



BUILDING A MORE JUST AND PROSPEROUS NEW BRUNSWICK THROUGH SOCIAL ENTERPRISE: *A practical guide*



**Social Enterprise New Brunswick
Entreprise Sociale Nouveau-Brunswick**

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BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE, JUST, AND PROSPEROUS NEW BRUNSWICK THROUGH SOCIAL ENTERPRISE

New Brunswick is navigating one of the **most significant economic transitions in decades**. Global tariff volatility, rapid AI disruption, affordability pressures, demographic change, and shifting labour markets are reshaping how people work, how communities sustain themselves, and how local economies thrive. These pressures are being felt most acutely in rural regions, in care and service sectors, and among those already facing barriers to participation.

At the same time, the national momentum around **social finance and impact investment** — including the federal Social Finance Fund — **presents an unprecedented opportunity**. If New Brunswick is prepared, **social enterprises and social purpose organizations can play a vital role in strengthening community infrastructure, expanding the workforce, improving wellbeing, and addressing affordability through locally designed solutions**.

The province's social enterprise community articulated this clearly in **A Call to Action for a Social Finance & Social Enterprise Strategy**, highlighting the need for coordinated support, skills development, and policy alignment to position social enterprise as a driver of inclusive prosperity and community wealth building.

This toolkit responds to that call. It is a **practical resource** for founders, nonprofits, co-operatives, and mission-driven businesses who are building solutions in a rapidly changing environment. It reflects lessons from across New Brunswick while drawing from national and global experience.

This work is supported through the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation's (ESIC) Pillar 16 from their Overcoming Poverty Together Plan 4, focused on strengthening non-profits, with a recognition that social economy is a pathway to addressing root causes of poverty, expanding economic participation, and enabling community-led innovation.

Developed in December 2025, this **toolkit acknowledges that the landscape will continue to evolve** — economically, technologically, and socially. We encourage readers to adapt, update, and collaborate as New Brunswick shapes the future of its impact economy.

THE CHALLENGES HAVE SHIFTED — AND SO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITIES. SOCIAL ENTERPRISE CAN HELP NEW BRUNSWICK MEET BOTH.

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THE 10 CORE SECTIONS OF THE TOOLKIT

The Social Enterprise Opportunity in New Brunswick

Why this moment matters: affordability pressures, shifting labour markets, tariff uncertainty, AI disruption, federal social finance, and growing demand for community-led solutions.

Listening to Communities and Defining the Problem

How to validate needs, engage lived expertise, protect dignity, and build “with” rather than “for.”

Designing Your Impact Model

Clarifying mission, outcomes, and the change you seek to create — including Theory of Change and logic models.

Building a Sustainable Business Model

Aligning purpose with revenue; considering hybrid structures; co-op, nonprofit, charity, or for-profit social enterprise paths.

Financing What Matters

Grants, revenue, social investment, capital stacks, federal funds, and NB-specific funding pathways — including ESIC Pillar 16.

Governance, Ownership, and Shared Power

Boards, advisory councils, Indigenous governance, cooperative models, worker ownership, and founder transition.

Prototyping, Piloting, and Learning in Small Markets

Learning loops, 100-day prototypes, rural realities, and partnership-based testing.

Measuring, Reporting, and Storytelling Your Impact

Indicators, dashboards, qualitative evidence, and reporting without burden.

Influencing Policy and Systems Change

How social enterprises shape the enabling environment — advocating, convening, partnering, and policy design.

Sustaining the Founder and the Team

Burnout prevention, succession, workload design, and building collaborative leadership cultures.

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1. THE SOCIAL ENTERPRISE OPPORTUNITY IN NEW BRUNSWICK

New Brunswick's economy is shifting — affordability challenges, AI-driven job disruption, demographic change, and tariff uncertainty are reshaping how communities participate in work and how local economies generate prosperity. Social enterprise offers a pathway for mission-led businesses and community-owned ventures that retain wealth locally and address the root causes of social challenges, not just their symptoms.

Social enterprise is emerging as a strategic tool to strengthen community infrastructure, create employment, build inclusive workforces, and drive solutions in housing, care, food systems, and climate resilience.

Key Concepts

- What is a social enterprise? (mission + model): the simplest definition is **using market tools for impact**. It is not a legal structure in NB.
- **Social enterprise continuum:**



Tools to Consider

- The **Social Lean Canvas** is a simple tool used to define how a social enterprise creates social value and financial sustainability in a single, easy-to-communicate page. ([Sample](#))
- A **Theory of Change** tells the story of why your work matters, what difference it will make, and how you'll know if that change is happening. ([Sample](#))

Resources

- [Social Finance Fund](#) (\$755M national initiative)
- [ESIC Overcoming Poverty Together](#)
- [How to choose the right legal structure for your business](#)
- [B Corporations](#)
- [Community Economic Development Corporations and Cooperatives](#)

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2. LISTENING TO COMMUNITIES & DEFINING THE PROBLEM

Social enterprises succeed not because they have the smartest idea — but because they solve the right problem. In NB’s relational ecosystem, **trust is earned through listening, co-design, and accountability to the people most affected**. Effective problem definition requires slowing down enough to understand **root causes, cultural context, lived experience, and the constraints that shape choices for individuals, families, and communities**.

When working in small communities — rural or urban — relationships are long-term, and reputational trust matters. Engagement is not a checkbox; it is a commitment to transparency, respect, and ongoing learning. This includes acknowledging **power dynamics, providing clarity about how insights will be used, and ensuring people see themselves reflected in the solutions being developed**.

Key Concepts

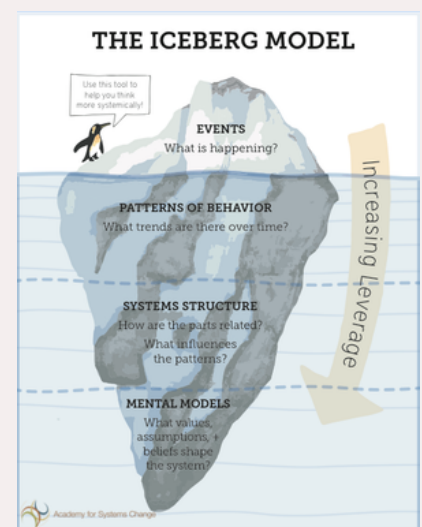
- **“Build with, not for”** — co-creation as a mindset, not a method
- **Lived expertise as governance**, not consultation — meaning advisory roles that shape direction, decision-making power that influences outcomes, and compensated contribution that recognizes expertise as valuable work.
- Ethics and consent in rural and small communities — **anonymity is harder when everyone knows everyone**
- How to **validate without large datasets** — by gathering insight through interviews, testing ideas with small cohort pilots, consulting frontline practitioners, and using hyper-local community data.
- Understanding **root causes** — many symptoms are systemic, not individual

Tools to Consider

- Iceberg model of understanding change
- [Stakeholder Mapping](#)
- **How Might We (HMW) Statements**: a design thinking method that allows designers to reframe and open up their problem statements for efficient, targeted and innovative ideation sessions to help solve design challenges.
- [Assumptions Testing Grid](#)
- [Journey Mapping](#)

Resources

- Regional Service Commissions
- [ESIC Community Inclusion Networks](#)
- [Data NB Population and Demographic Counts 2024](#)



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3. DESIGNING YOUR IMPACT MODEL

A clear impact model answers three essential questions: **What are we changing, for whom, and how will we know?** It provides the foundation of legitimacy with funders, investors, partners, and community members — not because it promises certainty, but because it demonstrates clarity, intention, and accountability. A well-designed impact model shows how your activities connect to the outcomes you seek and ensures that mission and business decisions reinforce each other rather than compete for attention.

Key Concepts

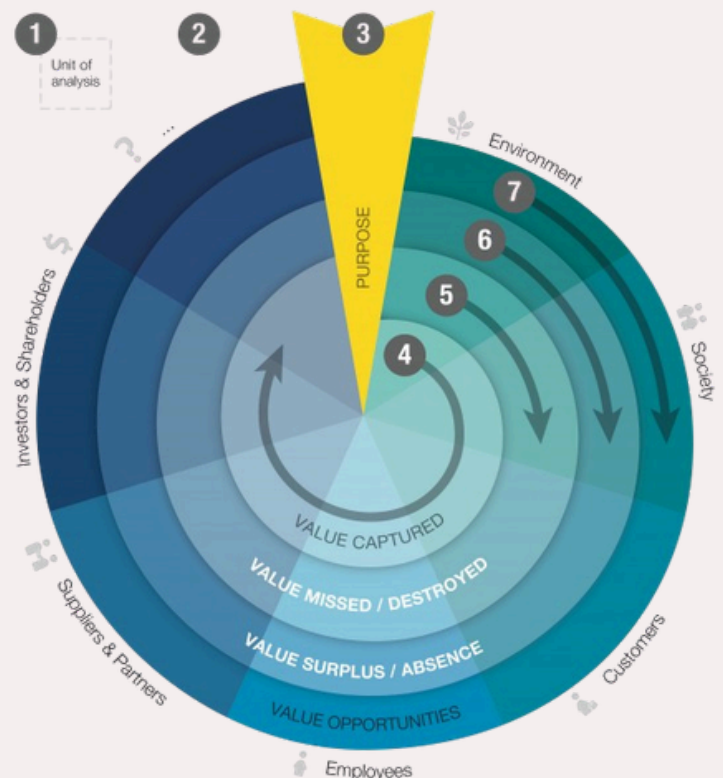
- We first introduced the **Theory of Change** in Section 1, and it's worth emphasizing again — it is the anchor that keeps your mission, activities, and desired outcomes aligned as your enterprise evolves. Logic models — visual tools that connect inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes
- Defining beneficiaries, customers, and partners — clarifying **who receives value, who pays for value, and who enables or supports value creation**. These may or may not be different and lack of clarity can create governance and operational issues.
- Distinguishing **service delivery from systemic impact** — knowing the difference between direct results (e.g., participation) and broader change (e.g., policy, affordability, norms).

Tools To Consider

- [Value Mapping Template](#)
- [Systems Mapping & Impact Management](#)

Resources

- [OECD — Measuring, Manage and Maximize Your Impact: A guide for the social economy.](#)
- [Public Health Agency of Canada — Social Determinants of Health Framework](#)



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4. BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS MODEL

Purpose needs a repeatable revenue model to endure. While passion and mission may spark a social enterprise, it is the **ability to generate consistent value — and income — that ensures impact can continue long after early funding ends**. In New Brunswick, many social enterprises operate hybrid models that **blend earned revenue, grants, contracts, and social finance** to navigate small markets, affordability constraints, seasonality, and community needs.

Key Concepts

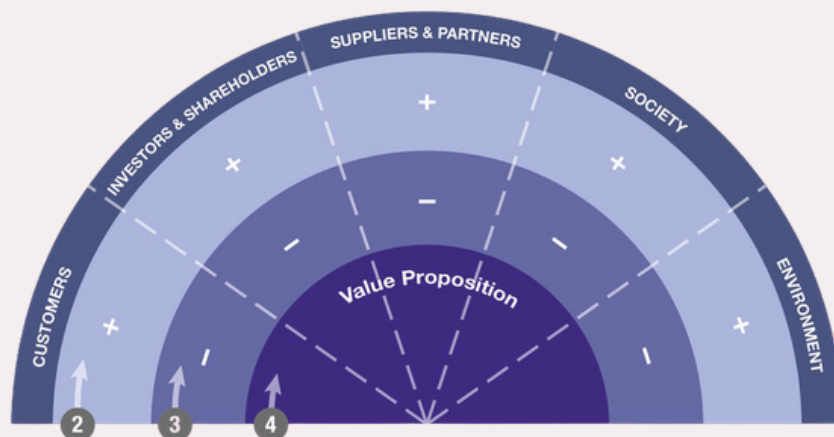
- **Revenue sources** — customer payments, government funding, institutional contracts, and philanthropic support
- **Value propositions** for community, state, and business — clearly communicating the value created for each stakeholder group
- **Co-op and shared ownership models** — distributing benefits and decision-making among members, workers, or communities
- **Rural and place-based business design** — designing services and pricing that reflect population size, travel distance, transportation access, and local economic conditions
- **Procurement as revenue** — accessing government or institutional purchasing as a stable income stream, not just fundraising

Tools to Consider

- [Social Business Model Canvas or Social Lean Canvas](#)
- [Revenue Mix Worksheet](#)
- [Sustainable Value Proposition Builder](#)

Resources

- [New Brunswick First Procurement Strategy](#)
- [Community Economic Development Corporations and Cooperatives](#)
- [Government of New Brunswick Economic and Social Indicators](#)



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5. FINANCING WHAT MATTERS

Funding is shifting — from short-term grants toward capital that expects both financial and social return. For social enterprises in New Brunswick, financing is about fit: understanding which tools align with your mission, your business model, and your risk tolerance. The goal is not to pursue all funding, but to build a capital stack that matches the stage, purpose, and sustainability of your work.

Key Concepts

- **Social Finance Fund (Canada)** — federal capital designed to grow impact-first investment in social purpose organizations.
- **Loan funding** — borrowed money that must be repaid with interest; suitable for revenue-generating activities with predictable cash flow.
- **Equity investment** — investors provide capital in exchange for ownership or future return; best for scalable models but requires shared control and expectations for growth.
- **Community bonds** — investment raised from community members who receive a fixed return while supporting local impact; aligns financing with community ownership and loyalty.
- **Revenue-based funding** — repayment tied to revenue rather than fixed payments, creating flexibility when sales fluctuate; suited for social enterprises with variable cash flow.
- **Investment readiness** — the ability to demonstrate financial projections, governance, impact clarity, and confidence managing other people’s capital.
- **Outcomes-based contracting** — funding tied to achieved results rather than activities; payment is based on impact delivered.

Funding Type	Good For	Not Ideal When	Key Consideration
Grants	Early-stage ideas, pilots, community benefit services	Long-term operational sustainability	Grants end; plan for what comes next
Loans	Proven revenue streams; equipment; space; working capital	Revenue is unpredictable or seasonal	Must be repaid regardless of impact
Equity Investment	Scalable models with potential for growth and return	Mission requires control to remain local or community-led	Shares decision-making and ownership
Community Bonds	Community-facing projects (buildings, hubs, assets)	Fast capital or small short-term needs	You become accountable to local investors
Revenue-Based Funding	Variable revenue models (training, product sales)	No revenue model or unpredictable demand	Repayment rises and falls with revenue
Outcomes-Based Contracting	Demonstrable, measurable change in defined outcomes	Impact is hard to measure or takes many years	Payment comes after results are proven

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6. GOVERNANCE, OWNERSHIP & SHARED POWER

Governance is how power is held, exercised, and shared — and in social enterprise, it is directly tied to legitimacy, trust, and long-term integrity. The structure you choose should reflect your mission, your values, and the level of accountability you owe to community, investors, employees, and partners. Good governance is not overhead; it is impact infrastructure.

Key Concepts

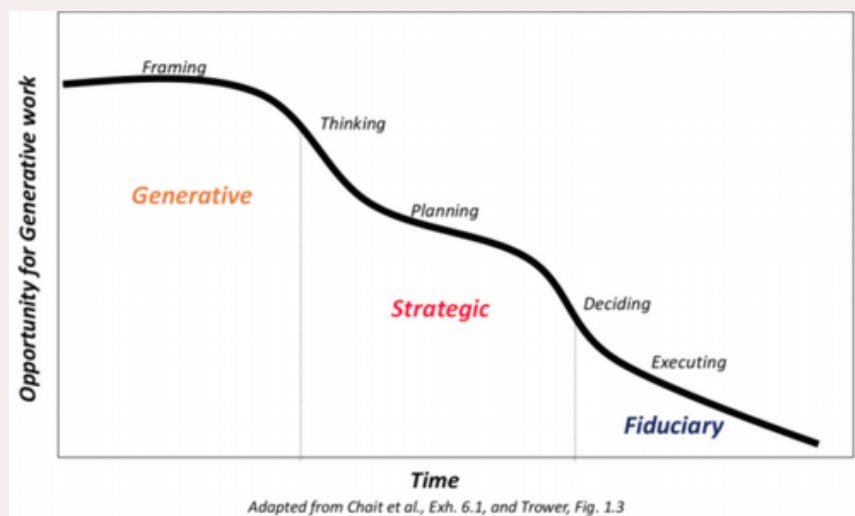
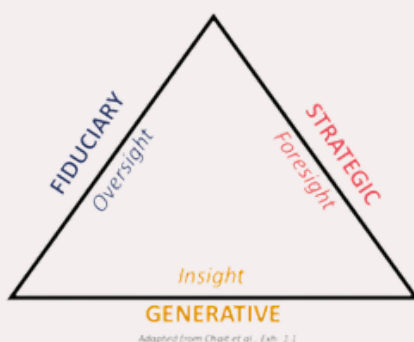
- **Fiduciary, strategic, and generative governance** — ensuring responsible and transparent management of finances, compliance, and organizational risk (fiduciary); guiding long-term strategy, performance goals, and alignment of mission and business decisions (strategic); and interpreting purpose, values, and community expectations in real time so the organization can evolve without losing its identity or eroding trust (generative). Who benefits — and who decides — aligning decision-making authority with those affected by the mission
- **Founder transition and succession** — planning for continuity beyond the founding team
- **Multi-stakeholder boards and advisory roles** — integrating diverse perspectives from those involved in or affected by the work, with transparent boundaries between advisory input and decision-making power.

Tools to Consider

- [Imagine Canada's Board Policies and Planning](#)

Resources

- [Creating and maintaining a social enterprise: Government of Canada](#)
- [Choosing a legal structure for your social purpose business: Futurpreneur](#)
- [Capacity Canada: Governance Training](#)



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7. PROTOTYPING, PILOTING & LEARNING IN SMALL MARKETS

New Brunswick's size is a competitive advantage — ideas can be tested quickly, relationships form easily, and early adopters are within reach. Prototyping helps test assumptions and reduce risk early, while pilots demonstrate how a solution performs in real-world conditions with partners and users. **Prototyping reduces risk, builds credibility, and demonstrates community value before significant resources are spent.** Pilots are not about proving you were right — they are about learning fast, adapting early, and showing partners that collaboration is possible.

Prototype = test the idea. Pilot = test the model.

Concepts to Consider

- **Minimum Learning Objective** — defining the smallest question you need answered before moving forward
- **100-day prototypes** — time-bound learning sprints to test and refine solutions
- Ethical piloting with vulnerable populations — ensuring consent, dignity, and transparency in testing
- **Partnership-based testing** — piloting alongside community organizations, municipalities, or service providers
- **Adaptation before scale** — using insights to refine the model before expanding

Tools to Consider

- **Design Thinking Framework** — a human-centred approach to innovation that emphasizes empathy, rapid learning cycles, and iterative solution development.
- **Journey Mapping** — a visual tool to understand the steps, emotions, barriers, and opportunities experienced by people interacting with your service or program — before, during, and after engagement.

Resources

- [Evaluating Social Innovation Prototypes: A Guide](#)

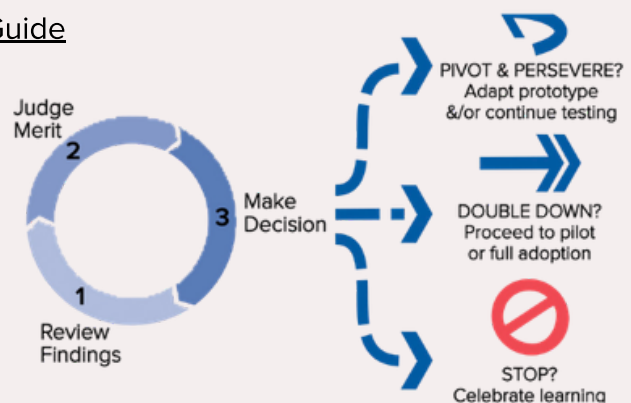


Photo from Evaluating Social Innovation Prototypes: A Guide. The fourth step in the evaluation process consists of three tasks: Review the Findings, Judge the Merit of the prototype, and Make a Decision about the future of the prototype.

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8. MEASURING, REPORTING & STORYTELLING YOUR IMPACT

Impact reporting is shifting from “**outputs**” to “**insight.**” Funders, partners, and communities are looking less for volume (“how many”) and more for meaning (“**so what**” and “**for whom did it matter?**”). The story of change is best told with **dignity, evidence, and consent** — balancing quantitative data with the lived experience of people impacted by your work.

For social enterprises, measuring impact is not about proving perfection. Rather, it is a **commitment to learning, transparency, and continuous improvement.** Done well, impact reporting strengthens credibility, informs funding and investment, and builds trust with community and partners. It should be useful to your work — not a burden.

Frameworks that allow for flexibility and proportional effort are emerging in Canada. The **Common Approach to Impact Measurement** offers principles-based, adaptable standards that enable organizations to measure what matters most to their mission and context, rather than conforming to a single rigid model.

Key Concepts

- **Contribution vs attribution** — demonstrating the role you played in the outcome, without claiming sole responsibility
- **Collecting useful, light-touch data** — gathering the right information without burdening participants or staff
- **Storytelling without exploitation** — sharing stories with consent, context, and dignity
- **Impact dashboards vs long reports** — communicating insights in formats people actually read

Tools to Consider

- [Tamarack Institute — Create an Impact Report](#)
- One-Page Impact Dashboard
- Indicator Library & Menu
- Consent and Story Use Agreement

Resources

- [Common Approach to Impact Measurement](#)
- [UN SDG indicators](#)



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9. INFLUENCING POLICY & SYSTEMS CHANGE

Some challenges are not the result of broken communities — but broken systems. Policy, regulation, procurement models, and legacy program design can either enable or constrain solutions. **Social enterprises often sit close to the problem and therefore hold insight into what isn't working and what could change.**

Influencing systems does not always mean public advocacy — it includes sharing data with decision makers, framing problems clearly, aligning language to government priorities, and building coalitions that show demand and feasibility. **In a small province, insights travel quickly — and aligned voices move change faster.**

Key Concepts

- **Policy design vs advocacy** — engaging to improve systems, not just to promote an organization
- **System mapping and leverage points** — identifying root causes, constraints, and places where change is possible
- **Coalition building in small jurisdictions** — amplifying influence through shared voice and shared outcomes
- **Government language and framing** — presenting insights in terms of priorities, feasibility, cost, and impact

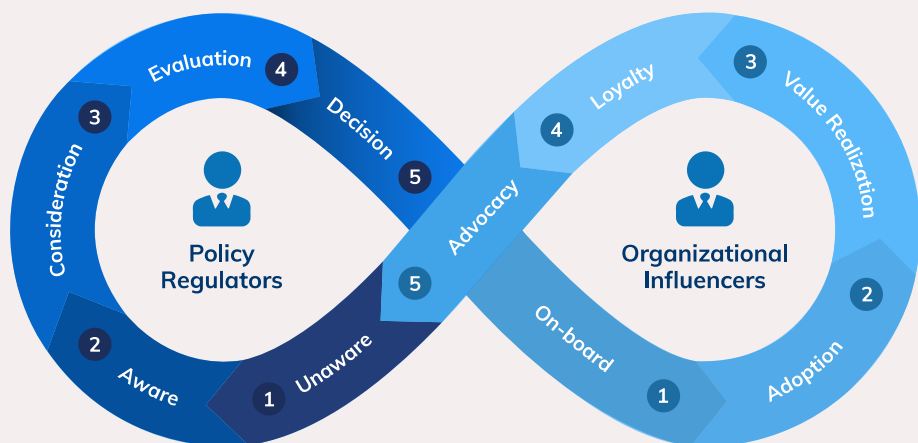
Tools to Consider

- [How to Write a Policy Brief](#)

Resources

- [Public Policy Forum](#)
- [NB Government Directory by Portfolio](#)
- [OECD \(Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development\)](#)

SAMPLE POLICY ADVOCACY CYCLE



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10. SUSTAINING THE FOUNDER & THE TEAM

The wellbeing of the people doing the work is part of the impact. Social enterprise can place unique emotional and operational demands on leaders — **especially when mission urgency meets resource constraints**. Sustainability requires **realistic workload, clear decision-making, boundaries, team support, and shared leadership**. The people building the change must also be able to live the change.

Succession planning is not about exit — it is about continuity. Distributed leadership is not about stepping back — it is about strengthening the enterprise so it is not dependent on any one person.

Key Concepts

- **Founder identity and transition** — separating self-worth from organizational role
- **Burnout prevention** — pacing, boundaries, support systems, and recovery
- **Hiring your first employee** — clarity of role, supervision, and onboarding
- **Distributed leadership models** — shared responsibility and decision making
- **Succession planning** — preparing for continuity and stability

Tools to Consider

- Delegation & Role Clarity Map
- Leadership Continuity Plan and / or Policy

Resources

- [International Coaching Federation](#)
- [Ashoka](#)
- [Social Succession Process for Small Business Owners](#)



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