

## A DIVERSE COLLABORATIVE

ICLEI World Secretariat, REFOCUS and the Viessmann Centre for Engagement & Research in Sustainability (VERiS), Wilfrid Laurier University have aligned to build an ambitious, international applied research partnership:

### **Municipalities Adapting in Response to Complexity (MARC):**

*Leveraging systemic management innovations to enable just transitions toward a sustainable future*

Dozens of municipalities, NGOs, funders, academics, innovators, and equity-seeking groups have joined the MARC partnership. This group is collectively motivated by the potential to accelerate the development and mobilization of transformative solutions through transdisciplinary collaboration.

## THE GROWING CHALLENGE MUNICIPALITIES FACE

Many of our public institutions are struggling with diminishing public trust, growing demands for social justice, and a steady stream of global shocks that have stretched government's ability to respond to the needs of our communities. Since 1970, humanity has increasingly exceeded the planet's carrying capacity, while failing to equitably maintain the well-being of our population. The pandemic in particular has demonstrated conventional governance systems are not adequately sophisticated for the complexity of the challenges local governments face. Furthermore, already marginalized communities are disproportionately suffering as a result.

Municipalities are finding it increasingly challenging to continue performing well while responding to accelerating change. When examined through the lens of systems theory, a municipality, like any enterprise or stakeholder, represents but one actor within a complex system. When a complex system is more stable, it is easier for any given stakeholder to take action and consistently generate desired outcomes. As a complex system becomes more dynamic and volatile, actions that have reliably produced desired outcomes in the past, may no longer be effective and increasingly produce unintended consequences.

## THE NEED FOR DISRUPTIVE INNOVATION

The complex challenges emerging are often addressed in silos and on the periphery through sustainability-, climate- and equity-focused planning processes. Leading NGOs, academics and experts alike have emphasized the importance of applying systems thinking as well as the sciences in responding to the complex issues governments face. Local leaders must transform strategic management practices, but to this point, have had limited access to evidence-based solutions designed to enable this change.

Today's brand of financially-oriented, short-term-focused strategic management methods and tools were not designed to match the increasingly complex challenges emerging. An international community of scholars and innovators has been developing a new generation of knowledge, methods and tools that combine leading management expertise with systems theory, as well as the natural and social sciences. These Systemic Management Innovations redefine how core functions like strategic planning, performance management and stakeholder engagement are practiced.

## THE ENTERPRISE EVOLUTION PROGRAM

Enterprise Evolution is a framework and applied learning program designed to enable senior leadership teams to transform strategic management practices. By supporting the adoption of systemic management methods and tools the program helps enterprises become more **adaptive**, **efficient**, and **resilient** as described below:



Through the Enterprise Evolution Program, municipal leadership teams select a combination of systemic management methods and tools that match their unique profile, challenges, needs, and priorities. The program employs a highly collaborative, hands-on approach that ensures all staff involved are supported through the process of applying new tools and methods in practice. This contributes to leaders learning experientially and developing the capabilities and confidence needed to continue applying the innovations adopted on their own.

## CONSIDER JOINING OUR PARTNERSHIP

Enterprise Evolution was originally co-developed by REFOCUS in 2018 to serve the offshore drilling sector in Norway and successfully scaled to engage the leadership teams of dozens of businesses. In 2020, REFOCUS started applying Enterprise Evolution with Kitchener; a progressive, mid-sized Canadian municipality. We are now in the midst of a two-year transformation program designed to support the adoption of a variety of systemic management innovations in collaboration with leaders and staff from across the organization.

With VERiS, REFOCUS started to grow a Canadian-focused partnership that included ICLEI Canada, to support conducting applied research on the City of Kitchener implementation and developing similar projects with five additional municipalities. In 2021, the ICLEI World Secretariat joined VERiS and REFOCUS to form the MARC partnership and expand applying Enterprise Evolution with municipalities and partners beyond Canada.

Our goal is to demonstrate the complex, interconnected issues we face can be more effectively addressed through fundamental change to core management practices. As part of our work with municipalities we are also focused on accelerating the refinement of the Enterprise Evolution Program and supporting the development of a model for effectively scaling the program globally. Whether you have questions, are keen to learn more or interested in joining our partnership, we would love to hear from you. Please be in touch.



**Pourya Salehi**  
Senior Officer, Urban Research, ICLEI  
[pourya.salehi@iclei.org](mailto:pourya.salehi@iclei.org)



**Randy Sa'd**  
Executive Director, REFOCUS  
[randy@refocussustainability.com](mailto:randy@refocussustainability.com)



**Manuel Riemer**  
Director, VERiS – Wilfrid Laurier University  
[manuel.riemer@wlu.ca](mailto:manuel.riemer@wlu.ca)