

WEAVE EAST

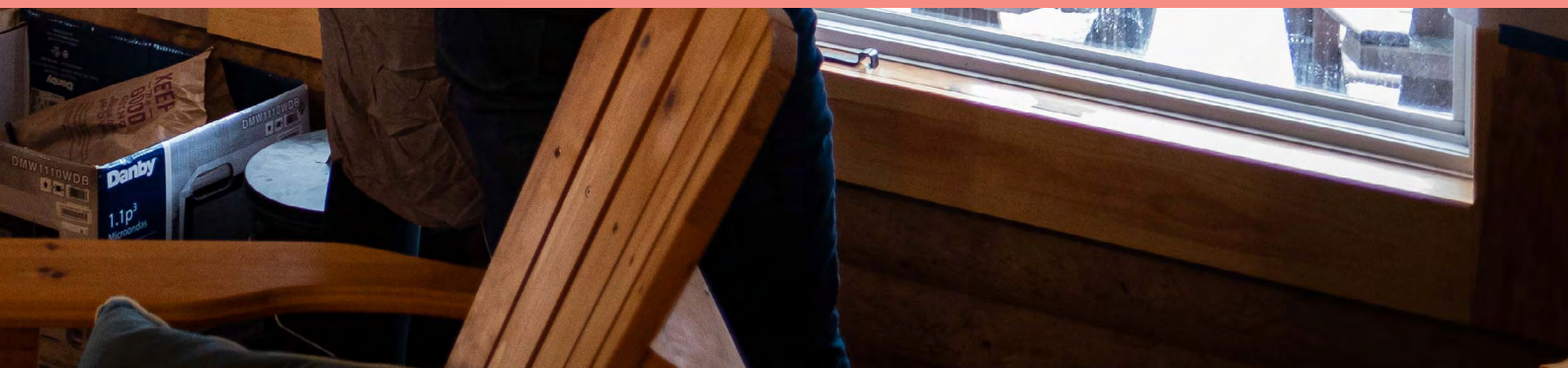


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# SOCIAL INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM FOR ATLANTIC CANADA

2020 Annual Report to the McConnell Family Foundation



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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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We'd like to thank the people who worked hard to bring the Atlantic Canada Social Innovation Ecosystem and WeavEast to where it is, including:

The leaders and participants who contributed to the WeavEast prototypes: the Atlantic Youth Weavers Photovoice Project (Dr. Jen McRuer, Tyler Colbourne, Rachel Morgan & Jackie Doves of the Atlantic Council for International Cooperation (ACIC)), the Narrative Project (Susan Szpakowski & Duncan Ebata) and the Social Innovation Policy Project (Dr. Annika Voltan).

Staff members from 2020:

- Jenn DeCoste, WeavEast lead and founder
- Annika Voltan, former Inspiring Communities executive director
- Miranda Cobb, learning and evaluation lead
- Olusegun Osunrinde, online animator
- Gregory Woolner, interim learning & evaluation lead, interim WeavEast lead
- Sophia Horwitz, WeavEast lead
- Tyler Colbourne, WeavEast lead
- Charlene Boyce, content curator

Our warmest thanks to everyone who has attended and participated in our convenings and jams, shared opportunities, inspiration and thoughts with the community and engaged in the work of weaving. And of course, our sincere gratitude to those who are gathering energy as we speak to lead us forward in 2021.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**INTRODUCTION** 4

.....

**2020 YEAR IN REVIEW** 5

.....

**DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION HIGHLIGHTS** 8

- **WICKED QUESTIONS**
- **LESSONS LEARNED & PIVOTS**

.....

**2021: MOVING FORWARD** 11

.....

**[CLICK HERE TO VIEW APPENDICES DOCUMENT](#)**

1

# INTRODUCTION

It has been an incredible year. Inspiring Communities has been fortunate to continue to grow and support systems leadership in Atlantic Canada throughout 2020, while also shifting to accommodate emerging challenges and opportunities due to COVID-19. We adapted to support new priorities in human resources, administration, and leadership, developing [principles](#), policies, and new ways to champion social innovation.

The proposed scope of work between the McConnell Foundation and Inspiring Communities for the second year focused on prototyping and collaborative action, stemming from Year 1 themes and learning. We aimed to build capacity for collaborative leadership and a more resilient network; demonstrate the value of the social innovation field; scale existing work; create an enabling policy environment; and enhance access to resources. 2020 presented many opportunities for pivots and responsive new directions, including supporting a number of online collaborations rather than face-to-face gatherings, and focusing on connecting changemakers across the region to reflect on the new global context.

2020 has shown us once again the importance of resilient, meaningful, and intentional relationships. Our work with and for community has grown in importance and reach. With the adoption of our online learning community, Wayside, we have deepened our capacity to support changemakers.

As we enter into our third year of this agreement, we turn to sustaining the learnings of WeavEast and the Social Innovation Ecosystem in Atlantic Canada through Inspiring Communities, Wayside, and our relationships with changemakers throughout the region.

*\*Note: In order to streamline this report, we have created a separate Appendices document with further information. If you're looking for more, [click here](#).*

## 2

## 2020 YEAR IN REVIEW

### WEAVEAST STRATEGY 2020

The WeavEast Strategy for 2020 was developed from discussions in November 2019 in New Brunswick, where network members engaged with data collected throughout the year. It included 4 strategic directions (see appendices for the full document):

- Coordinate and support shared work that addresses regional systemic issues through three priority areas:
  1. Bridge across sectors, communities, and decision makers.
  2. Shift narratives: strategic storytelling to shift dominant, negatively reinforcing patterns.
  3. Influence the redesign of restrictive policies.
- Weave relationships through convening.
- Expand the network through communications, convening, and connecting one-on-one.
- Move power to the periphery of the network.

### PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING & FUNDED PROTOTYPES

The backbone team stewarded a process to collectively determine how resources would be allocated across the Atlantic Provinces. Proposals from the network were posted on the [WeavEast website](#), an online gathering was hosted to query each project, and the network was invited to vote. One project went forward for each of the three priority areas from the WeavEast Strategy (see appendices for more information).

- Bridging across sectors: [Atlantic Youth Weavers: Photovoice](#)
- Strategic storytelling: [The Narrative Project](#)
- Influencing the redesign of restrictive policies: [Social Innovation Policy Research](#)

### ATLANTIC YOUTH WEAVERS (AYW) PHOTOVOICE PROJECT

This 8-week program, in partnership with the Atlantic Council for International Cooperation (ACIC), offered sixteen diverse youth from across the Atlantic Provinces the opportunity to explore, through capturing images in a reflective framework, what resilience looks like from their perspective.

How did this project move the Atlantic Social Innovation Ecosystem forward?

- Partnership with ACIC was strengthened.
- Replication: ACIC has already undertaken a second version with international participants.
- Cultivated relationships and a familiarity with systems thinking and a reflective approach.
- Created a resource in the online [#Gallery4Change](#) that has been shared with policy-makers.

## NARRATIVE PROJECT: CHOOSING THE STORIES WE LIVE BY

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The Narrative Project was inspired by the transformative work of [Dr. Chené Swart](#). As COVID-19 and the Black Lives Matter protests disrupted the continuity of dominant narratives, the Narrative Project hosted virtual spaces to re-author our systems through shining the light on Atlantic communities and initiatives.

How did this project move the Atlantic Social Innovation Ecosystem forward?

- Engaged a broad demographic cross-section in creatively considering system narratives.
- Creating resources that inspire and inform community hosting and narrative-shifting.
- Sessions covered stories from each of the Atlantic Provinces, thus engaging people from across the region to connect.
- Leaders continue to work toward shifting dominant narratives via Wayside.

## SOCIAL INNOVATION POLICY PROJECT

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The proposed goal of the project was to develop a better understanding of existing policies, programs and processes in the region that enable social innovation, and those that are acting as barriers. Lack of resources and inability to converge on focal areas for the research prevented its completion.

How did this project move the Atlantic Social Innovation Ecosystem forward?

- Two potential common agendas identified: racism & equity, and COVID response.
- Two participants have stepped forward wishing to pursue their interest in policies affecting inequities for BIPOC-led organizations in the arts and culture sector.

## SPARKING & AMPLIFYING CROSS-ATLANTIC COLLABORATION

One lesson that emerged from the participatory budgeting process was that cross-Atlantic collaboration is mostly new and needs stewarding. Backbone staff responded by reaching out to the network to identify possible cross-Atlantic areas of common concern or existing partnerships that could be fostered and amplified through WeavEast's unique position. Four areas emerged: food security, youth employment, social labs, and anti-racism. Backbone staff offered what was needed from coordination to meeting facilitation. The food security conversation resulted in tangible and ongoing outcomes.

## ATLANTIC CANADIAN FOOD SYSTEMS: A VISION FOR A JUST RECOVERY

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Members of the WeavEast network were engaged in a cross-Atlantic conversation regarding an equitable food systems recovery post-pandemic. Backbone staff offered meeting facilitation which supported the group to come to a consensus around content and directions for a vision document. Continuing into 2021 this group plans to meet and organize a campaign to get signatories and build momentum with local-decision makers.

## DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION DEBRIEF

Multiple personnel changes and the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic made clear our context had shifted. Through a developmental evaluation approach, we delved into collected data and experiences in order to learn deeply from what had come before and to inform the strategic directions going forward. This included debrief interviews with all 2020 WeavEast staff members, as well as multiple sensemaking and strategy sessions with the new team members.

## PIVOT TO WAYSIDE ONLINE LEARNING COMMUNITY INCLUDING PILOTING COURSES

The pandemic created a clear need for innovative, experimental ways to collaborate online. Inspiring Communities had recently nested the Wayside Initiative. Wayside offered online tools for collaboration, learning and connection. It could allow us to effectively convene the network and empower the periphery to do the same. Not only could Wayside help us transcend the challenges of COVID, it could allow us to address the issue of transportation and geographic equity that can sabotage cross-Atlantic initiatives.

After deliberation, we decided to step into Wayside as a virtual opportunity to continue the development of the WeavEast network. In November we successfully piloted two courses, supported by in-depth developmental evaluation, and began partnership meetings to explore possibilities. Through these actions we were able to:

- test the feasibility of Wayside;
- test and debug the technology, our processes and systems;
- test demand and uptake by changemakers; as well as
- prepare for the public launch in February 2021.

## WEAVEAST SOCIAL INNOVATION JAM

In December we hosted a 2-hour online gathering inviting the WeavEast network and beyond. With a blend of past participants and new network members, it was an uplifting end to the year in great company. See the [Jamboard](#) or the [summary](#) on our IC website for details.

One key learning was a deep craving for informal connection and relationship building, which has resulted in plans for piloting informal virtual coffee houses through Wayside in 2021. This will be an important component in the toolkit to combat burnout and ensure sustainability going forward.

3

# DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION HIGHLIGHTS

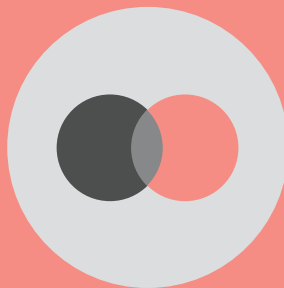
## WICKED QUESTIONS

These wicked questions are essential to understanding the tensions in achieving the work, and provide an underlying set of considerations for future projects.



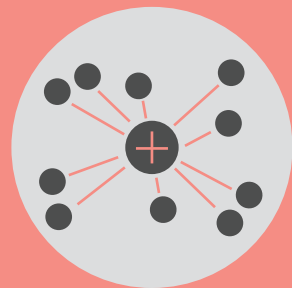
**DIVERGENCE ↔ CONVERGENCE**

How do we play/maintain a divergent/groan zone space of innovation AND have moments of convergence for nourishment and sanity?



**INCLUSION ↔ EXCLUSION**

How do we build the deep relationships needed for a thriving network AND call in diverse peoples to an intentionally inclusive network?



**CENTRALIZED ↔ DISTRIBUTED**

How can we have a functioning initiative (e.g., administration support, budgeting, backbone staff) AND have emergence/power from the periphery?



**LESSONS LEARNED & PIVOTS**

<p><b>HUMANS ARE THE HEART OF A NETWORK</b></p> <p>It's all about the people, and the people are taxed and tired. We are increasingly incorporating this consideration into our work.</p>	
<p><b>LESSONS LEARNED</b></p> <p><i>Burnout</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Innovators/changemakers are very involved, often over-committed and very prone to burnout.</li> </ul> <p><i>Network weavers need to be resourced</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Folks representing their community/province need time and resources to act as a weaver in their region.</li> </ul>	<p><b>PIVOTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support incredible innovative work that's already happening, rather than starting more.</li> <li>Involve network less in decisions / administration, and offer more backbone supports.</li> <li>Honoraria as one way to honour time and energy.</li> <li>Second round of funds in development for 2021.</li> </ul>
<p><b>EXPERIMENTS WITH NETWORK LEADERSHIP</b></p> <p>A one-leader model is not suited for this work. It serves neither the leader, nor the initiative's greater purpose. Experimenting within complexity and ever-changing systems, while building multitudes of relationships is stronger when held by a group.</p>	
<p><b>LESSONS LEARNED</b></p> <p><i>Network Brand or Personal Brand</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>It's a challenge to connect people to a network rather than a person.</li> <li>Never lead alone in complexity. Multiple people &amp; perspectives are needed.</li> <li>Leadership transitions need extra care.</li> <li>More time is needed for collaborative processes to work through emergent. challenges and opportunities.</li> </ul>	<p><b>PIVOTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>New team structure and composition.</li> <li>More debriefing and onboarding, time and resources for transitions.</li> <li>New team/project management systems, including regular huddles.</li> </ul>
<p><b>COMMUNICATE</b></p> <p>In order for folks to see themselves as part of a network, the network needs to be visible, to reach out and to reflect the diversity of Atlantic Canadian voices. Striving to have inclusion at the center, we're investing more time and energy to strengthen communication.</p>	
<p><b>LESSONS LEARNED</b></p> <p><i>More communication</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communication is fundamental, yet very challenging: who is the network and what do they need?</li> </ul> <p><i>Simplify brand identity(ies)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Succeeding with multiple brand identities requires resources, clarity and larger networks. Sometimes additional logos add unnecessary complexity and muddy organizational relationships.</li> </ul>	<p><b>PIVOTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hired a Content Curator to increase external communications, including inviting changemakers to share stories.</li> <li>Wayside's branding is aligned with/ under Inspiring Communities. WeavEast social presence is on pause with the exception of the ongoing, active Facebook Group.</li> <li>Shifted this identification by gradually inviting WeavEast network to join Wayside.</li> </ul>

## LESSONS LEARNED & PIVOTS

<p><b>DIVERGENCE AND CONVERGENCE IN INNOVATION</b></p> <p>We heard repeatedly that members of the network needed moments of convergence. On the other hand, in order to try new things, we have to constantly pull each other out of our comfort zones.</p>	
<p><b>LESSONS LEARNED</b></p> <p><i>Moments of convergence are needed</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Concrete action is needed even in emergence to re-ground and re-energize for the next phase.</li> </ul> <p><i>Ensure there’s something at the center</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To call people towards.</li> </ul> <p><i>Conveners not coordinators</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We offer more value in a backbone role.</li> </ul>	<p><b>PIVOTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Now channeling resources to the Wayside Online Learning Community as an anchor for the network to play a role of convening.</li> <li>Bridging the cross-Atlantic topic-specific groups onto Wayside (e.g., food security, youth employment, social labs, anti-racism). To be launched in 2021.</li> </ul>
<p><b>BUILDING AN ATLANTIC NETWORK IS NEW</b></p> <p>While those outside the region easily recognize the Atlantic Provinces as a unit, there is such diversity in our history that the concept of having a cohesive voice in any sector is new.</p>	
<p><b>LESSONS LEARNED</b></p> <p><i>Unique groups need unique approaches</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Successfully recruiting from discrete groups in the region will require tailored communication / relationship approaches.</li> </ul>	<p><b>PIVOTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focusing next funding round on both cross-Atlantic projects and localised work that can offer broader lessons.</li> <li>Cultivating partnerships with community-embedded groups.</li> </ul>
<p><b>PANDEMIC ↔ ONLINE COLLABORATION ↔ WAYSIDE</b></p> <p>2020 changed the world. Fortunately Inspiring Communities was already equipped with a virtual collaboration space.</p>	
<p><b>LESSONS LEARNED</b></p> <p><i>New need for online convening</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relationships form and strengthen best when meeting face-to-face, but collaboration needed to move online</li> </ul>	<p><b>PIVOTS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wayside Online Learning Community is the new focal point for WeavEast</li> </ul>

## 4 | 2021: MOVING FORWARD

As we continue working in pandemic conditions, the need for our network weavers to: go slow; be more conscious and intentional; be resourced; and be supported, feels very present. Burnout, again, emerged as a theme during the December WeavEast Jam. Lessons learned and network voices support our pivot from an effort to create another “organization” to serving as a backbone for the network through Wayside.

### HOW

**We will follow the momentum.** Wayside has sparked interest and excitement from diverse groups, organizations, and individual changemakers.

**We will be convenors or hosts rather than programme directors.** We will focus on the role of convening and backbone support.

**We will employ Developmental Evaluation.** We will ensure continuous open lines of communication from changemakers by setting up systems to understand the impact of the work, how the system is changing, and how changemakers want and need support.

**In thought partnership with McConnell.** We will co-create conversations around strategy, direction, sensemaking, systems change and continued building of the Atlantic Social Innovation Ecosystem.

### WHAT

#### WAYSIDE LAUNCH

The Wayside Online Learning Community will launch in February 2021 with:

**Ready courses:** Mindfulness, a second run of the Art of Collaboration, and the open course on Systems Thinking / Working in Complexity.

**Developing course(s):** Developmental Evaluation and possibly others.

**Collective impact initiatives using it:** Northside Rising is delivering education to a group of their community members and Between the Bridges is exploring how they might use the tool in their digital equity collaborations.

**External partners experimentation:** Engage Nova Scotia and the East Preston Empowerment Academy are reaching unique groups with targeted education.

#### WEAVEAST PROJECT FUNDING, ROUND 2

We have identified some desirable outcomes for this round:

- A mix of large, cross-region projects and smaller place-based projects.
- Targeted approach through partners to BIPOC and other marginalized communities.
- Bringing together project leads regularly to share learnings and support, and build new cross-Atlantic alliances.

### WEAVEAST JAMS / CONVENING

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Bringing together changemakers remains a fundamental element to build the network. We will continue to experiment with different foci for online convenings, and if possible, to host in-person events again. 2021 plans include:

- hosting two or more network gatherings;
- experimenting with different virtual collaboration tools and ways to empower informal connections; as well as
- stewarding communities of practice on Wayside for issues of common-concern for the Atlantic.

### PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

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Wayside offers us the opportunity to explore different models of partnership based on the needs of our partners. Our vision for Wayside is to:

- Create content, community, and resources.
- Offer accessible courses (free or low-cost) to overcome cost-related barriers to participation.
- Partner with a diverse set of organizations to develop and host content for changemakers in Atlantic Canada.

### FINAL THOUGHTS

As the funding with McConnell ends in December 2021 we are asking ourselves, “how can we sustain relationships and learnings?” In the original work of WeavEast, the movement was branded and positioned as a stand-alone entity. This created confusion for changemakers and reduced overall capacity from the backbone team. In combination with leadership transitions, it became clear that it wasn’t possible to balance a stand-alone brand and identity, while also leveraging work that was already happening with networks and systems with changemakers in Atlantic Canada. Our vision is to sustain the learnings and the relationships, without the limit of prioritizing the need to sustain the brand identity of WeavEast. This is counter to how many movements and organizations view and prioritize sustainability, and we believe it is the best way to support changemakers and social innovation in Atlantic Canada.

Inspiring Communities and Wayside are stand-alone entities and we continue to explore how to leverage the non-profit status of Inspiring Communities and the charitable status of Wayside to support changemakers. We believe by building lasting and meaningful relationships with underserved communities and organizations we can partner and co-create more just and harmonious communities through innovative projects, while using Wayside as the vehicle to support the work. For 2021 we are aiming to explore funding through federal and provincial grants, foundations, charitable donations, and through revenue generation with Wayside learning opportunities. The funding from McConnell has been key in supporting our pivot to online learning and community building.



[WWW.INSPIRINGCOMMUNITIES.CA](http://WWW.INSPIRINGCOMMUNITIES.CA)