

CASE STUDY | DESIGNING WELLBEING ECONOMIES IN CANADA AND ABROAD

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IMPACT SUMMARY

350 PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

13 LOCAL HUBS

Wellbeing Economy Alliance (WEAll) is a global network of organizations, alliances, movements, and individuals that work independently but collaboratively to question the status quo and disrupt business as usual.

In recent years, we have come to understand the many crises that are defining this moment in time as both systemic and interconnected manifestations of a broken economic system. Growing poverty, escalating climate change, and deteriorating mental health are not only some of the most visible symptoms of a system that fails to align to the needs of people and planet—they are outcomes embedded in its very design.

While capitalism and colonialism have deep historical roots, the economic paradigm that influences the ways our countries and societies operate today is the result of decisions made by a small group of people—all of them male and mostly White. The 730 representatives from 44 allied nations that came together in Bretton Woods in 1944 gave birth to institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank that, in addition to the establishment of a currency exchange regime, have come to define the economy as we know it today.

If a small handful of people can have such a far-reaching impact, the good news is that so can a movement powered by countless community advocates, policymakers, governments and other changemakers committed to redesigning (and realigning) the purpose of the economy.



What good is a strong economy if you're working 16 hours in a job you hate and never get to see your family?

-WEAll Can

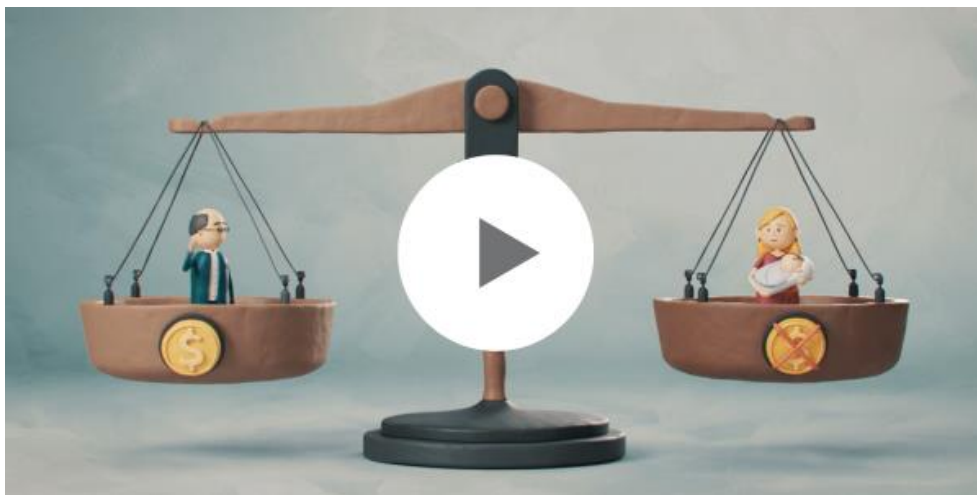
This is the mission of the [Well-being Economies Alliance for Canada and Sovereign Indigenous Nations \(WEAll Can\)](#), an emerging network dedicated to reimagining the economy to enable systems that deliver wellbeing for all people and the planet.

ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION

WEAll Can advocates for a difference, “life-centered” economic paradigm, one that makes the purpose of the economy to deliver wellbeing for everyone. WEAll Can aims to:

- Collectively define what we mean by “wellbeing” and advocate for this to be the purpose of economic policy
- Provide thought leadership and hands-on resources to grow capacity around a participatory shift to a more sustainable economic framework
- Shift public opinion to grow support for, and awareness of, wellbeing economies
- Collaborate with existing local and global movements to reform global economic infrastructure and governance, as well as national and regional economies
- Grow a national network to connect like-minded organizations committed to a the values and principles of a wellbeing economy
- Supporting locally rooted economic transformation, events, publications, and more

MEET THE CHAMPIONS OF THE WELLBEING ECONOMY MOVEMENT



Economy Is Care is an award-winning short film that questions the current state of the economy. (Also available in French, Spanish, German and Italian)

Directed by: Sergio Herencias & Andreas Tanner

WEAll Can’s vision is to operate as a distributed action network through which allies from all levels of the economic system lead the work of radically reimagining the purpose of our economic system. By

working collaboratively with economists, innovators, researchers, activists and policy experts, WeAll hopes to build a critical mass and to amplify the voices of those working to build wellbeing economies on Turtle Island, Inuit Nunangat, and around the world.

WEAll Can was presented in 2021 during World Wellbeing Week as the Canadian hub of the Wellbeing Economy Alliance (WEAll), the sister global network of organizations, alliances, movements and individuals that work independently but collaboratively to question the status quo and disrupt business as usual. WEAll itself was born in 2018 as a time-bound project so that economies around the world can come together to implement this new economic paradigm by 2040.

To date, WEAll convenes and counts on a global network comprising:


- € 350+ participating organizations
- € 6 national governments committed to wellbeing economies
- € 88 ambassadors
- € 150 academics
- € 13 local hubs

OVERVIEW: CHALLENGING LINEAR ECONOMIC THINKING

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“When the monetary value of the economy increases, we are led to believe that we are better off. But the current economic model can’t even consider the value of our relationships or our needs for care and caring.”

-*WEAll Can*



At its simplest, the economy is the way that we produce goods and provide for one another. The economic system that modern society has inherited has its roots in war and was created to respond to the aftermath of World War I and the Great Depression. As a system, its goal was to prevent another war, and for this reason it was never explicitly about generating wellbeing.

Following World War II, the economy embraced a linear model—one that extracts natural resources and converts them into disposable products—to meet increasing consumer demand. Known as the “take-make-consume-waste”

approach, this framework was designed to rely on the myth of unlimited growth, a principle which is complicit in past and ongoing instances of racism, injustice, and oppression. As climate change is demonstrating, it is also an inherently aggressive and unsustainable way of stewarding life on Earth.

In addition to disregarding natural limits to growth, the health of the current economic system is measured through a limited indicator called the ‘gross domestic product’, or GDP. The GDP is a way

to measure the monetary value on all final goods and services produced in a country over a set period of time. As an indicator, it is used universally to determine the strength of a country and to make international comparisons. Yet, the GDP has been criticized time and time again for leaving many key areas of life uncounted for. Things like happiness, work satisfaction, leisure time, community ties, health and the environment all fall outside its scope. As WEAll Can asks, “What good is a strong economy if you’re working 16 hours in a job you hate and never get to see your family?”

THE BIG IDEA: SHIFTING TO A WELLBEING ECONOMY



We often think of the economy as something given, fixed, and unchangeable – but it’s not. The rules, social norms, and stories that underpin our current system were designed by people, which means that they can also be changed by people.

In an age of interlocking crises, a wellbeing framework is a powerful way to rethink not only the way we understand the economy, but the function we’d like it to serve.

Indigenous Peoples the world over have been guided by the principles of wellbeing economies since time immemorial. Their principles center care and relationality, rather than growth at all costs, to advance life-enhancing outcomes such as better health, collective prosperity, and wellbeing for all.

In a wellbeing economy, the definition of societal success is no longer the GDP but indicators of shared wellness. As a result, an economy is considered good when its rules and incentives are designed to ensure that everyone has enough to live in comfort, safety, and happiness. In other words, it is a reimagining of economic purpose that puts people and the planet at the center.

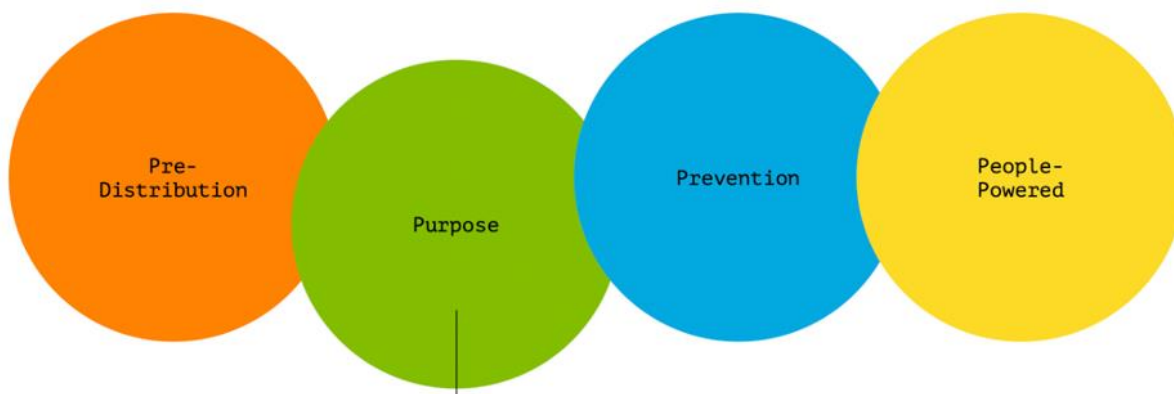
While transitioning to a wellbeing economy requires a fundamental systems change, this is a process that is already underway in countries such as Scotland, New Zealand, Bhutan, and Iceland. In 2022, Canada became the latest government to join WEAll's network and join this group of pioneering nations, and WEAll Can was born precisely to dream the possibilities and enable the transition here at home.

ANATOMY OF A WELLBEING ECONOMY

One of the most transformative aspects of shifting from a linear to a circular economic model is that instead of wasting time and resources fixing the societal and environmental damage caused by growth-focused economies, a wellbeing economy can deliver good life standards the first time around.

This is accomplished by embracing a series of principles, values, and guidelines that bring to life new ways of defining and measuring progress.

Principles:



Foundational principles underpinning a shift to a wellbeing economy.

Image credit: WeAll.org

- **Pre-Distribution:** Rather than leaving people to fend for themselves or rely on limited redistributive mechanisms, the *predistribution* of power, wealth, time and income means that the economy does the heavy lifting. An example of this is paying workers a [living wage](#) as well as [worker-owned, cooperative business models](#).
- **Purpose:** Moving beyond the capitalist and imperialist myth of endless growth is an opportunity to redefine the purpose of the economy from exclusively centering profit to delivering human and ecological wellbeing. Think, for example, of alternative GDP indicators

such as the [Happy Planet Index](#) or the [Genuine Progress Indicator](#).

- **Prevention:** Our current economic system is not only wasteful and harmful, but expects and dismisses most of these outcomes as ‘[externalities](#)’. In a warming world, it won’t be enough to attempt to simply fix these harms, we must adopt preventive measures that stop harm from happening in the first place. Circular frameworks such as the [Doughnut Economics model](#) and emerging practices such as [gender-responsive budgeting](#) or [outcome budgeting](#) are some examples of a preventative approach in action.
- **People-Powered:** Part of the reason current economic systems are unresponsive to the needs of people on the ground is because they operate in a top-down, technocratic way that privileges “expert” knowledge over lived experience. By being people-powered, wellbeing economies center experiential knowledge and local know-how so that people can be directly involved in decision-making, agenda setting, and evaluation. [Citizen assemblies](#) and [participatory budgeting](#) are promising examples of such an approach.

Goals:



Elements of a successful transition to a wellbeing economy.

Image Credit: WeAll.org

Wellbeing economies vary from place to place because they respond to the unique needs of unique contexts, but at their heart they should all share these basic five goals:

1. **Dignity:** Everyone has enough to live in comfort, safety and happiness
2. **Nature:** A restored and safe natural world for all life
3. **Connection:** Experiencing a sense of belonging and counting on institutions that serve the common good
4. **Fairness:** Placing justice (in all its dimensions) at the heart of economic systems, and reducing the gap between the richest and poorest in a society

5. **Participation:** Citizens are actively engaged in their communities and locally rooted economies

Outcomes:

When these principles and outcomes are applied to reimagine and redesign our current economic model, the outcome is the establishment of a wellbeing economy that is:

6. **Purposeful:** Meaning that the economy is built to deliver for people and the planet, so every aspect of it is oriented toward that goal;
7. **Regenerative:** The economy is circular, and puts back into nature the capacity it withdraws;
8. **Fair and Redistributive:** Wealth and power imbalances are shifted to reduce inequalities;
9. **Secure and Stable:** Every member of society has what they need to live a secure and dignified life, and ‘boom and bust’ cycles are no longer exploited in search of endless growth.
10. **Collaborative:** Resource management and decision-making around common goods are shared.

WELLBEING ECONOMIES IN CANADA

WEAll and WEAll Can feature an impressive array of case studies, articles, and other learning resources that bring to life the ways in which communities around the world are organizing to implement the principles of a wellbeing economy locally. Below is a non-exhaustive round-up of initiatives from Canada to spark your imagination:

A profile of wellbeing in the Yukon: The Government of Yukon has released a final report by the Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIW) that provides a snapshot of the quality of life in the Yukon. The report combines results of a major survey that was rolled out in summer 2020, with indicators of wellbeing gathered from available national sources to provide a profile of the Yukon and its residents. The information will now be used to inform evidence based policy development, funding decisions, program development, and service delivery, including in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. [Find the report here.](#)

- € **Edmonton Wellbeing Index:** In 2008, the chief economist of the City of Edmonton asked the following question: “Is Edmonton’s economic progress sustainable in terms of other quality of life and wellbeing conditions?” The result was the Edmonton Wellbeing Index, an initiative which provided a ‘state of wellbeing’ account to guide the annual budgeting of the City of Edmonton. While updates to the indicator set ended in 2012, the initiative has had a lasting impact, informing initiatives such as End Poverty Edmonton and affordable housing projects. Since the Covid-19 outbreak, a new mayor and council have expressed renewed interest in restoring the Index and are interested in exploring a new wellbeing accounting and reporting system. [Read more about the initiative on WEAll’s website.](#)

- € **Food Future Guelph:** In 2018, a group of community leaders imagined a food system that would recognize the value of waste, create space for businesses to grow and adapt their operations, and ensure everyone had access to healthy, nutritious food. From those discussions, Our Food Future was born: a bold initiative that aims to create a circular food economy in the Guelph-Wellington region. Thanks to the support of Infrastructure Canada’s Smart Cities Challenge funding, today the City of Guelph and the County of Wellington are working alongside community groups, businesses, industry associations, NGOs, post-secondary institutions, research institutes, public agencies, and utilities to design a circular economy and rethink waste as a resource. [Read their inspiring Strategic Framework here.](#)

- € **Toronto Imaginal Transitions:** To change the economy, it’s also important to change the narrative. This collaborative project brought together community members, designers, activists, economists, strategists, and policy makers over the course of 2022 to explore a transition to wellbeing economies in Toronto. Their process was grounded in transition theories, relationality, and place. [Read their beautiful report here.](#)

There are also a handful of nation-wide initiatives that have recently advanced the development of transformative economic policy in Canada:

- **Quality of Life Framework and Strategy:** Following the outbreak of COVID-19, the Government of Canada has announced that it is working on a Quality of Life Framework that would put a more holistic and comprehensive evidence base at the center of government decision-making, both now and over the longer term. Going beyond GDP measures, the Quality of Life Framework incorporates non-economic factors like health, housing, environment and safety in assessing quality of life. It also looks at the distribution of outcomes and opportunities across places and people, and whether current prosperity undermines future living standards. To read more, consult [Quality of Life Framework and Strategy](#), as well as the Government of Canada’s 2021 [Wellbeing Budget](#).

- **Northern Woods Summit:** A play on the (in)famous Bretton Woods Summit, this event hosted by WEAll Can brought together a number of individuals and organizations over the course of April, May and June 2022 to challenge dominant myths about the economy, rediscover and spotlight alternative ways of knowing, and imagine new narratives. The insights that were generated continue to inform WEAll Can’s work to this day. [Read the report](#), and [watch the recap video](#), to dive in.

(RE)DESIGNING GLOBAL POLICY

Traditional economic approaches have placed governments in a vicious cycle of growing the economy as quickly as possible so that they can sequester some of that wealth, through taxes, to fix the damage done to people and the planet by extractivism. In a wellbeing economy, on the other hand, governments take a participatory approach to policymaking and prioritize long-term

outcomes, implementing upstream solutions that distribute wealth from the start and prevent crises from happening in the first place.

Over the years, WEAll has worked to guide the design and implementation of wellbeing economies policies for governments and decision-makers. A handful of them are featured below, spearheaded by WEAll and its partner countries.

- **The Wellbeing Economy Governments partnership (WEGo):** Launched by WEAll, WEGo is a collaboration of national and regional governments interested in sharing expertise and transferrable policy practices to advance wellbeing economies domestically and internationally. The partnership currently comprises six national governments: Scotland, New Zealand, Iceland, Wales, Finland and Canada, which joined in 2022 as the newest addition to the network. [Find case studies, videos, and other resources by on WEGo's website.](#)
- **WEAll's Wellbeing Economy Policy Design Guide:** Recognizing that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to building wellbeing economies, this guide was co-created by WEAll to support visionary policymakers usher a just and sustainable transition for people and planet. As every society has unique structures, values, and objectives, the guide strives to be practical without being overly prescriptive. Its aim is to provide a starting point for policymakers to consider relevant processes that can support them along the way, complete with hands-on examples and design frameworks. [Download your copy of the guide here.](#)
- **Measuring the Wellbeing Economy – How to Go Beyond the GDP:** Now that hundreds of alternatives for measuring economic success already exist and are being used, WEAll published this report to help policymakers and community leaders navigate these resources and create a successful implementation strategy that changes the social narrative around growth. [Learn more about how to Go Beyond the GDP here.](#)
- **International Examples of a Wellbeing Approach in Practice:** Written by ZOE Institute, Germany's Institute for Future-Fit Economies, this report showcases five case studies of wellbeing economies policy from Wales, Scotland, France, Portugal and Canada. Their analysis was informed by WEAll's Wellbeing Economy Policy Design Guide, and was used to support the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management (IenW) in the Netherlands in their implementation of wellbeing policies in the country. [Read the report here.](#)
- **Policymakers Network:** WEAll has been partnering with ZOE Institute to connect and support visionary policymakers around the world who are interested in learning more about how to develop and champion Wellbeing Economy policies. [Visit their website to learn more and apply.](#)

CONCLUSION: A WHOLE-OF-CANADA SHIFT

Everyone has a role to play in supporting the transition to a wellbeing economy. As WEAll Canada

says, “the path is complex, difficult and entirely possible.”

These are some of their recommendations for getting started, across all levels of experience and engagement:

- “Starting at the **individual level**, we all have the ability to spread the word among friends, families and colleagues, to make our votes count, and to support businesses that are taking steps to being more responsible;
- **Civil society groups** need to collaborate through organizations like WEAll Can to amplify their shared vision;
- **Businesses** need to start shifting their operations to become more socially responsible;
- **Governments** need to introduce the legal framework necessary for the rest of the moving parts to fall into place. It’s already happening, through mechanisms like [Canada’s new Quality of Life Framework](#), but we have a long way to go.”

☞ Whether you are a community leader, a business executive, a civil servant or an individual looking to be part of the solution, WeAll Canada has tons of capacity-building offerings and prompts to help you affect change in four key action areas:

1. [Designing Public Policy](#)
2. [Transforming Business](#)
3. [Changing the Narrative](#)
4. [Participating in the Movement](#)



Looking for more inspiration? Some of these resources may be for you!

- [Wellbeing Economies in Canada](#): A presentation by Tara Campbell, Wellbeing Economies Manager at the David Suzuki Foundation, delivered to Tamarack Institute's Community of Practice on Localizing the SDGs.
- [About the Well-being Economies Alliance for Canada and Sovereign Indigenous Nations](#): Theory of change, FAQs, and lots of helpful links to get to know WeAll Can more closely!
- [WeAll Engagement Guide](#): First steps and action prompts for those who'd like to join the movement.
- [Updates from the Wellbeing Economy Alliance Team](#): The latest news and announcements by WEAll's global team (published April 22, 2023).
- [Moving Forward on Well-being \(Quality of Life\) Measures in Canada](#): This Statistics Canada report highlights six trends and proposes a range of data development and measurement activities to advance wellbeing goals in the areas of digitization; affordability and economic uncertainty; the quality of jobs; social cohesion; neighbourhoods and the built environment; and climate change.

At the Tamarack Institute, we believe we can all be part of solving problems and building capacity to take action. To learn more about how collective impact for climate action is supporting the work of communities across the country, discover Tamarack's [Community Climate Transitions](#) program. And don't miss our resources on the topic of wellbeing and 'post-growth' economies, such as:

- CASE STUDY | Alternative Economic Models Are Helping Cities Thrive: How the 'Doughnut' Is Transforming Nanaimo, Victoria and Cities Around the World: <https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/library/case-study-alternative-economic-models-are-helping-cities-thrive>
- PANEL DISCUSSION | Beyond Economic Growth panel conversation (including representatives from WEAll Can) at the inaugural Community Climate Transition's annual national gathering: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3VdkHEY6F0s>

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Canada

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