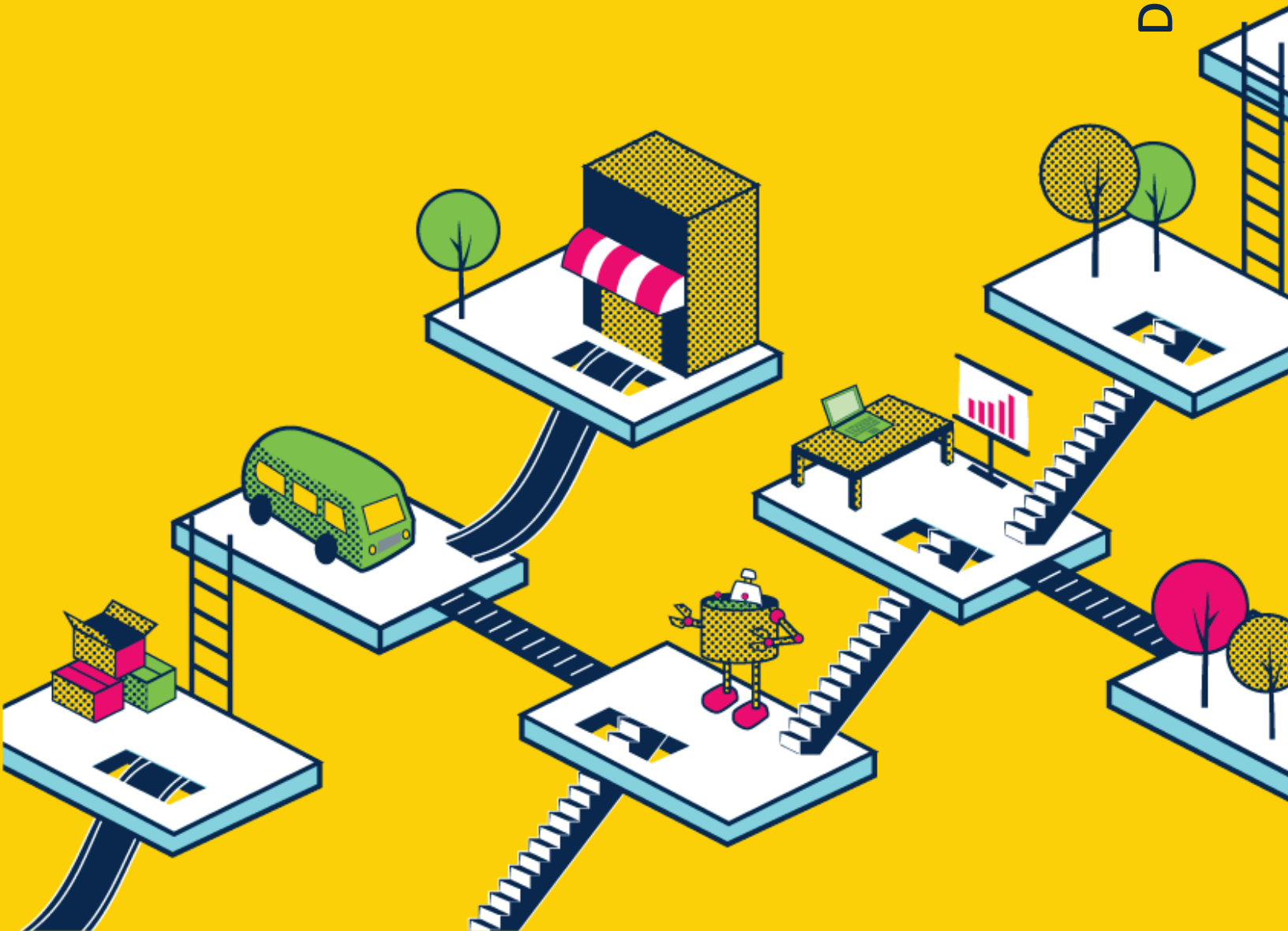


Empowering Women in Entrepreneurship + Social Enterprise Design Workshop

December 2017



The Brookfield Institute for Innovation + Entrepreneurship (BII+E) is a new, independent and nonpartisan institute, housed within Ryerson University, that is dedicated to making Canada the best country in the world to be an innovator or an entrepreneur.

BII+E supports this mission in three ways: insightful research and analysis; testing, piloting and prototyping projects; which informs BII+E's leadership and advocacy on behalf of innovation and entrepreneurship across the country.

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CONTEXT

The benefits of having more women-led high-growth companies in Canada and in Ontario are substantial, and yet so are the hurdles women must jump over for their businesses to succeed at scaling.

As one means to help overcome these hurdles, the Brookfield Institute for Innovation + Entrepreneurship launched an initiative in September 2017 to develop a Call for Proposals for targeted opportunities to provide better supports to women entrepreneurs in the province. The Call will be funded by the Government of Ontario.

In leading the design of the Call, the Brookfield Institute applied the following principles:

- + Use an evidence-based methodology to identify challenges;
- + Listen directly to women entrepreneurs to better understand their reality; and
- + Target only issues or interventions that can be reasonably impacted within the scope of funding.

Led by these principles, the Brookfield Institute conducted a literature review, which led to the development of a discussion paper that outlines the overarching challenges women entrepreneurs face.

This discussion paper served as a framework for discussion at an Empowering Women in Entrepreneurship and Social Enterprise Design Workshop at the Brookfield Institute offices in Toronto on September 28, 2017 (see Appendix for the Workshop Agenda).

The workshop brought together 29 participants active in the entrepreneurship space—entrepreneurs, funders, advisors, and supporters—to identify targeted opportunities for interventions that could support women entrepreneurs seeking to grow their businesses. This helped to further refine the challenges that the Call for Proposals could ultimately seek to address.

This report summarizes the key outcomes from the design workshop and outlines the work that the Brookfield Institute has been undertaking to finalize the design of the Call for Proposals.

The Call for Proposals will be announced by the end of 2017.

DESIGN WORKSHOP SUMMARY

The Design Workshop was comprised of two parts: Part 1 comprised table discussions, during which participants reflected on challenges to women entrepreneurs identified in the discussion paper that had been shared prior to the workshop. In Part 2, participants brainstormed and put forward their ideas for targeted issues the Call for Proposals could address.

PART 1: CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

The group reflected on the four key challenges identified in the workshop discussion paper: cultural barriers; access to finance; access to mentorship and networks; and access to training.

In considering the Ontario entrepreneurship ecosystem, they addressed the following questions:

- + Which challenges resonate with you and why?
- + Which challenges would you reframe?
- + What additional challenges or enablers would you add?
- + Where do existing supports do a good job of helping women seeking to grow their businesses?
- + Where do gaps exist?
- + Are there particular stages of growth that are better supported than others?

As part of this discussion, participants were encouraged to consider how their responses varied by sector, geography, for women with additional intersectionalities, or due to other factors.

Some of the key highlights we heard during this discussion include:

CULTURAL CHALLENGES

- + Cultural challenges were generally defined as differences (perceived or otherwise) between the behaviour of men and women and/or conscious or unconscious bias against women entrepreneurs due to preconceived beliefs or assumptions.
- + Cultural challenges cut across the other challenge areas and are foundational to any efforts to better support women entrepreneurs.
- + Challenges are typically magnified/multiplied for women who are visible minorities or with additional intersectionalities.
- + While there was agreement that cultural challenges lead to women accessing fewer resources than men in growing their businesses, participants disagreed on the cause. Some participants felt strongly that women entrepreneurs are often less confident than men. Others strongly disagreed, stating that unconscious and/or conscious biases within a male-dominated ecosystem are largely responsible for disparities between men and women entrepreneurs.
- + These differences of opinion also led to further differences of opinion as to whether solutions should focus on creating dedicated spaces and resource streams for women entrepreneurs, or whether this risked “ghetto-izing” women entrepreneurs. This was also true for women entrepreneurs with additional intersectionalities.

ACCESS TO FINANCE

- + The lack of women making investment decisions and lack of women on Boards continue to disadvantage women when it comes to accessing finance.
- + A number of participants highlighted that male investors lack an understanding of the market opportunity presented by products and services designed for women.
- + Participants discussed pitching at some length. Many agreed that women are often more conservative and pragmatic when they pitch, selling what they know to be achievable. Conversely, men are more likely to sell a vision or a dream, which often resonates better with investors.
- + This discussion led to differing opinions on whether there was a need for more resources to help women entrepreneurs present and pitch (e.g. language and tools); whether male investors needed solutions that address unconscious bias; and/or whether there is a need to look beyond venture capital to other funding models (e.g. “the traditional VC model doesn’t work for all businesses or funders”).

ACCESS TO MENTORSHIP + NETWORKS

- + Participants differentiated between mentorship and business coaching. Many women entrepreneur participants stated they lack access to both, although some emphasized the need to access business coaches who could help them specifically with tactics around business growth.
- + Mentors were defined by some participants as “champions” who could provide a broader range of support, including facilitating an entrepreneur’s pathway to access the resources and networks required to start and grow a business.

- + Some women entrepreneurs highlighted a frustration that some entrepreneurial support programs require entrepreneurs to participate in time-consuming and unhelpful mentorship programs to access funding.
- + More generally, participants agreed that too often they are paired formally or informally with mentors who are not entrepreneurs or who lack relevant experience.

ACCESS TO TRAINING

- + Participants agreed that access to skills training for women entrepreneurs is important, with less agreement on what that training should be (e.g. should more training be made available to help women pitch; is training that builds confidence needed; to what extent is training in financial literacy a need; etc.)
- + In addition to training for women entrepreneurs, participants also discussed training around unconscious bias for mentors and advisors.

ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES

Three additional challenges were identified.

Building an ecosystem

- + Participants highlighted that regionalization, and lack of supports in smaller communities, pose significant challenges and are an impediment to some women entrepreneurs across the ecosystem.
- + Some participants highlighted that Ontario is the only province that lacks a Women's Enterprise Centre, making it difficult to connect services for women entrepreneurs across the province.

Education

- + Some participants emphasized that better education is required at the K-12 level to build financial literacy, business development, and management skills.

Lack of accessible data

- + Participants highlighted the lack of publicly available, disaggregated gender and diversity data, both in relation to who receives support within the entrepreneurial system as well as who provides it (e.g. investors, mentors, advisors, board members, etc.)

PART 2: DISCUSSION

Participants brainstormed ideas for interventions that would support women growing their businesses that could be achieved within the context of the Call for Proposals.

Three main areas for intervention emerged that fit these criteria. Several other intervention areas were discussed but require policy change, which cannot be achieved via a Call for Proposals. These ideas are nevertheless important, and we highlight them here as areas for further consideration at the provincial and federal levels.

INTERVENTION IDEAS

Participants identified the following three ideas as the most viable for further consideration in designing the Call for Proposals.

Coordinate and disseminate “best practice” supports for women entrepreneurs across the Ontario ecosystem

This idea was discussed at length by those participants who felt strongly that the ecosystem for women entrepreneurs in Ontario needs to be strengthened. Ideas included:

- + Identify programs and best practices for supporting women entrepreneurs and disseminate them to new locations.
- + Develop new tools to support women entrepreneurs, as needed, and disseminate them.
- + Better coordinate services available to women entrepreneurs across the Ontario entrepreneurial ecosystem (e.g. create a “no wrong door” experience for women entering the ecosystem).
- + Develop a mechanism to signal what’s working (e.g. create shared metrics at a high level and/or specific strategies like a system to evaluate unconscious bias).
- + Establish a leadership group or provincial body, as exists in other provinces, to represent the voice of women entrepreneurs and advocate on their behalf.

A number of participants had contributed to the [WEO Report](#), and highlighted that the Report’s recommendations could be applied.

Provide relevant mentorship + business coaching

This idea was favoured by participants who wanted to see funds targeted at immediate and direct support for women entrepreneurs. Ideas included:

- + Support high-potential women entrepreneurs to grow their businesses by providing dedicated and business coaching for one year.
- + Ensure that mentors and business coaches possess relevant experience (e.g. having entrepreneurial experience, and capacity to provide advice that is appropriate and useful for women entrepreneurs with other intersectionalities).

- + Compensate mentors and business coaches as a means of appropriately valuing their time and ensuring quality.

Provide maternity leave and childcare supports for women entrepreneurs

This idea was discussed in particular by women entrepreneurs who have or are considering starting families, and was recognized as a key consideration by all participants. Ideas included:

- + Provide funding to bring on temporary support while women CEOs are on maternity leave.
- + Ensure better access to childcare for women entrepreneurs, including within the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

POLICY IDEAS

The following ideas were also generated. They require provincial or federal level policy change, and are therefore out of scope for the Call for Proposals. They are nevertheless highlighted as important areas for discussion in providing better supports to women entrepreneurs.

Employment insurance (EI) for women entrepreneurs

Some women entrepreneurs highlighted the need to make it easier for women who own more than 40 percent of their businesses to access EI to cover a maternity leave.

Changes to K-12 curricula

The need for better training related to financial literacy, business development, and management skills at the K-12 level was reiterated.

Access to data

Participants noted that government receives some gender and diversity disaggregated data that should be made public. This could support broader and streamlined efforts to measure the health of the entrepreneurial ecosystem for women and identify opportunities to strengthen it.

Public procurement quotas for women and minorities

Public procurement quotas for women and minorities were highlighted as a means to grow a customer base, revenue, and validation of products and services offered by entrepreneurs who are typically disadvantaged. New York City's targets and associated programs oriented at 30 percent of city contract dollars being awarded to minority and women-owned business enterprises was cited as an example.

ADDITIONAL ADVICE

Participants also provided some overall advice on the design of the Call for Proposals:

- + Balance appropriate accountability measures with the resources required for reporting purposes.
- + Avoid creating new infrastructure or programming.
- + The funding available presents a good start point to generate impact in the Ontario ecosystem, however additional steps could enhance this opportunity. Such steps could include:
 - Leveraging existing resources and programs within the Ontario entrepreneurial ecosystem;
 - Providing continued, annual investment; and

- Accessing matching funding (e.g. Business Development Canada, Status of Women Canada, FedDev, other Ontario government funding, private sector funding).

NEXT STEPS

Following the design workshop, the Brookfield Institute has been testing and refining the three key intervention ideas identified during the workshop through discussions with women entrepreneurs and ecosystem players who can provide valuable insight but who will not apply to the Call for Proposals. The Call for Proposals will be released before the end of 2017.

APPENDIX: WORKSHOP AGENDA

- 8:30-9:00 am Breakfast / Registration / Networking
- 9:00-9:10 am Welcome by Cristina Martins, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Economic Development and Growth
- 9:10-9:20 am Introduction to the Day by Alexandra Conliffe, Director, Policy Innovation Platform at the Brookfield Institute
- 9:20 am-12:30 pm Facilitated Design Workshop facilitated by Robin Cory, Partner, Colbeck Strategic Advisors
- + 9:20-9:35 am – Introductions
 - + 9:35-10:05 am – Table discussions on the barriers that women entrepreneurs face in scaling their businesses, and supports that currently exist/are missing
 - + 10:05-10:35 am – Group debrief
 - + 10:35-10:50 am – Break
 - + 10:50 am-12:00 pm – Group discussions around barriers that could be addressed via the Call for Proposals
 - + 12:00-12:15 pm – Group convergence on one to three barriers that could be addressed via the Call for Proposals
 - + 12:15-12:30 pm – Recap, Next Steps, Thank you's