



**SFU**

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## Building Social Infrastructure: May 3, 2017, Presidents' Roundtable

### Aide-Mémoire

On May 3, 2017 Simon Fraser University and the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation's RECODE initiative co-hosted a Presidents' roundtable on "How can universities and colleges unlock and maximize their capacity to support the social infrastructure of Canadian communities?" A discussion paper was commissioned for the event and is available [here](#).

The paper sets out the case for post-secondary institutions maximizing their contributions to social infrastructure, and provides a typology of instruments that they can utilize.

Building on the paper, the roundtable provided an opportunity for discussion among presidents of Canadian post-secondary institutions in attendance, together with a small group of foundation representatives and thinkers. A full list of attendees is available in Appendix A.

### Highlights

Several themes emerged from the discussion:

- **This is already a robust field:** Participants agreed that there is already diverse and significant activity on campuses across the country (collectively referred to as 1,000 points of light) but a lack of a) specific Canadian frameworks for executing effectively and b) corresponding metrics that support measurement and strategic learning.
- **Student voice:** It was suggested that both the paper and the discussion would benefit from stronger student participation and student focus. It was also highlighted that a focus on students lends itself to data collection and measurement. Participants also agreed that increased intra-Canadian student mobility would benefit the post-secondary sector and the student experience.
- **This isn't about doing new things, but about doing things differently:** Notwithstanding important concerns about adding more responsibility and activities onto already very full plates, the group identified that effectively building social infrastructure entails integrating it into core business and current activities. EG: *Social* procurement. On a similar topic, the group identified the value in improving the rewards and incentives for activities currently underway so that it becomes part of institutional DNA. Having a diverse set of institutions working on these issues adds to its overall impact and credibility, brand value, and market competitiveness.

- **Importance of narrative building:** There was much discussion on the need to build new narratives on the importance of this work, the changing role of post-secondary institutions as community anchors, and the corresponding untapped value. Finding new ways to report on current activities (i.e. recognizing and celebrating what it is already being done) emerged as a possible starting point for communication. Additionally, the narrow economic focus of public discourse around 'public good' was identified as a potential barrier. In this regard, working with government to reframe the roles of post-secondary institutions was considered key.
- **Data, measurement and frameworks:** There was a wide-ranging discussion on the need to collect better data, the opportunity to do more with the data already being collected and the need for common frameworks and collective scorecards to better track progress and showcase momentum.
- **Tools & Resources:** Goodwill and intent are not sufficient to build social infrastructure; know-how and mechanisms are needed. Creating a forum or agency for best practices, and / or cataloguing current activities would be a helpful starting point and building block.
- **Importance of context and place:** Given institutions unique histories and circumstances, this work will be different in each institution and each community. A uniform approach risks diluting the value of the assets at individual institutions and diminishing overall impact. Balancing the tension between a pan-Canadian initiative with local variety and adaptation will be challenging but imperative.
- **Broadening out the discussion and diversity:** Building social infrastructure is a two-way street and follow-up has to include a broader range of stakeholders, including CAUBO, the Federation of Humanities and Social Sciences, CICAN, etc., community groups and municipalities. It was also highlighted that the paper would benefit from stronger reference to marginalized groups and inclusive practices. Effective partnerships will require capacity building.

## Next Steps

Participants indicated that they considered the work important and timely and were keen to explore practical steps to move some of the instruments, ideas and strategies forward. In light of this, participants agreed to do the following:

- Work with Universities Canada to table this topic as a discussion item for their October 2017 members meeting.
- Some people expressed interest in sharing the paper with their Executive Teams. If you would like additional printed copies of the paper please contact Chad ([clubelsky@mccconnellfoundation.ca](mailto:clubelsky@mccconnellfoundation.ca)).

Additionally, in light of the interests and concerns expressed during the Roundtable, McConnell and SFU are looking to work with partners to create a bigger platform to advance this work, broaden our thinking and energize our institutions. This includes:

- Hosting subsequent meetings with interested stakeholders to identify key opportunities and leverage points.
- Circulating a survey to determine which social infrastructure instruments hold the most potential for initial implementation.
- Preparing additional discussion documents.
- Developing online templates for scorecards and other shared frameworks to better collect, curate and share the data we already have.

The McConnell Foundation is also looking to collaboratively support collective post-secondary capacity to operationalize some of the instruments identified in the paper. This could include working with a pre-existing structure, initiative or organization, or, depending on need, capacity and partners, might necessitate creating a new platform.

**If your institution wants to continue to be involved please let us know\***. We will keep you up to date and share opportunities to take action. Equally, if you discussed the paper with your executive team, please share their feedback.

Thank you once again for your participation. It was a pleasure to host you in Vancouver and we look forward to continuing the conversation.

Andrew and Stephen

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## President's Roundtable on Social Infrastructure May 3, 2017

### Participants List:

1. Alaa Abd-El-Aziz President and Vice-Chancellor, *University of Prince Edward Island*
2. Ian Bird President and CEO, *Community Foundations of Canada*
3. Max Blouw President, *Wilfred Laurier University*
4. Jean-Paul Boudreau, Special Advisor & Executive Lead, Social Innovation, *Ryerson University*
5. Joanne Curry Vice President, External Relations, *SFU*, Rapporteur
6. Patrick Deane President and Vice Chancellor, *McMaster University*
7. David Docherty President, *Mount Royal University*
8. Tim Drainin Executive Director, *Social Innovation Generation*
9. Peter Englert President and Vice Chancellor, *Quest University Canada*
10. Stephen Huddart President and CEO, *J.W. McConnell Family Foundation*
11. Pari Johnston Vice President, Policy and Public Affairs, *Universities Canada*
12. Chad Lubelsky Program Director, *RECODE*, *J.W. McConnell Family Foundation*, Rapporteur
13. Mike Mahon President and Vice Chancellor, *University of Lethbridge*
14. Ross McMillan President & CEO, *Tides Canada*
15. Ralph Nilson President and Vice-Chancellor, *Vancouver Island University*
16. Roseann O'Reilly Runte President and Vice Chancellor, *Carleton University*
17. Andrew Petter President and Vice Chancellor, *Simon Fraser University*
18. Morris Rosenberg President and CEO, *Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation*
19. Alan Shepard President and Vice Chancellor, *Concordia University*
20. Coro Strandberg President, *Strandberg Consulting*, Discussion Guide Writer
21. David Sylvester President and Vice Chancellor, *King's College, University*
22. Shauna Sylvester Director, *SFU Centre for Dialogue* - Facilitator
23. Vianne Timmons President and Vice Chancellor, *University of Regina*
24. Daniel Weeks President and Vice Chancellor, *University of Northern BC*