



Ten Actions to Accelerate University Social Impact

*A paper on how university presidents and
their teams can accelerate their institutions
as a greater force for good.*

September 2022.

Photo credit: Samantha Gades

McConnell

Introduction

Canadian university presidents collaborated for five years from 2017 - 2022 to accelerate their universities as a greater force for good.

Supported by the McConnell Foundation, a group of 30 presidents (the Canadian University Presidents Social Impact Collaboration) created several tools, resources, and connections to scale their social impact and put Canada on a more sustainable course. This report summarizes the results of this initiative, organized into President and Administrator Engagement. It includes ten actions presidents and their teams can take right away for greater impact.

Acknowledgements

Coro Strandberg, advisor to the Canadian University Presidents Social Impact Collaboration since its founding, and author of many of its reports, wrote this report on behalf of the McConnell Foundation. **Kelly Hodgins**, McConnell Foundation Program Manager, provided input and advice on the report and **Aquil Virani** designed it.

Ten Actions

Ten Actions Presidents and their Teams can Take Right Away for Greater Impact

This paper sets out **ten quick starts** university presidents and their teams can pursue to accelerate their institutions as a greater force for good.

For a full list of the ten actions to refer to, go to page **14**.

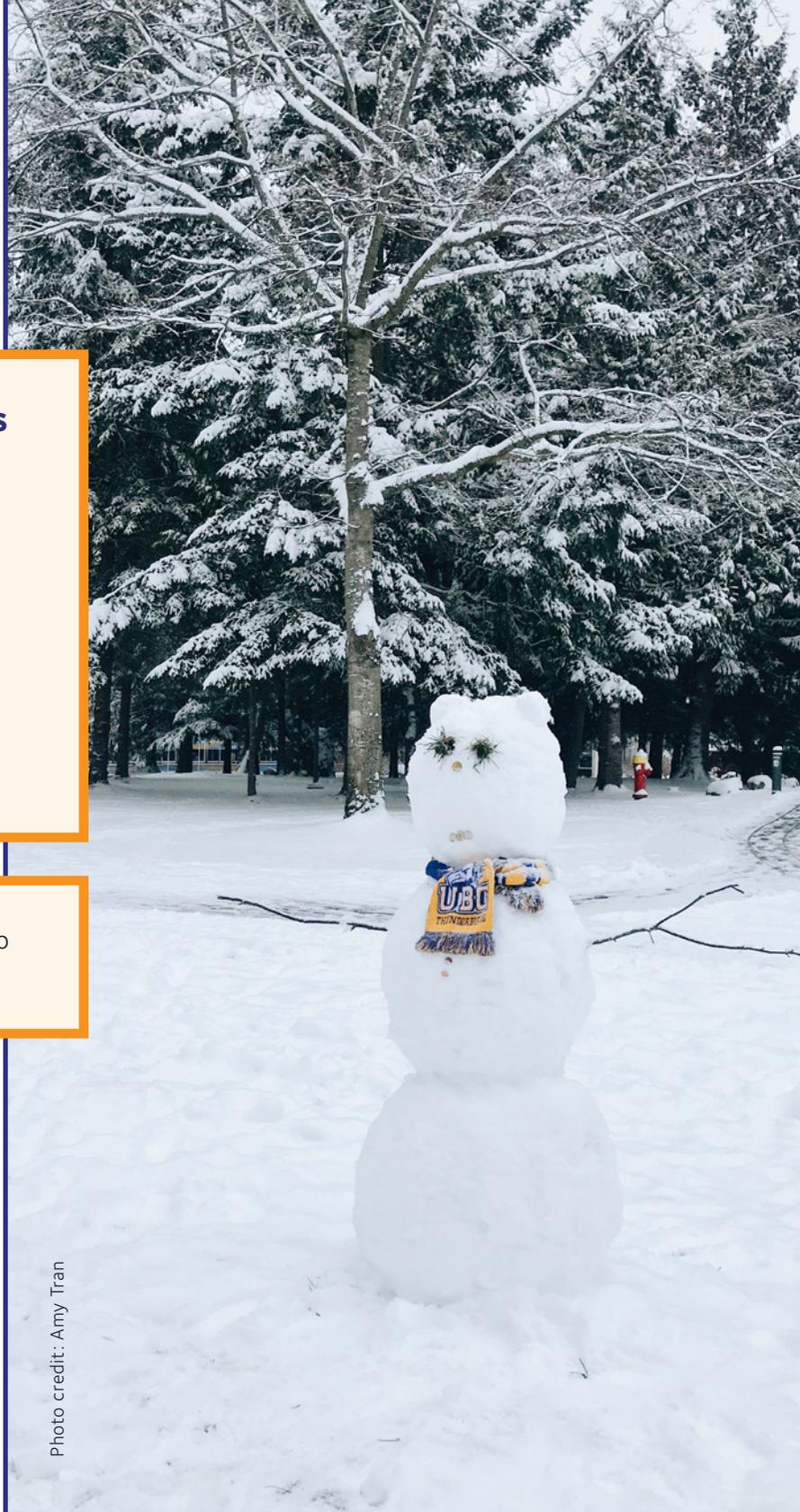
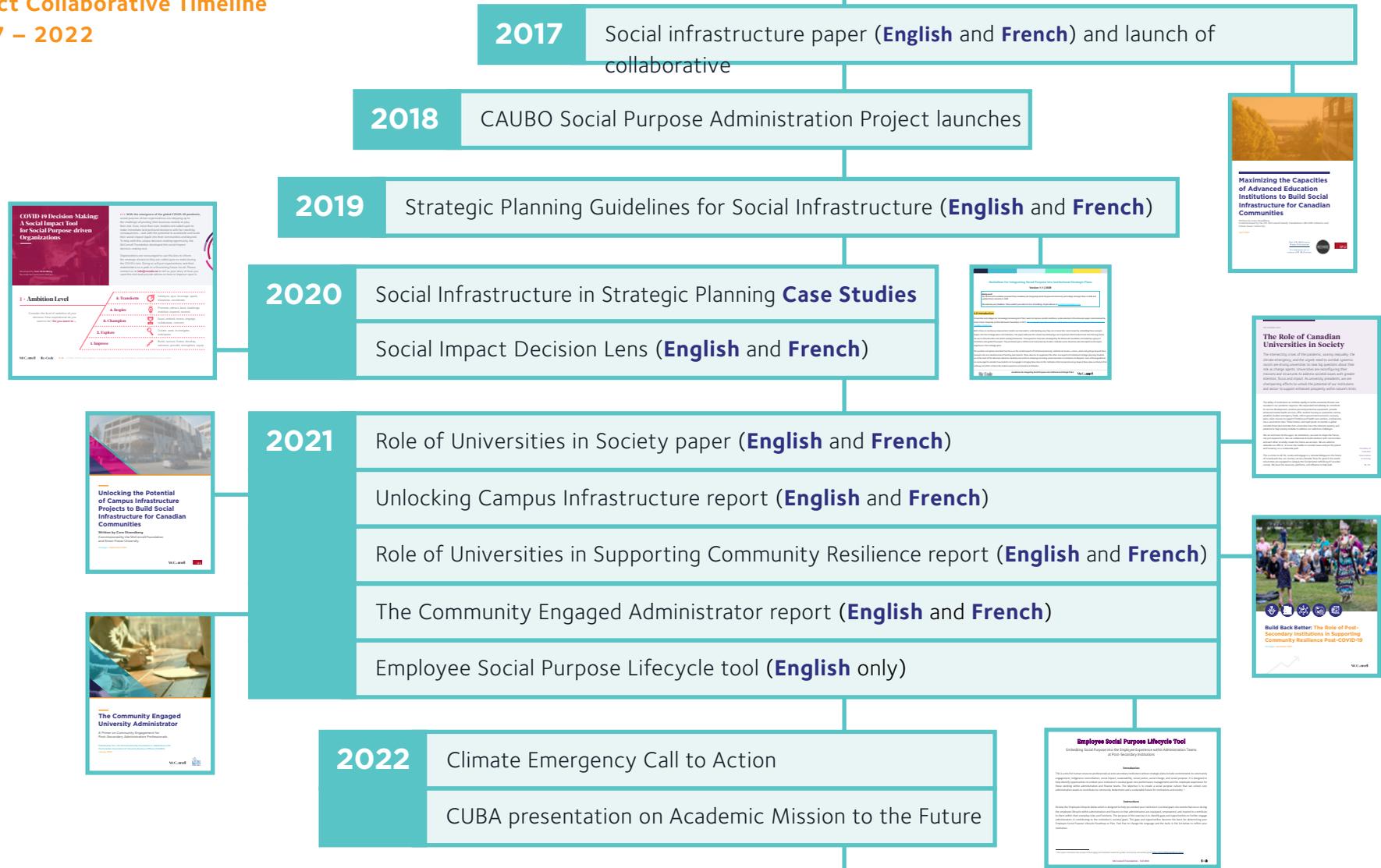


Photo credit: Amy Tran

Activity Timeline

Canadian University Presidents Social Impact Collaborative Timeline
2017 – 2022



University President Engagement

In Canada and around the world, society faces challenges and uncertainties that threaten social cohesion and community well-being. Universities are uniquely positioned to invent and scale the solutions needed to enable a better quality of life for all of society within planetary thresholds. Many of these solutions can be found in their existing assets and capacities, which, when directed at building social infrastructure, can reveal the pathway for citizens and their institutions to thrive.

In 2017, these words launched a journey to understand and mobilize the capacities universities, colleges and polytechnic institutes can unlock and maximize individually and collectively to build social infrastructure for Canadian communities. That year the report **“Maximizing the Capacities of Advanced Education Institutions to Build Social Infrastructure for Canadian Communities”** was published and Simon Fraser University convened the first Building Social Infrastructure gathering in May 2017. The foundational paper constituted a **Call to Action for post-secondary institutions to accelerate and scale their beneficial social impact.**

The Role of Canadian Universities in Society

The Role of Canadian Universities in Society is a manifesto on the bold and visionary role of the post-secondary sector to accelerate progress towards a sustainable future. The **Presidents’ Vision Document** was developed by 30 presidents and published in September 2021, the paper lists fourteen change agent roles universities are playing to build a better society (in **English** and **French**).



➔ Action 1

Share the **foundational paper** with your teams to get inspiration and ideas for harnessing your institution’s assets, tools, and instruments for social good.

Read the **Presidents’ Vision Document** when looking for inspiration in your work. Share it with your teams to use when they are updating their strategic priorities.

Photo credit: Amy Tran

Climate Emergency Call to Action

In fall 2021, Presidents agreed they wanted to advance one of these change agent roles, to join forces to move the needle on a societal issue and prioritized the Climate Emergency. They developed a Call to Action, a framework that “brings together Canadian universities around the shared urgency of the climate emergency.” The Call to Action commits Presidents to “engage in transformative action to address this existential threat. The aim is to integrate climate in the core of our educational mandate, and to mobilize collective, coordinated efforts to accelerate climate action across all of society”. They said that “Global action is needed; within the Canadian network of university climate leaders, we will work to build momentum at all levels.”

Peer Discussions

Presidents were interested in learning from each other and sharing best practices to accelerate their impact and over two years they came together to discuss the following topics:

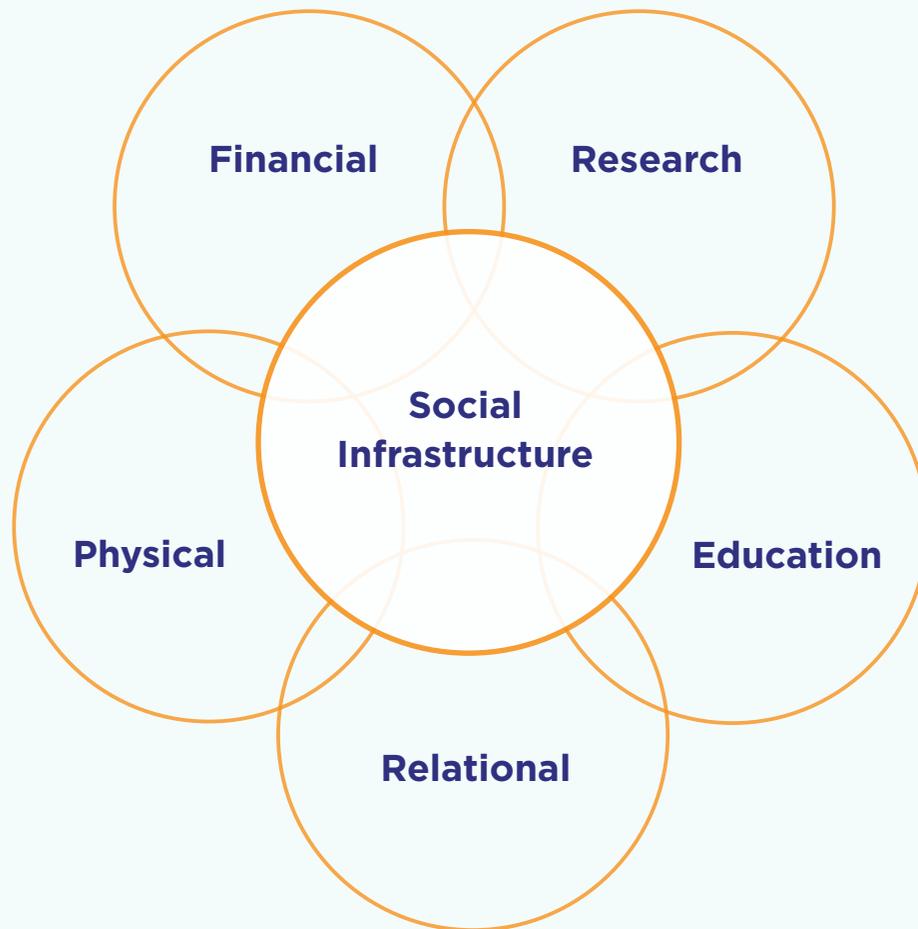
- Embedding social impact in strategic planning
- Purpose of the campus in the new area
- Leveraging campus expansion projects to increase social impact
- Transformational strategic planning
- Post-Secondary Instruments for Social Infrastructure

The foundational paper identified **a range of assets, or tools or instruments that institutions have at their disposal** to direct at social change, as revealed in this flower visual below. This is a holistic framework that can be applied when tackling local or global social issues as it highlights the role institutions play in society beyond teaching and research.

Photo credit: Samantha Gades



Social Infrastructure Framework



Financial

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

Research

- Research mandate
- Data, evidence and scientific information

Physical

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

➔ Action 2

When tackling a societal issue, ask your teams to use this **social infrastructure framework** to come up with strategies to deploy these institutional assets to address it.

Education

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

Relational

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

Community Resilience Report

Here's one example of how to use the Social Infrastructure Framework to mobilize institutional assets for good. A group of nine universities got together in 2021 to host a series of community dialogues using the flower diagram to ask how they could help community stakeholders build a more resilient future. This resulted in a set of actions universities can implement right away to respond to our collective social, environmental, and economic challenges post-pandemic. This **Community Resilience Report** summarizes communities' ideas (in **English** and **French**).



Social Impact Continuum of Practice

The 2017 foundational paper proposed that there was a **social impact continuum of practices** across institutions as the following diagram sets out.

Continuum of Practices – All institutions are active and engaged in community endeavours. Depending on their priorities, they will be active at different points of the following continuum of community engagement and social infrastructure practices.



1. Strong ad hoc community practices

2. Community embedment in teaching and research

3. Community strategic pillar in institutional plan

4. Holistic community integration across the enterprise and its governance, relationships and roles

➔ Action 3

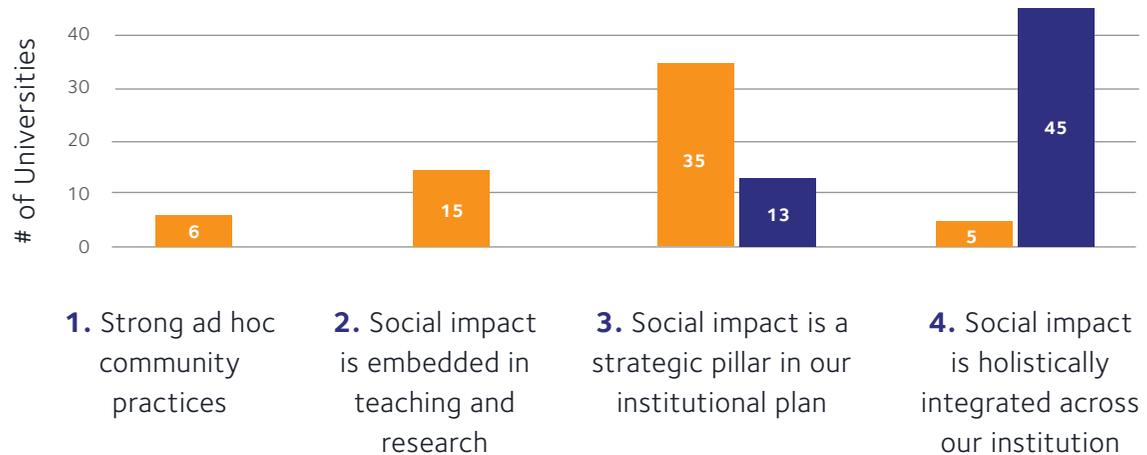
Encourage your teams to read the **community resilience report** to find quick start actions your institution can take. Use the **social infrastructure framework** as a holistic model when tackling community challenges.

➔ Action 4

Get your teams together to assess where your institution is on the **social impact continuum** and where you would like to be. Compare yourself to your peers. Set a plan to advance.

In 2019, Universities Canada surveyed its membership to find out where they sat along this continuum and where they desired to be (using the term “social impact”). Two-thirds of its members participated in the survey, totaling 65 universities. As can be seen in the table below, the survey revealed that **universities are strongly interested in advancing social impact practices**. Currently, most institutions are at stage 2 or 3 on the continuum. Respondents’ desired states are to either ensure social impact is a strategic pillar in their institutional plan, or integrated holistically across the institution’s governance, relationships and roles.

Social Impact Continuum of Practice: Universities’ current and desired states

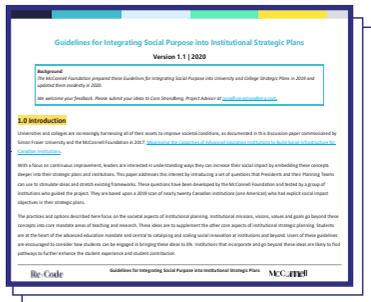


The survey results **demonstrate the appetite** among post-secondary institutions to fully embed social infrastructure. The seven initiatives summarized below further reveal the energy, passion and innovation within the sector to accelerate and scale social impact in their institutions, their communities and beyond. Advanced education institutions are poised to fully harness their capacities, instruments and assets to foster a flourishing future.

Barriers to overcome

Experience suggests that **intrapreneurs with collaboration skillsets who see their role within the existing system and know how to work within it** are needed to support this social infrastructure work. There are major policy, process, and cultural barriers to transforming institutions to become social impact organizations. By working together and sharing best practices with each other Presidents and their teams can mobilize their institutions and the post-secondary sector as a greater force for good.

Photo credit: Element Digital



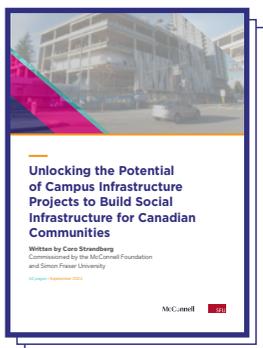
Integrating Social Infrastructure into Institutional Strategic Planning Guidelines

Social Infrastructure Strategic Planning Guidelines for Post-Secondary Institutions was published in the fall of 2019. The Guidelines provide ideas and options on how to embed social impact into university strategic plans. These three case studies from **University of Regina, HEC Montreal, and University of St. Michael's College** provide examples of how to use the Guidelines in strategic planning (in **English** and **French**).



Social Impact Decision Tool

The strategic planning guidelines were turned into a **“strategic thinking” tool** to help leaders make strategic decisions with a social purpose lens within urgent contexts. It was developed during the pandemic to support institutions through challenging, emergency circumstances and is generally applicable to all decision-making settings (in **English** and **French**).



Integrating Social Infrastructure into Campus Infrastructure

The Strategic Planning Guidelines were further adapted to campus infrastructure projects. This **toolkit**, “Unlocking the Potential of Campus Infrastructure Projects to Build Social Infrastructure for Canadian Communities” published in spring 2021, provides a framework for embedding social impact into campus development or renovation projects (in **English** and **French**).

➔ Action 5

Use these **social infrastructure strategic planning guidelines** when you and your teams are developing or refreshing your institution’s strategic plan.

➔ Action 6

Use this **social impact decision tool** on your major decisions to embed social impact into your decision-making. Ask your teams to use it for their decisions too.

➔ Action 7

Use this **social infrastructure campus development toolkit** if your institution is developing or renovating a campus. Share it with your campus planning team and ask them to use it to frame their approach.

University Administrator Engagement

At their first May 2017 gathering, Presidents recommended engaging finance and administration departments via the Canadian Association of University Business Officers (CAUBO). This resulted in the following initiatives:

Creation of a 2040 Vision for the Engaged Administrator

A 20-year vision was informally adopted by CAUBO and McConnell to unlock the physical and financial assets identified in the flower image of the foundational paper:

“In twenty years, the mandates of administration and finance departments at Canadian post-secondary institutions have been redefined to include community and societal well-being as a core component. Administrators are equipped with the knowledge, insights, capacity, networks, and resources to effectively execute these new roles and are encouraged by their institutional and public stakeholders to deliver this dual mandate. More

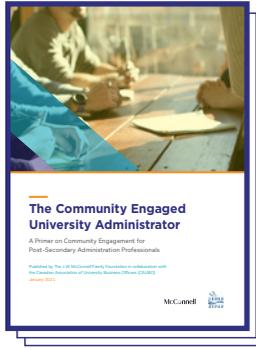
Canadian communities are prospering, students are better educated, staff are fulfilled, and institutions are thriving in part due to the societal contributions and innovations of administrative functions. Other public and private sector organizations look to higher education institutions for partnerships, inspiration, and ideas. This contributes to Canada becoming a global leader in community-engaged post-secondary.”

➔ Action 8

Share this **engaged administrator vision and definition** with your VP Finance and Administration for inspiration when developing the department’s mandate.

Photo credit: Mikael Christenson





Tool for Leadership in Community Engagement

Administrators identified that they lacked the knowledge, skills, and networks to play a meaningful role in community engagement. Thus, the **“The Community Engaged Administrator” tool** was developed, which lays a pathway for administrators to engage more deeply with community to strengthen their regions and help their institution achieve its aims (in **English** and **French**).

Creation of a Definition for Social Purpose Finance and Administration

Social Purpose Finance and Administration is defined as:

- Integrating social and environmental objectives into administration and finance functions, roles, decisions, and behaviours to benefit the institution, students, and communities.
- Harnessing administration and finance tools, assets, resources, and relationships to innovate, accelerate, and scale social impact.
- Aligning job purpose with social purpose, where all administrative jobs have more purpose and contribute to social impact.

Employee Social Purpose Lifecycle

Administrators also highlighted the need for social purpose to be embedded into their performance objectives and job descriptions to further engage administrators in contributing to the institution’s social impact objectives. Thus, **this “Employee Social Purpose Lifecycle”** was developed to help identify opportunities to embed social impact into performance management and the employee experience (**English only**).

Social Purpose Resource Kit for Administrators

Administrators can access a **social purpose resource kit** that pulls together all the resources developed to support finance and administration departments become change agents.

➔ Action 9

Share the **community engagement** and **employee social purpose lifecycle tools** with your VP Finance and Administration for additional ways to embed social impact into administration roles.

➔ Action 10

Share the **social purpose resource kit** with your VP Finance and Administration for additional resources and inspiration in embedding social impact and community engagement into administration departments.



Photo credit: Amy Tran

2020 Milestone Report on Universities as a Force for Good



A **milestone report** was published in 2020 to summarize social impact collaborations across the university sector. This report highlights lessons learned, resources and actions taken across the sector to mobilize university assets to create a better world. An analysis of sector efforts revealed **the social impact pathway in the box on the right** that can be created to generate accelerated benefits for society.

Bonus

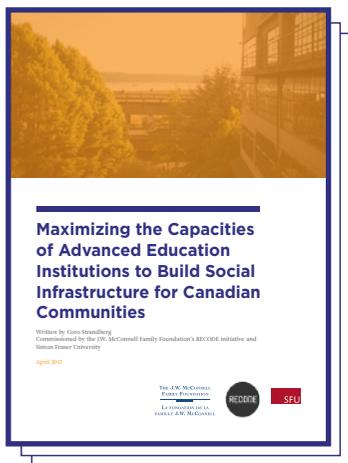
Action for those working at the system level

Read the **milestone report and consider the social impact pathway** to get ideas for how to further accelerate social impact in the post-secondary sector or other associations in your ecosystem.

Social Impact Pathway

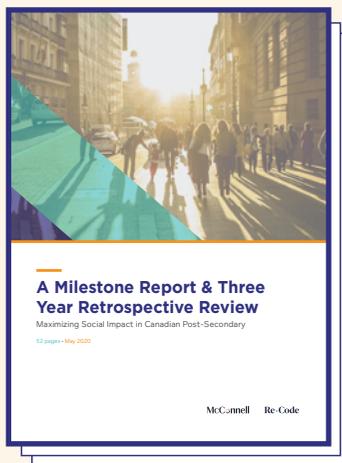


Background reports



“What are the roles that post-secondary institutions can play to drive societal impact?”

**Foundational Report, 2017
English and French**



“What achievements were realized in the first three years to accelerate the social impact of post-secondary institutions?”

**Milestone Report, 2020
English only**



“What is the transformational role of Canadian universities in society?”

**Presidents’ Collective
Vision Report, 2021
English and French**



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Action 1: Share the **foundational paper** with your teams to get inspiration and ideas for harnessing your institution's assets, tools, and instruments for social good. Read the **Presidents' Vision Document** when looking for inspiration in your work. Share it with your teams to use when they are updating their strategic priorities.

Action 2: When tackling a societal issue, ask your teams to use the **social infrastructure framework** to come up with strategies to deploy these institutional assets to address it (**page 6**).

Action 3: Encourage your teams to read the **community resilience report** to find quick start actions your institution can take. Use the social infrastructure framework as a holistic model when tackling community challenges.

Action 4: Get your teams together to assess where your institution is on the **social impact continuum** and where you would like to be. Compare yourself to your peers. Set a plan to advance (**page 6-7**).

Action 5: Use the **social infrastructure strategic planning guidelines** when you and your teams are developing or refreshing your institution's strategic plan.

Action 6: Use the **social impact decision tool** on your major decisions to embed social impact into your decision-making. Ask your teams to use it for their decisions too.

Action 7: Use the **social infrastructure campus development toolkit** if your institution is developing or renovating a campus. Share it with your campus planning team and ask them to use it to frame their approach.

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