

MOWAT RESEARCH #165 | APRIL 2018

Engage & Empower

Defining and engaging community in Ontario's community benefits initiatives

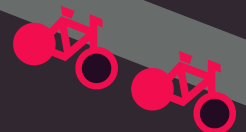
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Community
benefits
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development.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Community benefits initiatives are increasingly becoming a key consideration for governments looking to leverage public infrastructure investments to unlock greater economic, social and environmental value. The Government of Ontario has committed to the development of a Community Benefits Framework that all major infrastructure projects across the province must comply with by 2020. A key part of this framework and all future projects that aim to utilize community benefits will be how community is defined. Mapping out the impacted community in relation to a particular infrastructure project will be among the first and most important steps in the process of developing community benefits initiatives. This definition of community will have lasting implications in all stages of the project's development – and thus it is crucial that this is done right from the earliest stages.

The process of defining community, and engaging that community to understand the types of benefits that are most aligned with their priority needs will require meaningful engagement and a relationship built on trust and collaboration. Governments have a responsibility to conduct due diligence to ensure that their conceptualization of community is representative of the reality on the ground. However, governments must also be careful not to be overly prescriptive in their approaches to defining and engaging community, and acknowledge that communities should and often do have the agency to represent themselves. Our research finds that there is no one-size-fits-all definition, and the definition varies based on context. Governments should define communities using an approach that combines both place-based and population-based strategies, and use a set of core principles to guide the process of engagement.

Community benefits initiatives provide a key opportunity to maximize the benefits from public infrastructure investments by fostering a more equitable and inclusive society. By putting equity at the heart of economic development and focusing on the most marginalized, community benefits can create shared prosperity and empower communities to build lasting social capital. However, our research has made clear that in order to achieve the greatest impact, governments must recognize that communities are dynamic and robust ecosystems – with existing networks – and desire autonomy in the process of defining, articulating and negotiating the benefits that they wish to see through an infrastructure project. As such, governments can play a key role in providing support and capacity-building efforts to enable the participation of communities – providing necessary resources to groups and networks where they do exist and creating an enabling environment where they do not.



This report is the result of a comprehensive consultative research process, including several key informant interviews, two design labs, a mapping session, public questionnaire, literature review and jurisdictional scan. We asked stakeholders from the public, private, non-profit and academic sectors, as well as the general public, for input on important questions about how community should be defined and engaged in the process of developing community benefits initiatives. This report outlines what we learned, and aims to provide guidance to the Government of Ontario as well as the broader system of stakeholders interested in community benefits in Ontario and elsewhere.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Government of Ontario has committed to the development of a Community Benefits Framework that all major infrastructure projects across the province will have to comply with by 2020. Community benefits initiatives have the potential to transform the way governments purchase, build, employ and think about economic development. If done well, public dollars can be leveraged in a way that generates social, economic and environmental value while also empowering communities to shape their future. For community benefits to be successful, however, communities must be meaningfully engaged and involved in the process. This must begin in the earliest stages – ensuring that the way community is defined is inclusive and representative, and creating an environment that enables communities to be actively involved in determining and articulating their priorities.

There are numerous ways of defining community and choosing which definition is the most appropriate in relation to a large infrastructure project is not a simple task. There is no one-size-fits-all definition of the term: rather, the definition of community will vary depending on the local context, history and networks among its citizens, as well as the particular infrastructure project that intends to utilize a community benefits approach. Hence, policymakers should adopt a combination of place-based and population-based strategies, and recognize that in large part, the community defines itself. Communities do not only come into being as a result of public investment but are pre-existing, dynamic ecosystems – often with established networks and capabilities. Governments should not be overly prescriptive in their approach to defining community, as communities desire meaningful engagement and autonomy in planning and decision-making processes.

This tension between top-down and bottom-up processes is among a handful of challenges that governments face in defining and engaging community in the development of community benefits initiatives. Similar tensions arise around the push for firm targets and legally binding agreements from communities, which frequently conflicts with the flexibility and non-binding aspirational targets desired by other stakeholders. Furthermore, both communities and governments face capacity challenges: while communities want deeper and longer-term involvement in planning and decision-making processes, they often lack the necessary resources to do so. At the same time, governments may not have the mandate or the expertise to conduct the type of robust engagement work necessary to effectively involve communities. Indeed, many communities have a deep distrust in government structures and traditional modes of consultation.

This report suggests that governments should adopt a set of guiding principles to overcome these tensions and challenges, and keep broader public interest at the heart of all activities – from determining the definition of community in relation to a particular infrastructure project, to the broader community engagement and involvement throughout the process of developing community benefits initiatives. These include:

- 1] Accountability, Transparency and Trust
- 2] Inclusion and Accessibility
- 3] Equity and Social Justice
- 4] Uncover and Leverage Community Networks
- 5] Foster Community Capacity
- 6] Engage Early and Often

For community benefits initiatives to be successful, governments must establish a trusting relationship with the community and meaningfully engage citizens. Governments must also respect, acknowledge and leverage existing networks and capacity. Where these networks and capacity do not exist within a community, the government can play a key role in providing resources and supporting capacity-building efforts. These capacity-building efforts may include public education and outreach, providing physical space and financial resources, facilitating community engagement through expertise and staffing, and leveraging data to understand demographics and identify gaps. Not only can such resources enable the full participation of communities in developing community benefits, but also empower communities to shape their environment over the long term.

This report is the result of several key informant interviews, two design labs, a mapping session, public questionnaire, literature review and jurisdictional scan. We asked stakeholders from the public, private, non-profit and academic sectors as well as the general public for input on important questions about how community should be defined and engaged in these processes. This document outlines what we learned from the research process, beginning with the necessary background and context of community benefits in Ontario. The importance of defining community will be explored along with key tensions and challenges that may arise and how these can be overcome with good process and guiding principles. Finally, the report will conclude with a look at how governments can play a collaborative and supportive role in community benefits initiatives, providing capacity-building efforts in communities where needed.

To achieve its vision of ensuring that communities benefit from new infrastructure investments, it is integral for the Government of Ontario to consider how policymakers should define community.

2 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Community Benefits in Ontario

The Government of Ontario has committed to the development of a Community Benefits Framework to leverage infrastructure investments to unlock social value. Community benefits can be defined as “supplementary social and economic benefits arising from an infrastructure project, such as local job creation and training opportunities, improvement of public space or other benefits the community identifies.”¹ Community benefits can also include social procurement, i.e. the purchase of goods and services from local businesses or social enterprises.

Ontario became the first Canadian jurisdiction that passed legislation to include community benefits in infrastructure planning and investment in 2015.² The Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act stipulates that “infrastructure planning and investment should promote community benefits.” Section 3 of this act contains several principles that the Province and the broader public sector must consider during infrastructure planning and investment, including the promotion of community benefits.³ The 2017 Ontario Budget further committed to conducting consultations on the creation of a community benefits framework for the province based on the principle that public procurement should go beyond building infrastructure to create community benefits to advance goals such as poverty reduction and local

economic development by including input from underrepresented groups.⁴

The Province’s 2017 Long-Term Infrastructure Plan (LTIP) states that the identification and implementation of pilot projects is the first step in creating a relevant and evidence-based framework. The Province has sought to work with a range of stakeholders including the construction sector, social services and community groups to inform these pilot projects.⁵ The LTIP states that all major infrastructure projects will have to comply with the framework by 2020. It also highlights that the Province is in the process of launching five pilots to test a range of projects offering different types of community benefits in various urban and rural regions.⁶

1 Government of Ontario (2017) “Building Better Lives: Ontario’s Long-Term Infrastructure Plan 2017.” https://files.ontario.ca/ltip_narrative_aoda.pdf.

2 Ibid.

3 See: Government of Ontario (2016) “Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act, 2015.” <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/15i15>.

4 Ontario Ministry of Finance (2017) “2017 Ontario Budget: A Stronger, Healthier Ontario.” <https://www.fin.gov.on.ca/en/budget/ontariobudgets/2017/budget2017.pdf>.

5 Government of Ontario (2017) “Building Better Lives: Ontario’s Long-Term Infrastructure Plan 2017.” https://files.ontario.ca/ltip_narrative_aoda.pdf.

6 Ibid.

The Ministry of Infrastructure has identified three main categories of community benefits initiatives:⁷

FIGURE 1
Categories of community benefits initiatives

Category	Description	Example
Workforce Development Initiatives	The provision of employment opportunities (including apprenticeships) to members of traditionally disadvantaged communities, underrepresented groups and local residents.	In 2016, provincial partners signed the Eglinton Crosstown LRT Apprenticeship Declaration that sets an aspirational goal of employing apprentices or journeypersons from historically disadvantaged communities and equity-seeking groups to perform 10 per cent of all trade or craft working hours required to construct the Light Rapid Transit (LRT) project. A requirement to produce an Apprenticeship Plan and sign an Apprenticeship Declaration has also been included in the Request for Proposal (RFP) for the Finch LRT. Further, a financial penalty has been set if the successful bidder fails to sign such a declaration. ⁸
Social Procurement Initiatives	The purchase of goods and services from local businesses or social enterprises that seek to achieve social or environmental gains through their business processes.	The Community Benefits and Liaison Plan for the Eglinton Crosstown LRT committed to “maximizing business and procurement opportunities for social enterprises and businesses located along the corridor.” In particular, it suggests that Crosslinx Transit Solutions will work with Metrolinx, Infrastructure Ontario and the United Way’s Social Purchasing Project to develop social procurement initiatives. ⁹
Supplementary Benefits	Additional benefits a community may need during and after construction of a major infrastructure project such as the creation of space for more physical public assets (e.g. child care facilities, a park, etc.), or design features (e.g. to reduce noise pollution).	The City of Toronto, TTC and Metrolinx entered into an agreement to set aside 1.5 per cent of the total construction cost of the Rapid Transit Program (estimated to be greater than \$70 million) as ‘Public Realm Amount.’ This fund is to be used to improve streetscape and public realm impacted particularly by the Eglinton, Sheppard and Finch LRT projects. While \$10 million of this amount will be used by Metrolinx at their discretion to improve public amenities at underground stations, the remaining funds are to be used for improvements requested by the City. ¹⁰

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Crosslinx Transit Solutions (2015) “Community Benefits and Liaison Plan for Eglinton Crosstown LRT Project.” http://www.thecrosstown.ca/sites/default/files/cts_-_community_benefits_and_liaison_plan_rev_01_-_february_26_2016_.pdf.

10 City of Toronto (2014) “Metrolinx Rapid Transit Program – Allocation of the Public Realm Amount.” <https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2014/ex/bgrd/backgroundfile-68388.pdf>.

What type of benefits are Ontarians interested in?

As part of this research, we used a public questionnaire to gather input on important questions around defining community benefits in Ontario. We received 101 responses from individuals interested in community benefits, many of whom also participated in other phases of our research.¹¹

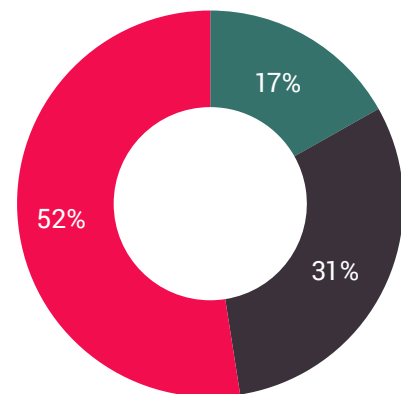
We asked about the types of benefits that they would like to see in their own community. Here's what they said:

More than half (52 per cent) of respondents identified workforce development initiatives as likely to be the most beneficial in their community.

Around 31 per cent of respondents expressed that supplementary benefits would be the most beneficial in their community. Those who chose this category offered specific examples of priority needs that have been identified in their communities:

- » Cycling infrastructure
- » Francophone programming
- » Green spaces and parks
- » Noise barriers for adjacent public transit
- » Public spaces for arts and recreation
- » Childcare facilities
- » Community centres
- » Affordable housing
- » Funds to subsidize public transit

FIGURE 2
Generally, community benefits fall into three categories: workforce development, social procurement, and other supplemental benefits. In your opinion, which category would be the most beneficial in your community?



- Social procurement initiatives, including purchasing from local suppliers and social enterprises
- Supplementary benefits that are identified by the community (e.g. physical public assets such as parks or improvements in existing facilities)
- Workforce development initiatives, including employment and training opportunities, apprenticeships, as well as targeted initiatives for disadvantaged workers and local groups

¹¹ For more details about the questionnaire, see the methodology and detailed results in the Appendix.

Research Questions

To achieve its vision of ensuring that communities benefit from new infrastructure investments, it is integral for the Government of Ontario to consider how policymakers should define community in relation to large infrastructure investments, and meaningfully involve the community in developing appropriate community benefits. As such, a key objective of the proposed Community Benefits Framework for Ontario is to “provide guidance to all participants on how to identify the affected community and to achieve community benefits.”¹² In line with this goal, this report presents insights on the following important questions:

- » How should ‘community’ be defined in relation to community benefits initiatives for large infrastructure investments in Ontario?
- » What should be the overarching principles that guide community involvement in the development of community benefits initiatives in Ontario?
- » Who should speak on behalf of and represent community interests?
- » Who should be responsible for engaging the community to determine its priorities?
- » In determining the community’s priorities for community benefits initiatives, when should the process of community engagement begin?
- » What does the community need in order to be fully engaged in the development of community benefits initiatives?

¹² Government of Ontario (2017) “Building Better Lives: Ontario’s Long-Term Infrastructure Plan 2017.” https://files.ontario.ca/ltip_narrative_aoda.pdf.

3 DEFINING COMMUNITY

Why is it Important to Define Community?

Defining community is one of the most important steps in the development of community benefits initiatives. Mapping out the impacted community in relation to a particular infrastructure project should also be one of the first steps in the community benefits process to allow ample time for its citizens to mobilize, understand the process that will ensue, and participate in that process to the fullest extent possible. The definition of community will play a lasting role in all other stages of the project development process: engaging the community, determining its priorities, negotiation, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. It is thus important that defining the community is done early and done right.

Governments have a responsibility to conduct due diligence to ensure that their conceptualization of community is well-defined and representative of the reality on the ground. This means understanding the local context, bringing a wide range of perspectives into the decision-making processes and including those who have historically been left out of the conversation. Getting it right from the earliest stages is integral to ensuring that the needs of the community are addressed, and that the benefits which are provided through the community benefits initiative are both relevant and necessary for the impacted groups and individuals.

If the approach to defining community has gone wrong, it will be apparent as community interests will not be well-represented. Opposition may mobilize against a particular project, which can derail any progress towards developing community benefits initiatives in that community.

An example of such opposition can be seen in the 2005 Atlantic Yards CBA in New York, which was the first Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) in the city for the multibillion dollar Atlantic Yards arena for the NBA's New Jersey Nets, and an attached residential and office high-rise complex. In this case, eight organizations were chosen to represent the community, but more than 50 community organizations that were not involved in negotiations signed a petition opposing the project. This project has since been mired in controversy, facing community opposition and widespread criticism. Due to lack of transparency, it is also unclear whether any community benefits were delivered by the project.¹³

¹³ Partnership for Working Families (2016) "Common Challenges in Negotiating Community Benefits Agreements — And — How to Avoid Them." <http://www.forworkingfamilies.org/sites/pwf/files/publications/Effective%20CBAs.pdf>.

If such opposition mobilizes towards government efforts more broadly in these early stages of the provincial framework development, it can erode public trust in the government's intentions to create meaningful community benefits. If a community is ill-defined and not representative from the very beginning, challenges will continue to arise as a result throughout the entire process. Hence, it is vital to define the impacted community appropriately to ensure that meaningful community benefits are developed.

Defining community is not an easy task, as there is no single approach to establishing who exactly the “community” is in relation to a project and defining the types of benefits to include in community benefits initiatives. In an effort to achieve these two necessary steps, governments are likely to face a number of challenges along the way. The following section outlines the tensions and challenges that may arise in the process, followed by suggested approaches that may help to mitigate them.

Key Tensions and Challenges

AGREEMENTS VS. NON-BINDING APPROACHES

In developing its Community Benefits Framework, the Government of Ontario has chosen to use the term community benefits “initiatives” rather than “agreements.” Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs) are very specific and legally binding agreements that are negotiated on a project-by-project basis and signed between developers and community groups. Governments may serve as intermediaries to these formal contracts, and these can be enforced by all signatory

parties.¹⁴ On the other hand, community benefits initiatives are more flexible in that they approach community benefits more broadly. While community benefits initiatives do not preclude agreements, they also include non-legally binding approaches, such as aspirational targets. Initiatives can also include community benefits clauses in contracts between governments and contractors and community benefits requirements in government procurement processes – which may or may not be binding.

There is often a tension that arises specifically between formal agreements and non-binding approaches. Agreements that are binding and enforceable provide more standing for firm targets and consequences for noncompliance, and leave more scope for community involvement in negotiations and enforcement. Non-binding approaches tend to use aspirational targets with fewer enforcement levers to ensure compliance. While non-binding approaches are still useful, there tends to be a significant push from communities to strive for agreements to which various stakeholders can be held accountable. Developers, on the other hand, are often resistant to hard targets with penalties.

This push towards agreements is much stronger in the United States. As a result of their legislative and regulatory environment and the context of existing planning processes, CBAs between developers and communities are the common approach. While this push exists in Ontario as well, it has been suggested that other approaches may be better suited to the Canadian context and tradition, specifically with respect to investments in public infrastructure. Binding arrangements can be achieved through other

14 Jamie Van Ymeren and Sara Ditta (2017) “Delivering Benefit: Achieving community benefits in Ontario.” Mowat Centre. <https://mowatcentre.ca/delivering-benefit/>.

mechanisms such as policy, procurement rules and contracts between the government and developers. For example, establishing minimum standards or baseline community benefits across all future projects through legislation or policy could be pursued, such as local hiring and job quality or social purchasing.¹⁵ Across-the-board requirements can be pursued in place of, or in addition to, agreements negotiated on a project-by-project basis.

TOP-DOWN VS. BOTTOM-UP

Similarly, there is often a tension between communities and government structures with respect to top-down and bottom-up approaches in planning processes. The purpose of community benefits initiatives is, of course, to benefit communities. As such, communities want the ability to define themselves through mobilization and coalition efforts, and desire autonomy in the process of defining, articulating and negotiating the benefits that they wish to see through an infrastructure project. This is because communities do not come into being as a result of public investment but are already existing, functioning entities. A truly bottom-up or grassroots approach to community benefits would have very little government intervention. At the same time, if community benefits initiatives are to become policy requirements pursued by governments, some degree of top-down measures will be necessary to make this possible.

In developing community benefits initiatives, it might be useful to view these approaches on a spectrum rather than as a dichotomy. In the United States, for example, CBAs established through grassroots mobilization are the typical approach to community benefits.¹⁶ These binding agreements are typically signed between the developer and a coalition of interests from the community, in which the developer faces strict enforcement terms. On the other end of this spectrum, the United Kingdom tends to take a more top-down approach through legislative frameworks and policy directives, with minimal community consultation or inclusive engagement.^{17 18}

If these approaches are placed on a spectrum, Ontario seems to fall somewhere in the middle as examples of both top-down and bottom-up initiatives are likely to emerge. While the two are not mutually exclusive, this tension will likely continue to underlie government efforts to develop community benefits initiatives in the province. It will be important for governments not to be overly prescriptive in their approaches as communities want to actively be involved in decision-making, rather than merely consulted. This is a reality that cannot be avoided, and thus should be acknowledged and leveraged for maximum mutual benefit.

15 Ben Beach et al. (2014) "Delivering Community Benefits through Economic Development: A Guide For Elected and Appointed Officials." Partnership for Working Families. http://www.forworkingfamilies.org/sites/pwf/files/publications/1114%20PWF%20CBA%20Handout_web.pdf.

16 For example, the Oakland Army Base, Hill District and Kingsbridge Armory CBAs in the United States

17 For example, Buy Social Northern Ireland, UK Social Value Act and the Wales Public Procurement Act

18 Dina Graser (2016) "Community Benefits and Tower Renewal." Evergreen. https://www.evergreen.ca/downloads/pdfs/HousingActionLab/TowerRenewal_Report_FINAL.pdf.

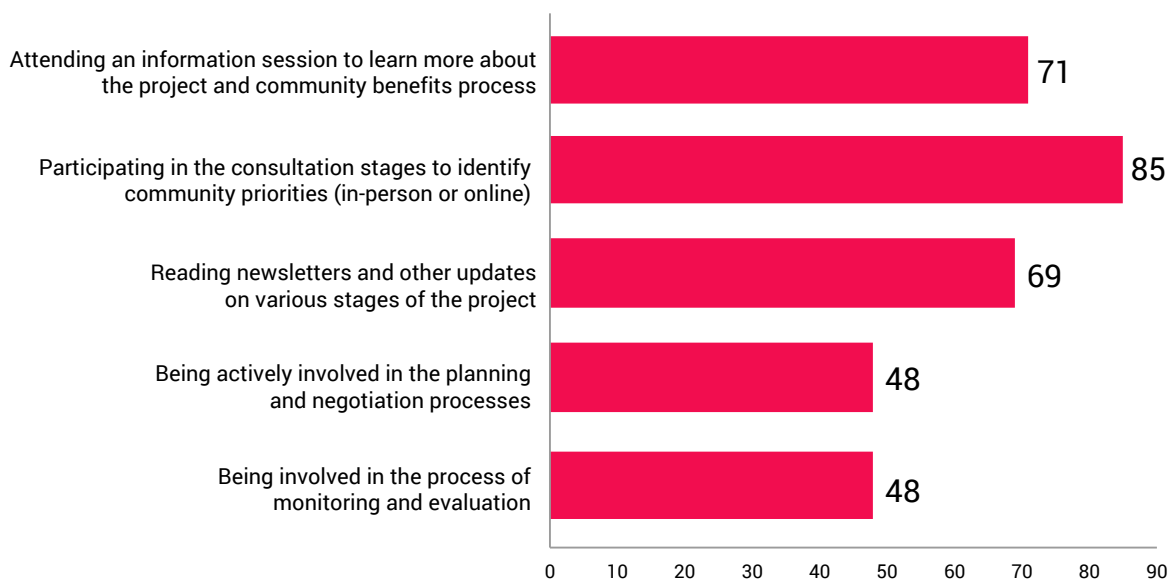
At which stages do Ontarians see themselves participating throughout the community benefits process?

We asked questionnaire respondents which stages they would envision themselves participating in if the government was to utilize community benefits for an infrastructure investment in their community:

- » 71 per cent would attend an information session to learn about the project and community benefits process.
- » 85 per cent of respondents see themselves participating in the consultation stages to identify community priorities.
- » 69 per cent would read a newsletter or updates at various stages of the project.
- » 48 per cent also see themselves being involved in the negotiation stages as well as monitoring and evaluation.

FIGURE 3

If the government was to utilize community benefits for an infrastructure investment in your community, at which stages do you envision yourself participating in the process? Please check all that apply.



COMMUNITY CAPACITY

Communities want to define and speak for themselves. Individuals and groups should, and often do, have agency to mobilize to discuss, prioritize and articulate their needs to influence decision-making processes from the bottom up. Communities also want to participate in deeper and longer-term involvement in these processes beyond just consultation. In fact, some dedicated community benefits networks have emerged in recent years for this very purpose – mobilizing a coalition of interest groups to define the community and work together to bring their collective voice to the negotiating table (see case studies on pages 31-32). However, communities often also face significant capacity challenges that may limit their ability to effectively participate in the community benefits process, particularly in rural and northern contexts, but also in communities that have been historically disadvantaged.

Community organizing takes significant time and resources, and requires physical space to convene meetings that many communities may not have. Furthermore, community benefits initiatives are a rather new development. The knowledge required to understand and influence decision-making processes as they relate to infrastructure and procurement can be quite complicated. Many groups and individuals may lack the basic necessary information required to meaningfully participate in the process of developing community benefits initiatives.

GOVERNMENT CAPACITY AND APPROACH

Governments also face capacity challenges in the sense that no particular body has the mandate or expertise to engage communities to inform the development of community benefits initiatives. Public consultation already occurs as part of infrastructure planning processes, although these existing mechanisms as currently practiced are often criticized as not being robust enough to address community priorities as they relate to community benefits initiatives. Furthermore, some communities may feel that existing consultation methods have not adequately addressed their concerns or enabled their participation. There is a consensus that the approaches used to define community benefits must be more robust, but who should be responsible for engaging the community is still an open question.

While the Government of Ontario is currently working on a community benefits framework for the province, there is no existing department or branch that could likely carry out these engagement activities at the provincial level. The ability to conduct robust community engagement at the hyper-local level is a skill which large governments do not necessarily have in-house. Some key informants expressed confidence that local governments do, in certain instances, have the expertise and experience to conduct this type of work, although the ability of municipalities to do this is not uniform across the province. The Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy (IFSD) points out that while some local governments hire community development officers for this exact purpose, such supports are not particularly common.¹⁹

19 Armine Yalnizyan (2017) "Community Benefits Agreements: Empowering Communities to Maximize Returns on Public Infrastructure Investments." Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy. <http://www.ifsd.ca/web/default/files/Presentations/Reports/17011%20-%20Community%20Benefits%20Agreements%20-%2017%20July%202017.pdf>.

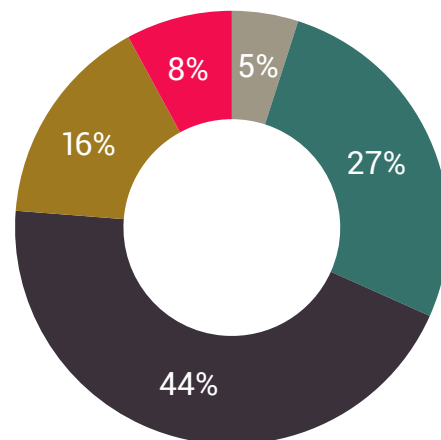
There is an argument to be made that this engagement is not most effectively conducted by the government at all. If communities do not have a great deal of trust in government as an institution or are wary about their track record of meaningful consultation, government-led engagement efforts are not likely to be successful. However, due to vested corporate interests in the project, many also believe that this should not be a responsibility of the contractor carrying out the project (i.e. the winning bidder) either. Another, and perhaps more favourable option for many, would be utilizing some third-party intermediary (such as a coalition of community groups) to convene, discuss community needs and determine priorities.

Whom do Ontarians trust to represent their community?

In the development of community benefits initiatives, it is important for the community to have appropriate representation of its interests.

About 44 per cent of respondents said they would trust a network or coalition of interested groups to speak on their behalf in these processes, while 27 per cent would trust an existing non-profit or community organization in their community.

FIGURE 4
In your community, which of the following would you trust the most to speak on your behalf (e.g. in negotiation processes)?



- Municipal government
- An existing non-profit or other community organization
- A network or coalition of interested groups
- Citizens should self-organize and mobilize around a project
- Other

How Should Community be Defined?

While communities should lead the way in defining themselves, it is also crucial that the decisions around defining and engaging communities are made prudently. Governments have a responsibility to conduct due diligence to ensure that their conceptualization of the community is well-defined and representative of the reality on the ground. As such, some guidance around how policymakers approach this exercise may be useful.

Establishing who exactly the “community” is with respect to large infrastructure investments is an integral but difficult task to undertake. While this may seem like a simple answer, there are numerous ways to define community and no clear consensus on which is the most appropriate. Some of the ways in which community can be defined include:

- » Residents living within a particular proximity to a project’s development.
- » End-users of a completed infrastructure project.
- » Self-selecting groups with an interest in the project.
- » Existing boundaries of municipal or regional governments or service delivery areas.

In some cases, community can be defined in the broadest terms as any and every individual or group that may be impacted by the infrastructure investment. On the other hand, the approach could take a more targeted focus on those whose voices may be quiet and must be sought out (e.g. historically disadvantaged and equity-seeking groups).

Realistically speaking, there is no one-size-fits-all definition of the term “community” and the definition for any single project will likely reflect a number of these elements based on the project or the type of community benefit. The relevant definition of community will depend on the local context, history and existing networks among its citizens, as well as the particular infrastructure project that intends to utilize a community benefits approach. In large part, the community defines itself and the government should be careful not to be overly prescriptive in its approaches to defining community.

Rather, policymakers should adopt a combination of place-based and population-based strategies to define community in the context of community benefits for large infrastructure investments. Government can ensure due diligence with respect to defining a community in a way that is representative and inclusive by first considering the geographic dynamics, and then tailoring that definition to include the dynamics of its population.

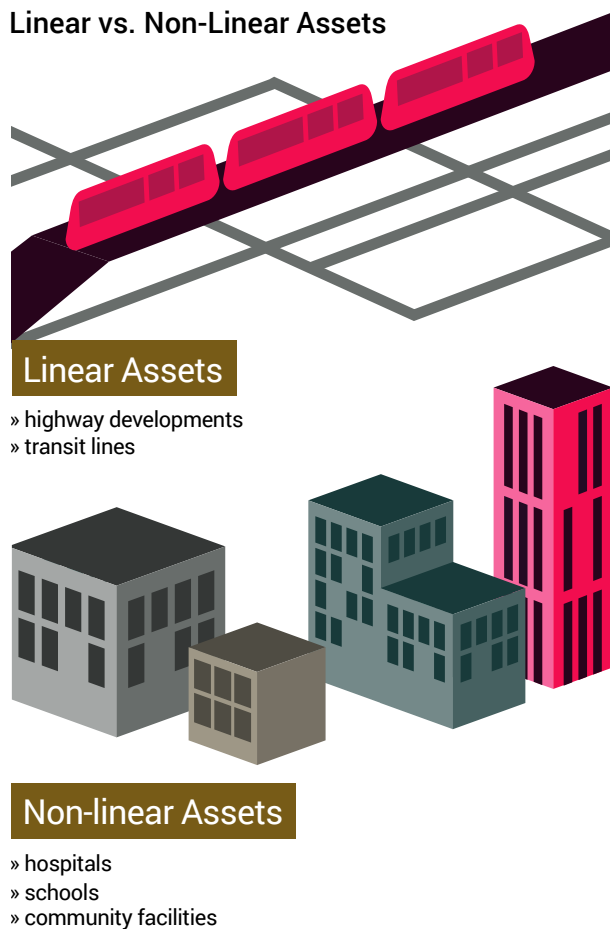
PLACE-BASED STRATEGY

At its core, a community benefits initiative should be a place-based strategy. This means that geography will be a key element to mapping out impacted communities in relation to an infrastructure project. For example, those living in close proximity to the construction of an infrastructure project will, in nearly all cases, be a crucial consideration.

There may be some variation between asset classes when it comes to impacted communities of large-scale infrastructure projects in which the provincial government is the owner. Linear assets, such as highway developments or transit lines,

may cross through multiple communities that can be considered in a rather clear trajectory. In the case of the Eglinton Crosstown Light Rapid Transit (LRT) development for example, the line will be built along 19 kilometres of Eglinton Avenue between Mount Dennis and Kennedy Road. In the Community Benefits and Liaison Plan for the project, the winning bidder (Crosslinx Transit Solutions) could map out neighbourhood boundaries along that east-west corridor and identify specific neighbourhood improvement areas for inclusion in the framework. Non-linear assets on the other hand may look slightly different. When defining community with respect to other infrastructure projects such as hospitals, schools or community facilities, the end-users in a particular catchment area may also need to be considered.

FIGURE 5
Linear vs. Non-Linear Assets



In either case, using existing indicators would be a useful starting point in defining the community. In the UK for example, postal codes of residents within a certain physical proximity to a highway development offer a simple data point that can be identified and monitored fairly easily. Similarly, using catchment area indicators may be useful for non-linear assets. For example, using Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) boundaries to determine communities impacted by a healthcare development, or school board districts in the case of educational facilities.

However, it is important to note that locality does not always necessarily reflect existing borders or boundaries. Boundaries used to distinguish between municipal authorities, local city wards or business improvement associations are often drawn arbitrarily and may not be representative of the way citizens live and interact with one another in reality. For example, economic impacts do not necessarily fall within these boundaries and would instead have a much larger ripple effect than the immediate area.

A much broader approach to locality will likely be required depending on the context of a particular project, and the goal of the community benefits. This is particularly true for workforce development initiatives for example, where strict geographical limitations on recruitment can negatively impact goals of sustainable employment. In discussions around community benefits initiatives, employers often express concern that using inflexible boundaries to define the community may restrict their ability to hire within those parameters and thus their ability to meet the desired targets – aspirational or not. Rather, defining community in broader terms that corresponds with realistic working areas may be more beneficial. In particular, a set of disadvantaged communities identified based on target postal codes or other criteria in a broad geographical region may prove more useful.

Community or Benefit?

In some cases, whether or not to prioritize the needs of the local community affected by the project or the broader potential social benefit the project can leverage may appear as a trade-off that needs to be made in arriving at community benefits decisions.

For example, limiting hiring for workforce development initiatives solely to the immediate area surrounding an infrastructure project could unduly limit the hiring pool of eligible candidates or conversely limit opportunities for candidates from other priority communities that might otherwise be eligible under a broader definition of community.

Similarly, with respect to social procurement, a community immediately impacted by an infrastructure project may not have the time or capacity to develop a social enterprise that meshes with the requirements of the project. However, there may be an existing social enterprise located in a nearby community better suited to meet the project's needs. Provided that such an organization were also required to deliver some social benefit to the impacted community, it ought not be disqualified from bidding on a community benefits initiative based on geography alone.

In short, while geographical factors are important, careful consideration should be given as to how restrictive they are to ensure that broader opportunities for social benefit are not missed.

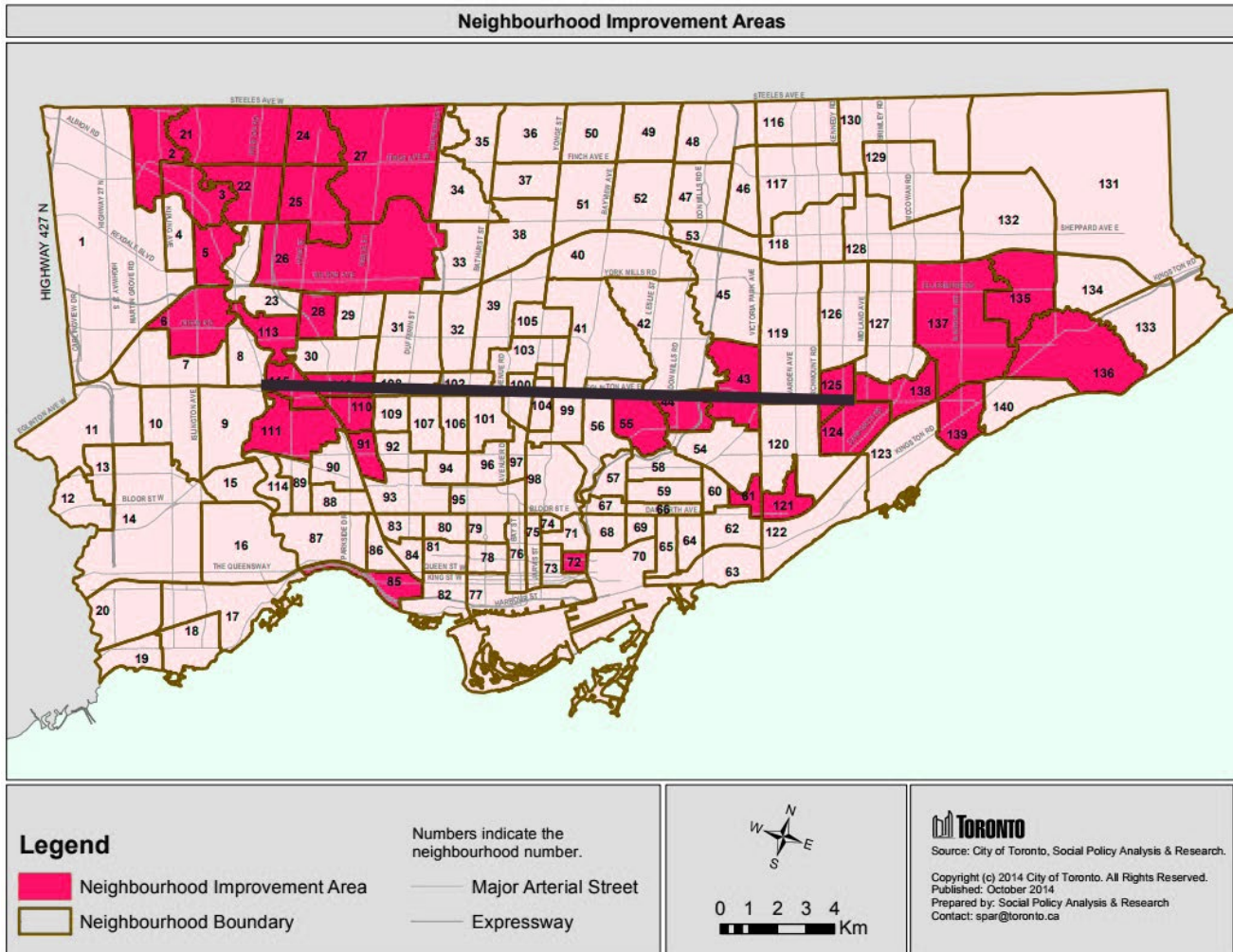
POPULATION-BASED STRATEGY

Context matters, and thus geographic proximity is perhaps a necessary but not alone sufficient element in the definition of community in the context of community benefits for large infrastructure projects. While this may often be a good place to start, the definition of community should be equally focused on the dynamics of its population. The “people” aspect of community will vary widely based on its historical and cultural context, and the unique barriers that might be faced by certain segments of that population. The definition of a given community is also likely to shift depending on what the community benefits initiative aims to achieve. If the objective is to provide more equitable access to the labour market, it will be vital to focus on particular groups that face barriers to employment. Similarly, the definition of community will vary if the objective is to achieve poverty reduction more broadly.

In the case of the Eglinton Crosstown LRT development for example, Crosslinx Transit Solutions used the City of Toronto's 2014 Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs) map that identifies 31 Toronto neighbourhoods to map out the surrounding neighbourhoods that would be impacted by the project, and then proceeded to identify specific neighbourhoods that faced unique barriers with respect to employment and would be prioritized for inclusion in the community benefits.²⁰

20 Crosslinx Transit Solutions (2015) “Community Benefits and Liaison Plan for Eglinton Crosstown LRT Project.” http://www.thecrosstown.ca/sites/default/files/cts_-_community_benefits_and_liaison_plan_rev_01_-_february_26_2016_.pdf.

FIGURE 6
Toronto Neighbourhood Improvement Areas used for Crosslinx Community Benefits and Liaison Plan



In some cases, these NIAs are in the direct vicinity of the transit line such as Weston/Mount Dennis and Thorncliffe/Flemingdon Park. Other NIAs, however, are more distant from the physical development of the transit line. To maximize the impact of community benefits, the scope of community was broadened beyond the immediate geographical area to include neighbourhoods that could benefit from the initiative. Such a two-pronged approach is likely to be the most effective way to achieve inclusive economic development.

The process for determining the population aspect of a community is less clearly-defined than geographical approaches, and cannot be determined by simply looking at a map. Defining the human element of community requires engaging the community on a deeper level to understand its reality, as well as more thoughtful analysis (see “Community Mapping in Practice” on page 20). Since the process of defining community will vary on a project-by-project basis, a set of guiding principles should be used to define the community and engage that community in a way that enables them to articulate their priority needs and the benefits they wish to see through the project.

Community Mapping in Practice

When determining a community's priorities to provide meaningful community benefits, a crucial responsibility of the government is to ensure the inclusion of a diverse range of voices and proactively remove barriers to community participation. While there are often visible community networks that the government should involve in developing community benefits initiatives, it is also essential to uncover invisible and informal networks and involve citizen groups that may not actively mobilize around the project. This is particularly critical as disadvantaged communities are generally detached from the decision-making processes, and community benefits must focus on them by ensuring their active participation in defining community benefits.

Without conscious effort, there is a risk that community members who may not have self-organized or disadvantaged groups that do not possess the resources to do so will be forgotten. To ensure that no groups are missing from the table, that groups which might have the most to gain from public investment are engaged, and that all voices are heard, it is vital that policymakers conduct a community analysis to map out the range of affected stakeholders and their priorities. This becomes even more important in the absence of a grassroots-led coalition of community groups. A few strategies are presented below:

CREATING THE COMMUNITY PROFILE

A starting point in ensuring a wide representation of community members is to build a community profile. Some of the first steps in this include understanding the specific history of the community and the demographics of residents to create a place- and population-based engagement strategy. In particular, data and statistics should be leveraged, where possible, to create a profile of the impacted community and identify disadvantaged populations. Indicators such as income, education and health outcomes may be utilized to understand community issues.²¹ Data, such as postal codes, may also aid in identifying geographies with a high concentration disadvantaged groups to effectively target community benefits. Further, ethnic diversity of the community should be taken into consideration to create culturally sensitive and language-based engagement strategies, as well as to ensure that the diversity of the community is reflected by those representing the community and those at the decision-making table. Moreover, understanding the diversity of the community is essential to build an effective communications plan that facilitates in obtaining free, prior and informed consent of communities to ensure the integrity of decisions.

In terms of specific data already available, the Canadian Council on Social Development administers the Community Data Program, which provides social data on the smallest geographies to monitor social and economic trends within communities across Canada, and to track poverty and wellbeing at the local level. Currently, over 300 non-profit sector and municipal organizations in both urban and rural regions use this service.²²

21 For example, see the City of Toronto's Neighbourhood Demographic Estimates for Mount Olive-Silverstone-Jamestown: <https://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/9015-2-Mount-Olive-Silverstone-Jamestown.pdf>.

22 For more information, see: Canadian Council on Social Development "About the Community Data Program." <http://communitydata.ca/about>.

Many other jurisdictions and organizations also collect valuable demographic data and have data portals and tools that can be used to better understand the community and identify target groups for community benefits. The City of Toronto is an example where the municipal government has comprehensive data and has organized it in various segments.²³ Some examples include:

» **Neighbourhood Profiles**

These are created by the City of Toronto's Social Policy Analysis & Research Unit and provide details on the demographics of the population in each of the City's 140 neighbourhoods.²⁴

» **Ward Profiles**

Based on Statistics Canada's 2011 Census and the National Household Survey, these are detailed profiles on each ward, and provide information on the demographic, social and economic characteristics of people and households.²⁵

» **Neighbourhood Improvement Area Profiles**

This includes profiles of the 31 priority neighbourhoods identified by the City under the Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy 2020.²⁶

» **Community Council Area Profiles**

This provides details on the four community council areas.²⁷

» **Toronto Social Atlas**

This is a collection of maps providing details on social demography, such as ethnicity, age, race, housing, poverty, income, language and country of origin, based on data from the Canadian Census.²⁸

» **Wellbeing Toronto**

This mapping application allows the user to create a map, tables and graphs by selecting datasets at the neighbourhood level. It can also be used to map community assets as the application also allows viewing services and facilities such as schools, community centres and libraries.²⁹

While jurisdictions such as the City of Toronto may have detailed data, there are smaller municipalities or remote areas where data may not be as readily available or useful. In such cases, it will be beneficial to take steps to collect relevant data to build community profiles, analyze existing data to see if it can be made useful and promote collaboration among governmental agencies to share data.

23 See: City of Toronto "Neighbourhoods & Communities." <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/data-research-maps/neighbourhoods-communities/>.

24 See: City of Toronto "Neighbourhood Profiles." <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/data-research-maps/neighbourhoods-communities/neighbourhood-profiles/>.

25 See: City of Toronto "Ward Profiles." <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/data-research-maps/neighbourhoods-communities/ward-profiles/>.

26 See: City of Toronto "Neighbourhood Improvement Area Profiles." <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/data-research-maps/neighbourhoods-communities/nia-profiles/>.

27 See: City of Toronto "Community Council Area Profiles." <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/data-research-maps/neighbourhoods-communities/community-council-area-profiles/>.

28 See: City of Toronto "Toronto Social Atlas." <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/data-research-maps/neighbourhoods-communities/toronto-social-atlas/>.

29 See: City of Toronto "Wellbeing Toronto." <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/data-research-maps/neighbourhoods-communities/wellbeing-toronto/>.



ON THE GROUND ENGAGEMENT

There are always informal networks within communities that may be invisible to outsiders. Hence, it is essential for policymakers to develop processes to identify these networks through grassroots engagement, as they cannot be discovered from the outside. One place to start is to identify community influencers, connectors and institutions that have credibility and trust within the community. Another option may be to hire public servants with grassroots community engagement experience. In either instance, the core of this approach would be increased willingness of the government to go into the community and talk to people, and engage in inclusive and meaningful community-based processes. This process must go beyond traditional consultation approaches which are commonly seen to be little more than bureaucratic checkboxes rather than genuine solutions-based approaches based on community understanding.

ASSET-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Another strategy to facilitate community organizing and understanding is the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) model, which is a place-based framework geared towards identifying the assets and strengths of a community. The process includes identifying and creating inventories of individuals, associations, physical assets, social enterprises and local businesses, institutions and their connections that exist within a community.³⁰ By analyzing and discovering the capacity of the community, this strategy can help unlock roles for different community members as well as the government by helping to address questions such as what can be done by residents, what should be the sole responsibility of the government, and in which areas should residents and government collaborate.³¹ ABCD can also play a key role in community building by fostering community connections that did not exist previously.

30 "What is Asset Based Community Development (ABCD)." http://deepeningcommunity.ca/sites/default/files/what_isassetbasedcommunitydevelopment1.pdf.

31 H. Daniels Duncan (2012) "The Classic Duo: Accountability and Community Development Can Help Unlock an Abundance of Resources." ICMA. <https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/publications/publications-by-topic/Documents/Duncan%20ABCD%20RBA%20ICMA%20Article%20Nov%202012.pdf>.

FIGURE 7
Community Assets Map



Note: Adapted from *Brighter Futures Together*. <http://www.brighterfuturestogether.co.uk/brighter-futures-together-toolkit/map-assets-in-your-community/>.



For government and community to truly collaborate and develop meaningful community benefits initiatives, the process must begin by establishing a relationship that is built on a foundation of trust.

4 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The process of defining community and engaging the community to define the intended benefits should be guided by a set of overarching principles. Because the process of defining community can be complex and even divisive, these principles can provide guidance to overcome the aforementioned challenges and tensions that may arise. These guiding principles should be at the core of all activities – from determining the definition of community in relation to a particular infrastructure project to the broader community engagement and involvement throughout the process of developing community benefits initiatives:

- » Accountability, Transparency and Trust
- » Inclusion and Accessibility
- » Equity and Social Justice
- » Uncover and Leverage Community Networks
- » Foster Community Capacity
- » Engage Early and Often

ACCOUNTABILITY, TRANSPARENCY AND TRUST

For government and community to truly collaborate and develop meaningful community benefits initiatives, the process must begin by establishing a relationship that is built on a foundation of trust. It is important to acknowledge that government structures or the winning bidder in an infrastructure development are not always trusted institutions in some communities, particularly in areas which have had negative experiences or have historically been left out of government efforts to engage local community. A trusting relationship takes time, and is not possible without a high degree of transparency throughout all stages of the

process, and accountability to the decisions that are ultimately made. This does not mean that the community needs to see that it gets everything it wants – any more than the developer expects to reach all of its ambitions. Rather, the objective is that all parties are dealt with in a forthright fashion.

Communities do not want to be consulted only as a matter of process or “box-ticking.” Rather, communities want to be meaningfully engaged, have their voices heard and be actively involved in various stages of the process. Indeed, successful community benefits initiatives will

provide opportunity for communities to not only articulate their priority needs and influence the decision-making process, but also be involved in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of a project's success.

Existing consultation methods have left some communities feeling pessimistic about the ability of the government to adequately engage the community in decision-making, and hear and address their concerns. This is particularly true for historically disadvantaged and equity-seeking groups who often have not been given a seat at the table in planning and decision-making processes. Decisions are often shrouded in secrecy, rather than obtaining free, prior and informed consent of communities. For example, Canada has historically had a poor track record of adequately consulting Indigenous Peoples on various projects across numerous jurisdictions. Lack of transparent processes, deficient understanding of historical context and failure to acknowledge cultural differences and diversity can have devastating impacts on the community – not only derailing any attempt to collect genuine feedback on a project, but also perpetuating or deepening distrust in government structures.

There is also a growing literature that outlines key success factors of recent community benefits initiatives – as well as factors that caused such agreements to fail. For example, Partnership for Working Families – a national network of leading regional advocacy organizations in the US who support innovative solutions to the nation's economic and environmental problems – explored key indicators and case studies of ineffective CBAs in the United States. Community engagement processes which were exclusive, opaque and did not maintain clear and consistent follow up with the communities intended to

benefit ultimately failed and, furthermore, acted to disempower rather than empower these communities.³²

Accountability and transparency can – and should – operate in both directions. This means that government is transparent about how outputs of community engagement efforts and discussions lead to decisions at each stage of the process, and is honest with the community about the aspects of the process they can influence. This also means being held accountable to the decisions that are made, following up with the community to keep them informed on a project's progress, making information publicly available and accessible, and providing them details on how their input is or is not being used. Some methods used to increase transparency include provision for an independent compliance monitor, and requirement for regular public reporting that is robust, i.e. with clear specifications about how outputs are measured and is verifiable.³³

For communities, this also means having clear and transparent roles and processes for how community members can engage and influence decisions internally. As communities begin to mobilize, it is important that they themselves are transparent about the way in which they represent collective interests, ensuring that it is not only the largest or best organized groups that take the lead but that smaller organizations and marginalized individuals are also engaged. One best practice to promote inclusion of diverse voices is through a coalition of community groups representing the various interests at stake. Of course, it is also a key responsibility of

32 Partnership for Working Families (2016) "Common Challenges in Negotiating Community Benefits Agreements – And – How to Avoid Them." <http://www.forworkingfamilies.org/sites/pwf/files/publications/Effective%20CBAs.pdf>.

33 Dina Graser (2016) "Community Benefits and Tower Renewal." Evergreen. https://www.evergreen.ca/downloads/pdfs/HousingActionLab/TowerRenewal_Report_FINAL.pdf.

the government to ensure inclusion by assessing that marginalized voices are not missing from the table.

INCLUSION AND ACCESSIBILITY

When defining community with respect to a particular infrastructure project, ensuring that this conceptualization is representative of the reality on the ground is of utmost importance. Making quick assumptions around who will be impacted by the project or only reaching out to the largest and well-organized groups will likely lead to a biased or skewed definition of community. This can lead to significant challenges later in the process if the community is ill-defined, or if the local community does not have confidence in the process.³⁴

The degree to which one group or segment of a community can mobilize does not necessarily reflect their ability to speak on behalf of the entire community and represent its interests. As communities mobilize or form coalitions to represent collective interests, it is important that not only the largest and established groups solely take the reins. Rather, community organizers must ensure that coalitions represent a broad range of interests, and that small groups and individuals can influence decisions made around community priorities. All parties and perspectives must be viewed as having a legitimate voice and a place at the table, with a focus on the priorities of those most disadvantaged, most negatively affected by the project, or who have the most to gain. For instance, a project of moderate importance to those who have access to decent

work opportunities may be one of enormous importance to those who are disadvantaged in the labour market.

Taking a broad view of community is likely a good place to start to ensure that a wide range of perspectives are included in the decision-making processes. However, additional efforts must be made to promote inclusion and accessibility. It is often said that inclusion is not merely the absence of exclusion – that to be truly inclusive means recognizing the structural barriers that some groups may face and actively involving them in the conversation. This means acknowledging early on that power imbalances exist, and actively working to limit these imbalances.

There are many things that can be done to make the community engagement process more inclusive and accessible. For example, convening meetings in accessible venues with access to transportation and food that is welcoming to the community. Meetings should be held at times in which citizens can work around their schedules (e.g. evenings or weekends) and provide wrap-around supports such as child care and translation services to enable greater participation. There should also be multiple outlets for participation, such as in-person, online and door-to-door engagement.

Another key element of accessibility is ensuring that the language used is simple to understand. Technical, specialized or bureaucratic terminology often used in government processes such as procurement, may not be understood or may be intimidating and deter participation. Being truly inclusive would mean identifying and using language that is trusted by the community and encourages their participation. It is also important to hear what the community is saying and not

34 For example, in the case of Atlantic Yards project in Brooklyn, NY, the developer was accused of handpicking community groups to participate in the process, which ultimately led to many of the promised benefits not materializing. For a fuller discussion, see: Dina Graser (2016) "Community Benefits and Tower Renewal." Evergreen. https://www.evergreen.ca/downloads/pdfs/HousingActionLab/TowerRenewal_Report_FINAL.pdf.

just listen. If the manner in which community members express themselves is different than those responsible for engaging, efforts should be made to clarify until the point is understood. Too often we unintentionally discard points that we do not understand, and critical information may be contained in those points.

EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Community benefits should put equity at the centre of economic development. This means that promoting equity should be at the core of engagement, decision-making and benefits provision. Community benefits initiatives should aim to benefit the overall community with a particular emphasis on those who have, over time, faced significant barriers to opportunity. This focus should include both process and outcome: ensuring that the most marginalized voices are included at the decision-making table, and also ensuring that the most marginalized are well-represented and ultimately benefit from the community benefits initiative that follows.

Historically disadvantaged and equity-seeking groups – such as Indigenous Peoples, racialized populations, newcomers, low-income individuals and those living with a disability – may be more difficult to reach as a result of structural barriers. Furthermore, perceived failure of government consultation efforts in the past may reduce the appeal of participating in the development of community benefits initiatives. Targeted efforts, strong communication and meaningful engagement of these groups will be required.

To the extent that governments can utilize data to better inform efforts such as community mapping, this would be incredibly valuable. For example, basic data analysis around which level of government and amount of public dollars have been spent in a community can help

identify where trust lies and where further efforts might be needed. More qualitative mapping of community relationships with various government agencies and anchor institutions operating locally may also prove instructive. Data can also be leveraged to target community benefits towards those who are the most marginalized (see *Community Mapping in Practice* on page 20).

A key threat to achieving equity in this process is equating community benefits with a public good that may result from a project in any case. It is essential to ensure that community benefits create additional value apart from the spillover benefits that will occur as a result of the development project, and that targeted measures are used to focus on the most vulnerable segments of the population. For example, the construction of a new transit line should not just result in better access to transit and job creation. Rather, community benefits that focus on workforce development can be harnessed to provide access to public transit in underserved areas and jobs of high quality that promote equity in the labour market.

UNCOVER AND LEVERAGE COMMUNITY NETWORKS

When defining the community in relation to a particular infrastructure project, it is important to acknowledge that this process never begins with a blank slate, and that each community is unique. Communities are dynamic and robust ecosystems with vertical and horizontal networks that are already working in various aspects. These networks are key to defining the community, mobilizing and establishing their priority needs – although oftentimes these networks are largely invisible to someone from the outside. Community groups, small businesses and resident connections already exist and operate in ways that hold the community together. Rather than transposing or imagining networks that do not exist, the most effective way to approach the community is to uncover these invisible networks, identify their strengths and leverage their existing capacity.

Using the approach taken in Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) may be a useful model for defining and engaging communities. This bottom-up approach to development recognizes the strengths, assets and potential within a community rather than focusing on what a community lacks, and aims to enable citizens and associations to shape their communities.³⁵ The ABCD Institute at DePaul University in Chicago, Illinois describes the approach as one that:

“...considers local assets as the primary building blocks of sustainable community development. Building on the skills of local residents, the power of local associations, and the supportive functions of local institutions, asset-based community development draws upon existing community strengths to build stronger, more sustainable communities for the future.”³⁶

This approach has been used successfully in examples closer to home. The East Scarborough Storefront, for example, has leveraged this model to facilitate collaboration, build community and support people. This hub brings together residents, staff, volunteers, funders, academics and 40 partner agencies, and has been an important voice in the community since 1999.³⁷ The Storefront credits its resident participation in leadership as a key factor in its success – creating a “relationship of equals” between residents and the agencies working within the community. After all, these individuals are in the best position to understand the needs of their community, and involving them in decision-making processes ensures that programs, services and initiatives that the community receives are relevant and necessary.³⁸

Identifying these groups and networks is a process that will take great time and sustained effort to engage community members in conversations to understand the local context. This type of community engagement requires significant skill – one that is often underappreciated, and may not be readily available in the traditional infrastructure and procurement stakeholders within government or the winning bidder. Groups such as the Storefront provide a useful facilitation role in this regard, connecting groups and individuals in the community to government agencies.³⁹


35 Tamarack Institute “ABCD Canada.” <http://www.deepeningcommunity.org/abcd-canada-home>.

36 DePaul University “Asset-Based Community Development Institute.” <https://resources.depaul.edu/abcd-institute/Pages/default.aspx>.

37 Cathy Mann (2012) “The Little Community that Could - The Story Behind Our Story: East Scarborough Storefront’s First Decade of Building Community Together.” East Scarborough Storefront.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.



Some communities may have an existing organization such as the East Scarborough Storefront or other community groups who are trusted to adequately represent the interests of a community. Some regions have even had dedicated community benefits networks emerge throughout the province. These coalitions of interested stakeholders convene, engage the community to determine priorities and participate in negotiations. Where these exist, they are working in different ways.

For example, the Toronto Community Benefits Network successfully negotiated the Community Benefits Framework for the Eglinton Crosstown LRT development, and has since been involved in mobilizing around other projects in the Toronto area to determine community needs and represent their interests at the negotiating table. The Halton Community Benefits Network has similarly emerged as a convener and voice for the community, bringing together groups and individuals to determine priority needs. However, Halton Community Benefits Network has been doing this needs assessment proactively, in the absence of a particular infrastructure investment commitment (see case studies).

When looking province-wide however, it will likely be the case that some regions have neither existing nor dedicated groups to act as convenors or speak on behalf of the community. In such cases, additional work will need to be done to enable the community to engage in these processes.



CASE STUDY

Halton Community Benefits Network

An example of proactive community mobilization to obtain community benefits can be seen in the Halton region. Launched in 2016, the Halton Community Benefits Network is an initiative of the Halton Poverty Roundtable and is funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation, Atkinson Foundation and Amarna. As opposed to community networks that often emerge around particular infrastructure projects to obtain benefits for the impacted community, the Halton Community Benefits Network was created proactively without a committed or identified project to create awareness about community benefits initiatives and social procurement. The network offers public education opportunities on community benefits as well as online resources. According to its website, the network is *“engaged in research and consultation with the initial goal of educating and engaging community partners to adopt Community Benefits Agreements that can lead to change the way our economic region does business and thus benefit its citizens with fuller employment opportunities and inclusive social well-being.”*⁴⁰

The Halton Community Benefits Network has been successful in bringing together stakeholders from the government, businesses, funders, community partners and citizens to create awareness and start a conversation on community benefits as a way of reducing poverty. Notable participants in this network include the Halton Poverty Roundtable, Halton Multicultural Council, Halton Children’s Aid Society, Halton Region, Town of Oakville, Town of Milton, Town of Halton Hills, Halton Cooperative Purchasing Group, Oakville Community Foundation, Oakville District Labour Council, Oakville YMCA, Change Rangers, Ontario Trillium Foundation and United Way of Halton and Hamilton.⁴¹ The network has been successful at influencing municipal policy, and Halton’s Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan was informed by their work.⁴² Ultimately, the network aims to build the capacity of the community to adopt social procurement and community benefits on a wider level.⁴³

40 Halton Community Benefits Network Website: <http://haltoncommunitybenefits.com/index.php/about-us/>.

41 Ibid.

42 Leena Sharma Seth (2017) “Cities Reducing Poverty Summit: A Catalyst for Community-level Change.” Tamarack Institute. <http://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/latest/cities-reducing-poverty-summit-a-catalyst-for-community-level-change>.

43 For more information on the Halton Community Benefits Network, see: www.haltoncommunitybenefits.com.



CASE STUDY

Toronto Community Benefits Network

The Toronto Community Benefits Network (TCBN) started with an initial focus on obtaining community benefits agreements for transit expansion projects to build *“Toronto as an inclusive, thriving city in which all residents have equitable opportunities to contribute to building healthy communities and a prospering economy.”*⁴⁴ The TCBN’s primary objectives include creating equitable economic opportunities that promote economic inclusion through apprenticeships, integration of newcomers, supporting social enterprises through social procurement, pushing for neighbourhood and environment improvements, and ensuring clear commitments and accountability.⁴⁵ The network aims to bring together five sectors to collectively create solutions, including community partners, labour organizations, workforce development groups, industry and the government.⁴⁶ Since its inception in 2013, the network has built a strong community-labour partnership with a large and diverse support base, and as of September 2017, it had a membership base of 80 organizations.⁴⁷

The TCBN actively organizes around infrastructure projects to push for community benefits agreements with firm and enforceable targets that benefit local communities and disadvantaged groups. In 2014, the network signed a Community Benefits Framework for the Eglinton Crosstown LRT, which includes a legally binding agreement between the government (Metrolinx) and Crosslinx for a community benefits plan. While this framework consists of a process whereby the TCBN can hold the parties accountable to the plan, the TCBN continues to strive for agreements that are three-way legally binding. The TCBN was recently successful in advocating for a significant community benefits agreement for the proposed Woodbine Casino through their Rexdale Rising campaign. The agreement includes hard targets for hiring local residents, procurement through local and diverse suppliers, and a \$5 million investment for a child care centre.⁴⁸ Another campaign is focused on building an agreement for the Finch West LRT.⁴⁹

44 Toronto Community Benefits Network (2016) “Foundation Document - On Track to Opportunities: Vision, Commitment and Objectives for Community Benefit Agreements.” https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/communitybenefits/pages/70/attachments/original/1458668750/TCBN_Foundation_Document_2016.pdf?1458668750.

45 Ibid.

46 Toronto Community Benefits Network “Who We Are.” <http://www.communitybenefits.ca/about>.

47 Toronto Community Benefits Network “Directory of Coalition Members.” http://www.communitybenefits.ca/coalition_members.

48 Toronto Community Benefits Network “Rexdale Rising: CBA Campaign for the Woodbine Casino.” <https://rexdale Rising.communitybenefits.ca>.

49 For more information on the Toronto Community Benefits Network, see: <http://www.communitybenefits.ca>.

FOSTER COMMUNITY CAPACITY

Where groups and networks do exist, establishing and maintaining relationships with them and utilizing their knowledge and connections within the community will be critical to successful outcomes. These relationships will enable governments to better understand the uniqueness and nuances of the local context, establish trust in the community and ultimately ensure their approach to defining community is accurate and representative, and that the benefits provided through the initiatives are relevant to the community context.

Where these groups and networks do not exist, it will be important for government to provide opportunities for the community to self-organize and mobilize to define itself and its needs. Central to this principle will be the recognition that communities can and should define themselves, and work collaboratively with government bodies when capacity-building efforts are deemed valuable or necessary.⁵⁰

Capacity-building efforts, for example, could be used to enable communities to build a coalition of interested groups around a particular project, or for community wealth building more broadly. There is inherent value in pursuing capacity-building efforts to invest in the lasting social capital of communities, which is where the government can play a key role. The ways in which government can support communities and foster capacity will be discussed in greater detail in Policy Responses (page 38).

50 For specific ideas on how public officials can help advance community benefits, see: Ben Beach et al. (2014) "Delivering Community Benefits through Economic Development: A Guide For Elected and Appointed Officials." Partnership for Working Families. http://www.forworkingfamilies.org/sites/pwf/files/publications/1114%20PWF%20CBA%20Handout_web.pdf.

ENGAGE EARLY AND OFTEN

Once a community is defined, that community should have agency to determine the types of benefits provided through community benefits initiatives based on their needs and to prioritize them. There is, according to our research, an overwhelming consensus that this process should start early. This should happen as early as possible, although there are multiple entry points in the overall process in which community engagement can begin.

In Ontario, the construction of large-scale publicly owned infrastructure assets is frequently contracted out to the private sector. Under the Alternative Financing and Procurement (AFP) model, the provincial ministry or project owner is responsible for establishing the scope of a project before the design and construction (and sometimes maintenance of that asset following construction) is financed and carried out by a private firm.⁵¹ The procurement process to choose the private firm that will carry out the project is led by Infrastructure Ontario – a crown agency that provides a wide range of services to maximize the value of the province’s public infrastructure and realty.

Once a project has been conceptualized and funds approved, a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) process begins by requiring potential bidders to first demonstrate their financial strength and ability to carry out a project of the intended scope. A short-list of pre-qualified bidders is made publicly available and each are asked to submit a Request for Proposal (RFP), which sets out more detailed conditions and specifications to undertake that project. The highest ranking bidder is awarded a contract

with Infrastructure Ontario, and design and construction may begin any time after the contract is signed.

Determining the priority needs of the community and desired benefits prior to this tendering process is crucial. Doing so allows adequate time for the needs to be identified by the community to be incorporated into the RFP issued by Infrastructure Ontario, which ensures that the winning bidder will have pre-emptively incorporated these demands into the project plan prior to the Project Agreement or contract.

51 Infrastructure Ontario “FAQs - Alternative Financing and Procurement (AFP).” <http://www.infrastructureontario.ca/AFP-FAQs/>.

Points to Begin Engagement

There are multiple points at which the process of community engagement can begin before a project is put to tender.

PROACTIVE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Ideally, communities would have the capacity to be proactive and hold ongoing discussions to identify community needs in advance of a specific project. In practice, this would require existing groups and networks who are trusted in the community to engage with residents on a regular basis to gauge what type of benefits would be most useful if a project were to arise. This is the approach currently taken by the Halton Community Benefits Network. Most stakeholders acknowledge that this would be the most effective way to ensure that community benefits initiatives are successful. However, it is also recognized that not all communities have the existing networks or capacity for this type of proactive engagement.

UPON PROJECT APPROVAL

Once a project has been conceptualized and the funds have been approved, it typically moves onto the Planning, Design and Compliance phase. At this stage, there are enough details about the project available that the communities would have the necessary context to mobilize around the project and begin to discuss the potential benefits associated with it. It is also sufficiently early as the tendering process has not yet begun. Engaging the community at this phase may also provide an opportunity for the project to gain public support before the environmental assessment process and detailed project scoping begins.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

There are existing requirements for public consultation in the early stages of infrastructure projects, namely through the environmental assessment (EA) process. In Ontario, the Environmental Assessment Act outlines planning and decision-making processes to evaluate potential impacts of an undertaking, including the impact on the natural, social, cultural, economic and built environments and their interactions.⁵² The Ministry of Infrastructure Public Work Class EA sets out how the Ministry of Infrastructure should meet these requirements – a key component of which is the obligation to consult.⁵³ Public consultation is required for projects of larger scale with likely potential impacts.⁵⁴ Parties typically include government ministries and agencies, parties that may be affected by a project (e.g. owners of adjacent properties) and others who may be interested in a project (e.g. community members).⁵⁵


This does present a window of opportunity in which communities can be engaged to discuss potential community benefits associated with an infrastructure project. However, key informants expressed doubts about the robustness and the potential of the existing process to incorporate conversations around community benefits initiatives, and acknowledged that this existing process would need to be significantly more robust in order to do so.

52 Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change (2014) "Preparing and reviewing environmental assessments in Ontario." <https://www.ontario.ca/document/preparing-and-reviewing-environmental-assessments-ontario-0>.

53 Ministry of Infrastructure "Environmental Compliance/Public Work Class Environmental Assessment." <http://www.infrastructureontario.ca/Public-Work-Class-Environmental-Assessment/>.


54 Category A is applied to undertakings that are minor in scale and have minimal or no adverse environmental effects and requires no EA of the undertaking. Category B (Consultation and Documentation Report) is a screening process applied to undertakings that have some potential for adverse environmental effects. These effects are well understood from a technical perspective, are minor in nature, and mitigation is also well understood. Category C (Environmental Study Report) is a comprehensive EA process that is applied to undertakings that have the potential for significant environmental effects and must proceed under the full planning and documentation procedures. The environmental effects are assessed and mitigation, monitoring and public consultation are documented in a detailed Environmental Study Report (ESR).

55 Ibid.



While it is strongly recommended that the community be engaged prior to the RFP process for all new projects, there remains potential to incorporate community benefits for existing projects even after the RFP process has wrapped up and the winning bidder has been selected. Community benefits can still be discussed after the RFP process by enabling the community to work together with the winning bidder to discuss its priorities. For example, while the design features of a new community pool had already been determined, community members in Regent Park were able to negotiate with the winning bidder provisions to ensure that it would be inclusive for Muslim women who form a growing segment of the community's population.⁵⁶ While this approach may reduce the likelihood of binding agreements and ability to set hard targets, successful community benefits can still be achieved in the later stages.

56 Armine Yalnizyan (2017) "Community Benefits Agreements: Empowering Communities to Maximize Returns on Public Infrastructure Investments." Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy. <http://www.ifsd.ca/web/default/files/Presentations/Reports/17011%20-%20Community%20Benefits%20Agreements%20-%202017%20July%202017.pdf>.



The approach that government takes towards these capacity-building efforts should be asset-based, beginning by acknowledging the existing capacity in a community first and foremost.

5 POLICY RESPONSES

In developing its Community Benefits Framework for Ontario, the government must strike a balance between ensuring its due diligence that communities are well-defined, representative and involved in all stages of the process, and allowing communities the opportunity to self-organize and speak for themselves. In striking this balance, governments should approach the community in a way that is collaborative, inclusive, supportive, and built on a foundation of trust from the earliest stages.

Our research and discussion with key stakeholders have made clear that communities are dynamic and robust ecosystems – with existing networks – and desire autonomy in the process of defining, articulating and negotiating the benefits that they wish to see through an infrastructure project. However, many communities lack the resources to enable their full participation. The role of government should be to support communities and enable this participation through capacity-building efforts.

Capacity building refers to the process of developing skills, knowledge and confidence within a community, and strengthening the networks and connections that facilitate the sharing of these resources among groups and individuals. This process builds community capacity and social capital, and enables communities to develop place-based solutions to

identified problems.⁵⁷ There is a significant case to be made for investment in capacity-building efforts that result in lasting social capital within communities. The IFSD points out that the very process of deliberate coordination of community builds resilience by enabling the creation of new networks, providing opportunity to build skills and improving social cohesion overall.⁵⁸ Such capacity will be long-lasting, and enable communities to ultimately shape their local environment for the better over the long term.

The approach that government takes towards these capacity-building efforts should be asset-based, beginning by acknowledging the existing

57 Ontario Healthy Communities Coalition "Community Capacity Building." <http://www.ohcc-ccso.ca/en/community-capacity-building-0>; Sustaining Community (2014) "What is community capacity building?" <https://sustainingcommunity.wordpress.com/2014/03/10/ccb/>; The Aspen Institute "Measuring Community Capacity Building: A Workbook-in-Progress for Rural Communities." https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/files/content/docs/csg/MEASURING_COMMUNITY_CAPACITY_BUILDING.PDF.

58 Armine Yalnizyan (2017) "Community Benefits Agreements: Empowering Communities to Maximize Returns on Public Infrastructure Investments." Institute of Fiscal Studies and Democracy. <http://www.ifsd.ca/web/default/files/Presentations/Reports/17011%20-%20Community%20Benefits%20Agreements%20-%2017%20July%202017.pdf>.

capacity in a community first and foremost. This means that the support that government provides should only fill as much space as it needs to, providing necessary resources to groups and networks where they do exist and creating an enabling environment where they do not.

The institutional form that this support takes may be less important than what it aims to achieve. For example, research by the IFSD has identified potential in an arm's length agency that integrates all third party functions such as organizing, negotiating, monitoring and evaluating community benefits. Establishing an agency that acts as a convener – with an emphasis on optimizing community engagement – could improve its effectiveness and accountability of public spending.⁵⁹ However, this could take many other forms. For example, a directorate or “hub” within a provincial ministry, or the provision of funding to municipalities to develop dedicated departments at the local level.

The exact resources that may be required will depend on the context of the community and perhaps on the infrastructure that intends on incorporating community benefits. However, our research highlighted a number of broad areas where government can provide support.

PUBLIC EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

The knowledge base required for full participation in the process of determining and articulating priorities for community benefits initiatives can be quite substantial. Community benefits initiatives are a relatively new concept for Ontarians – this is especially true for residents who may not be actively involved in conversations around their community's development, but

also for experienced community organizers in regions that have not yet been involved in such a process. Furthermore, the general procurement process for infrastructure projects in which these conversations fit into can be incredibly complicated.

Providing public education and outreach to promote awareness in communities is an area where the government can add significant value. Once an infrastructure project has been approved in a particular community, offering information sessions and online materials can help provide an adequate knowledge base for participation in the process. A combination of both in-person and online public education efforts should address details about the infrastructure project itself, what exactly community benefits initiatives are and how they work, and how groups and individuals can become involved in the process to benefit their community.

An example of this type of outreach can be found within Ontario's Ministry of Government and Consumer Services (MGCS) in their Supply Chain Ontario program. MGCS currently provides ample online resources and seminars on “*How to do business with Ontario*,” which provides detailed information on the processes and relevant regulations to vendors who are interested in selling goods or services to the Ontario Public Service and the Broader Public Service.⁶⁰ Similar resources and information sessions on social procurement are particularly valuable to small businesses and social enterprises who may not have the same experience and opportunity to reap the benefits of Ontario's public procurement as larger established corporations. This could provide a model for how the provincial government could pursue targeted outreach

59 See IFSD report for full recommendations.

60 Ontario Ministry of Government and Consumer Services “Information for Vendors.” <https://www.doingbusiness.mgs.gov.on.ca/mbs/psb/psb.nsf/English/forvendors>.

and public education to those impacted by an upcoming infrastructure project utilizing community benefits.

PHYSICAL SPACE AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES

While some communities may have established groups or dedicated networks to pursue community benefits initiatives, they may still lack the adequate resources to convene meetings for discussing and prioritizing community needs. Key informants noted that physical space to bring people together is often taken for granted – such space is integral for mobilization but is not always readily available in some communities, particularly for those which do not have an obvious network or organization that aims to do this. Coordinating the use of vacant government buildings or other public spaces for the community can be incredibly valuable.

Similarly, communities tend to lack financial resources to do this mobilization and engagement work. For example, the costs of renting space, paying for refreshments and conducting outreach to community members, are often critical barriers to convening. Limited resources at their fingertips and no dedicated funding from any governmental body has meant that most communities have tended to rely on philanthropic efforts and granting schemes. While these funds have been vital for the communities that receive them, one-off grants may not be sufficient for sustained efforts. Given the size and scope of these large-scale public infrastructure assets, government should set aside a portion of the budgets towards supporting these efforts, depending on the timing within the project phase. For example, using a portion of the Planning, Design and Compliance budget to fund community engagement efforts carried out by particular groups.

EXPERTISE AND STAFFING

In communities that may require a more hands-on approach, government can consider providing technical expertise or staffing resources to help facilitate community engagement where needed. Our research highlighted that this engagement work requires significant skill that may not be present, but can indeed be learned. It is critical that good intentions do not get subverted by poor execution thereby reinforcing negative notions about the inherent value of community engagement. Thus, investing in the skills required for community engagement is a worthwhile effort for governments. For example, many municipalities hire community development officers to conduct this work more broadly, although the extent to which these services are readily available is inconsistent. Recruiting and training – or outsourcing – these highly skilled staff to pursue community engagement efforts specifically for community benefits initiatives could be valuable where necessary.

For example, the Hamilton Community Connector program was established in partnership with Metrolinx to inform, educate and engage businesses, residents and property owners along the proposed route for the Hamilton LRT development. The goal of the program is to visit each of the about 1,400 properties twice per year for the duration of the project's development to gather feedback to inform the project plans.⁶¹ The community engagement process for this project also recruited an LRT Citizens' Jury – a group of local residents who were provided numerous presentations about the project from key stakeholders and staff from both Hamilton and other municipal governments. This team of

61 City of Hamilton "Community Engagement for the LRT." <https://www.hamilton.ca/city-initiatives/priority-projects/community-engagement-lrt>.

informed citizens engaged the broader public and reported back to City Council with their findings.⁶² While not specific to community benefits, such an approach can offer insights on how governments can provide a more hands-on approach if and when it would be beneficial to the community.

LEVERAGE DATA

As mentioned earlier, in addition to grassroots engagement, the government should leverage data to understand the demographics of communities and encourage evidence-based policymaking. In particular, efforts should be made to identify how existing data can be used in innovative and useful ways, as well as identify data gaps that require attention. Feedback mechanisms should also be established to allow communities to become fully familiar with the data, and to participate in identifying culturally relevant or geographically specific information that is missing. Further, the government should support communities by helping them collect data that they consider necessary to achieve the community's goals.

In terms of specific community benefits, utilizing data is particularly useful in the case of workforce development initiatives to identify demographic groups as well as geographies that are disadvantaged and should be targeted. Further, data points for various social and economic indicators can be used as baseline to set targets and track progress that has occurred as a result of community benefits initiatives. Where possible, open data practices should be adopted and shared in user-friendly formats to encourage transparency and provide opportunity to communities to monitor progress, understand

gaps and identify their priorities. Making smart use of data would also mean increased collaboration among government agencies to efficiently share valuable data so that efforts are not duplicated. This data can also be used to keep track of the impact of community benefits, lessons learned and sharing knowledge and best practices to inform future projects.

62 Tim L. Dobbie Consulting Ltd. and Associates (2016) "Report on Proceedings and Recommendations from the Citizens' Jury on Transit." <https://d3fp1lf1m7bvt3.cloudfront.net/sites/default/files/media/browser/2016-03-03/lrt-citizensjury-report-final-2016.pdf>.

For community benefits to be successful, communities can and must be meaningfully engaged and involved in all stages of the process.

6 CONCLUSION

Community benefits initiatives have the potential to transform the way governments purchase, build, employ and think about economic development. If done well, public dollars can be leveraged in a way that generates social, economic and environmental value while also empowering communities to shape their future. For community benefits to be successful, communities can and must be meaningfully engaged and involved in all stages of the process. This starts at the earliest stages – ensuring that the way community is defined is inclusive and representative, and creating an environment that enables communities to be actively involved in determining and articulating their priorities.

As the Government of Ontario continues to develop its community benefits framework for the province, these lessons will be crucial to consider. Governments in all jurisdictions must acknowledge the networks and capacity that already exist within communities, and work to play a supportive and collaborative role in the process.

APPENDIX

Research Methodology

To inform how the Government of Ontario should define community, and guide the process of community involvement in community benefits initiatives for large infrastructure investments, this study employed a range of methods to gather diverse perspectives on the research questions. The methodologies used included:

Literature Review: This included a review of relevant recent research from peer-reviewed journals as well as grey literature. This also included a jurisdictional review to understand how community benefits have been employed in diverse contexts (including Canada, United States and UK), as well as literature on community engagement strategies.

Key Informant Interviews: Interviews were conducted with issue area experts on community benefits initiatives from Ontario as well as international jurisdictions, and included informants from across the public, private, academic and not-for-profit sectors.

Design Labs: The first policy lab brought together a wide range of stakeholders, including policymakers, citizens, industry groups, community coalitions, employers and labour unions to identify a broad definition of community in terms of community benefits for large infrastructure investments. In addition, the research team collaborated with the Toronto Community Benefits Network to set up a station at their 2018 Community Benefits Creating Opportunities Summit where insights were gathered from various community benefits stakeholders throughout the day on the study's key research questions.

Mapping Session: This session was focused on testing the key findings of the research with issue area experts and determining how the report could be made more beneficial to end-users (including policymakers and other community benefits stakeholders).

Public Outreach Questionnaire: To gauge public opinion on various aspects of community benefits initiatives, an online public outreach questionnaire was disseminated through Mowat networks and social media to gather the views of Ontarians on how they define community, who they see as the key voices representing their community, and how they would like to be engaged in the development of community benefits initiatives in their communities. Overall, we received 101 responses on the questionnaire from a diverse range of stakeholders interested in community benefits – many of which also participated in other phases of our research. These include individuals belonging to non-profit or community groups, social enterprises, developers, public servants, academics and others interested in community benefits. The respondents reside in municipalities across Ontario.

This report presents a synthesis of the findings and diverse perspectives gathered through a review of literature as well as wide stakeholder engagement.

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Questionnaire Results

FIGURE 1A

When seeking to engage the community in developing community benefits initiatives for infrastructure projects, which of the following best captures how community should be defined? (N=101)

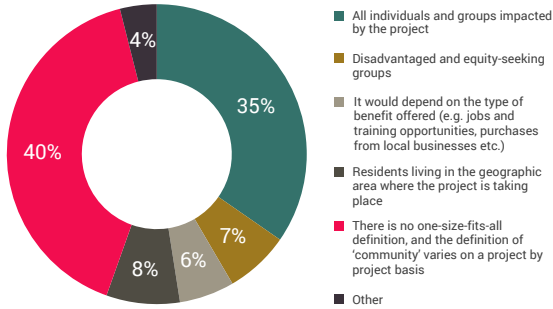


FIGURE 2A

Generally, community benefits fall into three categories: workforce development, social procurement, and other supplemental benefits. In your opinion, which category would be the most beneficial in your community? (N=101)

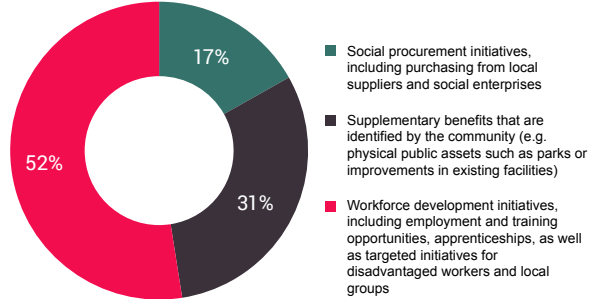


FIGURE 3A

In the development of community benefits initiatives, it is important for the community to have appropriate representation of its interests - for example, in negotiation processes with other interested stakeholders. In your community, which of the following would you trust the most to speak on your behalf in these processes? (N=101)

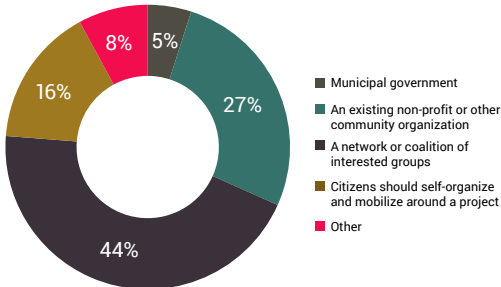


FIGURE 4A

If the government was to utilize community benefits for an infrastructure investment in your community, at which stages do you envision yourself participating in the process? Please check all that apply. (N=101)

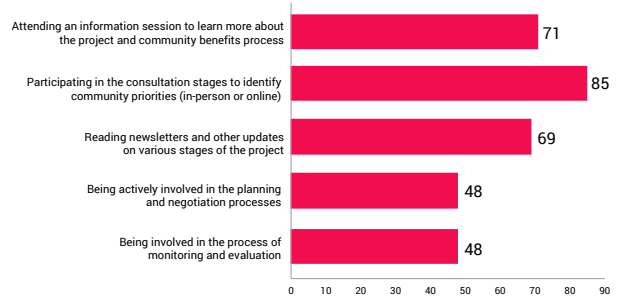


FIGURE 5A

Which of the following are you affiliated with? (N=101)

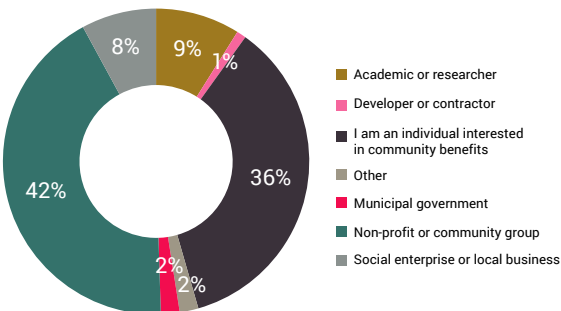


FIGURE 6A

Location of questionnaire respondents (N=101)

