



Unlocking the Potential of Campus Infrastructure Projects to Build Social Infrastructure for Canadian Communities

Written by Coro Strandberg

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SFU

“ As a President, I am not only concerned about the structure of my organization, but the soul of my organization. The soul gets its energy by understanding how it gives benefit to society. An institution needs a soul, and it must connect to the society it serves. The DNA of the organization is more than bricks and mortar and beyond traditional infrastructure. — *President of a Post-Secondary Institution*





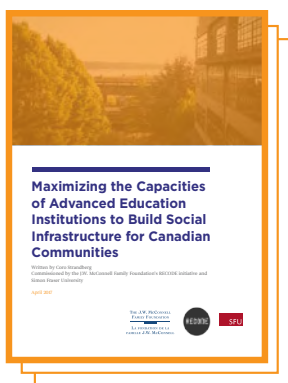
Executive Summary

Post-secondary institutions are at a crossroads as society reorganizes itself for the post-pandemic era. One road returns to “business as usual”, where the institutional priority is to get back to normal as quickly as possible. The other road challenges assumptions about past models, mindsets and behaviours that held institutions back from their full potential. Institutions that pursue this second path aim for a role that reflects the broader needs of society – and seek to unlock their assets as a greater force for good.

This paper is a think piece, conceived and written to stimulate innovations on this second path, directed at campus infrastructure development. It is a call to action for leaders, administrators, and the entire campus community to fully mobilize institutional assets, relationships, resources, and platforms to help communities and overall society course-correct for a flourishing future – through the campus development process and beyond.

It introduces an aspirational vision, the roots of which are already growing. It invites infrastructure builders to double down on their ambitions to leverage their projects for still greater scale and impact. It argues for a pivot in infrastructure development, where institutions and their communities identify a social purpose for the project at the outset, one that is outward-looking, fosters societal benefits throughout the planning and construction process, and goes beyond meeting the core functional needs of the university to also meeting the needs of community and society.

The bold, audacious aim is for a paradigm shift in infrastructure projects to unlock their full potential to address societal needs. Making this shift is a learning opportunity for the post-secondary, private, community and public sectors who collaborate to achieve the project’s higher ambition. It is an opportunity to attract, inspire and engage partners, consultants and suppliers and build their capacity to continue this work in the future. While enabling this pivot will face its challenges, this paper argues they can be reimaged as opportunities.



The report builds on the acclaimed 2017 think piece **“Maximizing the Capacities of Advanced Education Institutions to Build Social Infrastructure for Canadian Communities”**, extending its narrative to campus infrastructure projects. It introduces a conceptual framework with practical steps institutions and their planning teams can pursue to unearth the greater social impact of campus developments or redevelopments.

Over 30 people in the post-secondary and construction sectors were consulted on the framework. More than half of those involved were post-secondary presidents and many others had administrative responsibilities for infrastructure design and delivery. Leaders welcomed these ideas and reinforced their relevance to the times at hand. They felt the yearning that society has for institutions to play a stronger role in their communities, addressing the profound challenges that society faces – and believed campus development is an important and underleveraged tool for greater social impact.

The focusing question of this paper is: **“What is the untapped potential of post-secondary campus infrastructure projects in building social infrastructure for Canadian communities?”**. Read on to find out.

“ This is a mobilizing and inspiring idea, and an astute place to start. — Tamara Vrooman, President and CEO, Vancouver Airport Authority, Chairperson, Canada Infrastructure Bank, and Chancellor, Simon Fraser University



Acknowledgements: This report was written by **Coro Strandberg**. The author thanks **Stephen Dooley**, Executive Director of SFU Surrey Campus, and **Navinder Chima**, Director of Community Programs and Partnerships at the SFU Surrey Campus, for their vision, initiative, good humour, and advice on the paper. **Kelly Hodgins**, Program Officer at the McConnell Foundation, organized president focus groups, peer-reviewed the paper and coordinated its design by **Aquil Virani**. This greatly enhanced the final report.

Methodology: The paper was built around the 2017 discussion paper that elaborated upon the notion that post-secondary institutions had untapped potential they could harness for community good. It further built upon the author’s experience with the Social Purpose Institute at United Way helping businesses develop a social purpose as the reason they exist. A draft concept piece was circulated to over 30 people involved in post-secondary and construction including: 15 post-secondary Presidents, 3 VPs of Finance and Administration, 3 construction and infrastructure sector representatives, and 11 university representatives in roles including faculty, facilities, procurement, sustainability, advancement, and community engagement. The feedback they provided on the framework informed the final draft of the paper.

Quotations: The quotations on this paper have been anonymized.

Positionality: The author is a white settler living and working on the unceded and traditional territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and sə́lilwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. She identifies as a woman and did not consult or engage those who would benefit from, or be impacted by, campus developments or expansion projects.

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Who should read this report?

The paper is primarily directed at presidents and senior leaders within universities, colleges, institutes, cegeps and polytechnics. However, it is equally relevant to others involved in infrastructure and development projects including the following:

- Business and industry
- Indigenous communities
- Community and environmental organizations and groups
- Municipal, provincial, territorial, and federal governments
- Construction, development, real estate, infrastructure, and financial sector



Foreword

There is a danger in times of crisis that, in guarding against threats to our safety and security, we might look inward and disengage. We live in such times. Amidst overlapping crises including social dislocation, rising inequality, First Nations reconciliation, biodiversity loss, climate change, and, in the last 18 months, the COVID-19 pandemic, advanced education leaders struggling to maintain core functions might shrink from challenges to expand the reach and ambitions of their institutions.

Yet the social infrastructure project that the McConnell Foundation and Simon Fraser University initiated four years ago – with subsequent support from Universities Canada, CICan, CAUBO and others – documented conclusively how designing and developing post-secondary infrastructure for maximum social benefit can, itself, be seen as a core function for our sector. In building to serve a broader social purpose, we also enhance our own relevance and strengthen our community linkages, achieving considerable mutual benefit in the process.

Post-secondary institutions have always been social infrastructure, physically and programmatically. By our core functions, we educate, building individual and collective capacity, and we conduct research, expanding knowledge and answering the most pressing social, economic and environmental questions. By their personal

engagement, our students, faculty and staff also contribute an increasing amount to our communities' strength and prosperity.

Recognizing the value of that engagement, SFU and the McConnell Foundation commissioned the 2017 report, *Maximizing the Capacities of Advanced Education Institutions to Build Social Infrastructure for Canadian Communities*. It was a two-part exercise: first, it considered a taxonomy of all the instruments that advanced-education institutions might use to strengthen Canadian society; and second, it formalized the challenge to our entire sector to explore and leverage all of those instruments to enhance societal well-being.

That exercise gave rise to a national flurry of experimentation and productive community engagement. In bringing a social lens to campus development, our institutions have found new ways to build infrastructure to be so much more than isolated labs and classrooms. This new document now introduces a framework for planning and decision-making to help us further optimize that effort.

I am deeply grateful to the McConnell Foundation for helping to launch this initiative, and to our peers and partners for joining in this journey. I also commend this challenge to you, to embrace the full potential of planning and developing all new infrastructure to maximize its social impact, for immediate impact and a lasting legacy.



Joy Johnson

President and Vice-Chancellor,
Simon Fraser University



Definition of 'Social Infrastructure':

For the purpose of this paper "social infrastructure" is defined as the organizational arrangements and deliberate investments in society's systems, relationships and structures that enable society to create a resilient, just, equitable and sustainable world. It includes social, economic, environmental, and cultural assets.

Definition of 'Community':

For the purpose of this paper "community" refers to an institution's external stakeholders and includes students, alumni, retirees, volunteers, donors (individual and philanthropic), non-profit organizations, community groups, foundations, K-12 and other educational institutions, other research institutions, businesses and industry, professional associations, suppliers, cultural communities, First Nations, local, provincial/ territorial and federal governments (both elected and administrative representatives), the general public, and global communities.

Advanced education institutions are not apart from society - they are a part of society.

1.0 Introduction

Society is at an inflection point. We are called to surface our humanity and bring all of ourselves to build the future we crave – and head off a world characterized by runaway climate change, biodiversity loss, social polarization, and systemic racism and inequality.

This is no less the case for institutions and organizations, including universities, colleges, and polytechnic institutions whose ultimate role is to create a better community, country, society, and planet for the future. Indeed, higher education is all about the future: research to build a better future, education for the future. Postsecondary institutions know they and society have a huge number of challenges ahead – and are awakening to the idea that every dollar they spend should be a double- or triple-word score*. As future-forward organizations, higher education institutions are turning their attention to leveraging their roles and assets with the aim of building flourishing communities within a thriving environment.

This paper is a challenge and provocation to advanced education institutions and to those who fund and supply them to go beyond incremental and incidental measures and to boldly pivot their campus infrastructure investments in ways that put society on a secure footing. It is a call to action to use all the tools at their disposal, including their infrastructure, in service of that future. It is acknowledged there will be practical challenges to enabling this pivot, but this paper will argue that challenges might be reimaged as opportunities.

The ideas presented here further the concepts identified in the seminal May 2017 discussion paper commissioned by the McConnell Foundation and Simon Fraser University, **“Maximizing the Capacities of Advanced Education Institutions to Build Social Infrastructure for Canadian Communities”**:

“Advanced education institutions are uniquely positioned to invent and scale the solutions needed to enable a better quality of life for all of society within planetary thresholds. Many of these solutions can be found in their existing assets and capacities, which, when directed at building social infrastructure, can reveal the pathway for citizens and their institutions to thrive. (Strandberg, 2017)”

On the third anniversary of the influential 2017 report, the McConnell Foundation published **a Milestone Report** which chronicles the developments, next steps, and lessons learned on the institutional journey to unlock post-secondary assets for the greater good. The three-year assessment revealed that the sector continues to innovate around its social mission and that the pace of uptake is quickening. As examples in this report reveal, institutions are already reimagining their infrastructure projects to unlock their societal potential. More must and can be done, but leaders lack a framework to reveal the opportunities and the pathways to them. A framework, such as the one outlined in this paper, can help planning teams unearth greater social impact through the campus development process and beyond. It can also help frame discussions with private sector, government, and community partners in the interest of co-creating shared visions and goals of mutual benefit.

*Game of Scrabble reference.

Aim of the paper

The ideas in this report are designed to:

- Build capacity to address societal issues in place-based communities, including the process (how we build) and the outcomes (what we build).
- Operationalize institutional commitment to building social infrastructure in the context of a campus expansion or development project.
- Support post-secondary presidents and senior leaders to shift to a deeper level of thinking about the application of their institution's commitments to community engagement, social justice (e.g., student experience, equity, diversity and inclusion and Indigenous community relationships) and environment (e.g., climate change and biodiversity loss).

It introduces a "Social Infrastructure for Campus Infrastructure Framework", designed to prompt big-picture, bold, out-of-the box, aspirational, and systems thinking at the outset, with the intent of cascading these ideas across the lifecycle of the project through the commissioning and operating phases and beyond.

While the focusing question of the original 2017 paper was: "What capacities can universities, colleges and polytechnic institutes unlock and maximize individually and collectively to help build social infrastructure for Canadian communities?",

the focusing question of this paper is: "What is the untapped potential of post-secondary campus infrastructure projects in building social infrastructure for Canadian communities?"

“This is an extremely useful tool that would work for me. I really like the framework and the visuals.

— University President


Historique du rapport et biographie de l'auteure

Coro Strandberg, President of Strandberg Consulting, is the author of the seminal report jointly commissioned by SFU and the McConnell Foundation in 2017: "Maximizing the Capacities of Advanced Education Institutions to Build Social Infrastructure for Canadian Communities". Subsequently, she authored a set of **Guidelines for Presidents incorporating Social Infrastructure into their Strategic Plans**. Presidents asked that these Guidelines be tailored to other levels of strategic planning, resulting in this current report, which leverages and builds upon this earlier work.

Coro is a leading sustainability and social purpose thought leader in Canada. She advises associations, sectors, governments, and businesses on strategies to accelerate a regenerative, equitable and purpose-driven economy. She was the City of Surrey's first Social Planner where she played a role advising on the social impacts of property and commercial development. She is a co-founder of the Social Purpose Institute at United Way which helps business develop a social purpose as the reason they exist and for four years has been supporting The McConnell Foundation and Canadian Association of University Business Officers (CAUBO) to develop tools and practices for administration and finance departments to unlock their social purpose and bring it to life. Coro is a faculty member for Director's College and Governance Professionals of Canada providing education on the role of boards and directors in oversight of organizational purpose and sustainability.



Coro publishes her research and thought leadership on her website at: corostrandberg.com.

A photograph of a greenhouse interior. In the foreground, there are several black plastic trays filled with red pots containing small green seedlings. Some of the pots have white labels with the word "Pansy" on them. In the background, two people are standing and looking at the plants. A man in a dark jacket is on the right, and a woman in a grey jacket is on the left. The greenhouse has a curved metal frame and a translucent plastic covering. The lighting is bright and even.

“ Why would you use research and education as your only tool when you could put all your assets in service of the greater good? — University President

“ This changes the lens we use when we build and occupy these assets. In the past, institutions of higher learning saw themselves pursuing an economic imperative - to contribute to industry and the economy, as an extension of economic policy. We are learning that good public policy includes social and environmental, not just economic outcomes. We need to reimagine the roles we play, the communities we serve and the partners we work with. We need to understand how we use our physical assets, not only to build the economy, but to improve the environment and the quality of life. This paper helps with that reframing. — University President



2.0 Context

The drive to rethink the role of campus development in building social infrastructure is propelled by several powerful global and domestic forces, chief among them the pandemic, rising inequality, and the climate emergency.

The COVID-19 pandemic wreaked havoc on communities and economies and the institutions that support them. While devastating for so many, it also pushed institutions to think outside the box, challenging original assumptions about how things are and could be done. It heightened awareness about the interconnectivity of all things, and recognition that a healthy society can only be realized through systemic and holistic action. This goes for both the process of building and the buildings themselves. As a commentator said: “It is no longer sufficient to think of buildings in a narrow way. COVID broadened our awareness that we can’t just focus on the economy, or health or a singular university project – we must think of everything within the broader system and build infrastructure for the system we want.” COVID also launched a rethinking of the nature of learning and work, and the utilization and purpose of spaces. The COVID disruption created openings to rethink and reset everything.

This disruption was accompanied by heightened awareness of the systemic racism that dominates our institutions as a microcosm of Canadian society. The inequitable impacts of the pandemic, the Black Lives Matter movement, and the tragic news about the unmarked graves of Indigenous children at multiple former residential schools intensified the pursuit of meaningful and authentic routes to dismantling inequities and colonization.

“ PSE can be a beacon and a hub to recreate social capital in society. Despite institutions going to the online and virtual world, place and time are more important now than ever.

— University President

The climate emergency and low-carbon, circular economy transition are additional accelerants of new and bold thinking in institutions, beyond incremental and “business as usual” actions. Concerns about the inequitable impacts of these transitions have led to calls for a just transition: that no one be left behind in society’s pivot to live within its planetary means.

Students, faculty, and administrators are equally affected and powered by these tectonic forces. Campus communities are seeking a stronger institutional mandate to tackle society’s challenges and ignite solutions to them. These rising expectations are equally reflected in the broader community. Institutions are feeling the pressure to show their relevance to their host community and the general public, which expect them to be a more visible part of the social fabric. Governments, too, are expecting more from their infrastructure investments. New requirements for Diversity and Inclusion, Low Carbon and Indigenous Reconciliation objectives and Community Benefit Agreements are being written into infrastructure commissions.



Guide shows why and how the construction sector can contribute to a sustainable future

The Canadian Construction Association commissioned the author to develop a **CSR Guide for the Construction Sector**. It is **accessible at this link**. The Guide sets out the context, imperatives, and best practices for the construction industry to improve its contribution to a sustainable future.

3.0 Social Infrastructure for Campus Infrastructure Framework

The following framework is introduced to tap the potential of post-secondary campus infrastructure projects to build social infrastructure for Canadian communities and answer the question that provoked the paper.

Institutions and their partners are encouraged to reflect on the framework and prioritize approaches that resonate for them and their communities. These ideas are presented to stimulate innovation and rethinking to unlock greater societal benefits from the development. It is imperative that they inform the initial discussions, to ensure they establish a strong foundation for subsequent phases of work and implementation.

The Framework is comprised of 3 idea-sets to stimulate holistic, systemic, and societal dialogue and decision-making:

- **3 Meta-Concepts**
- **3 Foundational Steps**
- **3 Lenses**

Each of these is discussed in turn. The section concludes with an overview of project governance considerations. Some sections are designed to be thought starters and other sections are designed as a guide, suggesting how this approach can be practically implemented. Thus, the language of the paper switches from “what *institutions* might do”, to “what *you* might do”.

The fault lines of the intersecting crises are the foundation of change, and campus infrastructure projects can be the foundation of solutions. As one president said: “Rather than saying the outcome is the building, we need to determine how the building process itself addresses societal issues.” Another president commented: “We are all thinking about what our campuses will look like post-pandemic. For example, a shift to remote work and learning will drive a retrofit agenda. We have an opportunity now to think about the societal needs before us and address them through our infrastructure projects.”

3 Meta-Concepts

Concept 1: Social Purpose of Campus Project

The first meta-concept prompts institutions to determine if they wish their campus project to become a catalyst for social change. Central to this idea is that institutional leaders agree the campus development project should adopt and pursue an overarching social or societal purpose as the reason it exists. It extends the idea of organizations having a social purpose as their *raison d'être* to infrastructure projects.

Projects that have a societal purpose at their core cascade their purpose through all phases of engagement, development, and operation. In this fashion the project becomes a change agent, using its influence, scale and reach for social good. This goes much beyond thinking about who the building's users are and how the building is used. A societal purpose acts as the project's North Star and becomes a lens to guide decisions and trade-offs, setting the course and guiderails for the project's execution.

Consider: Do you want your project to have a social purpose as core to its operating model?

There is a shift from traditional approaches toward development – to an emerging model which challenges both the process and the outcome of development to deliver societal benefits.

“It is untapped potential if you start with an incomplete assumption of what the purpose is – most infrastructure has untapped potential because we haven't looked at its social purpose this way. — University President

Concept 2: Paradigm Shift Approach

A second meta-concept is to recognize that a paradigm shift is underway in how infrastructure projects are developed and brought to life. There is a shift from traditional approaches to development, which successfully deliver on conventional goals – to an emerging model which challenges the infrastructure – both the process and the outcome – to deliver societal benefits. That is, in the words of one president: “If the purpose of the infrastructure is to build a classroom, you will get conventional results. However, if the ambition includes goals around accessibility, cultural inclusion, decarbonization, Indigenous reconciliation, and digital connectivity you will realize a different infrastructure asset. That is how you unlock potential.”

The paradigm shift can be visualized as follows :

Paradigm Shift in Project Ambition and Execution

Figure 1

	From: Traditional model	▶▶▶	To: Emerging model
Vision	Real Estate Vision of project		Social / Societal Purpose of project
Timing	After the fact		At the outset
Orientation	Inward looking		Outward looking
Focus	Outcome		Plus process
Primary Users	Students, faculty, staff		Plus community
Needs	Meets core functional needs of university		Plus meets needs of community/society
Experience	Feel safe and invited		Plus feel ownership/like they belong
Investment	Builds the economy		Plus builds the community/tackles societal challenges

In commenting on this shift underway, one president observed that: “In past building projects universities have been inward-looking. We delivered an old model. There is a whole new question to be asked now: How to unleash the building process and physical premises to address emerging urgent matters?” Another raised the questions: “What challenges does society face, and how do all of our activities contribute to tackling these problems? Beyond our insular needs for research space and classrooms, we should ask how the institution can contribute to solving big problems through this development.”

Consider: Which of these paradigm shifts would you like to adopt for your project?

“We talk about how people feel safe and invited in a building, but not as much about do they feel ownership of it and like they belong. — University President

“Part of the paradigm shift is to give up things you no longer have time for that don’t align with your purpose. — University Focus Group member

“We thought we were developing a real estate strategy and realized we were developing a community strategy. — University President



Carleton University Regional Aquatics Centre and Wellness Hub Builds Social Infrastructure

"It is really striking how Carleton University's project, which started with a need to replace our old pool, maps onto the social infrastructure framework – notably the "paradigm shift ahead". In the old days we would have planned to retrofit the pool under the "traditional model", but something very different happened when we conceived of this project, very much along the lines of the "emerging model". We came to these ideas in a kind of organic and natural way as we brainstormed. At the inception was the need to renovate the pool but also our desire to create a more outwards facing and welcoming campus. Then as we finalized a new strategic plan, we wanted to bring its key strategic directions to life. Our Aspiration Statement states: "Carleton University will leverage the power of higher education to be a force for good". One of its ambitions is "to enhance the wellness of our people and communities and play a leadership role in the wellness of our country and planet". This led to considerations of how to best serve our community (Ottawa), and of emphasizing wellness, sustainability, Indigeneity, as well as equity, diversity, and inclusion. Then came the idea of tying the replacement project to our academic mission by incorporating academic and research space devoted to Wellness in the facility. Phase One of our \$60M Carleton Regional Aquatic Centre and Wellness Hub is planned for opening in the 2023-24 academic year. It will accommodate new partnerships, including a two-tank aquatic facility to be shared, or partnered, with the City of Ottawa; allow for wellness-focused research; and establish strategic connections to foster a holistic experience of wellness. Through its design the Wellness Hub will be a showcase and gateway to the University." — **Dr. Benoit-Antoine Bacon, President, Carleton University**

Concept 3: Project Social Purpose Continuum

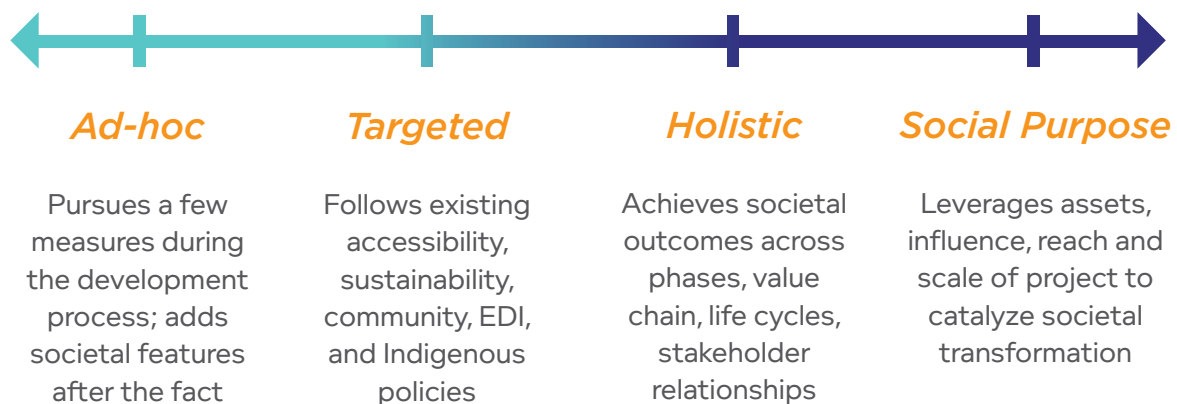
Institutions are already active and engaged in building social infrastructure into campus infrastructure projects. Depending on their priorities, they will be active at different points of the following continuum of social infrastructure practices. Sometimes institutions pursue a mix of different approaches. The continuum sheds light on the options institutions can choose to advance their societal ambitions through their infrastructure projects. The opportunity is to determine this in advance, with intention, to set expectations and increase the likelihood of success of the chosen approach.

Consider: What approach to project development have you taken in the past and what approach would you like to adopt for this project?

“ These ideas need to be part of the discussion at the outset.
— University President

Project Social Purpose Continuum

Figure 2



3 Foundational Steps

After gaining institutional agreement on whether and how far to pursue a social purpose for the project, institutions may wish to pursue the following steps to determine the purpose and bring it to life. These 3 Foundational Steps help you:

- Determine the social purpose of your project
- Develop societal goals for your project
- Determine which assets to leverage for your project

By going through these exercises, your institution can begin the process of setting its strategic intent for realizing greater societal outcomes from the infrastructure investment.

Step 1: Determine the Social Purpose of your Project

To determine the social or societal purpose of your project the first step is to conduct social research and development (social R&D) to identify community and societal issues faced by the community that the campus project can uniquely improve. The local, provincial, or territorial governments might have a set of sustainability goals, or you could use the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals to inform this effort. This is an important period of consultation and listening. Universities already excel at consultation, the ideas here are to stretch the inquiry to explicitly understand community and societal issues that the campus project can improve.



Community Co-creation and Co-design

While this paper does not provide detailed advice on approaches to engaging community stakeholders and rights holders in the creation and design of the project, it is essential this be scoped out early. During this first step in developing the project's social purpose consider how to centre diverse voices and perspectives in the initiative. Ideally on- and off-campus stakeholders and interests will be engaged early and meaningfully in scoping and realizing the project and its social purpose, ambitions, and potential.

Talk to the communities you are building the infrastructure to serve. Engage with the city planning and policy process to understand the municipality's needs and priorities. Tap into local community planning tables. Conduct a community survey, hold an innovation lab, or host workshops with key internal and external stakeholder groups. Research the top social and environmental trends likely to affect the region in the next decade. Conduct research, gather data, and generate insights to determine the role the project might play to address community and societal challenges and opportunities.

“ We need this vision to be shared with all involved. Often these discussions come too late. It becomes more difficult to work it in later.

— Focus Group member

After this period of social R&D, consider the following: What is the social purpose of your campus infrastructure project? How can your campus development project contribute to a better community or world today, and in the future?

Use the following as guideposts to answer these questions.

Defining your Campus Infrastructure Project Social Purpose

Figure 3



Here are some questions you could use in your internal and external stakeholder consultations to determine the social purpose of your infrastructure project. Review the following and choose / adapt those that make the most sense to you and your partners.

Stakeholder Consultation Questions

- How could the world be a better place because of how we developed our campus and what resulted?
- How can the infrastructure project be an agent for social change?
- How can the infrastructure project accelerate the transition to a just, inclusive, equitable, regenerative, circular, and low-carbon world?
- How can this project be a force for good?
- Imagine it's 2030, "What is the story you want your community to tell about the role the project played in supporting community outcomes over the last ten years?"
- How can the project contribute to social good over the long-term (e.g., ten or more years)?
- How can the project drive system and industry change and advance social innovation?
- How can the project contribute to regenerative solutions, address legacy impacts of colonization, racism, and carbon emissions, promote environmental justice and advance the circular economy?
- How can the project further system collaboration on complex challenges?
- How can the project address climate change, circular economy, and social equity?
- How can this new campus be a heartbeat for the community?

The first step to determine the project's social purpose is essential so the project team has clarification. The next step is equally important and will help set and manage expectations.

“ Sometimes people think there is a trade-off; it's either the purpose of the university or a social purpose, when in reality, it's an “and”. You will build a stronger university if you pay attention to societal needs.
— University President

Step 2: Develop Societal Goals for your Project

After you have determined the social purpose of the project, you need to develop goals to fulfill the purpose and bring it to life. Some goals may include the following, but they should be set based on your social purpose. Use these as conversation starters in your planning process. (They were derived from the **Guidelines for Integrating Social Purpose into Institutional Strategic Plans**, published by McConnell Foundation in 2020.)

When setting these social purpose goals, make sure they are aligned to, and help advance, your institution's pre-existing societal or sustainability goals.

Illustrative Societal Goals

- **Social Justice:** Build a positive climate of respect, transparency, openness, inclusivity, and diversity; be a welcoming and culturally aware project for community members and partners; enable and empower people to thrive.
- **Indigenous Reconciliation:** Advance decolonization and support Indigenous knowledge and culture; expand opportunities that contribute to the elimination of education and employment gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians; support Indigenous-led community economic and social development.

Student Engagement: Create opportunities for student skills development; establish/expand skill-building opportunities (both curricular and co-curricular) for students.

- **Community Development:** Catalyze the social, economic, and sustainable development of our communities and help grow the province's key, strategic sectors.

- **Cultural Enrichment:** Provide community access to performance and cultural spaces, libraries, and art galleries; use cultural activities and assets to build community empowerment and capacity, resolve disputes, etc.

- **Social Innovation:** Harness human-centred / user-centred design approaches; spur local innovation and experiential learning; consult construction / building sector on social innovation collaboration opportunities; hold social innovation labs and crowd source ideas to generate new thinking, e.g. student competitions; use "invitation to partner" process to identify collaborators and innovators; use the development process as a living lab to mobilize researchers, instructors, students, staff and community members to identify, test, and pilot solutions to societal issues.

- **Regenerative, Circular and Climate Positive Development:** Design the development process and infrastructure itself to be adaptive, flexible, and future-fit, improve the surrounding habitat and address legacy impacts; go beyond a "doing no harm" mindset to one in which the project replenishes, restores, renews and revitalizes the underlying social, environmental and economic systems on which the infrastructure relies.

When setting your goals, consider:

- Who will use, manage, and supply the infrastructure, and what societal goals can be pursued in collaboration with them?
- How might we decolonize this project and decenter Western approaches to physical infrastructure?
- How might we dismantle systemic racism in this project?
- How might our infrastructure sequester carbon, become circular, and restore and regenerate the environment?



- **Societal Solutions:** Co-develop solutions to critical social, economic, technical, and environmental issues facing the community and broader society; create solutions to local, national, and global challenges; address complex questions affecting the world; foster enlightenment and dialogue on key public issues.
- **Technology for Good:** Leverage emerging technologies for public benefit and direct technological development to maximize positive outcomes for all; act as a beacon in society for how technology can be used as a force for good.
- **Transforming Sectors and Professions:** Intentionally mobilize and engage sectors and professions on the role they can play to accelerate social change, through procurement, collaboration, research, and teaching. Where competency gaps exist provide educational pathways for students and executive continuing education. (**Here is a report** on the role of industry and professions in society, commissioned by the Canadian government. Read and share with associations in the project's network.)

“ We do this in a limited way already: we have accessibility consultants to make sure our project is accessible, a sustainability consultant to make sure it is sustainable, we include community art, Indigenization, etc., but we haven’t gone this extra step to develop a societal purpose and goals for our infrastructure projects. We haven’t determined how the process and outcomes of infrastructure development can be a force for good. It is happening, but not to the extent it could.

— University President

“ This approach gives faculty a way to operationalize university policies such as Indigenous Reconciliation, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion and Climate. It can showcase how those policies can be applied. — University President

“ For administrators, this helps us broaden our thinking in terms of what to consider when we build. Typically, we focus on meeting the core functionality needs and finding a way to pay for it. Usually there are a few sustainability and community policies administrators use. As the project team figures out what the core need is, are there other things we can do that are broader than classrooms and labs? — Administrator



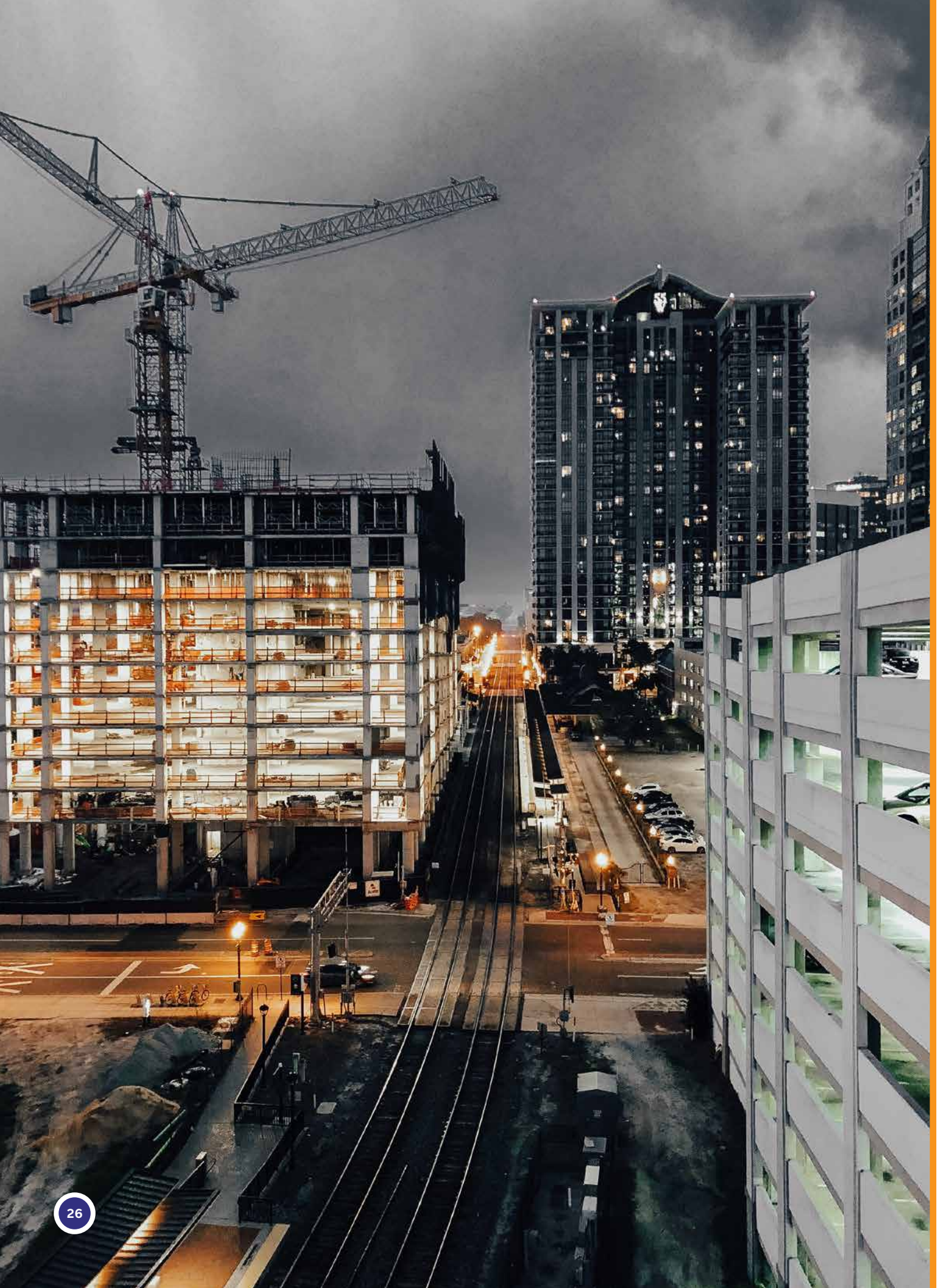
Applying Social Infrastructure to SFU Surrey Campus Development Unlocks Community Benefits

From its very inception, the post-secondary institution that is now SFU Surrey was located, designed and developed as a catalyst for community benefit. Contrary to the pattern of the day, in which new institutions were so-often sited on inexpensive land far out of the way, this campus was conceived as an anchor point for a new city centre. Leveraging the architectural brilliance of the late Bing Thom, it was built over a faltering shopping mall – and beside a new-but-still-underutilized rapid transit line.

The plan worked. With SFU stabilizing a neighbourhood at risk and helping to fill a new office tower, the City of Surrey followed, building a new City Hall and a Central Library. The Fraser Health Authority came next, as did private developers, building a hotel, a campus of Kwantlen University and a host of condominiums. To realize its social infrastructure aspiration, SFU collaborated with the City of Surrey on a vision for the area between the campus and City Hall leveraging their respective land holdings and desire to work together.

It's critical to note that, from the outset, this social infrastructure approach to campus development immediately fulfilled SFU's central educational purpose, providing top-tier research and post-secondary space to the least-served community in the region, increasing high school transition rates accordingly. But the physical design, location and sense of purpose also made it easier – almost inevitable – to engage with community partners, including the City, the health authority, the Surrey Board of Trade, the Downtown Surrey Business Association, and local and regional not-for-profits. In collaboration with these partners, SFU Surrey developed everything from a health and technology Innovation Boulevard to a series of strategies and programs that are now offered across all campuses, such as our student entrepreneurship incubator.

Finally, the original decisions about where and how to build SFU Surrey – on the unceded traditional territory of the Semiahmoo, Katzie, *kʷikʷəłəm* (Kwikwetlem), Kwantlen, Qayqayt and Tsawwassen Nations – became a major inspiration for what is now a university-wide strategic emphasis on community engagement. It became clear in Surrey that efforts to maximize the societal value of our investments generated a commensurate dividend for the institution itself. That realization (which also triggered SFU's support for this social infrastructure project) is certain to guide our planning and design decisions as we build out this burgeoning campus.



Step 3: Prioritize the Instruments for Institutional Engagement

Once you have determined your project's social purpose and goals, it is time to consider the institutional assets that can help you achieve them. The list of instruments for institutional engagement first summarized in the May 2017 Report and shown here can be a useful aid in this exercise.

This taxonomy tool can help you prioritize the institutional assets to harness, leverage, or mobilize to achieve the project's social purpose, both during the development process and upon opening. For details on the instruments listed here, [see the 2017 Report](#).

For example, the institution can develop a research agenda around the process and students can be involved in the development project. The project can be the site of research and harness the institution's knowledge, data, research, and teaching capacity to benefit society. The project can use its influence, reach and scale to mobilize stakeholders on its ambitions. It can use its political assets to engage policymakers on these ideas and opportunities.

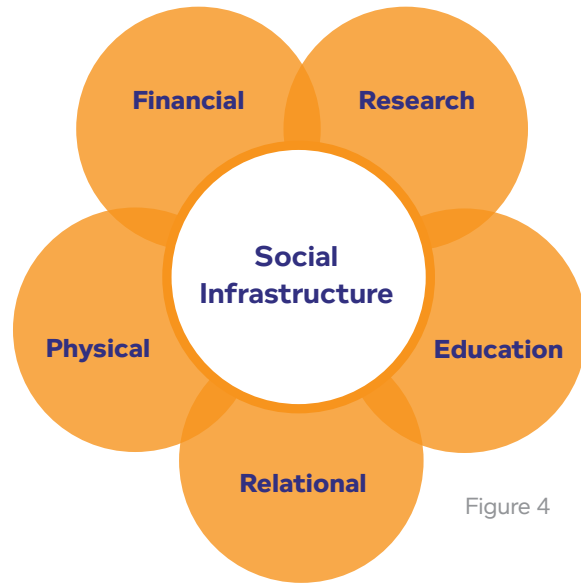


Figure 4

Financial

- Procurement
- Investment
- Administration hiring
- Compensation
- Real estate
- Funding sources
- Communications budget
- Commercialization role
- Risk management skills and expertise
- Budgeting and capital planning

Physical

- Facilities
- Cultural services
- Temporarily vacant student housing
- Technology and data
- Land

Research

- Research mandate
- Data, evidence and scientific information

Relational

- Alumni relationships
- Future students
- Administrative staff
- Government, business, industry and community relationships
- Post-secondary sector relationships
- Professional association connections
- Global reach, insights, and networks
- Convening power
- Role model
- Public policy and dialogue

Education

- Teaching mandate
- Faculty expertise
- Student expertise
- Social services

3 Lenses

After gaining agreement on the goals the institution would like to achieve to further its social purpose, and which instruments it would like to mobilize and harness, the institution can consider these three lenses to further prioritize and scope the project:

- **Lens 1: Infrastructure Development Phases and Partners**
- **Lens 2: Value Chain Mobilization**
- **Lens 3: Student, Faculty and Staff Lifecycle**

Each lens unpacks a different aspect of the project's potential and impact to be unlocked and uplifted for greater societal benefit. Considered together, they bring a holistic, systems thinking perspective to the undertaking.

By applying these lenses, your institution can prioritize what it wishes to mobilize to achieve the project's social purpose.

“ The process is the outcome.
— **University Focus Group member**

“ This is an opportunity to think through who your partners are and could be.
— **University President**

Developer's Perspective

“ Once the social purpose is defined and the tools prioritized, the project sponsor / project executive would communicate what they are trying to accomplish with the project. From the earlier steps, they would define the outcomes they are looking to achieve at a high level. Once this is developed, it becomes another piece of information that goes into the development project.

The design brief would say: it needs to meet these environmental and social criteria, have these functions, fulfill these standards. Then the design team would implement it and it becomes a set of priorities that architects and others take into account.

— **Real Estate Development Company representative**

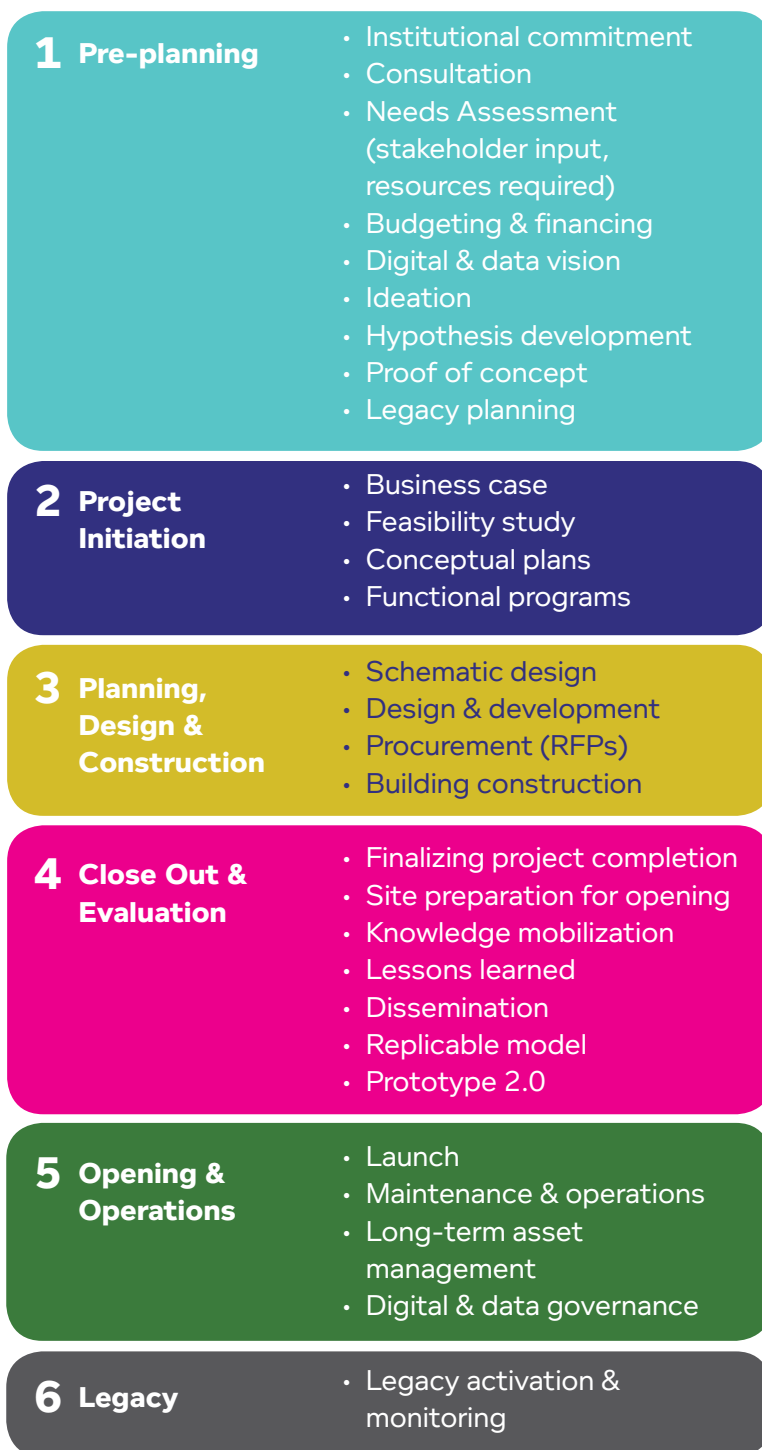


Lens 1: Infrastructure Development Phases and Partners

The adjacent diagram is an illustrative model of the phases of campus development, from identifying the original need through to the operational phase and potentially a legacy phase. The opportunity here is to consider if your institution wishes to cascade its social purpose through these infrastructure development phases.

The chart **on the next page** goes a step further and demonstrates how an institution might engage stakeholders and rights holders in each phase of campus development. It can be used to consider who your present and future stakeholders are, and develop mutually reciprocal goals with them to advance your infrastructure's social purpose in ways that achieve their goals and vice versa. A social purpose project does not merely engage and consult its stakeholders but mobilizes its stakeholders to further shared social goals. It asks the question: what stakeholder relationships might be initiated, built, leveraged, or mobilized – to advise, guide, and collaborate on the shared societal aims of your project?

Infrastructure Development Phases Figure 5



Engaging Stakeholders in Infrastructure Planning, Design and Delivery

Figure 6



Following the principle of “nothing about us, without us”, ensure Indigenous rights holders and other communities that animate your region and bring strength and wisdom to the social, economic, environmental, and cultural domains of your area are meaningfully involved in scoping the project, setting its vision, and bringing that vision to life.

A key stakeholder is your city partner. Early efforts to engage the municipality in determining the societal goals of the project, aligning with municipal priorities, and agreeing to shared societal goals will pay off. The local government can then become a collaborator in the effort and bring its assets, competencies, resources, relationships, and insights to the work. Another key stakeholder is your provincial government partner. Engaging them early on your vision and impact will enhance the potential for a financial partnership down the road.

As you engage in this effort, consider harnessing your institution’s existing social innovation labs and capacity to inform the social potential of campus developments.



Legacy Planning

Project initiators are encouraged to explicitly consider Legacy Planning at the very outset. More and more publicly funded infrastructure projects are considering the social infrastructure legacy of physical infrastructure projects. To do this, consider what ongoing tangible societal benefit you would like to achieve, establish, deliver, and point to once the infrastructure is operational – beyond the physical premises. One possible legacy to consider in the early phases of development is the creation of a community-governed endowment fund for scholarships and / or continued social innovation and community betterment, along the lines of the Columbia Basin Trust in BC ([see ourtrust.org](https://ourtrust.org)). One possible source of funds, requiring legislative authority, would be to flow a percentage of the increase in property values stimulated by the infrastructure project to a community fund. There could be an opportunity to harness the rezoning potential of the area, to create economic opportunities for nearby or displaced low-income communities. Another approach could be to set up a system where a portion of property taxes could contribute to a legacy fund.

When planning the project, consider ways that low-income communities in the area can benefit from the project and share in the new prosperity that is generated. The opportunity is to consider who benefits and how to tap into that benefit – and pay it forward to other communities who might otherwise be negatively impacted. See if there could be opportunities for “benefit-sharing” as a result of your infrastructure project.

Lens 2: Value Chain Mobilization

The diagram **on the next page** is a representation of the value chain of a typical building project, up and downstream of a project's lifecycle, from raw material extraction through to the building's users. Here, the opportunity is to consider:

- What societal goals can be introduced at these different stages of the project value chain?
- How can we mobilize our value chain partners for social good?
- How can we tap into our value chain's assets, capacities, and networks in the co-creation process?

“ It is very important to specify your societal goals in your RFPs. A good vendor goes beyond just “matching” our values and level of ambition; ideally, they would go further, and push us on these things. — University President

One way to start is to specify in your Requests for Proposals that you are looking for service providers with this capacity and experience, possibly who might have a social purpose themselves (**see www.socialpurpose.ca** for resources on social purpose businesses). This is an opportunity to be very intentional about the partners and allies you would like to attract to help you achieve your project's social purpose. Your social purpose becomes a platform to engage your consultants, advisors, and vendors such as your architects and engineers on the benefits of including a societal dimension in their work. They can translate their experience from your project into other projects

and commissions and in this way, your institution helps further accelerate the transition to a sustainable and thriving future. If you wish to go beyond influencing one or two firms, here is a resource commissioned by the Federal Government to encourage industry and professional associations to support their entire sectors and memberships to serve not just their members but society (**The Sustainable and Just Association**). Additionally, if you find that firms, trades, and professionals lack the capacity you seek, you may be in a position to offer professional education, skills development and upgrading to foster greater competency in these areas. This will benefit not only your project, but other infrastructure projects.

Financiers are included in the value chain to inspire fresh thinking about the range of funders who might be mobilized to finance and invest in your project. The clearly expressed societal benefits may attract governments, impact investors, or venture philanthropists to fund your project. Sustainable, social, and green bonds are becoming an increasingly popular route to financing capital expenditures that could help fund your social purpose infrastructure.

“ Administrators in project teams have a significant opportunity to influence and inspire project partners to build their competency and capacity in contributing to the social good of your infrastructure. Once project partners have this capacity, they can apply it to other projects, and attract and retain talent who seek to work for purpose-driven organizations. — Administrator

What societal goals can be introduced at different stages of the value chain?

	Raw Materials	Manufactured Products	Materials & Equipment Supplier	Architects & Engineers	Contractors	Developers	Users	Financiers
List societal goals you seek to implement at these points in the value chain here.								

Lens 3: Student, Faculty and Staff Lifecycle

The student, faculty and staff lifecycle is the third lens your project team could consider in scoping its societal ambitions and activation. The diagram **on the next page** sets out a framework to reflect on each of these primary stakeholders in terms of their lives and how they might engage with the project over a roughly 5 – 20-year period.

Campus infrastructure projects can take many years from concept through opening. With this in mind, Gr. 8 high school students in the area could become the first cohort to attend the new campus. As well, it is possible that alumni, faculty, and administrators (including retired alumni, faculty, and staff) live in the area. With the lifecycle of these primary stakeholders in mind, consider what special opportunities exist to address societal priorities experienced and understood by these groups and engage or mobilize them on the solutions and opportunities.

“ We need to engage K-12 students in this project early on. They need to see the university as a place for them. This is an opportunity to do that. — University Focus Group member

“ What the model suggests is that we should start early by defining the benefits of the different parts of the lifecycle. — University President

Student, Faculty and Staff Lifecycle



<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Local High School Students and Parents• Future Returning Students• Prospective Faculty	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Current Students• Current Faculty• Current Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Graduates• Alumni	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Retired Alumni• Retired Faculty• Retired Administration
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List opportunities to embed social infrastructure considerations into student, faculty and staff lifecycle here.





Project Social Governance and Decision-Making

After applying this framework, your institution will have developed the following:

- Social purpose for the project
- Societal goals for the project
- Stakeholder relationship goals for the project
- Activation, tactics and strategies to advance the societal goals, along the project's phases, value chain and student/faculty/staff lifecycle

At this point, your project steering committee should adopt targets and metrics to guide the project along with a societal decision lens to be used for major decisions. It is important that the social purpose and societal goals infuse the day-to-day decisions of the project and that they guide what to start and stop doing as the project comes to life. Having a societal decision lens can help spot mis-aligned efforts to drop – and should be a central and not marginal consideration in project execution.

You might adapt the social purpose and societal goals for this purpose. See the **COVID-19 Social Impact Decision Lens for Higher Education Leaders** for an example of a societal decision lens.

“ We have a portfolio of projects – we can bring this approach to all of them, not just big infrastructure projects. In fact, it can be easier to apply it to the projects over which we have more influence and control. We should look at all our projects with this wider lens. — University Focus Group member



Université de Montréal's New Campus Bridges Communities

For years, the old Outremont Train Yard was a long scar on Montréal's urban landscape. Now a new neighbourhood is taking shape there, centred around the Université de Montréal's new MIL Campus. When it acquired a tract of land in the middle of Montréal, the university had a clear vision to integrate the new campus into the surrounding neighbourhoods, following principles of sustainable development.

The first step was to connect the MIL Campus to the neighbourhoods blocked by the railroad tracks, with a safe and inviting overhead footbridge. Now families who previously faced physical barriers to university can access a better life through higher education.

More connections are planned: cycling lanes will be added to the Rockland overpass, and an at-grade crossing for pedestrians and cyclists will be built at the end of De L'Épée Avenue.

Green spaces also play a big role in the project. The central plaza includes a landscaped island and a rainwater recovery system. Says St-Cyr, an urban planner that served as a consultant to the University for the design of the MIL Campus, "The City listened to local residents, developed options based on their needs, and discussed the options with them before making any decisions. It was an exemplary process."

The MIL Montréal neighbourhood will ultimately comprise 1,300 residential units, of which 30% will be affordable or social housing. Many of these buildings are in the design phase.

The City and the University departed from the beaten path on this project making it possible to achieve ambitious goals in terms of environmental performance, sustainable mobility, and quality of neighbourhood life. With the opening of the new Science Complex, the first phase of the project is now complete.

Adapted from: <https://nouvelles.umontreal.ca/en/article/2019/09/23/mil-campus-birth-of-a-neighbourhood/>



4.0 Benefits and Barriers

“ This approach to infrastructure development helps us become more relevant to our communities and demonstrates that we are part of the social fabric. The public will see us in new ways and become ambassadors and champions of our institutions. — University President

This approach to infrastructure development creates many benefits but introduces several challenges or barriers that need to be addressed. The Benefits and Barriers are listed below. It is recommended that project teams review them, agree on the benefits, and put strategies in place to address the potential barriers that might be encountered.

Benefits
The following benefits might accrue to your institution if you adopt and implement a social purpose for your campus project. Encourage your project team to agree on those which are most relevant to your situation. Having an agreed understanding of the benefits will help motivate and inspire teams to bring not only the project, but its social ambitions, to life.

Benefit Area	Benefit
Community support and receptivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gain community support and social license to operate by ensuring the community feels reflected in the project.• Create an improved, more functional, facility that is embraced by the community; build loyalty and affinity with the co-creators who will be equally passionate about the project; they will become proud of the work and feel they have a stake in it.• Attract community to the campus including families whose children can see it as a place they belong; reduce feelings of intimidation.• Make the institution’s relationships more meaningful.
Teaching and research	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enable the teaching and research mission by leveraging faculty expertise and student participation (who gain real life learning experiences).• Create a new body of experience and research.
Government expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase ability to meet government expectations for higher impact infrastructure.• Attract government funding by providing greater space utilization.
Risk management	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• De-risk the infrastructure; minimize potential of faulty decisions by understanding the context and societal benefits to be created.• Increase likelihood of a more future-fit building.• Better address new role of physical space in the post-pandemic era.

Benefit Area	Benefit
Costs and revenues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce future operating costs by thinking about and planning for the future. • Reduce costs through partnerships and cost-savings. • Create opportunities for new revenue streams.
Attract students, faculty, staff, funding, partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage people to come to the campus who may be reluctant to go to public gathering places post-COVID. • Attract students, faculty, and staff to work, learn, and remain at the campus. • Attract students, faculty, and staff to live, study and work in the community's more desirable locale. • Attract faculty and staff to the campus to do things they were unable to pursue at home institutions or previous workplaces. • Attract capital, financing, partners, and donations to the project. • Increase the institution's ability to attract donor money and meet the needs of a more engaged donor in future.
Reputation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the institution's public reputation, brand, and profile. • Demonstrate the institution's value to society and taxpayers.

Gaining clarity about the project's societal goals and how they will be implemented at the outset is likely to reduce friction and tension later in the process, and better manage future expectations.

Some argue that embedding greater social good into an infrastructure project is not a benefits case but a values case. There is intrinsic value of contributing to stronger, healthier, and more sustainable communities.

“ These societal goals can help with fund-raising. It is ideal to have these goals identified at the outset so they can be worked into fund-raising campaigns. — University Focus Group member

Barriers and Challenges

While there are a number of benefits to this approach, the institution may nonetheless face the following barriers and challenges in adopting this societal approach to infrastructure development:

- Lack of funding and resources
- Lack of expertise (“I don’t know how to do this”)
- Longer planning timeline; difficult to meet “shovel ready” criteria (“I just need to get this built”)
- Trade-off mindset (“If we do this, we can’t do something else”)
- Conventional mindsets of project team, financiers / funders
- Competing priorities
- Increased project complexity
- Creates need to develop new partnerships and relationships and align with expectations and processes of other groups
- Introduces new safety and security requirements
- Discomfort with accountability, transparency and risk-taking (many processes are opened up to get the insight needed and to report on the outcomes to funders and donors; not everything goes perfectly)
- If it is too far removed from the mission of the university, there will be push back from the academy.

A further critical challenge worth understanding and tackling collectively is the reciprocal nature of this exercise with community collaborators. Old habits, expectations and relationships of the community may become barriers – especially if partners only think of institutions as places to get research done, to source students or employees, or to sell products and services. The community may lack the capacity and mindset to engage with the institution in this way. Community stakeholders, too, will need to prepare for this institutional pivot and develop their own capacities for mutual engagement.

“ This approach will create more expectations – I think we need to flip this expectations issue on its head. It is not about expectations, it’s about aspirations to do things better! To be a better university. — University Focus Group member

Advice and Perspective on Leveraging the Benefits and Overcoming the Barriers

Net new funding is not necessarily required to rethink and re-engineer an institution’s asset base toward social infrastructure benefits.

The biggest investment is in fostering the paradigm shift, from which innovations and impact will follow. It is possible to partner with donors and community partners to realize the vision. Indeed, many presidents believe that having social infrastructure outcomes in a project can help attract funding, as funders are looking for greater impact from their investments.

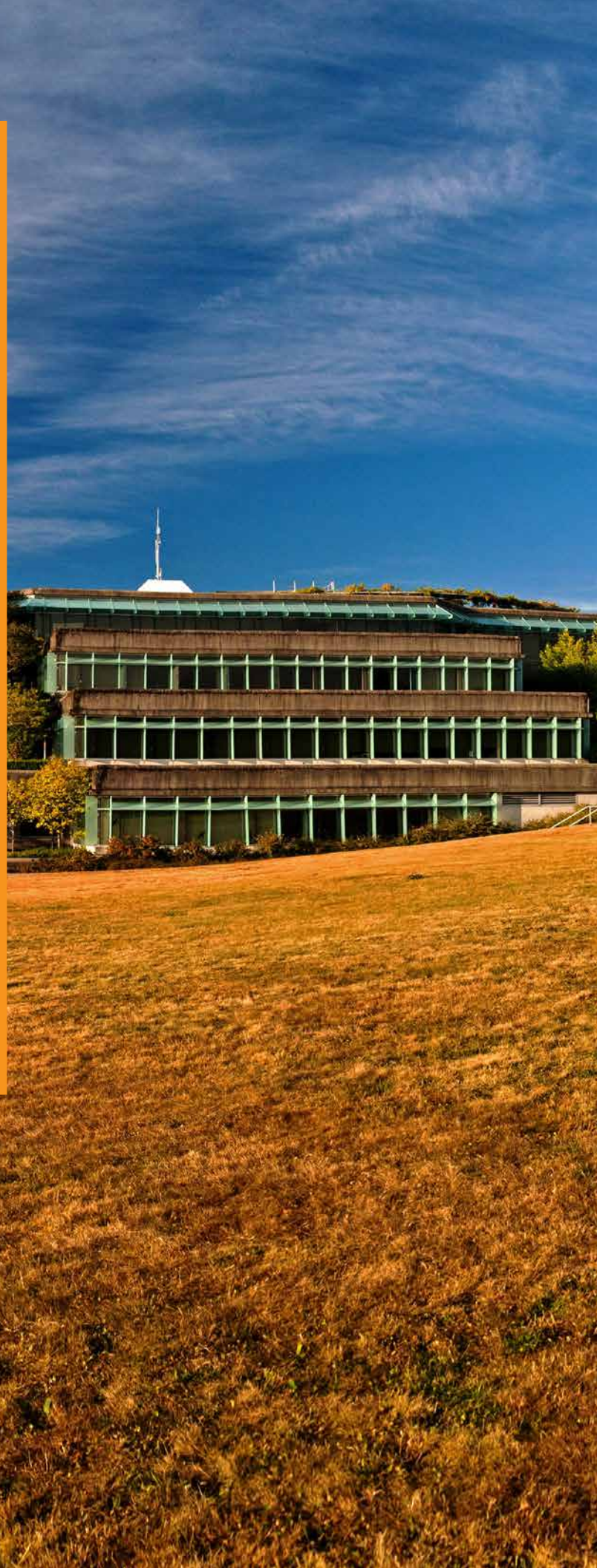
Start small: you do not have to figure it out overnight, and you don’t have to do it all. As you go down this path, you will learn how much people gravitate to this. Your institution will benefit from the pro-social efficiency that comes when people contribute and even overcontribute to your success because they can see themselves in the value your institution is creating.

While there are hurdles ahead, ultimately these investments will be beneficial for the institution over the long-term. The business case or the spreadsheet should not drive this direction, nor should challenges, though real and immediate, be allowed to stall the effort. This is the 21st-century reality of organizational leadership, driven by the social issues and imperatives of the era.



5.0 Conclusion

This paper gives post-secondary institutions a resource to help them uncover a more potent way for their campus development projects to contribute to the greater good. By reimagining the investment, by pursuing a societal North Star, and by harnessing and mobilizing underutilized assets, universities can set the course for greater societal impact through infrastructure development. By looking up and down the value chain, life cycles and timeframes, institutions can broaden their lens on the opportunities and partners. This paper concludes that the untapped potential is exponential for post-secondary campus infrastructure projects to build social infrastructure for Canadian communities. Post-secondary institutions may be at a crossroads in terms of operating in the post-pandemic era, but it's clear which is the right road to take.





References

The following resources are useful references for taking the societal impact of infrastructure projects to the next level and helped inform the ideas underlying this report.

1. Maximizing the Capacities of Advanced Education Institutions to Build Social Infrastructure for Canadian Communities: <https://mcconnellfoundation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Maximizing-Capacities-of-Advanced-Education-Institutions-to-Build-Social-Infrastructure.pdf>
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