

## Context – What is a Theory of Change?

Our Theory of Change helps us think through what we do and why. It helps to engage staff, community and stakeholders to develop a sense of common purpose. It tests our rationale about why we undertake the activities and the work that we do. It is used as a framework for strategic planning, decision making, and assessing our impact.

The nature of our work is emergent and dynamic. Our Theory of Change reflects this and it will evolve as we go. Using our natural ecosystem to represent our work was intentional, to incorporate both the work we do at Inspiring Communities, and how we play a part in a larger field with many players contributing to common goals.

## Where we are now and where we want to go The Issues We're Working to Address



Across Atlantic Canada, we see many examples of inspired efforts, aimed at improving lives and finding better ways of addressing social problems.

Too often these efforts are **disconnected**, and communities are working in **isolation** to solve the complex problems they are facing.

This **fragmentation** preserves a scarcity mindset, fueling **competition** in the field. It can result in the **duplication** of efforts, and a cycle of reinventing the wheel. This approach is sustained by traditional funding models and **historical power dynamics**.

We need new **relationships, approaches** and **actions** to change systems so they can serve and empower all communities. As the world rapidly changes, **new leaders are emerging**. We need to facilitate the development of leadership skills that value **genuine inclusion** and honour different ways of knowing and being. We must move beyond traditional approaches to problem solving, which have not served all communities. We must enable awareness of **inter-connectedness** and the collaboration needed to solve our complex social problems.

We need to develop **capacity to evaluate** complex change efforts, so we have a better understanding of what's working, what's not, and what's needed.





## Seeds for Change

To move beyond the current context, we need a collective desire to overcome the existing cycle together. A willingness to take risks and a sense of hope that a different way is possible are also key ingredients.

We believe these seeds have been sown and the time is ripe for change.



## Our Vision

*Positive social change is happening across the Atlantic region, that is based on new voices at the table, capacity to act, and a culture of collaboration and abundance.*

## Our Theory for How the Vision Can be Realized

-  Engaging with people with lived experiences, and a variety of cultural perspectives and worldviews to shift where power is held.
-  Working across sectors and communities through collaborative efforts to change the current systems.
-  Building a deeper understanding of how change happens and the impact of change efforts.
-  Developing strong relationships built on trust and collaboration.
-  Equipping leaders with the skills for equity-driven systems change, such as the ability to engage with complexity, collaborate across differences, and see inter-connectedness.

# Our role in contributing to the bigger vision

## Our Value Proposition

Inspiring Communities supports the growth and vitality of the field of systems change in Atlantic Canada. We are helping to shift communities and changemakers from a mindset of competition and scarcity to one of collaboration and abundance. So that we can work together to move toward new systems where power is distributed in ways that serve all communities. We challenge ourselves to apply an equity lens to all that we do.

### We do this by:

- ✦ Providing a **nest for experimentation** for social change initiatives: exploring new approaches, trying new ideas, engaging with diverse communities, challenging existing systems and power structures.
- ✦ Developing **evaluation capacity** for systems change: for a greater understanding of how change happens and its impacts on enhancing social inclusion, while growing a culture of learning and evaluation.
- ✦ Generating **learning opportunities**: building leadership skills for the field such as relationship building, strategic action, dismantling systemic barriers to equity and inclusion and facilitating shared learning.



## Nesting Social Change Initiatives

We offer a nurturing environment for social change initiatives that includes peer connections, access to learning opportunities, evaluation support and back-end administrative support. These supports and connections can increase the chances of long-term success, and allow those involved to focus on what matters most - impact on their local communities and the issues they are addressing. Those in the nest can focus on developing their ideas rather than being bogged down with operational burdens, or the need to establish a new organization.

We build and maintain connections inside and outside the nest to contribute to a greater culture of collaboration and reduce the effects of organizations working in isolation. The experimental nature of the nest allows for greater risk taking and space for ideas to evolve or dissolve if their potential is not realized.



## Evaluating Change Processes

We offer evaluation support to initiatives in our nest, through Developmental Evaluation frameworks, designing theories of change, data collection and analysis. Developmental Evaluation ensures the work is adapting and evolving in response to assessing our impact in vital areas such as social inclusion, while creating a responsive and flexible culture.

We also engage in work that helps to influence the culture of evaluation to be more rigorous, yet less rigid, more developmental, and more accessible to communities and changemakers. Through this work we are helping to deepen understanding of the impact of social change initiatives and the conditions for success.

We are also providing evaluation support to those outside of our nest by collaborating across organizations and government to increase capacity in evaluating our impact in the field. We are helping to build and develop connections between evaluators to strengthen the field of practice.

## Learning Opportunities for Systems Leaders



We offer skill building opportunities to help cultivate strong leadership for equity-driven systems change. Internally, we provide learning and training opportunities for those working on the initiatives supported by the nest. We also help to develop systems leadership skills for changemakers in the field to help strengthen overall capacity for change. Such skills include collaborative leadership, ability to interpret systems, remove barriers to inclusion and see interconnected elements, and coalition building.

Through this work we are helping to strengthen relationships and knowledge so there is greater leadership capacity in the field from diverse perspectives to make the shift to better systems, as well as more knowledge exchange in the field.

We know that change starts from within. Before we can change the systems, we must change mindsets and shift old power structures. We must build the capacity within ourselves to authentically engage with diverse communities. Leadership development plays a critical part to ensure that we develop an ecosystem that is ready for building systems based on diverse perspectives, worldviews, and actions.