

THE
SOCIAL
ENTERPRISE
OPPORTUNITY
FOR ONTARIO

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SECTOR SIGNALS

Sector Signals are a product of Mowat NFP. They are short descriptions and analyses of early warning signs that should be on the not-for-profit (NFP) sector's radar. They may be innovative ideas or challenges facing the sector. Topics are identified through sector engagement and are developed through collaboration. The goal of the Sector Signals series is to provide recommendations for action and suggestions for future research.

ABOUT MOWAT NFP

Mowat NFP undertakes collaborative applied policy research on the not-for-profit sector. As part of an independent think tank with strong partnerships with government and the sector, Mowat NFP brings a balanced perspective through which to examine the challenges facing today's sector and to support its future direction. Mowat NFP works in partnership with the Ontario Nonprofit Network (ONN) to ensure our research and policy recommendations are timely and relevant to the sector and reflect its values.

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THE SOCIAL ENTERPRISE OPPORTUNITY FOR ONTARIO

The term “social enterprise” carries particular meaning in particular contexts. In the broadest sense of the term, it means a business activity that produces a social benefit. Early examples date back to the 19th century with the founding of Goodwill Industries in Boston, cooperatives serving local community needs have been an important part of the social economy of Canada for decades. But the concept and practice have become the focus of significant attention for the not-for-profit, private and public sectors in recent years.

With support from the Ontario Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Employment (MEDTE), Mowat NFP developed this Sector Signal to explore opportunities for social enterprise in Ontario today, and ways the Ontario government can be an effective partner in building its success.

Recognizing the depth of experience, knowledge and wide variety of perspectives on social enterprise across different stakeholder groups, this was not an exercise in consolidating existing research. Rather, it was a process of reading the barometer of opportunity and identifying pragmatic and strategic ways forward in strengthening the social enterprise landscape in Ontario.

In developing this Sector Signal, multiple stakeholders and thought leaders were consulted, casting a wide net to focus the discussion on both short- and long-term actions and strategies. Through a set of key informant interviews, two multi-stakeholder roundtables, and a province-wide webinar, the context of the existing ecosystem of social enterprise in Ontario was explored and opportunities for strengthening the environment were identified.¹

Several themes emerged from the consultation process. This report distills these themes and consolidates a range of options for moving forward the goal of creating a vibrant social enterprise space that enables enhanced impact for Ontario communities.

¹ The first roundtable included 25 thought leaders from not-for-profit social enterprise practitioners, intermediaries, co-ops, and social purpose businesses. The discussion focused on the existing ecosystem of social enterprise in Ontario and current challenges and opportunities for strengthening the landscape. The webinar opened the conversation to a wider group of stakeholders with more than 60 participants from across Ontario. Findings from the first roundtable were validated with the webinar participants. The second roundtable brought together another 25 thought leaders from the private sector, not-for-profit sector, foundations, and social enterprise practitioners. The discussion built on the findings from the first two sessions, and expanded the broader consideration of the relationship between social innovation and social enterprise.

SECTION I

THE SIGNAL

Social enterprise is widely recognized as making a strong contribution to community benefit and economic growth in Ontario, Canada and globally. Governments, not-for-profit leaders and the private sector are all looking to social enterprise for innovative and cost effective ways to solve social and economic problems faced by Ontario communities.

Within the not-for-profit sector, social enterprise activities range from building inclusive economies by employing people who are marginalized from the labour market, to creating new ways of sustaining organizations with social impact through diverse income strategies. Social enterprise has become an attractive option to address sustainability challenges in the sector, with earned revenue the only income stream projected to increase over the short- to mid-term.²

The importance of earned income to the sector is reflected in an increase in the amount of research on the topic. In the month of June 2013, this report will be one of three papers published on not-for-profit social enterprise in Ontario and Canada.³

At the same time, governments across Canada are developing enabling mechanisms for social enterprise. At the federal level, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC) has been interested in this issue for many years and recently turned its attention to social impact bonds among other social finance tools.⁴

At the provincial level, both British Columbia and Nova Scotia have introduced legislation to define and regulate for-profit social enterprises or social purpose businesses. As of July 2013, British Columbia will allow Community Contribution Companies to function as for-profit enterprises but also maintain a primary focus on community benefit. In Nova Scotia, the Community Interest Companies Act, passed in 2012, permits a hybrid form of incorporation that enables entrepreneurship, while providing community benefit.

² See Mulholland, Mendelsohn and Shamshiri, Strengthening the Third Pillar of the Canadian Union: An Intergovernmental Agenda for Canada's Charities and Non-Profits, Mowat Centre, March 2011.

³ In June, 2013 Imagine Canada is expected to publish an Earned Income Framework paper that culminates a year's worth of research on earned income. The Canadian Community Economic Development Network (CCEDNet) is expected to release a report on the results of The Social Enterprise Survey for Ontario. This report will provide baseline data to begin to measure social enterprise activity in Ontario. The survey is based on similar surveys that have already been completed in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Manitoba, British Columbia and Alberta.

⁴ *Harnessing the Power of Social Finance*, profiled an 18-month consultation process on social finance (including financing for social enterprises).

“Social enterprises are helping Ontario build a vibrant and diverse economy with more opportunities for people of all abilities and backgrounds. These socially aware and economically viable businesses address the social, environmental, cultural and economic challenges no government can solve alone.”

DR. ERIC HOSKINS

Minister of Economic Development, Trade and Employment

In Ontario, MEDTE’s Office for Social Enterprise (OSE) was created in 2012 to promote a vibrant social enterprise ecosystem in Ontario. The office promotes social entrepreneurship across Ontario, and will partner with the private, not-for-profit and public sectors in order to coordinate and expand the tools available to social entrepreneurs.⁵

In spite of the heightened interest and the advancement of legislation and tools, social enterprise remains neither a legal form nor a universally defined concept. And yet, the currency and application of the term continues to grow. As a Sector Signal, this paper will explore what this means for supporting the growth and viability of social enterprises that deliver on the promise of inclusive economies and resilient communities.

⁵ MEDTE News Release May 24, 2013 <http://news.ontario.ca/medt/en/2013/05/ontario-helps-social-enterprises-create-jobs-and-strengthen-communities.html>.



SECTION II

DEFINING THE CHALLENGE

Definitions for social enterprise are varied. It is defined neither as a corporate form nor as an economic sector, but rather as an approach or means that is used to achieve an end that is both social and economic. As such, it is more useful to think of the social enterprise landscape as an ecosystem, one that is diverse and complex, and filled with stakeholders that include social enterprises and entrepreneurs, intermediaries, beneficiaries, partners and enablers (see figure 1 below). At the centre of this ecosystem, and the intended outcome of social enterprise, is community benefit, both social and economic.

FIGURE 1: SOCIAL ENTERPRISE ECOSYSTEM



This diagram was presented to all three consultations as a sketch of the stakeholders within the social enterprise ecosystem in order to prompt discussion about who is in the ecosystem and how they relate to one another. Although relationships are not illustrated in the diagram, the expectation is that if any of the three forms of social enterprise – not-for-profit, social purpose business, co-ops – were highlighted, the resulting connections would demonstrate different relationships and opportunities. This diagram is not a definitive picture of the ecosystem, but an initial effort to illustrate the landscape and provoke analysis.

Social enterprises assume varying corporate structures, including enterprising not-for-profits, social purpose businesses, and not-for-profit and for-profit co-ops. While each of these different structures has a mandate to deliver social impact, their drivers, approaches and conditions for success vary significantly. As a result, there cannot be a single approach or strategy for strengthening this diverse ecosystem.

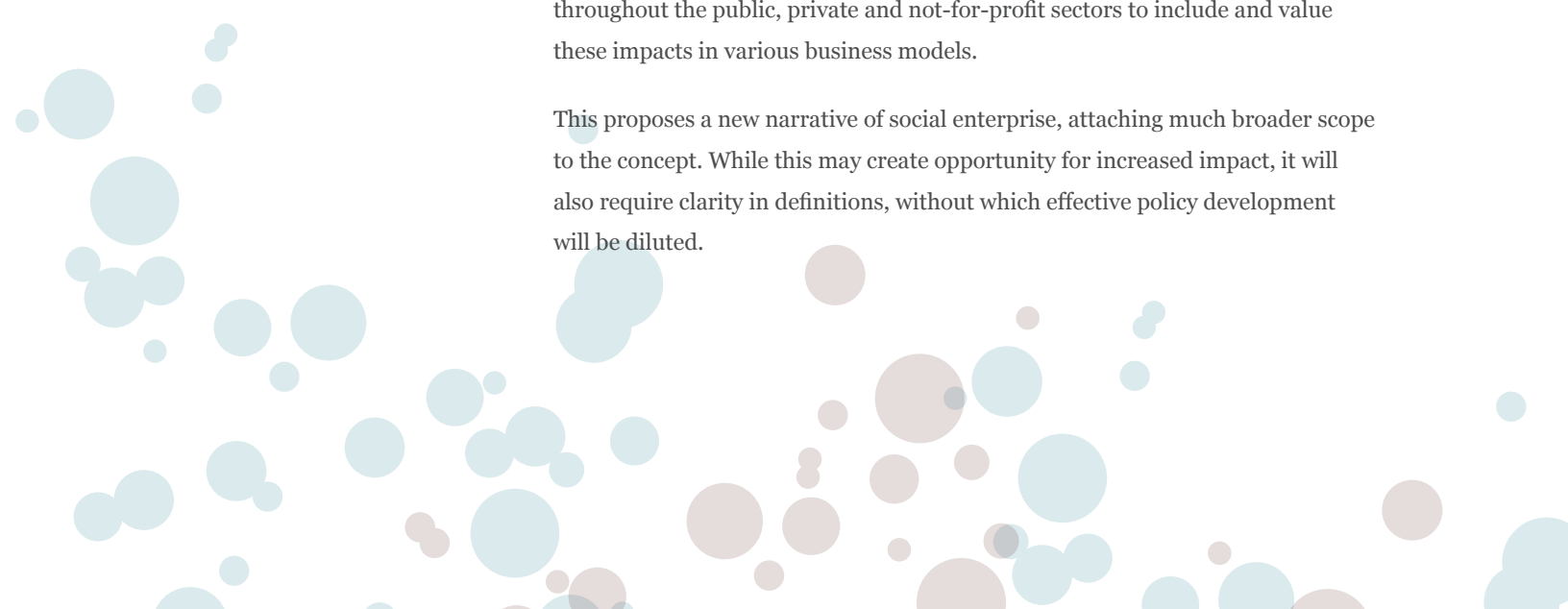
Many stakeholders in the ecosystem feel disconnected from the ongoing dialogue on social enterprise. Traditional barriers to inclusion prevent knowledge sharing. Some Aboriginal, Francophone, and rural and northern communities, although very active in this space, continue to feel excluded from the conversation and from decision making.

The diversity of players in this ecosystem means there are competing narratives of what social enterprise is and what the priorities are for the ecosystem. This creates a challenge in building cohesion and finding common ground. And yet there is broad agreement that in order to expand the market opportunity for social enterprise, there is a need for a shared brand. In a siloed and sometimes contentious landscape this is a significant challenge.

A critical element in building a shared brand is the ability to tell the story of impact and demonstrate value. The difficulty in achieving this stems from the diversity of organizational forms and objectives within the ecosystem, and the challenge of creating common metrics that can tell that story. Social enterprise is an emergent field, and there is still much work to be done in developing metrics that adequately demonstrate social, environmental and economic impact. Some of the most compelling and impactful work carried out by social enterprises cannot be neatly communicated through simple metrics.

There is an emerging shift in the narrative of social enterprise. Once thought of as not-for-profit organizations delivering blended value solutions that include social, environmental and economic impacts, there is now a broader movement throughout the public, private and not-for-profit sectors to include and value these impacts in various business models.

This proposes a new narrative of social enterprise, attaching much broader scope to the concept. While this may create opportunity for increased impact, it will also require clarity in definitions, without which effective policy development will be diluted.



SECTION III

IMAGINING THE SOLUTION

Social enterprise is an emergent space, which presents both uncertainty and opportunity. While there may not be consensus on definition and priorities, there is an abundance of success to build on and ideas for shaping the future. Even across the diversity of perspectives, there is agreement that transformation of this ecosystem is needed on three dimensions: from constrained to enabled; from siloed and fragmented to collaborative and networked; and, from unknown to recognized.

FROM CONSTRAINED TO ENABLED

Social enterprises, of all stripes, feel constrained on a number of levels: inadequate access to capital or the financial tools they need; ineffective funding support from government; lack of business development supports; organizational cultures that do not support risk-taking; and, lack of effective legislation, regulation and policy supports for the work they do.

While governments have an important role to play, transformation must happen in partnership with key stakeholders in order to ensure that solutions are practical and reflective of the needs of social enterprises and social entrepreneurs.

FROM SILOED AND FRAGMENTED TO COLLABORATIVE AND NETWORKED

There is a robust social enterprise landscape in Ontario. And there are a handful of networks and intermediaries that work effectively to identify key issues and think through opportunities and solutions. But there are many players that feel disconnected. A lack of shared perspective and language impedes the ability of multiple players to communicate, share knowledge and move forward effectively on a common social enterprise agenda.

Social enterprises need to be able to connect with one another in order to share knowledge and resources. Leaders in social enterprise, social finance and social innovation as well as intermediaries, enablers, funders, researchers, academic institutions, and many more players, are required to engage in real partnership and dialogue in order to connect and collectively promote social enterprise.

FROM UNKNOWN TO RECOGNIZED

A common thread across the ecosystem of social enterprise is the need to build awareness in the market and broader society of the value that social enterprise offers. To achieve this recognition there is a need to be able to tell the stories of success and change. It must also be able to provide the economic, social and environmental results that demonstrate value. Recognition of the collective value that social enterprises bring to communities will strengthen their position in the market, and build their collective success.

SECTION IV PATHWAYS TO SUCCESS

Through the consultations a number of approaches were identified to enable a mature and resilient social enterprise space, and for the provincial government to become a more effective partner in it. Three key areas were identified as paths to achieve this end: strengthening the opportunity for not-for-profit social enterprises; enhancing the structures that support the success of social enterprise; and, shaping the narrative that will grow social enterprise in Ontario.

STRENGTHENING THE OPPORTUNITY

The constraints faced by not-for-profit social enterprises are largely determined by the drivers that shape the enterprise. There are two primary drivers of social enterprise among not-for-profit organizations: i) impact first, creating programs that serve a range of social needs (i.e. employment for individuals not served by traditional services and marginalized from the labour market) and ii) finance first, developing an earned income stream of revenue to strengthen the sustainability and resilience of the organization by creating unrestricted funds.

These drivers create a continuum, where not-for-profit social enterprises are variously situated. They all work to deliver a blended value return but the primary measure of success may differ based on the driver (impact or finance).

Where greater emphasis is put on impact, sustainability will be tied to the funding supports that help underwrite the program. The enterprise may take a while to become self-sustaining, and may never be a viable business on its own, but may see the social impacts generated as offsetting the balance sheet deficit. This form of enterprise is an extension of an employment or training program;

one which is able to create a financial return that can help to support the program but that continues to rely on program funding.

Conversely, where the enterprise is intended to generate a viable revenue stream for a not-for-profit organization, the needs are more closely aligned with those of any business. For not-for-profits, there are inherent challenges in gaining access to capital from mainstream financial markets. While there is a growing industry of social finance tools and experiments, the majority of not-for-profits across the province feel this remains a constraint⁶.

There is a diversity of opinion about the availability of and access to capital in the social enterprise field. While access to capital remains a challenge for many not-for-profits, for some, capital is readily available and the challenge is actually a failure to connect supply and demand. The constraint may be a lack of intermediaries that are able to facilitate those connections. As new social finance tools become available, the role of intermediaries will become even more important.

In all cases, there is widespread agreement on the need for greater support for business development. Particularly for not-for-profits exploring social enterprise as a business solution, and new to the field, there is real need for the kind of start-up support that all new businesses require to succeed (eg. business planning, financial options, and market development). In addition, not-for-profits without experience in entrepreneurial activities may be challenged by a risk-averse organizational culture.

Although there is a well developed network of business development programming provided by the Government of Ontario, these programs are not always accessible or oriented to not-for-profit social enterprise. Awareness of social enterprise must be developed across government to create understanding not only of the opportunities that social enterprise offers, but also the unique challenges that social enterprises face. Unlike many businesses, the consequences of failure for social enterprises can directly impact vulnerable clients who may have nowhere else to turn. As such, appropriate funding processes, program supports and capital options are required.

A strong network of social enterprise leaders and intermediaries has been engaged in building the capacity of social enterprises for a number of years and significant work has been done on several policy fronts.⁷ One priority has been to expand market opportunities for social enterprises. Recently, a consortium of intermediaries has been successful in negotiating an opportunity to include social

⁶ The 2013 CCEDNet Social Enterprise Survey for Ontario of non-profit social enterprises in Ontario found that 80% of social enterprises find access to capital to be a challenge.

⁷ In 2010, The Social Enterprise Council of Canada, SiG@MaRS and Causeway released *Synopsis: Canadian Conference on Social Enterprise Policy Forum and Invitation to Engage in Next Steps*. The short report detailed six strategic policy priorities for government. In 2012, The Ontario Trillium Foundation released a preliminary report on the results of a grantee survey on social entrepreneurship in Ontario. This report identified four capacity building priority areas for a stronger social enterprise sector. Although the reports are unrelated, the findings are strikingly similar.

enterprises in the procurement processes for the Toronto 2015 Pan/Parapan American Games. There is an opportunity to build on this momentum and also explore how it can be leveraged for local networks of social enterprise elsewhere in Ontario.

Silos exist throughout the social enterprise ecosystem, resulting in lost opportunities to learn, partner and grow markets. There is an opportunity for the Government of Ontario to play a facilitation role to reduce these silos. In order to achieve a vibrant and innovative ecosystem, it is vital to include a diverse range of players and to ensure that effective connections, learning and supports are available at the local level. It will be important to be deliberate in this work to ensure inclusion of Aboriginal, Francophone, rural and northern, as well as smaller social enterprises.

“The primary indicators of a strong economy are how well the most marginalized are doing. How can there be confirmed support to address the issues if we are not engaged?”

CHESTER LANGILLE

Capacity Support Director
ONTARIO FEDERATION OF INDIAN FRIENDSHIP CENTRES

Critical to the success of not-for-profit social enterprises, as for all social enterprises, is being recognized for the value they bring to the market, their contribution and impact. In order to brand social enterprise and build market opportunities, social enterprises need to demonstrate their value. But there is a lack of common measures that demonstrate the impact of social enterprises, both individually and collectively. Being able to tell a story of impact and change, in both social and economic terms, is an essential element in building the brand of social enterprise.

ENHANCING THE STRUCTURES

Legal Framework

Social enterprise is not a legal concept in Ontario. Different corporate forms identify as social enterprises, but there is a lack of clarity in the language defining what constitutes a social enterprise. This leads to confusion and at times contested space.⁸

⁸ For more on the regulatory challenges faced by social enterprises see Social Entrepreneurship Series: Legislative Innovations, part of the MaRS White Paper Series. <http://www.marsdd.com/news-insights/mars-reports/social-entrepreneurship-legislative-innovations/>.

While the evolution of social enterprise in Ontario has been shaped by the not-for-profit sector, this is an emergent field, with an expanding ecosystem and a diversity of interested players. As for-profit social purpose businesses try to establish their space and market, they are looking for legal structures—like those developed in Nova Scotia and British Columbia—that legitimize their existence and help define their way forward. As a new player at the table, for-profit business offers a potential force for social change.

Social Innovation

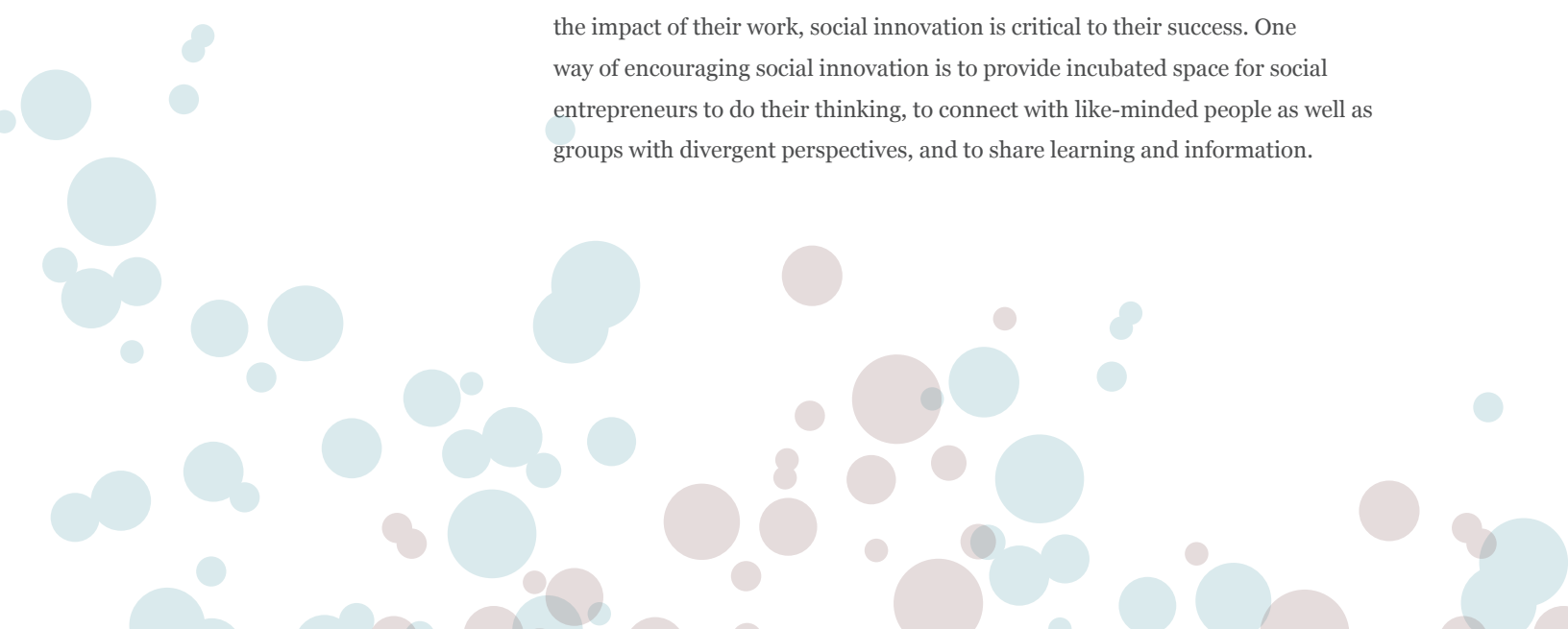
Just as industry seeks ways to innovate in order to be competitive and grow markets, social enterprises also seek ways to innovate, but with the aim to effect social change and create impact:

Social innovation is an initiative, product or process or program that profoundly changes the basic routines, resource and authority flows or beliefs of any social system (e.g. individuals, organizations, neighbourhoods, communities, whole societies).

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The above definition sets a high bar for determining what constitutes social innovation; not all social enterprises can or will deliver on social innovation. And it is not necessary that they do. However, social enterprise can be a useful means for developing, incubating, and scaling social innovation.

For those social enterprises that are focused on broadening and deepening the impact of their work, social innovation is critical to their success. One way of encouraging social innovation is to provide incubated space for social entrepreneurs to do their thinking, to connect with like-minded people as well as groups with divergent perspectives, and to share learning and information.



This results in a culture and environment where social change agents can test their ideas and take risks. Such opportunity and the requisite enabling environment is an essential part of the social enterprise landscape, and will require continued investment and development.

“...lessons learned about what makes a successful approach might not stay within the confines of social enterprise. If we think back 100 years, for example meals on wheels, a lot of these models became supported by government. Sometimes learning in social enterprise becomes mainstream finance and market based... We can't forget that what happens in social enterprise can transform markets and governments.”

SEAN GEOBEY

McConnell Fellow in Social Innovation
WATERLOO INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION AND RESILIENCE

In order to leverage the value of social innovation, it is critical that learning be effectively shared across sectors. Intermediaries are needed to connect the ideas and there is a role for government as a partner and facilitator in knowledge transfer. Already there are case studies and a marketplace of ideas. Providing a clearinghouse that collects and distributes information on new innovations would enable greater sharing of results and facilitate new partnerships.

Social Finance

Social finance refers broadly to the set of financial tools that deliver social, environmental and financial return through investments in social enterprises. Social finance includes multiple tools including microcredit, social impact bonds, impact investment and other processes that enable cash to flow to social enterprises to enable them to do their work.



Access to capital is an important feature of the business development side of social enterprise but does not tell the whole story of financial need. In some cases, social enterprises need sustained supports in their program delivery. Whether and how social finance tools can help social enterprises bridge periods of economic strain as well as grow their business to serve a wider community will be important to monitor and understand.

Social finance is an emergent field with new players becoming involved and looking to develop options to infuse more capital into social enterprise. The private sector has an important role to play, particularly financial institutions. A key challenge identified was that many social enterprises are not investment-ready and will require support to make themselves attractive to prospective investors. Private sector partners and other intermediaries can help social enterprises to better understand what investors are looking for and to build the kinds of efficiencies attractive to investors without making compromises in service delivery.

“Financing this space comes with certain inherent challenges. It’s a completely different risk profile – For example, collateral is often less robust. We need to find ways to mitigate these challenges. We need partnerships to make the credit make sense.”

JULIUS TAPPER

Manager, Social Finance
TD BANK GROUP

RE-SHAPING THE NARRATIVE

“We need to make the notion of economic and social return part of the way we all do things.”

BILL YOUNG

President
SOCIAL CAPITAL PARTNERS

The expansion of the social enterprise ecosystem has meant that there is a more diverse set of players working on the shared goal of promoting community impact. This movement suggests a new narrative for the broader economy, one in which businesses consider not only financial return but also social impact and environmental sustainability for a stronger overall economy.

Finding common ground has the potential to strengthen cross-sector collaboration and build bridges across sectors to share tools and learning. There is concern that broadening the scope could result in a lack of focus and run the risk of diluting the resources and support available to enable not-for-profit social enterprise. This may also weaken the policy response needed to strengthen the ecosystem and social impact for the community.

The consultations provided strong consensus that in the interest of building a brand for social enterprise, and expanding market opportunities, there is a need to evolve this narrative and sharpen the message. The challenge lies in finding the message and brand that succeeds in building awareness and consumer support, while recognizing the diversity of the ecosystem and its needs.

Measurement tools and indicators will be critical in telling the story of social enterprise and expressing its value. Building the story of impact and change will require leadership from within the social enterprise space, and must draw on the diversity of perspectives in this space to be effective. This will be an important opportunity to engage those who feel they are at the margins of the social enterprise dialogue, and to begin building common ground across the ecosystem.

“We need to approach this through the lens of people who are not part of the economic mainstream. Metrics should reflect that – are people who would not normally get jobs, getting jobs and are they coping? Although these things happen at the margins they have to be at the centre of the conversation.”

PEDRO BARATA

Vice President, Communications and Public Affairs
UNITED WAY TORONTO

SECTION V: THE WAY FORWARD

“Social enterprises and those individuals strategically placed within the field should lead the way forward in order to ensure that change is meaningful and reflective of the innovative thinking that happens within the sector as well as the real needs of the sector. On a practical level, mechanisms to move the sector forward should not reside 100 per cent within government but be hybrid arrangements...”

TIM DRAIMIN

Executive Director
SiG NATIONAL

The consultations confirmed a strong consensus that in order to remain nimble, flexible and responsive to the needs of social enterprise, the leadership must come from within, but be enabled by government.

In order for the provincial government to become an effective partner they will need to find ways to support an awareness of the social and economic contributions of social enterprise, improve mechanisms for coordination and cohesion, provide impactful support to a range of approaches, and ensure inclusive access to resources and tools for a resilient environment.

SECTION VI

RECOMMENDATIONS

The social enterprise ecosystem is broad, diverse, and emergent. Whether “impact first” or “finance first” in their approach, social enterprises need support in generating revenue and achieving and demonstrating impact. Below are recommendations for a stronger partnership with the Ontario Government to advance those goals.

These recommendations will require the Ontario government to be an active and enabling partner with a diverse range of social enterprise stakeholders and leaders. The specifics of implementation however, require further development.

I. MOVE ON EXISTING OPPORTUNITIES

- Enable local procurement opportunities.
 - There are two immediate opportunities in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area: the 2015 Pan/Parapan American Games and Metrolinx. By building on learning from these opportunities, we can develop processes and mechanisms that support effective inclusion for social enterprise in public procurement processes.
- Leverage intangible unclaimed properties for community benefit.

II. STRENGTHEN THE INFRASTRUCTURE THAT SUPPORTS SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

- Provide access to business development support (including skills development) within the existing infrastructure, but focused and oriented on the particular needs of social enterprises.
- Support access to intermediaries that connect social enterprises to capital and help them in becoming investment ready.
- Support the expansion of social innovation through investment in innovation/ solutions labs, and dissemination and knowledge exchange strategies. Where social innovation has demonstrated success, support its ongoing sustainability.
- Develop legislation for social purpose businesses to support their ability to contribute effectively to the overall goals of a vibrant social enterprise ecosystem, but not at the expense of any other part of the ecosystem.

III. ENABLE CONNECTIONS ACROSS THE ECOSYSTEM

- Support a critical analysis and mapping of the social enterprise ecosystem in order to understand the organizational drivers, resulting strengths and weaknesses, and highlight particular needs and challenges.
- Deepen the connections within the ecosystem by creating mechanisms that connect stakeholder groups and reduce barriers for effective engagement in knowledge exchange, partnership and building opportunities for creating impact.
- Enable local coordination and build networks among social enterprises in order to create the necessary relationships with municipalities and local markets to enhance procurement opportunities.

IV. EVOLVE THE NARRATIVE

- Develop shared metrics that are meaningful to communities, demonstrate value and tell the story of impact.
- Build the brand for social enterprise, on a foundation of defined categories and common ground.



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ABOUT MOWAT

The Mowat Centre is an independent public policy research centre located at the School of Public Policy & Governance at the University of Toronto. The Mowat Centre is Ontario's non-partisan, evidence-based voice on public policy. It undertakes collaborative applied policy research, proposes innovative research-driven recommendations, and engages in public dialogue on Canada's most important national issues.

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