

# National Call for Concepts for Social Finance



CFC

**Published On:** 31 October 2014

**Organisation:** Employment and Social Development Canada

**Country:** Canada

**Level of government:** Central government

**Sector:** Social protection

**Type:** Digital, Financial Resources, Methods

**Launched in:** 2012

**Overall development time:** 6 months

**Link to the innovation's website**

**Like this innovation**

0 persons like this innovation

# Description

---

The National Call for Concepts for Social Finance (CFC) was an open, web-based, public policy engagement process. It used crowd sourcing to empower organisations and individual Canadians to bring forward ideas about how to harness the power of social finance to improve social and economic outcomes for Canadians. Social finance has enormous potential for unlocking new sources of capital while creating a broader shift in the way that governments, business, service providers, charities and foundations work together to up-scale proven approaches.

The 150+ responses received exceeded expectations, suggesting Canadians' readiness to approach intractable issues using new tools, resources and partnerships. Compared to previously, the new approach has enabled the government to tailor and accelerate its social finance outreach activities. Follow up through social media, webinars and seminars is planned. In partnership with private, not-for-profit and charitable sectors, Employment and Social Development Canada will further build public knowledge about the potential of social finance. For the promising ideas identified, the department will help to connect partners and develop concepts into investment-ready ideas suitable for social finance pilot projects. Finally, the government will consider using existing programme funds to further cultivate community-level social innovation in support of social and economic outcomes for Canadians.

---

## Why the innovation was developed

- The Government of Canada seeks to engage Canadians in developing and implementing innovative solutions to persistent social challenges. Interest and momentum have been building around social finance, which is one example of a promising innovative approach that seeks to challenge current behaviours and expectations about roles and relationships, risk and responsibility, results and resources.
  - The CFC used crowdsourcing to "ask the community" for ways to harness the potential of social finance to bring new capital and new ideas to long-entrenched social dilemmas such as homelessness, persistent unemployment and at-risk youth.
  - This Web 2.0 approach supports the Government of Canada's Open Government Strategy of Open Data, Open Information and Open Dialogue, which aims to give Canadians a stronger say in Government policies and priorities.
- 

## Objectives

Improve effectiveness, Improve efficiency, Improve service quality, Improve social equity, Increase citizen engagement, Support economic growth

- Raise awareness about social finance.
  - Test the level of interest and readiness of external organisations.
- 

## Main beneficiaries

Businesses, Civil Society, General population, Government bodies, Government staff

- This new approach is an innovation both from the perspective of the research into the current potential of social finance, and its crowd sourcing research method.
  - The potential benefits of social finance include lower cost to taxpayers and government, sharing the risk of testing innovative approaches, unlocking new capital for social interventions, fostering outcomes-based performance measurement that encourages collaborative approaches to resolving complex social challenges, and, often, funding preventative interventions.
  - Citizens can provide local knowledge to inform government policy and programming; government benefits from a richer array of ideas and willing participants.
  - Not-for-profit, charitable, and private sector actors benefit from open sharing of social finance information, and from networking to form new partnerships.
  - Government can identify and help social innovators with good ideas achieve investment-ready condition.
  - Government develops a new evidence base to support social finance policy development.
- 

## Existing similar practices

### B.C. Ideas

In public administration of my country

British Columbia Social Innovation Council

B.C. Ideas: In 2012, the province of British Columbia held a competitive process whereby it invited social finance and social enterprise proposals for prevention services, improved social outcomes and new sources of capital. From among the 466 idea submissions, the winners shared over CAD 270 000 in government and non-government funding.

<http://www.changemakers.com/bcideas>

---

### Ontario Call for Social Impact Bond (SIB) Ideas

In public administration of my country

Ontario Ministry of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure

Ontario Call for SIB Ideas: The 2014 Ontario initiative (still underway at the time of writing) invited proposals for prevention-oriented social impact bond (SIB) ideas on the policy priorities of housing, youth-at-risk, and improving employment opportunities for vulnerable persons. From 83 SIB ideas submitted from philanthropic, not-for-profit, and municipal sectors, up to four will receive business case development, to assess their potential to deliver on improved social outcomes, service transformation and government savings.

---

## Results

---

### Efficiency

- Low-cost and high-impact research into the opportunities for advancing social finance was achieved.
- 

### Effectiveness

- Identified innovative intervention and partnership opportunities that can be further developed.
  - Piloted a new collaborative engagement model for policy development.
- 

### Service quality

#### Accessibility:

- A core characteristic of the CFC is open access to all Canadians and Canadian organisations who wish to offer direct input into government policy and programming. Individuals as well as organisations responded.

# Development

---

## Design

The Minister of Employment and Social Development, supported by policy planning, legal, privacy and communications staff, developed the idea for the National Call for Concepts for Social Finance. Consultation with stakeholders included ongoing consultation with a Voluntary Advisory Council on Social Partnerships, since reconstituted as a new Ministerial Advisory Council on Social Innovation.

---

## Testing

- The Call for Concepts was a public engagement initiative that used a Questionnaire as the basis for crowdsourcing research into social finance proponents in Canada.
  - The design and development of the Questionnaire and supporting web materials went through a rigorous internal process including expert advice and review from Strategic Communications, Public Environment and Stakeholder Relations, Corporate Web and Linguistic Services within Employment and Social Development Canada.
  - The Questionnaire was also designed to raise public awareness about social finance.
  - Research into applied lessons learned from other governments and departments was incorporated.
- 

## Implementation

### Tools used:

- The project team configured a Fluid Surveys platform, text rotator, and Twitter feed on a department Web site to create a low-cost, crowd-sourcing environment.
- Developed a new type of tweet enabling departmental Twitter accounts to go beyond broadcasting news releases to feature excerpts from submissions aimed at raising awareness, enticing individuals, stakeholder groups to join conversation, contribute, and network.
- Shared real-time statistics, submissions, and analysis within the department via a secure on-line SharePoint Library.

### Resources used:

- The 2012 Call for Concepts for Social Finance required 1.5 full-time employees over a six month period.
  - All other resources were internal to the department.
- 

## Diffusion

- In May 2013, the Minister of Employment and Social Development Canada launched the report, Harnessing the Power of Social Finance: Canadians Respond to the National Call for Concepts for Social Finance in print and online at [http://www.esdc.gc.ca/eng/consultations/social\\_finance/report/index.shtml](http://www.esdc.gc.ca/eng/consultations/social_finance/report/index.shtml); the report identified the next steps in continuing engagement, knowledge exchange, and accelerating promising opportunities and proponents.
  - Support the development of social finance pilots within the department.
  - Engage with other federal departments whose mandates are addressed by CFC submissions.
  - To raise awareness and increase stakeholder capacity for social finance projects, department officials: hold webinars to share the CFC findings and address information gaps, hold targeted face-to-face meetings based on CFC findings on the margins of scheduled workshops and conferences with not-for-profit and private sectors, and provincial and territorial governments, participate in social finance knowledge exchange events.
  - Provide consultation and expertise to other federal departments considering issuing similar Calls for Concepts.
- 

## Challenges and solutions

- The submissions received through the new process did not evenly represent all provinces and territories.
- The submissions received through the new process were most plentiful from charities, foundations and co-ops, but limited from private corporations and commercial investors.
- The department is now reaching out to fill these gaps. Any future crowd sourcing design can take these gaps into account.
- Legal, privacy, and access to information challenges were identified. They were resolved through rigorous, in-house expert collaboration.

# Lessons Learned

---

## Lessons Learned

- Social finance, at core a collaborative, multi-sectoral approach to financing social innovation and preventative interventions, is well suited to crowd sourcing and other collaborative social media approaches.
  - Crowd sourcing can be an inexpensive and effective way to identify issues and potential partnership solutions.
  - Persistent, complex social problems often fall under the purview of multiple government departments; both crowd sourcing and social finance foster a collaborative, cross-government approach to achieving meaningful outcomes.
- 

## Conditions for success

- An existing groundswell of active interest in the topic, in this case, social finance.
  - Good will and collaboration that is activated by the crowd sourcing initiative.
  - Political will.
- 

## Other information

The greatest challenge is to create an incentive for communities and stakeholders to participate. Prize/competition models should be considered. With a complex innovation, such as social finance, a nation-wide call for concepts that uses a well-designed questionnaire can raise public knowledge and support.

There is an achievable learning curve for public servants mounting crowd sourcing research.

The first pilot is likely to be the most challenging, for example in terms of establishing whether the legal, privacy, and transparency requirements can be met without hollowing out the good-faith invitation to participate in policy deliberations.

---

Copyright OECD. All rights reserved.