Rebuilding Cohesion and Trust:

Why Government Needs Civil Society

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LEADING EXPERTISE

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1. Introduction: A Summary of the Argument

In democracies like Canada's, civil society and governments have a long history of constructive engagement. The relationship has evolved over time, often in response to changes in the social and political environment. Today, huge new trends – including the emergence of social media, the rise of populism, the disruption of mainstream media, the ongoing digital revolution, and accelerating globalization – are transforming our society.

Changes on this scale are usually disruptive, and these are no exception. Sharp declines in both social cohesion and trust in public institutions are deeply worrying consequences.[1] These two factors are vital to a healthy democracy, and the pressure on governments to respond is growing.

Social cohesion arises from shared goals and values. It can be rebuilt by rallying Canadians around solutions to the emerging issues of our day. Solution-focused *leadership* will also rebuild trust. Though the task is clear, the political challenge is formidable: *Can leaders unite Canadians around a set of solutions?* As we'll see, there is genuine cause for concern. This kind of leadership gets harder as the issues get more complex and social cohesion and trust decline.

In our view, the main obstacle is neither the people nor the issues, but the *process*. There are better and worse ways to engage the public on difficult issues. While some ways tend to divide people, others can unite them. Increasingly, government's approach divides more than it unites. Indeed, on many issues, it not only divides them, it *polarizes* them, as we'll see in our discussion of the pipeline debates. Yet, a better process can improve the outcome. With the right kind of engagement, complex issues can be solved, and those solutions, in turn, will rebuild cohesion and trust.

This paper proposes a way for governments at all levels to work with civil society to strengthen dialogue and debate. Real progress will require new tools and new skills – ones better suited to the changing environment – and civil society has much to contribute here. As the 2019 Canadian Trust Index finds (Table 1),[2] public trust in organizations of all sorts is falling, but Canadians' continue to place a relatively high level of trust in civil society organizations:

[1] See, for example, *Trust: The Fight to Win it Back*, published by the Open Government Partnership and available at: https://www.opengovpartnership.org/trust/

[2] 2019 Proof Inc. Can Trust Index: https://www.slideshare.net/GetProof/2019-proof-inc-cantrust-index-141978866

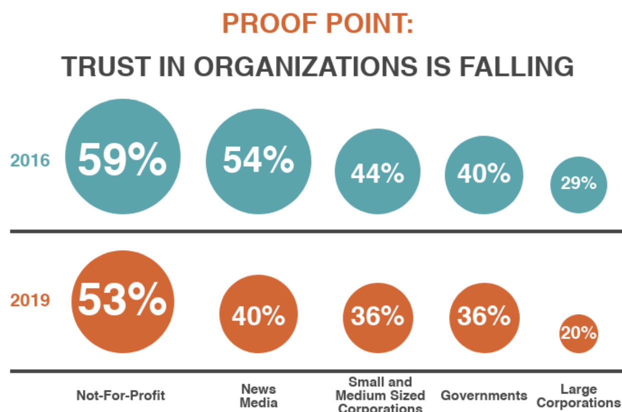

Figure 1: Public Trust in Organizations

This is no accident. Civil society's role brings it into close contact with communities and citizens, who look to these organizations to help articulate public needs and concerns, and to provide many of the programs and services citizens need.

Governments would benefit significantly from the kind of partnership[3] we propose in this paper, but there is a cost: they must be willing to experiment with new and more effective processes for engaging civil society on policy, service delivery, data collection, and more. The current interest in "co-creation" is a good start.

Our paper builds on this work. We examine two basic ways that government and civil society interact – *advocacy* and *service delivery* – to see how dialogue and debate can be strengthened to improve the outcomes. Three challenges emerge from our research. Governments and civil society must take steps to:

- Strengthen their capacity for rules-based dialogue and debate
- Deepen their understanding of how partnerships work and why they are essential for the future
- Develop the soft or "dispositional skills" needed to assess and empathize with one another's contexts, priorities and concerns

Meeting these challenges would constitute a huge step toward transforming dialogue and debate and give governments at all levels a reliable tool to begin rallying citizens and communities around shared goals. That, in turn, would help rebuild social cohesion and public trust and revitalize our democracy. It can be done, but it will take the right combination of effort and will.

[3] Please note the term "partnership" is used in this paper to refer to any type of collaboration where partners share responsibility for the design, production, and implementation of an idea or service. The term is not used in the strictly legal sense.

2. Methodology

The Institute on Governance's *Civil Society Dialogues* were launched in March 2019 to explore ways to strengthen the relationship between government and civil society. The project included four half-day Dialogues. Once a month, 30 to 40 representatives from the two sectors met, listened to experts speak on different aspects of the relationship, and discussed what they had heard. Although each Dialogue focused on a theme, no special efforts were made to arrive at a consensus on the issues and, as a result, the group's views were often diverse.

The first Dialogue session focused on social cohesion, public trust, and the state of public discourse between civil society and government. The second and third Dialogues examined two principal means by which civil society and government interact – advocacy and service delivery, respectively – and discussed how these relationships have evolved in recent decades. The fourth Dialogue focused on diversity, empathy, and ways to rebuild social cohesion and public trust.

> **Creating a Vision**
>
> A vision starts by imagining what a community wants to be (say, 20 years from now), describes that state, then defines the key goals that must be achieved to realize the vision. Finally, it produces a practical plan for achieving the goals. The vision (and the strategic goals around it) thus provide a focus – a centre of gravity – around which the community can organize to deliver the plan. This, in turn, builds social cohesion.

The process also included a small working group of nine people from government and civil society. Operating in parallel a week after each of the half-day Dialogues, the working group gathered for a half-day to discuss the key issues in greater depth. Many of the ideas and analyses in this paper were generated by or vetted by the working group.

In writing this paper, we have drawn freely on both sets of discussions. Our meetings with the working group played a particularly significant role in helping us define our views. However, as the paper's authors, we made our own choices about what to include and drew our own conclusions from the exchanges. Neither the Dialogue participants nor the working group members are responsible for the result.

3. Social Cohesion: A Vignette

3.1 Sketching out the Problem

Meet Peter Smith, the fictitious mayor of an imaginary mid-sized Canadian city, which we'll call Sweet Falls. We find Smith seated in his office at City Hall where he is engaged in discussion with Anna Fortin, a determined advocate for the homeless, who insists that everyone in Sweet Falls deserves a safe place to sleep and rest.

Mayor Smith listens patiently as she makes her pitch, but when she is done, his response is alarmingly frank: public housing, he says, won't get him re-elected. After a brief pause, he raises his eyes and adds that he is neither cynical nor indifferent to people's welfare.

The mayor reminds his guest that he is accountable to citizens for the things they elected him to do. The people of Sweet Falls, he informs her, are skeptical about the value of such efforts and see them as a poor use of tax dollars.

The advocate tries a different tack: homelessness, she says, has a serious impact on other aspects of government business and the community, from the high cost of emergency services to the value of commercial real estate, which in some parts of town is affected by the presence of a large homeless community.

This approach shifts her focus away from values such as fairness and onto outcomes and "return on investment." The advocate is making a "business case" for public housing. Homelessness, she insists, is the underlying cause of a range of important issues. If the mayor wants a safe city and a vibrant economy, he must recognize the real costs of homelessness.

The mayor nods knowingly. In his job, he replies, he hears about many "underlying causes," from public health issues and environmental degradation to unfair taxes on businesses and bureaucratic zoning rules – all of which have articulate advocates with similar stories.

The advocate shifts uncomfortably. Her point, she says, is that social and environmental issues like these are critical determinants of a healthy, vibrant community, and ignoring them undermines long-term development of all kinds, including economic growth.

The leadership challenge, she says firmly, is to engage the public in a discussion that helps define a balanced set of social, environmental, and economic priorities – a *vision* of what the community can be and a plan to realize that vision.

The mayor blinks. Schemes like these, he grunts, rarely resolve such differences. On the contrary, they are just as likely to divide the community.

Now it is the advocate who blinks. Her first instinct is to challenge the mayor – to insist that he is missing the bigger picture and thinking about issues in too linear a fashion. His views, she wants to say, ignore the subtler interconnections.

Except, the mayor is not ignorant of complexity; indeed, he is hypersensitive to it. He understands that issues like homelessness are part of a larger, worrying trend and that many cities grapple with growing isolation between different sections of town or different social groups.

His point is that ambitious policy agendas require lots of public support. He fears there is not nearly enough agreement within his community to rally people around such an initiative.

Having glimpsed the mayor's dilemma, the advocate now struggles to respond, but is at a loss for the right words. Instead, she finds herself awkwardly insisting that the mayor is wrong, that "a real debate about real issues" will draw people together, and that the community will rise to the challenge.

The mayor looks on in silence, but the expression on his face provides a clear response: "*Really?"*

3.2 Whom Should we Believe?

Both sides have a point. Mayor Smith is not so much a skeptic as a realist. He is worried about how difficult it will be to get different social groups in his community to agree on solutions to difficult issues in areas such as health, education, or economic prosperity. The mayor thus resists the advocate's project because he is convinced it will fail. In his view, Sweet Falls doesn't have the "social glue" it needs to succeed.

The advocate, on the other hand, thinks that the process will create its own centre of gravity and pull the community together. Thus, while the mayor sees the situation as bleak, she sees it as hopeful. Who is right?

It matters. Communities across Canada (and elsewhere) are facing similar challenges. Disruption has hit them hard, undermining their economic base, challenging their values, and dividing their citizens. When we discussed this situation in the first Dialogue session on social cohesion, most participants thought governments should take steps to rebuild social cohesion. They had lots of ideas about how this could be done, from new programs to support social enterprises to anti-hate laws that would control language on social media. Like our advocate, they were optimistic about the prospects for success and confident that government could get the job done.

We (the authors) are more guarded. Rallying the population around a new vision or plan to rebuild the community may sound like a solution but, as Mayor Smith notes, this can be difficult and politically risky. Dialogue and debate are the principal tools governments use to lead such projects, but as we heard from a presenter at the session on social cohesion (see Table 1), people's trust in political parties and government is growing thin:

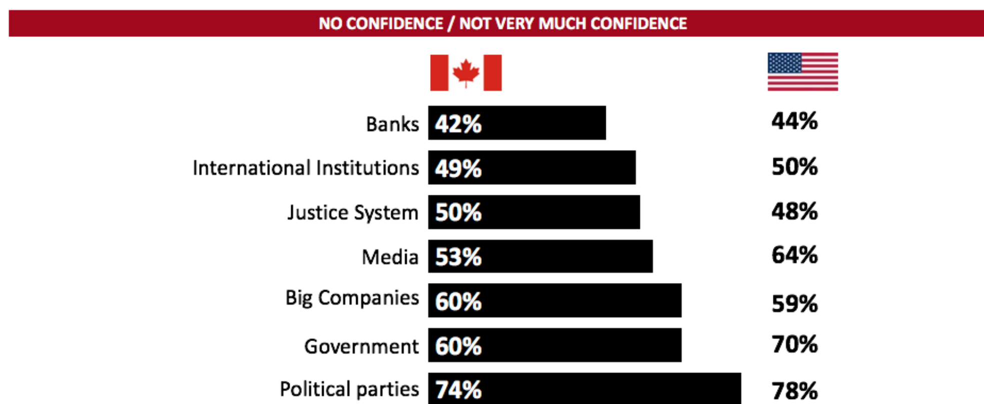

Figure 2: Canadian Confidence in Institutions

As a result, political leaders at all levels are increasingly wary of taking on challenging projects. Building pipelines is a timely Canadian example. Many Canadians now see the pipeline debates as a national symbol of a crisis in our democracy. Perhaps they are right. If dialogue and debate

can no longer resolve issues like the pipeline, cohesion and trust could go into freefall. So, can we count on dialogue and debate to find a solution?

4. Advocacy

4.1 Advocacy as Fair and Informed Dialogue

Advocacy is a big part of what civil society organizations do, and it involves a range of issues, from shelters for the homeless and safer streets and neighbourhoods, to health promotion and environmental protection. At first, our working group members generally agreed that advocacy helps inform governments about these issues and that it makes an important contribution to the public interest. Governments should therefore welcome it and should engage with advocates.

As our discussions quickly showed, however, the situation is more complicated than it at first appears. In fact, civil society organizations of all kinds engage in partisan politics and policy debates, and many see such engagement as a legitimate – even vital – way of advancing their causes. As a result, even the most innocuous causes – from protection of the environment to worker safety – can quickly become controversial. Once they do, the debate may be as likely to hinder progress as to inform governments on the issues. To see why, let's examine the debate around the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion.

4.2 Polarization and the Debate over Trans Mountain

The Trans Mountain pipeline stretches 1,150 kilometres, from Edmonton, Alberta, to Burnaby, British Columbia. It's been carrying Alberta oil to the west coast since 1953. In 2013 the owner, Kinder Morgan, announced plans to twin the pipeline by building a second one alongside the first. A second pipeline is projected to increase overall capacity from 300,000 to 890,000 barrels per day.

Alberta's oil industry says it needs the new pipeline to get its landlocked resources to new markets in the southwestern USA and Asia. They insist the survival of the industry depends on it. Some First Nations agree.

Environmentalists and some other First Nations see things differently. They worry, for example, that the increased supertanker traffic in Vancouver's Burrard Inlet would make environmental disaster a virtual certainty. They are fiercely opposed to the new pipeline.

Trans Mountain is a textbook example of how *polarization* is redefining public policy debate in Canada and elsewhere. Polarization occurs when opponents frame their positions as a simple choice between two options – effectively, yes or no. Advocates often then go on to raise the stakes by arguing that the "wrong choice" will lead to calamity.

Thus, in the Trans Mountain debate, one side (the BC government, environmentalists, and some First Nations) insists that building the pipeline will result in environmental catastrophe,

while the other (the Alberta government and industry) says that not building it will result in the collapse of Alberta's oil industry.[4]

The two sides are thus poles apart and both have ratcheted up the stakes to attract people whose interests and sentiments lean in their direction. Neither side is looking for middle ground. This is a zero-sum game – a battle to be won or lost.

The media mostly aids and abets the stand-off. Conventional wisdom says that the public isn't interested in news stories with too much nuance about "middle ground." Ordinary people find these stories hard to follow and are more likely to pay attention to stories that are more black and white. Supposedly, this approach makes the issues easier to grasp, and viewers like the conflict. Thus, the media has reported on Trans Mountain as though it were a showdown between two champions.

Social media is no different. As a speaker at the second IOG Dialogue put it: "The world may be grey, but social media is black and white."

But if this is the conventional wisdom, the reality in people's front rooms and at their dinner tables appears to be quite different, as these results from Abacus Data show:

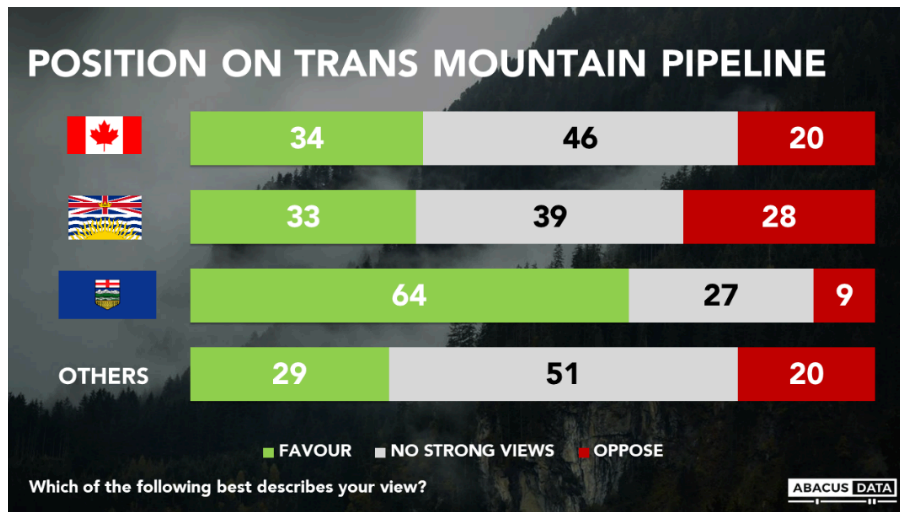

Figure 3: Position on Trans Mountain Pipeline by Jurisdiction
Note: the category of OTHERS shows the national numbers with BC and Alberta removed.

[4] The federal government maintains it is arguing for "middle ground" in the country's overall approach to climate change vs. industry. As a result, it supports Trans Mountain – indeed, it has purchased the pipeline – but with strong environmental regulations around it. At the same time, it has refused to allow development of other pipeline projects.

4.3 Conflating Facts and Values

Despite the heated rhetoric and tense exchanges in the pipeline debate, when Abacus took this poll (August 2018), many British Columbians and other Canadians were undecided. Given the high-stakes arguments and the strong positions among the key players, this may seem counter-intuitive, but we think there is a good reason why so many people felt this way. To get at that reason, first we need to distinguish between two aspects of the debate: *facts* and *values*. Consider these questions:

- How many jobs would construction of the pipeline, and expansion of the oil industry, create?
- Can the pipeline withstand a large earthquake?
- How vulnerable is the pipeline to terrorist attacks?
- How much harm would a spill cause to wildlife or vegetation?
- What impact will the pipeline have on the tourism industry?
- Would people's health be at risk in the event of a spill?
- How might the pipeline change the lifestyle in communities along its path?

Answers to questions like these involve lots of data and expert analysis in areas ranging from engineering to public health. Fortunately, significant amounts of data and expertise are available. Serious studies have shed real light on the risks associated with projects like Trans Mountain. Nevertheless, facts and data alone are unlikely to resolve the basic question over whether the pipeline should be built. Why not?

The disagreement is not just about the facts. It is also about the *values* that individuals and organizations use to *weigh* those facts. Consider these four questions:

- Do projects like this one unfairly offload the environmental costs of Canada's carbon-rich lifestyle onto future generations?
- Would the pipeline undermine the rights of some First Nations by putting their traditional way of life at risk?
- What is the value of pristine wilderness (the pipeline will run through some of the most spectacular natural settings in the world), and can its loss be compensated for?
- What priority should be given to the interests of citizens and companies whose economic viability may depend on the pipeline?

Unlike the first set of questions, these questions can't be answered by data and studies alone, because they are not about the facts around the pipeline. Rather, they challenge us to *interpret* those facts. These questions are about the values that are shaping the debate. Values like "intergenerational fairness" or "the right to a livelihood" help people evaluate the facts of a situation and decide how they think these facts should affect their plans and decisions.

However, different people are focused on different values, and that complicates matters. Imagine a study that concludes there is a one per cent chance of a pipeline spill over 25 years. Someone who believes that BC's pristine wilderness is priceless may see this risk as unacceptably high, while someone who cares more about creating jobs for their community may see it as reasonable. Their different values explain the different assessments. Basically, their values affect their tolerance for risk – or, in technical jargon, risk assessment involves a subjective element.

This does NOT mean that people are free to interpret the facts however they please. Suppose that studies showed that increased tanker traffic in Burrard Inlet would almost certainly lead to a disastrous oil spill – and that there was no known way to mitigate this. In this case, people on both sides would simply abandon the idea that loaded supertankers should be allowed to travel through the inlet.

When tense standoffs occur, however, it is usually because the evidence is inconclusive, which means the conclusions, too, will be less than certain. In addition, there may be ways to mitigate the risks. Debate then shifts to other questions: How much risk is acceptable? How reliably can the risks be mitigated? Finding answers that are acceptable to everyone – win/wins – requires dialogue and debate. And that is where the process usually breaks down and polarization often starts.

4.4 Lessons on Advocacy

So, when does advocacy serve the public interest? When and why should governments be seeking out advocates? Our working group members were intrigued by a proposal that advocacy be defined in "procedural terms," as legal theorists do with justice. In this view, justice is the outcome of a specific process, such as a *fair* trial, which, in turn, is defined by stringent rules of evidence, argument, and decision-making. The key idea here is that, like procedural justice, advocacy serves the public interest when it is part of a *fair and informed dialogue*.

Participants in a policy debate will have different views of the issues (as they do in Trans Mountain). But suppose that government invites them to join a process that is based on rules that promote fair and informed dialogue, and that a condition of their participation is that they agree to respect and abide by the rules of engagement. These "rules of engagement" now oblige participants to work together to analyze, compare, and, hopefully, consolidate their views. Specifically, they must agree to:[5]

1. ***Be open and transparent about their objectives and concerns***
   If the participants are working together to find a win/win solution, hiding information from one another will not help. This will only make it more difficult to find a solution that is mutually acceptable. Openness involves a willingness to share views, information, and knowledge relevant to the issues being discussed.

2. ***Listen to one another and try to empathize with different values and viewpoints***
   Empathy and mutual respect imply a willingness to seriously entertain alternative views. Without this, the process can't get started. This rule thus obliges the participants to listen to one another and to accept that there must be give and take.

3. ***Respect rules of evidence***
   Rules-based dialogue recognizes that evidence is often incomplete and that reasonable people may disagree, but participants must agree that the norm of providing and fairly assessing evidence is a critical part of deliberation. Participants thus agree that

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[5] These rules are discussed at length in Vols I and II of The Deliberation Series, published by the Open Government Partnership at: https://www.opengovpartnership.org/documents/deliberation-getting-policy-making-out-from-behind-closed-doors/ See especially Vol II, Section 2.6.

controversial factual claims must be supported with evidence and that, where they are, participants will fairly recognize the evidence.

4. ***Ensure that all the parties affected are fairly represented in the process***
   Inclusiveness requires that all those with a real stake in the issue be fairly represented in the dialogue. Leaving anyone out would undermine the legitimacy of the process.

In this approach, participants are still free to advocate for controversial positions, such as strong environmental regulations or jobs for their communities. The process does not ask them to abandon their values. However, the rules change *how* they engage with one another. Now they must listen to one another's arguments, defer to evidence, recognize the role that values play in the debate, and work together to address value conflicts through accommodation. Basically, instead of trying to defeat an opponent, the process directs them to look for a win/win, which, in turn, involves a gradual transformation of their views as they move toward finding a shared solution.

For example, suppose there are data sets to support both sides of the debate on whether supertankers should be allowed in Burrard Inlet. Rather than using this evidence to discredit an opponent or polarize the debate, now the participants would use it to help them identify strengths and weaknesses in their respective positions, and work toward a shared solution. Such a solution might be achieved by exploring whether there are reliable ways to mitigate the risks from tanker traffic.

As the Abacus poll shows, the more polarized debates like Trans Mountain become, the more likely they are to leave a wide swath of "moderates" stranded between the extremes, with no one to help them articulate *their* views, and no reliable process to help them sort through the issues. If these people want to join the debate, they have little alternative but to choose a side, which only divides the community further. This is precisely the dynamic the mayor worried about in Section 2.

By contrast, a rules-based dialogue encourages and rewards efforts to look for middle ground. This, in turn, creates space for the "undecideds." It gives them the tools and the platform to create a story that bridges their differences rather than deepening them. It would also incite journalists to pay more attention to the "grey area" in the debate and to take the time to report on it. These changes would help rebuild trust and social cohesion.

Rules-based dialogues are being tested around the globe through approaches such as co-creation and Informed Participation.[6] Nevertheless, governments have been generally slow to invest in the skills, tools, and forums to convene and lead such dialogues. Instead, they are often the driving force behind partisan, win/lose debates. Civil society organizations are therefore a major asset for governments wanting to experiment with this kind of advocacy process. They are often well-positioned to bring the right people together and to encourage them to work hard to make the dialogue productive.

[6] See, for example, *Deliberation: Getting Policy-Making Out from Behind Closed Doors*, The OGP Practice Group on Dialogue and Deliberation, 2019: http://live-ogp.pantheonsite.io/sites/default/files/Deliberation_Getting-Policy-Making-Out_20190517.pdf

5. Delivering Services to the Public

Delivering public services is a second way that governments and civil society interact. The history here is complex, but it contains important lessons about social cohesion and trust and suggests ways to rebuild both through better dialogue and deliberation. Let's start with the early efforts at government/civil society partnerships.

5.1 Contracting-out Partnerships

Several decades ago, governments began partnering with civil society to provide public services in a wide range of areas, from skills training to health promotion. The plan was that governments would gradually withdraw from delivering many services and instead contract with local organizations, who would deliver them on the governments' behalf. Civil society organizations often had high levels of expertise in their program areas and were skilled at collaborating with one another. The contracts were to be drafted in ways that would create some "flexibility" in delivery methods so that community organizations could use their special skills and expertise to improve the services.

Governments of the day believed that contracting out would give Canadians the best of both the public and voluntary sectors. Unfortunately, things didn't work out that way:

- Public demands for greater government accountability had been rising, and officials began using the contracts to spell out – often in detail – how taxpayer dollars could be spent. The promised "flexibility" never materialized.

- Pressure to cut government spending was also on the rise, and core funding to many organizations was reduced or eliminated, making them increasingly dependent on short-term government contracts for revenue.

- Pro-market reformers convinced many governments that the best way to deal with community organizations' demands for core funding was to force them to compete for government contracts. In hindsight, this strategy served only to erode the existing culture of collaboration, divert civil society resources from delivering services to filing grant applications, and to create a climate of competitiveness, secrecy, and mistrust among service providers.

In the end, many of the expected benefits from contracting out never materialized. Instead, unintended and damaging consequences developed, from the loss of foodbanks and legal aid clinics to a serious erosion of trust in the relationship between governments and their community organizations.

Over the last two decades, globalization and the digital revolution have reshaped the policy landscape: issues today are often bigger, more interconnected, and correspondingly more complex. At the third IOG Dialogue, a speaker from Employment and Social Development Canada summed things up as follows: "complex issues facing contemporary society – from homelessness to income insecurity to the opioid crisis – are too big to be solved by government alone." Success, he concluded, will require extensive, long-term partnerships between government, civil society, and business that employ new strategies, technologies, and resources.

So, success in this new era calls for some significant rethinking of the partnership idea. We agree. The next three sections explore how new and emerging approaches to service design and delivery are making room for genuine collaboration and, as a result, leveraging the partners' respective strengths. We start with *co-creation*, which is discussed in the next section. While this takes collaboration an important step forward, we think experimentation needs to go even further and begin building the skills and culture for what we call *collaborative partnerships*, which we'll discuss in Section 5.3. We conclude with some lessons about collaborative partnerships and service delivery in Section 5.4.

5.2 Co-Creation Partnerships

In IOG's third Dialogue on service delivery, Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) spoke about its Social Innovation and Social Finance Strategy (SISF). The federal government is committed to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 17 goals are broad and ambitious, ranging from the elimination of poverty to urgent action on climate change. The SISF Strategy is an innovative plan to advance the SDGs. Unlike contracts for services, the SISF is not just a government invention. The Strategy is the result of a two-year, pan-Canadian engagement process, which was launched by ESDC, led by a steering group of 17 sector leaders, and engaged a wide range of civil society organizations and stakeholders (see Table 4).

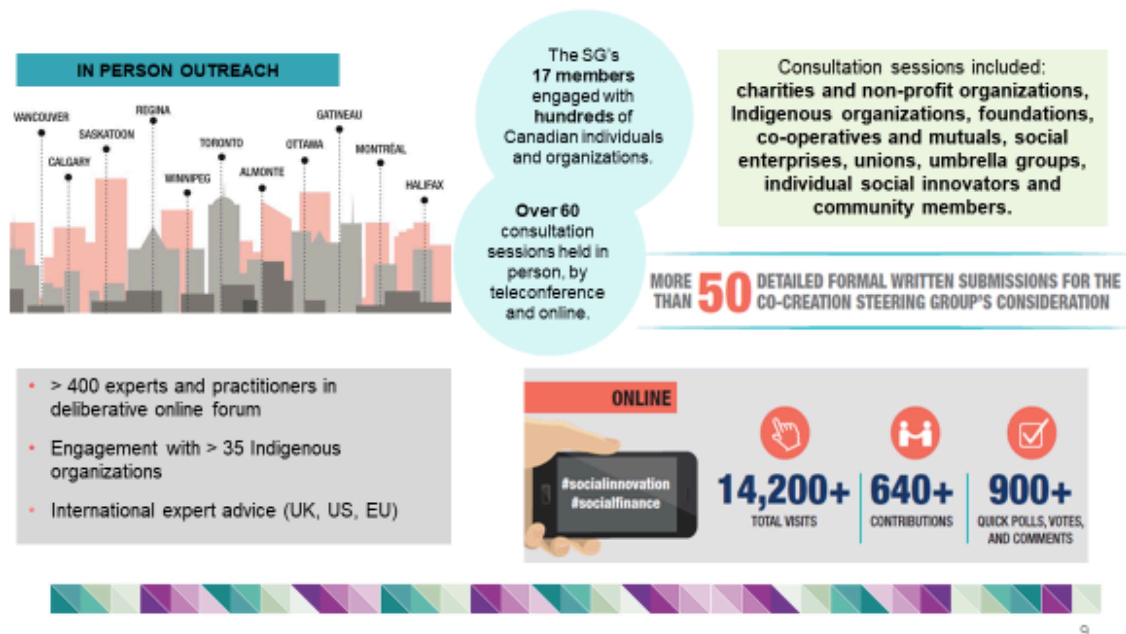

Figure 4: Building Canada's SISF Strategy: A Process of Co-Creation

The input from these consultations was vetted by the Steering Group and consolidated in the 12 key recommendations that form the basis of the Group's final report and the plan for moving forward.

This process – ESDC refers to it as "co-creation" – is a long way from the old model of contracting out. In important ways, it resembles our model of informed deliberation in Section 5.1: parties with different interests sit at the same table and work together to define a mutually acceptable approach to social innovation and a plan to advance it – a win/win. How does the new approach work?

"Social Finance" is about finding the "sweet spot" – a symbiotic relationship between public and private interests that will appeal to businesses. Unlike the contract-for-services model where civil society answered to government, in this approach "social enterprises" take the lead. They are encouraged to develop their own ideas, pitch them to potential funding partners, and forge a plan to realize them.

Our working group viewed the new approach as a promising way to fund social purpose organizations and to strengthen their role as centres of cohesion within communities, but there were also questions. To say that issues such as homelessness, income insecurity, or the opioid crisis are "complex" is to say that they require a multi-faceted response. For example, mental illness, addiction, illiteracy, and unemployment are some of the factors commonly seen as contributing to homelessness. Exactly which factors are in play, however, and how they are interacting, will differ from place to place. Every community is different.

The SISF deals with this kind of complexity by mobilizing lots of organizations to do lots of different things (the more, the better). If enough people are doing enough things, it's assumed that the right solutions should emerge. However, our discussions raised some questions about the approach. Consider the following case.

ABC Life Literacy Canada also presented at the third IOG Dialogue, but this story had a very different lesson from the SISF. When core funding for literacy organizations ended in 2013, a cascade of closures followed. ABC survived only because it made a concerted effort to adapt to the new environment, including repositioning itself as a social enterprise and experimenting with innovative funding strategies. Nevertheless, funding remains a constant challenge that leaves even this highly innovative organization extremely vulnerable.

The story gave us pause. Literacy surely makes a critical contribution to social innovation, so why is it so hard for organizations like ABC to attract private sector investment?

Some social purposes, it seems, are more marketable than others. Suppose business owners want to diversify the local economy. After listening to different social purpose groups make their pitch, they might agree that higher literacy rates are part of the "essential skills" needed. But the project might also require other tasks, such as building new skill sets, developing supply chains, or changing environmental regulations. In the end, private sector investors seem to find investment opportunities like these more attractive than literacy training, presumably because they are more aligned with their day-to-day business concerns.

This scenario raises questions about the limits of the SISF strategy. Is there a risk that critical factors like literacy training will fall through the cracks? If so, and if only the SISF strategy is relied upon, could solutions to issues like homelessness or climate change end up missing key elements? Could less marketable social purposes be "ghettoized" by the Social Enterprise movement?

At a minimum, we think these questions show there is still a critical need for government funding to support initiatives like literacy, but we'll go even further. Providing effective solutions to complex issues often requires a more *strategic* approach. Recent work on collaborative partnerships fills this gap.

5.3 Collaborative Partnerships

Collective Impact is an approach to service delivery that responds to complex issues (e.g., climate change or public safety) by coordinating different organizations' efforts in a way that maximizes their overall impact on the issue.[7] This approach involves a special planning stage (Priority #2 in the diagram) in which the critical tasks are carefully identified, then parceled out to the various organizations that are participating in the project.

This extra planning stage ensures that Collective Impact initiatives will not ignore key factors, such as literacy. If the analysis finds some task is essential to success, steps will be taken to ensure it is included in the plan. As the plan is implemented, the results will be monitored, and the actions will be adjusted to ensure maximum impact:

[7] The Collective Impact approach was developed in 2013 by two Harvard academics to achieve broad social goals. See the FSG website at: https://www.fsg.org/about or the Tamarack website at: http://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/collectiveimpact

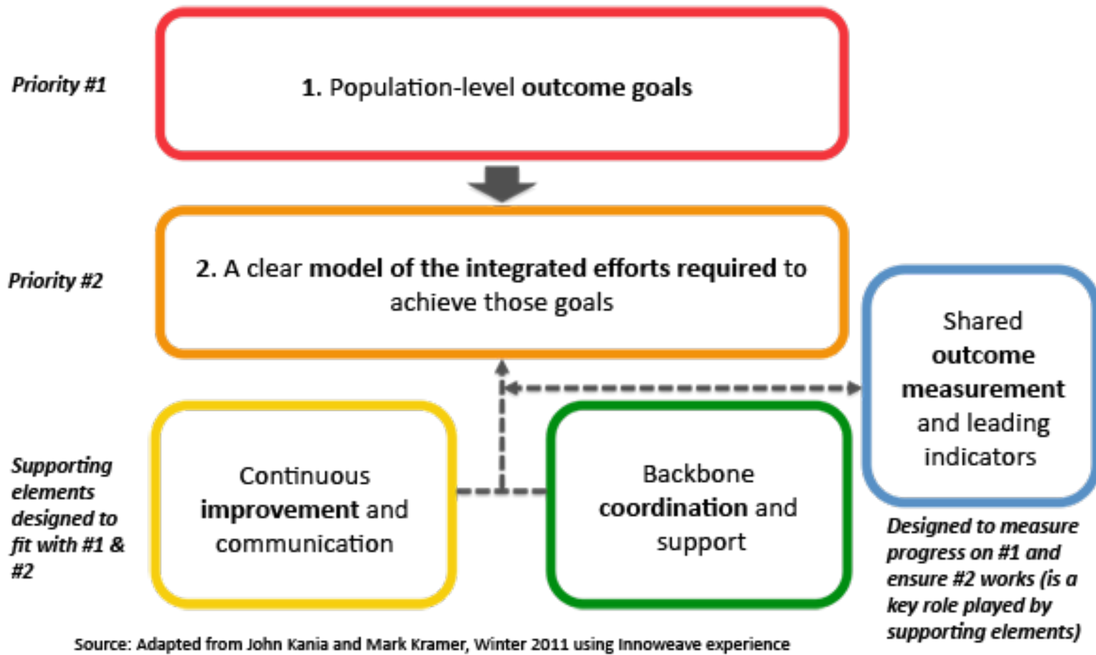

Figure 5: Successful Approaches to Collective Impact

Collective Impact is one type of what we call *collaborative partnerships*. These partnerships go well beyond the SISF's goals of securing funds or creating the right regulatory environment. They identify and coordinate the range of efforts needed for success. Developing and delivering such a plan requires high levels of collaboration at each stage, including extensive use of the kind of rules-based deliberation we discussed in Section 5.

For example, the stakeholders involved in a project to eliminate homelessness may find they have very different views on what counts as success. For some, it will be enough that these people have a place to sleep. Others may feel the issue will not be solved until the underlying causes, whether they be mental illness or substance abuse or something deeper, have been addressed.

Arriving at mutually acceptable solutions to the issue – a win/win – will require compromises around defining the goal. This, in turn, may involve a searching discussion of the facts and values at stake – and this brings us back to Mayor Smith's question: *Will people and organizations unite around a set of solutions, or is such a public dialogue more likely to divide them?*

The answer lies in the process. As we noted in the Introduction, there are better and worse ways to engage the community on complex issues. We can now explain that claim.

5.4 Lessons on Service Delivery

Imagine a conventional consultation on homelessness. It might start with government releasing a discussion paper and inviting public reaction. This could be followed by some town hall sessions where community members offer their views on the issues. Perhaps some stakeholders will be invited to join a roundtable discussion, or the government may hold some public hearings. There might also be a survey or some public opinion polling. Finally, when the consultation phase is over, the government will retire behind closed doors to review what it has heard and forge a strategy.

Once the strategy has been devised, the communications experts will be called in to help "sell" the strategy to the public. Typically, they will identify the "key messages" that need to be pitched to get public "buy-in," and they will produce a communications strategy (media interviews, social media campaigns, etc.) and tools (talking points, op-eds, etc.) to help deliver the messages.

This style of engagement is a mismatch with many of the issues facing governments. Recall that issues such as homelessness, income insecurity, and the opioid crisis are, in ESDC's words, "too big to be solved by government alone." Real solutions require concerted action from the stakeholders. Civil society and businesses will therefore be called upon to invest their own time, energy, and/or resources to help solve the problem. That's what happens in the SISF.

The problem with using a conventional consultation approach is that it assumes that a good communications strategy will be enough to secure a commitment from stakeholders. That is rarely the case. Experience shows that these organizations are highly unlikely to rearrange their priorities and line up behind a government strategy just because government asks them to.

If government wants civil society and/or business to do some of the heavy lifting to deliver the plan, it must give them a real say in defining it. The SISF proves the point. It is a refreshing change from contracting out precisely because it gives stakeholders a key role in developing both the program and the partnerships with private sector investors. *Co-creation* uses dialogue to help participants recognize and explore their personal stake in an issue and to find their own reasons and strategies for investing in solutions. It thus shifts the emphasis away from getting stakeholder *buy-in* and onto developing stakeholder *ownership*. The fact that businesses are increasingly willing to invest in the SISF is the best evidence that this process works.

Collaborative partnerships take the idea of "ownership through deliberation" even further. A highly coordinated action plan requires very close working relationships among the partners; and this, in turn, involves a more concerted effort at deliberation: participants must listen to one another, digest new information, provide and assess evidence, consider other viewpoints, hear from experts, and discuss the merits of the issues raised and the solutions proposed. The process also creates a deep level of ownership of the plan.

6. A Reply to Mayor Smith

The leadership lesson here is that Mayor Smith's lack of confidence in his community is based on a failure to understand how deliberation works. Smith assumes that the plan the advocate wants him to create would be forged through a conventional consultation process. Thus, he imagines that he and the town council will start by "consulting" the community. Of course, they will quickly discover that the people of Sweet Falls have very diverse views on what needs to be done. Thus, when Smith and his councillors retire behind closed doors to review what they have heard and to devise the strategy, they will have to make some difficult choices and trade-offs. When they emerge to announce their plan, those people or stakeholders who disagree with the choices and trade-offs the mayor has made – and there could be many – may reject the plan.

Smith may be right to expect this result. After all, this seems to happen more and more. People are less deferential to their leaders than they once were; and there is a growing sense that making such decisions behind closed doors is unacceptable. Advocacy groups take to the airwaves and use social media to rally people against the plan, and often they are very effective at interfering with a government's efforts to implement such plans. What Smith did not know, however, is that there is another way to engage the public – one that addresses his concerns:

1. It not only asks the participants for their views but gives them a meaningful role in making the trade-offs between juggling competing interests and designing the strategy. This brings the controversial part of the process out from behind closed doors.

2. It shows citizens and stakeholders why they need one another to achieve important shared goals, such as public safety, a healthy community, and prosperity. It makes clear that no one can achieve these alone – not even government – but that the community can achieve them together, *if people are willing to work together to align their efforts behind a shared strategy*.

3. The rules of engagement ensure that, while no one can expect to get everything they want, everyone can expect to be treated respectfully and fairly. We think that, in the end, that is as much as most Canadians expect.

Taken together, these three points can be used to show participants how a well-designed rules-based process will lead to win-win solutions, treat everyone respectfully and fairly, and align the community's efforts behind a plan to achieve a shared goal. If people trust their leaders to carry out the engagement process accordingly, they will have a very strong incentive to agree to participate and to respect the rules of engagement.

7. Culture Change and the Role of "Dispositional Skills"

The members of our working group want governments at all levels to pursue deliberation and collaboration in both the advocacy and service delivery areas, and several of their discussions dealt with advancing this practice. But there was also ambivalence about government's openness to this kind of engagement and its willingness to pursue this approach seriously.

While initiatives like the Social Innovation and Social Finance Strategy show that change is underway, more than a few in the working group and Dialogue sessions felt that the old culture

of risk-aversion and control is alive and well in most governments. If governments want to make deliberation and collaboration part of their basic toolbox, culture change must be a central part of the plan.

These reflections paralleled a stimulating exchange in the IOG's fourth and final Dialogue session on diversity and inclusion. Panelists discussed ways to accommodate minority cultural communities that are embedded in a larger, dominant culture. The challenge, said the presenters, is to create an environment of trust in which neither side feels threatened. A solution, we heard, requires a strong, shared commitment to values such as tolerance, respect, openness, and accommodation.

Much the same could be said for deliberation and collaboration. The "rules of engagement" also aim at creating an environment of trust, openness, and goodwill. The ability to learn from others, and to apply these learnings in new ways, is what distinguishes deliberation from traditional consultation, and collaborative service delivery from contracting out. But without trust, openness, and goodwill, meaningful discussion and learning are very difficult. These are the defining background conditions for co-creation, collective impact, and all other forms of collaborative engagement.

Catherine Waters, an expert on empathy, helped our working group take this issue a step further. She spoke to them about the role empathy plays in sensitive enterprises such as conflict management and negotiation. Empathy, she said, is not a skill like analysis or organizational design. It is more a *disposition* that lies behind certain skills. In policy making, for example, empathy helps decision makers use their analytical skills to see the diversity of positions in play without feeling threatened by them. This capacity to cope with difference helps the participants develop solutions that accommodate different views.

The idea that there are "dispositional skills" lying behind the more familiar ones, such as analysis and planning, is a helpful way to think about culture change. We've seen that deliberation/collaboration require new skills, tools, and processes. Now we see that this training must include "soft skills" as well, such as a *willingness* to embrace the rules of engagement and an *openness* to alternatives, beyond one's own position. If governments and civil society organizations want to engage in deliberation and collaboration, key dispositional skills like these need to be more clearly identified, defined, and articulated.

The good news from experts like Waters is that these soft skills can be identified, cultivated, and taught. For example, people can learn to listen better, and from there, they may go on to look for common ground and explore how perspectives they at first considered to be very different in fact have more in common than they thought.

One of our working group members talked about a workshop she attended on how to engage people with different values and perspectives in productive discussions. This workshop, she said, focused on the mechanics of conversations: it helped participants to understand how values come into discussions, how people can become more aware of the presence of those values, and how they can begin to identify and explore value differences in a respectful and non-threatening way. Much like the work around cultural diversity, this kind of training gives people the skills to recognize their differences and find ways to accommodate or at least respect them.

8. Recommendations

The lessons we've drawn from our discussions in the various sections of this paper can be consolidated into three basic recommendations, which, if acted upon, we believe, would make a major contribution to transforming public dialogue and debate. Together, they provide the basis for a new generation of engagement processes that governments could use to begin rallying citizens and communities around shared goals. That, in turn, would help rebuild social cohesion and public trust and revitalize our democracy. Here are our three recommendations for civil society and government to consider:

Recommendation 1: Strengthen government's and civil society's capacity for rules-based dialogue and debate.
In Section 5, we said that rules-based dialogue is already being tested through initiatives such as co-creation and Informed Participation.[8] Nevertheless, governments have been generally slow to invest in the skills, tools, and forums needed to convene and carry out such dialogues. We believe Canadian governments at all levels should be supporting initiatives that promote learning and capacity-building in deliberation and collaboration. Specifically, they should use their status as conveners to launch carefully chosen "demonstration projects" to test rules-based dialogue and collaborative partnerships, to develop the knowledge and skills needed to put the latter to work in solving complex issues, and to develop an evaluation framework to assess their impact. Civil society has a key role to play here. These organizations are often well-positioned to bring the right people together for a successful dialogue.

Recommendation 2: Deepen government's and civil society's understanding of how partnerships work and why they are essential for the future.
There are many ways to advance this recommendation. We'll mention only a few. For example, governments should be investing in academic and applied research on deliberation and collaboration. They should also develop training courses and workshops to help officials, members of civil society, and the business community understand the various tools and build the skills needed to use them and to evaluate their outcomes and impact. A key recommendation from the SISF Steering Group calls for the creation of a multi-sectoral Social Innovation Council. This body would provide advice and support stakeholder engagement in the further development of the SISF Strategy. This capacity would make it a natural leader in the areas of deliberation and collaboration. Governments should encourage this body to provide energetic sectoral leadership in these areas and should provide the funding and support to carry out such a mission.

Recommendation 3: Government and civil society should develop the soft or "dispositional skills" needed to assess and empathize with one another's contexts, priorities, and concerns.
Development of the soft or "dispositional skills" to support deliberation and collaboration should be a high priority. As with the other recommendations, there are lots of ways to advance this goal. For example, an initiative could be launched to create reliable indicators against which to measure governments' progress on rules-based dialogue, collaborative partnerships, and culture change. Perhaps these indicators could be backed up by some mechanism to hold

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[8] See, for example, *Deliberation: Getting Policy-Making Out from Behind Closed Doors*, The OGP Practice Group on Dialogue and Deliberation, 2019: http://live-ogp.pantheonsite.io/sites/default/files/Deliberation_Getting-Policy-Making-Out_20190517.pdf

government accountable for a failure to make progress, such as an ombudsperson, or an auditor general. One of the recommendations in the SISF Steering Group's report calls on the government to "[a]nchor long-term action on SI/SF through legislation." Perhaps such legislation could include performance standards for collaboration and indicators for success.

The idea of establishing a charter for social cohesion was also raised in our working group sessions. A charter would empower civil society organizations by giving them a legal means to ensure that government was taking appropriate steps to transform the relationship.

9. Conclusion

This project was launched to address two different but related sets of issues. First, we wanted to explore ways to strengthen the relationship between governments and civil society. Second, we wanted to address concerns over the loss of social cohesion and falling levels of public trust in public institutions, especially government.

Our paper outlines a single project that addresses both sets of issues. We've argued that the loss of social cohesion and declining levels of public trust are linked to an overall loss of capacity for productive public dialogue and debate within democracies like Canada's.

This capacity can be rebuilt through a rules-based approach to engagement. To succeed, governments must be willing to experiment with this approach – and that's where civil society comes in. A collaborative partnership with civil society on reforming advocacy and service delivery would be a very good place to start.

It would allow both sides to learn about rules-based dialogue and to build the capacity and skills needed to make it work effectively. At the same time, it would begin rallying Canadians around viable solutions to difficult issues, thereby rebuilding social cohesion and public trust.

In sum, we think that such a partnership is not only timely, but would be of huge benefit to governments, civil society, and Canadians, generally. All that is needed to get started is the leadership. On that, we look to government.

10. About the Authors

Dr. Don Lenihan is an internationally recognized expert on public engagement, accountability, and governance. He has over 25 years of experience as a project leader, writer, speaker, senior government advisor, trainer, and facilitator and is the author of numerous articles, studies, and books. To learn more about Don's work as a practitioner and a thought-leader, visit his website at: www.middlegroundengagement.com

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