LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT LAB
3 YEAR IMPACT REPORT
Initiated and closely supported by Ecotrust Canada and RADIUS SFU, LEDlab partnered with community organizations to build, test, and scale solutions for a more vibrant and inclusive local economy in Vancouver’s inner city. LEDlab’s organizational model demonstrated the benefits of cross-sectoral partnerships in addressing complex and multifaceted social and economic challenges. Our tools, methods, and processes were reflective of our parent organizations and blended social venture incubation, social innovation lab practice, and community development.

Ecotrust Canada is an enterprising non-profit powered by the vision of people and nature thriving together. They develop innovative economic solutions that enable rural and remote communities to share in the management and benefit of local resources – from forestry to fisheries to housing and energy. Their on-the-ground work and systems approach is entrepreneurial, partnership-based and relentlessly practical.

RADIUS SFU is a social innovation lab and venture incubator at Simon Fraser University Beedie School of Business. RADIUS envisions a transformed economy that is dynamic, just, sustainable, and resilient.

The Local Economic Development Lab (LEDlab) was a 3-year, place-based experiment in fostering systemic change from the ground up in Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside (DTES).

We respectfully acknowledge that LEDlab’s work takes place on unceded Coast Salish territory of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and səl̓ílwətaʔɬ / Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

Thank you to our funders and partners the Koerner Family Foundation, Vancouver Foundation, Boeing, City of Vancouver, The McConnell Foundation, Eastside Community Fund, Simon Fraser University and Mitacs Accelerate Canada.

We also thank our community partners from the past three years: Urban Core Community Workers Association, Potluck Cafe Society, The Binners’ Project, Carnegie Community Centre, Hives for Humanity, ReBuild, Hastings Crossing Business Improvement Association, Buy Social Canada, EMBERS Eastside Works, and Exchange Inner City.

Last but not least, we thank those who were instrumental in getting the LEDlab off the ground in the early days including but not limited to Brenda Kuecks, Dr. Blaize Reich, Dr. Sarah Lubik, Shawn Smith, and Colin Stansfield. Darcy Riddell, Steve Williams, and Cheryl Rose also provided invaluable guidance on bringing social innovation lab methodologies to our work in the DTES.

The LEDlab Program Model

LEDlab was a platform to support community-driven social innovation projects for a more vibrant and inclusive local economy in Vancouver’s DTES.

We partnered with local organizations and leaders, resourcing them with talented full-time graduate students, and working collectively with experts in a ‘Lab’ format to develop shared skills and knowledge, collaborate, and test new ideas to change the local economic system over time.

The LEDlab Program Model

**Social Enterprise Incubation**

We place skilled and resourceful graduate level students in high-potential community projects to help accelerate their development.

*Identify systemic-level barriers & potential solutions*
*Put tangible, practical projects on the ground*
*Create & hold a space for collaboration*
*Engage policymakers*

**Systematic Intervention**

Within this model key elements for future consideration include:

- **Graduate student project coordinators**, who added capacity to community-led projects and reduced risk in innovation and collaboration, funded by matching grants for graduate students from Mitacs Accelerate Canada;
- **Use of a cohort model** to enable cross-pollination of ideas and identify systemic barriers and leverage points;
- **Work at multiple scales** to engage the whole system and align grassroots innovation with government and institutional strategic priorities.

LEDlab was intentionally designed as a three-year initiative, in part because the DTES has one of the largest concentrations of service delivery organizations in Canada and we didn’t want to compete with our partners for scarce resources for an extended period of time. The time-bound, three-year model created impetus for action and a new approach, and forced LEDlab to stay committed to emergence.

Each year’s annual cohort of project incubation was supported by continuous learning through developmental evaluation. Lessons learned from each annual cohort were used to design the next year of work in collaboration with community partners.

Acknowledgements

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LEDLAB’s JOURNEY

**YEAR ONE**
- **Engaged** 26 community members in consultation and lab design, of whom 60% were still active in our network in 2018.
- **Joined** Urban Core and led Income Generation Continuum Mapping project in partnership with UBC Learning Exchange and Urban Core.
- **Facilitated** transition of Urban Core governance and committee structure, leading to 4 initiatives including Resource Hub committee (later Eastside Works), a micro-enterprise research committee, provincial legislative change committee, and a social hiring committee.
- **Incubated** four social enterprises in informal economy and task work: The Binners’ Project, Knack, DTES Market, and Carnegie Community Centre.
- **Convened** first workshops between social enterprise employers and provincial government staff.
- **Produced** On Income Assistance, Can Work income assistance policy research in partnership with Potluck Café Society.

**YEAR TWO**
- **Incubated** two new social enterprises and expanded work with The Binners’ Project and Knack.
- **Supported** the governance transition and fundraising efforts of DTES CED Strategy co-creation committee to community backbone organization, Exchange Inner City.
- **Facilitated** co-creation process for DTES Community Economic Development Strategy with City of Vancouver, strategy approved by City Council Nov 2017.
- **Facilitated** design workshops for Resource Hub committee (later Eastside Works) and facilitated Urban Core and EMBERS bid for location at 57 E. Hastings.
- **Produced** Pathways out of Poverty LEDlab submission to BC Poverty Reduction Consultations.

**YEAR THREE**
- **Incubated** four new service design innovations for intermediaries including Buy Social Canada, Eastside Works, and Hastings Crossing Business Improvement Area.
- **Supported** fundraising efforts and opening of Eastside Works.
- **Convened** DTES Changing Systems Learning Series with support from Vancouver Foundation, attended by over 40 inner city organizations and residents.
- **Collaborated** with Urban Core and Exchange Inner City on Policy Position Statement submission to BC Poverty Reduction Strategy Consultations. Presented recommendations to Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction.
- **Facilitated** partnership and resource sharing agreement between Urban Core and Exchange Inner City to support alignment and increased impact moving forward.
OUR GOALS
The goals of LEDlab were to:
1. Build, test and scale solutions that put money in the pockets of low-income residents;
2. Enhance the capacity of individuals, organizations, and networks for social enterprise, social innovation and systems change; and
3. Shift traditional patterns of power and resource use in the community in service of a more vibrant and inclusive local economy in Vancouver’s DTES.

LEDlab aimed to have impact at multiple levels and upon multiple stakeholder groups, from individual low-income residents of the DTES to students to government systems and back again.

OUR ASSESSMENTS
LEDlab used a Developmental Evaluation (DE) process to track progress towards our goals. DE is an evaluation approach well-suited to initiatives like ours. DE uses project developments and key pivot points to identify learnings for the project team. The idea is to conduct this evaluation in real time so the team can respond and adapt to changing conditions rather than waiting until review at the end of the project to see what went well and what didn’t.

We managed this process through a bi-weekly DE Report; a tool for reflection, management, and strategic learning throughout the organization. These reports focused on three key questions:

» Impact on lab strategy by providing a mechanism for co-design and co-creation with feedback from the system and community partners
» Impact on community by sharing insights and developmental outcomes with the system to help it better understand itself through community partner workshops and other venues.

Each year, we validated our learning and emerging strategic directions with a core group of community partners to inform program design.

In our final year, wanting to understand our overarching impact, we interviewed community partners about their overall reactions to LEDlab, shifts they and their organizations experienced as a result of their participation in the lab, the results of those shifts, actions they took, and questions about systems change. These findings were validated with respondents, student project coordinators, and the LEDlab project team in March 2018.

The remainder of this report illustrates LEDlab’s impact in three areas:
1. Impact on community
2. Impact on students
3. Impact on parent organizations Ecotrust Canada and RADIUS SFU

IMPACTS ON COMMUNITY
TANGIBLE PRODUCTS, NEW SOLUTIONS + INCOME GENERATED FOR DTES RESIDENTS
LEDlab helped deliver a number of tangible products, including guides and manuals, facilitated discussions, policy statements, communications materials, databases, case studies, and research. These products were delivered both at the project level and lab-wide. Whole initiatives such as the Eastside Works were direct results of the lab, as were policy frameworks such as the ‘income generation continuum’ used in the City of Vancouver’s Community Economic Development (CED) Strategy.

Our incubation of social enterprise initiatives generated new income for DTES residents. However, it is important to note that LEDlab contributed indirectly, given that community partners already had these goals when they joined. In consultations, community partners agreed that LEDlab’s support allowed them to deliver more services and to accelerate project delivery through the additional capacity that students and lab staff provided. Yet some projects, such as Eastside Works, are still too new to demonstrate these results.

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1. Impact on community
2. Impact on students
3. Impact on parent organizations Ecotrust Canada and RADIUS SFU

Of the 12 community partners interviewed for our impact evaluation, 86% reported that the LEDlab played a significant or critical role. Key reasons cited for this impact were:

» Learning about concepts such as strategic planning and connecting with other partners on capacity assessments and plan implementation
» Recognizing the need for a project and facilitating its launch
» Facilitating and convening partners
» Playing the role of catalyst
» Providing additional capacity with student project coordinators

86% of community partners reported that LEDlab played either a critical role or a significant role in supporting these actions and results.

72%
14%
14%

86% of community partners reported that LEDlab played either a critical role or a significant role in supporting these actions and results.

Case studies and messaging developed through LEDlab workshops and by the Project Coordinator have helped Buy Social to develop business with Calgary, Edmonton, and the Province of Alberta on social procurement frameworks. They are convinced on the why, now we’re talking about the how.

Alisha Maxfield
Buy Social Canada

Did hire more people, did put more money in peoples’ pockets, did get additional capacity to support new social enterprise activity at Potluck, and we created new jobs.

Colin Stansfield
Past Executive Director
Potluck Cafe Society

Through our partnership with LEDlab, the Binners Project secured a sorting contract with Science World, SFU, and other smaller pickups, which directly impact how much binners make through the project.

Anna Godefroy
The Binners’ Project

3. Shift traditional patterns of power and resource use in the community in service of a more vibrant and inclusive local economy in Vancouver’s DTES.
ENHANCED CAPACITY

Community partners reported learning and change at both individual and organizational levels. Workshops in social enterprise development and systems change supported new ways of working with partners in the community and with funders and governments. All community partners reported new networks and strengthened connections with existing networks as a result of LEDlab. Some partners, like Knack and Hives for Humanity, were able to leverage relationships and create inter-connections between projects, increasing income generating opportunities for local residents. Community partners emphasized the importance of LEDlab facilitating new connections both within and outside the DTES community, as well as the role that program staff, in particular Program Manager Kiri Bird, played in weaving networks and aligning people and resources around new ideas.

Through my involvement with LEDlab I grew my leadership and business skills and understanding. I gained language and structure for communicating what we do. What before felt like jargon and exclusionary, now equips us to participate in conversation about CED and social innovation.

Sarah Common
Hives for Humanity

Kiri and LEDlab helped me to think in a certain way that allows me to get a pilot project off the ground, be comfortable with many unknowns and have the tools to evaluate as we go along. I would not have been as comfortable to do this a couple of years ago. I would have had a real challenge to do something this innovative and ensure it is impactful and delivers the services it is meant to.

Johanna Li
EMBERS Eastside Works

I learned a lot about process design in the way the CED Strategy was convened and facilitated - food for thought in how we at the City engage with people with lived experience in policy and project development.

Wes Regan
City of Vancouver

SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE FOR CULTURE + POLICY CHANGE

All partners noted a marked change in the way that organizations in the DTES cooperate and collaborate. Partners attributed some of this to structural reasons, such as a change in community leadership, but they also affirmed LEDlab’s role in providing the social infrastructure to support the community’s latent desire for more collaboration.

Participants were appreciative of (and concerned about the coming lack of) LEDlab’s ability to spot gaps in the community and act quickly to fill them. These functions included contributing grant writing capacity on a tight timeline, convening community partners to develop and deliver a policy brief to a Provincial minister, and supporting groups like Urban Core with administrative and management tools and skills.

Community partners also remarked on the manner in which this was done. Convening without ego, without an organizational agenda, allowed LEDlab to bring diverse partners to the table, build trust, and move projects forward.

Finally, community partners reported a change in the way that policy is discussed; new players are part of the conversation and new language is being used. Several important investments have been made at the City of Vancouver towards recognizing and supporting the informal economy in government leadership and the resulting Provincial consultation process to develop a Poverty Reduction Strategy.

While this work has not led to policy change at the Provincial level during the lifespan of the lab, participants were optimistic that these changes would lead to policy change at a later time.

Of 12 community partners consulted, 86% reported that LEDlab played a significant or critical role in these changes. Key roles that partners identified were – LEDlab brought capacity at time it was needed, drive forward conversation more quickly than it otherwise might have happened. This is a critical role for labs to play. There is often great work being done in community, as was the case in the DTES, and a lab can catalyze new relationships and innovations. Community partners noted that the innovation may have happened eventually anyway, but the networks and capacity delivered by LEDlab helped bring it to fruition more quickly.

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LEDlab has been able to create social infrastructure to respond to policy windows when they arise. As a result the community can respond to these emergent opportunities much more quickly and effectively.

In 2018, LEDlab supported Urban Core in community organizing and research work to be able to respond to the change in government leadership and the resulting Provincial consultation process to develop a Poverty Reduction Strategy. While this work has not led to policy change at the Provincial level, the participants were optimistic that these changes would lead to policy change at a later time.

There’s been a changing of the guard in the way that people think in the DTES. I see it now as a much more collaborative community, and LEDlab has helped to facilitate that. The timing was really perfect, the community was ready for that and for someone to push that along.

Johanna Li
EMBERS Eastside Works

Urban Core’s brief to Minister Simpson on changing some procedures for people on income assistance would not have been possible without LEDlab’s support.

Kathleen Leahy
Urban Core

We now officially have a very different story about the economy in Downtown Eastside, one that recognizes employment and livelihood continuum. Really important contribution when trying to link CED and poverty reduction strategy. This came from the CED Strategy co-creation process and LEDlab work.

Wes Regan, City of Vancouver
This research gave me the opportunity to get a better understanding of the agencies, businesses, and social enterprises that support entrepreneurs in the neighbourhood. It allowed me to reflect on the larger system and the many opportunities, challenges, and service gaps that exist for entrepreneurs.

Austin Lui
Master’s Candidate, School of Community and Regional Planning (SCARP), University of British Columbia

MICRO-ENTERPRISE WORK


The Micro-Enterprise Work project grew out of the Low-Income Entrepreneur Needs Assessment (LENA) listening project conducted last year. The purpose of the project was to answer two questions:

1. How might we legitimize and support entrepreneurship in order to increase the personal incomes of low-income DTES residents?
2. What new community projects, resources, or policy changes could help achieve these goals?

The findings showed that to support micro-enterprises, low-income entrepreneurs need access to physical space to produce their goods and services, sales channels (i.e. markets), and business workshops and training.

In 2017/18 LEDlab Project Coordinator Austin Lui supported EMBERS in developing a database of business and social enterprise partners that could collaborate on service provision to a micro-enterprise program.

LEDlab funds were used to hire and train peer facilitators who are themselves micro-entrepreneurs, and who will be offering one-to-one business support to informal economy workers at Eastside Works. Private donors have also been engaged to build a small grant fund that will be available to micro-entrepreneurs through Eastside Works. This work has received support from the Sprott Foundation and will be continuing at Eastside Works through 2020.

OUR FINAL YEAR OF WORK

In our third and final year of work, LEDlab pivoted our core project incubation program to focus explicitly on shifting traditional patterns of power and resource use to the community in service of a more vibrant and inclusive local economy.

Having spent two years investing in and learning from the vibrant social enterprise sector, we felt that more attention was needed at the systems level to increase demand for social procurement and social hiring. Furthermore, all of the projects we took on were aligned with the strategic directions of the City of Vancouver’s DTES CED Strategy.

As a result of this pivot, we worked more closely with intermediary organizations in 2017/18 through our graduate student project coordinators. These organizations included EMBERS Eastside Works (formerly The Lux), a low barrier income generating hub, Buy Social Canada, an organization that brings socially driven purchasers and social enterprise suppliers together, and Hastings Crossings Business Improvement Association (HxBIA).

We played a more active role in brokering capital into DTES organizations – particularly those that would carry on LEDlab’s legacy and work beyond our planned end date.

Responding to the energy and momentum in BC around poverty reduction in the wake of the 2017 Provincial election, we focused knowledge mobilization efforts in our final year on solutions that address systemic causes of poverty in the DTES and were active contributors to the Poverty Reduction Strategy Consultations.

In our third and final year of work, LEDlab staff were asked to focus on knowledge integration, ensuring that process and content learning was being integrated into the ongoing and new work of Ecotrust Canada and RADIUS. As such, Program Manager Kiri Bird worked closely with the leadership teams at each organization to build institutional capacity and design and build new social lab initiatives related to the mission of each organizations.


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Supporting more than 650 businesses and property owners in the DTES, HxBIA is a unique business improvement association that takes a leadership role in managing change and shaping a more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable local economy.

Through collaboration with business members, non-profits, and government, HxBIA links area businesses with community organizations to foster a vibrant local economy for all. HxBIA was founded with social innovation as part of its by-laws, making it unique among BIAs. HxBIA’s mission is to promote and support members, business owners, and property owners, to advocate on their behalf and contribute to the social, cultural, and economic health of our area through innovation, partnership, and collaboration with other stakeholders in the community.

Project Coordinator David Harris-Koblin was hired to build the sales infrastructure required for social enterprises. He regularly interviewed HxBIA’s membership of businesses, social enterprises, and non-profits and populated the BIA’s customer relationship management system to include the most up-to-date information. He helped coordinate and facilitate the annual Experience Hastings Crossing event, including brokering partnerships between businesses and non-profits and social enterprises, tracking sponsorships, producing media kits, contributing to social media posts, and tracking funds/donations generated. As a result, 36 businesses, non-profits, and social enterprises participated in the event.

In January 2018, David facilitated a community event dedicated to promoting collaboration between businesses and social enterprises. David created a report based on his experiences which details a recommended methodology for engaging and tracking membership, in an effort to strengthen partnerships between businesses, property owners, non-profits, and social enterprises.

Another key output from David’s work was the creation of an orientation booklet for new businesses which details HxBIA’s services and governance structure, DTES history and culture, and emergency services contact information. He was also involved in the creation of a new subcommittee under HxBIA’s Arts and Culture committee which aims to revitalize a DTES alleyway for residents.

An important insight that emerged from David’s work was the difference between required education and information. Businesses have demonstrated a need for contact information and logistical details for social procurement and hiring, rather than higher-level messaging on the principles of community development. HxBIA is collaborating with Eastside Works and Urban Core to provide clear information for low barrier hiring and procurement practices moving forward.

This project has helped raise awareness of HxBIA’s efforts within and beyond the DTES, as well as lay the foundations for exchanges among HxBIA membership. There is potential to scale out social procurement and hiring knowledge to other areas. Several DTES BIAs have expressed interest in initiating similar projects in their own jurisdictions.

KEY LESSONS

1. The vast majority of businesses already understand the moral argument for engaging with community residents and investing in community economic development.
2. Participating businesses primarily expressed an interest in the business case for social procurement/hiring and the comparative advantages these practices would produce.
3. Many businesses already practice informal social hiring practices, such as hiring window cleaners or donating bottles to local binners, but are unfamiliar with the terminology of social innovation.
4. Successful community economic development can only be elicited through a coalition of stakeholders; a collaborative effort consisting of organizations, residents, governments, and businesses is required to produce a cultural change in the perceptions of what defines work.

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CHALLENGING OUR ASSUMPTIONS

Challenging our assumptions, the business community in the DTES isn’t just ready to adopt social innovation practices, they are eager.

David Harris-Koblin
Master’s Candidate, Public Administration
University of Victoria
EMBERS Eastside Works is an income generation hub in the heart of Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside.

EMBERS (Eastside Movement for Business & Economic Renewal Society) is a non-profit community economic development organization that works to combat poverty and assists in the revitalization of Vancouver’s Downtown Eastside through social enterprise and community-based business development. Through employment services and small business training and coaching, EMBERS’s mission is to empower people living on low incomes to be economically self-sufficient and develop productive futures.

In late February 2017, EMBERS was confirmed as the successful new tenant of a City-owned commercial property at 57 East Hastings Street, referred to by many in the neighbourhood as “The Lux”. Later renamed Eastside Works, the space was identified by the City of Vancouver as a site that could be used for a collaborative low barrier income generating hub. Eastside Works aims to meet people where they are at, but also provides individuals the opportunity to move along the income generation continuum if they choose to. The approach is innovative in its use of multiple partners working in true collaboration using existing programs and expertise to meet the needs of the community.

Project Coordinator Austin Lui worked on service and information design projects that would enable new forms of collaboration at Eastside Works. He helped create a user journey map and a service design framework for anyone entering the space in search of work opportunities. Austin also helped design a database that captures user information as they interact with the space or different programming. This data is key, as Eastside Works is hoping to influence future policy by using a development evaluation framework. They are also using the data in partnership with UBC researchers who are studying how personal circumstances affect the ways DTES residents access employment opportunities, resources, and supports. Austin was able to draw on his graphic design skills to assist in designing communication materials and branding for Eastside Works.

Through Austin’s work, 51 organizations, social enterprises, and businesses were engaged for programming at Eastside Works. A design jam event as well as 10 drop-in consultation sessions were held for community members to learn about and provide input on the design and use of the space. Austin also supported the development of new programming for Eastside Works based on his own research and feedback from community members. In total, 86 community members and organizations were engaged, 10 new program ideas were generated through insights from consultations, and 20 new program partnerships were formed.

With the support of staff, community members, and organizations, Eastside Works opened its doors on April 4, 2018. Two weeks later, an opening and celebration event was held that was attended by over 200 community members, organizations, and City of Vancouver staff. City staff presented a proclamation on behalf of the City to Eastside Works declaring April 19th as Vancouver’s Day Celebrating an Inclusive Economy for All. Austin will be continuing on with Eastside Works after his LEDlab term is done as Outreach and Operations Coordinator.

KEY LESSONS

1. Meetings and facilitated events may be comfortable to people in the non-profit and professional work setting, but can be intimidating or unattractive for community members. Meeting people where they are at means rethinking the way we facilitate events. The drop-in sessions consisted of informal, one-on-one conversations. The design jam took more time to prepare, cost more to facilitate, and had fewer attendees.

2. The biggest barrier for people to work is their internal struggles.

3. For many in the DTES work is not about money, it’s about something to do and being a part of and giving back to the community.

4. There is no one-size-fits-all solution that meets the needs of all community members.

‘LEDlab strikes the perfect balance between providing support while giving students the autonomy and agency to experiment with new ideas. I now have a better understanding of how complex systems work and feel more connected to a network of amazing people. LEDlab has given me the chance to reflect on the larger picture, and the many roles all of us can play in creating positive change.’

Austin Lui
Master’s Candidate, School of Community and Regional Planning (SCARP), University of British Columbia
Buy Social Canada brings socially driven purchasers and social enterprise suppliers together, building business relationships that generate social benefits to communities across the country. 

Buy Social Canada offers a recognized, Canada-wide social enterprise certification program that opens the door to an emerging social impact network. They work with community, private sector, and government to support the development of policy and resources to strengthen local and regional social procurement initiatives.

Project Coordinator Nicole Hanbury was brought on to help build the business case for social procurement and develop the value proposition for Buy Social Canada. Nicole researched and analyzed qualitative data collected from successful social procurement relationships, and designed 6 concise and informative case studies which are published on Buy Social Canada’s website. In November 2017 she attended and helped facilitate the Buy Social Canada Summit: Exploring the Future of Social Procurement in Gatineau, QC, where she also shared some of her research and findings.

The case studies have helped showcase examples of social procurement relationships formed between various institutions and social enterprises, and outlined opportunities and challenges and the key takeaways and lessons learned from past experiences. These have helped institutions interested in social procurement, specifically local governments, to consult with Buy Social Canada on how to approach it effectively.

Nicole also created a prototype Community Benefit Agreement (CBA) scoring system that measures and evaluates the social impact of such agreements. The scoring system includes a manual, external and internal user guides, as well as appendices of definitions and methodology. The scorecard provides a base list of criteria and supports communities in negotiating and expressing their relative preferences and interests for property development projects in their neighbourhoods.

"My main takeaway from my work through LEDlab is that the policy window for social procurement is currently open. Buy Social Canada and others working in the Downtown Eastside are really eager to jump in and share their expertise and knowledge with different governments and organizations as to how we can take advantage of every opportunity to create a more wholesome and thriving local economy - one that allows all residents to contribute by meeting them where they are at."

Nicole Hanbury  
Master’s Candidate, Public Policy  
Simon Fraser University

The details of each social procurement and CBA is case-dependent, but Buy Social Canada has seen enthusiasm for these practices overall. The City of Calgary has contacted Buy Social Canada to share their interest and to receive advice on implementation. The scorecard has been transformed into a worksheet for an online workshop on social procurement and CBAs, and is currently being adapted by the City of Vancouver for their CBA policy.

The case studies and scorecards have helped position Buy Social Canada as an intermediary in CBAs, and have supported work with governments and organizations in implementing social procurement in their supply chain practices.
Poverty Reduction in BC has had an exciting year. In 2017, under the leadership of the NDP government, and owing in no small part to the important organizing work of the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, and others, the Province committed to a legislated poverty reduction strategy. Under the leadership of Minister Shane Simpson, MLA for Hastings East, a robust community consultation has been rolling out across the province.

There were several ways to participate in engagement process, including community meetings, online, mail, or phone feedback, or holding specifically Indigenous or Metis engagement sessions.

The LEDlab prepared a submission to the BC government’s public consultation on the Poverty Reduction Strategy. The report, titled “Pathways Out of Poverty: Social Hiring and Income Assistance” examines the effects of existing income assistance policies and legislation on social hiring and employment in the DTES.

The submission aims to further facilitate some of the innovative solutions and non-traditional employment opportunities that have been developed in the community to help fill gaps in government service provision. The ten recommendations proposed in the submission pertain to the following five Areas of Reform:

1. Increasing access to income assistance
2. Recipient classification that reflects people’s needs and abilities
3. Financial incentives that incentivize, not punish
4. Modernizing employment services and supporting social enterprise
5. Improving the government-community relationship

In addition to participation through the formal channels of poverty reduction consultations, LEDlab continued our government relations strategy in 2017/18. In March 2018, LEDlab hosted representatives from the Province for a meeting with social enterprise employers. In total, 17 social enterprises and 2 government representatives spent a morning discussing legislative challenges to social hiring, and how the government might better support low-barrier work in the DTES.

Community representatives also championed the role of Eastside Works in advancing a new model of employment services for individuals on income assistance who are not ready for full or even part time work. Overall, the message to government was clear: recognize and embrace the full income generation continuum and the value of low-threshold labour force attachment, and move away from the single metric of success of moving people off of income assistance.

In addition to our own research and poverty reduction submission, LEDlab collaborated with the advocacy network Urban Core, as well as Exchange Inner City, to produce a Policy Position Statement. The Policy Position Statement was formally endorsed by more than 30 DTES organizations, including a large number of social enterprises hiring people on income assistance, key DTES housing service providers, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, and Vancouver Foundation.

The Policy Position Statement was presented in a special meeting with Minister Simpson on March 19, 2017, and was submitted through the formal channels of the Poverty Reduction Strategy submission process. The Policy Position Statement outlines the problems with the current system, recommended actions, and desired outcomes for policy changes.

The Policy Position Statement covers the following categories and recommendations:

### Barriers to access and mis-categorization
- Improve the income assistance application process
- Strengthen community supports for applying to income assistance
- Improve access to more supportive income assistance categories such as Person with Disabilities (PWD) and Person with Persistent Multiple Barriers (PPMB)
- Commit to continual service improvement consulting recipients of income assistance

### Problematic income assistance distribution and exemptions
- Develop a new evidence-informed income assistance distribution framework that emphasizes convenience and community wellbeing
- Remove earning exemption limits for PWD and PPMB clients
- Eliminate the application of the two year financial independence test

### Reforming the Employment Program of BC
- Reform the Employment Program of BC to reflect the nuance and flexibility of today’s workforce
- Increase support to social enterprises and non-profits that are filling gaps in Ministry employment service provision
- Recognize and embrace the full Income Generation Continuum
- Develop new ways to measure success that prioritize wellbeing and stability

The Policy Position Statement can be viewed on the LEDlab or Urban Core websites.
DTES CHANGING SYSTEMS WORKSHOP SERIES

Another of LEDlab’s goals was to build capacity amongst our broad network of civic and community partners for social enterprise and social innovation.

While our first two years of work focused on social enterprise incubation, in Year 3 we had a greater focus on systems change.

In 2018 we opened up our workshop series, usually only available to 8-12 people directly participating in our core cohort, to the broader DTES community. As a result, we were able to provide 40+ organizations with low-cost and low-commitment access to three high-quality workshops about changing systems:

» SI 101: Systems Thinking and Systems Change presented by Cheryl Rose

» SI 201: Working With the Social Innovation Toolbox presented by Darcy Riddell

» Understanding and Building Power for Systemic Change presented by Al Etmanski and Tovah Paglaro

The Changing Systems Learning Series served organizations, social enterprises, business leaders, and local philanthropic or government staff who were actively working to address the root causes of poverty and economic exclusion in the DTES, and who recognized that a collaborative approach is needed to achieve a long-lasting and systemic change.

Concepts included systems thinking, systems mapping, systems entrepreneurship, adaptive cycle and cross scale dynamics, developmental evaluation, and more.

It was exciting that there’s a group of people who we’re already working with, who we now share language with around strategies.

Vanessa Richards
312 Main

The thing that’s been useful and important for me in last three sessions is the intentional space around theory and practice. As we know, our days get away from us really quickly. We get bogged down in our operational roles. Having the time to talk about a process is pretty fantastic.

Karla Kloepper
Carnegie Community Centre

AGGREGATE OUTCOMES

Over three years, LEDlab’s work produced the following outputs and outcomes:

30 Master’s student internship units
4 universities
10 disciplines
6 to 8 month internships
40 organizations
$300K of direct investment in graduate students was leveraged in support of community-led projects

$60,960 of in-kind office, workshop, and meeting space donated for use by DTES organizations

$370K foundation + donor capital raised by DTES organizations with support from LEDlab

20 capacity-building workshops led to 1,006 person-hours of workshop training in social enterprise development and social innovation frameworks and practices

$92,215 of direct income generated for DTES residents

677 hours of training provided to DTES residents

11 DTES non-profit social enterprise initiatives and social service innovations incubated

2015 RECODE Cities for People Civic Innovation Award

2018 City of Vancouver Healthy City For All Leadership Award

71 partnerships or new instances of collaboration

268 relationships strengthened among organizations in and outside the DTES

2016 Cordes Innovation Award Nomination

7 graduate students focused Master’s research on their work at LEDlab

2017 LEDlab Field Book

2018 LEDlab Poverty Reduction Strategy submission to Province of BC

83 blogs
16 conference presentations

2017 City of Vancouver Healthy City For All Leadership Award

2016 RECODE Cities for People Civic Innovation Award

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2017 Cordes Innovation Award Nomination

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Karla Kloepper
Carnegie Community Centre
PARTICIPATING STUDENTS
2015-2018

LUONGO

UBC

NICOLE

LUI

UBC

AUSTIN

DAVID

UVIC

KOBLIN-HARRIS

SFU

KIRI

MIGICOVSKY

SFU

ANNA

HUANG

SFU

AMELIA

PILARINOS

SFU

ANDREAS

CHAKRABARTI

UBC

PRIYANKA ROY

TOEWS

SFU

BRANDON

CHRIS

SFU

PUZIO

SFU

SARAH

MOREHEART

SFU

IRINA

RUEDA

UWATERLOO

TERESA

EDGE

UWATERLOO

NICOLE

LUNGO

UBC

AUSTIN

LUI

UBC

DAVID

KOBLIN-HARRIS

UVIC

NICOLE

HANBURY

SFU

KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND ATTITUDES

The students were generally appreciative of what they learned as a result of their project work and participation in the LEDlab curriculum. Social innovation and systems thinking concepts and tools were fairly new for most students, and it provided them with a framework and language for better understanding and engaging with complex community issues, and seeing and responding to emerging patterns.

Students identified the ability to listen and empathize as being crucial in the success of their projects, allowing them to gain trust and work with diverse partners and community members.

The shift in focus in our third year from working directly with social enterprises to more intermediary organizations also affected the curriculum concepts that were relevant for the cohort. Students in Years 1 and 2 benefited from drawing on business model canvas, value proposition, and minimum viable product to support business development with social enterprises, while the Year 3 students used service design concepts such as user journey maps to understand the needs of their stakeholders at various stages of engagement with their projects.

I developed patience, empathy, and went deeper with my listening skills. It was interesting to look at the project as an outsider and not force the process. I accepted that it will take time to get results. It wasn't going to take a few weeks, but months.

Priyanka Roy Chakrabarti
Project Coordinator with The Binners’ Project, 2015

IMPACTS ON STUDENTS

In addition to Impacts on Community, LEDlab measured our impact on graduate students.

INTERDISCIPLINARY + INTERINSTITUTIONAL

In total 17 students were hired from 4 universities: Simon Fraser University (11), University of British Columbia (3), University of Victoria (1), and University of Waterloo (2). Disciplines included Resource and Environmental Management, Business, Urban Studies, International Studies, Planning, Health Science, Public Policy, Local Economic Development and Innovation, Sustainability Management, and Public Administration.

We interviewed LEDlab alumni and the current cohort to better understand their learning outcomes; their personal journey, struggle, and growth; and their future aspirations.

KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND ATTITUDES

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The adaptive cycle shows up in my work all the time. We are constantly seeing where we are as an organization in the different phases and what factors we need to consider. It’s relevant for my personal work as well.

Anna Migicovsky
Knack Project Coordinator, 2015

I developed patience, empathy, and went deeper with my listening skills. It was interesting to look at the project as an outsider and not force the process. I accepted that it will take time to get results. It wasn’t going to take a few weeks, but months.

Priyanka Roy Chakrabarti
Project Coordinator with The Binners’ Project, 2015
**GETTING OUT OF THE COMFORT ZONE**

For several students, this was their first time working in a community setting where plans could regularly change, and where they were accountable to multiple partners. By realizing that they weren’t meant to know the best responses right away, and by drawing on the LEDlab’s approach of being humble, inquisitive, experimental, and adaptive, the pressure was taken off.

It’s easy to want to have things done, but we need to stop and think: is this meeting our objectives? No? Ok, we need to go back to the drawing board and iterate. It’s easy to want to solve things but these are sticky issues and there’s no silver bullet. But then you shouldn’t be discouraged if you can’t solve everything. This feeds into leveraging failure and embracing it. For example, being ok with not having all the people you wanted to have attend an event.

*Amelia Huang*
*Hives for Humanity Project Coordinator, 2016*

**IMPACTS ON RADIUS + ECOTRUST CANADA**

Using a social innovation lab methodology for addressing complex challenges was a new approach for both Ecotrust Canada and RADIUS SFU. Throughout the lifespan of the lab, parent organizations closely observed the strategies and processes that were applied, the outcomes achieved, and the lessons learned.

Based on the success of LEDlab, Knowledge Integration work was undertaken in Year 3 to better adopt and institutionalize learning and practice across each organization.

Jean Pogge, President of Ecotrust Canada, and Shawn Smith, Co-Director of RADIUS SFU, were interviewed to better understand the impact of hosting a lab on their organization’s overall strategy, scope of work, networks, and capacity.

**ECOTRUST CANADA**

Ecotrust Canada works closely with remote and rural communities throughout BC and Canada on sustainable economic development. Given that their head office is located in Vancouver’s DTES, they were motivated to support economic development and build respectful relationships in their community. They wanted to explore new ways of building their relationship with SFU. Additionally, they wanted to see if Mitacs could lower the cost of providing support to social enterprises in the local community.

Ecotrust Canada believes the LEDlab has been a phenomenal success in meeting its goals of supporting social enterprises in DTES, identifying strategic gaps and policy needs, and convening stakeholders from every sector to develop and implement the City’s CED strategy. Utilizing a highly skilled Program Manager, Kiri Bird, combined with graduate students working full-time on projects for eight months, was key to the LEDlab succeeding in its goal of systems entrepreneurship and being financially sustainable.

Organizationally, one of the key outcomes for Ecotrust Canada has been a deeper understanding of complex systems issues through the lens of social innovation and systems change. LEDlab has helped bring Ecotrust into conversations around collective impact, social innovation, and support for social enterprise, strengthening its connections to groups in these fields.

Using Mitacs funding for LEDlab has also made Ecotrust Canada more familiar and efficient with this process and has resulted in additional hiring of graduate students.

LEDlab has expanded our thinking about use of labs as a method for tackling wicked problems within the context of place-based economic development. The biggest impact has perhaps been in shaping our thinking about our replication of the LEDlab model in remote communities and using the lessons learned to launch a Northwest Coast Innovation Lab in Prince Rupert.

*Jean Pogge*
*President and CEO Ecotrust Canada*

**FUTURE ASPIRATIONS + CAREERS**

As a result of their experiences:

- **80%** of the students are continuing to work in fields that are either addressing the same challenges as the lab or drawing upon similar concepts.
- **5** students were hired by their project supervisors post-internship.
- **7** students chose to base their Master’s thesis research on their work with the lab.

My internship confirmed that I want to work on environmental and social justice issues, and provided me an invaluable entry point into the field of sustainability.

*Brandon Toews*
*Project Coordinator*
*The Binners’ Project, 2016*

My undergrad work in international development work made me cynical about international development, but I’m recovering from that. LEDlab work helped with that and with being able to do interventions that are culturally appropriate. LEDlab helped me to be focused on how to develop appropriate solutions to problems now!

*Priyanka Roy Chakrabarti*
*Project Coordinator with The Binners’ Project, 2015*
In May 2018, Ecotrust Canada launched the North Coast Innovation Lab in Prince Rupert, BC, supported by Vancouver Foundation, the City of Prince Rupert, and the BC Rural Dividend Fund. Although the economic context in Prince Rupert is different from Vancouver’s DTES, the success of LEDlab gave Ecotrust Canada the confidence to initiate a lab methodology that could leverage local resources, entrepreneurs, and talent in co-creating a sustainable local economy in a remote community.

**RADIUS SFU**

It was also important to RADIUS to co-host a lab in the DTES to further develop relationships with and contribute to a community where it already belonged. RADIUS wanted the community to see and benefit from the university as social infrastructure, while giving university students and faculty unique opportunities to learn from and with DTES organizations and community. RADIUS also sought to engage in a specific social issue and set of systems over time, to learn how social entrepreneurship might intersect with a focus on systems change, and to further develop their own innovation methodologies.

LEDlab has exceeded all of these initial expectations. Starting with the goal of simply showing up and being useful, it’s been a transformational experience for graduate students; the majority remain involved in the social innovation field in various ways, showcasing a mechanism to build talent for the sector. There have been high-quality on-the-ground projects and social venture concepts with DTES partners. The Binners’ Project, for example, operates out of the RADIUS offices while also informing policy at the systems level. RADIUS has quickly adopted the lessons from LEDlab, and their future strategy has been influenced significantly. RADIUS has adopted a strategy of ‘entrepreneurship in service of systems change,’ continuing to harness this focus on the intersection of entrepreneurial activity and systems change. A methodology guide has been created based on LEDlab’s work and Developmental Evaluation has been integrated across multiple programs. RADIUS is also developing four new in-house lab programs: Health Promotion, Refugee Livelihoods, Indigenous Entrepreneurship, and The Future of Work.

While we were cautiously hopeful that we could contribute value in a community rich with existing leadership, I’ve been pleasantly surprised at how the lab has been able to help bring different systems actors together to contribute to on the ground innovation and networks alongside meaningful policy and other contributions. Kudos to the LEDlab team and community partners for making this happen.

Shawn Smith
Co-director, RADIUS SFU

RADIUS has been able to connect more authentically with systems change actors in the DTES, such as The Binners Project and Potluck Cafe, as well as City of Vancouver and Provincial staff. Other community groups are seeing RADIUS as a conduit to SFU and university participation. Senior SFU leadership has become more familiar with labs as social infrastructure approaches and are connecting with RADIUS to understand how to address complex problems with the lab methodology. Emerging as a meaningful node in the social innovation labs field, RADIUS will host CONVERGE: Canadian Lab Practitioners Exchange in June 2018.

Overall, developing a lab methodology has given RADIUS a way to differentiate themselves significantly from other university innovation hubs and impact accelerators. They have been able to provide a service to address complex problems, which is unique value proposition to community and SFU alike.

**LEDLAB LEADERSHIP TEAM**

Hosting the Local Economic Development Lab has been a transformative experience for program staff, graduate students, and parent organizations Ecotrust Canada and RADIUS SFU.

We are proud of the work we’ve done with community over the past three years, and we are incredibly excited about the assets and resources the DTES community now has to move forward. In particular, employment services and social enterprise groups have so much more cohesion than just a few years ago, and clarity in an approach rooted in cross-sector collaboration and systems change.

We are grateful for the trust our partners placed in us, and their leadership in continuing this work. In many respects the idea of a time-bound program was an experiment in itself, seeking to build new strengths and networks without competing for resources with existing community organizations. LEDlab sunsetting in line with the original design is in many ways a sign of success.

In July 2018 the LEDlab partnership between Ecotrust Canada and RADIUS SFU will reach its planned conclusion and LEDlab staff will move on to new positions.

We all remain committed neighbours in the DTES, with relationships that will long outlast this initiative. The ledlab.ca website will remain active through 2020 and knowledge products will gradually be transitioned to partners’ web archives.

This work has been challenging and not always easy, but it’s been extremely fruitful and all of us on the LEDlab team can genuinely say we’ve been changed for the better through this experience. We look forward to continuing to design innovative approaches to complex social and economic challenges in the future and to contributing to social innovation lab practice in BC and Canada.

The LEDlab Team
Kiri Bird, Ara Beittoei, Shawn Smith, Jean Pogge