



The Mi'kmaw Cultural Foundation: Indigenous-led social acquisition in rural Newfoundland and Labrador

This story is part of a series through the [Social Innovation Impact Initiative](#). As part of the SII Initiative, SI Canada aims to illuminate how social innovators across Canada are putting the principles of collaboration, equity, and systems thinking into practice — and in doing so, helping create the conditions for lasting change.

This is a story of Indigenous leadership, strategic persistence, and rural community resilience. It demonstrates how enterprise acquisition by community organizations can preserve infrastructure, diversify revenue, and strengthen long-term community vitality.

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When a medical clinic closed in Stephenville, NL, the building became a symbol of a challenge facing many rural communities: the disruption of essential services and loss of community assets. At the same time, like the rest of the province, the western region of Newfoundland and Labrador is grappling with a shortage of childcare spaces.

Around this time, the [Mi'kmaw Cultural Foundation](#) (MCF) was considering ways to enhance their financial sustainability to grow the organization's impact. MCF is an Indigenous-led organization that acts to preserve and promote the culture and heritage of the Mi'kmaq people. Under the leadership of President & CEO Jeffrey Young, the foundation decided to launch a social enterprise.

MCF explored multiple social enterprise ideas. Rather than build something from scratch, they eventually decided to acquire the medical clinic building and reimagine it as a Mi'kmaq-led childcare social enterprise and community hub. The childcare service was planned to include traditional Mi'kmaq teachings, aligned with the foundation's mandate of cultural preservation.



This project was supported by the [Social Enterprise Through Acquisition \(SETA\) program](#), an initiative of the [Community Sector Council of Newfoundland and Labrador's \(CSCNL'S\) Social Innovation Lab](#). SETA acted as a connector to experts and resources to support the acquisition. The Lab also acted as a navigator and de-risking partner by helping offset feasibility, business planning, and legal costs while guiding access to some capital.

Context: from spark to systems change

1. The Spark: Social Enterprise Through Acquisition (SETA)

SETA was launched in 2023 as a flagship initiative to address two urgent and intersecting rural challenges in Newfoundland and Labrador. The program was designed by CSCNL's CEO, Colin Corcoran and fleshed out with Christine Snow, who was Social Innovation Manager at the time. Core funding for the program was secured from the Northpine Foundation, with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador's Industry, Energy, and Tourism and the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency also joining.

The Succession Tsunami

- Fifty-five percent of NL small and medium-sized enterprises are projected to exit within five years (Canadian Federation of Independent Businesses, 2022)
- Many aging business owners lack succession plans
- Communities risk losing essential services, jobs, and economic anchors if owners retire without a business transition

Solution: Community-driven business succession.

The Community Sector Financial Sustainability Crisis

- Declining donations and fundraising revenue
- Rising operational costs
- Increased demand for services
- Limited and unstable public funding

Solution: Community Sector Revenue diversification through business acquisition.

SETA helps community organizations explore and implement social acquisitions. A social acquisition is when a business or business asset is transferred to or acquired by a community organization, such as a non-profit, charity, or co-operative. The ideal end state is the creation of a social enterprise that serves a local community and avoids the closure of a local business.



For eligible buyers, the SETA program provides up to \$15,000 in de-risking funding towards business valuation & feasibility, business planning, legal transaction costs in addition to support with navigating financing and capital sources, and guidance on governance and structure (e.g. subsidiary models).

SETA has full-time staff that act as a connector for buyers and sellers while offering bespoke social enterprise incubation. This helps reduce barriers community organizations face in the buying process.

2. Building the Ecosystem: The Social Innovation Lab

As SETA implementation began, deeper systemic gaps facing the NL community sector became clear:

- Limited access to patient and unrestricted capital
- Governance and investment readiness challenges in the context of social enterprise development
- Unclear understanding of social finance and entrepreneurship-through-acquisition models
- Strained capacity of the community sector resulting in staff burnout
- Fragmented connections between business ecosystem partners and community-led enterprises

Although a social innovation strategy was already aligned with CSCNL's mission, SETA became the catalyst to formally launch the Social Innovation Lab in May 2024.

The Social Innovation Lab strengthens the broader ecosystem through separate, but linked initiatives such as the Social Innovation Community of Practice, provincial social innovation and social finance landscape mapping, social procurement and social enterprise certification, and social finance/capital navigation.

SETA was an introductory pilot. The Social Innovation Lab is the long-term ecosystem effort.

3. The Driver: Community Sector Council of Newfoundland and Labrador

CSCNL drives this work as part of its mandate to support community changemakers. Through SETA, CSCNL delivers structured acquisition support while the Social Innovation Lab helps build long-term ecosystem infrastructure. As a result, community organizations gain access to new capital pathways and rural communities are better positioned for asset retention and financial resilience.



CSCNL does not replace community leadership. It strengthens the conditions in which community leadership can succeed.

Mi'kmaq Cultural Foundation's journey to enterprise acquisition

The Mi'kmaq Cultural Foundation exemplifies what this model can achieve. The Foundation produced innovative strategies to start a social enterprise and enlisted several supporting partners to complete the asset purchase.

MCF completed several important milestones:

- Identified and initiated the acquisition of a closed rural doctor's clinic
- Structured a social enterprise subsidiary to manage risk and access capital
- Secured blended financing to complete the purchase, including a mortgage from [Atlantic Edge Credit Union](#), non-repayable capital from local non-profit [Ulnooweg](#), and a crowdfunded social impact loan through [GoParity Canada](#)
- Navigated complex regulatory requirements for childcare licensing
- Designed a model to reinvest surplus revenue into cultural programming

Early in the SETA program, MCF accessed funding to cover an asset valuation of an outdoor recreation business. The valuation provided vital information that MCF used during negotiations with the business seller, but the transaction fell through. Since SETA covered this cost for MCF and thus de-risked the search process, they were empowered to continue the process and eventually acquire a different business.

Other ways that the SETA program supported MCF's social acquisition were by:

- Providing funding to complete a business valuation for the medical clinic
- Providing funding to cover the cost of a business plan
- Providing funding to cover the legal costs required to close the transaction
- Connection to multiple funders, including one which invested in the project
- A modest investment in the crowdlending campaign used to finance the acquisition
- Hands-on communication to navigate the acquisition process

Outside of SETA, in the fall of 2025, MCF took part in [Thriving Non-Profits \(TNP\)](#), a training program that helps non-profit organizations explore revenue diversification. SIL partners with the [Community Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador](#) to sponsor non-profits in the province to take this training.

The outcome of this project will be the creation of 24 childcare places in a new childcare centre and community hub that will once again take care of local community members while



strengthening long-term financial sustainability. Though not launched yet, the social enterprise is designed to create local jobs, including Early Childhood Educators. In addition, the acquisition of the former clinic has enabled the foundation to create an outdoor gathering space for the community, called Ta'n etl-mawitamk, which means "Where the people gather."

What's next

As of June 1, 2026, MCF is in the process of completing retrofits so the building can operate as a childcare facility. The retrofit costs are subsidized in part by the NL Government Childcare Capacity Grant. Approvals to proceed are approximately half complete; once approved the completion of the retrofits and opening of the social enterprise is anticipated for fall 2026. Through the social acquisition process, the Mi'kmaq Cultural Foundation incorporated a social enterprise company that can house their revenue generating activities. The foundation is planning to continue exploring other social enterprises in the future.

Why this model matters

This approach demonstrates that:

- Rural businesses and community assets can be preserved through social acquisition
- Indigenous-led organizations can leverage social enterprise for sovereignty and financial sustainability
- Support for de-risking the business acquisition process can enable transformative projects
- Social Innovation ecosystem building is essential to building resilient networks that enable new and scaled social impact opportunities

The dual challenges of the Succession Tsunami and financial sustainability for the Community Sector are not unique to Newfoundland and Labrador. Intentional efforts like the SETA program to address both challenges are a powerful way to enhance the well-being of rural communities in Canada.