



What does it take to scale successful social innovations?

Insights from the Edmonton Recover Initiative
Evaluation Brief 2



The [Executive Summary](#) link is here

INTRODUCTION

RECOVER is a City of Edmonton-led project that is working to address the complex challenge of urban wellness. The project began in 2017, in response to concerns of residents in the downtown core neighbourhoods about the cumulative impacts of existing and emerging social services in Edmonton’s downtown core neighbourhoods.

The purpose of RECOVER is to cultivate individual and community wellness in the neighbourhoods of Boyle Street, Central McDougall, Downtown, McCauley, Queen Mary Park, and Whyte Avenue. Recover participants employ a unique social innovation approach where neighbourhood residents, social agencies, and business work together to experimentally apply practical solutions to their everyday challenges. RECOVER’s approach includes ethnographic research, working together with residents, the social sector, businesses and government to build on what is already working, and co-designing and testing solutions that can improve the wellbeing of residents.¹

To do so, RECOVER followed a systematic process to surface, test, and scale innovative ideas in three broad phases, each with two steps. (See Table 1.)

To date, Recover participants have produced over 30 prototypes and continue to work on five of them. While the Recover Initiative stakeholders have learned a great deal about discovery and experimental phase of the work, they are only beginning to understand what is required to sustain and – if appropriate – scale the wellness solutions that prove effective.

This brief explores the early insights of the Recover Initiative based on three prototypes that have attained the pilot-sustaining-scaling steps using an emerging set of scaling frameworks developed by experienced social innovators from across Canada. It is important to note that the insights presented in this brief are from a moment in time in RECOVER’s overall journey. Additional insights and lessons will emerge over time.

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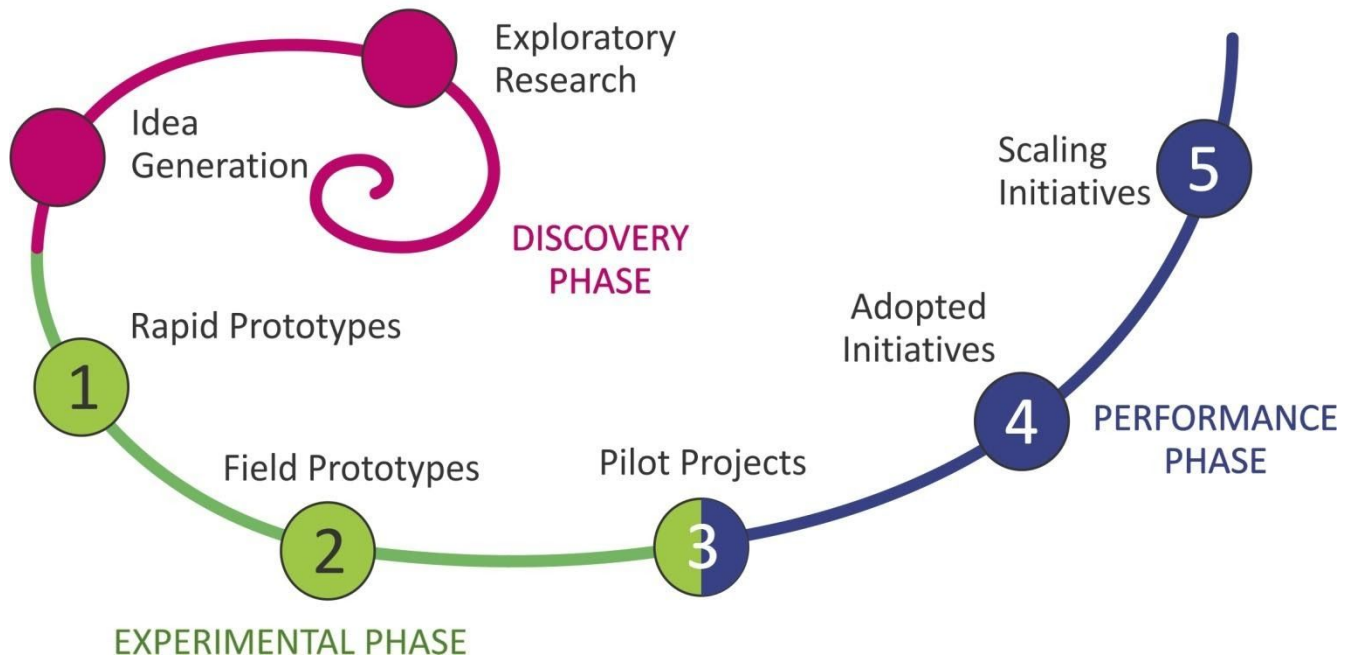


Table 1: The Innovation Continuum Features

Discovery Phase	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Research: spending time with people in the neighbourhoods to understand their daily experiences and needs. 2. Ideation: surfacing different ideas on how to improve conditions.
Experimental Phase	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Prototypes: testing the ideas through rapid prototypes (e.g. getting feedback on the full explanation of the idea from people) or field prototypes (e.g. testing a rough version of the idea quickly in field conditions) to see if it's worth exploring. 4. Pilots: creating a longer term, more systematic test of an idea in the community to see if it's useful.
Performance Phase	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Sustaining: formal adoption of the innovation by at least one organization.

6. Scaling: expanding the innovation for broader impact with other organizations and contexts.

BACKGROUND ON RECOVER

When the work began, the core team had a steep learning curve and much of 2017/18 was spent developing understanding with a variety of community leaders and social service providers. In the first year, a framework for approaching this work was established and toolkits were created. To inform these, ethnographic research was conducted in the downtown core, primarily among people experiencing homelessness and/or interacting with the social service system. This research led to the first round of prototyping - a rapid testing of ideas. Much was learned about the prototyping process and which ideas showed the most promise. Many of the people involved, who had been skeptical at first, could see the potential of RECOVER's approach for improving urban wellness.

In 2019, RECOVER had several concurrent lines of work. RECOVER's neighbourhood scope was increased to include Strathcona, a vibrant retail/residential district on the southside of the river from downtown alongside the initial five downtown neighbourhoods. RECOVER also endeavored to build capacity in the social innovation sphere, by working with other innovation experts in the city - such as the Social Innovation Institute at MacEwan University, the Think Jar Collective, and SDX to train a group of "innovation coaches" to support research and rapid prototyping work. To further support capacity building in the sector, RECOVER continued work to develop a Catalyst Group that would provide governance support, advice, and financial support. All this was in addition to refining the approach and tools developed over the previous years, while doing more research and rapid testing. These new rounds of research then fed another round of prototypes and rapid testing.

THE CHALLENGE OF SCALING

Most people are familiar with how successful innovations are scaled in the commercial sector. Once a process of trial and error has proven the effectiveness of a product, service, or business model, its original innovators typically codify or standardize it and then “roll it out” to what is hopefully a willing market of consumers. McDonalds is the most well-known exemplar of this approach: a business that has turned its fast-food model and product line into a finely tuned recipe that has been replicated across the globe.

In some cases, commercial innovations require changes in the policy or regulatory environment in order to be scaled. For example, even the relatively simple job of putting small high energy solar panels on residential homes may require a variety of changes to municipal bylaws and provincial regulations. In these cases, the scaling process is more complex.

Scaling innovations in the social sector is even more complex. A wider range of stakeholders is

involved. Many innovations work in one neighbourhood or organization but not in another. The public or philanthropic resources available to fund the original innovation, never mind its expansion, are often scarce. There are a lot of things to consider.

In the experience of a half-dozen veteran social innovators across Canada (Etmanski 2015, McLean & Gargani 2019, Tullock 2018, Riddell & Lee-Moore 2015), the success of social innovators to **scale the impact** of their original innovation depends on their ability to make progress in (at least) five distinct, yet interrelated, dimensions of scaling: **deep, out, up, scree,** and **infrastructure**. (See Exhibit 2 and Table 2.)

Exhibit 2: The Innovation Continuum & Dimensions of Scaling

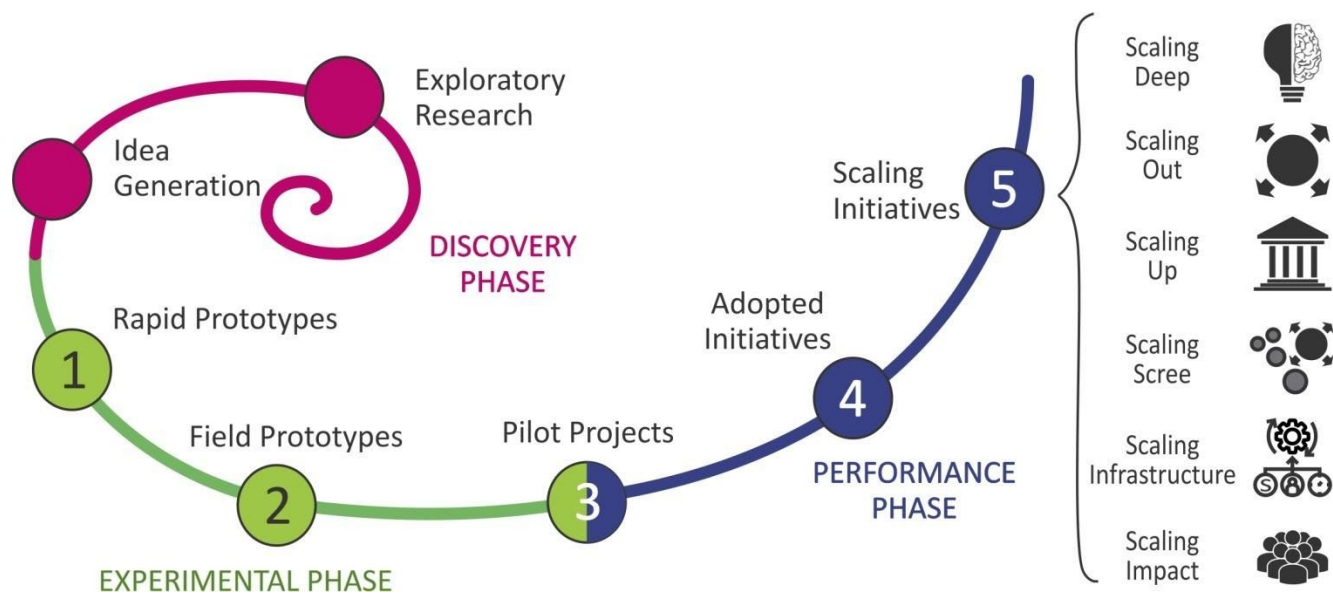








Table 2: Dimensions of Scaling

Scaling Dimension		Key Questions	
1: Deep		Capturing the hearts and minds of innovation stakeholders, enabler and the general public so there is a demand to adopt and support the innovation.	Who are the would-be adopters of the innovation? Why (or why not) are they interested in participating or supporting the innovation? How can we deepen their support?
2: Out		Replicating an innovation to other organizations or geographic areas to reach more people.	Who and where are the possible adopters of the innovation? How broadly can the innovation be replicated? How might the original innovation need to be adapted to different contexts?
3: Up		Adjusting larger policies, regulations, structures, and administrative practices to support the expansion of the innovation.	What parts of the larger systems support the scaling of the innovation? Which act as barriers? What needs to be adjusted to support scaling? How?
4: Scree		Developing additional innovations required to support the original innovation.	What else is required to make the original innovation successful? What other innovations can we build around this one to make it stronger?

<p>5: Infrastructure</p>		<p>Increasing the capital, data, knowledge, talent, and relationships to support and scale an innovation.</p>	<p>What types of financial, human, or technical resources does the innovation need to be sustained, to grow, and to expand? How can we increase their volume, quality of accessibility?</p>
<p>6: Impact</p>		<p>Broadening and deepening the positive outcomes of the innovation.</p>	<p>What is the magnitude, depth, quality, and durability of the impact of the innovations on resident and neighbourhood well-being?</p>

VIGNETTE 1: Connector

The 24/7 Diversion initiative was established in 2017 in an effort to help take the pressure of the Edmonton Police Services (EPS) and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) whose staff were struggling to keep up with skyrocketing calls to deal with “people crises” in the downtown area. Examples are people agitated by intoxication, mental health events, or sleeping outside in frigid weather. While many calls are to assist people in genuine distress, few involve the commission of criminal acts or the provision of serious medical attention.

The 24/7 Initiative involves a unique collection of organizations coordinated by REACH Edmonton, including EPS, EMS, Hope Mission, Boyle Street Community Services, and the Canadian Mental Health Association.

The model is simple. Someone who sees someone in distress in a public place can call a 211 hotline coordinator, who gathers the information, and then dispatches a roving outreach team to the location. Once the team arrives, they speak with the person in distress, assess the situation, and provide whatever support is required (e.g., food or a blanket, registration at a shelter, a drive home or to an appointment).

The Model has proven wildly successful in a short period of time. In 2019, the Diversion teams responded to over 14,000 social disorder calls and in the process has:

- kept thousands of vulnerable Edmontonians safe and connected to emergency supports.
- taken pressure off EMS and EPS, allowing them to focus on more serious health and safety crises.



- translated into estimated savings of \$2 in avoided EPS and EMS services for every \$1 invested.
- shifted the public image of persons in distress away from a perception that they are “dangerous” and towards a perception that everyone’s support is needed to ensure their safety.

For all of its success, the current Diversion Model is not designed to address the root causes of the emergencies to which they are asked to respond: e.g., loss/grief, trauma, lack of dignity and/or respect, and/or racism. As a consequence, many Diversion clients find themselves in distress yet again. “It’s often a revolving door, and we see people over and over,” reflected a member of the Diversion collaboration.

Until now. In 2018, a team of Recover participants surfaced several ideas on how they might better assist Diversion clients to avoid recurring emergencies. One very compelling idea was to add a “Connector” role to the Diversion Model. This person’s job would be to

connect street-involved adults and repeat users of the 24/7 crisis diversion program to sources of healing and culture - alongside attention to immediate needs It would also to explore ways to catalyze cultural spaces, businesses, and community members in the pursuit of urban wellness, recognizing that social services cannot, by themselves, satiate existential needs for respect and belonging.

Thanks to funding from the City of Edmonton, 24/7 Diversion partners are running a full-year pilot to develop, test, and refine the Connector role.

While the early results of the efforts are promising, it is already clear that the conditions for scaling what might be a successful pilot are mixed.




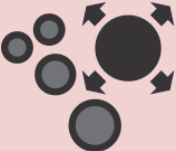
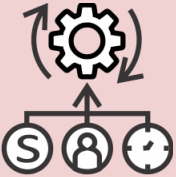

On the positive side, community groups, policy makers, and funders have been asking for a “warm hand off” role in the City for quite some time. For example, in 2016 the Edmonton Police Department put together a proposal to improve Wellness for persons with complex needs that identifies Warm Hand Off as a critical component.² The demand for the Connector role is strong (i.e., scaling deep).

On the more challenging side, the success of any future scaling efforts requires stakeholders to address a variety of larger systemic hurdles:

- In order for agencies beyond the 24/7 partnership to freely share information on clients, they may need to develop administrative practices (i.e., scaling up).
- There will be increased pressure to invest in the supports (e.g., affordable and supporting housing, mental health supports) required to help people create the foundations for wellness (i.e., scaling infrastructure).
- There may be a need to create a co-located “service hub” to improve service coordination and reduce transportation needs (i.e., scaling scree).

While these possible scaling challenges may be daunting, the data shows that the effort to overcome them is worth its while. In 2019, the Diversion Team worked with 46 people who used the Diversion service an average of more than 100 times that year and another 640 who the Team encountered an average of 13 times. Scaling a successful Connector model may be a key part of closing that revolving door.

Table 3: Scaling The Connector Idea

Scaling Dimension		Assessment
1: Deep		Capturing the hearts and minds of innovation stakeholders, enablers, and the general public so there is a demand to adopt and support the innovation.
2: Out		Replicating an innovation to other organizations or geographic areas to reach more people.
3: Up		Adjusting larger policies, regulations, structures, and administrative practices to support the expansion of the innovation.
4: Scree		Developing additional innovations required to support the original innovation.
5: Infrastructure		Increasing the capital, data, knowledge, talent, and relationships to support and scale an innovation.
6: Impact		Broadening and deepening the positive outcomes of the innovation.

VIGNETTE 2: THE GALLERY AT CITY CENTER MALL

The City Center Mall is a microcosm of the entire downtown. People go there to work, shop, eat, meet friends, and make their way to surrounding arts, culture, and entertainment activities. Thousands of people walk through the Mall's doors every day.

It is also a place of social tensions. While office workers and shoppers move through the space, they encounter marginalized residents who gather there to meet, perhaps have a smoke and drink a coffee, or simply escape inclement weather. They are often joined by drug dealers eager to prey on those with addictions.

The overall effect is that everyone feels uncomfortable, businesses suffer and there is an increased risk of negative – even unsafe – events.

In 2019, the Recover team facilitated a brainstorming session with a diverse group of organizations to develop inventive ways to address the challenge. Participants included Oxford Properties, Building Owners & Managers Association (BOMA), Downtown Business Association (DBA), Boyle Street Communities Services, and the City's N.E.T team and relevant City departments. They landed on the idea of a “micro-place” around key areas of interaction that would:

- encourage people to slow down on what otherwise might be a cold or vacant public space
- make them feel welcome and relaxed
- offer the possibility of multiple uses (e.g. sitting, smoking, making a phone call)
- encourage people to interact

Their approach mirrors a growing international trend for “tactical placemaking” which aims to “create quality places in which people want to

live, work, play, and learn through small, street-level, projects.

In September 2019, Oxford Properties Group and Recover staff created a simple place-making prototype by a busy entrance on the east side of the mall comprised of solar lighting, a bench, planters with flowers, a mural and ashtray. Then they and a team of researchers from MacEwan University watched to see what happened.

The feedback was positive. Researchers found that people quickly congregated around the benches and felt less nervous interacting with each other. “These are places of encounter, and the few times it happened, people were cordial, had their coffee, enjoyed the sun, and moved on,” noted Samuel Juru, a City Planner with the Recover team.




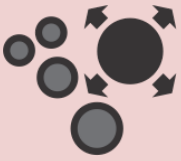


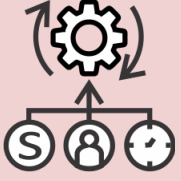

The effects of the prototype encouraged City Center Mall management to retain the original prototype (the planters were removed for winter) and agree to fund a much larger and longer version of the experiment on another side of the mall over the winter 2020. They will be joined by another City planner who will help identify – and if possible address – policy and regulatory barriers that get in the way.

Other would-be adopters are watching, including the DBA and the local chapter of the

BOMA and two other major retail towers. “What excites me is that three or four other building owners in the inner city have sent their general managers to see how it works,” says Juru. “We are hoping two or three years from now to have 20, or maybe 60, such areas.

Table 4: Scaling City Center Mall’s Placemaking Idea

Scaling Dimension		Assessment	
1: Deep		Capturing the hearts and minds of innovation stakeholders, enablers, and the general public so there is a demand to adopt and support the innovation.	The City, public, and key institutions have been transforming the downtown to become more livable for over a decade. This complements many initiatives (e.g., 24/7 Diversion, Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness, Neighbourhood Empowerment, etc.)
2: Out		Replicating an innovation to other organizations or geographic areas to reach more people.	A Recover Team participant estimated that there may be “up to 60” similar micro-spaces across the downtown that could be improved. The owners of at least two other retail buildings, with the DBA and BOMA, have expressed an interest in adopting the model.
3: Up		Adjusting larger policies, regulations, structures, and administrative practices to support the expansion of the innovation.	A Senior Planner from the City of Edmonton is participating to ensure meet planning standards and identify and address regulator, administrative, or policy issues that emerge.
4: Scree		Developing additional innovations required to support the original innovation.	A micro-space built around benches and flowers may only be a first step. Many other cities expand the focus to include other types of uses: e.g., food carts, pop-up stations for musical artists, etc.

<p>5: Infrastructure</p>		<p>Increasing the capital, data, knowledge, talent, and relationships to support and scale an innovation.</p>	<p>At this point in the process, it appears that the amounts required for small-scale placemaking efforts can be easily covered by downtown retailers and existing City programs.</p>
<p>6: Impact</p>		<p>Broadening and deepening the positive outcomes of the innovation.</p>	<p>The benefits of placemaking in North American cities are well-documented through existing research: more interaction, increased safety, appreciation of urban space. The more the model expands in the downtown, the more people and retailers experience the benefits.</p>

VIGNETTE 3: PROJECT WELCOME MAT

The retailers in Edmonton’s downtown shopping district are not the only ones interested in creating more interesting, human scale, and engaging public spaces. The buildings of a score of services agencies in the larger downtown area are surrounded by equally – if not more – cold and uninviting sidewalks and spaces.

In the early summer of 2018, the staff and community members of the Boyle Street Community Services (BSCC), supported by Recover team and community stakeholders, asked themselves a simple question:

What if we improve the sidewalk space in front of Boyle Street Community Services to facilitate human connection, destigmatize service, and provide dignity to vulnerable people? If we improve this sidewalk space, would we improve relationships both within and beyond Boyle Street Community Services?

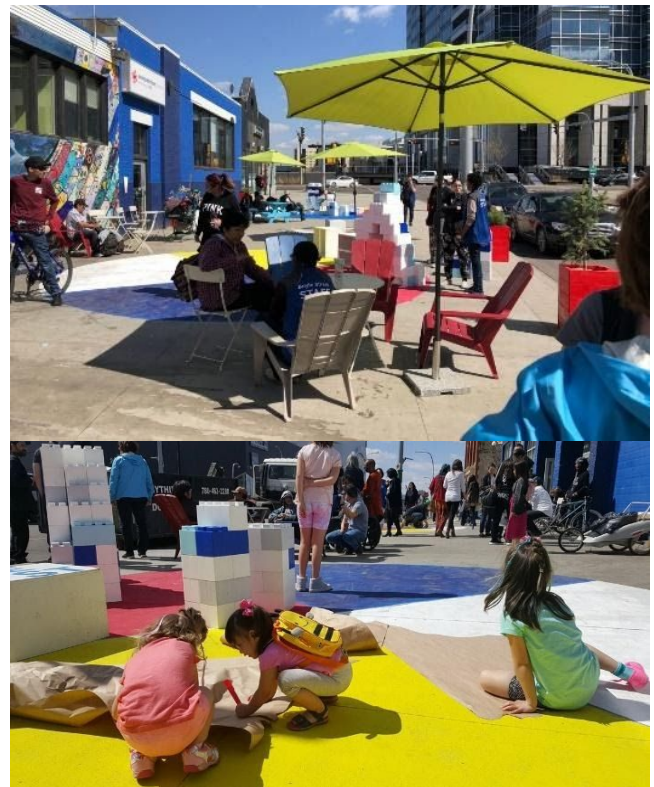
Of the many ideas that emerged from their brainstorming efforts, the Project Welcome Mat concept was the one that the group was to test by creating a quick mock-up of what the space would look like, co-designed with the community members who would use it, and watching to see what would happen.

It was truly a group effort. City staff loaned the agency a variety of equipment from their network of programs: picnic tables, planters, bistro tables, Adirondack chairs, umbrellas and stands, ashtrays, and even giant LEGO blocks.

BSCS community members did the rest. Those with artistic abilities painted the sidewalk with colourful medicine wheels, feathers, and bear paw prints. Boyle Street Moving Company, a social enterprise employing community members, delivered items from City storage

facilities. Everyone helped put together the new street installation. The Recover team facilitated the entire process. Once it was complete, all made time to enjoy the newly renovated space.

The feedback on the co-creation process and prototype installation was excellent. “Community members that are usually difficult to work with, prone to violence and misbehaviour, were actively engaged,” said Elliott Tanti, Communications Lead at Boyle Street. Another agency staffer shared, “I actually saw community. They were sitting on chairs, gathered around tables. There were conversations. It humanized everyone. It was natural. Kids showed up instantly and you heard kids’ laughter. It was almost a playground atmosphere.” Agency clients shared similar results: “It gave members a sense of



purpose. They felt acknowledged,” noted one. A

local business person mused, “It gave a different perspective on what this place is about. I could definitely see more of this. There was a sense of calm.”

Despite the positive experience with the Welcome Mat prototype, the agency’s ability to formally adopt the initial installation was stymied by a lack of sufficient resources. While the one-time grant from the City to purchase umbrellas, chairs, planters, and industrial paint was welcome, it was not enough to cover the ongoing costs of maintaining the equipment. “Even the industrial paint was washed out in 12 weeks – rather than the planned 18 months – and there was already wear and tear on other materials as well, noted an agency manager.

The lack of resources for managing and programming the space was even more daunting. “The key to the success of the installation is ensure that there are always positive activities going on and that it is supervised: so while the effort to create the prototype was helpful, it takes 100 times the time and resources to make it a permanent program.” As a result, the Boyle team decided against making the front of building installation permanent.

At the same time, the team was sufficiently impressed with the human-centered, experimental approach to implement place-making the following year with an MacDonald Lofts facility across the street. Thanks to the offer of Ice District Properties to lease a vacant adjacent property for \$1, the agency created a “courtyard.” The fenced-in space, filled with garden boxes and tables, provides clients with a safe place to relax and the agency with a venue for gardening programs, ceremonies, and other events. The Courtyard is only accessible through the agency, so staff can screen who enters the program and fund the activities through

existing programs. It does not need a new investment of resources.

BSCS and volunteers had the courtyard up and running within weeks. “The power of this has had an effect on our staff”, noted Tanti. “We just have to do it in a way that is financially and humanly sustainable. We found that with the Courtyard.”



While the BSCS team has embraced the idea of place-making, the half-dozen major social agencies in the core neighbourhoods have given the Courtyard a mixed reception.

The staff of the Bissell Center employed a human-centered design approach to remodel three of their building’s four sides. They report benefits similar to those witnessed at BSCS: a more welcoming physical space; more positive interaction amongst clients; and reduced incidents of social disorder. On the other hand, while the Hope Mission and Boyle McCauley Health Centre see the value in the approach,

they don't feel that place-making is a priority. One executive reported that, "Given the complex needs of our clients, it's hard to justify using limited resources for anything except service delivery."




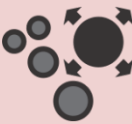
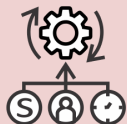

RECOVER recognizes that this is a reality for many organizations and believes that providing opportunities to explore ideas that foster connection and balance are just as important as traditional forms of service delivery. RECOVER is interested in combining both the material and immaterial aspects of wellness in service delivery.

The efforts to scale the Project Welcome Mat model continue. Recover stakeholders have surfaced the idea of developing a pilot Sidewalk Improvement Program, similar to the City's

popular Façade Improvement Program which provides business owners with matching grants to support exterior renovations and storefront upgrades. This would create the interest (scaling deep), supportive policy (scaling up), and investment and technical support (scaling infrastructure) required to encourage a much larger and diverse set of agencies and organizations to adopt the model. This addresses neither the challenge of the costs of programming and managing the activities associated with the renovated public space, nor that of ensuring sufficient resources to fund services to adequately address clients' often complex needs. However, it does remove one more of the barriers to scaling the model.



Table 4: Scaling Welcome Mat Place-Making

Scaling Dimension		Key Questions	
1: Deep		Capturing the hearts and minds of innovation stakeholders, enablers, and the general public so there is a demand to adopt and support the innovation.	There is some interest in the idea of creating more engaging public spaces around agencies, especially the surrounding business communities. However, some other agencies feel that whatever scarce resources are available should be invested in programs and services, rather than place-making activities.
2: Out		Replicating an innovation to other organizations or geographic areas to reach more people.	Boyle Street Community Services has sustained the Welcome Mat's format in the adjacent MacDonald Lofts while the Bissell Center has replicated the idea and renewed 3 of the 4 sides on its own building.
3: Up		Adjusting larger policies, regulations, structures, and administrative practices to support the expansion of the innovation.	Recover stakeholders are exploring the idea of creating a Sidewalk Improvement Program, modelled after the City's Façade Improvement program. It would address not only policy issues, but also infrastructure and public awareness gaps.
4: Scree		Developing additional innovations required to support the original innovation.	Boyle Street Community Services staff identified the importance of programming additional activities for the space to make it even more interactive and safe.
5: Infrastructure		Increasing the capital, data, knowledge, talent, and relationships to support and scale an innovation.	The service agencies have limited extra resources to invest in physical improvements and additional programming. A Sidewalk Improvement Program can address some of these barriers, but leaves untouched the challenge of ongoing programming dollars.
6: Impact		Broadening and deepening the positive outcomes of the innovation.	The positive effects of the renewed places outside two of Edmonton's busiest social agencies are felt by (1) their staff, (2) an estimated thousand clients, (3) a score of surrounding businesses and residents, as well as (4) the likelihood of reduced calls from EPS.

INSIGHTS

The three vignettes provided in this Brief – viewed through the framework – provide a number of informative insights about scaling social innovations.

1

All six dimensions of scaling are important. The ability of small innovations to generate a larger impact depends on its stakeholders' broad success in scaling the innovation deep (aka capturing hearts and minds), out (aka adoption by others), up (aka policies and regulations), scree (aka complementary innovations) and infrastructure and (aka capital, knowledge, networks). No scaling, no impact.

2

Efforts to scale innovations are adaptive and unique. The partners in the City Center project proceeded smoothly from (1) idea to (2) prototype to (3) pilot to (4) laying out the conditions for scaling. The benefits that emerged from the field prototype of a similar model, Welcome Mat, were such that two agencies adopted it without a conventional pilot project. Furthermore, raising money to fund the replication of a roughly similar placemaking model is an easier task for private sector participants in the City Center project than it is for the cash-strapped social service agencies involved in the Project Welcome Mat project. This is due to the fact that they work in sectors that employ different business models. Each scaling effort must be tailored to its unique context.

3

Scaling requires multiple roles and a lot of effort. Successful social innovations don't spontaneously scale themselves: stakeholders must work together to fulfill multiple roles in order to make progress:

- Innovators – develop, test and refine the original innovation.
- Adopters – adopt and adapt the original innovation to suit their context.
- Funders – fund the adoption and spread of the original innovation.
- Policy Makers – adjust policies and regulations to allow the innovation to flourish.
- Public – inform, support and/or resist the innovation and its scaling.
- Bridgers – convene, facilitate, mobilize networks and funds, and advocate.

It is worth noting the Recover teams played the often invisible – though critical – bridging role in each of the three vignettes.

4

Scaling successful social innovations takes time. The Project Welcome Mat prototype was developed and completed in the early summer of 2018. Yet it wasn't till the following year that the host agency continued with a scaled-up version, and another agency was able to test a similar prototype. Further replication appears (at least partially) dependent on the creation of a Sidewalk Improvement Program. The City Center and Connector projects have similar trajectories. Scaling social innovation is a long- term, sustained process characterized by incremental progress in each of the six areas of scaling.

5

Not all innovations are meant to be scaled. Only three of the estimated 30 prototypes that have emerged through the Recover Initiative are fully in – or entering – the scaling process. Their future prospects appear promising but their success is not guaranteed. Just as private sector companies often need to test hundreds of prototypes to find one that turns out to be wildly successful in the market, it takes a lot of experiments and scaling efforts to find one that makes a dramatic impact.

As the work of the Recover initiative continues to unfold, the Recover team aims to capture and communicate what it takes both to experiment with new, community-driven ways to address complex social issues and to scale those that prove successful for greater impact.

ENDNOTES

For more on Edmonton Recover, see: <https://www.urbanwellnessedmonton.com/>

² See: https://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/documents/PDF/CWS-VulnerablePersons.pdf

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