

# Community Impact Lab Update: Community Belonging

March 2024

Through the **Community Belonging Community Impact Lab\***, the YMCA of Simcoe/Muskoka and Georgian College are collaborating to explore how local organizations can innovate together to create a greater sense of belonging in the community.

***Outcomes** of the Community Impact Lab focus on community engagement, supporting sustainable community innovation, and evolving community services to enable well-being and belonging that represent the future local landscape.*

### **Objectives:**

- Build a culture of decolonized innovation
- Business Model Innovations
- Diverse community partnerships
- Belonging and relevance
- Experiential learning opportunities

### **Lab Background**

The vision for the work being done in this lab is to develop a Community Innovation Network (CIN), stewarded by a Community Innovation Council. Community Innovation Networks are promising approaches to build community-led innovation capacity by unlocking and reorganizing community assets and resources in new and insightful ways. They are bottom-up change agent models stacked together, and supported by a networked infrastructure of Living Labs that enable a rural community's capacity to build data-driven health, well-being, and economic innovations. Using the strength of the network, community can develop solutions to issues that disproportionately affect equity-deserving groups (e.g. healthcare, affordable housing, food security), which are then catalyzed by system intermediaries whose extensive social and built capital, can foster the adoption and scaling of these approaches at the municipal level, or other channels. Municipal partners can then propose changes to policy or invest in social programs with the support of Municipal Councils. Through this chain of impact, enabled by the Community Innovation Network, positive change is scaled for all parties.



**\*Community Impact Labs** allow diverse community actors to tackle complex socio-economic challenges through community-based participatory research to co-design, test, and launch future-ready equity-first or justice-first based solutions

## Exploring and Mapping Community Capitals

The Community Capitals Framework (CCF) is a tool used for understanding and analyzing the functioning and development of communities. It's based on the idea that communities have eight types of capital that can be nurtured and invested in for sustainable and equitable development. The eight types of community capitals are natural, cultural, human, social, political, built, digital, and financial (see Figure 1). The capitals are all interconnected, and each capital can have a positive or negative impact on other capitals.

The CCF can help reveal the interconnections, local resources, and opportunities for improvement in our local communities (Jacobs, 2007). Each type or category of actor is associated with a particular community capital. For instance, bio-regional actors are associated with natural capital, whereas citizen and community groups are associated with social capital.

By identifying the actors and, in turn capitals, in our community, we can begin discovering our strengths, weaknesses and potential collaborations to address these gaps. Through community networks such as uncommon innovation clusters, we can create partnerships to enhance and leverage our existing community capitals.



Figure 1 Community Capitals Framework (CCF)

Maximizing our community capitals increases the probability of implementing successful interventions, such as supporting greater community belonging. Community capitals are resources that can be invested, saved, or exercised (Jacobs, 2007). A sense of belonging is one aspect of social capital. Therefore, we can utilize and invest our social and other capitals to build even greater capacities of belonging. Moreover, developing a greater understanding of the power structures in our community is a significant step towards creating lasting change and ensuring equitable representation. Given its value in revealing the interconnections, local resources, and opportunities for improvements in communities, the CCF provides a foundational framework for the Community Belonging Community Impact Lab.

## Community Engagement – Testing New Tools and Approaches

The first of a series of community workshops for the Community Belonging Lab was held on December 8, 2023, at the Sandbox in Barrie. The focus of this workshop was to a) test how effectively participants could work with visual thinking tools to explore new relationships for innovation; and, b) gather a baseline of our regional Community Capitals related to community health, wellbeing, and belonging. The goal of this inaugural workshop was also to lay the foundation for a community engagement toolkit and the training that will support the foundational community-based research to achieve the outcomes and vision of this Lab.

Participants worked in seven groups on canvases mapping community actors on the circular portion of the canvas along a vertical axis of **influence** from governance and policy design to funding and finance, and a horizontal axis of perceived **knowledge** approach, as in tendency to develop and hold knowledge or apply and use it (see Figure 2). Each canvas group also grouped community actors within two additional dimensions: **actor type**, with six actor categories (community group, non-profit, public, private, grassroots movement, and social purpose) denoted using color-coded stickies; and, **regional levels** (starting from citizen and community group and up to bio-regional) indicated by positionality within the five rings on the canvas.

The second part of the exercise was to identify Uncommon Innovation Clusters by selecting an actor from each quadrant of the circular map, while also selecting actors from a range of actor type categories, to create actor groups who may not have historically worked together.

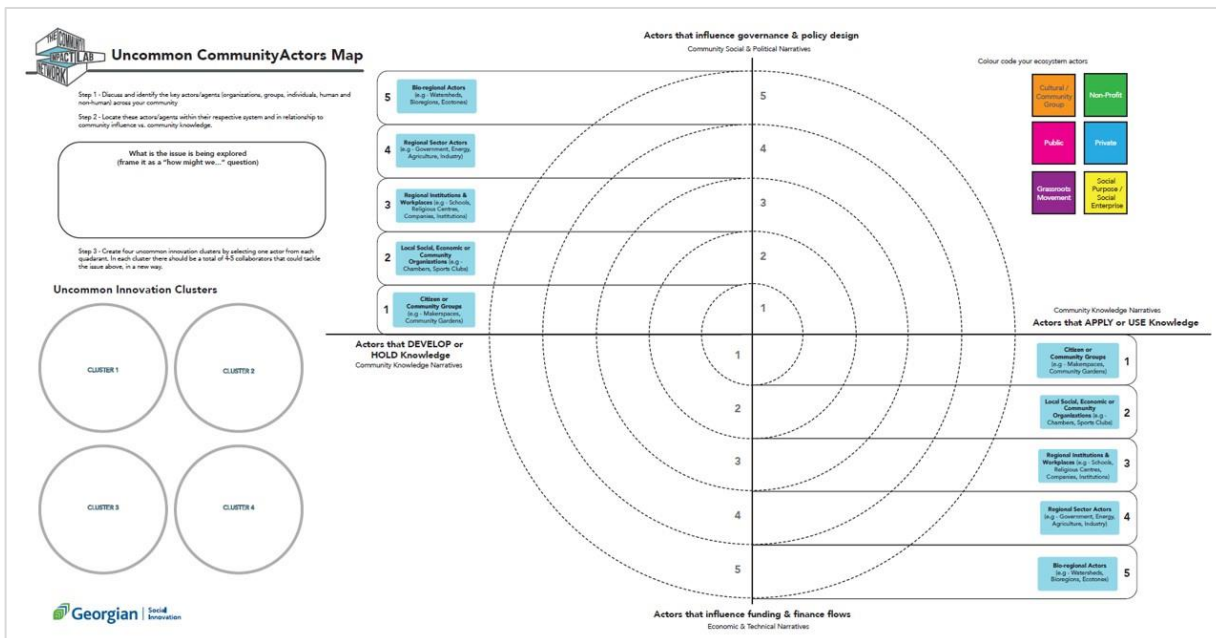


Figure 2 Uncommon Community Actors Map Canvas

Despite the complexity of this group exercise, the seven teams excelled in building canvases that provided a prolific array of local actors spanning the gamut of categories and regional levels. Of the seven teams, five chose to explore the topic of health and wellness, one group chose childcare, and one group chose immigration. Hence the combined overall actor data may skew towards a health and wellness influence. Including both parts of the canvases (the circular community map actors and the uncommon clusters actor compositions), the groups compiled over 500 hundred actor stickies or elements. Even after eliminating duplicates, the teams generated hundreds of unique actors categorized and plotted according to their influence and regional level. This wealth of data provides some insights into forming innovation networks and collaborations based on combining diverse strengths and varying levels of reach and purpose.

### Regional Level Analysis

Looking at the combined actor data, there seems to be a nearly even distribution among the various regional levels, aside from the bio-regional actors (e.g. watersheds, bioregions etc.), of which were only 5% (Figure 3). Examples of bioregional actors include Bruce Trail and Lake Simcoe. Considering the bio-regional actors was a stimulating challenge for many of the teams. Based on the data, despite their outsized area of influence and impact, we can sometimes insufficiently account for the power of Earth’s natural capitals and actors. Exploring more proactively the inclusion of nature-based actors in future innovation networks could be an avenue for wider reach and impact by leveraging the natural richness of our communities.

The leading popularity of local social, economic and community organizations on the collective canvases demonstrates that participants are attuned to the strength and broad array of the community’s social capital. Likewise, the prevalence of regional institutions and regional sector actors points to a keen awareness of built, political, human, and financial capital in the region.

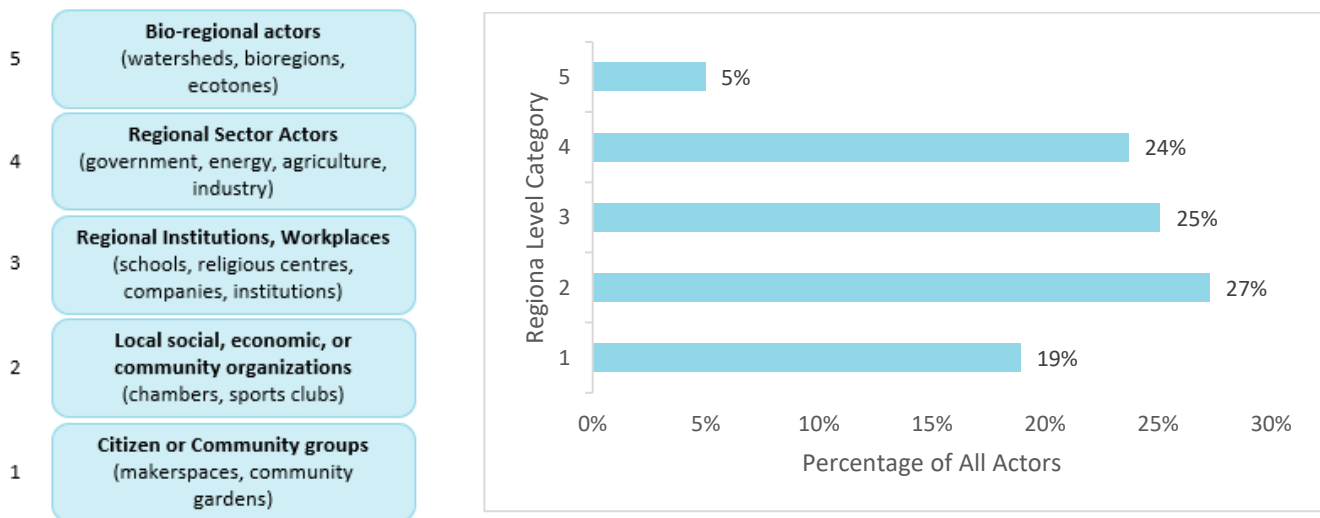


Figure 3 Frequency of Actors by Region

## Building Effective Partnerships

In total, 519 actors were named across all seven canvases (Figure 4). Public actors and nonprofit actors were the two most popular types across the set of all actors from the seven maps, each accounting for approximately a third of the total, while the combination of private actors and cultural/community groups comprised roughly a quarter of the total. Social purpose/enterprises and grassroots movements comprised only about one-tenth of the total actors. Hence, identifying and involving more socially conscious and grassroots movement-based actors in community belonging networks could be a means to achieve more substantial social traction, organic growth, and alignment with evolving public opinion. The social purpose and grassroots movements are key sources of political, human, and social capital that should not be overlooked when developing community interventions and improvements.

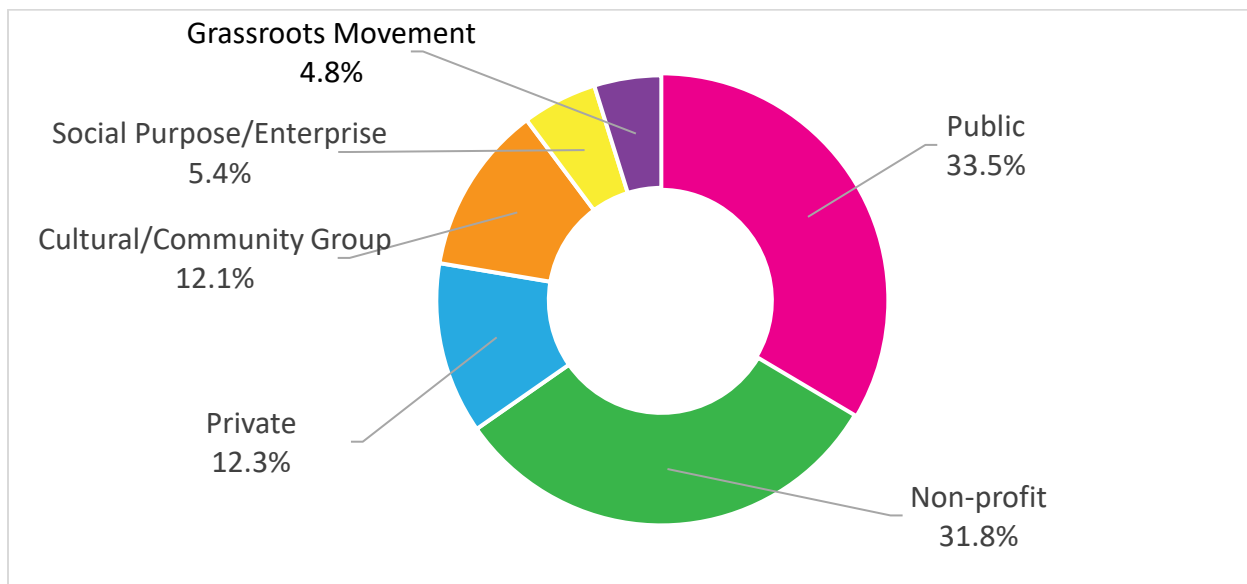


Figure 4 Frequency of Actors by Type

## Innovation Cluster Composition

The next step was for each of the teams to create clusters of 4-5 actors that could work together to explore these issues, creating clusters of actors who may not have traditionally collaborated (i.e., uncommon actor groups) and representing actors that spanned all four quadrants of the knowledge/influence grid. The idea is that this diverse group collectively possesses more knowledge and influence than the sum of their parts (Jacobs, 2007). A total of twenty-four clusters were created. Figure 5 below is an example of one of the uncommon innovation clusters. Within this cluster provincial parks and trails, primary health care teams, the Busby Center, local sports clubs, and YMCA Simcoe Muskoka have created a collaborative network to provide new solutions for health and wellness concerns. This example leverages and combines multiple types of actors and resources such as natural, human, social, and cultural capitals to strengthen the impact of the collaboration and benefit the wider community.

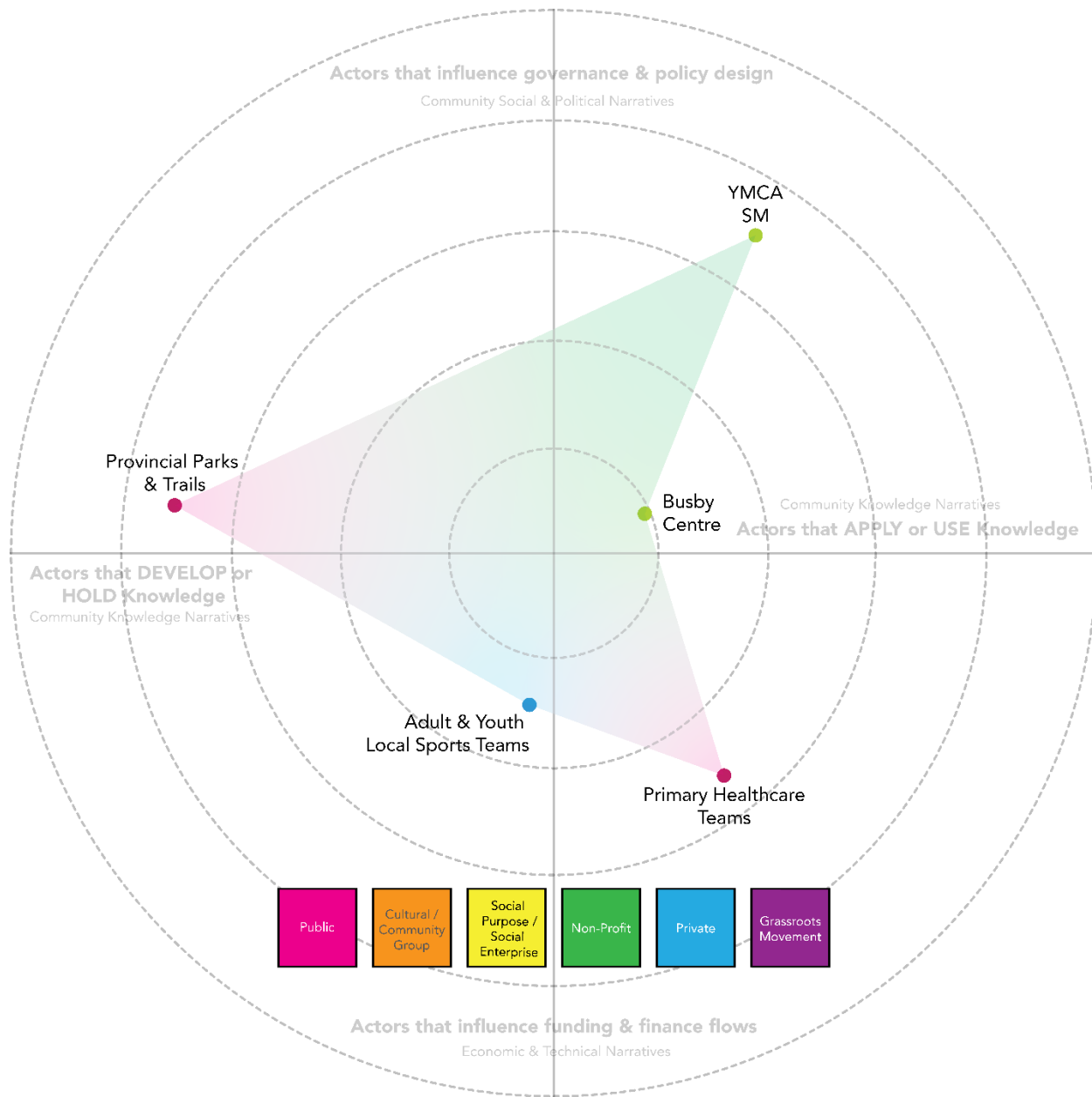


Figure 5 Innovation Cluster

Examining the breakdown of all the uncommon innovation clusters shows private actors gaining a growth of mindshare, going from 12% of the overall total to 20% of the innovation cluster total (Figure 6). While community groups, social enterprises and grassroots movements experience minor growth in these innovation groupings, they still combine for less than third of the cluster totals. Therefore, it remains worthwhile to further explore how these overlooked social entities can be more broadly integrated in innovation networks that address local community issues.

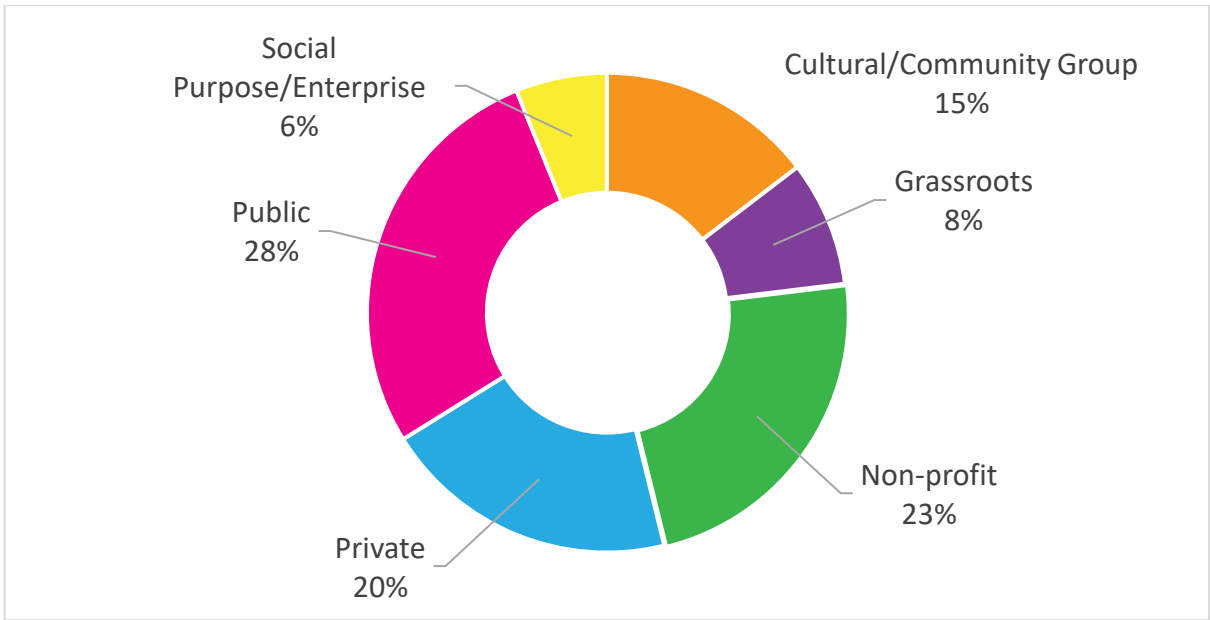


Figure 6 Uncommon Innovation Clusters Actors Composition

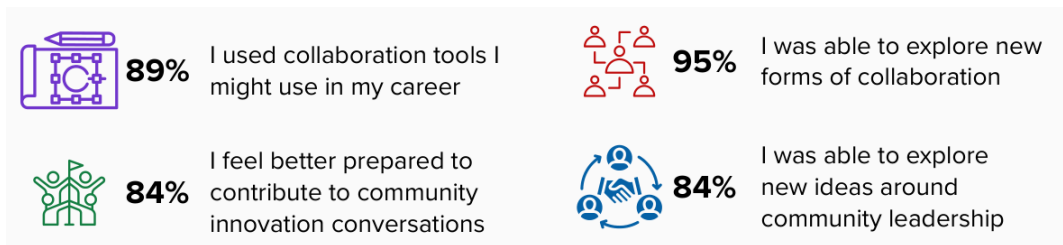
### Uncovering the unconscious biases

While the depth of information gathered in this first workshop is valuable in determining the community capitals and opportunities for innovation, by nature, it is also inherently biased on the knowledge and experiences of the participants in attendance. Therefore, it is important to invite contribution from a diverse set of participants in future workshops, particularly traditionally marginalized population groups, to ensure an accurate reflection of the community.

### Workshop Feedback

A workshop feedback form was distributed digitally to the forty workshop participants the day following the workshop. A total of nineteen responses were received for a response rate of approximately 50%. The workshop feedback was very positive, with 94% of feedback respondents indicating they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the workshop.

When asked about the collaboration tools and methods, and how prepared they felt after the workshop to support community innovation conversations and new ideas around community leadership, the nineteen respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the following statements:



## Conclusion

The community belonging workshop demonstrated the value of the Community Capitals Framework in understanding and leveraging diverse community resources. By mapping out various actors and their connections to different types of capital, participants gained insights into potential collaborations and innovation networks. The exercise highlighted the importance of including a wide range of actors, especially those connected to natural capitals and grassroots movements, to address community issues more effectively. The findings suggest a need for greater inclusion of underrepresented groups and a focus on leveraging all types of community capitals for holistic and sustainable community development.

The December 8, 2023 workshop was the beginning of a series of workshops and analysis to map actors to the regional community capitals, and develop a better understanding of stocks and flows. The information gathered through future workshops will help lay the foundation for system change to support community innovation across our region.

## What's Next

- Ongoing workshops focused on equity-deserving participants, including youth, LGBTQ+, newcomers and international students, and Indigenous and black members of our communities.
- Ongoing analysis mapping the community capitals to system actors and mapping the local network to identify community strengths and opportunities.

**To stay up to date on what is happening with the Community Belonging Community Impact Lab, visit [futureofbelonging.ca](https://futureofbelonging.ca)!**

## References

Jacobs, C. 2007. Measuring success in communities: Understanding the community capitals framework. Extension Extra. SDSU (South Dakota State University Cooperative Extension Service)(Series 1-6).

Moore, W. P., Klem, A. M., Holmes, C. L., Holley, J., & Houchen, C. 2016. Community Innovation Network Framework: A Model for Reshaping Community Identity. *The Foundation Review*, 8(3).  
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