

Strategies to Change Systems Toward an Inclusive Economy

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ABSTRACT

Poverty is a complex issue that requires systemic and collaborative responses. This article examines the systems change strategies implemented by the Inclusive Economy Team at EndPovertyEdmonton (EPE) to address poverty through inclusive economic development. Using community-based participatory and strategic learning approaches, data were drawn from internal documents, learning debriefs, and 26 interviews with EPE staff and network members. Five strategies emerged: building networks, advocating for policy change, advancing economic reconciliation, testing approaches to shift economic systems, and fostering learning in inclusive procurement and workforce development. The Inclusive Economy Team functioned as a convenor and “fourth space” actor, bridging nonprofit, government, and business sectors. These findings illustrate how nonprofit actors can support social innovation and influence policy through collaborative, equity-oriented systems change.

RÉSUMÉ

La pauvreté est un problème complexe qui nécessite des réponses systémiques et collaboratives. Cet article examine les stratégies de changement systémique mises en œuvre par l'équipe Économie inclusive d'End Poverty Edmonton (EPE) pour lutter contre la pauvreté grâce à un développement économique inclusif. Au moyen d'approches communautaires pour assurer un apprentissage participatif et stratégique, des données ont été obtenues à partir de documents internes, de comptes rendus d'apprentissage et de vingt-six entretiens avec des membres du personnel et du réseau d'EPE. Cinq stratégies ont émergé : créer des réseaux, plaider en faveur d'un changement de politique, faire progresser la réconciliation économique, évaluer des approches visant à transformer les systèmes économiques et favoriser l'apprentissage en vue de développer un approvisionnement et une main-d'œuvre inclusifs. L'équipe Économie inclusive a joué le rôle de coordinateur et d'acteur du « quatrième espace », établissant des liens entre le secteur sans but lucratif, le secteur gouvernemental et le secteur commercial. Les résultats montrent comment les acteurs à but non lucratif peuvent soutenir l'innovation sociale et influencer les politiques grâce à un changement systémique collaboratif et axé sur l'équité.

Keywords / Mots clés : inclusive economy, qualitative, systems change, poverty, fourth space / économie inclusive, qualitatif, changement systémique, pauvreté, quatrième espace

INTRODUCTION

Poverty can be described as a “wicked problem”—a complex, dynamic, and context-dependent issue with no single cause or straightforward solution (Rittel & Webber, 1973). Because of these characteristics, wicked problems cannot be easily solved, “but are reliant instead upon ‘elusive political judgment for resolution ... over and over again’” (Rittel & Webber, 1973, as cited in Crowley & Head, 2017, p. 541). Understanding poverty in this way shifts attention from isolated programs toward systemic approaches that address the root causes of inequity. Systems-change and social-innovation theorists emphasize that durable solutions to wicked problems depend on transforming the underlying structures, relationships, and mental models that perpetuate social and economic exclusion (Meadows, 1999; Westley, Zimmerman, & Patton, 2006; Kania, Kramer, & Senge, 2018). These perspectives underscore the importance of collective action, distributed leadership, and reflexive learning in reconfiguring complex systems toward equity and sustainability (Moore, Riddell, & Vocisano, 2015).

The concept of an inclusive economy has been proposed to address systemic inequities and reorient economic systems toward shared prosperity. Inclusive economies aim to ensure that all people, particularly those historically excluded from economic participation, have equitable opportunities to contribute to, benefit from, and influence the systems that shape their livelihoods (Lee, 2019; Utting, 2015; Munro, 2020). EndPovertyEdmonton (EPE) has defined poverty as the condition in which people “lack, or are denied, economic, social, and cultural resources they need to have a quality of life that ensures full and meaningful participation in the community” (EndPovertyEdmonton, 2015). This multidimensional definition moves beyond an income-based lens to frame poverty as a systemic issue rooted in social exclusion and inequity. Within this context, EPE represents an innovative municipal-level initiative that mobilizes systems-change approaches to address poverty, including through inclusive economic development.

Established from the Mayor’s Task Force to End Poverty and the Aboriginal Round Table, EPE emerged as a nonprofit convener working to “broker innovative partnerships, advocate for policy changes, and build the capacity of Edmontonians to take action to end poverty” (EndPovertyEdmonton, 2023). Among EPE’s eight key strategic areas of action, which are locally referred to as “game changers”—anti-racism, early learning and care, Indigenization, affordable housing, education, health services, transportation, and inclusive economy—the Inclusive Economy Team focused specifically on tackling systemic barriers to participation in economic life. Its mandate reflected a growing recognition that municipal and community actors had the potential to influence economic systems by aligning procurement, workforce development, and policy advocacy with equity goals.

Nonprofit organizations such as EPE play a distinctive role in systems change as “system convenors” or “boundary spanners,” bridging sectors and aligning collective action (Riddell & Moore, 2015; Williams, 2012). Positioned between government, business, and civil society, such organizations operate as “fourth-space” actors capable of fostering collaboration, navigating institutional com-

plexity, and testing innovations that can later be scaled or institutionalized (Bradach, 2010; Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009; Mulgan, 2019). Through this role, nonprofits contribute to shaping the policy and market conditions necessary for systemic transformation, which represent key factors in advancing an inclusive economy.

Building an inclusive economy requires shifts in policies, practices, relationships, power dynamics, and social norms (Mühlenbein, 2018). These shifts can emerge through strategic learning, which is the intentional use of reflection and evidence to adapt strategies in real time (Preskill & Gopal, 2014). The Inclusive Economy Team adopted this approach, engaging diverse stakeholders in ongoing cycles of learning and adaptation to understand what it means to change systems toward inclusion. Such work exemplifies the complexity of systems-oriented change in the nonprofit landscape, where local actors increasingly lead efforts to reimagine economic systems that strive for equity.

This article describes how the Inclusive Economy Team at EndPovertyEdmonton implemented systems-change strategies to advance inclusive economic development. The research question guiding this inquiry is: What strategies can be used to change systems toward an inclusive economy?

METHODS

EPE partnered with researchers from the Community University Partnership (CUP) to track and evaluate the four-member Inclusive Economy Team's efforts to create systems change toward an inclusive economy. When dealing with complex system change processes, tracking progress can be challenging, due to less tangible and unmeasurable outcomes. Therefore, we used an approach combining community-based participation and strategic learning. Strategic learning involves the 1) "systematic use of data for continuous improvement and the collective interpretation for new information," and 2) "applying the collective interpretation of information to strategy" (Lynn, 2012, p. 2).

Research approach

To determine an appropriate research approach for this evaluation, we sought a method that would shed light on the specifics of the Inclusive Economy Team, working at a systems level to solve poverty in Edmonton. A case study offered this capacity, given that case studies "seek to explain some present circumstance (e.g., ask 'how' or 'why' some social phenomenon works)" (Yin, 2009, p. 4) and we wanted to capture the hows and whys of EPE's work.

Additionally, the unique nature of EPE—a group of professionals testing various solutions for poverty elimination—makes it well suited to evaluation as a case study, as this approach allows for customization and adaptive analysis. For the purposes of this evaluation, we understand EPE as a case of poverty elimination work specific to the Edmonton context. Yet it also positions the case as exemplary, generating insights that other cities and municipalities could draw upon in their own poverty elimination efforts.

Data collection

For a two-year period (2022–2023), the CUP employed multiple methods to gather comprehensive data from the Inclusive Economy Team and its network.

The Inclusive Economy Team

Data were collected with the Inclusive Economy Team using strategic learning debriefs, strategic learning interviews, emergent learning tables, and internal documents. All four Inclusive Economy Team members were initially asked to document their activities and insights on building an inclusive economy by submitting strategic learning debriefs via a Google Form, resulting in 52 completed debriefs.

Additionally, due to the time required to consistently complete the learning debriefs, CUP researchers offered to conduct strategic learning interviews with Team members. Two of the four members participated in these interviews, one of whom was interviewed eight times, and the other, four times.

The CUP also organized seven emergent learning tables, each lasting between 1.5 and 2 hours, to facilitate focused discussions on critical questions. These sessions involved single-loop, double-loop and triple-loop learning. Briefly, single-loop learning focused on questions regarding “system actions, including constraints on core practices, relationships, and resources” (Cabaj, 2019, p. 4). Double-loop learning examined what the Team was learning about their “assumptions, understanding, and thinking,” while triple-loop learning explored what the Team was “learning about how they were being” (Cabaj, 2019, p. 4). Finally, the Inclusive Economy Team provided CUP researchers with access to internal documents, including meeting minutes, evaluation plans, and staff work plans.

The Inclusive Economy Team's network

A total of 19 external interviews representing 17 different organizations in the Inclusive Economy Team's network were conducted to further capture the strategies used by the Team to build an inclusive economy. The Inclusive Economy Team provided CUP researchers with the names of network contacts, including individuals from nonprofit organizations, businesses, business/industry associations, educational institutions, and municipal leadership. The researchers then invited these individuals to be interviewed; all persons contacted agreed to participate. In three interviews, two organization representatives participated together, bringing the total number of interviewees to 22.

Interviews explored what the Team had done to help participants develop and implement inclusive economy initiatives, as well as the Team's impact and influence on their efforts. Each semi-structured interview lasted between 50 and 60 minutes, allowing researchers to adapt “how and when the questions are asked in response to the unfolding conversation with the participant” (Mayan, 2023, p.158).

Data analysis and rigour

To determine the strategies employed by the Inclusive Economy Team, data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. Qualitative content analysis “is the process of coding and categorizing the primary patterns in the data” (Mayan, 2023, p. 190). It starts by coding for persistent words, phrases, and concepts within the data to identify the underlying patterns and develop a comprehensive description of the phenomenon (Mayan, 2023).

Rigour was attained through peer debriefing, negative case analysis, data triangulation (i.e., Inclusive Economy Team, Inclusive Economy Team network), method triangulation (i.e., Google forms, interviews, documents), methodological coherence, adequate and appropriate sampling, collecting and analyzing data concurrently, keeping an audit trail, and practicing reflexivity (Mayan, 2023).

RESULTS

Building networks to share information, provide mutual support, and advocate for inclusive economy policies

One strategy used to build an inclusive economy was to form networks for sharing information, providing mutual support, and advocating for inclusive economy policies. Working to connect widely with players interested in—and potentially essential to—building an inclusive economy, EPE's Inclusive Economy Team networked and/or partnered with many groups and organizations: nonprofit organizations, businesses (primarily in construction), business/industry associations (again, primarily in construction), educational institutions, and municipal departments within the City of Edmonton.

Participants expressed their gratitude to the Inclusive Economy Team for building the network, acknowledging that their own efforts would have been unsuccessful without the Team's leadership. As one member of a construction association explained:

We didn't have any connections to the community or potential service providers who could identify these candidates for work readiness. So, our project would actually not have been a success without the intervention of EndPovertyEdmonton. (Construction Association)

As a result of building networks for inclusive economy policies, the Inclusive Economy Team was perceived as influential by many stakeholders throughout the city and province. Indeed, many network members reported feeling they could turn to the Team for help overcoming obstacles, for information, and for access to its existing connections with industry, government, and nonprofits. Network members also described how the Team broadened their understanding of inclusive economic possibilities in Edmonton, helped them identify target demographics for workforce development (such as newcomer communities), and amplified ongoing efforts in the city to build an inclusive economy. These positive influences suggest that the Team was contributing constructively to inclusive economy work in Edmonton, leading to the subcategory, "Keeping a pulse," described below.

"Keeping a pulse" on the inclusive economy space in Edmonton

This subcategory stemmed from the Inclusive Economy Team's focus on tracking "who's doing what" in the inclusive economy space to bring about more effective connections between players. Continuously updating its list of groups and organizations working on inclusive economy-related issues, the Team was not only able to identify gaps in the system, but also reach out to the players and/or partnerships most apt to fill them. As one industry stakeholder reported: "What I find most useful is they'll connect organizations that are walking the path."

The Team also met with the provincial Construction Association to help launch a trade pathways program and with the Alberta Living Wage Network to advance advocacy for a living wage policy in the workplace. The Team's vital advocacy role is detailed in the next category.

Advocating for the adoption and implementation of inclusive economic approaches and plans within Edmonton's economic development sector

The Team explored how and where they could most effectively advocate for inclusive economic practices in Edmonton. This involved clarifying appropriate strategies for engaging the City, the provincial and federal governments, industry, and the nonprofit sector. One participant from a nonprofit remarked: "I think what [the Team is] doing ... in Edmonton, is really important. And all of Alberta in time will benefit." These strategies are identified and described in the following subcategories.

The timing of policy "asks"

As the Team established itself, it increasingly focused on advocacy and, as a result, was thrust into efforts to influence provincial electoral platforms. By consulting with a policy advocacy group and meeting with government officials, including provincial Assistant Deputy Ministers (ADMs), the Team worked to insert policy "asks" related to building an inclusive economy—specifically around employment—into provincial platforms at the right time.

Being a "fourth space"

Operating as a "fourth space" (connected to but independent from industry, government, and other nonprofits) allowed EPE to occupy a unique position: using its independence to advocate regarding pressing and interlocking issues. One nonprofit partner described this as follows: "It is about sitting down with the people that are doing it now ... and strategizing with them."

The Inclusive Economy Team consolidated this fourth-space identity and put it into practice, including by integrating Inclusive Economy and Indigenization Game Changers priorities to advocate for economic reconciliation. Its position as a fourth space also enabled meetings with politicians across parties, such as with provincial ADMs and the Alberta Official Opposition regarding employment and training, and with the City of Edmonton's mayoral staff regarding broader inclusive economic strategies. Additionally, the team engaged with advocacy experts and politicians to explore barriers and pathways to advancing community employment benefits (CEB) and social procurement policies.

These efforts continued productively with a wide range of nonprofits, businesses, industry/business associations, and municipal stakeholders on projects related to CEB and social procurement. A key outcome was the broad support garnered from these stakeholders, as the Team successfully requested and received endorsement from the Federal Minister of Workforce Development and Official Languages regarding a CEB initiative. While other nonprofits were constrained by certain procedures and regulations surrounding policy advocacy, EPE had the freedom, capacity, influence, and clout to advocate for policy change on inclusive economic issues.

Supporting the City's economic plan

The Team engaged with the City of Edmonton, including with the Office of the Mayor, through advocacy-focused meetings. For instance, they met with the City's Economic Investment Services to discuss supporting the municipal Economic Plan. They also connected with procurement staff to advocate for a municipal policy "ask" that would require the City to incorporate CEB into construction bids. This work enhanced the Team's understanding of Edmonton's areas of need and oppor-

tunity. One notable success was their advocacy for a social procurement strategy, which guided the City's adoption of its Social Purchasing Strategy.

Moving economic reconciliation approaches forward

Economic reconciliation was a crucial inclusive economy strategy that was tracked using strengths-based indicators and “seven-generation thinking” (i.e., basing decisions on how they will impact people seven generations ahead of us). The Inclusive Economy Team pursued economic reconciliation both internally and externally.

Internally, non-Indigenous EPE staff had been engaging in reconciliation learning led by Indigenous staff. One key reason for this was to build understanding about Indigenous ways of being and knowing, so that the staff (including the Inclusive Economy Team) could be more aware and knowledgeable as they worked toward economic reconciliation practices. One staff member discussed how Indigenization Team teachings had shaped their strategic thinking:

I think the way we think about [ending poverty] and the current systems, we can see that they are clearly not working. I've been really interested in learning the teachings because I'm trying to think about things like seven generations thinking. How do we have an impact on the next seven generations? And how does this fit into how we structure our organization and our work? Indigenization is a way to inform our future systems.

Reflections from the Team's own interviews indicated that economic reconciliation was becoming further embedded into their perspectives. To one staff member, their knowledge of how to work as an ally to Indigenous peoples and implement reconciliation shifted their approach to work overall:

We're trying to work as a team. Sometimes, I think people's heads like, oh, that's an indigenous activity, so [Indigenous Lead] is like, we're gonna go to all these meetings together, not one of us, because ... Indigenous, and settler has to be done together. And so we have to go together and talk about it together. And it means, you know, we may look at it differently.

Through its ongoing reconciliation work and learnings about Indigenous history, knowledge and ways of being, the Inclusive Economy Team became better positioned to advocate for the adoption of economic reconciliation approaches within Edmonton's economic development sector.

The Team also met with two strong supporters of economic reconciliation in Edmonton: the Indigenous Professional Association (IPA), and the Alberta New Democratic Party (NDP). The meeting with the IPA board focused on Indigenous workforce collaboration and organizing, while the meeting with the provincial NDP representatives addressed the need to incorporate Indigenous business and social procurement into an inclusive economy. These efforts advanced the Team's relationship-building work in the economic reconciliation space and set the stage for tangible outcomes, such as connecting Indigenous workforce and business owners with opportunities in Edmonton.

Members of the Inclusive Economy and Indigenization Teams also spent time building relationships and engaging with the urban Indigenous community to better understand how to define economic

reconciliation. These staff members met with approximately 15 national and local Indigenous and non-Indigenous organization leaders to learn about economic reconciliation, what economic reconciliation looks like in other parts of Canada, and opportunities for collaboration. From these meetings and networking efforts, the Team identified the economic systems and policies they aimed to change, leading to the next category describing how some of the envisioned changes were tested.

Testing options to change economic systems and policies toward inclusive economic approaches

The Inclusive Economy Team identified economic policies, approaches, and strategies appropriate to the Edmonton context and tested possible options via two experimental construction industry initiatives. The first was an apprenticeship cohort focused on acclimating newcomers to the workforce in a healthy way. The second initiative tested whether liaison support between employers and workforce development agencies could increase the number of agency clients who were hired and retained. Through these initiatives, the Team identified economic systems and policies requiring change and began to consider potential solutions.

Testing an apprenticeship cohort initiative

In one micro-experiment for systems change, the Team tested an apprenticeship cohort initiative with newcomers to Edmonton. The focus was on shifting hiring and training practices within a single business, with associated learnings potentially applied to other businesses and/or the broader industry context. Undertaken with a local construction company and supported by a nonprofit, the initiative helped address both industry-specific labour shortages and barriers to workforce entry by training cohorts of newcomers to Canada. This model also allowed newcomer trainees to feel supported by their peers by sharing experiences and working through challenges together, often in a language other than English. One industry employee commented:

Its moving forward, it's still the first time so you know, we've run into a couple of hiccups here and there that we're navigating. But that was the point of trying it out: what do we run into? So, I would say that [the Inclusive Economy Team] are probably one of the first groups outside of the union to actually be fully engaged in solving the problem.

However, workers participating in this initiative were employed for seven months before being laid off due to industry fluctuations, which was particularly challenging for newcomers who had not yet earned enough to see them through slow periods. Moreover, the Team learned that implementing alternative initiatives to address labour shortages required significant motivation and capacity, since it involved consistent communication and problem-solving between the business and workforce development agency, in addition to coordination support from the Team.

Testing a liaison support initiative

The Team tested another initiative focused on engaging with and learning from the Edmonton newcomer community, which often faces barriers to workforce entry. Working with several local businesses, including one construction company, the Team sought to determine whether liaison support (i.e., acting as the convenor between an employer and a workforce development agency) could fa-

facilitate employment among newcomer clients. This work aimed to address the needs identified both by marginalized worker populations and the Edmonton business community.

There's a lot of stuff that EndPovertyEdmonton points out, you know, different challenges, different things we need to think about that I never would have thought about. I probably would have just been trying to recruit newcomers, and then not knowing why it wasn't working. (Construction company)

Another local business owner collaborated with the Team to explore applying a similar initiative to their business. This engagement, which demonstrates the momentum building around liaison support possibilities, is exemplified below:

EndPovertyEdmonton was working with [this nonprofit] and their ask was, you know, "We'd just like to bring a group of immigrants, I think, refugees and other new immigrants, to your shop, to give them a tour, just you know, so they get an understanding of what's going on. And if nothing else, it's a good experience. And, you know, you guys might find a couple qualified employees that tumble out of the exercise," etc. And I said, "Sure, why not?" And I guess, because of the EndPovertyEdmonton connection, I was pretty open to this from a business standpoint, because we needed employees desperately, and I knew what EPE was trying to accomplish. So, I was pretty supportive of this. I think they originally had, I don't know, eight, nine or 10 signed up to come. We ended up with something like 16 [interested potential employees]. (Local entrepreneur)

The liaison support initiative did not always achieve the intended outcomes: of the 21 resumes submitted by four different workforce development agencies and nonprofits, only two individuals were interviewed, and just one was offered a position. This prompted the business in question and the Inclusive Economy Team to reflect upon the company's internal organization and the allocation of trades and labour. Nevertheless, a positive outcome was that the business remained engaged and interested in connecting with high-potential candidates.

Fostering learning with key players in the social procurement and workforce development space

Lastly, the Inclusive Economy Team attended a wide range of community gatherings and meetings, presenting their work to raise awareness and foster collaboration. These events and presentations supported the ongoing efforts to build an inclusive economy network with key players.

One event exemplified the benefits of this approach. "Buying and Selling Social with Impact" was a workshop organized with a postsecondary institution and other nonprofits with expertise in inclusive economic strategies. Local nonprofits, social enterprises, and business groups attended to learn about social procurement possibilities and feasibility, thereby becoming more connected with other organizations and/or companies interested in social procurement.

In addition, the Team continued engaging with the City of Edmonton as it adopted a Social Purchasing Strategy—part of its efforts to demonstrate commitment to eliminating poverty through an inclusive economy. Working with the Alberta Living Wage Network, the Team met with City staff to gauge interest in supporting a living wage policy. They also collaborated with the City to

identify economic opportunities and develop proposals for major sporting events such as FIFA and World Junior Hockey. Additionally, a construction association sought the Team's assistance in applying for funding and information on social procurement.

The Team also began raising awareness around the need for CEBs. Working with a global construction conglomerate—the company tasked with building an extension to the light rail transit line—the Team advocated for CEB agreements between the company and the City of Edmonton. Promoting CEBs was one part of the process, but the Team soon discovered the critical need for accountability on CEB implementation. In essence, CEBs could be written into proposals, but there was no follow-up to ensure they were being honoured and implemented. As a result, the Team advocated for measures such as improved evaluation and enforcement around CEB projects. The CEB initiative with the construction conglomerate provided timely and critical insights into CEBs and the urgent need for accountability mechanisms.

It is worth noting that the Inclusive Economy Team consistently fostered learning among key players both within and outside of Edmonton. This was possible because the Team engaged in strategic learning about their own efforts, ensuring that all decisions were evidence informed.

DISCUSSION

Inclusive economy strategies represent innovative approaches that require individuals, organizations, businesses, and governments to shift both their focus and their standard practices. To clarify the role of the Inclusive Economy Team in the strategies presented here, we have drawn on social innovation literature. Westley (2008, para. 1) defines social innovation as “an initiative, product or process or program that profoundly changes the basic routines, resource and authority flows or beliefs of any social system.” Similarly, Mulgan (2007) describes social innovation as “innovative activities and services that are motivated by the goal of meeting a social need and that are predominantly developed and diffused through organisations whose primary purposes are social” (p. 8).

Aligning with Mulgan's definition of social innovation, the primary aim of the Inclusive Economy Team was to meet a social need; in this, their activities were motivated by the desire to address the root causes of poverty and build an inclusive economy. For social innovation to occur, the engagement and collective action of stakeholders from various societal sectors is imperative, emphasizing the importance of systems thinking in addressing poverty root causes (Mair, Wolf, & Seelos, 2022). Social innovation also has a cultural focus and aims to offer community payoffs while addressing social needs (Phillips, Lee, Ghobadian, O'Regan, & James, 2015).

The inclusive economy strategies facilitated by the Team relied on collective efforts, demonstrating that actors needed to work together dynamically to achieve social objectives and outcomes (Phillips et al., 2015). For example, the strategy of “Keeping a Pulse” was vital, not only because it fostered collective efforts, but also because it removed known barriers to social innovation, such as the inability of stakeholders to connect to meaningful networks (Lettice & Parek, 2010). In the context of systems change, the involvement of actors from diverse backgrounds with differing areas of expertise and levels of influence (e.g., local versus national) is crucial (Foster-Fisherman, Nowell, & Yang, 2007). This diversity was evident among the actors in the Edmonton economic space and the inclusive economy strategies supported by the Team.

Key actors can indeed serve as facilitators of social innovation (Lettice & Parek, 2010). The Team played this role in every inclusive economy strategy outlined here, whose sustainability will require consistent cross-sectoral partnerships and communication (Phills, Deiglmeier, & Miller, 2008). For example, the work to define economic reconciliation was aimed at facilitating communication—a critical first step for those seeking a just approach for Indigenous-owned businesses and the Indigenous workforce. Developing a definition for economic reconciliation also tapped into systems change, as the values it expressed were intended to guide future inclusive economy strategies (Mühlenbein, 2018). Communication and collaborative problem-solving are central to what Phills et al. (2008) define as social innovation and entrepreneurship.

The strategies described as “advocating for the adoption and implementation of inclusive economic approaches” and “the timing of policy ‘asks’” reflected the understanding that social innovation to change systems and create an inclusive economy could also be driven by politics and government (Mulgan, 2007). Public administrators have a role to play in developing and disseminating solutions to societal problems such as poverty; nonetheless, their engagement and ongoing support can be elusive (Mair et al., 2022). This was one of the reasons for the Team’s continued efforts to tap into policies (e.g., related to purchasing and procurement) that could advance systems toward a more inclusive economy.

To be effective, the Inclusive Economy Team had to stay abreast of developments and use their knowledge to “identify leverage points that will cultivate second-order change” (Foster-Fisherman, Nowell, Yang, 2007, p. 201). With regard to enabling social innovation through policy, Cahill & Spitz (2017) emphasize that governments have their own priorities and demands at all times. Recognizing these priorities is crucial to being heard by policymakers and ensuring that social innovation issues become government issues.

Another factor enabling social innovation is a cross-sector composition committed to developing an ecosystem of essential conditions for social innovation and systems transformation (Cahill & Spitz, 2017). Embedded within EPE, the Inclusive Economy Team facilitated such cross-sector compositions and played a “convenor” role in the strategies described in this article. Such a role is multifaceted, much like the interpretations of social innovation itself (Turpin & Shier, 2024). As a civil society organization without direct programming, EPE fits into the category of “convenor” in multiple ways. Van Hille et al. (2020) describe convenors as organizations that “convene, or bring together, heterogeneous actors” (p. 2) and can also be referred to as “‘brokers’ or ‘broker organizations,’ ‘bridging agents,’ ‘intervenor,’ or ‘orchestrators’” (p. 2). Convenors can facilitate a complex set of stakeholders with varying interests while pursuing their own objectives and agendas (van Hille, de Bakker, Groenewegen, & Ferguson, 2020). This was the case for EPE and the Team, established in response to community needs and placing both equity-based outcomes and social innovation such as inclusive economy strategies at the forefront of their work.

CONCLUSION

The Inclusive Economy Team was central to the design and implementation of the inclusive economy strategies outlined in this article. Their role as convenors with a strong social mandate created opportunities for social innovation in Edmonton. Key aspects of their work as convenors remain to

be fully captured and understood, including specific factors that enabled them to operate effectively in a complex environment where stakeholders with diverse interests come together to discuss and implement inclusive economy strategies. Further research could clarify these factors and offer insights into how similar initiatives could be sustained and scaled in the future.

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