



Community Impact Lab Update:

May 2024

Community Belonging for Newcomers & International Students

Through the **Community Belonging Community Impact Lab***, the YMCA of Simcoe/Muskoka and Georgian College are collaborating to explore how local organizations can innovate collectively 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 this lab's work is to develop a Community Innovation Network (CIN) stewarded by a Community Innovation Council. Community Innovation Networks are promising approaches to building 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, the 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 Actors and their Capitals

The Community Capitals Framework (CCF) is a strategic tool used to analyze and enhance community development through eight types of capital: natural, cultural, human, social, political, built, digital, and financial. These capitals are interconnected, influencing each other either positively or negatively. The CCF emphasizes the identification of local actors associated with these capitals, which helps uncover community strengths, limitations, and potential for collaborative development. By leveraging these capitals through innovative community networks, communities can foster sustainable development and enhance a sense of belonging.



Figure 1 Community Capitals Framework (CCF)

This framework relates closely to the Community Belonging Community Impact Lab by providing a structured approach to understanding and mobilizing local resources and capitals for community-led innovation. The lab aims to use these insights to address issues important to equity-deserving groups and to support broader community engagement. By applying the CCF, the lab can effectively map out and enhance the community's assets and capabilities, leading to more meaningful interactions and integration efforts, such as engaging newcomers and international students. These efforts can help cultivate a more inclusive and supportive community environment, enhancing community members' sense of belonging and participation.

Second Community Conversation – Newcomers & International Students

The Community Impact Lab facilitated the second in a series of community conversations on belonging at the Georgian College's Barrie campus on April 3, 2024. This engagement was specific to newcomers and international students and was one of the feature events of the RISE (Research, Innovation, Scholarship and Entrepreneurship) Symposium at Georgian College. At RISE, Georgian College and the YMCA of Simcoe/Muskoka officially announced their collaboration to reshape community engagement and innovation by co-creating a Community Innovation Network.

The first workshop on December 8, 2023, explored well-being/belonging partnerships and networks from the lens of industry professionals and general community participants. The insights and report from that first conversation are available at futureofbelonging.ca. In contrast, this second conversation was much more targeted, provided explicitly for the equity-deserving demographic of newcomers and those with lived experience of immigration and studying internationally. Guided by these unique perspectives, the objective of this event was to continue mapping community actors and gathering data regarding regional capitals related to community health, well-being, and belonging. Participants identified and categorized actors and their capitals during the session using a collaborative mapping tool and canvas.

Workshop attendees worked in four teams, discussing and mapping community actors on the circular portion of the canvas (see Figure 2). Actors were placed 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 the tendency to develop and hold knowledge or apply and use it). Each team 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 colour-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 for groups to identify Uncommon Innovation Clusters (actor groups who may not have historically worked together). Ideally, each cluster would include an actor from each quadrant of the circular map and a range of actor-type categories.

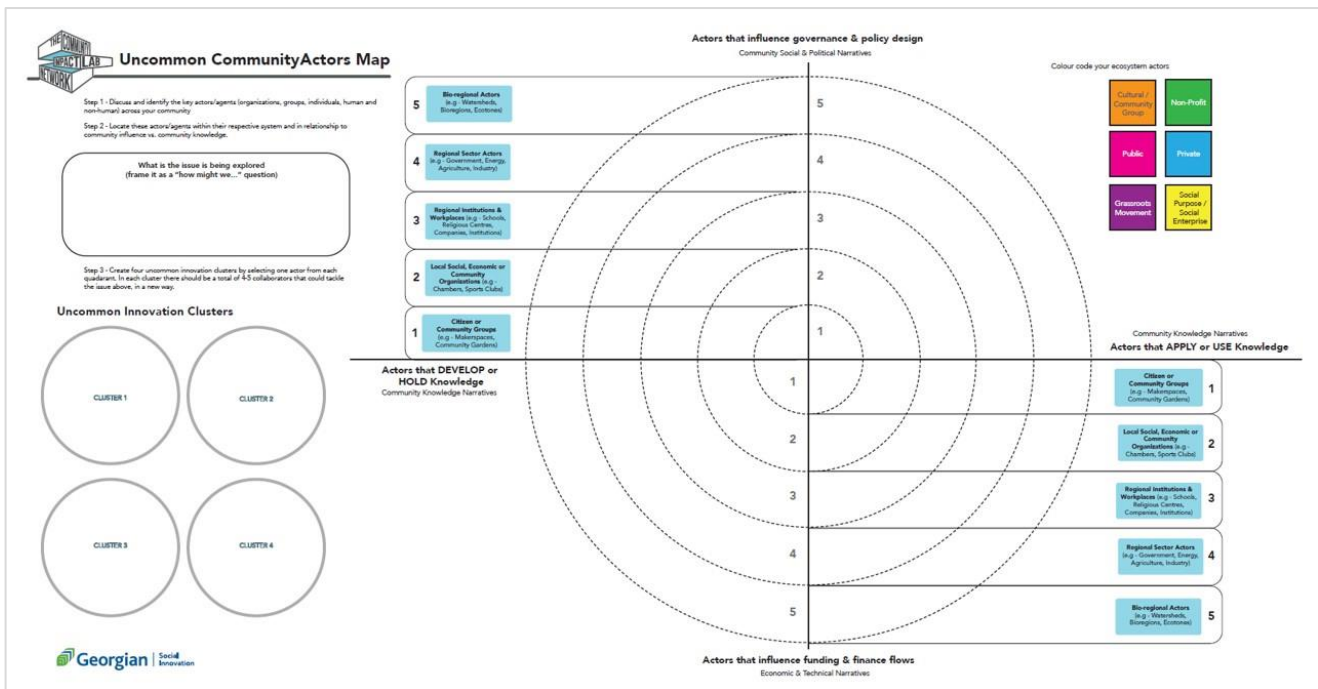


Figure 2 Uncommon Community Actors Map Canvas

Each of the four teams provided an array of local actors spanning categories and regional levels. Of the four teams, two chose to explore the topic of immigration, one group chose health and wellness, and one chose skilled labour and market services. Even with the two groups choosing issues other than immigration, the topic of immigration influenced all the actors highlighted. Hence, the combined overall actor data skews more towards immigration actors, as intended. Including both parts of the canvases (the circular community map actors and the uncommon clusters actor compositions), the groups compiled over 250 actor stickies or elements. Even after eliminating duplicates, the teams generated over a hundred unique actors categorized and plotted according to what they thought their influence and regional level is.

This wealth of data provides insights into forming innovation networks and collaborations based on combining diverse strengths and varying levels of reach and purpose. Compared to the first workshop, fewer actors were plotted on the canvases. This outcome is unsurprising because, compared to the first session, there were fewer teams, and they had less time to use the tool. However, some participants did express that, as newcomers to Canada, they are not always familiar with many organizations that work in the community and provide relevant services for them. These lived experience insights are why engaging in community conversations and examining belonging and well-being from equity-deserving perspectives is critical.

Regional Level Analysis

The combined actor data shows a close distribution among the three middle regional levels, with regional institutions and workplaces as the most heavily cited actors (see Figure 3). Continuing the trend from the first workshop, bio-regional actors remain one of the lowest populated levels and more challenging regions to account for and consider. The limited representation of nature suggests newcomers have similar or even more significant challenges in identifying natural or biological actors compared to the first workshop. Including nature-based actors in future innovation networks and solutions that support belonging and well-being, particularly for newcomers, could help community members access and reconnect with natural community capitals.

The regional level data also shows community/citizen groups are surprisingly low at 5.7% of the total. However, this may be misleading as the categorical data shows cultural/community groups (yellow label/sticky) at a healthy 21% (see Figure 4). This discrepancy may be due to teams' difficulty placing the actors in appropriate regional areas. 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 indicates a keen awareness of the region's built, political, human, and financial capital.

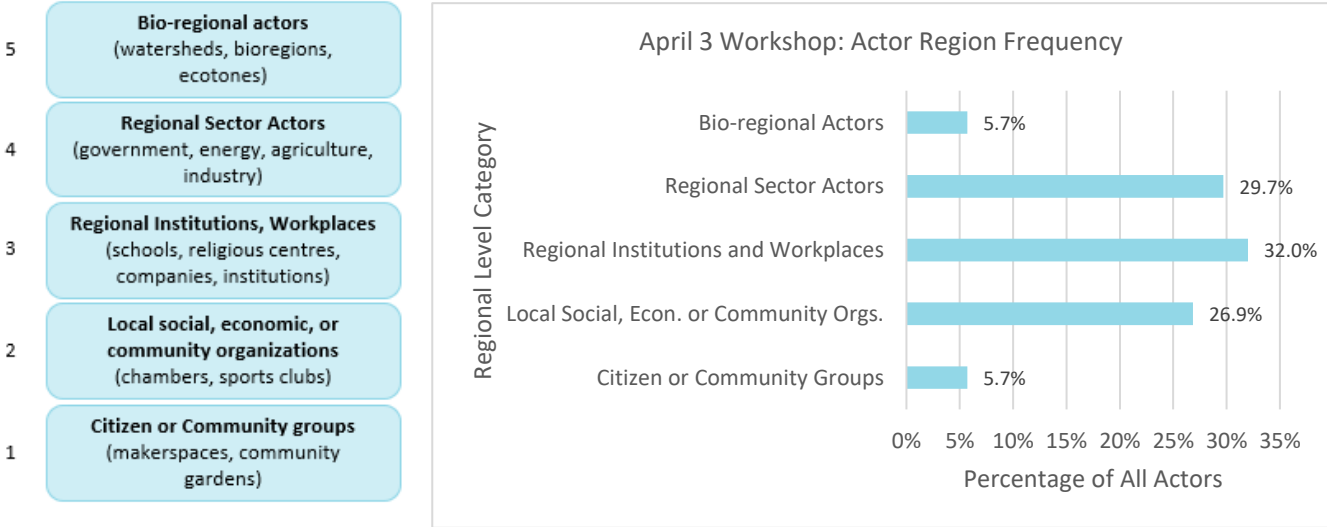
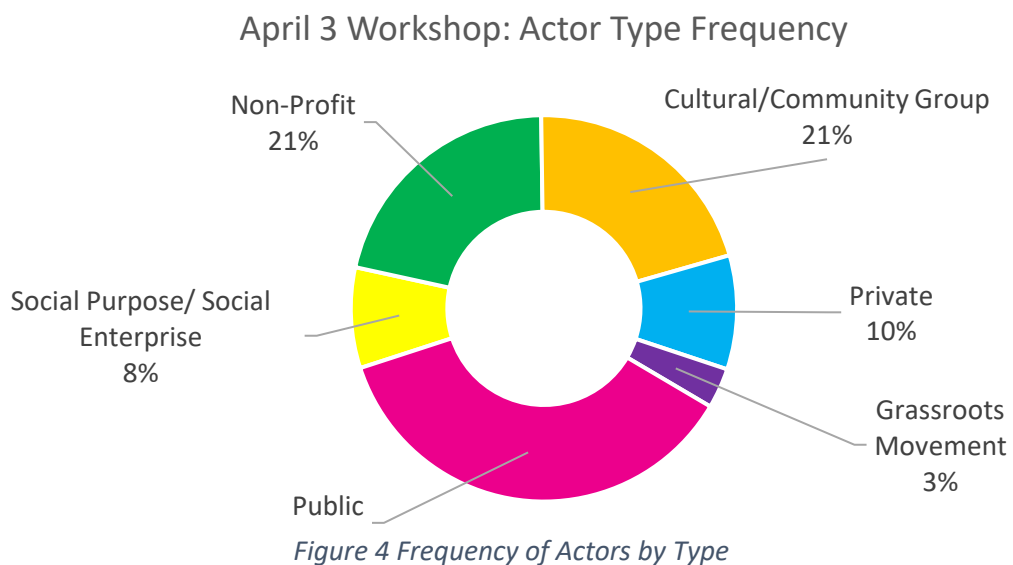


Figure 3 Frequency of Actors by Region

Composition of Community Actors

In total, all four teams' canvases together identified 253 actors. Public actors are the most popular type of actor (over one-third of the total), which follows the same trend from the first workshop. Non-profit actors and cultural/community groups tied for the second most popular actor category with one-fifth of the total (see Figure 4). Non-profit actors, one of the top categories, track similarly to the first workshop. In contrast to the first engagement, cultural/community groups were well represented in this session, while private actors were only one-tenth of the total. The data suggests that newcomers may have stronger ties and greater familiarity with local community groups (cultural associations, places of worship, etc.) than commercial private actors. Newcomers' unfamiliarity with the wide variety of private actors and the services they offer may contribute to this more substantial connection to community groups. Social purpose/enterprises and grassroots movements comprised roughly one-tenth of the total actors, which mirrors the findings from the previous workshop.

Involving socially conscious groups and grassroots movements in community networks is vital as they can significantly enhance newcomers' sense of belonging and well-being. These social enterprises and movements deeply understand local social dynamics and are adept at mobilizing resources and support in culturally responsive and inclusive ways. Transitioning into a new community can be challenging for immigrants due to cultural differences, language barriers, and social isolation. Grassroots movements are typically rooted in the community. They can offer personalized support, advocate for the needs of these groups, and provide a platform where their voices can be heard and valued. This inclusive approach helps build a supportive environment that promotes well-being by ensuring newcomers feel welcomed, valued, and connected to the community.



Innovation Cluster Compositions

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). The four teams created fifteen uncommon innovation clusters in total. See Figure 5 below for an example of one of the uncommon innovation clusters. Within this cluster, the Canadian Mental Health Association, translation/interpretation services, hospitals, municipalities, and the County of Simcoe have created a collaborative network to provide new solutions for health and wellness and immigration concerns. This example leverages and combines multiple types of actors and resources, such as human, social, political, and cultural capitals to strengthen the impact of collaboration and benefit the wider community.



Figure 5 Uncommon Innovation Cluster for Health & Wellness + Immigration

Examining the breakdown of all the uncommon innovation clusters shows public actors continuing to dominate, going from 37% of the overall total to 44% of the innovation cluster total (see Figure 6). Meanwhile, non-profits show a slight decline of 5%. The percentage of cultural/community groups in the innovation clusters was almost halved compared to the overall total. We may attribute this reduction to reclassifying certain actors from cultural/community groups as social enterprises and grassroots movements. Both these categories saw jumps of 5% in the innovation cluster composition. The prevalence of private actors recedes in the innovation clusters, once again confirming they are not salient in the newcomer perspective and experience for well-being, belonging and innovation. A lack of private actors starkly contrasts with the first workshop, which was more industry-based and had a strong representation of private actors in their innovation clusters. It may be worthwhile to investigate further and identify the cultural, community, and local factors contributing to this discrepancy in private actor relevancy between sector insiders and newcomer demographics.

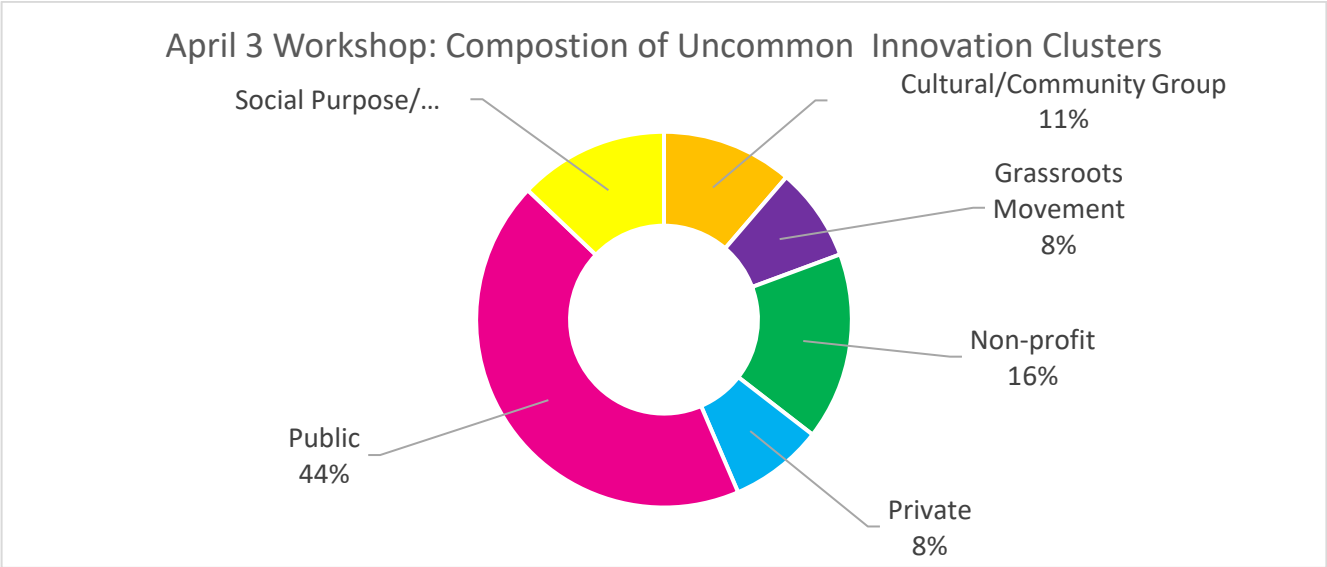


Figure 6 Uncommon Innovation Clusters Actors Composition

Enhancing Inclusivity and Representation through Diverse Participation

Building upon the insights gleaned from the first community belonging conversation, which underscored the necessity of a diverse participant pool in mitigating bias, this engagement welcomed newcomers and international students. New Canadians' varied experiences, perspectives, and cultures enrich the innovation clusters and network diversity of localized approaches to support community belonging and well-being. Future workshops must actively solicit input from diverse participants, such as historically marginalized groups, to deepen inclusivity and diminish bias. This approach ensures a more faithful representation of the community's diversity.

Themes from Participant Feedback

The lab used multiple feedback channels to gather comments and impressions from workshop attendees. Some of the recurring themes from the participant feedback include that they are seeking opportunities to network and build connections within the community. Another theme was newcomers seeking improved access and information regarding various services available. Participants also shared that they desire more culturally sensitive and inclusive healthcare services.

Conclusion

In summary, the Community Conversation hosted by the Community Belonging Community Impact Lab at Georgian College successfully engaged newcomers and international students in mapping the diverse actors within the Simcoe/Muskoka region. This workshop highlighted the effective use of the Community Capitals Framework to identify and leverage local resources for community-led innovation. Four teams identified over 250 actors using a community-based participatory method, enriching our understanding of the regional community capitals and their interconnections. The data gathered offers valuable insights into the potential for forming innovation networks that harness diverse strengths across various levels of influence and knowledge. Moreover, the creation of uncommon innovation clusters suggests a forward path toward more integrated and inclusive community engagement strategies. These efforts are essential in building a supportive environment that enhances newcomers' sense of belonging and participation, ultimately contributing to the broader goal of fostering sustainable community development in the Simcoe/Muskoka region. The localized and community-driven insights gathered from past and future participatory engagements will help lay the foundation for supporting systemic change and more significant community-based innovation.

What's Next

- Ongoing workshops focused on equity-deserving participants, including youth, LGBTQ+, 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.
- Informational Sessions

As part of this initiative, Georgian College and the YMCA of Simcoe/Muskoka will be hosting two informational sessions to explore the vision for a Community Innovation Council and outline how interested organizations and individuals can get involved:

Date: Wednesday, May 22, 2024

Time: 1:00 pm - 2:30 pm

Location: Sandbox Centre, 24 Maple Ave, 2nd Floor, Barrie ON, L4M 7W4

Register for either in-person or virtual attendance here - <https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/info-session-the-community-innovation-network-tickets-897772109547>

Date: Tuesday, May 28, 2024

Time: 9:30 am - 11:00 am

Location: Sandbox Centre, 24 Maple Ave, 2nd Floor, Barrie ON, L4M 7W4

Register for in-person only attendance here - <https://www.eventbrite.ca/e/info-session-community-innovation-network-tickets-897772911947>

To stay up to date on what is happening with the Community Belonging Community Impact Lab, visit 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).

