

Learning from B2E Cycle of Experimentation

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B2E

Building to
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1. Introduction and Context

The first two years of the Building 2 Electrification Coalition (B2E) consisted of convening, listening, learning, and acting to understand the complexities of accelerating the pace of adoption of building electrification in BC through B2E network actions. As we reached the two-year mark, staff determined that in order for the network to be more strategic and effective, we would need to become more focused on activities that have the highest potential to make change. Recognizing that trying to do everything all at once is not possible, especially with the limited resources of support staff, the B2E network and our committees needed to prioritize strategic and shared actions to move our collective work forward with the greatest impact.

In the spring of 2023, ZEIC began working with our first-ever Social Innovation Researcher in Residence, Dr. Lindsay Cole, to support this work. We initiated a structured cycle of experimentation with the B2E and focused on this question: How might we structure, grow, and maximize the potential impacts of the member-based network model guided by the B2E Leadership Council with influential leaders from government, non-profit, and private sectors? We used social innovation and systemic design approaches in this work as they are particularly well suited to work on complex, non-linear, uncertain challenges using cycles of experimentation and learning. Figure 1 provides a generalized process map for what this approach looks like, and how it is different from a more linear project management approach.

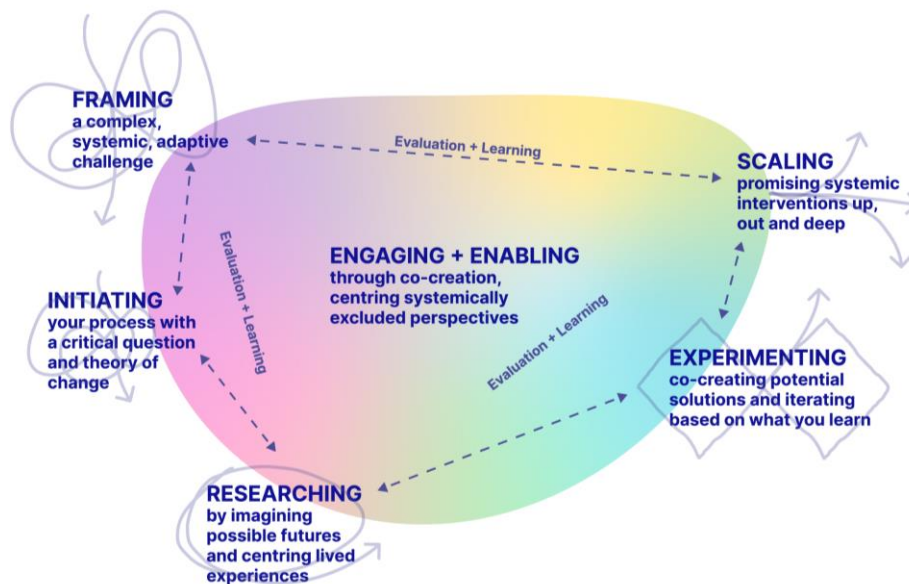


Figure 1: Transformative planning and policy making process map (Cole & Low, 2024).

Between August 2023 - July 2024 we implemented this social innovation process through the following activities (Figure 2).

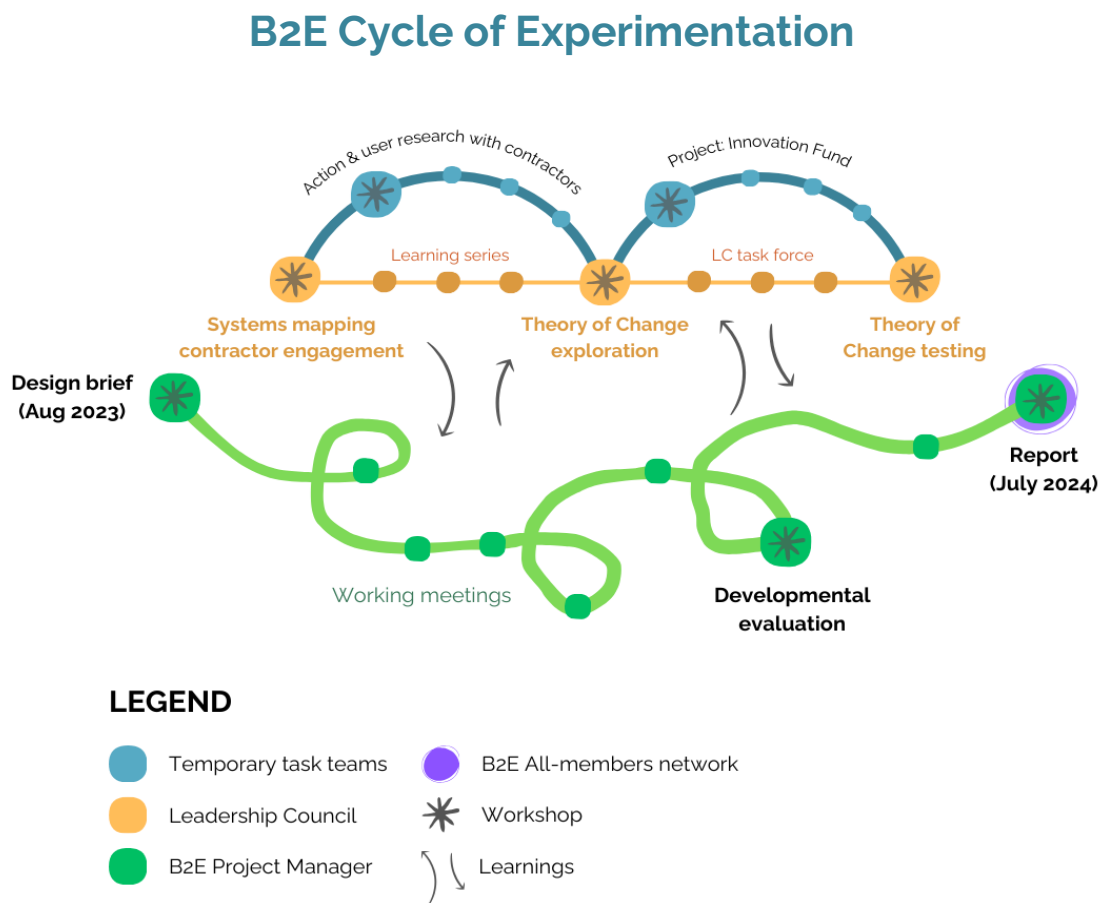


Figure 2: B2E Cycle of Experimentation process and activities.

This cycle of experimentation with B2E is now coming to a close, and the purpose of this report is to summarize our activities, insights, and learning for B2E Coalition members and for others managing networks that are working toward climate mitigation and adaptation in different ways. The results from this work are actively being integrated into the work of B2E, and the next sections summarize how we are activating our insights and learning, provide more detail about the experiments that we ran, and share reflections from the core team that led this work together.

2. Activating our Insights + Learning

We have experimented with and learned many different approaches, concepts, practices, and ways of thinking about the B2E network. There are four key ways that we will activate our insights and learnings over the coming months:

1. We will center the wants and needs of our growing and diverse membership and focus all B2E work on activating our network as this is our biggest strength.
2. We will integrate regular and rapid evaluation, learning, reflecting, and adaptive action into our practice. This will ensure that we remain strategic as our field rapidly evolves, and that we focus the time and resources that network members and B2E staff have on highest and best use activities.
3. We will share, refine, and implement our new theory of change to align our efforts, shift current structures and processes, and focus our activities on highest impact collective work.
4. We will increase the frequency, flow, and accessibility of communications and information throughout the network.
5. We will implement our renewed Innovation Fund to include more members in accessing this resource, to focus on projects that help with de-risking innovation, and to streamline administrative processes while ensuring a rigorous process.

3. Summary of Experiments

Although there were many activities that happened during this cycle of experimentation, five main experiments generated many fruitful insights and each of these experiments is shared briefly here.

Experiment 1: Systems Mapping Workshop

This was a two hour workshop with the LC to learn and practice systems mapping, and to deepen our understanding about how the LC members were thinking about the role of contractors in building electrification.

Key questions and assumptions we were testing:

- If we have a better understanding about the roles of contractors in the system of building electrification, this could help us to come up with higher impact intervention points to support and enable them in their work.
- Is systems practice helpful in the work that we're doing?

What we learned:

- Doing this work won't generate new insights without the right perspectives in the room - we did this mapping work with actors who were not contractors.
- Co-creating solutions with those most affected by them will lead to much better outcomes, and reduce the risk of making the wrong assumptions and developing and investing in solutions based on faulty foundations.
- Systems mapping can help broaden perspectives, deepen shared understanding, make blind spots clearer, and identify patterns for participants.

Why this matters:

- We might keep doing things that we think are best for a sector that could be ineffective or potentially cause harm.

Experiment 2: Action Research with Contractors

This was a rapid experiment with a small task team, following up from Experiment 1. We did a short training on action and research and then went out into the field to speak with contractors in their own contexts.

Key questions and assumptions we were testing:

- Understanding the diversity of contractor perspectives, directly from their experiences and points of view, can help us co-design interventions that will have greater impact and uptake by experts in this sector.
- By asking about challenges and opportunities they see in their sector using action and user research techniques we will get different, and better, insights.

Insights:

- Will take more time than we gave it for this to generate useful insights.
- Promising approach to understanding trades – different knowledge resides in different aspects of the sector (varying opinions) and we need to do much better in understanding this in the network.

Why this matters:

- Different intelligence is generated by doing it this way - talking to individuals on their terms in their space – than when you invite them into your space to participate on your terms.
- Different skills and more resources to do it properly.

- Could take this approach for other important and under-represented perspectives.

Experiment 3: Theory of Change

A workshop introduced [Theory of Change](#) as a structure and process to inquire into the way that B2E is organized, and if this is the most strategic and effective in helping us to maximize impact and reach our vision. The B2E Leadership Council and a smaller task team were drawn in on this concept to provide more clarity to the work we're doing together by developing a working Theory of Change for B2E.

Key questions and assumptions we were testing:

- Do LC members have a shared and clear understanding of the vision, mission, understanding of how change happens, B2E's unique contribution to change, and of how our activities and measures of impact align with this?
- That this is a good time to reevaluate strategy now that we have two years of activities completed – testing if this is true.

Insights:

- There was disruptive energy during the initial Theory of Change workshop and informal discussions afterwards – raising more questions and potentially surfacing new solutions.
- Despite having some things written down about B2E, people have different understandings of what we're doing together, even at Leadership Council level.
- There was a need to draft an explicit Theory of Change to capture what we're trying to achieve together, and to create a strategic resource to guide our action, reflection, and iteration.

Why it matters:

- Now is a good time to do this work, and this is a promising topic to focus on within B2E. We need to develop a structured way to revisit our purpose and how this connects with what we are doing and the impacts that we are having.

Experiment 4: Project Innovation Fund

B2E has an existing project fund whereby grants are provided to projects that have been developed through B2E committees. It was determined that the current process was extremely resource-intensive to staff and with a new influx of funds being added to it, should be streamlined to reduce staff burden. This also invited a

review and reflection about the purpose and goals for this fund in the work that B2E is trying to catalyse and support.

Key questions and assumptions we were testing:

- Can we better define what types of projects we're looking for and inspire more innovation?
- Can we open up the intake to the broader B2E membership?
- Can we increase the value or proportion of granted funds to each recipient to reduce the number of projects delivered (to reduce staff burden)?

Insights:

- Defining project themes, and determining that if we want to de-risk innovation at ZEIC failure is as important as success as long as learning happens, may lead to different types of project pitches.
- Investigating several application and approval models did not reduce the number of steps by a large amount due to internal administrative processes.
- Funders needed to be consulted on the application and approval process to ensure the fund still aligns with their initial goals when providing the seed funding.

Why this matters:

- To ensure the highest and best use of staff time, we determined that increasing the project funding amounts can still reduce the number of hours that B2E support staff work on projects, and the new framing will de-risk innovation.

Experiment 5: Social Innovation Coaching

To develop the knowledge and skills to apply social innovation practices to the B2E program, Dr. Cole coached the program manager throughout this process. Using reading, videos, and templates, the program manager learned to apply the skills to evaluate the network and the program offerings.

Key questions and assumptions we were testing:

- Is the B2E network organized in a way that being part of it is of benefit to individuals and their organizations? Is there a more creative and effective way to organize?
- Can we empower B2E members to connect with each other, and to take action without requiring the involvement of the program manager? Is this happening already?

- Do we have enough staff resources to support a growing membership, and growing urgency and ambition for our work?

Insights:

- Many of the concepts were new and required a significant amount of effort to learn.
- Templates were incredibly helpful to apply the principles.
- Ideas were tested with different audiences and some B2E members were keen to learn more.

Why this matters:

- To continue to develop and evaluate the work that B2E undertakes, it was necessary for the program manager to learn and apply the knowledge beyond when the social researcher was in residence within the organization.

4. Closing Reflections

From Mariko Michasiw, B2E Program Manager

I am typically a linear thinker. My regular approach to doing work does not include maps, systems, or deep thinking. This work has encouraged me to apply different techniques and to evaluate the work B2E is doing and enabling to ensure that it is aligned with our vision. Working through some of these exercises with our Leadership Council left members feeling a little unsettled about the clarity of our work and the direction that we're heading in. This "shake-up" was needed to get ourselves into systems change thinking and doing.

Social innovation is a process of research and experimentation. We have already been doing some experimentation within B2E and our activities, and we will continue to do so as we chart a path to building electrification that takes all stakeholders into consideration. Previous to beginning this work, B2E activities were based on instinct and previous experience from program leads and supporters. Many of these initiatives have been successful and we continue to do them today. Given that market conditions are changing, new opportunities and constraints continue to surface, and membership is rapidly growing and becoming more diverse in their interests and need, B2E needs to apply an adaptive management system and continue to evaluate our service offerings.

This work has resulted in us developing a Theory of Change for B2E to better describe what we're trying to achieve and to put a boundary around what we do, and just as importantly, what we do not do. To ensure that we are appropriately resourced, the Theory of Change provides clarity on what's within our scope. We are also pursuing a more member-focused approach to ensure that the program offerings and services are aligned with the needs of our members.

From Lindsay Cole, Social Innovation Researcher in Residence

When I set out on this cycle of experimentation, I didn't know what to expect, and for me this is always a bit exhili-terrifying. I've worked with the theories and practices of social innovation and systemic design in quite a few different contexts now and I'm confident in their utility in bringing helpful new ways of working on complex challenges, like building decarbonization. What is harder to predict is how open and ready the people whose work I'm supporting will be to trying out something different, often uncomfortable, and always unpredictable. Especially when they already have so much on the go.

As our drawing of the cycle shows, the green line, representing the experience working with Mariko and a few others responsible for stewarding the network, was meandering and a bit loopy at times. Their wholehearted commitment to being of service to this vital, diverse, and growing network of people was a true gift for me to be a part of. Together we explored some broad terrain, tried out a bunch of different ideas, and even found a few new approaches that generated some helpful areas of focus and redirection. In particular, our action and user research with contractors, which led to some new clarity about why and how to center users (aka members) in the work of B2E, was an important outcome. Doing some quick developmental evaluation work on everything that B2E has done so far, and thinking about these as experiments to learn from, generated some really helpful insights. We captured some things that are working well which helped to see where to invest more time and energy to grow impact, for example reframing the funding activities to focus on supporting earlier stage innovations and experiments. Finally the theory of change work, which definitely raised some discomfort, led to some really important work in surfacing assumptions, identifying different perspectives, and then getting to some greater strategic clarity about the ways that B2E can focus to have greater impact.