

Social impact survey results



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Introduction and methodology

As a continuation of Universities Canada’s work over the past decade on campus-community collaboration, Universities Canada is leading a pan-Canadian initiative to map, strengthen and promote the social impact of Canadian universities (see Appendix A for a backgrounder on the Social Impact Initiative). As part of the Social Impact Initiative, Universities Canada launched a survey with its member institutions to better understand how Canada’s universities are strengthening their local communities, as well as to guide the initiative’s next steps.

To explore the range of priorities, practices and partnerships across Canadian universities, the survey focused on seven categories: institutional strategy; a continuum of practice; measuring social impact; priority areas; barriers; activities to strengthen impact; and partnerships. This report outlines the methodology undertaken, considers key takeaways by survey category, and concludes with strategic considerations for Universities Canada’s Social Impact Initiative.

Methodology

Universities Canada consulted extensively with its social impact advisory group, different university representatives and regional associations on the design, purpose and format of the survey. In early 2019, Universities Canada reached out to university executive heads asking them to identify a main contact (a ‘social impact lead’) who can respond to the survey on behalf of the institution. Of the 95 member institutions, 84 put forward a representative. In March 2019, Universities Canada sent the survey to this network of social impact leads and was pleased to receive a 77% response rate. (see Appendix B for the list of participating institutions).

Note: Universities Canada recognizes that, given the broad definition of ‘social impact’ and the size of universities, it is impossible to capture all social impact activities, projects and partnerships on campuses across Canada. This report gives a sample of community-oriented activities and serves to help continue map the social impact landscape across Canada.

Key takeaways

INSTITUTIONAL STRATEGY

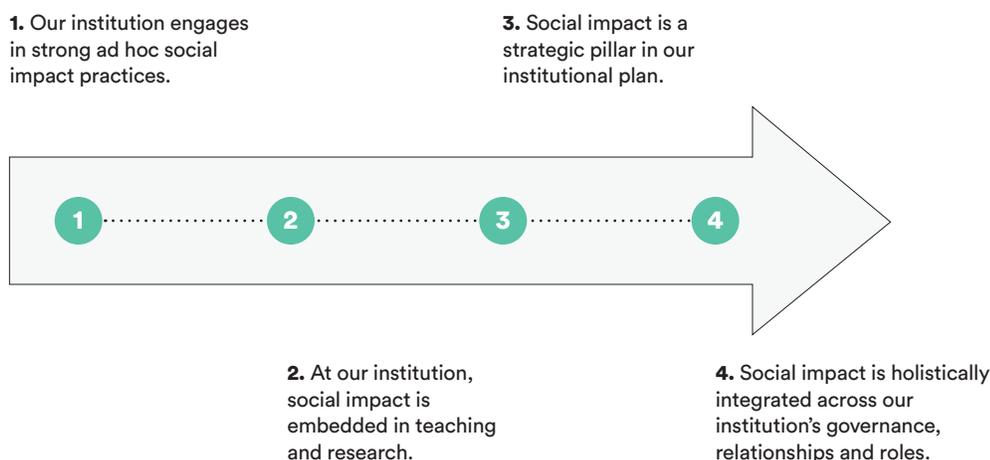
All universities have a social impact on their local communities. This impact may include financial activities (buying local, investments, administrative hiring, etc.), the use of physical spaces (community access to gyms, libraries, land, etc.), relationships (students, government, industry, etc.), research activities (tackling local challenges), and teaching and learning (curriculum that directly engages with community).

Findings from the social impact survey reveal that Canadian universities are deeply committed to their local impact. Ninety-two per cent (92%) of respondents indicated that social impact is explicitly referenced in their institution's mission, vision and/or values and also in their university's strategic plan or long-term planning documents. Moreover, over half of respondents (52%) have a specific plan focused on maximizing the university's impact in the local community, while 78% have identified social impact as one of the top five priorities in the university's strategic plan or long-term planning documents.

CONTINUUM OF PRACTICE

While all universities are active and engaged in social impact endeavours, the extent of engagement depends on institutional priorities and contexts. In the social impact survey, respondents were asked to identify where they believe their institution is currently situated and where they would like their institution to be situated in the following continuum of practice. (see Figure 1.0).

Figure 1.0 - Social impact continuum of practice¹

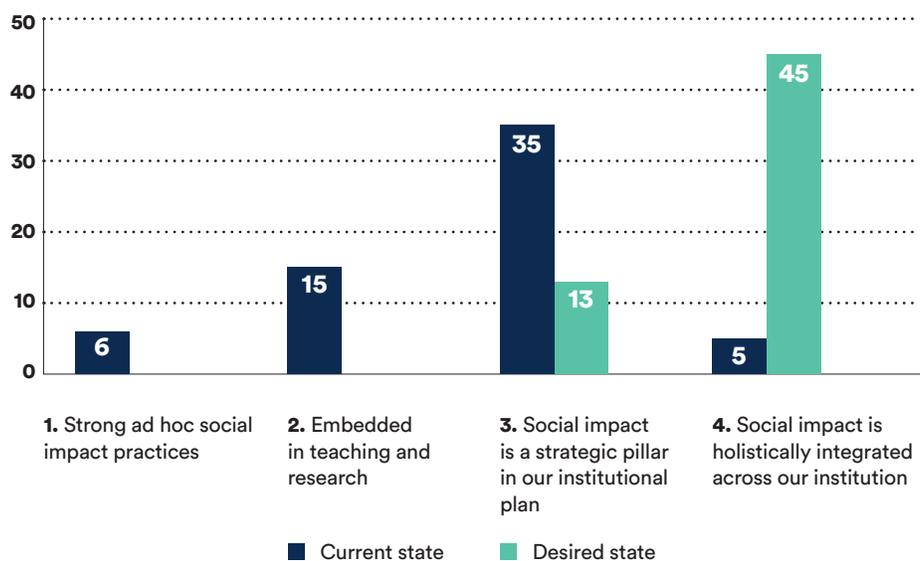


¹Adapted from the McConnell Foundation, *Maximizing the Capacities of Advanced Education Institutions to Build Social Infrastructure for Canadian Communities*, 2017.

Key takeaways

Survey findings reveal 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 and their institutional plan, or integrate social impact holistically across the institution's governance, relationship and roles. (See Figure 2.0 for details.)

Figure 2.0 - Social impact continuum of practice: Universities' current and desired state



MEASURING SOCIAL IMPACT

Measuring social impact is an area of interest for postsecondary institutions. Almost half of respondents (42%) have formally measured or are currently measuring their social impact at the institutional level.

Of those engaged in measurement practices, the top measurement frameworks used/being used to assess impact include: the National Survey of Student Engagement (67%), the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification (Canadian Pilot) (30%), The Times Higher Education Impact Rankings (15%), the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE)'s The Sustainability Tracking, Assessment and Ranking System (15%), and the Ashoka U Changemaker Campus (11%). Several institutions have also conducted individual economic and impact assessments. It is worth noting that almost half (41%) of those engaged in measurement activities are employing more than one framework to assess their impact.

Key takeaways

PRIORITY AREAS

Canadian universities are committed to community betterment. The majority of respondents (66%) identified social impact as a priority for their institution over the next three years. When asked to identify specific areas of focus, institutions noted a variety of themes including:

- Disadvantaged and vulnerable youth and families
- Community economic development
- Indigenous engagement and reconciliation
- Arts and culture
- Social innovation and impact research
- Equity, diversity and inclusion
- Increasing community engagement strategy and activity
- Developing social impact culture at the institution
- The Sustainable Development Goals
- University-municipal relations
- Social procurement practices

BARRIERS

While universities are interested in maximizing their social impact, there are several barriers that prevent institutions from moving forward with this work. Survey results reveal that the dominant challenges are a lack of resources (time, funds and staff) and competing priorities that relegate social impact activities to lower priority work.

ACTIVITIES TO STRENGTHEN UNIVERSITIES' SOCIAL IMPACT

The survey explored how Universities Canada could help strengthen and scale the social impact of Canada's universities. Respondents' top areas of interest were measurement frameworks, opportunities to exchange knowledge with other institutions, national principles signed by Canadian university presidents, and increased funding for social impact initiatives. Universities Canada will explore ways to support member institutions in these areas.

Partnerships

The survey highlighted universities' strong and diverse partnerships that help advance social impact initiatives. A sample of partnerships are listed below.

- *Federal government:* At the federal level, universities have partnerships with many federal government departments and initiatives including: the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), the Tri-Council Agencies, Women's Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub, Indigenous Services Canada, Employment and Social Development Canada, Correctional Service Canada and Global Affairs Canada, among others.
- *Provincial government:* Universities work closely with provincial governments on a variety of initiatives such as: community economic development, healthy communities, climate change, transportation, housing and homelessness and arts and culture, among others. A sample of working partnerships include: the Eastern Ontario Task Force on the Role of the Postsecondary Sector in Regional Sustainability and Prosperity, The Nova Scotia Sandbox program, the Ontario Agri-food Innovation Alliance, MOUs with provincial Indigenous organizations, the Saskatchewan Regional Centre of Expertise on Education for Sustainable Development and the Centre intégré de santé et de services sociaux (CISSS) du Bas-Saint-Laurent.
- *Municipal government:* Canada's universities have strong relationships with their local municipalities and together advance several impactful initiatives. Some activities include:
 - CityLab Hamilton – an initiative whereby city leaders work hand-in-hand with local academic institutions to tackle complex challenges related to healthy neighborhoods, climate change and municipal excellence.
 - The Winnipeg Promise with the City of Winnipeg – an initiative committed to finding ways to remove barriers preventing low income families and children from accessing the Canada Learning Bond.
 - The Eastern-Strait Regional Enterprise Network (ESREN) – an initiative created by municipalities in Nova Scotia to provide regional economic development leadership.
 - City Studio – innovation hubs that bring together city staff, students, faculty and community to co-create experimental projects and tackle local challenges. Pioneered in Vancouver, there are now many CityStudios in municipalities across Canada including London, Montreal, Victoria and Waterloo.
 - Concertation Montréal – an initiative that brings together socio-economic leaders and municipal representatives to support innovative and regional activities.

Partnerships

- Participation on municipal committees and working groups including: the City of Toronto Economic Development and Culture, Harbour Development, Chamber of Commerce, Industry Education Council, Municipal Integrity Office, Economic Planning Commissions, school boards and regional conservation authorities, among others.
- *Other Canadian universities and colleges:* Universities recognize the benefits of working together to tackle local challenges. Some examples of initiatives include:
 - Partnerships with Indigenous post-secondary institutions
 - Community Campus Engagement Canada – a national community of practice focused on strengthening Canadian communities by increasing the capacity, infrastructure and impact of equitable community-campus partnerships.
 - Faculty research projects
 - Change Lab Action Research Initiative (CLARI) – a cross-province multi-postsecondary institution partnership designed to support Nova Scotia communities and address social and economic challenges.
 - CIRODD (Centre interdisciplinaire de recherche en opérationnalisation du développement durable) – an initiative to accelerate sustainable development across Quebec.
- *Community organizations:* At the local level, universities collaborate with a wide spectrum of organizations to tackle complex challenges including literacy, addictions, access to education, arts and culture, legal issues, reconciliation, climate change, diversity and inclusion, housing, food security, sexual violence, health care, youth, and many others.
- *Philanthropic organizations:* Likewise, partnerships with philanthropic organizations have proven to be an effective means to drive change. Local United Way chapters and community foundations surfaced as strong university-philanthropic partnerships across Canada. Other partnerships include the Mellon Foundation, the McConnell Foundation, the Pathy Family Foundation and MasterCard Foundation.
- *Private sector:* Universities' partnership with private sector companies takes many different forms. For instance, institutions collaborate with the private sector through co-op programs, industry research projects, business school activities and experiential learning curricula. Universities also work with private sector companies on specific initiatives such as sustainability projects and increasing the number of women in STEM.

Conclusion

Findings from the social impact survey demonstrate that Canadian universities are deeply committed to their third mission – service to community – and are advancing this work through an impressive breadth and depth of social impact initiatives. Universities are continuously expanding, enhancing and innovating in the ways they engage with community. Universities employ a variety of instruments to maximize their impact and are interested in measurement tools to learn new ways to strengthen community wellbeing. Partnerships and projects are growing, curriculum is becoming more community oriented and research is being co-led with community, while university operations are diving deeper into practices and policies that uplift local business and community members.

University practitioners recognize their important role in strengthening connections with community and are actively working together to build communities that thrive. Universities are leading local efforts to map and strengthen this activity, and are also part of many other social impact initiatives (some Canada-wide) including: the Canadian pilot of the Carnegie Community Engagement Classification, Ashoka U Changemaker Campus, McConnell's RECODE program and Community Campus Engagement Canada (CCEC), among others. It is encouraging to see so many institutions committed to the postsecondary social impact movement; however, it raises the question: how can we collectively move forward and harness this energy to make meaningful sector-wide change?

Over the coming year, Universities Canada will explore recommendations from this survey in terms of how we can best support and strengthen member institutions' social impact. Universities Canada will continue conversations with stakeholders across the sector to explore areas of potential collaboration. As the national voice of Canadian universities, Universities Canada will consider innovative ways to promote the positive impact of universities in communities. We will also continue to work closely with our advisory group and network of social impact leads to map out the next steps of the Social Impact Initiative and determine how we, as a national association, can help strengthen and maximize the social impact of Canadian universities.

Appendix A

Social Impact Initiative: Overview

What is the Social Impact Initiative?

Over the past decade, Universities Canada has increasingly focused on university-community engagement to address key challenges and barriers and explore opportunities to advance campus-community partnerships for greater impact. In 2018, Universities Canada received a grant from the McConnell Foundation to amplify this work; more specifically, to lead a pan-Canadian initiative to map, strengthen and promote the social impact of Canadian universities in their local communities.

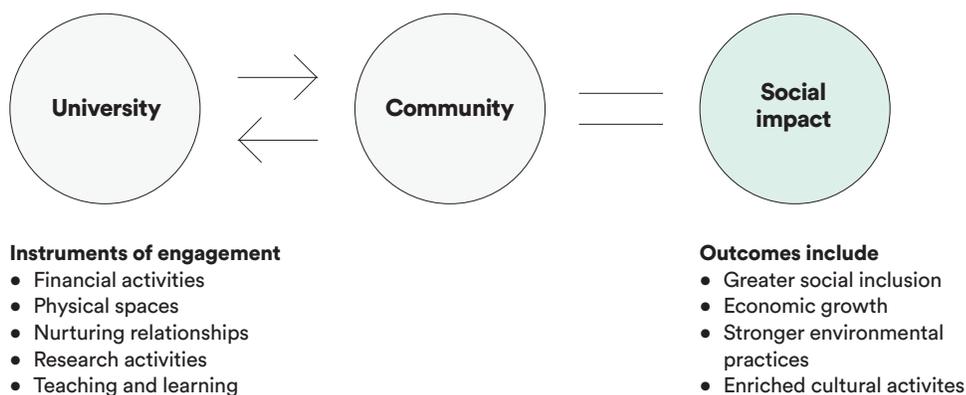
The aim of this initiative is to gain a deeper understanding of social impact initiatives at member institutions, build tools to increase capacity and share knowledge and develop a robust narrative on the role of universities in their communities.

What do we mean by ‘social impact’?

All universities have a social impact on their local communities. For the purposes of this initiative, Universities Canada defines the term ‘social impact’ as the positive outcomes of initiatives that tackle social, economic, environmental and cultural challenges faced by people, organizations and communities. This concept goes beyond the academic mission to holistically encompass all aspects of the institution including:

- *Financial activities* (i.e.: buying local and supporting nearby businesses)
- *Physical spaces* (i.e.: community access to gyms, meeting spaces, libraries, land, etc.)
- *Relationships* (i.e.: nurturing relationships with students, government, industry, etc.)
- *Research activities* (i.e.: researching innovative solutions to local challenges)
- *Teaching and learning* (i.e.: learning opportunities that directly engage with local communities)

The following diagram is a helpful tool to visualize the many ways universities socially impact their communities.



Appendix A

Social Impact Initiative: Overview

We recognize that member institutions employ a variety of terms to refer to university-community initiatives, including community engagement, social innovation, social infrastructure, social enterprise, social purpose and public good, among others. **Universities Canada uses ‘social impact’ as an umbrella term to encompass these concepts.**

What activities are planned?

The activities of this initiative will aim to improve linkages between universities and their communities, raise awareness about the importance of university-community partnerships and contribute to a prosperous future for communities across Canada. This will be achieved by:

- *Scanning the landscape*: Gathering information on social impact initiatives led by member institutions and other key players. Activities include:
 - Mapping current social impact initiatives across Canada
 - Identifying gaps, synergies and areas of duplication for action
 - Collecting data from member institutions on social impact initiatives
- *Deepening capacities*: Providing tools for members to facilitate the implementation of social impact initiatives. Activities include:
 - Identifying scalable practices and social impact principles
 - Developing tools and resources to be shared across member institutions
 - Providing frameworks to measure and benchmark the social impact of university-community collaborations
- *Strengthening networks*: Increasing partnerships between universities, communities and philanthropic organizations to enhance social impact initiatives. Activities include:
 - Creating networks of social impact key contacts across member institutions and with philanthropic and community organizations
 - Developing mechanisms to increase collaboration between universities and community and philanthropic organizations
 - Facilitating knowledge sharing amongst member institutions
- *Shifting the narrative*: Employing an effective communications and public relations strategy to promote the vital role of universities in building resilient communities. Activities include:
 - Raising awareness of university-community activities and partnerships
 - Enriching Universities Canada’s advocacy work with data on university social impact initiatives

Note: The scope of this initiative focuses on the social impact of Canadian universities in their surrounding communities, including the campus community and local areas. Virtual and global communities are not a focus of this initiative.

Appendix B

Responding member institutions

Algoma University	St. Thomas University
Brock University	TÉLUQ
Campion College	The University of British Columbia
Cape Breton University	The University of Lethbridge
Carleton University	The University of Winnipeg
Concordia University	Thompson Rivers University
Dalhousie University	Trent University
École de technologie supérieure	Université de Moncton
École Polytechnique de Montréal	Université de Sherbrooke
Emily Carr University of Art + Design	Université du Québec à Montréal
Huron University	Université du Québec à Rimouski
Institut national de la recherche scientifique	Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières
King's University College (King's University College at Western University)	Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue
Kwantlen Polytechnic University	Université du Québec en Outaouais
Lakehead University	Université Laval
Laurentian University	University of Alberta
Luther College	University of Calgary
MacEwan University	University of Guelph
McMaster University	University of King's College
Mount Allison University	University of Manitoba
Mount Royal University	University of Northern British Columbia
Mount Saint Vincent University	University of Ottawa
Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD University)	University of Regina
OCAD University	University of Saskatchewan
Redeemer University College	University of St. Michael's College
Royal Roads University	University of the Fraser Valley
Ryerson University	University of Trinity College
Saint Mary's University	University of Victoria
Simon Fraser University	University of Waterloo
St. Francis Xavier University	University of Windsor
St. Jerome's University	Vancouver Island University
St. Thomas More College	Western University
	York University