## SOCIAL INNOVATION DESIGN LABS

**5 STEPS**

EMPATHY 1

DEFINE 2

IDEATE 3

PROTOTYPE 4

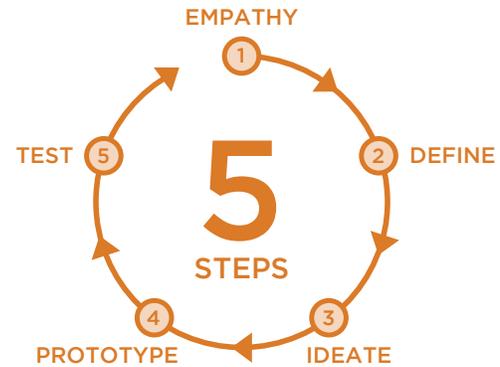TEST 5

*(Stanford University)*

# Design Labs & Baby Boomers

## Tapping into Canada's Radical Social Innovators

**Can design labs and baby boomers inspire a new approach to the nonprofit change-making business?**

By 2025, almost a quarter of Canada's population will be over 60 and busy redefining retirement. The early boomers were the young adults of the sixties, they have already lived through times of intense social innovation. Having inherited their parents homes, most baby boomers are financially secure, vibrant, healthy, educated professionals; happy to throw off the corporate shackles in search of making a difference and living a meaningful retirement. Capturing the intellectual capacity of the boomer generation is key to building Social Innovation and to redesigning the delivery of public sector services across Canada.

You cannot make real social change without empathy, imagination, curiosity; passion for the cause; a willingness to take risks, to try new approaches and even to be wrong.

However, to fully engage boomers, the volunteer experience must change radically. Low level tasks

### Ten steps to facilitating a Design Lab process

1. Define the problem you are trying to solve

2. Describe the ultimate goal
   - What would the world look like if the problem were solved?

3. Identify target beneficiaries

4. Hypothesize the causes of the problem for the intended beneficiaries

5. Engage Social Science and Ethnography students
   - to help test the causal hypotheses and uncover beneficiary needs

6. Select one need at a time

7. Develop potential theories of change
   - address one specific need at a time

8. Select one particular theory of change

9. Identify stakeholders & partners who could help solve the problem or impede a solution (conduct ethnography)

10. Brainstorm particular solutions to address the need

### Take Action. Test. Learn. Redesign. Repeat.

*(Source: Adapted from the principles set out in the Stanford University approach to Human Centred Design - HCD)*

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and dull board meetings will need to be replaced with dynamic opportunities to drive meaningful social change. A focus on action over process; impact over inputs. Many baby boomers are high performance, high energy people and now is the time for both the public sector and the nonprofit sector to consider how best to harness and ignite the thinking of this tremendous human capital. Training baby boomers to lead Social Innovation Design Labs is one idea worthy of consideration.

## What is a Design Lab?

At their core, Design Labs provide a shared belief in our capacity to prototype an improved vision of the future. To date, Design Labs have been purpose built physical spaces where stakeholders with diverse perspectives, come together in a neutral space to engage in a workshop process; to design new solutions to old problems. Universities and governments around the world have for many years been experimenting with Design Labs, also called Innovation Labs or Think Tanks. Denmark, Finland, the UK, France, USA and Australia all have valuable insights to offer both the Canadian government and Canada's nonprofit sector.

Labs provide creative, highly visual, collaborative opportunities to develop and test rapid proto-types, before large-scale investments are made. Social Innovation Labs are designed specifically to co-create new approaches to stuck social problems; to build a nation's capacity to advance socially innovative thinking (Westley, 2012). As the concept and framework develops, Design Labs are becoming more of an emergent methodology than a physical place.

An important component of a Social Innovation Design Lab is to include people from the beneficiary group in the design process; an approach known as Human Centered Design (HCD). This approach disrupts hierarchical systems and provides participants with an enriching opportunity to develop empathy and a deeper understanding of the  people, problem and constraints. Labs provide experiential learning opportunities and build deeper connections to the people that organisations are working to serve. Engaging board members in the design and development of socially innovative approaches, develops new

**Theory:** If you want to understand, focus on the complexity

**Practice:** If you want to act, focus on simplifying

organisational intelligence and innovative prototypes. If successful, piloted solutions can be resourced and moved into operations. HCD effectively connects board members directly with the populations they seek to serve.

## Why Public Social Innovation?

Small tweaks to existing government structures and policies will not solve the most pressing issues of our times – issues such as poverty, climate change and widening inequality. Whereas social entrepreneurship focuses on an individual and social enterprise addresses organizations, Social Innovation strives to change the entire system. And change we must. Resources are limited. Current systems are both expensive and ineffective; often more problem serving than problem solving.

## Most Social Innovations Start Locally

Unlike technological innovations, which often emanate from multinational companies located far away from the site of their eventual application, research shows that most social innovations start locally and consist of three critical factors:

### Three critical factors of Social Innovations

1.  The will to change most often comes from the awareness of a threat or failure; occasionally, from a sense of new opportunity

2.  The internal capacity to change, including leadership and culture

3.  A supportive eco-system providing, access to the external resources that help change happen, including people, money, skills and networks

# APPLYING HUMAN CENTERED DESIGN TO THE SOCIAL SECTOR

| COMMON PITFALLS: | APPLYING DESIGN THINKING TO: |
|---|---|
| Target a generic stakeholder | Target a specific beneficiary |
| Addressing a symptom | Addressing an underlying need |
| Try to do it all - design something that meets everyone's needs | Choose who and what to focus on. Design something that meets a subset of people's specific needs |
| Think your way through the problem | Go out and talk to people and build to learn |
| Analyze and design alone | Synthesize and design with a diverse team |
| Wait till the concept is perfect before launching | Prototype the idea early and inexpensively in the process to test assumptions and hypotheses |
| Test to validate | Test to learn and uncover new insights |
| Sell the idea to your target beneficiary | Engage them in the design process and have them champion the ideas |

*(Stanford University)*

*In the UK, the riots of 2011 triggered a review of the fragmented approach to the delivery of social services. The research identified 120,000 family units, many related, who collectively were costing the taxpayer £9 billion annually. This is the equivalent of £75,000 (CDN $150,000) per family, per year to keep people living in high-crime, marginalized neighbour-hoods, that are ghettos of poverty.*

*At the very core, most innovation will start simply as a conversation between two people.*

Building on the UK hypothesis that most social innovations start locally, the Government of Canada, and the Provinces, would be wise to work strategically to develop the Social Innovation bench strength of Canada's baby boomers.

*Pay for performance* transfer payments from senior governments to regional governments would further incent the exploration and development of innovative new models.

Passion and the commitment of strong, inspiring leaders is critical to getting Social Innovations started.

## A National Network of Local Labs – it all starts with a conversation

Canada's baby boomers are well-placed to become the country's ChangeMakers; to lead a national network of community based design labs and to facilitate intentional Social Innovation conversations across the country. The Local Labs would provide opportunities for people from diverse backgrounds to explore the same prob-lem through many different lenses and to engage members of the beneficiary group in co-creating ways for us to better look after one another.

**Sandra Hamilton, EMBA** is the first Canadian to earn an Executive MBA, with a specialty in Social Enterprise Leadership. More at: SocialMBA.ca

Hamilton is a speaker and consultant; the former Business Manager to clients such as John Furlong & Olympian Silken Laumann. Today, her work is focused on advancing social innovation and social procurement in the public sector and working to inspire & support organisa-tions seeking transformative change, revenue generation & increased impact.

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