

## **Can Government Help Enable Social Innovation?**

Kelowna entrepreneurs unite to talk shop, B.C. Minister asks how he can help

The Lower Mainland is typically dubbed B.C.'s hub for social innovation, so it's not every day that government leaders attend meetings about innovation in smaller communities across the province. But when B.C. Social Development and Social Innovation Minister Don McRae joined a Feb. 5 convening in Kelowna, he expressed excitement about the innovation already happening and what community members can teach him about how the government can help.

The gathering marked the second meeting in Kelowna for the B.C. Partners for Social Impact (BCPSI), a network of cross-sector leaders collaborating to find new ways to solve old, intractable problems.

The group of 24 included the organizer of a program that matches NGOs and businesses for mutual learning opportunities — kind of like “speed dating” across sectors. It also enabled developers of a downtown social housing project layered atop a nonprofit centre of excellence to cross paths with collaborators exploring the development of a social impact bond.

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*B.C. Minister of Social Development and Social Innovation Don McRae joined a BC Partners for Social Impact gathering of social innovators in Kelowna, B.C on Feb.*

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“In many ways, they are far more the experts in social innovation than I am or ever will be,” Minister McRae says. “If they have some insights into social innovation, what government could or should be doing, and either short-term, mid-term or long-term wins to share, these are opportunities that I’m very curious about — to see what they think government could be better at.”

Traditionally, the Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation has focused primarily on income assistance and supporting persons with disabilities. Innovation was added to its portfolio last year as the work of BCPSI and the B.C. Social Innovation Council evolved.

“The social innovation piece is really important because government needs to, at some degree, be a champion and catalyst for people doing work in communities large and small,” McRae says.

BCPSI first met in June 2012 to implement council recommendations with the goals of finding new ways to tackle intractable social challenges, identify emerging trends and opportunities for innovation, and spread information across sectors for collaboration.

“Breaking that down, it’s about looking at tomorrow instead of yesterday — a new relationship with government, not as a funder but as an enabler,” says Ken Gauthier, B.C. Partner and community catalyst at Urban Matters.

“When you think back to why we’re all getting together, it’s not for government to give us permission. It’s for government to be a partner on this journey,” he says.

Ken has been actively involved in BCPSI for nearly two years, with most meetings occurring in Vancouver or Victoria. At what was just the second Kelowna gathering, Urban Matters co-ordinator Jaime McCormick nudged Ken out of concern for his health because he appeared so unusually quiet.

“What I saw yesterday was that I didn’t have to talk much,” Ken said in an interview the day following the meeting. He was struck by the shared learning and cohesiveness that emerged among a group of mostly strangers.

“What was most apparent to me on the bus ride home was there is confidence

emerging in the conversation locally. There's a lot already happening and that started to bring the room together," Ken said.

BCPSI will continue to convene local gatherings in Kelowna, Vancouver and Victoria as other local groups continue to emerge and as ongoing innovations surface into the collaborative network.

*A version of this article was originally written for the [Urban Matters news service](#). This repost, for which we received permission, follows the style guidelines of the original post. To learn more about generative newsroom options for your organization or community, please contact [peter\(at\)axiomnews.ca](mailto:peter(at)axiomnews.ca).*