

Enabling Social Innovation in Canada

Country Snapshot

Social innovation: "the processes and outcomes of developing novel approaches to address societal challenges facing people and planet." ¹

This snapshot represents a descriptive, non-exhaustive overview of key highlights from Canada's social innovation ecosystem.

✓ Direct focus on social innovation 🔗 Connected but indirect focus on social innovation ✗ No focus on social innovation

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Official Definition of Social Innovation 🔗



While not legally defined, the Canadian government describes social innovation as new responses to social problems that improve community well-being more effectively than past approaches ²

Government Body for Social Innovation ✓



Canada has no standalone agency for social innovation. Departments like Employment and Social Development Canada coordinate implementation.

Government Strategy for Social Innovation ✓



Canada's only piece of the strategy currently in place is the Social Finance Fund

- Social Finance Fund (launched 2023, ongoing to 2039): \$755M to scale social finance ³
- Investment Readiness Program: This program ended on March 31, 2024. Although it's still considered a foundational component of the strategy, it is no longer being implemented.

Policies, Laws & Regulations ✓ 🔗



- No SI-specific federal laws or regulations; social enterprises take diverse legal forms
- The **Social Economy Act / Loi sur l'économie sociale** (2013) has formalized the social economy in Quebec
- British Columbia and Nova Scotia offer hybrid incorporation models (e.g. C3, CIC) ⁴
- 2022 tax reforms allow charities to fund non-charities more flexibly ⁵
- Social procurement: Federal **Policy on Social Procurement** launched in 2021, some provinces/territories/municipalities have social and/or sustainable procurement policies in place (e.g. **Nova Scotia, British Columbia, Newfoundland and Labrador**)

Official Statistics 🔗



No SI-specific stats. But community nonprofits contribute 1.4% of GDP and over 714,000 jobs ⁶. Québec alone has 7,000+ social economy enterprises ⁷.

Government Programs ✓

- Social Finance Fund: Affordable capital via social finance intermediaries ³
- **College and Community Social Innovation Fund**
- **Impact Canada** (broad innovation focus that can include social innovation)
- Some provinces, territories or municipalities may offer funding

ECOSYSTEM

Stakeholders ✓

- Chantier de l'économie sociale (Quebec) Canadian Community Economic Development Network (national), Buy Social Canada (national): major ecosystem anchors
- **Table of Impact Investment Practitioners**: national network for impact investment fund managers and social finance intermediaries
- **Co-operatives and Mutuals Canada** (CMC): national network for co-ops and mutuals
- **Common Approach to Impact Measurement**: network developing impact measurement standards



Support Initiatives ✓

- The following are illustrative examples (non-exhaustive) of social innovation labs, incubators, and accelerators in Canada: RADIUS at **Simon Fraser University**, **Trico Changemakers Studio**, **The Action Lab**, and **WISIR Solutions Labs**.
- Examples of ecosystem intermediaries, networks, and capacity-building organizations (non-exhaustive): Ashoka Canada, Innoweave, Tamarack Institute, and Social Innovation Canada

Collaboration ✓

- Social Impact Bonds piloted in several provinces ³
- Events: Social Finance Forum, **Canadian Forum for Social Innovation**
- Awards: **Governor General's Innovation Awards** (broad innovation focus that can include social innovation)

FINANCE

Financing Schemes ✓

- Ecosystem has a mix of grants, loans, impact investments, blended finance
- Credit unions (e.g. Vancity), foundations, intermediaries (e.g. SVX) channel capital

Inclusiveness of Financing

- Of the social purpose organizations funded by the Investment Readiness Program to build capacity to access social finance: 75% were led by women, 24% were led by racialized peoples, and 24% were Indigenous led ⁸
- The Social Equity Lens Investment coding system for the Social Finance Fund will ensure that investments advance social equity and gender equality ²

SOCIETY

Public Awareness of Social Innovation

SI appears in media and policy, though public understanding remains limited ^{10 19}. Terms like "social enterprise" and "B Corp" can be more familiar

Research

- Le Centre de recherche sur les innovations sociales (Université du Québec à Montréal and 11 other institutions), Carleton Centre for Community Innovation (Carleton University), Waterloo Institute for Social Innovation and Resilience (WISIR) (University of Waterloo): university and college research hubs (examples)
- Practitioner research from McConnell Foundation, Social Innovation Canada, [Le Réseau de recherche en économie sociale et solidaire](#)

Education & Human Capital

- Examples of degrees in SI and related fields: Cape Breton University (MEd), Mount Royal University (BBA), Ontario Tech University (MA), Saint Paul University (BA & MA), Waterloo (graduate diploma)
- Extracurricular: Enactus, youth labs, online learning

Entrepreneurship

6th / 82 countries

Enabling conditions for business

EIU Business Environment Ranking 2024

17th / 133 countries

Innovation capacity

Global Innovation Index 2024



GEM: High early-stage entrepreneurship (~16% of adults); top-rated for social entrepreneurship support ¹³

Social & Environmental Consciousness



Solidarity

43.5% reported trust in most people (2025); 48.1% report somewhat or very strong sense of belonging (2025) ¹⁴



Participation

Democracy Index score 8.69/10, rank 14th globally ¹⁵

32 population

% Giving and Volunteering

8th globally; 32% volunteering rate ¹⁶

28th / 180 countries

Sustainability

Environmental Performance Index rank 28th (2024), Climate Change Performance Index rank 61st (2026) ^{17 18}