



Annual Letter

June 2019

Each of us has dedicated almost a decade to shaping and evolving Grand Challenges Canada, which we are now privileged to lead as Co-Chief Executive Officers. Over the coming years, we look forward to sharing with you how our ambitious vision for Grand Challenges Canada is unfolding towards the achievement of our mission: to catalyze innovation that saves and improves the lives of the most vulnerable in Canada and in low- and middle-income countries.

Grand Challenges Canada is an innovation platform that funds and enables innovators with potentially transformative solutions to challenges faced by vulnerable populations. We test and, where proven promising, transition these solutions to scale. As an organization, we need to be at the cutting edge in order to remain relevant for the innovators we support and the partners we work with – to have the greatest impact we can. So we are always testing new ways to do our work more effectively and efficiently.

Since we were named Co-CEOs, one innovation that we have been asked many questions about is our co-leadership model. This model has a number of compelling strengths. It supports a high quality of decision-making by providing equal weight to our diverse thoughts, expertise and experience. It also allows Grand Challenges Canada to have senior leadership in two places at once, without diminishing our authority or accountability, and to still contribute to the fast-paced, day-to-day work of our organization, which is critical for a non-profit organization of our size. Finally – and importantly – our co-leadership model provides built-in resilience and allows us to each provide full-time, committed leadership without burning out.

Given the interest in this innovative co-leadership model, we are using this, our first annual letter, to answer some of the questions that we are frequently asked about our experience in implementing this innovative model.

WHY DID YOU APPLY TO BE CO-CEOs?

Jocelyn Mackie: We believed that a model where we share leadership would best meet Grand Challenges Canada's needs as we continue to grow and evolve as a platform that supports innovation for impact. We recognize that co-leadership is not a standard model. It is the one, however, that had evolved organically over seven years of working together at Grand Challenges Canada. As Vice Presidents, our work was already closely entwined, with each of us leveraging our own domain knowledge and experiences as part of the senior leadership team.

Karlee Silver: As our founding CEO Dr. Peter Singer began to step away from the organization, our co-leadership model emerged as the best fit for a nimble organization playing within a complex environment and reliant on an extensive partnership network. When we launched Grand Challenges Canada in 2010, we were funded almost entirely by the Government of Canada. While the Government of Canada remains our anchor funder (we are a proud Canadian organization!), over the past eight years, we have launched new programs and diversified our funding base to the point where we have 14 funding partners and dozens of implementation partners. These partners are a vibrant part of how we expand our impact and therefore our relationships with them are critical to Grand Challenges Canada's success. A co-leadership model greatly increases our capacity to work with our existing partners, and to convey our vision and impact to potential new partners.



JM: Further, we recognized that together we have a unique mix of core institutional knowledge and executive capacity that can help us to realize a shared vision for what Grand Challenges Canada can accomplish – now and in the future.

I can draw on both my legal and bioethics expertise to ensure that we are good stewards of public funding and that our funders are proud of what they are supporting, while ensuring that our innovators have the institutional support they need to succeed. My training in business has allowed me to interact well with a variety of stakeholders who hold diverse perspectives; all of these diverse perspectives are needed to get the best results from the platform. Karlee brings outstanding scientific judgement and an ability to navigate the global landscape of ideas, resources and conversations to ensure that we identify and fund the innovations that can have the most transformative impact. Over our many years of working together, we have developed a profound relationship with each other that is based on trust, high-bandwidth communication and respect of each other's complementary expertise.

KS: Absolutely. Our co-leadership model wouldn't work without the trust and communication that we have built with each other over the years, working closely together at Grand Challenges Canada – and I'm not sure we would ever recommend it to others who have not yet established those elements.

HOW DID YOU CONVINC GRAND CHALLENGES CANADA'S BOARD OF THE POSSIBILITIES INHERENT IN THE CO-CEO MODEL?

JM: When Peter announced that he would be stepping down, we started exploring the idea of co-applying to lead Grand Challenges Canada. As we would with any innovation, we did our due diligence. We researched and consulted with organizations and leaders that have implemented co-leadership models. We found that, while innovative, the co-leadership model is not unique. In fact, Grand Challenges Canada shares the key characteristics that have led other notable organizations – Oracle, Unilever,

Deutsche Bank, KKR, Roots Canada, USC Canada and the Toronto International Film Festival, to name a few – to a co-leadership model, including: the need for high-quality strategic decisions paired with the need for rapid operational decision-making; management of an extensive network of partners; and the co-leads having played fundamental roles in the organization's creation.

KS: We put forward this co-leadership approach because, in our view, it offered the best chance of success, both in terms of implementing the organization's current strategy and in building the new programs and capacities we will need going forward. We proactively addressed the questions we expected our Board to have with an honest assessment of the advantages and challenges of the model. In the end, we communicated to the Board our strong belief that, together, we can accomplish more than any single executive could alone. We have deep respect for the dedication that the Board showed in diligently reviewing all of the relevant considerations and candidates, and we are grateful that our Board agreed with our assessment when they selected us last year.

"Having served on many Boards, I am used to having one CEO with a single point of accountability. When Karlee and Jocelyn applied as Co-CEOs I was the greatest skeptic; they had worked well together as Vice Presidents but at first I wasn't convinced that a shared leadership model would work. We had many strong candidates apply for the job. In the end, Karlee and Jocelyn's co-leadership vision was the best choice."

The characteristics that I believe are needed for a co-leadership model to work are: complementary skill-sets, demonstrated success in working together, having a shared vision, and both being ambitious high-performers who excel at collaboration. Jocelyn and Karlee have these traits. I look forward to continuing to work with them to enable Grand Challenges Canada to have the greatest impact possible."

Guylaine Saucier, Chair, Grand Challenges Canada Board



SO HOW DOES YOUR CO-CEO MODEL WORK?

KS: Each of us brings a different set of expertise and experiences to Grand Challenges Canada and to our joint leadership roles. We have evolved a model of co-leadership where:

- We each make the day-to-day decisions needed to manage our own teams – Jocelyn leads the Operations, Communications, Finance and Legal teams, and I lead the Development Innovations, Humanitarian Innovations, Knowledge Management & Translation, and Every Woman Every Child Innovation Marketplace teams.
- We work jointly to incubate new initiatives – such as a new impact fund and the Indigenous Innovation Initiative –and make joint decisions on a set of strategic items of top importance to the organization.

JM: This model requires patience and good communication. Every day, there are elements of each of our roles that have major implications for the other, and we have to be sensitive and work together to stay in balance. Clear lines of operational accountability are critical to our model and approach. The key challenge cited in the literature with co-leadership models is inefficiency resulting from internal confusion on who to go to for decisions. With clear reporting lines, open lines of communication with the entire management team, and explicit articulation of a point of contact for partners, this has not yet been an issue but we will remain vigilant.

WHO IS ULTIMATELY ACCOUNTABLE?

JM: In our model, the answer is clear: both Co-CEOs are 100% accountable for all decisions taken and results delivered (or not). We are a package deal and there is no expectation that if one of us leaves, the other will continue on their own.

KS: The advantage of this model, for the Board and our team alike, is that they can engage with either CEO and know that she is fully responsive and accountable, even if one CEO is out of the country or visiting a remote project with limited connectivity. Most of the time, we consult with each other before moving forward. If a decision is highly time-sensitive, however, each of us can make a decision on our own with the knowledge that we have the full support of the other.

HOW HAS THE CO-CEO MODEL WORKED?

JM: We have already benefitted from our diversity of thinking to come up with paths forward that neither of us would have come to on our own. One example of how we deploy our complementary skill sets is how we approach the final approval of deal structures to balance risk and reward, which is inherent when supporting innovations for impact. After a deal has been recommended for funding by the Investment Committee and approved by the Board, there is still further due diligence and final structuring needed. Before funding agreements are signed and the first tranche of funding is advanced, each deal is approved by both of us at a negotiation huddle with the team. Karlee is particularly focused on reviewing deals for impact, including scientific and technical rigor. I complement this substantive review, paying more attention to accountability considerations to mitigate risks. Working together, we look at each deal from our particular vantage point to optimize the chances for success.

KS: The model has also let us pursue mission-critical opportunities by being in two places at once, which is helpful for a small organization that is engaging an expanding set of international partners. For example, earlier this year I was in Hanoi with the International Alliance for Development Innovation (IDIA) to inform the Vietnamese government on their science, technology and innovation agenda, while Jocelyn was engaging the Department of Women and Gender Equality here in Canada on critical seed funding for the Indigenous Innovation Initiative.



THANK YOU

We are deeply grateful, excited and energized to have the opportunity to lead an organization that we love. Our work would not be possible without contributions from and the incredible abilities of a huge number of individuals and institutions. We would particularly like to thank:

- The more than 1,100 **innovators** Grand Challenges Canada has had the privilege of supporting. You are the true visionaries who are working to save and improve the lives of vulnerable people around the world.
- The **Board of Directors**, chaired by the very experienced Guylaine Saucier, for choosing an unconventional leadership model and giving us your enthusiastic support.
- Our founding CEO and mentor **Peter Singer**, for giving us the guidance and latitude to work together in a way that would allow our co-leadership to thrive.
- **David Brook**, our Chief Strategy Officer, who is the third piece of our leadership puzzle.
- The hard working, engaged and talented **GCC team**, who trusted us with this move.
- The many smart people who helped us think about and improve our co-leadership model and approach, especially **Nathaniel Foote** and **Jamie Radner**.
- Our **many funding partners**, for supporting our leadership transition and for continuing to enthusiastically support Grand Challenges Canada's innovation platform. Particular thanks go to our colleagues at the Partnerships for Development Innovation branch at Global Affairs Canada.
- Our families and friends, who continue to support us on this journey.

We look forward to continuing to work with all of our partners and stakeholders in the years ahead, to save and improve the lives of the most vulnerable through innovation.

Yours truly,



Jocelyn Mackie and Karlee Silver
Co-Chief Executive Officers
Grand Challenges Canada