BUILDING A CANADIAN SUPPORT SYSTEM FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION

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The panel builds on emerging alignment and concertation efforts around the Canadian Forum for Social Innovation (socialinnovationforum.ca) to inform discussion on strategy and policy from the perspectives of institutional enablers in the social innovation ecosystem. Specifically, the panel will consider two main elements of a support system for systems innovation around the great societal challenges: talent and usability of/access to research knowledge in practical and decision-making context.

Ursula Gobel, VP Stakeholder Engagement and Advancement of Society, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council

Creating solutions to address the complexity of societal challenges involves designing policies and strategies at a systems level. It requires sustained cross-sectoral, multidisciplinary collaborations that nurture skills, and harness talent and knowledge with the goal of building capacity to innovate with new services, process, products, that ultimately create a better future for people, communities and societies.
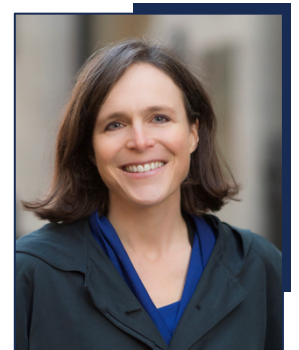
Marie-Claude Lagacé, Directrice principale, innovation et transformation sociale, Conseil de l'innovation du Québec

Social innovation is a process in which ingredients such as collaboration and knowledge mobilization are key to cocreate concrete and beneficial change. But first, some rules, structures and programs need to be amended for those ingredients to work together as a whole and better serve the transformations our complex society so urgently needs. Let's see how Québec's ministry of Innovation is adapting its policies so that social innovation can contribute to meeting societal challenges.

Elicia Maine, Associate Vice-President, Knowledge Mobilization & Innovation, Simon Fraser University

Addressing global societal challenges through better mobilizing breakthrough university research is a priority for governments and international organizations around the world, notably in the areas of climate change and pandemic response. With the long timelines and expenditures of science innovation, what happens within a university after invention and before the formal stages of science commercialization is crucial. Interdisciplinary, experiential development of talent to mobilize knowledge along multiple pathways is an essential component of support for innovation to address societal challenges.

John Hepburn, Chief Executive Officer, Mitacs

There is a need for a more systematic approach to linking and mobilizing research and talent to address societal challenges across the innovation ecosystem. At Mitacs, we see a wide range of projects that advance social innovation outcomes, and that build the skills required for interdisciplinary approaches. We also know that these projects can be isolated or atomised and see the need for a "system integrator" that will bring together different innovation actors to collaborate on developing solutions to great societal challenges. In Canada, what might a system integrator around great societal challenges look like? What skills and talent would be needed to deliver on these challenges?

Nipun Vats, Assistant Deputy Minister Science and Research Sector, Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada

In seeking to apply social innovation research to tackle and inform major challenges facing Canada and global community (climate change, reconciliation, etc.), it is important to embrace a multisectoral approach and think about the "end user". Recent federal initiatives focus on better understanding and capturing the value of social innovation (e.g., the Strategic Science Fund, a new knowledge mobilization survey, and a national lab-to-market platform) in relation to government priorities. But this raises hard questions such as: How do researchers interested in social innovation measure their impacts and what lessons are there for larger actors in the ecosystem? And what role can the government play to ensure all the relevant disciplines and actors are brought together to address the major challenges facing our society, as well as seize opportunities as they arise?

Mike Wilson, Assistant Director of the McMaster Health Forum

In the face of pressing societal challenges such as climate action, emergency preparedness (e.g., for wildfires prevention and management and for pandemics) housing shortages, social inequalities, systemic racism, and poverty, it is important to build capacity for supporting innovation in social sectors to address these challenges with innovative solutions. However, building capacity for innovation and for research about them needs to also be accompanied by capacity for: 1) strengthened evidence-support systems that providing timely, demand-driven evidence responses to questions emerging from advisory and decision-making processes; and 2) integrated social-innovation systems.

Host and Moderator: Sandra Lapointe, Professor and Director of The/La Collaborative at McMaster University

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