



>> REPORT SEPTEMBER 2018

# Learnings from **CONVERGE**

Canadian Lab Practicioners Exchange



# >> Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
CONVERGE participant persona	4
<b>Labs definition</b>	<b>5</b>
Labs purpose	5
Working minimum specification for Labs	5
Impact of labs	6
<b>Status of the Labs field in Canada</b>	<b>8</b>
Issues Labs are working on	10
Maturity signs	11
Key questions and tensions	12
Emerging opportunities	15
What's coming next	16
<b>Conclusion - Impact of CONVERGE</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Thanks!</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Appendix 1 - Participant list</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Appendix 2 - Session descriptions</b>	<b>23</b>



*"Thanks for bringing together such a talent pool and helping us see each other and the larger network. The energy was incredible! A great start to a rich community of practice."*

**- Anonymous**

**CONVERGE was made possible thanks to our partners:**



**BEEDIE SCHOOL  
OF BUSINESS**



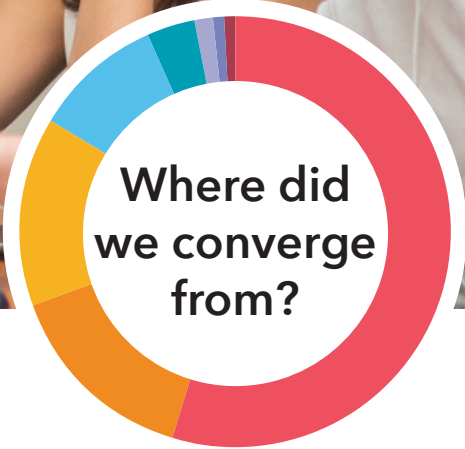
**vancoouver  
foundation**

# >> Introduction

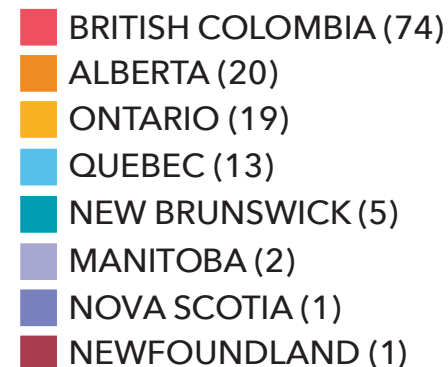
CONVERGE was a gathering of over 130 active social innovation lab practitioners and key ecosystem enablers in Vancouver, BC on June 27th and 28th 2018 hosted by RADIUS SFU.

The gathering was a response to signals we were seeing in the Canadian labs field as this way of working has been increasing in popularity in recent years. We understood that this proliferation has been happening in a fairly divergent way with a lack of connective infrastructure that would allow coordination for greater systems change. We were hearing that practitioners were eager to learn from each other and build robust practice together. CONVERGE aimed to :

- > Deepen relationships and trust amongst lab practitioners, laying the foundation for an active pan-Canadian Community of Practice;
- > Create a space for lab practitioners to add value to each other's work through Peer Input Processes;
- > Make visible the diversity and impact of social innovation labs in Canada through system mapping;
- > Begin to build a shared set of tools, practices, language, knowledge, and expertise across the lifecycle of a lab; and
- > Identify key problem/opportunity areas where Canadian labs can better align for increased coordination and impact.



Where did we converge from?



CONVERGE took place on the unceded and traditional homelands of the xwməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam), skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and selílwitlh (Tsleil Waututh) Coast Salish peoples.



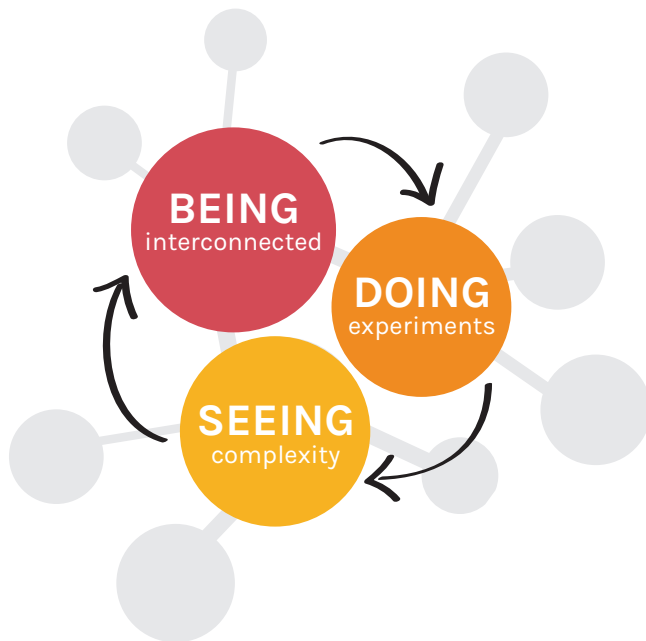


## >> CONVERGE participant persona

*"CONVERGE offered invaluable insight into the Canadian labs landscape! It was great to meet with so many different participants in this space, and to gain a wider perspective on social innovation, change labs and other social change practices from public, private, non-profit and academic lenses."*

- Nathan Randall

North Coast Innovation Lab Ecotrust Canada



On the first morning of CONVERGE we spent time understanding who was in the room and the patterns we shared of how we got into this work. This is the collective persona that emerged.

- > The CONVERGE participant is someone who strives for systems change and real impact.
- > Their passion was ignited by a witnessing of injustice that started them questioning the way things are. This questioning led to personal transformation resulting in new ways of seeing, being and doing.
- > CONVERGE participants are risk-takers and bridge-builders. They care about people and seek community.
- > They're connected to the environment and see nature as a teacher and inspiration.
- > In coming together we saw that we are largely white, middle-class, highly educated. This provoked ongoing conversation about diversity and inclusion over the two days.



## >> Labs definition

### Labs purpose

*"Our long-term challenges call for comprehensive and collaborative work across sectors, because they are deeply rooted in cultural values, encoded in our institutions, and re-enacted each day through the behaviour of countless people."*

- **Darcy Riddell, McConnell Foundation**

An Emerging Community of Practice for Canadian Social Innovation Labs

Social innovation labs aim to transform systems by getting to the roots of complex problems and involving a diverse range of stakeholders in the process.

Labs recognize that a lot of our biggest problems are embedded in our institutional logic - our patterns of power, authority and marginalization. By working intersectionally and bringing citizens and systems closer together, labs aim to generate new collective narratives based on shared understandings of how things could be different. The problems we work on are complex and intergenerational, problems for which there are no quick fixes and no one organization able to solve them.

This work is by necessity experimental. The answers don't exist already so labs try things out and learn from doing. Labs create a safe container for this experimentation and learning to happen. They enable citizens to have a sense of creative agency over their futures.

Lab practitioners consider not just what they do, but how they know what they know, how they feel and how they are being. This reflexive way of seeing, being and doing is at the heart of lab practice.

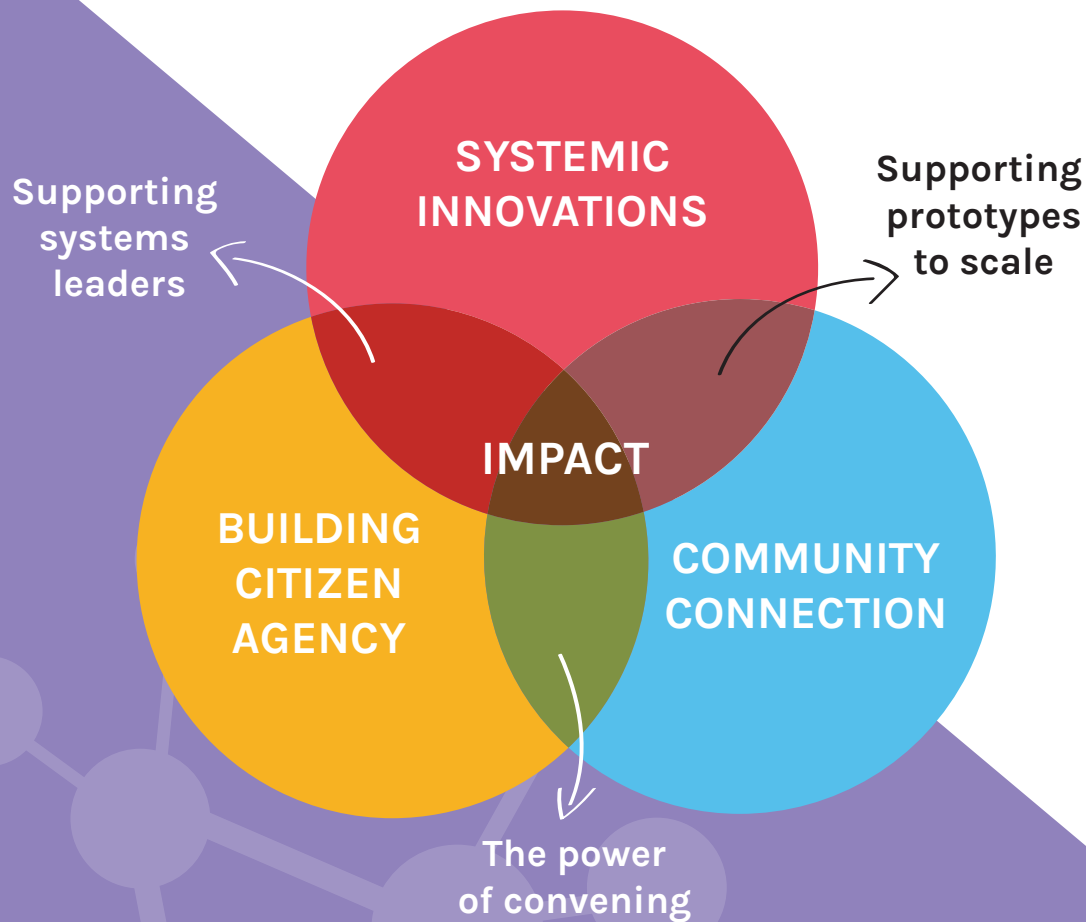
### Working minimum specification for Labs

Many things are being called 'Labs' these days. What labs look like and the methodologies they use in Canada is beneficially diversified. One of the questions we heard again and again at CONVERGE is "I don't know if I'm in a lab or not". This minimum specification has been devised to help people answer that question.

#### A lab must be :

- > Thinking and acting across scales (systemic)
- > With diverse stakeholders, including people with lived experience of problem (social)
- > In sustained, iterative experiments (experimental)
- > To solve highly complex, intergenerational, wicked problems (transformational)

**See also :** Zaid Hassan's definition of social labs in *The Social Labs Revolution: A New Approach to Solving our Most Complex Challenges*



## Impact of labs

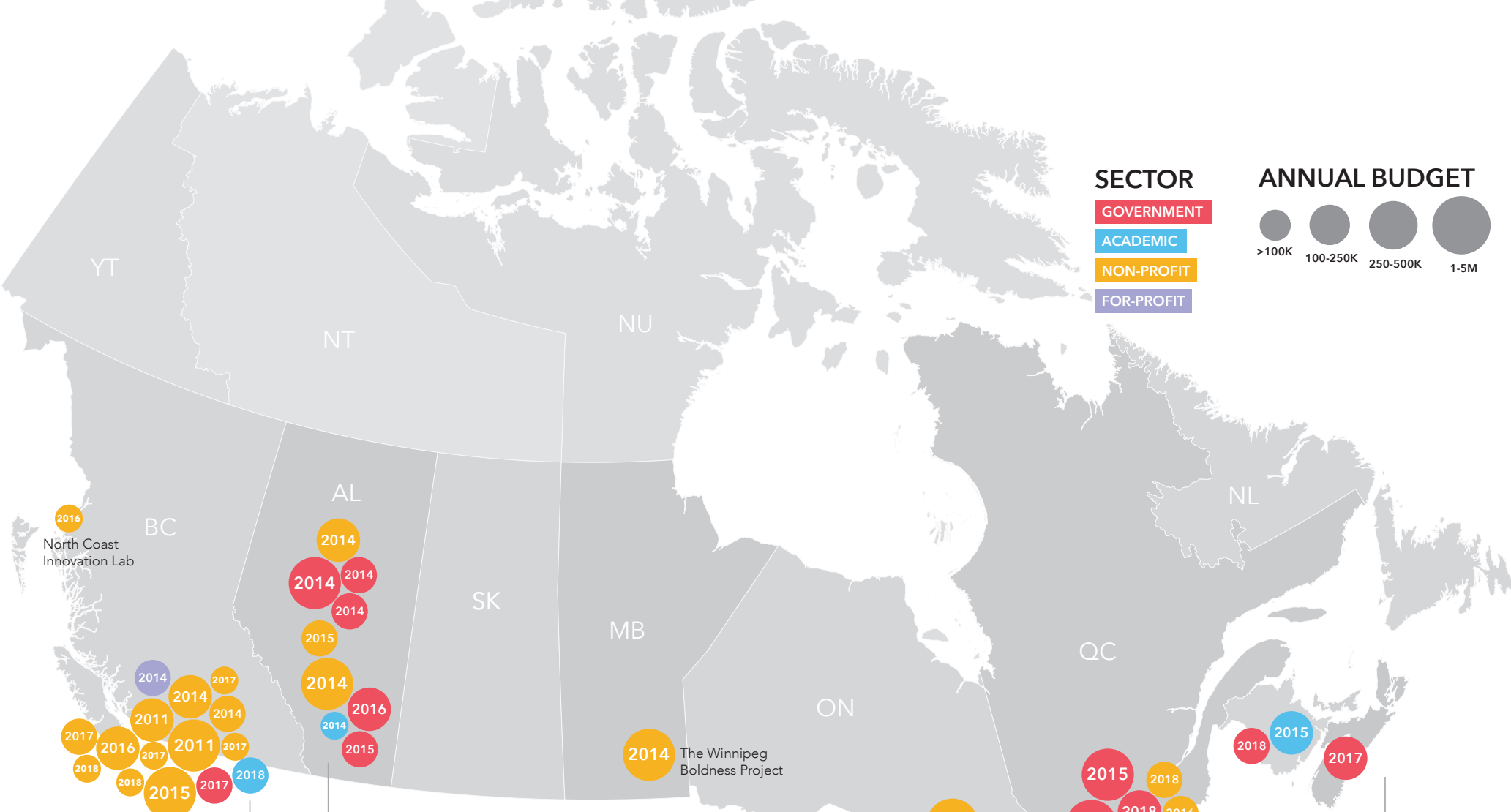
The impact labs can have is three-fold. Our outputs are prototypes which can be implemented as systemic innovations, but the greater impact labs have is in empowering citizens and increasing the connectivity of communities; creating high-trust constituencies equipped to understand and evolve systems.



*"It is beautiful to see the lab community growing and thriving in Canada, as a field it feels like we are at a moment where it becomes critical to build strong bridges across sectors and with various types of funders so that labs will have a deep and lasting impact on society in Canada and beyond."*

- Aleeya Velji  
Edmonton Shift Lab





### VANCOUVER CLUSTER

- + CityStudio Vancouver
- + Local Economic Development Lab
- + Leverage Lab
- + Kudoz
- + Community, Economy and Place Initiative
- + City of Vancouver Solutions Lab
- + Share Reuse Repair Initiative
- + Overdose Prevention Site Lab (OPS Lab)
- + reFRESH Water Lab
- + Supply Gap Solutions Lab
- + Beyond Borders: Refugee Livelihood Lab
- + Neighbour Lab

### ALBERTA CLUSTER

- + Alberta CoLab
- + Reforming the Family Justice System
- + Trico Changemakers Studio (hosts SI labs)
- + Alberta CoLab (Alberta Energy)
- + Action Lab & Shift Lab
- + Energy Futures Lab
- + Civic Innovation YYC
- + Design Lab
- + Project Blue Thumb

### ONTARIO CLUSTER

- + Green Change
- + WoodGreen Innovation Hub
- + MaRS Solutions Lab
- + Hack - A New Way of Thinking
- + London Life Solutions Lab
- + Waterloo Social Innovation Lab
- + Overlap Innovation Programs
- + Food Systems Lab
- + MINDS of London-Middlesex
- + SE Futures (Toronto)
- + SE Futures (Markham)
- + Making the Shift Youth Homelessness Social Innovation Lab
- + Guelph Lab
- + Nourish
- + Engineering Change Lab
- + Housing Action Lab

### EASTERN CLUSTER

- + Digital Collab Division
- + FCM Innovation Network
- + Inclusive Culture Lab
- + Canada School of Public Service Innovation Lab
- + Smart Commons
- + ESDC Innovation Lab
- + NouLAB
- + Laboratoire d'innovation sociale de la PALC
- + NS GovLab

# >> Status of the Labs field in Canada

*"A big thank you to the organizers. As a new person into the field of social innovation labs and despite the barriers sometimes of language (I work and live in French), I felt I started to be part of a family."*

- Anonymous

*"Nature is conservative with things that work and wildly creative when they don't."*

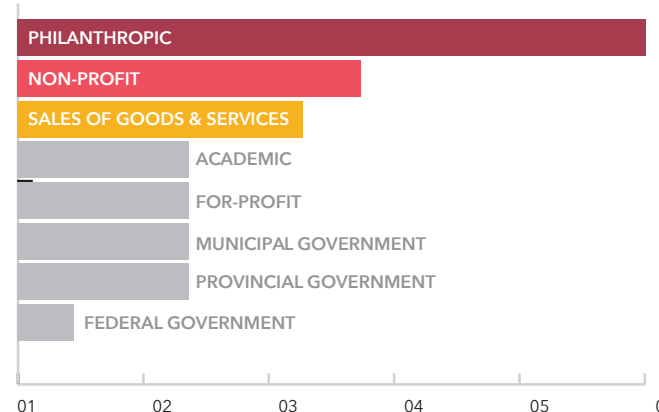
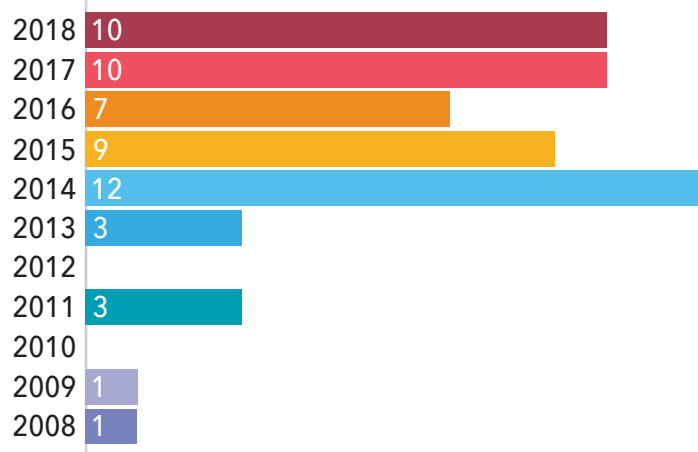
- Elisabet Sahtouris

Canada is home to one of the most diverse social innovation lab ecosystems in the world. They're being established from government, non-profit, for-profit and academic sectors, addressing a wide range of intractable issues that Canadians care deeply about.

Prior to CONVERGE we sent out an online survey which 56 labs from across Canada completed. Some of the results of this survey are captured in this report. For the full results see this slidedeck [Canadian Labs Landscape 2018](#).

## GROWTH OF THE LABS FIELD IN CANADA

90% of these labs have been established in the last 5 years, and close to half in the past 2 years. This rapid and diverse proliferation demonstrates both the increasing recognition of labs as a powerful approach for social innovation, and also the relative immaturity of the field. There isn't yet codified best practice for labs in Canada, instead we have a 'wild' exploration of this way of working and the outcomes it can produce.

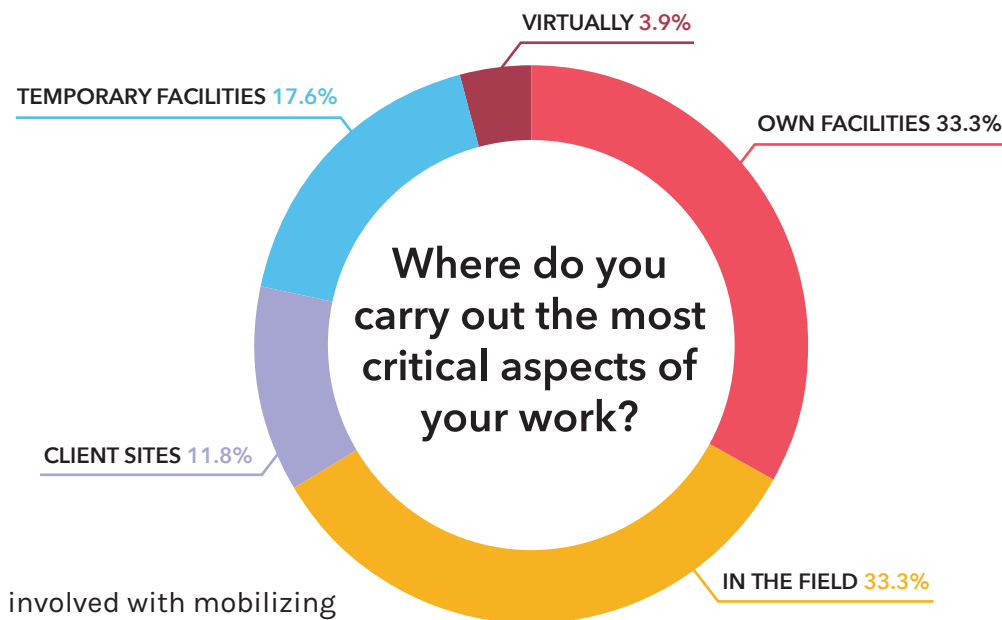
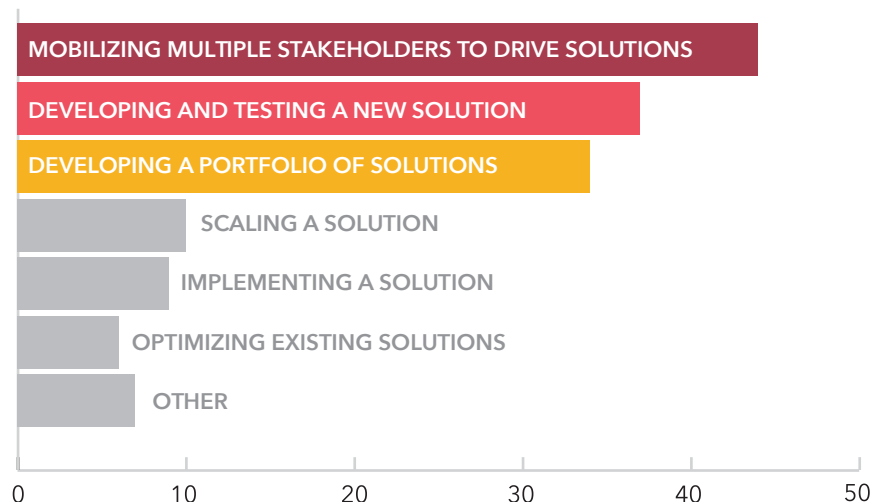


## FUNDING

The largest sources of funding for Canadian labs are philanthropy, non-profit partners, and entrepreneurial activity. Note : Only 2 of the 16 government-based labs answered this survey question.

Start-up costs are most significantly supported by philanthropy, for-profit partners and Provincial governments.



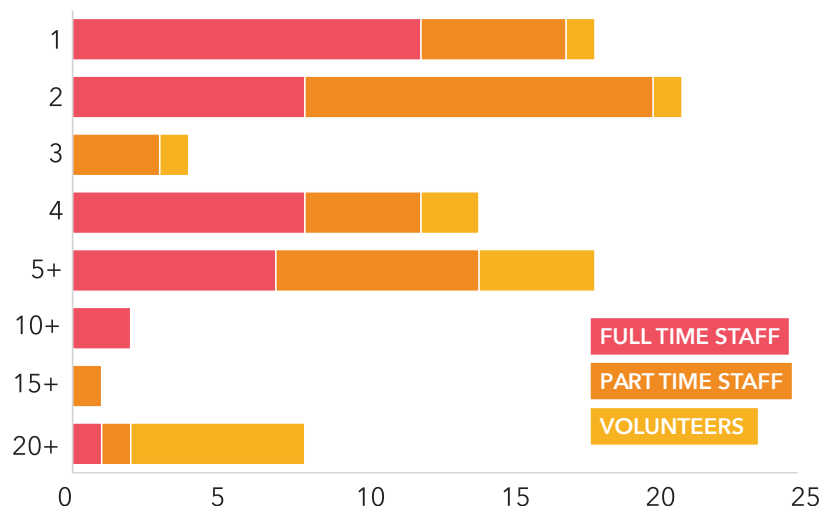


## WHAT TYPE OF WORK AND WHERE?

Coherent with the newness of the labs field in Canada, most labs are involved with mobilizing stakeholders, developing and testing solutions (or portfolios of them).

One challenge facing the labs field currently is how to move beyond promising prototypes to full implementation and optimization of social solutions over time. In short, it's the challenge of scaling.

There are questions about the role of labs in scaling and implementing solutions. Should labs stick to their specialties of research and development and stakeholder convening and achieve scale through the reach of committed institutional partners who have the organizational infrastructure and legitimacy for implementation? Or do labs need to be engaged in institutionalization to ensure that deeper insights and potentially radical nature of solutions do not get lost?



## HUMAN RESOURCING

Many labs operate with 1-2 full-time staff and extra support from part-time or pro-bono contributions.

At the other end of the scale there are four labs (2 non-profit, 2 government) operating with 10 or more full-time staff. We anticipate that number will increase as mainstream legitimacy of this approach to social innovation grows.

*"There is something about being in a room with a few hundred people, who share and understand exactly why you're there, that expands your capacity to explore and soar. That's what CONVERGE provided."*

- Pat Letizia  
Alberta Ecotrust Foundation

# >> Issues Labs are working on

*"CONVERGE enabled us to find and develop our community of practice, but also our community of Purpose."*

- Anonymous

## MARKET AND ECONOMIC INNOVATION



- > Social Procurement
- > Micro-enterprise incubation
- > Local economic development
- > Growing the circular economy
- > Procurement innovation in long-term care facilities, universities & municipalities
- > Youth employment

## EQUITY, RECONCILIATION, INCLUSION



- > Sustainable economic development in indigenous communities
- > Family Justice
- > Poverty
- > Racism
- > Reconciliation
- > Disability inclusion
- > Inclusion and accessibility to major cultural institutions

## PUBLIC SECTOR & GOVERNANCE INNOVATION



- > Changes to Income Assistance Policy
- > Healthcare service redesign and patient-centred care
- > Mental health and addictions
- > Public servants training
- > Human-centred and systemic design in Ministry of Education
- > Immigration/Newcomer settlement
- > Justice system reform
- > New forms of government and services
- > Breaking down government silos
- > Action research partnerships with academics
- > Government funding of innovation

## ENERGY TRANSITIONS



- > Enabling workers to thrive in a low carbon economy
- > Economic development and diversification towards energy transition
- > Reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples in oil sands

## FOOD ACCESS AND SECURITY



- > Healthy eating
- > Food waste, food security
- > Disconnections between food, culture and health
- > Strengthening supply side of local food system

## CITIES



- > Civic engagement
- > Urban wellness and healthy city strategies
- > Innovation across multiple city strategies
- > Affordable housing
- > Newcomer settlement and enterprise
- > Open data and municipal regulation
- > Urban planning, parks engagement



## >> Maturity signs

*"CONVERGE was a beautifully curated event that helped the social lab community strengthen itself and its work."*

- Samantha Slade  
Percolab

Although many labs have existed for less than two years, the field as a whole is showing signs of maturity with urges for greater convergence. Here are some of the signs we've observed :

- > **Community-seeking** - 130 people attended CONVERGE, with a waitlist of more eager participants. It was originally planned as a gathering for 80. Many people are also showing up to informal labs gatherings around Canada. People are seeking each other and there is demand for connective infrastructure for this emerging field. The enthusiastic commitment to building an evolutionary learning community at CONVERGE was evident.
- > **Diversity** - there is a wide diversity of labs being established across issue areas, sector and ways of operating.
- > **Buzz** - Labs are gaining mainstream attention and lots of different things are being called a lab.
- > **Coordination** - people are motivated to connect and learn from each other to avoid duplicating work.
- > **Best practice** - labs want to codify best practices to increase integrity of the field. There is a demand for knowledge products and academic research from the field to support this.
- > **Rigour** - the community has started to ask itself deeper questions. At CONVERGE there was a great deal of critical reflection on the concrete outcomes of Lab practice and desire for robust evaluation practices.

### HOW MIGHT WE

Each lab has a guiding 'how might we' question which defines the challenge the lab is working on. Here are some examples. How might we :

- > demonstrate that Canadian cities can be both innovative and equitable?
- > create better conversations that embody everyone's full humanity?
- > embed design thinking to solve complex problems in healthcare?
- > co-create new ventures and enhance paths to move from survival towards fair, meaningful livelihoods for refugee communities?
- > foster connections across generations and cultures to create resilient communities in Nova Scotia that can adapt to their changing demographics?
- > ensure that technology is fully beneficial to humanity?
- > use collaboration as a force for a circular fibres economy?
- > incorporate ecosystem values into the governance of the Columbia River Basin?
- > use Alberta's leadership position in today's energy system serve as a platform for transition to the energy system the future requires of us?
- > leverage the purchasing power and reputational credibility of the healthcare sector to drive transformative change for more sustainable food systems?



# >> Key questions and tensions



## FUZZY VALUE PROPOSITION

Do labs work? Better than traditional approaches? How do we know? The value proposition of labs approach, while showing promise, is still fairly fuzzy. Labs can have positive impact in building citizen capacity and constituencies to tackle Canada's intractable problems, yet this is work that takes a long, steady effort and the resources to sustain it. Often labs are funded based on the prototypes they produce, yet very few of these are actually implemented. We need more defined proof points for what funders and partners can expect at different stages of labs, and to more clearly understand what success looks like under what conditions. Funding for labs needs to be long-term enough so that emerging solutions can be implemented.



## RISK OF 'CAR-WASHING' AMIDST THE BUZZ

To create systems change, labs need to be aware of the power structures and politics that surround them and develop strategies to analyze and work with them. If not, they risk being 'a nice car-wash' - meaning 'You drive a dirty car into the lab, and at the end you get a nice, shiny, clean car but it's still a polluting car!'. This is especially true for those labs who act in institutional contexts like government and large corporations. Amidst the buzz, labs must have the courage and savviness to not just be a superficial improvement to failing systems, but something that effectively shifts power structures and innovates from the root causes of problems. Political or financial pressure to communicate tangible results too soon could exacerbate this challenge.



## AUTHENTIC ENGAGEMENT

There's a growing understanding in the labs field that authentic engagement is a prerequisite for meaningful change. However, with small teams and budgets, and pressure for fast results (show me the shiny prototypes!) it can be difficult to resource building the strong relationships and trust required to have the radically open and transformative conversations at the heart of real change. We understand that the success of our work relies upon bringing truly diverse stakeholders together and building new forms of power. If this is the beating heart of lab practice, how can we effectively and consistently resource it?



## LANGUAGE INCLUSIVITY

A strong commitment to de-expertise, democratize, and de-colonize our labs language emerged at CONVERGE. We recognize that to meet our ambitions for radical inclusivity we need to start to avoid and replace expert terms like prototype, experiment, lab, systems theory, etc. and translate them into plain language. One tool that was mentioned is a text editor which uses just the top 1000 words (see [splasho.com/upgoer5](https://splasho.com/upgoer5)). The US government also publishes this plain language guide [plainlanguage.gov](https://plainlanguage.gov).





*"I feel enriched and replenished with connections and new insights and I am dedicated to bring this knowledge home to the B.C. public service and the B.C. Government at large. Events like CONVERGE enable me to reflect critically and think deeply about our innovation practices in order to continue to do our work, which is to make sure we support all people in B.C. in living their best lives. Thank you so much! "*

**- Marlieke Kieboom**  
Province of BC



# >> Key questions and tensions

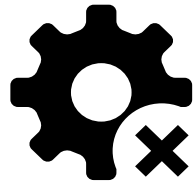
*"CONVERGE was masterfully convened to answer the questions I arrived with and leave me reflecting on a better set of questions."*

- Anonymous



## EQUITY PRACTICE

We need to be constantly asking ourselves 'who are we including and excluding'? How are we holding convenings and who is holding them? How is social justice and equity practice expressed or not in the way we are operating? Who are we learning from? These questions all came up in the final plenary session at CONVERGE. There was an invitation posed to broaden our circles for the next gathering to include other people who might not look, speak or act like us and might not agree as much as we do. What is at risk if we do this and if we don't?



## FOCUS ON TOOLS VS ISSUES

Many lab conversations can be focused on tools and methodologies rather than the issues we're actually trying to effect change around. There was a call at CONVERGE to yes, develop and evolve our methodologies, but also to not lose sight of the most important thing, which is positive impact on real issues and people. This ensures that we're not becoming process geeks in a shiny bubble, but instead staying close to the ground. An increased issues focus could also be beneficial for funding and evaluation, as well as alignment between labs. The UN's Sustainable Development Goals are being explored as a shared framework.



## TALENT PIPELINE

There are still very few direct social innovation / lab practitioner academic or other training programs in Canada. Most of us tend to be self-taught. This becomes a challenge as the labs approach takes force and there are opportunities to scale but no talent pipeline to support it. How can we assess or certify that someone is equipped to run a lab? How do we rapidly grow the number of people who have these competencies? How do we ensure that the people leading labs have connection to the issues topic and are representative of impacted communities?




## FUNDING TO MATCH THE SCALE OF OUR AMBITIONS

Labs exist to get at the root causes of Canada's most complex, intergenerational problems but the resources we are operating on doesn't match this ambition. This makes it difficult to back up the systems transformation claims of labs and could undermine the true potential of the labs approach. Systems transformation, and the constituencies to support it, take sustained resourcing and many labs are scrambling to get multi-year investment. How could investment collectives be set up to provide stable funding at the scale of the change we're wanting to create?



# >> Emerging opportunities



*"This was a truly unique and stimulating experience for our team. We were honoured to learn alongside of such dynamic, committed people and organizations."*

- Anonymous

## 1. INCREASED COORDINATION

By building a strong constituency for the labs approach we can graduate from being a group of small labs operating in silos with limited impact to make a stronger case for this way of working. Through shared learning infrastructure like Communities of Practice we can bring rigor to our work without imposing control. It's important that we benefit from increased coordination without needing to standardize our approaches. Increased connective infrastructure will allow more labs to see and learn from each other across location and issue areas.

## 2. SCALE AND IMPLEMENTATION

Canadian labs are mostly operating at small-scale in the work of mobilizing stakeholders and developing solutions. As individual labs and the field as a whole mature, there is a place for us to boldly accelerate Canada's solutions ecosystem. This will happen by scaling the number and size of labs, coordinated at a national level. From there we will have the infrastructure needed to scale the implementation of our most promising innovations and have a demonstrable collective impact. To realize this requires us to more clearly substantiate the value of labs and mobilize the needed resources (human and financial) to achieve success at scale.

## 3. PUBLIC SECTOR INNOVATION

Government at all levels is committing to changing its ways of working. How can the labs field use this opening to transform the public sector? We need to clearly demonstrate how an experimental approach, prototyping with citizens involved, is a less risky way to spend public money than expensive pilot schemes. We need to show how labs could show government to be an amazing service provider to citizens. We also need to challenge public sector labs to open their doors to lab participants and co-leadership from other sectors, recognising that it's this kind of partnership that allows transformation to happen. Aligning ourselves to macro frameworks such as the UN's Sustainable Development Goals could be a bridging strategy.

## 4. LABS AS CONVENORS OF 21ST CENTURY ETHICAL DILEMMAS

The disruptive technological revolution of the 21st Century will rapidly and repeatedly pose our society ethical dilemmas from algorithms for autonomous vehicles deciding who should survive severe car accidents to genetically engineering human babies. We don't currently have any real infrastructure for having these conversations in a meaningful and generative way, and yet these things will affect all of us. As labs develop their practice of creatively convening diverse stakeholders around polarizing issues, could we be building the constituencies and methodologies for hosting these tough conversations?

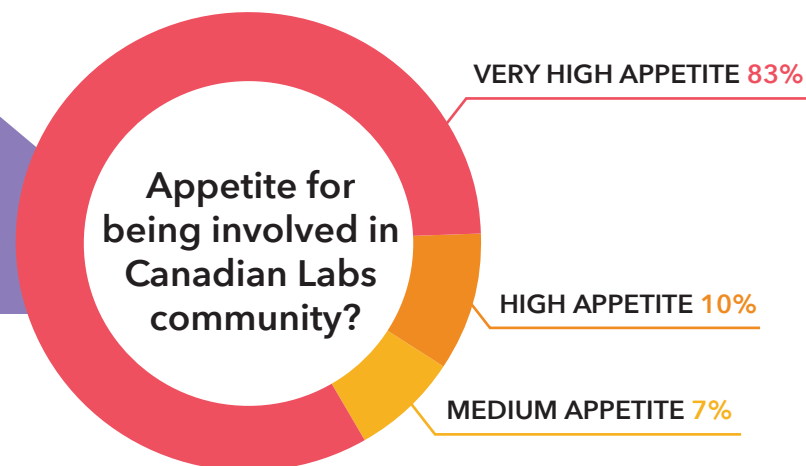
# >> What's coming next



## CONVERGE DIGITAL HANDBOOK

The CONVERGE Handbook is an Open Source documentation of what we shared and learned at CONVERGE in these new ways of Seeing, Being and Doing. It documents insights, questions and provocations to the labs field in Canada and will continue to evolve and develop over time, with anyone in the Labs community able to propose content through GitHub.

See [convergehandbook.gitbook.io](https://convergehandbook.gitbook.io)



## COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

There was a vibrant session at CONVERGE on developing a labs Community of Practice (CoP). A CoP is a group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do, and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. This can happen at three levels :

1. Focus on getting people to connect and share practice
2. Focus on building practice - documenting, testing and refining
3. Focus on support structures to help people implement a codified practice

**Reference :** [Cultivating Communities of Practice](#), by Etienne Wenger, Richard A. McDermott and William Snyder.

The discussion at CONVERGE oriented on what practices within the lab field might be ripe for developing a CoP around (e.g. evaluation) and also seeking advice on what are core things for the stewardship group to keep in mind when designing the labs CoP.

At the end of the session 10 people volunteered to take this work forward. Regular bi-monthly touch points have been set up in the form of online calls, facilitated by Claire at MaRS Solutions Lab. Contact Claire Buré [cbure@marsdd.com](mailto:cbure@marsdd.com) to learn more.



# >> What's coming next

## EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

Mark Cabaj (Here to There Consulting) is working with the McConnell Foundation to develop and test an evaluation framework for labs. Mark held a session to stress-test the general features of the project at CONVERGE and is now working with Foundation staff and representatives from Social Innovation Canada to upgrade the proposed framework. More info will be made available through the Labs CoP Fall of 2018, including how interested Lab practitioners can contribute to and test the framework in the following months. Contact [saralyn@socialinnovation.ca](mailto:saralyn@socialinnovation.ca) to get involved.

## SOCIAL INNOVATION CANADA

A group has spent the past year researching what social innovators in Canada need to scale their impact. An urgent need for ecosystem-level infrastructure was discovered to strengthen and sustain our often fragmented field.

The group is focussed on tackling this need, weaving together existing assets and building collaborative infrastructure to enable people, organizations and systems to problem-solve better."

Strategic partners will meet this fall to create a work plan for next year. Stay connected at [socialinnovationcanada.ca](http://socialinnovationcanada.ca)

## SOCIAL R&D COMMUNITY

The McConnell Foundation and Community Foundations of Canada are the current hosts of the Social R&D Fellowship: a practitioner-led community committed to help strengthen the research and development (R&D) capabilities of Canada's social sector. Social R&D has been described in many ways, but consider it 'the art and science of applying research and experimental processes on the frontline to generate new knowledge and innovations that transform lives'.

### The community has three focuses :

- Connecting practitioners across methodologies like labs, data science and ethnography through an annual practice gathering, and other in-person and virtual fora.
- Working with apex organizations and funders to help them understand and respond to the emerging Social R&D field by hosting roundtables on key supports like early-stage funding, talent pipelines and R&D philanthropy with corporate partners.
- Prototyping infrastructure at the ecosystems level by uncovering and relieving pain points with apex organizations and practitioners.

For more info see [sigeneration.ca/social-rd](http://sigeneration.ca/social-rd)

### Upcoming gatherings :

- Social R&D Practice Gathering in September 2018
- 3-4 regional consultations on Social R&D principles and practices this fall and winter



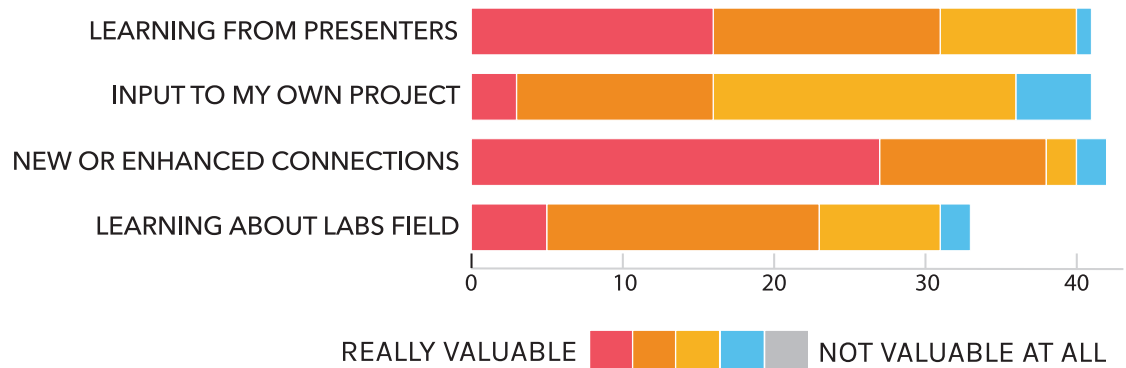
# >> Conclusion Impact of CONVERGE

CONVERGE happened at a critical and optimistic time for labs in Canada. Participants highly valued the opportunity to connect and learn together as a field. The depth and authenticity of the conversations we have and who we include was a continuous thread throughout the two days.

As an essential competency of labs is to build high-trust constituencies to tackle wicked problems, so CONVERGE was a vital stepping stone to building that kind of constituency for ourselves as a community. CONVERGE laid the foundation for us to face our deep questions and discomforts together in a state of care and cooperation. This foundation will allow us to be more bold, daring and rigorous as a field. As said in the Reconciliation and Lab Practice session, strong relationships are the essential ingredient for being able to both uplift and critically engage with each other, a safe space where we can question assumptions without being afraid of offending each other.

Another constant thread was the question of what is a lab? People were asking each other 'What do you mean by a lab? Is it the same thing as I mean by a lab?'. In many ways CONVERGE was the first opportunity the Canadian labs field has had to really see itself. Understand and appreciate our differences, and realize amongst this we're facing a lot of common challenges that we can address more powerfully together than alone.

## WHAT WAS VALUABLE ABOUT CONVERGE?



*"I found the openness to share lab experiences and approaches tremendous. We are all striving to address complex social and environmental problems that will determine the future of humanity and our earth so it makes sense that we come together and help each other out."*

- Rosemary Cooper  
One Earth

# >> Conclusion Impact of CONVERGE

*"This was a phenomenal event - and the first of its kind. A signal of an emerging and growing field in which Canada is proving itself to be a leader. All of my discussions, both in sessions and one-on-one, were deep and valuable. No fluff! Thank you."*

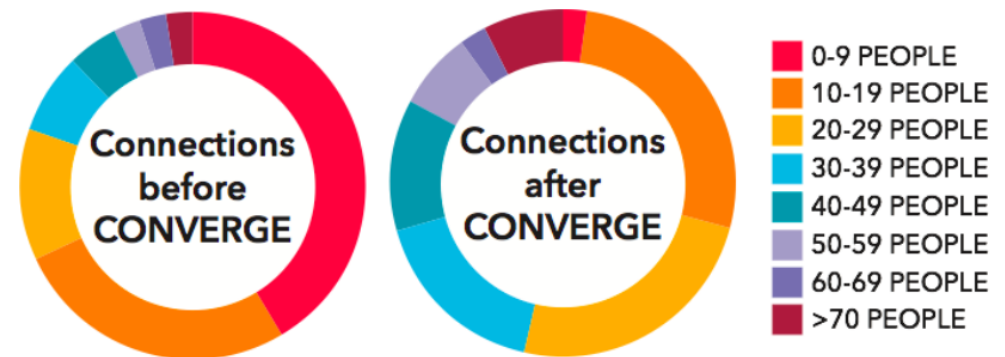
- Anonymous

A final thread that emerged while looking around the room was the question of inclusion. We recognize that while we have a commitment to including diverse peoples in our work, that was not hugely reflected by practitioners who lead labs. We realize that we are largely white, educated middle-class people. One participant left CONVERGE with a potent question that is emblematic of many of the discussions : How can I, as a white woman, best hold space for diversity in the labs and communities that I convene? How can I best work with indigenous peoples, and when I do, ensure an indigenous worldview is fully recognized, respected and upheld in my practice?

## **Suggestions were made in the final plenary session, creating a strong call to action around how we convene :**

- > What would change if we led with reconciliation as the foundational plenary, setting the DNA to practice grounding ourselves in a decolonization frame for the whole event?
- > What would it mean for the next gathering to not be majority white? How can we make space for those who are usually left out?
- > This comes down to questions of valuing and leadership. Who is leading the event and who do they value being there?

For more see the [Inclusion & equity practice section](#) of the CONVERGE Handbook.



- > Prior to CONVERGE, almost 70% of participants were connected to less than 20 of the other attendees. Post-event, over 70% of participants were connected to over 20 other attendees.
- > Over 65% of those who filled out the post-event evaluation survey had already been in touch with someone they had met at CONVERGE.

*"It was heartening to be in a gathering full of people so dedicated to systems change and able to have the critical conversations about the real impacts of our practice. I came away with valuable new connections and inspired to up my practice."*

- Anonymous



# >> Thanks!

Thank you to the 130+ people who participated in CONVERGE and the survey leading up to the event. RADIUS gratefully acknowledge the contributions of our partners McConnell Foundation, Vancouver Foundation, City of Vancouver and SFU Community Engagement Fund without whose support CONVERGE would not have been possible.

## **We also wish to thank our advisory committee members :**

- > Aleeya Velji, Edmonton Shift Lab
- > Amanda Hachey, NOULab
- > Ben Weinlick, Action Lab and Edmonton Shift Lab
- > Claire Buré, MaRS Solutions Lab
- > Darcy Riddell, McConnell Foundation
- > Janey Roh, Kudoz/InWithForward
- > Keren Perla, Alberta CoLab
- > Kiri Bird, RADIUS SFU
- > Lindsay Cole, City of Vancouver Solutions Lab
- > Sara Blenkhorn, Leverage Lab
- > Saralyn Hodgkin, Social Innovation Canada

Moving forward, we will continue to share broadly and collaborate generously with the emerging labs Community of Practice as we seek to align our work with the emerging priorities of the Canadian labs field. We look forward to working with many of you in the months to come.

Warmly,

## **The CONVERGE team**

- > Kiri Bird, Associate Director, RADIUS SFU
- > Sara Blenkhorn, CONVERGE Producer + Director of the Leverage Lab
- > Nigel Mojica, Communications Officer RADIUS SFU + CONVERGE Co-host
- > Chloe Waretini, Designer + Synthesis Reporter

If you have any questions about this event or thoughts to share please feel free to email [kbird@radiussfu.com](mailto:kbird@radiussfu.com).

*"CONVERGE was a useful, meaningful experience. Spending time together lets us have tough conversations and hold ourselves to account - we can push and encourage each other. I received insights about values and impact, power, and strategies for change that are already informing my work."*

**- Roya Damabi**  
Alberta CoLab



# >> APPENDIX 1

## Participant list

- > Ajay Puri, Changemakers Vancouver
- > Aleeya Velji, Edmonton Shift Lab
- > Alessia DeSalis, Missions Exeko
- > Alex Ryan, MaRS
- > Allan Bailey, Primary Care Network of Family Physicians
- > Allison Stewart, Stony Plain Public Library
- > Amanda Hachey, NouLAB
- > Andrea Reimer, City of Vancouver
- > Anna McClean, Translator and Educator BC Public Service Agency
- > Annelies Tjebbes, AnneliesVera Consulting
- > Ara Beittoei, Local Economic Development Lab
- > Aubrie McGibbon, Government of Nova Scotia
- > Ben Weinlick, Skills Society Action Lab
- > Camille Dumond, RADIUS SFU
- > Candice Day, RADIUS SFU
- > Carol Ann Young, City of Vancouver Chantal
- > Abord-Hugon, New Brunswick Department of Education and Early childhood Development
- > Chloe Waretini, The Future of Work is Human
- > Claire Buré, MaRS Solutions Lab
- > Coro Strandberg, Strandberg Consulting
- > Crecien Bencio, Collingwood Neighbourhood House
- > Dave Doig, Vancouver Foundation
- > Darcy Riddell, McConnell Foundation
- > David Kahane, University of Alberta
- > Deirdre Gourdiaan, Shift Collaborative
- > Delyse Sylvester, Social Currents
- > Derek Masselink, BC Public Services Agency
- > Devlin Fernandes, Ecotrust Canada
- > Diana Lowe, Reforming the Family Justice System
- > Diane Roussin, The Winnipeg Boldness Project
- > Duane Elverum, CityStudio Vancouver
- > Emi Webb, Neighbour Lab
- > Erin Blanding, WE
- > Felicia Ochs, Parkland School Division #70
- > Gordon Ross, OpenRoad
- > Grace Kennedy, EMBERS Eastside Works
- > Heather Laird, Government of Canada
- > Heidi Schiller, Vancouver Public Library
- > Hilary Kilgour, Federation of Canadian Municipalities
- > Irene Guglielmi, BC Government Communications & Public Engagement
- > Irina Rueda, University of Waterloo
- > Jacqueline Antalik, OpenRoad
- > James Coghill, Connections for Learning Y(our) Program
- > Jane Morley, Access to Justice BC
- > Janet Moore, CityStudio Vancouver
- > Janey Roh, Kudoz/InWithForward
- > January Wolodarsky, Collingwood Neighbourhood House
- > Jason Doiron, Covia
- > Jason Gondziola, MTSET Productions
- > Jayme Cochrane, BC Family Justice Innovation Lab
- > Jennifer Chan, Jane Finch Centre
- > Jess McMullin, Situ Strategy
- > Jill Andres, Mount Royal University
- > Johanna Li, EMBERS Eastside Works
- > John Purkis, The Natural Step Canada
- > John Cawley, McConnell Foundation
- > Joshua Cubista, Evolution Lab
- > Julian Gonzalez, EcoPlan International
- > Kara Boles, The Winnipeg Boldness Project
- > Karen Joseph CEO, Reconciliation Canada
- > Kari Boyle, BC Family Justice Innovation Lab
- > Kate Sutherland, Kate Sutherland & Associates
- > Kathryn Mann, Parkland School Division
- > Kathryn Way, Alberta Parenting for the Future
- > Katie Macpherson, Kalein Centre
- > Kelsey Klaver, RADIUS SFU
- > Ken Craig, BC Public Service, Behavioural Insights
- > Keren Perla, Alberta CoLab
- > Kerri Klein, SHIFT Collaborative
- > Kevin Ehman, OpenRoad
- > Kiri Bird, RADIUS SFU Laura Stephan, Regional Municipality of Durham Social Services
- > Lena Soots, Institute for Community Prosperity
- > Lesley McMillan, A Way Home Canada
- > Lewis Muirhead, NouLAB
- > Lindsay Cole, City of Vancouver
- > Lisa Gibson, Collingwood Neighbourhood House

## >> APPENDIX 1

# Participant list

- > Lisa Joy Trick, Kudoz Lucie Aounetse, New Brunswick Department of Education
- > Lyn Daniels, Surrey Schools / Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee
- > Mali Bain, WellAhead
- > Marissa Nahanee, Decolonizing Practices
- > Marketa Evans, WoodGreen Community Services
- > Mark Cabaj, Here to There Consulting Inc.
- > Marlieke Kieboom, Province of British Columbia
- > Marlies van Dijk, Design Lab at Alberta Health Services
- > Mary Ellen Schaafsma, Social Purpose Institute at United Way
- > Melanie Goodchild, Turtle Island Institute
- > Michelle Colussi, Shift Collaborative
- > Michelle Garraway, Durham Region Social Services
- > Michelle German, Evergreen
- > Michelle Nahanee, Decolonizing Practices / Nahanee Creative
- > Mike Bulthuis, Canadian Observatory on Homelessness
- > Mike Stolte, Kalein Centre
- > Monica Pohlmann, Reos Partners
- > Moura Quayle, UBC School of Public Policy and Global Affairs
- > Nathalie Leclerc, Canada School of Public Service Innovation Lab
- > Nathan Randall, Ecotrust Canada
- > Nigel Mojica, RADIUS SFU
- > Niveria Oliveira, Vancouver Foundation
- > Olive Dempsey, OliveDempsey.ca
- > Paola Ardiles, SFU
- > Pat Letizia, Alberta Ecotrust Foundation
- > Phedia Gottot, City of Montreal Urban Innovation Lab
- > Rosemary Cooper, One Earth
- > Roya Damabi, Alberta CoLab
- > Rumon Carter, BC Ministry of Citizens' Services
- > Ryan Murphy, Memorial University Student Experience Office
- > Ryan Conway, McConnell Foundation
- > Ryan Voisin, Overlap Associates
- > Sally Kupp, Vancouver Coastal Health
- > Sam Singh, Government of Alberta
- > Samantha Slade, Percolab
- > Sara Blenkhorn, Leverage Lab
- > Sarah LeBlanc, Sarah LeBlanc + associates | associé.es
- > Saralyn Hodgkin, Social Innovation Canada
- > Sean Geobey, University of Waterloo
- > Shawn Smith, RADIUS SFU
- > Sheldon Tetreault, Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee
- > Stacy Barter, SHIFT Collaborative
- > Stephanie Falcon, Vancouver Foundation
- > Steve Williams, Constructive Public Engagement
- > Tamara Connell, RADIUS SFU
- > Tatiana Fraser, MetaLab
- > Teddie Geach, One Earth
- > Teresa Bellefontaine, Employment and Social Development Canada
- > Tim Draimin, McConnell Foundation
- > Tonya Surman, Centre for Social Innovation
- > Tovah Paglaro, Avalanche Strategy
- > Trilby Smith, Vancouver Foundation
- > Tyson Atleo, The Nature Conservancy
- > Veronika Bylicki, CityHive
- > William Beauchemin, Missions Exeko
- > Xenia Menzies, Social Innovation Division
- > Zita Botelho, reFRESH Water Lab

## >> APPENDIX 2

# Session descriptions

### **Design Methods Circuit Training!**

Sara Blenkhorn, Lisa Joy Trick, Keren Perla, Janet Moore, Claire Buré

Join us for this fast paced Design Methods Circuit Training Session where groups of 10 people will circulate through 4 unique design methods moving quickly from one design method to the next.

Each group will learn the following:

- > a tool for assessing different ways of knowing data
- > a co-design tool to effectively inform policy-making
- > a powerful tool for having groups go deep with one another and a tool to explore the future and stress test ideas and actions

### **Tools for Seeing the System**

Stacy Barter, Julian Gonzales, Lisa Gibson, Tatiana Fraser, Melanie Goodchild

Share and learn about a range of tools and approaches that can help lab participants better know and understand the systems we are collectively working to change. From technical mapping to adaptive approaches exploring the habits, beliefs and values that hold systems in place, together we'll learn frameworks that help us bound the system(s)

we want to influence, and hone in on leverage points and where to take action. Bring your own tools and maps to share, and inquiry questions to dig into, such as: What are we learning about which tools for the seeing system are most appropriate for different contexts? How do we do a better job of using these tools? How do we right-size these approaches to an appropriate level of depth and rigour? How do we ensure that tools for seeing the system are accessible to a diversity of audiences and participants?

### **Lab Design and Set Up - Peer Coaching Session**

Monica Pohlmann

Bring your questions and challenges, along with your success stories, to this peer exchange session lead by Monica Pohlmann, Principal with Reos Partners. Monica will bring her own questions, success stories and thought on the evolution of labs from her work on social labs in Canada, US and Thailand over the last five years as well as experience from her Reos Partners colleagues in six offices around the world. This session is particularly well suited to practitioners in the earlier stages of labs.

### **Innovation for What?**

Sarah Schulman

Is innovation an ends or a means? Ever wonder what we're really innovating for? Curious about whether our well-intentioned attempts at solving social problems actually further reinforce the status quo? Come along for an honest conversation about the limits of experimentation, and why collaborative processes aren't the panacea for ethical action. Expect no answers - just good questions and nuanced examples!

### **Public Sector Labs - What Happens After the Honeymoon?**

Keren Perla and Lindsay Cole

Without a doubt, the age of public sector labs arrived and their numbers are growing exponentially on the policy innovation landscape. But what happens when the conditions that allowed your lab to launch start to change, when the newness of your lab begins to fade? This interactive session will focus on exploring what is truly required to ensure the longevity of these initiatives and become part of the new DNA of public sector organizations. This workshop is for practitioners working in or closely with public sector organizations.



## >> APPENDIX 2

# Session descriptions

### **Reconciliation and Lab Practice: Centring Indigenous Wisdom and Weaving Multiple Worldviews**

Edmonton Shift Lab, Winnipeg Boldness Project, Turtle Island Institute

Edmonton Shift Lab, Winnipeg Boldness, and Turtle Island Institute will share learnings and processes from their work striving to weave together indigenous, systems, and design methodologies and worldviews for systems change. This session will be a mix of briefly showing what our projects have looked like in action, and conversations together and with the audience around what's been enlightening, puzzling and promising in linking lab practice and indigenous worldviews.

### **Lab Business Models and Open Book Budgets!**

Sara Blenkhorn and Ara Beittoei

Are you working with/in a Lab and looking to build an excellent budget to support your work? Then, please join us as we explore business models and development, and pull back the curtain on diversifying revenue, organization set-up and structural choices. This is a practical look at how the back-end looks when successfully running a lab. This is also an opportunity for everyone to learn

about each other's work, so feel free to bring your own budget examples to add to the discussion.

### **Cities CONVERGING**

Hilary Kilgour, Duane Elverum and Janet Moore

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities and CityStudio are connectors who bring together cross-sector partners everyday – all for the benefit of our municipalities and their citizens. Duane Elverum, Janet Moore, and Hilary Kilgour will host a conversation with municipal leaders and nonprofit civic innovators about domains and areas of innovation work in cities, navigating partnerships at the municipal scale, and prototypes and outcomes resulting from City innovation labs.

### **Scaling and Embedding Innovation Outside the Lab**

Diane Roussin, Kiri Bird, Janey Roh

Beyond ideation and prototyping, social innovation labs and systems change practitioners are often tasked with the role of 'scaling' innovation. This session will unpack different definitions of scale, draw on examples from the work of the Local Economic Development Lab, Kudoz, and the Boldness Project, and invite participants to share their own journeys to scale and what

enabling conditions and barriers they might be encountering along the way. Through a collaborative Q&A we'll help each other problem solve through challenges with our shared promising practices.

### **Building Outside Power and Narrative Change**

Tovah Paglaro, Darcy Riddell, Michelle German, Delyse Sylvester

Labs have the potential to surface and prototype promising solutions based on a deep understanding the complex systems they are working in, but translating those solutions into practical change is all too often a challenge. The focus on process design, relationships and solution generation in the lab can often take precedence over wider public engagement and cultivation of political pathways that make implementation more likely. Campaigns are outcome focused, with refined practices of power analysis and political engagement. In this session, we will consider how a campaign mindset might strengthen lab practice, by considering and embedding pathways to adoption into lab design and execution.

## >> APPENDIX 2

# Session descriptions

### **How Might we Practice Design Thinking with an Equity Lens?**

Jennifer Chan

What's the balance between tokenism and targeted diversity? Is it possible to go too far down the equity path and get lost in the intention versus the practice? Come participate in an conversation about challenges of multi-disciplinary collaborations, struggling to find the happy medium between resident-led committees and institutional/organizational politics and committing to addressing social determinants of health and breaking systems of oppression. There are no easy answers - but lots of behind the scenes conversations and exposed power dynamics. Jenn Chan is the Design and Strategy Lead and Jane Finch Centre.

### **Co-Designing a Canadian Labs Community of Practice**

Mark Cabaj, Claire Buré, Saralyn Hodgkin

In order for communities of practice (CoP) to be effective, they must be clear on their purpose, members, domains of interest and priority practices. This session is designed to 'flush out' the elements of a CoP on Labs that can then be further developed and implemented by participants moving forward. This is a working session. WARNING: You will leave this room with a to-do list!

### **Owning our Mainstream Powers in Convening Practice**

Camille Dumond and Ajay Puri

Using an experiential process based in the principles of Deep Democracy, we will explore the dynamics of mainstream and margin at play in every group, organization and system. We will put ourselves in the picture to learn to negotiate these dynamics with dignity, clarity and accountability in our convening work and life. You will leave with a framework for understanding patterns of power, and practices to use privilege in a way that leads to more justice, relationship and even joy.

### **Stress Testing an Evaluation Framework for Labs**

Mark Cabaj

Some of the most common questions in any conversation between innovation lab practitioners and participants include: How do you evaluate Labs? What constitutes success? What kind of measures and methods are most useful? This session is designed to gather feedback on a proposed evaluation framework that will developed and tested, piece by piece, with Canadian Lab practitioners through 2018 and 2019.

### **Big Picture Impact: SDGs and Labs**

Alex Ryan

Come to our session as we use the results of the Canadian Labs Landscape Survey as an input to map Canada's social innovation labs against the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to identify gaps and overlaps; then to explore collaboration opportunities between labs based on shared SDG impact objectives.

### **A Dialogue on Lab Funding Strategies**

Niveria Oliveira, Shawn Smith, McConnell Foundation

What is appropriate funding for labs? What sources of funding can be stacked to best enable innovation and systems change work? What creative fundraising strategies diversify, leverage, and match funds to bring multi-sectoral investments into labs? These funders and others want to hear from practitioners today on their needs, aspirations, and strategies for resourcing experimentation and systems change work.