Report

Opportunities for City/HEI Collaboration and Research

Based on the CivicLabTO 2021 inaugural Academic Summit and discussion series

Prepared by City Building at Toronto Metropolitan University
in collaboration with the City of Toronto © 2022

Introduction

CivicLabTO is a partnership between the City of Toronto and Toronto's eight higher education institutions (HEIs) that includes a platform for research partnership, a common curriculum course, a discussion series and a final summit.

This report toplines key insights from the 2021 CivicLabTO Academic Summit and Pre-Summit Discussion Series, which brought together city leaders, public servants, academics and students to grapple with some of the biggest urban challenges and opportunities we face in Toronto following the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants shared their diverse perspectives, experiences and provocative ideas for moving forward, offering insight from policies and programs, community projects and research.

This report was created to inform the CivicLabTO partners. It collects ideas and offers input on next steps, identifying some priorities for research and collaborative activities that might support the City of Toronto's post-pandemic recovery goals. This report may also help inform the planning of the next summit scheduled for 2023.

Summit 2021 Theme: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Building Back Better

Based on the plenary session

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, people's lives in Toronto have drastically changed. The pandemic has widened gaps within communities, exacerbated inequality and challenged our systems.

In examining the impact of difficult circumstances on communities, municipalities can find lessons that could help make progress on complex societal challenges. In order to build a brighter future (or "build back better,") there needs to be meaningful and collaborative work undertaken to address some of the most pressing social problems, including climate change, reconciliation, equity and housing...using an interdisciplinary approach and coordination across multiple sectors. We can have greater impact by eliminating silos in services and programs. Institutions must practice selflessness to promote interdisciplinary solutions that listen, build and facilitate trust.

To make positive change and develop new ways of achieving success, colleges and universities have an important role to play in training students, informing governments, and measuring and reporting on progress. Institutions need to work with communities and invite them into the process when it comes to research and partnerships.

We need to continue the momentum that has developed during the pandemic to keep driving positive change. Progress has been made on issues such as affordable housing, but there is so much more that remains to be done. As we look to the future and how we address these complex challenges, collaboration is going to be an essential part of innovation. Our work must look beyond one year, or one election; we need to think in terms of decades and generations. Society cannot succeed without making progress on those areas that contribute to inequality. We have the information required to make changes now.

1. Collaboration Strategies

This section proposes collaboration strategies between the City of Toronto and higher education institutions (HEIs) based on concrete ideas discussed during the summit and pre-summit panel discussions.

Analyzing Data and Leveraging Evidence

A key part of effective collaboration involves collecting and sharing data. The City of Toronto has an open data portal (open.toronto.ca), which it updates regularly with new datasets and data visualizations. Researchers at HEIs are encouraged to access these at any time, and model research projects to incorporate and build on them. Questions to answer: can we create a strategic collaboration to more fully harness this data, produce timely analysis and generate third-party evidence to support decision making? Can HEIs help to answer specific questions by performing more real-time analysis?

It was suggested that HEIs can play a role with data collection, modelling and analysis as well, based on the needs of the City and communities. Summit participants noted there is work to be done if we want to make more informed decisions about policy (especially related to data-driven research involving BIPOC and equity-deserving groups), and that strategic academics can support this. Representation at all stages of research and data collection is crucial for doing this well, to ensure that the right questions are asked, the data is authentic and useful, and that it can be meaningful and beneficial for everyone. HEIs offer expertise in data collection and analysis, interjurisdictional best practices, and methods for continually monitoring and evaluating outcomes to improve public services, apply research findings, and gather/incorporate community and stakeholder input effectively. This expertise could be leveraged by the City of Toronto through collaborations and partnerships.

Contributing to Program Analysis

A recurring comment from public servants during the summit and pre-summit conversations was in support of HEIs contributing to the City of Toronto's program evaluation, offering recommendations and measurement of outcomes, as academics have expertise in this, and have the academic freedom to study, critique and offer innovative strategies. For example, academics can analyze and model strategies for scaling up innovative programs that are working, and take on a knowledge-sharing role by documenting methods that are found to be effective in service delivery and community work. Academic experts can also offer greater recommendations around risk factors and protective factors, and assist in prioritizing competing objectives when developing programs and policies.

Strengthening Public Engagement

Summit participants noted that meaningful public engagement involves trust and relationship building, and suggested HEIs could play a role in facilitation and of strengthening public engagement to improve project inputs. On campus, HEIs can pilot and innovate in engaging students and staff on community initiatives and share lessons learned with the City, as well as leverage faculty expertise in the areas of public engagement and community facilitation, either through experiential learning, hands-on research or focus group projects. HEIs can also develop innovative strategies for public communication and input, as well as incorporating more training on public engagement in professional programs, with opportunities for applying this training in City engagement activities.

Providing Student Opportunities

The students at our HEIs are a force to be reckoned with and cannot be left out of any discussion about building back from the pandemic. As a group, students today are facing precarious employment and a future of climate uncertainty, and they are engaged in equity issues; they also have fresh ideas and perspectives to contribute, as well as a hunger for learning and experience. The students offer an incredible resource for the City and HEIs to tap into, involving students in programs at various stages, while prioritizing culturally appropriate and responsive education for BIPOC students and making student success a top priority. Giving students opportunities for mentorship, job training and experiential learning will help prepare them for the good, sustainable jobs of tomorrow. This can be achieved in many ways, including through experiential learning programs, studio courses and Mitacs-funded internships as some ready-made examples.

Networking and Sharing Resources

One frequent topic during the discussions was that researchers and City experts, as well as other organizations, may not be aware of work underway and/or resources available. This can lead to experts and teams working on the same topics and missing opportunities to build on related work and to join forces to strengthen efforts. It was suggested that online networks and tools could facilitate connections and help to avoid duplication of work and open doors to collaboration. (See sidebar on eCampus Ontario's new Toronto Collaboration platform.) Some participants suggested developing a map of shared resources, and/or a database that leverages networks and tools and consolidates efforts.

Another way City departments and offices can collaborate with HEIs and their organizational partners is by sharing documents, guidelines and templates to facilitate partnership agreements, experiential learning opportunities and student placements. Streamlining these and creating masters for use across sectors would facilitate collaboration across sectors.

Harnessing HEIs' Physical Spaces, i.e. Campus as Platform

The final resource put forward as necessary for facilitating collaboration is physical space, not just for working together on initiatives but also for meetings, events, networking and piloting innovations. In a city such as Toronto where affordable/available space is limited, the hard infrastructure of HEI campuses and City properties can prove to be critical resources for relationship building and collaboration. In addition, HEIs can be test sites, using their "campus as platform," to pilot social and physical innovation in practice.

2. Research Opportunities

The Academic Summit presented timely discussions focused on specific issue areas. Its unique program gathered under a common umbrella a host of experts from multiple sectors actively involved in conversations about pandemic response and post-pandemic recovery; it wove together the issues and presented them in a unified two-day program. While sessions focused on challenges and solutions, little time was spent directly exploring current research collaborations or potential shared research opportunities. (The next summit may wish to look at how to tackle problems through research collaborations in greater depth.) For this reason, this section is limited to noting the suggestions and starting points that were offered – it is not comprehensive of the wide range of opportunities possible.

The importance of research collaboration

Summit participants noted that research collaboration is important to approaching the issues of today. Not only can research collaboration result in bigger, better projects and more relevant outcomes, data and evidence stemming from HEIs can give credibility and justification to those making the case for innovation investment and resource allocation at the municipal level.

Public servants can be restricted in the amount of rigorous analysis they can perform and the recommendations they can provide to Toronto City Council, due to time and other pressures. Supporting evidence and recommendations provided from external stakeholders can help them build a strong case for change. CivicLabTO delegates agreed the City should be leveraging HEIs to perform research that isn't necessarily possible at the municipal level – for example longer-term research, analysis of policy outcomes, answering specific questions – and HEIs should be looking to increase opportunities to work with the City and community groups on shorter-term or immediate priorities. Grounding research in the local context can benefit all partners.

Public Health – Panel Highlights

Public health has been top of mind since the beginning of the pandemic in 2020, as we grappled with how to limit and manage the spread of COVID-19 – a strange twist of fate following the major budget cuts in 2019-2020 to provincial and municipal public health departments in Ontario. Public health officials at multiple levels of government have guided us through a time of great uncertainty and risk, and have risen to the challenge through collaborations across organizations, transparent communication and innovative solutions for emerging issues, for example, the voluntary isolation facility for people testing positive. During the first year of the pandemic, decision makers had to balance the need to act quickly with a lack of evidence or a full understanding of the virus, leading to public scrutiny and having to change course when more information came to light. The result was, and continues to be, Toronto Public Health stretched thin and prioritizing limited resources. The pandemic has also unfortunately shifted public focus away from other public health concerns such as the opioid crisis.

We have seen that the pandemic has impacted groups and urban areas in different ways. Toronto City Councillor Joe Cressy suggested, "[in this pandemic] It's your postal code, not your genetic code, that determines your health status." Residents living in long-term care homes and other congregate settings were often exposed to outbreaks and restrictions, as well as long periods of social isolation and lack of access to services due to visitor restrictions. Frontline workers, often from equity-deserving groups, were disproportionately exposed to the virus because of the nature of their work and inability to stay home. One year into the pandemic, it was shown that Toronto neighbourhoods with the highest proportion of essential (non-health care) workers had three times the number of COVID-19 cases than neighbourhoods with fewer frontline workers. At that time, half of all cases were in 20% of neighbourhoods, with working conditions seen as one important risk factor.

The push to vaccinate all Torontonians has been an enormous, protracted coordinated effort, involving governments, the health care sector, community volunteers and many others. Community-based health care agencies and community ambassadors have been a powerful way of promoting public health measures to those hesitant to receive a vaccine or who lack access to health care. And while Torontonians for the most part have chosen to be vaccinated, there has been a small subset of the population opposed to vaccination, mask mandates and other public health restrictions, adding complexity to the scenario.

The disproportionate impact of the pandemic on populations such as seniors, people experiencing homelessness and essential/frontline workers made inequity in health status clear to everyone. This public health crisis has intersected with structural issues such as housing access, income inequality and investment in community services. The link between public health, community safety and wellbeing is evident, and a public health perspective needs to be incorporated across programs and policies moving forward. Panelists expressed the value of strong collaboration and partnerships between public health, city departments and HEIs to continue to be key to achieve these goals and to be better prepared for future crises.

eCampus Ontario's new Toronto Collaboration Platform

"TOCP is a partnership between the City of Toronto, CivicLabTO, eCampusOntario and eight of Toronto's higher education institutions (HEIs). Together, this group will use the expertise in each organization to collaborate on research and development projects to support Toronto's communities, economy and post-COVID-19 recovery efforts….Projects to date have not only supported COVID-19 recovery efforts throughout the city, but they have also provided students with jobs, experiential learning opportunities and micro-credentials as part of their participation."

Learn more about active research opportunities with the City of Toronto and apply to participate at tocp.ecampusontario.ca.

Urban Economic Recovery – Panel Highlights

Toronto's economy appears to be showing signs of a comeback following the lowest points of the pandemic. However, some sectors were impacted by public health measures and shutdowns much worse than others. As shown by Dr. Vik Singh of Ryerson University, the accommodation and food, and manufacturing sectors were hit hardest, showing 12 and 8 months of consecutive employment loss respectively. While many professional workers have been able to work remotely to reduce risk during the pandemic, this is often not an option for frontline or essential workers, who are more likely to experience layoffs, an increasing wage gap and a lack of adequate sick pay and benefits. Women and newer immigrants have been most likely to bear the brunt of negative impacts on the labour market. Dr. Singh's research showed that women experienced a wage decrease of 13% compared to men due to the pandemic, and that workers who had immigrated to Canada more than ten years ago and Canadian-born workers saw a 20% and 30% increase in wages over more recently arrived new Canadians. Similar trends were shown in labour force participation.

Various innovations and changes were already shifting employment prior to the pandemic, such as increased use of technology, automation and AI, and with the rise in remote work and financial pressures during the last two years, these shifts have continued. Urban economic recovery post-pandemic will need to address the needs and situation of those who were laid off or left the labour force during the last two years and need retraining to re-enter employment, as well as young people at the beginning of their careers. How will we redevelop the sectors that were negatively impacted during the pandemic that are so vital to our local economy and also the culture of our city? And how will the issues highlighted herein around housing and transportation impact our ability to attract and retain a labour force in a way that doesn't leave anyone behind?

Panelists expressed that economic recovery in Toronto must have equity at its core and make the transition to the new green economy as smooth as possible for workers and employers. Access to affordable childcare, suitable housing and reliable transportation are necessary for maintaining and growing our labour force. Meeting the new opportunities that technology and sustainability bring to the economy through job training and investment will be key to long-term success, as well as finding ways to bolster the hard-hit cultural and hospitality sectors that are so important to our urban life.

Transit and Transportation – Panel Highlights

How to reliably and efficiently move people around the growing city of Toronto via public transit has been a major concern for decades, but the pandemic exacerbated existing issues and caused new problems. After pandemic movement restrictions and work-from-home mandates were put in place in the first wave (March 2020), Toronto observed a marked decline in travel and transit ridership. For the TTC, which relies heavily on fares for its transit operating budget, this created a major challenge of having to maintain transit service levels and invest in safety measures related to COVID-19, with unpredictable and much lower revenues. Now, the TTC has the challenge of planning for some increase in ridership in the near future without really knowing what this will look like.

An unforeseen benefit of decreased mobility during the pandemic, particularly in the first year, was that the city had the opportunity to address the public's need for safe transportation and recreation options without having to accommodate the typical number of road users. Initiatives such as the ActiveTO temporary street closures and cycling lane expansion, and the RapidTO streetcar and bus priority initiative were met with public support, uptake and little political

opposition. Innovative pilots and programs were implemented to meet immediate needs, when in the past these would have faced much more debate and regulatory delays.

Panelists agreed that good transportation is vital to a strong urban economy and superior quality of life for Torontonians. Given the realities of climate change, a shift from car dependence to sustainable options like public transit and active transportation are the only way we will thrive. Toronto has a rapidly growing population with a finite amount of roadways, so the only option is to invest in decreasing auto dependency and increasing options for public transit and active transportation.

The panelists addressing the situation of transit agreed that the timelines of accommodating the post-pandemic rise in mobility, reducing our greenhouse gas emissions, welcoming new residents, and improving transportation options for every corner of the city mean that we need to scale up now. We need to maintain the momentum of the transportation innovations and improvements realized during the last two years and keep innovating on a grand scale. This requires investment, political will, innovation and a shared vision, but the alternative is a congested city that will not meet the challenges of tomorrow.

Focus on rapid solutions

As Dr. Eileen de Villa, Chief Medical Officer of Health for the City of Toronto, said during the summit, the pandemic has been "a period of accelerated learning." Since March 2020, we developed interventions we did not think were possible, quickly. In many instances, previous barriers to innovation were overcome in record time. Summit participants agreed that this experience proves we can be ambitious about scalable innovations that have meaningful impact, and work together on quick-to-deploy solutions that test innovations in real time.

Housing – Panel Highlights

When it comes to housing, many existing challenges were exacerbated by the pandemic's economic impacts of revenue and job loss. Over the past decade, a mounting number of low- and middle-income households in our city have struggled to find adequate and affordable housing, due to escalating home prices and rising rents out of pace with incomes. The hot market was cooled only momentarily by public health measures and restrictions, and a moratorium on evictions; now, rising prices have picked up again, despite many reduced incomes and tighter household budgets as a result of the pandemic. Unfortunately we have seen rising rates of homelessness, and for people experiencing homelessness, the pandemic has had dire impacts. Toronto's shelter system has faced limitations in terms of public health safety, and a shortage of space for a growing user base. Temporary outdoor encampments in public space and the intersection of homelessness with other public health crises have also made headlines.

To address these complex issues, a mix of innovative and equitable solutions is required. Many affordable housing programs are already underway, for example the Housing Now program, a component of the City of Toronto's HousingTO 2020-2030 Action Plan. But the City cannot solve all existing problems alone – more programs and market solutions are needed at every level of government and involving multiple sectors. As Abigail Bond, Executive Director of the City of Toronto's Housing Secretariat put it, we must "collectively push forward systemic change and inform urgent action on solutions to both Toronto's general housing affordability challenges but specifically how it affects overrepresented groups."

CivicLabTO delegates all recognized the right to housing and the role that adequate, safe housing plays in health outcomes and wellbeing. In an ideal world, all Torontonians – including those experiencing homelessness, newcomers, seniors, low-income, middle-income and young families – should be able to depend on having suitable housing in our city. For some, this means affordable options for home ownership or rental. For others, it means supportive housing with the right services and amenities to support quality of life. Ensuring suitable housing for people experiencing homelessness is a priority to ensure safety and access to healthcare and other supports. Design, policy, pilots, community engagement, market interventions and industry innovations are all important strategies for achieving the vision.

A related goal that surfaced throughout the summit was related to urban planning, emphasizing the importance of complete communities that are responsive to local needs and goals. This includes transit access, walkability, quality public spaces and mixed neighbourhoods.

Public Space – Panel Highlights

The pandemic highlighted the importance of public spaces in Toronto. For months, when pandemic movement and gathering restrictions were in place to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 virus, outdoor public spaces and parks were some of the few places people could visit safely, and were particularly important to those without access to private outdoor spaces, like tower residents. Public spaces provided somewhere to socialize and were essential for mental health and exercise. But this highlighted that access to public space is unevenly distributed across communities in the city. A focus became optimizing available outdoor spaces and providing more options to communities to make the most of public spaces. The City launched innovative programs such as free recreational programming and the CafeTO initiative that allowed businesses to create patios on sidewalks and curb lanes. Many residents, community groups and non-profits made their own public space interventions, such as parking lot pop-ups (which were largely allowed despite their violating current by-laws) and front-porch and balcony concerts.

As parks became recognized as essential sites of refuge and wellness during the pandemic, they also became contested spaces. Clearings of park encampments and closures of playgrounds were controversial, as was the City not allowing access to park washroom facilities for reasons of public health at the start of the pandemic. Many communities felt an acute lack of park space, and used private spaces such as coffee shops and shopping malls as quasi-public spaces because of the amenities they offer.

The discussion of this topic centred on the fact that as we emerge from the pandemic, we all more readily understand the importance of quality public spaces, and can seize on this moment of public and political buy-in to create more inclusive, accessible spaces that meet the needs of local communities. As speaker Howard Tam (CEO and Founder, ThinkFresh Group) asserted, many public spaces – and privately owned public spaces (POPS) – in Toronto have been planned through a risk management and maintenance lens, perhaps at the price of creating inviting places for everyone to enjoy. Ideally, our public spaces and parks should be equitably distributed, and designed as places to support a good quality of life, connect with each other and provide the amenities that allow us to enjoy them and be comfortable. Public art and design have a role to play in this, as they can allow people to connect with spaces in novel ways.

Climate Change – Panel Highlights

CivicLabTO looked at all issues tabled with an environmental lens, as urban pandemic recovery and city building necessarily has to address climate change mitigation and adaptation. During the pandemic, many catastrophic weather events related to climate change threatened homes, food supply, employment, health and safety – forest fires, floods, heat waves and storms around the world caused great concern throughout 2020 and 2021. For Toronto, climate change mitigation will necessitate new ways of moving around the city, generating power and consuming resources. We can anticipate sectoral shifts in employment, vast investments as well as inconveniences as we update our aging infrastructure (ex. several Metrolinx capital projects currently underway), and rethink the ways we live, work and play.

Participants were united in the view that with scientific consensus that events like these will only increase with continued warming of our planet, we have a closing window of time to make drastic reductions to our greenhouse gas emissions. As Prof. Cheryl Teelucksingh of Ryerson University observed, the pandemic saw us adapt a societal view to well-being and a willingness to work together; a similar shift in thinking will be crucial to our response to the climate crisis. As we build back from the pandemic, sustainability must be at the forefront – economic, social and environmental. Recognizing that groups are impacted inequitably by environmental issues and the climate crisis, climate justice is an important principle for investment and outcomes. We have as a strong starting point TransformTO, a city-wide climate action plan with ambitious targets and timelines, and the Women4ClimateTO mentorship program for fostering innovative climate solutions. And as we've already seen with the global Climate Strike movement, the energy of students and youth will hopefully continue inspiring us all to take up the challenge of the green recovery.

Technology and Equity – Panel Highlights

As the pandemic unfolded and lockdowns were implemented to enhance public safety, many vital services moved online. Payments, education, access to information and other activities could not be completed without digital technology. Within Toronto, the pandemic exacerbated the digital divide, and further challenged equity-deserving groups and marginalized communities that do not have acceptable access to services like reliable high-speed internet.

The provision of high-speed internet and the digital technology used to access it are more than just tools, but ways people and communities ensure quality of life. The internet has become vital infrastructure that touches nearly every aspect of life. The functioning of democracy and the global human agenda is reliant on people having the information and access required to succeed. Progress cannot be made without digital equality, and it is important to acknowledge the link between technology and human rights. If society is to end inequality at all levels, it must ensure that the digital divide is overcome. This poses many challenges to be addressed by organizations across the public and private sectors.

When considering the growth of the digital world, there need to be actions taken to ensure structures are in place to promote accountability and trust. Data and other activities have played a role in colonialism and inequality, and this needs to be considered when designing digital policies and programs. Equity has a role to play not only as an outcome, but in the planning and implementation of these activities. The importance of data, and the possibilities for data to deliver positive change across health, housing, poverty and inequality are significant, but these things cannot be done without collaboration and accountability across sectors.

Community Safety and Justice – Panel Highlights

In Toronto and beyond, there is a need to better support communities and families to prevent young people from entering the justice system. There are challenges that would benefit from a systemic approach to creating more just communities, one that brings together governments, families, communities and educators to implement preventative measures that are culturally responsive for those at risk. For example, there is no consistent definition of "youth" across jurisdictions, which contributes to fragmentation and a lack of alignment. Striving to understand what's working and what's not can be facilitated through data-driven analysis and action.

With equity-deserving groups overrepresented in the justice system, there needs to be anti-oppressive and culturally responsive policies and programs to address gaps in the system. Developing strong and long-term collaborations with communities, and engaging people with lived experiences in policy and program design, are essential elements in making progress. The connections must be meaningful to bring experience, empathy and knowledge to decision makers. It is through collaboration that positive changes can be made. There are many areas and organizations that are involved in youth justice, and this highlights why collective action is so important to achieve results. The lack of holistic supports that are culturally honouring combined with siloed activities only serve to create and exacerbate gaps in the system.

At the systemic level, there needs to be leaders who can drive positive change through focus on prevention and mitigation. Opportunities to break the cycle include investing in the protection and positive growth of young people, starting with the education system, multi-sectoral partnerships and adequate funding, supports to parents, resources for youth exiting the system, and building trust among partners from across communities. It is through thoughtful, collaborative and intentional action that things will

begin to change for the better. New methods, informed by data-sharing and evidence-based decision making, must be implemented to help individuals, families, educators and communities.

Toronto's Cultural Sector – Panel Highlights

The pandemic has been incredibly challenging for Toronto's cultural sector due to closed venues, tourism slowdown, worldwide supply chain issues and the impact of social distancing on festivals and events among other factors. As we move beyond this period, there is an opportunity to re-imagine the way we do things in society, and to reflect on health, wellbeing and the ways we want to live. The pandemic has forced many creatives out of the cultural sector due to loss of audience and income, and it is vital that we examine and understand the challenges that have led to this outcome. Toronto's recovery needs to include artists and the cultural sector, because they are key in creating a vibrant city and resilient economy. With respect to entrepreneurship and innovation, content creators and artists operate in ways that are unique. The discourse around what it means to be an entrepreneur or innovator can, in some ways, be exclusive. Artists and other creators are entrepreneurial, but they often don't think of themselves in this way. Collectively, we need to transform the language to be more inclusive and open in ways that empower individuals in the cultural sector. CivicLabTO has an opportunity to enhance connections between colleges, universities and other organizations at the intersection of arts and culture, and to facilitate deeper conversations about these questions.

As the city moves forward from the pandemic, there is an opportunity to build collaborative relationships, processes and other collective actions to help foster a revival of creative and artistic activities and audiences. Panelists noted that there needs to be recognition of the work that artists do and more discussions about the ways they can be supported within the city.

Starting Points for Research Mentioned during the CivicLabTO Summit

Issue Area	Related to the pandemic	Beyond the pandemic
Plenary Session	• Understanding service delivery and community engagement approaches that worked during the pandemic • Case studies of innovative collaborations that succeeded and fostered positive change • Studying the ways that researchers and policy-makers can bring communities into processes to collaborate and benefit from their unique knowledge as partners, not subjects	• Ways to improve inter-sectoral collaboration on issues like climate change, inequality, reconciliation and housing • Finding ways to remove silos and barriers to collaboration and taking a whole of community approach to challenges • Undertaking new ways of planning that considers societal investments for the long-term and beyond
Public Health	• Global comparisons of pandemic response • Compare policy responses and outcomes • Best practices in science communications & PR • Best practices in use of community ambassadors • How to improve ventilation systems • Mental health impacts & solutions needed • Understanding vaccine hesitancy / resistance	• Structural determinants of health • Addressing labour shortages with experiential learning opportunities • Improving access to careers for internationally-trained health professionals • Design collaborations for health-care settings
Economic Recovery	• Supply chain impacts during the pandemic: causes and lessons learned • Impacts of shift to remote work – research into productivity, behavioural changes, travel behaviour, digital infrastructure • Study pandemic business supports – impacts and outcomes, measurement. Going forward, what targeted assistance can best help specific sectors and small businesses? • Model impacts of pandemic on different sectors	• Impact of economic shifts on land use in the city • Predictions for the labour market: trends, required skills, anticipated labour shortages, retaining talent • Research on wage gap and strategies to address it • Increased use of technology: impacts on labour • Jobs training – explore potential of micro-credentials, continuing education, experiential learning, networking and other programs
Transit/Transportation	• Case studies of innovative programs such as ActiveTO and outcomes • The impact of ride-sharing apps on travel behaviour before and during the pandemic • Public transit and virus transmission study • What a "new normal" may look like: forecasting • Evaluation of tools and strategies that can be used to continue moving forward with innovation in City programs and pilots, lessons learned to "stay unstuck"	• Consultation on a Transportation Master Plan • Program monitoring and evaluation of initiatives to improve outcomes • Data and models to assist the City and transit agencies to understand travel behaviour, ridership, trends and issues • Initiatives such as StudentMoveTO that help understand and promote sustainable transportation options • Interjurisdictional scan of public transit governance models

Starting Points for Research Mentioned during the CivicLabTO Summit

Issue Area	Related to the pandemic	Beyond the pandemic
Housing	• Impacts of interest rates, investor activity on real estate and home prices, rents during pandemic • Data on outmigration of Toronto residents before and during the pandemic, impact on housing and labour markets • Short-term rentals in Toronto before and during the pandemic, impact of pandemic restrictions and demographic changes on rental supply and prices	• Modelling of what housing supply we need • Piloting and evaluation of tools, strategies and innovations that can facilitate new ways of creating the right supply of housing • Design strategies for social housing and LTC that draw on multidisciplinary expertise • Understanding the impact of physical spaces on health and wellbeing • Developing new public engagement strategies re. housing development • Using university campus as a lab – opportunities for pilot projects and innovations that can be studied, evaluated, and implemented broadly (ex. energy retrofits of university buildings)
Public Space	• What can we learn from community-driven public space interventions (ex., parking lot pop-ups, front-porch concerts). What can we learn from pandemic experiences, to facilitate more broadly?	• Documenting, developing and sharing community engagement methods and processes • Investigating how public engagement is taught in professional programs (ex., architecture, urban planning, public policy, design) > develop curriculum to advance innovative approaches to co-creation, relationship building and inclusion • Understanding the role of art and design in placemaking and community development • Best practices for year-round / winter public space interventions
Climate Change / Environment	• Measuring the impact on environment of pandemic disruptions	• Climate disaster relief planning and emergency management • Best practices in Community Benefit Agreements • Best practices for community engagement and involvement in green initiatives • Rethinking city business processes to take integrated approaches to climate targets • Planning for workforce transition to greener jobs/economy

Starting Points for Research Mentioned during the CivicLabTO Summit

Issue Area	Related to the pandemic	Beyond the pandemic
Technology and Equity	• Study of the ways the pandemic negatively impacted digital equality and what can be done to address this for sustainable change • Case studies on successful actions taken during the pandemic to improve the digital divide, and what lessons can be learned from these actions • Development of new ways of engaging communities to understand the impact of the pandemic on digital issues facing equity deserving groups	• Study of structural changes that can be enacted to reduce digital inequality • Policy and program developments to enhance trust, security, and privacy when using personal data • Development of collaborations across sectors to eliminate digital inequality
Community Safety and Justice	• Review of programs undertaken during the pandemic to evaluate successes and challenges • Compare pandemic policy activities against anticipated outcomes and objectives • Studying interventions to address the needs of communities post-pandemic, focusing on both the short and long-term	• Developing new collaboration and consultation strategies to work with individuals and communities • Investigation of ways to bring together multiple actors from across the system to develop collective actions to common challenges • Examining programs and policies to integrate evidence-based decisions and flexibility to address issues as they are identified • Engaging partners in data-sharing initiatives to better understand challenges and opportunities
Toronto's Cultural Sector	• Examination of issues that led artists to leave the cultural sector and lessons learned • Study of pandemic policies and government activities in relation to the cultural sector to understand if objectives were achieved and how improvements can be made • Research what other jurisdictions, nationally and internationally, undertook in response to the pandemic to understand the challenges and opportunities of supporting the cultural sector	• Review of supports for entrepreneurs and innovators focusing on ways to enhance inclusivity and openness for artists and content creators • Study of ways to increase experiential learning and paid opportunities for students to connect with industry • Research on wages and supports for artists and strategies to address challenges