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Changing the Conversation

Revitalizing the Social Sector

Part 1: State of the Art

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Revitalizing the Social Sector

Participants

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Ann Dale

Welcome to our first e-Dialogue using our new platform, *Changing the Conversation*. Since it is new, please excuse any bugs as we experiment with this revamped way of leading virtual on-line dialogues. Conversation has never been so important for developing shared meaning about the ways forward with some of the challenges we are currently facing.

This 4-part series of dialogues on *Revitalizing the Social Sector* is being led with one of our partners, *Canadian Council on Social Development*, and the first one is on the current state of the art in the sector. We are joined by a panel of seasoned practitioners and leaders in the field. I hope you enjoy our conversation and look forward to the outcomes of what we discover together.

With this new platform, we have tried to be more inclusive and respectful of our audiences, and thus, we have embedded a Live Chat feature directly into the software. Both the e-panel and e-audience will be actively moderated and curated after the conversation ends. We look forward to any questions you may have of the panel during the last half hour.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend my team who co-created this site, Robert Newell, Chris Strashok and Celia Winters, all of whom are RRU graduates. Une mille fois merci.

Peggy Taillon

Thank you, Ann, for hosting and moderating this important discussion. Love this new platform. Looking forward to collaborating with our colleagues.

Janet Austin

Hi, Ann and friends. I am new to this and terrible at typing so hopefully I can make some kind of meaningful contribution.

Tim Hutchinson

Hello everyone, Tim Hutchinson here. Also new to this format.

Katherine Scott

Hi everyone,

Might be a bit slow on the uptake ... but it will be interesting no doubt. Thanks so much to everyone for participating.

Ryan Kadowaki

Hi, everyone. Thanks for the invite to participate today.

Peggy Taillon

I have spent most of my professional life in not for profits and today lead two charities:

One of Canada's longest established, CCSD is a not-for-profit organization that partners and collaborates with all sectors (not-for-profit, philanthropic, government and business) and communities to advance solutions to today's toughest social challenges. We are neutral, non-partisan, non-governmental and independent. We provide an evidence-based 'safe space' that facilitates open and honest dialogue among the many sectors and the public. This safe

space leads to innovative and active problem solving to address a wide variety of the issues and challenges we face in our society today.

And, HERA Mission, a Canadian based foundation that works with a leadership group of Kenyan women who are supporting over 300 orphans and 100s of widows, grandmothers and great grandmothers in a village in Western Kenya. Education, economic development, health programs and community infrastructure are areas we focus on.

Katherine Scott

My name is Katherine Scott and I have worked with the CCSD as a researcher, writer and advocate over the past 20 years. The health and vibrancy of the social sector touches all that we do at the CCSD - from research to public education to policy development. We have been deeply involved in social sector causes - reaching back twenty years to the Broadbent Panel on Accountability and Governance in the Voluntary Sector. Today's discussion is a great opportunity to take stock - where have we come from and where are we going.

Ryan Kadowaki

I am a Science and Policy Specialist at the David Suzuki Foundation. I'm based in Vancouver, although participating today from Ottawa, and have been working on climate change and clean energy campaigns for the past 6 years. I finished my Masters in Environment and Management from Royal Roads last November. I completed my thesis research under Ann's supervision where I explored the concept of organizational effectiveness in the environmental non-profit sector.

Many of my contributions today will be based on the research and thinking I did for [this project](#). I also sit on two non-profit boards: [The Climate Reality Project](#) and [Green Teams of Canada](#)

Jodi Mucha

Hi, my name is Jodi Mucha. I am the Executive Director of [BC Healthy Communities Society](#) (BCHC). I've been involved in community development work for over 20 years now and also have a background in research. A bit about BCHC:

BC Healthy Communities (BCHC) is a province-wide not-for-profit organization that facilitates the ongoing development of healthy, thriving and resilient communities.

We serve a niche in BC through providing expertise and support in process design and facilitation of collaborative processes for complex issues. Specifically, issues that are:

- Multi-sector: require many sectors to work together
- Complex: require groups to dig deeper together to understand what is going on
- Require Participatory leadership: the issues require everyone at the table co-creating and co-owning outcomes
- Integrated: require ‘making the links’ with other issues and working at the intersection of these connections
- Multiple scales of change: personal, sectoral or community-wide and systemic.

Launched in the Fall of 2005, we have a dedicated team of staff and associates who work from our central office as well as satellite offices throughout the province.

Janet Austin

I'm Janet Austin, CEO of the YWCA Metro Vancouver. We are one of the largest and most diversified ‘social profits’ in BC. Currently 50,000 people visit our programs every year and we operate in about 40 locations in Metro Vancouver providing a broad range of services. We self-generate most of our revenue through mission-related social enterprises, fee for service activities and fund-raising. We also advocate for public policy reform on a variety of issues: universal child care; affordable housing; violence prevention; work/life balance and family friendly workplace, etc.

I am also active as a community volunteer and currently chair the Vancouver Board of Trade and serve on the Canadian Paediatric Society Board of Directors.

Tim Broadhead

Hi - Tim Brodhead, in Lecce, in the ‘heel’ of Italy's boot - and several hours ahead of you. Most pressing issue - climate change, of course, and on the social side the growing inequality in our (and other) societies and the disenchantment with government as a tool for addressing societal challenges.

Ann Dale

Welcome, Tim, in some ways we are all new to this platform. Don't forget everyone when you are quoting anyone in your reply, to put your cursor before the square bracket, to place it at the bottom of your post. We keep trying to get rid of the opaque commands; hard to do completely, but the world is getting friendlier.

Thank you for agreeing to be part of our grand experiment. It is interesting that with on-line discussion, it is not who has the loudest voice, but who has the fastest fingers. The best decision I ever made in high school was to take the professional typing course in order to avoid home economics.

Tim Hutchinson

Tim Hutchinson here. I come to 1125@Carleton from the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), where most recently, I have been a key contributor to the Agency's transformation and innovation agenda working closely with the Chief Public Health Officer, the Associate Deputy Minister and the Senior Management team.

I having an appreciation for complex systems thinking and was formally educated in Social Work and Public Administration. Believe I bring a wealth of program and policy experience that encompasses the health, social service and government sectors.

My career has included clinical program development, implementation and evaluation activities as well as senior administrative positions within the health care delivery systems spanning ambulatory care, long-term-care, oncology, rehabilitation and acute/tertiary care settings.

Having a longstanding interest in supporting healthy communities, my interests have focused on advancing 'upstream' population health approaches and population level interventions to build community capacity and resiliency. While at the Public Health Agency, I was the Director, Chronic Disease Prevention. Later developed the knowledge mobilization function and was appointed the first Director, Chronic Disease Interventions and Best Practices.

Ann Dale

Peggy, given your experience, what do you think are the most critical issues now facing Canadian society? Others, jump in as well, please. My two cents worth - climate change adaptation and mitigation and biodiversity loss.

Peggy Taillon

Important context about the sector, thanks to [Imagine Canada](#).

There are over 170,000 charitable and non-profit organizations in Canada. 86,000 of these are registered charities (recognized by the Canada Revenue Agency). The charitable and non-profit sector contributes an average of 8.1% of total Canadian GDP, more than the retail trade industry and close to the value of the mining, oil and gas extraction industry.

Two million Canadians are employed in the charitable and non-profit sector
Over 13 million people volunteer for charities and non-profits.

Those are two key issues, Ann. I would add isolation and separation as society ages as and as we see the political divide and inequality grow. Mental health is another area that is emerging with greater awareness and media coverage. Stigma is a big challenge.

Ryan Kadowaki

I agree that climate change is most pressing, not just due to more obvious ecological impacts (water availability, species loss, etc.), but also the intersection with a host of other social issues including public health and poverty. The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report notes that climate change will have pronounced effects on vulnerable populations in developed countries as income inequality increases.

I would also add that voter apathy, especially amongst young people, is a major problem.

Tim Hutchinson

Piggybacking on your question to Peggy, I think an aging population is pretty important. Also, what seems to be the increasing power of corporate entities over nation states. In addition, citizen engagement.

Agree, that climate change is so significant and the negative impacts are being realized at an even greater speed than anticipated.

Peggy Taillon

One emerging issues that I have become more mindful of is how much issues are interconnected. There is a compounding effect, globalization, adaptation, consumption, aging, chronic health conditions, poverty, the health, social and economic impact of global warming...as social challenges become more complex, our responses need to be far more comprehensive, iterative and organic. Technology is a great enabler but it also comes at a cost. All these things are connected but our institutions, social structures, processes and resources tend to be disconnected and almost counter intuitive.

Jodi Mucha

I totally agree, Peggy. BCHC has recently been involved in the Social Innovation conversation and looking at change across scales. These include the institutional level, organizational

level, network/group level, and individual. Then, there's how to scale UP your efforts or scale them OUT. Sometimes you can only go so far in which direction you are going and you then have to stop and reflect on the actual impact you are having and if it's achieving the desired outcomes.

Katherine Scott

I don't think that there is any shortage of pressing issues facing Canada - what I do know is that the non-profit sector is on the front line. Much of the work that CCSD has done in the past 10 years has focused on funding and capacity issues in the sector. We published **Funding Matters** ten years ago - and many of the issues identified in this study - are still with us. I think that we are still flying under the radar...

And, as Peggy notes - the issues that we are facing as a society are increasingly complex.

Ann Dale

We have a very eclectic group of practitioners and I admire all of you for your work in the sector. As a pointy-headed academic, I often wonder if we are making much of a difference.

So, to our first question, why is social sector important for Canada, what do you guys contribute to 'let's be provocative', the infamous bottom line? As Peggy stated in a previous post, "The charitable and non-profit sector contributes an average of 8.1% of total Canadian GDP, more than the retail trade industry and close to the value of the mining, oil and gas extraction industry".

What about the other imperatives - social in particular?

Ryan Kadowaki

I think the social sector provides citizens greater participation in our democracy and they provide services that would otherwise not be available. I see the sector as the product of imperfect government and free market institutions, when people see their values underrepresented in policy making they attempt to correct this by enabling a social sector.

Environmental NGOs are a prime example. Canadians care about the environment, it's part of our identity. The sector is viable because the public simply doesn't believe government and industry is doing a good enough job on this file. The **public trusts** the social sector more than business and governments on a host of issues.

Ann Dale

Quite a mismatch between the key social issues and the current structure of government departments, federally, as still hewers of wood and drawers of water, and Ryan just made some key points here about their contribution to democracy. Perhaps that is a key role that the social sector plays, as an alert, as a forecaster of what we need, the critical changes as society, and yet for some reason I feel the social sector has been silenced.

Ryan Kadowaki

Hi Tim and others,

In your experience, do you think that periods of disenchantment with government has been a boon to the social sector? Do people turn to the sector as an alternative or do they simply become apathetic?

Peggy Taillon

Building on Ryan's point, I believe that there has been a loss of faith in our public institutions and a scepticism of the intentions of big business around our greatest challenges such as climate change. This can easily lead to apathy and disengagement. Katherine often points out that families are working harder than ever before and gaining little ground. People are overwhelmed and distracted. This can allow governments to move agenda forward with little or no awareness from their citizenry. I think we have witnessed that in the past few years in Canada.

Ryan Kadowaki

One other social sciencey bit I'll add to the last question (since Ann and others did make us do a ton of reading in our coursework), there's been **some research** done on how social sector organizations act as defensive mechanisms against our anxiety around big societal issues. We aren't able to address these on our own (e.g. climate change, global poverty, etc.), but social sector orgs provide an important outlet and relief that someone is acting.

Ann Dale

That leads me to our second question:

What changes have you observed in the sector, and in its relationships, over the past 20 years?

Tim Hutchinson

Given that the world is rapidly changing (technology, etc.), I really wonder if the traditional participants in the sector need to re-work the way they do business. Overstating the point... are the members in the sector relevant to the current needs of the population or are they contributing to the status quo?

Ann Dale

Janet, can you expand of why your work is becoming increasingly challenging. And Tim, if the sector has lost 'its edge', what do you do about it?

Janet Austin

With respect to your question about whether 'we' are making a difference, I would observe that front-line service we deliver is enormously valuable to those who benefit, but the social problems our country faces are far beyond the capacity of the philanthropic sector to solve. It is the opportunity to engage in meaningful advocacy, based on good quality research and evidence that offers the best potential for real systemic change. Sadly, this work is becoming increasingly challenging.

Peggy Taillon

Jane is so right, and those at the front line are making the greatest impact, often in the hardest context or environment, and for there to be real gains, all sectors need to partner.

Katherine Scott

I know that governments certainly turn to the sector in times of need with the hope that civil society can fill the gaps. I am speaking of social organizations or non-profits that play a large role in service delivery. These organizations have grown up in partnership with government in Canada - and continue to play - through good times and bad - a fundamental role supporting Canadians and enriching community life. I completely agree with Janet. I also agree that organizations are having an increasingly difficult time pursuing their mandate. It is a very challenging environment.

Jodi Mucha

I agree, it's also the front line folks who burn out the fastest, doing the most with the least resources and capacity. For change to be sustainable we need a 'whole' or community

approach - a multi-sectoral ownership or responsibility in the matter - taking the bottom up top down approach.

Tim Hutchinson

Continuing my thread... I worry that the sector sometimes acts like 'do gooders'. I think some have used the term as a type of colonialism.

Peggy Taillon

Tim, such a good point, we see this in developing countries, as it is more obvious and acute. It is certainly true in Canada with respect to the government and their relationship with Aboriginal communities.

In a democracy, the government is responsible to respect the voices of organizations that disagree with the government's decisions. If those organizations act in the public interest, play a role in maintaining the strength of Canadian civil society, and contribute to the diversity of perspectives available to Canadians, the government should not only respect their voices, but encourage them.

Unfortunately, in recent years, the voices of numerous civil society organizations that have acted in the public interest, and contributed to the diversity of Canadian perspectives, have not been respected. Instead, they have been ordered or pressured into silence, sabotaged by dubious political appointments, defunded, gutted...

Ann Dale

Jodi, can you unpack a little how we would adopt a multi-sectoral approach, tough question I know, but new partnerships and collaboration has never been greater. I know that you have led your organization in novel ways.

Ryan was one of the best students I had the privilege of working with :) Ryan, can you expand a little on some of your research findings if you don't mind, as it bears on our second question?

Ryan Kadowaki

I don't have quite the historical perspective that many of you do. The most significant change that I've experienced was the recession in 2008-09. In the aftermath, an [Imagine Canada survey](#) found non-profits reporting difficulty fulfilling their missions.

The environmental sector was hit very hard, and saw layoffs throughout the sector. In a sector that receives a small proportion of non-profit funding in Canada, I think the recession really set us back a couple of years at least. Organizations are now trying to be more robust and have a contingency strategy, but this is difficult. One of the issues that I tried to look at in my thesis research was the dynamic between organizational self-preservation and mission achievement. Are these at odds? If any of you have experiences from your sub-sectors I'd love to hear them.

Tim Hutchinson

What can be done? I think the sector needs to re-think what it is doing and how it works together. We use the term partnerships extensively, and set up 'partnership' arrangements with government and others, but the model needs to be reworked in more creative ways. The focus on chasing the funding, (government, donor etc.) that lack of coordination in the 'sub sectors' of the sector, I think create real challenges for creating significant change.

Janet Austin

Re: changes in the sector:

- 1) increased competition for donors/funders
- 2) government retrenchment at all levels which increases demand for community service
- 3) shifts in patterns of volunteer engagement
- 4) unfunded capital and administrative infrastructure an increasing concern
- 5) greater focus on outcomes (largely a good thing but difficult to do well and costly)
- 6) poor general understanding of the legitimate costs associated with fund-raising
- 7) need for greater sophistication in governance and financial management (a generalization, I know)
- 8) etc. etc.

Re: difficulty of undertaking meaningful advocacy

- 1) time consuming and costly; difficult to fund
 - 2) organizations fear consequences
 - 3) requires a sustained long-term focus
-

Jodi Mucha

What we've recently be grappling with is that it's a shared understanding of the issues that's needed. Values may be different, perspectives may be different, but when you can bring people to a place of a shared understanding of the issues involved (i.e. root causes of an issue), then something else opens up in the conversation and you can build from there. What we initially thought, and it's often referred to in relation to healthy communities, is that it's a

shared vision for a common future, and instead I think it's more the tough conversations people don't want to have, to unpack what's really going on and creating a safe space to talk about it - then a shared understanding. This also doesn't necessarily mean shared agreement.

Peggy Taillon

The answer for me resides in lived experience of those who are marginalized, learning from their experiences at the local level, where they live, and rewiring systems based on those experiences. Taking that evidence base and building public policy, institutions and structures that can better respond and evolve with the changing needs of society is key. Reform or restructuring is often an exercise in tweaking what we have which is of little impact. All sectors have to be at the table, empathy is a powerful tool.

Ann Dale

Tim raises a key point about the importance of partnerships and strategic alliances. Partnership is like good communications in a relationship, everyone thinks they are good at it. There are a lot of silos and stovepipes in the sector, for example, environmental groups need to embrace the social imperative more, and the health sector needs to embrace the environment? What thinks you?

Ryan Kadowaki

This is an important point. It is easy to see the benefits of enabling broader inclusion in our work as there is such overlap. We often work with other sectors on our campaigns but these tend to be one-offs rather than sustained efforts to work together. I think part of the problem is that many organizations were established with very narrow mandates to deal with very specific issues and it's hard to justify sustained broader collaboration without fundamentally re-jigging the organization.

Tim Hutchinson

Not tooting the 1125 horn, but I think places like 1125, that bring a diverse group of players to problem solve, being user centric, co-creating, and listening and engaging the broader 'system' in the solution is a start.

The sector cannot act alone, the context is bigger for most of the issues/problems being addressed.

Ryan Kadowaki

I'm not sure to what degree this has changed over time, but as recent scrutiny on spending by the social sector has intensified, there seems to be an increased emphasis by organizations on transparency and to prove low-overheads. It's obviously important for non-profits to be accountable to funders. But there is a balance that must be managed between meeting an organization's administrative and reporting duties and fulfilling its mission. These can sometimes be at odds depending on an organization's capacity. I also worry that the focus on ensuring low-overhead is hindering capacity building. Staff training and certain system infrastructure is key to long-term mission attainment but may be seen as extraneous if not looking long-term.

From my thesis research I know the ENGO sector hasn't progressed much on diversity in the past few decades. Canada's demographics are changing but the backgrounds of those in the environmental movement are fairly homogenous. Anecdotally I would say this is beginning to change slowly. But, we need to ensure that our organizations incorporate diverse perspectives or we are missing out on opportunities to engage and support more Canadians.

I found [this paper](#) quite telling, and I think it echoes what Katherine mentioned earlier about some of these most pressing challenges from several years ago persisting today. It's a series of interviews with environmental groups nearly 10 years ago. A lot of the same issues came up when I interviewed current ENGO leadership. Rate of change on some of these fundamental challenges is slow.

Katherine Scott

Thanks, Janet, for the succinct summary of challenges facing the sector. What I have noticed, picking up on Ryan's point, is the different capacity of groups to respond to today's environment - the different capacity to pursue innovation.

There is a divide opening up between organizations between those that have the resources and connections to mount successful programs, take care of back office administration and invest in community partnerships, and those that scramble day to day to keep the lights on. So much is needed and expected today...so it isn't surprising to see the evolution of large community service organizations. Smaller advocacy continue to play a vital role but they will need additional supports to participate fully in problem solving initiatives.

Janet Austin

I agree. It requires discretionary revenue to be able to make these investments. Few organizations have the capacity - especially the smaller organizations and those that are largely dependent on government revenues.

Ann Dale

Janet, keen observations on the changes in the social sector, thank you. Jodi, key point that building a shared understanding doesn't necessarily mean shared consensus. Jodi, what engagement strategies have worked best for BC Healthy Communities? And, Peggy, difficult question, and others, how do you ensure your contributions to public policy development are heard? Maybe, there are different audiences and ways we should be communicating to?

We've heard a lot, the key issues are isolation and separation, aging population, climate change adaptation and mitigation, voter apathy, mental health and its stigma, growing inequality and governance. Peggy reminded us of how all of the issues are so interconnected now, and Janet gave us an accurate snapshot of the changes in the sector. You have identified the need to partner, the need for collaboration has never been greater, the desire to take a multi-sectoral approach. Given the interconnectedness of these issues, how is the health of the sector in its ability to bridge silos and stovepipes between all the organizations working so hard in this country? And, please if you can, add more detail to the above, if we have time.

Katherine Scott

There are other divides in the social sector as well. For example, the growing divide between service organizations and traditional advocacy organizations (back when advocacy wasn't a forbidden word).

We have seen, with the shift to project funding, organizations report being much more cautious about speaking out on issues related to their mission, for fear of having their funding requested denied. The experience in Ottawa since 2006 - as Peggy noted - provides ample evidence of advocacy chill, reinforced by attacks on non-profit organizations as 'special interests', and increased monitoring of charities by the CRA. There is now a lengthy list of over 100 national organizations that have closed their doors or scaled back operations.

But, this trend isn't only about voice and dissent. At the core of this move is a paradigm shift in terms of thinking about the role of the non-profit sector - a narrowing of focus - reinforced by constraints on the sector's capacity to participate in the civic domain. The tighter integration of government/funders with non-profits through contracting - and the demands of modern management - are also driving this change.

Peggy Taillon

Love the question, Ann. I think we need to target Canadians rather than government with the evidence...and the evidence needs to be far more accessible and meaningful in order to engage people in both what is happening and what we need to do in order to address it. If Canadians were given the right kinds of narratives when politicians knocked on their doors, we would move beyond superficial to the substantive changes that need to take place. Use

examples of people living in your neighbourhood, the challenges and the successes, build narratives...ask people what they are worried about...

There are literally 100s groups in Canada who continue to target government with the same kinds of information and messaging as they have done for 20 years. At some point there needs to be recognition that it's not working and find other ways to engage people in ways that will resonate.

Tim Hutchinson

Peggy, I think you are on to something. My sense is that Canadians are not co-ordinated in their response and they do not have the narratives that would provide the inter-related connections to affect change in the system.

Ryan has identified a number of key considerations. The capacity building, admin infrastructure, etc. that is required within an NGO, to demonstrate transparency and the other requirements from funding bodies, are significant challenges. The funding cycles inherently create a level of competition between 'partners' that is such a distraction from the work that is needed to be accomplished.

I believe the sector needs to think more as an interconnected 'system'.

Jodi Mucha

I agree with Peggy and Katherine, in terms of local level community organizing. We have been involved in a very grassroots level initiative called [Building Resilient Neighbourhoods](#), and as part of that Building Resilient Streets. Often starting at the grassroots level is very powerful for generating momentum and thus resulting in policy change.

From the website:

[Why create resilient communities by starting on individual streets and buildings?](#)

Sometimes it seems overwhelming to try to change entire cities, provinces or nations to make them more resilient. But, we can make changes in our own lives, and reach out and try to change our relationships with the people near us. Then, as we knit those connections together, we're soon changing our neighbourhoods, and then our cities! But, it all starts with each of us and the people around us. You can join with your neighbours to contribute to your resilient neighbourhoods one block or building at a time.

Katherine Scott

I agree - We all walk the line between 'mechanics' and 'mission'. It is so easy to get lost in the weeds in this complex and competitive environment. Connection to community is the only answer. It is fundamental to the definition of the social sector.

Ann Dale

An interconnected ecosystem that knows how to strategically partner on grants, share intelligence and give up some ownership. The latter is particularly difficult for the big guys to partner with the smaller guys. I have argued, for example, that in the ENGO sector, there is a responsibility of the large to 'include' the small, but it has largely fallen on deaf ears, we can't just keep asking governments or foundations to help us build capacity. This platform is one small attempt to build new partnerships, and ideally will become an open space for the sector (in a year when we work out the bugs, and indeed, there are some), for the entire sector to use to keep the conversations going, to ask the tough questions, to convene diverse groups of people in different ways, to work with physical labs such as 1125@Carleton, and the community brilliance of CCSD's outreach to experiment with how best to work with face-to-face community engagement and virtual ones.

Ryan Kadowaki

We know how important collaboration is as we attempt to leverage limited funding and capacity. We also know that collaboration itself requires resources. One thing I found in my research was that NGO leadership raised resource constraints as one of the major obstacle to achieving their mission yet continue to report collaboration as a major missing opportunity. This has been the case since the 90's.

I would also say that our diagnosis of sector health depends very much on its definition. We often associate health with financial stability and prognosis for longevity. I don't have current financial data for the environmental sector so I'm not sure how it compares to pre-recession. I know that at the David Suzuki Foundation our membership has grown over the last few years. So, I feel the sector's ability to engage the public is healthy. But, if you measure health by whether a sector has the means and track record of achieving its mission, I wouldn't say that's less certain. This is the difficulty in assessing effectiveness for social change non-profits, metrics can be very subjective (public opinion, investment dollars into environmental programs by governments, policy changes, and empirical environmental indicators). I think this is easier to gauge for service organizations if you can track the number of people served. Although I'm sure that sector has its own unique challenges.

Ann Dale

Perhaps, that is a role for Foundations and/or the research community to convene social sector leaders together once a year, for brainstorming, for strategic visioning, for enhanced collaboration, maybe on a regional basis first, as once again, as Katherine raises, there is always the question of who is going to fund this. But this could be a key leadership role for Foundations to play? And, work collaboratively with all the physical labs that are springing up everywhere. I am going to ask Mary Herbert-Copley to apply her considerable experience in networking to comment on this in the Live Chat.

Peggy Taillon

And, interconnectedness is threatened in environments that are rationing. Competing for air time, space and money...sadly shoulder to shoulder turns into elbows in this environment. Plays into government's belief that the sector does not work well together. It's a scary environment for many who have watched peer organizations go down, be audited etc...

Ryan Kadowaki

I also think it's important to consider the health of the sector at different organizational levels. Are we creating opportunities for young professionals to build a career and retain their skills and knowledge for the long-term? Are we resourcing our sector with the talent needed to be effective? Do we have women and diversity in leadership positions?

Janet Austin

These challenges are common in the service sector as well. For example, while it is useful to track the number of people served the real goal is to identify the factors for 'success' - i.e. can we demonstrate a change in a person's status by virtue of their participation in a program/service - is their evidence of progress on policy/legislative reform, etc. The challenge is compounded by the fact that the work evolves over long periods of time.

Tim Hutchinson

Reading the 'chain', I am reminded of the importance of relationships in partnerships and creating the 'space' for bringing people together. From previous work the challenges and lived experience in the Chronic Disease Prevention world and CDPAC (Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance of Canada) come to mind. This alliance of chronic disease NGO's (big and small) looking for broader 'systems' change in the prevention world really had to change the rules of engagement. Very interesting times, when chasing the \$'s, capacity within the groups and the need for individual players to have profile with their distinct donors and constituents.

Jodi Mucha

I've been involved in sessions like this in the past, and it's all of us 'similar fish' talking. What's missing is including other sectors in this kind of conversation and I believe one of the main untapped sector is the private sector.

Ann Dale

Key point, Jodi, how do we attract those fish to the table? There is the Sustainability Business Network being led by Dr. Tima Bansal, who led a meeting last September to convince the business sector about the need for engaging in civic dialogue. The report they produced can be found [here](#).

But, as you know, engaging people is all about relationships and we need to have the time to reach out. We will try and ensure that in future dialogues, we include at least one business person, if anyone has names of key people, please forward them to me, it is a sector in which I don't have many connections. And, connections is what makes us work together, the social is fundamentally all about relationships?

Mary Herbert-Copley

Hi Jodi - you are talking my language - you need diversity at the table (opponents included) to start to rethink and reframe the issue(s) - imperative to see how all the key players view the problem especially the end users who are most affected by any solutions created to break one issue down - climate change. Ann, we see lots of money spent on physical infrastructure but not on building community resilience at the social level thoughts?

Ann Dale

Well, my dear colleague, some of us have been working in [climate change](#), especially on the social sector. But, you raise a key point, the social imperative is often the most neglected. I recently kick-started a three-year SSHRC funded project, and my co-investigators and 12 research partners all agreed we don't need more research, we need to identify what community engagement strategies are working, what are the best knowledge mobilization ways to close the knowledge gap, particularly between political decision-makers and research outcomes. But then that gets down not to whose science is better, but ideology, if a person isn't open to your information, your research, the evidence it doesn't matter a damn what you present, so big question for all of us, but for another conversation, n'est-ce pas?

Jodi Mucha

This is exactly what BCHC is working on right now...the links between Health and Climate Change, and all the social implications versus the 'hard' /infrastructure stuff.

- Our PlanH program has a nice [summary](#)
 - And a recent Webinar we led: [Health in a Changing Climate](#)
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Katherine Scott

Ann is right. It is fundamentally about relationships.

I was talking with a service provider recently about a community project that would need cross-sector support. She clearly saw the need and was very enthusiastic but stopped short of volunteering any of her resources to support the initiative. She made the point that while it would be good to fund prevention, she couldn't be assured that her service would realize the savings.

I appreciated her candor. This is such a hard nut to crack. How do we get to the tipping point - when doing the right things is inevitable? It is a fundamental question of system change - one the social sector is trying to drive home.

Jodi Mucha

I agree Ann, it IS about relationships and finding the champions within the organization or institution that can help to move things forward. The key as well is to somehow formalize the work or relationship so you can build beyond the relationship. For example, we had a longstanding partnership with a private sector organization and we did really great work. The organization lead got it and moved it forward and up the chain. We were gaining momentum. Then, there was a staffing change and everything got halted and thus our worked slowed, and eventually there was no longer a fit. The thing I learned from this valuable lesson was to work with the champion and HELP them to get others in the organization (the decision-makers) to get it. For us to identify what she would need to inform, influence and educate those higher up. Otherwise the work can get lost when the Champion leaves.

Peggy Taillon

Love the approach of linking to existing networks and bringing unusual suspects to the table. There are some great pan Canadian groups in public health that Tim refers to we need to bring climate change into those tables and the business sector, etc. As a concrete next step, we could easily each put a list together and then connect on how best to reach out.

Ann Dale

I am not going to try and wrap up such a diverse and wonderful conversation. You have raised some key questions, and Katherine raised the crucial question of fundamental change, which we will address in the fourth part of this series on Revitalizing the Social Sector. Our next conversation is on leadership in the social sector - where do our leaders come from today and for the future? And, we need to think about what we will do with the outcomes of our four discussions, perhaps publish a catalyst paper? We would appreciate your thoughts on this, or maybe convene us in a face-to-face meeting?

Regardless, I cannot thank you enough for your time and commitment to this grand old experiment, not too many glitches, but a few annoying ones. Une mille fois merci. Concluding remarks.

Peggy Taillon

Love this format and this exchange has been invigorating for me...great to share with like-minded souls. My concluding thought is always focus, work with and learn from lived experience, keep it local and connect the dots. Nothing happens in isolation, we are all interconnected as such so are our issues and we need to be willing to take chances, test things out and fail in order to have success.

Jodi Mucha

You may want to consider 'leadership' for today and the future vs 'leaders'. Sometimes the biggest change is catalyzed by those who would never even self-identify as 'leaders'... makes me think of our work years ago with Ken at United We Can :)

What if leadership was a shared responsibility? As opposed to over there on others..just something to ponder (I ponder:)

Thanks for the great discussion!!!

Mary Herbert-Copley

Again, Jodi I like your point about a champion - leadership is key and can come from unexpected places if we are open to it.

Ann, we have not touched on Aboriginal issues - not a happy place for Canada - Tim raised some successes below that did in fact involve co-creating new solutions WITH First Nations amongst others - maybe another discussion some time in future

Tim Hutchinson

For me it speaks to 'adaptive leadership' and the ability for leadership to come from many sources...frequently not those identified in the traditional leadership positions.

Katherine Scott

My last thoughts for today.

The emerging trend in the sector is one of growing variation and unevenness among non-profit organizations and civil society organizing across the country. In this context, it has never been more important to build bridges, to reach out, to create spaces for debate and dialogue. NGOs have a critical role in these discussions, bringing the voice and experience of community to the table, without which there is scant chance of success - or lasting impact.

It is very difficult in a political culture - where citizens are treated like consumers shopping for policies to meet their individual needs - to host an honest conversation about the non-profit sector and its role in our society. But, that is exactly what's needed to move forward with meaningful change.

I am looking forward to our continuing conversation. Thanks Ann and to all of your team.

Ryan Kadowaki

I enjoyed the conversation, thank you all for your insights. I have never participated in a moderated chat like this before but see great potential for it facilitating these conversations. We need sustained effort and discussion to get us to the next level on some of these challenges. It would also be great to transition the discussion from this online space to face-to-face interaction down the road.