



**SOCIAL
IMPACT
SUMMIT**

Summit Conversations

What makes a social impact leader?



an initiative of
impact
institute



CONTENTS

INSIDE

RISE OF THE SOCIAL IMPACT LEADER	02
—	
RECLAIMING CREATIVITY: UNLOCKING ITS POTENTIAL FOR SOCIAL IMPACT	04
Creativity in Action: The REFUGE Project	05
Breaking Down Barriers to Creative Confidence	05
Investing in Creativity for Social Good	06
The Transformative Power of Storytelling	07
—	
COURAGE IN SOCIAL IMPACT: NAVIGATING UNCERTAINTY AND RESISTANCE	08
Overcoming Resistance and Intimidation	09
Functional Literacy	09
Embracing Collaboration and Co-creation	10
—	
LEADING WITH CARE AND COMPASSION	11
Centring Lived Experience in Care	12
Embracing Diverse Perspectives and Collaboration in Care	12
Redefining Success in Social Impact	12
—	
THE POWER OF GOOD CONVERSATIONS	14
Navigating Polarisation and Disinformation	15
Embracing Vulnerability and Active Listening	15
Finding Shared Goals and Outcomes	15
Harnessing Storytelling for Connection	15
—	
SO WHAT NOW?	16



Rise of the Social Impact Leader

A social impact leader is a visionary, progressive, and person-centred professional who believes that positive change in society is both necessary and possible.

They do not wait for governments or others to lead change; instead, they advocate for social progress, greater equality, and diversity, which they believe benefits everyone. They also see the need for new systems to transform lives.

Social Impact Summit brings together passionate individuals from all walks of life – the public sector, private enterprise, and the heart of the social sector.

For two days each July, these social impact leaders connect, share ideas, and find inspiration to create meaningful change in our communities.

We make a unique event that thrives on cross-sector collaboration, fuelled by shared values, disruptive ideas, and a strong sense of community.

However, a key challenge is bridging the divides that naturally exist across these sectors. We take different approaches to problem-solving, competing interests, and diverse ways of thinking that can make collaboration and systems change an uphill battle.

That's where this magazine comes in. By capturing the conversations from Social Impact Summit 2024, we aim to create a common understanding of what it means to be a social impact leader – regardless of what sector you work in.

Social impact leaders can pop up anywhere in an organisation. They might have different roles, levels of seniority, and work in various teams, but what they all share is a drive to make a difference by addressing social, economic, and environmental issues.

This shared understanding is crucial for moving from inspiration to action, which is exactly what we hope to achieve at Summit 2025 and beyond.

HOW DOES A SOCIAL IMPACT LEADER THINK?

If we harness the collective wisdom from conversations at Social Impact Summit, we reveal a mindset and skillset that we believe will enable us to tackle the big issues.



LEADING WITH COURAGE AND CREATIVITY

Embrace uncertainty: The world is changing rapidly, and social impact leaders need to be comfortable navigating complex issues with no easy answers. This means being able to adapt to evolving circumstances and embracing ambiguity.

Think outside the box: Creativity is essential for tackling complex social challenges. By embracing creative approaches and fostering a culture of innovation, social impact leaders can inspire others to experiment and find new solutions.

Challenge the status quo: Truly innovative ideas often disrupt the status quo. Social impact leaders need to be courageous enough to challenge established norms and advocate for systemic change, even when it's difficult or unpopular.

COLLABORATING AND CONNECTING

Cross-sector partnerships: No single organisation or sector can solve complex social problems alone. Collaboration is key. Leaders need to build strong partnerships across sectors to leverage resources, share knowledge, and drive meaningful change.

Embrace open dialogue: Creating spaces for honest and challenging conversations is crucial for building trust, fostering inclusion, and driving innovation.

Harness the power of storytelling: Sharing stories and experiences can help build empathy and create a sense of shared humanity, even when beliefs and backgrounds differ.

ALIGNING PURPOSE AND ACTION

Prioritise lived experience: Centre the voices and perspectives of those most affected by the issues you're tackling. Empower communities to participate in co-designing and implementing solutions that meet their real needs.

Redefine success: Move beyond traditional metrics and embrace a broader range of values when evaluating social impact. This includes considering the impact on human, social, and environmental capital, as well as financial outcomes.

Champion functional literacy: Create spaces for nuanced dialogue that move beyond simplistic narratives and empower everyone to participate in discussions and decisions that affect their lives.

This magazine is one part of the conversation. By exploring these themes and sharing the insights from Summit 2024, we hope to inspire a new generation of social impact leaders and equip them with the tools they need to create a better future for all.

Reclaiming Creativity

Unlocking its Potential for Social Impact

Creativity and social impact may seem like unlikely partners, but as attendees at Social Impact Summit discovered, creativity offers a powerful tool to approach difficult situations with lightness and resilience, creating meaning and connection in the face of adversity.

CREATIVITY IN ACTION: THE REFUGE PROJECT

Dr Jen Rae from the Centre for Reworlding is an award-winning artist and researcher of Canadian Scottish-Métis descent, recognised for her expertise at the intersection of art, speculative futures, and climate emergency adaptation.

Her work with Arts House's REFUGE project showcases the power of creativity in disaster preparedness. The project brings together residents, artists, scientists, Elders, and emergency services experts to collaborate in simulated climate-related emergencies.

Through this collaborative process, participants identify essential elements of preparedness, recognise the interconnectedness of individual and community survival, and understand their roles in facing such challenges.

It's an approach that reframes challenges as opportunities for growth and transformation. It also encourages individuals and communities to discover, strengthen, and reclaim their creativity to drive positive social change.

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS TO CREATIVE CONFIDENCE

However, embracing creativity isn't always easy. Fear of judgement and societal pressures to conform can stifle creative expression. As Caitlin Marshall of MakeShift pointed out:

“

Children play, make, invent, dance without being taught. And somewhere along the way, we unlearn that.”

During her session “Impact Through Creative Communities,” Caitlin guided participants through a simple drawing exercise to demonstrate the universal experience of creative expression. This exercise highlighted the societal barriers that limit creativity and emphasised the need to cultivate creative confidence.

She stressed that creativity is not about skill but an inherent human capability. Other speakers echoed this sentiment, emphasising the transformative potential of embedding creative practices within community development initiatives.

Jodie Wainwright, CEO at Milk Crate Theatre, highlighted the importance of “community and connection” in creating spaces where individuals feel empowered to share their stories and contribute their creative talents. She explained this focus on community engagement and co-creation fosters a sense of ownership and belonging, allowing individuals to find meaning and purpose through creative expression.





INVESTING IN CREATIVITY FOR SOCIAL GOOD

Fear of judgement is often compounded by a lack of resources and opportunities for creative engagement. Dr Georgie McClean, Executive Director of Development and Partnerships at Creative Australia, highlighted the economic challenges faced by artists in Australia.

Despite the growing recognition of the arts' value, artists continue to earn significantly less than the average worker, averaging only \$23,000 per year from their creative work. This financial insecurity can hinder creative exploration and artistic innovation.

To unlock creativity's full potential for social impact, speakers advocated for moving beyond traditional funding models. They called for innovative approaches that recognise the multifaceted value of the arts.

Dr McClean proposed strategies such as impact investing, social enterprise models, and creative clusters that foster collaboration and resource sharing. She also emphasised the importance of robust impact measurement frameworks to demonstrate the social and economic benefits of creative endeavours.



THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF STORYTELLING

The Summit highlighted storytelling as a powerful tool for building empathy, fostering connection, and driving social change. Jon Blackburn, Executive Director of Corporate Services and CFO at the Sydney Opera House, shared how the organisation has leveraged storytelling to shift perceptions and broaden its reach.

He cited the success of their creative video “Play It Safe”, which garnered 1.8 billion global views and significantly increased the Opera House’s appeal to new audiences. This example demonstrates how creativity can challenge assumptions and create more inclusive spaces.

By dismantling barriers to creative expression, investing in artistic potential, and harnessing the power of storytelling, we can unlock the transformative power of creativity for more resilient, equitable, and connected communities.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

Reframe creativity: Challenge the perception that creativity is an exclusive talent and recognise its inherent value in building resilience and social connection.

Invest in creative potential: Explore innovative funding models and partnerships to support artists and creative communities, ensuring their sustainability and growth.

Harness storytelling: Use narrative to build empathy, connect with diverse audiences, and amplify the impact of social initiatives.

Empower communities: Embed creative practices within community development programs to foster a sense of belonging and enable individuals to find meaning through creative expression.

Courage in Social Impact

Navigating Uncertainty and Resistance

A recurring theme at Social Impact Summit is the need for courage among social impact leaders. As leaders, we need to confront uncertainty, overcome resistance, and navigate the pushback that often comes with innovative solutions.

Social impact work often tackles complex issues with no easy answers.

This inherent uncertainty requires leaders to embrace ambiguity and adapt to evolving circumstances.

As highlighted in the Profit and Purpose stream, truly groundbreaking ideas often challenge the status quo. Initially, these ideas may seem disruptive and even unwelcome because they disrupt established norms.

OVERCOMING RESISTANCE AND INTIMIDATION

Challenging the status quo inevitably leads to resistance. Social impact leaders must be prepared to face pushback, and sometimes even intimidation. This requires resilience, a commitment to dialogue, and a willingness to challenge dominant narratives.

Opening keynote speaker, Craig Foster, illustrated this point when discussing his advocacy for refugees. He acknowledged the pushback that comes with social justice work, particularly in Australia's current climate, stating:

“

When it comes to social justice, particularly in Australia at the moment, that [pushback] is natural... What's most important is to choose the type of messaging that we are going to apply.”

Craig emphasised the need to tailor communication strategies to specific audiences and contexts when navigating resistance; a strategy that echoed across the two days of Summit.

FUNCTIONAL LITERACY

The session “Impact Literate Communities” explored the idea of functional literacy—the ability to participate in discussions and decisions that affect one's livelihood. This concept underscores the need to move beyond simplistic, adversarial framing often presented in the media. It calls for creating safe spaces for nuanced dialogue.

Throughout the session, Toby Dawson (Tomorrow Together) and Dr. Martin Farley (Creating Preferred Futures) explored functional literacy around an offshore wind farm off the coast of the Illawarra.

They stressed the importance of prioritising lived experience and empowering communities to shape solutions. As Toby explained:

“

It's not that you need to have a PhD to be literate and understand what offshore wind's going to be. Functional literacy is the ability for anyone to participate.”



EMBRACING COLLABORATION AND CO-CREATION

The summit underscored the power of collaboration and co-creation in driving social change. The People and Communities stream advocated for moving beyond traditional consultation models and embracing participatory, asset-based community development practices. These approaches prioritise co-designing and implementing interventions with community members to ensure solutions are grounded in lived experience and address actual needs.

Chloe Spackman, CEO of 'think and do tank', Next25, highlighted the importance of a systems thinking approach for systemic change and transformation. She stated:

“

What is required for a flourishing future is a systems thinking approach for systemic change or transformation.”

During a session on Social Impact in the Regions, Dr Chad Renando (Queensland University of Technology) highlighted the importance of “observing and documenting what you see” to understand community needs and impact. He noted that even established concepts, like “innovation hubs,” can take on different meanings in diverse contexts, requiring tailored approaches.

Courage in social impact leadership is not just about individual bravery. It's about creating a culture that supports innovation, collaboration, and a willingness to challenge the status quo. By embracing these principles, social impact leaders can navigate uncertainty, overcome resistance, and create lasting positive change.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

Embrace uncertainty: Social impact work requires a tolerance for ambiguity and an ability to adapt to changing circumstances.

Challenge the status quo: Be prepared to face resistance and intimidation and develop strategies for navigating pushback.

Prioritise language and framing: Foster functional literacy and create safe spaces for nuanced dialogue that moves beyond simplistic narratives.

Build trust and relationships: Engage authentically with communities, adapting language and approaches to resonate with diverse contexts.

Embrace collaboration: Empower communities to participate in co-designing and implementing solutions grounded in lived experience.



Leading with Care and Compassion

Care and compassion are fundamental values for social impact leaders who prioritise building quality relationships, embracing diversity, and creating opportunities.

At Social Impact Summit, speakers discussed the

importance of recognising our shared humanity, interdependence, and inherent vulnerability. These principles are essential for driving positive social change and understanding the systems that support or hinder caring practices.

Mark Jones, Chief Storyteller at ImpactInstitute, encouraged attendees to reflect on individual responsibility and the shared vulnerability expressed in the common phrase “take care”. Mark emphasised that the “act of caring” involves navigating complex emotions and acknowledging vulnerability and interdependence.



CENTRING LIVED EXPERIENCE IN CARE

During a session on the Care Economy, speakers stressed the importance of centring lived experience in designing and implementing social impact initiatives.

Matt Caruana, an ambassador for Tender Loving Care (TLC), shared his personal journey navigating disability services. He highlighted the need to understand individual needs and empower those receiving care to express their preferences. Matt emphasised the importance of clear communication and active listening to ensure person-centred care practices.

Laura Cowell, Australian CEO at TLC, added that care extends beyond those receiving services to include the wellbeing of caregivers. She stressed the importance of creating systems that support the sustainability and resilience of the care workforce.

EMBRACING DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES AND COLLABORATION IN CARE

The summit highlighted the need for social impact leaders to embrace diverse perspectives and foster collaboration in the care economy. Gillian McFee, Program Director at Care Together, discussed the value of cooperative and mutual enterprise models. She shared examples of how these models empower consumers and communities to shape services that meet their unique needs.

Layusa Isa-Odidi, a Partner at Dalberg, advocated for strong partnerships between the private sector and government to effectively leverage resources and drive positive change in the care economy. She cautioned against expecting the private sector to change on its own, emphasising the need for clear frameworks, transparency, and accountability mechanisms to ensure ethical and equitable outcomes.

REDEFINING SUCCESS IN SOCIAL IMPACT

Summit 2024 challenged participants to move beyond traditional metrics of success and consider a broader range of values when evaluating social impact.

Dr Georgie McClean presented the “six capitals” model from integrated reporting, which encourages organisations to consider their impact on financial, manufactured, intellectual, human, social and relational, and natural capitals. This holistic approach acknowledges the interconnectedness of different forms of value and promotes a more nuanced understanding of social impact.

It’s an approach all too familiar to Jon Blackburn, CFO at Sydney Opera House, and John O’Mahony, a Partner at Deloitte Access Economics, who shared insights from a report estimating the social value of the Opera House at \$11.4 billion as of 2023, a 38% real growth over the past decade. John said:

“

I don’t visit the Sydney Opera House every day, but I like living in a city, I like living in a country that has this institution and that means something to me. Is there a way through survey, willingness-to-pay analysis, survival analysis, present value calculations, we could try to put a number on that?”

In the Profit and Purpose stream, Katherine Trebeck, a political economist and advocate for economic system change, spoke to her research on a compassionate economy, which involves understanding the causes of suffering and working to address them.

We heard how the Sydney Opera House is approaching this concept through initiatives like free and subsidised programming to increase access for all members of the community, regardless of their financial situation. It has also embraced digital platforms, making content available to a global audience through its streaming programme.

These examples demonstrate the Opera House's commitment to a holistic view of success, encompassing economic impact, accessibility and community wellbeing.

By similarly embracing the principles of care and compassion, social impact leaders can unlock the transformative potential of quality relationships, diversity, and opportunity creation.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

Embrace vulnerability and interdependence: Recognise that care and compassion require acknowledging shared vulnerability and building systems that support our interconnectedness.

Centre lived experience: Prioritise the voices and perspectives of those receiving care and empower them to shape the services and support they receive.

Foster collaboration and embrace diversity: Build strong partnerships across sectors and create space for diverse perspectives to inform solutions.

Redefine success: Move beyond traditional metrics and consider a broader range of values when evaluating social impact. Embrace holistic approaches to measurement and communication.

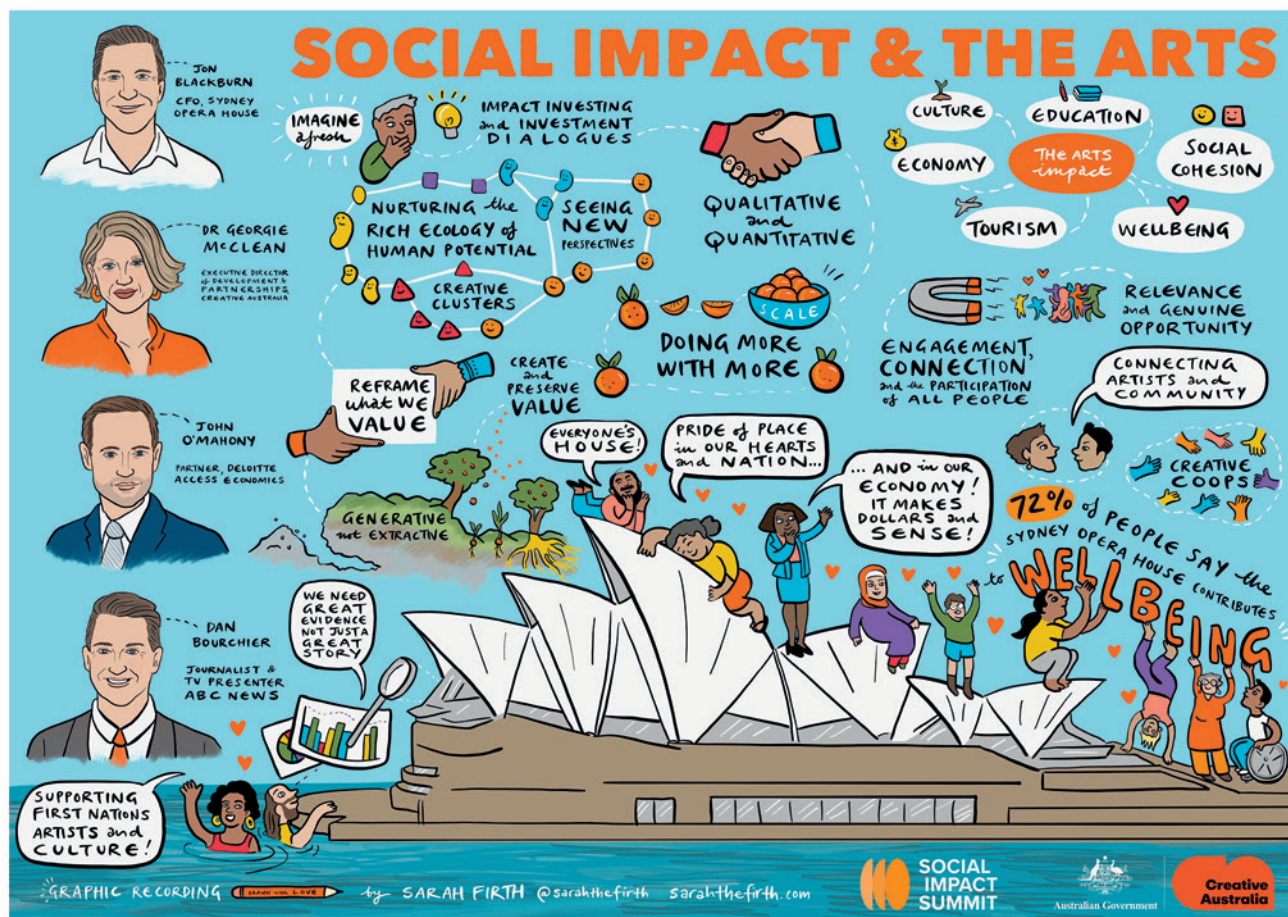


Image: During the Social Impact and the Arts session, artist Sarah Firth captured a graphic recording capturing the Sydney Opera House's holistic approach to evaluating social impact.

The Power of Good Conversations

Good conversations are essential for social cohesion and building meaningful partnerships, even when individuals hold different beliefs and worldviews. While this sounds simple, it can be challenging to achieve in practice.

Speakers across various streams at the summit emphasised the need to move beyond polarised debates and embrace constructive dialogue as a powerful tool for bridging divides and driving positive change.

NAVIGATING POLARISATION AND DISINFORMATION

Speakers addressed the influence of media polarisation and disinformation in shaping public discourse. This often leads to superficial coverage and a focus on conflict rather than nuanced understanding.

Craig Foster, reflecting on the challenges of advocating for social justice, noted, “Unfortunately, at the moment in the political arena, we have the opposite, and therefore, voices of reason and intellect are seen as though – and are portrayed as – not worthwhile, not worthy”.

To counter this trend, Craig and others encouraged engaging with diverse media sources, critically evaluating information, and actively seeking perspectives that challenge existing beliefs.

EMBRACING VULNERABILITY AND ACTIVE LISTENING

Building relationships with those who hold different worldviews requires a willingness to embrace vulnerability and engage in active listening. Chloe Spackman and Renu Burr of Next25, shared insights from their work facilitating constructive conversations among politicians from different parties.

Chloe stressed the importance of showing up authentically and approaching conversations with curiosity and compassion rather than judgement. This involves listening to understand rather than to respond and seeking common ground, even amid disagreements.

FINDING SHARED GOALS AND OUTCOMES

Despite differences in beliefs, finding shared goals and outcomes can serve as a powerful foundation for building partnerships and driving collective action. The “Social Employment and Procurement” session highlighted the importance of establishing a common purpose early in the conversation.

Dr Karina Davis, Director of the Centre for Social Impact at Swinburne University, explained the need to “navigate around differences in the challenges if we are really clear on the outcome driver”. This involves identifying areas of agreement and focusing on the positive impact that collaboration can achieve, even if the path to get there may differ.

HARNESSING STORYTELLING FOR CONNECTION

Ultimately, social cohesion and connections can be strengthened through storytelling and shared narratives. Craig Foster, for example, shared his experience advocating for refugee Hakeem al-Araibi. His story highlighted the importance of connecting with people’s empathy and shared values. Dr Christen Cornell emphasised that “creativity is a social act” that builds connections across differences and reimagines possibilities. By sharing stories and experiences, individuals can create a sense of shared humanity and build empathy, even when beliefs differ.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

Create safe spaces: Foster environments where individuals feel comfortable expressing their perspectives without fear of judgement.

Combat polarisation: Engage with diverse media sources, critically evaluate information, and seek out challenging perspectives.

Embrace vulnerability and active listening: Approach conversations with curiosity and compassion, seeking to understand rather than to respond.

Focus on shared goals: Identify areas of agreement and emphasise the positive impact that collaboration can achieve.

Harness storytelling: Share stories and experiences to build empathy and create a sense of shared humanity.

So what now?

This magazine has explored the key themes of Social Impact Summit 2024, offering insights and inspiration for social impact leaders. But the journey doesn't end here.

Now's the time to translate these insights into action. How can you, as a social impact leader, contribute to a more equitable, sustainable, and resilient future?

ImpactInstitute is here to help. Our services are designed to empower social impact leaders like you to create meaningful change. Here's how we can support:

Embrace Discomfort: We believe modern organisations should be about people and communities. Our impact advisory services guide you in becoming an impact-driven organisation. This process may involve challenging existing norms and practices, which can be uncomfortable. Our expertise in social impact strategy can help you navigate these challenges effectively.

Measure Your Impact: We offer Social Impact Measurement as part of our consulting services. We can help you establish impact frameworks and measurement plans to track and evaluate the effectiveness of your initiatives. This includes moving beyond traditional metrics and considering a broader range of values, encompassing human, social, environmental capital, as well as financial outcomes.

Become a Storyteller: We believe that storytelling is the most powerful agent of change in the world. Our integrated brand storytelling services include Brand Strategy, Public Relations, and Content & Production, helping you develop and share your story and communicate your impact.

Invest in Meaningful Conversations: We believe in the power of gathering to create community and connection. Our events team specialises in designing and executing impactful events, including the Disability Expos and the Social Impact Summit. Our experience in facilitating these events and fostering community can support your efforts to create spaces for dialogue and collaboration.

Join the Social Impact Summit Community: Connecting with the Social Impact Summit community is an opportunity to share ideas, find inspiration, and collaborate on impactful projects with like-minded individuals within this community. Tickets for Summit 2025 are on sale now, so be sure to snap yours up.

By taking these steps, you can contribute to a future where everyone has the opportunity to thrive. Let's transform your purpose into impact, together.

hello@impactinstitute.com.au

ImpactInstitute wishes to thank the speakers, endorsed partners, and members of our advisory board for their contributions to Social Impact Summit 2024, and whose insights have helped shape this magazine.

We also express our gratitude to the attendees of Social Impact Summit and the wider social impact community for their unwavering commitment to enhancing our society. You inspire and encourage us each and every day.

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