

COVID-19 Decision-Making: A Social Impact Tool for Higher Education

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••• With the emergence of the global COVID-19 pandemic, higher education institutions are stepping up to the challenge of pivoting their business models to play their role. Now, more than ever, institutional leaders are called upon to make immediate and profound decisions with far-reaching consequences – and with the potential to accelerate and scale their social impact ripple into their communities and beyond. To help with this unique decision-making opportunity, the McConnell Foundation adapted its **Strategic Planning Guidelines for Integrating Social Infrastructure into University and College Strategic Plans** as a “strategic thinking” tool.

Social impact institutions are encouraged to use this distilled set of insights to inform the strategic decisions they are called upon to make during the COVID crisis. The original guideline document (**found here on the Re-Code website**) remains a useful tool to inform updates of strategic plans. Please contact us at **info@recode.ca** to tell us your story of how you used this tool and provide advice on how to improve upon it.

1 • Ambition Level

Consider the level of ambition of your decision. How aspirational do you want to be? **Do you want to ...**



2 • Strategic Thinking

Choose one or more of these to guide your decisions. As you make this decision, **consider...**



What will **future generations** want to see from us?



What **greater role** do we believe our institution could play in the world?



What could we **accomplish** in 10, 20 or 100 years if all obstacles were removed?



What **societal issues** are being experienced by our students, faculty, staff and communities and how can we **help**?



What **human need** could we try to meet?



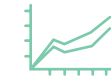
Is there a wrong we could make right, an **injustice** or condition we can address through our decision?



How can our institution make a **bigger difference**?



How do we **affect change** in our community / society? How much **influence** do we have?



How can we **adapt** to and influence societal trends and forces in a positive way?



How do we **live out our purpose** / mission and vision? What **behaviours** do we want to demonstrate during this time? What behaviours might **define our culture** in the future? How would an outsider **describe** the behaviours they are seeing at our institution?



How do we consider **diverse communities and perspectives** in our decisions, including non-dominant ideas and worldviews and the views of those we have not partnered with before? What contribution can we make to enhance community-led collaborations addressing local problems?

3 • Social Infrastructure Decision Lens

Choose one or more ideas below and apply the questions to your decision, projects, investment, practice or undertaking.
As you make this decision, **you might consider...**



1. Sustainable Community Development: How can this decision complement and accelerate the social, economic, cultural and sustainable development of our communities? How can we enhance the growth of green economy and social economy businesses and industries?



2. Community resilience: How can this decision build the community's capacity to anticipate, manage and recover from future risks and help it adapt and thrive in future? How can this decision build social capital and community networks?



3. Cultural Enrichment: How can we use our cultural activities and assets to build community empowerment and capacity and resolve disputes and conflicts?



4. Asset Mobilization: How can we harness all our assets to address this societal issue? (e.g. teaching, research/data, student experience, physical, financial, and relational assets?)



5. Future Generations: How will this decision improve social and planetary conditions for future generations? What beneficial societal impact can result in the future from decisions we make today?



6. Social Innovation: How can this decision spur social innovation, experiential learning and foster co-created solutions?



7. Society Transformation: How can we challenge the status quo for the benefit of all through the decisions we make? How can we leverage this decision to transform lives and empower positive change?

3 • Social Infrastructure Decision Lens

Choose one or more ideas below and apply the questions to your decision, projects, investment, practice or undertaking.
As we make this decision, **we want to consider...**



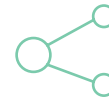
8. Climate Emergency: How can we hasten the decarbonization of society and jump-start low-carbon and circular economy innovations through this decision?



9. Global Citizens: How can this be a transformative learning opportunity for students to enable them to gain the knowledge, critical capacities and civic understanding to become engaged global citizens? How can this shape the next generation of active, engaged citizens?



10. Alumni and Donor Engagement: How can we engage our alumni and donors as thought leaders and influencers to become more powerful contributors and active citizens locally and globally at this time?



11. Technology Purpose: How can this technology solution be co-created or shared with society partners for the mutual benefit of all? How can this technology be used as a force for good?



12. Diversity and Inclusion: In this decision, are we applying fair and just treatment of all and removing barriers to address historic and current disadvantages for under-represented and marginalized groups; how are we including people with lived experience in this decision?



13. Indigenous Reconciliation: How does this decision advance decolonization, support Indigenous knowledge and culture, help eliminate education and employment gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians and support Indigenous-led economic and social development?

4 • Different ways you can use the Social Impact Decision Lens



Emergency Planning

- Use it to spot / identify the core objectives that your organization wants to contribute to and that may be accelerated in this time of rapid change
- Use the questions to guide your daily thinking
- Use the ideas as a social purpose cross-check for emergency operational decision-making



Retroactive Framework

- Use it as a sense-making tool to understand, articulate and communicate decisions you made
- Use it to package and communicate your decisions to stakeholders



Student Engagement

- Use it as a tool for students working on social impact projects, to think through the impact of their projects
- Use in the classroom for community service learning and co-creation
- Use the tool with student entrepreneurs



Conversation Starters

- Use it as a springboard for conversation
- Use the vocabulary to frame the decisions you are making



Strategic Planning

- Introduce the tool into upcoming strategic planning discussions
- Share with Presidents, Deans, VPs and Provosts



Purpose Education

- Incorporate into purpose workshops with students and faculty
- Use it to ask: what is your purpose, where does this fit into where you are going, how might it guide your career?



Impact Measurement

- Use this tool to inform an evaluation, impact and reporting framework for decisions taken at this time