

WE ARE ALWAYS BECOMING

SHIFT Centre for Social Transformation

About SHIFT

Started in 2019, the SHIFT Centre for Social Transformation (SHIFT) at Concordia University in Montreal aims to create a transformative collaboration ecosystem where diverse people, communities, and organizations work together to address major societal challenges and create a more just, inclusive, and broadly prosperous Montreal. SHIFT does this through our four main mission elements, which can be found on our website.

Purpose

SHIFT engaged in an impact evaluation starting in its fourth year (Fall 2022) and ending in Fall 2023, with analysis and report-writing taking place in the first four months of 2024. The evaluation, called *We are always becoming*, sought to understand SHIFT's direct, relational impact on our many diverse stakeholders. We asked, "How has being in relationship with SHIFT - either as a governance member, an intern, a funded partner, or a combination of those - brought new learnings, widened your network, or supported your socially transformative impact?"

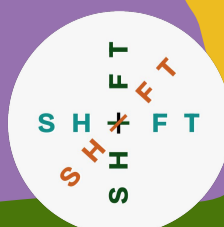
More information about the methodology can be found in the Full Report, and in the Methodology visualizer document.

Primary Findings: Archetypes

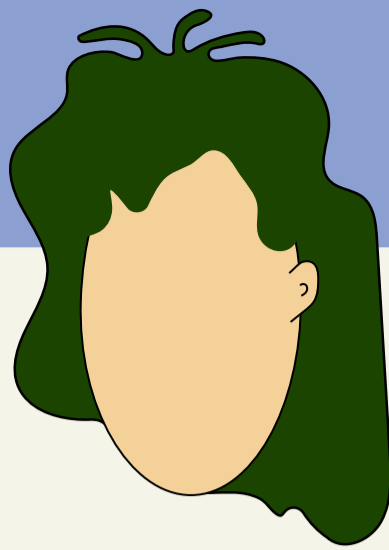
To represent the enormous and amorphous amount of data collected, the evaluation team created four different archetypes that represent 4 different journeys that represent the "most common" experiences of ecosystem members. We present the Archetypes as an experiment in data sharing, with the intention of continuing to view evaluations (and their results) differently. We hope that anyone who is or has been in relationship with SHIFT has a shared experience or perspective with one of the Archetypes, as they represent collated information and feedback from all of our respondents and participants.

Important Note

The Archetypes are written to demonstrate common patterns amongst our evaluation respondents. While some of these reflections on SHIFT were specific to an element of each character's positionalities or standpoints, they are not meant to be demonstrative of all of our collected data, nor are they necessarily prescriptive across archetypes (for example: it was not just intern respondents who stressed challenges with the way they received payments). The goal with the Archetypes is to present the data in such a way that the majority of SHIFT ecosystem members will find commonalities with one or more Archetypes.



GINN



AGE 21

I'm in my final year of my geography degree and have been involved in on-campus mobilization within the student movement, which is where I first learned about Feeding the Future Farm as part of the Concordia activism scene. They do great work; it's interesting theoretically thinking about the worldview that surrounds regenerative agriculture - but also tangibly, they're feeding people and doing popular education on urban agriculture. I had already been pretty involved with FFF because I know the people who run the project and they're an easily mobilized body on campus, which is great. One of my friends who works on the farm told me about SHIFT – how they're the ones who funded the farm in 2020 and have given money each year since then, and that I should apply for an internship so we could work together - I hadn't even heard of SHIFT before that, but I applied and got an internship in 2021.

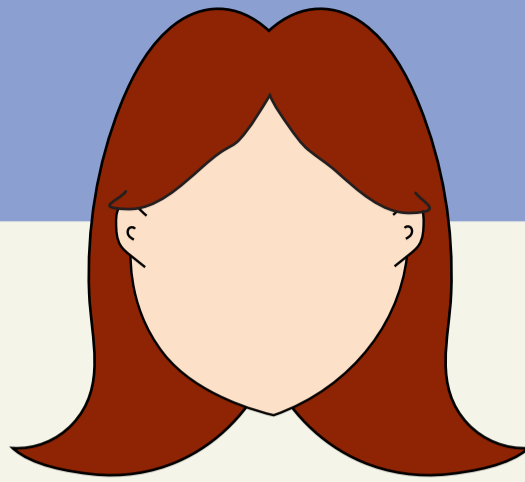
It was great working on the farm, but a little challenging to navigate the new dynamic with people who I had only ever been friends with, now being my colleagues. Obviously when we're just hanging out things feel super chill – but that's not really how managing staff works, so it was hard to feel like we were actually getting things done. I tried to deal with it on my own but I eventually talked to the internship coordinator at SHIFT about it, and she was really, really helpful. I wish I had known earlier the things SHIFT had to offer because it would've saved some stress for sure. She invited me to the SHIFT space for our meeting because I had never been before – it's great, I spend time there in-between my classes sometimes even though I'm not an intern anymore. Once I was there for co-working and there happened to be an L&L written on the board that sounded really cool and I went to the next week – I probably wouldn't have been aware of the event if I hadn't gone in person that day. I still volunteer with FFF and it's maybe better that I'm not their intern anymore because honestly it was super annoying that the internships are only paid twice a semester. I get it, Concordia and slow administration and whatever, but it's annoying.

Spending more time in and around SHIFT has been a really interesting experience that has offered me a lot of space for reflection, though I don't know much about what else they do besides funding and events. Seeing alternatives to how workplaces can be structured, that community work is valued, and just meeting so many different people on projects that have different theories of change than I do – it's all really helped me gain confidence in asking for what I want in order to get my needs met, and trusting that I am capable of doing meaningful work. I feel like I have started to measure success differently in my head – valuing the strength of relationships rather than the quantity.





DINA

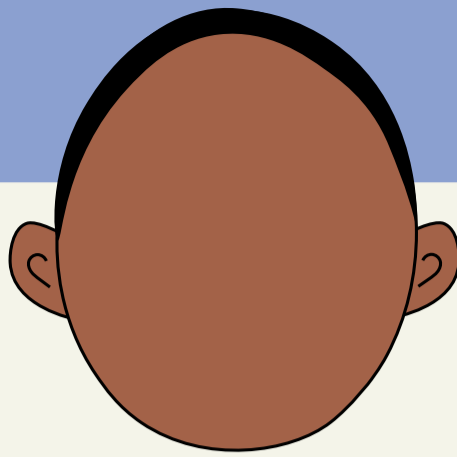


AGE 35

I'm quite concerned about the loneliness epidemic in my Montreal West community: it's so hard for people to gather when they don't want to spend money. I applied for the Gateway program and got it in 2022, for my project Sing-Connect that's using music as a tool of togetherness and intergenerational exchange. I really appreciated the money, but I was not a fan of the "Horizons" training program... I guess it was nice to connect with people, and maybe being part of SHIFT raised my profile, but it was so many more young people and having to be at these events every month felt like a lot to ask of me for just \$5000; I work fulltime and do this project on the side! Plus I keep getting invited to things which feels out of my capacity.

I took an intern in my first year which was amazing. She did administrative work for me which helped lighten the load. But then I applied for the renewal grant in 2023 and didn't get it. Part of the problem is that the SHIFT staff member that used to support me left and the person who replaced them just completely forgot about my work, so I didn't get any help in figuring out how to apply. I think when I didn't get the renewal, they said it wasn't "social transformation" and not close enough to Concordia, which again I blame on not having a relationship to help me build understanding. The money from SHIFT definitely got my work started which I'm grateful for, and I suppose I learned more about how to write better grants now that I got that feedback, but there haven't been many other outcomes besides that.

KENJI



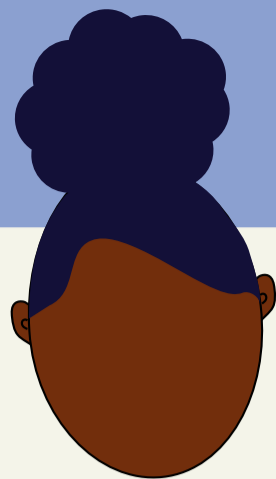
AGE 41

I was previously an urban planner for the city of Montreal but felt myself becoming disconnected from community and learning that I craved. I'm now working in a lab that conducts research on mitigating infrastructural challenges to accessibility in urban centers at Concordia. I learned about SHIFT by attending a Lunch & Learn that a colleague recommended to me, and I've since attended several events; it has been refreshing meeting community members and likeminded colleagues from a wide variety of professional backgrounds. I had a long conversation with someone I met at an L&L about my research – we're planning to reconnect and I'm looking forward to it.

Being at SHIFT for L&Ls and booking rooms in the space for meetings is how I met some staff and got invited to be on a funding selection committee in 2022. I find participatory governance fascinating, and this experience was influential in shifting my understanding of the challenges faced by the community sector, which I didn't know much about. One thing I've already implemented that I learned while on the jury was the “setting up applicants for success” approach, so when I was recruiting some summer research assistants, I gave all the candidates my questions beforehand and they were all paid for the length of the interview. I think it was well appreciated. As a jury member I was struggling to understand SHIFT's strategic objectives in operation. Toward the end of 2023 I was appointed to the Steering Committee which has aided my comprehension – though I still feel unsure about how and where SHIFT is heading, and my personal role within the governance system - but I think will have a nice influence on my leadership style. We'll have to see how it goes.



ZARA

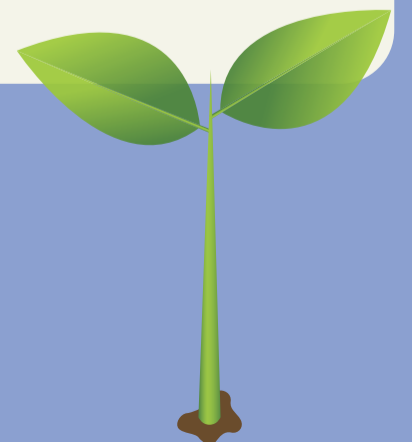


AGE 27

I absolutely love SHIFT, but that doesn't mean I don't see its flaws. Maybe because I'm so involved at this point, I get a peek behind the curtain a bit you know? I first got funding in like 2020 or 2021 through the Social Transformation Fund I believe. My project, Babe Talks, originally was created to support the mental health of Black diasporic students in Concordia. I got money every year after that through the OCG, and have taken many many interns, some of them my peers or friends when the project first started. As I graduated from Concordia I wanted to get out of the institution, so my point person at SHIFT (who I love!) connected me with another group that gets SHIFT money – Racines & Ancestres also working with/in the Black diaspora – and we started a collaboration which opened up my work beyond the university. I think the continued SHIFT funding really gave legitimacy to my work and helped me & my team be taken more seriously – like I got other funding and kept learning how to be a better community member which have both made my work stronger. I got to sit on a funding jury right after getting funded for the first time, which was a really cool experience. I joined the Fund Disbursement Hub after because I wanted to get more involved, after attending multiple events and stuff on top of the jury. It inspired me to join the Board of a nonprofit recently, which feels different but easier after being on SHIFT things.

What I mostly struggled with – and still do a bit – is the Concordia thing. Sometimes the people I work with through Babe Talks are skeptical because they don't like or trust institutions, especially when I host events at SHIFT which they feel like is a very “white” space, you know what I mean? People feeling like they couldn't talk about their experience in an institutional space. Personally, being part of SHIFT helped me understand more about the institution and how it operates (even as a student/alumni) and feel less gaslit by it (ha-ha), it's nice to know that there are other people who work within it who feel this way. But I do also feel like it's restrained by being inside Concordia in some ways.

Also, I know this is changing, but the project-based funding approach of SHIFT hasn't kept up with the expansion of my organization: the funding is too focused on just one aspect of what we're doing now. I think this is part of the vagueness or something in SHIFT's operations and vision, like not always lining up with what I know the staff believe to how people experience it and stuff. I don't always feel like I understand how the staff are implementing things, except for governance which I feel like I have learned so much about. Specifically, about the non-hierarchical process and democratization in practice, which has been beneficial. And of course, about grant-writing and distributing funds, which as I mentioned helped me fundraise better too! It's more the day-to-day stuff that I'm like, I hear conversations and decisions being made, and then all of a sudden, we hear “it's been implemented”, but what changes have actually happened in-between?



Learnings and Recommendations

Overall, respondents gave broadly positive feedback about their experience of being in relationship with SHIFT, and the importance of it as an entity that supports social transformation efforts around Montreal.

Throughout the phases of the evaluation there were several recurring, overarching learnings that emerged. The importance of SHIFT as a space for relationship building was both the highest reported on data point, and an observed phenomenon at the in-person evaluation activities. Respondents also reported positive, impactful benefits of SHIFT's funding, internship program, and events on their capacities and learnings.

The largest challenge that people face when interacting with SHIFT is a lack of clarity, which is emphasized in three different dimensions: unclear offerings to funded partners, the operational aspects of SHIFT's mission and vision, and a non-explicit articulation of SHIFT's politics. SHIFT's pilot year evaluation also spoke to a need for clarity in our operations. This gap provides insight on how communications need to be targeted in the coming years of SHIFT's life to ensure our partners feel the most supported as possible, and our resources are being most effectively used.

An Evaluation Hub (committee of community members) were recruited to go through the report and identified a series of key learnings, from which they created a series of recommendations for SHIFT's next few years. Their recommendations took into account the reality that SHIFT's initial seed grant of \$10 million would be coming to an end, meaning there are two potential and diverging paths for SHIFT to take depending on whether additional funding is secured to continue SHIFT's work.

The recommendations are laid out below, with the "key learnings" from the evaluation that they respond to underneath.

Recommendations for next year (Year 6):

Maintain investment in partnership building through: collaborative funding, governance members supporting funded partners, building collaboratives between alike funded partners, and peer-to-peer learning opportunities

- Responds to Hub learning that connection making is strong and SHIFT has facilitated the making of new connections for 96% of total respondents. For the most part, these connections are being made on governance bodies and at events. These connections are worth further investment as so far, the new connections are not translating into collaborative work for most stakeholders and have high potential for Social Transformation.
- Responds to Hub concerns around ensuring that partners maintain relationships & sustainability in the event that SHIFT does not continue to exist.

Work towards further embedding of SHIFT's partners and practices in Concordia to better leverage the university's resources for partners, through creating more events and opportunities targeted towards Concordia (CU) staff & faculty, deepen partnerships with offices and departments, invite more CU staff and faculty to SHIFT governance (particularly "expert" committees")

- Responds to Hub concerns around ensuring that partners maintain relationships & sustainability in the event that SHIFT doesn't continue to exist
- Responds to making CU less opaque
- Responds to building institutional trust and/or towards working to change the university

Put resources towards more tangible types of teaching & learning activities that will both support the sustainability of our funded partners, and promote SHIFT's visibility. These include: collaborating with partners to create downloadable resources, workshops, and speaking at conferences/events, and revisiting social media strategy

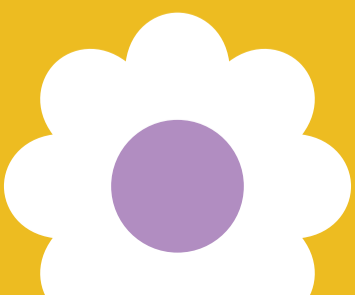
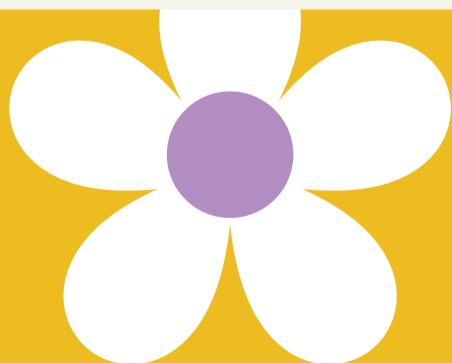
- Responds to Hub concerns around ensuring that partners maintain relationships & sustainability in the event that SHIFT doesn't continue to exist
- Teams strongly value and need capacity building and sustainability to improve their potential for social transformation

Explore "expert" committees or Hubs: groups that could contribute to specific needs either internally to SHIFT (ex: fundraising) and/or for funded partners (ex: provide trainings)

- The participatory governance model is successful in cultivating connections. All Steering Committee members report enhanced knowledge of alternative power structures and power sharing Concordia staff and faculty report to have learned from their SHIFT experience more than other groups.

Maintain events, space rentals, internship program (within budget constraints), co-working and Funding Renewals like Ongoing Connections Grant (OCG), Deep Investment Fund (DIF), and Capacity Fund

- These are all successful program areas that are benefitting teams and the wider ecosystem.



Recommended Next Steps

Pathway 1: Budget Non-Renewal (Years 7-8)

Initiate wind-down activities, including diverting resources away from Governance and further embedding partners and practices in CU to be sustained.

Pathway 2: Budget Renewal (Year 7 and Beyond)

Revisit SHIFT's vision & mission through a deep dive into our Theory of Change in the next chapter. Take a temporary pause from regular activities (maybe over a summer) to do this work, engage stakeholders through consultation. If needed, "pivot" SHIFT strongly towards one of its pre-existing goals (ex: advocacy & policy) to provide more focus and impact. This could manifest as focusing on working more closely with existing funded partners, though the Hub also highlighted that bridging the institution with grassroots groups is fundamental to SHIFT's goals, and being too focused on existing partners could possibly limit community leadership in SHIFT's operations.

Recommendations Visualizer

