

# The Purpose of the Campus in the New Era

The pandemic revealed an opportunity and imperative for universities and colleges to rethink their use of space and place to further their academic and societal mission. With the rise in remote work, accelerating societal challenges, and an increased desire on the part of postsecondary institutions to act as anchor institutions, we sit at a unique point in time. This creates a new opportunity to reimagine and retrofit campus spaces for greater social good. Across the next two pages, we share some of the ways your campus can realize these opportunities. The ideas and prompts are highlights from discussions among 18 university presidents on May 18 and 21 2021, convened by the McConnell Foundation and Coro Strandberg.

## Part I: High-Level Questions

**In what ways might we generate greater social, environmental, and economic value from campus infrastructures (existing and planned)?**

This question applies to infrastructures in many forms, including:

- Land, facilities / buildings, housing
- Equipment, furniture, vehicles
- Services such as restaurants, libraries, athletic facilities, performance space, bookstores, etc.
- On-site utilities, roads and parking lots
- Technologies including digital, robotics, sensors, and other emerging onsite technologies

**To generate improved social and environmental outcomes from the campus built environment, it's important to consider:**

*In the two pages that follow, we offer prompts that can help you and your team explore each of these questions in greater depth.*

1. What are the broader societal trends and issues affecting our region or society and how might our campus infrastructure be in service of those issues?
2. How can we shed physical and metaphorical barriers between campus and community?
3. How do we dismantle systemic racism in our built environments?
4. Who are the firms/organizations we are working with, and under what values and principles are they operating? If the values and principles are not aligned with our mission how might we influence them in a positive direction?
5. How does our existing infrastructure sequester carbon, become circular, and restore and regenerate the environment?

## Part II: Digging Deeper

### 1. What are the broader societal issues and trends affecting our region and how might our campus infrastructure be in service of those issues?

#### Examples:

- **Housing Crisis:** Some institutions are tackling the lack of affordable housing in their region through student residences. How else could the university or college's real estate play a role in helping address housing costs in the region?
- **Hollowing-out of city centres:** Considering the important role that universities and colleges play in the economic and community health of cities, how can they collaborate with municipalities to address the decline of both in many downtown cores in Canada?
- **Struggling Community Organizations/Nonprofits:** How can current infrastructure be repurposed for the use of community members or groups?

### 2. How can we dismantle physical and metaphorical barriers between campus and community?

- How can the community embed itself into the institution, and how can the institution embed itself into the community's infrastructure? How can this be done in true reciprocity?
- Many universities and colleges have expanded their footprint further into the community. In some cases, this was motivated by a desire to make education more accessible; in others, it is to work alongside community organizations in addressing issues like homelessness, drug safety, etc. How can the university or college leverage its resources, assets and relationships into the community to address local issues in partnership with community?
- How can the campus become a "community hub" and bring the community on to the campus to benefit from the institution's amenities and to bring its social assets to advance shared goals?
- How can campus be a space where people live, eat, go to concerts, improve their health, find community, and learn together (in ways beyond just academic programming)?

### 3. How do we dismantle systemic racism in our built environments?

- How can the institution de-centre Western approaches and knowledge in the design and retrofit of physical infrastructure, space, and land?
- How can the commitment to decolonization and anti-racism be as clear as possible in the institutional strategic plan? Professionals and firms hired to do the work will draw on the institution's foundational documents (especially Vision and Mission) as a guide.
- Expect that many professional firms may need to be supported in decentering a Western mindset they were likely educated in.

**4. Who are the firms/organizations we are working with, and under what set of values and principles are they operating? If the values and principles are not aligned with our mission how might we influence them in a positive direction?**

- Is it possible to partner with firms that go beyond just “matching” the institution’s values and level of ambition? Ideally vendors and suppliers will go further, and *push the institution further* to deliver a greater social impact.
- If there are not enough companies with the skills/experience to work under a social purpose orientation, then what is the role of the postsecondary institution to ensure its education equips graduates with this kind of thinking? Can postsecondary institutions provide continuing and executive education and upskilling for this new competency?

**5. How does our existing infrastructure sequester carbon, become circular, and restore and regenerate the environment and social systems?**

- In many instances, the college or university acts as a role-model in the region on environmental stewardship, green technology innovation, and energy efficiency. How can it continue to boldly innovate and set an example with its campus infrastructure?
- How can greenspace merge not only environmental considerations but also social and cultural elements, to act as spaces of holistic wellbeing and social connection?

**6. How can we “make the case” for taking a social impact focus?**

- All postsecondary institutions have articulated priorities on Reconciliation and EDI. Pursuing social purpose in campus infrastructures can be a way of operationalizing those priorities.
- Social impact through campus infrastructure can also be tied to the academic mission.
- In today's funding climate, there is an important case to be made for social impact, especially as more funders and donors look for projects that produce multiple benefits.
- Demonstrating success via case studies from other institutions can appeal to key stakeholders: board members, government officials, donors, etc.