

LEARNING FROM OUR FIRST YEAR

WHAT WE LEARNED ABOUT SOCIAL
INNOVATION LAB PROCESSES IN
ADDRESSING COMPLEX CHALLENGES

Proudly supported by:



The Edmonton Shift Lab is based in amiskwaciwâskahikan on Treaty 6 territory, traditional meeting grounds for the Cree, Saulteaux, Blackfoot, Dene, Nakota Sioux, Métis, and Inuit.



edmontonshiftlab.ca/

Proudly supported by:



skillsociety.ca/action-lab
ecfoundation.org

SHIFT LAB

The Edmonton Shift Lab is a social innovation lab convened by the Skills Society Action Lab and the Edmonton Community Foundation, which built on the initial research of EndPovertyEdmonton on poverty and racism in Edmonton. From the outset, a guiding principle of the Edmonton Shift Lab was that the lab was going to generate prototypes of solutions, learn from the journey, share what worked and share what needs to be changed and adapted. This report captures the learning from the first year of the Edmonton Shift Lab.

Addressing racism and discrimination continues to be identified as a critical piece of the puzzle in how we reach the big goal of ending poverty in a generation in Edmonton. Building on the work of many local initiatives, the diverse collective making up the Edmonton Shift Lab is stewarding an exploration to develop potential service, policy, system and community action prototypes that will help reduce racism as it contributes to poverty. We want to be bold and explore how to Shift ideas. Shift attitudes. Shift systems and Shift into new ways of solution finding with community.



Celebrating our launch at the Intercultural Centre with 150 community members



Core team testing prototype themes with industry

“Aboriginal people, immigrants and refugees experience discrimination in workplaces, housing, services and facilities that exclude them from opportunities and put them at risk of poverty.”

EndPovertyEdmonton Strategy 2015

Core team in the early days getting to know each other

OUTLINE OF THE JOURNEY OF THE 4 KEY GROUPS OF THE SHIFT LAB COLLECTIVE

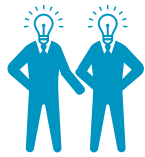
Designed by Melissa Bui

JUNE 2016 AUGUST 2016 DECEMBER 2016 APRIL 2017



ADVISORY

Leaders with hands on levers in key systems



CORE TEAM

Diverse team tackling challenge



STEWARDS

Lab designers, facilitators, adapt process to emergent learning



COMMUNITY CAMPFIRES

Interface with community

POST LAB

Evaluation, Reports, Prototype development

After the end of the lab sessions, the Stewards and Core team continued with a few streams of work:

1. Led by Mark Cabaj: interviews of lab stakeholders to inform developmental evaluation of the lab process and outcomes

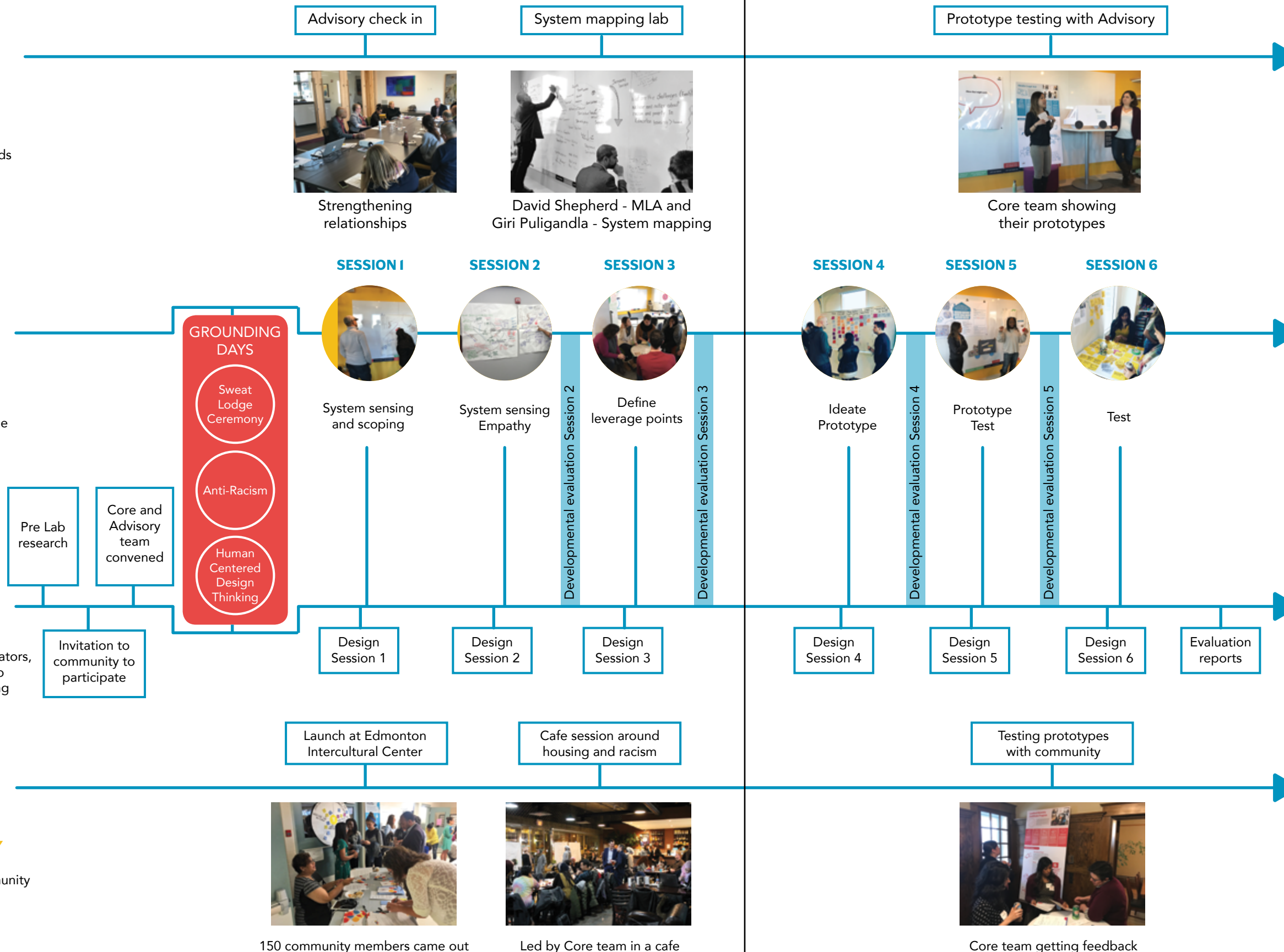
2. Evaluation and feedback on what worked well, less well, and what needs to be different for Shift Lab 2.0

3. Continued prototype development: all three prototypes had enough positive feedback to continue testing, development, and piloting. There is on-going work to incubate the prototypes.

Design Shift Lab 2.0 based on Developmental Evaluation and Feedback

Shift Lab Stewards have begun designing the next phase of the Shift Lab.

As of February 2018, the pre-lab research phase for Shift Lab 2.0 has begun. The Stewards are sifting through feedback and are designing another robust lab process that will go deeper into the complex problem and will yield another portfolio of prototypes that strive for systemic impact to address racism in Edmonton and possibly beyond.



150 community members came out

Led by Core team in a cafe

Core team getting feedback

WHAT WE LEARNED ABOUT SOCIAL INNOVATION LAB PROCESSES IN ADDRESSING COMPLEX CHALLENGES



Ben
Weinlick



Jodi
Calahoo-Stonehouse



Aleeya
Velji



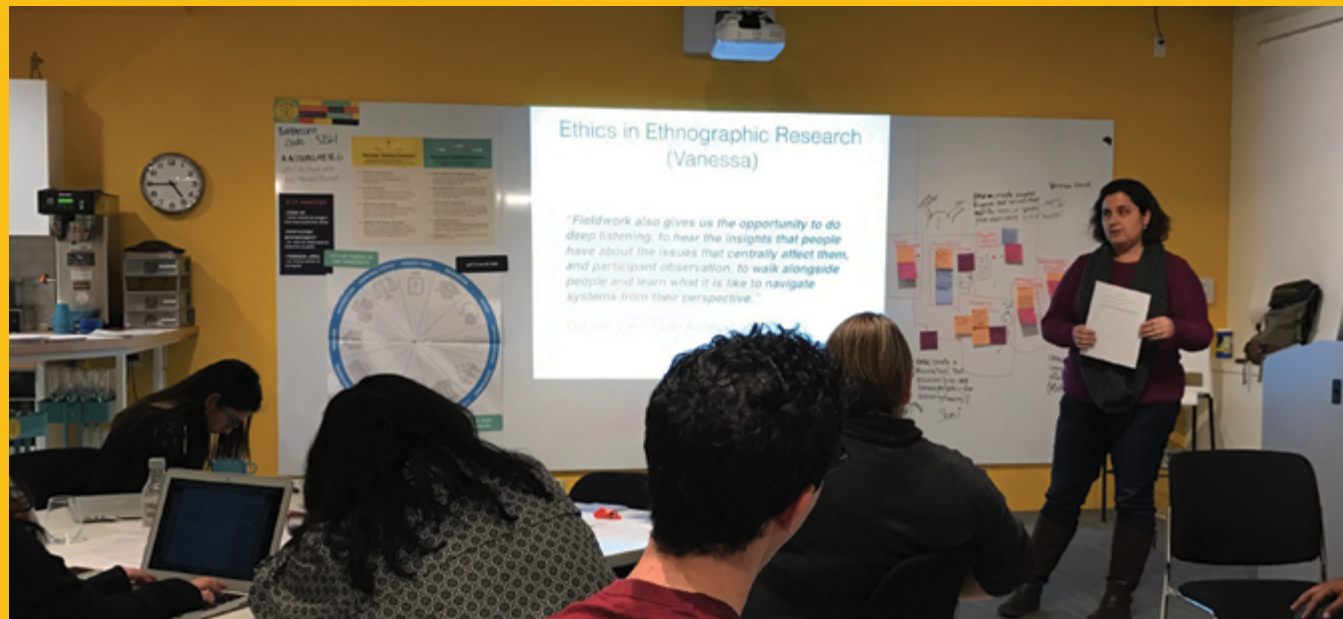
Ashley
Dryburgh



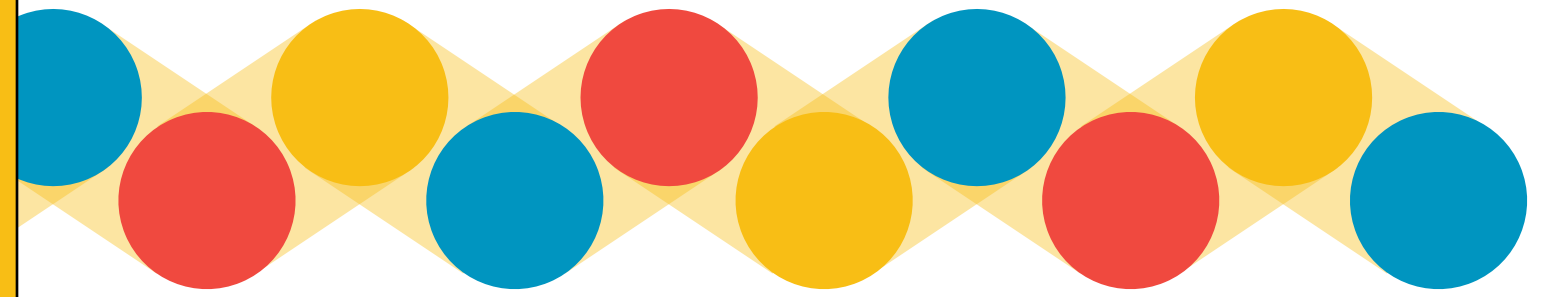
Sameer
Singh

Stewarding a social innovation lab is an emergent and adaptive process. Labs require agility and adaptability to be inclusive and responsive. Balancing the needs and perspectives of stakeholders while maintaining the process of a lab is quite complex and tricky to navigate. Nevertheless, designing and facilitating a

social innovation lab can lead to important learning and practical interventions that have potential for positive impact. Here we share the Stewardship team's learning from the first iteration of the Shift Lab's social innovation lab process.



Core team member and anthropologist Vanessa de Koninck sharing ethics considerations in ethnographic research



CREATING SPACE FOR EMERGENT LAB ROLES

Careful consideration went into what knowledge, diverse experiences, skills and balance of privilege and power would be required to support a successful social innovation lab. In addition to the four teams making up the Shift Lab collective, we learned over the course of the journey that we had to adapt and make space for other necessary lab roles. These included:

Developmental Evaluator Role

Developmental evaluation was vital to capture learning and help adapt to emergent feedback. We brought on Mark Cabaj, a locally based, world renowned developmental evaluator. The value of a developmental evaluator supports innovators in being responsive to emergent feedback and in balancing individual lab member learning with learning from the system being explored.

Graphic Designer

Mid-way through the lab exploration we learned that it is easy to lose key learning in an iterative process. We realized we required visual ways of capturing knowledge artifacts to help communicate complex ideas. We brought on a graphic designer, Molly McMahon, to help share the story of the lab. As the lab progressed, and because of Molly's stellar systems and design perspective, this role developed to the point where she worked with each prototype team to help visualize their prototype concepts.

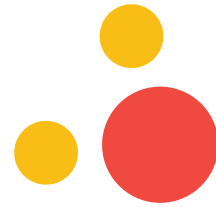
Research Broker Role

We learned that for the next Shift Lab iteration, an embedded research broker role will help to increase research rigour and help teams to both connect and respond to existing approaches and knowledge in the problem domain. We see this research broker role being almost like a librarian who can help to find articles related to a research area and synthesize the findings into digestible information for lab participants.

Mediator for tough conversations

In tackling a deeply personal and messy topic such as racism, privilege and power are at play in conversations and stewardship of the process. We heard repeatedly that the Core lab team wished they could have dug deeper into difficult conversations. In the future we think a mediator lab role will help when conversation tensions get tricky to navigate. A mediator role would also help keep power and privilege in check and maintain healthy relationships amongst core team.

THE ROLE OF POWER AND PRIVILEGE IN A LAB



Talking about the intersection of racism and poverty is messy. Stewarding a collective to find leverage points in a system around which to prototype is also messy, not only due to the complexity of the system but because participants bring their own experiences, biases, and preferred familiar ways of problem solving to the lab. Conversations, suggested ideas, and solutions were not just weighed on their utility, but by the degree of power and privilege held by the person suggesting the idea. This meant that it was quite tricky to unpack “truths” about racism and find common ground to design prototyped solutions around. In general we learned that it is important for all lab participants -- Stewards and Core team alike -- to strive to question our assumptions and biases and how deeply our mental models influence how we see potential solutions in system.

What we did to strive to address power and privilege:

Convene with diversity in mind: A strong effort was made to convene diverse Stewardship, Core Lab, and Advisory teams with a wide range of ethno-cultural backgrounds as well as other diversity markers (including class, age, sexuality, and gender).

Adapt to feedback: The Stewardship team strove for honest feedback and changed workshop plans to meet both the design process needs and the emergent needs the Core team identified.

Participant observer role: Each workshop, a Core team member would volunteer to be a participant observer. This person’s job was to observe the interactions of everyone in the lab and report back at the end of each session as to how well we embodied the Lab’s guiding principles as well as to make suggestions for improvement for subsequent sessions.

Rigorously test suggested solutions: A social innovation lab should not create solutions in isolation. Neither should a lab create prototypes with the expectation that they will be adopted just because they are fancy or look and sound nice. A lab has to be willing to throw a prototype away if it’s not meeting needs. As such, the prototypes underwent three rounds of initial testing. To test prototypes, the Core team did an amazing job presenting them with humility and a willingness to be challenged. The teams tested the prototypes with each other, with the Advisory team, and then with the greater community, refining the prototypes after each round of feedback. Currently, the teams are exploring further testing with people with context/lived experience.

What we are going to do next time:

- Create more space and time for lab participants to step out of the design process, voice what’s on their minds, what’s not sitting well and explore how implicit biases and power could be influencing workshop insights and outcomes.
- Enlist a mediator to explore tough conversations
- Engage in more grounding days for the teams around power and privilege
- Clarify who holds power in decision-making related to lab activities

NARROW THE CHALLENGE SCOPE IN THE PRE-LAB PHASE

It was a conscious decision by the Stewardship team at the outset of the lab to not narrow the scope of the lab beyond the intersection of racism and poverty. We heard that our scope would have more legitimacy if it was decided in consultation with people outside of the Stewardship team. However, experience demonstrated that it was a mistake to start with such a large scope in the time we had available. We either should have engaged in broader consultation before beginning with the Core lab team or given ourselves more time for the lab process. Social innovation labs often carry the hopes of a community that there is a magic formula or process to solve very big and complex challenges in a short amount of time -- sadly, this is not true. In our experience, we found that the scope of the lab needs careful consideration and conversations need to be had with the stakeholders connected with the lab to manage expectations.

What we learned to better scope a challenge for a social innovation lab:

Explain the tension: People and community without much experience with social innovation labs will often want to apply a lab approach to a very broad challenge. Explain that the broader challenge, the greater the need for time and resources. Also explain that if the scope is too narrow and specific, systemic root causes of complex challenge can be missed.

Pre-Lab Research: A major factor of the Pre-Lab research phase is to identify promising signals and leverage points in the system being explored. There are typically three avenues to explore to uncover these signals: consult with the wider community to surface key assumptions about the challenge, gather learnings from organizations, community groups, and others who are already working in the challenge area, and explore papers, books, journal articles, case studies, and other research about the challenge domain.

Right Scope, Right Lab participants: One of the great values of a social innovation lab is how they can positively harness the creativity and valuable experience of a diverse collective. Labs strive for diverse perspectives not only because it will help balance power, but also because better ideas emerge if lab participants don’t all think the same way or are from the same domain. As narrower scope leverage points are identified in the pre-lab phase, a stewardship team is better equipped to find the right mix of perspectives and expertise. There needs to be a mix of people with domain expertise and fresh, new perspectives.



GETTING THE RIGHT MIX OF LAB PROCESS METHODS

We knew from the outset of the Shift Lab that we wanted to use human-centered design (HCD) as our underlying process coupled with systems-thinking tools. This aligned with our commitment to running a social innovation lab, which try to strike a balance between design thinking and systems thinking. However, due to time constraints, we leaned a built more heavily toward design methods. Design thinking allowed teams some insight and empathy into people's needs and pushed the teams towards designing tangible prototypes in a very limited timeframe, but the downside was the process pushed participants to begin creating prototypes from a limited number of insights, which meant that it was harder to know if prototypes were robust enough to get at systemic root causes.

What we are going to do next time:

- We will adapt our HCD process to be more robust and develop more strategies, techniques, and tools that are the roughly right mix of methods for the next iteration of the lab to go deeper.
- We began to integrate Indigenous ways of knowing and sense-making in Shift Lab I.0 and want to increase this. What would it look like if we weaved together Indigenous epistemologies with design thinking and systems thinking? Stay tuned to find out!
- We will create more time and space for design methods, ethnographic research, systemic thinking, reflection and constructive tension and debate among lab members.



Team learning and practicing prototyping and co-design

TRIANGULATING DATA AND INSIGHTS

A key aspect of social innovation labs are the insights that are uncovered. These insights are a vital piece to inform the development of prototypes. Insights are typically generated from two sources: the lab process and prototype testing. Good lab process help teams to find insights in both unlikely and likely places and should help teams make informed decisions around what to do with the data/insights that emerge. Design thinking and systems thinking have slightly different processes for uncovering insights. Design thinking focuses on ethnographic research with people who are struggling with a challenge or system in order to find out how to design interventions that will meet users' needs. Systems thinking methods often involve a group of stakeholders collectively identifying and mapping a systemic problem in order to both uncover leverage points for creating interventions and to reveal the mental models and biases of the group.

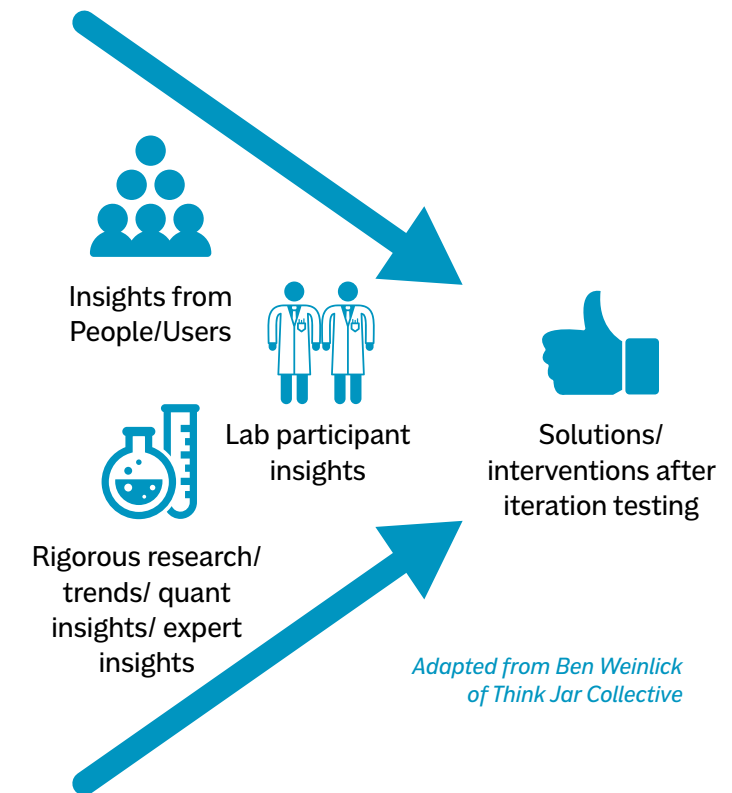
What we Learned

Design thinking and systems thinking methods for generating insights both have their strengths and flaws: design thinking is limited by the skills of the ethnographic researchers and how "deep" they can go and mainly focuses on users needs rather than all system players, whereas systems thinking doesn't usually produce rigorous data and the insights can be difficult to explain to those who were not a part of the insight-generating exercises (for example, systems maps are almost incomprehensible to anyone other than those who created them).

Insights from design and systems thinking methods mainly come from people's intuition after hearing stories from field work, listening to expertise, or having conversations and mapping the heard, felt, and sensed system challenges. These intuitive insights are deeply important and valuable, AND they need to be triangulated with rigorous data insights.

What we are going to do next time

- Hire a research broker to help align data insights with ethnographic and systems insights
- Continue to improve how the Shift Lab generates and triangulates insight data in order to more rigorously check the balance between intuitive insights, evidence, and whether interventions are addressing systemic root causes.



Adapted from Ben Weinlick of Think Jar Collective

GRAPPLING WITH LAUNCHING PROTOTYPES ONCE TESTED

The Shift Lab was fortunate to have an innovative funder (Edmonton Community Foundation) as a partner who wanted to not just invest in a lab, but also help in getting tested prototypes off the ground. It is quite rare for social innovation labs to have support for launching prototypes and is key for impact.

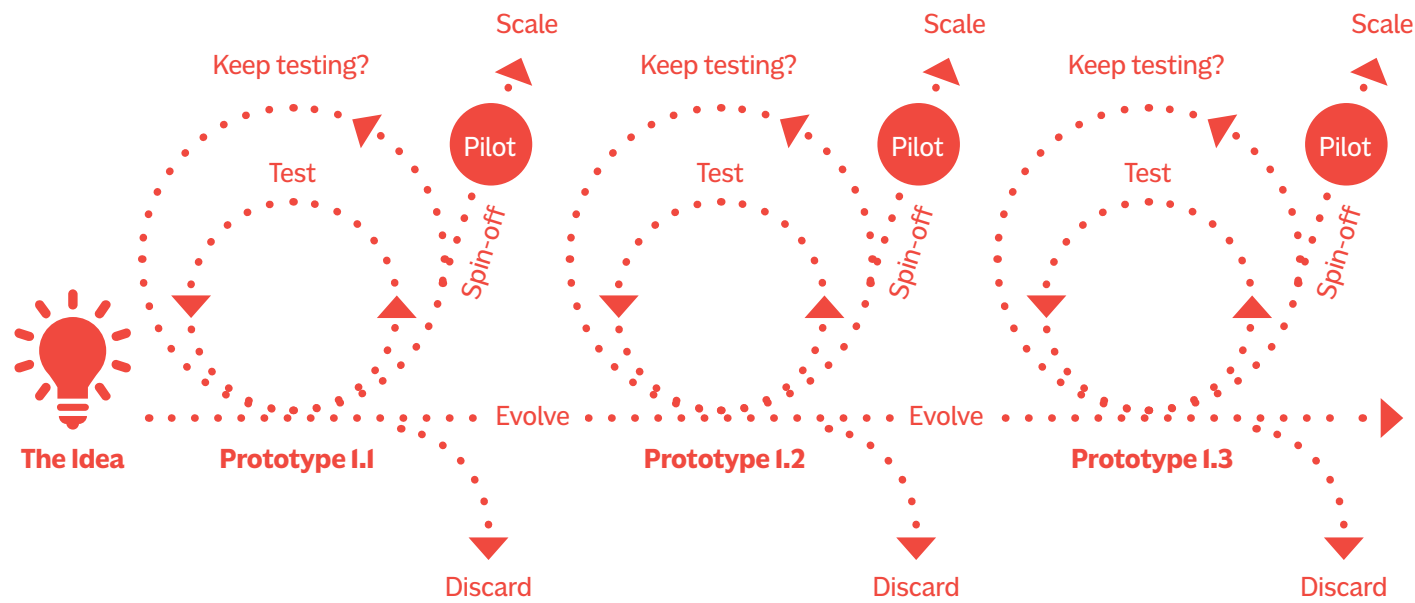
Social innovation labs throughout the world struggle with the “who, what, and how” when trying to roll out prototypes. Often a stewardship or convener team doesn’t have the capacity to project manage each developed prototype, create business models, or go out into community to pitch an intervention to stakeholders or networks who might adopt it. The Shift Lab continues to want to break this trend and

do some field building to uncover better patterns and pathways to support the launch of social innovation prototypes.

By the end of the first iteration of Shift Lab, the Core team developed prototypes to a point where they had enough testing and feedback to decide that each could go to a deeper stage of incubation. At the end of the Lab Exploration phase, questions arose in the Stewardship team around how to best support prototypes to launch. It became apparent that there wasn’t a one-size-fits-all approach for prototype support; each team had different needs and capacity to further develop their interventions.

The Prototyping Process

Courtesy of Mark Cabaj



3 TEAMS, 3 PROTOTYPES, 3 INCUBATION PATHWAYS

At present, there are three ways Shift Lab is supporting further incubation of prototypes after Shift Lab I.0:

Self Starters: One team wants to further develop their prototype on their own and is undertaking further testing and looking for ways to launch a pilot.

Embedded Hosts: One team has a member deeply embedded in a racism and diversity training organization and is looking at stewarding a feasibility study and deep testing of their prototype with the community their organization serves.

Warm Hand-off: The last team has already won an award through a city data innovation event and a community organization approached the team to see how they might take on their prototype as a supported pilot.

Promising signals around supporting prototype development after a lab exploration:

Consider where and who might be best to implement

It is often assumed that social innovation lab collectives will also implement promising prototypes, pilots, or interventions that emerge from a lab process. We want to keep in mind that this might not always be the best way forward, as often a lab team is not necessarily the right group to adopt and implement an intervention. We are also mindful of who the intervention serves, and who in the challenge domain ecosystem might be a good champion to steward a pilot.



Core team presenting and testing their prototype at a community campfire session

Consider readiness factors for organizations piloting an intervention

If an organization is deemed to be the best steward of a pilot, the lab team will need to consider the culture and readiness of the organization to adopt and roll out an intervention. There is a need to consider how the intervention will disrupt business as usual approaches of the organization and what is needed to safeguard the implementation process.

Consider how insights will be passed on

Once the initial lab exploration is finished, it can be tricky to hold on to the insights that were generated. If the plan is to hand-off the prototype to another partner for development, it might be wise to include some members of the original prototype team in order to not lose knowledge and insights. If the original prototype teams will continue to develop the prototypes, establish a way for them to access the archive of materials from the lab exploration.

Consider it might be better to have smaller implementation teams

With implementation, smaller teams seem to be better for sorting out details and having agility. As Stewards we are considering how to balance keeping the previous lab collective informed and engaged in some way while ensuring implementation teams are not too unwieldy.

What are we going to do next time:

- Consider how to balance supporting the development of the first round of prototypes with developing Shift Lab 2.0 and new prototypes
- We will continue to experiment with models of prototype implementation. For example, we may explore developing a living lab model that can grow the lab participant group to be responsive to the topics in which the prototypes are built upon. This model can support how we develop a distribution system for prototypes that are produced in the lab. We will continue to learn, be inspired by, and draw from many social innovation labs across the globe.



Core team member Noelle Jaipaul sorting feedback on her prototype

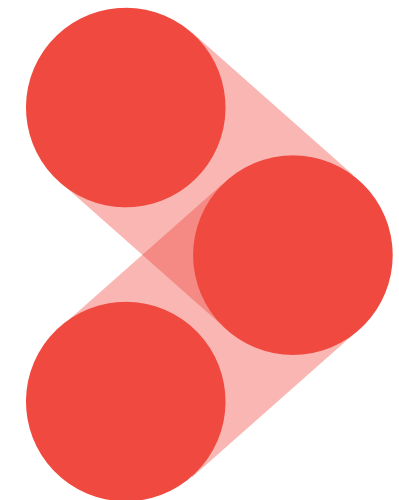
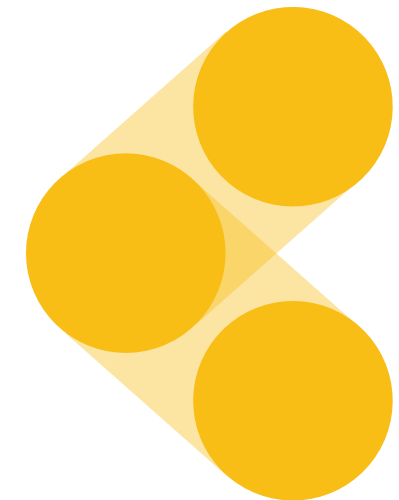
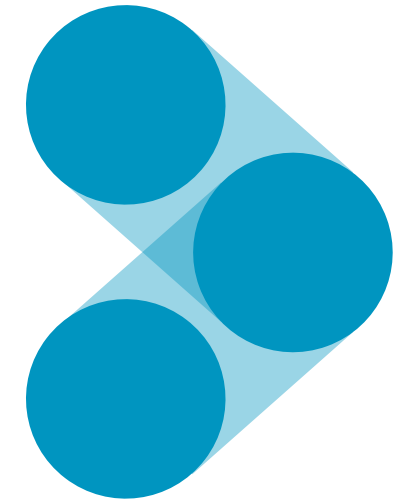


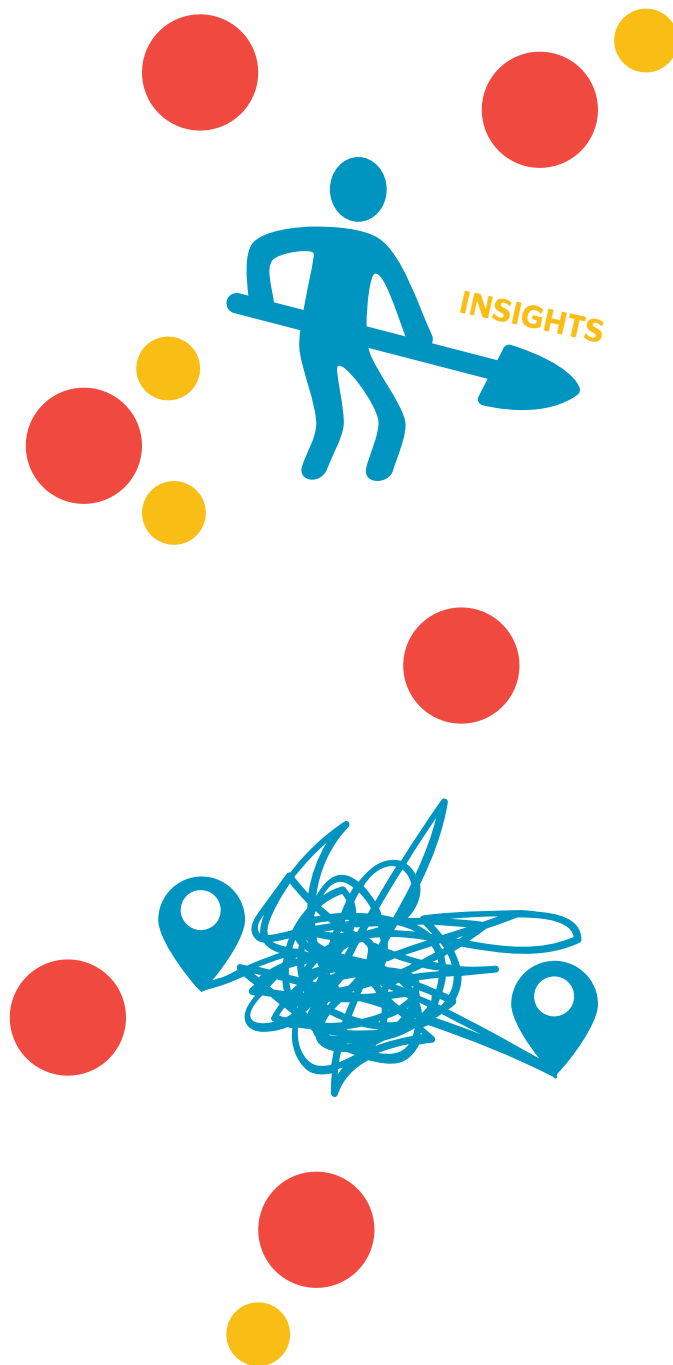
Near the end of Shift Lab 1.0 relationships deepened and were key to success

THE PARADOX OF CO-DESIGN

Co-design is a process wherein potential solutions are generated with insights and input from users/people with lived experience of the challenge and who will be impacted by or using potential solutions. Co-design is often misunderstood as a method that enables people with lived experience to design and create innovations and systemic delivery systems that support themselves and others. Social innovation labs are in the process of figuring out how to steward authentic, ethical, and meaningful exchanges with the people a social innovation lab is trying to support while designing solutions that keep the biases of lab explorers in check, so that solutions actually work for people.

Often when people first learn about social innovation labs and the concept of co-design, they rightfully get excited that work will be done to listen to the too-often forgotten voices of people with lived experience of a complex problem domain. While the excitement around co-design is well placed, what is often missed is that good solutions require multiple perspectives and insights from all stakeholders in a system, including those who might traditionally be viewed as antagonistic to the perspectives of people with lived experience. In the case of the Shift Lab, the Stewards do not come from traditional design education backgrounds, but from education and experience in social justice and human rights approaches to systems change. The notion of co-designing solutions with the most marginalized is deeply aligned with our values and human rights advocacy. As Stewards, we understood that power is unbalanced in systems and too often the voice of lived experience is missing from solutions in business-as-usual approaches to problem solving. It was tricky balancing this commitment with the knowledge that we needed to hear from multiple perspectives, particularly in a problem area like racism which has a long history of well-intentioned (but misguided) interventions by people with power. Shift Lab 2.0 is going to further explore this tension.





What's Positive about Co-design

- Can help with keeping biases and assumptions of designers/lab explorers in check
- Strives for deeper input and insights from people for whom a potential solution is intended to support
- Acknowledges that good ideas can come from anyone and anywhere in a system
- Often more engaging community consultations than simply conversations. More interactive consultations can lead to deeper insights about what is needed

What's Tricky about Co-design

- Can be interpreted as design by committee, where more value is placed on ensuring everybody contributes to a solution rather than whether a contribution addresses the challenge being tackled
- Can place a large burden on marginalized people to not only identify what isn't working in a system, but also to generate systemic solutions
- Moving beyond tokenistic engagement of people with lived experience
- Ethics and ensuring that people with lived experience that help design solutions are fairly compensated for involvement and are not subjected to "over researching."
- Navigating co-design efforts with humility to help ensure lab leads keep power and privilege in check

As we move forward into Phase 2 of the Edmonton Shift Lab we are thinking about these complex dynamics and will share back how we work with the paradox of co-design.

In many ways, the Edmonton Shift Lab was an experiment: is a social innovation lab a useful tool for a problem as complex as racism? What is the right mix of processes, people, and resources? We have learned an enormous amount over the past year and look forward to uncovering new insights about racism in Edmonton, about labs, about prototypes and about scaling for systemic impact.



Want to be involved?

There are a number of ways to support and be involved with the Edmonton Shift Lab.

- Do you want to be a champion or host of one of our current or future prototypes?
- Are you a funder interested in exploring how to scale either the Shift Lab process or one of the prototypes?
- Do you work for an organization who is interested in connecting with us for some ethnographic research?

- Interested in participating as a Core team member?

If you answered “yes!” to any of these questions, get in touch: info@edmontonshiftlab.ca

To keep an eye on what we’re doing, check us out online (www.edmontonshiftlab.ca) or on Twitter (@YEGShiftLab).



MAKING
SHIFT
HAPPEN.