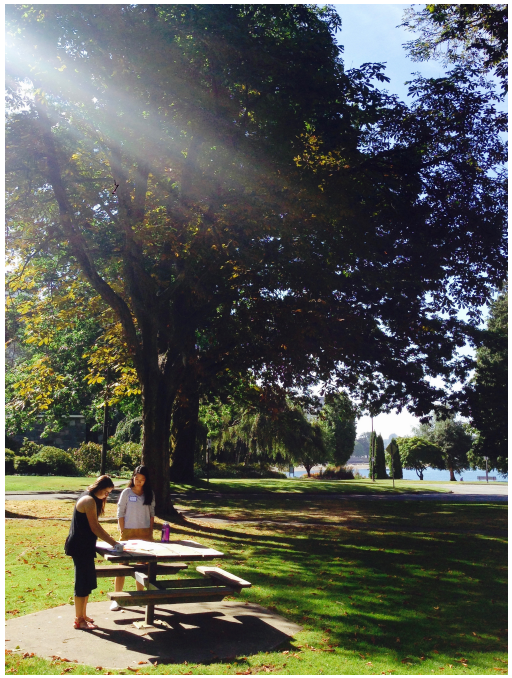
A Developmental Evaluation Framework for the City of Vancouver Solutions Lab



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Greenest City Scholar

Final Report

September 15th, 2017

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This GCS project was conducted under the mentorship of City staff. The opinions and recommendations in this report, and any errors, are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the City of Vancouver or The University of British Columbia.

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Greenest City Scholar Final Report, August 2017

What's the City of Vancouver Solutions Lab?

The Solutions Lab is a new approach to seeking breakthrough, transformative solutions to some of the city's most complex problems. It's a place where City staff, community members and stakeholders collaborate to deeply understand complex challenges from the points of view of the people most affected by them, and where we rapidly prototype and test innovative responses to see what we can learn through co-creation and some risk taking. It's an exciting place where we dialogue and listen deeply, try new processes and collaboration tools, and learn and have fun together. **The City of Vancouver Solutions Lab is using a combination of Theory U and human-centred design to get at both personal/cultural and systems transformations and to reach breakthrough solutions** (please see Figure 1. below).

The City of Vancouver Solutions Lab model is part of a broader picture of "public sector innovation labs" (PSIL's) being developed in other places around the world, especially in Europe. PSIL's take a variety of forms and focus areas; they will vary in their purpose, theory of change, operating model, methods and impact. What PSIL's or "Labs" do have in common is their **strong action-reflection processes** and they regularly review their impacts and evolve their structure, governance and funding models, leadership, methods and share their learning (Westley, 2016).

The Solutions Lab is currently in a soft launch stage (phase 2), with core methods, operating model, and appropriate types of Lab challenges and teams all being developed by working on four complex challenges in the Lab context. From May through mid August 2017, I held the Greenest City Scholar position and was tasked with supporting the Lab Manager with the roll out of Lab processes and developing an initial developmental evaluation framework to evaluate the impact of the Lab (more details about developmental evaluation on pg. 5). The Solutions Lab was initiated by an action on Collaborative Leadership in the Healthy City Strategy, and has one staff lead, a Steering Committee and senior City staff leadership. To date, community members and stakeholders on specific Lab teams have consisted of staff and volunteers from Neighbourhood Houses, local NGOs and non-profits, arts organisations, Tourism Vancouver and Business Improvement Associations (BIAs). **The purpose of this report is to share what the City of Vancouver Solutions Lab has been doing and why, how we've been evaluating our activities with Developmental Evaluation and based on our evaluations, what kinds of questions could we be asking for the next iteration of the Lab. The hope is that the Solutions Lab will offer CIty staff and community partners viable ways to reach different kinds of solutions to the sustainability challenges we all face. More broadly, solutions found in Vancouver can potentially be scaled to cities globally due to Vancouver's leadership position and growing reach and impact.**

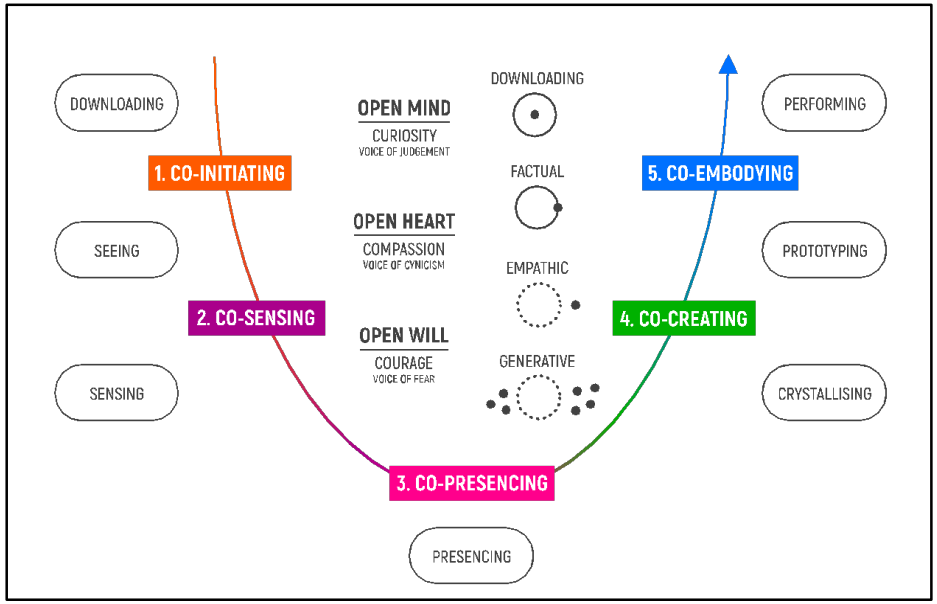


Figure 1. (left) Adapted from Theory U (Scharmer, 2016)

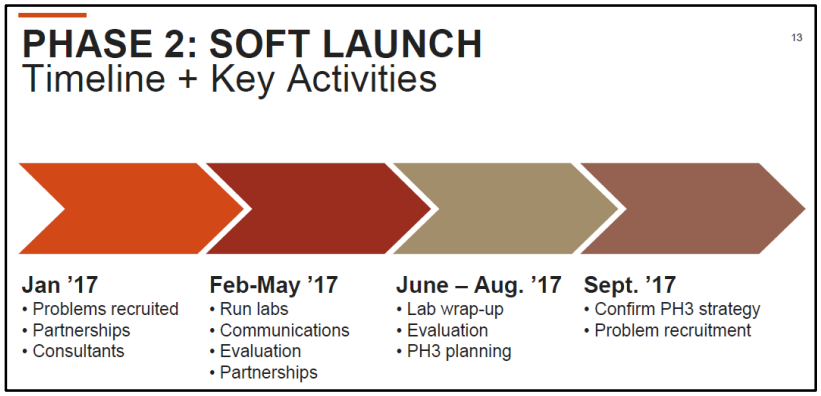
Theory U is a process that allows us to learn by not only reflecting on the experiences of the past but also learning from the future as it emerges. Figure 1. depicts Theory U as a process that takes a deep dive into a problem by "letting go" of what we think we know and re-emerging with different solutions than would have otherwise been reached.

Human-centred design is a process used by designers that involves building empathy with the people you are designing for. It starts with the users and ends with new solutions that are custom made to suit their needs.

Summary of Activities

Timeline of Soft Launch (Phase 2)

The soft launch phase of the Solutions Lab has been underway since January 2017. This report consists of activities and findings from May to August 2017 when the Lab Manager and I put the Lab into practice by convening 4 different City problems in the Solutions Lab processes that are under development. Please note a great deal of work was done by the Lab Manager and Steering Committee before my position began in May (please see Figure 2) and a summary of each Lab problem is in Table 1 below.



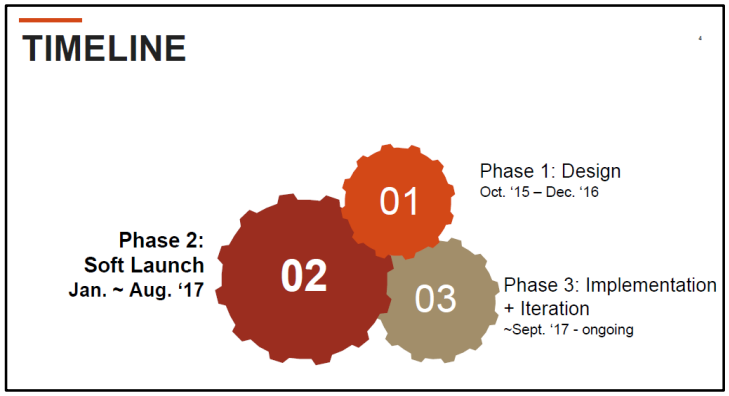


Figure 2. Time and Key Activities of Solutions Lab

Recent Activities (January 2017 - August 2017)

For each individual Lab problem, a Lab team consisting of City staff and community partners - thoughtfully curated by the Lab Manager and Lab leaders - are led through the Solutions Lab processes based on Theory U and human-centred design principles. The individual sessions are 1-2 day long workshops and have been occurring over 4-6 week periods depending on City staff schedules. In this current iteration of the Lab, each stage of Theory U (i.e. Co-initiating, Co-sensing, Presencing, etc.) has had it's own session with the same team members invited to participate in every stage. The sessions are run by experienced facilitators and held in locations outside "City" meeting rooms such as CityStudio, Stanley Park and the Queen Elizabeth Theatre. Below is a description of the Labs that are currently underway as well as other problems that are in the initial development stages (i.e. - before a Lab team is curated and begin the Lab process).

Table 1.

Project	**Convening Question/Purpose**	**Status**
Engineering Customer Service Lab	How might we improve customer experiences in Engineering Services? We will use the front desk as a focal point, and use water + sewer permits and major project interruptions to streets as examples.	Early co-creating/ prototyping

Public Engagement Lab	How might we be more consistent, collaborative, and values-aligned in our public engagement work at the City?	Moving into presencing + co-creating
Public Space + Public Art Lab	How might we build a culture of collaboration between the City and community partners to unlock further potential for creative and engaged city-building through our public spaces.	Moving into presencing + co-creating
Community Connections + Resilience Lab	How might we increase resilience, connectedness, and belonging in a neighbourhood with growing diversity and increasing densification?	Co-initiating

What is Developmental Evaluation?

Developmental evaluation (DE) is a field of evaluation meant to assist social innovators **create** - or radically adapt - a program based on trial and error. DE is different from other types of evaluations; whereas summative evaluations help *judge* the value of a program and formative evaluations assist in the *improvement* of a program, DE evaluates what the next steps are in the *creation* of an emerging program. DE asks questions such as: What is developing? What are the options for the next iteration of the program? (Cabaj, 2014). The difference is that in DE the turnaround between question asking, question answering, question interpretation and use for action often happens in short, iterative and on going cycles with **focus of development** (Patton, 2011, p. 232).

Another way to think about DE is as "real time strategic learning" where the evaluator gathers real time-data to inform ongoing decision-making and adaptations to the innovations being implemented. Patton (2011, p. 2) explains:

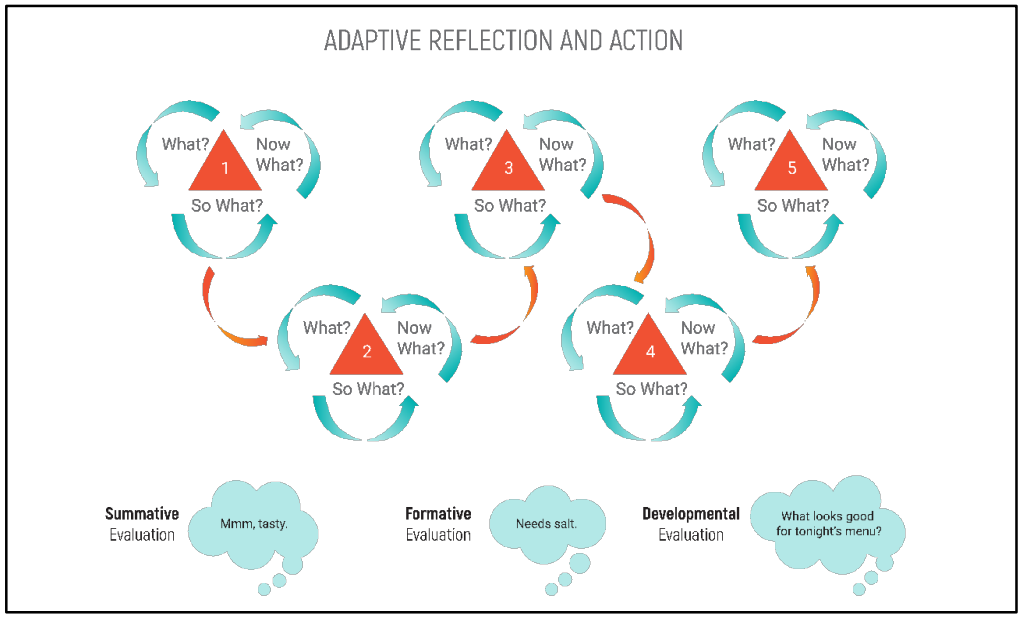
"The evaluator is often part of a developmental team whose members collaborate to conceptualize, design, and test new approaches in a long-term, ongoing process of continuous development, adaptation, and experimentation, keenly sensitive to unintended results and side effects. The evaluator's primary function in the team is to infuse team discussions with evaluative questions, thinking, and data and to facilitate systematic data-based reflection and decision making in the developmental process."

Simply put, the person doing the evaluating is often closely involved in the development processes of the innovative program. To keep developmental evaluation of the Solutions Lab simple, effective and timely the "What, So What, Now What?" inquiry framework has been used by the Solutions Lab team to date (please see Figure 2). This model simply applies basic evaluative

thinking to inquire about social innovations and it is an approach useful to those new to evaluation. Patton (2011, p.232) starts with the following questions when using DE in a new environment:

What is the innovation *now*? (What?)
What do the results of innovation efforts mean *now*? (So what?)
What do the findings reveal about next steps *now*? (No what?)

Figure 2. (left) Adapted from Developmental Evaluation (Patton, 2011)



The Solutions Lab is using developmental evaluation (DE) because the Lab is in a discovery phase and it is constantly in motion. The Solutions Lab is being built as we go and there is a lot of learning to do as the processes unfold in real time. In other words, the team has been integrating reflection and adaptation into lab practices at every step. Now we turn to the methods used and key learning from Phase 2.

<u>What have we been doing and why?</u>

As the Solutions Lab unfolded, DE helped to evaluate the core purpose, methods, operating model, and impact of the Lab for the City of Vancouver as well as for its community partners. Our DE involved "tracking emergent and changing realities, illuminating perspectives and realities, and feedback into meaningful findings in real time" (Patton, 2011, p.3).

We have been performing action research to do this real time learning and using the "What, So What, Now What" inquiry framework to inform Phase 2 between June and August 2017. Specifically,I was intensely involved in the delivery of 3 out of the 4 Lab problems, and by doing so, was able to capture real time data to help inform each phase of the Lab and document important learning relevant to other Labs (please see Figure 3. for an explanation of how DE is and was used at two different scales). As per Cabaj (2014, p. 3), the evaluation design and methods have been "diverse, highly adaptive, evolving and lightweight designs and emphasis on seeking patterns across experiments to inform strategy."

Specifically, the DE inquiry framework of "What?" "So What?" "Now What?" has been used to test the core design and methods used in the Lab (i.e. Theory U), convening questions, Lab team composition, facilitator combinations, space requirements, the overall operating model and the role of the Lab Manager. We have been paying close attention to what is happening before, during and after the Lab sessions (please see Figure 1 for a refresher of Lab processes) to make sense of what is happening, why it's important (or not) and if and how we want to do it next time. This type of evaluation has been based on the following realities:

- Conducted pre-interviews with the Community Connections + Resilience Lab team leads asking them to reflect on their expectations of the lab
- Participated in the design, implementation, facilitation and write up of 3 out of the 4 lab questions
- Participated in the preparation and debrief with the facilitators and Lab Manager for 3 out of the 4 labs
- Prepared and collected feedback from lab participants at the end of each session and incorporated this feedback into the planning of next labs
- Assisted with the write up of 3 lab reports
- Took detailed notes and pictures during the lab sessions
- Consulted with DE expert, Mark Cabaj, and read relevant DE literature

Much has been learned on the operational scale (both within each Lab and across Labs) and we are starting to probe and glean insights into what the larger impact the Lab could have for the City as a whole. Below is a summary of key learning from the Lab activities so far. Please see Appendix A for a sample feedback form used at the end day for each Lab session.

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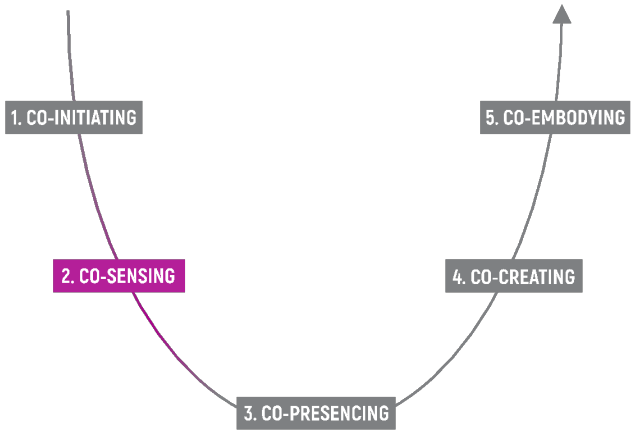
<td> 
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<td>Scale 1: Within and Between each of the 4 Labs

DE was used to evaluate each phase of individual Labs (i.e. Engineering Customer Service Lab OR Public Engagement Lab) by collecting real time data and either adapting to challenges and questions as they arose or by taking note of outcomes of our decisions in one Lab and using what we learned in the design of other Labs. The graphic to the left depicts an example of one phase of a Lab (Co-sensing) that can be evaluated. All other phases of the Lab were also evaluated using DE.

Example #1: Tracking who and when Lab team members attend the Lab session has been an interesting challenge, for example when new people were invited to participate in the co-sensing part of the Lab without being part of the co-initiating process. Initially it was thought the new participants would be an unhelpful distraction. However, with minor tweaks to the “re-cap” session on the first day of the co-sensing session, new lab participants were brought up to speed and added new perspectives and energy to the room.</td>
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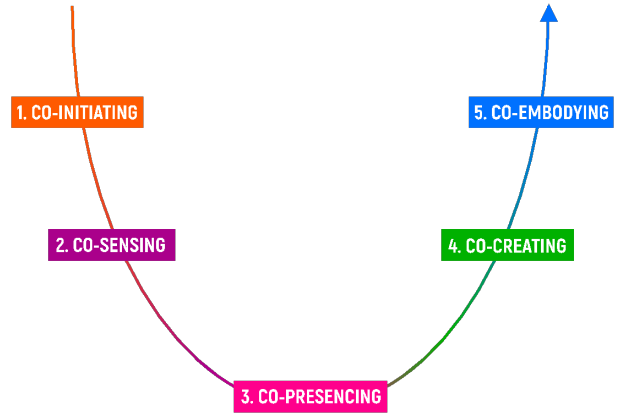
<td> 
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<td>Scale 2: The Solutions Lab processes as a whole

Preliminary ideas about how to measure the impact of the Lab have begun to surface from several places including lessons learned from DE in each Lab, debrief meetings with facilitators, reflections from Steering Committee members and meetings with senior City staff. At this phase it would be useful to take stock of what we have learned and develop a concrete evaluative framework to measure the impact of the Lab in terms of breakthroughs, transformations and relationships. Please see below for detailed definitions.

Example #2: Throughout the Lab process, the time commitment required by City staff and community partners has been substantial. We should ask and test whether parts of the Lab can be used for different kinds of problems. Does each problem have to go through the entire U to reach different solutions?</td>
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Figure 3. Developmental Evaluation used at different scales

Key Learning from Phase 2 of the Solutions Lab:

- **Who is on the team really matters.**
  - The team leads need to be "pioneers". These are people who only need to know the *why*, and not necessarily the "what" or the "how". The team leads will participate in the process in various ways, from being a stronger voice in the room to more of a quiet yet encouraging voice. Different variations of this spectrum will work, what is important is that the team leads are advocates of the process and are willing to participate with open minds and hearts.
  - Diversity really matters! Participants made very clear that diverse perspectives, educational backgrounds, worldviews, and ethnicities are extremely important to an authentic Lab experience. The Lab Manager, support and teams leads need to take account for this to the best of their ability from the very beginning of the process.
  - Finding the "pioneer" staff leads, and the problems with the right amount of urgency and complexity to them, takes time and intention to get it right.
  - Team members don't necessarily need to commit to the whole process right away; they can say yes at the beginning but things change. It was useful to ask for each person's commitment at the end of the "Co-initiating" workshop as all participants expressed interest and commitment in going further in the process together.
- **Time is precious.**
  - We are learning to design the Lab process with people's time and schedule's in mind, while still facilitating a "deep dive" into the problem (i.e. design sprint and/or shorter session over a few weeks, allowing for a certain amount of coming/going of lab team members during sessions). The more intense design sprint format used in one of the Lab's allowed us to go through (almost) the whole process and come to concepts for prototypes. While stressful, it was important for us to do it this way because we learned useful information about when and how to narrow the scope of the problem, and how challenging it can (and will be) to get to the "Co-embodying" phase.
  - Planning around people's time and schedules is always challenging; during the summer months we've been trying to work around vacation time and still trying to hit the sweet spot of timing (i.e. - 1, 2 or 3 weeks) between each phase in the Lab process. If too much time lapses between each session, does the team lose steam and interest? So far the answer is no, the Lab teams seem genuinely committed to the entire Lab process.
- **Productive tension? (Pressure cooker metaphor from Mark Cabaj)**
  - The cook (being the facilitation team) has control of the turning the heat up or down. If the pressure goes beyond the carrying capacity of the vessel, the pressure cooker can blow up. On the other hand, with no heat nothing cooks. We don't want to eliminate stress/tension completely. We have been learning to manage these tensions as they come up in the Lab:

    - Outcomes versus process: There is a strong tension between process and outcomes; we all know achieving tangible outcomes is important for a municipal government, so how much time can the Lab focus on the "deep dive" process without losing the goal of coming to testable prototypes?
    - Consensus versus debate: how to balance collegial and open space with discomfort and conflicting views
    - Supply versus demand of time: how much time is too much, or too little? Should we be spending more time unpacking the learning journeys?
- **Everyone loves a learning journey.**
    - Maybe not everyone loves this part of co-sensing; however, it's been an invaluable part of the Lab process in terms of pushing City Staff to see their work through the lens of those most impacted by it. It's more than "consultation with stakeholders"; it's about listening, observing and asking questions to gain a new perspective on the problem, and then taking those insights back to the ideation stage.
- **Facilitators are key, so we need more.**
    - Different consultants have different abilities to facilitate the current Solutions Lab framework and bring their own specific tool-kits to it. There currently seems to be enough capacity in the consultant ecosystem to creatively facilitate the U process; however there may be fewer consultants in Vancouver that can actually "build" a variety of different types of prototypes.
- **Lab Manager as a convener, with a little bit of help.**
    - The role of Lab Manager has been to convene, organize, coordinate, and help facilitate the Lab in its entirety. This role has been about maintaining relationships, bridging to implementation, and ensuring a safe space in which Lab process can occur. Facilitation consultants can then provide more uncomfortable pushes if needed, without risking these relationships. The Lab Manager holds a certain sense of accountability to/from team participants. This model has worked well so far.
    - Having 4 problems in the Lab at one time has been manageable and can certainly continue as long as there is support staff (i.e. - each lab takes quite a bit of time to plan, unfold and wrap up).
- **It's all about the food...and space.**
    - It's been crucial for Labs to be out of regular CoV meeting spaces and contexts and therefore we've been moving around city into different neighbourhoods, accessing outside space (i.e. THNK Home, Park Board/Stanley Park, Art Starts,CityStudio, Slocan Park Field House). We provide nice food, warm invitations, and personal touches as much as possible. People appreciate this as this demonstration of care, and honouring people's participation has been important to creating a gracious space.
    - This level of detail has also been logistically challenging (i.e. carrying boxes of supplies on our bikes). It is worthwhile

having a permanent Lab space (that is bright and with a kitchen) if it can provide an "out of CoV" experience.

- **What makes a Lab a Lab?**
    - We need more time in the Lab to figure out "what is a Lab and what is not a Lab"? It's an important question that keeps coming forward from the Lab Steering Committee and senior City staff. We may need to think about how we can apply what we have learned so far elsewhere in easy/simple ways. Can a lab be one ½ day session that offers a creative push? Does it need to be a series of in-depth workshops to get at breakthrough solutions?
    - Developmental Evaluation has been helpful to get us to shape and run what is seeming like a well rounded Lab process, though as the Lab moves into its next iteration other DE inquiry frameworks may be necessary to track the full impact of the Lab in terms of breakthroughs, transformation and relationships. How do we measure the overall impact of the Solutions Lab for the City of Vancouver? This could include following "key informants" through the Lab process from beginning to end. Please see Table 2. below.

What's next for the Solutions Lab?

As the Lab continues into the fall 2017, 3 out of the 4 Labs will move into the Co-creation and Co-embodying sessions and potentially 2 new problems will be taken on by the Lab. As the problems become more complex, it will be important to continue to adapt the overall purpose of the Lab with the Lab Manager, Steering Committee, and Deputy City Manager. As the Lab unfolded in practice, DE has helped make the case that measuring the Lab in terms of breakthroughs, transformations and relationships is clear and simple, and also conveys ambition and a strong call to action. How might we understand and measure these impacts?

Much of the initial thinking about how to measure the overall impact of the Lab, or also known as the Lab's "theory of change" took place before my Greenest City Scholar position began in May 2017. Please see Appendix A for an initial list of "Units of Analysis" to use as potential indicators. To date, the following describes possible ways of measuring the overall impact of the Lab in terms of breakthrough solutions, transformation, and relationships:

Breakthroughs (aka getting to different kinds of solutions): Innovation, risk-taking, experimentation, action, complex problems, prototyping, failure-as-learning, creative disruption

Transformations (aka people showing up differently and seeing themselves as agents of change; transforming the culture and systems that we're working within): Systematic, personal, leadership, action/reflection, developmental, intrapreneurship, new metaphors + stories

Relationships (aka breaking down silos): Diverse perspectives, collaborative, empathy, new insights, whole system in the room, deep listening

Potential methods to measure the three areas of impact include:

Table 2.

Method		**Potential Questions**
User Profile **What will you want to know about the overall impact of the Lab?**	Identify primary users of the evaluation and complete user profile as per Cabaj (2014). Organize and prioritise user cases to ensure the evaluation is purposeful and relevant. Use the user profile to orient DE to track larger impact of breakthroughs, transformations and relationships.	1) How would life be better if this project worked well? 2) What is it about the lab that you think will make a difference? 3) How will the lab overcome likely challenges and barriers? Please see Appendix C for other potential interview questions to complete the user profile.
Pre + post in person interviews **What are core team members learning by going through the Lab?** **Are staff seeing themselves in**	Conduct pre and post interviews with core team members for Solutions Lab problems. Pre interviews will ask each interviewee to reflect on their mindset going into the lab. Post interviews will ask each interviewee to reflect on what they feel would not have happened without the lab. The pre and post interviews are intended to glean a deeper understanding of how the core methods used within in each lab are	Potential Pre Interview Questions How do you currently perceive/understand the problem? What are your hopes and fears for the Solutions Lab? What are some of the barriers to innovation for the City? (Try to get people to see they have more agency in the system or something that gets them to think about role in bigger system. Provide an example…) How do you think the SLab will help with this problem? Potential Post Interview Questions

more expansive ways?	working, why or why not. Write up all reflections and pre and post interview data in excel sheet to track and code the potential changes taking place throughout the SLab processes.	How did the lab help change this perception? In your opinion, what was the biggest challenge you overcame in this process? What would you have done differently? What would have not happened without the lab?
Pre and post Lab online surveys **Prompts to get at mindsets before coming into the lab as well as mindsets after the Lab experience.**	Prepare a short online survey to send to all Lab team members 1-2 days before the Lab begins. This will give you a sense of what the team members know and feel about the Lab, and how they perceive the convening question. Send the same, or similar online survey to each Lab team member after the full Lab has been completed to glean if how their understanding of the convening problem changed throughout the Lab process and why.	The following pre Lab online survey questions were used for the Customer Service in Engineering: In your opinion, how important is it to improve customer service in Engineering? In your experience, what are the top three issues or 'areas of focus' for improving customer service in Engineering? What are the most useful and effective tools, equipment, processes, etc. that are available to you, and enable you to provide great customer service? What are the most frustrating tools, equipment, processes, etc. that get in the way of providing great customer service? When Engineering has improved our customer service, what does that LOOK and FEEL like to you? What are some of the barriers to innovation in Engineering? What are some of the barriers to innovation at the City in general?

Bigger Questions for the Solutions Lab

Below are the main questions I would recommend the Lab focus on in its DE work moving forward into the Phase 3 and beyond:

Lab purpose

- Does the Lab need an identity?
- What are the basic requirements for work to be done in "the Lab"? (i.e. it must be a complex problem, it must have a committed staff lead who has the problem on their work plan.)
- How can the Solutions Lab best help achieve city priorities?
- What, if any, parts of specific Lab processes can be leveraged individually to benefit other projects and programs?
- How can we iterate our theory of change?

Impact

- To measure impact should we increase the sample size? (i.e. - use data from the next iteration of Labs)
- How can we best measure breakthroughs, transformations, and relationships?

Methods and process

- What are the conditions that make Theory U appropriate or not to take a deep dive into the problem?
- What parts of Theory U, human-centered design, and other potential lab methods can be used independently by different departments and for which problems?
- What Lab methods are most appropriate, high impact and engaging in different situations and for different problems?
- Re-evaluate the intentional differences between Lab models - design sprint versus over a longer period of time - what worked well and what didn't?
- How do we ensure prototypes don't die off?
- How can we support risk-taking in uncertain problem spaces?
- How do we ensure that successful prototypes are integrated into City activities and operations in effective ways?

Types of convening questions and teams

- What types of problems are complex enough?
- What are the qualities of a Lab team that need to be in place?

Space +aesthetic experience

- Would a permanent Lab space create the same atmosphere (i.e. - help Lab team "show up differently")

Operating Model

- What are the benefits and limits to the model of a Lab manager and an ecosystem of consultants?

- What does succession planning need to look like?
- Can we communicate “success stories” of the Lab internally and externally to generate buy-in and understanding about the approach?

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APPENDIX A - Example Feedback Form from Day 5 of Engineering Lab

Engineering Customer Service Lab
Date and Location

Thank you for your blood, sweat and tears over the last two weeks. Before you go, we need your feedback to help us determine the impact of the Solutions Labs, and plan successful Labs in the future.

1. I've learned new methods and/or I have new tools to bring back to my work/team?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

2. I have developed new relationships and/or deepened existing relationships because of the Solutions Lab.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

3. As a lab, we came to solutions/prototypes that would not have otherwise been created?

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree

4. What was the biggest personal challenge for you to overcome throughout the Solutions Lab process?
5. Do you understand the problem of customer service in Engineering differently than when you started? <u>If so, how?</u>
6. What advice do you have for us for future Labs?

APPENDIX B - Evaluation "Units of Analysis"

- Funding leveraged
- Prototypes tested
- Professional and personal development opportunities – team members learned new skill, team work improved, vertical and horizontal development, more engaged in city, brought whole self
- Clarified/honed role for lab within broader city context
- Successfully failed
- Generated excitement internally
- Didn't get bogged down in hierarchy
- New methods tried
- Community relationships stronger. Built trust. Shared power.
- Collaboration
- Breakthroughs
- Internal coverage/storytelling
- Personal transformation; signs of systems transformation
- Built and supported network of process experts
- Each project team can say: we got a bit uncomfortable and tried some new things. We learned some new methods that we can bring back to future projects. We're a stronger team. We've build/strengthened community relationships.
- What is one thing they are working on that will require they grow to accomplish it
- How are they working on it
- Who else knows and cares about it
- Why does this matter to them

APPENDIX C - Interview Questions to Complete the User Profile

1. What benefits might you expect to see?
2. What are the current barriers to achieving this? How will the lab overcome these?
3. How would life be better for staff, stakeholders, the city if this project worked well?
4. What is it about the lab that you think will make the difference for them?
5. What else will be needed to achieve these results?
6. What might be some negative impacts? How might they come about? How might we reduce the risks of those impacts?