

SI



**SOCIAL
INNOVATION
CANADA**

Introducing Social
Innovation Canada

**Building the
Ecosystem to
Align for Action**



Setting the Stage

Over the fall and winter of 2017/2018, a group of social innovation practitioners set out on a listening and learning journey across Canada with a key question: how might we work collaboratively to unlock the potential of social innovation in Canada?

The engagement team heard loud and clear from over 750 practitioners from across communities and sectors nationwide: there is a strong desire to better work together, but the field is distributed, disconnected and not very well coordinated. There are bold ideas but they are not scaling. Individuals and organizations working to affect social and environmental change are seeking greater capacity-building and other supports that will help them better align for impact.

Results from the engagement process, summarized in the [“Findings from the Field”](#) document, catalyzed the opportunity for a new initiative, **Social Innovation Canada**.

With our findings in hand and foundational funding for year 1 secured from The McConnell Foundation, the study team morphed into a project team. The Centre for Social Innovation (CSI), and the affiliated Social Innovation Charitable Foundation, in its role as Secretariat, assembled a Guardians Group and reconvened regional leaders in September 2018 to inform and guide the program design and governance of SI Canada.

This Pathways document builds on the findings of a year of consultation, incorporating feedback from the September retreat. It shares the pathway forward for SI Canada, with a close look at year 1 foundational activities that will help set the stage for priority activities in years 2 and 3. It's where we are at now. Throughout the coming months and years, we will refine and adapt the strategy based on our shared learnings and as we secure additional resources to drive the work.

Thank you to everyone who has helped in this formative stage for Social Innovation Canada. We are excited to begin this next stage of this important and exciting journey to make our communities and Canada stronger with all of you!

Social Innovation: New Approaches, Real Impact

Social innovation – new, inclusive and collaborative approaches to solve complex problems – is working. Though the language of social innovation is still emerging, Canada has a proud legacy of creating solutions to social and environmental problems. These solutions, tools and approaches often blend profit with purpose, building the economic bottom line while addressing deeply rooted, systemic challenges. In 2018, CSI penned a [landscape document](#), to help frame and unlock the current state of Canadian Social Innovation.

New Solutions for People and Planet

**Open
Government**

**Social
Enterprise**

Labs

**Collective
Impact Projects**

**Network
Movements**

**Emergent
Strategy**

**Community
Bonds**

**Human-Centred
Design**

**Civic
Tech**

**Systems
Thinking**

**Citizen
Solutions**

**Social
Finance**

**Constellation
Governance**

The opportunity to nurture transformational impact in our communities is at our fingertips.

After years of actors from across sectors working to build awareness of and capacity for social innovation, in November 2018, Canada's federal government announced [\\$800M in social finance funding](#). This is incredibly strong validation that social innovation, combined with the financing needed to create social, environmental and financial returns, makes real, lasting and tangible social impact possible.

As the challenges facing our communities continue to mount in complexity and scale, the need for social innovation has never been greater. Those doing the work whether on the front lines of service delivery, working in academia, within government and corporate institutions, are looking for ways to connect, to learn and ultimately, to better align so we can scale our individual and collective impact.

This is where Social Innovation Canada comes in.

Social Innovation Canada: Aligning for Action

Social Innovation Canada will **empower people, organizations and systems with the tools, knowledge, skills and connections** they need to solve real and complex problems. By leveraging existing assets, using the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and focusing on action, SI Canada will build a unique, inclusive and open movement for people and planet first.

A robust, connected, social innovation ecosystem will inspire new efforts to illuminate relationships between social innovators, bringing together key parts so they can combine to create a much greater whole.

Social Innovation Canada will serve as a powerful tipping point for the social innovation ecosystem that can lead to widespread social and environmental change. To make this possible, we need to pay greater attention to both the whole and to the parts. We need to create the collaborative infrastructure to connect, support and enable social innovators to maximize the potential for change.

Objectives

SI Canada will build Canada's social innovation ecosystem, and make greater change possible by:

- Helping new practitioners to enter the field
- Strengthening capacity and building knowledge among practitioners
- Elevating the field of social innovation
- Enabling practitioners to collaborate, building stronger connections that help us align for action

Who's it for?

Social Innovation Canada's unique value proposition lies both in who it serves and how it will work together.

Social Innovation Canada is an ecosystem effort, informed, designed and governed by practitioners. These practitioners encompass people and organizations from across sectors and geographies *seeking to affect change at a systems level*. They come from the grassroots, from the echelons of corporate power, they are front-line workers and process facilitators. They work at the community level, act as intermediaries and inside the highest levels of government. They work individually or come from across sectors, demographics and geographies. Some are at the beginning of their journey and others are experienced systems change agents. They come from social enterprise, nonprofits, labs, corporate social responsibility, academia and so much more. While many identify as being social innovators, others align or identify with their sector first and haven't recognized that they too, are social innovators.

What unites these practitioners is the shared desire to bring a systems lens to their work so that they can achieve a real and substantive impact in the world. They know that to do this, they need to learn quickly, build connections, collaborations and capacity to align for greater social impact.

Values and Design Principles

Through the 2017–2018 engagement process, participants articulated what their interests, priorities, hopes and fears might be for building a pan-Canadian social innovation ecosystem. They articulated a number of values which have informed the purpose, the design and governance, of Social Innovation Canada:

Values Into

Open and transparent

Design Principles

Enabling and unlocking

Weave together existing assets	Align self-interest for collective impact
Lightweight governance	Bias for action & energy
Power to the periphery	Hold the tensions
Financially resilient	Practitioners at the centre
Inclusion at the core	Accessible

Launching: Building the Collaborative Infrastructure

As we work together we will learn by doing. The next 3 years will focus on creating the **collaborative infrastructure** to support experiments, prototypes and learning. As we support the actions of social innovators across the country we'll keep adapting to create an innovation ecosystem with local legitimacy and thriving connections that create real impact across Canada.

The following describes the three key ingredients of the collaborative infrastructure that is being put in place to build the SI field and create the enabling conditions for SI Canada to thrive. This infrastructure is proposed as a pan-Canadian model, one that is designed to be both regionally responsive and aligned for impact nationally.

1. Constellation Governance
2. Regional Nodes
3. Shared Knowledge Exchange Platforms (National)

1. Constellation Governance

SI Canada will adopt the Constellation Model of Collaborative Governance as our primary decision making framework. This is a 'light touch' governance model, designed to enable multi-organization collaborations within dynamic and complex systems. It biases for action, leverages self-interest and moves power to the periphery (i.e., as few decisions made nationally as possible), while responding to emergence that advances collective strategies.

In applying the constellation governance model to SI Canada, our objective is to make decisions at the most appropriate level, empowering the regional communities while working together on

initiatives that truly benefit from national or global connectivity. For example, we see types of decision making occurring:

- **Action** – regional
- **Navigation** – regional / national / global
- **Capacity-building** – regional / national / global
- **Policy** – regional / national
- **Stories, Data** – regional / national / global
- **Learning/knowledge sharing** – national / global

To help make decision making at the right level, the SI Canada constellation governance approach is comprised of a few key roles and functions:

Constellations: are outwardly-focused, nimble action teams of people and organizations aligning their self-interest for collective impact. Constellations respond to a ‘magnetic attractor’ – a threat or opportunity – in an ecosystem, and this, combined with energetic leadership, drives the focus of the activity. When the energy declines, a constellation can become inactive or off-ramp entirely without negatively affecting the overall partnerships of SI Canada.

SI Canada will host thematic or emergent constellations. Thematic constellations might include SI Labs or Social R&D, for example. They serve to advance cross-sectoral sector relationship building and shared learning. An emergent constellation might come together to respond to policy threats or opportunities, e.g. how labs access social finance funds. These constellations emerge to respond to the threats and opportunities in the ecosystem. They can be led by anyone and must align around our collective goals. Constellations will be of many different shapes and sizes and will be resourced and supported according to the guidance of the Stewardship Group.

Project Secretariat: The Secretariat will ensure the smooth operation of SI Canada, responsible for building the pan-Canadian infrastructure – aligning and coordinating efforts, facilitating decision making, mobilizing fundraising, finding efficiencies, financial management and coordinating the overall project work plan. The Secretariat ensures that the pieces fit together and seeks to ensure that the right decisions are made at the right time by the right people.

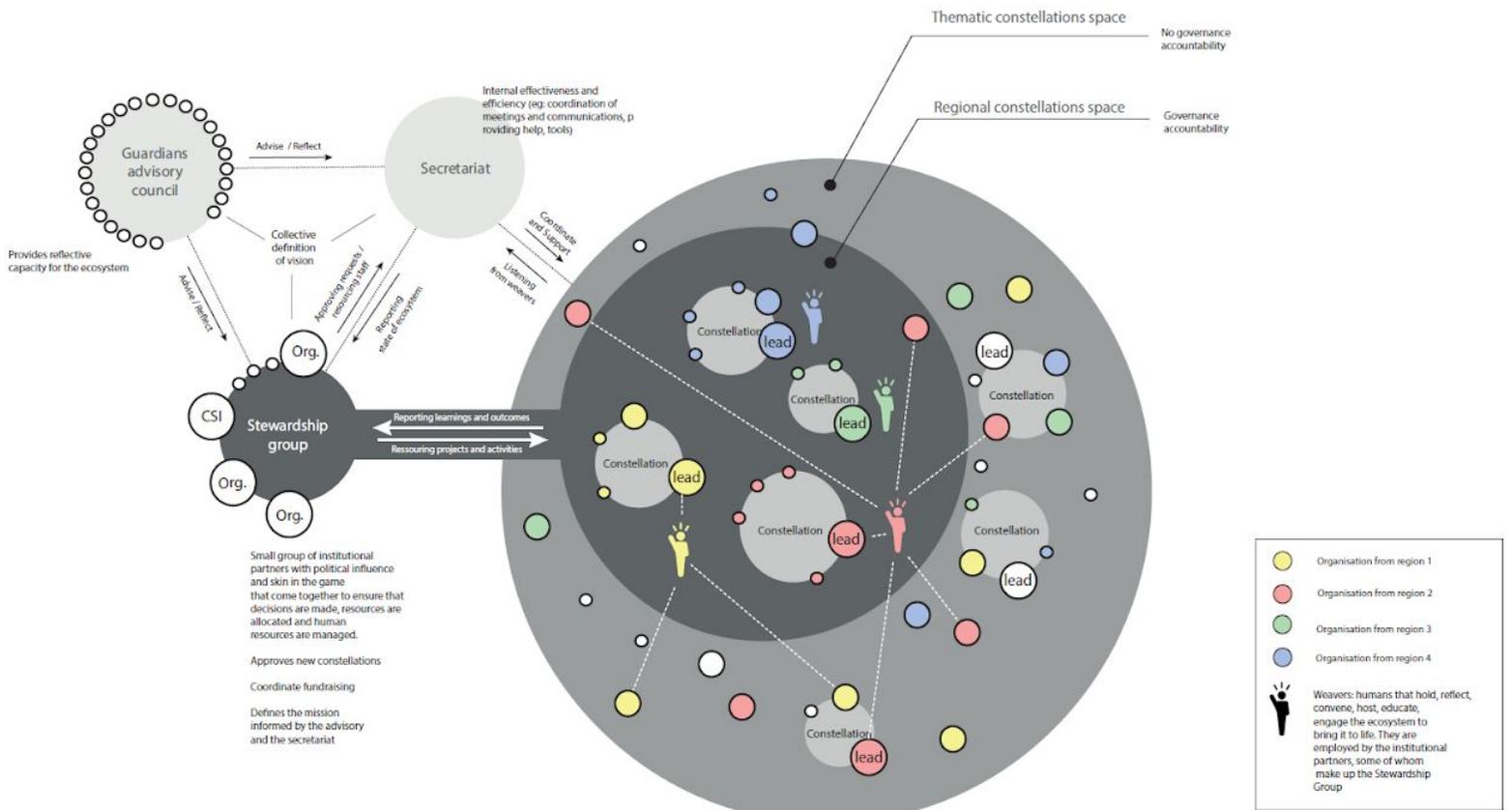
The Centre for Social Innovation, and its affiliate, the Social Innovation Charitable Foundation, are the legal entities that have assumed fiscal responsibility for Social Innovation Canada. The Centre for Social Innovation will serve as the SI Canada Secretariat.

Stewardship Group: is the small group of institutional partners, including CSI, that ensure SI Canada is operating at an institutional level, coming together to ensure that decisions are made,

resources allocated and human resources are managed. A process will be created to nominate partners into positions on the Stewardship Group. Ultimately the members of the Stewardship Group will act as an alliance to build their collective self-interest while fostering a vibrant ecosystem.

Guardians Group: is an inclusive and diverse body which will hold the vision, provide advice, support and collective intelligence. The Guardians will be composed of sense-makers, thought leaders, elders and emerging leaders, providing reflective capacity for the ecosystem. The Guardians also serve, if necessary, to make decisions on behalf of the ecosystem when agreement has not been possible at the regional, secretariat or stewardship group level.

SI Canada Governance Model



2. Regional Nodes

Regional Nodes are the front-line and foundation of SI Canada, essential to creating a locally legitimate and inclusive network. Regional nodes will explore and respond to regional needs and opportunities, undertaking regional ecosystem mapping, convening the field/hosting regionally responsive convenings, collecting and sharing stories, and helping to build the capacity of practitioners.

Insights gained at the regional level will contribute into the national learning platforms, and in turn, leverage national support that helps practitioners scale and solve challenges across sectors, systems and geographies – from community to global.

Regional nodes will build the social capital amongst regional practitioners vital to field building. SI Canada will begin by investing in existing regional leaders spanning coast-to-coast:

1. RADIUS SFU in BC
2. ABSI Connect in Alberta
3. Social Enterprise Centre in Manitoba
4. Centre for Social Innovation (CSI) in Ontario
5. La Maison de l'innovation sociale (MIS) in Quebec
6. Inspiring Communities in the Atlantic Region

Essential to the work of the regional constellations are the “weavers”. Weavers are employed by the regional nodes. Weavers are natural networkers who are already working in the field and who share a desire to build a vibrant ecosystem of practitioners. With an ear to the ground, weavers will reveal, share, unlock and enable people, organizations and systems to thrive. They meet regularly and work together to reflect the vibrancy, diversity and knowledge that is emerging from coast to coast.

3. Shared Platforms

The third ingredient of the collaborative infrastructure being put in place to help unlock the potential and weave together Canada's social innovation ecosystem is a shared digital knowledge exchange platform. This platform will facilitate learning and information exchange to leverage our shared assets, build knowledge and aggregate our data and stories.

Shared Online Platform: This registration-required member portal will enable SI Canada members to participate in online groups, peer circles, create and post jobs, news and events, search for knowledge and each other across a robust community of members. A go-to for practitioners, to find each other, to learn about latest trends, to contribute to content feeds such as job postings, funding announcements, latest research and to publicly share how SI Canada is

evolving in response to our shared work, what we are learning as a network and how we are responding to these insights.

Thematic Constellations: are either strategic or responsive efforts that support deep dive learning or other organizing effort that the field deems appropriate. The constellations must extend the goals and objectives of SI Canada.

Current constellations include:

- 1. Labs Community of Practice** – Building on the work of the Solutions Lab and RADIUS SFU and the Converge Conference in BC in 2018, over 150 Labs Practitioners are gathering regularly to share best practices.
- 2. Developmental Evaluation** – A sub-constellation of Labs is focused on Developmental Evaluation, where practitioners are co-evolving some DE best practices for Labs.
- 3. Corporate Social Innovation Community of Practice** – Being developed in partnership with MaRS with a focus on socializing the field of social innovation within this sector.
- 4. Social R&D** – Weaving the existing Social R&D community of practice into SI Canada is underway as this constellation seeks to build the capacity of nonprofits and charities to build more intentional social research and development capacity within their own organizations.
- 5. Indigenous Social Innovation** – Recognizing that there are many efforts across Canada to unlock the knowledge and learning that connects indigenous issues and social innovation, this is as yet an unformed constellation and we will be inviting others to begin to explore this vital work.
- 6. Transformative Leadership** – Supporting emerging thought leaders and capacity builders, creating opportunities for their continued growth, learning, connections and partnerships building, while removing barriers that might otherwise limit their opportunity to participate.

This work of the constellations is occurring with the active participation of several strategic partnerships and other affiliations are also being explored. For example, conversations are developing with organizations such as Innoweave, Ashoka, CKX and others.

Program Design

These three strategic pillars emerged through the engagement phase findings and have been organized to best addresses the current needs of the sector.

1. Navigation, Wayfinding, Connections

Purpose: Create pathways into the social innovation field that make it easier for social innovators to find each other, share and learn about what is going on.

Key tactics:

- **Regional Ecosystem Mapping** – To establish a baseline and determine where collective energy is for moving forward, each region will begin by mapping their local social innovation ecosystem. Using a shared taxonomy that allows for regional and national pattern recognition, the ecosystem maps enable practitioners to be able to find the tools, resources and communities – the entry points into the field, in their community. This information will then inform and support local pathways to see the national picture of social innovation in Canada.
- **SI Canada Branding** – We have developed a clear, national SI Canada brand that is professional and inspirational. The design attempts to hold a modern and sophisticated approach that works well as a stand-alone brand and in concert with its regional partners.
- **Website** – The “front door” to social innovation in Canada. This public gateway will be the online home of our shared content, promoting stories, news, jobs, events and practitioner profiles from across the network. It will provide a doorway to the community, host a range of online groups and support the navigation of visitors into the field.

2. Capacity-Building and Convening

Purpose: Strengthen individual, organization and sector capacity by facilitating access to social innovation and systems change training, and disseminating and scaling knowledge transfer through train-the-trainer and peer groups.

Key tactics:

- **SI 101 Training** – SI Canada will launch with SI 101 Curriculum directly engaging the regional constellations. The 101 curriculum will start with context and design, highlighting problem framing, systems mapping, leadership and awareness practices. We will also curate existing SI curriculum to understand where there innovation is emerging that can be folded in to SI Canada, and to begin to create a 101 train-the-trainer program that will support knowledge dissemination.

Over time, SI Canada will expand to encompass a series of modules that introduce a range of topics and that build on existing competencies or ‘ways of learning frameworks’ that are important for this work (i.e., Academy for Systems Change, School for Systems Change and Systems Sanctuary). Each module will include an overview of the topic, experiential exercises, and further resources. Potential modules include:

- Working across difference, power and perspectives
 - Collaboration practice and processes: partnership, labs, collective impact, effective facilitation
 - The innovation process: design thinking, creativity, innovation process, innovative organizations
 - Scaling, implementation and impact
 - Strategic Learning and Evaluating impact
- **Convenings** – to collaborate, share learning, adapt and plan for the work, SI Canada will host a variety of convenings:
 - **Regionally Responsive Convenings** – cross-pollinate ideas at the regional level, feeding into and informing national conversations and informing the constellation governance practice.
 - **National Convenings** – pooling insights gained at the regional level to align for impact. First national convening planned for Spring 2020, a chance to begin to align regional insights and deep dive for aligning with SDGs.
 - **Governance Team** – annual retreats with the secretariat/Regional Node Leaders, timed for inflection/learning moments.

3. Sharing Stories, Data and Building Knowledge

Purpose: In order to elevate the field and scale our impact, we need to share knowledge more fluidly, tell our story and demonstrate our value to each other, our stakeholders and the world.

Key Tactics:

- **Storytelling Platform** – SI Canada will engage a pan-Canadian audience by curating and creating content that’s exciting, accessible and relevant to them. We’ll invite them to join an online community of their peers that helps facilitate the development of their practice. SI Canada will both create, and be a platform for, sector thought leadership and news distribution. We’ll curate high value content *from* the network for distribution *to* the network through email, groups and social media. At the same time we’ll work with external media, news agencies and journalists across Canada to share the stories generated by the network with new audiences that don’t yet know about social innovation. By telling our stories well, often, loudly and new places, SI Canada will both keep practitioners informed and knowledgeable, and be a conduit between practice and the family dinner table, starting conversations that create allies in places we’ve never been.
- **Impact Dashboard** – SI Canada will work with its members to aggregate data and stories using the UN Sustainable Development Goals as the organizing framework. Aggregating data, evidence and stories will be key to tracking the impact of the ecosystem and telling the stories of our impact to each other and the world. Working with others, such as Carleton University’s Social Enterprise Impact Measurement Project to build a SE data standard, we will evolve existing tools and build an interoperable data standard, using the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) so that we can work together to make an impact.

Deliver, Learn, Adapt

Year 1 is a foundational year for SI Canada in which we will put in place the building blocks necessary for creating a legitimate and inclusive SI ecosystem aligned for long-term impact, while developing and testing key wayfinding, capacity-building and convening activities.

What are we trying to learn and accomplish in year 1?

- Build social capital amongst those in the ecosystem, the foundation of trust and relationships critical for keeping forward momentum.
- Establish the secretariat, backbone project functions and design the governance model for ongoing decision making.
- Build the collaborative infrastructure, clarifying the online program requirements (a collaboration between CSI and MIS) and prototyping the platform.
- Host new and support existing thematic constellations on a variety of topics and supporting connections between constellations. Bring in new constellations, working explicitly and intentionally to incorporate diverse perspectives and weave indigenous knowledge into how we learn as an ecosystem.
- Launch the six regional nodes so that they can begin to host regional conversations and weave these insights together to build an understanding of national needs.
- Develop the SI curriculum and pilot the training in each regional node.
- Build strategic partnerships beyond those currently involved, for example with youth and Indigenous organizations.
- Articulate our future direction and continue to refine and evolve the SI Canada narrative, leverage The McConnell Foundation's generous early stage investment.

“If you want to go fast go alone, and if you want to go far, go together...”

Creating SI Canada will be a process of learning and experimentation. There will be temptations among many of us who want to run fast and make decisions and get to the hands on work that drives social change forward. That is good, and it is welcomed. But we'll also seem at times to be going slow, and this will be frustrating to many of us. The process of collaborative engagement will take time and also some patience. Both are necessary for aligning for action that helps each of us become part of the solution

Aligning for greater social and environmental impact is the end game. The opportunity awaits us all.