



Guest Column/David Johnston

# Innovation: The New Imperative

One of the great privileges of serving as Governor General comes in having the opportunity to shine a spotlight on important issues facing our country. Innovation is one such issue, and this special edition of Policy Magazine, featuring insights from leading innovators working in a range of disciplines, makes a timely and useful contribution to the innovation conversation in Canada at a critical moment in time.

We're at a hinge point in our history. Not only does the 150th anniversary of Confederation offer us a rare opportunity to reflect, to celebrate, and to reimagine Canada, we find ourselves in the midst of a global moment of change. And with that change, we are presented with both challenges and opportunities. This is an age in which innovation is critical to our well-being. That means constantly strengthening our political, economic, social, technological and environmental processes. Whether in the realm of education, governance, sustainability, health care, finance, technology or civil society, the spirit of ingenuity and improvement must be part of how we operate as a society. Put simply, if change is the new constant, innovation is our new imperative.

How do we meet this imperative? One of the keys will be to make innovation more accessible—to make the concept less abstract and to ground it in reality and everyday life for all Canadians. We want to tell stories to make the importance of innovation vital and real and provide practical advice to help everyone realize they can, indeed must, be an innovator. We want to create a culture of innovation in which individuals and organizations

see such creativity as part of who we are and what we do as Canadians.

One way we do that is through storytelling, which is fundamental to any culture. That's why I've recently co-authored a new book, titled *Ingenious*, with leading Canadian innovator Tom Jenkins. Subtitled *How Canadian Innovators Made the World Smarter, Smaller, Kinder, Safer, Healthier, Wealthier, and Happier*, the book highlights notable innovations throughout our history. The light bulb, the Blackberry, the canoe, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Blue Box recycling, insulin, restorative justice, the synthesizer, Me to We, the McIntosh Apple—this is just a sample of Canadian innovations that have improved our lives in countless small and large ways. Our aim with the book is ambitious: to establish a narrative for all Canadians, telling our inspirational stories and making them part of a rich “can do” heritage that consistently overcomes challenges. The book is one component of a suite of initiatives intended to promote the culture of innovation. That effort also includes a national innovation database, an educational curriculum developed by Nipissing University, a web site and a children's book. It's all part of building that culture, providing inspiring, real-life stories and practical advice to the next generation of Canadians—who are all potential innovators.

Celebration is another key component in our innovation strategy. The Governor General's Innovation Awards, which honour outstanding individuals, teams and organizations who are creating value, building better communities and meaningfully improving our quality of life, aim to celebrate

the innovators in our midst with an eye to encouraging others to follow in their footsteps. With the second annual cohort of award-winners set to be recognized this year, we look forward to continuing to celebrate excellence and to foster an innovation ecosystem that spans the country. Some of the world's most creative people live among us, yet we haven't celebrated their stories or brought them together often enough. We aim to change that with the Governor General's Innovation Awards.

A third addition to Canada's innovation ecosystem is the Rideau Hall Foundation. Incorporated in 2012 as an independent, non-partisan charity, the Foundation is a tool we've created to amplify and broaden the reach of the office I represent. Its aim is to gather, align and catalyze forces for positive change. With priorities that include innovation, education, philanthropy and volunteerism, the Foundation is already effecting positive change in Canada. It's my hope that the Foundation can continue to help foster a world-class Canadian innovation ecosystem in the years ahead.

The good news is that Canadians have long been innovators. Indeed, what is Confederation itself if not an innovation in governance among diverse peoples? This is a remarkably vast, diverse and challenging country to live in, and our pre- and post-Confederation history is full of examples of people working creatively and collaboratively to improve our lives. As 21st century Canadians we must continue to innovate in countless ways so that our institutions and society evolve to ensure continued and enhanced relevance in a complex, rapidly-changing world. **P**