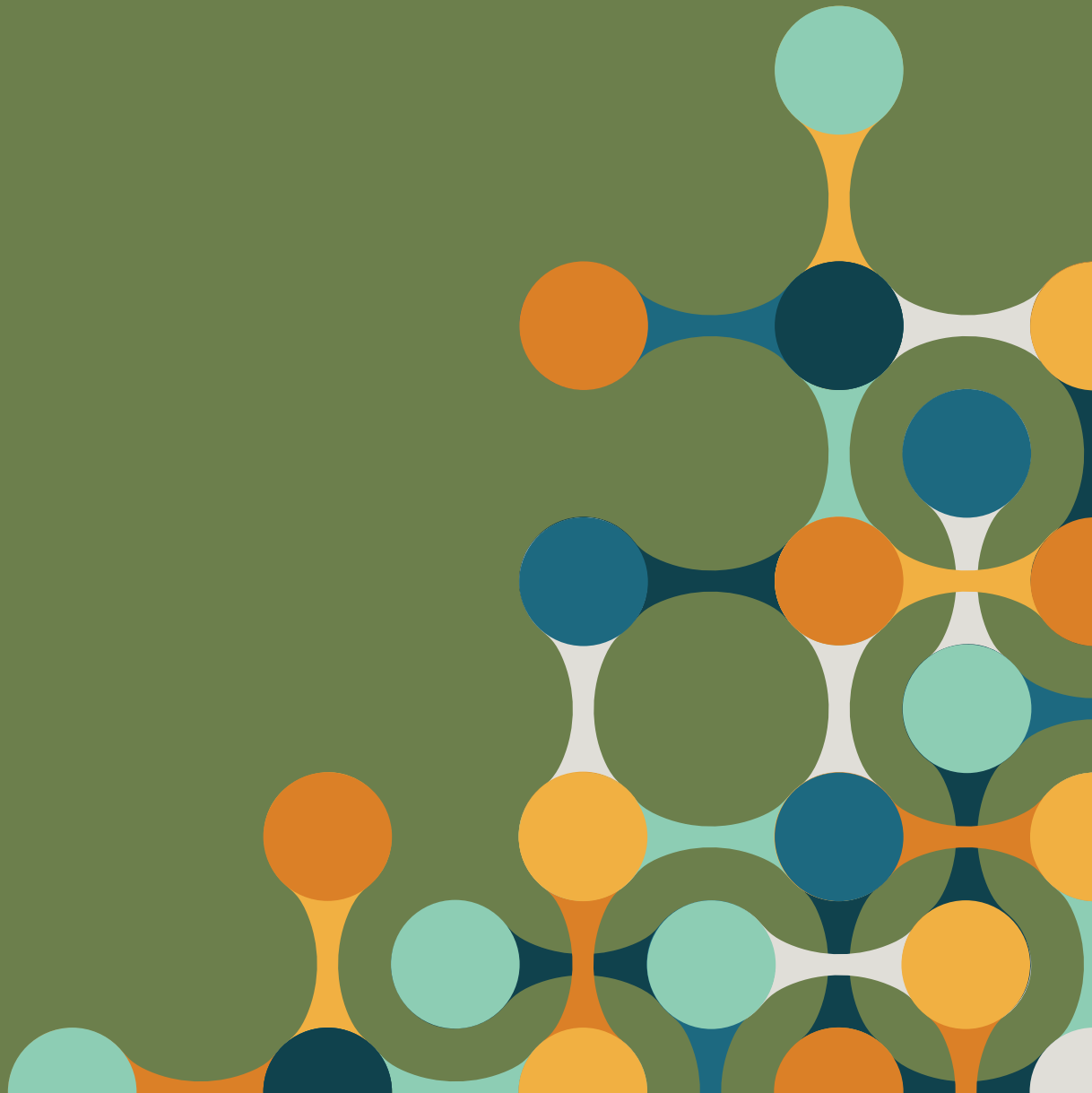


ANNUAL REPORT
2025/26

INSTITUTE FOR
**Community
Prosperity**



Message from the Executive Director



On behalf of the entire Institute team, I am thrilled to share with you our 2025/26 Annual Report. 2025 marked our 25th year at MRU (time flies)! The Institute began in 2000 as the *Institute for Nonprofit Studies* and was the first Institute at Mount Royal College. Since that time we have grown, evolved, and adapted to the changing needs of students and the increasingly complex challenges facing communities. It is an understatement to say that a lot has changed in the past 25 years. More than ever, we need the tools and practices of systems thinking and social innovation, along with the processes of deep engagement and generative dialogue, to co-create pathways that bridge differences and ensure prosperity for all.

During our renewal process with the university in the fall of 2025, I gathered reflections from some of our community partners on the role and impact of the Institute. Here is an example of what I heard:

"What stands out is the Institute's genuine commitment to humanity in action - reciprocity, inclusion, and collective capacity building. Its work exemplifies how universities ought to engage with community to lower artificial barriers and participate as partners in navigating our most thorny challenges and our most powerful aspirations. The Institute's leadership in systems thinking, its practical focus on equity and prosperity for all, and its ongoing contribution to community learning make it an indispensable part of Calgary's civic life."

Community Partner

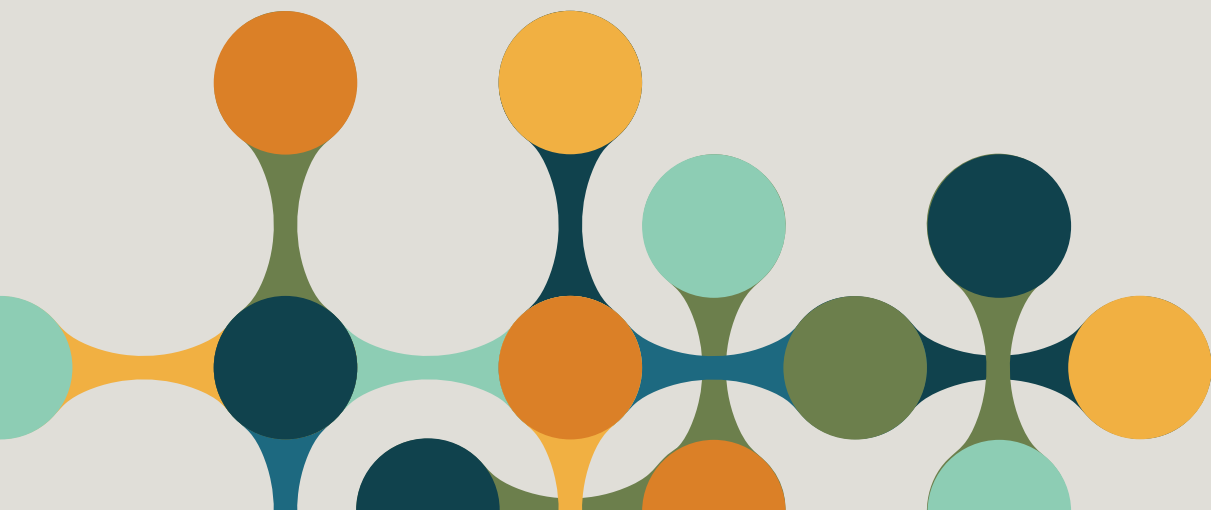
Testimonials like this not only serve as validation of our work, but also as an important reminder of the role we play in community and the responsibility we have to serve as a bridge between campus and community based on the principles of reciprocity, inclusion, humility, curiosity, shared learning and collective vision.

Perhaps our 'silver anniversary' warrants some kind of party, but honestly, the true celebration is in these pages - the students, the faculty, the organizational partners and community members who are truly making change, everyday.

Be prepared to be inspired.

Lena Soots Haley,
Executive Director

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Who We Are

The Institute for Community Prosperity at Mount Royal University is a hub of social innovation, systems-learning, and community engagement that bridges the knowledge, wisdom, and experience of community with academic learning and scholarly insight.

We bring together students, faculty, and community from across disciplines, sectors, and backgrounds to address the complex social and ecological challenges of our time.

Community prosperity is the interconnection of **cultural**, **social**, **ecological**, and **economic** conditions necessary for individuals, organizations, and societies to flourish.

Why We're Here



To provide transformational, experiential, and co-curricular learning experiences for students that empower them to become the changemakers of tomorrow.

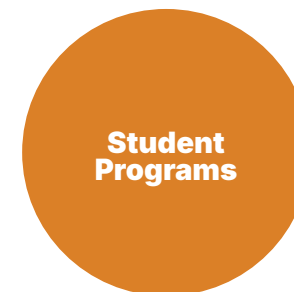


To build the capacity of the changemakers of today to navigate increasing complexity and create positive change.



To create pathways of trust, reciprocity, collaboration and learning between campus and community.

What We Do



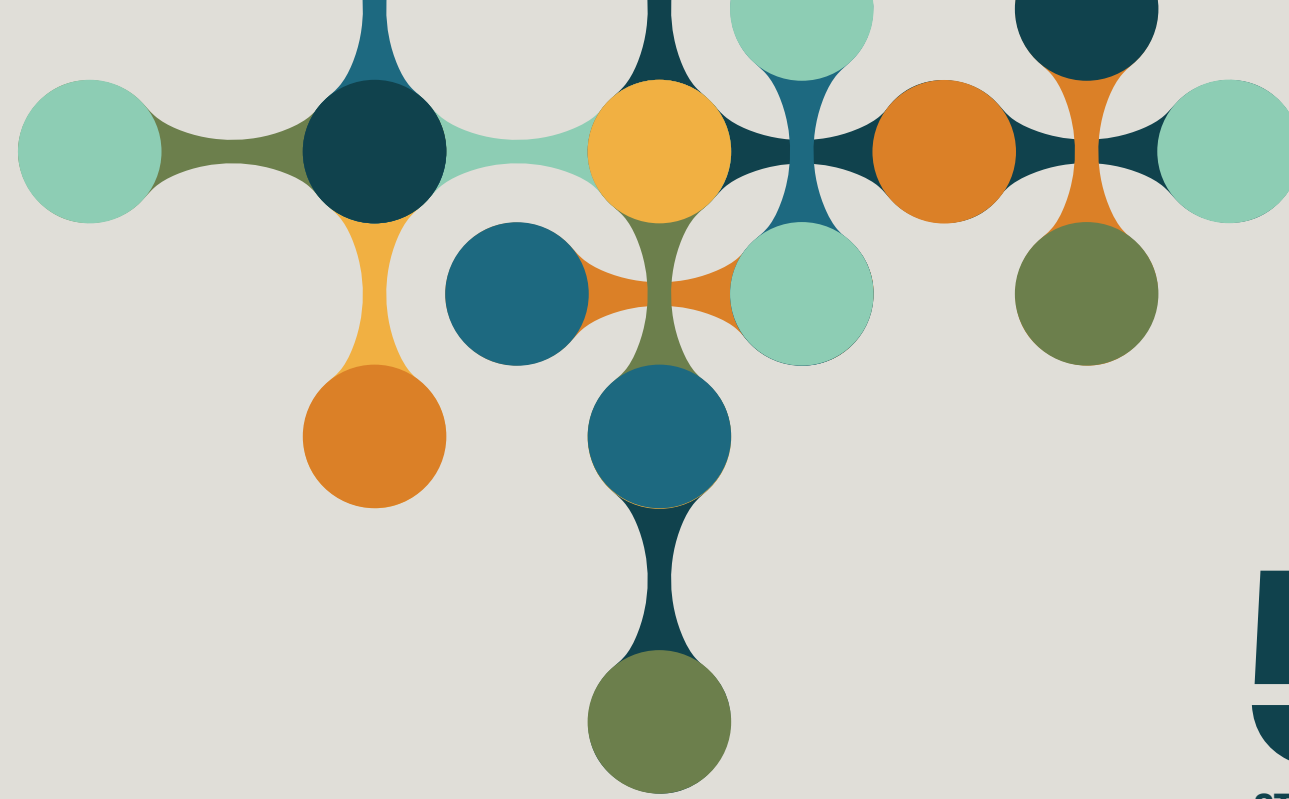
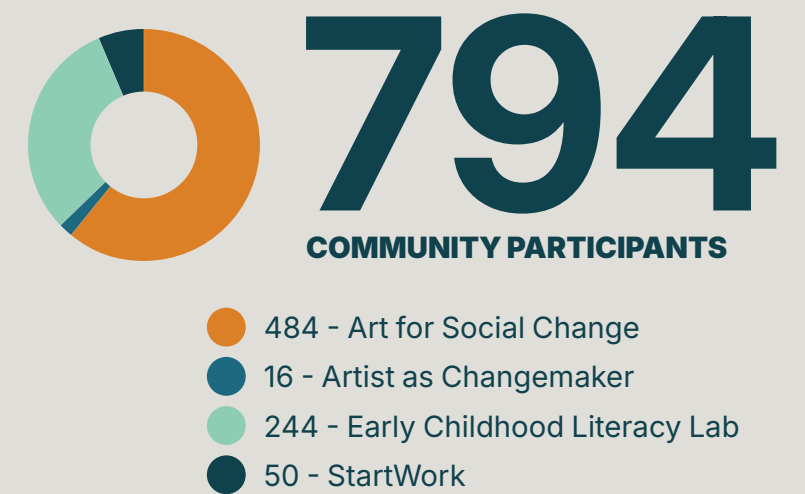
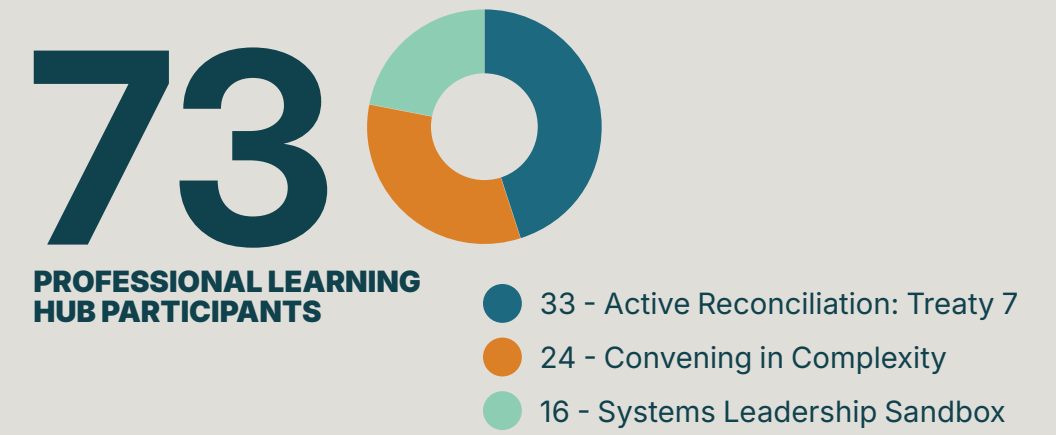
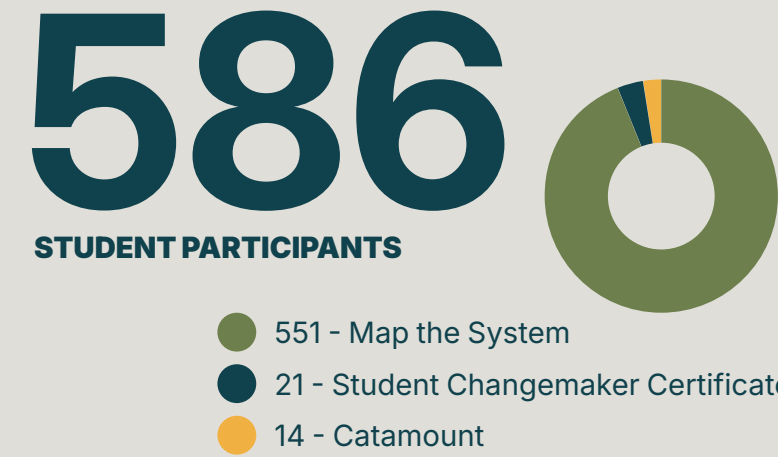
How We Work

The complex challenges society faces are not linear and cannot be solved in isolation, but require mindsets, tools, and approaches that allow us to embrace complexity, recognize systems dynamics, and identify places for transformative change. At the Institute, we bring a systems thinking approach to all that we do.

Our place within the university is a place of privilege that comes with both opportunity and responsibility. We are guided by the principles of reciprocity and inclusion, working with students, faculty and community as partners and co-creators in building community prosperity for all.

Year at a Glance

1904
TOTAL PARTICIPANTS FROM ACROSS
ALL CHANGEMAKER INITIATIVES



Student Programs

The Institute offers co-curricular student programs that are designed to be unique, experiential, and engaged directly with community. Our programs build the capacity of young people to work collaboratively across disciplines and backgrounds and apply systems tools and frameworks to complex problems with community partners.

My time as a Catamount Fellow allowed me to foster new relationships on Campus but also branch out to local Calgary communities. Now I'm working a full time job at Mount Royal University Students Association. The experiences and knowledge shared with me has set me up for success long term as a young professional. By learning tools which have taught me how to prepare for meetings, facilitation skills of large groups, foster my imagination and how to show up authentically to the community. In my new role, I have continued to use systems thinking and shared tools like the POPP model with my team.



Julia Madden
Vice President Academic, SAMRU

Student Experience

As the campus lead for Map the System at MRU, I was able to connect with students and faculty in a meaningful way. The Institute gave me an opportunity to explore my creativity through social media creation and workshop facilitations, where I truly felt connected to students. Along the way, I honed new knowledge through the research we had to do when filming videos, as well as through the projects students were working on. I was able to deepen my understanding in systems thinking, and to me this is an essential skill of being a changemaker. I first have to do a lot of listening and understanding before I can act and truly make a difference. My role has taught me that passion sparks the beginning of what can create huge changes. Seeing the passion in the students I have worked with, I am confident that the Institute will nurture changemakers who will continue to make impacts that are both big and small.



Nicole Darnayla
*Map the System Campus Lead
BA Psychology (Honours)*

My journey with the Institute has been deeply rewarding. It has given me the language and clarity I needed to express many of the thoughts I had been carrying throughout my university experience. I had often felt the pressures and limitations of the systems around me, especially when witnessing the inequalities they create and reinforce, but I didn't have the vocabulary to explain them beyond broad terms like systemic injustice.

Alongside my student journey, I have also had the honour of working as a Program Assistant for the Art for Social Change initiative. I have met and learned from artists who use their work to build community, create connection, and spark important conversations around inequity, resilience, and belonging.

Thanks to the Institute, I have experienced tremendous personal, academic, and professional growth in a short time. As I enter my final year of university, I feel incredibly fortunate to have had these opportunities, and hope more students are able to learn about and access these programs; many would benefit from the same clarity, confidence, and sense of purpose that these experiences brought me.



Marie-Soleil Hudon
*Art for Social Change Program Assistant
BCMM Information Design (Honours)*

Map the System

Map the System is an international student research challenge that invites students from any discipline to explore complex social or environmental issues through the lens of systems thinking. Unlike pitch competitions or design sprints, Map the System emphasizes deep understanding over quick solutions. Students are evaluated on the clarity, rigour, and scope of their system analysis, specifically their understanding of root causes, key actors, existing interventions, and leverage points for change.

“Being given an opportunity like this, to travel outside my comfort zone, both metaphorically and literally and being an active participant in systems thinking is an unforgettable experience. And yes, it’s scary, and it’s hard, and it’s frustrating at times, but the end result is always worth it. This experience allowed me to do things I was scared of, to dig deep and make something worth presenting after months of research, as well as standing in front of people and judges from all over the world. And I’m so proud to have represented Mount Royal University and Canada.”

Nooriya Zaidi,
Map the System Campus Winner & Global Participant

MRU CAMPUS COMPETITION

The campus final was held on April 13 with 44 people in attendance. Tori McMillan, Director of the Iniskim Centre; Dr Ines Simetband from the Faculty of Arts; and Hallie Vermette, MRU alumni and previous Map the System competitor served as guest judges, reviewing presentations and reports. With a mixture of judges and audience voting, each of the top five finalists were awarded a prize:

Best Storytelling

Cameran Christianson, Laura Gonzalez, Amelia Gutfriend, & Mohamad Kamel, *The Cost of Waiting: How Funding Delays Harm Children with Disabilities*

Best Research

Dana Dutton, *The Risk of Loneliness; Canadian Youth’s Battle With Feeling Lonely*

Best Systems Map

Aleaha Florence, *The Opioid Crisis in Alberta: Barriers to Treatment and Recovery & Indigenous Overrepresentation*

Most Thought-Provoking

Andres Gomez, *The Attention Economy: A Systems Analysis of Digital Overstimulation*

Overall Winner & MRU Representative at the Global Finals at Oxford University

Zainab Zaidi & Nooriya Zaidi, *Alberta Public Healthcare Deterioration*

MAP THE SYSTEM CANADA

Since 2018, the Institute has brought together campus educators from across post-secondaries to coach and mentor students as they collaborate and compete with others to apply systems thinking approaches to understand the complexity of a social or environmental issue.

2025/26 HIGHLIGHTS

This is the tenth year that Map the System Canada has been offered. To celebrate the Institute facilitated a nationwide call-out to system thinking practitioners in order to match the teams from each campus with a coach. This meant that the 42 finalists met with the 42 coaches this year. Over 1,100 students took part in Map the System Canada which included researching a systemic issue, mapping it, and presenting their findings.



All 15 Canadian institutions attended the 2026 Global Finals at the University of Oxford to showcase their research. Humber Polytechnic was one of the top six teams, and the University of Calgary received the third-place prize among 40 teams at the global competition. Both the University of Waterloo and Mount Royal University received the excellence award for the inclusion of underrepresented voices.



Student Changemaker Certificate

The Student Changemaker Certificate is a cohort-based learning experience for MRU students to engage in and apply systems-thinking approaches to a complex, systemic issue while deepening their capacity to make meaningful change. Students develop foundational skills to navigate complex issues impacting people and the planet. The Student Changemaker Certificate is offered in the fall of each year and serves as a prerequisite the Catamount Fellowship and a primer for Map the System.

2025/26 HIGHLIGHTS

The Student Changemaker Certificate was developed in response to learnings and reflections after six years of offering the Catamount Fellowship. The Changemaker Certificate introduces system thinking approaches in a peer-to-peer learning environment and readies students for community-engaged practice that is the cornerstone of the Catamount Fellowship.

This year marked the official launch of the Student Changemaker Certificate at the Institute. 21 students embarked on this learning journey as they developed skills in applying systems thinking approaches in a peer-to-peer learning environment. Students valued sharing space with community and learning from Changemakers including Elder Miksika'am and Medicine Trail Coordinator, Dion Simon. Students challenged their assumptions about how to engage in changemaking and hosted a community conversation based on the question - How might we re-imagine post-secondary for 21st century learners? The closing celebration was held on November 27 and included reflections from three student participants: Tamar Derksen, Marie-Soleil Hudon, and Talvir Singh Dhillon.

"What I did not expect was to have shifted the way I think about connection, leadership, and what it takes to create real change. Change-making is not defined by title or project. It is defined by intentionality. Intentionality in how we show up, how we listen, how we build relationships that actually last."

Student Changemaker



"I felt a sense of connection, community, and intimacy that I hadn't experienced before."

Student Changemaker



Catamount Fellowship

Catamount is a cohort-based learning experience for senior-level undergraduate students at Mount Royal University to work in an interdisciplinary collaboration on a community-identified complex social and/or environmental issue. Catamount is one part community-partnered research and one part transformational learning. Diving into social innovation frameworks, experiential learning and deep listening with community, students explore the root causes of community-identified ecological, social, economic, and cultural issues.

2025/26 HIGHLIGHTS

This year was the first offering of the re-designed fellowship based on learnings from the past six years of offering Catamount as a co-curricular experience on campus. Our focus was on supporting students to thrive as changemakers and working towards relationships with community partners and faculty mentors grounded in reciprocity.

14 students participated in this year’s Fellowship, each of whom were matched with a community partner and a faculty member as they explored a complex social or environmental issue. Through systems-thinking tools, community engagement, and applied research, the Catamount Fellows dug into complex challenges and created a variety of outputs to document and share their learning journey. This year’s features include blog posts, a card game and self-guided walk, scholarly reports, and facilitation and mentorship frameworks.



"This has been one of the most rewarding and engaging experiences of my education."

Student Fellow

Our Catamount Fellows, their topics, and partnered organizations were:

STUDENT FELLOW	TOPIC	COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION	FACULTY MENTOR
Angad Singh	Evaluating SDG Understanding	Town of Golden	Anh Thu Nguyen, <i>Entrepreneurship, Marketing, & Social Innovation</i>
Anjali Ford	Collective Action Ecosystem	City of Calgary	Carlos Fiorentino, <i>Information Design</i>
Ayden Osvath	A Thriving Social Service	Trellis	Leda Stawnychko, <i>General Management & Human Resources</i>
Calyssa Weaver	Community Data for Collaborative Impact	Calgary Foundation	Elisabeth Richardson, <i>Biology</i>
Helena Ansari	Human-Centered Sustainable Tourism in Alberta	CPAWS	Kathy Rettie, <i>Geography</i>
Julia Madden	Grassroots Power & Systems-Level Change	Community Development Learning Initiative	Robin E. Owen, <i>Biology</i>
Lama Al-Wadeiah	Responsible AI Growth & Water Sustainability	Canada WaterPortal	Lauren Dwyer, <i>Information Design</i>
Marie-Soleil Hudon	Strengthening Youth Support Through Collective Impact	United Way	Jamie Anne Vaughan, <i>General Management & Human Resources</i>
Nichelle Sterling	Youth Autonomy, Agency, and Access	Starlings Community	Cherie Woolmer, <i>Mokakiiks Centre for Scholarship of Teaching & Learning</i>
Nicole Gallant	Family-Centered Systems of Care	Family Advocacy Support Centre	Harpreet Aulakh, <i>Criminal Justice</i>
Oluchi Ebisike	Finding Meaningful Work	Calgary Alliance for the Common Good	Esra Ari, <i>Sociology & Anthropology</i>
Rakhshi Malik	Resilience in Older Adults	Palix Foundation	Elaine Ori, <i>Health & Physical Education</i>
Stephanie Blencowe	Housing and Climate Change	Canadian Poverty Institute	Heather Nelson, <i>GNED</i>
Thamar Derksen	Youth Engagement & Empowerment in Calgary	Big Brothers Big Sisters	Kris Hans, <i>Public Relations</i>

In 2025, with support from Calgary Foundation, the Institute began developing a Professional Learning Hub for nonprofit and social purpose organizations with a focus on systems learning and systems leadership to help build the capacity of the social sector to navigate increasing complexity and lead transformative systems change.

The Professional Learning Hub houses the Systems Leadership Sandbox, Convening in Complexity Facilitator Training, as well as a Systems Mapping program for community practitioners that is in development. Together, these three programs form the basis for a Systems Leadership Badge. Other workshop, training and learning opportunities will be developed over time and in response to emerging needs in the sector.



Convening in Complexity Facilitation Training

Convening in Complexity is a facilitator training program designed to build the capacity of nonprofit leaders to design and facilitate meaningful processes towards transformative change. Facilitating diverse groups in the context of complex community challenges can be daunting and overwhelming. Over the years, we have heard time and again that community and nonprofit leaders want to build their capacity to design, convene, and facilitate meaningful group processes that improve decision making, inspire action and address shifting community needs.

In 2025 the Institute, led by Latasha Calf Robe, designed a facilitator’s toolbox — a collection of tools, approaches, frameworks and exercises for understanding complexity, working across differences, and co-creating systems change. In 2026, our facilitation team designed and delivered a training program based on the toolkit. Through hands-on activities, coaching, peer learning, and guided conversations, participants developed their facilitation skills and techniques for managing changing group dynamics and addressing complex issues.

Convening in Complexity was piloted as a 3-day intensive with two cohorts of participants from the nonprofit food sector in Calgary. A total of 11 community organizations and 24 leaders participated.



With two successful pilots, the Institute will be offering Convening in Complexity Facilitator Training again in the fall of 2026 and the spring of 2027.

"I am so grateful for the opportunity to learn from your incredible team! I learned and practiced more in these three days about facilitating groups and systems change than I did in my university degree."

Convening In Complexity Participant

"I really valued so much of this session both to reinforce current practices, re-invigorate practices that have been lost and to learn new ways of doing things."

Convening In Complexity Participant



Systems Leadership Sandbox

The Systems Leadership Sandbox is a professional learning experience designed for community leaders to build their capacity to more effectively and meaningfully lead, enact, and mobilize systems-level change. Participants come away with a stronger foundation and new tools in applying systems thinking approaches in their own practice, as well as deepened relationships with others wrestling with time-sensitive, systemic injustices impacting our communities.

This spring, we welcomed 16 participants to this professional learning experience from across sectors, backgrounds, and disciplines including civil servants, post-secondary educators, nonprofit leaders and consultants, as well as foundation executives. Over the course of nine cohort gatherings, Sandbox participants developed their leadership capacity to navigate the complex terrain of their organization's social mission. In gathering bi-weekly, participants developed relationships with one another and challenged their existing ways of being, doing, and knowing as they developed insights as systems leaders.

Sessions were offered by systems practitioners with decades of experience applying system thinking approaches to complex social challenge.

SANDBOX SESSIONS

 **Opening Gathering**
with Elder Roy Bear Chief

 **Foundations in Systems & Complexity**
Lena Soots-Haley

 **Systems-Led Leadership**
Daniela Papi-Thornton

 **Case Studies in Systems Thinking**
Jill Andres

 **Reconciliation & Systems**
Latasha Calf Robe and Tim Fox

 **Systems Futures**
Jeny Matthews-Thusoo

"The people. The facilitators were exceptional. The conversations were rich. It was the perfect amount of knowledge to shift mental models and allow people to come to their own self discoveries and learnings. I found myself thinking and talking about the sessions in my professional and personal life."

Sandbox Participant



"This course really changed my life, (this type of learning) in the beginning of my career will impact how I show up as a leader throughout my career. I also really benefited from the models that I use all the time now to articulate how my brain works and how I see the world. Accessing tools that allow for optimism in this work is transformational."

Sandbox Participant



Active Reconciliation: Treaty 7

In October of 2025 we co-hosted the eighth annual Active Reconciliation: Treaty 7 (ART7) retreat with Calgary Foundation at the Juniper Hotel in Banff. Designed as an immersive retreat rooted in ceremony, Indigenous teachings, land-based learning and collective responsibility, ART7 welcomes senior leaders and board members from nonprofit organizations in Calgary to dive deeply into reconciliation and system change.

Over the course of three days together, participants were invited to engage in immersive conversations rooted in reconciliation, decolonization, and systems change. Participants explore tools and practices that support meaningful dialogue, collaborative design and relational leadership. The retreat is designed not as a ‘training’, but as a relational experience, where knowledge is shared, stories are honoured, and wisdom is collectively held.



“After attending the ART7 retreat, I came away with a deeper awareness of how the impacts of colonialism continue to shape the lives of Indigenous peoples today. It’s not just something in the past, it’s a living reality that continues to affect communities in painful ways. During the retreat, I realized there were gaps in my understanding and assumptions I hadn’t examined before. That experience reminded me that reconciliation isn’t a single act or destination, it’s a lifelong journey of learning, respect, and genuine action.”

ART7 Participant

2025 PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

The 2025 retreat hosted 33 participants from 4 organizations.

- The Alex
- The Women’s Centre
- Faculty of Nursing, University of Calgary
- Calgary Foundation



THE FACILITATION AND HOSTING TEAM

- Elder Evelyn Good Striker
- Elder Casey Eagle Speaker
- Tim Fox
- Latasha Calf Robe
- Siikapinaki Low Horn
- Ayodeji Adetimehin
- Lena Soots-Haley
- Amy Rintoul
- Allison Schulz

Community Initiatives

Our community initiatives cover a wide range of opportunities for community members to engage with the Institute—from social labs and artist residency programs to pilot projects testing new economic models. Our community initiatives are designed to be action-oriented and experiment with new ideas and approaches through creative collaborations, pilot initiatives and community based projects that push boundaries and invite new ways of thinking and doing.

Strategic Partnerships and Collaborations

As a community facing Institute, our relationships within the community are central to the value we bring to our community partners as well as to the learning and research opportunities available to students and faculty. The Institute holds several formal and strategic partnerships within the community as part of our commitment to building strong and meaningful relationships for the benefit of MRU and the broader community.



Art For Social Change

Art for Social Change (ASC) is a practice-based stream that brings together artists, community partners, students, and faculty to bridge creative practice with systems learning so that community wisdom, academic insight, and artistic process inform each other. Art for Social Change recognizes and supports artists as catalysts for meaningful transformation in community. We equip, connect, and amplify artists and partners to integrate community-engaged creative practice with systems learning to build trust, grow shared capacity, and move ideas into action.

2025/26 HIGHLIGHTS

At the beginning of the year, our work continued under the banner of the Art for Social Change Network: Calgary Hub, in partnership with Calgary Arts Development and the International Centre for Art for Social Change. Our programming continued work through the Blue Sky City series, which used creative practice as a lens for artists, community members, and organizations to interrogate the gap between Calgary's civic identity and lived experience. Through art-based activities, participants examined how systems can both support and limit collective thriving and what responsibility we carry to this land, to Treaty 7, and to each other, affirming that art is a powerful tool we have for entering into complexity together.



ASC also hosted and participated in a range of community gatherings, including Creative Mixers with The Alcove Centre for the Arts, ArtistSpeak Community Conversations with Kenna Burima, engaging with over 480 participants throughout the year.

"The questions worth asking are rarely the comfortable ones. These gatherings are willing to enter into a conversation that could have easily stayed too spicy to touch, and being in that spiciness together is what let us think critically and creatively about how we engage with what's ahead."

ArtistSpeak Participant

In December 2024, the International Art for Social Change Network came to a close. In January 2025, the Calgary Hub relaunched as simply Art for Social Change. Still rooted in the same commitment to artists as catalysts for change and still in proud partnership with Calgary Arts Development, but now fully grounded in the work within Mohkínstsis and in the systems-learning framework of the Institute.

This new approach works through three connected streams:

CREATIVE PRACTICE makes visible the issues and possibilities within community through art as praxis.

CONVENING AND CONNECTION strengthens the network of artists and creatives working in social and systems change.

CAPACITY BUILDING AND SYSTEMS LEARNING equips people with creative approaches and systems thinking tools that link reflection, creative work, and action.

The Artist as Changemaker Residency now lives within the Creative Practice stream, bringing the program's cohort-based, relational way of working into closer alignment with Art for Social Change's broader approach. Looking ahead, keep an eye out for new developments on the Capacity Building and Systems Learning front in the coming year.



Artist as Changemaker

The Artist as Changemaker Residency is a year-long residency for socially engaged artists, rooted in relationship, process, and collective imagination. Now in its seventh year and fourth iteration, Artists as Changemaker is a partnership between the Institute and Calgary Arts Development. The purpose of the Artist as Changemaker program is to illuminate, elevate, and expand the capacity of artists to create pathways for social change.

The residency is artist-led and cohort based. Artists apply in partnership with a community partner, bringing either an existing relationship or a new relationship they are ready to grow. Together, they spend eight months working through the social challenges they care about using artistic process and social innovation. The work emphasizes collaborative, experimental, and iterative practice between artists, organizations, and communities.

"As an artist, this is a dream come true, coming to a place where you can be financially supported, spiritually supported, educationally supported. It's a space you don't find anywhere else."

Artist

2025/26 HIGHLIGHTS

This year's residency brought together eight artists and eight community partners. Over nine months, the cohort took part in learning sessions, mentorship, and community-based practice. This year, we were intentional about holding three bodies of knowledge in conversation: systems thinking, social innovation practice, and the long tradition of socially engaged art.

Across the cohort, artists worked in dance, mixed media, drawing and painting, theatre, literary arts, photography, and multidisciplinary practice. Together with their community partners, they addressed challenges spanning newcomer youth belonging, climate storytelling, Black Calgarian community-building, family resilience, public reading spaces, queer and racialized youth narratives, postpartum mental health, and immigrant women's wellbeing.

Throughout the year, we have watched artists move into complex social challenges with presence, curiosity, and a willingness to stay with what is difficult, growing in their own practice along the way. Community partners continue to discover that the artistic process reveals what traditional approaches tend to miss, opening pathways into the deeper layers of systems change that are hardest to reach.

"This cohort lit something within me: their passion, their devotion to community, the way we pour ourselves into the world with such fierce love. It's impossible to witness that and remain unchanged."

Artist



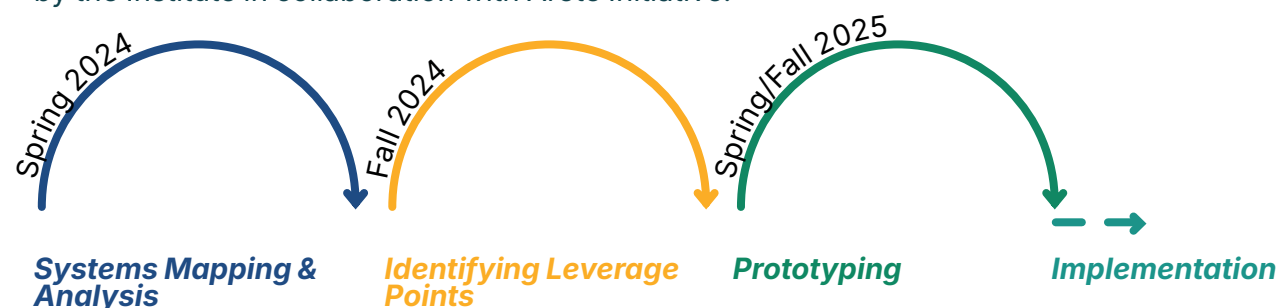
Scan here to
read the Artist
as Changemaker
Final Report





Literacy Lab (February 2024 - March 2026)

The Literacy Lab was a two-year social innovation lab aimed at addressing Calgary's urgent and complex literacy challenge: How might we collectively ensure all children in Calgary are reading by the end of grade 3? Recognizing that childhood literacy is shaped not only by schools but also by social, cultural, economic, and systemic factors, the Lab was designed to bring together diverse participants from across traditional boundaries to deepen shared understanding of what is keeping the problem entrenched, uncover root causes, and test new approaches that could lead to meaningful, positive change. The Literacy Lab was facilitated by the Institute in collaboration with Arete Initiative.



Over the course of the Lab, more than 400 individuals representing nearly 50 organizations were engaged through workshops, interviews, solution teams, and community events. Engagement intentionally included educators, caregivers, Indigenous Elders, newcomer families, early childhood practitioners, service providers, and system leaders, with a strong emphasis on voices often excluded from traditional literacy planning processes.

"The lab created a space for people to express needs thoughtfully and respectfully, and to feel represented and cared for in the process. That kind of environment is rare, and it makes meaningful, lasting work possible."

Organizational Partner



2025/26 HIGHLIGHTS

Drawing on insights from 2024 community workshops, challenge mapping, and leverage point identification, the Literacy Lab launched its prototyping phase. Three small community-led Solution Teams were formed to design, test, and refine solutions, each focused on a guiding area of intervention:

THE UNDERSTANDING SCHOOLS IN CALGARY team developed culturally and linguistically accessible sessions focused on helping newcomer caregivers understand Alberta's school system and better support their children's literacy and learning. This model was formally adopted by the Calgary Public Library, in partnership with the Calgary Bridge Foundation for Youth.

THE INDIGENOUS LITERACY KIT team created an online, culturally grounded literacy resource (*The Story Lodge*) supporting Indigenous families to integrate literacy into daily life and strengthen early literacy skills. Miskanawah Community Services Association agreed to steward and further develop the Indigenous Literacy Kit, embedding it within Indigenous family programming.

THE FESTIVAL OF EARLY WORDS team explored the potential of an early-literacy event focused on language acquisition beyond reading (singing, storytelling, etc.), connecting families with literacy-supporting organizations.

THE GENERATIVE AI LITERACY CHATBOT team developed a multilingual tool to help newcomers navigate literacy resources in Calgary.



FINAL SHOWCASE

The Literacy Lab Showcase held in November 2025 at Calgary's Central Library shared learnings and celebrated community contributions. Beyond specific solutions, the Lab strengthened cross-sector relationships, increased shared awareness of gaps and duplication in the literacy ecosystem, and built community capacity for systems-level collaboration.



StartWork

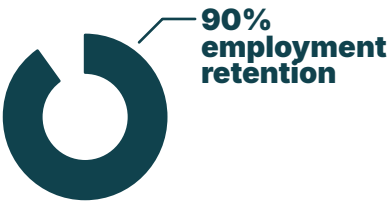
StartWork is a novel partnership between the Government of Alberta, Northpine Foundation, and the Institute applying an outcomes procurement approach to complex social issues. Outcomes procurement provides an alternative to traditional funding where outcomes are paid only after they are achieved at a cost savings to government. The procurement approach enables nonprofits to be adaptive and responsive to clients’ needs without the constraints of traditional funding while working collaboratively with other nonprofits, rather than competing against them.



“Because of your help, I’m now holding down a good job, earning an honest living, and moving forward with real purpose. You didn’t just help me find work—you helped me rebuild my confidence, and that means everything.”

StartWork Participant

Employment outcomes have been significant for the initial cohort of 40 refugees engaged with StartWork with over 90% employment retention since February of 2024. The results of the initial pilot speak to the direct effectiveness of this novel approach and the promise of outcomes procurement to dismantle long-term employment barriers.



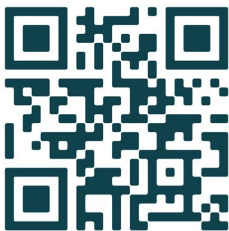
SHARING OUR INSIGHTS

Doing Things Differently: StartWork and the Case for Outcomes Procurement provides insights about the outcomes procurement model based on interviews with 18 stakeholders including civil servants, foundation staff, community-serving organizations and StartWork participants. Dr. Amanda Williams, Associate Professor at MRU was the lead investigator and co-author of this publication.



Scan here to read the StartWork case Study

UPEND: How Nonprofits, Charities, and Government Can Work Together Differently To Get What We All Want is a practitioners guide to unlocking resources for social good. This publication was written by Shaun Loney, a social enterprise consultant who was the visionary behind StartWork and continues to serve as a consultant with the Institute.



Scan here to read UPEND

EXPANDING OUR IMPACT

A second outcomes procurement contract is now underway transitioning up to 300 individuals from Alberta Income Support into the labour market over the next three years. Momentum, a community organization involved in StartWork, is the contract lead in partnership with the Ministry of Assisted Living and Social Services. The Institute’s role in the second contract is to support and expand Calgary’s social enterprise ecosystem providing pathways to employment for individuals facing barriers to the labour market.

“Momentum is grateful to partner with the Institute for Community Prosperity in developing StartWork. Not only is StartWork enabling Momentum to provide life-changing opportunities for Albertans to move off of Income Support, but it also has the potential to shift how government works with community organizations to make meaningful change in the community.”

Jeff Loomis, Executive Director, Momentum

PARTICIPATING COMMUNITY PARTNERS



Campus Connection

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Pathways for Community Engaged Research and Teaching

The Institute for Community Prosperity has deep and diverse relationships in the community that can provide pathways for community engaged research and teaching for MRU faculty members. Until now there has been no formal or structured mechanism by which opportunities are identified or shared. We are developing two pathways for faculty to connect with our work.

Bridging and Brokering

The Institute hosts faculty information sessions twice per academic year to share information about current community initiatives and identify opportunities for teaching, class projects, and research. The idea was tested in 2025, hosting two faculty information sessions that resulted in six courses integrating StartWork into course content and assignments as well as a research and evaluation project that will carry into future years.

Annual Environmental Scan - Calgary Foundation

As part of our ongoing partnership with Calgary Foundation, the Institute is creating an opportunity for MRU faculty and students to contribute research to Calgary Foundation's Annual Environmental Scan. The Environmental Scan includes research and analysis related to current trends in various theme areas including:

- Economy
- Politics
- Philanthropy and the Nonprofit Sector
- Equity and Inclusion
- Environment and Climate
- Technology, Innovation and AI
- Current Community Issues (affordable housing, food security, mental health)

The Environmental Scan is used for identifying and adapting strategic directions within Calgary Foundation, as well as informing decisions around grant making and capacity building support for the sector. This report is available to other community organizations who use it to inform their own community work and strategic directions.

Through the Institute, MRU faculty will have the opportunity and support to contribute research and writing to this publication, and to engage undergraduate students in research that is directly applied and used by the community.



Faculty Experience

This year, the Institute served as a community partner in a fourth-year capstone course taken by students in the School of Communication Studies, supporting the StartWork Community Celebration on December 3. A team of four students from across disciplines completed the project: a broadcasting student created a video featuring interviews with community partners, affiliates, and participants; an information design student developed a brochure; and public relations students produced a poster, press release, community partner profiles, and a post-event survey email. These outputs provided StartWork with professional communications assets. Students left with portfolio-ready work and a clearer understanding of how communication skills translate into practice.

I also partnered with StartWork to publish a case study, securing ethics approval and conducting 18 interviews with partners and participants. The study will be completed this June and launched in the fall. Working alongside Institute staff and faculty on this case study was inspiring, and it was also meaningful to be partnered with stakeholders committed to making a real difference. Together, this collaboration demonstrates the value of faculty-Institute partnerships in producing rigorous applied research that translates community knowledge into evidence to inform practice and future programming. We plan to continue this research agenda as the project expands and engage in multiple knowledge mobilization activities in the upcoming years.

The Institute's strength lies in its capacity to create transformative learning opportunities by connecting students to community partners and live research. These experiences build confidence, empathy, and critical reflection while strengthening students' ability to apply communication skills in professional contexts.



AMANDA WILLIAMS
Associate Professor,
School of Communication Studies

In the past academic year, almost every single Social Innovation course at MRU has benefited from the Institute for Community Prosperity. This includes the Institute's support for the Student Social Innovation Showcase, an end of term celebration of the SINV2201 Social Innovation Lab (10-12 sections/year), the community service learning/work-integrated learning partnerships between SINV3305 and StartWork, including the incredible international collaboration with Rosenheim this past spring term (3-4 sections/year, typically), or how the Trico Changemaker Studio hosts SINV5010, allowing students to begin transitioning their learning to professional practice in a collaborative setting. Additionally, the co-curricular opportunities created and supported by the Institute, such as the Catamount Fellowship and Map the System provide transformative opportunities for students interested in expanding their classroom learning to meaningful community-based and international partnerships. There are very few students that are enrolled in social innovation classes that do not benefit from the Institute's continued space holding, place-making, network building and inquiry-driving changemaking work. This dynamic creates a ripple effect that greatly increases the Institute's reach and impact - for the betterment of our entire campus community.



KATHARINE MCGOWAN
Associate Professor,
Social Innovation

I've had the pleasure of working with colleagues at the Institute for Community Prosperity (ICP) on two flagship programs: the Catamount Fellowship and the Systems Leadership Sandbox. As a returning faculty mentor in Catamount, I have been able to connect my research and teaching interests while supporting students as they engage in a unique experiential, community-focused project. I have particularly appreciated the opportunity to mentor, rather than assess, my student partners, seeing confidence and agency fostered through self-directed learning and meaningful co-creation between students, faculty, and community partners. Using a systems lens, my student partner is developing practical tools for navigating complexity that they can apply throughout their studies and future careers.

Inspired by my experiences with Catamount, I participated in the Systems Leadership Sandbox. The program has given me a new perspective on leading institutional change to enhance teaching and learning, providing concrete ways to bring systems thinking into the designs of my programs and conversations with others at MRU. It has been inspiring to see the benefits of bridging university and community expertise and engaging with the Institute as the hub for this model of learning and development.



DR. CHERIE WOOLMER
Associate Professor,
Academic Development Centre & Mokakiiks Centre for SoTL

TRICO CHANGEMAKERS STUDIO

Hosted by the Institute for Community Prosperity, the Trico Changemakers Studio is an open and inclusive space on campus for collaboration, co-creation and community.

The Trico Changemakers Studio continues to be a vibrant and dynamic co-working space that houses the Institute for Community Prosperity, Miistakis Institute, the QriTical Queer and Trans Research Hub, the Institute for Innovation and Entrepreneurship, and the Institute's partnership programs with Calgary Arts Development and Calgary Foundation. The Studio is also home to the Catamount Fellowship, Student Changemaker Certificate, Map the System and several social innovation courses.



The Trico Changemakers Studio
was created and is supported by:



Our Team



ASHLEY DION
Systems Learning Lead



HALLIE VERMETTE
StartWork Workforce Analysis



ASHLYN SMITH
Community Program Coordinator



LINH BUI
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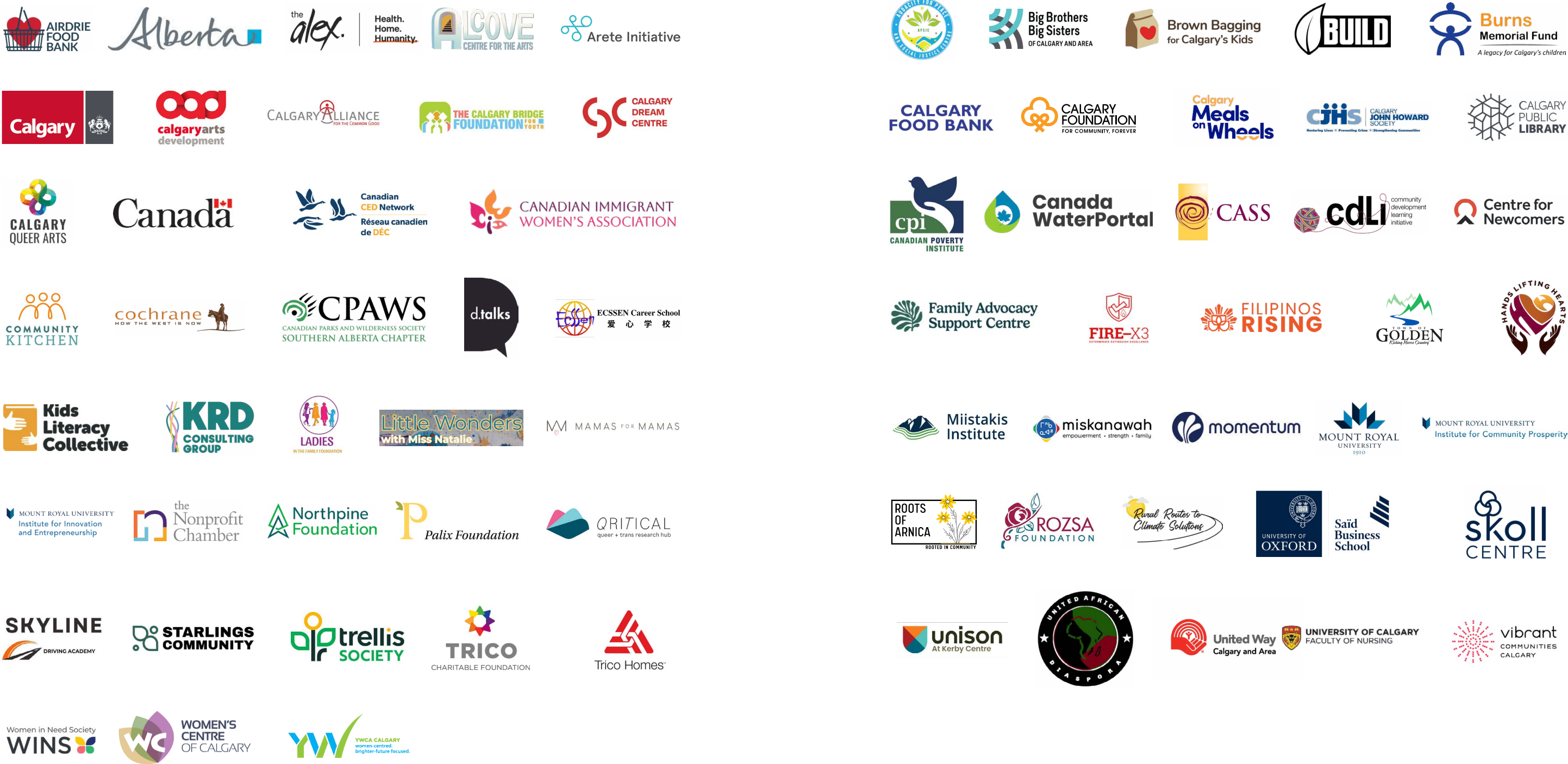
Faculty

- **AMANDA WILLIAMS**, Associate Professor, School of Communication Studies
- **JODI NICKEL**, Professor, Department of Education
- **KATHARINE MCGOWAN**, Associate Professor, Social Innovation

Collaborators

- **AMY RINTOUL (AMY RINTOUL CREATIVE)**, Information Designer
- **ALLISON SCHULZ (CALGARY FOUNDATION)**, Systems Capacity Building
- **LATASHA CALF ROBE**, Systems Facilitation
- **MATT MAYER (ARETE INITIATIVE)**, Systems Facilitation
- **ROMAN KATSNELSON (KRD CONSULTING)**, Systems Facilitation
- **SHAUN LONEY**, StartWork Consultant
- **TIM FOX (CALGARY FOUNDATION)**, Active Reconciliation: Treaty 7

Community Connections





MOUNT ROYAL UNIVERSITY

Institute for Community Prosperity

