



Community-driven.
Culturally responsive.
Equitable participation.
Action oriented.


PARTNER REPORT

Fall 2025



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Introduction: Approaching a Crossroad



For over a decade, the Evaluation Capacity Network (ECN) has been working in partnership with organizations from across the country to build evaluation capacity in the early childhood and broader social serving sectors. The ECN collaboratively develops community-driven and culturally responsive approaches for producing and using evidence to improve practices, programs, and policy towards system effectiveness. We have achieved a great deal as a partnerships, and many new opportunities still lie ahead of us.

Proposed as a seven-year SSHRC-funded partnership initiative, we are in the final year of the project. The good news? The ECN was approved for a one-year no-cost extension! Conversations around the sustainability of the ECN have already begun and will continue over the following months. Questions that will shape our conversations include: What direction and shape should the ECN take moving forward? What value can we add to the evaluation field? We invite you to reflect on these questions as you celebrate our past achievements, some of which we highlight on the following pages.

When you see this icon, click on it to access more information



Project Refresher: Our Current Direction

The Evaluation Capacity Network (ECN) seeks to address three priority areas in evaluation, identified through extensive community engagement consultation (2014-2018), within the early childhood field:

1 COMMUNITY-DRIVEN & CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE

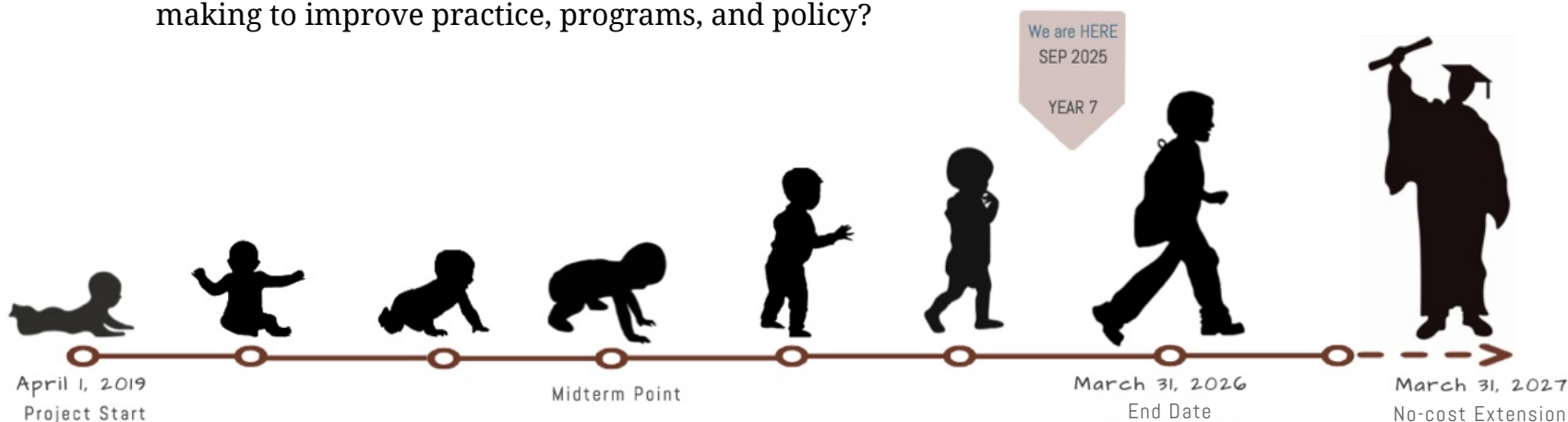
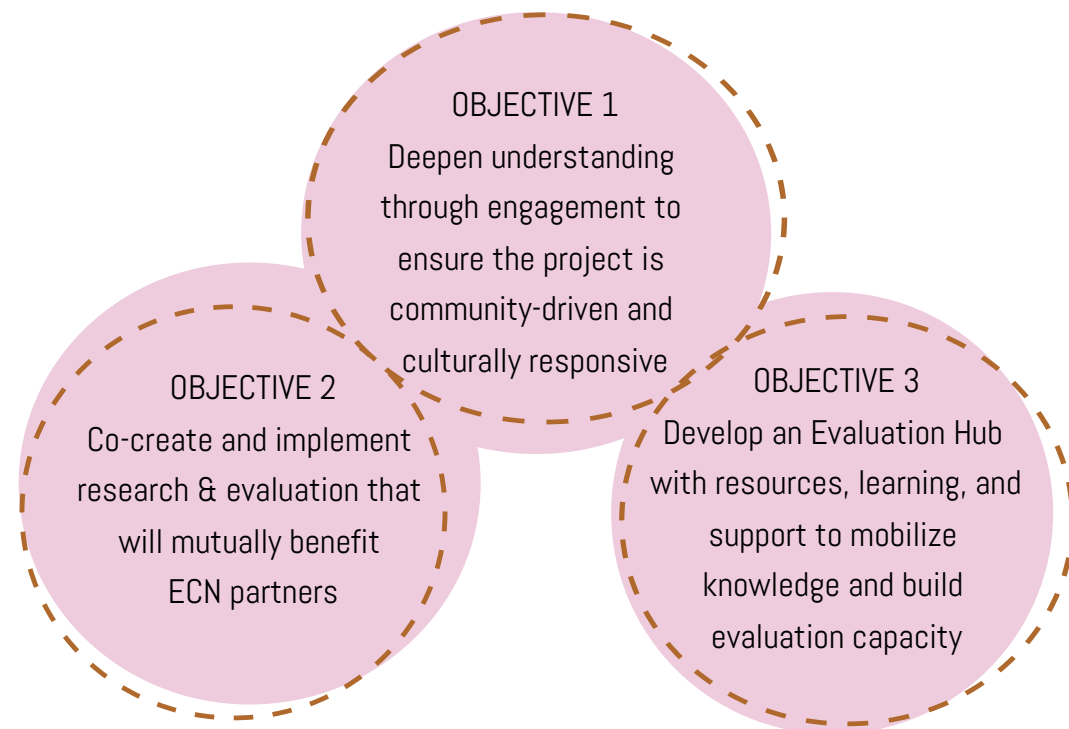
How do we ensure that the demand for, creation, and use of evidence is community-driven and culturally responsive?

2 INNOVATIONS IN CAPACITY BUILDING

How do we increase knowledge, skills, and motivations to create and use meaningful evidence through innovative capacity building approaches?

3 EVIDENCE FOR ACTION

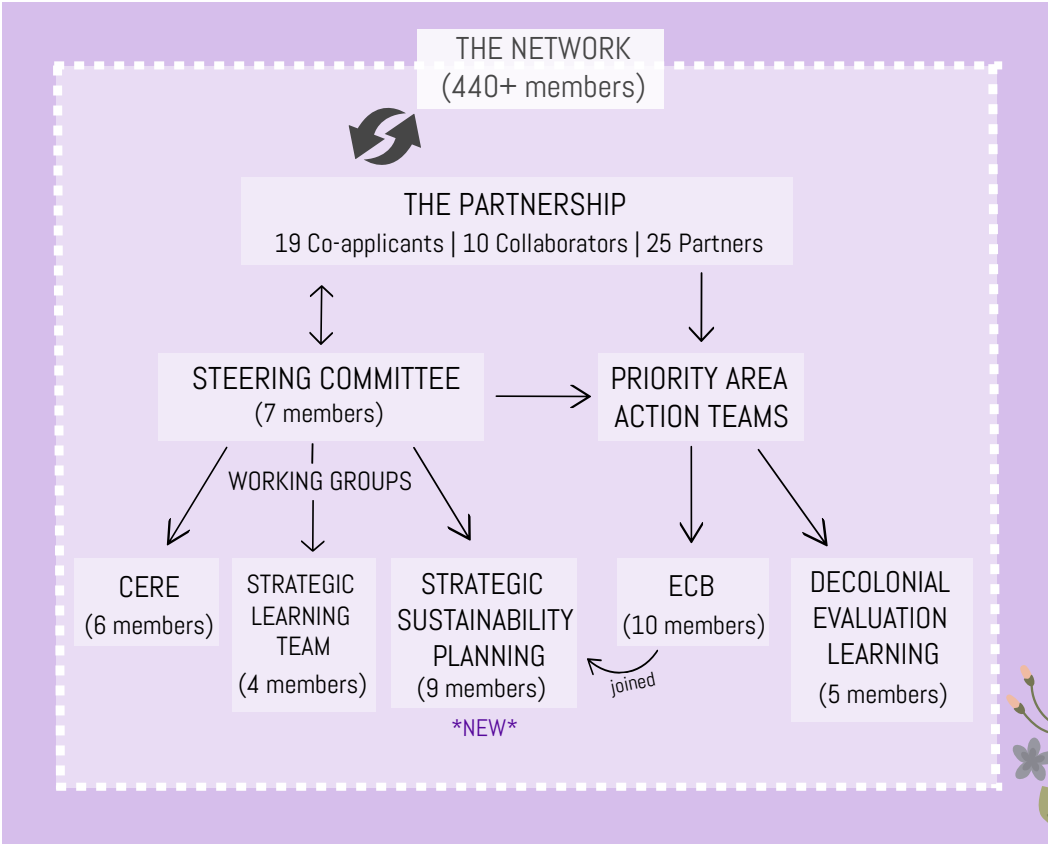
How do we increase the value and use of evidence for decision making to improve practice, programs, and policy?



GOAL: Collaboratively develop community-driven and culturally responsive approaches for producing and using evidence to improve early childhood practices, programs, and policies

Network Engagement

While the overall structure of our collaborative governance has been the same throughout our SSHRC Partnership Grant, we welcomed one new collaborator and three new partners. We are also experiencing changes in the working groups and priority area action teams as some completed their work and new ones emerged. The Strategic Sustainability Planning Working Group will begin its work this month (read more on page 14) and the Evaluation Capacity Building Action Team will merge the new working group.



 In case you haven't met our newest team members yet:



Sophie Wood
Postdoctoral fellow



Umaira Behzad
Research Assistant



Stella Severin
Graduate Research Assistant

We recently launched an ECN LinkedIn page! Stay up to date on all things ECN by following us.



Experiential Learning & Capacity Building



We are continuing to offer accessible learning opportunities to build evaluation capacity across different sectors. From formal university credit courses to social innovation labs and workshops, we provide a variety of opportunities that support individuals and organizations in strengthening their community-driven and responsive evaluation practices. Below, we highlight just a few initiatives.

LABOÉVAL

Hosted at our partner institution, the University of Ottawa, LaboÉval is an innovative evaluation training program that provides free, tailored support to help community organizations build their evaluation capacity. Since 2019, it has helped strengthen evaluation capacity and practices of 16 francophone organizations. The LaboÉval team also researches factors and strategies that foster strong evaluation practices in the community sector.



UEVAL

This year, we successfully ran UEval, our one-week intensive experiential learning course, for the seventh time! We had a slightly smaller cohort as the sister course QEval at our partner institution, Queen's University, was on pause for a sabbatical year. Twenty-eight students and community learners, along with eight senior facilitators, came together to develop evaluation frameworks in collaboration with five community organizations. Case studies included literacy, indigenous art, education, wellness, and harm reduction initiatives.

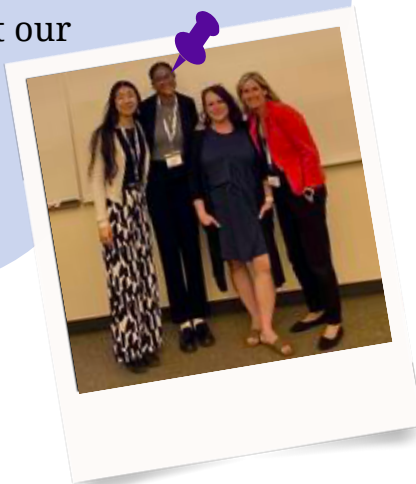


DECOLONIAL EVALUATION LEARNING

The Decolonial Evaluation Learning (DEL) team hosted "Widening Our Worldview," a [free five part webinar series](#) that brought together learners, evaluators, academics, and communities to explore decolonial evaluation in a welcoming, accessible space. Our goal was to foster rich, reflective conversations and build a supportive learning community with others. Looking forward, we plan to create a community of practice to encourage relational, community-rooted engagement and evaluation practice. We also hope to co-create additional workshops based on areas that our community of learners has suggested.



1. Creating Safe Spaces
2. Co-Creating Evaluation Plans
3. Logic Models & Theories of Change
4. Arts-Based Data Generation
5. Data Sovereignty in Evaluation



EVALUATION CAPACITY CASE CHALLENGE (EC3)

The Max Bell School of Public Policy at McGill University, with support from the ECN, has hosted EC3 for the third time this year. The challenge spans five months, culminating in a 24-hour strategy sprint where interdisciplinary teams, guided by expert mentors, develop tailored approaches to a real-world evaluation capacity building case. Two University of Alberta students participated this year and described EC3 as both professionally and personally transformative, deepening their understanding of evaluation as a tool for empowerment and systems change.



McGill



Co-Created Research & Evaluation

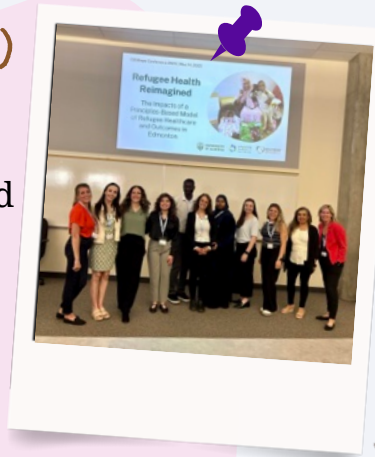


The demand for additional evaluation capacity in community organizations is ongoing, and we continue to leverage funding and human capacity to meet community needs to the best of our ability. Through our co-created research and evaluation projects, we build knowledge and skills of students, community members, and organizations, while ensuring that the evidence produced is useful for informing practices, programs, and policy.



NEW CANADIANS HEALTH CENTRE (NCHC)

The NCHC began supporting government-assisted refugees in 2021 with integrated, culturally safe care. They partnered with the ECN to co-developed a research and evaluation program that is both principled and practical. Groundwork included ethics approval, data-sharing, and interpreter training. Using community-based research, priorities like maternal and child health emerged, leading to service improvements. Real-time feedback prompted changes such as better stroller access and interpreter scheduling. Our partnership is building NCHC into a sustainable, scalable model for equitable refugee care in Canada.



ALBERTA MENTORING PARTNERSHIP

In collaboration with the Alberta Mentoring Partnership (AMP), we helped build evaluation capacity through E-Eval and consultation within agencies participating in the Mentoring for Youth and Young Adults from Care (MYAAC) program. We provided AMP with mid-year and annual report writing support involving amalgamated evaluation data across agencies to provide insight into the MYAAC program functioning. This summer, the ECN was asked by AMP to shift the focus towards supporting their broader evaluation capacity initiatives and strategic planning. Therefore, we are conducting a retroactive evaluation of AMP's Phase VI Strategic Plan to inform the upcoming AMP Phase VII Strategic Plan for 2026.





UNDERSTANDING THE EXPERIENCES OF NEWCOMER ETHNOCULTURAL FAMILIES SEEKING EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE (ELCC) SERVICES

As part of a student thesis project, we conducted a qualitative study using a community-based participatory approach with Bangladeshi, Nigerian, and Indian-Punjabi newcomer ethnocultural parents in Edmonton. We facilitated three focus groups with 21 parents in partnership with cultural brokers. The findings were aligned with the five core ELCC principles: quality, affordability, accessibility, inclusion, and flexibility. This research highlights key facilitators and barriers to seeking ELCC services, as well as parent-identified solutions. It also offers insights from parents as Alberta transitions to a \$15 flat child care fee.



%

7.1%

Each 1% increase in attendance
boosts graduation odds by 7.1% for
AIFY students.



81.4%

AIFY supports an average 81.4%
attendance rate, a major gain in
high-vulnerability schools.



61.6%

Among students in AIFY schools for
3+ years, 61.6% graduated, a 27.4%
improvement over similar peers.

ALL IN FOR YOUTH (AIFY)

Since 2016, AIFY has provided wrap-around services to support vulnerable students and families in Edmonton's inner city. Eight years of longitudinal data confirmed the model's effectiveness, showing improved graduation rates, attendance, and well-being. Now in its ninth year, AIFY's research has turned toward sustainability and assessing broader societal impacts using Social Return on Investment. This approach will estimate AIFY's economic influence on systems like justice, social services, and unemployment, offering a fuller picture of its long-term value. Conducted in partnership with Concordia University of Edmonton, this work will build a stronger case for investment in prevention-focused programs.



Community-Engaged Research & Evaluation (CERE) Projects

ECN co-applicants, together with a community partner(s), have had the opportunity to apply for small grants to design and lead research and evaluation projects that are community-engaged and contribute to the ECN goal and objectives. This past year, we supported three projects with a CERE grants.

Read more about the Settlement EvalHub in our July 2025 EvalByte

SETTLEMENT EVALHUB



In partnership with the [Centre for Community Based Research](#) (CCBR), we developed the [Settlement EvalHub](#). The Hub was designed to be Canada's preeminent evaluation capacity-building resource for the national settlement sector and to better equip organizations in building a culture of evaluation and using evidence for decision-making. The Hub was built on our previous collaborative efforts in the settlement sector, the Eval4Refugee project.

CERTIFICATE PROGRAM IN COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH

Led by CCBR, the certificate program was launched early this year. It is a capacity-building project that offers practical skill-building mini-courses. It is designed to be a leading resource for learning how to use research to collaboratively drive change and build more responsive, supportive, and equitable communities. Over the next few months, this CERE project will focus on enhancing equitable access, community engagement, and the reach of the courses.



EXPLORING PARTICIPATORY VISUAL METHODS ONLINE

Co-lead in partnership with CCBR and [Trillium Health Partners](#), this project identifies promising practices for using Participatory Visual Methods (e.g., digital storytelling, cell-philming, photovoice) in virtual and hybrid environments. Through the CERE grant, the project team will be able to extend the knowledge sharing and capacity-building work by developing further podcast episodes and infographic factsheets.



Knowledge Mobilization

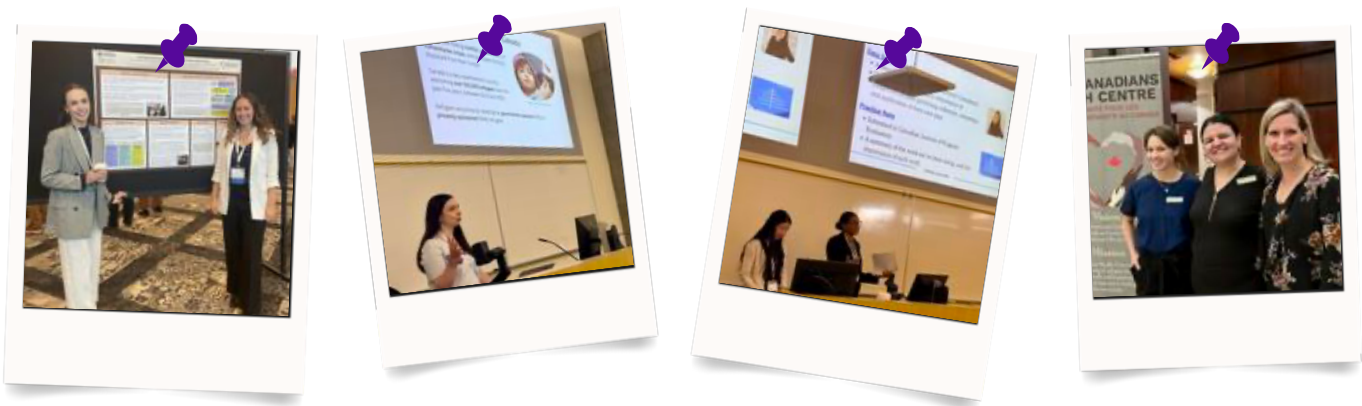


This past year, we leveraged numerous opportunities to share projects, learnings, and evidence created in collaboration with our community partners. As a network, we don't only strive to strengthen evaluation practices of other people and organizations, but also to learn from and with others to grow in our knowledge, skills, and practices of doing and using evaluation and research.



CONFERENCES

Many of our partners, staff, and students presented their ECN work at conferences across Canada. Their presentations highlighted the impacts of a principles-based model of refugee healthcare (based on the NCHC project), ECN's journey toward decolonial practices in evaluation, the process of our community-based evaluation scoping review, the experiences of newcomer ethnocultural families seeking ELCC services in Edmonton, and more.





CES WATCH PARTIES

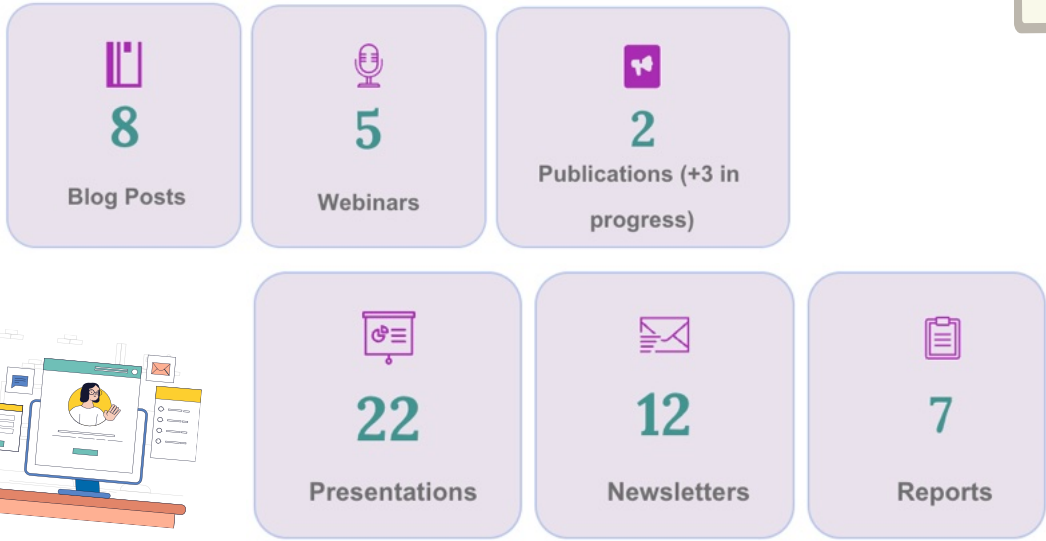
The Canadian Evaluation Society and the ECN were pleased to co-host a series of post-conference watch parties in Edmonton, Calgary, and Yellowknife this past June. These events brought local evaluators and evaluation-curious people together to learn, connect, and reflect. At each session, participants watched a presentation from the CES 2025 conference and engaged in a thoughtful discussion led by a CES Fellow. We had 29 evaluators and evaluation learners join us in Edmonton!



OTHER OUTPUTS

Our network members also continue to develop new resources with and for communities, which can be accessed on the ECN website and our online repository.

Since September 2024, we have produced:

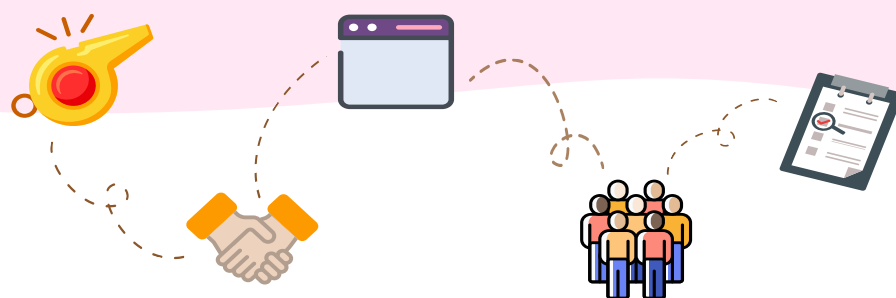


Click here to explore the repository



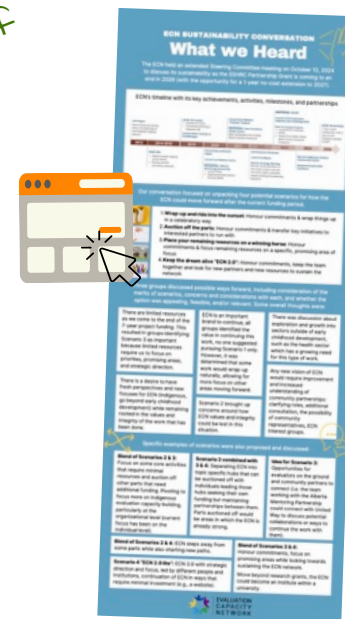
Strategic Sustainability Planning: Our Future Direction

In October 2024, we initiated conversations with ECN's steering committee around sustainability and our future beyond the SSHRC Partnership Grant. Since then, we met twice with the Steering Committee and consulted [Pieter de Vos](#), an expert facilitator with a strong focus on strategic planning processes (and former ECN postdoctoral fellow).



Pieter de Vos

Click here for the summary of our first discussion



Our discussions focused on setting the stage for a strategic sustainability planning process, which will encompass sunsetting some of the Network's current activities while prioritizing building a business case for future growth. During past conversations, four potential key investment pathways have been identified: strengthening infrastructure, maintaining responsiveness to communities, monetizing training curricula, and driving systems change. To begin the strategic sustainability planning work for the ECN, we completed an environmental scan to identify and analyze entities, both in North America and internationally, that are similar in mandate or scope to the ECN. Keep reading to find out more about the environmental scan and its results.

Environmental Scan

As part of our sustainability efforts, we conducted an environmental scan to better understand the broader landscape in which we operate. The goal of the environmental scan was to explore how other organizations (n=16) structure their operations, engage with communities, develop and deliver training, and contribute to broader system change. By learning from the experiences and practices of others, we aim to strengthen ECN’s strategic direction, deepen partnerships, and enhance our long-term sustainability.

KEY AREAS OF EXPLORATION AND MAIN TAKEAWAYS



Next steps: Upcoming and Events

Between September of this year and June 2026, ECN’s focus will lie heavily on developing a business case in collaboration with the Steering Committee and some additional partners. We are also grateful to have Pieter de Vos on board, who will support us in this endeavor by designing and facilitating the process. To drive progress, we established a new Strategic Sustainability Planning Working Group, which will convene monthly, and the Steering Committee will meet bi-monthly to provide valuable input. The first step starting this month is going to be clarifying ECN’s value proposition, followed by building and testing the business case, building partnerships, and generating new resources, all while balancing current commitments.



Stay tuned !



As we continue planning the sustainability of our Network over the upcoming months, we hope to bring everyone together for a face-to-face partnership gathering in Spring 2026. This will be an exciting opportunity to celebrate our past achievements and launch our new strategic plan. More details to come!



VISIONING
Sept 2025



BUILDING THE CASES
Oct 2025 - Nov 2025



TESTING
Dec 2025 - Jan 2026



REFINING
Feb 2026 - Mar 2026



RESOURCING & PARTNERING
Feb 2026 - Apr 2026



LAUNCHING & IMPLEMENTING
Apr 2026 - May 2026



TRANSITION PLAN (UNTIL 2028)
Jun 2026 - onwards

Thank you!



A special thank you to all our funders, partners, and network who make all this work possible!



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