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# NATVAC Roundtable - Building Social Infrastructure October 31, 2017

Aide Mémoire

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## Introduction

As part of NATVAC's annual meeting, Simon Fraser University, the University of New Brunswick and the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation hosted a **Roundtable discussion on University Administration Perspectives on Building Social Infrastructure**.

The session focused on the role of vice-presidents academic- individually, collectively and in collaboration with key partners - in **maximizing their institutional capacity** to build social infrastructure for and with Canadian communities. The discussion built on previous roundtables held by University Presidents during C2U Expo and at the October 2017 Universities Canada member meeting.

A overview document prepared for this meeting can be found [here](#) . For more context, a discussion paper had been commissioned as an input to previous discussions 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. If you would like printed copies of the paper to share with your executive team please contact Chad Lubelsky ([clubelsky@mcconnellfoundation.ca](mailto:clubelsky@mcconnellfoundation.ca)).

## Highlights

**1. Awareness / Current activity:** Most VPAs were aware of this work, consider it important and identified where and how they were doing it already. There was a spectrum of opinions vis-a-vis seeing social infrastructure as being very specifically about service learning and co-op while others saw it as a suite of activities that could encompass multiple facets of a University. There was general alignment that the real questions are not “if”, but “how” and “how much”.

**2. Value Proposition:** There was broad recognition that social infrastructure is very much part of the contemporary social contract and accountability expectations. At the same time, there was concern that this might be mission creep, and that schools run the risk of promising civil society more than can be delivered. The importance of setting expectations that are realistic and to recognize that investments in social infrastructure could come at the expense of other priorities was highlighted.

**3. 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.

**4. Value of Metrics and Frameworks:** Having a shared framework to identify, measure and benchmark this work was identified as a key need in order to move this work forward. The Ashoka Changemaker Campus framework was mentioned as being useful for inventory taking and self-reflection for the campuses that have been through the process.

## Possible questions VPAs could ask for moving forward

- Are we giving this the priority, recognition and visibility it deserves? Is this an important question for us to be asking?
- Should this be a priority we place emphasis on when we hire faculty and staff?
- Should this be a priority when we look at curriculum and student experience?
- How can we better recognize what we are already doing internally and externally? Is this important to us?

## What can the VPA office do to move this forward?

- Recognize a broader definition of service in tenure processes.
- Have dedicated personnel to advance social infrastructure on campus.
- Recognition of applied research that receives credit in collective agreements.
- Creating more programmatic opportunities for students.
- Include it in strategic directions that already exist (eg: sustainability and indigenization).

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## Next steps

Participants indicated that the roundtable was an excellent opportunity to collectively talk about what universities can do to advance social infrastructure. In light of the interests and concerns expressed during the Roundtable, McConnell, SFU and UNB are looking to work with partners to **create a bigger platform** to advance this work, broaden our thinking and energize our institutions. We will therefore be hosting subsequent meetings with interested stakeholders to identify key leverage points and needs.

If your institution wants to continue to be involved please let Chad know ([clubelsky@mcconnellfoundation.ca](mailto:clubelsky@mcconnellfoundation.ca)). We will keep you up to date and share opportunities to take action.



