Patricia Bradshaw and **Erin Elaine Casey** describe how the BSIS process has helped herald the impact of the Sobey School in Canada, the first business school in North America to utilise the system

Creating impact with purpose

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The Sobey School of Business at Saint Mary's University is a large business school in a medium-sized university in a small city in a small province on the far eastern coast of Canada.

We think of our city and province as a welcoming gateway, much in the way that Ellis Island was in the US. Over the early decades of our history, immigrants to Canada landed by boat at Pier 21 in Halifax and travelled to other parts of the country.

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The instability of our particular location is captured by the trends outlined in the *Now or Never: An Urgent Call to Action for All Nova Scotians* 2014 report (https://onens.ca/commission-report/) on the dire economic and demographic challenges facing our province. The report's authors urged all sectors in the province to undertake collective action to address a declining population, outward migration of young people, poor economic performance, decline of rural areas and high dependence on government support.

The report recognises universities as important drivers of change to help reverse these trends. For example, universities can attract international students and encourage some of them to stay in the region. We can incubate and accelerate start-ups that grow the economy. We can drive entrepreneurship, innovation and leadership to enhance productivity and support international trade and the development of global mindsets embedded in values of sustainability and corporate social responsibility.

In their 2011 article "Collective Impact" in the winter edition of the *Stanford Social Innovation Review* John Kania and Mark Kramer described the difference between isolated and collective impact.

With isolated impact, single organisations formulate independent solutions to complex problems. While they might make progress, it tends to be limited rather than systemic.

Collective impact, on the other hand, involves a long-term commitment by a number of influential people and groups to make significant change. No organisation can single-handedly solve any major social problem. Ideally, such change is guided by shared goals and measurement systems, collaborative and complementary activities, and clear communication.

At the Sobey School of Business, we felt compelled to be a partner for prosperity, keeping in mind the call for a collective impact approach. We knew that our impact would be limited if we acted in isolation from community partners. We also recognised the need for cross-sector coalitions that commit, over the long term, to a common agenda to change how we build prosperity and a healthy future.

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We wanted to benchmark our contributions and build our reputation as a partner in collective action in an accountable and transparent way. Using the Business School Impact System (BSIS), we were able to learn from others' experiences and test our assumptions about our contributions.

BSIS is designed to determine the extent of a school's impact upon its local environment and was initially designed by FNEGE (the French National Foundation for Management Education) and is already well established in the French higher-education arena.

The process has now been adapted for an international audience and is offered in a joint venture between EFMD and FNEGE as a service to EFMD members in any part of the world.

Internally, the BSIS process at Sobey became an opportunity for reflection, data collection, dialogue and commitment to working together with purpose. Externally, it was an opportunity to build our brand as a contributor to regional prosperity and success.

We are the first business school in North America to undertake the BSIS and the process gave us a number of insights. Perhaps the most exciting is the determination that the Sobey School of Business, with our 3,200 students, makes a direct, indirect and induced annual economic contribution to the Nova Scotia economy of $329 million. Eighty-seven per cent of our budget is spent in the province.

We also determined that:

- Every year, more than one-third of our undergraduates and two-thirds of our graduate students stay, work and help to build the prosperity of the region on completing their programmes
- In one year, our chapter of the international ENACTUS movement, with a membership of more than 200 students, launched 34 businesses, created 156 jobs, helped 447 refugees and provided 2,300 kilograms of food to hungry people
- The Sobey School Business Development Centre works with 700 students annually to utilise design thinking aimed at creating start-ups. This includes the Startup 100 Project, which helped more than 100 students create 100 new ventures in 50 communities
- More than 45% of our 78 faculty members are involved in community organisations, including various governance roles

87%

Eighty-seven per cent of our budget is spent in the province – Sobey School of Business, with our 3,200 students, makes a direct, indirect and induced annual economic contribution to the Nova Scotia economy of $329 million

> *BSIS has helped us articulate a much stronger sense of brand, pride and identity both internally and externally. It has identified and spurred dialogue about common goals within our business school and university and with our colleagues and neighbours outside them*

45%

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- The Sobey School is ranked 11th in the world by Corporate Knights Better World MBA Rankings and 75% of faculty teach and/or research in the area of corporate social responsibility
- We train 1,800 managers in professional and executive learning programmes annually
- Our activities support the province's new China strategy. Each year, the school recruits approximately 100 undergraduate and 70 masters students from China. Twenty faculty members fly to China every year to teach in our joint Bachelor of Commerce programme with Beijing Normal University of Zhuhai
- In 2014, our faculty published 21 peer-reviewed articles and four cases, wrote seven book chapters, produced 11 reports and gave 39 conference presentations on topics directly influencing our region.
- Through our research centres, we shared knowledge with over 1,000 participants at 15 public talks, conferences and seminars

BSIS helped us assemble a catalogue of accomplishments of which we feel extremely proud. It helped us understand that we can do an even better job of benchmarking and measuring our successes, of encouraging and highlighting collaboration and interdisciplinary endeavours within the school and across the university, of tracking our commitment to social responsibility, and of telling each other and the community how and what we are doing.

Reaching out is changing our school culture and stimulating new projects. New faculty are attracted to our mission and story, resulting in positive momentum and a growing wellspring of energy and sense of empowerment. While still living in that liminal space and experiencing that sense of precariousness, we are more confident in our ability to tolerate uncertainty.

Feedback from outside the university reinforces this positive feeling. For example, in November of 2016 the Nova Scotia Minister of Business recognised our work with a motion of congratulations in the Legislature. The motion noted, in part, that "the Sobey School of Business at Saint Mary's University delivers top quality graduates every year and is an important asset to both Nova Scotia's academic and business communities…"

Going forward, this enhanced understanding of ourselves means we can better anticipate and respond to needs in the community. The generosity of that community in participating in the BSIS process revealed their faith in our ability to respond to challenges. They told us that we have an established and solid place in the social and economic ecosystem. This is both a challenge and an opportunity.

Saint Mary's University has long existed in juxtaposition to several other universities in the province, and has had a tendency to define itself in terms of what it is not. The BSIS has helped us articulate a much stronger sense of brand, pride and identity both internally and externally. It has identified and spurred dialogue about common goals within our business school and university and with our colleagues and neighbours outside them. Each of us is still doing what we do best. And we are now also consciously working collectively.

The most important story we discovered through the BSIS process was not one of facts and figures. It was the story of ourselves. It was the story of a business school in a small province in transition. We inhabit an important gateway. We are on the edge and – if we have anything to say about it – the edge of a new era of prosperity, growth and hope.

To read our* Creating Impact With Purpose First Impact Report*, visit https://www.smu.ca/webfiles/BSIS_FullReport_WEB.pdf.

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