



# ACHIEVING THE FUTURE CANADIANS WANT

IDEAS TO SPARK ACTION

## ABSTRACT

What if we looked at sustainability and climate change as if they were an opportunity to help people live better? We'd get better results and a stronger cultural foundation for leadership. Welcome to "cultural sustainability", an approach based on deep and lasting transformation through solutions that help people live better with less.

Chris Winter, October 2015



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# ACHIEVING THE FUTURE CANADIANS WANT

## *Ideas to spark action*

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Over the past three years, through the [Canada Conserves](#) Initiative I have been researching how to help design the next wave of sustainability leadership in Canada. I released a detailed report, [The Next Wave](#), in November, 2014, looking at the negative environmental, economic, and social trends and ways to address the root causes.

This past September, I released a report card on sustainability leadership in Canada, [The Future Canadians Want](#). The major conclusions (which led to an overall “C” grade for Canada) were:

1. **There is a wealth of activity on the ground** – organic and voluntary change
2. **There is a lack of leadership and support for organic change**, be it through high-level government commitment or investments and incentives for sustainability
3. **Culture is everything** – without a strong cultural support for a sustainable future the leadership response will be based on crisis management as opposed to investing in a positive vision.

This third point is crucial. Without a strong social vision of the future we want and a strong cultural desire for sustainable solutions, we will not see the support for voluntary transition to a sustainable future.

In order to strengthen leadership and action on sustainability, I proposed five major areas of focus:

1. **A public vision of the future we want** – a coalition of senior organizations across Canada to translate the UN sustainability goals into a Canadian set of values and a vision for a healthy and sustainable future.
2. **Better government leadership** – refocus government strategies to focus on sustainable development as an ongoing, government-wide objective. Broaden the mandates of environment ministries to “Environment and Sustainability”. Recognize the value of sustainable development as a means to addressing climate change and adaptation.
3. **Future Funds** – develop major funds for investing in sustainability through dedicated carbon taxes and/or resource royalties.
4. **Empower change** – invest in the infrastructure, provide incentives and support initiatives that will help Canadians live better with less.
5. **Engage Canadians** – set up a national community action program to engage Canadians as part of the solution.

## The need to change our collective approach

Chances are, you read the above recommendations and thought, “Yeah, right. Not likely to happen.”

You’d be right to think so. Big change is not likely to happen within what has become our conventional approach in the face of declining funding and a declining cultural and policy environment<sup>1</sup>. We need to change our dominant approach from linear thinking and direct results to complex, circular modelling leading to cumulative results that will rebuild a foundation for change.

I hear another “Yeah, right” or two out there. With tight budgets, many funders are investing in fewer but bigger projects with direct and measurable results, or supporting small on-the-ground projects. Funding fuzziness is not about to happen anytime soon. Most of us work for organizations or departments within specific mandates and terms of reference. Silo busting and embracing complexity is not about to happen any time soon either.

But I also know that people on all sides of the equation are looking for better answers. From the frustration with international climate talks down to the local fights over bike lanes and wind turbines, we are beginning to realize that we cannot achieve the progress we need without having the cultural support behind our proposals. Nor can we truly defend against the politics of hate without a strong cultural foundation of compassion. And once you realize that the root of the problem is cultural, then everything changes.

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Not quite everything. The science still drives the urgency for action, but the framing of our climate and sustainability strategies has to be on social benefit and not just environmental imperative. Public engagement is no longer the tail end of the strategy, it is the heart.

The logic of the argument flows like this:

- To get action on climate change and sustainability we need public support;
- To get meaningful and lasting action on climate change we need deep cultural support.
- To achieve deep cultural support we need to focus on solutions that build a stronger Canada and that improve the quality of life of Canadians.
- To have the maximum impact, we need to focus on initiatives that will encourage and empower the maximum number of people to take action in their own lives and businesses.

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*Can we address cultural complexity with simple interventions?*

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So here’s the challenge: can we integrate deep cultural support into our current strategies for sustainability and climate change? Can we address cultural complexity with simple interventions? Can we, as leaders in the quest for a healthy sustainable future in Canada, work collectively to enhance our individual contributions and empower

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<sup>1</sup> For more detail on the negative environmental, economic, social, governance, and funding trends see the Trends section of [The Next Wave](#), pages 9 through 45.

leadership across Canada? I believe we can, and so the purpose of this paper is to outline both a national strategy and individual initiatives based on complexity, collaboration, and strategic interventions that will help build a conservator culture in Canada as the foundation for progressive policy and economic development for sustainability.

**If we act now, individually as leaders in the sustainability field and collectively as a movement, I believe we can see substantive results on the above recommendations within four years – one election cycle.**

## Defining a new approach to sustainability

What are some of the characteristics of a new approach based building a cultural foundation for sustainability?

First, we need to shift our thinking **from linear to cyclical** – to recognize that change is a complex process, and to focus our efforts in ways that will empower organic change.

Second, we need to include a focus needs to be on **cultural sustainability** - solutions people want. Be it simply to save money, to improve the quality of life, or to match our actions with our personal values, the solutions we propose need to resonate with Canadians. For example, it is not enough to say we need a carbon tax, we need to show people how a carbon tax will benefit them.

Third we need to **empower people** – by making action easy, affordable, and (above all) desirable. The three components of empowerment reflect important requirements for success: capacity building in organizations and infrastructure to make change easy; fiscal instruments and incentives to make change affordable; and engagement to get people motivated.

Fourth, we need **elegant solutions** – solutions that enhance quality of life, save money, and protect the environment all at the same time. These solutions must be simple, yet transformative. For example, the safer we can make cycling as a viable transportation option, the more we help Canadians enjoy commuting, save money and transform road rage into shared roads.

Fifth, we need **strategic interventions** – campaigns and initiatives that will have a strong ripple effect throughout society and that will further empower organic change. These can be large scale, such as the creation of government future funds to invest in sustainability, or they can be community-based, such as the creation of community networks and action plans to support local groups and volunteers.

These are not distinct items. They are part of a holistic, rational, and feasible approach to achieving the results we want – a better future for Canada.

## The Need for a Cyclical Model

Let me start with notion of shifting from linear to cyclical thinking.

Our traditional approach is linear. On the policy side, we identify an issue, galvanize resources and public support, and focus on a policy outcome. For community engagement, we see a need, develop a program, and measure results. In business, we see a niche, develop a product or service, and measure our success in sales.

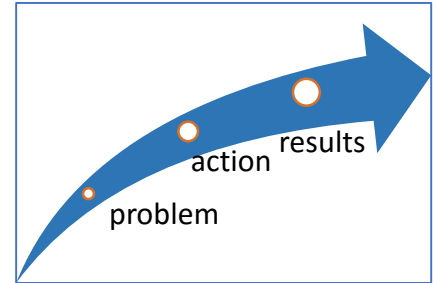


Figure 1: a linear campaign model

Linear thinking is how we work individually within the silos of our groups and mandates. It can be extremely effective in achieving individual objectives, but rarely allows for the opportunity to look at deeper change.

In order to address the complexity of change, we need to incorporate a cyclical model into our thinking, where we build a positive reinforcement cycle based on positive results leading to demand for further leadership.

Occasionally, groups (particularly funders), have the ability to look strategically at cumulative or collective impacts, analyzing the cumulative impact of numerous projects over time.

Individual campaigns (policy or public outreach) are still vital within a cyclical model. They can add extra momentum to cultural change, and they can use a strengthened cultural foundation to achieve heightened results. They add extra momentum to the spinning wheel.



Figure 2: a cyclical strategic model

The ideal approach is a hybrid model, where collectively we can analyze the overall shift to a sustainable path, identify priorities, and create opportunities for individual or collaborative action and new linear campaigns.

For practical reasons, much of our daily work will still be linear. The cyclical model really comes into play when we get involved in strategic analysis and planning – which is every time we bemoan the state of the nation around the bar or formally plan organization strategy around the boardroom table.

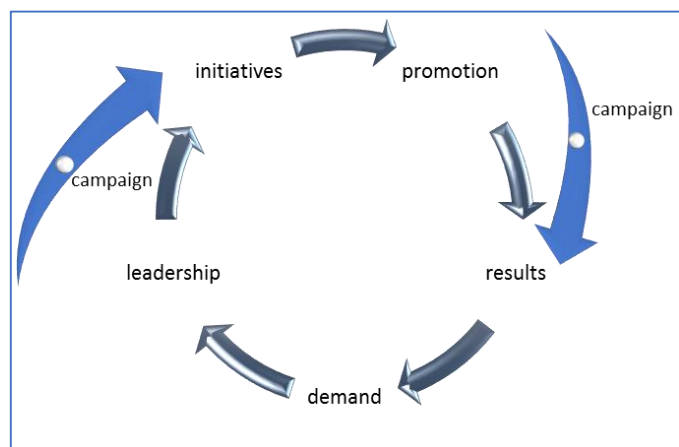


Figure 3: a hybrid model

## The Cultural Sustainability Model for Collaborative Action

Now add in the other four elements of a new approach:

1. The focus on cultural sustainability – solutions people want
2. The emphasis on empowerment – ease, affordability, and desirability
3. The search for elegant solutions that address multiple objectives
4. Strategic interventions that will have a strong ripple effect

Pull it all together within a framework of sustainability and it begins to get very interesting – a systems approach with strategic interventions focused on solutions people want. We start the process by understanding where the current public demand lies. The process is driven more by solutions than problems. No matter how great the issue may be, we cannot move faster than society is willing to allow, so we need to focus on escalating the desire for change.

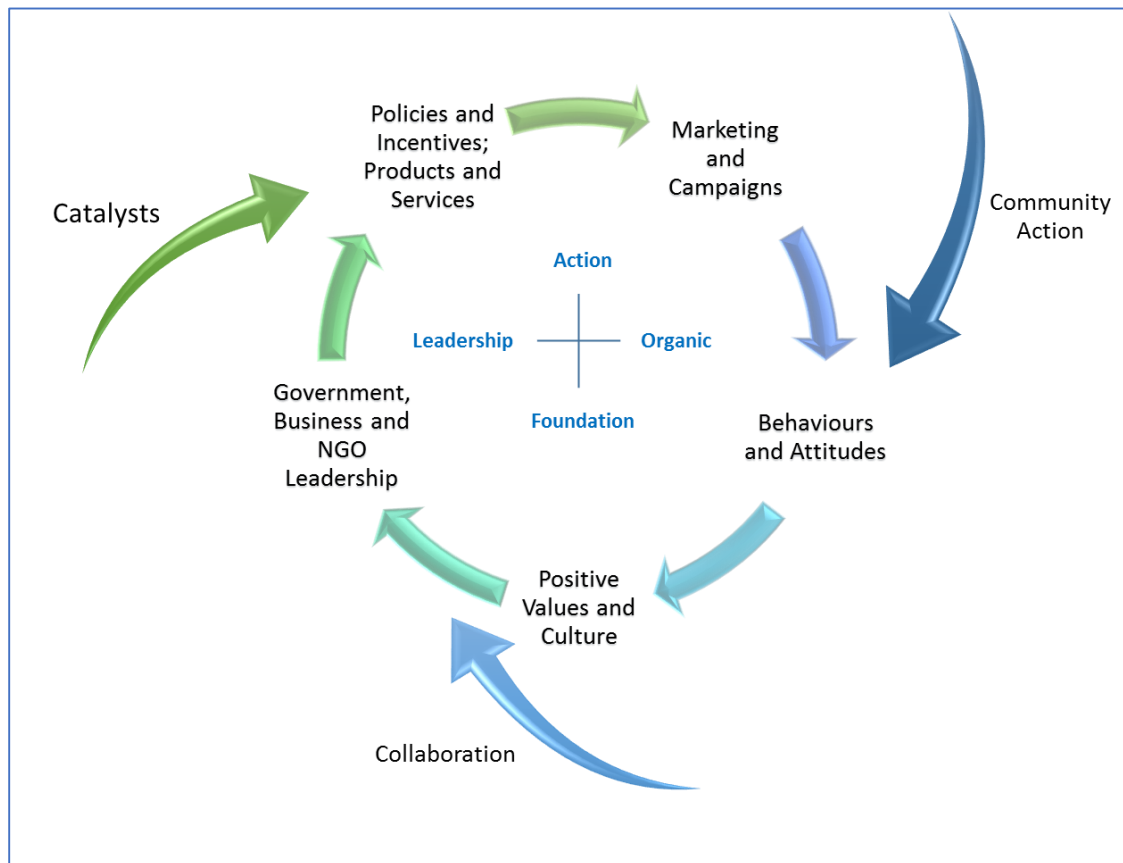


Figure 4: the cultural sustainability model – driven by a focus on solutions to help people live better with less.

What makes it even more interesting is that sustainability is no longer an environmental or economic agenda, it is a social one. At the core of the approach is the focus on empowering voluntary action. Positive experiences lead to stronger interest, they create demand for new products and services, and they strengthen the call for leadership in government policy.

## Notes

- The model shows the positive feedback loop between solutions-on-the-ground, a culture of change, leadership, and the development of new initiatives to further support solutions
- The top half is **action**; the bottom half is the **foundation** of support for sustainability
- The left side is **leadership** by government, business, organizations, and others; the right side is **organic**, voluntary action across society
- The model incorporates voluntary sector, business, and government leadership as having an equally important role in the process.
- There are three major points of influence: **community action**, **collaboration** for leadership, and new initiatives as a **catalyst** for change. These three areas need to be seen as synergistic, not isolated activities.
  - The focus of **community action** is on individual and community action. This is where we support our constituencies, be they members, citizens, clients, customers, target audiences, or the public at large. The actions on this side are by nature complex and organic, yet they will combine to build a strong foundation for leadership.
  - The focus of **collaboration** is on organizing ourselves as leaders in sustainability to provide a clear vision and national roadmap for a healthy and sustainable future for Canada. It needs to be broad-based and inclusive, reflect a strong cultural foundation, and empower the individual leadership of all participants.
  - The focus of **catalysts** is on identifying major new initiatives that will be a catalyst for organic change, including legislation, carbon taxes, incentives, products, and services. Catalysts are usually developed by a single leader, although they can be developed or influenced by a collaborative campaign.



## Applying the Model

Okay, so that's the model. So what does it mean in practical terms?

Well, for starters, it means we can look at the programs and activities of any one player and analyze what else needs to happen in order to achieve long term success. It can help identify and build a business case for new initiatives.

We can also use the model to improve the effectiveness of individual initiatives as they are designed and rolled out. For example, Ontario is currently considering a home energy rating and disclosure initiative that would provide home buyers and renters with information on energy consumption (based on the federal Energuide for Homes). The idea is that energy consumption data will spur buyers to favour energy efficient homes, which in turn would promote energy retrofits and improved efficiency in new building design. The idea is an excellent one in that it will do for homes what mileage ratings has done for cars: raise awareness, influence consumer choice, and provide a foundation of regulated efficiency standards. The potential roadblock is the negative messaging of the cost for an audit as being a "tax" on homeowners. To overcome this, I would look at ways to position the initiative within a broader strategy to lower energy bills through conservation, including [property-based financing](#), [conservation incentives](#), green energy, [net-zero housing](#), and strengthened capacity for community-based conservation outreach and support programs. Connect individual initiatives within a marketing plan that makes it easy, affordable and desirable for the homeowner to act.

The [statistics](#) tell us that the average Canadian household uses 78.6 gigajoules of energy and emitted 4.2 tonnes of greenhouse gases. That figure needs to be at least 30% lower as a goal for a climate strategy. What the public knows is that electricity and heating bills are going up, and we'd like them to go down.

Energy and climate change are linked at the hip, so it only makes sense that we should apply the same approach to the provincial and federal climate change strategies.

Here's a pop quiz: how do we solve climate change? Most of the climate campaigns and research reports revolve around setting hard targets, pricing carbon, leaving the oil in the ground, and promoting a low-carbon economy. Pretty much in that order. Our current strategies are sold on fear and urgency and rely on sacrifice to achieve targets that are admittedly lower than what science tells us we need. Marketing strategies focus on climate data and extreme weather, and public engagement campaigns focus on collecting signatures and donations to press for political leadership. The direct implications of climate strategies on our way of life are often avoided by proponents of action, but they are well understood by the naysayers and general public.

What if we turned it around? What if we designed a climate change strategy as a transition to a better future for Canada? We would start with a vision of the future we want: Canada as a great place to live. We have a high standard of living in Canada, a strong economy, vibrant communities, and a warm and generous culture. These are the things we want to protect and strengthen.

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*What if we designed a climate change strategy as a transition to a better future for Canada?*

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We would then acknowledge the threats to our way of life from climate change, extreme weather, and other factors such as resource depletion and economic uncertainty. To address them, we need to become a lot more efficient in our energy use. Ideally, we need to cut our energy consumption up to



one half. If we can do so, we will all save money, and create a stronger and more resilient economy. The challenge for a climate strategy is to find ways to reduce our energy consumption and improve our quality of life at the same time. Live better with less.

Next, we would organize the strategy by end user, not the source. What are the best opportunities for reducing energy consumption and GHG emissions, and how are we going to help people take action? There will be sections on industry and the oil and gas sector, but the one I want to focus on is the public. Why? Because the public need to see personal benefit in our strategy if they are going to support it in the next election. Strong public support will also lay the foundation for regulatory and fiscal initiatives.

The three main items to be addressed from a social perspective are transportation, home heating, and home electricity bills. Of these, transportation is the biggest issue, in terms of expense, personal frustration, and greenhouse gas emissions. If you can address gridlock and the high cost of personal mobility through a climate plan, you'll find a lot of public support.

Primarily, climate solutions for transportation is an urban issue. It's where 80% of Canadians live, and it's where we can make some huge gains. Again, start with a vision: efficient, seamless transit and viable alternatives to single-passenger vehicles. The list of solutions will range from infrastructure and urban design down to business opportunities (e.g. car-sharing) and individual choice. The temptation may be to simply invest in transit, but if we look at it from the perspective of commuters and urban dwellers, the real goal is a seamless transportation system that connects locally vibrant villages within an urban region. The real goal is to help as many people as possible avoid the expense of owning a car (or multiple cars) by making the alternatives easy, affordable, and desirable.

The cyclical model helps us to understand how we to focus on gradual change over time, and the interconnection between individual choices, cultural shift, and the ability to invest in infrastructure and urban design. Thirty years ago, as a young environmentalist, if I turned up at a meeting with a bike helmet I was a curiosity, an oddity. Ten years ago, I could count on being interviewed for a couple of media stories on car-free families each year. Now, my family is just part of a growing trend of urbanites who prefer cycling, transit, and car-sharing over actually owning a car. And last week, I attended an Ontario media conference announcing that new bike paths will be included in the Municipal Class Environmental Assessment, making it easier for municipalities to build cycling infrastructure. There is still a strong cultural resentment to cycling, and a strong politicization of cycling as being a "war on cars", but gradually the organic shift in cultural norms is happening – fueled by economics and lifestyle choices, and reinforce through strategic actions and investments.

In the end, it's just common sense. We created the problems; we must be the solution. And that is why Canada's climate strategies need to have a solid foundation in cultural sustainability.

You may have noticed that we wind up at the same place as the policy reports, such as [Acting on Climate Change, Pathways to Deep Decarbonization in Canada](#), [Clean Prosperity](#), or the [Trottier Energy Futures Project](#) – carbon pricing, low carbon energy, better urban design, and net-zero homes. The difference is not just in how we market the solutions, it is in making Canadians and Canadian aspirations an integral part of the strategy. Our quality of life and economic opportunities are equally important goals, and they will drive the strategy forward.

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# *From Theory to Practice:*

## *Twenty ideas for action*

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Trust me. Putting a cultural sustainability approach into action is actually not that hard. All the elements are already in place. What we need is the commitment and leadership to step it up.

All the ideas below have been done before, are already underway, or are extensions of existing initiatives. What I have done is look at them as potential candidates for a national initiative capable of building the capacity and leadership for a sustainable future.

I will highlight twenty ideas within the three main categories: community action, collaboration and catalysts. You may well have other examples that are worthy of elevating to national campaign status. Put all these ideas together, and we begin to have the framework for a national collaborative strategy for a better future for Canada.

## Solutions People Want

First, let's start with a sense of what people want: a great place to live, money in their pockets, and a sense of security and well-being.

The chart at right shows the ten green solutions that were used in the [sustainability report card](#) and that are on the [Canada Conserves](#) site.

Each one of these priorities contributes to a healthy and sustainable future.

- Most contribute to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
- Each one can improve our quality of life and sense of community.
- Most offer opportunities for saving money.
- Each can be achieved through a partnership between government policy and programs, business leadership, NGO programs, volunteerism, and individual initiative.
- Each can create a positive feedback loop leading to a deeper culture of conservation and sustainability across Canada.
- They are interconnected, which reinforces the need for collaboration.



The list of priorities can change, shrink, or grow. It can be adapted to local priorities, or to fit the ever-changing emerging national needs. What matters is that we can define sustainability and climate action in tangible terms that will improve the quality of life for Canadians.

Now let's look at ways to build our capacity to deliver these solutions through community action, collaboration, and catalytic interventions.

## Community Action

If so much of social change is organic and voluntary, then we need to get serious about supporting community action. We have municipal climate plans, community consultation and engagement programs, and a plethora of community groups and volunteers. What we don't have are a national program or campaign to support community-led sustainability initiatives.

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*Community action is as much an investment in Canadian culture as it is a means to deliver programs.*

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Community action is as much an investment in Canadian culture as it is a means to deliver programs. It can be unpredictable and organic, but over time it will strengthen the capacity to engage people, deliver solutions, and develop deep-rooted cultural support for a sustainable future.

### 1. Create community-based action plans

Imagine if every municipality across Canada had an organized network of organizations and local businesses that worked together to promote a healthy and sustainable community.

Organizing a community is relatively easy. Start with a community network, host community meetings, and find out ways to support local projects that fit within municipal, provincial, and national mandates. Community Action Plans can be low-cost (as is the case in 22 year old [City Green](#) Strategy in Cambridge, Ontario), or they be the stepping stone to bigger projects (as was the case with several [Green Communities](#)).



Figure 5: Community Action in seven steps. [Click here](#) for the full checklist.

One way we could develop a national community action program is to build on the municipal climate plans through the [Partners for Climate Protection](#) program of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability. For more information on community action, see the Canada Conserves [website](#).

## 2. **Create a national community action network**

What if we created a national network of all the dozens of organizations, foundations, companies, and government programs that promote and support individual and community action? If we focus on co-marketing programs and developing action kits, community organizing would be so much easier and effective. We have policy networks, why not an outreach and action network?

## 3. **Host community town halls – *the Future We Want***

We Canadians aren't shy about talking about the future we want. A national series of community town halls, co-hosted by NGOs and governments, can help raise awareness and support for solutions and build support for community action. David Suzuki's [Blue Dot](#) tour is an example of how a senior national group can take the lead on this project. In this instance, the focus would be on empowering change within our communities. How can we make our communities better and sustainable, and what help do we need to get there?

## 4. **Initiate national campaigns on signature issues**

We haven't had a really good national campaign since Rick Mercer led us on the "One Tonne Challenge" back in 2004. To be really effective, campaigns need to be a collaborative effort: a single message backed up by the resources of many organizations, businesses and governments. They should be used to amplify existing trends and help make it even easier to adopt solutions.

Issues ripe for national campaigns include:

- Saving energy – lowering energy bills through conservation
- Safe cycling – making our roads safer for cycling
- Parks for People - creating vibrant urban parks as a community hub
- Toxic Free – alternatives and safe disposal for household hazardous waste
- Waste reduction – maximizing the 3Rs

Combine a number of key indicators together, and you have the basis for a national contest for the greenest community.

Here's another idea for a national campaign. Calgary's Mayor Naheed Nenshi recently gave a [passionate speech](#) on what it means to be a Canadian, at the end of which he issued a challenge to Canadians to start a "3 Things for Canada" campaign based on the [3 Things for Calgary](#). It would be a terrific boost for volunteerism in Canada, for groups that need volunteers, and for all those students who are required to complete volunteer hours in order to graduate (30 hours in B.C. and 40 in Ontario).

## 5. **Develop a national community ambassadors program**

What if we had an army of volunteers, trained in the solutions and able to speak different languages?

Back in the 1980's, the Toronto Chinese Health Education Committee developed a simple and effective environmental ambassadors program to reach out to people in the Chinese community. The ambassadors received training on the priority issues and solutions of the day, and attended community meetings and special events to encourage people to take action. A variation of the model still in effect today, through [Live Green Toronto volunteers](#).

## 6. **Establish a National Green Corps**

A generation ago, Katimavik was the place for young Canadians to gain experience while helping out in communities across Canada. Katimavik still exists as a non-profit organization, and it runs an [eco-internship project](#) with the Government of Quebec. It's a good place to start for designing a national youth experience program, if not an international program for Canadian youth and professionals to donate time and skills on sustainability projects.

## 7. **Create a national green directory**

Imagine having a single online directory for all the incentives, support programs, products, services, and resources to back up green solutions. Make it searchable by solutions: energy conservation, organic food, safe cycling, etc. The goal would be to connect people with solutions.

I developed the prototype for the Conservation Council of Ontario in 2010 – the [Great Green Directory](#) – which could be adapted and beefed up, or a new directory could be established with multiple NGO, government and business partners.

## 8. **Create a national green leadership recognition program**

Let's make it easy to support companies that are green. A Canadian Green Leaders program would build on the existing green certification programs and unite them under a single five star rating program for

You can view a pilot program developed for the Conservation Council of Ontario – the [GreenLeaders](#) program – which was integrated into the Great Green Directory.

## 9. **Create a national green card**

While working with the community animation program at the City of Toronto, we came up with a Live Green Toronto card to promote local green retailers and organizations, and to provide people with discounts. The program currently has 500 businesses and 35,000 cardholders.

A national version of the card, connected to the national green directory, can be adapted and adopted by participating municipalities. Each card would be branded with the local municipal green

program (e.g. Live Green Toronto, Green Vancouver, EcoMontreal), but the cards would also tap into the national Community Action program and the national green directory.

#### **10. Create community innovation centres**

A [2014 study](#) commissioned by Tides Canada found around 200 shared workspaces across Canada, which shows a strong interest in shared space for shared social purposes. The largest, and most successful model, is the [Centre for Social Innovation](#). Eight parts organic, one part synergy, and one part strategic, an innovation centre provides shared office space for small organizations and start-up businesses that share a common passion for their community and the world. Put fifty to two hundred like-minded people in a common workspace and you also get the potential for synergy, and opportunities for strategic planning on common priorities.

Every municipality with a population over 50,000 should have an innovation centre to support local innovators and spark the next generation of community and business leadership.

#### **11. Create a national schools sustainability challenge**

Canada's youth is aware of the environmental and economic challenges their generation will face. A sustainable future will need innovation and ideas from tomorrow's entrepreneurs and social activists. Groups that are working closely with Canada's schools and universities (such as [Earth Day Canada](#) and [Ontario EcoSchools](#)) could be leaders in developing and distributing a collaborative campaign.

#### **12. Celebrate our Sesquicentennial**

All of the above activities will take on special significance as we approach our 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of confederation in 2017. This means we have just one over a year to lay the groundwork to include a commitment to a green future in our sesquicentennial celebrations.

## Collaboration

We have no shortage of great environmental and sustainability leaders in Canada: individuals, organizations, businesses, foundations, and governments. Yes, they have different and sometimes divergent perspectives and opinions, as do we all, but if we can improve the high level collaboration on a common vision, goals, and agenda for Canada it will go a long way to supporting and empowering leadership across Canada.

### 13. Create a national collaboration

In the early 1990's, almost every province and the federal government has a round table on the environment and the economy. They have all been disbanded. We need a new high-level national collaboration in support of a healthy sustainable future for Canada, but this time focused more on empowering action than on policy advice.

There are several models and precedents for a high-level collaboration, with subtle differences in scope and approach. They include:

- CivicAction Canada – based on the [CivicAction](#) model in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area
- A Canadian Climate Council – based on the Australian [Climate Council](#) model
- A Canadian Round Table on Environment and Economy – resurrecting the [NRTEE](#) but with a stronger mandate for collaboration and action
- A Canadian Sustainability Council – combining a high-level council with a broad sustainability network
- A Canadian Sustainability Network – a networking function alone, similar to the [Canadian Environmental Network](#)
- A Canadian Partnership for Sustainability – a network of senior partners with the ability to form constellations around issues of mutual interest (based on the [Canadian Partnership for Children's Health and the Environment](#))

### 14. Craft a national vision

We need a common vision for Canada, drawing on the United Nations [Sustainable Development Goals](#) and expressing a vision for sustainability both in Canada and internationally.

Here are some recent initiatives that support a collaborative national vision in Canada:

- The [Leap Manifesto](#) – a vision for Canada initiated in the spring of 2015 at a two-day meeting in Toronto attended by representatives from Canada's Indigenous rights, social and food justice, environmental, faith-based and labour movements.
- The [Possible Canadas](#) project – interviews with Canadian thought leaders conducted by Reos Partners. Possible Canadas is helping build a vision of Canada for the Sesquicentennial in 2017.
- [Sustainable Canada Dialogues](#) – an interesting project out of McGill that is engaging students and communities in a dialogue around a sustainable future.

### 15. Convene a national high-level conference on The Future Canadians Want

With an eye to empowerment, hold a national conference to turn the vision into a common agenda for action. This should not be a conference to set someone else's agenda, but an opportunity for leaders across all sectors to come to the table with their own commitment to meeting our common goal of a healthy and sustainable future. A national conference would be able to support a number of other initiatives, such as a nation strategy (16) and a collective impact model for charitable funding (20).



## 16. Draft a national strategy: The Future Canadians Want

Use a national collaboration, community town halls, and a national conference as the building blocks for a national sustainability strategy: the Future Canadians Want.

The goal is to create a healthy, sustainable future for Canada, based on the belief that Canada is a great place to live, and we want to keep it that way. We want to ensure Canada remains a land of opportunity where all Canadians can aspire to a high quality of life. We believe Canada must focus on a healthy, sustainable future in order to find long-term solutions to the economic, social and environmental challenges that lie ahead.

I'd suggest three strategic objectives which can be applied across all issues:

- a. **Empowerment:** to help Canadians live a healthy and sustainable lifestyle and find or create meaningful work in a sustainable economy.
- b. **Collaboration:** to build collaboration by Canada's social, economic, and government leaders for a better future.
- c. **Innovation:** To stimulate innovation and leadership in support of a healthy, sustainable future.

The strategy could incorporate a list of interconnected activities that may be undertaken collaboratively or through the individual leadership of any organization in support of the overall goal of a healthy and sustainable future for Canada.

## 17. Initiate campaigns to promote specific solutions

Similar to the recommendation under community action, and flowing from a national vision and strategy, national and provincial campaigns led by a coalition of leaders would help break down the barriers and facilitate action on some of the top priorities for sustainability.

Whether through a formal coalition, or through "constellations" of like-minded organization, campaigns provide the necessary profile to nudge new initiatives into reality. For example CivicAction ran a campaign, "[What would you do for 32?](#)", to promote prompt action to fund transit improvements in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area. The campaign was endorsed by 187 elected officials in the region, and helped raise awareness and support for transit funding.



National campaigns could target major strategic initiatives, such as carbon pricing and future funds, or they could support awareness and action around strategic priorities, such as a national transit strategy, local food, green jobs, clean water, and energy conservation and green power.

## Catalytic Interventions

What are the big ideas that can will be a catalyst for organic change? This is the realm of national think tanks and organizations. If you use a cultural sustainability perspective and focus on long-term cultural change, there are a number of major initiatives that emerge as possibilities.

### **18. Ministries of Environment and Sustainability**

As big an issue as climate change is, it is but one aspect of a sustainable future. True sustainability looks at all the challenges to our long-term vision, and maps out a coordinated response. The foundation of sustainability is a healthy environment, without which we cannot have a sustainable economy, In turn, a healthy economy supports a healthy and prosperous society. For this reason, it makes sense to expand the traditional role of our ministries of the environment to include a mandate to coordinate a government-wide commitment to a sustainable future.

### **19. Create government Future Funds**

Our future needs funding. Whether it is funding for public transit, new bike lanes, investments in community capacity, or incentives for energy conservation and green power, the transition to a sustainable future will proceed much more smoothly if we choose to invest in our future. The alternative, of course, is to wait for the future to force change upon us.

Future funds offer the possibility to link revenue from climate pricing, resource royalties, and/or environmental penalties to investments and incentives for the future we want. They should be revenue neutral and flow funds back to people and companies that are implementing solutions. A formal Future Fund will also increase transparency and accountability, ensuring that all funds raised through pricing, royalties and penalties go to funding alternatives. The Fund will sunset naturally at such a time when the transition to a low-carbon future is complete. (See also the Alternatives Journal blog post on [The Case for a Climate Fund.](#))

### **20. Rethink charitable funding and fundraising**

Canadians give over \$10 billion a year in charitable donations, according to [Statistics Canada](#). Of this total, funding for the environmental sector in Canada hovers around three percent. From foundation sources, the Canadian Environmental Grantmakers Network reports annual grants of over \$280 million in 2011/12. There is a longstanding recognition of the need to beef up charitable contributions to the environmental sector, and perhaps a focus on social solutions will help attract new donors.

We're not talking about the environment as a discreet entity any more, we are talking about the future of our society and we are promoting solutions for energy, food, transportation, and urban design. With an emphasis on cultural sustainability, it's time we rethink the silos of funding that place climate and sustainability on the periphery of social and cultural funding.

A collective impact approach to sustainability is one possible approach, bringing together all major funders to analyze the complexity of a sustainable future, develop a common agenda, and coordinate funding streams to maximize the impact of mutually reinforcing activities within each funder's mandate.

A second approach would be to develop a sustainable futures fundraising program into one of the major funding networks. The Vital Signs project of the [Community Foundations of Canada](#) is a possible avenue, marrying statistical research on quality of life indicators with an agenda for action. Other options are to expand the [Giving Pledge](#) in Canada (a U.S. campaign to encourage the world's wealthiest individuals and families to commit to giving more than half of their wealth to philanthropy or charitable causes either during their lifetime or in their wills), and a One for All Canada campaign to encourage Canadians who are in the top one percent income bracket to contribute at least one percent of their income to charity See [The Next Wave](#) p 70).

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And there you have it. Twenty ideas based on a model of cultural sustainability: a vision of the future Canadians want, solutions that improve our quality of life, and results that will build a strong cultural foundation of support for further action.

For the most part, they are all ideas based on existing initiatives. They are doable, if we have the initial leadership and collective will to make them happen.

So what next?

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# WHAT NEXT:

## INVESTING IN THE CULTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY

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Canada has always invested in culture. We support the arts, cultural diversity, and a national broadcasting corporation that is as much a part of the Canadian identity as the sport of hockey. Investing in the culture of sustainability should be just as important.

At the same time, however, we have seen a steady erosion of core Canadian values over the past two decades through a relentless campaign to convert people into taxpayers, neighbours into enemies, charities into special interests, and scientists and civil servants into endangered species. There have been strong forces at play that equate cultural erosion with opportunities for economic wealth. The challenge of fostering a culture of sustainability will be made even more difficult by the cumulative impact of budget cuts, increased administration and reporting, and direct suppression of the organizations and government departments that we would expect to lead in delivering solutions. We have a lot of work to do to undo the damage of the past decades and to create solutions that will have both immediate and tangible benefits as well as foster a deep cultural commitment to investing in a healthy and sustainable future for Canada.

By now, you should have a sense of both the theory and practical applications of cultural sustainability. It is the missing element in our climate and sustainability strategies. We need to rethink our strategies and programs from the perspective of helping people, strengthening communities, and investing in a better future for Canada. I have outlined twenty ideas for action, but we are still left with the question: what next?

It all depends There are two ways we can proceed.

Chances are, this paper will be forgotten by all but a handful of people with a week. There are too many pressing priorities: deadlines to meet, proposals and briefing notes to write or review, offices and campaigns to run; all the challenges of keeping our collective heads above water. The [COP21](#) UN Climate Change Conference in Paris this December is the current climate priority, and all eyes are on the prime minister-designate to see what target Canada will set and how we will meet it.

Somewhere down the line, that age-old frustration will set in again, and perhaps then you might remember that there was this other model of “cultural sustainability”.

If, however, the concept and ideas in this paper resonated with you, there are a number of ways to proceed, either organic, or strategic.

## Organic: adapt and adopt the model

You can take the ideas in this paper and apply them to your own organization.

Overlay your organization /government department/business on the model (page 5). Where is your focus and expertise? Whether your focus is narrow (i.e. single issue or an area of expertise) or broad (covering many issues and approaches), can you identify how increased collaboration can help meet your goals? Who are your allies, both formal and informal?

For foundations and other funding programs, how are you integrating linear funding into a complex, cyclical approach?

The main reason for adopting the complex and cyclical model is to be able to understand and describe how our individual actions can contribute to an overall theory of change. Overall, you may not change your strategic approach, but what you should look to develop within your organization is a stronger sense of how change will happen, what other interventions or activities will support your own objectives, and who are your allies.

If I can be of help, let me know.

## Strategic Development

As an overall strategic approach to sustainability in Canada, we are on new ground here. Traditionally, we have a fractured, silo approach with areas of specialization. We have wealth of leadership on environmental issues and climate change, social issues, policy research, community engagement and green living, municipal planning, and on any one single issue or solution. We also have a window of opportunity with particularly strong political leadership at all three levels of government. We certainly have the opportunity, capacity and talent to implement a collaborative national transition strategy.

What I have been unable to find is a single organization that would convene or host such an initiative. If you do exist, and have such a mandate, please let me know. But I suspect we are on new ground. This leads to a number of options:

### **1. Identify a host organization and initial partnership**

We find a senior national organization to lead in designing the next steps for a national collaboration in consultation with Canadian leaders.

### **2. Create a new government initiative**

The federal or any of the provincial governments can establish and fund a new collaborative process through their existing climate or sustainability strategies. The mandate should emphasize a common goal and a focus on empowering action rather than a purely consultative role.

### **3. Create a new national collaboration**

As outlined in idea #13, a core group of leaders could come together to form a new national collaboration, filling the gap left by the National Round Table and creating a new mandate based on empowering action.

#### **4. Develop individual components**

There are a number of potential projects within the list of twenty ideas that can be developed through various lead organizations or partnerships. They include:

- #1 Community Action Plans
- #4 issue campaigns, or 3 Things for Canada
- #5 A national community ambassadors program
- #7 A national green directory
- #8 A national green leadership recognition program
- #9 A national green card
- #11 A national school sustainability challenge

#### **5. The Twenty: project research and partnership development via Canada Conserves**

Looking for more detail before committing? A six month to one year dialogue and research project would develop business plans and support for key projects in the list of twenty ideas. The project would look at fleshing out an implementation plan and schedule, including:

- Lead organization and partners
- Five year budget
- Potential sponsors
- Work plan and timeline
- Anticipated results and benefits

#### **6. Ongoing mapping and research via Canada Conserves**

Build on the Canada Conserves initiative:

- map existing strategies and leadership
- develop resource guides for solutions – downloadable factsheets for community organizers
- conduct further research on opportunities for action.

## Comments and Support

Three years ago, I started the Canada Conserves initiative because I could see the need to promote a culture of conservation across Canada, building on the research, strategies, and programs developed at the provincial level through the Conservation Council of Ontario (CCO). Two years of research and a year of travel (a family sabbatical) have helped to solidify the conclusions that our environmental, economic and social problems are deeply rooted and interconnected, and that we need to focus on positive solutions in order to create the cultural foundation for long lasting change.

There are new ideas in this paper, but it is interesting to note that the emphasis on cultural sustainability is an affirmation of much of the work piloted through the CCO over the past two decades. The ideas are solid, but the core funding and support for strategic planning and capacity building faded with the overall shift to small project funding, tighter mandates, and dwindling resources.

With this paper, I am keen to shift from research to action. It's time to put these ideas into practice, either as part of a national organization, as an independent consultant, or by creating a more formal structure for Canada Conserves. I'd welcome your comments, suggestions, and offers of leadership and support.

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