

The background of the page features a large, stylized leaf pattern in a lighter shade of teal. The leaves are arranged in a cluster, with some overlapping, creating a sense of growth and interconnectedness. The overall aesthetic is clean and modern, with a focus on natural elements.

Forging the missing link: New evidence towards building capacity for a robust Social R&D ecosystem.

A Mitacs research report.

| Summer 2020

About the Social R&D Fellowship:

The Social R&D Fellowship was a multi-year effort to seed an ecosystem of supports for social purpose organizations (SPOs) looking to boost their ability to conceive of and develop better programs, services and products via research and development (R&D).

The Fellowship focused on building a community amongst practitioners, funders and policymakers; developing more clarity on the R&D practices emerging across SPOs in Canada; and introducing key assets that would accelerate the growth of this field.

Led by practitioners, and hosted by Social Innovation Generation from 2015-2017, and then McConnell Foundation and Community Foundations of Canada from 2018-2019, the Fellowship's work began with the *Social R&D Declaration to Action* and ended with the launch of *Employment and Social Development Canada's Investment Readiness Program: Social R&D Ecosystem Mobilization Initiative*.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Study Participants:

We would like to extend a sincere thank you to all of the frontline staff, program managers, and executive directors who voluntarily agreed to take part in this research. We value your experience and insights, and are inspired by your commitment to better serve your communities.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Canada's social impact sector is driven to deliver social and environmental benefits and increase wellbeing. Comprising a blend of charities, nonprofits, foundations, public sector and for-profit entities, the sector dedicates countless hours and spends billions of dollars per year to improve outcomes.

Despite this investment, too few social and environmental change efforts are seeing sufficient gains: from youth homelessness and food insecurity in cities, to economic reconciliation and the transition to a low-carbon economy. The COVID-19 crisis is only amplifying the systemic issues that were already in place, exposing the sector to heightened demands and new operating conditions. To respond, governments, organizations and individual practitioners must devise new ways to tackle the root causes of the problems we face.

THE MISSING LINK

This report summarizes the results of a Mitacs sponsored study by the Social R&D Fellowship and McGill University to generate new evidence towards growing capacity for research and development (R&D) within social purpose organizations.

R&D refers to a number of inter-related practices that when done well, uncovers new knowledge and creates solutions that can prove radically more efficient and/or effective than current approaches.

R&D's specific value in a social context is that it activates research that informs and shapes the development and delivery of better services, which in turn stimulates more research; and the cycle continues. Other sectors (health, education, digital technology, etc.) have long since understood the importance of supporting this linkage between research and practice. When implemented in a social impact context, an R&D function - however it is structured - has the potential to dramatically boost the outcomes of social impact efforts.

If we consider social science research on its own; it is primarily funded through and generated in academia. Frontline social purpose organizations may engage in improving and developing services largely without funding, while meeting their core funded service delivery requirements. Although the research generated in academia would inform the improvement of services, the two poles - research and practice - are insufficiently connected given our current challenges. This is where R&D is highly relevant: it's a reliable way to close this missing link.

Following breakthroughs in establishing a practitioner community and accelerating shifts in the policy and funding environment for social mission R&D (e.g. additional visibility, legitimacy, and funding), a solid foundation is now in place to grow Social R&D work beyond the early adopters.

THE RESEARCH:

This study included five research streams to support the identification of high potential pathways for Social R&D capacity development, including: literature scan, R&D capacity building environmental scan, R&D capacity needs survey, structured interviews with R&D capacity building intermediaries, and field visits.

THE FINDINGS:

There have been multiple efforts to support more systematic use of R&D practices in the social impact sector in North America over the last 60 years. These have most often started and ended with a motivated network of early adopters. While these efforts have yielded tangible results, they have fallen short of meeting the potential that mainstreaming R&D within a sector holds.

In this latest push for Social R&D, there is a real opportunity to hit that critical mass of activity if the needs of social purpose organizations with existing research or development practices can be better supported (especially social mission nonprofits).

Our findings point to capacity building, policy, and funding interventions to help us get there.

Specifically, we recommend cultivating:

- **Well designed and sufficient funding programs at organizational- and at consortium-levels;**
- **Right-sized learning opportunities for R&D-based theory, knowledge and skills (e.g. experimental design or integrating data into practice); and**
- **A deep understanding of operating contexts and the theories, evidence and practices associated with change management.**

MOVING FORWARD:

In this final report from the Social R&D Fellowship, key findings from this study are summarized and parting recommendations are offered to move the social impact sector's R&D capacity forward.

We do not see Social R&D as a singular solution to a range of complex social problems; rather, our mission has been to maximize the supports available, and bolster the enabling environment, for those individuals and organizations who are keen to use R&D as a means to close the research and practice gap.

As with other sectors, a healthy innovation system requires strong R&D, and that requires a number of actors to do their part. Accordingly, individual organizations need to own some of these recommendations, while funders and intermediary organizations need to step up for others. Furthermore, we see essential roles for governments, philanthropy, universities and colleges.

The [Social Innovation/Social Finance] Investment Readiness Program and sectoral adaptations to the COVID crisis offer a unique opportunity to make significant gains in establishing a thriving Social R&D ecosystem in Canada. We hope these findings contribute to the ongoing conversations about tangible ways to increase the impact of social investments and accelerate the breakthroughs that our communities need.

For those interested in exploring the evidence and findings, contact the research team for more information.

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TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

CAPACITY BUILDERS:

Actors and organizations that offer capacity building interventions or services to other organizations. Such services all relate to professional skills development and take various forms: consulting, coaching, workshops, training, networking, access to databases and other knowledge products. Such services aim to improve various organizational aspects: management, human resources, data utilization, research and evaluation, product or service development, implementation, etc.

DATA INFRASTRUCTURE:

A data infrastructure allows data collection, categorization and utilization. Its main parts can be delineated as follows: "[1] Data assets, such as datasets, identifiers, and registers. [2] Standards and technologies used to curate and provide access to data assets. [3] Guidance and policies that inform the use and management of data assets and the data infrastructure itself. [4] Organizations that govern the data infrastructure. [5] The communities involved in contributing to or maintaining it, and those who are impacted by decisions that are made using it." See the excellent full definition provided by Open Data for Development (OD4D) here [<https://www.stateofopendata.od4d.net/chapters/issues/data-infrastructure.html>].

EXPERIMENTATION:

In this report experimentation carries 2 meanings: 1) experimentation as a broad and open expression to describe the act of trying new ways of doing things (e.g., a different process, a novel technique, new services, new technological device, etc.). Here, experimentation is synonymous with trial and error, with taking risk, with dealing with the unknown as well as with learning about what works and what doesn't. 2) The second meaning of experimentation is inspired by the methodological concept of experimental research in the scientific sense. Here experimentation means the relatively rigorous testing of a prototype (e.g., device, treatment, service, etc.) under more or less controlled conditions. Such a process involves documentation (production of knowledge) and successive prototype iterations (development of a solution). Experimentation and R&D are not synonymous and shouldn't be confused.

FIELD BUILDING:

Strong Field Framework is an assessment and planning tool developed by The Bridgespan Group (2009) to help funders attend to the essential ingredients needed to grow a network of practitioners and the right environment for addressing targeted challenges. It has five components: shared identity, standards of practice, knowledge base, leadership and grassroots support, and funding and supporting policy. While often used to coordinate actors that have a shared social mission, this framework is also useful when considering how to build networks of practice, at scale.

INNOVATION CYCLE:

"Although every innovation is a complex story of feedback loops and jumps, there are various structured stages that most innovations pass through." (Nesta, 2018, p. 4-5) Here is one version of what those structured stages are: 1) Identifying Opportunities & challenges, 2) Generating ideas, 3) Developing and testing potential solutions, 4) achieving a first successful pilot (or invention), 5) Delivering and implementing, 6) Growing and scaling, 7) Changing systems. R&D work happens through stages 1 to 4.

INNOVATION AND INVENTION:

Although there is no consensus on these terms (Godin, 2017, p.407-417), the literature on innovation theory in disciplines such as economics and business (Rogers, 1962; Maclaurin, 1953; Schumpeter, 1942), offers a useful contrast between innovation and invention. The latter designates the result of the act of inventing; an invention (e.g., product, service, ideas, etc.) is something new that emerges in a specific context. In contrast, innovation refers to the large-scale adoption (or commercialization) of the invention. Such adoption transforms how collectives, industries or sectors behave and think. The invention of the personal computer or seatbelts, as examples, are innovations because their effective wide scale adoption has significantly transformed how contemporary societies function.

INTERMEDIARY:

In this report the term carries two meanings. 1) a capacity building intermediary is an organization that provides professional skills development services to frontline organizations or funders. 2) a funding or fiscal intermediary links funders and frontline organizations. Its mandate is to distribute funds and manage accountability regimes related to funding. Some intermediaries act both as capacity builders and funding managers. For more precision on this notion see the article "Intermediary Organizations and Field" by Paul Dekker (2010).

MITACS:

Mitacs is a Canadian nonprofit organization that facilitates research partnerships between post-secondary institutions and other sectors to give graduate students real world experience and to help businesses and nonprofits reach their goals. This study benefited from the Mitacs Accelerate internship program.

PRACTITIONERS:

A category of actors working with service users or working within well defined practice models. Practitioners can work in frontline organizations as well as in intermediary organizations. The meaning of this term is better understood when contrasted with other categories of actors such as policy makers and funders.

R&D (RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT):

R&D work happens in the early stages of an innovation cycle. In its successful instances the result of R&D is the localized invention of a new product or service. Such invention then has to progress through subsequent stages of the innovation cycle (e.g., adjustments to fit operational context, marketing, distribution, etc.). Moreover, R&D work most often follows a non-linear cycle composed of different stages. Identification of a research question, design of a research protocol, review of the literature and work of peers, prototype building and testing under experimental conditions, documentation and diffusion of learnings, etc. are all actions happening at different stages of an R&D cycle.

SOCIAL INNOVATION:

"Refers to a response to a social or environmental problem (including everything from a program or a service to different ways of structuring organizations) which, once adopted, results in better outcomes than existing approaches. Social innovations have a transformative impact, delivering improvements across organizations, communities, regions, or systems. Recent innovations, such as microfinance, Fair Trade, and safe injection sites are examples of social innovation disrupting systems today." (ESDC, 2019, p.15)

SOCIAL IMPACT SECTOR:

Canada's social impact sector is a mix of nonprofit, for-profit, foundations, academic and public sector entities. Any organization pursuing social outcomes (i.e., any social purpose organization (SPO)), regardless of its legal status is part of the social impact sector. Collectively, the sector spends billions per year on social outcomes and increasing wellbeing.

SOCIAL MISSION NONPROFIT:

Nonprofit organizations with a mission directly and especially focused on alleviating and ending social problems (e.g. homelessness, racism, unemployment, gender inequalities, wealth inequalities, addictions, social isolation, pollution, food insecurity, illiteracy, etc.). Professional and business associations or religious congregations, for example, are excluded from the scope of this term. Social Mission Nonprofit (SMN) as we use it in this report is therefore an original sub-categorization of our own which nonetheless fits within the notion Nonprofit institutions (NPIs) as defined in the Third or social economy (TSE) categorization offered by the United Nations in their Satellite Account on Non-profit and Related Institutions and Volunteer Work (United Nations, 2018, p.10).

SOCIAL PURPOSE ORGANIZATION (SPO):

To align the recommendations of this report with current Social R&D policy and funding frameworks we use the term Social Purpose Organization (SPO) as defined by Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC, 2019, p.15). However, for the purposes of this research we further narrow this definition by applying the inclusion/exclusion criteria of the Third or Social Economy Sector Institutions (TSEI) to better prioritize the type of organizations evolving in environments with limited access to appropriate R&D supports (United Nations, 2018, p.22-25). In this report SPO therefore includes 3 main categories of organizations: Nonprofit institutions (including charities), cooperatives, and social enterprises; and excludes profit-distributing corporations as well as government agencies or government-controlled institutions (e.g., universities and hospitals) (United Nations, 2018, p.28).

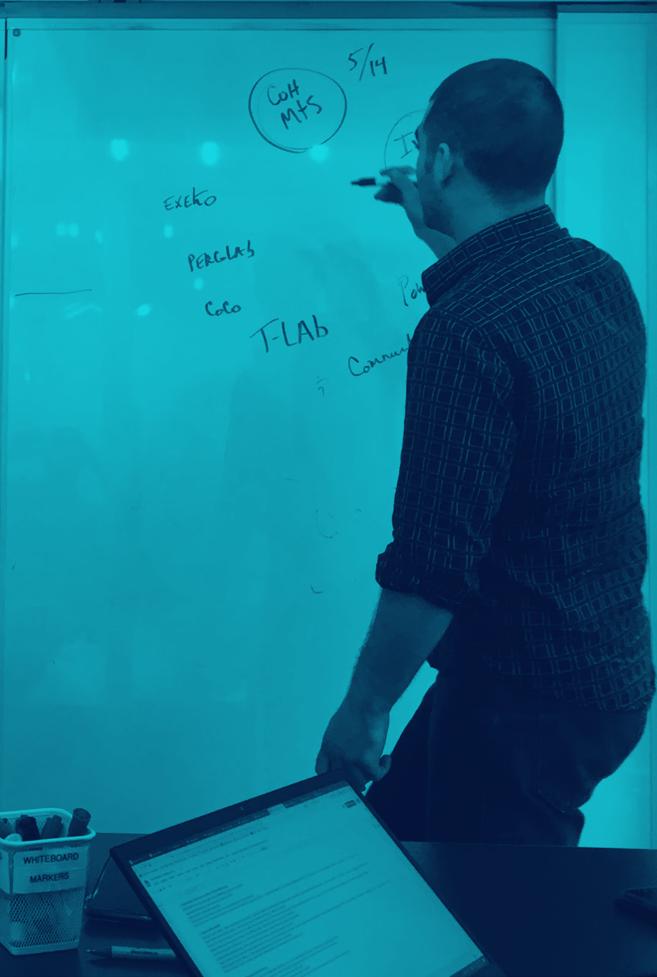
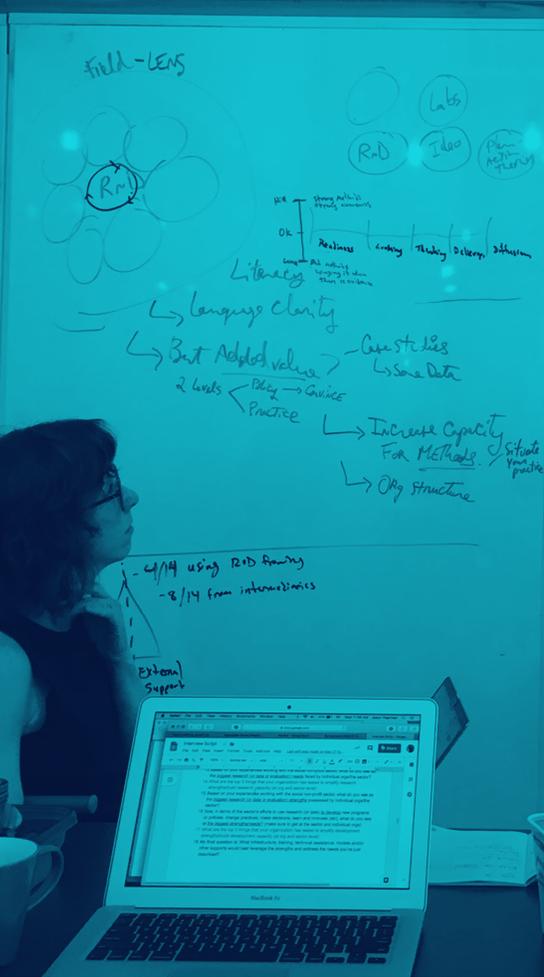
SOCIAL R&D:

The literature offers multiple valid definitions of Social R&D. Here is how we defined it in the context of our Mitacs research design: *Social research & development (R&D) refers to a variety of organizational practices that systematically generate and use knowledge to develop innovative adaptations and solutions to social problems.* In some specific instances, Social R&D can also be defined as the intentional application of industrial R&D processes, principles and knowledge in the context of social purpose organizations.

SOCIAL R&D COMMUNITY:

Active alumni from the 2016, 2017, and 2018 Social R&D Practice Gathering. The Community has been curated with shared objectives of i) improving members' R&D craft and ii) creating the conditions for R&D to grow and thrive in the sector. Initially curated by the Social R&D Fellowship, the Social R&D Community is now curated by Social Innovation Canada as part of the Investment Readiness Program - Research and Development Ecosystem Mobilization Initiative.

objectives
 study & improve across [what] [where] [why]
 Fellowship improve understanding & capacity
 Engage sector to act on evidence methods
 D/10
 - Clarify on concept
 - role in innovation ecosystem
 - role in innovation ecosystem
 - Support self-reflection, peer methods
 - Support possibility on what they should & what they can go
 10 of understanding
 old has possibility
 RISE RAISED
 (mining) - This section is not read!
 - Emerging theoretical team
 Not doing possible [copy]
 - participants / sample
 (agency)



Background & Introduction

In Canada, research and development led by charities, nonprofits or other social purpose organizations (hereafter Social R&D) is an emerging field. There are pockets of deep expertise, but a limited shared understanding of R&D principles, practices, and skills.

We know from advances in cleantech and healthcare, financial services and education, that networks of organizations doing high quality R&D are essential to strong innovation systems. Social R&D is equally positioned to drive breakthroughs, but breakthroughs that respond to the deep social challenges being navigated today. To realize this potential and tackle these challenges, smart investments are needed.

Luckily, momentum has been growing to establish a more coherent suite of support for Social R&D¹, but guidance for practitioners, decision-makers, and intermediaries in these efforts has been underdeveloped. To this end, the Social R&D Fellowship used the Mitacs program to partner with researchers at McGill University to investigate R&D capacity building models for the sector.

In this report we describe the results of the year-long Mitacs Accelerate research study, titled: R&D in the Social Impact Sector: documenting practices, assessing current needs and prototyping support models to enhance R&D capacity. This study uncovered past efforts to support R&D practices within social purpose organizations (SPOs), as well as generated new evidence towards growing capacity for Social R&D in Canada.

Currently, existing R&D capacity building supports for the sector are primarily targeted at increasing competency for a specific innovation method (e.g. social labs) or focused on micro-pilots (e.g. testing something new in the organization or new to the sector) or increasing the scale of existing R&D work (e.g. introducing a new iteration of a micro-pilot to a larger community). There are, however, limited supports for organizations that want to grow robust R&D capabilities.

A better understanding of the R&D capacity building needs of SPOs (in particular, social mission nonprofits²) is of strategic, and arguably national importance: strong

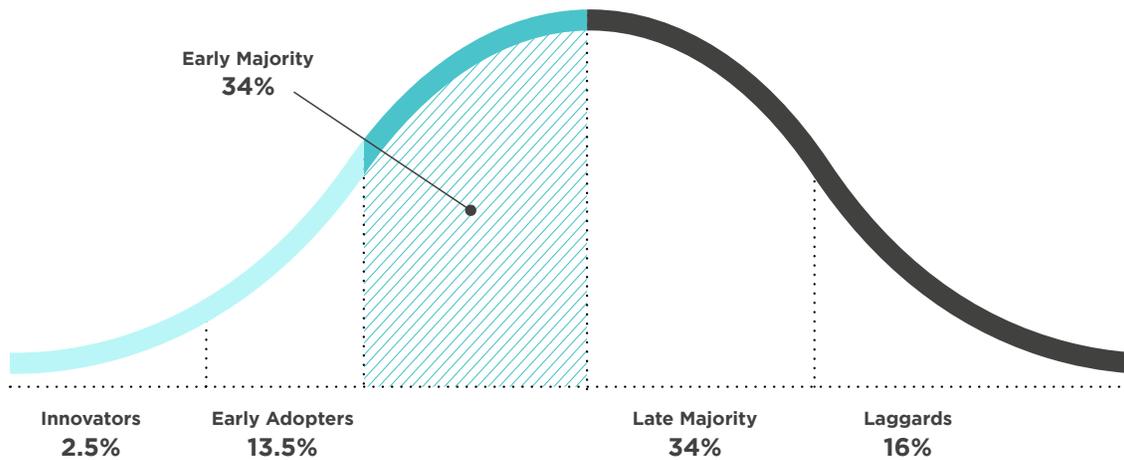
¹ The Investment Readiness Program (IRP) is the latest initiative: a \$50M (over 2-years) investment to support social purpose organizations in building their capacity to design, launch, measure and scale social/cultural/environmental impact initiatives. Eligible activities include capacity building for things like research and development. The Community Foundations of Canada and the national network of Community Foundations, one of the long-time hosts of the Social R&D Fellowship, is one of the delivery partners for this program.

Given the importance of R&D to the creation of investment ready innovations, the IRP - Research and Development Ecosystem Initiative was launched in parallel by ESDC, McConnell Foundation, SI Canada and Innoweave.

² Despite the contributions from the range of social purpose organizations in Canada, social mission nonprofits are a primary delivery arm for change in Canada.

R&D is a team sport. That is to say, if we want to increase the probability of dramatic improvements in social programs, services, policies and practices emerging then we need a critical mass of SPOs doing high quality R&D work.

Considering the Innovation Adoption Cycle and the current momentum for Social R&D in Canada, organizations with a high will to implement Social R&D practices and existing capacities upon which to build if the right supports are in place, are likely a good group to focus on. These organizations represent the Early Majority. If the Early Majority's R&D capacity building needs can be met, the sector has a better chance of reaching a tipping point towards mainstreaming research and development efforts towards social, environmental and cultural ends.



Rogers' diffusion of an innovation curve, and where this research was focused given a range of practitioner profiles³

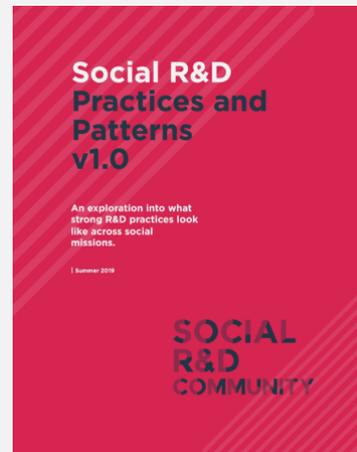
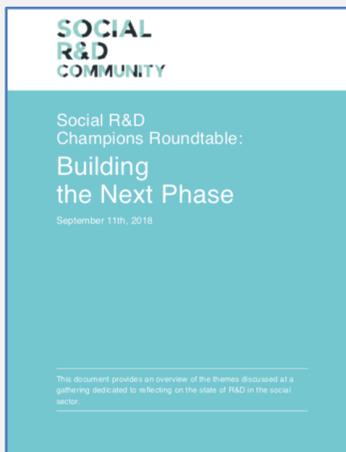
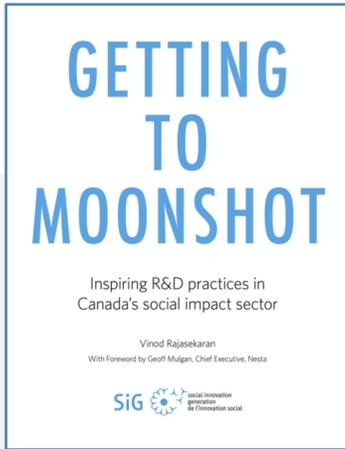
THE REPORT ADHERES TO THE FOLLOWING OUTLINE:

- Research design and documentation of the history of Social R&D as a concept;
- Four key portraits of Social R&D practices and conceptualizations that emerged from our study data;
- Synthesis of expressed R&D capacity building needs and core competencies to be fostered in order to cultivate a thriving Social R&D ecosystem.
- Recommendations to establish right-sized and robust Social R&D capacity building experiences for Canadian SPOs.

³ While there are a number of different ways to conceptualize a community of practitioners or the use of a novel approach, .e.g Gartner's Hype Cycle, diffusion of an innovation theory has given the Fellowship cues on how to grow and tend to segments of the community.

This report is the final contribution to a body of work produced by the Social R&D Fellowship, which includes Getting to Moonshot (Rajasekaran, 2016), and Social R&D Practices and Principles v1.0 (Pearman, 2019), among others⁴.

As with these earlier efforts, our hope is these findings help practitioners and sector leaders establish the critical R&D infrastructure needed to pursue social missions with vigour and thoughtfulness. From youth homelessness and food insecurity in cities, to economic reconciliation, the transition to a low-carbon economy, and responding to the COVID-19 crisis, R&D is a valuable practice and policy construct that will help the sector make leaps in outcomes.



⁴ See Annex for a full list of the Social R&D Fellowship reports and recommendations.

The Research

To generate an understanding of the needs and practices of organizations with a high-will to implement Social R&D practices, we invited people working in Canadian social purpose organizations (SPOs) to complete a survey about their current Social R&D practices, the resources they have and those they need to do this work. We also conducted interviews and observations with intermediary organizations across Canada and internationally, known for their pursuit of evidence-driven innovation.

We situated the results of this research alongside a review of the academic and grey literature on Social R&D and related applied social research approaches. The results of our literature review were used to create an accessible database (i.e., open access and searchable) of academic and non-academic articles, reports, practitioner-oriented resources and tools to support social mission R&D efforts⁵.

Finally, we traced the concept of Social R&D historically from its emergence in U.S. policy development, to its adoption by social scientists interested in improving the social impacts of their work, and more recent interest in the concept related to social innovation.

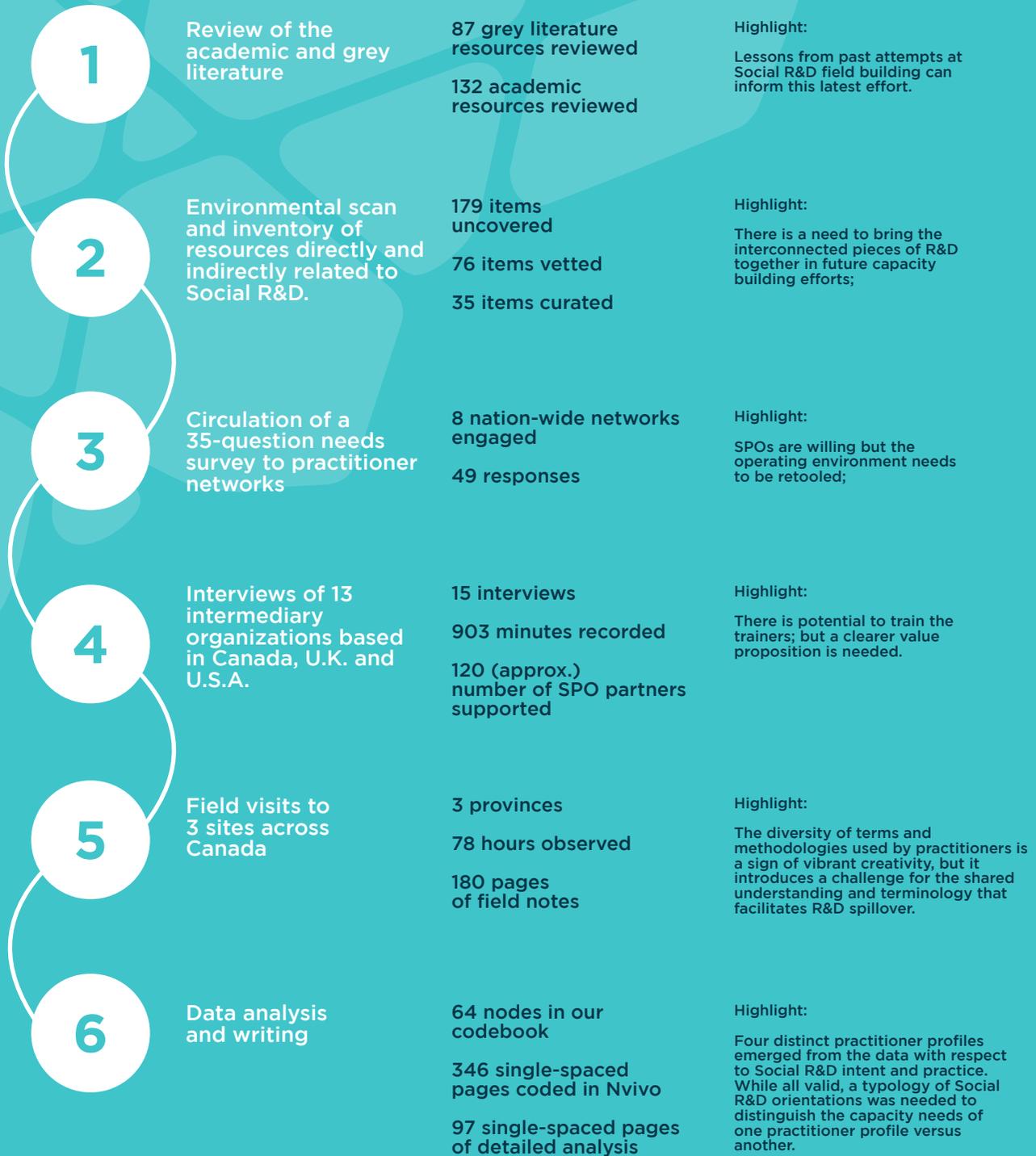
Synthesizing these various research streams allowed us to create evidence-informed personas, and triangulate high potential capacity development approaches. The research design intentionally utilized multiple methods (survey, observation, interview, and textual research). The survey allowed us to generate a high-level understanding of people's familiarity with Social R&D, as well as a general understanding of their current Social R&D needs and strengths. The ethnographic approach (including in-depth interviews and observational research) allowed us to generate a deeper understanding of how people do, understand and seek to improve R&D in the social impact sector, including the barriers and facilitators that constrain or enable their work. Finally, the textual analysis allowed us to situate contemporary findings within an historical analysis of Social R&D (as a policy concern, practice and set of discourses) in North America over the last 100 years.

Note:

Given the ethics approval for this study, quotes and title attribution are not used in this report.

⁵ The database includes an inventory of various items that support directly or indirectly R&D practices in the social impact sector: <https://airtable.com/shrWlMipaBCVc66LB/tblLuvSXImvECXyjc>. It is mainly intended for practitioners and managers that want to explore and access ways of increasing the ability of their teams (and is coded by the key practices noted in *Social R&D Practices and Patterns v1.0*). This database and other resources and reports are hosted on SocialRD.org.

The streams of this research:



History of Social R&D

Social R&D has a relatively long history of use as a policy concept and applied social science research approach throughout North America, and particularly in the United States. In this first section, we synthesize what we learned about the various conceptualizations of Social R&D over the last 60 years, and highlight the most promising dimensions of earlier iterations of Social R&D as a policy, research, and practice field. Overall, our analysis shows the field of Social R&D has been revitalized in two main waves and at each juncture, important insights into the generation and use of research for social purposes can be gleaned.

The first wave (1960-1990), was directly inspired by U.S. President Johnson's vision of a Great Society and saw the creation and large scale implementation of Social R&D policies and "methodologies," particularly in fields like education and social work. The second wave (2010-2020) emerged independently from government and academic initiatives and is intimately tied to the development of and interest in the fields of social innovation and social entrepreneurship. Rather than drawing on academic literature associated with the original efforts, the second wave has found its inspiration in practitioner networks who are blending novel theoretical constructs (academic literature, indigenous world views, social change traditions, etc.) with contemporary design and lean start-up methodologies and approaches.

WAVE ONE: 1960 - 1990

EARLY POLICY AND RESEARCH INTEREST IN SOCIAL R&D

The R&D field of action in the technology and industrial sectors emerged primarily to direct organizational, policy and budgetary attention to uses of research for product, process or (more recently) service development (Godin, 2017: 332-344). Interest in R&D boomed after World War II when economists emphasized a positive correlation between technological innovation and Gross Domestic Product growth. From this point onward, R&D began to appear as a regular indicator of "innovation", which was interpreted as technological product and process generation (Godin, 2008). In pragmatic terms, R&D also appeared as a column in budget documents and a department in organizational charts. But beyond simply stating R&D departments engage in research and development activities, actual practices and principles were very different from one industry to another; this explains why R&D's definition, as a policy notion, remained quite vague.

The concept of applying an "R&D" lens to develop solutions to social problems first appeared in U.S. federal policy documents in the second half of the 1960s. In 1964, building on the optimism and hopes for social progress inspired by the alliance between science and technology, President Johnson and the Gardner Task Force on

Education ordered the creation of a nation-wide infrastructure of Regional Educational Laboratories (REL) (Miller, 1966; Simon-McWilliams, 2007).

By 1966, a total of 11 laboratories⁶ had been created and mandated to develop the following:

"tested solutions to pressing educational problems – strategies for diffusing and implementing educational innovations – a growing understanding of the discipline of educational development – an institutional capability for long-range, comprehensive, systematic research and development."

Stephen K. Bailey, 1970

The overall goal of this large-scale federal investment in R&D (starting with \$5-10 million per laboratory annually for 5 years) was a "rapid increase in educational quality on mass scale." The strategy was motivated by a desire to ensure educational research was applied and impactful. Considering the "past failures of university-based R&D to impact the schools," responsibility for the budget and direction of each REL was held by a non-university-based scholar. The Gardner Task Force wanted the REL to serve as a bridge between research and practice. In their view, "no mechanism existed to forge the necessary links between the various groups concerned with different phases of the innovation process and the education process." (Bailey, 1970, p.9)

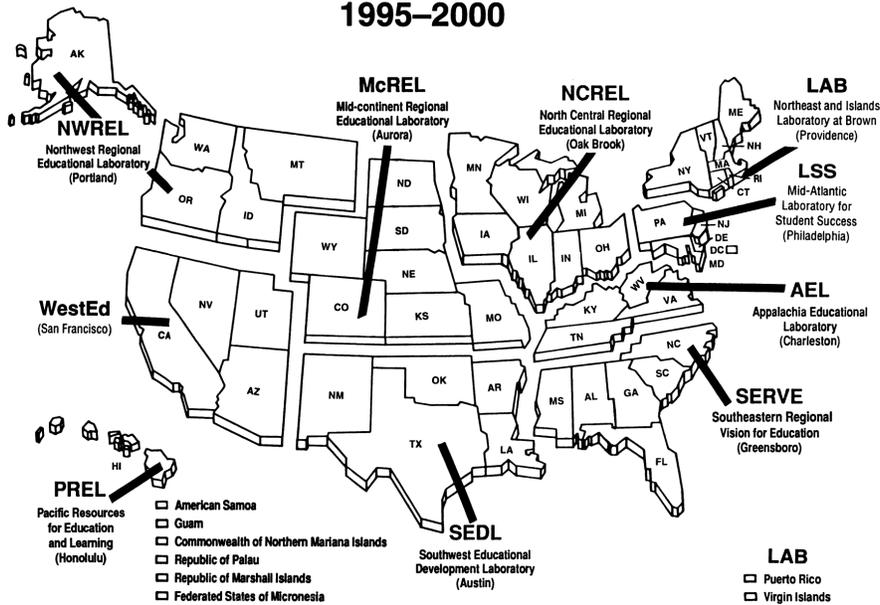
Numerous pedagogical innovations originate from the REL initiative. In their book *Tried and True Tested Ideas for Teaching and Learning from the Regional Educational Laboratories*, Levinson and Stonhill (1997) present 16 approaches that were once innovations that then became established in classrooms. Simon-McWilliams (2007) also highlights the fact that through the decades RELs addressed pressing structural inequalities such as "wrongs done to Blacks, segregation, and low-income families, poverty, through unfair national policies and act." (Simon-McWilliams, 2007, p.399).

The REL program⁷ dramatically influenced the emergence of Educational R&D and its effects can be felt in the contemporary field of educational research (McKenney & Reeves, 2014). This quest for a more efficient application of social science knowledge continued throughout the late 1960s.

⁶ This number went up to 25 centres in 1990 and then back down to 12 centres in 2001 (Simon-McWilliams, 2007, p. 396).

⁷ The program still exists today. For more information consult [<https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/>].

Regional Educational Laboratory Map 1995–2000



Source: (Levinson and Stonhill, 1997, p.87)

Despite the early interest among researchers and policy makers, it was not until the 1970s that R&D gained popularity in fields like psychology, social work and corrections. While early projects were limited by a focus on individualized responses to social problems, later initiatives sought to address root causes, through the pursuit of economic and institutional solutions. In 1973, “A Review of Manpower R&D Projects in the Correctional Field (1963-1973)” (Rovner-Piecznik, 1973) summarized a decade of experiments “focused on the criminal offender as a manpower resource.” In alignment with the Manpower Development and Training Act of 1962, at first these prison experiments aimed to improve prisoner skills training initiatives by pinpointing the “need for change within the individual offender.” Along the way, the experiments shifted to target crime prevention through community-based projects aimed at job development and placement on the one hand, and “the need for change within the established social institutions” (Rovner-Piecznik, 1973, p.1) on the other.

In social work, Tony Tripodi, a researcher at the University of Michigan drew on these advances in R&D to develop a model intentionally linking research, development, training, and evaluation (RDTE) (Tripodi, 1974). Tripodi’s work was emblematic of an intervention model-building trend in his field. Model-building research (Reid & Epstein, 1972), developmental research and utilization (Thomas, 1978), and personal practice model development (Mullen, 1978) were all explicitly inspired by industrial R&D practices and behavioural theory. These scholars all sought to create, develop and test interventions using a sequential and applied

scientific methodology, modelled on experimental methodologies (i.e., pharmaceutical testing). As Kirk and Reid (2002) note, this engineering approach to social work intervention created a significant paradigm shift within the field. Despite differences between the approaches, they all sought to use social sciences to create new technologies (i.e., not only knowledge). This new paradigm was based on the following idea: "We need to make use of research to build effective models of intervention for practitioners to implement" (Kirk & Reid, 2002, p. 99). From this point of view, developing an intervention as a social technology was akin to the development of planes or trains as physical technologies.

In the field of education, Havelock and Havelock (1973) emphasized a similar perspective on the importance of research utilization emerging in the aftermath of World War II. Their work was based on the idea that "research by itself does not provide direct answers to the problems faced in the practical world, and this awareness has been articulated in the formation of a new discipline focused on the problem of knowledge dissemination and utilization (D&U)." (Havelock & Havelock, 1973, p.1) The D&U process was their answer to the disconnection between research and practice. Similarly, in the field of psychology, Gottman and Markman (1978) created a program development model, which they describe as "a set of steps for creating, evaluating, and improving a treatment program." (Kirk & Reid, 2002, p.116) It is indeed striking that all theories and approaches listed here were direct answers to a shared diagnosis: the persistent existence of a research-to-practice gap.

FORMAL ACCOUNTING OF SOCIAL R&D

In the 1970s there was also considerable interest in Social R&D at the U.S. federal policy level. Policy conceptualizations of Social R&D largely enabled federal accounting functions. In 1974, the U.S. General Accounting Office was mandated to examine "Federal social research and development (R&D) and determine its contribution to the formulation of national social policy." (United States General Accounting Office, 1977, p. 1)

At the time, almost no data was available to evaluate the effectiveness of R&D activities in major sectors such as health, education and welfare. In order to fill this data gap, The National Science Foundation initiated the creation of an Interagency Committee on Social R&D in 1975. Then in 1976, the Federal Council on Educational Research and Development was established (Public Law, 94 482, 1976). This Council was to report on the status of educational R&D, and make recommendations on effective ways to disseminate educational research across the nation. The most important, rigorous and detailed account of U.S. federal Social R&D was published in 1978-1979 by the National Research Council. Their Study Project on Social Research and Development produced six volumes⁸, each of which examines a single aspect of

⁸ The title of this first volume is *The Federal Investment in Knowledge of Social Problems: Study Project on Social Research and Development, Volume 1: Study Project Report.*

Social R&D, including federal investments in knowledge of social problems. In these reports, the authors provide the following general definition of Social R&D:

"Social R&D consists of research and development and related activities concerned with understanding and alleviating social problems. It is intended to include such activities as the production or application of knowledge concerning the behavior of individuals, groups, or institutions or the effects of policies, programs, or technologies on behavior."

1978:101

Ultimately, the authors propose a new framework of "Social knowledge production and application" they believe offers a more encompassing scope to capture the diversified research and development related activities happening in the health, education and welfare sectors. This new framework includes two distinctive types of activity associated with this field:

(a) knowledge-producing activities, including research, statistical reporting, program evaluations, and policy-formulating demonstrations that bear on social problems; and of (b) knowledge-applying activities, including policy-implementing demonstrations, the development of materials, and other methods of synthesizing, disseminating, and using knowledge of social problems

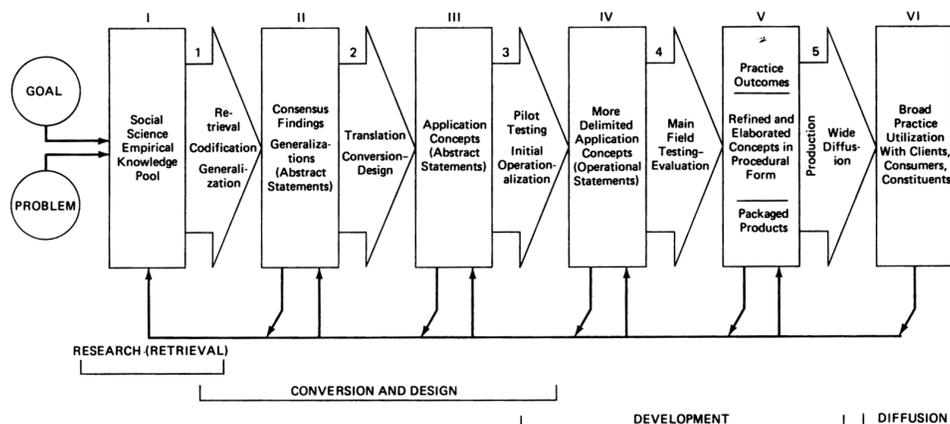
National Research Council, 1978, p. 23

EARLY PRACTITIONER INTEREST IN SOCIAL R&D

The first major attempt at conceptualizing and using Social R&D as a well-defined methodological approach can be attributed to Jack Rothman, a social work practitioner and scholar. Rothman and his research team (1980) defined Social R&D in the following terms: "the application of industrial research and development techniques to problem solving in the human services." Rothman and his team spent almost ten years undertaking what they describe as a "sustained-action-research examination" of Social R&D. Their research allowed them to distill the following phases of an effective Social R&D process: 1) Research, 2) Conversion and Design, 3) Development and 4) Diffusion⁹. They draw on advances in social work and education, as well as health care planning (Flook and Sanazaro, 1973) and mental health (Urban, 1976).

⁹ These phases are very similar to those captured in *Social R&D Practices and Patterns v1.0* that was developed by the Social R&D Fellowship in 2019. The main difference to the Rothman model is the "Preparing" phase to build practitioner and organizational capacity to conduct R&D work.

SCHEMATIC MODEL OF RESEARCH UTILIZATION—R & D PROCESS



Source: Rothman, J. (1980). *Social R & D; research and development in the human services*. Prentice-Hall.

Although Rothman and his team were aware of the epistemological issues of applying an engineering approach in a social service context, the authors note they remain committed to Social R&D because “it works.” Inspired by the figure of a “clinical scientist” or scientist-practitioner within the then known paradigm of “scientifically based practice” (SP) (Briar, 1979), Rothman argued the field of social work was faced with a “missing-link” problem. Like the physical sciences where knowledge produced by scientists is applied by engineers who produce devices that can be adopted/purchased by various users, the social sciences requires a field for connecting research to practice.

Rothman affirmed that the frontline service-delivery organizations required a new kind of role: the engineer of social services (Rothman, 1980, p.33). Bridging the research and application divide, this engineer of social services was conceived as a model developer who would use scientific knowledge to develop and test intervention models. This move was framed as an efficient alternative to “the uncoordinated, and often conflicting, collections of program people and researchers who typically generated and evaluated new interventions” (Kirk and Reid, 2002, p.116). Rothman emphasized that taken separately, each step of the Social R&D process was not particularly foreign to social work scholars, but the novelty and efficiency of his proposal resides in the systematic progression from one step to the other.

Despite Rothman’s significant and sustained attempts to promote Social R&D¹⁰, he remains one of the only scholars associated with this approach¹¹.

¹⁰ By 1994, Rothman and Thomas were positioning Social R&D as one approach among others within the larger Intervention research paradigm. In an emblematic paper (1994), Rothman and Thomas flesh out their Design and Development (D&D) approach -- a subsequent version of Rothman’s earlier work. The approach has six main steps. Rothman and Thomas position the prototyping or pilot testing step as a particularly critical and distinctive phase, which is uncommon in the human services. Pilot testing is framed as addressing the missing link (between research and practice), allowing for the elaboration of solutions more rapidly and efficiently. The final step (Diffusion) is also particularly important as a D&D approach should directly aim at stimulating policy changes.

¹¹ In 1983, Canadian scholar Richard Ramsay, based at the University of Calgary in the Social Work Department, elaborated the “LivingWorks” and “Assist” approach to suicide prevention and education applying Rothman’s Social R&D model. This approach seems to be one of the only documented examples of Social R&D output that successfully scaled world-wide.

WAVE ONE OBSERVATIONS

To summarize this first wave, the various R&D inspired methodologies were almost exclusively driven by scholars. Furthermore, research and development projects were generally tied to government budgets. All the research and development variants we examined were directly and explicitly inspired by engineering processes. Most obstacles examined by the different authors concern timelines, financial resources and adequate knowledge and training.

A dominant social field where R&D approaches have continued to prove influential is Education. The Handbook of Research on Educational Communications and Technology contains articles discussing engineering-inspired approaches such as Design and Development Research (Richey & Klein, 2014), and Educational design-research (McKenney & Reeves, 2014). The following definition highlights shared features between Rothman's (1980) version of Social R&D and contemporary research: "Educational design research is a genre of research in which the iterative development of solutions to practical and complex educational problems provides the setting for scientific inquiry. The solutions can be educational products, processes, programs, or policies." (McKenney & Reeves, 2014, p. 131)

Despite the sustained R&D activity seen in education as Kirk and Reid (2002) note, Briar's (1979) "clinical scientist" never materialized in practice-oriented institutions because practitioners would never have access to enough time and resources to complete a research and development cycle: only scholars could afford to pursue a "clinical scientist" approach.

WAVE TWO: 2010 - NOW

STATE ACCOUNTS OF NONPROFIT R&D ACTIVITY

Our literature review found few references to Social R&D between 1990 and 2010. Even though the term was not explicitly used by social scientists during this period, some core principles remained, and interest in intervention research and research impact (Rothman & Thomas, 1994) continued to influence new scholars.

Around the year 2000, statisticians started collecting data on nonprofit R&D activity. Before this time, national statistical categories to collect data on the nonprofit sector were very limited. For example, in Canada the distinction between employment in the for-profit and nonprofit sectors only emerged in the fall of 2000 (McMullen & Schellenberg, 2002, p. 2).

Most of what is currently captured in Canada as nonprofit R&D activity pertains to Medical and Health sciences (49.7%) and natural sciences and engineering (26.9%); while less than a quarter refers to social sciences and humanities (23.4%)¹². Canada's gross domestic expenditures on research and development (GERD) reached \$35.7 billion in 2017¹³. The expenditures on nonprofit social sciences and humanities R&D only accounted for 0.87%. Statistics Canada also clearly indicates that its Annual Survey of research and development of Canadian private nonprofit organizations (RDNP) is focused on producing “useful statistical information to monitor science and technology activities in Canada and to support the development of science and technology policy.” While there are now efforts to capture nonprofit R&D activity, social mission nonprofits and other social purpose organizations (SPOs) R&D activity may not be captured by current national statistical categories as they are considered social service delivery organizations operating outside of “science and technology”.

This situation is well problematized by a 2015 report of the U.S. National Research Council titled *Measuring Research and Development Expenditures in the U.S. Nonprofit Sector: Conceptual and Design Issues: Summary of a Workshop*. The authors of the report observe that the nonprofit sector is important and underestimated (given its enormous size and scope) as a key contributor to the national economy. Despite this importance, as in Canada, data for nonprofit R&D had not been consistently collected.

The report conveys the dynamism and inventiveness of the nonprofit sector: “Many nonprofits are engaged in researching and applying new techniques of intervention in the broad area of human services, improving recovery from addictions, finding new ways to promote economic independence, solving significant health issues, and

¹² Private nonprofit organization in-house research and development expenditures, by field of research and development. Statistics Canada, 2017. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=2710032701>

¹³ Spending on research and development, Statistics Canada. Released: 2020-01-30, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/200130/dq200130b-eng.htm>

generally improving life chances." (National Research Council, 2015, p.18). The authors note the term R&D is seldom used in the sector to describe this work. Instead, nonprofit organizations engaged in innovation processes use terms such as "applied research, evidence-based decision making, translational research, data mining, testing, capturing information or experimenting."

Finally, the National Research Council re-introduces both 1) the importance and potential of understanding "R&D style" activities, as well as 2) the need to do so through the creation of an adequate conceptual apparatus able to capture "these new forms of R&D beyond physical production processes and new technology." These may "involve new social processes that [...] can potentially relieve or resolve a variety of social and economic maladies." (National Research Council 2015, p.5)

Ensuring that nonprofit R&D activities are statistically visible will be essential if policy makers want to better support nonprofit innovation that contributes to social missions, like the attainment of the United Nations 2030 Goals for sustainable development.

PRACTITIONER REFLECTIONS ON SOCIAL R&D AND WHAT IS NECESSARY TO SUPPORT IT

Despite lingering conceptual and sectoral tracking challenges, a second wave of actors began advocating Social R&D approaches in Canada and elsewhere around 2010. Associated with social innovation and social entrepreneurship, nonprofit sector practitioners, consultants and intermediaries started exploring the application of R&D practices in the context of social purpose organizations. A major source of inspiration was industrial innovation theory coupled with the boldness and tactics of social entrepreneurship (e.g., lean start-up, micro-pilots, minimum valuable product, etc.).

Interestingly, this second wave appears to have emerged completely independently from the first one. Furthermore, the key thought-leaders associated with the second wave are not scholars and their writings are not found in academic journals; instead, reports, blog posts, slide decks, policy briefs and magazine articles are the main formats through which people's ideas are conveyed for an action-oriented readership.

Between 2010 and 2020 we found a total of 22 documents directly discussing Social R&D. Most were written by Canadian authors, with further contributions from the United Kingdom, United States and France. In what follows, we synthesize the results of five documents particularly influential in the Canadian context.

In 2011, Peter York, a consultant for the TCC group, published an article in the Stanford Social Innovation Review (SSIR), where he argued that R&D is a better approach than traditional program evaluation for organizations seeking to improve their services. York's assertion was based on TCC group client data on 2500 nonprofit organizations (approx.). Of this sample only 5% of the organizations reported R&D behaviours, and the TCC Group described an analysis that provided evidence that nonprofits whose leaders engage in R&D behaviours are almost two and a half times more likely to grow at or above the annual rate of inflation (refer to Figure 2) regardless of the size of an organization's budget [...]” (York 2011:4).

A report on R&D in the Canadian nonprofit sector was published in 2016 titled: Getting to Moonshot: Inspiring R&D practices in Canada's social impact sector (Rajasekaran, 2016). Here the term “Social R&D” was explicitly defined in the following way: “A combination of competency, culture, and craft that is intentionally applied to continuously learn, evaluate, refine and conduct practical experiments in order to enhance social well being” (Rajasekaran, 2016, 8). Findings reported in Getting to Moonshot are based on survey and follow-up interview data from 14 organizations across Canada that were selected as positive deviants in regard to their systematic R&D practice. Key R&D characteristics were clustered around three notions: 1) capacity, 2) culture, 3) connectivity. Capacity in this context refers to enabling “reflecting, voicing, reframing, and building know-how.” Open-mindedness, critical thinking and empathy are key cultural dispositions associated with Social R&D. Finally, R&D is seen to be reinforced by connectivity -- that is, through knowledge exchange between organizations and sectors and between theory and practice.

Following Rajasekaran's 2016 report, in 2017, Schulman published Develop and Deliver: making the case for social R&D infrastructure. Written for Employment and Social Development Canada (the Government of Canada department primarily responsible for the social safety net) Develop and Deliver is anchored in the experience of Grounded Space, an R&D collective inspired by industrial innovation clusters, and composed of five major organizations from the disability sector in the Vancouver area and Toronto.

Here, Schulman seeks to clarify the specific value proposition associated with R&D:

“[...] to date, social innovation within the social welfare sector has been confused with social service improvements. The policy levers and financial incentives have emphasized optimization rather than transformation. Innovation dollars still largely flow to program delivery. There has been little investment in developing breakthrough social interventions [...] If we want to get to new social products, processes, services and systems that add value to people’s lives then we need to re-purpose the social welfare sector and add a development not just a delivery function.”

Schulman, 2017, p.4

Schulman’s report provides the most clarity on the function of R&D in a wider innovation process. Inspired by industrial R&D, Schulman details the major successive steps of the innovation spectrum: 1. research and development (R&D as exploration, evidence gathering and knowledge production); 2. invention (creation of a prototype as a new evidence-based solution); and 3. innovation (scaling and wide adoption). Here R&D is clearly placed as the motor of any relevant innovation ecosystem and the author warns us about the negative consequences of confusing invention with innovation.

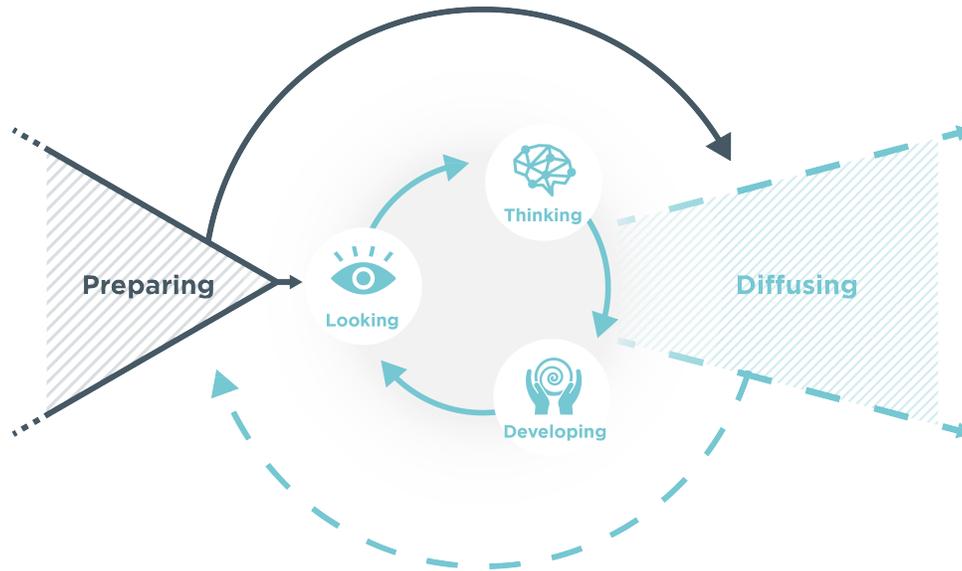
Importantly, Schulman also makes clear recommendations to support R&D infrastructure in Canada. These are organized around the following themes: capital, talent, connections (networks and knowledge spillover) and data. Without such infrastructural support, “social” innovation, the counterpoint to industrial/commercial innovation, will never be successful at generating “inclusive” growth. And since in Canada very few supports are available for R&D in the social impact sector, Schulman’s suggestion is to start by looking at how the industrial sector is supported and make similar resources available.

In a SSIR article, Ryan, Schulman and Rajasekaran (2018) defined Social R&D as “the art and science of applying research and experimental processes on the frontline to generate new insights and innovations that transform services, products, organizations, and—ultimately—lives.” The authors explained that good Social R&D is based on connecting directly with people to understand their routines, habits, and motivations. They emphasize the importance of an R&D ecosystem that supports the following assets: people (expertise and education), infrastructure (funds, clusters, networks, etc.), policy and skills (tools, professional development, etc.).

The last document we examine is Pearman’s Social R&D practices and patterns v1.0 published in August of 2019. Building on four years of research and documentation by the Social R&D Fellowship and anchored in ongoing dialogue with the Social R&D community of practitioners (comprising 40+ Canadian organizations), this report synthesizes R&D practices and patterns visible across the community’s R&D work.

In this model, R&D activities cycle across five phases:

PRACTICES FOR SOCIAL R&D / VERSION 1.0



Source: Pearman, J. (2019). Social R & D Practices and Patterns v1.0

1. PREPARING

(building the mindset in the organization, the resources, the skills and the permissions);

2. LOOKING

(accessing literature, conducting primary research on a context, etc.);

3. THINKING

(generating hypothesis and insights, refining observations, etc.);

4. DEVELOPING

(prototyping new solutions, testing and refining); and

5. DIFFUSING

(field building, collective intelligence, ethics, etc.);

Once defined and explained, these practices are further fleshed out through 3 case studies and 5 vignettes, to assist the reader to grasp their contextual application.

These R&D practices and patterns are an important addition to the conceptualization of Social R&D especially considering they are directly informed by practitioners.

Though developed independently, 40-years later, this codification of an R&D cycle in five phases is surprisingly consistent with Rothman's 1980 conceptualizations of R&D which also emphasize the importance of linking in rigorous methodological ways the research pole and the development pole.

The report concludes by stressing the importance of creating and nourishing an R&D ecosystem in order to support the promising work already happening and reduce the barrier to entry for organizations who wish to adopt and embed such practices.

WAVE TWO OBSERVATIONS

Literature produced in the second wave offers an increasingly clear conceptualization of Social R&D that is a) inspired by advances in industrial R&D and social entrepreneurship; b) stresses the importance of bottom-up approaches and processes well connected to community; and c) highlights the necessity of evidence-based prototyping and content knowledge.

Looking forward, the continued evolution of the second wave will be impacted significantly by the 2019 launch of the Social Finance Investment Readiness Program to build sectoral capacity to develop and scale new solutions to social challenges.

The size of this public and private investment and associated reporting offers an unprecedented opportunity to plug holes in the evidence gap with respect to key ingredients for healthy innovation systems in social contexts.

Where Wave One actors were largely supported by public funding, Wave Two has benefited primarily from philanthropic support. The Social R&D Fellowship's role, however, is unique to Wave Two: an intermediary curating a range of actors to both grow a community of practitioners and a complementary network of R&D supports.

Influenced by innovation system scholarship (Mazzucato, 2018; Council of Canadian Academies, 2018; Knott, 2017; Block, 2008), diffusion of an innovation theory and network sciences (Slaughter, 2017; Rogers, 1962), field building theory (The Bridgespan Group, 2009; Hussein, 2018), and practical experience, the Social R&D Fellowship used an evidence approach to advance the field in Canada. These bodies of knowledge suggest isolated organizations conducting R&D have a low probability of generating disruptive innovations; while a system that includes networks of organizations conducting R&D, an environment that facilitates knowledge spillover, and pathways to scale have a higher probability of generating innovations.

The Fellowship's aim was therefore to curate a system, with key ingredients of: Talent (practitioners and managers with the right training and expertise); capital (dedicated, stable and sustained investments); practitioner connectivity (knowledge

spillover via peer-to-peer learning, innovation clusters or collectives, open access evidence-based data sets, etc.); and pathways to scale (influencing the decisions of policymakers and funders, and shifting practice norms across the sector).

Note:

It was not within the scope of this research study to pursue an in-depth investigation into the knowledge production and application habits of organizations associated with significant social movement breakthroughs, such as the end of Apartheid, civil and LGBTQ rights recognition and many more. Nonetheless, our preliminary scan of the literature on social movements found references to practices such as primary research, experimentation and iteration, and knowledge diffusion (Choudry, 2015). Additional scholarship on the potential consistency between such social movement practices and R&D practices (past and present) could enrich the conceptualization of Social R&D.



**“...it is through R&D that
new ideas are reliably and
purposefully developed.”**

Max Blouw, Chair

Council of Canadian Academies Expert Panel on the State of Science and
Technology and Industrial Research and Development in Canada

Typology of Social R&D Objectives, Conceptualizations, and Practices

A primary outcome of this research was the development of four distinct practitioner portraits representing prevailing conceptions of Social R&D and its practices. These portraits are the synthesis of the pan-Canadian needs survey circulated to networks of social purpose organizations (SPOs), as well as the intermediary interviews and observational research. Previous research conducted by the Social R&D Fellowship also contributed to these profiles.

To conduct the interviews and survey, we employed a broad definition of Social R&D, adding practical examples to facilitate recognition of people's applicable work:

What does Social R&D look like in practice? Establishing a hunch then testing it, conducting research and/or seeking out the latest evidence, prototyping and testing ways to improve or transform programs and/or services, testing the utility of new tools and/or approaches, creating an organizational environment where insights from research and testing influence strategy, etc. – if you are continuously mixing these kinds of habits and practices together, you're likely practicing R&D.

Based on this definition, 86% of survey respondents (42/49) indicated that R&D processes are somewhat (20/49) to significantly (22/49) embedded in their organization, and 94% (46/49) of respondents wished to see R&D embedded significantly in their organization. Respondents also consistently named financial (63.3%), data management (77.6%), and professional development (73.5%) capacities as key areas requiring investment in order to support existing organizational R&D assets and actualize a functioning R&D ecosystem among SPOs. Among those who responded to our survey, 88% (43/49) self-described as directors or managers of organizations, thus suggesting willingness and interest among senior leadership to embed more systematic cycles of research and action into their organizational contexts.

The results suggest a keen interest in shoring up capacities to undertake and benefit from Social R&D practices; however, the qualitative data from the interviews with Social R&D capacity-building intermediary organizations made it clear that the survey results are not straight-forward. These intermediaries work with and support nonprofit agencies to design and implement Social R&D cycles in their organizational contexts. There is considerable inconsistency in how people talk, think about and do Social R&D; as well as a range of objectives being pursued through their engagement with (or rejection of) this framework.

Describing and understanding these different conceptualizations of Social R&D was important to reconcile our quantitative and qualitative data, and ground our thinking for what could prove to be more effective policy, programmatic and/or funding frameworks to support a thriving Social R&D ecosystem for Canada's social impact sector.

At a high level our portraits are as follows:

PORTRAIT ONE:

inspired by entrepreneurship and innovation practices;

PORTRAIT TWO:

focused on enabling organizational and community development;

PORTRAIT THREE:

influenced by social and health sciences research and knowledge mobilization approaches; and

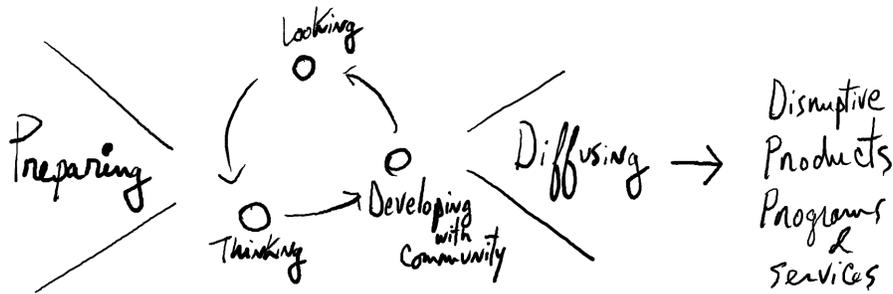
PORTRAIT FOUR:

an outlier in our data set: rejects the "*Social R&D*" frame in favour of grassroots community organizing, centring community-led research, governance and collective decision-making.

Collectively, these portraits create a typology of Social R&D practitioners, including objectives, definitions and practices, paying attention to the ways in which people use specific discourses and ideas in descriptions of their work. The portraits represent distinctive ways of thinking and talking as well as implementing Social R&D processes, even as some aspects of the portraits overlap.



**PORTRAIT ONE:
INNOVATION-INSPIRED SOCIAL R&D**



A visual representation to summarize how participants described their research and development work and objectives.

People represented by this portrait consistently use the term R&D or Social R&D to frame their work. Their view of Social R&D is inspired by R&D processes associated with disruptive innovation: in organizations that are transforming their respective sectors, **R&D driven by a blend of social science, industrial design, business management and STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) methods** is considered an essential activity to produce new or transformative product classes and services. The approach is reflective of the “bold and ambitious culture of Silicon Valley.”

This conceptualization of Social R&D work is focused on enabling inventions or significant improvements in the “front end” or “early stage” of a larger innovation arc. The Kudoz project (highlighted in *Social R&D Practices and Patterns v1.0* (Pearman, 2019)) is an exemplary innovation-inspired Social R&D initiative.

For strict adherents to the classical view of innovation, moving from inspiration to invention to innovation is a complex and risky process, characterized by iterative phases of research, development, testing and marketing. Inside this larger innovation arc, R&D is itself codified as a smaller cycle meticulously geared towards uncovering better or new products or services.

Our field observations revealed prototyping as the most idiosyncratic feature of this Social R&D approach, when compared with other ways of generating and applying research in SPOs. Once key needs are identified, experimenters propose a potential solution, grounded in research to address those needs. They then build a material and tangible version of this idea, described as a prototype¹⁴.

The prototype, either product, device or service, is tested in real life experimental circumstances that allow adjustments and improvements before a final version is developed and implemented. Prototyping is seen as an efficient way to allow developers to gather user feedback, deduce what works and what doesn't, before more substantive resources are invested in implementation. This type of approach to service and product development is common in the start-up world. Frameworks like lean start-up (Ries, 2011) or lean experimentation (Murray and Ma, 2015) are structured in the same way as those described by the people whose views informed the first portrait.

A distinguishing feature of Portrait One's Social R&D process, compared with Industrial R&D, is the involvement of stakeholders in the research, ideation, prototyping and testing phases. Designing services or program prototypes on the basis of people's lived experience and expertise is a core principle of the well codified human-centred design¹⁵ approach:

“And I think part of the other reason of the importance for the R&D too is to actually talk to the people who have the lived experiences.”

The intensity, nature and quality of involvement of potential stakeholders varies, however, and there is some indication that superficial involvement in all phases of a cycle can impede implementation of new ways of working down the road.

Because Portrait One's Social R&D effort is based on attempts, trials, modifications and iterations, outcomes can never be guaranteed. More importantly, failures are often considered as much a source of learning as successes. The working culture and structural supports for this group need to be aligned with productive failure, which has a cost. Indeed, all study participants agreed that quality Social R&D is expensive. On average, experiments have to be structured over 6 to 18-month time frames and often, additional time is needed.

¹⁴ People use the term pilot, minimum viable product (MVP), and micro-pilot interchangeably with the term, prototype.

¹⁵ Human-centred design was first codified by the U.S. design firm IDEO. It "[...] consists of three phases. In the Inspiration Phase you'll learn directly from the people you're designing for as you immerse yourself in their lives and come to deeply understand their needs. In the Ideation Phase you'll make sense of what you learned, identify opportunities for design, and prototype possible solutions. And in the Implementation Phase you'll bring your solution to life, and eventually, to market. And you'll know that your solution will be a success because you've kept the very people you're looking to serve at the heart of the process."

Source: <https://www.designkit.org/human-centered-design>

Social R&D experiments typically do not yield the kind of results that can be measured in conventional ways:

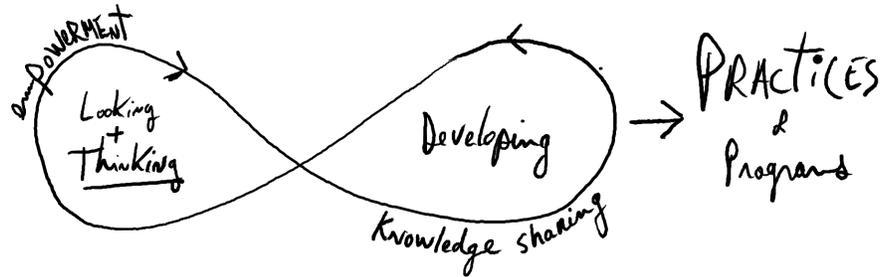
“Whatever metrics you’re using to measure the existing nonprofit outcomes, these do not apply to R&D.”

Adopting this Social R&D approach thus involves a conceptual and practical shift away from the logic of short-term outcomes-based planning, towards learning and experimentation. Indeed, many of the participants whose viewpoints informed this portrait view Social R&D as a “craft.” Some described it as “a whole sensibility and a lifestyle” that necessitates a specific working culture, characterized by boldness, risk-tolerance, willingness to experiment and continuous learning. From a methodological perspective, the practitioners that fit this profile share many similarities with Wave One Social R&D actors.

The activities and conceptualizations described above are organized around achieving three key objectives:

- 1. Changing failed systems through disruptive activities;**
- 2. Knowledge generation; and**
- 3. Enabling product and service focused inventions.**

**PORTRAIT TWO:
ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT**



A visual representation to summarize how participants described their research and development work and objectives.

The second portrait reflects the experiences and observations of participants who use Social R&D as one framework among many to characterize the various forms of research and/or development activities they undertake. Overall this portrait offers a conceptualization of Social R&D as an inclusive and broad framework, with which a variety of activities can be associated. The Akuk project (Social R&D Practices and Patterns v1.0 (Pearman, 2019)) is representative of the Social R&D efforts in this portrait.

Portrait Two actors tend to strategically locate their work within a Social R&D frame when they want to distinguish the research-informed organizational activities they undertake. Beyond its function as a means for soliciting citizen participation, improving services, and enabling inclusivity, Social R&D is employed to claim and affirm the legitimacy of nonprofit organizations to conduct research activities. For many organizations, especially those seeking to transform social systems through innovative practices, the pressure to develop new programs and services is relentless. Social R&D is a compelling way to convey the impacts of their work.

Further to this portrait, Social R&D is not conceived as a specific process or craft; rather, it represents a generous orientation to using research to strategically inform development efforts. Unlike those in Portrait One, no distinction was made between invention and innovation, and 3 of 4 participants didn't identify a clear contrast between Social R&D and Social Innovation¹⁶. Both terms were used to signal an objective of finding better and new ways of addressing social issues. Indeed, participants used a range of terms to talk about their Social R&D practices: developmental or evolutive evaluation, social innovation lab, collective impact

¹⁶ In comparison with Portrait one, people in Portrait two were less influenced by innovation theories coming from academia, business and economics. In portrait two for example, people didn't insist on the difference between innovation and improvement. Where people in portrait one considered organizational improvement to be outside the scope of a Social R&D effort, in portrait two Social R&D was, in fact, mainly focused on program and organization improvement.

evaluation, collective and regional development, action research, partnership research, praxis, complexity theory, public consultation. Many participants used the terms “Social R&D” and “experimentation” interchangeably throughout interviews.

“R&D, ça été beaucoup centré sur développer des nouvelles façons de faire des pratiques. Donc, comment on cartographie un territoire pour savoir la dynamique de ce territoire-là. Comment [...] un groupe peut le faire ensemble collectivement puis apprendre. » « Mais à la base, pour moi, il y a vraiment les deux composantes : [une] de recherche et [une] de développement. » « On le faisait plus à partir de nos propres pratiques, façons de faire. [pas suivant des methodologies des sciences sociales au sens propre] ça demande quand même tant l’aspect recherche, pas juste compréhension des problématiques mais aussi compréhension du contexte dans lequel les acteurs qui vont trouver des solutions, vont pouvoir les mettre en place. Donc ça, c’est la partie recherche.»”

Within this portrait, the term experimentation is employed in the broad sense of trying new things and learning from them even if they don’t yield expected results. Unlike those participants represented in the first portrait, people are not employing the concept in the scientific sense of experimental research, nor are they testing a prototype in a controlled setting in order to produce successive iterations.

In general, and despite the flexible use of terms to describe particular research or action efforts, participants define Social R&D as structured over two distinctive phases: **1) a research phase and 2) an action phase**. Unlike the version of Social R&D put forward in Portrait One, there was no mention of cycles or arcs; rather, activities are structured as an oscillation between the research phase and the development phase.

The activities and conceptualizations described above are organized around achieving three key objectives:

- 1. Enabling fund-seeking, organizational development and legitimacy;**
- 2. Value lived expertise and empower citizens; and**
- 3. Transforming practices and social systems.**

**PORTRAIT THREE:
SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH AND POLICY CHANGE**



A visual representation to summarize how participants described their research and development work and objectives.

The third portrait represents the views and practices of people who do not employ a Social R&D frame to describe their work, though their work fits within the generous Social R&D definition grounding our study. Participants associated with Portrait Three were unable to define Social R&D in their own words, even though they had heard their work described in this way by senior leadership. The term has been employed as a way of framing efforts to bind research to policy and practice change goals in a cyclical fashion.

Many participants informing this portrait had Ph.D. level backgrounds in the social or health sciences and were well-versed in a variety of research methodologies. Others were experienced capacity builders specialized in knowledge translation and knowledge mobilization. During interviews, participants were enthusiastic and curious about Social R&D; they were keen to learn more about this term they had previously only encountered in passing. Once provided with our generous definition, they quickly made connections with research methodologies with which they were more familiar; for example: knowledge-to-action frameworks in the health sciences or community-based action research approaches in the social sciences.

These participants described their own approach as structured by three interrelated activities, conducted over several years: 1) [research and evaluation](#); 2) [capacity building, knowledge mobilization and technical assistance](#); and 3) [changes to the implementation and delivery of services](#).

Like the testing process defined in Portrait One, these activities function in a cyclical fashion over the medium- to long-term in order to constantly improve and adapt the programs on the basis of evidence. Rather than developing and testing new products or prototypes, people are developing and testing programmatic and policy interventions. The innovation in this case is a shift in ways of working across an entire sector, enabled by the adaptation, implementation and testing of programmatic and policy interventions on a national-scale.

“...that program that’s working in Vancouver that seems to be having success with Indigenous youth, how can that be re-imagined in Winnipeg where there is a high population of Indigenous youth?”

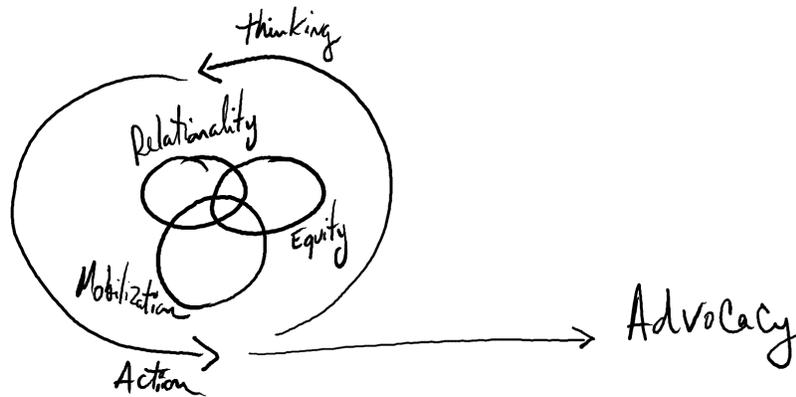
For this group of actors, the implementation process is a testing phase during which researchers monitor what does and doesn’t work, so this information can be shared with stakeholders and changes can be made at the service delivery level. This iterative process goes on until programs are stabilized. This stabilization state could be understood as the achievement of a successful pilot. At this point, an outcomes evaluation is conducted to prove whether the pilot is a desirable innovation. Despite using different terms to describe their work, the focus on hypothesis-testing and ongoing waves of research and action suggests compatibility with Wave One and Wave Two conceptions of Social R&D.

Finally, like Portrait One, this group systematically seeks out and uses a range of knowledge sources, including lived- and front-line experience as well as academic literature and program evaluations.

The activities and conceptualizations described above are organized around achieving two key objectives:

- 1. Policy change; and**
- 2. Program and practice change, ultimately driving transformations in an entire sector’s way of working.**

**PORTRAIT FOUR:
THE SOCIAL R&D SCEPTIC**



A visual representation to summarize how participants described their research and development work and objectives.

The fourth portrait reflects the views of a single participant in our study as well as concerns expressed by many in the Canadian Social R&D Community and ourselves. Indeed, it is important to note most participants raised critical questions about and identified critical issues with the R&D frame (e.g., processes for enabling product and service innovation may not be fit for relationally-driven frontline practices). We thus offer this final portrait to make these concerns explicit regarding the mainstream adoption of Social R&D in the social impact sector.

The participant whose views we draw heavily on, and whom we will designate “Participant 0,” has worked as a community organizer and organizational capacity builder for 20 years. He has extensive experience in popular education projects as well as in rights-focused and advocacy organizations. In the last decade he has also worked for an intermediary organization offering organizational development and capacity building services.

Participant 0 rejects the Social R&D lens, though this should not be interpreted as a rejection of research and/or development practices. He confirmed that most of the skills and knowledge he understood to be under the umbrella of Social R&D were important and useful. The problem for Participant 0, is that it seems to prioritize innovation over time-intensive relational work, and sidesteps a “whole set of social critiques” and learnings that were hard won by social movements. In contrast to what he found as politically neutral narratives associated with Social R&D, Participant 0 passionately argued for the adoption of community-owned research, governance, and decision-making practices that prioritize equity, affirm dissent and keep alive the hard-won learnings of social struggles.

This position aligns with calls from the Social R&D Community to highlight the importance of relational work within R&D processes designed for and by social purpose organizations. It also highlights the importance of Diffusion and Connectivity -- key principles endorsed by the Social R&D Community in Pearman's 2019 report.

From Participant 0's perspective, what is needed is more opportunities for organizations to meaningfully document and share these practices.

He also saw Social R&D as a simple rebranding of people's work:

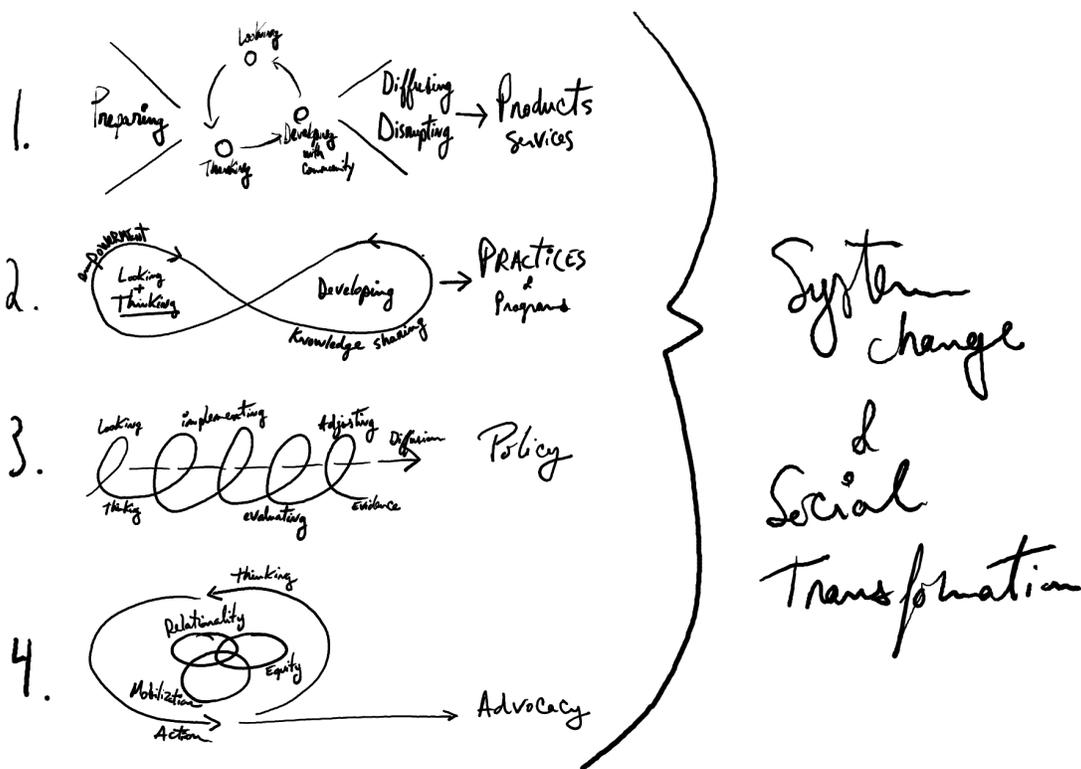
“Those practices are there, it's just they're not uniform. And so, when [Sunny Sector Foundation] drops in with Social R&D, there is this misconception about the extent to which this work is occurring, because it is occurring. [...] There are all sorts of practices out there, and so we need to shed this starting point that these practices don't exist.”

Participant 0's concern is that branding the forms of research, action or development that organizations undertake, results in a standardization of practices that shifts power away from grassroots organizations. Indeed, members of the Social R&D Community (2019) also stressed the importance of practitioner-leadership and community co-ownership of the Social R&D ecosystem, while also facilitating the diffusion of actionable insights from R&D work between practitioners, funders and policymakers.

Portrait Four offers an important reminder that evidence is not neutral and maintenance-oriented aspects of direct service provision and social mission work remain important, even as the sector explores new and exciting ways to increase the impact of their practices, programs, services and policies.

SOCIAL R&D PORTRAITS ARE NOT STATIC

While representative of our data and our analysis, the portraits developed are not static. Just as humans are more complex than the sum of their physical parts, the characteristics and practices described in this section could show up in all organizational settings and across portrait models. As such, each portrait needs to be recognized as likely present within all social purpose organizations (SPO), and their needs attended to. In our next section, we outline the expressed needs of our study participants and propose remedies for sector uptake.



Expressed R&D Capacity Building Needs and Possible Solutions

As outlined in the last chapter, all practitioner profiles need to be attended to when executing R&D in an organizational context, yet **focusing on growing R&D capacity of Portraits Two and Three, may prove particularly useful.** These portraits represent a larger sector segment than Portrait One, and they already have research and/or practice activities that can be strengthened and better connected. Portrait One practitioners, and likely their organizations, are highly self-motivated and find ways to continually strengthen their R&D craft, meaning there are fewer valuable ways capacity builders can support them other than creating a more conducive policy and funding environment.

To understand the expressed Social R&D capacity building needs of Portraits Two and Three segments, we examined survey results for those respondents indicating a high level of interest in Social R&D who also expressed having considerable internal resources for Social R&D efforts. Additionally, we returned to the interviews with people working in intermediary organizations that support R&D in social purpose organizations (SPOs) in Canada, the US and the UK, and the observational data recorded during site visits. Based on these three sources of information, we narrowed in on the following four needs:

NEED 1:

Establish shared language and precision of understanding on the meaning and practices associated with Social R&D

NEED 2:

Develop foundational research and data utilization skills, and accessible data infrastructure

NEED 3:

Support organizations to create and implement inclusive, equitable and effective change management processes.

NEED 4:

Design and resource evidence-based Social R&D funding models

NEED 1

Establish shared language and precision of understanding on the meaning and practices associated with Social R&D

For many working in intermediary organizations and whose experiences informed Portrait Three, there is a concern that SPOs are already working at full speed to design, deliver and monitor life-sustaining services (e.g., harm reduction, food security or housing). This work is time- and labour-consuming and requires considerable emotional investment. Most of the organizations providing these services have insufficient financial and human resources to take on another set of tasks. Even those working in intermediary organizations tasked explicitly with “research-to-impact” leadership questioned the value of adding an explicit Social R&D frame to their work and whether it’s worth their time learning about it.

This is not to say people aren’t open to learning new things or changing their practices; rather, this perspective points to the importance of generating sustained buy-in for R&D investments among intermediary organizations and the SPOs with whom they work. Both subsets need to clearly see this new discourse and set of practices as adding value to their existing discursive and practical repertoires.

At minimum, it is essential for intermediary organizations, as well as social innovation funders and policymakers to have a common understanding of Social R&D and the value it provides; this includes being comfortable with the language used to communicate R&D theory and practice.

N 1.1 People need to understand what Social R&D entails

A solid understanding of R&D and its social variants is necessary for the development of coherent and integrated Social R&D policy, funding, capacity-building, and monitoring frameworks. Our primary research uncovered competing understandings of what Social R&D entails and lingering questions about what it has to offer. Our historical analysis of the emergence and use of Social R&D as a policy, accounting and applied research paradigm addresses this gap, but this knowledge needs to be effectively mobilized.

So I think it's just... for me, the capacity building, one of the reasons that I get a little uncomfortable about it is that it dilutes how intense these projects actually are. And it probably doesn't put enough weight on the fact that this is not traditional capacity building in that, like, hey, you want evaluation, program evaluation to be done well. You want... and standards to be rolled out really well. You want financial management of an organization to be done really well. But there are standards for that, and there's competence... and there's known best practices in all of this. I think for this, I just caution a little bit, like, our use of that term. It almost needs a specificity that's specific to R&D, that I can't even quite articulate. But I just know it's not the traditional definition.

Funder, Social R&D funding stream

N 1.2 People need shared language through which to exchange ideas and practices

Some of the ways people employ and/or respond to the concept of Social R&D are at cross-purpose (e.g., employing the concept to talk about program improvements in one portrait and conceptualizing improvements as outside the scope of Social R&D in another). Currently, a lack of precision about what is and isn't Social R&D and how we talk about it makes it challenging to cultivate the knowledge spillover that is a critical component of strong R&D and innovation systems.

REMEDIES TO ADDRESS NEED 1

R 1.1 Social R&D bootcamps and open-access primers for practitioners and funders/policymakers/SPO executive teams

Bootcamps and primers would convey the basics of innovation theory, the history of Social R&D, and cover the latest developments in Social R&D practice, including case studies and worksheets. To suit a range of audiences these primers need to be offered at a variety of depths (e.g. overview to advanced) on a range of mediums (e.g. MOOCs, in-services). The basic curriculum and high-level descriptions should remain consistent to cultivate a shared understanding and shared language, i.e. describing the 5 phases of a Social R&D cycle. Given the already stretched realities of most SPO staff, bootcamps and primers should be designed as experiential learning opportunities to advance planned work in a way that strengthens R&D practices and routines¹⁷.

Lead actor: Intermediary organizations with a track record of Social R&D expertise and field building, as well as adult education/organizational learning.

¹⁷ Over 2018/2019, the Fellowship was contracted to develop a Data Utilization module for Innoweave that would help organizations move up the ladder from being data collectors to intentional data users. We discovered that 5x1.5hr sessions spaced over 4-months was an effective way to support a learning cohort to advance existing work, but in a way that built organizational capacity for new skills and routines "...the [previous trainings] never actually took a step back to show how an organization may evolve, how to focus energy... in DU [the Data Utilization training pilot] we were forced to 'start small' and continually be challenged to focus on something manageable and doable and be held accountable".

R 1.2 Social R&D tables (leadership and technical)

To complement the IRP-Social R&D Ecosystem Mobilization Initiative, and broader efforts to strengthen Canada's social innovation system, two multi-sectoral tables should be convened:

- I. A leadership table to maintain an active conversation about Canada's Social R&D system and socialize Canada's Social R&D tradition across the sector; and
- II. A technical table to grow and evolve shared language, review new evidence and patterns, inform the Social R&D bootcamp and primer curriculum, craft and update policy recommendations.

Both tables would be multi-sectoral in nature, including community organizations, Social R&D practitioners and decision-makers.

Lead actor: Intermediary organization with a track record of Social R&D expertise and field building/curation (with strong public sector participation).

R 1.3 Online open-access resource hub

To facilitate access to just-in-time resources (i.e., tool-kits, videos, case-studies, research and practice articles, methodology descriptions, data gathering strategies, promising practice stories), and intra-sectoral knowledge spillover, a curated, open-access, web-based resource is needed. This resource hub would have content sharing protocols with other platforms to enable equitable access to the resources necessary for creating a shared understanding across diverse organizational contexts¹⁸.

Lead actor: Intermediary organization with an academic partner (to enable access to academic research).

¹⁸ As part of this study, a database was created to inventory various items that support directly or indirectly R&D practices in the social impact sector. It is mainly intended for practitioners and managers that want to explore and access ways of increasing the ability of their teams (and is coded by the key practices noted in Practices for Social R&D v1.0): <https://airtable.com/shrWIMipaBCVc66LB/tblLuvSXImvECXyJc>. This database and other resources and reports are hosted on SocialRD.org.

NEED 2

Develop foundational research and data utilization skills, and accessible data infrastructure

Creativity is a key strength in social purpose organizations. Capacity building efforts should leverage this strength and focus on developing foundational research and data literacy, including experimental design, (qualitative and quantitative) data collection, data management and use systems and integrated data-driven practices. Indeed, 77.6% of survey respondents indicated they had medium to very high data management needs. Many organizations are actively gathering information about their programs, services and participants, but lack the infrastructure and/or specific skills required to organize and use this information to develop new understandings, drive hypothesis generation and testing, and ultimately inspire invention and innovation.

N 2.1 People need a foundational level of research and data literacy, and easy access to the latest evidence

Research and data literacy ensure all SPO stakeholders can participate equitably and effectively. This is especially true of staff responsible for data collection and data entry or when programs they deliver are the focus of R&D efforts.

I'm really interested in your research because I feel like even writing this toolkit, I'm seeing how much communities are going to need on the research and data management side of things. There's so many things that we want communities to do in our work, like coordinated access, even just doing measurement - like, outcomes measurement. Helping them develop that capacity is going to be really important because we can make recommendations for 100 years and nothing might help them if we don't help them actually do that.

*Content Developer and Knowledge Mobilizer,
Research and Knowledge Mobilization Intermediary Organization*

N 2.2 Core R&D actors need to develop flexible social science research skills

Competencies identified by this need include applied research, design-oriented and experimental approaches, in addition to the specific issue-area competencies organizations already possess (e.g., pertaining to homelessness or disability). Even with advanced academic backgrounds and years of acquired social issue knowledge,

people expressed a need for ongoing access to resources that enable the methodological dexterity and the creative solutions-finding competencies required for timely and effective research-to-practice processes.

N 2.3 Data infrastructure and tools are needed to ensure effective data generation and analysis

For an organization, and the sector, to effectively uncover new intervention opportunities and monitor impacts, data infrastructure and tools are required. This need is not about oversight and accountability; rather, it's focused on sufficient data literacy and utility.

REMEDIES TO ADDRESS NEED 2

R 2.1 Provision of foundational social research and data literacy

The curated, open-access, web-based resource hub described above to address Need 1.3, should include trusted sources for pursuing foundational research and data questions. If more intensive support is required, e.g. experimental design, interpreting results, thinking through data ownership, etc. practitioner-led Centres of Excellence referred to in Need 4 could offer more hands-on support. Given the value of evidence, efforts should be made to facilitate access to journal publications - either directly through an account with the resource hub or via another mechanism.

Lead actor: Intermediary organization with an academic partnership (to enable access to academic research).

R 2.2 Foster and resource a thriving talent pool

To grow Canada's Social R&D talent pool some people will need more intensive technical training while others with expertise in R&D will need to build up sufficient issue-area content knowledge. An example of an in-depth technical training could be a deep dive investigation and application of particular experimental methods within a selected social issue area (e.g., systemic racism). Experiential and project-based learning approaches will be critical to making these learning experiences "sticky".

- I. To address the talent gap over the short-term, we suggest immediately activating technical R&D training initiatives for Social R&D teams, funders and policymakers.
- II. In the long term, we suggest partnerships with post-secondary and training institutions to create pathways to up-skill individuals currently employed in SPOs. Stackable certificates could cover particular methodological approaches (e.g., social statistics, user-centred design, data science, participatory research). To complement these training options, new measures like funded scholarships and/or sabbaticals would allow for social purpose practitioners to benefit from these new options to develop and upgrade their skills, theoretical knowledge and methodological flexibility.

III. To cultivate a pipeline for new R&D talent, we suggest paid internships and/or Social R&D-informed thesis opportunities for PhD, MA and MSc-level students of applied interdisciplinary programs. Measures to retain and grow this talent are covered in Need 4.

IV. Finally, as in Remedy 2.1, we need to ensure that people have access to the subject-matter research evidence, which forms the basis of much of the early stages of an R&D process (i.e., the development of a hunch or hypothesis). Partnerships with university libraries and/or investments in open-access content could effectively address this need.

Lead actors: For the immediate technical training: Intermediary organization with a track record of Social R&D expertise, field building/curation, and adult education
For up-skilling and sustainable talent pipelines: post-secondary and government institutions, in partnership with Social R&D and Social Innovation tables.

R 2.3 Invest in robust data infrastructure

For the social impact sector to benefit from data-enabled R&D any data literacy or data utilization training should be matched with investments in organizational data infrastructure (e.g. data storage, off-the-shelf data analytics tools, curated and accessible data sets, sharing guidelines and ethics protocols for data management, support for organizations responsible for maintaining the infrastructure, support to facilitate the participation and ongoing contribution of member organizations, etc.). The desired outcome is to increase the utility of the sector's data, such that it supports systematic learning and innovation¹⁹.

Lead sector: Nonprofit technology, data science, and/or data utilization intermediary organization.

¹⁹ Even now, social impact organizations lack access to the information and data they need to enumerate, understand and address systemic issues (e.g., systemic racism). Data infrastructure for Social R&D should find ways to make a range of disaggregated outcomes data available to practitioners.

NEED 3

Support organizations to create and implement inclusive, equitable and effective change management processes

Social R&D aims to disrupt status quo ways of working, thinking, and talking in an organization, sector or intervention system. Given the intended disruption, there is a need for practitioners to learn how to create and implement a change management process to take innovations to scale. Amongst those we interviewed and surveyed, not one person claimed they had the expertise to design and implement a Social R&D initiative that led to sustainable and/or scaleable actions. Some people (e.g., those associated with Portrait Three, focused on creating social science research and policy change,) clearly had this aim, but even so, due to the size and complexity of their sector-wide change efforts, it was still too early in implementation for people to claim successful scaling. People made comments like: “I don’t have a good understanding of scaling at all, but a clear understanding of doing rigorous research and evaluation.”

N 3.1 People need greater familiarity with organizational change management practices

Across our study, we encountered people with deep knowledge of the research side or implementation side – but no-one claimed expertise in advancing a project to scale. People observed that few of their proposed “solutions” were received positively and/or appropriately implemented in specific practice settings. Greater familiarity with change management practices was identified as an asset to drive positive reception and uptake.

N 3.2 Organizations need to learn to “let go” in order to take new programs to scale

People in intermediary organizations tasked with driving research-to-action processes identified implementation and organizational receptivity as one of their biggest hurdles. The following quotation suggests that implementation issues represent the “final mile” - one that must be crossed to ensure all the foundational work connects to real change:

I actually feel like the biggest thing we get caught up with is change management inside [the organizations we worked with]. This is partly why I think I’m not very confident that one can build R&D capacity inside organizations, because I think you just get bogged down as a change management exercise and then you

never actually get to do the R&D. And maybe you do in 10 years. Maybe it just takes 10 years. But in our short timeframes [it's insufficient] ... As our old organizational change guru [Name] used to say, it's a grief and loss process, and a lot of this stuff is not about the technicalities. It's about people learning to let go of stuff that they themselves architected, and so they're pretty wedded to it or they think it's really good practice.

Director, Social R&D Organization

REMEDIES TO ADDRESS NEED 3

R 3.1 Social R&D teams should include organizational learning and change expertise.

- I. Competencies in this realm include: change management, knowledge mobilization, implementation sciences and other fields of management, education, social work, health and/or the social sciences focused on implementation, adult or organizational learning, and scaling. Advanced training opportunities in these areas, focused on the social sector, are required.
- II. Where resources do not allow for in-house R&D teams to develop these necessary skills, we recommend fostering partnerships with universities, independent R&D and/or organizational change intermediaries.

Lead Actor: Intermediary organization with expertise in change management and/or implementation science to create online tools and resources, certificate-based learning opportunities (partnerships with academia are required to increase scholarship in this area).

R 3.2 New tools and approaches to help organizations work through loss and grief associated with change

Acknowledging that a program is no longer relevant, closing down an organization, drastically reorganizing teams, practices and workflow; these are all difficult processes and require thoughtful support. Coaching, workshop series, curated resources, peer-learning sessions, dedicated communities of practice, and ceremonies are all examples of formats that should be created to ensure organizations are equipped to; 1) diagnose if, when and how it is best to end things, and 2) implement the change process in order to open a new chapter in the most respectful way possible. Here we recommend something akin to Cassie Robinson's Farewell Fund²⁰; designed to directly facilitate access to the tools and resources necessary to face change and transition.

Lead Actor: Post-secondary research groups with expertise in change management and/or implementation science (with support from intermediary organizations that have conducted previous invention scaling efforts).

²⁰ For more information on the idea of the Farewell Fund see Robinson's text How do we help things to die? [<https://medium.com/thefarewellfund/how-do-we-help-things-to-die-29aef0c39e0a>]. This work is in part inspired by a report by Leadbeater and Bunt titled "The Art of Exit", as well as ideas disseminated by the International Futures Forum.

NEED 4

Design and resource evidence-based Social R&D funding models

Our study participants were unanimous about the importance of well-designed, sufficient and sustainable funding for organizations to practice strong R&D. This viewpoint was also supported by the evidence uncovered during our literature review. What has also become clear is that R&D-led innovation is a team sport: a critical mass of strong discovery and development work happening across organizations who are connected (formally and informally) facilitates critical knowledge spillover. This spillover of ideas, techniques, observations and talent increases the likelihood that one of those organizations develops a breakthrough. All this points to Social R&D needing to be supported at the organization- and at the sectoral-level to maximize its impact.

N 4.1 R&D and early stage-innovation funding programs need to accommodate R&D's many phases²¹.

Numerous members of the Social R&D Community of Practice pointed out how too often the name and the objective of a grant may be framed as innovation or R&D but the design and accountability process (e.g. reporting categories of the final form) remains structured for short-term service delivery-type programs from which population-level outcomes are expected. R&D is first and foremost about rigorous learning activities that lead to invention. Reporting on R&D therefore, should not be expected to use standard outcome frameworks. In concrete terms, this means that an organization at the "preparing" or "looking" phase can't be expected to report on the scaling of a successful pilot.

N 4.2 Funds need to be sustained over a full R&D lifecycle

Long term and sustained funding is particularly important if organizations are to hire, train and retain staff (or partner with R&D agencies or university departments) with high-expertise in R&D. Health and digital technology are good examples of sectors where it is well understood that R&D's likelihood of generating return on investment directly depends on long term commitment.

²¹ We are not suggesting here that R&D is simply a linear process. In fact, phases most often overlap, happen simultaneously, developed prototypes are often inconclusive and teams need to go back to their questions and assumptions. That is why R&D is often qualified as a "messy" but methodologically rigorous process.

The following quote provides a striking image of this:

"Imagine if funding for cancer research, for instance, was relegated to a one-off grant cycle, where work stopped at the end of the financial year, waited for the next call for proposals, and expert research teams were let go in the meantime. This is the dominant experience of social service organizations wanting to move from delivery to delivery & development."

Schulman, 2017, p.19

N 4.3 Funders and grant reviewers need to understand the specific nature of R&D and innovation.

As already articulated in Need 1 and Need 2, without an adequate level of R&D knowledge, funding organizations, grant reviewers and policymakers won't be able to allocate resources in a coherent way.

N 4.4 R&D funding at a sectoral- or cluster-level is needed to complement Social R&D funding at the organizational level.

Since R&D's maximum value is realized when a network of organizations are doing a lot of it well, sector-level R&D investments are required, which means more complementary action between funders. At the very least, key funders should find ways to ensure their strategies and program architecture complement each other.

N 4.5 Insights from Social R&D work need to influence government policy, program, service and regulatory direction.

At the Fall 2018 Social R&D Champion's update, Geoff Mulgan (former CEO of Nesta) forcefully made the observation that if R&D activity across Canada's social impact sector wasn't influencing government policy and program design, it would have, at best, marginal impact.

REMEDIES TO ADDRESS NEED 4:

R 4.1 Create R&D funding models that are responsive to the range of objectives within a complete R&D cycle.

- I. Accountability measures should be focused on learning objectives, community empowerment, idea development and testing, and diffusion of insights as outcomes. Grants could incorporate a 3-stage structure, for example:
 - A. Identification of research objectives and capacity building needs; organizations report early findings and learnings; prototypes are identified for stage 2.
 - B. Support prototype building and testing; successful or failed small scale pilots recorded; reporting focused on documenting the learnings from the experimentation, and generous sharing of these insights.
 - C. Implementation of a successful pilot; structured diffusion is the main focus in this stage. Pathways to funding and policy/regulatory supports to facilitate scaling should be activated when stage 3 is accomplished²².
- For each funding stage, a portion of the funding should be deployed for ongoing operations.

²² Challenge programs, such as the SunShot Catalyst Program, are a good example of these multi-stage grant approaches.

- II. To support funder accountability and impact measurement activities, funders and policymakers should be monitoring these programs from the perspective of human capital formation, organizational resilience, sector-wide knowledge production and solution development, and successful scaling of solutions with demonstrated potential.

R 4.2 Create long term funding opportunities to support networks of organizations' development of strong Social R&D practices.

Some examples of how this can be accomplished include:

- I. A fixed increment, e.g. 0.7% or 1%, for R&D on all non-innovation grants. All SPOs should have the resources to run low-cost experiments, commission research, cover the cost of advanced technical training, etc.
- II. Funding to support context-based, or “mission” clusters. Similar to other sectors, these clusters would require multi-year funding to operate (e.g. 5 years), and be accompanied by a thorough monitoring layer (e.g. summative and formative evaluations, along with academic partnerships to continue to grow understanding of what works for supporting socially oriented R&D and Innovation). This funding could be a shared commitment by the members of the Social R&D Tables mentioned in Remedy 1.2.
- III. Social R&D practitioner-led network of centres of excellence. Modelled on existing examples in the business²³ and education²⁴ sectors these networks serve funding administration, partnership brokering and capacity building mandates (Schulman, 2017, p.25). Each centre of excellence would be equipped to host and drive some of the recommendations above (e.g., host and curate the context-based resource-hub, curate cross sectoral partnerships (universities, business, government), offer training opportunities (bootcamps, university internships for R&D programs), coordinate and support knowledge production and diffusion of Social R&D, develop capacity building models, etc.).

Centres would complement the work of the IRP-Social R&D Mobilization Initiative and existing intermediaries with track records in building R&D capacity across the sector (e.g. Grounded Space, Open North, A Way Home, Nu-Lab, etc.), scaling social innovations (e.g. Innoweave, Make Way Foundation, LEAP: Pecaut Centre for Social Impact), and impact evaluation, (e.g. MaRS Centre for Impact Investing, Tamarack Institute, etc.). Finally, these centres could act as a marketplace (Rajasekaran, 2016, p.23) where organizations can search, share and demonstrate successful pilots and new knowledge (e.g. codified practices, context-specific qualitative data, case studies, etc.).

²³ “In Canada, the federal government allocates \$12 million per year for a business-led centre of excellence to accelerate the transfer of inventions from the lab into innovations in the field.” (Schulman, 2017, p.25)

²⁴ The Regional Educational Laboratories program in the U.S. provides a well established (more than 60 years of existence) and tested source of inspiration.

R 4.3 Exposure to exemplary projects and embedded expert practitioners inside funding and policy organizations.

- I. Given conventions for funding Social R&D do not exist, there is an opportunity to co-design criteria (benchmark and measures) with a multidisciplinary and multi-stakeholder table (see R1.2) to guide a more effective granting process.
- II. New accountability measures for funders would incentivize more productive investments. Mission-Oriented and Challenge based programs could offer inspiration.
- III. Having mechanisms to bring in technical advisors or sectoral expertise when required via multi-year “tours of duty” is key to helping R&D and innovation funders make stronger bets that increase the short- to long-term impact of their investments. The well known ARPA (Advanced Research Projects Agency) model and Code for ‘x-country’ are emblematic of this approach.
- IV. Facilitating field visits for funders and policy makers to observe exemplary Social R&D in practice would also facilitate a deeper understanding of this practice and improve the nuance of these essential funding programs.

R 4.4. Create pathways to mobilize insights from diverse Social R&D portfolios towards policy, program, service design and evaluation teams.

The Social R&D Fellowship took an active knowledge broker role with the public sector between 2015 to 2019, which helped build and sustain momentum for Wave Two in Canada. Looking forward:

- I. New organizations will need to step up. Funding for Social R&D capacity building intermediary organizations should include brokering partnerships with government and other sectors, as well as ongoing field building work.
- II. Inspired by Participant 0’s perspective on existing discovery and development activities across the sector, a series of measures should be created to support practitioners and their organizations to meaningfully document and share their practices, regardless of how they frame it. Examples of what these remedies could look like include: scholarships targeted at practitioners, paid internships and sabbaticals for SPO leaders to up-skill and document practices as described in R2.2; and/or a shared Social R&D storytelling platform to capture and publish practitioner insights; etc.

These efforts will provide decision-makers with early signals about what’s working and not working or what’s emergent on the front-lines. The end result: a policy and funding environment that reduces the start-up costs of an R&D portfolio, increases the scale-up support for promising interventions, and gives funders and policymakers fresh insights that lead to more responsive and impactful government policy, programs and services.

Lead actor for all Need 4 remedies: Public and philanthropic sector in close collaboration with experienced intermediary organizations (e.g., Portrait One organizations).

SYNTHESIS OF EXPRESSED NEEDS

Depending on how people define and practice Social R&D, there will be different views on how to address the needs we have outlined above. For example, those represented by Portrait Two (i.e., the organizational development and community empowerment-oriented portrait) stressed the importance of building from the work people are already doing to use research to drive organizational or systems-change efforts. In contrast, those represented by Portrait One (i.e., the innovation-inspired group) prioritize R&D craft and entrepreneurial, risk-tolerant cultural dispositions that strive for disruptive innovations.

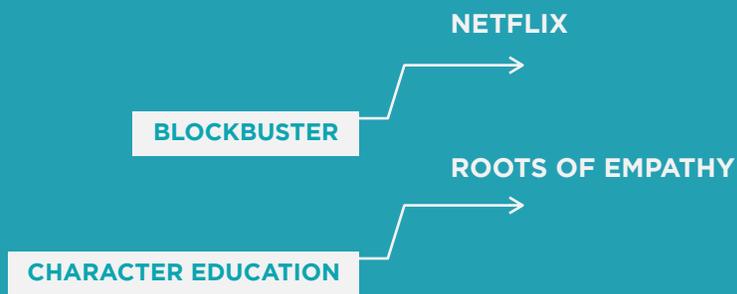
Despite the different perspectives and learning objectives that people hold, they all expressed a desire to conduct research and to develop and test solutions that accelerate a social change process. Likewise, despite people's different understandings of Social R&D and the ways it could be strengthened, some shared needs emerged across all portraits:

- 1. R&D-based skills and knowledge (e.g. experimental design or integrating data into practice), and Context-based skills and knowledge (e.g., about disability or homelessness);**
- 2. A deep understanding of the operating contexts of implementation and the theories/practices associated with change management efforts.**
- 3. Well designed and sufficient funding programs at organizational- and consortium-levels.**

The diversity of the needs outlined in this section suggest a traditional single-pronged capacity-building effort will be insufficient. Rather, if there is sincere interest in creating a flourishing and sustainable Social R&D environment in Canada, capacity building will need to be included in a range of intermediary-led interventions (e.g., the resource hub, bootcamp, primer and training), and reciprocal partnerships between academic institutions and the private sector. Furthermore, the health of such an ecosystem will depend on intentional and complementary investment strategies by public and philanthropic actors. Anything less, will make systematically connecting research to programmatic, service, practice and/or policy inventions and innovations untenable. Finally, creative monitoring approaches will be required to track the ways that organizational- and sector-level investments in Social R&D are influencing collective capacities to drive systemic change.



Ph: Melanie Gordon - a photo of Roots of Empathy sessions



*Adapted from Dan Roam's
Business Break-Lines*

Concluding Thoughts

The social impact sector has strong capacity for program and service delivery, funding administration and reporting, human resources, advocacy and community engagement. In addition to these program and service delivery competencies, the sector is resourceful and inventive. Despite these strengths, there is a growing recognition that in order to address society's wicked challenges, the social impact sector requires bespoke R&D infrastructure as much as every other sector.

A key building block of this Social R&D infrastructure is capacity building support for the social purpose organizations eager to grow an R&D practice from existing research or development activities. Despite a range of capacity building programs within the social impact sector as a whole, there is little available for this group that is both right-sized and robust. This research study was designed to generate the evidence to help fill this gap.

We are not calling for an R&D team in every nonprofit; this is unrealistic and introduces power imbalances well articulated by Participant 0. Also, while some of these capacity building support recommendations are explicit, we don't believe in a prescriptive R&D method or operating model. We do, however, believe that more attention should be applied to the innovation system know-how documented by other sectors, and the insights and experiences of Social R&D practitioners past and present. Anything less diminishes our chance to realize a productive ecosystem where basic and applied research findings can effectively serve the interests and needs of those living with and seeking to address social problems.

We will continue to analyze our data and will publish the full results in the coming months. Until then, given the myriad efforts underway across Canadian cities and communities to address the deep rooted and persistent problems people face, including responding to the ravaging effects of the novel COVID-19 virus, we are hopeful that this detailed summary of our findings empowers the sector's capacity building intermediaries, funders, and policymakers with actionable insights to better align their innovation supports for the sector.

We are confident an integrated and sustainable Social R&D ecosystem is possible, and that it can accelerate our transition to a more just, healthy and ecologically resilient future.

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ANNEX: LIST OF REPORTS DOCUMENTING SOCIAL R&D ECOSYSTEM CHALLENGES/OPPORTUNITIES

To support practitioners in honing their craft and support funders and policymakers to shift policy and program design to better enable Social R&D work, the Fellowship has generated a series of knowledge products to document and grow the field.

Below is a list of past reports and programming, which can be accessed on SocialRD.org.

Report Name (and theme)

Getting to Moonshot, 2016 (positive deviant analysis)

Drive Inclusive Growth by strengthening R&D in Canada's social sector, 2016 (policy recommendations)

How Can We Support R&D in Canada's Social Sector, 2017 (funding roundtable report)

Field Notes: Insights from Practitioners on Growing Social R&D, 2017 (practice gathering and SI/SF Strategy roundtable report)

Canadian Innovation in an Age of Acceleration, 2018 (Stanford Social Innovation Review special insert)

Social R&D Talent Pipeline, 2018 (talent roundtable report)

Social R&D Champions Roundtable: Building the Next Stage, 2018 (capacity building at scale roundtable report)

Social R&D Practices and Patterns v1.0, 2019 (detailed synthesis of SocialR&D CoP practices)

Transition Report to Investment Readiness Program - Social R&D Ecosystem Mobilization Initiative, 2019 (history, observations, and recommendations for continued field building)

*Forging the missing link: evidence and support towards a robust Social R&D ecosystem, 2020 (research study on Social R&D capacity building)

These reports compliment others, also written by practitioners, to offer ways to address factors that have inhibited the emergence of a thriving Social R&D ecosystem in Canada, e.g. Ready. Set. Experiment.: Social R&D Experiment Cohort Learning Journey Synthesis Report, CKX, 2018; Develop and Deliver, Schulman, 2017.

Fellowship Curated Programming

Social R&D Practice Gatherings, 2016, 2017, 2018

Accelerating Social R&D Webinars: Data Collectives, 2018

Social R&D Storytelling Workshop: exploring essential audiences and narratives, 2018

Innoweave Data Utilization module co-development process, 2019



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