

Calgary Youth Employment Lab

LESSONS FROM THIS PROCESS

A DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATION REPORT

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The Youth Employment Lab is based in the traditional territories of the Blackfoot Confederacy (Siksika, Kainai, Piikani), the Tsuut'ina, the Îyâxe Nakoda Nations, the Métis Nation (Region 3), and all people who make their homes in the Treaty 7 region of Southern Alberta.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2017, Calgary's Collaborative Funders' Table (CFT) launched a collaborative funding initiative with the goal of improving employment prospects for Opportunity Youth in Calgary. The initiative focused on the interface between 'supply' (youth and youth serving agencies) and 'demand' (employers). The CFT chose to use a social innovation lab approach as a way to develop solutions for this complex challenge. The intent was to give a diverse set of key stakeholders (youth, youth serving agencies, employers, intermediaries, service designers and change makers) the opportunity to explore, learn, ideate, co-create and test strategies to create and strengthen employment pathways for Opportunity Youth. Ultimately, the CFT wants to advance employment for Opportunity Youth while contributing to business success and workplace diversity.

The Youth Employment Lab (YEL) was made up of four lab teams. Each team tackled a unique challenge area by gathering ideas and insights from diverse stakeholders connected to the challenge; developing these ideas into prototypes; and then testing and refining the prototypes with stakeholders.

YEL Team #1 explored the challenge of designing a community of practice to build the capacity of employers to employ and retain Opportunity Youth. YEL Team #2 worked to identify innovative ways to find and connect Opportunity Youth in community to employment supports and pathways. YEL Team #3 explored developing a system to enable Opportunity Youth to more easily communicate and showcase their skills when applying for entry level jobs. YEL Team # 4 worked to find a way to better support employers to understand the experience of Indigenous Opportunity Youth and be better prepared to hire and support

this population of employees. These teams were supported over five months to engage through a process of discovery and co-creation. Four innovative solutions were developed and will be considered for pilot funding in November 2019.

The lab process generated many lessons related to funding and convening a social lab; labs as a method to address social issues; creating and strengthening employment pathways for Opportunity Youth; and, working with Indigenous peoples to collectively tackle complex challenges. The CFT will continue over the next three years to support the development and potential scaling of solutions generated by the lab and building on what has been learned to advance employment among Opportunity Youth and increase diversity and success among employers.



BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW



Young people in Canada are increasingly challenged to find lasting and meaningful employment due to factors such as changing labour market conditions, automation, the rise of precarious employment and “gig” work, as well as mismatches between supply (i.e. workers skills and training opportunities) and demand (i.e. job requirements and employer needs). Securing employment can be particularly difficult for youth who face multiple barriers ranging from homelessness, mental health challenges, English as a second language and struggles with identity. These challenges also make youth at risk of social and economic exclusion. These young people, described as “Opportunity Youth”, may be motivated to work but require more support in finding pathways to employment.

While there are a variety of programs and services that have been developed to assist youth transitions to employment, the overall unemployment rate for disadvantaged and vulnerable

youth remains high. Many youth serving agencies that offer employment-readiness training programs, don’t always have employer input into the design and delivery of the program or a direct path to paid employment. These youth serving agencies bring tremendous resources - strong relationships with youth, experience delivering quality programming, and a desire for innovation; However, many don’t have the resources and opportunities to forge partnerships with employers who will ultimately hire their youth. Providing them with an opportunity to work more closely with potential employers of youth could lead to more successful employment outcomes.

Employers are essential stakeholders in improving employment outcomes for youth. They present the most sustainable solution – paid employment with opportunities to learn, grow and advance in the workplace. Increasingly, employers are recognizing the social and business value of diversity and inclusion in their workforce and some have translated this into new hiring practices, including for vulnerable youth. On the other hand, some employers are reluctant to hire youth due to the perceived potential risks and the unknown challenges. Many employers are unaware that there are community resources available to help youth prepare for and succeed in the workforce.

In 2017, the Collaborative Funders’ Table (CFT)¹ launched a collaborative funding initiative with the goal of improving employment prospects for Opportunity Youth in Calgary. The initiative focused on the interface between ‘supply’ (youth and youth serving agencies) and ‘demand’ (employers). The goal is to ensure that youth seeking work are better prepared to meet the needs of employers, and that employers are better able to recruit and retain youth.

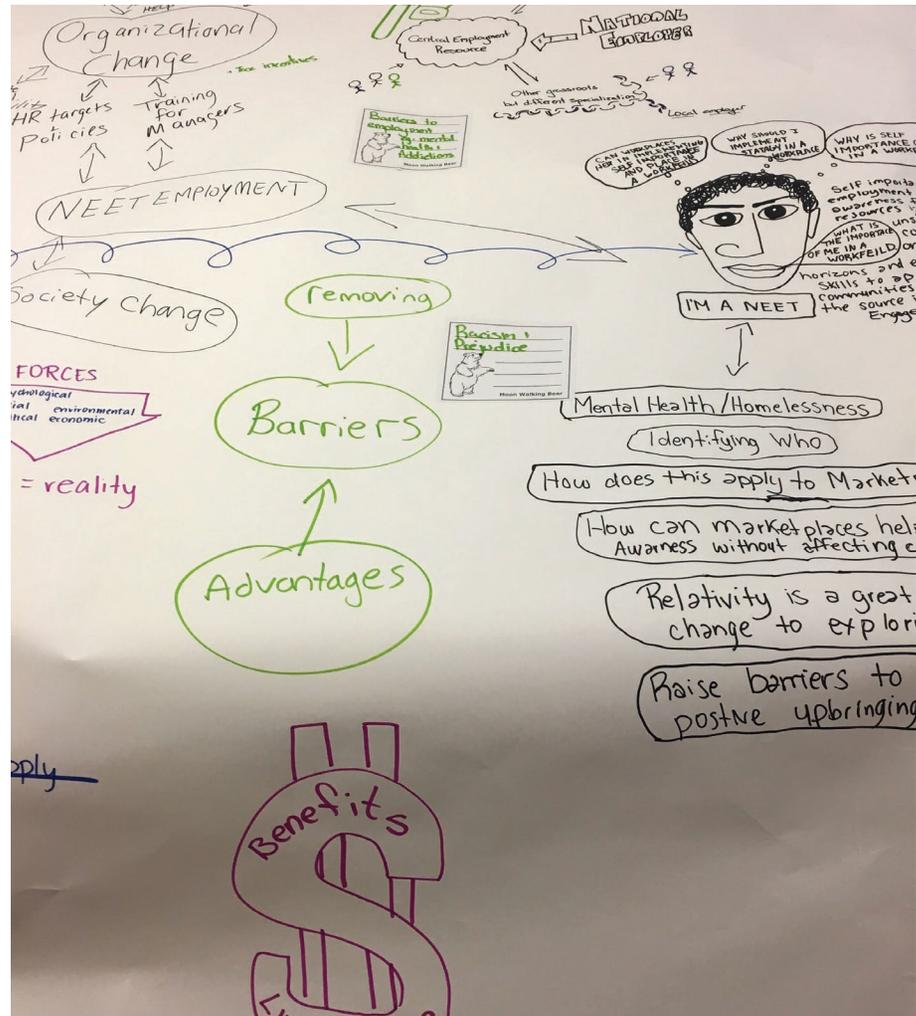
¹ The Collaborative Funders’ Table members are the Calgary Foundation, the United Way, Burns Memorial Fund, the RBC Foundation, the City of Calgary and the Carthy Foundation.

Improving employment outcomes with youth facing barriers is a complex social issue requiring collaboration among multiple stakeholders and the CFT knew it would be important to engage employers, youth serving agencies, and other community resources as critical players in the design, testing and scaling of employment strategies. The CFT chose to use a social innovation lab approach as a way to develop solutions for this complex challenge. The intent was to give a diverse set of key stakeholders (youth, youth serving agencies, employers, intermediaries, service designers and change makers) the opportunity to explore, learn, ideate, co-create and test strategies to create and strengthen employment pathways for Opportunity Youth. Ultimately, the CFT wants to advance employment for Opportunity Youth while contributing to business success and workplace diversity.

This report will provide an overview of the Youth Employment Lab (YEL) process, summarize lessons learned and set out implications for the CFT and other stakeholders going forward. It is based on developmental evaluation field notes, interviews with lab participants and conveners, artifacts from the lab teams, and materials developed by Ben Weinlick and Think Jar Collective² for the lab.



Ultimately, the CFT wants to advance employment for Opportunity Youth while contributing to business success and workplace diversity.



² <https://thinkjarcollective.com/>

THANK YOU

As developmental evaluator supporting the CFT and the YEL, I am grateful to all who took part in and supported this Lab. Without their generosity, commitment, passion and wisdom, the Lab and this report would not have been possible.

To Reg and Rose Crowshoe and the Knowledge Keepers Group, thank you for your patience, genuine interest, guidance and support for this process.

To Kirby Redwood, Adrian Goulet and Miskanawah, thank you for your support and guidance to help the YEL connect with Elders and others from Indigenous communities.

To the Collaborative Funders' Table, thank you for championing this cause and the idea of a lab.

To the Lab Stewardship Group, thank you for your tenacity, courage, responsiveness and agility.

To members of the Lab, thank you for your wisdom, courage and willingness to trust the process.

To Ben Weinlick and Think Jar Collective, thank you for your skillful facilitation and your support in the development of this report.

To all the stakeholders who agreed to take part in an interview, thank you for your candidness and contribution to growing our collective understanding of social lab processes and strengthening employment pathways for Opportunity Youth.

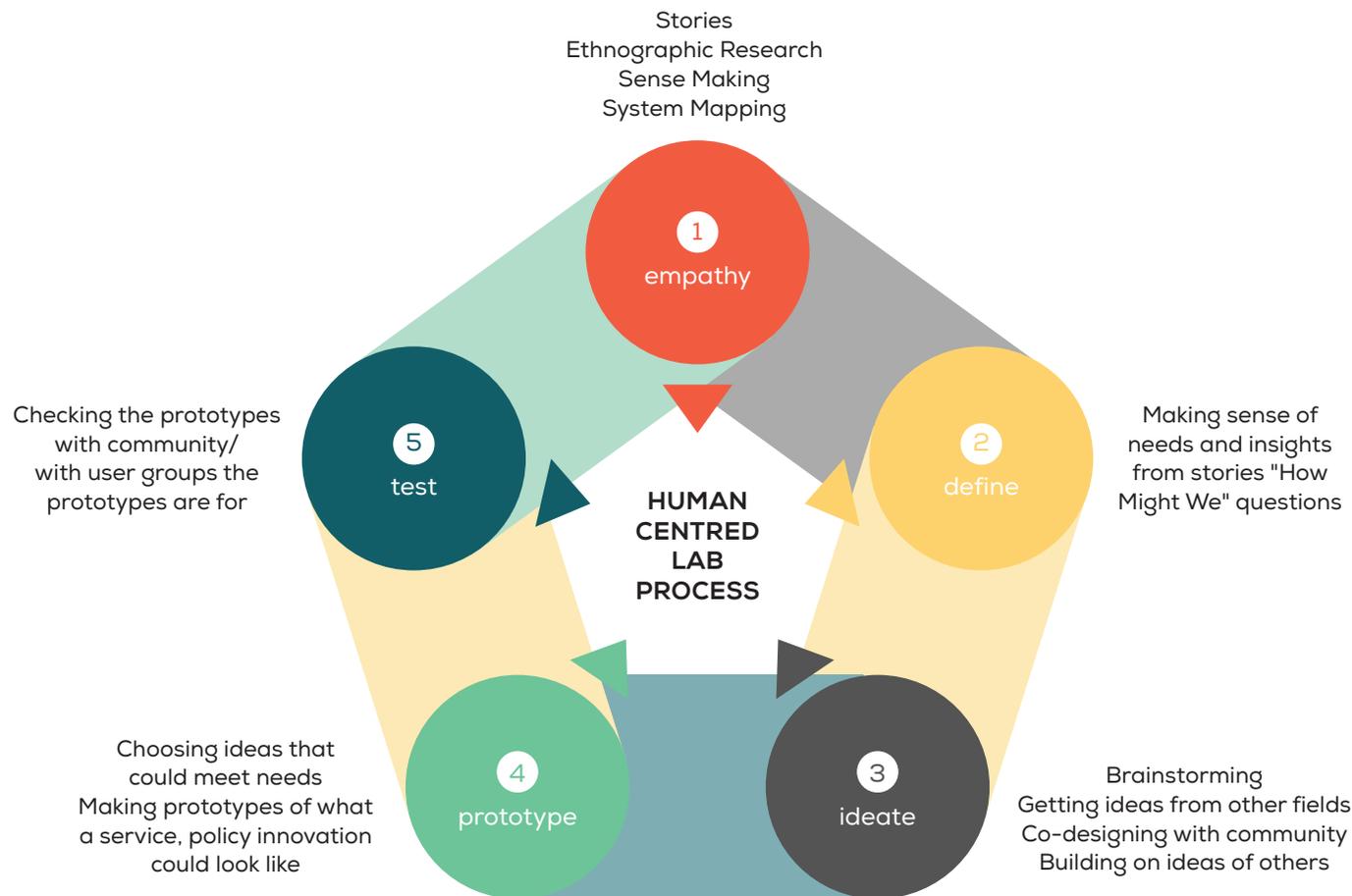
WHY A SOCIAL INNOVATION LAB?

Improving employment outcomes for youth facing barriers is a complex social issue requiring collaboration among multiple stakeholders. The CFT chose to address this issue using a social innovation lab³ because labs are designed to balance both traditional ways of problem solving and new ways of co-designing solutions with those affected by a challenge – in this case: youth, employers, youth employment service providers, intermediaries, and funders.

³ Please see the Think Jar Collective's Social Innovation Lab Field Guide for <https://thinkjarcollective.com/tools/social-innovation-lab-field-guide/>

A social innovation lab draws on the strengths, empathy, creativity, and wisdom of a collective to explore new ways of making progress on a complex challenge. The premise of a lab is to understand challenges and seek solutions by convening the diverse perspectives connected to an issue. The lab draws insight from people with lived experience of a challenge, facilitates ideation, builds prototypes of solutions, and tests them to see how they work on the ground with people in real situations. A lab creates a safe space for a collective to explore, question assumptions, be bold, be agile and adapt as learning emerges, and experiment with solutions. As evidence emerges of what prototypes are working, these potential solutions can be scaled and spread to create broader-level, systemic change.

Labs are typically based on principles of human centered design (empathy, collaboration, experimentation, testing assumptions, making ideas tangible and action) and work iteratively through five stages:



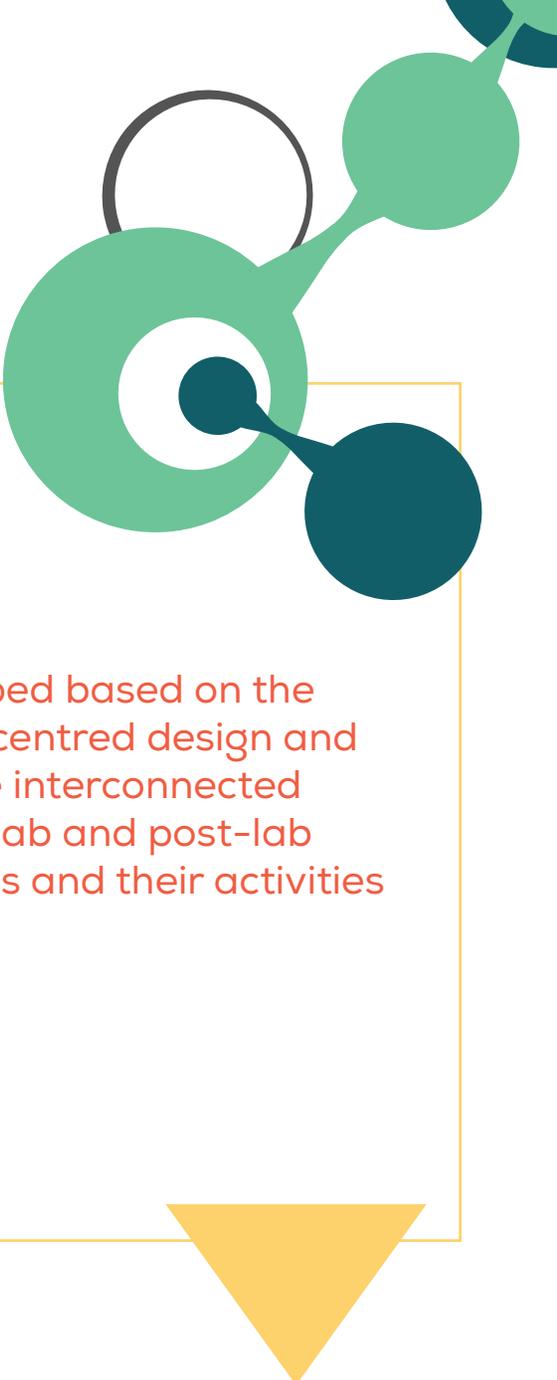
Given the complexity of advancing employment for Opportunity Youth, the Collaborative Funders' Table chose the social innovation lab approach. The lab approach is conducive to complex issues because it creates a space where multiple stakeholders with different perspectives can come together to co-create and test possible solutions. The YEL was supported by a Lab Stewardship Group and facilitated by Ben Weinlick from Think Jar Collective in Edmonton.

SNAPSHOT OF THE LAB PROCESS

PRE-LAB

LAB

POST-LAB



The YEL was developed based on the principles of human centred design and is comprised of three interconnected parts – the pre-lab, lab and post-lab phases. These phases and their activities are described below.

PHASE #1: PRE LAB (MAY - DECEMBER 2018)

The Pre-Lab phase included:

- **Research** and the development of a report related to the current state of employment pathways for youth facing barriers who are not employed, nor in, education or training (NEET)
- **Identification of key stakeholders** connected to this issue in Calgary and beyond
- **Sense-Making Workshop** which brought together 60 people with diverse perspectives and took them through a facilitated process that helped to make sense of the diverse needs and surface challenges, opportunities, gaps and tensions in the current system
- **Identification of six challenge areas** uncovered during the Sense-Making Workshop. Four challenges were explored through the lab process (described further below) and two were addressed with grants to augment already existing programs (See Appendix 3)
- **Engaging Indigenous Elders, youth and agencies** to allow the CFT to create more relevant and meaningful prototypes. The CFT recognized Indigenous Youth as an important group of Opportunity Youth and also wanted to honour growing funder commitment to reconciliation. The CFT reached out to Miskanawah, an organization that embeds Indigenous teachings, ceremonies and guidance from Elders into its service delivery model. Staff and leaders from Miskanawah helped the CFT to connect with Elders Reg and Rose Crowshoe so that the YEL could benefit from their wisdom and advice. Reg and Rose engaged with CFT, read the lab briefing documents, hosted a smudging ceremony, established some of the principles to guide the lab, and brought together other Elders from across Western Canada to provide feedback and guidance on the lab process. This early and sustained relationship with the Indigenous community was an important part of the YEL's success and led to several unanticipated positive outcomes
- **Curation of the lab teams**, each of which would address one of the challenge areas. The CFT invested time and energy to identify and engage the right combination of people for each team. All of the teams had youth, youth serving agencies and employers represented. (See Appendix 4)



APPENDIX 2

APPENDIX 3

APPENDIX 4

PHASE #2: LAB EXPLORATION (FEBRUARY - MAY 2019)

The Lab itself involved:

- **An opening reception** and overview of the process with members of the lab teams and other stakeholders in the field
- **Four “lab days”** that took place every four weeks from February to May 2019. These were highly facilitated half-day sessions where lab team members were supported to build their capacity for human centred design, dug deeply into their challenge area, and began to develop and test possible solutions
- **Ethnography⁴ and testing of ideas** in community by each of the teams between each lab day

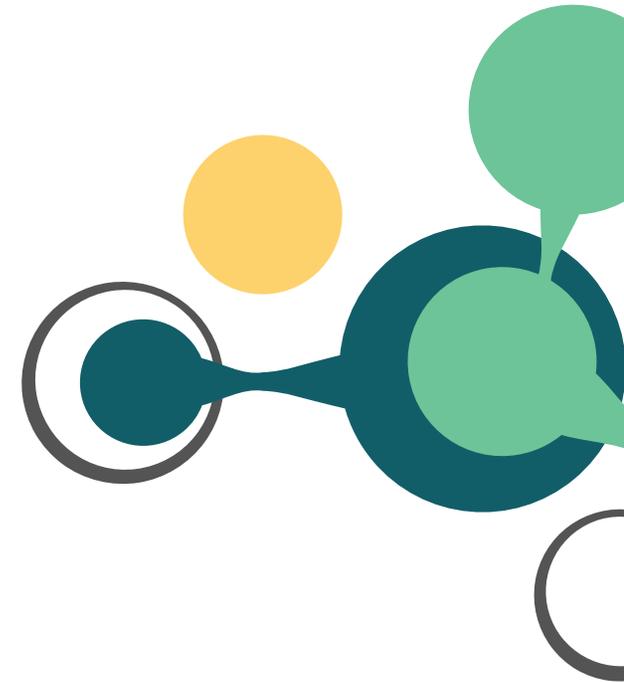


⁴ Central to any lab process is connecting with people who will use or be affected by an intervention to understand more about their experiences and to gather their insights and ideas. This involves using ethnographic techniques such as meeting with people, asking questions and observing.

PHASE #3: POST-LAB (ONGOING SINCE JUNE 2019)

Post-Lab work is on-going and involved:

- **A Showcase** where lab teams prepared storyboards and videos of their prototypes and presented these to the other lab teams, CFT members, allied group members and others interested in the work. These stakeholders were invited to ask questions and provide feedback to the prototypes to support further development and refinement
- **Moving from prototypes to pilots** – team members worked with their lab team coordinators over the summer to further test and refine their prototypes. Not all members could commit to this work, but each team had 3-4 people and financial support from the CFT to further test and refine their prototypes, find an implementing partner for their project (that was eligible to receive grants), create an estimated budget, and outline a timeline for implementation
- **Possible funding** for project implementation, as these “pilots” are set to be presented to the CFT for possible funding in late 2019



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Guiding principles are meant to be reminders to lab members of the values and norms they want to bring to their lab. The first five of the YEL's guiding principles were developed by Ben Weinlick and the Lab Stewardship Group. The others were recommended by Reg and Rose Crowshoe and were embraced by the lab teams. These principles were revisited at the beginning of every lab day and helped to establish and sustain a creative, empathetic and appreciative culture in the YEL.

FOSTER TRUST – treat each other with respect and help others to succeed

BE AUTHENTIC AND CURIOUS – be yourself and bring your perspective, speak in ways that help people be willing and eager to listen, be open to having your thinking provoked and expanded, be open to surprise

BE APPRECIATIVE AND REFLECTIVE – don't describe how something is wrong, explain your perspective and why you might disagree, recognize your bias and hear others' insights

EMBRACE FEEDBACK KNOWING IT IS THE WAY TO BETTER – be receptive to new ideas and be willing to change your thoughts, opinions and behaviours, resist the urge to jump to solutions

FOCUS ON THE POSSIBLE AND HAVE FUN – don't get hung up on obstacles and reasons why something can't happen, don't take yourself too seriously, humour and fun build trust and openness

WE'RE ALL TREATY PEOPLE – and need to trust and support each other

INDIGENOUS WAYS OF SEEING AND WESTERN PROBLEM SOLVING WILL INFORM THE WORK – we won't try to integrate these two worldviews, rather we will value each equally

MAKE SPACE FOR STORIES – listen to and value oral culture and stories to get at deeper insights

CREATE ETHICAL SPACE – establish spaces where we respect and build an understanding of each other's history and culture and perspective

LISTEN TO THE YOUTH – do what it takes to engage and create space for youth to tell their stories



CHALLENGE AREAS

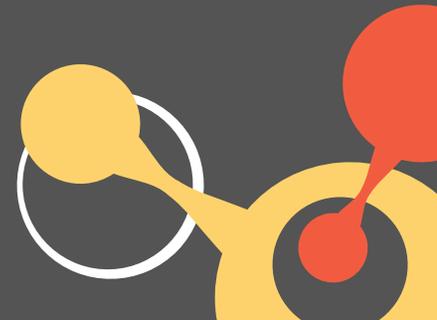
The YEL was designed to tackle four challenge areas that surfaced during the Sense-Making Workshop and in the research. These were refined and articulated as “how might we questions” and helped to focus the efforts of the team.

How might we design a community of practice that builds the capacity of employers to employ and retain Opportunity Youth?

How might we more easily and effectively find Opportunity Youth in community and connect them to employment pathways that work for them?

How might we develop a system that helps Opportunity Youth more easily share their skills and unique abilities when applying for entry-level jobs?

How might we support employers to better understand the experience of Indigenous Opportunity Youth and be better prepared to hire and support this population of employees?

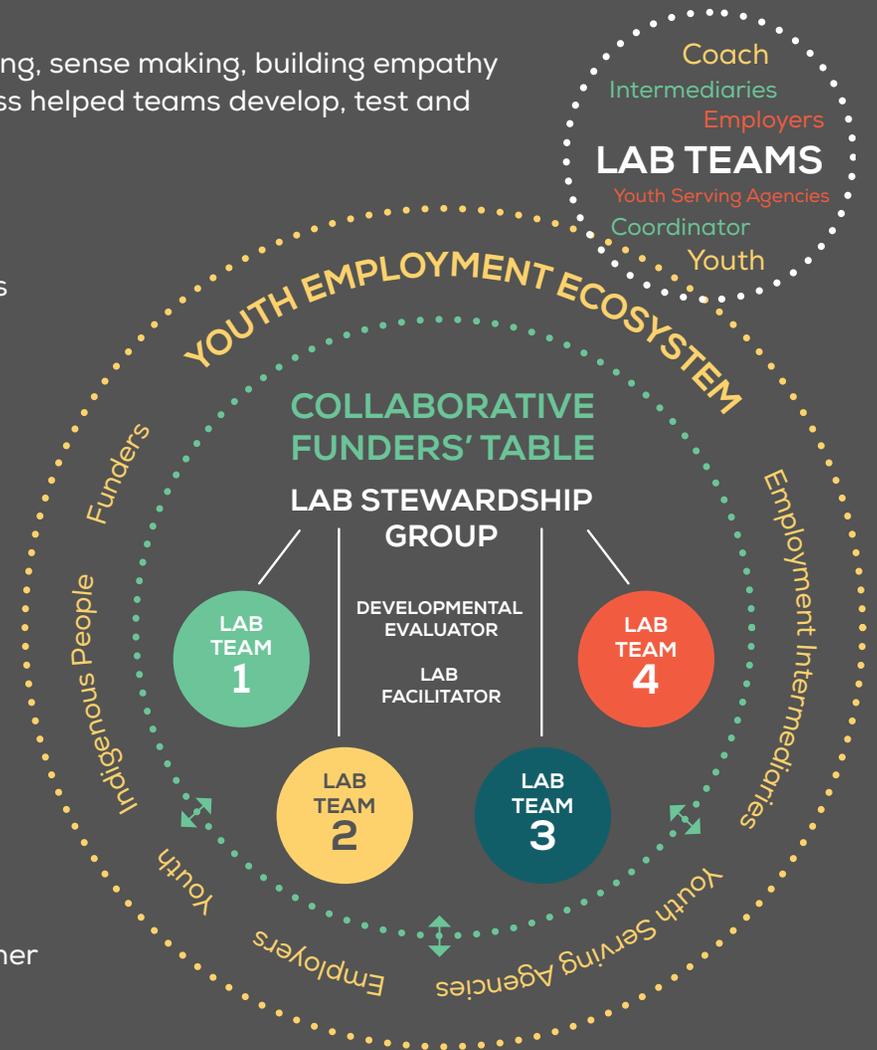


LAB TEAM STRUCTURE AND PROCESSES

As described earlier, four lab teams were created, each tasked with exploring one of the challenge areas. Each lab team was comprised of 8-10 people with the skills, insights and diversity to research and prototype possible solutions. Each team had a prototyping coach and a coordinator who kept the team organized and moving forward. These teams were also supported by the Lab Facilitator and a developmental evaluator.

The Lab was designed to help teams explore their challenge area by learning, sense making, building empathy and identifying leverage points and minimum requirements. The lab process helped teams develop, test and refine prototypes. Over the course of the lab, teams were supported to:

- Build their understanding of and capacity for human centred design
- Dig deeply into their challenge area to understand diverse perspectives and make sense of the dynamics at play
- Identify and learn from people connected to the challenge area. Each team reached out to, engaged and interviewed issue stakeholders in order to hear different perspectives
- Share and synthesize insights gained from their fieldwork and make sense of what these meant for the challenge and the emerging solution
- Identify gaps and blind spots, then explore these gaps through follow-up dialogue with more people to generate further insights
- Turn insights and ideas into prototypes. Teams were supported by coaches and graphic designers to make their ideas tangible either through storyboards or videos
- Field test prototypes with stakeholders to gather feedback, refine, further develop and then test again



PROTOTYPES DEVELOPED BY THE LAB

The efforts of the lab teams produced four promising prototypes for expanding and strengthening employment pathways for Opportunity Youth. Each of these prototypes is being further developed in the post-lab period and those that show promise as a fundable pilot will be considered by the CFT for on-going support. A full description of these prototypes is contained in Appendix 2. Below is a brief summary of each.



PROTOTYPE #1: EMPLOYER FORUM

The Challenge

How might we design a community of practice that builds the capacity of employers to employ and retain Opportunity Youth?

There is a disconnect between supply and demand in the current labour market – Opportunity Youth face systemic barriers to finding and maintaining employment, while employers have experienced greater difficulty in sourcing and retaining talent.



The Big Idea

Convening an Opportunity Youth Employer Forum that brings together employers to build employer capacity to hire and retain Opportunity Youth in businesses across Calgary. The Employer Forum is informed by the perspectives of employers, youth serving agencies and youth and is intended to support employers to adapt hiring, on-boarding and retention practices to become more inclusive of Opportunity Youth and facilitate successful outcomes. The team set out to explore the development, sharing and implementation of best practices to guide hiring partners, and help them move from intention to action. These efforts will help remove barriers to employment and connect Opportunity Youth to sustainable jobs, while providing employers with a growing pipeline of motivated and deserving talent.

[CLICK HERE FOR MORE DETAILS IN APPENDIX 2](#)

PROTOTYPE #2: EMPLOYMENT PATHWAYS POP-UPS

The Challenge

How might we more easily and effectively find Opportunity Youth in community and connect them to employment pathways that work for them?



Opportunity Youth struggle to connect to employment pathways and find work. They often don't know where to start in the job search process and find it to be intimidating. These youth are disconnected from systems, programs and services, and they are often unaware that there are youth service agencies that can assist them in finding employment.

The Big Idea

An ongoing series of community pop-ups that would take place at locations where youth congregate and community events of interest to youth. Community pop-ups would be hosted by coaches and mentors from different industries, allowing youth to have authentic, personal interactions with industry professionals. These pop-ups would provide an informal setting for youth and professionals to interact and engage in prosocial activities.

Through these pop-ups, youth influencers would be identified to maintain and strengthen the connections with youth. A coach/mentor network would be developed to support the pop-ups.

[CLICK HERE FOR MORE DETAILS IN APPENDIX 2](#)

PROTOTYPE #3: HOSPITALITY FORUM

The Challenge

How might we develop a system that helps Opportunity Youth more easily share their skills and unique abilities when applying for entry-level jobs?

Youth with few traditional work or volunteer experiences are screened out of current online hiring processes even though they might have the skills to be successful on the job. Employers and youth need a different way to engage with each other that allows youth to show off their abilities and employers to easily assess them.

The Big Idea

The Hospitality Forum would invite employers in the hospitality and retail sector to watch youth between the ages of 18-29 show off their skills, personality and talents by competing in a series of real-world hospitality scenarios. These youth would be supported at the forum by peer mentors; they would be able to take part in on-the-spot interviews; there would be a process to provide some sort of credentialing for the skills youth demonstrate during the forum; and the production of “star videos” of youth to post on LinkedIn.

[CLICK HERE FOR MORE DETAILS IN APPENDIX 2](#)



PROTOTYPE #4: RE:VISION CULTURE EVENTS AND HIRING FAIR

The Challenge

How might we support employers to better understand the experience of Indigenous Opportunity Youth and be better prepared to hire and support this population of employees?

Indigenous youth are often not supported in the workplace, and many employers are not equipped to hire, retain and support young Indigenous employees.



The Big Idea

re:VISION is an innovative and comprehensive way to connect and support Indigenous youth and potential employers through a series of culturally-supportive events and a unique hiring fair. It would include outreach and mentoring to Indigenous youth; capacity building and awareness raising among employers; an Indigenous hiring event; and follow-up support upon employment.



[CLICK HERE FOR MORE DETAILS IN APPENDIX 2](#)



INSIGHTS FROM THE LAB

The YEL brought together funders, youth, employers, youth serving agencies, Indigenous agencies and intermediaries into a collective exploration. The lab generated important insights into how we create better and more sustainable pathways to employment for Opportunity Youth. The lab also generated many lessons that may be helpful to others as they strive to tackle this and other social challenges. These lessons and their implications have been organized into four main categories and are described further below.

LESSONS ARE RELATED TO:

FUNDING AND CONVENING A SOCIAL LAB

SOCIAL LABS AS METHOD TO TACKLE
COMPLEX CHALLENGES

STRENGTHENING EMPLOYMENT
PATHWAYS FOR OPPORTUNITY YOUTH

WORKING WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

6.1 LESSONS LEARNT: FUNDING AND CONVENING A SOCIAL LAB

Understand what a lab is meant to do and have realistic expectations. The conveners understood the purpose of the design lab and were realistic about what could be achieved. The design lab was focused on collaborative, multi-stakeholder design, not on creating a final product. The products that emerged from the lab were not polished, clearly defined programs ready for funding, but rather innovative ideas that had been developed and tested with input from all stakeholders in the system. Conveners were realistic that it will take time to realize tangible returns. Groups interested in convening and supporting design labs need to be clear about what they are getting into. It requires patience, a tolerance for risk and an ability to play the long game.

Invest in the prologue and the epilogue. The pre-lab work and the post-lab work are essential to the effectiveness of any lab. For the YEL, the prologue (pre-lab work) included a literature review and scan of the current state of youth employment in Alberta; a carefully curated and facilitated Sense-Making Workshop that brought together more than 60 stakeholders from across relevant sectors; an analysis of data generated by the sense-making process; and, identification of six key challenge areas. Two of these were addressed with augmentation funding to existing initiatives and four became the areas of focus for the lab teams. The questions posed to the lab teams were tightly framed and enabled the lab teams to stay focused on their specific challenge area.

The pre-lab work was critical in helping to narrow down and refine the focus areas.

While the lab generated many important insights and partially developed prototypes, the work is far from over and it is essential for the conveners to support and invest in the 'epilogue' (the post-lab period) to ensure that these gains are not lost.

This kind of committed follow-up to a social lab process is still relatively rare. The CFT was positioned from the outset to support ideas that emerged from the lab so that these ideas can be turned into pilots that are more likely to achieve longer-term impact for youth and employers. The YEL was a mechanism to help design innovative solutions to the youth employment challenge, the lab was a means to an end and not an end in itself.

It's exciting that there is funding in place to support things going forward. In other labs [that I've been involved in] nothing tangible comes out of them. Things just drop off because there is no follow-through. It's really exciting to have the CFT in place to take these promising ideas forward.



Be adaptive and committed. The conveners of the lab were willing and able to adapt to the emergent process of the lab. They developed a plan to support the lab and its members but were flexible as the process unfolded. For example, the CFT recognized and supported the need to engage with Indigenous Elders. This engagement was essential but unforeseen, and required dexterity, flexibility and trust.

Another factor that contributed to the nimbleness and overall success of the YEL was that several of the CFT members were able to participate as members of lab teams, sit on the Lab Stewardship Group and engage with the Indigenous Elders. This direct line with leadership and decision-making capabilities meant important decisions could be made without delay. It also meant that the rest of the CFT could be briefed about the lab by known and trusted colleagues.

I feel as if I have a much deeper understanding of the issues and therefore, hopefully, can help us [the CFT] to make better funding decisions. I think we can ask much better questions now and if we go to an RFP [request for proposals] we will make better decisions.

Create decision-making sub-groups The CFT created a Lab Stewardship group to which they delegated responsibility and decision-making powers. The creation of this smaller group enabled timely and coherent decision-making and helped the lab to adapt to the needs of its participants. The broader CFT trusted the Stewardship Group to make good decisions on its behalf.

CFT really trusted the stewards' group to do the work and were really flexible. There was a foundation of trust and personal relationships going in that enabled the whole process.

The conveners listened to the stakeholders. They really lived adapting to emergent learning. The stewards' group really nailed that part of the process.

Commit to the creation of "ethical space". The sense-making process made evident that work with Indigenous youth and Indigenous service-providers was key to creating employment pathways and acting on commitments to reconciliation. Although one lab team was specifically designed to address employment for Indigenous youth, the conveners were committed to integrating Indigenous ways of knowing and working across the lab process. To this end, the Stewardship Group connected with and sought advice and guidance from Elders from the outset and revisited that guidance in every lab day. This creation of "ethical space" helped to establish positive norms and ultimately changed the nature of the lab by balancing Indigenous with conventional ways of listening, sharing and learning.

It feels like we began with the right intention, we wanted guidance from the Indigenous Elders, not at the end but at the beginning. We began in the right way, with the right intention. We created ethical space and Ben [the lab facilitator] did a fantastic job of consistently bringing us back to that and keeping Reg and Rose's [the Indigenous Elders advising the lab] guidance alive in every lab day.



Choose participants carefully. The lab conveners invested considerable effort in selecting, recruiting and engaging the right people into the YEL. This investment, combined with excellent facilitation, paid off in terms of participant commitment to and engagement with the lab process.

The teams were self-motivated and self-directed. I was so impressed that people kept coming and they kept working together in-between the sessions. I was so surprised by people's willingness to embrace the ethnographic research, to go out and actually talk to people and try to understand more about what they need and want.

Team members were so invested in really understanding the dynamics and what was important to all of the stakeholders in the system.

Be clear upfront about expectations. Labs require deep commitment from participants and although it is difficult to know beforehand what exactly will be required throughout, it is important to be as clear as possible about the time, effort and teamwork required of participants before they begin. The YEL participants stated that they had not anticipated the amount of work required between lab days to do the ethnographic work and test prototypes. Participation, especially among employers, dropped off over the course of the lab and although there are many reasons for this attrition, the time requirement was a contributing factor.

Further, there is significant behind the scenes work required to coordinate each lab day to ensure that the venue is set up, required materials are available and participants have what they need. It is important from the outset to clarify who is responsible for that work and to decide if it is the role of the facilitator or the conveners.

It would have been good to know more about what's needed to organize each lab day. I felt constantly surprised by the extent of what was required.

Hire a great facilitator. The YEL had a skilled and dynamic facilitator. Ben's understanding of the principles of human centred design, experience with other labs, ability to manage tensions and create a generative space, inspire others and keep people moving through the process was essential to maintain people's engagement and emergence of the prototypes.

Ben gave us enough direction to keep us moving but he was so careful not to take over. He created a safe container that let us take risks, explore things that seemed impossible and be really creative.

Invest in coaches. Lab team coaches need to be excellent facilitators, understand ethnographic strategies and techniques, support sense-making of ethnographic findings and understand the prototyping process. Although the YEL had one excellent coach, engaging and retaining experienced coaches was a serious challenge. Only one coach remained involved for the duration of the lab and two of the teams had no consistent coaching support. There was not enough clarity about the role of the coaches at the outset and with the facilitator being Edmonton-based it was harder for him to draw on his direct network. If the conveners had understood more about the purpose and the level of effort required from coaches, they could have engaged skilled and experienced facilitators from their Calgary-based networks. Allocation of additional resources to pay coaches more may have been a worthwhile investment, enabling the lab to hire more experienced facilitators who were more committed to the process.

If I were to do it again, I would get much clearer about the role of the coaches and I'd hire consultants to support the process and pay them properly.



Ensure each team has a coordinator/motivator. Each of the lab teams included a ‘git-er-done’ person – a team member responsible for coordinating and mobilizing action between the lab days. These coordinators organized conference calls and meetings among lab teams between lab days, arranged venues, provided honorarium to stakeholders that were interviewed or took part in testing prototypes. They took notes and highlighted action items. They kept things moving and the teams working together to engage in the field work and testing required to develop the prototypes. Without exception, lab team members interviewed for this report stated that without this in-between support, the teams would not have made much progress towards their solutions.

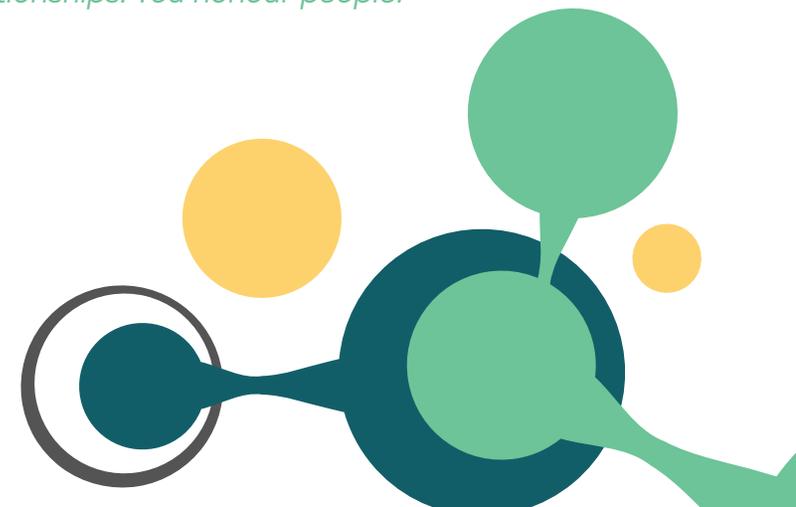
The support from the git-er-dones [Lab Team coordinators] was so important. The whole thing would have fallen apart without Sara [name changed].

Three of the four coordinators on the YEL teams were members of the CFT (funders of the lab) and there was some concern at the outset that their presence would create problematic power dynamics on the teams. To mitigate this issue, the coordinators were clear about their role as equal members of and support to their lab team, and not decision makers. Ultimately, their connection to the CFT was considered an asset by other team members.

There were no power dynamics. No one viewed them [the coordinators] as external funders. Everyone forgot who everyone was and just worked as a team. I think it was important that they were involved they can now help CFT to make better decisions because of their deep involvement in the process.

Invest in food and the venue. The YEL had a great space for lab days and invested in delicious nourishing food. This was important for many reasons. First, the work is hard and good food and a bright airy space helps to keep people motivated. Second, many were volunteering their time or working the lab in addition to full-time jobs, and food helped to acknowledge and thank people for the sacrifices they make to be engaged. Finally, sharing meals helps bring people together and builds trust and rapport.

Food is life. When you give people food, good food, you create relationships. You honour people.



One serious drawback of the YEL space was our inability to smudge. Fire regulations for the building made it impossible. Work with the Elders and Indigenous youth made clear that smudging is central to any kind of gathering. As groups do more to support reconciliation and more together with Indigenous peoples, we need to address this constraint. Fire regulations need to be changed to allow smudging in public and collective spaces.

It felt disrespectful and such a contradiction to hear the knowledge keepers describe the importance of smudging and then to work in a space where it wasn't allowed. We need to figure this out.

Sustained engagement is challenging – be creative in gathering stakeholder input. Engaging and sustaining participation among employers and youth was an on-going challenge. The YEL conveners adapted the lab structure in an effort to ensure their engagement (fewer lab days, shorter days), but these adaptations strained the overall process and were not successful in maintaining engagement. Of the nine employers who began with the lab only four participated consistently until the end. The youth members of the teams were equally challenged to make it to all the lab days and take part in the field work in between.

We shortened the lab process to try to accommodate the employers and it still didn't work out. We need to engage more employers in a different way.

It may have been better to try to engage youth and employers differently by finding ways to ensure their input but being creative in how they contribute. Some of this input could have been done through the ethnographic work – interviews and focus groups with youth and employers. That said, lab team members felt that the contributions of those employers and youth who did engage consistently on the teams were extremely valuable.



Reflecting on what they would do differently to increase engagement, YEL conveners made the following suggestions:

- Organize the lab to begin in September or October and run (if needed) until May or June. This creates space to extend a lab as required and to add days as the teams need
- Ensure participants understand the emergent nature of the process and how commitment may change over time
- Have full lab day sessions. There was consistent feedback that the ½ days, although easier to commit to, did not provide enough time to work through ethnographic findings and integrate these into the prototype ideas
- Consider a series of 'sprints'⁵ with ethnographic and testing work in between. This means bringing stakeholders together for several days to do the sense-making, ideation and early development of prototypes all at once instead of over the course of several weeks or months
- Create more time during the lab to integrate findings from the ethnographic work (interviews and focus groups with stakeholders) into the prototyping ideas. For some, it felt like decisions about the importance of specific insights were sometimes made too quickly by the lab teams. Make sure this valuable information is not lost

It felt like we were always rushed.

So many insights were generated and there was not nearly enough time to integrate these fully into the prototypes.

⁵ Design sprints are like a lab in that they are designed to bring together diverse stakeholders to understand, ideate, prototype and test solutions over a short, but intense, timeframe, typically 4-5 days. <https://designsprint.academy/design-sprint-3-0/>

6.2 LESSONS LEARNT: SOCIAL LABS AS METHOD TO TACKLE COMPLEX CHALLENGES



Labs are time and resource intensive...but when addressing complex challenges, it's worth it. Calgary's YEL (from the Sense-Making Workshop to the showcase) cost close to \$100,000 and required the in-kind support of one full-time coordination position over the 10-month period. It is too early to assess the impact that has or will be achieved; however, there are several products and other important outcomes that suggest the investment was a good one.

- Four prototypes that include promising innovations that could improve employment pathways for Opportunity Youth
- Deeper understanding of the complexity of each of the challenge areas and important insights about possible solutions among all stakeholders connected to the lab

- Growing awareness of the importance of working with youth and employers to find solutions to youth unemployment and labour shortages
- Growing awareness of Calgary as a hub for the engagement of employers in employment pathway solutions
- Creation of connections among lab participants that can be leveraged as potential solutions are rolled out
- Engagement of a growing number of employers. This engagement varies in its depth depending on an employer's proximity to the lab, but includes Starbucks, Amazon, Walmart, the Hyatt, ULS, Kal Tire, the Calgary Zoo, ATB and Federated Co-Ops Limited
- Increased understanding of human centred design among the 40 lab participants. Many claim their involvement in the lab has changed the way they approach other human service and social change issues

Lab process is long and hard and complicated. A smaller work group may have gotten their idea farther more quickly but the ideas we generated are so much better.

We had really smart people on our team and we developed our ideas but then when we tested them, they failed. We learned so much. In a conventional program design process, we would have just gone with what we thought was a really good idea and funded it, but it would not have actually addressed the problem.

The connections and networks that were built by those participating in the lab are real and have long-lasting value. When we talk about cross-sectoral collaboration, this lab was a big step in breaking down silos.

Labs help us to understand the problem deeply, preventing us from jumping to easy solutions. Participants in the YEL consistently noted that the lab structure helped (forced) them to stay focused on digging deeper to understand the diverse elements of their challenge area and to resist the urge to jump too quickly to solutions.

The lab structure got everyone thinking about the problems, surfacing the root causes and understanding the problem before we went to action. The time invested in the initial thinking and the ethnographic work was so important.

Labs must manage the tensions of co-design. Co-design is a process wherein potential solutions are generated with insights and input from people with lived experience of the challenge and who will be impacted by or using potential solutions. For the YEL, this was Opportunity Youth, employers and the youth serving agencies. Developing feasible, effective and sustainable solutions to youth underemployment requires employers to hear from and be influenced by youth to change some of their processes. Equally, for youth to provide meaningful input and suggestions, they need support from employers to understand employer systems. Creating space and authentic opportunities for all of these voices to be heard is an enormous challenge. To manage these different priorities and perspectives, lab teams required trust and respect among members so that they could share their ideas without blaming or offending. The lab had to make many compromises (i.e. timing and duration of the lab and the lab days, moving processes along when some people did not feel quite ready to create space for other processes, balancing the work in-between the lab days) to engage these different stakeholders, create space for their sometimes-divergent voices and develop ideas that account for both perspectives.

It wasn't always perfect and sometimes some voices were much louder than others, but overall, I think the lab teams did an excellent job of creating space for divergent perspectives to be heard and considered. I think the process helped us to understand each other better and to surface ideas that reflect our different needs and priorities.

Labs involve lots of uncertainty. Given the complexity of the issue and the lab design itself, lab members and conveners had to be comfortable with risk and ambiguity. Labs are emergent processes and it is difficult to know at the outset if anything tangible or scalable will emerge. Lab members had to trust and stay committed to the process even when it was unclear sometimes where the process was going and if it was going to result in anything meaningful. In the end, lab members were almost unanimous in believing the lab to be an effective method to surface innovative solutions to complex social challenges but most experienced doubt and discomfort along the way.

I'm so far out of my comfort zone I can't even see my comfort zone.



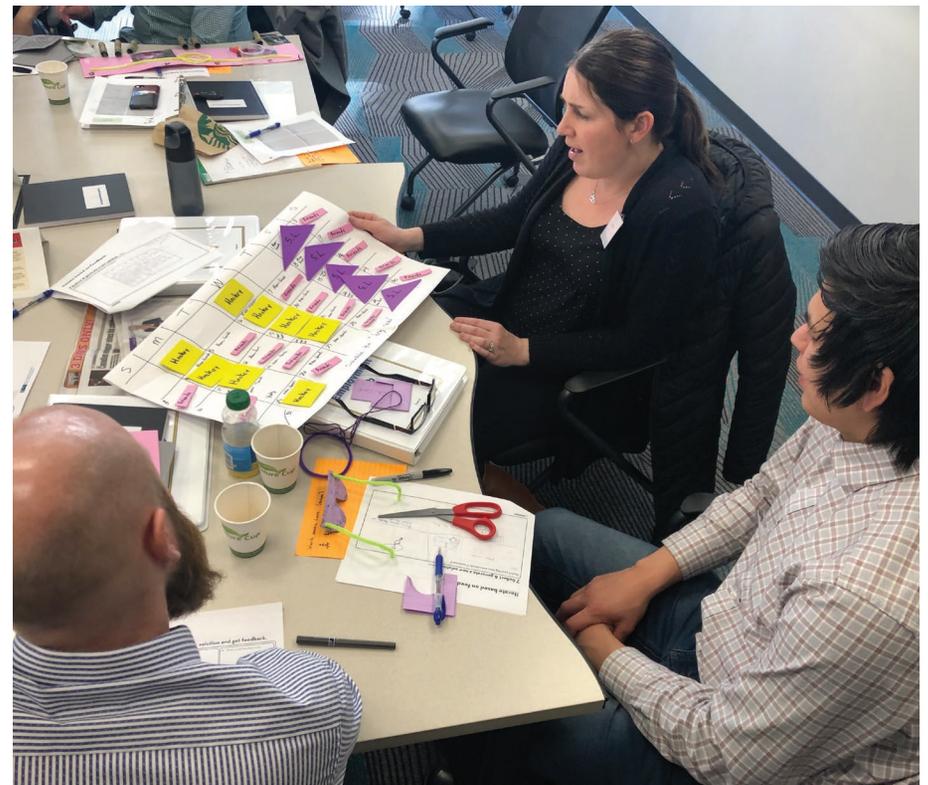
Labs are not the right solution to every challenge. Human centered design and social labs are relatively new and exciting. They offer innovative ways to develop solutions to social challenges. However, not every question requires a lab to find the answers. For example, one of the tasks for the YEL team was to create a community of practice or an 'industry council', and many felt this challenge could have been addressed in a less labour intensive, more conventional way. Given that communities of practice have been around for many decades and there is extensive research, this challenge may have been better addressed through a small design team that adapted best practice with support from employers and input from youth.

Our question did not require much innovation. It felt like it was mismatched with the social lab process.

Alternatively, it may have been that the question was too narrowly framed, and it could have been left more open-ended for the lab team to explore a broader range of solutions.

The solution was included in the challenge question "how might we develop a community of practice?", so the group kind of had their work laid out for them. It would be interesting to see how it would have turned out if the question was framed as a problem "how might we build the capacity of employers?".

When deciding if a lab is the right approach to address a challenge it is important to consider the nature of the challenge. Labs are meant to tackle complex challenges and can feel like overkill when addressing simpler, more straightforward issues. For example, the Sense-Making Workshop surfaced six main challenge areas related to pathways for Opportunity Youth. Four of these were thought to have the kind of complexity that would benefit from a human-centered approach. The other two, described above were simpler and could be addressed by solutions that were already well-developed and only required more resources to be successful.



UNCERTAINTY IN THE LAB

Things that kept us up at night:

Will this end up being a good use of resources?

What happens if this does not amount to anything?

What if we get attached to ideas and move forward with them even if they aren't good?

How will we assess the feasibility of the prototypes and evaluate if the prototypes are worthy of further funding?

Will we get anywhere? Are these going to lead to successful pilots that will lead to scale and impact?

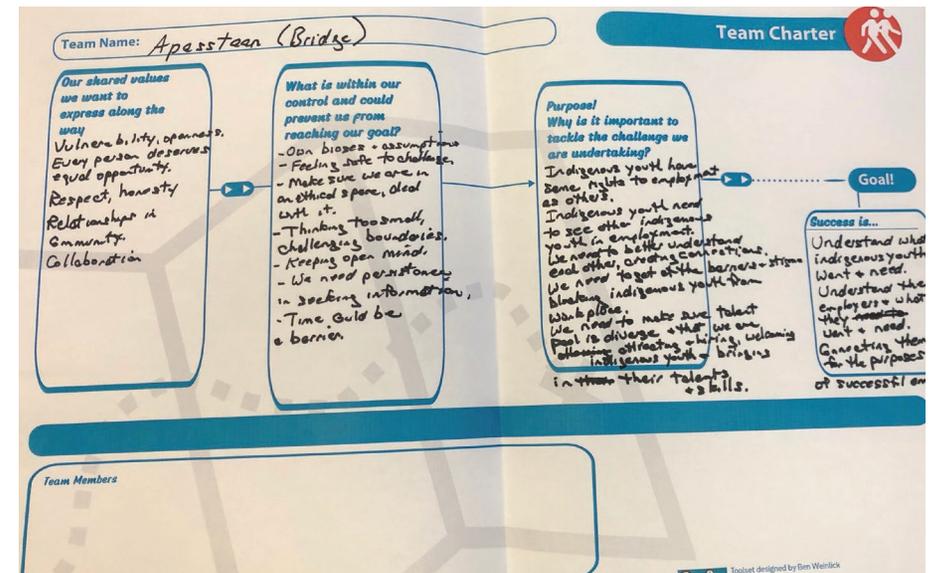
6.3 LESSONS LEARNT: STRENGTHENING EMPLOYMENT PATHWAYS FOR OPPORTUNITY YOUTH

Each of the lab teams surfaced many insights and lessons related to creating better pathways for youth. These are captured in the prototypes that are emerging and more will be done over the next few months to ensure these insights are integrated. The lessons set out below emerged from the lab process overall and are meant to guide the work of the CFT (and others in the field) as they continue to work towards more effective and sustainable strategies.

The lab process brought to life the big gaps in perspective between youth, youth serving agencies and employers. These gaps are not new, but the lab made them real to the participants. Employers gained important insight into the barriers that youth face and their needs and preferences for better engagement. Youth and youth serving agencies became aware that many of their expectations of employers were unrealistic. Having a deeper understanding of each others' opportunities and constraints meant collectively the teams could develop more realistic and appropriate solutions.

There is an underlying tension between youth serving agencies and employers, they speak different languages and have different goals. In the view of youth servicing agencies, employers are both the problem and the solution, so there is a desire to chastise them, but also bring them along as allies.

This work to close the gap between stakeholders needs to continue as the prototypes move towards pilots. Creating opportunities for employers and youth to influence programming and other interventions needs to be at the heart of CFT-supported efforts going forward.



6.3.1 LESSONS RELATED TO EMPLOYERS

Consider working with smaller more nimble employers initially.

The CFT was originally keen to work with bigger national employers in an effort to create as many potential jobs as possible for Opportunity Youth. Experience with YEL, however, suggests that it may make sense to work with smaller local employers who are potentially more agile to develop and test innovative strategies to find, recruit, hire and retain Opportunity Youth. These employers may be more able to adapt their practices to meet the needs of Opportunity Youth, and then if strategies prove effective, this experience can be used to build a case for innovation among bigger, national employers. Alternatively, the CFT may be able to work with the local branch of a bigger employer to test strategies and then scale them across the nation. Either way, engaging decision makers inside employer partners is key to developing and testing new recruitment and retention strategies.

For the bigger employers it is hard to go way up the chain of command.

Smaller employers can actually innovate. We may need to work with these to demonstrate to bigger employers what needs to change and how it can be changed. We may need to build a case around the prototype ideas before we try to sell them to the bigger employers.

The YEL pilots could help to translate national commitments into local action. There is much evidence nationally, and with employers connected to the YEL, of openness among employers to explore employing Opportunity Youth⁶. These national commitments need support to translate into action at the local level. Ideas surfaced from the YEL lab teams can help to engage local employers connected to these broader initiatives to take action on their commitments, but this will only happen if these

initiatives are not seen as competing. More needs to be done to connect the work of the YEL to the local branches of employers involved in these national initiatives.

There is commitment at the national level, but that doesn't always translate into actual work or progress at the local level. A splashy event does not mean things are happening on the ground. We need to leverage our personal connections to bring people into the ideas emerging from this lab.

Engaging employers continues to be a central challenge. Despite huge commitment among a few employers engaged in the lab and on-going efforts among the conveners to leverage existing connection with the business sector in Calgary, engaging employers continues to be a major barrier to moving the ideas surfaced during the lab to implementation. This challenge highlights the structural divide between the not-for-profit sector and the business sector and calls for further creativity. Things we did learn about engaging employers in the development of these solutions includes:

- A business case that clearly articulates how being involved can help them meet some of their needs
- Relying on social and professional networks and word of mouth to support recruitment of new employers. Employers trust their peers and colleagues
- Spending less time telling employers what we think they should do and more time listening to what they need
- Understanding more about how the regulatory context and organizational structure affects our ability to work across sectors. The YEL demonstrated that there is great value in cross-sectoral design, but what does this mean

⁶ Initiatives like the Opportunity for All Youth coalition (<http://opportunityforall youth.ca/>) demonstrate important commitments among many employers to helping NEET youth connect to employment.

for our ability to test and scale promising solutions when some sectors (charitable) are easier to fund than others (private companies). If the solution involves funding companies, how do we do this?

The employers are not the big bad guys out there but employer participation in the lab fell away. We needed to do more empathy work around the employer experience and some of their constraints. How can we build that into the next phase of this process?

6.3.2 LESSONS RELATED TO OPPORTUNITY YOUTH

Cultural safety is key. A consistent theme that surfaced across the lab teams was the importance of safety and belonging for Opportunity Youth. Youth referred to feeling uncomfortable, out of place, not safe as some of the most important barriers to their ability to access employment. This was especially true for Indigenous Youth but was also true for other youth. Lack of transportation, training, childcare, tools, appropriate clothing, skills, are all barriers, but feeling like they don't belong or are different than other employees often prevents them from even wanting to apply for a job or reach out to an employer.

We need to see ourselves in a space, or at least be connected to someone who we trust. It's so hard when you feel like you really don't belong somewhere.

Youth want to connect in person. Surprising in this digitally dominant time, Opportunity Youth were clear they want opportunities to connect face-to-face with potential employers and other professionals who can connect them to potential employment. These youth struggle to navigate digital application screening processes and find it hard to showcase existing skills or life experience through this medium. Strategies

to connect Opportunity Youth to employment services or employers should account for this need to meet in person.

Leverage trusted social networks. As with employers (and people in general), youth trust people they know. When trying to find and engage Opportunity Youth it may be important to try to build relationships and rapport with a smaller group of youth and then work with these youth to connect to other youth in their social networks. The idea of coaches or peer mentors that connect and support Opportunity Youth was another recruitment theme from the ethnographic work with youth.

Be clearer about which youth we are trying to engage. The term "Opportunity Youth" refers to youth who are experiencing many different barriers to employment. This term refers to Indigenous youth, immigrant youth, youth who may have experienced homelessness or mental health and addiction issues, youth who identify as LGBTQ, youth who live in poverty, youth with English as a second language, youth who lack appropriate training and tools, or youth who lack self-confidence and motivation. Many Opportunity Youth experience some combination of these challenges, however, efforts to engage youth may benefit from being more specific about which youth they are targeting. By understanding more about the needs and assets of that specific group of youth, program and strategies can be tailored and engagement strategies will likely be more effective.

There is value in being clear about who we talk about when we talk about Opportunity Youth. How close to "work ready" are they? What specific things are getting in the way? We could do more with each of the prototypes to figure out who our target population is.

Even with the \$50 incentive youth still didn't show up. We really don't know enough about what is going on for them. We need to understand more about what motivates them and what gets in the way.

6.4 LESSONS LEARNT: WORKING WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

As the conveners of the YEL began to explore youth employment challenges, they recognized the importance of connecting with Indigenous communities, and especially Elders and youth. While the CFT is only beginning this journey and engagement, there are lessons that were learned along the way that may be helpful to others. These are in no way comprehensive or generalizable, but rather a reflection of the experiences of the CFT, the Lab Stewardship Group and the lab teams and their work with Elders Reg and Rose Crowshoe and leaders at Miskanawah.

Engagement with Indigenous Peoples is no longer optional.

Canada's commitment to reconciliation and the Calls to Action set out in the Commissioner's Report⁷ are being embraced by members of the CFT and its partners. It became clear after the sensing making workshop that it was important that the CFT work to address specific barriers to employment experienced by Indigenous youth. To do that well they needed to connect with Indigenous advisors and Elders.

The work with my team totally changed my perspective on the indigenous youth. It upset all my assumptions.

Seek guidance at the outset. Once high-level ideas about the lab were developed, the CFT connected with Indigenous advisors at Miskanawah to seek guidance on the best way forward. These advisors recommended connecting to Elders and connect the Lab's Stewardship Group with Elders Reg and Rose Crowshoe. Reg and Rose agreed to provide advice to the Lab Stewards, hosted ceremonies and connected the group to other Elders.

The connection to Reg and Rose and their guidance completely changed the nature of the lab.

Say yes as often as possible. Some of the requests that were initially made to accommodate the needs of the Elders were unfamiliar to a Stewardship Group that had little previous experience with this kind of engagement. Despite this, the group said yes to these requests without asking too many questions. They trusted the process and wanted to foster relationships of openness and goodwill. These early signals helped to demonstrate the Stewardship Group's commitment to the Elders and that they valued their contributions. This meant a lot to the Elders and other Indigenous people who were involved and helped to lay a solid foundation for the relationship.

Connect to cultural advisors. Recognize and compensate these advisors. The support and advice provided by leaders at Miskanawah was essential to the YEL's connection to Indigenous communities. These advisors guided members of the Stewardship Group, helping them to understand and respect important protocols and navigate their relationship with the Elders and others from the Indigenous community. This guidance was invaluable and the advisors' generosity with their time, expertise and energy was recognized.

⁷ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Actions. http://nctr.ca/assets/reports/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

The Indigenous people we reached out to were so willing to engage with us. All we had to do was be sincere in our efforts, be willing to listen and meet them halfway.

Value ceremony and protocols. Part of reconciliation is taking the time to build our understanding of and appreciation for Indigenous ceremonies and protocols. The Stewardship Group learnt how to give tobacco and blankets and how to speak appropriately to Elders, and they also learnt the importance of being humble, listening and approaching the process with an awareness of their own lack of knowledge and understanding.

You have to be quiet and learn to listen. Not ask questions. Not think of responses. Just listen.

Compensate Elders for their time and expertise. It was important to recognize and compensate Elders connected to the YEL for their time and advice. The advisors helped the Stewardship Group to work how to do this respectfully. In Treaty 7 territory, gifts of blankets and tobacco and an honorarium were appropriate.

Do not use these people, don't take their generosity for granted. Pay them for the ways they are helping us to educate ourselves.

Act on Elders' recommendations. Through various gatherings and ceremonies, the Elders provided the YEL with several important recommendations. As much as possible the stewards of the lab and the facilitator acted on these and each lab day was opened by revisiting the Elders' guiding principles. Recommendations provided during the ceremonies and the Knowledge Keepers Meetings⁸ were integrated into the work of the lab teams and have been heard by the broader CFT.

Educate everyone. If the Lab Stewardship Group could begin again, the one thing they might change in relation to their work with the Elders is that they would include everyone from the entire lab in the ceremonies and gatherings. Although this would have been very challenging logistically, many involved in the lab, and especially those on the lab team focused on improving pathways for Indigenous youth, felt this would have helped to build awareness and understanding among all lab members. In addition, involving everyone in the ceremonies could have engaged more people in reconciliation efforts.

I wished everyone was part of the work with the Elders.

Tap into existing resources and expertise. Much work has been done across Canada to begin the important work of reconciliation. The YEL explored these resources and used them to guide their efforts, especially in supporting employers to engage with Indigenous youth. One of the lab teams pulled together some key resources for employers interested in employing Indigenous people.

The impact of engagement is far-reaching. The relationships built through the lab with Indigenous Elders, Indigenous youth and Indigenous agencies is changing the way some of the conveners and other members of the lab work and think about reconciliation. There is a deeper understanding of what it means to create spaces that respect both Indigenous and Western worldviews, as well as an increased understanding of the importance of the smudge to open public gatherings and all meetings. Shifting perspectives and building capacity among lab members to engage in reconciliation is an important and unanticipated outcome of the YEL.

Engaging with the Indigenous communities has changed how we are working and helping us to think about how we engage in reconciliation.

⁸ The Knowledge Keepers met twice over the course of the Lab. This group is comprised of more than 20 Elders from across Western Canada who gather periodically to provide advice and guidance to initiatives that have an impact on Indigenous communities in these regions.



NEXT STEPS: Things for the CFT to Consider Going Forward

The formal lab process wrapped up with the Showcase in June 2019, but for the Lab Stewardship Group and the CFT this marked the beginning of two crucial phases – prototype-to-pilot, and if appropriate, longer-term funding to scale initiatives. As the CFT moves through these next two phases and makes decisions about which lab ideas are worth further investment there are several things to consider.



- 1.** Support lab team coordinators to engage lab members to continue testing and refinement of the prototypes (currently underway).
- 2.** Support these post-lab teams to turn the prototypes into potentially fundable initiatives. Create an opportunity for lab teams to present their ideas to the CFT. Allow these ideas to be presented in a variety of formats (orally, written, visual) to recognize conventional and Indigenous ways of presenting (currently underway).
- 3.** Where relevant, connect lab teams to each other. There are many points of intersection and leverage between the prototypes could be beneficial to all. Support coordinators to explore these and leverage these connections.
- 4.** Develop criteria to help the CFT assess the value and feasibility of funding these pilots. These criteria should recognize that the CFT may need to adapt existing funding procedures to support innovative elements of the pilots.
- 5.** Be creative in working within the current regulatory framework. Be open to exploring ways to work across the for-profit and not-for-profit/charitable sectors.
- 6.** Circle back to all lab members to communicate progress and decisions related to the prototypes to which they contributed.
- 7.** Consider moving forward with small things. Some of the prototypes are extensive with many components. If it is not yet possible to move on everything, try to move on smaller elements to maintain momentum.
- 8.** Explore ways to engage with smaller, local employers to support further testing and development of the prototypes. Take the time to build the business case for employers to recruit, hire and support Opportunity Youth. Build on nascent relationships with KalTire, the Calgary Zoo, the Federated Co-Ops Limited and ATB.
- 9.** Be ready to tolerate failure. With the prototypes that receive funding to pilot there will be unforeseen challenges and tensions. Things that the teams thought would work will fail and will need to be adjusted. Create space for the development of the pilots into more stable programs and initiatives.
- 10.** Support the use of evaluation methods that are aligned with the emergent and innovative nature of the pilots. Consider funding pilots in phases to minimize risk and enable adaptations.
- 11.** Support the CFT evaluator to integrate new thinking about evaluating Indigenous projects into her work.
- 12.** Follow-up with the Allies Group to share the products from the lab and pilots. Explore opportunities for other funders, employer and intermediaries to be involved in initiatives that show promise.
- 13.** Surface and follow-up on promising ideas and opportunities that emerged during the lab but were not included in the final prototypes. Connect with stakeholders who showed interest in supporting or leading these ideas. For example, connect with Starbucks lab members to help them to share suggestions coming out of the Indigenous lab team with Starbucks Inclusion Council (recognizing important holidays and ceremonies on their partner calendar, participating in ceremonies if invited, doing a refresh of a store(s) to reflect a local Indigenous community).

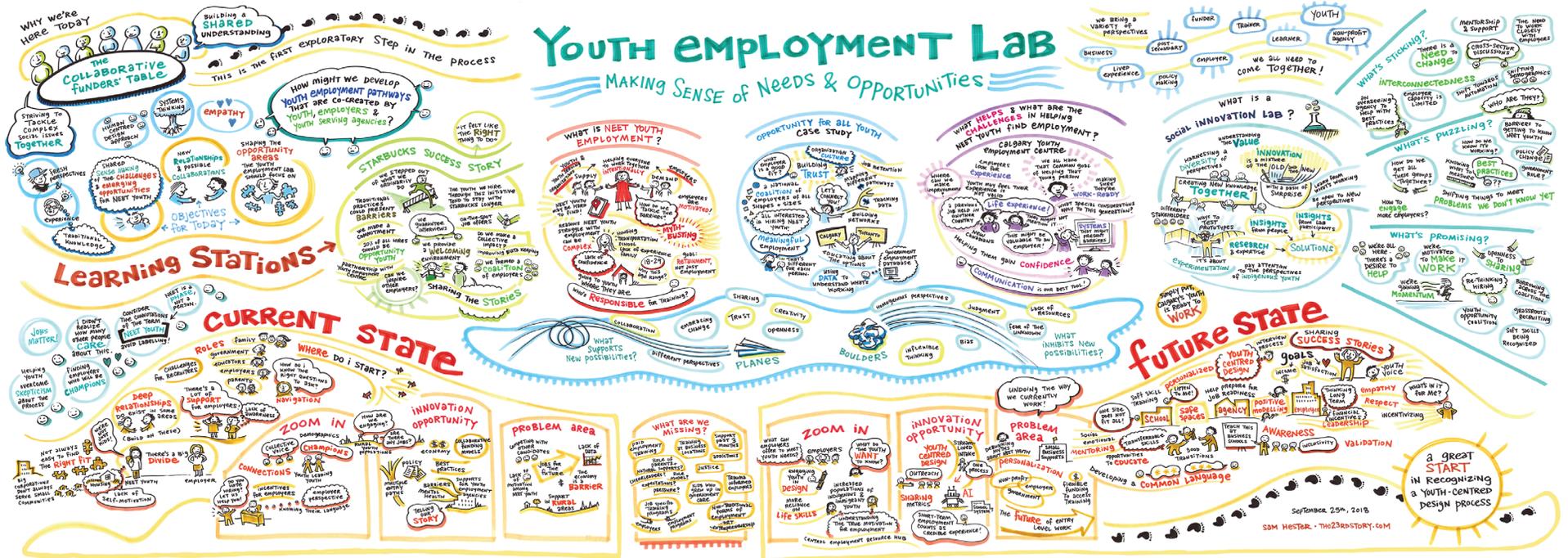


In Conclusion

Improving employment outcomes for Opportunity Youth is a complex social issue and the efforts of Calgary's Youth Employment Lab generated several unique and innovative ideas that could help to strengthen these employment pathways. The CFT recognized collaboration is key to addressing this level of complexity and the social lab approach created new connections and relationships among unlikely partners, fostering empathy, goodwill and commitment that may lead to all kinds of new initiatives. Often there were divergent perspectives and wicked challenges, but by embracing trust, authenticity and curiosity the YEL members developed creative solutions that account for the complexity of the issues. These ideas have the potential, over time and with on-going support, to connect youth to meaningful and sustainable work and create more diverse and inclusive workplaces. The rich lessons generated by the labs will not only help YEL as we move from prototype to pilot, they will also help to inform the efforts of others as they venture down their own pathways towards positive social change.

Although it feels like the work of the CFT and the lab partners is has only just begun, there is much to be proud of in the achievements to date. Onward!

APPENDIX #1: GRAPHIC RECORD OF SENSE-MAKING WORKSHOP



The CFT engaged Sam Hester to create a graphic record of the Sense-Making Workshop. Sam took illustrated notes throughout the course of the day and prepared this poster.

Graphic recording is an innovative way of creating interest and engagement among a group of diverse stakeholders. It caters to different learning approaches and fosters creative and often unexpected feedback and collaborations.

This visual record created a "collective memory" of the sense-making day that can be reviewed and validated by participants. It was a key artifact from the day and was helpful as the CFT began to refine the challenge questions for the Youth Employment Lab.

APPENDIX #2: PROTOTYPES THAT EMERGED FROM THE LAB

PROTOTYPE #1: EMPLOYER FORUM

The Challenge

How might we design a community of practice that builds the capacity of employers to employ and retain Opportunity Youth?

There is a disconnect between supply and demand in the current labour market – Opportunity Youth face systemic barriers to finding and maintaining employment, while employers have experienced greater difficulty in sourcing and retaining talent.

The Big Idea

Convening an Opportunity Youth Employer Forum that brings together employers and youth serving agencies to build employer capacity to hire and retain Opportunity Youth in businesses across Calgary. The Employer Forum is informed by the perspectives of employers, youth serving agencies and youth and is intended to support employers to adapt hiring, on-boarding and retention practices to become more inclusive of Opportunity Youth and facilitate successful outcomes. The team set out to explore the development, sharing and implementation of best practices to guide hiring partners, and help them move from intention to action. These efforts will help remove barriers to employment and connect Opportunity Youth to sustainable jobs, while providing employers with a growing pipeline of motivated and deserving talent.

Next Steps

- Seek funding for facilitation/coordination, venue and food for Employer Forum meetings
- Discuss ideal governance structure and organization to “house” the Forum
- Clarify messaging to employers about the value of the Forum and the practical steps they can take to access the Opportunity Youth talent pool
- Conduct more tests of the Employer Forum to find the ideal size of group, time of day and topic of discussion

Components of the Employer Forum

CONVENE AND STRATEGIZE – Invite employers (of all sizes and industries) who currently face challenges in fulfilling their entry-level positions and would be open to considering Opportunity Youth as a talent source.

FOSTER PEER-TO-PEER SHARING – Create spaces to share knowledge and expertise among employers, complemented by the insights and expertise of youth and community partners. The Employer Forum would have an ongoing, centralized facilitation to ensure timely and relevant communication with members and support with logistics.

DEVELOP IMPLEMENTATION TOOLKITS – To support partners in putting these hiring practices into action, the Employer Forum would leverage existing tools (such as CivicAction’s online HireNext platform) while creating new resources as required (such as a short video series for hiring managers on youth hiring strategies, etc.).

EVALUATE AND SCALE – The Employer Forum will hold itself accountable for achieving its mission by developing and implementing an evaluation framework with measurable outcomes and data collection processes. Employer partners would be encouraged to invite additional firms in their networks to join the Forum, bringing more jobs to the table for Opportunity Youth, therefore scaling collective hiring and retention outcomes. As the Employer Forum scales across Calgary, sub-committees or working groups may be formed for specific sectors (e.g. retail, IT, hospitality) or types of organizations (e.g. small business, enterprise).

PROTOTYPE #2: EMPLOYMENT PATHWAYS POP-UPS

The Challenge

How might we more easily and effectively find Opportunity Youth in community and connect them to employment pathways that work for them?

Opportunity Youth struggle to connect to employment pathways and find work. They often don't know where to start in the job search process and find it to be intimidating. These youth are disconnected from systems, programs and services, and they are often unaware that there are youth service agencies that can assist them in finding employment.

The Big Idea

An ongoing series of community pop-ups that would take place at locations where youth congregate and community events of interest to youth. Community pop-ups would be hosted by coaches and mentors from different industries, allowing youth to have authentic, personal interactions with industry professionals. These pop-ups would provide an informal setting for youth and professionals to interact and engage in prosocial activities.

Through these pop-ups, youth influencers would be identified to maintain and strengthen the pop-ups. A coach/mentor network would be developed to support the pop-ups.

Pop-Up Components

ATTRACT - These pop-ups would be booths set up at locations where youth congregate. Coaches and mentors would wear bright t-shirts, have signs with the hashtag #yycwerkin and offer free coffee/food (or vouchers) to start conversations.

Events would be designed around prosocial activities when possible (e.g. music, art, sports, etc.) so that youth and coaches can interact in a non-intimidating way and build relationships.

SNOWBALL - As more youth are added to the contact list, relationships form and trust builds. These youth become influencers and invite peers. Influencers could eventually begin co-designing guerilla marketing campaigns and eventually run pop-ups for more youth.

DEEPEN CONNECTIONS - The coach/mentor network would be developed more formally so that coaches can meet with youth outside of pop-ups and help connect them to employment pathways. The network program would be designed so that CEU (Continuing Education Unit) credits are earned by coaches as an incentive to participate.

Next Steps

- Seek funding for:
 - Marketing and online tool development
 - Pop-up design (locations and events)
 - Incentivizing participation (gift cards, pop sockets)
- Coach/mentor recruitment and program design

PROTOTYPE #3: HOSPITALITY FORUM

The Challenge

How might we develop a system that helps Opportunity Youth more easily share their skills and unique abilities when applying for entry-level jobs?

Youth with few traditional work or volunteer experiences are screened out of current online hiring processes even though they might have the skills to be successful on the job. Employers and youth need a different way to engage with each other that allows youth to show off their abilities and employers to easily assess them.

The Big Idea

The Hospitality Forum would invite employers in the hospitality and retail sector to watch youth between the ages of 18-29 show off their skills, personality and talents by competing in a series of real-world hospitality scenarios. Youth would compete in challenges like:

- Game of Phones
- The Table Tear Down
- Synchronized Customer Match-up
- Cashier Triathlon

The Components

REAL-LIFE WORKING TASKS – The Forum would be designed to simulate the real working conditions of participating employers and would include components such as workplace setting and materials, mock customers and employee supervisors. This would allow youth to get a feel for the job.

PEER MENTORSHIP – Youth would get feedback on their performance from employer mentors. Not only would this help the youth improve, it would also create the opportunity for youth to ask mentors further questions on the workplace and what it is like to work for the employer.

ON THE SPOT INTERVIEWS – Only employers who are hiring for entry-level positions would participate in this event. Youth could receive interview offers or employment as a result of their participation.

MICRO-CREDENTIALING – After each challenge, qualifying youth would receive a badge recognizing the skill and ability they demonstrated in the challenge. Badge qualifications would be agreed upon in advance by participating employers. ProServe, WHMIS and Food Safety training would be provided onsite as well.

STAR VIDEOS – The Forum would end with a star video event that would task youth with creating a 2-5-minute video documenting themselves as star employees. Onsite support would be provided for this event by communications professionals and support to connect and upload to LinkedIn.

Next Steps

- Identify employers who are willing to design challenges and badges, and who have jobs that are attainable by Opportunity Youth
- Identify youth serving agency willing and able to organize and engage youth in the event
- Seek funding for marketing, venue costs and videographers

PROTOTYPE #4: RE:VISION CULTURE EVENTS AND HIRING FAIR

The Challenge

How might we support employers to better understand the experience of Indigenous Opportunity Youth and be better prepared to hire and support this population of employees?

Indigenous youth are not being supported in the workplace, and employers are not equipped to hire, retain and support young Indigenous employees.

The Big Idea

re:VISION is an innovative and comprehensive way to connect and support Indigenous youth and potential employers through a series of culturally-supportive events and a unique hiring fair.

The Components

OUTREACH TO INDIGENOUS YOUTH – The process would begin by reaching out to Indigenous youth via Facebook and Instagram advertising and forging relationships with employers.

BUILD EMPLOYER'S UNDERSTANDING – To support employers, a Sharing Circle and bus tour to various important sites would be hosted the day before the hiring fair. This experiential learning would give employers increased awareness about Indigenous culture, and increase their understanding and confidence when working with, hiring and retaining Indigenous youth in their respective workplaces.

FACILITATORS AVAILABLE TO SUPPORT YOUTH – To make the event more successful for youth, re:VISION facilitators would refer youth to agencies and services such as the Youth Employment Centre, Dress for Success, pardon services and child-minding services. After visiting different booths and having conversations with various employers, youth would be able to apply for jobs using available iPads.

BUILDING CONNECTIONS – More than just a traditional hiring event, re:VISION seeks to build relationships between employers and prospective youth. With the knowledge garnered from the Sharing Circle and bus tour, employers would feel more informed, while youth who have been supported by re:VISION facilitators would feel confident and prepared.

SUCCESSFUL EMPLOYMENT – Entering into a workplace that has shown commitment to reconciliACTION, Indigenous youth would feel more supported and have more successful employment. The mutual understanding and respect fostered by the re:VISION events would spur further employment opportunities as workplaces become more welcoming to Indigenous youth.

Next Steps

- Identify employers who are open to learning and willing to commit to hiring and supporting Indigenous youth staff
- Seek funding for staff who will build the necessary relationships, organize events and support employers and youth
- Funding for venues, the bus tour, transportation for youth and other related expenses

APPENDIX #3: INVESTMENT OPPORTUNITIES THAT EMERGED FROM THE SENSE-MAKING WORKSHOP

Two opportunities to augment and/or leverage existing efforts emerged from the Sense-Making Workshop. These opportunities did not require the collaborative design process being provided via the YEL but would benefit from CFT support. As such, non-profits working in Calgary were asked to develop proposals and subsequently received two years of from the CFT funding to address these challenges. The challenges as articulated out of the Sense-Making Workshop are described below:

How can we augment the work of the YEC and the Opportunities for All Youth to connect more youth to employment by adapting and scaling the Starbuck's model (single-entry recruitment, screening and hiring process that enables direct connection between opportunity youth and multiple employers)?

- YEC ability to meet demand from employers has reached capacity to meet the demand of new employers
- Need to find youth who are not already connected to support
- Need to figure out how to find these youth
- CFT wants to expand practices in the field
- What could this look like – a grant to support one FTE at YEC?

How can we support new efforts in Calgary to find, engage and provide technical skills training to Opportunity Youth (augment and learn from the work of NPower and Prince's Trust Canada)?

- Need to find youth and connect them to IT skills and jobs
- Indigenous, immigrant youth, marginalized youth
- Should CFT fund NPower to expand to Calgary and provide more skills training to youth to enter the IT jobs?



APPENDIX #4: LAB TEAM MEMBERS

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Claire Smith
Ian Chiasson
Kathy Makin
Lily Lo
Christina David

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Dani Morrison
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Cody Gagne
Jennifer Fox
Sherri Kellock

Momentum
Boys and Girls Clubs of Calgary
Starbucks Coffee Company
Amazon
Calgary Youth Employment Centre
NPower Canada
Walmart
Carthy Foundation
Carthy Foundation
SAIT
Centre for Newcomers
Miskanawah youth
ULS Landscaping
NPower Canada
Calgary Youth Employment Centre
Calgary Assoc. of Skateboarding
Enthusiasts
Walmart
Burns Memorial Fund
Prototyping Coach
Prince's Trust Canada
Boys and Girls Clubs of Calgary
Champions Career Centre
Prototyping Coach
Calgary Youth Employment
Centre YEC
Calgary Youth Employment Centre
Starbucks Coffee Company
CAREERS: The Next Generation
Momentum
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