Government of Canada — Gouvernement du Canada

Policy Innovation Design Thinking Series
Summary of the Experiment

Canada

Purpose

- In February – April 2018, the ESDC Innovation Lab hosted a policy innovation design thinking series centered on user experience to develop innovative policy ideas to improve economic inclusion of populations that have traditionally been marginalized:
    - Indigenous peoples
    - Persons with disabilities
    - Lone-parent families
    - Lower-skilled workers
    - Recent immigrants.

- The four-day workshop included 35-37 participants from across the federal government and outside organizations (See Annex A for a list of participating organizations).

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Objectives of the workshop series

The Design Thinking Process

- Experiment with using design thinking as a problem solving approach for policy development.

- Design an interdepartmental policy innovation series centered on user needs and experiences.

- Develop and iterate policy concepts (i.e. prototypes) to improve economic inclusion of populations that have traditionally been marginalized.

Empathy and Defining Problems
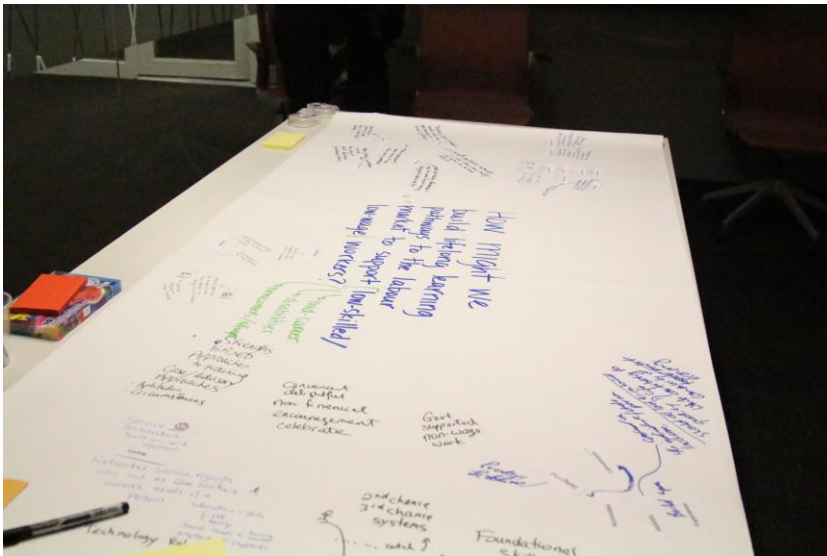
Ideation

Prototyping

Testing

? Validating with Users

Canada

Design Thinking Series Day 1

Empathy and Defining Problems	Ideation	Prototyping	Testing	User Validation

Objectives: Use existing qualitative research regarding the experiences of economically marginalized populations to better understand their challenges and prioritize identified problems for subsequent workshops.

Activities: Gallery walk profiling quotes and experiences of Canadians gathered from fieldwork, repurposed raw transcripts, and government consultations; development of personas based on gallery; identification of problems; scoring and ranking of problems based on jurisdictional fit, impact on the individual's ability to find work, and whether or not there are existing programs to address the problem.

Output: Seven key problems identified for further exploration.

Outcomes: Participants better understood the cumulative impact of vulnerability and the need to address problems of inclusion from a holistic perspective. Vulnerable populations rarely experience one barrier to economic inclusion at a time. Unpredictable "life curve balls" can make it very difficult for some Canadians to bounce back.

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Design Thinking Series Day 2

Empathy and Defining Problems	Ideation	Prototyping	Testing	User Validation

Objective: Identify as many innovative solutions as possible for economic inclusion, particularly focusing on the problems and *How Might We Questions* derived from the first workshop.

Activities: Participants dove deeper into the problems and articulated the interactions between individual (micro), organizational (meso), and cultural/institutional (macro) aspects of each problem. Then, used lateral thinking methods, including collective mind mapping, aspirational thinking, and analogous thinking to push their creativity and generate solutions.

Outputs: Over 250 ideas for solutions were produced.

Outcomes: Participants generated solutions that recognized the interconnectedness of policy, programs, and service delivery. Solutions focussed on the overlapping mandates of departments, levels of government, and service providers.

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Design Thinking Series Day 3

Empathy and Defining Problems	Ideation	Prototyping	Testing	User Validation

Objectives: Bring a selected number of ideas to life by illustrating how the solution would work for its intended users, and present low definition prototypes to the group to receive feedback for future iterations.

Activities: In small teams, participants brought their ideas to life visually through story boards, process maps, role plays, mock ups of advertising, and 3D modelling. Teams presented seven prototypes (e.g. policy concepts) in plenary to get feedback for their next iteration.

Outputs: Seven policy prototypes (refer to next slide for more details).

Outcomes: By developing low definition prototypes, each team challenged their thinking to imagine and bring to life how their solution would apply in a real context, and received feedback to improve their user experience.

ANNEX B - Policy Prototypes from Day 3

Theme 1: Holistic interventions that leverage user behaviours – Solutions that harness labour mobility and encourage innovation and self-learning

- Develop an accredited life-long education partnership between federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to fund re-skilling and upskilling and to coordinate eligibility requirements.
- Develop a method to assess an individual's informally- or internationally-obtained skills through competency tests and simulations.

Theme 2: Multi-level/jurisdictional governance coordination – Solutions that ensure a coordinated, client-centred approach

- Give every Canadian a "life account" at birth, which both the government and individual can contribute to, which could be used to provide a safety-net for difficult to anticipate life challenges.
- Provide Canadians with artificial intelligence-powered "coach" that can develop a personalized program to address their challenges by referring them to services that they are eligible for from various providers.
- Integrate post-service support into program design by connecting clients with additional programs and services for which they may be eligible.

Theme 3: Place Sensitivity – Geographically-targeted solutions to minimize regional disparities and inequities

- Support rural and remote communities in developing their own entrepreneurship and investment strategies by connecting them to social policy hubs or research hubs in other locations.
- Provide subsidies to companies for accessibility retrofits and assistive technologies while also connecting them to candidates with disabilities.

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Design Thinking Series Day 4

Empathy and Defining Problems	Ideation	Prototyping	Testing	User Validation

Objective: Refine prototypes based on feedback received in day 3. Develop a plan to test the feasibility and desirability of prototypes with real potential users.

Activities: Participants refined prototypes based on peer-feedback. Prototypes were tested using ethnographic profiles of economically marginalized Canadians (see excerpts of sample profiles in Annex B) and journey maps. Groups then developed a field testing plan and summarized their prototypes using the golden circle method.

Outputs: Refined prototypes and pitch for each prototypes summarizing the problem, value proposition, solution, and user testing plan.

Anticipated Outcomes: Participants gained a better understanding of how testing can be used to de-risk innovative ideas by testing feasibility and desirability early and refining prototypes to better meet user needs.

Canada

Considerations for economic inclusion that emerged:

Interconnected programming and service delivery across departments and governments: "artificial" eligibility requirements segment populations and cause disjointed user experiences.

Tailoring interventions holistically rather than designing for demographic markers:

- There is a distinction between "chronic" and "back on your feet" vulnerability;
- Interventions personalized to the users and their context (e.g. family members, caregivers, employers, location, etc.).
- Focus beyond Government's role and responsibilities, and include other actors such as employers, education and training institutions, and civil society.

Validating and testing interventions with a range of user experiences with cumulative vulnerabilities - vulnerability is not experienced in a structured, calibrated way.

Leveraging data in addition to socio-demographic markers (e.g. ethnographic observations, behavior patterns and variations, etc.): vulnerability is experienced by individuals to different degrees of severity.

Focussing on prevention (e.g. readiness/preparedness and transitions to change) as well as reaction to change: unpredictable life situations can quickly deteriorate and make it very difficult for Canadians who already experience some vulnerability (e.g. loss of job, loss of income, impact on security and wellbeing, loss of home/care, etc.). The number of unmet needs affect the capacity to adapt to change and overall economic inclusion.

Ensuring interventions reflect the realities of the region where they are being delivered.

Outcomes

The policy prototypes generated in the workshops go beyond one area of responsibility to **bridge traditional government silos**.

The policy prototypes produced treat users **holistically,** taking into account the other opportunities and challenges that target groups experience concurrently.

The workshop series advanced participant's thinking beyond traditional policy approaches. **100% of participants reported that they strongly agreed that they learned something that they could apply to their work**.

Participants **challenged their own default positions**. They learned to become more daring, testing their draft ideas through prototyping, and becoming open to early feedback. Many participants felt liberated to experiment and to be intentionally playful.

ANNEX A – List of Participating Organizations

Government of Canada

- Canada Revenue Agency
- Employment and Social Development Canada
- Finance Canada
- Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
- Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada
- Privy Council Office
- Statistics Canada
- Status of Women Canada
- Treasury Board Secretariat
- Western Economic Diversification

**Service Providing Organizations**

- Native Women's Association of Canada
- Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion
- YMCA Toronto

Annex B: Unpredictable Life Events Impact Economic Inclusion

In a former life, Dave was a firefighter, a science teacher, and a businessman. Dave fell into poverty when his relationship fell apart and he fell into a deep depression. He was prescribed benzodiazepines and became addicted. He has now overcome his addiction and dreams of being an entrepreneur.

Bernie used to work at TD Bank as a supervisor. Then he was in a car accident that left him paralyzed and moved to supportive housing. He has managed to save a few hundred dollars and exchanges skills with friends and neighbours to feel useful.
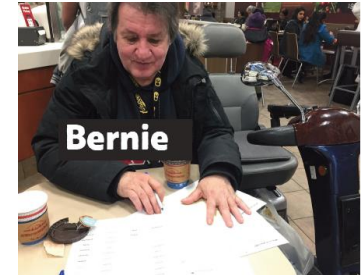
Holly has a Masters in Environmental Studies and a post-graduate diploma in Correction Work. She also has lots of recent work experience in her field and strong references. Holly suffers from depression, which makes the highs and lows of job searches worse. She recently connected with Employment Ontario which has led to a greater focus on networking and is giving her a boost.