



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT REPORT

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The Vancouver Island Social Innovation Zone (VISIZ) envisions Vancouver Island as *the* place to test and grow enterprising solutions to social issues.

VISIZ was launched in conjunction with funding from the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation as part of the RECODE project (www.re-code.ca) a national movement to fuel social innovation and entrepreneurship in higher education.

The Vancouver Island Social Innovation Zone's vision is to enhance the quality of life throughout Vancouver Island by encouraging and supporting a culture of social innovation that strives to build an economy of blended economic value and social equity. In a rapidly changing region, new collaborations, thinking and approaches are required to address ongoing social, environmental and economic issues.

VISIZ provides an opportunity for Vancouver Island stakeholders to align efforts and collaborate to achieve this vision and create change together.

In 2015/2016, a number of post-secondary and community partners collaborated to:

- map the assets for social innovation, social enterprise and social finance on Vancouver Island;
- identify gaps;
- consult with Vancouver Island residents as to ways to address gaps; and
- recommend ways to move forward together

This report is one of several that describe the assets, gaps and community feedback to guide our collective direction forward.

The Vancouver Island Social Innovation Zone Steering Committee underscoring its commitment to strengthen collaborative relationships, activities and initiatives of post-secondary institutions, community, industry and government initiated a process of community engagement to assist in advancing the establishment of a social innovation zone on Vancouver Island. The engagement with the sector and interested public addressed the following two objectives:

- I. To test the four strategic priorities set out in the Vancouver Island Social Innovation Zone discussion document "Strategic Priorities to Support Social Innovation."
- II. To identify additional gaps which may not have been captured in the discussion document.

To achieve this outcome, the Steering Committee determined that testing should focus on the "tools, resources and supporting infrastructure" - the design features of a social innovation backbone organization for Vancouver Island. The Steering Committee's priority was to host a practical discussion leading to actionable advice.

The strategic priorities and identified gaps were summarized in presentation format to each of the workshops and interviews as they were represented in the discussion document.

Strategic Priorities

1. To Generate, Incubate, Accelerate and Scale Social Innovation, Social Enterprise & Social Finance.
2. To be a leader in community informed and engaged educational experiences on social innovation, social enterprise & social finance.
3. To strengthen and support Vancouver Island research that connects students and researchers to communities.
4. To build a strong eco-system for social enterprise and impact businesses on Vancouver Island.

Gaps

- Backbone support to bring together existing assets and support collaboration.
- Lack of a comprehensive 'lab', incubation and accelerator support for social enterprise and social innovation.
- Educational gaps in social innovation and enterprise available to communities and students
- Difficulty for students, communities and campuses to connect to each other for work experiences, community-based projects and research.

The Community Engagement process was initiated at the Vancouver Island Economic Alliance Summit in Nanaimo on October 28th, 29th. Subsequent workshops were hosted at Royal Roads University (November 2, 2015) and at North Island College (November 5, 2015). Attempts were made to schedule a workshop on northern Vancouver Island, however logistics and timing proved challenging. Interviews were conducted to solicit feedback from recommended north island interview subjects.

Workshops and interviews have been conducted with sector participants in the following Communities:

- Victoria
- Greater Victoria
- Cowichan Valley
- Nanaimo
- Courtenay
- Comox
- Campbell River
- Port Alberni

An online survey was developed and is posted on the VISIZ website. The survey can be distributed through VISIZ networks to further test awareness and perceptions of the strategic priorities and gaps.

The discussions and interviews were most focused on the requirements identified by sector participants to strengthen collaboration and the opportunity for shared success in moving ideas to innovation through action. The perspectives taken into consideration were the offerings of “Knowledge” largely through the provision of teaching and research, “Resources” both financial and human and “Infrastructure” or network design.

The following statements reflect perspectives that were raised a number of times during the workgroups and interviews and informed a great deal of the ensuing discussion.

Knowledge

- We need to be data reliant, undertake an economic impact study to build understanding of the sector’s importance and positive influence on communities.
- What information in addition to the VISIZ data, currently exists on the size and importance of the not for profit and emerging social innovation sector?
- The Not for Profit sector is enduring the “endless treadmill” of grant application and process accountability which is motivating a move to greater market reliance.
- Find a project with a market- don’t leave it to your great idea to create one.
- Success - to some extent - will be evident when customers or clients are no longer aware of the social innovation objectives.
- What post secondary research already exists that the community can tap into? What has already been done and how do we share it?

Resources

- Not For Profits and SI practitioners need education. There needs to be a transition plan to shift away from granting to other forms of revenue generation. This transition - the shift of organizational models is considered to be a high risk proposition.
- In order for the social innovation sector to exert influence on government policy or the business community it requires data to make its case.

- How do you measure “Social - Return on Investment” and communicate it to the investor community? What is the Angel Investment community like on the island?
- SI participants are not clear on how to subscribe to resources in the “system”. Access to expertise and social finance products seems constrained.
- Social Finance products and services exist however participants require education.

Infrastructure

- Universal appeal of creating “lab spaces”. Accepted wisdom that these should not just be limited to physical infrastructure but should connect with online studio spaces to facilitate greater connectivity.
- Establish a network of centres and offices already purposed to community based research, university industry liaison, government relations, community relations to educate and market VISIZ strategy and opportunities.
- A lab(s) should offer a range of “Change Lab” technologies - IDEO, Agile, Lean UX to build collaboration.
- Location of the physical lab space is critical. PSI located but must be community accessible - “boundary-spanning”. The lab space(s) should be designed to deliver on the VISIZ
- vision of being recognized as “the” place to test and prototype enterprising solutions to social issues.
- Establish an “Office of Collaboration” between all of the island psi’s - resourced equitably.

The priorities, generally stated, are the right things to be focused on. Workshop participants and interview subjects easily accepted that success in the social innovation sector would be founded on the availability and opportunity to apply relevant knowledge in the form of data, teaching and research, in combination with sufficient capacity, both financial and human, and further, that a connecting infrastructure was both lacking and desirable.

Participants were unconcerned or at least for the purposes of our conversation did not want to focus on definitional issues distinguishing Social Innovation, Social Enterprise, Social Entrepreneurship. The terminology is recognized as part of a continuum and that the success of an innovative practice required a particular appeal in order to generate revenue or some means of ongoing operational support. In short, participants and interview subjects were unanimous in expressing the perspective that they were not interested in innovation as an academic undertaking, void of the opportunity for practical application at the community or business level.

This ‘mainstreaming’ of social innovation by focusing on the adoption of the new idea at a business level is spoken to by Tonya Surman, CEO of the Toronto based, Centre for Social Innovation in her Ashoka Interview with Al Etmanski. Surman’s perspective captures the feedback offered through our engagement.

A general impression could be derived from all feedback that while increasing post-secondary involvement in community based social innovation is highly desirable, many participants acknowledge the challenge of connecting teaching and research to priorities set by external community absent a system created expressly for this purpose. Attempts to secure post secondary support are described as haphazard, rely on relationships and referrals and often lead to inconclusive results and confusion. This finding is consistent with previous VISIZ generated research on how PSI’s communicate a commitment to social innovation to external audiences.

“The random assortment of information available on various post secondary websites is challenging to break down into neatly comparable components. Often the content used different terminology, was outdated, or appeared to be more for marketing purposes than to reflect what was actually happening on campus. Establishing context and motivation for social innovation was also difficult to identify from public information and messaging; ideally, this type of information would be obtained through interviews with knowledgeable folks who could speak to the PSI’s rational for engaging in social innovation activities. Reporting and measurement were notoriously absent in all

cases and/or out of date by at least a year, making this data impossible to discern". (pp2/3 Social Innovation & Post Secondary Institutions (PSIs) Friesen).

Workshop participants and interview subjects were also asked to comment on the VISIZ vision and specifically the premise of establishing Vancouver Island as "...the place to test and grow enterprising solutions to social issues." Conceptually, establishing Vancouver Island as a "prototyping space" for others to generate and test social innovation practices and interventions was seen as desirable. The positive aspects of this broader recognition were primarily cited as creating greater market opportunity, expanding the SI ecosystem, diversifying practice, expanding research opportunities, appealing to a variety of educational opportunities as an attractor to prospective students and continuing studies.

Participants also spoke about the desire to broaden the social innovation and enterprise appeal to practitioners from off island as a means to address what was described as a "culture of scarcity" evident on the island. Many discussions and VIEA presentations expressed the perspective that the single greatest challenge for emerging social innovators and entrepreneurs, particularly those currently operating as not for profits, is to step off what has been described as the "granting treadmill". Universally, participants spoke about the de-energizing influence of increased competition for granting opportunities combined with increased reporting requirements to secure ongoing funding. The scenario repeatedly offered is that great effort is spent on finding and accounting for the necessary resources to deliver goods or services in the fulfillment of mandate, leaving little capacity to actually deliver and promote value through programs and services. The increasing competition for resources in the context of existing Island regionalism biases participants against collaboration and deepening levels of trust. Purposefully set, the design and resource elements of a Vancouver Island Social Innovation Zone could begin to change this regionalized culture and competitive dynamic. Success in this regard is seen to be a longer term objective.

It was generally recognized that building the network or zone to address community needs on the island would be resource intensive at the outset. Addressing the Island's innovation needs as a first step to the longer term objective of legitimizing VISIZ for testing or prototyping ideas and opportunities from off island was seen as appropriate - "prove the concept at home first". It is also acknowledged that there currently exists recognized centres of Social Innovation in the post secondary sector, most notably Simon Fraser University and the University of Waterloo among others and that the five post-secondary institutions on the island should differentiate from psi offerings available elsewhere.

A number of participants spoke about the need to ensure entrepreneurship remains at the very center of developing a social innovations practice and culture on the island. As such the business community can play a leadership role through ideation and implementation of new

approaches to persistent challenges. The inference could be drawn that, in part, challenges remain persistent because bureaucratic and centrally driven responses have predominated. Examples were specifically cited with regard to the challenge of accelerating and scaling initiatives to achieve market prominence and that entrepreneurs need to lead this process with easily accessed support. It was proposed that Chambers of Commerce or other leaders in the economic development sector could co-lead strategy development and implementation oversight in partnership with the island's post secondary sector. In the case of Campbell River, the Chamber of Commerce is leading the movement to establish an innovation economy.

Economic transition is occurring on the island, particularly on the mid and north island as well as evident on the Gulf Islands. Social Enterprise should speak to the prospect of creating new opportunity with meaningful employment, attractive to next generation employees. Local SI/SE champions can help to establish this new narrative with the support of a strong backbone organization. The storytelling needs to quickly and directly connect to resources such as workshops, mentorships and advisors, marketing and financing solutions.

A contention was made that Vancouver Island is too diverse and geographically divided to operate as a single network or container for social innovation. A regionalized approach, taking advantage of existing linkages with PSI's may be preferable.

A perspective was offered that social innovation as a principles-based practice has much to promise, however the practice has tended to be shaped by western institutional intellectualism, present in virtually all organizational forms including educational institutions. The defining ground of social innovation must shift to allow for a more holistic appreciation of diverse cultures and practices and most notably in the Canadian context, to a deeper relationship with Indigenous community.

The VISIZ strategic priorities are framed within a post-secondary definition of "knowledge transference" as an opportunity for theoretical and applied offerings of teaching and research, to combine with investment practices to create progressive and positive change. A contention is made that stronger and more enduring results will be evident with a reframing of the opportunities and priorities to include Indigenous knowledge and opportunity on Vancouver Island. Widening the frame to include Indigenous knowledge can manifest more enduring and positive results. There exists, particularly on Vancouver Island, the opportunity to bring together the two cultures both Indigenous and western or non-indigenous to create a deeper understanding of both what is possible and how we it can be achieved. This offering extends beyond the scope of social innovation however, as a practice which references the importance of culture and community, it holds particular promise for the promotion of social innovation.

Several participants expressed a desire for governance training to be available to assist with transition to a social enterprise organizational model from a current charity based model. In particular training was desired in the area of risk, liability, business planning, and leadership. Training may be available through Community Futures or there may be an opportunity for the psi's to collaborate on the development of certificate programs which earn the organization a recognized certification. A scenario was offered whereby the certification combined with other expressions of operational diligence could be recognized by the social finance sector in establishing investment products and services. The perspective has been offered that greater education of the SI/SE sector is necessary to better understand the current investment offerings. The Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation may be placing greater emphasis on the social finance policy field at the current time. A number of participants indicated the need for an integrated VISIZ strategy with regard to social finance should be included in the VISIZ plan.

The vast majority of participants were supportive of the four strategies as set out in the discussion document. They acknowledged that there is activity underway on most of the priorities articulated under the plan and that connecting more of the system to itself is the right approach to generating, accelerating and scaling social innovation. This connection should be evident in all spheres including the establishment of innovation labs supported by active Communications and Engagement approaches and take into consideration current platform development efforts.

Participants also acknowledged the current “separateness” between sector participants and the current system of competing for resources as a barrier to change. The prospect of post secondary institutions offering greater teaching and research resources to communities was very appealing and aligned fully with the creation of an islandwide backbone organization. In addition, expanding student co-ops and internships to generate and support innovative work with municipalities is seen as very positive. At the same time many participants voiced a caution that the VISIZ needs to prioritize and serve the needs of community and economy and not become an additional strategy to serve the teaching and research mandates of the island psi’s. Introducing an improved system for securing psi resources is critical. A reframing of the goals and strategies to more fully and consistently represent the broad partnership of community, indigenous community, business, social finance, and post secondary institutions should be considered.

Participants expressed the need for greater awareness of the social finance opportunities which currently exist and the possibility of defining where there may be additional opportunity for customized SI/SE investment products. Different perspectives were offered on the nature of collaboration. On a principles level people understood implicitly the benefit of collaboration. Growing the partnership was considered a priority in reaching out beyond traditional dividing lines both by sector and by geography. A compelling case was made to take full advantage of the opportunity to convene with First Nations community on Vancouver Island to both root the work of social innovation and make ideal use of diverse knowledge to support processes of change.

Next Step Considerations

1. Follow-up with all interview subjects and workshop participants. Present a summary of the feedback and articulate next steps. Plan a follow-up working event bringing together a network of SI champions and leaders from the island to initiate work on 2016 priorities.

2. Collect data and build a case for the economic and social contributions made through social innovation on the Island.
3. The Chair of the Vancouver Island Coastal Economic Development Association would like to convene a meeting themed to social innovation/enterprise involving not for profits, community leaders, social enterprise practitioners to determine the scope of the opportunity for the North Island Region. Could be timed with a series of regional economic discussions being hosted by the newly elected MP for the North Island or other plans for community economic outreach.
4. The CEO of the Campbell River Chamber of Commerce is moving forward with plans for the creation of an innovation lab space. Continued collaboration with the CEO and the community of Campbell River could assist in continuing to deepen and broaden the sector.
5. Prototype a system to improve coordination between community actors and the post secondary sector to access teaching, research, faculty and student support for advancing the social innovation agenda on the island. The "Civic Studio" initiative in Victoria may create some insight.
6. Continue to explore and develop platforms such as "riippen" tech. to determine opportunity to improve connection between students and employers. May assist to build connectivity on social innovation projects.
7. Review outputs from the Indigenous Innovation Summit, hosted in Winnipeg Nov 18,19, 2015, to determine if there are improved ways to connect Indigenous knowledge and participation with current social innovation practices.
8. Continue work with the Vancouver Island Economic Alliance on the 2016 Summit agenda to continue to raise the profile of the social innovation sector and emerging Island zone.
9. Continue discussions with the Greater Victoria Development Authority as it regionalizes its approaches to economic growth and its identification of "social innovation" as a theme in that planning.

