

# Calgary Transforms

Inspired Community-Driven Solutions: **People**, **Place** and **Potential**

A Canadian Urban Institute  
Collaboration, June 2021



# Introduction

The Canadian Urban Institute (CUI) is the national platform that houses the best in Canadian city building, where policymakers, urban professionals, civic and business leaders, community activists and academics can learn, share and collaborate from coast to coast. CUI believes that it is by growing the connective tissue within and between cities of all sizes that we can together make urban Canada all that it can be. This report is part of that on the ground sharing, connecting and taking action.



Our **CUI x Local** series shines a spotlight on local responses to some of the most pressing challenges in Canada's large urban regions. In collaboration with city leaders, we're connecting with cities across Canada to seek out the very best ideas that can inform and be adapted by city builders across the country. And what we're seeing are solutions that demonstrate creative, sometimes risky, yet ever-inspiring approaches that haven't received enough national attention — yet.

**Calgary Transforms** summarizes what Calgarians told us is happening in their city today. We heard diverse perspectives on what it's like to live there, what people are concerned about, how they view the city and its organizations and how many are coping with and driving positive change. People from the arts, academia, business and industry, community agencies and many other sectors told us what they see as their successes, where they think needs more work and what their hopes are for a post-pandemic future.

Join us on our cross-Canada tour for inspiring stories, actions and innovation, as we learn how Canadian cities are addressing local challenges today and planning for a greater urban future.

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# Land Acknowledgement

## Welcome to Moh’Kinsstis

The Blackfoot name, Moh’Kinsstis, refers to the traditional gathering place where the Elbow and Bow Rivers meet, and where present-day Calgary was built. The rivers are ancient water courses dating back to pre-glacial times almost two and a half million years ago.

**We acknowledge that the City of Calgary was built on the land of the First Peoples.**

**We recognize that present-day Calgary is on the traditional territory of the Blackfoot Confederacy (the Siksika, Piikani, and Kainai First Nations), the Tsuut’ina First Nation and the Stoney Nakoda First Nations (the Chiniki, Bearspaw and Wesley). It is also home to the Métis Nation of Alberta, Region III. The City is situated on Treaty 7 land, signed in 1877 with Southern Alberta’s Chiefs — notably Chief Crowfoot of the Siksika First Nation. Moh’kinsstis was a gathering place for the Niitsitapi (the Blackfoot people) since time immemorial.**

**We thank Indigenous leaders for taking part and for allowing us to listen, learn and reflect on the past, present and future of the city.**

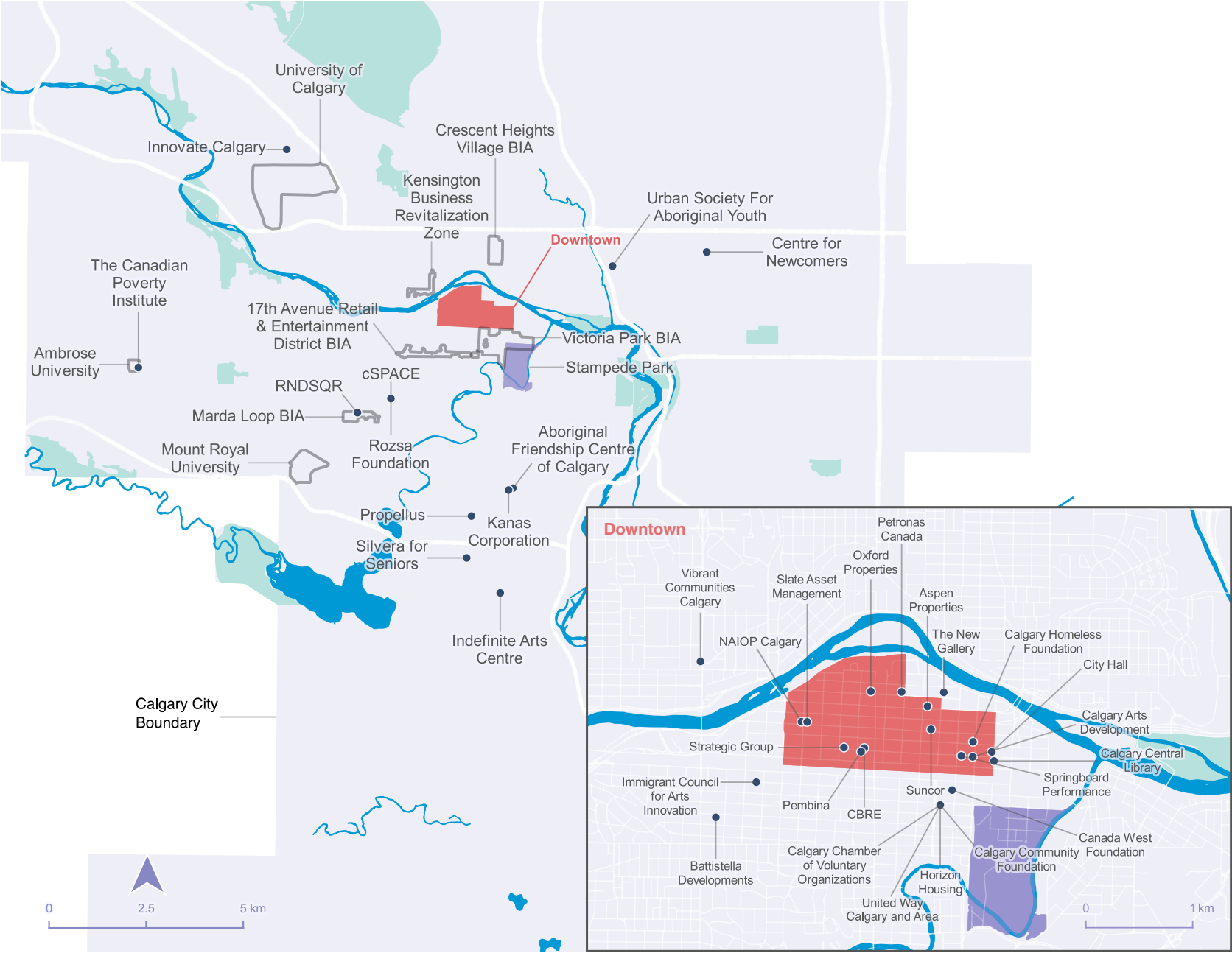


**We need to take a lesson from the Wampum Belt**

**principles of two canoes going down the same river and work together rather than imposing on each other. Each system needs to understand a system is a way to achieve goals, whether it’s written or oral. We need to cross-validate the systems to understand that we can use either system or both.”**  
**Elder Reg Crowchild**



# Calgary Map



# Summary

Calgary Transforms serves to shine a light on the people, places and potential of this city. It showcases the best guidance Calgary can offer to city builders who are looking for inspiration and direction for more livable and responsive cities.

Calgary has a population of almost 1.3 million, making it the third largest city in Canada. It has the highest household income in Canada and the highest concentration of wealth. It is a young city, where 70% of its population is between the working ages of 15 and 64. And it has the highest concentration of high-tech workers in Canada.

This report explores Calgary through three themes: people, place and potential.



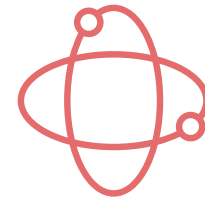
## People

Calgarians are community-minded with a “get it done” attitude. Calgary managed to cut its child poverty rate in half, from ten percent to five percent, helping to make Alberta’s child poverty rate the lowest in the country. Calgary is committed to addressing mental health and addiction — with a ‘made in Calgary’ model that focuses on the individual and breaks down silos. Local leaders are focused on problem-solving and have slowed the growth in people experiencing chronic homelessness, despite the 2013 catastrophic flood, the economic downturn, decreased vacancy rates, shortage of affordable housing and significant population growth.



## Place

Place describes the formal parts of the city, its institutions, built form and wider landscape. The culture of volunteerism and generosity in Calgary is unmatched. From community and arts organizations, big events like the Stampede and the Olympics, to philanthropic donations, hundreds of organizations and thousands of Calgarians are working to achieve great things in the city. Calgary is full of people who work within and outside of the formal systems to create social change. Artists and the arts community are finding a role in activating and reimagining the downtown and telling the stories of this time. Calgary is also creating space for experimentation, convening partnerships and using the city as a living lab to reimagine its future — a future that is resilient.



## Potential

Calgary is investing in a massive transformation to evolve its downtown moving forward, recognizing that it needs to adapt to the changing needs of a new generation of work and business and the way people live, travel and access amenities, goods and services. Calgary has a vibrant social innovation landscape with public, non-profit, academic and private sector actors working to uncover new solutions to global, social and environmental problems. Benevity is a perfect example of this — a Calgary-based corporate social responsibility platform helping to deliver workplace giving, matching, volunteering and grant management solutions for companies. One of the first certified “B Corps” in Canada, Benevity has over 2 million users, and has processed \$2 billion in donations and 10 million hours of volunteer time at almost 150 thousand charities worldwide.

This document  
does not need to be  
read in sequence.

Dip in and out to  
discover more about  
the city of Edmonton.

# Letter from Mary W. Rowe

Canadian Urban Institute  
President and CEO

**We started our cross-Canada CUI x Local** listening tour in Alberta, where we met with city builders in Edmonton and Calgary to learn about what's happening in these cities today. In Calgary, local leaders helped us organized 20 virtual meetings, working group sessions, workshops and public meetings with 57 organizations and more than 260 individuals.

**Over five packed days in late 2020, Calgarians told us** what they love about the city, what is working well and where work is needed, and about the inspiring steps it has taken to make the city what it is today, and what it is quickly becoming.

**We heard from people** from the downtown sector, people from the new economy, people from the old economy, people from social services, people from the arts, people who are entrepreneurial, people working on poverty, people working on equity, and many others. It was a rich week for CUI, and we hope it was for those who took the time to meet with us. We need to remember that this is a remarkable moment in our lifetime — to be afforded the opportunity to really examine what we've been doing right and what else can be done. As we emerge from this extraordinary time, we can reflect; how are we? How will our lives change? How do we want to change? And how do we want our cities and our urban environments to change, to be places that are inclusive of everyone?

**As with all the CUI x Local reports, Calgary Transforms reflects the people, place and potential of the city.** In this report we give you a chance to hear from dedicated Calgarians in their own voices. While it isn't intended to capture everything, we've done our best to highlight what Calgarians told us about the city and share some of the best guidance they can offer to others in cities across Canada on ways to create a strong foundation for a vital and resilient urban future.

**A final note, about us.** As CUI enters its 31st year,

the critical importance of Canada's cities is clear. Our collective ability to achieve the highest environmental, social and economic goals – at all levels of government and internationally, depends on how well our cities can manage local and systemic challenges, create and build on community-driven solutions and take steps to secure their future well-being. We are focused on driving those linkages that accelerate innovation, hasten reform and direct investment, and we want to ensure local realities and experiences are integrated into government policies, plans and programs at all levels.

We look forward to hearing and sharing your story. Please check in with us at [canurb.org/cuixlocal](https://canurb.org/cuixlocal) as we continue our CUI x Local tour of Canada's cities through 2021.

**Mary W. Rowe (she/her)**  
President and CEO  
Canadian Urban Institute  
@rowemw



Canadian Urban  
Institute Institut  
Urbain du  
Canada

# Calgary At a Glance

**1,285,711**

**Population**  
3rd largest in Canada

**\$102,570**

**2018 median household income**  
(highest in Canada) and highest concentration of wealth

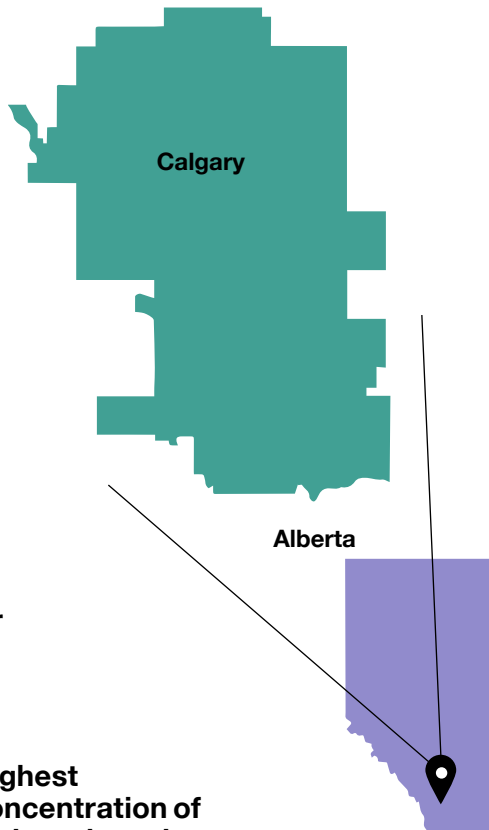
**33%**

Percentage by which racialized Calgarians are more likely to be low-income compared to their non-racialized peers

**1st**

most livable city in North America  
The Economist  
2018 & 2019

Highest concentration of high-tech workers of Canadian cities



## Income inequality is manifested spatially

Second most spatially unequal city in Canada

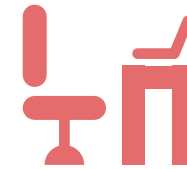


## Highlights



### Young City

Youngest population of major Canadian cities (70% between ages of 15 and 64)



### The Prophetic City

29.5% of downtown offices vacant, with empty office space equivalent to 130 Canadian football fields



### The Resilient City

Calgary's 2013 flood was the costliest disaster in Canadian history with insurable damages estimated at \$1.7 billion and displaced 110K people



### The Giving City

Alberta has the second highest volunteer rate in Canada at 55%. The Calgary Foundation has an endowment of almost \$1 billion

## A Tale of Two Cities



Most unequal city in Canada by four times the national average



Indigenous and Black Calgarians are more likely to experience deep poverty

**21%**

percentage of Calgary's homeless population who are Indigenous

**69%**

percentage of those in Alberta's child welfare system who are Indigenous

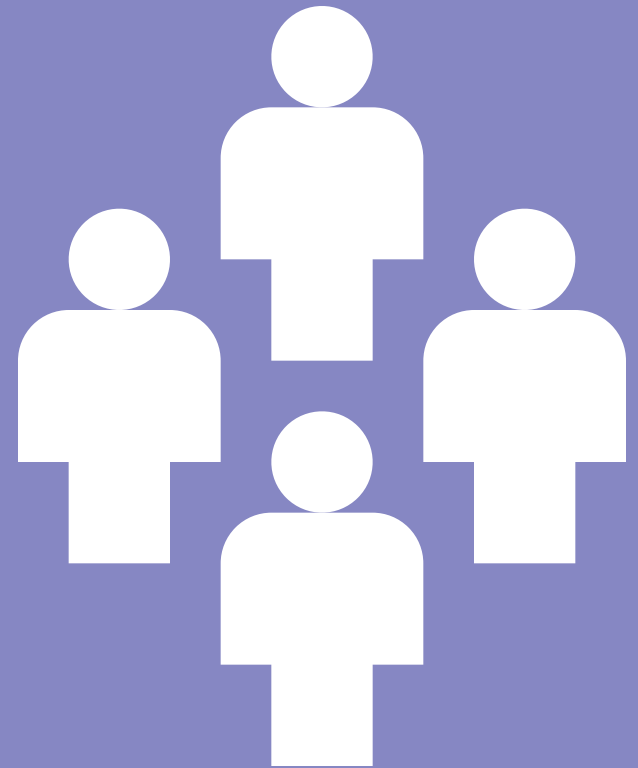


# Inspired Solutions: Connecting People, Place and Potential

The following sections describe what people told us about how connected they feel to the city, what helps create a sense of place for them and what they see for the future of Calgary. We can describe what we learned about Calgary as a city that's caring, changing, innovating — and much, much more. We look at the city's challenges and responses more closely in each of the sections below.

## People

The people in a city are its life force. It's the individuals who work informally or within organizations, on their own or with others, that drive change and progress. In this first section, *Calgary Transforms* highlights the people we met, and heard about, who are taking the lead on some of these critical and complicated challenges.



# People

## The Paradox of Calgary

Calgary is known for having a wealthy population, much of it stemming from the oil and gas sector. In fact, it has the highest median household income among all cities in Canada. However, not everyone benefits from this. Calgary has the highest income gap of any large city in Canada, and that gap doesn't fluctuate much with changes in the economy. Many people and organizations are working to address the root causes and impacts of poverty on a significant portion of the city's population.

Even before COVID-19, more than a 130,000 people were living below the poverty line, and another 70,000 were earning 25% above the poverty line — almost 15% of the city's population. Derek Cook from the **Calgary Poverty Institute** describes the nature of disparity in the city:

"You have a lot of very high-income people who are in the oil and gas sector or attached to it, and they do very well. This extremely well-off group of people will, through their purchasing power, drive up the cost of living for everybody else. And the situation for those at the low end doesn't get better in the 'boom' of the boom and bust cycles. In fact, they seem to do worse during the 'booms'."



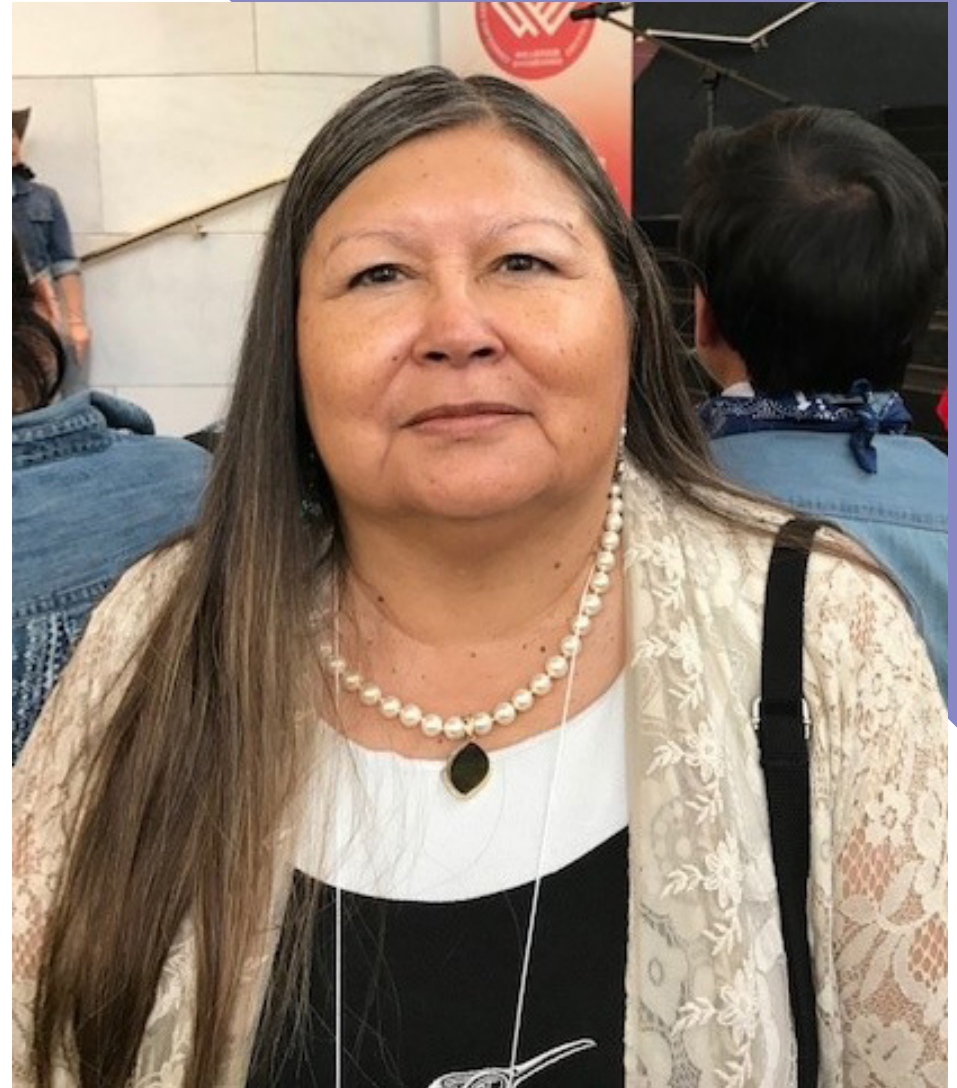
"We consulted with 1,800 businesses and community leaders to develop *Calgary in the New Economy*, our current economic strategy. Through this process, we learned that Calgary is a city of paradoxes. We can take pride that it is named the most livable city in North America by The Economist, while also acknowledging we are one of the leading jurisdictions for income inequality."

**Jason Ribeiro, Calgary Economic Development**



### Profile

**Staahtsisttayaaki Dr. Genevieve A. Fox** is the Education Director for the Blackfoot Confederacy Tribal Council which includes K-12 schools and colleges on the Kainai, Siksika, Piikani and Aamskapi Pikuni Nations. Dr. Fox, as part of the Calgary Poverty Reduction Initiative, served as a writer on the Aboriginal Strategy. For her, the revitalization of Niitsipowahsin — the Blackfoot language — and spiritual and cultural empowerment are the key to success for Indigenous students. She sees the infusion of Indigenous knowledge, languages, cultures and histories of Indigenous Peoples into the curriculum as something that will benefit all students, at all levels and will help with understanding and appreciation for the contributions made by the Indigenous Peoples who are still living in their territories.







#### Profile

**Ariam Wolde-Giorgis** is a passionate community connector dedicated to the social and civic inclusion of immigrants and other equity deserving community groups. Starting off volunteering in local non-profits, Ariam now has more than 12 years of experience with Calgary-based organizations including the City of Calgary's Anti-Racism Action Committee, the Calgary Foundation and the Foundation for Black Communities, in addition to being a co-founder of Black Voters Matter Canada. She is an active member of Calgary's Eritrean community, serving as the Vice President of YYC Eritreans, where she connects and empowers Eritrean youth by creating local opportunities and advocating for the inclusion of their voices and experiences in Calgary organizations and institutions.

Ariam serves as the Community Hub Coordinator for the Alex Community Food Centre, helping to create a welcoming place where people can come together, access support and create change in their community. For her efforts, Ariam was named one of the 20 Compelling Calgarians for 2016 by the Calgary Herald and received the Achievement under 40 Award at the Immigrant of Distinction Awards in 2015 by Immigrant Services Calgary.

# People

## Reducing Child Poverty

Calgary has undertaken some influential initiatives that have had an impact. The City of Calgary's poverty reduction strategy was one of the first in the country and it has reaped results — child poverty was cut in half in 2017, from 10 percent to five percent, making Alberta's child poverty rate the lowest in the country.



Poverty in Blackfoot is kimatapsini, which means “to have empathy and compassion for someone.” In the old days, no one suffered for need of food, shelter, protection or transportation. The leadership, the war chiefs and warriors who were in charge, took care of all the people in their community. Leadership, in the old days, meant not only to protect the people, but see to it that they had everything they needed for sustenance. The people were communal. They practiced collectivism and interdependence. They shared everything. Family connections were strong. They had built-in systems that accommodated their beliefs, laws, clan system, societies and spiritualism. That was their way of life — their survival depended on it.”

Excerpt from Calgary's  
Enough for All 2.0 **poverty**  
reduction strategy to 2023



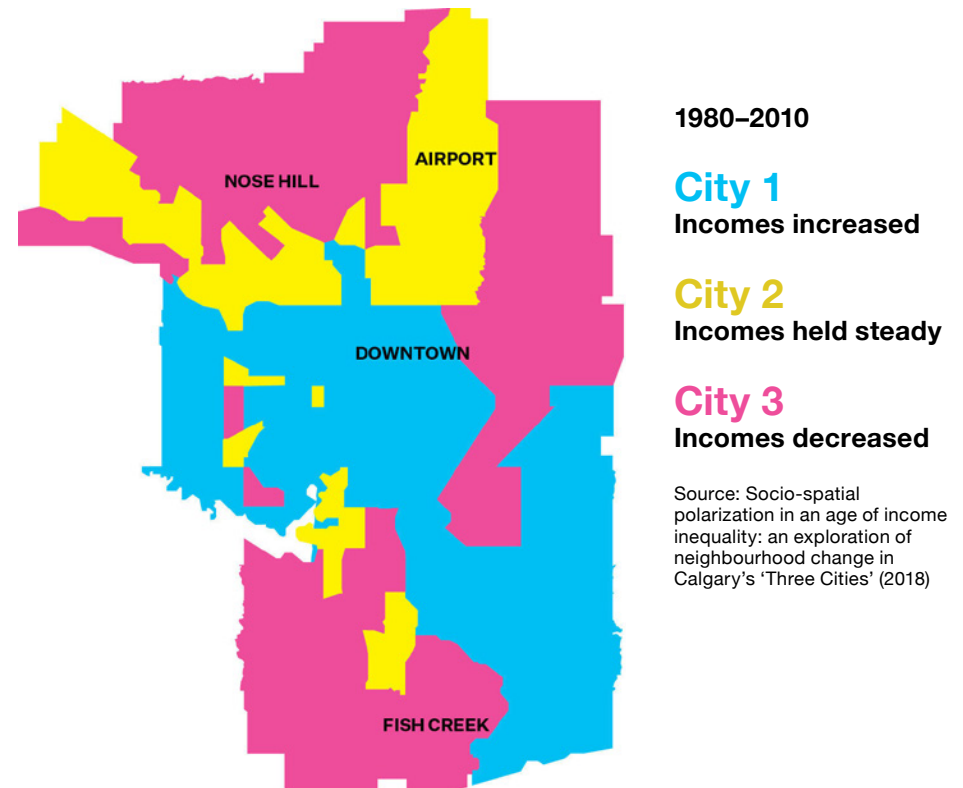
# People

## Addressing Poverty Through an Equity Lens

The City of Calgary's **Enough for All - 2020 Snapshot** portrays a city where poverty is racialized, gendered and intersectional, and has a notable spatial dimension:

- Indigenous and Black Calgarians are more likely to experience deep poverty (an income less than half of the poverty line)
- Among Indigenous women, 44 percent reported that they could not cover an unexpected expense of \$500 compared to 33 percent of Indigenous men
- Albertans with disabilities find themselves overrepresented well below the poverty line
- Calgary is Canada's second-most **spatially** unequal city, after Toronto

This map visualizes distinct areas of Calgary where incomes have increased, decreased or stayed the same between 1980–2010, with income growth in the core and income decline in the outer suburbs. This trend has continued over the last decade.





**Enough for All: Calgary's Poverty Reduction Strategy** sets out a path and commitment by Calgarians. The original strategy was developed through the leadership of the Mayor's Office and with extensive public consultation in 2012–2013, was refreshed in 2019 and evolved into the current **Enough for All 2.0**. Vibrant Communities Calgary was appointed as the steward of the strategy, with the community as its collective 'owner'. The City of Calgary and United Way of Calgary and Area are active partners that fund its implementation, align their work to its goals and collaborate closely. The strategy has three goals:

- 1 All Calgarians live in a strong, supportive, and inclusive community
- 2 All Calgarians have sufficient income and assets to thrive
- 3 All Indigenous People are equal participants in Calgary's future





### Profile

**Yasmin Dean** is an advocate for “making a ruckus.” She is the chair of Child Studies and Social Work and works as an Associate Professor of Social Work at Mount Royal University. She has an extensive interest in the scholarship of teaching and learning, including internationalization efforts of social work education at the local and global levels. She is especially focused on the design of international field schools that commit to principles of reciprocity. She has worked in South Korea and the United Arab Emirates and has participated in culturally dynamic initiatives with community and academic collaborators in Australia, Cambodia, India, Vietnam and Canada.



### Profile

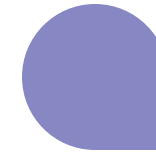
**Jeny Mathews-Thusoo (she/her)** is a proud second-generation Malayalee woman with a vision that the future of cities belongs to the those who believe in the power of dreams. She reaches for this vision in her role as the Program Lead of Inclusive Futures with Resilience at the City of Calgary. Her focus is on how governments and institutions can better trust equity-deserving communities so that collectively, we can respond to the epic challenges of the 21st century. Right now, she is experimenting in Futures Literacy where communities reimagine and re-design the futures they want. Jeny is also an instructor with the University of Calgary, Faculty of Social Work, teaching social policy and social justice in hopes of inspiring future socially responsible policy makers.



# People

## Innovating in the Mental Health and Addictions Sector

The City of Calgary has taken a leadership role in convening the many partners involved in mental health and addiction and developing tools and techniques to facilitate the process of diagnosing and problem solving. Breaking down silos is not an easy task, as the issues are complex and pressing, and need to serve the diverse needs of the individuals they're meant to help.



**Almost half of Canadians will have or have had a mental illness before they're 40 years old. It is complicated because mental health is impacted by poverty, addiction, social isolation and community belonging, and as well as the crushing burden of shame and stigma. Opioid deaths outweigh deaths by other diseases, vehicular crashes and COVID-19. It can be very difficult to access support.**





Efforts were fragmented, members struggled to determine whether the patchwork of organizations and their combined portfolio of services had the appropriate scale and scope to reduce opioid deaths and address the systemic issues related to mental health and addiction. They also faced difficulty in determining what types of interventions were most helpful to the individuals most at risk. Furthermore, the team suspected that the services were not sufficiently integrated, so the interventions were not as effective as they could be. Finally, it was impossible to determine whether the funders had allocated resources in the most effective efficient and equitable way.”

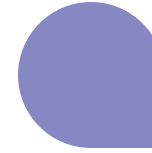
The above quote describes the state of mental health services in 2019 as profiled in the **Stanford Social Innovation Review**. The profile follows the City of Calgary as it embarked on a Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative to help develop its mental health strategy.



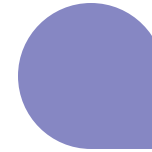
# People

## Innovating in the Mental Health Sector

Calgary wants to be a beacon for other cities to learn from. Through Mayor Naheed Nenshi's office, the City convened a task force and committed up to \$25 million over five years (2019–2023) for its **Community Action on Mental Health and Addiction** (CAMHA) initiative. A unique strategy and action plan was developed, a Calgary model, based on a systemic view of mental health and addiction that centres on the individual. The City of Calgary is funding pilot projects to undertake quick wins, providing \$3 million in funding, on top of funds raised by community partners.



One CAMHA pilot project successfully improved the navigation of services for South Asian youth through training and outreach events for mental health ambassadors. The proponent, the Punjabi Community Health Services Calgary Society found, “through training and outreach ambassadors, we can help people navigate the mental health system more easily, which would make them more likely to get help. Additionally, we were able to develop a website, saymhyyc.ca that included resources and a self-serve questionnaire that people can use to direct themselves to appropriate resources.”



**Another CAMHA pilot project aimed to build awareness and reduce stigma by providing a community Wellness Desk at the Calgary Public Library where people can quickly access critical resources. It found, “The Wellness Desk pilot provided an opportunity to aid and strengthen caregivers and other support persons in learning how best to direct their loved ones to the right services. We believe this pilot reduced stigmas and offered a welcoming, safe and discrete opportunity for all our communities to seek assistance with mental health concerns or issues.”**

## Profile

**Karen Gosbee** is a community leader and an advocate for change and action in mental health, addiction and domestic violence. Karen has extensive lived experience, having been exposed not only to mental health and substance misuse in both her childhood and adult life but also to domestic violence in her marriage.

Karen came forward to share her story to help others who identified with her situation to feel more comfortable sharing their own story, address the lack of resources and coordinated services and most importantly, to ensure others find the right help in a time of crisis.

Karen co-chairs Calgary's Mental Health and Addiction Community Strategy and Action Plan stewardship group. She is on the provincial Mental Health and Addictions Advisory Council and is a member of IIMHL International Cities and Urban Regional Collaborative (I-CIRCLE).

Karen's mantra is to educate and advocate. Her work has identified the need for federal legislation on coercive control. She is also a strong supporter of gender-based equality and is the head of the Gosbee Family Foundation, a registered charitable organization that provides information, access and referral services to anyone experiencing mental health issues. She is also the author of the bestselling book, *A Perfect Nightmare: My Glittering Marriage and How It Almost Cost Me My Life*.



# People

## Reducing Chronic Homelessness

Alberta's cities are at the forefront in achieving real results in reducing chronic homelessness. Calgary's first Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness was developed in early 2008, with the **Calgary Homeless Foundation** (CHF) as its lead. Since then, the growth in people experiencing chronic homelessness has slowed, despite the major flood in 2013, the economic downturn, decreased vacancy rates, shortages of affordable housing and significant population growth. CHF reports major achievements on multiple fronts:

- Housed close to 8,000 people in more than 2,000 spaces operated by 56 programs
- Created unprecedented levels of support and leadership from provincial agencies including almost \$45 million in annual program funding and capital grants for 2,700+ affordable housing units
- Partnered with the federal government and prioritized investment in Housing First to address chronic and episodic homelessness, reinforcing Calgary's ongoing success, that also allows for predictable funding of approximately \$8.3M annually
- Raised \$120 million from the private sector to build affordable and supportive housing for 3,000 Calgarians, under the RESOLVE Campaign, the first of its kind in Canada
- Provided 6,000 people with rental housing by working with private sector landlords
- Shared data with 30 agencies and 90 programs on a common information system



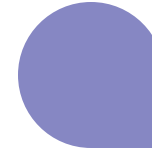


# People

## Entrepreneurial Attitudes To Get Things Done

Local leadership has been an important factor in the city's successes to date. In 2007, following the steadily increasing number of people experiencing homelessness, Calgary's business leaders and other concerned citizens got together to address the issue. They created the Calgary Committee to End Homelessness, then partnered with the CHF, agencies and other community partners to develop a plan to end chronic homelessness. With the CEOs of major Calgary companies backing the plan, the Province and others stepped in. The CHF took the lead from that point forward.

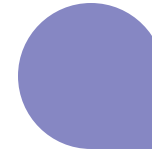
Tim Richter of the **Canadian Alliance to End Homelessness** (CAEH) credits the achievements in Calgary to a few key factors, such as, a "get it done" attitude and a young, dynamic, driven, and entrepreneurial population. Local leaders are focused on the problem-solving, and less concerned about where the ideas originated. They are happy to borrow from other models and other cities as needed to get results.



### **The Calgary Homeless**

**Foundation** has created a system of care, an interrelated network of agencies and people working together to ensure those at risk of,

or experiencing homelessness have timely access to the right housing and resources. As the system planner of Calgary's homeless-serving system of care, CHF uses its resources, expertise and robust database (HMIS) to develop an integrated system of care that creates greater ease and access to services and supports. HMIS is regarded as one of the best of its kind internationally, providing data that guides evidence-based decisions. Agencies use common intake processes and metrics to benchmark service impacts and quality to improve outcomes and impacts.



Calgary's **RESOLVE Campaign** is a collaboration among nine partners that

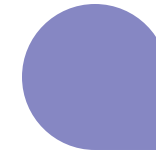
raised over \$120 million from the private sector, and \$28 million from the provincial government to build affordable and supportive housing for 3,000 vulnerable and homeless Calgarians — a first of its kind in Canada.

## People

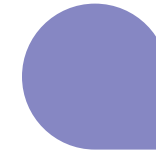
# Investing in Affordable Rental and Ownership Housing

The single family detached ownership model is the norm in Calgary and there is a low supply of other housing types. In the inner city, there is a lack of choice in larger units that are affordable and work for families. A variety of housing options contributes to social equity. People told us Calgary's housing lacks diversity in form and tenancy. People told us that housing supply in Calgary needs to be more varied in type, tenure, density, market versus non-market and affordability.

Calgary has the lowest proportion of rental households in Canada and **Calgary renters spend a greater share of their income** on housing compared to other major Canadian cities. This is problematic for low-income households and seniors. There is low availability of multi-family residential rental housing and non-market housing. Sarah Woodgate, President of the Calgary Housing Company pointed out that only 3.6 percent of Calgary's housing supply is non-market, while 6 percent is the national average.



The affordability/unaffordability of housing in Calgary is relatively in sync with that of Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal.



For many years, the City of Calgary has supported the notion of complete communities where people “of all ages, incomes, interests, and lifestyles feel comfortable and can choose between a variety of housing types and locations in which to live”.

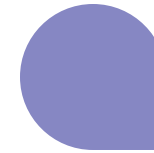


# People

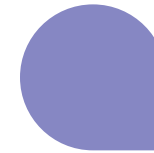
## Investing in Affordable Rental and Ownership Housing

The City of Calgary is working in collaboration across government, non-profits and the private sector to address housing affordability. Some recent initiatives include:

- Zoning for change: The **Guidebook for Great Communities** proposes how the City will modernize its planning system and change how existing neighbourhoods are redeveloped. Local area plans will be created to guide what kind and where redevelopment is allowed. The City hopes to facilitate the development of a variety of housing typologies, such as the “missing middle” (smaller-scale multi-family housing such as townhouses, rowhouses and multiplexes that are not easy to build because of restrictive zoning regulations and push back from community). While years of public feedback has informed the guidebook up to this point (spring 2021), the surge in local interest is influencing the finalization of the document.
- Partnering on affordable rental: The City is leveraging the federal government’s Rapid Housing Initiative (2020). With almost \$25 million in immediate funding, they are working with housing providers to create 116 new units of permanent affordable housing.
- Facilitating affordable ownership: The City has also found results in helping moderate-income Calgarians achieve home ownership by creating **Attainable Homes Calgary**, a partnership model with builders, financial institutions, law firms, mortgage insurers, and others. Since 2009, it has helped almost 1,000 families become homeowners by helping people meet a 5% threshold for a down payment that is recouped and reinvested to help others when the homeowner sells.

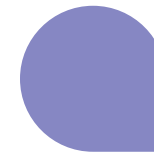


The **Community Housing Affordability Collective** is a network of individuals and organizations that recognize a need to improve housing affordability in Calgary through collaboration and advocacy. Joining the collective means committing to doing things differently. Individuals and organizations that join are accountable to themselves and to the rest of the collective on bringing the CHAC approach to life.



**Attainable Homes Calgary** is a non-profit social enterprise, created and owned by the City of Calgary, that works to help moderate-income Calgarians achieve homeownership.

Attainable Homes helps families with children who earn less than \$103,000 per year (\$93,000 per year without children, \$83,000 per year for singles) to buy their first home by providing a loan toward a down payment, with the applicant contributing \$2,000. The family buying the home has to agree to make the property their “permanent sole residence” and when they sell the home, a share of the appreciation accrued is given back to the program to finance more families getting into homes.



**HomeSpace** has completed 11 projects since 2016 and currently has four buildings at various stages of development. The model leverages funding from various

sources and engages major Calgary home builders to manage the construction. To date, HomeSpace has worked with 11 different home builders in various communities across the city. It cites anti-development attitudes among a few individuals as a major obstacle to success.

## People


# Advancing Reconciliation With Indigenous Peoples

United Way of Calgary and Area created an Indigenous Advisory Committee to advise on Indigenous worldviews, perspectives, knowledge and practices to help with its decision-making processes and to develop a targeted strategy. It is one of the first United Ways in Canada to create an Elder-led Indigenous strategy. What is different about this approach is that United Way of Calgary and Area is bringing Indigenous knowledge and capacity in parallel to settler-created approaches. Rather than imposing one on another, they are structuring a working relationship, understanding that both processes are needed to achieve their goals.



The Indigenous population is the fastest growing segment in all of Canada. This should tell us a couple of things. First, there's going to be an untapped human resource of Indigenous folks entering into the workforce in urban centres. Second, it is incumbent for all sectors and institutions to prepare themselves for this growth. Gone are the days when we should expect Indigenous people to adapt, change and assimilate. The time has come for systems to change, shift and adapt. I'm asking the question, what are you, as an organization and sector doing to shift and change your practice to be more inclusive to provide a sense of belonging for this growing population, which, by the way, is going to be a really young population?"

**Tim Fox,**  
**Calgary Foundation**



**We are most  
successful  
as Indigenous people  
in Calgary when  
we gather ourselves  
together and try  
to work on our issues  
and challenges  
in our own way and  
with our own  
people and processes.”**

Joanne Pinnow,  
United Way of Calgary and Area





**In the default system you can be in a boardroom and say, ‘here’s the code of conduct and here’s boardroom procedures. Now it’s a safe place. You can talk when you want to talk because you’re safe to talk.’ Well, that’s an ethical space. In our culture there are traditional conventions. You make a smudge and you tell the stories of code of conduct and stories of procedure. Then it’s a safe place to talk in our oral system.”**

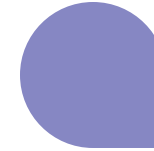
Reg Crowshoe, a Blackfoot Elder and former Chief of the Piikani First Nation, shared with us that reconciliation can help people to heal and move forward to bridge the gap between Indigenous culture and traditions and what he calls the “written, default system”. He compares it to Mac and IBM computers — two systems that don’t understand each other but that need to be made compatible. There are challenges to enabling the two systems, Indigenous principles and values and Westerner’s systems and values, to work together.

# People

## Advancing Reconciliation With Indigenous Peoples

In March 2020, the Aboriginal Friendship Centre of Calgary (AFCC) reached out to collaborate with more than 20 partners, including mainstream and Indigenous-led organizations, to establish an Indigenous COVID-19 Task Force. The AFCC recognized that the Indigenous homeless population was at particularly high risk of contracting COVID-19. While only 3 percent of Calgary's population identify as Indigenous, Indigenous peoples represent more than 20 percent of those without housing. Some also struggle with mental health and addictions that make the realities of COVID-19 and public health measures even harder to manage.

The new Task Force used the opportunity to build on Indigenous oral governance, introducing a consensus-led process, achieving greater buy-in from Indigenous people and Elders. They made it a priority to raise awareness and educate people on COVID-19 transmission, symptoms and taking preventive measures. They also provided printed resources and collaborated on how to effectively relay critical information and delivered emergency hampers to those most in need.



The **Urban Society for Aboriginal Youth** (USAY) created augmented reality murals to communicate their message. USAY works with urban Indigenous youth aged 18

to 29, combining community initiatives such as afterschool programs and backpack giveaways with projects that combine art and technology through an Indigenous world view.

Executive Director LeeAnne Ireland describes an art project from an afterschool program called the Indigenous Inclusion Project created by a group of girls. They created three murals, each with a different theme surrounding issues that are important to them — gender-based violence, workplace participation and civic engagement. USAY designed the augmented reality targets that appear to come alive on the murals. In a gender-based violence mural, there are a series of three ribbon skirts. When you scan over the skirts with the app, an honour song with related images appears.





#### Profile

**LeeAnne Ireland** is of mixed Anishinaabe decent and a member of the Métis Nation of Ontario. She is a decolonization activist and has been the Executive Director of the **Urban Society for Aboriginal Youth** since 2008, providing essential programming and services to Calgary's Indigenous youth between the ages of 12–29. She believes, “Everyone has the power within themselves to know what their version of success is. Everyone has the power to know what their pathways are and to know what they excel at. There are so many brilliant young Indigenous people that do not need my help. They need access to opportunity.”

### Profile

**Tim Fox** is a proud member of the Blackfoot Confederacy from the Kainai (Blood) reserve. Tim is Vice President of Indigenous Relations and Equity Strategy with the Calgary Foundation where he takes a systems-change approach to mobilize the work of reconciliation, decolonization and equity. He is Co-chair for the Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada. With hopes to strengthen, enhance and shift the culture and practice at the Foundation he explains, “There is no guidebook on how to do this work, I’m definitely in a space of learning, unlearning and growth. I do know that there is a big piece of knowledge and context, related to reconciliation and equity, missing from the very infrastructures of all settler-created organizations. I feel like this work is generational and as a generation, that’s part of the journey we have to reconcile with.”



# Are Indigenous Youth Involved in Planning or Civics in Calgary?

“In my experience in Calgary, there is an automatic criminalization for being both young and Indigenous. If you are a young Indigenous person, you are often branded a criminal just for existing — not for actually doing anything bad, not for creating a criminal act, just for existing.

**We have a youth group** that meets on Wednesday nights and we used to meet at the food court in the local mall before we would go and do our activities. Prior to the pandemic, we had 25–40 Indigenous kids meeting on Wednesday nights at the mall. We would buy them Orange Julius and other stuff and security would harass us. We began to film these interactions because of how security would treat us. We would explain that we were a youth group and not doing anything criminal and we’re spending money. Security then started calling the anti-gang suppression unit, telling the police we were gang-affiliated. The anti-gang suppression unit shows up and assumes that we are a gang.

**We had to stop meeting at the mall.** Part of me felt that we shouldn’t have had to leave because we were not doing anything wrong. We were spending money and being treated like criminals because we were gathering. And I realized what this must have been like for our grandparents when it was illegal for them to gather. The anti-gang suppression unit is the new Indian agent. It’s still essentially illegal for Indigenous people to gather. An automatic criminalization of our people for coming together to try and generate safety for ourselves.”

“And that’s why Indigenous youth aren’t included in planning of the city, because they’re criminalized.”

LeeAnne Ireland,  
Urban Society  
for Aboriginal Youth



## People

# Addressing Structural Barriers to Opportunities

Calgary's **Centre for Newcomers** put out a survey early in the pandemic to understand the impacts of COVID-19 on Black people and newcomers. It found very clear and striking disproportionate impacts of what Dr. Francis Boakye, Vice President of Strategy, calls "corona racism," by virtue of the different systemic realities, the economics and exposure to COVID-19 as frontline workers and transit users. He sees that the violence to Black people in public spaces and the protests, have brought forth a renewed energy and will to address systemic racism. Over the past months, the City of Calgary convened an Anti-Racism Committee to identify systemic barriers to city programs and services, language barriers, ways to address structural racism on a community-wide level, as well as developing a community-based strategy. Boakye, a member of the committee told us:

**"Because when you take all the statistics, the economics and education, Black people have been affected disproportionately in almost every facet that we are looking at: gainful employment, who is going to school and who are living in good homes — Black people are being disproportionately impacted. My role is to make sure that we bring this to the forefront and make sure that we are working together with the City of Calgary to align our strategies to reduce the inequities that exist between us. The second piece I really want to finish up with is the topic of inequities. While we have programs for Black people, we have less funding for them. And I'm hoping that there will be some research done to really uncover, with evidence, some of these things I'm talking about."**



**"Calgary is a conservative environment, and addressing anti-racism is worthwhile but it's also an uphill battle. There are safety issues and challenges to having your voices heard in a peaceful way. There is this anti-immigration behaviour, given the fact that mostly in a pandemic or natural disaster, frontline jobs which are done by mostly of people of colour, are the ones that get hit most of the time. Let's face it. The issue is structural, but it's also symptomatic."**  
**Yared Belayneh,**  
**United Way of Calgary and Area**





# People

## Addressing Structural Barriers to Opportunities

Together, the Calgary Foundation, United Way of Calgary and Area, and the City of Calgary created a fund for an Anti-Black Racism Capacity Building project. The grants are intended to support Black-led, small grassroots organizations to advance their work on tourism, training and community organizing and mobilizing. A good start, according to advocates, but in need of scaling up with more sustainable sources of funding for these groups to go out and have a meaningful dialogue with others about inclusion and supporting each other.

Despite these challenges, there has also been a mobilization of social resilience across the Black community:

**“We’ve seen a surge in the number of people who are accessing services through online processes because they form a virtual community where support is being given to each other. We also see a surge in interest in really aligning social services with anti-racism work. And I think that we are at a turning point, where addressing racism issues head-on will mean an increase in people being able to access services and address basic needs.”**

**Francis Boakye,**  
**Centre for Newcomers**



# People

## Addressing Structural Barriers to Opportunities

The **Calgary Dollar** is Canada's first local, digital currency, created to promote local purchasing and to nurture a sense of community and minimize the city's ecological footprint. While not recognized by the federal government, it is intended to function alongside the Canadian dollar as a form of local economic development. First issued in 1996 by a non-profit organization, it was relaunched in 2018 and has received additional attention during COVID-19.

How it works: A Calgary dollar is equivalent in value to one Canadian dollar. The system is a legal form of bartering, and businesses pay taxes on any Calgary dollars they earn. Residents can earn Calgary dollars by taking surveys, posting ads, referring users and more. Calgary Dollars partners with Calgary Housing, CUPS Calgary and the Norfolk Housing Association to provide local residents with the opportunity to earn Calgary dollars by getting involved in the community, which can then be put towards rent or other needs. Businesses can accept anywhere from 10% to 100% of a purchase with Calgary dollars.

- SunnyCider is a local business using Calgary Dollars. Locals who have fruit trees drop off their apples, pears, cherries and berries and trade them for Calgary Dollars, which are accepted by a network of 150 businesses around town (e.g., breweries, restaurants, tattoo parlours, local skincare lines, interior design services, house cleaning services and more). They can also be spent at some farmers markets and lending libraries that rent useful items like vacuums, tools and cleaning supplies.
- In the summer of 2020, Reworks Upcycle shop and Calgary Dollars partnered to create monthly Neighbourhood Gift Boxes. The items in each box come from local businesses and come with Calgary Dollars that can be redeemed at local businesses.





### Profile

**Francis Boakye** works at Calgary's Centre for Newcomers. He has over 15 years of experience in the social services sector and has been engaged in teaching and research in the Social Work Faculty at the University of Calgary since 2008. Francis served as the regional research coordinator for a national project on racism, violence and health and continues to represent the Centre for Newcomers on research projects with community and academic researchers on critical social issues. Francis volunteers on several boards and committees whose mandates promote the building of stronger, better and just communities. He currently sits on the Calgary anti-racism committee.



## Place

Geography and built-form shape cities and their cultures inform where we live, how we move through our urban spaces and how we connect to each other. Place is the landscape around us, the formal organizations, our access to economic and institutional resources, its transportation, community services, and more. *Calgary Transforms* is also about how we move through these places together.





# Place

## A Culture of Volunteerism

Calgary boasts the highest per capita number of volunteers in the country. From big events like the 1988 Winter Olympics and Calgary Stampede to the smaller daily actions by organizations that help individuals in need, Calgarians' volunteerism speaks to the city's historic civic pride and the culture of philanthropy among those who are prospering. Derek Cook from the Canadian Poverty Institute sees "community mindedness" as one of Calgary's greatest strengths. He recalls, "Senior business leaders were the champions for a lot of these initiatives, like the Homeless Foundation, that led to the first ten-year plan to end chronic homelessness. The Rotary Club championed other causes too."

Examples include:

- 150+ **Community Associations** serve the recreational and social needs of their communities. These are maintained primarily by thousands of volunteers.
- **Arts organizations** make heavy use of volunteers in their activities. They engage over 20,000 volunteers. That's almost 122 volunteers per organization on average, and a median of 59 volunteers per organization. Almost one-third of arts organizations that receive municipal funding are run strictly by volunteers and have no full-time staff.
- The catastrophic **2013 Calgary flood** saw thousands of spontaneous volunteers come forward to assist citizens with emergency relief and recovery tasks. Many of these Calgarians were unaffiliated with any emergency volunteering organization but responded to either emergent volunteer organizations or calls for volunteers from the City of Calgary. Volunteer contributions accelerated relief and recovery efforts while minimizing costs for governments and those affected by the flood.



Alberta's average annual charitable donation of \$2,703 was the highest among Canadian

provinces and territories in 2017 and it also has the 2nd highest volunteer rate in Canada at 55%.

The **Calgary Community Foundation** has the largest endowment of any in Canada at almost \$1B.

# Place

## A Culture of Volunteerism

Some view the city's reliance on volunteers and charity for service delivery as complicated and draw attention to Calgary's donor culture as a symptom of how Calgarians and Albertans generally view the role of government. They point out that Alberta is the only province that doesn't have a provincial sales tax. Others emphasize biases about the "deserving poor" and note that emerging challenges are complex and require new models to be addressed. Non-profits and the volunteers who support them are not equipped to address all of these issues. In addition, as government funding for education, health and social services fluctuates, it will be challenging to fill these gaps with volunteers.



**Right now [in late 2020] across the country, we are looking at an estimated \$4 to \$6.2 billion reduction in philanthropy. 69 percent of philanthropic non-profits report experiencing a decline in revenues. Twenty percent of these organizations report that they are not likely to make it, which means loss of jobs and services. When we look at the situation in Calgary, COVID-19 has revealed those disparities. These curve lines are going in exactly the wrong direction."**

**Beth Gignac,  
United Way of Calgary  
and Area**

# Place

## Philanthropy Under Strain

Calgarians are very giving, but the ability of the philanthropic sector to be able to address the city's challenges is at risk. The **Calgary Community Foundation**, with almost \$1 billion, has the largest endowment of a community foundation in the country. Organizations like Vibrant Communities Calgary are creating opportunities to align and leverage the work of hundreds of organizations and thousands of Calgarians to reduce poverty in the city.

However, people from the sector told us they are very concerned about a recent decline in donations and the impacts that will have. Beth Gignac from United Way of Calgary and Area says,

**“There are way more people who need supports and services, who have never needed supports and services from social services in before, and philanthropy won’t be able to fill that gap. So, we need to think about how our sector is going to need to restructure ourselves and our relationship not only to philanthropy, but to government. And what does that look like and where are those conversations happening?”**



# Place

## Changes in the Arts and Culture Sector

The pandemic has brought forward the importance of investing in arts and culture in Calgary. Some municipal politicians are supporting arts and culture as a way to “save” Calgarians, particularly through the winter months. Grants are being offered to artists like for the Chinook Blast Festival, where local artists illuminate winter weekend nights in February across the downtown. There is impetus to get initiatives through the door quickly and to partner with arts organizations in the community. This change is welcomed in the arts and culture sector. Local arts organizations expressed to us that if Calgary doesn’t continue to invest through COVID-19, it might mean the end of arts and culture altogether. Other peripheral industries like service industries and fabrication, and others that depend on the arts and culture sector, will also be impacted.



What is the city that we want to live in and how does art become a part of that? Pre-pandemic, we held hundreds of events, performances, exhibitions and collisions with the community in interesting ways and built partnerships. That was the city that I wanted to live in, that I wanted to invest in and call home. You’d be a fool not to embrace the hybrid nature of the world that we now live in. Cresting through this, developing new skills, constantly learning and moving toward that place that we want to be, I think is going to be really, really important.

I just cling to a notion of what’s going to get us through. And it’s this idea of a coral reef. A coral reef is such a small footprint in the ocean as a whole, but it’s a concentration of life. And I think there’s a lesson in that in terms of being able to collaborate as a community, work together, share ideas and innovate.”

**Deeter Schurig,**  
**cSPACE**



# Place

## Changes in the Arts and Culture Sector

The pandemic has hit some segments of the arts and culture sector harder than others. For example, artists with developmental disabilities or those requiring ASL interpretation have found it especially difficult to find outlets for their work. There have been fewer places and spaces that artists can access throughout the pandemic and as a result, there have been less opportunities to integrate people with disabilities. People asked how they can stay creative and connected, and how artists who are non-verbal or with visual impairments can participate online.

Artists also see a strong role for themselves in city-building and downtown revitalization. As Patti Pon from the Calgary Arts Development describes,

**“We hold an arm’s length relationship and reach with Calgary City Council, so we try and depoliticize the investments we make. We also see a role in what we call city building, or what we refer to as arts-led city building.”**



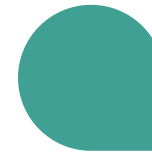
**ContainR** by Springboard Performance features an art park and mural installations made of retrofitted shipping containers. Connecting communities through

art and creative ideas, ContainR is distinctly Calgary — a vibrant meeting place and an experiment in cultural placemaking. ContainR is something that has been happening for many years, and found creative ways to continue to operate throughout the pandemic by working with Alberta Health and Safety to maintain a significant season of arts, by fencing off the area. Partnering with the University of Alberta and Arts Common, people who tested negative for COVID-19 could purchase tickets online to attend. People found it exciting to see rich programming offerings and increasing revenues. And people were willing to come out with a sense of safety and honour for the art and the viewing experience.



**In the future, when we can go back to live performance, I think this notion of hybridity, of what will stay digital and what should be done live, is one that we are all going to have to contend with. This may open up more audiences for us.”**

**Nicole Mion,**  
Springboard Performance



**Calgary Arts Development** is the City of Calgary’s vehicle for investing in the arts and artists. It looks to leverage municipal funds to provide

additional resources to the arts sector and support hundreds of organizations, individuals, artist collectives and ad hoc groups in Calgary. In 2019 it disbursed more than \$9.5 million in grants to artists and arts organizations.



**They [artists] are our storytellers. We — this time — will be remembered through the stories that artists will tell and express, through their lenses, through their eyes, hearts and minds. And because of that, it's really important to us at the Calgary Arts Development, that we do our best to include artists at these tables talking about the future and exploring ways to innovate. How can the arts help activate a downtown? How can artists and residents with corporations or retail blocks start to help us look at our cities, our neighbourhoods, our communities in different ways?... Because the bulk of our investments are made from tax dollars at the city level in support of the public good... I'm very conscious that ours is a role of arts-led city building... for all Calgarians, not some Calgarians."**

**Patti Pon,  
Calgary Arts Development**

### Profile

**Patti Pon** is the President and CEO of the Calgary Arts Development. She is a veteran community and arts champion with an extensive track record of leadership and service in Calgary. Patti has deep and diverse experience in the arts sector, having served as Vice President, Administration at the EPCOR CENTRE for the Performing Arts (now Arts Commons), with stints at the Alberta Performing Arts Stabilization Fund and Alberta Theatre Projects, among others. In the community, she serves on the board of the Calgary Foundation and on a committee for the Calgary Stampede. She was a founding board member of the Asian Heritage Foundation (Southern Alberta) and served on the steering committee for imagineCalgary as well as on the board of CKUA Radio Network. Patti has been awarded the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal as well as the 2013 Harry and Martha Cohen Award, recognizing significant contribution to Calgary's theatre community.







#### Profile

**Djaka Blais-Amare** is the Director, Grants and Racial Equity Strategy with Calgary Foundation. In this new role, Djaka guides the Calgary Foundation through an ongoing journey towards a Racial Equity Culture, defined by Equity in the Center as one that is focused on proactive counteraction of race inequities inside and outside of an organization. She also works collaboratively with the grants team to deliver a broad range of grantmaking activities. Before joining the Calgary Foundation, Djaka worked for several years with the federal government where she administered a variety of funding programs, including the Official Languages Program, Multiculturalism Program and Settlement Programs.

Djaka is currently a fellow with the Justice Funders Harmony Initiative and a founding member of the Foundation for Black Communities, the first philanthropic foundation for Black communities in Canada.

## Place

# A “Spirit of Experimentation”

Calgary’s post-secondary institutions, including the University of Calgary (UCalgary), Mount Royal University and the Southern Alberta Institute for Technology, have a deep history of engaging with the city to help tackle key urban issues. Researchers are often at the table as part of the city’s ecosystem, supporting innovation across multiple sectors. Through shared spaces, partnerships, university-led public symposia, grassroots projects and media conversations, the core post-secondary institutions are increasingly seeking to influence the quality of life of the city, often proposing using the city as a hybrid type of learning space. In this past year, the City of Calgary reached out to UCalgary to help develop its response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some key partnerships are:

- **Civic Innovation YYC** is public-sector lab embedded in and run by the City of Calgary to bring best practices in innovation to internal City business units. The Innovation Lab helped the City transform its programs, processes and people with Design Thinking for effective service delivery and to build a resilient city together.
- The **Urban Alliance** works to foster closer ties between the City of Calgary and UCalgary, to develop the human talent that Calgary needs to ensure a robust economy and a healthy, vibrant and caring city. Its purpose is to help achieve imagineCALGARY, the City’s long-range sustainability plan, through collaboration by attracting and engaging top researchers who seek out and implement solutions with high quality research. It facilitates data sharing and low barrier project development.
- **Living Labs** coordinates city infrastructure that companies, researchers and individuals can use to test ideas and products in a real-life environment. To date, this has included looking at roadways for testing autonomous vehicles, industrial lands for drones, the Calgary Film Centre for augmented reality demonstrations and much more. The City is working to formalize and simplify processes to make public space, transportation corridors and land more accessible for the research and testing of innovative solutions.



Great cities are built around great research universities and cities that successfully reinvent themselves do so in partnerships with focused, world-class institutions. The fates of the City of Calgary and the University of Calgary are inextricably tied. Our community has supported us, and now is the time to show returns on those investments for the benefit of our community.”

Ed McCauley,  
University of Calgary



**CBDX** (City Building Design Experiments and Exhibitions) was conceived in 2020 as a proposed solution to the pandemic and transitions exhibitions to an online or hybrid format. An initiative of the University of Calgary’s School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape, CBDX aims to collectively tackle the big issues of tomorrow as a design community, initiate change, foster new ideas and showcase innovation — the future of city building.



**Growth through Focus** identifies the role of UCalgary in giving back to the community by leveraging its capacity to improve the lives of Calgarians.





The **9 Block** program is a one-year partnership between the City of Calgary (through the leadership of the Mayor's Office) and UCalgary and explores solutions for improving downtown safety and its vibrancy at low or no cost. The partnership focuses on making the area and neighbourhoods around Calgary City Hall more welcoming, distinct and vibrant for everyone through innovative design, planning and programming strategies. Students and researchers at the University's School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape have come up with a wide range of ideas, including using light installations to improve safety, green infrastructure and park spaces, permeable walls and wayfinding ideas to make it easier to navigate. Over the summer they fabricated an experimental canopy with 3D-printed lights that are activated by pedestrians. This project also hired four students to design and implement a tactical urbanism project in the area to test out potential improvement strategies. 9 Block is a project that came out of Urban Alliance.





# Place

## A Model for Civic Partnerships

Calgary's civic institutions coordinate and collaborate to tackle some of the city's key challenges. Many groups from other places come to Calgary to explore and better understand the different models of civic partnerships that exist here. We heard about the new ways that agencies, academia, the City of Calgary and many others are working together to solve important issues. Calgary Arts Development, Calgary Economic Development, Calgary Municipal Land Corporation (CMLC), universities and United Way of Calgary and Area, work closely on diverse issues, from downtown revitalization to equity and inclusion to affordable housing.

# Place

## A Model for Civic Partnerships

The **City Building Design Lab** is a research hub at the University of Calgary's School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape and Calgary Municipal Land Corporation. The lab provides opportunities for students to connect with the building industry and communities to explore how innovations in design, construction and operational management can work together to make cities more resilient, equitable, vibrant, prosperous and healthy. Located downtown in the former library, the space acts as a community connector and catalyst for civic transformation and offers a collaborative space that fosters entrepreneurial approaches to city building and growth. The lab is part of a group of core institutions serving the growth of the city by helping to diversify the economy, revitalize downtown and create new jobs in a range of industries.



**Calgary on Purpose** is a self-funded citizen group of Calgarians working to uncover the shared values and ambitions of the community. It seeks to create a space for constructive conversations about the future of the city. Its mission is to increase transparency, build trust and facilitate inclusion. **We believe that every individual has the opportunity to shape Calgary's future.**



In many ways, the challenge, which is no different today, than it was a year ago, is how do you support organizations carving out time to think about how to work better together? It's really difficult and it's even harder in a constrained resource environment because it takes a lot of work to build better partnerships, to figure out how to work in different ways, to share resources or to share information in more innovative ways. And so, you know, that's a future that we see is going to need a lot more energy, support and investment that we're excited about being a part of."

**Quentin Sinclair,**  
United Way of Calgary and Area

## Place

# Leveraging Calgary's Entrepreneurial Nature

In Calgary, there is a sense of urgency about the need for the city to reinvent itself and to embrace the innovation economy to support it. Today, the city has more patents per capita than the rest of Canada, and the second highest concentration of small businesses among major Canadian cities. Many local organizations are dedicated to supporting tech and innovation-driven entrepreneurs, startups and enterprises, including Startup Calgary, A100 and Calgary Technologies. The city is also seeing major investments in the diversification of its economy.



Calgary has been a “have” city for so long that it hasn’t needed its residents to be resilient. You could go to school, graduate with a technical diploma or degree. A company would hire and train you, and you would have a well-paying job. You could even get a well-paying job with just high school or having dropped out of high school and be okay.

When the path is too easy, there’s no need for critical thinking or adaptation. The city’s new reality will require a new level of alignment, leadership and trust from all levels of government, businesses, educators and social-welfare organizations to succeed.”

Janet Lane,  
Canada West Foundation



### **Advancing Canadian Wastewater Assets** is an initiative of the Urban Alliance and is

a partnership between the City of Calgary and the University of Calgary that supports research and development, knowledge transfer, de-risking, and piloting of leading-edge wastewater treatment technologies. The partnership considers water systems as they relate to the city.



# Place

## Reimagining the City

Calgary is no stranger to big shocks and disruptions. On June 20, 2013, the Bow and Elbow rivers overflowed, flooding neighbourhoods, initiating the largest evacuation order in the city's history and severely challenging the resilience of the municipal government and its residents.

Coupled with a decade of tumbling oil prices, it is not an overstatement to say the city has been tested to its core. Calgary's response to reimagining its future is one centered on inclusion, a diversified economy, future-proofed infrastructure and an open mind to evolve the city's approaches into 21st century. This reimagining is being realized in various ways.

- The City of Calgary undertook an intensive collaborative process to develop a **Resilient Calgary** strategy as a participant in 100 Resilient Cities — pioneered by the Rockefeller Foundation. The strategy is forward thinking and aims to build an inclusive culture across the city, its people and its institutions.



The city established a **strategic foresight resilience team** to guide learning and application efforts across the organization. Since 2017, the team has delivered learning opportunities to staff, including a facilitated strategic foresight approach to select projects by the Corporate Project Management Centre which included activities and professional learning undertaken by the City of Calgary's Innovation Lab. One initiative in particular was a scanning practice that was advanced in the Environment and Safety Management division and is scaling up to be applied across the City's departments.



**Inclusive Futures** is a core part of the city's planning for resilience. The city's lack of equity and inclusion in leadership and decision-making, anti-Black racism, and racism experienced by Indigenous communities and other racialized communities, were identified as key challenges. More recently, Inclusive Futures recognized the differential impacts of COVID-19 experienced by equity-deserving communities and people living in poverty. In 2020 the resilience team worked on increasing diverse representation on boards, establishing equitable decision-making processes and creating a community informed plan to recover from the pandemic and promote community future-readiness.



**Inclusive Futures will happen when Calgary institutions have trusted and informed relationships with equity deserving communities. This is possible when they are regarded as strengths to society, have meaningful voices in decision-making and leadership, are connected and feel empowered to act, interact with systems where power is fairly distributed and are valued for their differing opinions that challenge our thinking.”**

**Resilient Calgary Strategy**



We can talk about the fact that we have the most highly educated workforce per capita in the entire country, in Calgary. But at the same point in time, the ground is shifting underneath us, not only in an energy transition, but in a wave of digitization that has displaced a ton of people who are trying to find their way, with very, very high educational credentials.

I think we can talk at length about what's not working. But from my vantage point, what is working is that we're starting to have conversations that have momentum. This diversification conversation from 10, 15, 20, 30 years ago... paid a lot of lip service, but it was hard to see the results. Macro economically, maybe, but not necessarily on the ground.

Increasingly, we're starting to see people talking to their kids about what companies they're going to work for, and it's not often the bigger players that have played a large, outsized role in our community. It is these social enterprises and technology companies that are increasingly hiring bastions of people.”

**Jason Ribeiro,  
Calgary Economic  
Development**

## Profile

**Ari Agha** (Ph.D., they/them) is a genderqueer singer, creator, researcher, and writer. At 39 years old, Ari had to decide whether they were willing to risk their singing voice to get relief from gender dysphoria by taking testosterone, or 'T', as part of their gender transition. Upon deciding to begin testosterone therapy, they started *Key of T* with University of Calgary voice faculty, Laura Hynes (D.M.A). *Key of T* is many things. Having received SSHRC research-creation funding, it is the first rigorous study of transgender singing voice change. It is a documentary short film and a vocal music theater performance that premiered in September of 2019 at the University of Calgary. The show moves through and beyond Ari's singing voice change, exploring the richness and complexity beyond the gender binary. *Key of T* allows others to learn from Ari's transition experience, expands how we think about gender and works to create a more just world for people of all genders. Ari has begun working on the next iteration of *Key of T*.

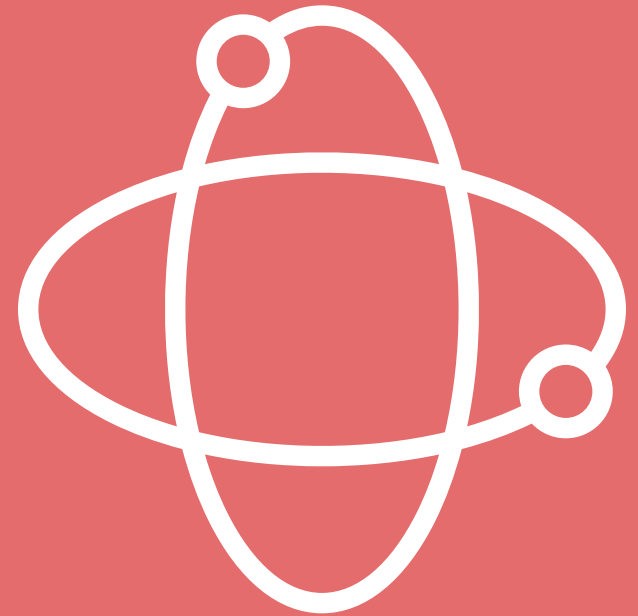
Ari moved from Washington, D.C. to Treaty 7 territory in 2014. They work for wages as a leader of Policy, Partnerships and Research with Calgary Housing Company. They advocate feminism, anti-racism, decolonization and trans rights. Ari blogs at [www.genderqueerme.com](http://www.genderqueerme.com).





## Potential

**This section focuses on what people told us they see as the future of Calgary. A great city offers to its residents, both individually and together, the potential to achieve sustainable development aims and the good life we all seek. Jane Jacobs used to say that cities hold “the seeds of their own regeneration.” *Calgary Transforms* highlights areas to watch for growth.**



# Potential Towards An Inclusive and Equitable Calgary

Advocates point to a surge in social resilience and mobilization among Black, Indigenous and other racialized groups. While social service providers have seen an increase in the number of racialized Calgarians who are accessing services during this time, informal groups are also building community capacity. The City of Calgary has also dedicated an anti-racism capacity-building fund to support collaborative initiatives that will allow organizations to identify and undo systemic racism by changing practices, policies, structures and systems.

People recalled during Calgary's flood in 2013, the community came together, organized themselves, took care of seniors and many others, and this kind of action continues in other sectors and by different groups.



When the formal system is absent, it's the informal system that gets in and that makes a difference”.

Yared Belayneh,  
United Way of  
Calgary and Area



According to the 2020 **Vital Signs report**, 82% of all respondents said they believe racism exists in Calgary. Two-thirds of Black Calgarians expressed they have felt unsafe or threatened in the city. While 56 percent of respondents felt that Calgarians are committed to anti-racism, equity and inclusion, that belief drops to 53 percent among Indigenous people and 35 percent among Black Calgarians.

# Potential

## Towards An Inclusive and Equitable Calgary

Francis Boakye from the Centre for Newcomers pointed out that Black youth in particular are really struggling: “Many parents juggle long work hours or multiple jobs and have little time to take care of family and build identity and belonging. This is a very complex issue and requires family-based perspectives and solutions.”

People also told us that more diversity is needed in leadership and there is a need for cutting across siloed conversations. Calgary Arts Development's Patti Pon suggests organizations should double their budget for developing more diversity in leadership and building on their organization's equity, diversity and inclusion tenets to achieve results in this area. She suggests finding the “disruptors” who can work on the side and take risks. She told us,

**“We have work to do. If we never get into the system, how can we identify what we need to fix?”**

“One of the things I feel is a cause of why we have all these siloed conversations is because people feel like they're not being listened to ... so how do we use this time of COVID-19 to be better listeners as a city? Somebody described Calgary to me as the reluctant city. We've got all these great ideas. We've got all these conversations happening. We are so reluctant to pull the trigger and try. And I don't know why that is, but I'd love to have a conversation with people who don't get to be a part of the conversation. And maybe that's where Zoom platforms and online platforms and these protests and all those things can help us create some kind of meaning or different hypotheses for the city.”

**Patti Pon,  
Calgary Arts Development**



# Potential

## The Future Calgary's Equity-Deserving Communities Want

On December 8, 2020, Resilient Calgary, the Canadian Poverty Institute, Vibrant Communities Calgary and the Canadian Urban Institute, hosted an equity-deserving communities (EDC) conversation about what they envision the city's post-pandemic "new normal" could look like over the next decade. EDCs include groups of people who generally have less access to opportunities, resources and systems of power because of their actual and perceived identity or identities. EDCs often experience social and financial disadvantages because of systems of oppression.

The event provided a platform to discuss issues around the future that Calgarians want. Almost 80 people participated in the virtual session. CUI recorded, summarized and shared the break-out room conversations with the organizers, who intend to continue this work. While it is not possible to adequately relay everything that CUI heard during this session, some of the key points are included below.



# Potential

## The Future Calgary's Equity-Deserving Communities Want

### Economic Prosperity

- Closing the economic gap: A K-shaped recovery (where after a recession certain parts of the economy resume growth while others lag behind) has resulted in EDCs being further economically disadvantaged
- New approach to economic restart: Has been marked by tensions between ideologies
- Small and medium-sized businesses: Concern about the significant closures across the city
- Food security: Disproportionate impact on women and income fallout from pandemic is driving discourse on rights-based economic recovery
- Universal basic income: Should be part of mainstream discussion; lots of positivity around the potential for structural change

### Leadership

- Recognition: Build up informal leadership
- Value lived experience: Engage people with lived experience to fill the gaps
- Governance: Work toward harmony across municipal, provincial and federal government systems
- Build on investment: Use Calgary's community organizations to give voice and facilitate dialogue. Ensure investment is broad, representative and equitable

### Public Health and Social Services

- Greater equity: The pandemic has made it worse for people already trying to secure resources like food, shelter and general help
- End the opioid crisis
- New models: There is an opportunity to build new collaborations that build on the community coming together (e.g., police and social workers)
- Focus on people: Embrace new ways of thinking in the community; there is value in centering people
- Preparedness: How can we all (locally, nationally, globally) have a contingency plan moving forward? Resurrect generational thinking
- Reimagine: Services and supports can promote a just society
- Work from home: Extremely limited without equipment, wi-fi and support

### Cohesive, Engaged and Just Communities

- Community needs: An emphasis on community needs is essential, more so than our pre-pandemic condition. The insights gained from the Black Lives Matter movement should be an integral part of the foundation for our future
- End to systemic racism: Find ways to combat the acceleration of systemic racism

# Potential Indigenous Placemaking

While Calgary has the fifth largest urban Indigenous population in Canada, it does not have a dedicated gathering place. The **Indigenous Gathering Place Society of Calgary** is changing that. Working with the City of Calgary and the Province of Alberta to find a location at the junction of the Bow and Elbow rivers, the vision is for “a space where we share, connect, heal, renew and celebrate Indigenous culture. A place to protect Indigenous practices, languages and Elders’ wisdom, and oral and written teachings among all Nations and all our relations”. It will be a place where the urban Indigenous people of Calgary can practice their spirituality in a safe way and where non-Indigenous people can come to learn and be a part of the community knowledge and traditions.

Since 2017, the **Calgary Library** has been working with the Indigenous Place Making Council of Canada to receive guidance on how to make Indigenous visual and oral storytelling more prominent in libraries. Library staff visited the Stoney Nation, Siksika Nation, Tsuu’tina Nation, the Métis Nation of Alberta and the AFCC for input. These consultations helped create the library’s Indigenous Placemaking initiative, which creates traditional and contemporary artworks that promote understanding and inspire collaboration among artists of all disciplines, backgrounds and experience levels. Having these pieces in the library helps create an inclusive space for sharing and gathering of all Nations and communities to learn and grow together.



**The Niitsitapi li tass  
ksiii nii mat tsoo kop  
(Niitsitapi Learning  
Centre)** is a communal

place to deepen knowledge and understanding of Indigenous ceremonies, histories, cultures, contributions and ways of knowing for all. The centre is working closely with and being guided by the advice of community Elders to maintain and build key partnerships and to enhance educational opportunities for students, families, the Calgary Board of Education and community. Calgarians are invited to use the facility for programs, celebrations and events.





### Profile

**Dr. Reg Crowshoe** is a prominent cultural and spiritual leader from Piikani First Nation in Southern Alberta, where he formerly served as Chief. He is also known as Awakaaseena, meaning Deer Chief in the Blackfoot language. As an Elder and a Bundle Keeper, his father Joe Crowshoe's teachings were instrumental to Piikani cultural preservation. His mother's side was from the Nez Perce Nation in Idaho. The Piikani people took in his mother's ancestors when they came across to Canada, to escape being forced onto a reservation in the southwestern United States. At the age of five he was sent to Anglican Residential School. Prior to going to school, he spoke the Blackfoot language and believed in his grandparents' ways. When he went to residential school, he was lost — the system did not reflect his belief system in any way. Reg finds strength in the ceremonies and teachings of his parents and grandparents. They passed on traditional authorities that he is responsible for today as a ceremonial Grandparent. He runs ceremonies of the Thunder Pipe, the Sun Dance and the Brave Dog Society as a part of his traditional lineage and Blackfoot identity.

# Potential Downtown Revitalization as a Beacon for the Rest of Canada

Downtowns are not only central to the economies of Canadian cities, but they provide much of the culture, innovation, social fabric and connections that draw people together for celebration, entertainment and civic engagement.

The City of Calgary is investing in a massive transformation to evolve its downtown moving forward, recognizing that it needs to adapt to the evolving needs of a new generation of work and business and the way people live, travel and access amenities, goods and services. The city recognizes that this is complex and will require leveraging the collective efforts of the city and its public and private sector partners to respond to prolonged economic challenges. This will involve exploring opportunities to create jobs, drive economic recovery and revitalize and transform the downtown to accommodate this new way working.



When you look at cities like San Francisco, Vancouver, Toronto and New York, they've been successful in the digital

and tech economy for a whole bunch of reasons. And they all have amazing downtowns with residential that are active and animated almost 24/7. We really have to push that way. We've got some great opportunities [for office conversions] here. We also need public parks and public spaces downtown. We need to make downtown fun. We really have to work hard at it. It will take money and the investment will be worth it.

For example, the CMLC is implementing public infrastructure programs to kickstart Calgary's urban renewal. It started with the Rivers District and it is now launching the Arts Commons Transformation project to advance three long term city building initiatives, completing construction on several East Village projects and continuing to provide community programming options. CMLC's biggest city building projects including a large arena expansion, known as the Event Centre and 17th Avenue extension, and a Victoria Park/Stampede Station rebuild, will continue to advance this year."

**Ken Toews,**  
**Strategic Group**

# Potential

## Downtown Revitalization as a Beacon for the Rest of Canada

Bold intentional investments are part of a strategy to revitalize downtown. The city has been looking at the lasting impact of the 2014 recession and re-evaluating what downtown should be. A new strategy seeks to retool the core from being a business district that is often empty at night to one with more amenities, including pedestrian and cyclist infrastructure, better connections to green space, more housing and more life beyond the work week. In April 2021, **Calgary's Greater Downtown Plan** was endorsed by Calgary City Council. The budget for the full implementation of downtown over ten years is estimated to be \$1 billion. Council has approved \$200 million to begin, which includes:

- \$80 million to fund the first phase of the Arts Commons transformation project
- \$45 million to incentivize office to residential conversion, redevelopment or adaptive use projects for post-secondary institutions
- \$55 million for a “downtown vibrancy capital program”
- \$5 million for programming events

Calgary has the tools to invest in its downtown. In 2007, a Community Revitalization Levy (CRL) was created specifically to serve infrastructure and development plans in the downtown through the **Calgary Municipal Land Corporation (CMLC)**.




**1M** is a platform to amplify and accelerate hundreds of small ideas, experiments and projects to help reconnect people to downtowns and main streets. 1M is about boosting connectivity at a micro-neighbourhood scale, building momentum one million sq ft at a time. 1M is partnering with the Calgary Downtown Association, private developers and community partners to accelerate creator-led projects that activate under-utilized spaces downtown.



**Arts Commons** was granted \$80 million for the first phase of its transformation project under the new Downtown Strategy, which will see a new purpose-built theatre complex connected by an elevated corridor to its current home across the street. The expansion, known as the Arts Commons Transformation, will allow Arts Commons to increase its seating capacity by about 35 percent. This funding is an important signal that the city values the arts and sees the arts as a key player in its downtown recovery.





**Similar to Tax Increment Financing (TIF) used widely in the United States, Calgary's Community Revitalization Levy (CRL) provides a means to segregate property tax revenue increases that result from redevelopment in the Rivers District into a fund for infrastructure improvements. The city levies and collects the CRL through the property tax system and then allocates the funds to the Canada Municipal Lands Corporation to implement the plans.**

# Potential

## Downtown Revitalization as a Beacon for the Rest of Canada

The City of Calgary is also working on boosting a robust downtown ecosystem with arms-length agencies like the new library that anchors the redevelopment of the East Victoria Park and leveraging innovative financing policies like the **Community Revitalization Levy** (CRL). Calgary Economic Development and Calgary Arts Development have both been heavily engaged in the creation of the Downtown Plan. These agencies reflect the commitment of an ambitious municipal government, as do recently announced programs to incentivize office conversions and residential development and the continued nurturance of a burgeoning tech and innovation sector through the Living Labs program and others. The challenge of economic diversification isn't a new one for Alberta's cities, but the pandemic may provide the nudge to accomplish it.

For example, through its Community Revitalization Levy, CMLC is implementing public infrastructure programs to kickstart Calgary's urban renewal. It started with the Rivers District, and it is now launching the Arts Commons Transformation project to advance three long-term city building initiatives, including completing construction on several East Village projects and continuing to provide community programming options. CMLC's biggest city building project is a large arena expansion, known as the Event Centre and 17th Avenue extension, and a Victoria Park/Stampede Station rebuild, which will continue throughout 2021.



This is the opportunity to showcase what solutions Calgary has to the world's problems.

We're entrepreneurial. This is the time to showcase it. On office conversions, it's a no brainer if we get to the right incentive. It's not just conversions, but activations and reactivations of downtown. We need to work on the technical policy pieces around conversions, density bonuses, but also really thoughtful investments in animation, pilot testing for particular initiatives, around long-term care facilities and transformation and things that were never thought about before. We have to really think about getting rid of some stuff that is not actually serving its purpose anymore and pursuing opportunities that can be. I haven't seen us as a city really embrace that kind of change. And I worry about the risk aversion in a market like this, but also in a time where people are being a little more precious about those longer-term commitments."

**Jason Ribeiro,**  
**Calgary Economic**  
**Development**

# Potential

## Solving Problems Through Social Innovation

Social innovation is the intentional work of solving complex social and environmental problems at the root to increase resiliency and reduce vulnerability within people and the environment. Calgary has a vibrant social innovation landscape with public, non-profit, academic and private sectors working to uncover new solutions to global, social and environmental problems.

The Calgarians we engaged with pointed to the ingenuity of their counterparts who work within and outside of the formal systems to create social change. They spoke to the importance of process, partnerships and patience required to see impact. The universities and United Way of Calgary and Area are doing important work in the space and the ecosystem works well.

COVID-19 in Calgary, like everywhere else, has laid bare the broken systems. And in Calgary, resourceful people and communities worked with and around the systems to get through to the people who needed help. What we heard was the hope that as these new approaches start to normalize, the institutions will adjust to this new normal, and learn and adapt to be more responsive and proactive.

We also heard that better coordination and local investment is needed. As Beth Gignac of United Way of Calgary and Area describes, “If we were to harness 1–3 percent and it was coordinated and harnessed, we would achieve greater common purpose.”



**People are resilient, systems are not. Ingenious people in Calgary are making things happen while systems are failing around them.**

**Food security systems, shelter and housing. In Northeast Calgary, the community has come together to put up vaccination sites and spread COVID-awareness. This is all because people leaned into the disruption and, acknowledging that the systems were not working, just figured it out themselves. What we are seeing a year in is that those new practices are starting to normalize and settle to what a new normal way of working could look like and how we can turn this into a sustainable approach.”**

**Beth Gignac,  
United Way of Calgary and Area**



**This is also emblematic of the new and next economy. Suncor Energy Foundation, among publicly traded companies, has arguably the most interesting approach to community innovation there is. It has funded and seeded much of the social innovation in the nation. ATB Financial, a large publicly owned bank, has helped to bring attention to LGBT rights and Pride celebrations in spite of having a primarily rural clientele.”**

**James Stauch,  
Institute for Community  
Prosperity at  
Mount Royal University**



# Potential

## Solving Problems Through Social Innovation

Some of the innovative organizations leading the way include:

Calgary Arts Development (CAD) is one of those at the forefront of addressing social issues. Between 2013–2018, CAD doubled its budget with equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility as core pillars. It is now being called upon to participate and lead anti-racism programs and policy development and is taking a view to innovate within the systems while also identifying and supporting the disrupters who can work from the outside. As CAD's Patti Pon describes, "That's where the research and development happens. That's where you can risk and fail. It has to be iterative, or it will never happen."

Other organizations such as **Trico Changemakers** at Mount Royal University focus on supporting youth with social innovation and social enterprise. As Calgary is the youngest city in Canada, it makes sense to Trico to focus on giving young people the voice and the venue to contribute now, with the view that they will transform the city. In Calgary we heard that there is sometimes reluctance to give up space by those who have power and voice to lead with new ways of thinking creatively. But as Studio Director Lena Soots says, "If we actually give young people more of a role in social innovation, we will see some pretty amazing things happen."



**We are an army of problem solvers. We don't look for partners. We look for co-conspirators in systems change. And we want to bring artists to the table."**

**Patti Pon,**  
**Calgary Arts Development**



The **Trico Changemakers Studio** is a social innovation, collaboration, and learning space based at Mount Royal University. They describe themselves as a

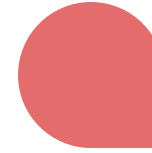
"community of social entrepreneurs, non-profits, community organizations, small businesses, artists, agencies, faculty, and students committed to addressing the complex social and environmental challenges of our time." Before the pandemic, the Studio was home to the Alberta Health Services Design Lab, Calgary Boys and Girls Club, and Calgary Arts Development with the Artist as Changemaker project giving space for artists. Other startups and individuals and activists working in social innovation also made their home in the Studio. The intention of the space is to create a home on campus that is alive and doing the work of social innovation on campus so that students are not having to leave campus. The space itself also serves as a social enterprise, with a coworking space that brings in revenue together with consulting services in social impact facilitation for clients that are looking at systems change and social innovation either in their organizations or their communities.

# Potential

## Solving Problems Through Social Innovation

The Institute for Community Prosperity (ICP), housed in Mount Royal University, gives students access to high impact, immersive learning and offers undergraduate community-partnered research opportunities to build their confidence and capacity to lead transformational change in their communities. ICP has established a number of city experience labs (CityXLab) to support the transformation of Calgary into an “experience city”. Their five current research programs include:

- **ActiveCITY** is focused on the development and delivery of active living, organized sports, active recreation and health and wellness experiences.
- **CreativeCITY** is supporting Calgary Arts Development and the Calgary Economic Development in developing a Creative Economy Playbook for Calgary.
- **LearningCITY** aims to help Calgary transition from the traditional closed learning system (which is defined by isolated learning experiences like the path from kindergarten to post-secondary to professional development), to an open, lifelong personalized learning system (where people are empowered by and accountable for their own continuous development). The LearningCITY team conducted a two-part study examining how Calgary’s learning system should evolve to meet emerging demands.
- **Measuring What Matters** produces a unified community prosperity index to ensure that decisions made at every level in Calgary, (individual family, corporation, public body or a social organization), are coming from a common baseline of fact to stimulate debate and momentum for collaborative action. The CityXLab and the Institute for Community Prosperity at Mount Royal University will be facilitating a working group to develop, test and refine a unified community prosperity index. A feasibility report will be released in June 2021.
- **Why Calgary** looks for data to determine trends in young adults leaving or considering leaving Calgary.



**cSPACE** is a social enterprise dedicated to supporting communities of artists, non-profits, and entrepreneurs working at the creative edge of change with

the belief that diverse communities of artists, designers, musicians and makers can shape the Calgary of the future. cSPACE’s vision for Calgary is a city where creative enterprise thrives in vibrant communities. Situated in the 1912 King Edward School that underwent an urban transformation and converted into a 47,000 square foot community hub and arts incubator that opened in 2017, its \$34.5M transformation was a complex mix of government, foundation, corporate and individual donations. The entire block was transformed from a school site to a mixed-use site with luxury condos to the west and a luxury seniors’ care facility to the east. The design and scale of both the residences of King Edward and The Edward complement the school in scale, architecture and façade materials. It created a unique block where old meets new and is home to 30+ artists and art groups, ranging from Sage Theatre to Making Treaty 7 Cultural Society and from NUR Films to The Alexandra Writers Centre Society. It’s also home to the The Sandbox, which has a coworking space, hallway galleries, and a 138-seat multi-use theatre.



**There are so many brilliant people [in Calgary] who can hold and guide people through that space. This is much more important**

**than doing it by ourselves.”**  
**Lena Soots,**  
**Trico Changemakers Studio,**  
**Mount Royal University**

# Potential

## Solving Problems Through Social Innovation

One of the city's most successful and largest social enterprise/tech startups is **Benevity**. This Calgary-based corporate social responsibility platform helps to deliver workplace giving, matching, volunteering and integrated grant management solutions for companies. One of the first certified “B Corps” in Canada, Benevity's scale is staggering: the company has over 2 million users around the world, has processed over \$2 billion in donations and 10 million hours of volunteering time to almost 150,000 charities, and boasts almost 2 million charities in its database. In early 2021 it acquired an investment that brings its valuation to over \$1 billion (USD).



**We often get hung up on ‘the what’ of social innovation — what does it look like and what is the outcome and what are we trying to achieve and what are we going to change — whereas the transformative potential of social innovation is in the process of new ways of thinking and creativity. And that takes time. The process of innovation over the product of innovation is really important.”**

**Lena Soots,  
Trico Changemakers Studio,  
Mount Royal University**



# Potential Adapting Through “Open Innovation”

Learning to adapt to new opportunities is at the heart of Calgary’s economic strategy, Calgary in the New Economy, approved by City Council in 2018.

At the root of adaptation is learning. In the past, Calgary’s economy has been mostly reliant on natural resources and its prosperity has meant that Calgarians have not been forced to be as innovative as people in other cities. For example, only a quarter of Calgary’s technical expertise is made up of software engineers and data scientists, compared with 50–62 percent in Ottawa, Vancouver, Montreal and Toronto.



## **Calgary in the New Economy**

was guided by the community’s top CEOs and community leaders representing a variety of industries, post-secondary institutions and municipal agencies. Insights were also gathered from community stakeholders and citizens. The City of Calgary is seeing progress in each of the strategy’s four areas of focus: talent, innovation, business environment and place.



**COVID-19 has brought to the fore how critical adaptability is, and the need for profound change in Calgary, and in all of our cities. A Learning City re-envisioning the nature of learning and the learner by recognizing that traditional education systems are only one component of the learning system.**

# Potential

## Adapting Through “Open Innovation”

Calgary is proposing to adopt an open innovation learning model. This model, adopted by companies ranging from Google to LEGO, advances the idea that when people are empowered, innovation is accelerated. However, with this empowerment comes significant responsibility to invest in this new model. Calgary Economic Development, together with a group of community partners, has launched the **LearningCITY** Project to embrace the concept of life-long learning for Calgarians.

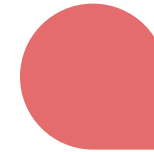
The **LearningCITY** Project is based on five **principles** of an empowered learner:

- 1 Transition to an open life-long personalized learning system for continuous development**
- 2 Transition to purpose-based learning that prioritizes empowerment and autonomy—a climbing wall rather than a ladder**
- 3 Commit to universal experiential learning, incorporating a minimum level of experiential learning for undergraduates**
- 4 Develop enabling competencies — useful skills in multiple context**
- 5 Invest in community-level structural capital with a high-level of coordination and collaboration between many stakeholders**



**What I’m concerned about is that the actions won’t be connected or integrated. And that’s really going to dilute our assets, and it will dilute our strengths and people will not get the support that they need. And we need to build *with* people, not *for* people.”**

**Beth Gignac,**  
**United Way of Calgary and Area**



The **LearningCITY** Project explores how a city-wide learning system could redefine the future of Calgary. Calgary’s Economic Development Department and post-secondary institutions are looking at how to ensure Calgary remains competitive and grows and develops its talent pool. The initiative looks to the educational system, but also employers, professional associations and individuals themselves.

# Acknowledgements

CUI x Local is the result of an inspiring contribution from a diverse cross-section of partners in Calgary. We reached out to our most trusted network of those who live in and love Calgary to help us set up meetings and roundtable discussions throughout the week and could not have done it without them.

**Robert Plitt**, CUI's Regional Lead in Calgary, did much of the heavy lifting for us to be in Calgary. He reached out to his network to develop & deliver a fulsome program.

**The City of Calgary** helped us understand the numerous municipal initiatives and supported us to convene one session on mental health and a second session on municipal innovation.

**Jeny Mathews-Thusoo, Megan Reid and Derek Cook** organized and convened "The Future Calgary's Equity-Deserving Communities Want" event. They prepared facilitators, designed the session, created a video and guided participants through thoughtful activities. They also summarized the findings for us.

**John Brown** brought colleagues together to share how academic institutions are contributing to city building.

**Brad Krizan** connected us with the development sector; **James Stauch** brought together the key players in social innovation and **David Finch** convened a session on **Learning City**.

**Elsbeth Mehrer** and **Ari Agha** organized a cross-industry session on housing; **Joni Carrol** from Calgary Arts Development put together a discussion on the arts sector while **Karen Ball** pulled together not-for-profits to talk about the state of philanthropy and giving. **Francis Boakye** and **Yared Belayneh** patiently shared the challenges in confronting Anti-Black Racism in Calgary and **Joanne Pinnow** convened a session on Indigenous issues.

**To those organizations and individuals who participated throughout the week: Thank You.** We could not have undertaken this work without your valuable time, energy and commitment.

# Acknowledgements

## 57 Organizations

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**CUI x Local is a virtual listening tour to gather interpretations, data, assessments, priorities, bright spots and stories from on-the-ground voices to help deepen our collective understanding of the interconnected and interdependent issues facing urban Canada. Alongside local partners, we are organizing week-long residencies involving a combination of public and invitation-only meetings and activities. By looking at local issues and connecting them nationally, CUI x Local will strengthen the connective tissue within and across communities from coast to coast to coast.**

**More at:**

**[canurb.org/cuixlocal](https://canurb.org/cuixlocal)**

