

# SUSTAINABILITY TRANSITION LAB

A Call for Expression of Interest

*Working together to tackle complex sustainability challenges in Canada through multi-stakeholder collaboration.*

**Application Due Date:** June 30, 2013

**Project Start Date:** Fall 2013

We encourage you to express your interest as soon as possible to start the conversation and work with us on emerging ideas. See process description enclosed.





## OVERVIEW

Tackling the root causes of our complex social, environmental, and economic challenges requires an approach that looks at whole systems, collaborates across boundaries, and fosters innovation and hope. The Sustainability Transition Lab aims to strengthen the capacity of networks of stakeholders to respond to these complexities with such an approach.

The Natural Step Canada seeks Expressions of Interest by potential convening partners for the Sustainability Transition Lab. The Expressions of Interest will help determine the focus for The Natural Step's next Sustainability Transition Lab to be launched later in 2013.

Generous support for the Sustainability Transition Lab has been provided by the J.W. McConnell Foundation, Suncor Energy Foundation, Catherine Donnelly Foundation and others.

## WHAT IS A SUSTAINABILITY TRANSITION LAB?

A [Sustainability Transition Lab](#) is a multi-stakeholder approach to address complex social, economic and environmental challenges that no single party can tackle on its own.

Why the name **Sustainability Transition Lab**?

- **Lab** implies learning, experimentation, and breakthrough;
- **Transition** is a recognition that change is required;
- **Sustainability** is the shared goal.

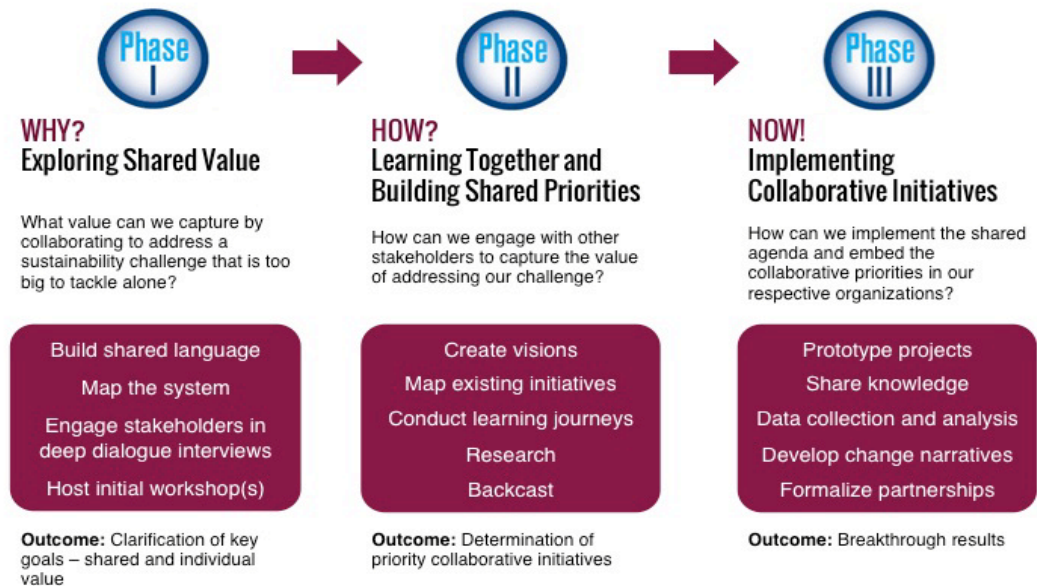
Each Sustainability Transition Lab is:

- Aimed at addressing barriers to sustainability in a given system;
- Co-designed and co-delivered with key partners in the system;
- Facilitated to involve diverse stakeholders in a deep exploration of the challenge;
- Focused on generating and implementing tangible, breakthrough results.



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The Sustainability Transition Lab [process](#) draws upon the latest research and practice in creative collaboration including: Change Labs, Theory U, the Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development and Collective Impact.



## WHAT ARE SUITABLE CHALLENGES?

A Sustainability Transition Lab is most appropriate when:

- Either the status quo is uncomfortable enough, or the risks and opportunities are compelling enough, that a desire for change exists.
- There is a clear sense that existing or past efforts to address the challenge are not working. There may be a feeling of being “stuck” in the way things are done.
- There is a need for better alignment among stakeholders, particularly as it relates to the risks and opportunities presented by sustainability.



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A Sustainability Transition Lab can be a forum for:

- **Community/regional collaboration**, where stakeholders in a given region need to coordinate collective action to address a regional sustainability issue.
- **Industry sector/value chain collaboration**, where industry players need to collaborate on environmental and social challenges that could threaten the viability of the sector and/or value chain.
- **Issue-specific collaboration**, where a range of stakeholders come together to advance change on a particular sustainability issue. For example, The Natural Step is working with a range of other organizations involved with the [rating and ranking of “sustainable business”](#) to advance practice in this area.

Whatever the scope, the nature of the challenge is such that it requires trust-building amongst players who have not worked together – or not worked *well* together - before. It likely requires that people “un-learn” current ways of doing things and open themselves up to new possibilities.

## WHO IS INVOLVED?

The Sustainability Transition Lab is, in and of itself, a collaboration of [partners](#). While it is led by The Natural Step Canada, a variety of other partners are invited into the design and delivery of the program. These partners include individuals and groups playing important roles in process design and facilitation, research, systems mapping, evaluation and communications.

The Sustainability Transition Lab is also supported by an expert [Advisory Council](#) whose members are among the pre-eminent thought leaders and practitioners in social innovation and sustainability. Advisory Council members advise and coach on the design, delivery, evaluation, and dissemination of the lessons and outcomes from each Sustainability Transition Lab project.



## WHAT WE ARE LOOKING FOR?

With this call for Expressions of Interest, we are looking for potential collaborators for the next Sustainability Transition Lab project. Specifically, we seek an idea for a complex challenge to be addressed by a Sustainability Transition Lab and a partner or group of partners that can serve as a co-convenor of the Sustainability Transition Lab with The Natural Step Canada.

The convening partner will ideally be able to help frame and articulate the challenge and represent at least one of the affected stakeholders. For example:

- For a **community or regional challenge** in Canada, the convening partner may be the local government and/or other regional stakeholders.
- For a **sector or value chain challenge** in Canada, the convening partner may be a proactive industry association, aiming to prepare its membership and stakeholders for the sustainability constraints of today and the future, and/or other another industry player.
- For an **issue-specific challenge** in Canada, the convening partner may be a coalition of organizations working around a specific issue.

We anticipate working with the co-convenor(s) to specify a design for the Sustainability Transition Lab that is well-suited for the organizations and conditions involved. We also anticipate working with the co-convenor(s) to secure additional resources to support the collaborative process.



## WHO BRINGS WHAT TO THE TABLE?

### What The Natural Step Canada brings:

- A high-level design for the Sustainability Transition Lab.
- Expertise in process facilitation, developing shared visions, and building [sustainability literacy](#).
- A network of [Associates](#) with extensive experience in strategic planning for sustainability.
- A network of social innovation thought leaders and practitioners to support the collaborative process.
- Budgetary resources that can be applied to the Sustainability Transition Lab project.

### What your organization(s) brings:

- A complex sustainability challenge that, if tackled upstream, has the possibility of rippling change through the system.
- A willingness to convene and collaborate with stakeholders involved in that challenge.
- Subject matter expertise of your industry/sector/region/issue.
- An organizational openness to new ways of approaching complex challenges.
- Matching funds (see below).
- Time and creative resources to enter into a Sustainability Transition Lab.



## WHAT IS THE BUDGET?

A Sustainability Transition Lab is expected to be a multi-year initiative with a significant investment of time and resources in the early stages. Because collaborative priorities are determined during the early phases, later-stage costs are more difficult to state precisely. The Sustainability Transition Lab process is designed so that value can be assessed at different intervals and participation levels adjusted accordingly. It is expected that early phases will build momentum to help secure additional resources for later-stage implementation of collaborative initiatives.

The budget for the first two phases of a Sustainability Transition Lab is expected to be in the range of \$100,000 to \$250,000, depending on the scale and design.

The financial support of the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation and the Suncor Energy Foundation will allow The Natural Step Canada to allocate funds to cover between 50% and 80% of chosen projects. This call for Expressions of Interest will help The Natural Step Canada decide where we will invest these resources.

## WHAT IS THE PROCESS FOR THE EXPRESSION OF INTEREST?

### SELECTION PROCESS

The Expression of Interest process entails a written submission, the guidance for which is provided later in this document, supported by follow-up conversations in July and August 2013 with a short-listed group of potential collaborating organizations. Each response will be treated with curiosity and will be assessed from the standpoint of how strategically and boldly it supports The Natural Step Canada's mission to accelerate the transition to a sustainable society.

Expressions of Interest will be reviewed and evaluated by a committee comprised of The Natural Step Canada staff and Associates in connection with members of our Sustainability Transition Lab Advisory Council.



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### YOUR NEXT STEP

Your next step in this process is to think through your answers to the questions in the Expression of Interest application. Once you have done that, we encourage you to e-mail us **as early as May 1, 2013** to book a time to talk through your interest before providing a formal submission. Starting the conversation as soon as possible allows us to explore your idea and connect it with other thoughts and opportunities as appropriate.

Once you are ready, please formally submit your Expression of Interest application no later than June 30, 2013. Further follow-up conversations will take place in July and August with select groups. We aim to select and begin the next Sustainability Transition Lab by September 2013.

### WHAT IS THE PROCESS AFTER THE TOPIC AND PARTNERS ARE DETERMINED?

Once the topic and partners for the Sustainability Transition Lab are chosen, we will co-create a project plan and budget with the intention to begin activities before the end of 2013.

For other short-listed topics and partners, we will continue to discuss how the project may advance with The Natural Step Canada's support and remain open to the possibilities that emerge from those conversations.





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## GETTING MORE INFORMATION

We encourage you to come to the [Accelerate: Collaborating for Sustainability](#) conference June 10-11, 2013 in Guelph, ON as an opportunity to learn from and with prominent colleagues in the field and to experience collaboration by playing creatively with your ideas and interest.

Here are some links and references to relevant resources and materials:

- [Sustainability Transition Labs](#)
- [SiG Knowledge Hub](#)
- [Forum for the Future](#)
- [REOS Partners](#)
- [Theory U](#)
- [Partnership Brokering](#)
- [Collective Impact article](#)

Looking forward to hearing from you,

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The Natural Step Canada  
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## CONTACT

Name:

Title:

Organization:

Address:

E-mail:

Phone:

Web site URL:

Brief Organizational Background (Max 100 words):

## APPLICATION QUESTIONS

*Please try to keep to two or three paragraphs per question*

1. Briefly describe the complex sustainability challenge that you would like to address through a Sustainability Transition Lab.



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2. Why does this complex sustainability challenge require collaboration among multiple stakeholders?

3. Which organization(s) do you foresee as a potential “co-convenor(s)” of this Sustainability Transition Lab? Why is this organization(s) a good representative(s) of the system?



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4. What other organizations are involved or would you like to engage in this initiative? List them here and indicate your perspective(s) on them.

<b>Organization name</b>	<b>Willingness to engage in this process</b>	<b>Sense of the need for collaboration</b>	<b>Capacity to influence the system</b>	<b>Comments</b>
	High Med Low	High Med Low	High Med Low	
	High Med Low	High Med Low	High Med Low	
	High Med Low	High Med Low	High Med Low	
	High Med Low	High Med Low	High Med Low	
	High Med Low	High Med Low	High Med Low	

5. Why would a neutral space with a structured process be useful to convene these stakeholders? (You may wish to elaborate on some of the power dynamics that you anticipate, or describe the nature of the existing relationships among these stakeholders, if any.)



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6. The Natural Step Canada will be best positioned to support a Sustainability Transition Lab when:
  - there is a need for a shared **vision** to guide collaboration efforts
  - there is a lack of a **shared understanding** about what sustainability means for the system or groups in question
  - there are stakeholders who see the value of improved levels of **sustainability literacy**
  - the credibility of a **science-based approach** can help attract stakeholders that might not otherwise become engaged in a process.

Why might any of these elements be relevant to addressing your complex challenge?

7. How might you and your organization leverage The Natural Step Canada's contributions to a Sustainability Transition Lab to secure additional financial resources to support the initiative?



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8. Please feel free to provide us with any other context that you feel would be useful to understand this challenge that has not yet been addressed within this form. (And please note that our follow-up conversations will dive deeper into many of these issues and more.)

*Note:* Please remember that once you've taken a first attempt at organizing your thoughts using these questions, we invite you to email us as early as May 1, 2013 to book a time to talk through your Expression of Interest before providing a formal submission. Starting the conversation as soon as possible allows us to explore your interest together and connect it with other related interest, thoughts and opportunities we may not have expected.