



PART 1 - GENERAL INFORMATION

1. Lead organization

Name of lead organization

NouLAB / Pond- Deshpande Center / University of New Brunswick

Name of project lead

Karina LeBlanc

Amanda Hachey

Project lead's preferred method of contact (email address and/or phone number)

karina.leblanc@unb.ca

2. Proposed project

Project title

Early Childhood Education Training Lab -Phase 2

Project start and end dates

February 2021 to July 31st 2023

Projects must end no later than September 30, 2023.

Amount requested from FSC (total)

\$1,087,780

Project partners and their location

Confirmed Partners

New Brunswick Community College - NB

Holland College - PEI

College of the North Atlantic - NL
Collège communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick
Early Childhood Development Association ECDA - PEI
Association of Early Childhood Educators NL
Government of PEI
Government of NB
Government of NL
McKenna Institute - UNB
Atlantic Collèges Atlantique
Collège de l'île - PEI
Association des centres de la petite enfance francophones de l'Île-du-Prince-Édouard
Fédération des parents francophones de Terre-Neuve et du Labrador
L'Université Sainte-Anne - Nova Scotia

Additional Partners (to be confirmed)

Association for New Canadians - NL
NB Multicultural Association
Immigrant and Refugee Services Association of PEI
NB Pay Equity Coalition

PART 2 - PROJECT SUMMARY

1. Proposed project “one-liner”

How would you describe your new project in one sentence?

Helping Early Childhood Educators thrive in their careers by integrating learnings from Phase 1 to advance prototypes into services, while expanding focus of participatory co-design to include underserved populations.

(30 words maximum)

2. Proposed project summary

How would you describe your new project and how it builds on the testing and learning of your current project to date?

We suggest that this summary covers the main information about how your new project addresses all selection criteria of this targeted call.

The demand for innovation and support for a resilient and quality Early Childhood Educator (ECE) workforce is front and centre as Canada and the provinces work towards a national \$10/day childcare plan. This new project builds on the momentum of the current project by going beyond the early adopters and further testing the current prototypes with underserved populations and for sustainable business models. Evidence generated in Phase 2 of the ECE Training Lab will continue unfolding from the human-centred design approach we used in Phase 1 to understand and co-design to the needs identified from within the sector. Our team has the capacity, expertise, and trust with the stakeholders to guide these multi-stakeholder groups through a coherent co-design process.

(250 words maximum)

3. Additional scope

How does your new project go beyond the scope of your current FSC-funded project?

The additional scope may include expanding or extending a project model, its principles and/or components. For example, it may include expanding the project to new regions or jurisdictions, including new or larger target populations, and testing different delivery formats to understand what works to address demands. This would assume the potential for bringing additional partners to deliver the project at a broader scale. The additional scope must be grounded in new concrete learning questions to contribute to your work and of others in the skills ecosystem.

Now that we have done small scale tests with segments of the early adopters, what

adaptations need to be made to increase overall accessibility while addressing the distinct cultural and contextual needs of newcomer, francophone, and rural populations? During Phase 2 we aim to use the current prototypes as probes to better understand their needs of the underserved newcomer, rural and francophone populations and to co-design with them.

(150 words maximum)

4. Importance of the additional scope

Why is the additional scope of your project important to your organization, sector and target populations? Why is it timely?

While the Federal and Provincial agreements are underway to reach a \$10 a day childcare plan the need to recruit and retain a quality workforce has never been more urgent. Immigration strategies in each province all point towards newcomers playing a growing role in our workforce. Yet this population faces particular challenges to entering and staying in the ECE field. In addition, ECE workforce challenges facing minority francophone communities are more acutely felt because the lack of francophone educators impinges on children's cultural identity expression in early learning. The current project is ripe with learnings from prototypes that suggest impactful leverage points to help ECEs gain their qualifications while working and contribute to conditions that will increase retention. The ability to iterate solutions based on Phase 1 findings will allow us to advance these high-potential prototypes through more robust testing and experimentation with sustainable business models.

(150 words maximum)

PART 3 - PROJECT DETAILS

A. Relevance:

a. How does your new project align with FSC's Strategic Priorities?

Responsive Career Pathways - In the second phase of the ECE Training Lab we will expand the reach of testing, prototyping and evaluating new approaches to upskilling workers in the ECE field. For example, we are currently running small scale field tests in early learning centres for a centre based mentorship program in PEI, an educational pathways support program for administrators in Newfoundland, a work study leave program in New Brunswick, and working at improving the process of experiential recognition for accreditation for francophone ECEs. All of these tests are being evaluated, and the findings will be used for further development in the second phase.

Agile Labour Market Responses The fastest-growing populations in Atlantic Canada are newcomers, and provincial governments are looking for ways to connect these workers to the opportunities and needs that exist in the provinces. This provincial strategy underpins our proposal to engage underserved populations through a new lab cohort recruited from these communities to co-create context-specific solutions. The new ECE lab cohort will be invited to test the Phase 1 prototypes as part of their Lab process. This prototype-as-a-probe approach will allow the cohort to better understand the ECE workforce needs and strengths in newcomer, francophone and rural populations, and accelerate the development of robust prototypes to test with these communities by building on existing research-informed field work.

Parallel to testing the Phase 1 prototypes with underserved populations, we will continue to iterate these solutions in existing communities, building on Phase 1 findings to implement higher-fidelity prototypes. For example, through the Phase 1 evaluation of a new ECE mentorship role that we believe may impact both retention of skilled workers and recruitment of new workers into the field, we have observed an emerging opportunity to leverage the mentorship role to also address the increasing needs for inclusion support skills for children with higher needs.

“What works” replication - Already in Phase 1, evaluation reveals the impact the lab cohort relationships and shared learning are having on the sector. New collaboration has blossomed between stakeholders, and conversations and findings are being used in planning and policy conversations beyond the scope of the lab. Phase 2 of our project continues to activate these established relationships, and widen this network of impact to new communities. Our lab design promotes the integration of community building, knowledge transfer, and supports for impacts to carry beyond the lab prototypes. The networks created and strengthened through the prototypes, and across the Atlantic provinces through the lab exchange, create systemic change nudges and provide supportive infrastructure that increases the return on investment beyond the immediate impact of the prototype solutions.

b. How does your new project address recognized systemic challenges about future skills in Canada?

Of the many systemic challenges facing the ECE sector, there are two key challenge areas that our Phase 2 project addresses, both of which have become visible and actionable through our current work. These challenges are echoed in the trends discussed in the FSC strategic plan, specifically trends toward unequal access to training opportunities based on income, geography and background; unequal access to workplace-based skills training; and increasing reliance on immigrants and older workers to fill gaps.

In researching the challenges and needs that exist in the sector for Phase 1 discovery and ideation, we learned that there is much available information about the state of ECE as a whole, but little information available that describes the specific challenges the ECE workforces from underserved communities face. In our Phase 1 field research we spoke with educators from underserved populations and learned that there are unique challenges in access to training and career development that must be explored further. Additionally, through engaging stakeholders and those with influence in the sector, it became increasingly visible that leadership and influence roles in the sector are missing representation from underserved populations. Phase 2 of our project aims to open pathways to influence and leadership by underserved populations on the issues that ECE workforce from these communities face. We'll do this by filling the gap in understanding of the needs and challenges of these communities, and using the lab process in a strategic way to build and connect leadership within these communities to the existing networks of influence that Phase 1 of the lab has activated.

The second systemic challenge that our Phase 2 project addresses is the vicious retention and recruitment spiral resulting from chronic understaffing of centres. The key contributing factors to this spiral are a confluence of rising demand for childcare, being outcompeted by adjacent sectors for workers, and negative work conditions resulting from chronic understaffing. Through our Phase 1 work we have learned that wage remedies implemented in the last few years are hugely important first steps in resolving this systemic dysfunction but they are not enough on their own. Each of the Phase 1 prototypes address retention and recruitment issues through ideas generated by educators and administrators in the field. The findings generated by these Phase 1 prototypes will be directly applied to Phase 2 iterations, further developing their capacity to address these systemic challenges. Each of the prototypes work in different functional areas of ECE but recognize the interdependency of increasing the quality of working conditions, while expanding access to training in order to both retain existing qualified staff and increase desirability for potential new recruits.

c. Explain how your proposed project fulfills the demand for your service. Who is demanding this and how do you know? Why is it timely?

Given the urgency to fulfill the federal goal of \$10 of quality childcare, all Atlantic provinces are scrambling to ensure the already stretched workforce has what it needs to meet this increased demand for quality childcare. Newfoundland, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island are all working on different strategies for the workforce to meet the immediate and growing needs of the sector. The prototypes tested during the lab are well aligned with the priorities in each province and with the needs we have heard from the sector. The current ECE Lab findings contributed to the provincial bilateral agreements with the federal government and are well positioned to help support the governments, colleges, associations to ensure the educator voice is considered and brought to the forefront when developing and implementing workforce strategy solutions going forward.

B. Innovation and evidence

a. In what way is your project innovative by pursuing a new way of doing things? If applicable, how is your project model informed by evidence?

Rarely do the organizations working on the issues truly get to work together in developing and testing solutions. The ECE Lab not only brings together colleges, government, and industry associations but bringing the voice of the educator actively to the table is not common practice in this sector, and we have proven just how valuable it is to have them at the table during the current FSC funded project.

The ECE Lab uses a human-centred approach to solution-generation that engages those most affected by the problems they are addressing. We use expertise in human-centred research, facilitation of co-creation, and service design to support participants in using service design tools and methods to create solutions that we can field test and learn from. The iterative nature of this process creates impacts both in the generation and the implementation of solutions, which is a novel set of outcomes for strategic work at this level. Particular to our lab process is the inclusion of business model thinking in our outputs. Not only are we testing what might solve challenges in existing contexts, but we are building in learning and iteration of ways to sustain and scale these solutions by thinking through and prototyping how they can be funded, creative ways they can live in or be owned by collaborating organizations and communities, and how they may be shared and scaled up over time through roadmapping the prototypes together with the communities who own them.

b. How do you plan to generate evidence and insights during your project? What new knowledge will it generate and what are the potential implications of your approach for the broader skills ecosystem?

Evidence generated in Phase 2 of the ECE Training Lab will continue unfolding from the human-centred design approach we used in Phase 1 to understand and co-design to the needs identified from within the sector. In Phase 2 this will include community-specific tests of the prototypes developed in the current project with an evaluation process that includes reflective interviews with lab participants, and pre- and post-test interviews and surveys with those who experience the prototypes. This data is evaluated through a theory of change model developed with guidance from MARS Solutions Labs, Imprint Consulting and Blueprint.

Lastly, evaluation results are then validated in reflection and discussion with lab participants and other stakeholders.

As we uncover the intersecting challenges that newcomer, francophone and rural ECE educators and operators face, and co-develop field-tested potential solutions to them, we create findings from this process that can inform other sectors addressing similar intersecting challenges. Moreover, innovating in different functional areas of ECE in each province or community means that through the lab cohorts we are able to share findings throughout Atlantic Canada that are applicable to each province's work, extending the impact far beyond the scope of the test. Through our data collection and synthesis efforts, including release of Phase 1 findings in an upcoming impact report and convening the lab teams to reflect on these results, our findings and test data are being shared among all Atlantic provinces to support their work on these same challenges.

C. Learning

a. What learning has your current project with FSC generated and how has this learning informed the scope of your new project?

As hopefully illustrated in the responses to the questions above, the current project has generated learnings into several dimensions of the challenge of upskilling an overburdened sector that lacks the social, political, and economic infrastructure that is needed to create conditions for success.

Through our foundational and desktop research, we have found a mature and extensive body of literature that outlines the desirable skills, qualities, and credentials of highly qualified Early Childhood educators, and documents the social, political, and economic barriers to a thriving workforce.

Through our primary research, we surfaced the lived experience of 42 Early Childhood educators from the Atlantic provinces. They provided insights into the impact of those barriers on their career, family, and health and wellbeing.

Through the overall lab process, we developed an understanding of a fragmented but passionate, dedicated, and determined sector that has much to share and learn from each other.

Although the field testing of the four prototypes in progress at the time of submission, preliminary observations suggest that:

- providing a framework for unqualified educators to reflect on their career aspirations and possible career pathways, and fostering a community of practice for administrators will increase the likelihood of ECEs pursuing their professional credentials;
- creating space for ECEs to study while working through paid study leave will incentivise ECEs who may otherwise be deterred by the threat of burnout and exhaustion to pursue their professional credentials, and support those while they are studying to reduce strain on mental health *and* sustain the workforce while they are

training (by reducing the likelihood of them needing to take a leave of absence to study), and

- creating a new role for mentorship within early learning centres will reduce attrition of qualified ECEs and promote a more supportive environment for unqualified ECEs.
- improving the experiential recognition process for educators getting accreditation for their years of experience in ECE in the Francophone college system in NB. Finding the balance between recognizing experience and maintaining quality education for educators.

However, it is not so much the learnings of this lab that has informed the scope of the second stream, but an acknowledgement of the limitations of our learnings. We acknowledge that the vast majority of our work thus far has been informed by the dominant demographic and culture of the Atlantic Provinces. As such, the second stream of the second phase of this project will focus on the needs of Early Childhood educators in/from newcomer, francophone, and rural communities.

b. What are additional learning questions that your new project will address?

- Now that we have done small scale tests with segments of the early adopters, What adaptations need to be made to increase overall accessibility while addressing the distinct cultural and contextual needs of newcomer, francophone, and rural populations?
- What are the sustainable business models that can support these prototypes?
- Is there a correlation between increased mentorship capabilities in a centre and
 - Retention of High-credential ECEs in the overall ECE workforce? (ie not moving out-of-sector)
 - Increase of Low-credential ECEs participating in certification training
- How can substitutes be funded to allow for educators time off the floor to study? By who?
- Does a supportive relationship (mental, emotional, psychological) between administrators and ECEs positively impact ECEs desire to pursue higher certification?
 - Does co-creating an action plan to pursue higher certification with their administrators increase ECEs confidence and desire to pursue higher certification?
- How can we recognize prior experience in the field of ECE while maintaining quality certification in the French college system?
- How might the 4 prototypes tested in our current project work in concert with one another in NB, PEI and Newfoundland?

D. Equity, diversity and inclusion

a. Does your project incorporate in its design and execution the perspectives of end-users and other stakeholders, particularly groups facing barriers? If so, how? If not, why not?

Over the course of the ECE Training Lab we have developed relationships and built trust with educators by bringing them in to fully participate in the process and by listening to their concerns, hopes, challenges and experience. We paid for their time off the floor of early learning and childcare centres so that they could fully participate, and we paid for a substitute to fill their spot on the floor with children. Through Phase 2 we hope to continue to do so, which will allow us to connect with more newcomer educators by inviting them to participate and reducing their barriers to be able to do so. In our current project, we dedicated a cohort of the lab to the francophone ECE sector, which yielded important insights to shape future engagement strategies as we plan to continue working both provincially and regionally in Francophone minority communities.

b. What are the practices and activities of your project that directly support and are grounded in principles of equity, diversity and inclusion?

As a program of UNB, NouLAB follows the commitment to equity, fairness, social justice and social change. The NouLAB team is committed to creating an inclusive environment for our staff and lab participants. We strive for diversity on our team and in our programs. In the lab process we uphold a core principle of people centred co-design. With all of our activities we hold central that those most affected by decisions must be able to participate in and shape those decisions.

c. Will your project further equity, diversity and inclusion in the field or sector of your project? If so, how? If not, why not?

Yes. The project will explicitly explore and address the unmet needs of underserved populations through the intentional focus and recruitment of individuals from newcomer and francophone communities into the second cohort of lab participants.

In addition, we will also work with partners to examine ways to address the impact of the digital divide which has already been highlighted as a barrier to upskilling by participants of Phase 1.

Traditional approaches to digital capacity building, such as standalone online tutorials, are failing to effectively support this segment of the population. The Frank McKenna Institute has indicated that they would like to help fund and partner with us on this project to help identify the areas within the prototypes we are testing which would benefit from support for digital capacity building and access to equipment.

E. Capacity

a. What are the skills, experience and resources available within the lead organization (and partners, if applicable)? How will these elements support the successful execution of the project?

The NouLAB team has proven experience in social innovation and service design practices with strengths in facilitating co-design processes (in French and English), user research, data synthesis and data visualization. We have been able to bring key partners together throughout this project such as government, educators and director associations and the colleges, and these partners are still enthusiastically involved. Over the course of the current project we

have been able to develop trust with key ECE stakeholders in NB, PEI and NL. We also have experience leading similar social innovation lab projects in a variety of sectors, including in the area of retention of newcomers, and will be able to leverage those relationships for the next iteration of this project.

b. Does your current project with FSC hold a good track record? Have you faced any challenges? If yes, how have you addressed them?

We currently hold an excellent track record with FSC. We did encounter two main challenges in Phase 1. Our first challenge was developing a relationship with all provinces in Atlantic Canada. It is inherently difficult to work across provincial boundaries even with just two provinces and this proved to be even more true as we navigated relationships with and between four provinces. It was clear from early in the project that the Nova Scotia representatives had other priorities and were hesitating to participate in the ECE Lab. We were able to meet with FSC and the Government of Nova Scotia partners to come to an understanding that Nova Scotia would continue to meet with the other provincial government partners in an advisory role but choose not to have participants in the lab. We are still in communication with them and will share learnings from the project. The other challenge we faced was the need to completely redesign our process to be online due to the impacts of the pandemic. This proved to be a much more accessible way for educators and directors to participate in meetings and therefore we were able to turn a challenge into an opportunity. These two challenges lead to delays in the start times of our lab workshops and therefore made the timing difficult for the prototype testing and synthesis of the findings. We requested a brief extension of the project to ensure we have time to gather and share the findings from Phase 1.

F. Coherence

a. What are the main project activities that will enable you to meet the project objectives?

Phase 2 project activities fall under two categories 1) moving the current prototypes into further service design development and 2) running a lab cohort with participants from underserved populations (in this case newcomer, francophone and rural). Building from what we have learned in the first lab cohort, and using these learnings and prototypes as research probes, we will examine the areas of alignment and divergence in context, capabilities, and challenges, with a view to adapting existing or co-creating new prototypes to the unmet needs of the underserved populations.

1)Service Design for Prototypes developed during current project

- **Development Deliverables**
 - Insights generated by prototype test findings
 - Synthesizing prototype test findings with lab teams
 - Prototype solution in underserved populations
 - Business model for tested solution

- Community showcase
- **Iteration Planning Deliverables**
 - Implementation partners and funders identified
 - Implementation recommendations and roadmap

2) Lab Cohort 2

- **Groundwork Phase (Create Conditions for Success)**
 - Establish relationships with organizations and those with lived experience in underserved populations
 - Project planning
- **Discovery Phase (Understand the Problem)**
 - Desktop research - build on the existing research carried out in phase one.
 - Field research - to gain first hand insights into challenges faced by underserved populations engaged in Phase 2
 - Recruit lab teams
- **Design Phase (Translate Insights into Opportunities)**
 - Lab Workshop with teams building on what we learned from cohort 1
 - Additional field research as needed to address knowledge gaps
 - Iterative design and testing cycles to further refine prototypes
- **Development Phase**
 - Insights generated by prototype test findings
 - Synthesizing prototype test findings with lab teams
 - Prototype solution in underserved populations
 - Business model for tested solution
 - Community showcase
- **Iteration Planning Phase**
 - Implementation partners, funders, business models identified
 - Recommendations and roadmap - prioritization of activities for implementation of the blueprint
 - Finalise service blueprint - the service designs of the prototypes with the resources and roles needed to implement them
 - Final reports (brief community version, in depth sector and funder version)

b. Explain how your project presents good value for money. How is your budget reasonable, appropriate and aligned with your work plan?

Existing relationships, taking a holistic approach by maximizing the value of existing resources by identifying the barriers to success, established relationships with lived experience. We are a nimble team able to reach a lot of regions online and in 2 languages.

(3,500 words maximum)

PART 4 - PROJECT WORK PLAN AND BUDGET

1. Please submit a **one-page work plan** with key milestones and their timeline. **Do not** include detailed activities at this time. If your proposal is selected, we will work with you to develop a detailed work plan.
2. Please complete the project budget template provided to you as part of the application material.
 - a. Include only **new funding** associated with your new project and its additional scope. Please do not include the existing funding that is already part of your current funding agreement with FSC.
 - b. If applicable, identify new funding pending or confirmed for this project from other sources. **This funding should be included as in-kind contributions.** (Please note that funding from other federal sources cannot be counted towards in-kind contributions)
3. Please submit your work plan and budget by sending these files, along with this completed form, to targetedcall@fsc-ccf.ca.
4. You may use the space below to provide comments to accompany your work plan and/or budget.

(100 words maximum)

PART 5 - DECLARATION

By submitting an application, the lead organization and its partners agree to the requirements of the following sections, detailed in the guidelines outlined for this funding call, and they affirm that they comply with and/or commit to the following:

- Organization eligibility.
- Active support for co-creating and carrying out an evaluation with an FSC-approved evaluator, if FSC decides an evaluation is appropriate for this project.
- Active engagement in knowledge mobilization activities related to the project.
- Compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement on the Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Humans.
- Confidential due diligence inquiries from Future Skills Centre into the applicant.

Signature



Name of signing authority

Karina LeBlanc

Date

November 2, 2021