SDG 11 focuses on the importance of our cities and towns for achieving sustainable development.

Many community foundations are exploring the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within their planning, granting, convening, Vital Signs and more. This Fact Sheet is part of a series that focuses on specific SDGs to engage and inspire community foundations of all sizes to deepen their work around these goals.

What is this approach?

The targets for SDG 11 represent a global approach to safe and affordable housing, sustainable transport systems, the protection of cultural and natural heritage, disaster preparedness, the reduction in our environmental impact, and safe and inclusive public spaces. Sustainability begins in our communities, but rapid urbanization is putting pressure on cities and towns around the world (source). Global housing costs are rising (source), only half the world's urban population has convenient access to public transport (source), and cities face increasing threats from climate change (source). Canada is facing an affordable housing crisis and a decline in community belonging, while many public spaces remain unsafe for women and gender-diverse people, and Black, Indigenous and people of colour.

Canada's national approach to SDG 11 combines leadership from federal, provincial and municipal governments. The federal co-leads for SDG 11 are Infrastructure Canada and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, which bring a focus on green infrastructure investment and a national housing strategy.

This national approach to SDG 11 includes:

- Creating new housing supply, modernizing existing housing and providing resources for community housing providers.

- Supporting Indigenous communities to build and manage their own urban development infrastructure and services in a way that is effective and sustainable. This includes supporting Indigenous people living in or transitioning to urban centres.

- Providing infrastructure investment and support for provincial and local governments to improve the quality, safety and accessibility of public transit.

- Investing in urban infrastructure to address pollution and increase the resilience of communities to climate change and other natural disasters.

- Increasing access to natural and cultural heritage, including parks and green spaces.

> **Indigenous Community Development National Strategy**
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> The Indigenous Community Development National Strategy supports the implementation of community-driven, nation-based development and planning initiatives that engage and empower communities to express their own strengths and visions for the future.
>
> — CANADA VOLUNTARY NATIONAL REVIEW 2018

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Calls to Action include recognition of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Call to Action 43), which establishes Indigenous peoples' rights to their own forms of community development. Bill C-15, legislating the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) into Canadian law, received Royal Assent on June 21, 2021. Canada's national approach to SDG 11 incorporates these rights and involves honouring Indigenous ways of understanding and practising community, of relating to land and in creating culturally appropriate spaces.

Approaches to SDG 11 are inherently local and reflect the efforts of communities across Canada to improve their sustainability and prosperity, and the well-being of all community members.

By considering culturally sensitive housing, housing providers can support practices that define an individual's or a family's cultural identity. An example of this in practice is the design of two-bedroom duplexes in Nunavik, Quebec. The Nunavimmiut community and Quebec's housing agency collaborated to create housing that embraces cultural responsiveness and empowerment for Nunavik residents. Features like a reverse entryway to face the sun and homes built to preserve permafrost demonstrated how culturally appropriate design can be implemented to serve the community and promote cultural empowerment.

— HOMELESS HUB

Local approaches to SDG 11 include:

- Integrated housing developments that are close to transit, work and public services.

- Community-established youth councils for urban planning.

- Social housing initiatives, including rent-to-own options, housing co-ops and developments that incorporate affordable housing units.

- Urban design that creates spaces where people of diverse backgrounds and ages can feel safe, comfortable and included.

- Introduction of sustainable building codes such as Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification.

- Parks and public spaces that are safe and inclusive, including spaces that have trees, are well lit and child-friendly, and encourage people of all ages to visit.

- The work of Indigenous communities in developing their own community infrastructure solutions, including water, energy, roads and housing.

- Local green infrastructure solutions, such as solar or geothermal energy systems in homes and businesses.

Why is it important for grantmakers?

The work of community foundations is deeply connected to SDG 11 and the creation of sustainable communities where we can belong and flourish together. More than 82% of Canadians live in urban areas (source), including 90% of recent immigrants (source), and cities and towns are the places where social and environmental change happens. The importance of SDG 11 is recognized by grantmakers across the country and is the third most funded SDG in Canada (source). Much has been achieved, but new challenges make the work of community grantmakers as important as ever. More than 1 in 10 Canadians is in need of core housing (source) while 21.7% of Indigenous Canadians live in homes in need of major repairs, compared to 6.8% of non-Indigenous Canadians (source). Urban sprawl is often driven by housing affordability, with lower-income families forced to move to the outskirts, incurring longer travel times and increasing transport costs. A disproportionate number of people being pushed out of city centres are Black, Indigenous and people of colour (BIPOC), who are more likely to experience housing discrimination and more often hired into low-income jobs (source).

Economic barriers, cultural differences and discrimination by landlords and real estate agents reinforce racial and ethnic segregation in urban housing. Prospective tenants who are Black document discriminatory experiences with landlords during the rental application process, such as harassment from landlords or refusing to rent to certain ethnic groups. This discrimination often leaves them with only poor-quality housing options.

— HOMELESS HUB

Transport systems can compound issues of urban sprawl, with increasing transport costs and commuting times for low-income families, while lack of public transit increases the environmental impacts of greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution (source). Poor transport connections between rural and urban areas strain family and cultural ties, while for others they are a matter of life and death. In British Columbia, Highway 16 is known as the "Highway of Tears" because of the many women who have been murdered or disappeared along the route. The majority of victims have been Indigenous women hitchhiking between towns due to inadequate transport options (source). Climate change is also impacting cities, with increases in extreme weather and natural disasters, including flash flooding, heat waves, storms and droughts (source). The economic cost of natural disasters in Canada has increased dramatically from $54 million between 1970 and 1994 to $410 million between 2005 to 2014 (source).

- **WORDS YOU SHOULD KNOW** 💬

Belonging
We define belonging simply as being part of a collective "we." It's a two-way street: It's about communities sending signals of acceptance and inclusion, and about individuals cultivating their own connections to community. A sense of belonging is important to build safe, vibrant communities, and it brings purpose to our lives.

— BELONGING: EXPLORING CONNECTION TO COMMUNITY

Community foundations are working to address many of these issues, while also bringing a unique focus on the importance of belonging. Here too we face challenges, with 38% of Canadians feeling like they do not have a stake in their local community, while only half of Canadians think that being involved in community is important (source). We are increasingly aware that we have different experiences of belonging, a fact driven home by the #MeToo movement, the Black Lives Matter protests and the ongoing struggle for Indigenous rights.

Women are twice as likely to worry about their safety on public transport after dark and five times more likely to stay at home at night because of safety concerns, with immigrant and racialized women feeling most unsafe (source). Black Canadians experience discrimination when trying to find housing and neighbourhoods, with a higher proportion of BIPOC Canadians experiencing excessive police surveillance due to racial profiling (source). Most migration to urban centres is by younger people, but their voices are often not included in the design or planning of the communities that they will inherit (source). As Canada diversifies, there is a need to make sure all community members feel like they are welcome and belong.

Research shows that when communities are made up of people who feel they belong and trust each other:

- We are healthier

- Neighbourhoods are safer

- People give more of their time and money to support the community

- Social inclusion improves

- We are more resilient in the face of community emergencies

- We engage in environmentally responsible behaviour

— BELONGING: EXPLORING CONNECTION TO COMMUNITY

Across the country, grantmakers are responding to the importance of these issues and taking actions that advance SDG 11. On the national scale, CFC has partnered with the Future Cities initiative, which "brings together people, ideas, platforms and innovations from across sectors to find new and collaborative ways to address the challenges facing cities" (source). At the same time, many municipalities are engaging with the SDGs as a way to support community sustainability, including incorporating them into their policies, monitoring and impact evaluation, and partnership building. The SDGs can serve as a valuable language for grantmakers to collaborate with municipalities and achieve impact at the community scale.

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Left untended, economic forces tend to be extractive and exclusive, generating greater inequality and making cities less affordable and livable over time. (…) The solution is to harness forces that are prepared to work towards the creation of 'really smart city building,' forces that promote inclusivity and affordability, seek to work in harmony with and respect natural environments, and create spaces that allow residents to meet and mingle with each other in public, thereby retaining an appropriate human scale.

— CITIES OF THE FUTURE

Community foundations clearly see the importance of thriving and sustainable communities, and their work was advancing SDG 11 issues long before the Sustainable Development Goals existed. A snapshot of this work includes:

- Impact investing by many community foundations in affordable housing, including London Community Foundation's partnership to increase affordable housing projects.

- The Centre Wellington Community Foundation's support for the Elora Green Space, which converted a derelict gas station into a vibrant public greenspace to meet, rest and connect.

- Hamilton Community Foundation's support for Sacajawea Non-Profit Housing, which will build 23 affordable rental apartments for Indigenous families.

- The Victoria Foundation's partnership in the NewCities conference, which raised awareness and supported action on the SDGs at the city scale. The Foundation also launched a series of conference legacy grants to support work towards the SDGs in Greater Victoria.

- The Sustainable Community Builder Award launched by the Cranbrook and District Community Foundation and the City of Cranbrook to encourage community sustainability.

- Toronto Foundation's Black and Indigenous Futures Fund, which supports Black and Indigenous leaders, organizations and grassroots groups to identify and advance solutions for their communities.

Common principles to get started

SDG 11 is the lens through which many community foundations will naturally view and take action on the other Sustainable Development Goals. Getting started with SDG 11 involves looking at how your work aligns with the targets that make up this goal, including affordable housing, sustainable transport systems, inclusive community building, the protection of cultural and natural heritage, disaster preparedness, the reduction in our environmental impact, and safe and inclusive public spaces.

01 Learn and understand

- Vital Signs is a great starting point for taking the pulse of the community. Consider adopting an SDG lens to assess community sustainability.

- Gather disaggregated data that allows you to understand how different groups are faring, including the BIPOC and 2SLGBTQ+ communities.

- Use Vital Conversations to dive deeper into understanding what belonging means to your community and to different community members.

- See how your work aligns with your municipality's official community plan or vision document and see if there are opportunities to collaborate.

02 Build relationships

- Develop relationships with your municipal and First Nations governments. See if they are familiar with the SDGs, and consider using the goals as a framework for collaboration.

- Build relationships with local community networks to better understand the needs and programs of different community groups. See the work of the Community Foundation of Lethbridge and Southwestern Alberta in building relationships with Indigenous community members.

- Build relationships with urban planners and property developers to understand the opportunities and constraints they face when supporting community sustainability.

03 Strategic grantmaking

- Use different funding mechanisms to support affordable housing in your community, including grants, impact investing and loans. See the work of the Hamilton and London community foundations.

- Develop targeted funds to support community members who have traditionally experienced exclusion or discrimination, such as Toronto Foundation's Black and Indigenous Futures Fund.

- Support local and green infrastructure to prepare your town or city for the impacts of climate change. See the work of Unflood Ontario, which brings together 12 community foundations to address the risk of flooding caused by climate change.

- Invest in accessible and affordable transport options for local communities. See Hamilton Community Foundation's support for bike sharing.

04 Lead and collaborate

- Explore opportunities to combine Vital Signs and municipal monitoring, including data sharing and collaborative reporting. See the work of The County Foundation.

- Advocate for social housing and culturally appropriate housing solutions in your community. See the Nunavimmiut community housing development in Quebec.

- Use the SDGs to frame community sustainability and build partnerships with local actors and governments. See the work of the Victoria Foundation.

- Use the convening power of your community foundation to encourage and enable greater participation in urban planning and design, including youth, new immigrants, and BIPOC and gender-diverse folks.

- Advocate for accessible, affordable and safe public transport options that benefit those most in need, such as bike lanes to protect commuters, affordable rural-urban transport links and public transport for low-income neighbourhoods.

Resource list

Planning Cities for All: Implementing the New Urban Agenda
- A 4-page overview of key urban sustainability issues and actions in Canada.
- Page 2 presents an overview of key challenges.
- Pages 3–4 look at specific issues and response strategies.

Living in Colour: Racialized Housing Discrimination in Canada
- A short online article that covers some of the main housing challenges faced by racialized communities in Canada.
- Outlines a pathway to anti-racist housing.

Sustainable Cities: The Role for Philanthropy in Promoting Urban Sustainability
- Pages 1–9 introduce the importance of urban sustainability in Canada.
- Pages 10–72 look at urban sustainability issues in relation to grantmakers.
- Pages 73–96 present challenges and opportunities for grantmakers.

City Funders: Case Studies on Philanthropic Engagement in Urban Contexts
- Pages 6–25 provide case studies of philanthropic support for urban sustainability in Europe.
- Pages 26–37 provide case studies from North America.

Future Cities: Community Solutions Portal
- Website with a range of resources to support cities moving toward sustainability.
- The Resources and Tools tab has a searchable database of reports, toolkits and media.

Canadian Urban Institute
- The Institute's mission is to ensure Canada builds vibrant, equitable, livable and resilient cities.
- The Our Work page has a wide selection of toolkits and reports for supporting community sustainability as well as success stories under the Insights tab.

10: A Guide for Advancing the SDGs in Your Community
- A 52-page report on how cities are engaging with the SDGs in Canada.
- Pages 11–41 provide good ideas and success stories on local cities engaging with the SDGs.
- Pages 46–47 offer 10 ways for cities to get started with the SDGs in Canada.

When a Crisis Strikes: A Guide for Community Foundations
- A guide that outlines the role of community foundations during times of crisis, including future climate change disasters.
- Pages 5–12 look at the unique role of community foundations during times of crisis.
- Pages 13–19 provide general guidelines for community foundations in times of crisis.