



COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATIONS  
OF CANADA



# EQUITABLE INFRASTRUCTURE

A resource framing infrastructure types  
using an equitable placemaking lens

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## Introduction

We, a collective convened by the Community Foundations of Canada, comprised of practitioners, funders, organizers, and academics leading transformative place-based initiatives across multiple disciplines, submitted an earlier version of this infrastructure resource document in response to Canada’s first National Infrastructure Assessment: “Building the Canada We Want in 2050.” Given the complexity of infrastructure and its role in building a better, more equitable society we thought it was paramount to make this document open sourced to not only foster collaboration across professional disciplines, but also to unite people across differences such as identity, region and political affiliation. Through a series of multi-disciplinary round tables, informal conversations and research, we’ve generated rigorous, future-focused ideas for our infrastructure resource document while modelling the respectful inclusion required for establishing a long-term infrastructure vision that benefits everyone living in Canada. **This infrastructure resource document is a radical, imaginative first step in developing shared infrastructure language and analysis to improve outcomes for all.**

Specifically, our infrastructure resource document focuses on the way in which “infrastructure” is defined—not as an exercise in semantics, but as a way of fostering a more comprehensive understanding of various infrastructure types. This is crucial because as linguistic scholar Sally McConnell-Ginet notes, “Linguistic and social change go hand in hand.” Because infrastructure has contributed to social good and social harm, it is paramount to question the term itself, acknowledge that it evokes skepticism and even trauma for some communities, then redefine it in a holistic manner to address environmental, social and economic challenges and opportunities.

As such, our infrastructure resource document endeavours to both expand and critically redefine the term infrastructure, conventionally understood as the provision of roads and bridges, buildings, power generation plants, and more. While physical infrastructure is critically important, there’s also an increasing recognition of distinct yet mutually reinforcing and overlapping infrastructure types. The infrastructure types we’ve identified recognize this complexity and are informed by our extensive, cumulative experience funding, leading and designing projects related to the following: **physical infrastructure, social infrastructure, participatory and democratic infrastructure, digital infrastructure and economic infrastructure (see Figure 1)**. Given the equal value, and cross-cutting characteristics and function of these infrastructure types, we’ve positioned them in a concentric circle rather than a hierarchy. We have located the natural environment at its core to recognize the sovereignty and sacredness of the planet. We explore this concept and also the need to prioritize equity in the proceeding pages. And we also reject notions of “hard” and “soft” infrastructure, which are gendered terms that subversively privilege certain types of infrastructure over others.



**Figure 1. Concentric Infrastructures Circle**

We present these infrastructure types with the caveat that our list is not static. In fact, infrastructure is emergent and constantly evolving to meet unprecedented change and crisis. Also, colleagues and communities may use slightly different language to describe our proposed infrastructure types and add context that may deepen definitions. We presume this is the case, so we introduce this framework as an unprecedented first step in consolidating infrastructure types and collectively exploring them across a wide array of professional disciplines. Ours has been a journey of humility, mutual respect and rich knowledge exchange. We both anticipate and welcome further analysis and contributions.

In addition to equally recognizing a wide range of infrastructure types, our approach aligns with the fundamental step in all assessments, which is to critically look back before planning forward. As with most nations, Canadian infrastructure has been primarily propagated as part of the colonial project or following world wars, and implemented to accelerate economic and urban growth. However uncomfortable, we must begin by recognizing that while infrastructure has significantly enhanced the quality of life for many Canadians and positioned the country as a global leader, it has also contributed to immense structural inequities.

In Canada, infrastructure has played a significant role in displacing Indigenous peoples and places, in propagating a car-centric approach that pierced the hearts of low-income and racialized communities, and in restricting the mobility of disabled people and women. These and other historical inequities were laid bare during the COVID-19 pandemic, which proved that historical infrastructure transgressions continue to disproportionately impact equity-seeking and sovereignty-seeking groups today.

As a collective, we believe that first and foremost, infrastructure should connect us to each other, as well as to evidence-based information, the natural environment and opportunities. All infrastructure types should make us healthier, kinder and more joyful. We believe that

infrastructure is as intimate as it is institutional, and that a human-centred approach must be taken to fund, design, construct and program infrastructure types that serve everyone.

Again, this document is intended to serve as a resource for government, professional and community stakeholders. We acknowledge our esteemed co-authors and contributors who provided their immense practice and research knowledge of the infrastructure types redefined and unpacked herein by lead author Jay Pitter, who independently wrote the Physical Infrastructure section, contributed research and equity-based placemaking principles to other infrastructure types and translated the collective's in-depth expertise into succinct prose. Additionally, Ms. Pitter developed questions for each section and contributed the Glossary of Terms and Annotated Resource List to deepen engagement and prompt action. To serve this effort was not only a privilege but also a wonderful professional development opportunity for the both of us to learn from all of the co-authors and contributors to this document. We hope that our collective infrastructure resource document facilitates generative conversations and courageous action across government agencies and communities.

Regards,



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## Why have we centred the natural environment and equity?

Recognizing the ways infrastructure has historically harmed the planet in the name of economic and cultural advancement, we've refrained from positioning the natural environment as an infrastructure type. Instead, as you can see above, we have positioned it at the centre of our concentric circle. We've done so to honour the natural environment or earth as an ever-transforming, sometimes-violent spherical vessel that—despite her temperaments and complexities—graciously extends a place for all living beings to co-exist in varying degrees of symbiotic mutualism. This spiritual inheritance supersedes colonial borders, race, religious doctrine, extractive capitalism and other manufactured phenomena which are increasingly threatening our very existence here.<sup>1</sup> We recognize the natural environment as distinct from, yet crucial for, all infrastructure types and living beings to exist. Moreover, as noted by Indigenous leader Carrienne Agawa, “The natural environment, our land, provides numerous living examples of sustainable, reciprocal networks that should be considered across all infrastructure types.”

Similarly, we feel strongly about using an equity-based lens as a guiding theory and principle for assessing, funding, developing and programming all infrastructure types. Due to adverse historical and present-day physical infrastructure harms, as well as polarization, exclusion

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted from a soon-to-published book *Black Public Joy* by Jay Pitter

and outright violence enacted across all infrastructure types—even those that purport to be socially progressive—we feel strongly about using an equity-based lens as a guiding theory and principle for assessing, funding, developing and programming all infrastructure types. Within the context of infrastructure, this means going beyond inclusion and analyzing which groups have the power to shape all infrastructure types, feel safe across all infrastructure types and reap economic, mobility and health benefits from all infrastructure types.

Without the restoration of the natural environment and integration of equity principles, there is no solid foundation upon which to advance high-performing infrastructure types for all.

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## **Social Infrastructure**

DEFINITION: Social infrastructure refers to co-creation processes, publicly accessible local systems, social movements, physical spaces and services that foster community connectivity and mutual care. These aspects of social infrastructure include grassroots initiatives, not-for-profit services, informal community hubs, online support spaces, and hyper-local innovation incubators. At its core, social infrastructure is relational, predicated on practices, policies and social covenants that increase individual agency and dignity; collective resilience; and human-centred networks spanning the grassroots to the global. Social infrastructure spurs trans-disciplinary and cross-cultural collaboration, contributing to trust-building, civic participation and ethical decision-making. Often inappropriately referred to as “soft,” this form of infrastructure delivers hard-hitting, tangible impacts ensuring that all members of society can fulfil their basic needs, realize their potential, and experience a deep sense of belonging and well-being.

SCOPE AND DIMENSION: Globally, governments are beginning to recognize the value of social infrastructure—both from a pragmatic economic investment standpoint reducing health care, incarceration and demographic-ageing expenditure, and as a way of promoting a peaceful and democratic society amid increasing civil unrest. However, social infrastructure itself has been ensnared by polarized partisan politics. Anne-Marie Slaughter, a political scientist and international lawyer, underscored that by noting how Republicans framed their objection to President Biden’s plan by insisting that spending should focus on “real infrastructure”—roads, bridges, ports and airports—versus what they dubbed “liberal social programs,” including supporting home-based and community care.

Political affiliation aside, this kind of framing reveals the aforementioned diminishing of social infrastructure and a misunderstanding of its scope. In fact, it includes the built environment, natural environment, digital infrastructure, and participatory and democratic infrastructure. In addition to partisan politics, there is also concern that this term is being co-opted, particularly in social innovation spaces where there is a notable growth opportunity for creating a culture of inclusion and employing equitable practices that not only reference, but also deliver on, social good.

In addition to recognizing misunderstandings and nuances within the context of social infrastructure, it is important to note that this concept is neither new nor novel. The theory and practice of social infrastructure are relatively emergent, but its values and systems are rooted in ancient, intuitive co-operative practices and values upon which most clans, tribes and contemporary civilizations are predicated. Noted community organizer Michael Redhead Champagne reminds us that the family—biological and chosen—is an important aspect of Indigenous social infrastructure. Other Indigenous leaders who participated in the equity-seeking and sovereignty-seeking group round table concurred that this was a critical point—a point that is heartbreakingly salient amid the unearthing of the remains of Indigenous children at residential school sites and the continued over-representation of Indigenous children in the foster care system. Likewise, Dr. Jayne Engle, lead of the cities and places portfolio at the McConnell Foundation, notes the need to expand beyond not-for-profit organizations as important actors in this area to recognize “individuals, families, groups, activists and communities” within the social infrastructure ecology, contributing to a virtuous cycle of social capital.

The World Bank recently issued a survey measuring qualitative and quantitative data considering the following six dimensions of social capital: groups and networks; trust and solidarity; collective action and co-operation; information and communication; social cohesion and inclusion; empowerment and political action. Dr. Garfield Hunter, another participant in the equity- and sovereignty-seeking group round table, challenged us to consider the ways individuals with low levels of these types of social capital are made to feel ashamed or a societal burden. Not-for-profit racialized leaders engaged in high-risk and traumatic work intended to build social capital are calling for fair distribution of funding for the organizations they lead.

The non-profit sector was hard hit by the pandemic. Communities continue to turn to them for support more than ever, but their resources are constrained due to decline in revenue and volunteer support, specifically Black-led non-profits and grassroots have long been overlooked by philanthropy and government, so the impact of the pandemic on these organizations is adverse, reducing their capacity to respond to community needs. A report published in 2020 by the Network for the Advancement of Black Communities and Carleton University showed that for every \$100 of funding grants dispensed by leading foundations, only 30 cents go to Black community organizations.<sup>2</sup>

More broadly, social innovation leaders have noted a lack of opportunities to apply their expertise across all infrastructure types, which significantly reduces the social and economic return on those particular initiatives, while excluding critical indicators related to inclusion, power sharing, environmental justice and cultural responsiveness. This is a missed opportunity for both governments and communities—a missed opportunity that Stephen Huddart, former philanthropy executive, describes this way, “Social infrastructure links local

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.forblackcommunities.org/assets/docs/Unfunded-Report.pdf>

to systemic by fostering webs of inclusion, enabling societal transition across time, scale and geographic distance.”

KEY QUESTIONS:

- » What are upcoming opportunities for social infrastructure leaders to play an integral role in co-shaping and benefitting from upcoming infrastructure investments?
- » How can the national infrastructure assessment address the funding gaps between mainstream not-for-profit organizations and organizations led by equity- and sovereignty-seeking groups?
- » How can we enhance social infrastructure evaluation and establish common indicators to propagate this lens across all infrastructure types and continue building a case for its immense efficacy across Canada?

## Physical Infrastructure

DEFINITION: Physical infrastructure refers to visible, built environment structures such as housing, parks, public transit, places of worship and recreational facilities. It also includes less visible, but critically important, systems such as wastewater systems, heating and ventilation systems, and power grids. These and other forms of physical infrastructure are both publicly and privately owned, and often positively contribute to hyper-local and national economic prosperity, enhanced population health outcomes and mobility. Due to its tangibility, cost, longevity and connection to fundamental human rights, physical infrastructure tends to be elevated above other types of infrastructure. It is also true that physical infrastructure is tethered to the violent colonial project displacing Indigenous peoples and places, built on the backs of equity-seeking groups, unevenly distributed across Canadian regions and continuing to contribute to displacement and other harms.

SCOPE AND DIMENSION: A defining characteristic of countries deemed developed and prosperous is their robust infrastructure stock and systems. However, as noted earlier, the histories tethered to physical infrastructure across colonized countries are extraordinarily fraught. A visit to the archives of almost every developed country will reveal images of three main types of infrastructure built to embed colonialization into the foundation of newly conquered lands—churches; colonial street names and railways; and European-style residential housing. Colonialists didn’t invest in infrastructure simply to advance trade, accommodate new settler populations or assert military might. Physical infrastructure was also used to impose imperialism and dominance against an already wounded landscape.

Across Canada, infrastructure significantly disrupted, and continues to disrupt, the safety and sense of place for Indigenous peoples, forcibly separating them from their sacred, cultural homelands and loved ones. For centuries, the forced labour of people of African descent also significantly contributed to the physical and economic infrastructure in Canada, along with unethical labour practices such as the treatment of Chinese workers who were paid less than

their European counterparts to build the most dangerous section of the Canadian Pacific Railway.

Later, car-centric infrastructure destroyed racialized and other low-income communities in the name of urbanization; racist housing ordinances created segregated neighbourhoods much like redlining in the U.S; and disabled people were egregiously institutionalized rather than provided with accessible amenities within their communities. These and other physical infrastructure inequities, causing intergenerational trauma and social harm, are rarely explored because infrastructure is predominantly discussed and constructed through an urban design and development framework, sanitized of social and historical analyses. However, COVID-19 revealed the direct link between infrastructure and intractable social challenges, forcing a reckoning within urbanism, revealing systemic discrimination and considerable growth opportunities across land-use professions.

In response, professional membership organizations serving land-use professionals are beginning to explicitly integrate a social equity lens into their strategic priorities, while certification programs have added credits that address social equity. For instance, Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED),<sup>3</sup> a group advancing the design, construction and ongoing operations of green buildings, recently piloted the following new social equity credits: Social Equity within the Project Team; Social Equity within the Community; and Social Equity within the Supply Chain. For the time being, these credits will exclusively be applied to new construction projects, but the organization has committed to deepening its understanding of the application of these credits and translating them to other rating systems and to existing physical infrastructure types such as residential buildings, commercial interiors and neighbourhood development.

These and other actions are hopeful and exemplify the power of accountability over apology. However, there is much work ahead. Far more attention needs to be paid to the policies governing public spaces like streets, public transit parks and entertainment spaces, where equity- and sovereignty-seeking groups are more likely to experience harassment or lose their lives.

For instance, Amnesty International<sup>4</sup> found that Black people living in Toronto were 20 times more likely to be shot by police, while in 2014, 64 per cent of men reported feeling safe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark compared to only 38 per cent of women. Almost a third (32 per cent) of young Muslims say they have experienced incidents of religious discrimination<sup>5</sup> in a diverse range of public spaces, including streets, parks, schools/universities, stores/banks/restaurants, and the workplace. Sadly, these experiences were sharply underscored by a recent, unthinkable truck attack that extinguished the lives of a beautiful Muslim family out for an evening walk.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.usgbc.org/articles/usgbc-accelerates-social-equity-new-leed-credits>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.amnesty.ca/blog/carding-and-anti-black-racism-canada>

<sup>5</sup> <https://inspiritfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/young-muslims-in-canada-youth-study-final2.pdf>

Acknowledging complicity in systemic racism and other harms enacted across time is overwhelming. However, an unnamed issue cannot be reconciled. Transformation cannot occur without radical truth-telling followed up with courageous action.<sup>6</sup>

Historically, states have intensified infrastructure investments and questioned their approaches following a crisis. It's time to redress social divisions and discrimination caused by infrastructure while developing new social indicators and community partnerships to inform future development.

#### KEY QUESTIONS

- » During COVID-19 the Canadian government quickly dispensed infrastructure funding and loosened the rules to respond to people living in Canada. How can the same approach be taken to immediately address the Indigenous water crisis?
- » How can the government play a role in establishing social indicators to guide future infrastructure investments and strategic priorities?
- » How can the government support the integration of social infrastructure and equity into land use related academic programs and professional disciplines?

### Participatory and Democratic Infrastructure

DEFINITION: Participatory and democratic infrastructure, sometimes called deliberative democracy refers how people participate in the political decision-making process through different ways such as voting; expressing opinions on public issues and governmental actions; forming interest groups; influencing decisions by demonstrating or lobbying; filing lawsuits to contest actions; establishing partnerships with government agencies; or mobilizing attention to issues through artistic expression. All infrastructure types either hinder or foster participation. Also, meaningful participation extends beyond the public consultation process. The latter often results in community engagement fatigue and broken promises.

SCOPE AND DIMENSION: The institution, practice and theory of democracy assert the necessity of widespread participation of the public. However, empirical evidence<sup>7</sup> collected over the past half-century finds that many individuals and groups do not have the opportunity to meaningfully participate and, equally disturbing, that those at the top end of the wealth and income distribution ladder are increasingly provided with more opportunities to participate. This trend is apparent across all levels of elected leadership and the voter base. Although women's representation within the political system has increased since 1921 when Agnes Macphail became the first woman elected to the House of Common, women still represent only 35 per cent of all legislators in Canada.<sup>8</sup> In the 2015 federal election, visible

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<sup>6</sup> <https://canurb.org/wp-content/uploads/OpenLetter-ACallToCourage-Final-June2020.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11158-017-9382-1>

<sup>8</sup> <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/november-2019/house-of-commons-becoming-more-reflective-of-diverse-population/>

minority groups represented only 12.9 per cent of all candidates from the five main parties. This lack of representation among elected officials can be found at all levels of government, from school board trustees to city councillors and mayors.

This trend undermines the very tenets of democracy because representing all members of a constituency is as important as being able to cast a vote for representation. Organizations like Apathy is Boring based in Montreal and Progress Toronto are working to make political participation more inclusive, which is paramount. In a demographically diverse country, globally known for multiculturalism and acceptance of all people, having the option of voting for one of five men or one of five white people, fails to fulfil the aspirational tenets of democracy.

Commissions and regulatory bodies across the country play an integral role in facilitating public participation pertaining to multiple infrastructure types. Land-use tribunals and committees across Canada are independent bodies that help to resolve disputes related to development projects and most, if not all, planning agencies have a “duty to consult” clause. The Métis Settlements Appeal Tribunal<sup>9</sup> promotes self-governance and engages the public to resolve land and membership disputes and amends right-of-entry orders and settles compensation disputes for oil and gas activities on settlement lands.

Also, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) holds public hearings, round-table discussions, informal forums and online discussions designed to gather Canadians' views about broadcasting and telecommunications services—information that we can then act on to serve the public interest. Its commissioners regularly participate in meetings with their international counterparts in 25 countries to discuss new technologies, new market arrangements and emerging trends, which Indy Johar, a co-founder of Dark Matter Laboratories, asserts is imperative due to the transnational nature of digital infrastructure.

While many people may not always view private corporations as partners enabling widespread public participation, they too have an important role to play. In many countries, including Canada, infrastructure cannot be solely financed by “the public purse”<sup>10</sup> so the involvement of private partners cannot be diminished or ignored. They also offer benefits such as the mobilization of the private sector’s technological expertise and managerial competencies in the public interest. In a large number of countries, private participation in infrastructure has in recent decades helped boost both the coverage and efficiency of infrastructure services. Despite the fact that many large infrastructure projects are monopolistic in nature, the private sector<sup>11</sup> can play a role in increasing inclusivity in infrastructure when there is careful planning and oversight.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.msat.gov.ab.ca>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/daf/inv/investment-policy/38309896.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> <https://inclusiveinfra.github.org/action-areas/private-sector-roles-and-participation/>

Recognizing these and other democratic systems and stakeholders that make valuable contributions required for robust participation, we must honour the distinct role of local leaders, civic institutions and spaces, activist movements and informal groups that are not only building pathways to meaningful participation but also co-creating core principles that underpin meaningful and equitable public participation. Serena Purdy, a public health scholar & local organizer with Friends of Kensington Market, locates these approaches within a relational theoretic framework. "Relationalism sees ethical decision-making as rooted in communities, and communities as 'groups of individuals who share values, customs, institutions, and interests.' The benefit of that is that you can view the community as a dynamic network, which is essentially what infrastructure is."

The initiatives undertaken within this context are multifarious, including but not limited to citizen assemblies, community-centred design processes; participatory budgeting, mutual aide and community care networks and Indigenous elder circles. These and other participatory processes overlap with social infrastructure and tend to move at the speed of relationship and trust-building while being agile enough to respond to crises as we've witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Mary Rowe, CEO of Canadian Urban Institute states, "Public participation of all kinds is most appropriate and effective when it is led, designed, funded and managed locally." Informed by her exceptional political acumen, Ms. Rowe adds that when appropriate, local communities should engage elected representatives across all levels of government to co-identify change levers and policies to translate community inputs to tangible action and structural transformation. On the topic of action and impact, Tim Draimin, a senior fellow at Community Foundations of Canada, underscores an equally critical point, "We must enshrine equitable public participation through the lifecycle of the development of all infrastructure types taking into account how it is designed, how it is funded, how it is built, and how it is stewarded into the future." By using a bottom-up approach that creates space for local knowledge, trauma, rituals and power, the depth and impact of public participation will be significantly enhanced.

#### KEY QUESTIONS

- » How can the government address barriers and provide the public information to enable meaningful public participation related to upcoming infrastructure investments?
- » How can participatory processes related to infrastructure first and foremost address Indigenous reconciliation while redressing other historical harms?
- » How can participatory processes related to infrastructure be more accountable, reciprocal and clear about the community's scope of influence?

## Economic Infrastructure

DEFINITION: Economic infrastructure refers to the physical infrastructure, natural resources, technology, public services and financial institutions that facilitate economic growth. These include railways, airways, telecommunications systems, banks and waterways. In some cases,

there is a co-benefit and interdependency, meaning that these and other forms of economic infrastructure are reliant on each other for their individual economic growth.

SCOPE AND DIMENSION: Evidence shows a direct and positive correlation<sup>12</sup> between infrastructure economic growth and social equity. For instance, investments in transportation infrastructure reduce travel time, thus positively impacting production and distribution at the global and local level. Also, water and sanitation systems are associated with enhancing learning abilities and the development of labour skills. These and other examples are closely associated with studies that find that one per cent growth in the stock of infrastructure is associated with one per cent growth in per-capita GDP.<sup>13</sup> While many of us benefit from living in a country with robust economic infrastructure that supports significant aspects of social equity, it's time to reform the traditional, capitalistic prism through which the state propels and calculates economic growth.

The long-standing practice of centring economic growth has led to broken land treaties, labour exploitation, extractive land-use practices and climate change. As well, ideas pertaining to human productivity inadvertently contribute to ableism; the devaluation of elders/seniors; the stifling of innovation and creativity; and they diminish bold social policy. Moreover, fiscal policy, public accounting and public infrastructure investment approaches that prioritize physical infrastructure over social infrastructure to maximize financial returns often have the reverse effect. Since 1976, intangible capital has grown at twice the rate of tangible capital, and currently accounts for more than 35 per cent of Canada's total capital stock. An intangible economy needs different sorts of physical infrastructure and also has a greater need for intangible infrastructure. These critiques and trends have prompted economist and activists alike to make strong counter-proposals for rethinking economic infrastructure, calculating return on investment (ROI) and defining growth in sustainable ways that enhance the health of the public and the planet.

Governments and policy researchers globally, and across Canada, are recognizing that adopting a more-holistic approach to infrastructure accounting and investment can better optimize infrastructure investments to achieve the government's long-term strategic goals.

New Zealand recently published a Wellbeing Budget prioritizing mental health; child poverty and domestic violence; sustainability; community resilience; and economic performance. This approach breaks down silos between economic, environmental and social equity that together redefine prosperity in an ethical and accountable manner. Similarly, the EU-funded Smart Public Intangibles (SPINTAN) project has developed a framework for accounting for the total economy that includes intangible infrastructure investments in education and health care. In addition, the Wellbeing Economy Alliance<sup>14</sup> is a 10-year project that aims to be a catalyst for systems change by linking and co-ordinating activity at all levels of the wellbeing

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.cepal.org/en/publications/36307-infrastructure-integration-and-equity-social-impact-health-and-public>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.toppr.com/bytes/economic-infrastructure/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://wellbeingeconomy.org/>

economy movement to create a critical mass of people and organizations working toward a common vision around the need to shift economies from being focused on economic growth to delivering human and ecological wellbeing. At the same time, the Indigenomics Institute<sup>15</sup> is an Indigenous economic advisory group for the public, governments, Indigenous communities and the private sector. Indigenomics honours the powerful Indigenous wisdom about local economy, relationships and human values. It explores the pathway between the indigenous relationship and modern economies.

In 2021, the Canadian federal budget introduced a Quality-of-Life Framework, recognizing broader measures of progress and prosperity beyond economic growth. Among numerous commitments to social infrastructure, the budget commits to a landmark investment in early learning and childcare, noting that this kind of investment pays for itself and that, “for every dollar invested in early learning and childcare in Quebec, between \$1.50 and \$2.80 comes back to the broader economy.”<sup>16</sup>

These and other emerging frameworks and evidence-based approaches point to progress. However, we must be careful about how we are building the business case for further economic infrastructure reforms by demonstrating return on investment and emphasizing productivity. Take for instance, “One in 5 Canadians are disabled. And 2 of 5 Canadians who are poor are disabled.”<sup>17</sup> Many of these individuals contribute to the economy but many visible and invisible disabilities prevent disabled people from working. When considering infrastructure investments that create greater physical and social accessibility, an ROI and productivity lens will not lead to ethical decision-making that honours all of these individuals while safeguarding their human rights. Rabia Khedr, national director at Disability Without Poverty, is leading extraordinary disability justice work centred on love for all people and the principle that, “every Canadian regardless of disability should be able to afford the basic essentials of life and to enthusiastically participate in society without financial, physical or social barriers.”

The Network for the Advancement of Black Communities is also engaging in unparalleled work advocating for Black peoples’ inclusion in economic systems and infrastructure related opportunities through an equity lens. Executive director Amanuel Melles and project coordinator Minnie Karanja note, “Black and Indigenous communities have historically been excluded from economic systems, generational wealth-building and labour opportunities related to the development of physical infrastructure.” The group, along with numerous others, feel strongly that new pathways toward fair and equal access for racialized and low-income communities to meaningfully shape community benefits agreements, access procurement opportunities related to infrastructure development, and be paid a decent wage for work is fundamental to redefining economic prosperity in Canada.

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<sup>15</sup> <http://indigenomicsinstitute.com>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.budget.gc.ca/2021/report-rapport/intro-en.html?wbdisable=true>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.disabilitywithoutpoverty.ca/>

## KEY QUESTIONS

- » How can the government build on its Quality-of-Life Framework, further deepening explicit value-based messages, investments and initiatives that lead us into a more economically just and sustainable future?
- » How can we create substantive pathways for equity- and sovereignty-seeking groups to benefit from infrastructure investments, government procurement processes and the development of physical infrastructure?
- » What immediate steps can be taken to ensure all people living in Canada receive a living wage or social benefits?

## Digital Infrastructure

DEFINITION: Digital infrastructure—often referred to as framework infrastructure—encompasses information technologies, devices and equipment, online platforms and digital services. Examples include the internet backbone, broadband and online data-collection programs. Digital infrastructure is rightfully lauded for supporting economic infrastructure, the development of physical infrastructure, democratic-knowledge production and civic participation. However, like offline infrastructure types, digital infrastructure is unaffordable for many, poses privacy and surveillance risks, and is inequitably distributed, diminishing its values and efficacy.

SCOPE AND DIMENSION: Digital infrastructure has transformed culture, created revenue streams that were inconceivable a few decades ago and even given rise to new dialects. It is rapidly advancing innovation and connectivity across all infrastructure types. But some demographic groups are being left behind as we sprint toward the future. This “digital divide” has multiple implications and adverse impacts for people living in Canada. According to the CRTC<sup>18</sup>, nearly 86 per cent of households have standard levels of broadband speeds and access to unlimited data. But in rural areas, only 40 per cent do and in First Nations communities, only 30 per cent of households do. Also, connections in these areas tend to be slower and service is generally more expensive. Numerous reports find that digital disparities are not solely rural/urban but also occur within cities where residents in low-income neighbourhoods face barriers to access. Just as disabled people face barriers navigating physical infrastructure, there are unfortunately barriers for many people to navigating digital spaces.

Digital infrastructure also poses surveillance concerns for equity-seeking and sovereignty-seeking groups. This is particularly relevant as more municipalities adopt a “smart cities” approach. These surveillance concerns exist on digital platforms themselves, particularly among more-privileged neighbourhood groups that sometimes create a version of online neighbourhood watch, which can also serve to profile and alienate “others” perceived to be out of place in their areas. Another source of tension perpetuated by digital infrastructure is

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<sup>18</sup> <https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/internet/internet.htm>

the role it plays in fueling polarization and social conflict. For instance, as a nation experiencing a sharp rise in explicit public expressions of Islamophobia, anti-Indigeneity, anti-Blackness and anti-Asian sentiments, and record high police-reported hate crimes<sup>19</sup>, it is important to consider the ways that digital infrastructure is creating a haven for fascists and other hateful individuals and groups.

At the same time, digital infrastructure can be an antidote to loneliness, which is also a growing epidemic. It is also a powerful connector for individuals who may not otherwise have the opportunity to get to know each other across differences. However, digital platforms have engagement limitations, particularly as they relate to public consultation processes. When consulting the public about infrastructure investments such as the redevelopment of a low-income neighbourhood or design of a new park, it is important to meet people where they are. This allows communities themselves to provide in-depth inputs and ask questions, which is almost impossible when filling in an online public engagement survey.

Finally, given the ways that digital infrastructure is shaping physical infrastructure and the offline world overall, it is necessary to not only question who has access to digital infrastructure, but also to ask who has the power to shape digital infrastructure. Michael Lewkowitz, general partner with Possibilian Ventures, underscores this distinction, “Given the growing role of digital technologies in the way in which we organize society and live out our lives, we need to create greater access for all people to co-shape digital infrastructure to respond to a wide range of needs and opportunities.” Anthonia Ogundele, founder and executive director of Ethos Lab, concurs. “We’re seeing how blockchain is contributing to the reimagining of affordable housing, and conversely, it is also emboldening corporations to sell virtual land and assets like real property without broad public knowledge and participation.” The infrastructure for our digital future is being built now and at an accelerated pace, so we must be vigilant and accountable while embracing exciting new opportunities.

## KEY QUESTIONS

- » What are short- and long-term solutions for addressing the digital divide in Canada?
- » How can the government and digital platform providers create updated terms of use to combat online hate?
- » What role can civic and academic institutions play in creating greater access for all people living in Canada to co-shape digital infrastructure?

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2018/11/29/hate-crimes-hit-record-high-in-canada-with-most-targeting-muslim-black-and-jewish-communities.html>

## Resource

Annotated Bibliography

Developed by Jay Pitter, MES | 2021

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The following bibliography has been culled from a larger catalogue of resources, which inform Jay Pitter’s placemaking practice focused on urban design and social equity. It is intended to provide urbanists and other interested stakeholders with concepts for thinking about urban equity amid and beyond COVID-19. This resource has been formatted to be user friendly. Key information pertaining to each resource appears alphabetically—each title is a live link—followed by citations at the end of the document.

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Outbreaks like coronavirus start in and spread from the edges of cities

S. Harris Ali | Creighton Connolly | Roger Keil | *The Conversation* | 2020

This article argues a need to examine where and how disease outbreaks occur in relation to the urbanization of cities. Themes discussed include economic forces, ecological changes, mobility infrastructure, “megaurbanization,” and racial and intercultural conflict.

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Geography and the Political Imaginary in the Novels of Toni Morrison

Herman Beavers | Springer International Publishing | 2018

This book critically examines and reviews the spatial and domestic geographies that are present in Toni Morrison’s work to highlight the “deep structure of power relations” in Black communities. Emphasis is placed on “tight spaces” and sites of “erasure” and “silence.”

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Model CBAs and Community Benefits Ordinances as Tools for Negotiating Equitable Development: Three Critical Cases

Nicholas Belongie | Robert Mark Silverman | *Journal of Community Practice* | 2018

This Detroit-based case study highlights the ways community benefits agreements and ordinances can be used as tools to advance equitable development.

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Indigenous Communities Should Dictate How \$1 Billion Infrastructure Investment is Spent

Kerry Black | *The Conversation* | 2021

This article discusses Canada’s \$1 billion investment deal dedicated to First Nations, Métis and Inuit infrastructure in which the Canada Infrastructure Bank (CIB) is establishing the Indigenous Community Infrastructure Initiative (ICII), which will enable the building of new infrastructure projects in Indigenous communities and help generate investments in projects that are vital to economic growth and environmental protection. The article particularly highlights the large infrastructure divide within Indigenous communities which impact drinking water, housing, and wastewater treatments, as well as assets such as roads, bridges, energy, broadband connectivity, trade and transportation.

## Walking While Black

Garnette Cadogen | Lit Hub | 2016

This essay chronicles a Black man's experience of walking along the streets in the Caribbean and in the United States. Cadogen shares his informal map as "often bizarre, cultural and political and social activity" and appoints himself "its nighttime cartographer."

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## The Changing Bases of Segregation in the United States

Thurston Domina | Douglas S. Massey | Jonathan Rothwell | The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science | 2009

This article discusses the role of spatial segregation that Black, Latino and Asian communities experienced in the United States. Themes discussed in this article are segregation, racism, class and ethnicity.

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## Digital Divide Holds Back Indigenous Communities and Canada's Economy, New Report Finds

Peter Evans | CBC News | 2021

This article discusses the impact that the digital divide has on Indigenous communities and Canada's economy. The article specifically highlights the growing cohort of Indigenous entrepreneurs remaining a largely untapped resource due to the systemic digital divide. The themes discussed were remote and rural communities, infrastructure gap, digital inequities, and Canada's economy.

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## Barbara Kentner, and missing and murdered Indigenous women in Thunder Bay

Sarah Garofalo | Excalibur | 2021

This article specifically discusses the death of Barbara Kentner, and missing and murdered Indigenous women in Thunder Bay. The article highlights the longstanding history with anti-Indigenous racism within Thunder Bay which is seen through instances such as the inquest into the death of seven Indigenous students and the recently released independent report unveiling the institutional and systemic racism within the Thunder Bay Police Force.

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## Water insecurity in Canadian Indigenous communities: some inconvenient truths

Maura Hanrahan | Amy Hudson | Atanu Sarkar | Pub Med | 2015

This article discusses the complex socio-economic and cultural dynamics of water insecurities in Indigenous communities, and the health consequences that emerge as a result. The themes discussed include water insecurity, accessibility, availability, quality, and health-related concerns.

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## Smart cities have an opportunity to become far more inclusive

Homi Kharas | Jaana Remes | World Economic Forum | 2018

This article unpacks the "digital infrastructure" gap and asserts that equity and inclusivity must be centered within smart cities schemes.

Introduction to Design Equity

Kristine Miller | University of Minnesota Libraries Publishing | 2018

This book provides a guide/process to help professional designers, non-profit, government partners and community members design for the public interest using an equity lens.

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The sinking class: the New Yorkers left to fight the climate crisis alone

Emily Nonko | The Guardian | 2019

This article highlights how public housing residents and other marginalized groups located at the waterfront are being disproportionately impacted by a lack of protective waterfront infrastructure.

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“What’s up with all these walls?” Racialized Lesbian/Queer Women Immigrants and Belonging in Toronto

Sheila C. S. Pardoe | Ryerson University | 2011

This article focuses on the experiences of racialized lesbian/queer immigrant women, an often invisibilized category where there is a lack of scholarship and physical space.

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Urban Density: Confronting the Distance Between Desire and Disparity

Jay Pitter | AZURE | 2020

This article challenges urbanists to cast their gaze beyond the downtown core to consider “forgotten densities,” a term coined by Pitter to describe residential density types such as favelas, shanty towns, factory dormitories, seniors’ homes, tent cities, Indigenous reserves, prisons, mobile home parks, shelters and public housing.

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Public Space Praxis: Cultural Capacity and Political Efficacy in Latina/o Placemaking

Michael Rios | Berkeley Planning Journal | 2009

This article unpacks how spatial interventions and placemaking can support Latina/o cultural capacity building within the context of politics and urban policy.

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Is the Internet a Useful Resource For Indigenous Women Living In Remote Communities In Canada, Australia and New Zealand To Access Health Resources?

Christine Smillie-Adjarkwa | York University | 2005

This report focused on Indigenous people in Canada, Australia and New Zealand to discuss the following questions: “What kind of access is available to the internet in remote communities? “Where is the internet accessible in these communities?” and “whether or not the internet is a useful tool for Aboriginal women within these communities to access health information”. The themes discussed include digital divide remote Aboriginal communities and internet accessibility.

HOW THE ACORN UNFOLDS IN EDUCATION: Mapping the Legal and Normative Orders that Interact to Inform First Nation Youths' Right to Education through Legal Pluralism and Critical Legal Pluralism

Patricia Robinet | University of Manitoba | 2018

This research paper explores a variety of themes relating to Indigenous experiences and education within Thunder Bay including, availability and accessibility to education, barriers particular to post-secondary education; discrimination and racism in education; and perceived definitions on the right to an education. This paper specifically highlights the racially motivated death of Barbara Kentner by Brayden Bushby as an example to display the violence, verbal abuse, and racism experienced by Indigenous people in Thunder Bay.

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Queer Space, After Pulse

James Rojas | Susan Surface | Archinect Podcast | 2016

In the aftermath of the shooting at Pulse night club in Orlando, Florida, this podcast discusses queer and Latinx culture, spaces, community and the idea of “third spaces.” It features Susan Surface, queer designer, architect and program director at Design in Public Health, and James Rojas, an urban designer whose work centers on Latino urbanism and community engagement.

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Mapping neighborhood outdoor activities: space, time, gender and age

M. Reza Shirazi | Journal of Urban Design | 2018

This article analyzes spatial, temporal, gender patterns and social activities in urban neighborhoods. The methodology prompts urban planners to observe socio-spatial characteristics of a neighborhood and to think critically about age-friendly spaces.

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The Black Plague

Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor | The New Yorker | 2020

This article from the New Yorker discusses the systemic neglect racial and socioeconomic inequalities putting Black communities at risk of exposure to and while recovering from COVID-19.

### Resources For Processing Difficult Information

Pleasure Activism – Change that Nourishes You

Adrienne Maree Brown | Neil Sattin | Youtube | 2019

In this interview, Adrienne Maree Brown (author, activist and healer) shares strategies for tapping into pleasure and desire while fighting for social change.

Relieving Stress: Mind Over Muscle

Tara Bennett-Goleman | Daniel Goleman | The New York Times | 1986

This article explains how stress induces muscle tension in the workplace and provides methods for relief.

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Guided Meditation

Deepak Chopra | The Chopra Center | 2014

This article includes links to several mind-clearing meditations varying from five minutes to one hour in length.

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## Glossary of Terms

### Equity-based Placemaking & Community Engagement

Equity-based placemaking and community engagement begins with respectful and informed conversations. While we occasionally use an outdated or incorrect word or term, it's important to continually strive to increase our equity-based placemaking vocabulary. Here is a list of terms that may be helpful during the course of the work.

“\_\_\_\_\_” ism: Harmful beliefs, behaviours or institutional practices by a group or person with power directed against specific groups, rationalized by an underlying belief that certain people are superior to others. Examples include ageism, antisemitism, audism, cis-sexism, classism, ethnocentrism, heterosexism, racism, sexism, shadism and sizeism.

“\_\_\_\_\_” phobia: A learned dislike, aversion or an extreme, irrational fear and/or hatred of a particular group of people. It is expressed through beliefs and tactics that devalue, demean and terrorize people. Examples include biphobia, homophobia, Islamophobia, transphobia, xenophobia and others.

**Access Barriers:** Any obstruction that prevents people with visible and invisible disabilities from using facilities, equipment and online tools.

**Accommodation:** An adjustment made to policies, programs and/or practices to enable individuals to benefit from and participate in the provision of services equally and perform to the best of their ability. Accommodations are provided so that individuals are not disadvantaged based on the prohibited grounds of discrimination identified in the Ontario Human Rights Code or other similar codes. All accommodations should be dignified.

**Affordable Housing:** Affordable rental housing, as defined by the City's Official Plan, is housing where the total monthly shelter cost (gross monthly rent including utilities – heat, hydro and hot water – but excluding parking and cable television charges) is at or below one times the average City of Toronto rent, by unit type (number of bedrooms), as reported annually by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

**Asset-Based Community Development:** Asset-Based Community Development is defined in different ways; however common values for building equitable, sustainable and resilient communities tie the concept together across the globe. These primarily include a focus on supporting existing community assets and capacity; equity, inclusion and participatory approaches; local leadership and the importance of building relationships; and, transparency and accountability.

**Bias:** A subjective opinion, preference, or prejudice often formed by lack of education and/or exposure.

**Cognitive Dissonance:** A contradiction of beliefs or when a person's belief is inconsistent with their actions.

**Community Engagement:** The process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of those people. It is a powerful vehicle for bringing about environmental and behavioral changes that will improve the health of the community and its members. It often involves partnerships and coalitions that help mobilize resources and influence systems, change relationships among partners, and serve as catalysts for changing policies, programs, and practices.

**Cultural Competence:** A person's ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures. Cultural competence has four components: awareness of one's own cultural worldview; attitude toward cultural differences; knowledge of different cultural practices and worldviews; and cross-cultural skills. Developing cultural competence results in an ability to better understand, communicate with and effectively interact with people across cultures.

**Deliberative Democracy:** A system in which citizens/participants have the opportunity to consider multiple perspectives and facts to inform decisions that impact their lives.

**Dominant Group:** A group that is considered more powerful and privileged in a particular society or context and that has power and influence over others.

**Duty to Accommodate:** The legal obligation that employers, organizations, service providers and public institutions have under human rights legislation to ensure fair and equal access to services in a way that respects the dignity of every person. The principle of dignity strives to maximize integration and promote full participation in society, in consideration of the importance of privacy, confidentiality, comfort, autonomy, individuality and self-esteem.

**Equity:** The practice of ensuring just, inclusive and respectful treatment of all people, with consideration of individual and group diversities. Equity honours and accommodates the specific needs of individuals and groups.

**Healing:** The process of becoming well after a physical injury and or personal loss. Revitalization initiatives often create unaddressed feelings of loss and trauma for equity-seeking groups. Community engagement should engender a form of community healing for those from equity-seeking groups.

**Intangible Cultural Heritage:** Cultural heritage refers to tangible and intangible expressions of the history of a place. Tangible cultural heritage refers to physical aspects of the built environment. Intangible heritage, which is less understood, refers to equally important community assets like place-based stories, rituals and celebrations.

**Internalized Oppression:** When members of a marginalized group accept stereotypes assigned to them and begin to believe they are inferior. This can result in self-hatred, speaking poorly about one's own group and powerlessness. This form of oppression is oftentimes difficult to detect and perpetuates systemic inequity.

**Intersectionality:** Intersectionality is a theory and analytic framework coined by African American scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw. It helps us to understand how various aspects of our identities such as race, class and gender overlap, creating interconnected forms of discrimination. This scholarship is increasingly applied to restorative justice, health care and city-building as it enables professionals to mitigate systemic and spatial barriers.

**Intrinsic Personal & Community Power Versus Empowering:** Oftentimes the term "empowering" is used in relation to equity-seeking groups such as women, racialized people, disabled people and poor people. While these and other groups are subject to uneven power relations and systemic barriers, they also possess intrinsic forms of power such as resilience, creativity and intangible cultural heritage. Rather than "empowering" people it is more effective and respectful to share space, resources and access to decision-making. This distinction directly emerges from Jay Pitter's equity-based placemaking practice.

**Lived Experience:** Lived experience is an important form of expertise often underutilized in urban development processes. Individuals with lived experience of a place and/or social identity possess a deepened knowledge of neighbourhood strengths, challenges and opportunities. Lived experience experts are also the keepers of important place-based stories and rituals. When this form of knowledge is coupled with

professional expertise and translated into design, programming and policy decisions—community transformation processes are more harmonious and productive.

**Trauma-Informed Placemaking & Community Engagement:** Place-based community trauma is often caused by divestment, displacement and neighbourhood-based stigma. It impacts social groups and entire neighbourhoods subjected to other forms of systemic inequities such as historical oppression and poverty. The goal of the Trauma-Informed Community Building and Engagement model is to contribute to the social fabric, health and agency of the community.

**Urban Revitalization:** Urban Revitalization refers to design and policy initiatives intended to transform a place or structure considered to be in “decline” due to economic, social and safety factors. These initiatives often include upgrades to street infrastructure, new housing developments and the provision of amenities such as parks. These changes can create many benefits and enhance communities. However, this term is contested by equity-seeking groups—often diminished or erased in the revitalization processes.

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