



From the Ground Up: Case Studies on Inclusive Innovation in Alberta

A Case Study Series by Innovate Calgary

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About this Series

Innovation in Alberta is not confined to labs or venture-backed startups. It's also growing in community hubs, kitchens, clinics, and boardrooms across the province. This case study series shows what happens when social enterprises and nonprofits take the lead: scaling ideas that serve people, strengthen communities, and build long-term resilience. The series was developed by Innovate Calgary, in partnership with On the Hill, and funded by the Government of Alberta.

The collection brings together eight real-world case studies from participants in Innovate Calgary's *Business Model Enhancement Program (BMEP)*. Designed to support changemakers navigating complexity, BMEP provides tailored guidance on revenue generation, governance, commercialization, and inclusive growth.

Each case can be read on its own, but together, they offer a broader view of Alberta's evolving innovation economy; one where purpose and profit, inclusion and impact go hand in hand.

This series is designed for founders, researchers, funders, policy leaders, and ecosystem builders. It offers a window into what's working, and where support, capital, and collaboration are still needed. We hope these stories serve as permission, inspiration, and practical insight. As one founder put it:

“This wasn't just strategy, it was permission to reimagine sustainability.”

— Executive Director, nonprofit in family support sector



The examples in this series span a wide range of pathways, from social entrepreneurship and land-based ventures to IP stewardship and scale-stage commercialization. Taken together, they reveal an innovation economy in Alberta that elevates talent, lived experience, and local knowledge as core drivers of impact.

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Within that landscape, several themes come into sharper focus:

- **Revenue as Resilience** – *Over 62% of Canadian nonprofits now rely on earned income strategies, diversifying from traditional grants and donations.*

- **Transformative Leadership & Governance** – While only 21% of nonprofit leaders identify as racially diverse, Alberta organizations are creating new governance models rooted in lived experience and shared leadership.

- **Blended Finance in Action** – Canada's blended finance market is growing rapidly, catalyzed by initiatives from Community Foundations, Family Offices and the Government of Canada's Social Finance Fund, which aims to unlock \$755 million in mission-aligned capital.

- **Social Procurement Pathways** – Alberta cities are piloting inclusive procurement models, helping organizations secure contracts that align with their values.

- **Digital Infrastructure for Social Impact** – *Despite 60% of nonprofits increasing their digital reach, less than half have a defined digital strategy, highlighting a key area for capacity building.*

- **Navigating IP in Community Contexts** – 80% of purpose-led organizations lack formal IP strategies, limiting how they protect and scale innovation.

- **Policy and Revenue Alignment** – Organizations are increasingly called to navigate policy landscapes (like CRA regulations) that were not built with social enterprise in mind.

- **Centering Equity** – Research shows that investing in community-led solutions generates 2–3x the social and economic value per dollar when focused on equity-deserving populations.

The stories in this series reflect a systems shift underway, not just incremental improvement.

Beyond individual successes, they point to a sector moving from scarcity to strategy, from charity to enterprise, from isolated effort to ecosystem action.

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Land Acknowledgement

This work was created in Calgary, Alberta, situated on the traditional territories of the people of the Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta. This includes the Blackfoot Confederacy (comprised of the Siksika, the Piikani, and the Kainai First Nations), the Tsuut'ina First Nation, and the Stoney Nakoda (including Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Goodstoney First Nations). The city of Calgary is also home to the Métis Nation within Alberta (including Nose Hill Métis District 5 and Elbow Métis District 6).

We acknowledge the enduring presence of Indigenous Peoples on these lands and the role of innovation, equity, and enterprise in supporting Truth and Reconciliation.



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Explore the Series

Below are quick links to each case study:

1. Leadership: Transitioning from grant-funded to national social enterprise	LINK
2. Regulation: Understanding Revenue Generation	LINK
3. Blended Finance: Scaling With Intention Combines Funding Sources To Grow	LINK
4. Shifting Minds And Processes: Aligning Leadership And Governance To Enable Enterprise Growth	LINK
5. Financial First: Revenue As Resilience For Non-Profits Monetizing Skills Training And New Revenue Models	LINK
6. Understanding IP: Navigating IP Ownership In Social Enterprise Partnerships	LINK
7. Purchasing Pathways: How Social Procurement Supports Mission-Aligned Growth	LINK
8. Integrating Technology: Moving From Short-Term Tech Adoption To Long-Term Digital Strategy	LINK

Have a story to share or a lesson learned? We want to hear from you.

Email us at info@innovatecalgary.com

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