



the partnership
for water sustainability in bc

Waterbucket eNews on February 20, 2024
<https://waterbucket.ca/wscblog/>

Living Water Smart in British Columbia:

**Build the network to
achieve mission impact**

Note to Reader:

Waterbucket eNews¹ celebrates the leadership of individuals and organizations who are guided by the vision for [Living Water Smart in British Columbia](#)².

The edition published on February 20, 2024 featured Dr. Jane Wei-Skillern of the Haas Business School at the University of California Berkley. Her work provides the Partnership for Water Sustainability with a framework for the networked approach to collaboration that explains what we have been doing intuitively for more than two decades in the local government sector.

The umbrella for Partnership initiatives and programs is the [Water Sustainability Action Plan for British Columbia](#)³. In turn, the Action Plan is nested within [Living Water Smart, British Columbia's Water Plan](#).



Cover Image Credit: photo by Cameron Stephens

¹ <https://waterbucket.ca/wscblog/>

² https://waterbucket.ca/wcp/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2017/11/livingwatersmart_book.pdf

³ <https://www.waterbucket.ca/cfa/sites/wbccfa/documents/media/81.pdf>

One-Minute Takeaway

“Growing the network is all about a culture change that requires a different mindset and a commitment to something bigger,” states Dr. Jane Wei-Skillern of the University of California at Berkeley

“Once you put committed people in a room together and build trust amongst them...and allow them the space to experiment, learn and make mistakes... that is when amazing and wonderful things happen.” Dr. Jane Wei-Skillern



Dr. Jane Wei-Skillern is co-author of [The Networked Nonprofit](#), groundbreaking research published in 2008. She is a Senior Fellow at the Haas Business School at the University of California Berkeley. This is the #2 ranked business undergraduate program in the USA.

Dr. Jane's work provides the Partnership for Water Sustainability with a framework that explains what we have been doing intuitively for more than two decades in the local government sector.

“In the early 2000s, when I was on the faculty at the Harvard Business School, I began my research into the concept of a networked approach that is more focused on network-building and trust-based relationships, and less about building an organization to get to your mission impact,” explains Dr. Jane.

Dr. Jane's four counter-intuitive guiding principles for growing effective networks

“The network emerges around a common goal, rather than a particular program or organizational model. The community mobilizes the resources from throughout the network and does this based on existing relationships in the community.”

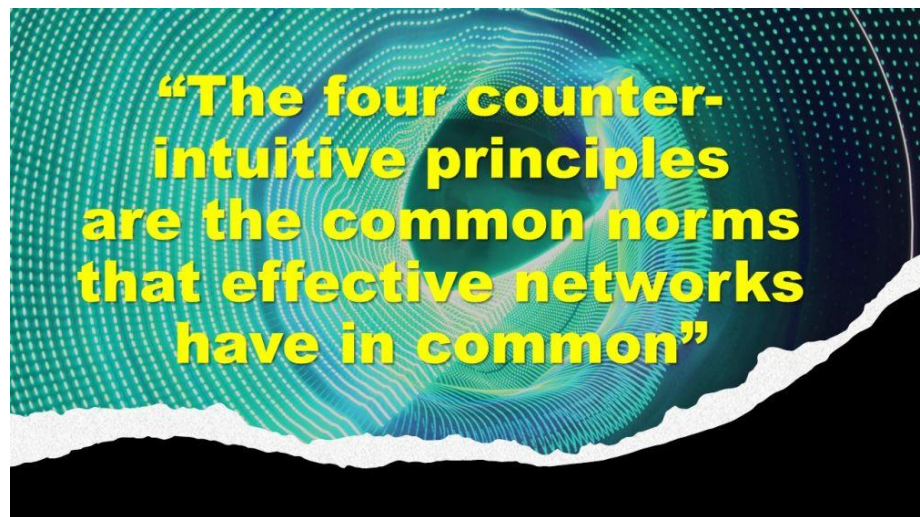
Focus on mission before organization. "Effective network leaders build strategies that advance the mission even when it does not result in direct benefits to their organization."

Build partnerships based on trust, not control. "Leaders depend upon shared values and trust rather than top-down controls and accountability systems."

Promote others rather than yourself. "Network leaders exhibit a strong norm of humility above all else, sharing credit and foregoing opportunities for individual advancement and institutional growth and brand building."

Build constellations rather than lone stars. "Leaders who catalyze successful networks acknowledge their weaknesses as readily as their strengths. The goal is to build the larger system that is necessary for delivering on the mission, not to become the market leader."

Dr. Jane Wei-Skillern has created the New Network Leader website at <https://newnetworkleader.org/>.



Editor's Perspective by Kim A Stephens

The Partnership previously featured Dr. Jane Wei-Skillern in a story published in May 2022, titled [Living Water Smart in British Columbia: Four counter-intuitive guiding principles for effective collaboration](#)⁴. She is an ongoing source of inspiration and is a mentor for what we do.

Instill a culture that supports champions

Dr. Jane Wei-Skillern has identified four counter-intuitive principles for effective networks:

Focus on mission before organization.

Manage through trust, not control.

Promote others, not yourself.

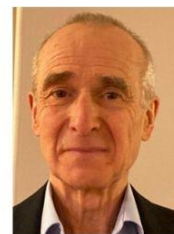
Build constellations, not stars.

As the hub for the Living Water Smart Network, the Partnership aligns individuals and organizations to deliver results across organizational boundaries...through a model known as collaborative leadership. This modus operandi is unencumbered by the cultural constraints and limitations usually associated with a conventional organization.

The [Georgia Basin Inter-Regional Education Initiative](#)⁵, aka "the IREI", is the mechanism that enables and facilitates inter-regional collaboration in the southwest corner of British Columbia. At the end of the day, the hard work on the ground must be done by our IREI partners.

Hence, the Partnership aligns what we do to support their organizational aspirations and objectives. In that way, we can help our partners be successful. But the real key is that their organizations [instill a culture that supports champions](#)⁶.

"Through her applied research, Dr. Jane has given us confidence to know that we are on the right track with our networked approach," says Derek Richmond, Chair of the Partnership's Ambassadors Program.



⁴ https://waterbucket.ca/wcp/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2022/05/PWSBC_Living-Water-Smart_grow-the-network_2022.pdf

⁵ <https://waterbucket.ca/viw/category/inter-regional-education-initiative/>

⁶ https://waterbucket.ca/wcp/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2022/05/PWSBC_Living-Water-Smart_grow-the-network_2022.pdf

How to deliver results across boundaries

"Once a network is up and running and proves itself to be effective, it becomes the primary vehicle for change, rather than the individual organizations themselves," explains Dr. Jane.

"The leaders who work in this way are really competent in what they do. They have great people skills, they are good organizational managers, and they are good at seeing the big picture and identifying where they need to engage others and build the network to solve the problem."

"I have been studying people who have done this well and gotten great impacts because of it; and documented the patterns and themes from their work. So, it is no surprise that other people who are doing it right are doing it similar to how the Partnership is doing it and are getting positive results."

"It is exciting to follow the work of the British Columbia Partnership for Water Sustainability and see how their approach exemplifies network leadership as I have conceptualized it. Their success is so similar to what I have seen in my research. It is rewarding to see these ideas validated in practice time and time again."



STORY BEHIND THE STORY:

Build the network to achieve mission impact - *extracts from a conversation with Dr. Jane Wei-Skillern*

Early case studies highlighted a different way

"I was teaching an MBA elective on social entrepreneurship, was doing some case writing, and came across Guide Dogs for the Blind Association. Geraldine Peacock, the CEO, did all of these counter-intuitive things in order to get her organization's impact bigger."

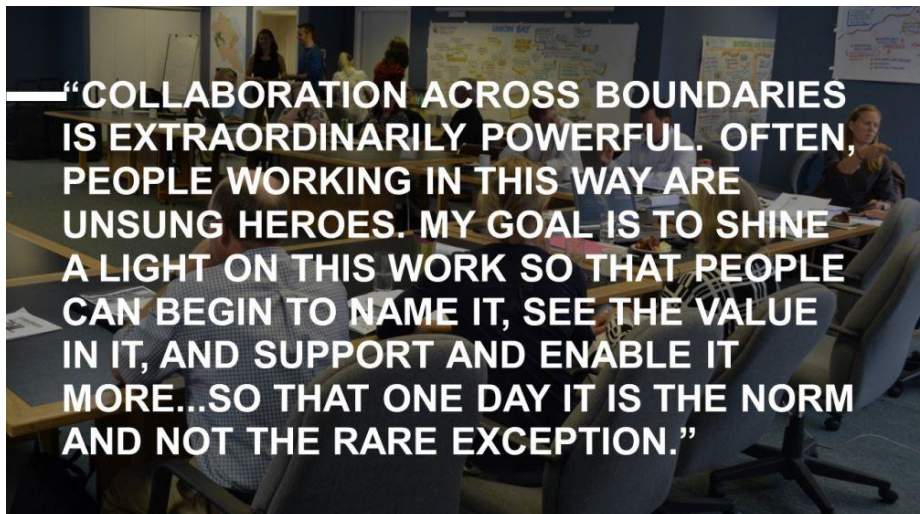
"But it was by decreasing their own organizational footprint, investing in their peers and former competitors, and focusing more narrowly on their core business, that enabled them to leverage their resources more broadly and create greater and more sustainable impact in the entire field."

Through the networked approach, deliver results across boundaries

"Rather than continue to teach MBA students, my focus is now on the speaking and practitioner side of the work," says Dr. Jane. "That is where I really feel the demand is...and the opportunity for impact....because the people doing the work NOW can take the ideas and run with them immediately."

"I am reaching out to practitioners who are struggling and have enough experience to know they do not have all the answers. And they also have a degree of humility because of experience and perhaps failure. That is what makes them able to take these ideas and move forward more readily. My goal has always been to have the most impact with my time."

"I so often say this work and this way of leading through collaboration is very intuitive. It is not rocket science. You do not need a PhD to learn or understand this. It is in our midst all the time in different communities. In virtually every community, there are people working and leading in this way."



Open the flood gates and let this way of engaging and energizing grow and thrive

"Coming out of the pandemic, there is a greater openness to new ways of working. And with more in-person gatherings happening, this is also very conducive to this way of leading. So, it has been very exciting. I have been busier than ever. And in all different fields because I am not a context expert in any particular issue area."

"The engine for change in the social space is different. It is not institutional-focused but more about investing outside your organization to get there."

"After a few years of focusing on these kinds of cases, the pattern became apparent. The case study organizations were quite different. But when I met and talked with the network leaders, I saw that their approaches were largely the same. Networking is highly visionary and ambitious."

"It is fun to share the wisdom that I have gained from studying people who have done the work in this way for a long time. While I believe we are turning the corner, I do wish that everyone had been working in this way YESTERDAY. We would be a lot better off and actually be ahead of the game."

"The change cannot come soon enough because this is so needed. But it is still relatively rare that entire organizations or systems within particular fields are working in this way."

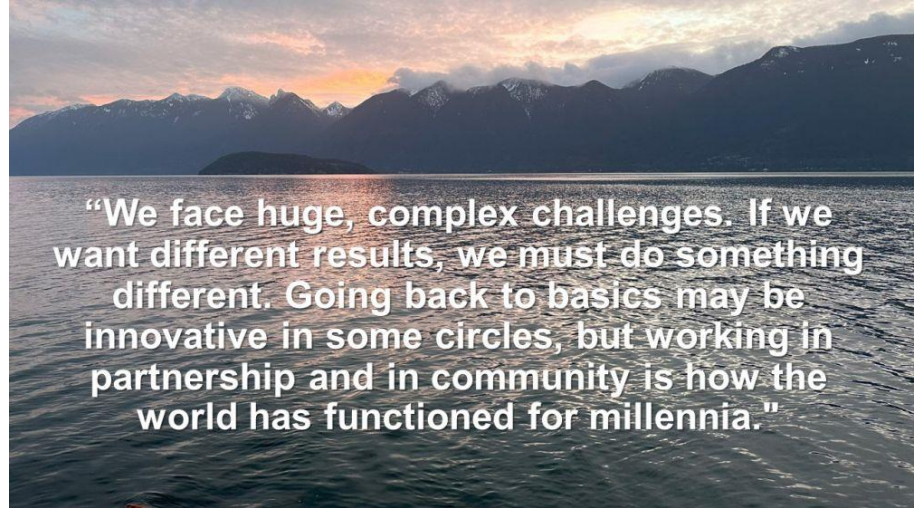
"Everybody on down through an entire value chain needs to buy into the change. That is a bit daunting at times. And it is a slow and ongoing process because there is always turnover. Changing human behaviour is one of the most difficult things in the world to do and that compounds the challenge!"



Shine the light on the positive and align efforts to make communities better places

"It is about giving the younger generation of leaders that hope that there is a path forward. Put your own ego and self-interest behind the shared goals. We need more of that. On a lot of problems, it is win/win if we work in this way. There is no downside to finding a common path to travel."

“There is so much positive and potential out there that is very actionable. That is where I choose to focus. There is a lot of benefit in working with others as a trusted partner and being trustworthy yourself. Find trusted partners who have integrity and values that align with your own and move forward together.”

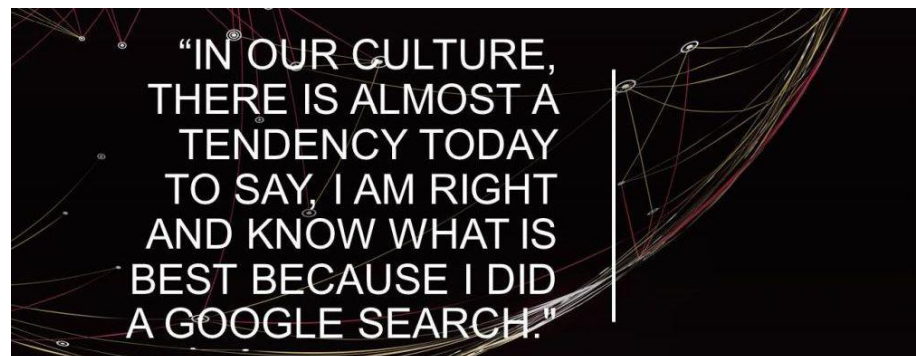


Inter-personal connections and learning from each other leads to better outcomes

“This way of working includes the reconciliation piece. It means treating people and communities outside of your own as equals. You have to listen to those voices. And you have to work in partnership as equals. It cannot be, we want to extract your knowledge and use it for ourselves. It has to be, how can it be reciprocal. How can we also advance your interests and work in partnerships so that there are synergies and mutual benefits.”

“Seeing people connected to their phones is a worrisome trend. Get off your devices. Interact with others as fellow human beings to build those connections, build trust, build relationships. Because that creates an openness to being open to listening and learning from each other. And that your peers have something valuable to add. Even more so than a YouTube influencer.”

“Those inter-personal connections start to build and grow so that you can be potential allies and partners in solving the very real challenges that people are facing in their work. But we do not take time to do that. If we would do that, we are almost certain to get better outcomes...on so many dimensions....because of how critically important it is to go into collaboration with an open mind.”



Openness to networks should help pass the inter-generational baton

"I believe that whenever you find leaders in the government sector that are truly effective and are making headway on the challenges they are facing in their respective roles, more than likely they are working in partnership with others, whether it is across different departments or government agencies that need to coordinate."

"If we are successful in changing the system to one where decision makers are leading through a networked approach, that would surely enable the younger generation who already think in terms of networks. Keep in mind, however, that their networks are still used for more selfish purposes."

"But if we could marry the younger generation's openness to networks to networks for achieving the common good, therein lies the opportunity. And that is where there needs to be more growth, and more education or engagement on how that can be used."

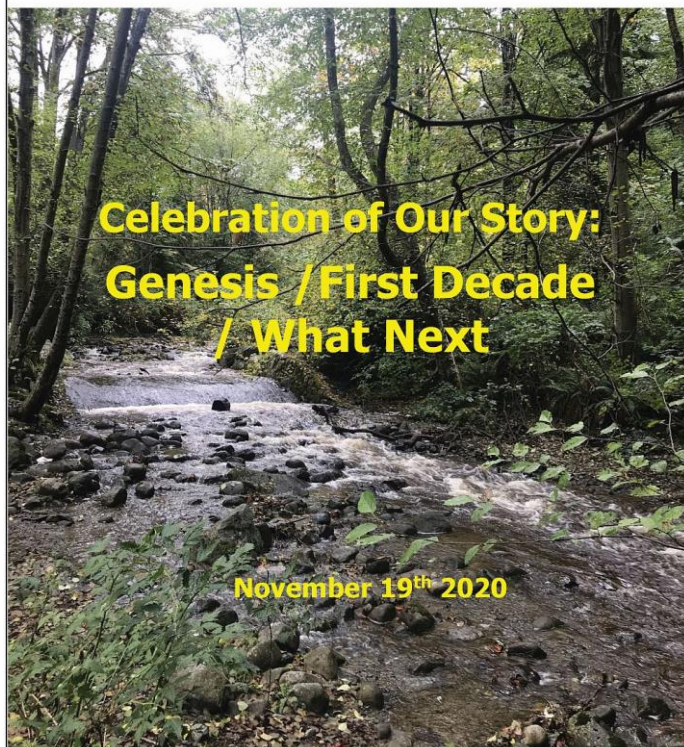
"When we say, let's get to know each other so that we understand where each of us is coming from, and explore how can I help you with your challenges and vice versa....that changes the whole tenor of the relationship. We can be partners and support each other. We come out stronger if we do that," concludes Dr. Jane Wei-Skillern.

"The more you can build buzz around your work and GET PEOPLE ENERGIZED, the more feasible it becomes. When people hear about it, they want to become part of it too. Success breeds more success. It is not something that you have to push or sell."





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TO LEARN MORE, VISIT:

<https://waterbucket.ca/about-us/>

About the Partnership for Water Sustainability in British Columbia

Incorporation of the Partnership for Water Sustainability in British Columbia as a not-for-profit society on November 19, 2010 was a milestone moment. Incorporation signified a bold leap forward.

Over two decades, the Partnership had evolved from a technical committee in the 1990s, to a “water roundtable” in the first decade of the 2000s, and then to a legal entity. The Partnership has its roots in government – local, provincial, federal.

The Partnership has a primary goal, to **build bridges of understanding** and pass the baton from the past to the present and future. To achieve the goal, the Partnership is growing a network in the local government setting. This network embraces collaborative leadership and **inter-generational collaboration**.

The Partnership believes that when each generation is receptive to accepting the inter-generational baton and embracing the wisdom that goes with it, the decisions of successive generations will benefit from and build upon the experience of those who went before them.



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