



A HEARTFELT GOODBYE

“As I reflect on my time at GCC, I think about the things that have touched and inspired me the most. Without question, I’ve been most influenced by and found motivation in the people I have met, primarily women and children, who are living better, safer and healthier lives because of the innovations that we have nurtured.”

Earlier this year I announced that after a decade with Grand Challenges Canada (GCC), I will be leaving my role as CEO. In order to ensure that GCC is sustainable, I wanted to leave my role as CEO with GCC stronger than it has ever been, with great leadership in the organization and with an incredible team. As a co-founder, I am just as committed to the success of this remarkable organization as ever. It has been a great privilege to be able to launch and help to build a high-performing innovation platform. Over the past eight years, \$450M has been committed to fund our programs, which has enabled us to support 1,000 innovations and thousands of innovators in more than 90 countries. I feel proud of what we have accomplished and believe all Canadians can also feel proud of GCC as well.

One woman, in particular, stands out for me. She lived in rural Haiti and had suffered for her entire life from untreated epilepsy. Through the innovative work of Zanmi Lasante, her condition was diagnosed and she received affordable and effective treatment. The transformation in her life was incredible – when we met, she was joyful and full of life, and had developed her own small business (a stall in the local market).



Photo: Beneficiary of Zanmi Lasante’s innovative project to identify and treat epilepsy.

As my time comes to a close as CEO I know that our team at GCC has changed the trajectory of her life, and the lives of so many other people and their families, and will continue to do so in the future.





THE ORIGINS OF GRAND CHALLENGES CANADA

Fifteen years ago when we first began to work on the idea that would become Grand Challenges Canada it was rare, if not unheard of, to think about innovation as a pathway to solve global problems. The prevailing paradigm at the time was to do more of the same interventions that had been tried in the past or to fund research that could, with the alchemy of time, transform into new products or services.

In 2003, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation launched its Grand Challenges in Global Health initiative, which I had the great privilege in helping to get started. Having assisted in identifying the Grand Challenges that the initiative would address, I wrote editorials in Canadian newspapers in 2005 advocating that Canada should adopt the Grand Challenges approach in its development assistance.

Around this same time, we started working on an idea we called Canada Science International, a new initiative that would leverage Canada's science and innovation capacity to support international development. Although this idea failed, it laid the groundwork for future success in GCC.

At this same time, I (and my colleague Abdallah Daar) had begun working closely with a remarkable Canadian, Joe Rotman, one of Canada's leading philanthropists and entrepreneurs, who would go on to become not only a close colleague but also a friend and mentor. We all had the same vision: to see all sectors – government, civil society, academia, and the private sector – working together to solve the Grand Challenges our world faces.

We believed the resources and approaches of these different sectors could be leveraged to have a bigger impact together than they could in isolation.

We believed that a small organization working outside of, but in close partnership with government could demonstrate success. This success would then catalyze change, re-ignite development with innovation, and bring new partners together to solve problems and improve lives.



Photo: Joseph Rotman and Peter A. Singer (2011). Photo courtesy: The Globe and Mail.

We imagined a Canada where innovation and the Grand Challenges approach would be embedded in our approach to international development and also our domestic innovation efforts. Such an approach would identify the barriers to success, especially in greenfield areas, and would stimulate the world's best minds, particularly those closest to the problem, to pursue innovative solutions to overcome these barriers.

We imagined a world where Canada would be a catalyst for transformational change, where innovation would lead the way to healthier and longer lives.

We imagined an organization that would lead and model this change, and would push the boundaries of existing models of research and development, and international development.

In February 2008, with the announcement of the Development Innovation Fund and with the subsequent launch of Grand Challenges Canada in May 2010, we had the opportunity to translate this vision into reality.





WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

As I look back over the past decade, there are three lessons that I think are at the heart of Grand Challenges Canada's success.

1. IMPACT IS EVERYTHING

To understand impact, you need to be able to measure it – and measuring impact, particularly in development innovation, is hard. However, even though something is hard, that doesn't mean it's not important or not worth doing. I am awed that the innovations that we have supported thus far have the potential to save 450,000–1.6 million lives, and improve 11–35 million more by 2030.



450,000–1.6 million lives saved by 2030
through the use of innovative products and services that **save lives**.

Nearly 13,000 lives have been saved to date.



11-35 million lives improved by 2030
through the use of products and services that **improve lives**.

1.5 million lives have been improved to date.

I have rarely come across other innovation organizations that track lives saved and improved in this way. We have worked with the International Development Innovation Alliance to share learnings and best practices in measuring innovation. I am excited to see the impact of this work on the entire sector, as rigorous impact measurement and modeling allows for the meaningful comparison of programs investments and approaches. I firmly believe that innovation is critical to the acceleration of progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We owe it to ourselves and to those who need our support to ensure that we maximize the impacts of our investments in development innovation.

Impact is about more than numbers – it's about the lives of the people that we touch and lift up. It's the innovators who have had the chance to test their ideas after other organizations said that their idea was too risky or they didn't have enough

experience. Hundreds of young innovators, many of them young women, have been given the chance to test innovations and launch organizations or social enterprises to build better lives for their communities.

Impact is about the end beneficiaries who have better health and, as a result, a better chance in life. It's about the newborns in Nepal whose umbilical cords are safely sterilized at birth with chlorhexidine, rather than following the local custom of treating it with dung or mud. It's about the women in Harare and across Zimbabwe (and now New York City) who have received treatment for their mental health challenges on the Friendship Bench.



Photo: The Friendship Bench enables access to mental healthcare across Zimbabwe, and shows promise to scale internationally.

Impact is about the Canadians who are inspired to make a difference. Impact and innovation is always hard in the face of entrenched interests and risk aversion. It will always be easier and safer to do the things that have always been done. But easier and safer is not always better. Smart innovation is the pathway to better outcomes and more impact – and acceleration of progress on the SDGs.





WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

2. LEADERSHIP MATTERS

I have been so fortunate to work with outstanding young leaders. Our two Vice Presidents, Jocelyn Mackie and Karlee Silver, in particular, are incredible examples of the power of thoughtful and empowered women leaders. My leadership principle has been to try to only do what others could not do. With the emergence of Karlee and Jocelyn as leaders, this mandate has become smaller and smaller over time, and their growth was my indicator that the time was right to step away from the CEO role. I know that a great deal of what we have achieved has been because of Karlee and Jocelyn's leadership.

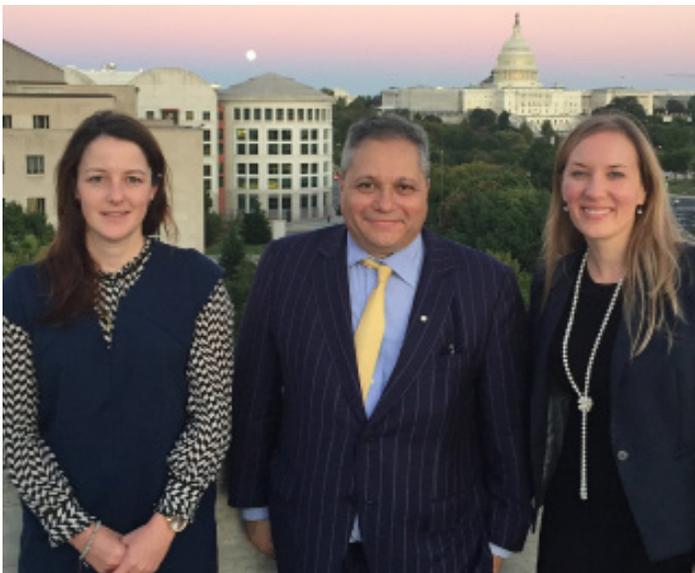


Photo: Karlee Silver, Peter A. Singer, and Jocelyn Mackie in Washington, D.C. for the Annual Grand Challenges Meeting.

Leadership matters in the public service. Without a few visionary leaders, GCC would never have been created and would not have flourished. A new generation of leaders is now working with us to ensure that we continue to have transformative impact in the future. We benefit from ongoing leadership in the public service to continue realizing the potential of this innovation platform, and to embody and put in practice the knowledge and learning that have emerged from our work.



Photo: The Grand Challenges Canada team.

Leadership matters in the private sector. Without the guidance of Joe Rotman and the support of his family, GCC would have only remained an idea. His early leadership, guidance, trust and support enabled GCC to become what it is today. I continue to see my role as being to shine the light of his vision.

The leadership of our partners matters. One of our greatest accomplishments has been to help build a network of Grand Challenges organizations around the world. In this sense, the Grand Challenges approach is like the operating system for collaboration and global governance of innovation. When GCC started, we were funded exclusively by the Government of Canada. Since our launch, we have built a range of strong funding and implementation partners across sectors. Over the past three years, we have more than doubled our funding from sources outside of the government. Further, for every dollar we have spent, we have leveraged over \$1.75 of additional funding from outside sources.

Finally, the leadership of our innovators matters. I have been consistently amazed by the willingness of innovators, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, to risk everything to develop a promising innovation. It is our innovators who have always led the way.





WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

3. CANADA CAN LEAD

The world looks to Canada for leadership in a number of domains. Increasingly the world looks to Canada as a leader in innovation. Grand Challenges Canada will continue to help light the way in development innovation.

Canada took a risk in launching GCC: we were the first country to take a Grand Challenge approach to development. This risk has paid off and has paved the way for similar programs with the Government of Canada and throughout the world. There are now grand challenges initiatives in more than a dozen countries – a measure of success that the idea has caught on.

Canada has also led the way on critical challenges like global mental health. When GCC began, this was an incredibly neglected field. In many countries, less than 1% of their total health budget was allocated to mental health, and only a small fraction of that to global mental health innovation. Starting with a Delphi process to identify the Top Ten Challenges in Global Mental Health, we launched our Global Mental Health program to help overcome the stigma associated with mental health challenges and to increase access to treatment. Through this program, Canada has supported one of the largest portfolios of global mental health innovations in the world.

Further, mental health challenges are now a prominent element of discussions on global health and Canada is leading the way. We have played a similar role in the field of early childhood development and, more recently, humanitarian innovation (alongside great partners such as USAID and UK Department For International Development).

Canada's leadership on gender equality is helping to create a better and more equal world. This is another area where Grand Challenges Canada is leading the way. We take a gender lens in assessing our projects and programs, and we have launched a



Photo: Women leading innovations, Audra Renyi (right) from World Wide Hearing and EarAccess.

comprehensive [Gender Equality Portal](#) to support our innovators in making gender equality and women's empowerment a cornerstone of their work.

Looking forward, I believe that Canada can continue to lead both in development innovation and, more broadly, in using innovation to help accelerate attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. A key part of this leadership, however, must be a continued focus on outcomes and impact. To have a realistic shot at addressing some of the most pressing SDGs, we will need to be able to honestly and accurately assess what is working (and not), why, and how we can sustainably take the best ideas and innovations to scale.





THE FUTURE

As I conclude, I am left asking the question: Have we accomplished the mission that Joe and I, and so many others, set out to achieve? I see some very positive signs.

I was thrilled to see that development innovation was given such a prominent place in the most recent Federal Budget. Budget 2018 comes a decade after the announcement of the Development Innovation Fund that supported GCC in Budget 2008 and sends the message that development innovation is now institutionalized in Canada's international development system. Going forward, I see the International Assistance Innovation Program as a cornerstone of Canada's efforts in this regard and I hope that Grand Challenges Canada will both help to deliver this exciting program and that the lessons that we have learned, particularly in areas like repayables and social finance, will help to shape the way the program is developed and implemented. I am also very encouraged by the new challenges initiatives in the Government of Canada like the Impact and Innovation Unit at the Privy Council Office.

I like to think that our work at Grand Challenges Canada has helped to pave the way for this focus on challenges and development innovation and that, going forward, we will continue to lead the way, in critical areas like gender equality and in working with Indigenous communities and innovators. Globally, innovation will continue to play a key role to strengthen health systems and primary healthcare at a time when the World Health Organization, led by its Director General, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, is promoting universal health coverage.

Similarly, I am proud and excited by the Indigenous Innovation Initiative that launched earlier this year, hosted by Grand Challenges Canada. I can honestly say that, in my view, this is the most important (and risky) undertaking we have been a part of since we launched in 2010. As with any innovation program, there is no guarantee of success but, with partners like the McConnell Foundation and Johnson & Johnson, the leadership of this program by Indigenous colleagues and advisors, and the Indigenization of GCC itself, I am optimistic that we can support and enable Indigenous innovators to identify and overcome the challenges faced in their communities.

Thank you for reading these annual letters and thank you for coming with me on this journey. Leading Grand Challenges Canada for the past decade has been the greatest honour of my life. The journey is only beginning and I am confident the organization will reach even greater heights in the future.

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A NOTE OF GRATITUDE

I want to recognize the friends, family, colleagues and mentors, who have helped to shape my time and leadership at GCC.

THE GCC TEAM

- **Joe Rotman**, without whose leadership GCC would never have launched, and to the Rotman Family, **Sandy, Janice** and **Ken**;
- **Guylaine Saucier**, who Chairs our Board, and all **GCC Board members** past and present who have helped to shape and build this remarkable organization;
- Our senior leadership team of **Jocelyn Mackie, Karlee Silver, David Brook**, and **Jeff Cyr**, who together are an incredible force for good;
- **Abdallah Daar, Andrew Taylor**, and many others who are no longer with GCC but who made incredible contributions;
- And most importantly, the **entire, remarkable team at GCC**, past and present who have made an ambitious vision a tangible reality.

OUR PARTNERS

- **Graham Flack** and **Neil Saravanamuttoo**, who shared the initial vision of GCC and championed it early on and helped get it started and, most recently, **Caroline Leclerc, Elissa Golberg** and **Louise Holt**, and all the other public servants – too many to name here individually – who have supported and championed GCC in the public service;
- Thank you to all of the funders who have supported our work over the past eight years, including: the **Government of Canada, USAID, the UK's DFID, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia), the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, NORAD, World Health Organization, UN Foundation, the McConnell Foundation, Johnson & Johnson, Bernard Van Lear Foundation, ELMA Foundation, UBS Optimus Foundation** and the many individuals, companies, not-for-profit organizations, universities and other organizations who have worked with and support our innovators. Without your support, none of our impact would be possible.
- I would like to thank my colleagues, **Steven Buchsbaum** at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and **David Ferguson** at USAID, and many other colleagues at Grand Challenges initiatives around the world. Our work together has just begun.
- I would also like to thank **Bill & Melinda Gates** for their vision, compassion and continued leadership and support of the global Grand Challenges movement.
- Thanks to the **1,000 amazing innovators** we have supported – and all who have applied – who are changing the world for the better.

Most importantly, I would like to thank my beloved family, **Heather, Rebecca, Erin** and **David**, who provided encouragement and support, and kept me humble and grounded by pointing out my many faults.

