AN EVALUATION OF THE LABWISE INITIATIVE

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1. Preface

This report describes the findings, conclusions and recommendations of an evaluation of the LabWISE program. This initiative, which ran from mid-2016 to late 2017, aimed to strengthen the capacity of social innovators to employ a Social Innovation Lab approach to address tough problems in their communities.

The participants, facilitators and sponsors of the LabWISE program make up the report's primary audience. They wanted an opportunity to reflect on the activities, learnings and results of the program as well as to surface some options for additional capacity -building efforts in the future. However, the findings of the evaluation may also be interesting for other social innovators, funders and Lab designers interested in the emerging field of change labs as another "tool" for social innovation.

2. Background

"Change Labs" are becoming an increasingly popular way for people and organizations around the world to address complex social, economic and environmental problems. While there is a wide variety of models of change labs being utilized globally, they all share a number of basic features:

- A commitment to engaging diverse stakeholders in order to give them a voice on issues that affect them, benefit from their insight and enhance their ownership of the issue and possible solutions;
- An emphasis on understanding the systemic factors underlying complex issues using a variety of innovative techniques (e.g., system mapping, ethnographic research, etc.); and
- A focus on employing experimental techniques to surface, develop and test promising solutions.[1]

While much of the early development of Change Labs occurred in Europe, United States and Asia, a number of made-in-Canada approaches have recently emerged. Among them are:

- the Social Lab, developed by REOS Partners
- the Co-Lab, based in the Government of Alberta
- the MaRS Solutions Lab in Toronto

The Social Innovation Lab (SI Lab) is one of the new Lab models. It was developed by practitioners and academics from the Waterloo Institute for Social Innovation and Resilience (WISIR), under the leadership of Dr. Frances Westley, and partially tested in the field with the MaRS Solution Lab and the Rockefeller Foundation in an initiative to improve employment prospects for vulnerable youth.

[1] This distillation of Change Labs is informed by the work of Zaid Hasson on social labs. Retrieved from: https://social-labs.org/slr/

While the SI methodology is informed by many of the existing Lab models, it is unique in two ways:

1. In addition to employing a variety of unique techniques (e.g., the Nemesis exercise), it is organized around a set of foundational ideas that have emerged from decades of research into the dynamics of social innovation. Four features stand out:

    - It seeks to change the systems that underlie complex issues.
    - It works across multiple scales of a system.
    - It emphasizes seeking out "windows of opportunities" for change.
    - It focuses on encouraging people to seek out multiple innovations, rather than a "silver bullet."

2. The SI Lab methodology is one of the most well-documented Lab models in the field, providing would-be Lab facilitators and participants with a detailed description of key ideas, phases, activities and techniques.[2]

The LabWISE Training Program, supported by the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, is designed to build the capacity of participating organizations to employ a Lab approach in their work. The immediate goal of the program is to provide SI Lab training and coaching to a team of Lab Stewards, and enable them to facilitate a rigorous and effective SI Lab-informed process in order to tackle a complex social challenge in their organization or community. The long-term goal of the program is to develop the personal and institutional capacity of practitioners to use Lab processes to address complex challenges beyond the Lab they currently are working on, share the methodology and program learnings with others, and (possibly) form the nucleus of an eventual community of practice devoted to SI Labs.

A team of coaches and facilitators supported Lab Stewards through the initial three phases of the SI Lab methodology: initiation, research and workshops. The program was designed to run concurrently with a community Lab process, so that the knowledge and training can be applied in real-time, accompanied by coaching support. A list of the Lab participants is provided in Table 1.

The program had three main phases. Each comprises a formal training component and a coaching component to support the application of the concepts/training received in a real-time Lab process.

1. Full Lab Process Overview and Preparation for Research and Engagement Phase:

- Training: Overview Lab methodology session (October 19 - 22, 2016)

  3.5-day session for Lab Stewards (lead organizers and facilitators) to build an in-depth understanding of the end-to-end WISIR SI Lab methodology. Participants will learn the

[2] See: https://assets.rockefellerfoundation.org/app/uploads/20150610111553/10_SILabGuide-FINAL-1.pdf

concepts and system perspectives that frame the process as well as the details for applied practice. Includes specific orientation to the first phase, the research phase.

- Coaching:

  Coaching provided by Lab research experts to support Lab Stewards in the application of the concepts in the Lab research and preparation phase. Research, including identification of full Lab participant lists, will take place over approximately five months (November 2016 - March 2017).

2. Debrief Research Phase and Preparation for Lab Workshops Phase:

- Training: 2-day Lab planning and facilitation session

  Return for 2-day training to debrief on research phase and prepare for facilitating a series of SI Lab workshops.

- Coaching:

  Coaching provided by Lab facilitation experts to support Lab stewards in the facilitation of a series of three workshops over a 5-month period.

3. Debrief Workshops Phase and Preparation for Lab Implementation Phase:

- Training: 2-day Lab implementation planning session (late August 2017)

  Return for 2-day training to debrief on workshop phase and prepare for SI Lab implementation

- Coaching:

  Coaching provided by Lab facilitation experts to support lab stewards in the facilitation of first stage implementation of strategy/outputs from Lab workshops over 4-month period (September - December 2017).

Table 1: Summary of Lab Teams

Seven Lab teams from across Canada **fully participated** in the LabWISE program, including exploratory discussions with the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation staff and LabWISE teams, attending each of the face to face workshops, applying LabWISE methodology in their work, and connecting with LabWISE teams and participants between workshops . They are:

- UVIC Water Governance Lab: co-created water governance policy in B.C.
- Edmonton Shift Lab: addressing racism and poverty in Edmonton.
- Alberta Eco-Trust | Blue Thumb Lab: new watershed stewardship in central Alberta.
- Winnipeg Poverty Reduction Council: Employment for Indigenous youth.
- United Way Toronto York Region: addressing employment inequity in vulnerable neighbourhoods.
- Trudeau Scholar, University of Toronto | Food Waste Lab: improving urban food systems and waste reduction in Toronto.
- Winnipeg Boldness: to improve socio-economic outcomes for children in a Winnipeg neighbourhood.

In addition to these fully participating Lab teams, there are also five groups of observers from Lab teams interested in Labs who **partially participated** in the programs. This includes participating in the first workshop and periodic contacts with LabWISE teams. They are:

- McGill University
- Arthritis Society
- Red Deer College
- National Theatre School
- Pearson College

A few organizations participated in the first workshop in Vancouver, but **decided to withdraw** due to changes in organizational leadership and/or because their teams determined that the they were not ready to pursue a lab process or training at this time:

- Mount Royal University – withdrew in November 2016 due to internal pressures to focus on key internal alliances and related activities, necessary conditions required to launch future Lab efforts.
- Dechinta University – withdrew in November 2016 due to shifting priorities resulting from the emergence of new funding, which required immediate attention.
- Quest University – withdrew in March 2017 in order to focus on deeper community engagement, coupled with shift in campus leadership.
- Telanet Center for Innovation Peace - withdrew in September 2017. Returned to work in the initiation phase, in order to develop deeper relationships and direction with First Nation stakeholders.

3. Evaluation

The purpose of this assessment is to better understand the experiences, outcomes and reflections of LabWISE participants (i.e., Lab Stewards, LabWISE Team and funders) in order to inform possible follow-up activities to the program. Some potential options are:

- develop resources that Lab Stewards can share directly with their peers.
- embedding LabWISE learning through other mechanisms (e.g., Innoweave).
- the development and participation of a community of practice.
- new programs to build capacity of social innovators to design and deliver labs, including one focused on specific groups (e.g., post-secondary organizations).

The six major questions explored in the evaluation are:

1. Which factors shape how participants experience the program and SI Lab methodology?

2. What did we learn about the SI Lab methodology?
   - What parts of the methodology worked well (and not so well) for whom, in what context and why?
   - What are the patterns across diverse Lab contexts?

3. What did we learn about the LabWISE program?
   - What parts of the program worked well (and not so well) for whom, in what context and why?
   - What are the patterns across diverse Lab contexts?

4. What were the outcomes of the program?
   - What internal shifts did participants experience in the process (e.g., new insights, confidence, commitment to act, relationships)?
   - What parts of the SI Lab methodology did Lab Stewards apply in their Lab work?
   - What were (if any) the results of applying SI Lab methodology in their work?

5. What new insights have emerged about the role, design and delivery of Labs (the SI Lab methodology and beyond) as structured processes to address tough problems?

6. What questions and/or recommendations do Lab participants have for future efforts to strengthen practitioners' capacity to design and deliver Labs to tackle complex issues?

The evaluation team, comprising Mark Cabaj (Here to There Consulting Inc.) and Jake Wildman-Sisk, employed three methods for gathering and analyzing data to answer these questions:

1. A review of program documents, including proposals, workshop materials, and after-workshop reports.

2. An on-line survey of 20 questions with 36 participants and members of the facilitation and coaching team.
3. In-depth phone interviews with 12 representatives of Lab teams and eight coaches and facilitators.

The strength of the evaluation design is its use of multiple methods, which results in richer and diverse insights into the evaluation questions. The major limitations include: (a) carrying out the evaluation part-way through the program, which means that participants were unable or unsure about providing feedback concerning the still-unfolding program or their still-emerging Lab projects; (b) the preliminary analysis of the survey does not include cross-tabulation analysis, which examines how various sub-groups experienced the program differently. The latter limitation will be addressed before the final report, and is somewhat offset by the findings of the in depth interviews.

4. Findings

This section summarizes and analyzes the findings of the evaluation. It is organized in four sections:

- Participant Reactions to the LabWISE initiative
- Applications of Methodology
- Progress on Complex Issues
- General Reflections on Labs

4.1 Participant Reactions

This section explores how participants reacted to the LabWISE initiative. This includes an exploration of the factors that shaped their experience of the initiative, as well as a summary and discussion of their feedback on the SI methodology and the program.

4.1.1 The Role of Context

The facilitation-coaching team made it a priority to recruit a wide range of Lab teams to the program: participants represented diverse groups working in varied institutions and communities and on different issues. “We wanted to see how the methodology and program worked – or did not – in different settings,” noted one member of the facilitation team.

The diversity of contexts has had a strong influence on how participants experienced the program and the SI Lab methodology. For example, some participants from a post-secondary institution were more interested in learning more about the SI Lab methodology in the hopes of employing Lab methods on some to-be-determined topic. Their experience was very different from that of a team of Lab stewards who came to the program to work on burning issues in the community, such as water quality, racism or food security. Table 2 lists some of the more important factors shaping participants’ involvement in the program.

Table 2: Context Matters

Factor	*Effect on Program Experience*
Intent of Participation	Participants with "burning issues" for Lab attention tended to find the program more immediately relevant and useful than those exploring the SI approach as a possible methodology to improve internal processes or an approach for future use.
Experience of Participant Team	Participants with more experience in the Labs and social innovation niche were more comfortable with picking and choosing the most useful elements of the SI Lab methodology. They also were more satisfied with the overall program than those relatively new to the field who often sought more complete, less flexible approaches. Experienced participants also were more concerned with situating Labs within larger set of change methodologies (e.g., social justice, collective impact).
Authority of Participant Team	Participants with full authority or confidence of their lab partners were more able to fully participate in the program and apply insights to their Lab work. Those with less authority or support were more likely to be cautious, and to spend time keeping their Lab network up to speed.
Stage of Lab	Groups that were already in operation before the program were more apt to pick and choose the elements of the SI Lab methodology that worked for them. Those starting up were more likely to follow SI Lab methodology more closely.
Availability of Resources	Participants with access to sufficient resources were able to move more quickly to implementation and/or broad application of SI Lab methodology than those with limited resources.
Sponsoring Organization	Participants were shaped by the culture, decision-making processes and risk-tolerance of their convening or sponsoring organizations: post-secondary, community organizations, foundations, etc.
Ethno-cultural Community	Participants working in Indigenous communities were (sometimes very) concerned with the limited understanding of Indigenous worldview, knowledge and practices contained in the program design and SI Lab methodology.
Nature of Complex Issue	Participants addressing process issues (e.g., governance) found some of the SI Lab methodology techniques (e.g., computer modelling) more difficult to apply than those working on issues (e.g., food security).

Diverse contextual factors have had a variety of effects on the program. On one hand, the diversity contributed to a rich learning environment. "The huge variety was a real plus for me because I saw Lab work from so many different angles," reported one interviewee. This sentiment was echoed by other participants. On the other hand, the diversity made it more difficult for the program facilitators-coaches to successfully accommodate learning styles, expectations, and examples. As one survey respondent noted:

I think the tone and mood of participants has been challenging at times (mostly in the first workshop) but was the consequence of having so many people at different stages of a Lab process. A number of people seemed to be seeking out evidence of the worth of Labs […] as opposed to just being open and trying to learn what it is and how to do it better if they are running one. As most of those people self-selected out of the process by the second workshop, the tone shifted immensely from my perspective, and even seemed more collaborative across the Labs themselves.

In the third and final workshop in October 2017, one Lab team member likened the process of designing and adopting the LabWISE program to building a Swiss army knife, which "does a number of different things tolerably well, but is not designed to do any one thing extremely well."

While intensity of these design and delivery challenges diminished after the first workshop, after several groups decided to withdraw from the program, the challenge of trying to accommodate such a varied set of expectations continued right up until the end of the initiative in October 2017.

4.1.2 The LabWISE Program

Despite the challenges that diversity presents in creating a program that works for everyone, Lab participants and coaches have largely positive reactions to the LabWISE program. Survey respondents and interviewees identified a number of strengths and limitations of its various elements. See Table 3.

Table 3: Summary of Feedback on LabWISE Program

	Strength	*Limitation*
Program Criteria	Simple, coherent and relevant for the Labs in general, and LabWISE program in particular.	Unevenly or loosely applied in targeting and screening participants.
Pre-Workshop Engagement	Useful to introduce people to provide general overview of Labs and the program; very useful for helping people to assess their readiness or fit for the program.	Sometimes targeted to senior decision makers, not always participants; some unintended pressure to participate because of encouragement of the Foundation; sometimes abstract.
Workshop Design & Delivery	Informative; good tone/mood, spirit of inquiry, and time for interaction; a good opportunity for people to connect with and learn from other Lab stewards.	A sense for some that the pace and intensity was "overwhelming"; less time for lecture, with more time for exercises.
Facilitators	Provided high-quality presentations, stimulated peoples interest, gave clear instructions, were well prepared, managed tensions, and held peoples' attention.	Did not always relate ideas to real life situations; uneven quality or levels of expertise; often "too academic."
Coaches	Knowledgeable, responsive, easy to access, and offered useful advice.	Unevenly used; did not always have required expertise.

Resources	Appreciate the resources invested into creating the LabWISE program.	Insufficient to expect participants would fully implement the SI Lab methodology.
Applied Learning	The idea to match program to the real time development of Labs created a sense of immediate relevance and urgency to the program.	The program and Lab teams' efforts back home were largely out of sync due to the complexities and diversity of Lab start-ups.

The interviewees mentioned that the facilitation-coaching team was responsive to feedback and flexible in adjusting the workshops and coaching model. This was evident in how the team adapted the Winnipeg session based on the feedback to the Vancouver session, and included a site visit, more time for interaction, and greater inclusion of Indigenous perspectives and practices.

4.1.3 SI Lab Methodology

The majority of participants had positive reactions to the SI Lab methodology, including (a) the content in the WISIR SI Lab Guide; (b) the elements presented in the two workshops; and (c) the support offered by coaching. Table 4 records the highlights of their feedback.

Table 4: Summary of Feedback on SI Lab Methodology

	Strength	*Limitation*
History of Labs	Helpful, useful to understand the foundational ideas under Labs.	Not as interesting or helpful for some participants; did not include Indigenous approaches or contributions to social innovation.
The Four Key Ideas	Strong support for developing Labs that focus on systemic responses to complex issues, working across scales, looking for windows of opportunity, and encouraging a range of innovations, rather than "silver bullets."	Often felt abstract or theoretical to practitioners.
The Four Phases	A general sense that initiation, preparation, workshops and field testing by and large were useful ways to organize a Lab.	Difficult to assess for groups still in the early phases; a sense that the SI Lab methodology encourages one-time initiatives, rather than multiple iterations.
Methods	An interest in many of the techniques, with Nemesis Exercise being the most popular, followed by Wicked Question, Horns of the Dilemma; sample workshop agendas used by multiple participants.	Widely shared opinion that computer modeling workshop was ineffective; some exercises need adaption to different cultures (e.g., the Nemesis Exercise may be culturally inappropriate in some communities).

The SI Lab Guide and facilitator-coach team appear to have struck a "roughly right" balance between encouraging participants to systematically follow and use SI Lab methodology, and flexibility in adapting the approach to their unique context. **Almost everyone interviewed felt that members of the facilitation-coaching team clearly and consistently encouraged program participants to customize the SI Lab methodology to their context**. Yet, when asked about the extent to which they felt that that methodology itself was too tight, too loose, or just right, over one-half (54%) reported it was just right, with less (approximately 30%) reporting that it was "too rigid" or "too loose." These opinions reflect the personal preferences of participants. One said, "When you are new to something like Labs, you want as much of a recipe as you can get, even if deep down you know that your situation is too unique to get something useful off the shelf like that. So, if you are looking for a perfect fit, it can't help but feel inappropriately prescriptive." Another participant, with a long history in multi-stakeholder initiatives, noted, "Give me a fire hose of ideas and explanations of how you think they should be used: I can make the choices about what to use and how myself." S/he and two other participants suggested ways to expand the SI Lab Guide, including more examples of the Lab in action with more techniques and guidelines on if, when and how to use them.

LabWISE participants provided additional ideas for improving the SI Lab Methodology and LabWISE program during the third program workshop in Edmonton in October 2017 (Table 5).

Table 5: Additional Recommendations for LabWISE SI Lab Methodology & Program

Area	*Recommendations*
Context to the SI Lab Methodology	• A description relationship of Labs to other social change and innovation techniques (e.g., social justice, collective impact). • An exploration of the alternatives to Labs when they are not appropriate and/or when to wind down a Lab. • More explicit statements about the need to adapt the Lab to different contexts and a discussion of what are "realistic" timelines for Lab implementation.
Communication & Formatting	• Stronger emphasis on plain – versus academic – language. • The use of short videos to introduce modules, concepts and tools.
Additions to SI Lab Methodology	• The dynamics and issues related to power in the development, implementation and evaluation of Lab initiatives, particularly in relation to gender, LGBTQ, Indigenous issues. • More Lab examples: i.e., Labs that have "epically" failed; Labs from other countries; examples of social innovation from Indigenous contexts. • A broader set of techniques from similar/complementary approaches (e.g., Art of Hosting, The Power of Liberating Structures, MaRS Solutions Lab, In With Forward)
Program Implementation	• More time to apply concepts and techniques in between Lab training sessions. • More time for peer feedback.

New Capacity Building Elements	• The creation of an ongoing Community of Practice with other Lab practitioners. • Expand access to people with expertise on specific topics (e.g., fisheries, homelessness, racism). • Development of an "on-line" resource kit with various tools and techniques.

4.2 Application of LabWISE Methodology

Mid-way through the program, LabWISE teams have managed to **apply** some of the SI Lab **ideas and methods in their own practice**. Nearly two-thirds (59%) reported that they had employed only a few concepts and ideas in their work, while nearly 30% reported employing "a lot" (29%) or "all of it" (9%). The primary reasons that participants give for not applying the practices more broadly are: (a) they have not yet had the opportunity to do so (often because of the early stage of their Lab) (58%); (b) they lack sufficient financial (19%) or human resources (19%); and/or (c) because some of the ideas and methods are not directly related to their work (19%).

The program is **influencing participants' overall approach** to Labs. Fifteen percent of respondents reported that it had a powerful influence on their Lab; one-third (34%) reported that it had some influence; and nearly one-in-five (19%) say it had a little influence. Only 7% reported that it had no influence at all so far. Given that survey respondents included some participants who decided not to pursue a Lab after the first workshop, the percentage of program completers who experienced some to powerful influence is likely to be higher.

Participants also report a dramatic increase in their **confidence** in designing and delivering a Lab. This includes a doubling in the percentage of participants who reported that their confidence was good or very good (from 26% to 50%) and a 75% reduction in the percentage of people who rated their pre-Lab confidence as poor or very poor (a drop from 52% to 13%).

4.3 Progress on Complex Issues

It is too early to assess the extent to which participation in LabWISE has helped Lab teams make **measureable progress on the tough issues** they brought to the program. The majority of teams have either elected not to start a Lab at this time or are in still in the development phase.

4.3.1 Prototypes

Despite the fact that most Lab Stewards are still in the development phase, three of the groups have managed to produce prototypes:

- The participants of the Shift Lab (Edmonton) produced three prototypes to address the intersection of racism and poverty that are now being further developed with community partners.
- The organizations in the Food Security Lab (Toronto) have produced five prototypes, three of which are proceeding to more fulsome prototypes or pilot projects.

- A signature project of the Blue-Thumb Lab (Red Deer) appears to have had a modest impact on an important provincial policy related to water management.

It is important to note that the Shift Lab and Blue Thumb Lab were in the process of developing prototypes before the LabWISE program fully began.

4.3.2 Defining Success

Participants surfaced important questions about the **definition of success** in a Lab. Several argued that improvement on the status complex issue (e.g., better water quality, reduced racism, enhanced food security) is a central measure of success, but that by itself is too narrow to represent all the benefits yielded by Lab processes. Instead, they argued it was also important to include a variety of capacity-building outcomes as well. These include (a) increased community awareness of an issue; (b) new insights about the nature of the challenge and how it might be addressed; (c) new and strengthened networks, partnerships and trustful relationships in the community, particularly amongst people that have not worked together before; and (d) a sense of confidence, commitment and momentum to continue to move forward. "You really need to look at it like a **multiple bottom-line**," noted one participant.

Next, several participants were careful to point out the dangers of unrealistic expectations or progress. Specifically, they noted that it was inappropriate to expect "magical solutions," "guaranteed" and/or "breakthrough results," particularly within a first year or even the first Lab. "I think we are expecting too much of Labs," noted one experienced social innovator, "and I fear many people will drop them altogether if their unrealistic expectations are not met." "They are just another tool," explained another, "not a magic bullet." Yet a third reflected, "I think sometimes you have to run multiple Labs before you start to uncover transformational ideas … it may not happen right away or in your first Lab."

Mid-way through the program, LabWISE teams have managed to apply some of the SI Lab ideas and methods in their own practice. Nearly two-thirds (59%) reported that they had employed only a few concepts and ideas in their work, while nearly 30% reported employing "a lot" (29%) or "all of it" (9%).

4.3.3 Unintended Outcomes

Participants also pointed out the possibility that Labs could unintentionally produce **negative outcomes** as well. "I think that Labs can lead to some unwelcome results, such as some participants feeling disrespected or disempowered by the process, or certain innovative ideas or policy proposals could increase the polarization on the issue in the broader community," noted one participant with experience in community development. "I have seen change processes where people get disappointed because they do not see meaningful progress and it becomes extra hard to keep them engaged over the long term," noted another. A third noted, "An innovation is not good or bad, it's just new or innovative: you could actually pick a prototype or

new idea that makes the problem worse, like a social marketing campaign to increase the public support on an issue that backfires and gets people all riled up." Any evaluation of a Lab process, therefore, should seek to capture both intended and unintended outcomes.

4.3.4 Satisfaction with Progress

Despite the longer-than-anticipated time to get Labs off the ground, the majority of participants reported that they were **satisfied with the progress of their work**. Two thirds were either very satisfied (20%) or somewhat satisfied (44%), while the remainder are either uncertain (28%) or dissatisfied (8%). Interviewees identified a variety of barriers to moving more quickly with their work, including the time and energy required to mobilize resources and leaders and to work through the activities and Lab phases. As one participant noted, "No matter how much people don't like hearing this, it takes time to make things like this to work in the real world."

4.4 Overall Satisfaction with LabWISE

Overall, the majority of participants reported that they were very **satisfied** (55%) or satisfied (29%) with the LabWISE **program**, while 16% were uncertain about their level of satisfaction. Nearly 70% of the respondents would definitely (29%) or probably (39%) recommend the program to the colleagues, with the remaining 32% reported "maybe." Some of the factors that influenced participants' willingness to make a recommendation were: (a) whether they feel that the colleague is ready for the program; (b) the nature of their complex challenge and its suitability for Lab; (c) what might be offered in a future LabWISE program; and (d) the Lab participant's level of satisfaction with the program after its completion.

4.5 Reflections on Innovation Labs in General

Some program participant identified questions that they had about Social Innovation methodology that relate to the emerging field of Change Labs overall.

4.5.1 Clarify the Role & Niche for Labs

While the Change Lab is a promising new approach to tackling complex issues, it is only one of many approaches in the field of social change. This surfaces questions about the role and niche of Labs in a more comprehensive approach to tackling tough problems:

- How can Labs be employed as part of (or alongside) other approaches to social change, such as social justice initiatives, grass roots community development, collective impact efforts, policy advocacy?
- When is a Lab a good fit for a complex issue? When can it be counterproductive?
- What kind of results can be reasonably be expected through a Lab?

4.5.2 Go Deeper

While the general elements of Change Labs are becoming clear, there are number of deeper questions about the design and implementation that participants felt were not fully addressed in the program (and possibly amongst other Lab practitioners). These include:

- Are Labs meant to be one-off initiatives or platforms for multiple cycles of system analysis and experimentation?
- How can Labs prototype social – rather than technical – interventions?
- What are the minimum specifications– key processes, skills and resources – that must be included in the Lab in order for it to be successful?

4.5.3 Explore Scaling

Most innovation Labs appear to focus primarily on the upstream process of social innovation. This includes using participatory processes to develop a deeper understanding of the systemic nature of complex issues as create experimental initiatives to surface, test and adapt promising solutions. This raises the following questions:

- Should Labs also systematically facilitate the downstream process of scaling successful experiments? What are the arguments for and against extending the scope of the Labs to include scaling?
- When should an innovation be scaled? What are the criteria?
- How can Labs help social innovators scale their successful experiments?

4.5.4 Improve Evaluation

The process of evaluating LabWISE program uncovered a number of different insights and questions that can be useful for evaluating Labs in general:

- What are the different types of key results to emerge from Labs (e.g., progress on the issue, enhancing community capacity)?
- What is a reasonable expectation for the pace and scale of outcomes?
- How can Lab evaluations seek to track both intended and unintended outcomes?

4.5.5 Expand Investment

The specific successes and challenges faced by LabWISE stewards in securing and managing resources for their own Labs represented the larger questions about how to create a more supportive eco-system of investment in Canada. These questions include the following:

- What kinds of resources are required to ensure Labs are successful?
- What are the sources of such resources, both in terms of types (e.g., in-kind, financial) and source (e.g., government, non-profit, academic)?
- What types of administrative practices strengthen and weaken Labs? (e.g., accountability, timing of disbursements, procurement practices)?
- What types of resources currently exist to invest in Labs? How can they be expanded and made more accessible?

5. Conclusions

While the evaluation of the LabWISE did not include a post-program follow-up assessment of participants' reflection, activities and results, the evaluation findings at the end of the program are clear enough to draw a number of conclusions about the program as well as the SI Lab methodology.

5.1 LabWISE helped participants build capacity.

Participants reported that they gained new knowledge and confidence about if and how to employ Lab ideas and practices in their work.

5.2 LabWISE 2.0 can be strengthened.

This was a first iteration of the program, and participants and facilitators-coaches surfaced a number of major and minor recommendations that can inform the next iteration of the LabWISE program and/or other capacity-building measures.

5.3 The SI Lab methodology is relevant and useful.

While the program was not a fulsome "beta" test of the SI Lab methodology (this would require participating groups to agree to implement the entire SI Lab methodology over a longer period of time) participants are largely supportive of its main concepts, phases and practices and are employing many of these in their work.

5.4 The SI Lab methodology can be improved.

Lab participants and stewards provided a number of useful and reasonable suggestions for how to upgrade the model currently laid out in the Lab Guide.

5.5 The LabWISE is a contribution to the field of social innovation.

Many of the insights and questions surfaced about the LabWISE program and SI Lab methodology (e.g., What are minimum specifications for a Lab?) are relevant to the emerging field of Change Labs in Canada and beyond.

6. Recommendations

This section provides a number of recommendations on how to improve the SI Lab methodology, the LabWISE program, and emerging field of change labs.

6.1 The SI Lab Methodology

6.1.1. Upgrade Format

The next iteration of the SI Lab Guide could be restructured to include (a) a smaller up-front guide focused on the general ideas and phases of the Lab, and (b) a larger set of appendices which include (even more) SI Lab tools, with additional insights on if and how they might be used, with examples of their application where and when possible.

6.1.2 Expand Content

The next iteration of the SI Lab Guide could be expanded to cover the issues or questions that were not (fully) covered in the current edition. Some of these are other experimental methods beyond prototypes; evaluation; and material related to scaling successful experiments. It might also include a review of if and how Labs might be part of – or work alongside – other change processes, such as social justice initiatives, collective impact, etc.

6.1.3 Clarify Minimum Specifications

The next iteration of the SI Lab methodology should include some recommendations on which parts of the model are considered "minimum specifications" and which areas are open to local variation. This includes which elements of the methodology are core to the approach (e.g., framing the complex issues, select workshops) and which elements are open to variation (e.g., use of the Nemesis Exercise). This description would also include some suggestions about the minimum budget and skill set required to carry out a Lab.

6.1.4 Include a Greater Diversity of Examples

The next iteration of the SI Lab Guide and workshops should include more examples to illustrate key concepts, phases and techniques of the SI Lab methodology. Many of these can be drawn from the experiences of the LabWISE team, as well as the experiences of LabWISE participants. There should also be an effort to include case studies from the international experience and Indigenous communities.

6.1.5. Embrace Diverse Cultural & Indigenous Perspectives

The next iteration of the SI Lab Guide (and capacity-building sessions) should be designed in a way that integrates the diverse perspectives, knowledge and practices that exist in Canadian communities, with a special emphasis on Indigenous people. This might include embedding such paradigms and approaches into (a) the content of the SI Lab methodology, (b) the design of capacity building workshops and coaching, as well as (c) guidelines on how Lab practitioners can acknowledge and work with such diversity in their own labs.

6.2. The LabWISE Program

6.2.1 Seek Fit-for-Purpose Design

The multi-purpose design of the LabWISE program was useful for testing a wide variety of issues about the program and SI Lab methodology with a diverse group of people and organizations. This was a very useful and learning-rich way to proceed with the first iteration of a program.

The next iteration of LabWISE should consider employing a tighter fit-for-purpose design. This means settling on a clear intent and target group, and then designing workshops, coaching, resources and program timelines that "fit" that purpose. For example:

- Intent of Program: Is it general capacity-building or beta test of SI Lab methodology?

- Target Group: Is it to be open to any group interested in Labs or targeted to (a) specific organizations (e.g., post-secondary), (b) specific issues (e.g., water quality, poverty), (c) community (e.g., Indigenous), or (d) region (e.g., western Canada)?

A fit-for-purpose design surfaces the possibility of multiple combinations of intent and target groups, each with their own design implications. A program to build the capacity of post-secondary institutions, for example, would look very different from one designed to more fully test the SI Lab methodology for groups trying to reducing homelessness. Both would differ significantly from a program designed to develop a Lab model that reflects the content, world views, and approach of Indigenous communities living in urban communities. (See diagram, next page.)

Fit-for-Purpose: An Example

Interviews were held with representatives of post-secondary organizations that participated in LabWISE. These interviews surfaced a number of ways in which the program could be customized to reflect the context of universities and colleges. Some of the suggestions from participants include:

Involve Students

- "It would be ideal to involve students in this process…. That would open up funding for me that I can't get if it's just training for me and my colleagues."

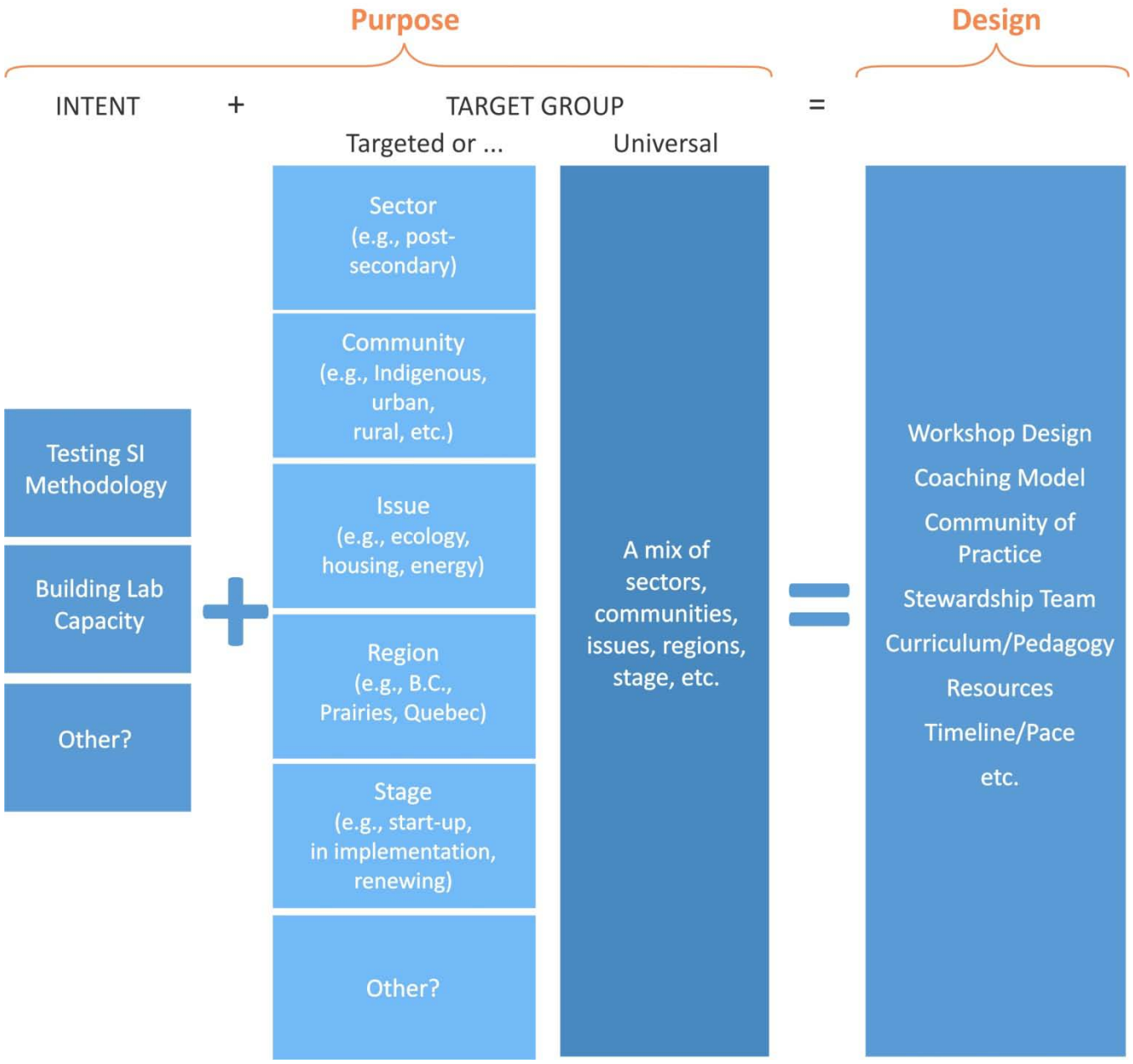
Align with Academic Rhythms

- "How can we embed or align Lab processes into [annual] academic planning cycles and research initiatives?"
- "If I am going to get a student to help with research, I almost need to know the year before so I have time to recruit, engage and prepare them."

Develop A Lab Specific Research Program

- "How do we create a research program based in social innovation?"
- "The academic literature on Labs is quite low, beyond what Francis [Westley] has published. We can participate in this. There are SSHRC grants for community-based research, so why not for Labs?"

Diagram: Fit for Purpose Design



6.2.2 Target Lab Facilitators versus Lab Teams

Future capacity building efforts should consider targeting Lab Facilitators rather than Lab Teams. This suggestion is based on an observation by Frances Westley about the manner in which Developmental Evaluation (DE) was introduced into Canada.

> *If you look at the way that Developmental Evaluation emerged in Canada, it was introduced by having Michael Quinn Patton train promising Developmental Evaluators working on real projects, using a community of practice model. They improved their skills, engaged a lot of organizations in DE, and helped further develop the methodology, which Michael then continued to develop over time. Now, Canada has large network of good Developmental Evaluators. The key was building the capacity of evaluators, facilitators and trainers, rather than organizations using DE. If we built on this lesson, that means we'd target Lab facilitators for capacity-building over the longer term, not specific lab groups working on specific Lab initiatives.*

The advantage of focusing on Lab facilitators is that the capacity which they develop is more likely to be fully developed and broadly used over time in multiple Labs. By contrast, Lab teams eventually may only complete one Lab.

6.2.3. Integrate Skills Development

Future capacity-building efforts could complement the knowledge-building emphasis of the program with a stronger skills-building component. Its purpose would be to help participants apply the ideas and methods in practice. "I get the main ideas," mentioned one participant in an interview, "but I need to develop the capacity to employ them. I have never facilitated prototyping or systems mapping before." There are a variety of ways to do this, including a greater use of applied learning techniques, such as Lab participants developing a systems map or prototype together.

6.2.4. Add Pre & Post Program Coaching

Future capacity-building efforts should provide would-be participants with formal coaching before the program. This would include an introduction to the Lab process and support to assess the fit of a Lab to their work and their readiness to undertake a Lab. Post-program coaching would assist participants with the ongoing challenges of implementation, adaptation and evaluation.

6.2.5 Establish a Community of Practice

Lab participants expressed a great appreciation of peer-to-peer learning in the program. Future capacity-building efforts therefore could include a more intentional focus on facilitating a community of practice (CoP) for the purpose of building capacity and Lab models. It would involve hosting periodic, face-to-face events (e.g., shared teleconference calls, bilateral meetings) among former and future Lab teams.

6.2.6 Expand Financial Resources

The next iteration of the LabWISE program could pay greater attention to helping Lab participants secure sufficient resources to explore, develop and implement a Lab. Many Lab participants reported that they were spending more time than they expected mobilizing resources to launch their Lab while others felt that they were implementing a relatively weak Lab because they lacked the resources to do a more fulsome job.

6.3 The Field of Innovation Labs

6.3.1 Share the SI Methodology and Evaluation

The LabWISE team and sponsors can contribute to emerging field of Change Labs by disseminating the SI Lab methodology and evaluation of LabWISE through the various networks focused on social innovation in Canada, the United States and beyond.

6.3.2 Compare Lab Models

While the emergence of different lab models in Canada – e.g., MaRS Solution Lab, Co-Lab, Social Innovation Lab, Social Lab – offers practitioners a wide range of choices about which approach to choose, it provides them little guidance about which approach – if any – they should choose. The sponsors and Lab team of the LabWISE program could work with practitioners of other Lab models to more systematically compare the similarities and differences of each other's approach, assess their relative strengths and limitations, and clarify the conditions under which each approach would be useful or not. Not only would the product of such an effort be useful to on-the-ground practitioners, the process might surface ways that advocates of each approach could improve their own model.

6.3.3 Build Shared Practices

The LabWISE evaluation surfaced a number of practice gaps in the SI Lab methodology that *may* well represent gaps in other Lab models. Some of these include:

- The different approaches to prototyping, particularly less-technical, more social innovations,
- The questions, methods and indicators used to evaluate Labs, including prototypes specifically, and Labs in general,
- The options for integrating Indigenous ways of knowing and change processes (which are critical to use in Indigenous settings) enrich the Lab approach, and contribute to the work of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in Canada,
- The different types of functions, roles and expenses for Labs that help practitioners begin to develop budgets for the work.

The specific priorities of a shared practice building agenda could emerge from some of the activities described in 6.3.2.

6.3.4 Strengthening the Eco-System of Investment

The Lab Stewards and sponsors can help improve the eco-system for investment into Labs by co-commissioning research and discussions on the topic with other existing investors in Labs on the topic. Obvious candidates are affiliated groups (e.g., Community Foundations of Canada, United Way-Centre-Aide of Canada, Philanthropic Foundations of Canada, Canadian Environmental Grantmakers Network) and agencies from different levels of government who run or invest in Labs (e.g., Department of Energy in Alberta).