

WeavEast  TissEst

ANNUAL
REPORT

2019

A PROJECT OF INSPIRING COMMUNITIES

www.weaveast.com


Inspiring
Communities

McConnell



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MESSAGE FROM THE FIELD

At the beginning of 2019 we sensed a need for trusted, locally led convening and a community of practice for social innovators in Atlantic Canada. There were many signs that leaders in our region were seeking greater collaborative practice and our assumptions were validated throughout the year by a diverse and quickly growing show of support for a regional platform. Together we launched WeavEast: a platform to connect for positive social change in Atlantic Canada. Throughout the year we have been part of the formation of new partnerships across the region that led to new and tangible collaborations. These stronger connections have already started to help reduce duplicated effort and move us more quickly to action when solving complex social problems.

Through national alignments with initiatives like Social Innovation Canada and its affiliate organizations we have also begun the work of making our region more visible on a national scale, supporting Atlantic Canada to flourish in the future.

Throughout this first year, WeavEast and the staff of Inspiring Communities have approached this work with a truly cooperative design mainly because regional work of this nature is complicated by several factors: Atlantic Canada covers a large geographic region with cultural, language and policy differences that seems to make it impossible for any singular organization to serve as a credible convenor. Our cooperative approach has enabled us to gather together as systems change leaders from across the four Atlantic provinces to bring community, public sector, and varied organizational perspectives to this work. We have worked together to identify the shared systemic barriers to our changemaking efforts, to find and connect the contributors, projects and organizations leading this work in Atlantic Canada and to identify key areas of focus that could make a significant impact in our region. This year of sensing has laid a strong foundation for our second year of growth.

We learned a lot on our journey. The speed with which this work scaled, being pulled forward by demanding interest from the region, was a challenge for all contributing partners because they are all committed to other organizational work as well. The application of horizontal practices and a non-linear hierarchy was an active experiment for our team and remains a work in progress. We collected reams of data from our 6 month Fellowship program but we do not yet have a fully formed and shared vision for the design of this network. We are following the energy of what is emerging from across the field and we are pleased to have this opportunity for reflective practice, looking back over our year with intention to understand more clearly with the clarity of vision available to us now that we have wrapped the year of sensemaking. Please join us in our reflections and we welcome feedback from our funding partners with regards to opportunities to share more broadly what we have learned and what we would recommend to others who are starting similar projects elsewhere in Canada with support from McConnell.

WHAT WE ASSUMED

As the practice of Social Innovation increases its national presence, Atlantic Canada has unique regional needs that need to be accommodated to ensure readiness to participate in this field of practice. While local initiatives are working hard to address immediate needs we have experienced limited regional collaboration and mixed support for innovation within provincial governments policies and practice. We began this project with a hypothesis: a regional network of Social Innovators would present an opportunity to collaborate for social change in an unprecedented way.

Our three year goals

- Capacity building for collaborative leadership and systems change
- Network building to create stronger linkages between those in the field
- Promoting and demonstrating the value of the field
- Amplifying and scaling existing work
- Creating an enabling policy environment
- Enhancing access to resources

We expected that with the formation of a regional network, Atlantic Canada could also become a more active contributor in a national network of social innovation hubs. In order to build trust with national work, we saw a need to create an “intermediary space” in our region that could engage with national networks, players and funders on behalf of the Atlantic ecosystem. We led with the assumption that this work would be most effective if created by a coalition of partners that are provincially or regionally focused.

Systems_change_redefined



At a gathering in April 2019, 24 Social Innovators gathered from across the region to test our assumption and align to name and begin to build "WeavEast".

WHAT WE ACCOMPLISHED:

Big Picture 2019



WHAT WE ACCOMPLISHED:

Time Line



GUIDANCE & WISDOM FROM ACROSS THE PROVINCES

- Interim advisory council is formed to continue to define an intention and formulate an invitation to a regional partners gathering.



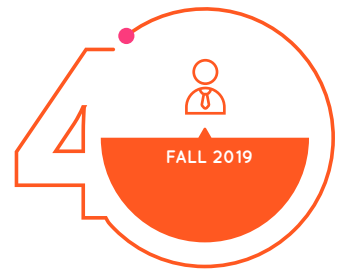
WEAVEAST IS NAMED

- First regional in-person gathering. 24 social innovators gathered at Windhorse Farm. April 30 - May 4 to talk about the development of a network of social innovators in the region.
- Brought in Going Horizontal methodologies to learn about co-creation as a foundation for the work.
- Collectively named guiding principles and named the network WeavEast.



FELLOWSHIP LAUNCHED AND OUTREACH BEGAN

- WeavEast Atlantic Fellowship Program is launched on June 1st during the How We Thrive event in Nova Scotia. 9 fellows in place with representation from all four provinces and one dedicated Indigenous fellow.
- Their mission was to engage in and source first-hand, first-voice information from communities across the region to help set the direction for WeavEast.
- The fellowship objectives included:
 1. To understand the current system of social innovation across Atlantic Canada
 2. To identify potential points in the system that could be strengthened to improve outcomes, create opportunities for alignment, and/or scale existing efforts
 3. To inform the planning of year 2 activities for WeavEast
 4. To create a new peer network amongst the fellows
- They engaged with hundreds of people doing innovative work around AC, collecting stories, listening for challenges, opportunities, and how WE might best support them to amplify their work.
- Engaged the 'Systems Sanctuary' to build the cohort of fellows and to track their learning to relay back to fellows, backbone team, and Yoda Council.
- Implemented a developmental approach to evaluation.



FELLOWSHIP COMES TO A CLOSE, AND WE LOOK TO THE FUTURE

- WeavEast's 2nd regional in-person gathering. "WeavEast Jam" at Richibucto River Lodge, NB, Nov 21 - 24.
- **click to watch video**
- The purpose of this gathering was to;
 - o Identify leverage points where energy and resources could best be added to amplify the work of social innovators in the region
 - o Define purpose, scope, vision of WeavEast for year 2
 - o Identify potential organizational concepts and structures that could hold this vision well

We experienced hesitation for this new approach:

“Trying to get people to trust in systems after systems have broken their own spirits makes partner recruitment difficult. I’m worried about getting people to come into an emergent space with us when we don’t know where we will get in the end.”



We experienced appreciation for an opportunity to connect regionally:

“It is rare to be able to connect and reflect with peers in a focused manner, but with no “performance pressure”.

“I was most impressed with the group decision making. I have used the techniques within my workplace to great success, I learned from the facilitators and believe in horizontal management structures.”

“Connecting people with each other who are working in similar areas is like having all your favourite people at your birthday party. People pushing the envelope often struggle alone or in silos, and finding ways to connect and support each other is important and effective.”



We saw real connections starting to form:

“So glad to have met folks from Food First NL - we’re both doing Collective Impact and agreed to meet about that in future. Loved learning about SmartICE and will follow up re: opportunities for regional funding (ACOA). Enjoyed connecting with Rachel from NB about how to bridge some of the negative politics in the field.”



“So many connections happened. Meeting and learning more about change-makers from NL and NS (including Mi’Kmaq people) was a treat. The in-person connection with the “backbone team” was very positive.”

We gathered very practical data about the needs and realities of our region:

“It is evident that in-migration (whether inter-provincial or international) has both a cross-pollination effect and an economic “sparkplug” effect. A disproportionate number of newcomers seem to be able to observe gaps in goods and services and to craft enterprises that meet community needs. Many of these initiatives stem from a desire to make a meaningful contribution to their adopted community (whether year-round or seasonally).”



“Rural communities all have similar issues of capacity and many women wearing many hats. Have had limited engagement with men in social innovation sphere. It is very gendered so far.”

“I heard lots of frustration for the government. I heard calls for staff funding/ executive assistance. I heard self-reliance, and doubt that policy can be shifted or that the government knows what is good for them/us.”

We saw hope for the future of this work:

“People are really seeing [WeavEast] as a way of increasing their visibility within their own province and network as well as across the region; there’s a lot of hunger for more storytelling capacity (comes up in every conversation)”

“I learned that while there are many great ideas and solutions to problems, there are many barriers to bring these ideas to fruition. It is my opinion that it is possible to address these barriers and in fact create system changes.”

“There is a need to connect these people who are doing amazing things, strength in numbers/collaboration and not having to reinvent the wheel.”

“I learned that creativity is very exciting but also very inspiring. In sharing (my fellowship experience) with my staff, we feel like we have renewed energy in building stronger communities.”



WHAT WE LEARNED

Completing the first year of this project felt like a milestone in itself. Starting with clarity about aspirations but very little pre-established groundwork meant that we were designing our approach at the same time as we were growing the network. From this we have gained a lot of insight we could share with others engaged in designing regional networks for social changemakers while this field is still emerging.

1. Set aside time to clarify expectations

Several times during the first year we encountered a tension between the backbone team and expectations of those supporting the work regionally. For instance, it was an accomplishment to find and convene a committed team of advisors in the early stages. Their thoughtfulness around design and willingness to share contacts set this work up with credibility and ensured early success. Their reach in our region was an advantage but their availability was limited. We faced an ongoing logistical challenge keeping in regular contact with a group of this size. Many of the early advisors were also expecting to, by default, become longer term leaders of this work and struggled to find their role as the work expanded to include other contributors. While it is challenging to provide structure to emergent work we would recommend co-writing an MOU at the very beginning of a relationship with an advisory board to ensure that all needs are shared and discussed. Similar challenges were faced by the launch of the WeavEast Fellowship. Within an 8 week period we got agreement from the regional partners to launch the program, put out a call, interviewed candidates, organized a launch event in Halifax that required coordination of 9 travel itineraries and a facilitated training program. The energy required for this launch drained our team and our resources were too depleted to design a strong framework around the fellowship in the first month. It was our expectation that the Fellows would simply feedback information they gathered from their existing contacts as part of this sensemaking project but left without structure the Fellows inflated the program to include active network building efforts that required a website, marketing materials, and active support from the backbone team. We found ourselves in response mode and our activities in this period were not structured. We would recommend a period of rest after the initial launch of a fellowship - a period of time, likely 2 months, after the fellows are recruited and trained during which the program coordinators and fellows could pause to co-design expectations before beginning the work of the fellowship itself.

2. Relationships ARE the work (and they are a lot of work)

Our region experiences barriers to connection compounded by things like geography which makes it particularly challenging for connecting participation from Newfoundland to the Maritimes. The Francophone/Anglophone solitudes are shared by all provinces, and the under-representation of BIPOC changemakers connected into our ecosystem is a reality we are facing daily. We had our greatest success when we spent time, in person, developing relationships with 'credible messengers' from these communities who would help spread the message of WeavEast, building a desire for participation from their position in community rather than us pitching from an external position. This would not have been possible without the means to form those initial connections in person and then to be able to convene these changemakers together where the connections extended beyond the backbone team and out into the formation of the network itself. We would recommend building time and budget into the design of networks to ensure a focus on in-person connections to build a foundation of trust.

3. Field building with boundaries

When offering to serve as a backbone resource for this work Inspiring Communities never intended that the network would be centralized and led from our office long term. Despite efforts to provide training and lead with horizontal organizational practice, we noticed a pattern of reliance on the backbone for leadership and decision making as well as administrative function. This was not unexpected for an emerging project that needed to be nested for a short time, but a similar pattern was witnessed when the WeavEast fellows were active in the field: despite positioning themselves as sense makers and data gatherers, our fellows often felt that they were being asked to step into board positions or leadership roles where they could be part of leading change in the communities they were connecting with on behalf of WeavEast. Based on this experience we would recommend network builders are very clear as a team about the boundaries established for the work and set up to reflect, adjust and protect each other from scope creep which can lead to burnout, especially in the early days of network growth.

4. This work is not going to follow a linear path

We had identified Social Network Mapping as one of our priorities for the year. When we were ready to talk about mapping design, we launched into active and somewhat circular conversations about strategic considerations relating to mapping. Primary concerns were related to access to the data (in terms of privacy perspective), and then expanded to a discussion about who is “in” ie: should previously collected lists of contributors and partners be uploaded or should there be a vetting process to ensure people on this newly forming map are clearly identified as people who are demonstrating a willingness to work collaboratively across the region, etc.

We also got stuck on discussion of which tools are best for capturing the map’s content. We looked at simple, agile tools like Kumu all the way to larger investments in something like Hivebrite. None of these were simple to implement, each had a balanced advantage/disadvantage list and our board never managed to secure agreement to take the first step. When we assembled a design committee to attempt to use collective wisdom to land on some decisions. This committee started questioning how this content would stand the test of time and whether or not we would be able to maintain accuracy. Big questions that we couldn’t answer without much more research. If this content was entered by an individual who then moved to a new role, for instance, how likely would they be to re-enter and update their information in the map? What if work expands – would tags be added or removed as necessary to show current links to keep the content relevant?

In the end, we realized that our work needed to focus on trust building and building a value proposition for participation in the network itself before mapping would be successful in this region. This became the focus of our work and ultimately we moved away from mapping for the short term. We recommend being flexible in project plans and moving at the pace of trust in work of this nature.

“The organizations I talk to really want to learn and be part of learning communities. I don’t think WeavEast alone has the resources to make this happen, so I’m having good conversations about how to share knowledge without it being resource intensive.”

“The Fellows found it challenging to draw a clear line around the communities, provinces and the kind of people they were interviewing. With systemic issues, there was a lot of overlap and interconnection between worlds.”

“Not enough time to connect with everyone. Feeling overwhelmed, how am I going to connect with all of these people.”

“I don’t feel like I’ve rounded the corner. I haven’t had enough time to really dive into this.”

WHAT WE RECOMMEND

Major Needs

Major needs in our ecosystem that we collectively need to address, as identified at the Design Jam:



**Bridging across sectors,
communities, and decision
makers**



Shifting Narratives
Strategic storytelling to shift
dominant, negatively reinforcing
patterns



**Influencing the redesign of
restrictive policies**

Possible Places To Intervene In The System

From our year of sensing emerged a set of possible places to intervene in the system, where innovation or focus might help to build the field of social innovation in the Atlantic region. Some of these represented ‘Bright Spots’- things that were already happening, places to focus energy, which appeared to be working and could be built upon. Others were challenges the Fellows and partners saw in the system that could be explored in the ongoing work of Inspiring Communities.

Acknowledge systemic pain points and barriers for moving forward

a) Challenges with Funding

When we set out to explore systemic pain points, the dominant theme that surfaced was lack of funding.

“The biggest challenge is funding. It’s very complicated on the back end to get funding. There are challenges in getting things qualified.”

“Government priority overlooks a lot. There’s a lack of core funding for change makers, a lack of support for innovators. There’s no focus on root causes, or organizational culture.”

“Lots of social justice work comes out of churches, because it’s a free space but a church can’t get funding, because you’re working under the umbrella of a church.”

“System change work is very long-term deep work and funding is short term output and outcome based. When we see people in the field who are resource and time scarce, can be quite challenging.”

b) Mindset shifts are required

Fellows identified limiting cultural norms and mindsets that made it difficult to move innovation and systems change forward.

c) Avoiding risks halts innovation

“Mismatch of structural things around how innovation is funded and what would actually allow people to do innovative work.”

“Bureaucrats like policies, rules and guidelines -afraid of taking risk and afraid of change. Innovators are risk takers. Ability to look at challenges collectively and look for solutions.”

“Risk is too high for doing what’s best. People who want to do best are pretty risk averse. They’d rather you mend, quick fixes.”

d) Increase support for entrepreneurs

“There’s a lack of creativity, positivity, innovation. That mentality is very niche and rare and reserved in little pockets. There’s a small crowd who gets it and drives it. Generally, there’s a hopelessness and pessimism among Nova Scotians.”

“In New Brunswick, we had the Youth Entrepreneurship Challenge which is inactive now- used to be a competition with judges and seed funding. Hasn’t been nurtured enough/ Could that be reborn or redeveloped?”

“We need to normalize social innovation as a job choice - to connect the people with the ideas to the people who have the skills for it. There’s the financial piece that doesn’t fit into the projects. We could pay someone to develop ideas, under our umbrella with a social impact model. We do it with universities and high schools, but it’s not a normalized internship or fund, you have to rig it, so it fits what is needed.”

Next Steps/Bright Spots

a) Focus on the margins

There was a sense that interesting challenges and opportunities lay on the outside of power centers of social innovation in the region.

“We’re not always mapping the typical leaders, but also the people behind the scenes doing advocacy work. The hyper-local work that’s never noticed, volunteer based stuff that’s not connected. We go out and connect and convene. These people aren’t coming into the spaces we usually convene or host.”

“There’s lots of things happening on local scales, on the margins.”

“This is really sparking interest in connecting to indigenous people, build life skills and employability skills especially.”

b) Build social innovation capacity

We found that there was a continuum of access and awareness of social innovation practices and approaches. Some practitioners were well connected, others were aware of mindset and resource scarcity to support innovation and systems change.

“Innovator in residence programs could happen. 6 months to be placed in non profit org, take skills back.”

“It’s important to be apprenticing in, not just writing down.”

“Could you build an internal community of practice? To learn and surface how people are doing this work. You could take notes, capture themes of work and that way embed systems practice within a system.”

“We need to think about how to have innovative spaces to convene - what that looks like - institution has its own grassroots level.”

c) Seek (and value) opportunities for deep reflection

A theme that ran through our entire year was the need for time and space for reflection. Fellows shared their frustrations and anxieties about trying to do systemic change work without the time to truly understand the roots of issues. This issue came up for fellows on personal, professional and systemic levels but was most troubling when thinking about how to create collaborative and collective processes.

“How do I do the reaching out and also the deep reflection work as a fellow. How do I carve that time out?”

“I have time poverty and I need a safe place to learn.”:

“

We are doing systems thinking, design thinking, long-term prototyping, learning and we struggle to keep people in that deep place of reflection. Slowing down to speed up. How do we as Fellows do that on our own and bring that to the systems that we work within? How do we enable deeper meaningful conversations? The Art of Hosting methodologies are great. Human and heart-centered. But there are tensions when I try and encourage people to come into deeper spaces.”

“People are obsessed with productivity, my grandma had convalescence time as a teacher- to prevent herself from getting ill. I appreciate white space, we need to chew, otherwise we’re eating food whole.”

“I’m guilty of dealing with the urgent rather than the important.”

d) Build meaningful relationships between government and marginalized communities

Working across difference is a key systems change capacity and practice and the Fellows did a deep dive on the specific context of cross sectoral collaboration in the African Nova Scotian and Indigenous Communities. Through a PIP process, we dove into some of the dynamics that create division and made it difficult to move forward. We explored how we might shift these dynamics that seemed to perpetuate ineffective engagement and barriers based in fear and not wanting to rock the boat.

“The people from the communities you want have not shown up - have you driven to someone’s door and shown up and asked?”

“How can this question be held with a wider community, who are the people who can lead in this way- so systemic changes that can happen.”

“One loud voice in the community currently influences the government.”

“They need to come into the community outside of elections.”

“Could you name the power? Putting a power lens on this and zoom out? Hold a frame recognizing a history of structural racism to this community in Nova Scotia. What interventions can be done to act at that level?”

e) Dedicated focus required to connect with Indigenous Communities

While we were able to partner with an Indigenous Advisor as a member of our early Stewards committee and engage a dedicated Indigenous Fellow, we discovered through this process that Mi’kmaq communities across Atlantic Canada are independent and in most cases do not have a conduit for sharing communication, coordinating engagement or collectively supporting regional initiatives. Outreach to each individual community is required to ensure a broadly reaching message of invitation and engagement. Possibility exists with partnership with Ulnooweg, local Mi’kmaq Friendship Centres who support several communities, but this work will require dedicated focus from the WeavEast collective as well as time to build trusted relationships.

APPENDIX 1

2019 Summary from How We Thrive

by Susan Szpakowski

Context

How We Thrive grew out of some of the same relationships and motivation that gave rise to WeavEast. We sensed that our networks were in need of, and ready for, greater connectedness, collaboration, and co-learning among those working to address systemic barriers and opportunities in the region. We began to think more intentionally about an ecosystem of learning and support for ourselves as partners and for those working on the ground in communities.

Within this ecosystem, Thrive has been playing a convening role, bringing together like-intentioned partners such as Inspiring Communities, Community Sector Council of NS, New Dawn, Centre for Local Prosperity, Engage Nova Scotia, St Frances Xavier University Extension/ Coady Institute, Centre for Social and Spiritual Innovation, Windhorse, Mocean Dance, an Indigenous Collective, Change Lab Action Research Institute, and others. Our two annual gatherings (2018 and 2019) have provided an opportunity for relationship-building, strategic thinking, and capacity-building across our organizations and networks.

Most recently, a four-day How We Thrive gathering (June 2-5, 2019) at Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax was attended by 178 people. You can meet some of the people and catch glimpses of the event and what people said about it here. We are grateful to the McConnell Foundation for supporting this event through WeavEast. Our partnership with WeavEast also made the Thrive gathering accessible to change-makers across the Atlantic region.

What we've been learning

Most of our year-round activity involves relationship-building, sensing, and learning. Thrive gatherings are like mushrooms that pop up after the rain, as expressions of less visible mycelium webs below the forest floor. Following are two key insights that have emerged from this activity in 2019.

How we gather is how we thrive

“What we need is a way of living on this land together with respect, reverence, reciprocity and responsibility.”

—Elder Albert Marshall

Time and again we've seen that Intentional convening and hosting builds relationships of trust and models a “culture of thriving.” Convening is a radical act, and something many of us already know how to do. Older cultures in this region still hold the memory of neighbours coming together around food, music and spirituality. In a spirit of “many-eyed seeing,” our work is to bring together the best of this Indigenous and folk wisdom and culture, and the best of systems understanding and tools. In this way we can undo (decolonize) while doing (creating the way of life and systems of the future).

In a recent stakeholder gathering, we heard that people make time for Thrive gatherings because they find there (and want more of)...

- a way of being together with openness, bravery, authenticity, abundance and creativity.
- a spirit of being in this together, with all our differences. Family.
- strong, just relationships of trust that can hold change, conflict and complexity.

In these times, convening means holding contradictions.

“The times are urgent; we must slow down.”—Bayo Akomolafe

Early in 2019, Thrive organizers convened a diverse group to “provide input into the 2019 event design.” Instead the group put on the brakes, shifting the focus to questions about Thrive’s founding assumptions and ways of going about “inclusion.” This process, which continued on for many hours over a number of months, was in service to creating an event space that would be truly welcoming to communities not yet represented at Thrive.

As someone valuing this process while also holding responsibility for the planning and execution of an event, I experienced first-hand the creative tension in polarities like doing and undoing, stopping and moving forward, coherence and decentring leadership. Clearly these tensions are not unique to Thrive but expressions of what is required in order to move forward on new ground. Read further reflections about this here.

What Thrive will do in 2020

During several stakeholder meetings over the past six months, we heard Thrive’s large gatherings have value, as spaces of “oxygen” and nourishment that cross-pollinate learning and build and deepen relationships, so we can all move forward together with strength. We also heard that we have more work to do, particularly around bringing a multiplicity of perspectives into the centre of Thrive and articulating Thrive’s purpose and principles more clearly.

We’ve also had requests for smaller year-round gatherings, closer to where people live. We heard that the large gathering and smaller, year-round, community-based groups and events go hand-in-hand. These two are mutually reinforcing. The large gatherings both harvest what’s going on in the field and generate new groups and gatherings for the next cycle (breathing in and breathing out).

As a result, in 2020 How We Thrive will...

- Reconstitute a more permanent and diverse board, and clarify Thrive’s purpose and principles.
- Convene small regional gatherings, in collaboration with Inspiring Communities and other community partners.
- Experiment with ways of going deeper into some of the relationships and themes that have arisen so far, including an Indigenous-led initiative in Unama’ki/Cape Breton.
- Capture emerging narratives about how we thrive, now and into the future.
- Begin experimenting with an online learning platform, in collaboration with Inspiring Communities.
- Bring all perspectives/voices and learning into the next large gathering, which will take place in 2021.

Not surprisingly, against the backdrop of the climate crisis, growing inequity, and strained systems, many other initiatives are also experimenting with ways to support and empower community-based leadership, networks, innovation and resilience while decolonizing their own organizational mindsets and agendas. It has never been more timely to work and learn together, and to find ways to support one another’s efforts.

APPENDIX 2

Proposal for February & March 2020



Proposal for February & March 2020

For review by the WeavEast network

Purpose of this doc: to share the proposed work plan for the WeavEast network for the next few months in preparation for getting feedback during the group Zoom call on January 29th.

Proposal for February & March 2020

Key learnings from WeavEast Year 1

Through the fellowship, the November gathering, the survey, and follow up conversations, we heard 3 things loud and clear:

WeavEast should support taking action to address systemic issues that affect the Atlantic region.

We need transparent and participatory decision making at the core of how WeavEast operates.

Convening and connecting is still at the heart of WeavEast.

At the November gathering we worked together to highlight shared systemic barriers and identify key areas of focus that could make a significant impact in our region. To identify priority areas within this list, we asked for input through the follow-up evaluation survey.

We asked people, "If you had to choose up to 5 for WeavEast to support action on, which would they be?"

Three areas of focus clearly rose to the top:



Bridge Building:

Bridging across sectors, communities, and decision makers.

100% of survey respondents said WeavEast should focus on this



Shifting Narratives:

Strategic storytelling to shift dominant and negatively reinforcing narratives.

80% of survey respondents said WeavEast should focus on this



Policy:

Influencing the redesign of restrictive policies.

67% of survey respondents said WeavEast should focus on this

*None of the other options received more than 33%.

Proposal for February & March 2020

Proposal for WeavEast 2020

We want to move more of the decision making to the network, and support the work that emerges. We are keeping staffing and other costs minimal for now and will continue to go where the energy is and adapt to best serve what is needed. This approach is a departure from what was proposed in November, in that we intend to follow the needs, desires, and energy of the network to inform our structure, rather than the other way around.

In the short term, the backbone support will be minimal, (Gregory, Olu, Annika), and additional staff will be added as support is needed. What follows are the proposed activities for WeavEast for the next year:

Supporting Action to Address Regional Systemic Issues: We are proposing that we focus on these areas for this first phase of taking action and micro-funding. In the following months we would like to invite people to step in as champions of these 3 areas and propose actions that could be taken. Through a transparent and participatory budgeting process, we will collectively decide how to allocate resources to best support these actions. We will see what emerges from this process and these projects, and then hold participatory decision making processes to decide how to move forward. (This is



Convening:

Monthly zoom calls starting in March or April. Where we celebrate and share what people are working on, and then connect with others. These will be facilitated using the breakout function of Zoom, so we can connect in smaller groups. Not your typical 30 person Zoom where everyone zones out :) We'd love to have someone from within the network share a story upfront for 10-15 minutes, and then break out into smaller discussions.

Gathering of Changemakers in November (there is also potential to explore how it might be possible to connect with the Social Enterprise World Forum to be hosted in Halifax in September). A clear focus on connection and supporting one another.

Convening on specific issues: We imagine that convening could likely be a function of the groups working in the 3 focus areas.

Expand Communications Efforts: to effectively communicate about what's happening to the current network members, and ensure we are creating channels for more people to be engaged with WeavEast. For example, opportunities will exist to connect to a national online networking platform through Social Innovation Canada, as well as a regional learning platform that will be hosted by Inspiring Communities.

APPENDIX 3

Q1 2020 Timeline

WeavEast  TissEst

Q1 2020 TIMELINE

1. Search for Champions to host and join groups

We hope to converge on the three focus areas (Policy, Bridging, Narratives) and identify champions in the network who are willing to host follow-up conversations and steward the development of proposals for activities and next steps related to each, as well as resource needs.

JAN 29



2. Ideation

The three working groups will go through an ideation phase to come up with ideas that are related to their group's focus area over this period.



4. Voting on Projects

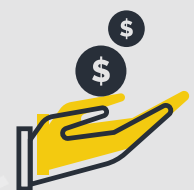
The backbone team will upload the ideas generated by each group on the WeavEast website for voting. Everyone within the network will be allowed to vote and comment

EARLY MARCH

3. Project Pitches

During this phase, each group will work together to document their ideas with the guidelines provided and submit to the backbone team by FEB 21.

FEB 21



5. Participatory Budgeting

A collective process will be used to determine how resources are allocated to each of the projects.

MID MARCH

FINAL REFLECTIONS FROM INSPIRING COMMUNITIES

In reflecting on the learning journey of WeavEast in 2019, it's worth noting the broader context within which this ecosystem building work was born. Inspiring Communities itself was in its infancy, having just been formed as a legal entity in October 2018. Similarly, our role with Social Innovation Canada was only a few months old and that network was in its early start-up stage. As a result, each learned from the other – Inspiring Communities from WeavEast, WeavEast from SI Canada, etc. and the lines between were not always clear. There were times along the way when we questioned whether Inspiring Communities would evolve into WeavEast, and it wasn't always clear how WeavEast and SI Canada could best intersect.

In many ways we are still in the very early stages of being an organization and are feeling through our role in the local ecosystem. Beginning in July 2019, the Inspiring Communities board and staff began to focus on developing a Theory of Change for the organization, which will be released publicly in February 2020. This work has led to clarity about our main areas of focus, which are: nesting social change initiatives, evaluation and learning for systems change. For now, WeavEast is a social change effort that is being “nested” at Inspiring Communities – that is, we provide the backbone support, administration and leadership to help build the relationships needed to create a desire to work together, share resources, collaborate on projects, etc. in the Atlantic region. We are already seeing signs that people are excited about the work, see the value in developing a regional approach to social innovation, and are committed to collaborative action. Year two of WeavEast will push this interest further as we encourage decentralized leadership, follow the energy, and use resources to enable experimentation along three areas that have emerged from the network: bridge building across communities, sectors and decision makers; shifting dominant narratives; and, influencing the redesign of restrictive policies (see proposal for February to March 2020 and Q1 2020 timeline in the appendix).

The biggest lesson we have learned in our first year of this work is the power of relationships – and the importance of taking time to build trust. It's a cliché that is often shared in social innovation circles (“you have to go slow to go far”) but it's the only way that people will come to the table. We received pushback at the beginning about the perception that resources were being controlled nationally to manipulate the region but this scepticism is gradually eroding as we consistently show up with transparency and an emphasis on shared ownership and decision-making. When we do not achieve wide support for proposals from the backbone team, we take a step back and redesign until that support is present. We're optimistic about where WeavEast is heading in 2020 and are happy to share more with McConnell about our learning any time! Thank you so much for your support in this important work.

Annika Voltan
Executive Director, Inspiring Communities

