca>.

Conflict is being reframed as collaboration

Twenty years ago, in an effort to see past the economy-versus-environment debate then raging, Harvard management guru Michael Porter proposed that the long-term profits and market positioning to be gained by adapting to strict environmental regulations would outweigh short term costs. Today, corporate CEOs and green economy experts recognize that the *Porter Hypothesis* has been proven, to the benefit of companies' and countries' double bottom lines.

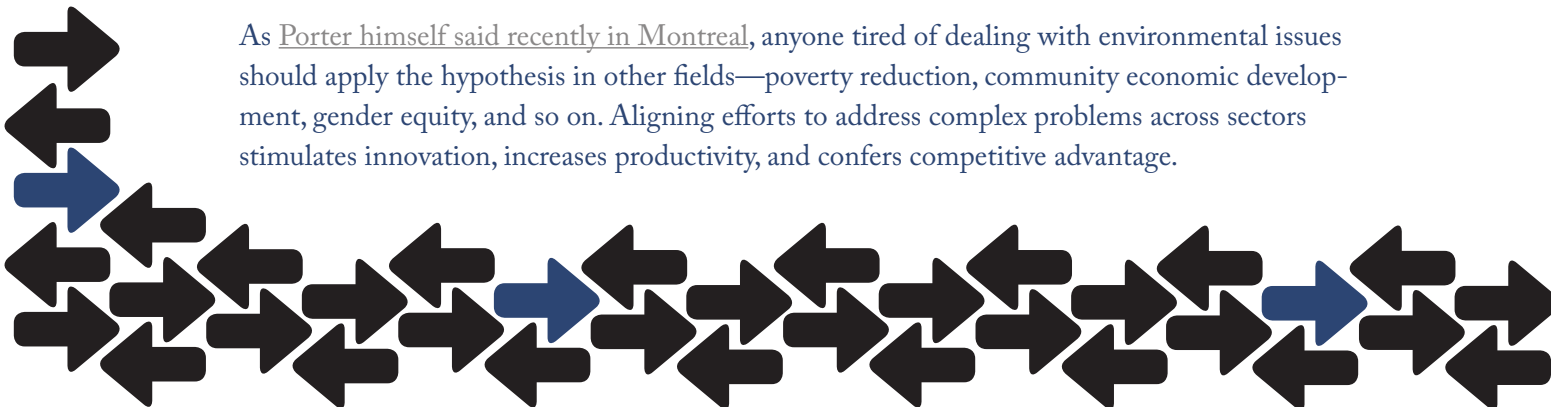
The underlying pattern is the integration of externalities: for governments, framing the public good as economic *and* environmental sustainability; for companies, capitalizing on opportunities arising from commitment to a double bottom line (financial and social); and for philanthropic foundations, responsible investing of endowments. In the reconciling of oppositional views, a third space opens in which innovation thrives.

A case in point

[Canopy](#), formerly called the Markets Initiative, was created by several environmental organizations⁶ after BC's "war in the woods" against logging giant McMillan-Bloedel left a legacy of bitterness and failure. Today, Canopy "collaboratively engages the business community and public to create a sustainable and innovative supply chain"⁵, in effect reshaping a market in the public interest. In 10 years, 650 book, magazine and newspaper publishers and printers have adopted its environmental policies. Canopy-generated market demand has led industry to create over 150 new green papers. Canopy has mentored similar initiatives around the world.

A model for other sectors

As [Porter himself said recently in Montreal](#), anyone tired of dealing with environmental issues should apply the hypothesis in other fields—poverty reduction, community economic development, gender equity, and so on. Aligning efforts to address complex problems across sectors stimulates innovation, increases productivity, and confers competitive advantage.



A new type of volunteering has emerged

Is civic engagement going up or down?

Lawrence Scanlon (2010) has produced a detailed portrait of people working on the front lines of philanthropy and the deeper issues they contend with. He notes a 31% decline in Canadian volunteerism in the years preceding 2000 (p. 311) and mentions two possible causes: time pressures on young families and the sense that super philanthropists like Bill Gates may make people feel less needed. Perhaps they are spending more time online, as part of the new global community sector, and may not count this as “volunteering.” Or it may be that people’s work and volunteer lives have merged in new blended-value enterprises that get socially necessary work done by other means.

Meanwhile, at a time when it is experiencing increasing demand for its services, the community sector faces several human resource challenges, including a retiring cohort of leaders, compensation levels that cause many of the best and brightest to leave the sector early or avoid it altogether, and cultural diversity that does not reflect Canada’s current reality.

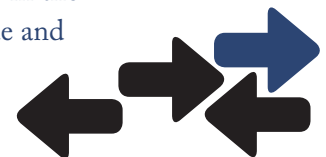
Evidently, patterns of volunteering are in flux. A number of examples point to a new pattern of civic engagement.

Volunteering at school

Research shows that access to experiential education rivals IQ as a predictor of academic success (Marzano, 2003). The past decade has seen the introduction and rapid growth of [university-based community service learning](#) in Canada. Elsewhere in this issue, Gabriel Bran Lopez describes [Youth Fusion Jeunesse](#)—a social innovation that puts graduate students to work in low wage/high impact jobs, leading programs for students in under-performing schools. The Canadian Teachers Federation is launching its own initiative, [ImagineAction](#), in partnership with community organizations.

Volunteering at work

Companies with an eye to the future know that their social license to operate requires that they meet the needs of shareholders, the communities in which they operate, and the planet. [Manulife](#), which is sponsoring the current [CBC Champions of Change](#) series, knows that supporting civic involvement by its employees makes good business sense. Senior VP’s act as executive sponsors overseeing its 13 areas of community engagement and employees are permitted to volunteer during work hours. It also makes financial and in-kind commitments over and above its corporate donations to ensure that agency capacity increases in line with best practice in the private sector. Published research demonstrates tangible improvements in employee pride and morale, and reduced turnover rates.



Volunteering for the government

Change Camps, originated by Toronto's Mark Kuznicki and spreading across the country and around the world, employ social media to invite citizens to convene on an issue of interest [open space meeting technology](#) to assist attendees in contributing ideas and volunteer time to a government program or public agency, like the local transit system. As governments commit to making data accessible to such groups, a new wave of social innovation and entrepreneurship will follow. Portals like [visiblegovernment.ca](#) and [openparliament.ca](#) are Canadian prototypes. For examples of what is possible when governments support this movement, see [www.data.gov](#) and [www.data.gov.uk](#).

An experience economy

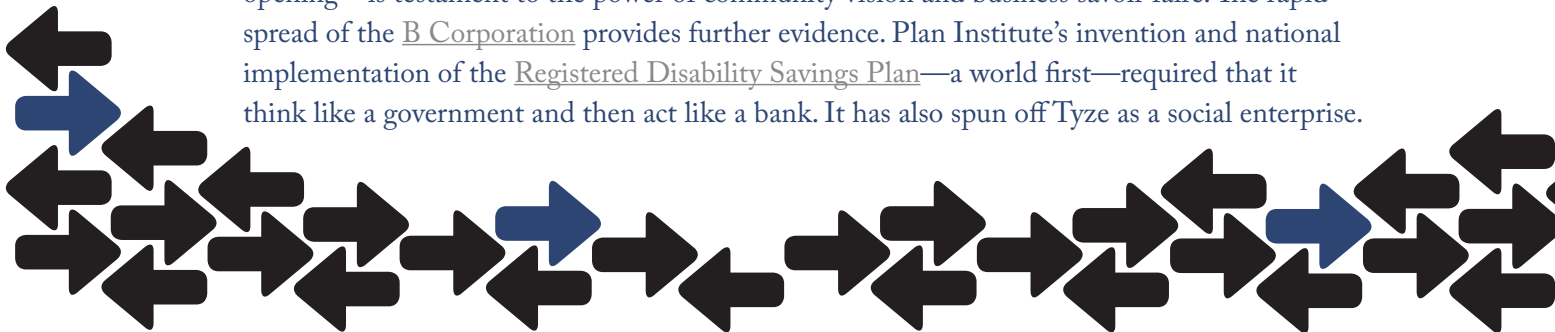
People are being increasingly selective with their time. In order to get involved in volunteering, young people want a high-quality experience with a payoff in observable impact. Attracting retiring boomers will require similar inducement. Quality of experience is so important that people will pay to volunteer, as [Volunteer for Nature](#) demonstrates. Framework Foundation's innovative [Timeraiser](#) events make choosing to volunteer a fun activity; it attracts hundreds of people sign up to volunteer and then bid those hours on works of art. Timeraisers have generated over 5,000 new volunteer placements among young professionals, while supporting emerging artists and building community agency capacity.

The new pattern here is one of a continuity of engagement through one's education, work life, and retirement, assisted by a host of new technologies and social processes.

The boundaries between sectors is blurring

In a turbulent age, social innovation becomes everyone's work. This produces the "strange bedfellows" effect so productive of innovation, generating hybrid models and, when they prove themselves, introducing transformative change.

Witness the rise of the [social entrepreneur](#), thousands of whom are starting hybrid enterprises with dual or triple bottom lines. Evergreen Foundation's \$50 million dollar [Brickworks project](#)—which National Geographic named a top geo-tourism destination even before its official opening—is testament to the power of community vision and business savoir faire. The rapid spread of the [B Corporation](#) provides further evidence. Plan Institute's invention and national implementation of the [Registered Disability Savings Plan](#)—a world first—required that it think like a government and then act like a bank. It has also spun off Tyze as a social enterprise.

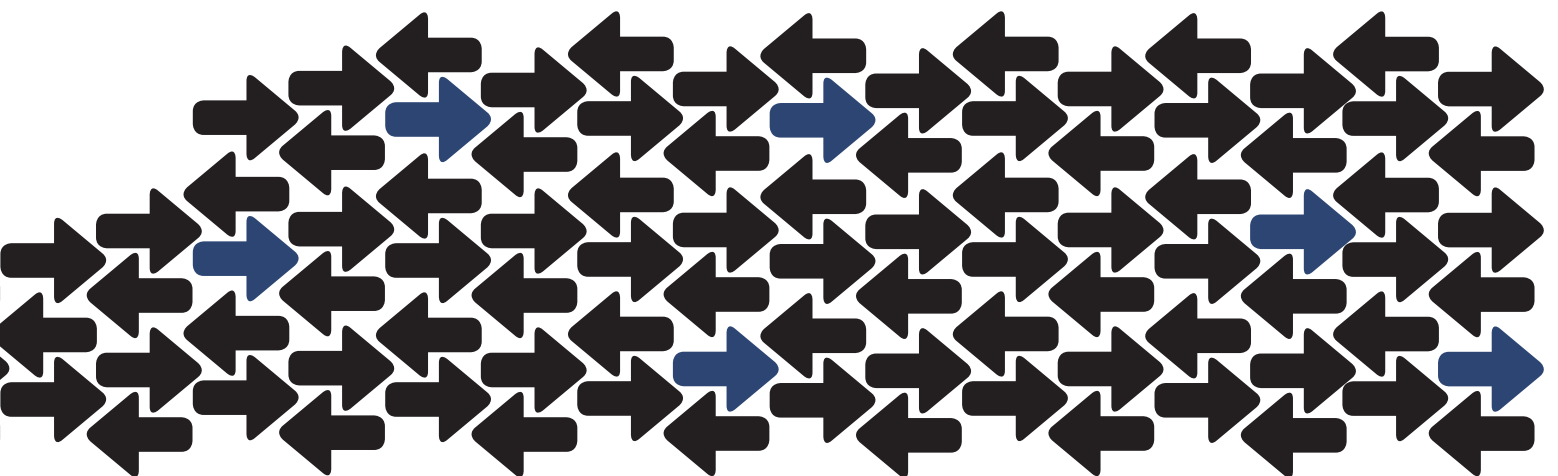


The clear pattern here is one of flourishing innovation, particularly at the borders of the community and private sectors.

For corporations, effective engagement with the community sector is increasingly cast as partnership and involves a commitment to capacity building through tech transfer, access to consulting services, and co-investment.

For the community sector, the examples we've cited above demonstrate that it is not impossible to work under the present regulatory regime, but, as Nora Sobolov's article on social finance illustrates, elsewhere in this issue, and with the example of the *l'économie sociale* in Quebec, current levels of activity presage a much greater shift towards inter-sectoral collaboration, accompanied by a significant shift in resource flows.

Government is the sleeping giant in this picture. As the essays in *Open Government: Collaboration, Transparency and Participation in Practice* (Lathrop & Ruma (Eds.), 2010) argue, government structures designed for a different age are no longer serving us well. Public sector participation in social innovation constitutes one of the next great steps forward for this work.





PRINCIPLES FROM THREE SOCIAL INNOVATIONS AT SCALE

The following three cases highlight several principles of large-scale social innovation. The first, the Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement, is an example of a concerted effort to “move” a system, beginning at the top. It involved tough negotiations between former antagonists, and while it has celebrated a key victory, intensive follow up is required. The second, ALLIES, describes collaboration among three sectors extending from the community to the national level, based on one city’s success in addressing immigrant employment. The third, ArtsSmarts, profiles the evolution of a concept, tested in communities and eventually extending geographically into provinces and thematically into new subject areas.

The Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement

On May 18, 2010, 21 forest companies and nine leading environmental organizations signed the Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement, a three-year conservation accord covering 72 million hectares of Canada’s boreal forest. While there is much to be done, including bringing First Nations fully on side, the agreement halted logging on 27 million hectares of caribou habitat, suspended a campaign to scare off customers that cost industry an estimated \$200,000,000, and vaulted Canada to the forefront of sustainable forestry globally.

The agreement takes a whole-systems approach to land use issues, linking formerly opposed stakeholders in a new win-win arrangement. It fundamentally reshapes a domain toward greater resiliency by simultaneously addressing several ecological and economic challenges.

While there were many hands on the wheel, for one of the participants, the Ivey Foundation, the agreement was the culmination of 20 years’ work and a commitment to direct 60% of its granting to one issue. Reflecting on this achievement, board chair Rosamund Ivey writes (Ivey Foundation 2010) “...our experience tells us that while there are several critical elements to ‘moving the needle,’ ultimately it is all about scale” (p. 6).

A review of the Ivey Foundations’s granting history shows that it invested in dozens of complementary projects and initiatives, some large, some small. In effect, it created an “ecosystem” of actors of different types and sizes, whose collective capacity to learn and act in concert grew over time.



However, according to Ivey Foundation executive director Bruce Lourie (personal communication, August 13, 2010), concluding this agreement required a tightly focused collaboration with clear objectives and a well-defined timeline. He cautions others attempting this that “soft coalitions” are ineffective at this stage. Ivey’s strategy shifted into a different gear when it came time to negotiate with business. Process facilitation in high-stakes mediation is expensive and requires sophistication and rigour to attract and keep business leaders at the table.

Government was not a participant in the agreement, which is a reason that First Nations were not represented. First Nations outreach is now a priority for the Canadian Boreal Initiative, with work also being done by the Sustainability Institute.

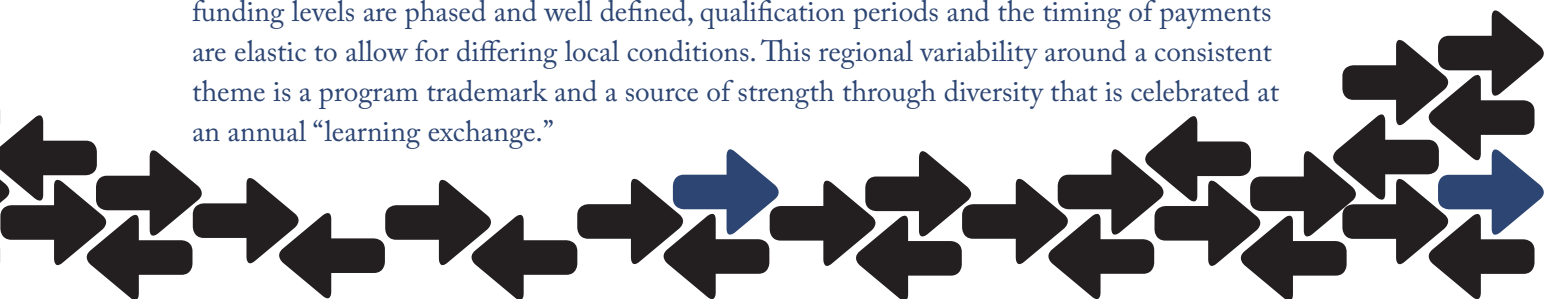
Provincial governments are coming on board, particularly Alberta, Ontario, and Quebec. However, Lourie notes, there is a need for new funding partners to ensure that the agreement’s provisions make an enduring contribution to regional sustainability and resilience.

Assisting Local Leaders with Immigrant Employment Strategies (ALLIES)

ALLIES is a program partnership between Toronto’s Maytree Foundation and Montreal’s J.W. McConnell Family Foundation. Using a multi-sectoral approach developed by Maytree and the Toronto City Summit Alliance in the TRIEC² program, ALLIES’ goal is to improve the rates at which professional immigrants to Canada succeed in securing suitable employment.

By structuring ALLIES so that it provides incentives for local coalition building among all three sectors, including all levels of government, collaboration is “baked in” from the outset. While it has taken longer than anticipated to reach critical momentum at several project sites, the number of mentorships, temporary placements, and other supports for immigrants is leading to employment for hundreds of newcomers.

According to Maytree board chair Alan Broadbent, TRIEC works because it is focused on just one issue. As a mature program based in the nation’s biggest labour market, it offers the ALLIES partners access to national firms, a suite of proven programs, policy and research capacity, links to a global academic network, and the ability to create award-winning communications. ALLIES communities are free to select or replicate the programmatic elements that they need (with one exception—participation in www.hireimmigrants.ca is mandatory) and, although funding levels are phased and well defined, qualification periods and the timing of payments are elastic to allow for differing local conditions. This regional variability around a consistent theme is a program trademark and a source of strength through diversity that is celebrated at an annual “learning exchange.”



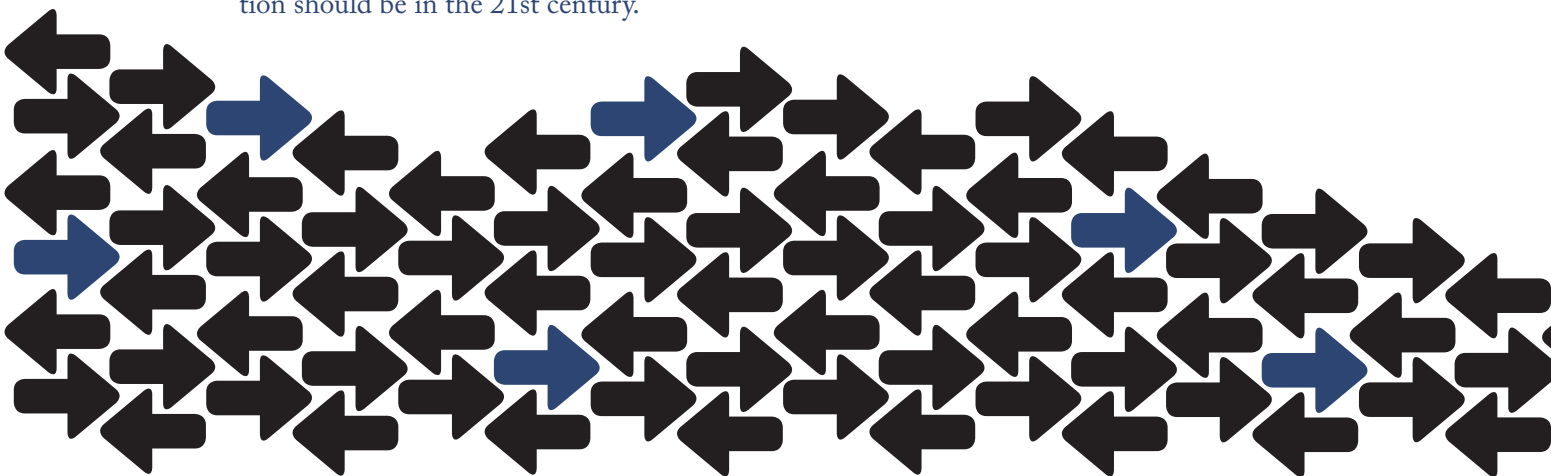
Another strength of ALLIES is its close affiliation with thought leaders working on immigration issues. A steady stream of op-eds and reports is produced by Ratna Omidvar (Maytree executive director), professor Naomi Alboim, and the chief economists of partner banks and think tanks. Their reputational and intellectual capital is useful in guiding the national initiative, in validating the efforts of local partners, and in influencing decision makers in the corporate and public sectors.

ArtsSmarts

ArtsSmarts, established in 1998 by The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation with eight community partners, sought to counter a trend of stripping the arts from education. ArtsSmarts is not about art education; rather, it enables teachers and artists to co-deliver school curriculum focusing on student engagement, teacher practice, and school-community partnerships. Music might be used to teach physics, for example, or a mural-making project might frame a unit on local history. What began as a set of local project sites funded by the Foundation has evolved to a network sustained by school boards and hundreds of donors at the local level, as well as partnerships between arts funders and ministries of education in most provinces. A small national secretariat organizes an annual conference, coordinates research, and administers the partner network.

Over time, the program partners came to appreciate that ArtsSmarts was having an impact well beyond its original intent of preserving a place for the arts in education. Particularly surprising was the beneficial impact on a diverse cohort of disengaged learners—aboriginal students in rural and urban settings, for whom culturally relevant content was a bridge to personal engagement in learning; students with learning disabilities who benefited from inclusive teaching strategies; and a group of highly talented and extremely bored students for whom ArtsSmarts became the reason they don't drop out of school altogether.

Furthermore, in fostering young people's creativity across several disciplines, ArtsSmarts prepares them for an era when the rules are changing in many fields. It has come to recognize that its future lies in advancing the role of creativity in line with an emerging vision of what education should be in the 21st century.

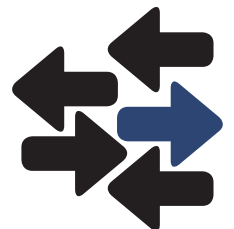


PRINCIPLES TO BE DRAWN FROM THESE CASES



This is necessarily a provisional and partial list of principles that appear to guide effective work in the field of social innovation.

1. *Work at scale requires long time lines and strategic intent.* Although the Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement was concluded in a couple of years, it built on a much longer history of engagement with forest conservation. With complex problems, balancing focus with adaptability is key to achieving results.
2. *Strategy is phase and scale dependent.* For example, early-stage innovation involves mapping systems, convening diverse partners, and prototyping and learning from new approaches, as ArtsSmarts did at the beginning. In later stages it is common to use influence and alliances to shift mindsets and redirect resources, as ALLIES is doing as it builds on TRIEC's experience.
3. *"Listen to the system."* As innovations unfold, "surprises" provide valuable clues as to where to place attention. ArtsSmarts' impact on aboriginal learners, for example, was discovered when its introduction to a Metis school yielded unexpected results, both positive and negative.
4. *Reflect.* When working on innovations, we are often operating outside the norms of conventional practice. Reflection is helpful in documenting decisions taken and linking current strategy to larger purpose.
5. *Trust is essential* and is founded on shared commitment to the public good, transparency, and accountability. This principle is one that oppositional groups, like the forest companies and environmentalists in the Boreal example, must strive to achieve.
6. *Learn to work across sectors.* Inter-sectoral collaboration is a rich source of innovation. Like foreign countries, the community, private and public sectors have language and cultural differences that need to be considered for collaboration to be effective.
7. *Commit to social inclusion.* When we include vulnerable populations, including those for whom we are ostensibly working, solution sets are larger, and the results more enduring.
8. *Set minimum specifications* when working at multiple sites and multiple levels of scale, allowing partners freedom to adapt.
9. *Share information.* Being open and transparent allows unsuspected allies to find us and creates new connections. Working closely with academics links practice to research and accelerates learning and innovation.
10. *Work with diverse professionals.* Complex problems yield surprising information when we bring multiple lenses to bear on them. Artists and designers help us to imagine. Engineers can help with restructuring.
11. *Effective use of the media* helps to set the public agenda, creates a shared sense of identity across different jurisdictions, and aids in the formulation of new mindsets and narratives.
12. *Acknowledge the personal dimension.* We cannot change any problem unless we accept our own role in it. Humanizing one's adversaries is key to overcoming conflict and brings us closer to collaboration.





A REVIEW OF SOME NEW TOOLS AND PROCESSES FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION: BUILDING COMMUNITY SECTOR 3.0

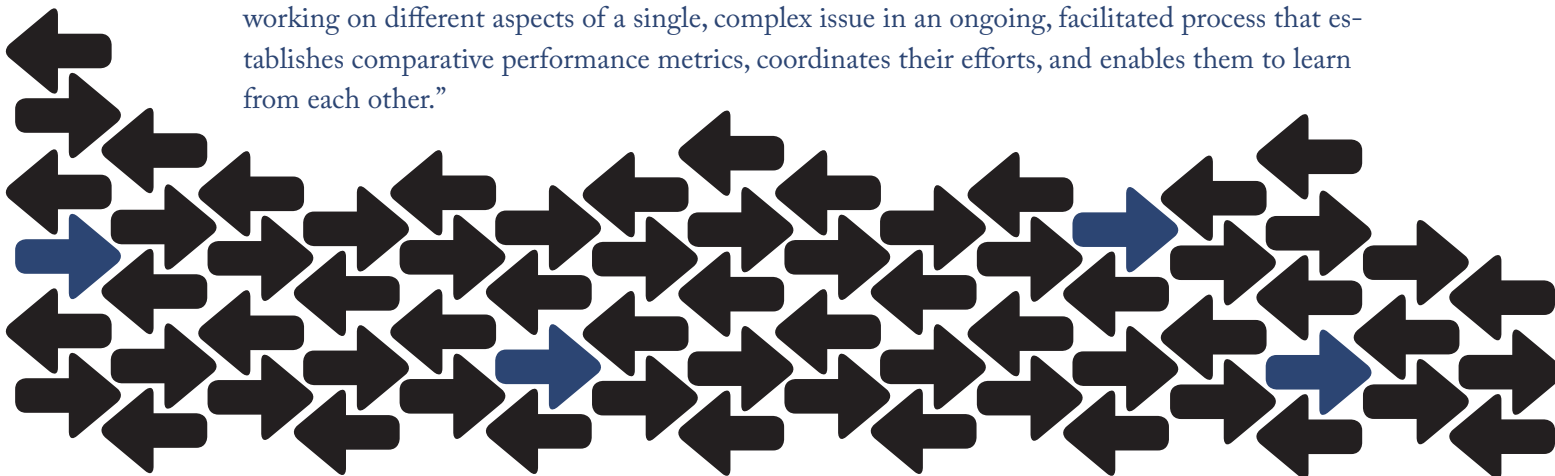
Here we briefly consider the evolutionary nature of technologies, organizational models, and social process tools involved in advancing social innovation. There are a number of areas where gaps and opportunities exist. (While pivotal, we will not discuss the matter of social finance, as it is reviewed at length elsewhere in this issue.)

Towards a new business model: Collaboration platforms and cloud computing

As demonstrated by Project Streamline⁸, the current community sector business model in which grantees fill out multiple applications and file a suite of different reports to different funders is obsolete. Not only does it waste time and money but it also makes it almost impossible to generate comparative data. To make a claim on scarce public resources, the community sector needs to measure impact, which requires common indicators for organizations working in particular domains.

While the benefits seem self-evident, the process of streamlining requires considerable support. As the Platformation Report from the Framework Foundation notes, organizational readiness is key, and for most organizations the decision to share human resource policies or operational budgets requires some soul searching.

Similar technology can enrich short- and longer-term collaborations involving diverse actors across multiple project sites. The next evolutionary step in this process is what Kramer et al. (2009) refer to as adaptive learning systems, which “engage a large number of organizations working on different aspects of a single, complex issue in an ongoing, facilitated process that establishes comparative performance metrics, coordinates their efforts, and enables them to learn from each other.”



Organizational structures— networks, hubs and clusters

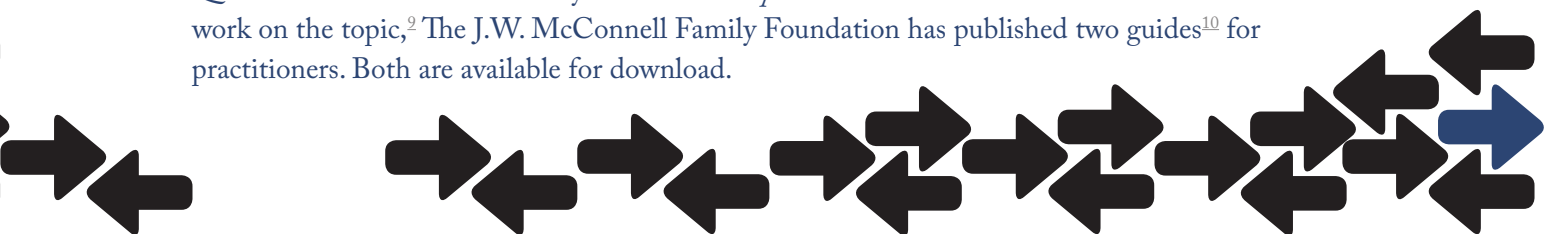
As we have seen in several instances above, much activity is being structured as *networks*, which create the conditions for collaboration across disciplines and distance. Connecting produces community, which in turn fosters emergence. As a geographically extensive country, Canada has many such networks for learning and collaboration. However, as social media pioneer TakingITGlobal found with its Creating Local Connections Canada program, nothing animates networks like the opportunity to meet face to face.

A second structure is the *social innovation hub*, where organizations are co-located and enjoy the benefits of shared services, stimulation from peer groups, and opportunities for collaboration. The combination of ingenuity, enterprise, and social values is embedded at MaRS Discovery District, which pursues science, technology, *and* social innovation. Toronto's Centre for Social Innovation co-locates 100 socially innovative for-profits and nonprofits, and is expanding to a second site. Halifax's Hub is an operations base for community organizations, social entrepreneurs, and open source technology groups, and hosts events like Envision Halifax. Waterloo's Capacity Waterloo Region, co-located with the Communitech enterprise incubator, is another example.

Clusters form the third structure in this group. Michael Porter pointed out in his seminal 1998 piece on Clusters and the New Economics of Competition that the “advantages in a global economy lie increasingly in local things—knowledge, relationships, and motivation that distant rivals cannot match.” (Porter, 1998) Applied to the realm of social innovation, clusters describe the confluence of funders, visionaries, organizations, artists, and academics who share a passion for innovation around a particular theme. When grouped this way they take advantage of the “school of fish effect”—they become more influential, visible, adaptive, and capable of rapid response to changes in their environment. Sport Matters Group, profiled elsewhere in this issue, operates on this principle. Schools Without Borders offers incubation and co-location support to dozen or so youth-led social innovators and entrepreneurs.

Organizational strategy, tactics, and evaluation

As noted earlier, strategy is related to both to scale and to phase. New tools for social innovation include tactical maps to determine blockages and leverage points in a system; ethnographic research to discover prevailing mindsets; and social media content analysis to map discourse, as Environics Nexalogy currently offers to private sector clients. Such tools permit us to read and take the pulse of the system we are working to change. A related tool developed by Michael Quinn Patton for the community sector is *developmental evaluation*. In addition to Patton's new work on the topic,² The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation has published two guides¹⁰ for practitioners. Both are available for download.



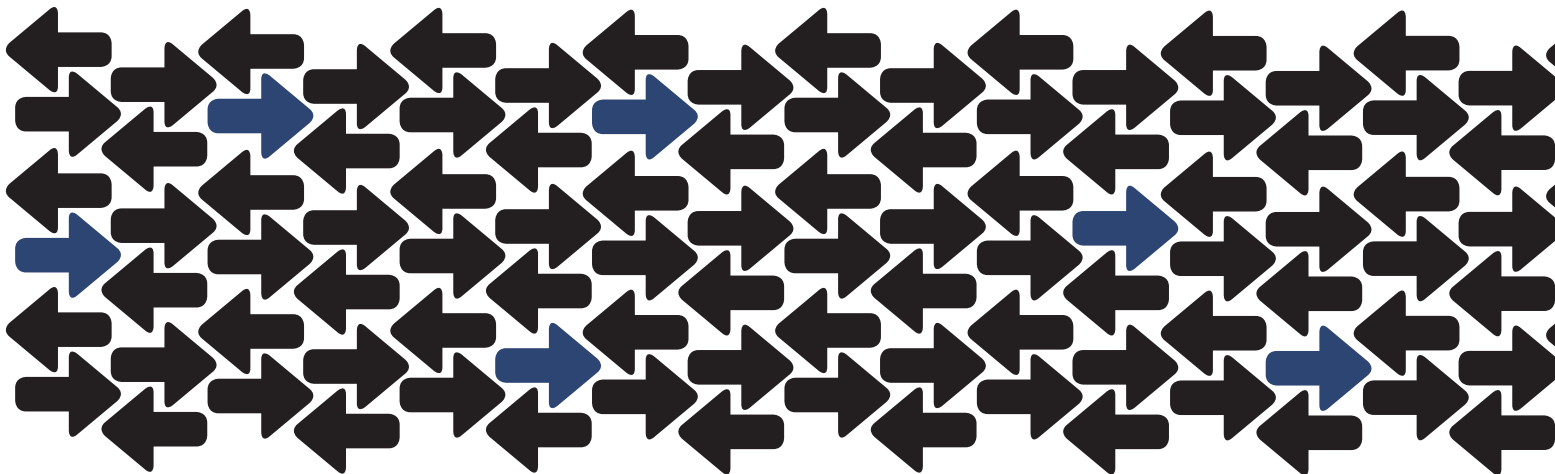
Intersectoral collaboration

The practice of learning and collaborating across sectors is in its infancy but will shape much of our work over the coming decade. There is an evident need for models and approaches to doing this, and SiG@Waterloo is developing a program for practitioners, to be launched in 2011.

Social process tools

As a constructivist endeavour, social innovation requires tools for facilitation and exploration in large groups. Among a growing number of such processes, some of the most used include Deliberative dialogue, Open Space Technology, Future Search, World Cafés, and Social Analysis Systems. Design thinking is yet another useful approach.

As the open government movement expands, and we take full account of our place in overlapping complex systems, innovations in governance can be expected to surface. Elinor Ostrom's notion of Polycentric Governance, for which she won the 2009 Nobel Prize in Economics, seems like an idea whose time is coming.

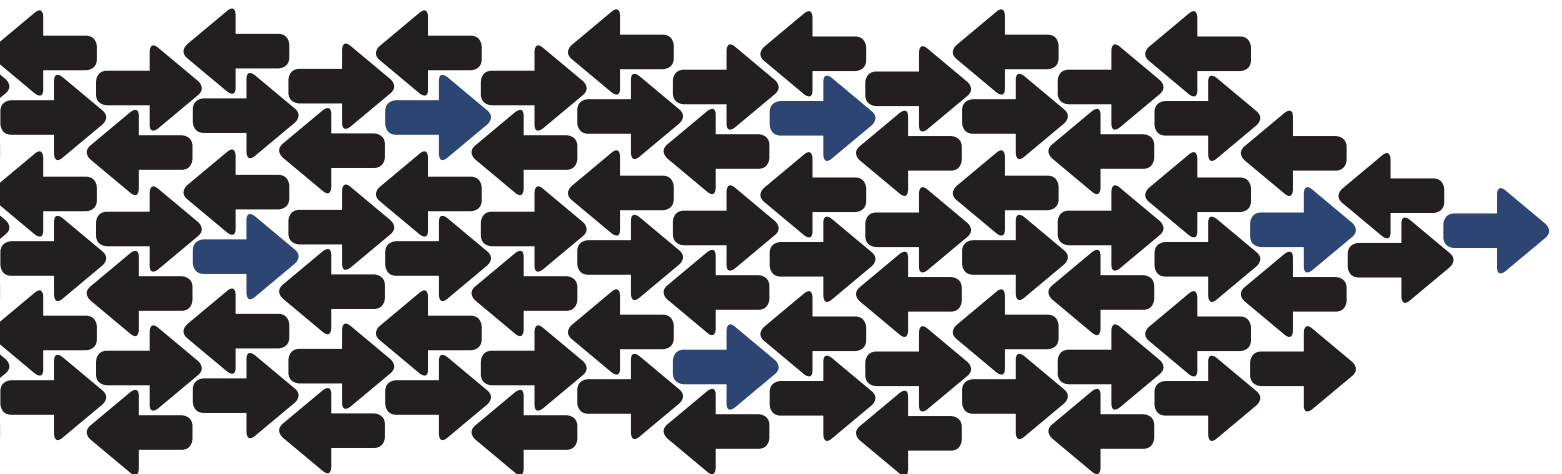


CONCLUSION



There are no simple answers to wicked problems. In this age of turbulence, we are coming to recognize that many of the social and economic systems we have inherited are ill-adapted to new environmental and economic realities. They are unsustainable, unjust, inefficient, or simply inelegant. Social innovation offers us the means by which to re-imagine, recalibrate, and introduce greater resilience in our institutions.

As I hope that this article has illustrated, the work is spreading. It touches every sector of society, at every level of scale. It is also just beginning and will increasingly call upon all of us to engage in making the transition to a more conscious, durable, and humane state. History has brought us here, and our great, great, great grandchildren await!





NOTES

- ¹ This list is adapted from *Convergence: How Five Trends Will Reshape the Social Sector*, available online at www.irvine.org
- ² See the HighScope Perry study for example, which has run for 40 years, at <http://www.highscope.org/content.asp?contentid=219>
- ³ See the Quality of End of Life Care Coalition at <http://www.chpca.net/qelccc.htm>
- ⁴ The term “disruptive innovation” refers to innovations that introduce a different set of values than the ones prevailing in a particular market, while lowering costs and widening availability.
- ⁵ From Canopy’s mission statement, which can be viewed at <http://bit.ly/cRDh68>
- ⁶ Canadian Boreal Initiative, Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Canopy, David Suzuki Foundation, ForestEthics, Greenpeace, The Nature Conservancy, Pew Environment Group International Boreal Conservation Campaign, and Ivey Foundation.
- ⁷ Toronto Regional Immigrant Employment Alliance
- ⁸ www.projectstreamline.org
- ⁹ Patton, Michael Q. (2011, but available now) *Developmental evaluation: Applying complexity concepts to enhance innovation and use*. New York: The Guildford Press.
- ¹⁰ Gamble, J. (2008) *A Developmental Evaluation Primer*. The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation: Montreal; Dozois, E., Langlois, M., Blanchet-Cohen, N., (2010) DE 201: A practitioners guide. The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation: Montreal & the International Institute for Child Rights and Development: Victoria, B.C. Downloadable at <http://bit.ly/a7j6Ks>

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