How to Lead an Equitable Adjudication Process

Why infrastructure and equity?

The Community Foundations of Canada, working in partnership with the Canadian Urban Institute and community partners, has been selected to identify and fund place-based projects through the Canada Healthy Communities Initiative (CHCI)—a funding program created in response to challenges created or worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic.

While people across Canada have experienced and continue to experience COVID-19 related challenges, this fund is intended to meet the needs of the most adversely impacted communities. Data collected from across the country confirm these priority communities are made up of high numbers of individuals from equity-seeking groups such as Black, Indigenous and people of colour (BIPOC), people living on low-incomes, unhoused people, and women working in essential and informal sectors. Coincidentally, these individuals tend to reside in communities historically harmed or excluded from infrastructure investments like safe street infrastructure, adequately maintained affordable housing and good local amenities.

With this in mind, it is paramount to integrate an equity-based lens throughout the entire granting program, including and especially the adjudication process.

But how?

To achieve this goal, we must first unpack the meaning of infrastructure. The term infrastructure is popularly understood as the provision of roads, buildings and power generation plants. While physical infrastructure is important, there's also an increasing recognition of social infrastructure and digital infrastructure. These forms of infrastructure—physical, social and digital—contribute to overall equity and community health outcomes. The Canada Healthy Communities Initiative applies a holistic lens to include and evaluate all three of these infrastructure types.

This is a great first step. However, the practical application of this inclusive approach requires careful planning and considerations. Despite the fact that the link between infrastructure and social equity has been explored for decades within academia, the infrastructure sector is just beginning to make these connections and incorporate these approaches. For example, a report on the Canada Green Building Council's website states: "Social equity is a critical issue in contemporary cities. Cities and communities are encouraged to cater to social infrastructure at the design stage to support better quality of life and community well-being." The Canada Healthy Communities Initiative is well positioned to model how this aspirational goal can be met tangibly by funding a wide-range of equitable, place-based projects.

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Include a wide range of individuals engaged in place-based work

Infrastructure projects like adapting sidewalks to create space for restaurant patios or reallocating streets to accommodate more cyclists and walkers are common and worthwhile interventions. These types of projects are typically led by highly credentialed professionals such as engineers, urban planners, architects and placemakers with urban design training. However, when assessing infrastructure projects, especially those responding to COVID-19 related challenges disproportionately impacting equity-seeking groups, it's important to consider a wider range of stakeholders leading place-based projects. These types of place-based projects tend to prioritize community engagement, service provision and resident accessibility. Many of the stakeholders leading this work do not communicate using technical terms or sleek design sketches, but they are adapting spaces and places to meet urgent needs. When compiling your juror list, survey your community and also include the following groups and individuals engaged in place-based work:

- **Social service organizations** using unconventional indoor spaces and adapted outdoor spaces to continue delivering essential community service programs during COVID-19;

- **Online community care groups** matching residents with resources to residents with urgent needs;

- **Neighbourhood association and parent groups** informally installing community fridges to help alleviate food insecurity and hunger;

- **Public health agencies and activists** establishing and programming safe injection sites and outdoor mental health service sites;

- **Artists** creating new online and offline spaces to support local cultural economies;

- **Informal greenspace stewards and clean up crews** helping maintain park trails, and extending supplies and services to unhoused people living in encampments;

- **Youth leaders** serving on advisory groups and boards providing advice on how to respond to the needs of young people;

- **Community animators** running errands for elderly neighbours and leading physically distanced neighbourhoods walks;

- **Feminists groups** finding new ways of connecting with vulnerable and isolated women;

- **Public health professionals** working with volunteers to organize pop-up COVID-19 health and information services;

- **Faith-based groups** collaborating with communities to provide non-denominational spaces and support services

- **Caregivers** informally collaborating to provide respite for individuals supporting children and elders;

- **Multilingual residents** serving as informal community translators to ensure individuals who are not proficient in English receive vital COVID-19 health and service information.

Hub Committee Size, Expertise & Lived-Experience:

A jury should be comprised of 5-7 individuals representing the following areas of expertise, identities and lived-experiences:

- Deep local knowledge, both mainstream and marginalized;
- Geographic diversity: rural, suburban and urban (this mix may differ across regions);
- Technical expertise: formal land use, tactical urbanism and digital;
- Diverse social identities: race, gender, class, age, ability, linguistic etc.;
- CF Diversity: Lead Hub versus supporting.

Accommodations

Accommodations refer to the support individuals require to fully participate in a physical space or process including: accessible meeting spaces, childcare, eldercare, language translation, transportation, and meals. Ideally, everyone would be provided with all of their desired and needed accommodations but this isn't always possible due to limited resources. When making difficult decisions pertaining to the provision of resources, many individuals tend to offer everyone the same accommodations because equality is often wrongly conflated with equity.

Equality means responding to everyone in the same manner, whereas equity means responding to everyone in a manner that ensures fairness and justice. While there isn't a singular approach for achieving this aspirational outcome, there's broad consensus that achieving equity requires the consideration of individual and group identity, histories of marginalization, and spatial and systemic barriers. This more nuanced approach ensures everyone receives what they need to participate and thrive within spaces and processes. The following is a list of accommodations that may support full juror participation—especially those from equity-seeking groups:

- Assign an individual who can provide technology support such as one-on-one instructions for individuals unaccustomed to digital platforms that have been widely used during COVID-19, short-term laptop loan, and/or suggestions for local internet hotspots, currently operated by libraries, community agencies and faith-based organizations;
- Provide honoraria for in-home child or elder care to be carried out by family members or professionals already in their bubble;
- Provide translation services for languages other than French, prioritizing Indigenous languages;
- Provide honoraria (no less than $500 for individuals from equity-seeking groups and individuals who are un or under employed);
- $75 meal allowance for half-full day adjudication sessions.

Whatever you decide, please make all available accommodations known upfront so jurors aren't made to inquire.

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Preparing the Jurors for a Safe(r) Equity and Infrastructure Conversation

Each individual has distinct experiences that shape their definition and sense of safety. As such, it is impossible to promise a safe space, process or conversation. That stated, steps can be taken to enhance levels of individual and group safety. The following considerations may help you to establish a safe(r) virtual space for the Canada Healthy Communities Initiative adjudication process:

- Clearly underscore the distinction between equality and equity at the outset of the conversation. This is important because some jurors may become uncomfortable if they perceive an applicant group as getting preferential treatment over another. Remind everyone that just as local adjudication tables were established to fairly assess applications from geographic communities with distinct needs, access to resources and local character, the same fair approach is being applied to applicants from equity-seeking groups;

- Acknowledge that issues related to equity and place—colonialism, racist public space enforcement, gender-based violence, unhoused populations etc.—are difficult topics to discuss for people from mainstream/dominant culture and equity-seeking groups. Remind everyone that although we are differently impacted by these and other issues; we've all inherited these terrible histories and have the power to collectively make a positive impact within our daily lives and adjudication process;

- At the beginning of the adjudication process, encourage jurors to identify three guiding principles for having an informative and productive conversation. Also, take a few moments to unpack each principle. For instance, respect has differing meaning for each individual;

- Encourage jurors to "speak their truth" in ways that don't contravene historical facts or diminish harm done to entire communities;

- Ask jurors to extend grace if an imperfect word is used or idea is ill-framed unintentionally. We're all learning;

- Be clear that if someone speaks about harm naming a particular group that it is understood that not all members of that group are homogenous or equally complicit. For example, although men broadly benefit from and oftentimes perpetuate patriarchy; there are wonderful men who treat women and gender-diverse individuals with immense care and respect;

- Remind people to breathe, pause and make "I statements" if they experience discomfort during the conversation. Also, remind jurors that discomfort isn't necessarily bad; it is often a precursor to personal growth.

JP

Developed by Jay Pitter Placemaking

An award-winning practice specializing in equity-based placemaking & urbanism
Healthy Communities Initiative Infrastructure & Equity Lead

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Equity Guidance for the Review Process

How to assess vastly different place-based projects using an equity-based lens

The Canada Healthy Communities Initiative is incredibly inclusive of many types of place-based initiatives across the country. The following is a list of considerations that may support jurors with assessing varied proposals within the same adjudication process:

- While comparison is an inherent aspect of the adjudication process, be sure to equally assess the applicants' past experience, process, and budget against their own stated objectives/vision;
- When assessing projects with significant scope variance focus on impact—a small project has the potential to deliver big impact and the reverse is true;
- Applicants will have different levels of access to evidence-based information underpinning their projects, equally consider stats and stories;
- Each project should centre place but resist the urge to immediately prioritize design heavy interventions over social infrastructure and community care interventions;
- Carefully assess how each applicant describes place in terms of demonstrating an understanding of its complexity—sustainability, environmental justice, untold stories, local wisdom, hidden barriers, and/or invisible policies;
- Remember that ideas of innovation and design excellence differ across communities—value this plurality;
- When assessing projects do not be overly awestruck by sleek drawings and use of technical terms.

Basic Eligibility – Equity Criteria

- The applicant and/or community co-leads tangibly demonstrate a commitment to equity prior to the funding opportunity through policies, past work, team composition, vision statement etc;

- The applicant has a grasp of intersectionality, considering how multiple aspects of identity and lived-experiences shape the ways we engage with on and offline infrastructure;

- The proposed initiative addresses an urgent COVID-19 challenge whilst instilling a sense of hope and vision for more equitable and sustainable infrastructure investments.

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Project Criteria #1: Project Rationale

Criteria

The degree to which the project clearly creates safe and vibrant spaces, improves mobility options or provides digital solutions for communities experiencing the impacts of COVID-19.

Equity Guidance

- Evidence-based project proposal informed by meaningful inputs from affected groups and/or community-based examples of similar approaches;

- The applicant demonstrates an appreciation for historical and psychological safety issues that may arise (where applicable);

- Portfolio proof demonstrating competency and effective collaboration with external stakeholders.

Project Criteria #2: Community Engagement

Criteria

The degree to which the project clearly engages diverse communities in design, implementation and use, and strengthens community resilience; including communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.

Equity Guidance

- The proposed project is reflective of the values and portfolio of the project leads—be sure to also consider the experiences of community co-leads partnering with larger institutions;

- Expertise and lived-experiences support the project vision and goals;

- Meaningful community involvement in terms of project co-leads and/or deep community engagement;

- Meaningful inclusion of community members, including those most adversely impacted by COVID-19;

- The project fulfils the principles of "Nothing for Us Without Us."

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Project Criteria #3: Outcomes

Criteria

The degree to which the project clearly demonstrates short term, immediate benefit and potential longer-term impact, viability and sustainability.

Equity Guidance

- The proposed initiative has the potential to impact long-term systems change and positive community impact;

- Actionable and well-thought-out implementation plan inclusive of project initiation, reasonable timelines for major tasks, monitoring, contingency and evaluation

- Measurability in terms of clear milestones and success indicators;

- The proposed initiative supports a larger local strategic imperative and/or builds on grassroots advocacy;

- The project initiative has the potential of answering an intractable place-based challenge or modelling a new approach.

Project Criteria #4: Project Implementation and Readiness

Criteria

The degree to which the project clearly has developed a responsible work plan, project team, timelines and budget, and has considered required permits and approvals that may affect successful implementation.

Equity Guidance

- Equitable budgeting reflecting fair compensation of all project leads and community contributions;

- The project both addresses the challenges and strengths of the community;

- The project supports capacity building, establishing relationships across difference and empathy-building;

- If heavily focused on adaptation of the built environment, the applicant has demonstrated due diligence in terms of addressing required permits, local by-laws and/or decision-maker buy-in.

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