



United Way
Greater Toronto

Delegation to Brampton City Council on Community Benefits Policy
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Thank you, Mayor, Councillors, for the opportunity to speak to you today on the proposed Brampton Community Benefits Policy.

My name is Nation Cheong. I am the Vice President of Community Opportunities and Mobilization at United Way Greater Toronto.

United Way Greater Toronto has been at the forefront of building inclusive communities and a key partner in advancing community benefits throughout the region.

Using insights gained through research such as *Poverty by Postal Code*, *The Opportunity Equation*, and *Building Inclusive Communities*, United Way recognizes the geographic nature of poverty and has put into practice specific tools, approaches and interventions that have enabled more equitable economic outcomes.

As a founding member of the first ever transit Community Benefits Agreement in Ontario for the Eglinton Crosstown LRT project, and signatory for the West Park Healthcare Centre agreement, United Way Greater Toronto has enabled the delivery of hundreds of jobs and thousands of dollars of benefits for residents through Community Benefits Agreements.

This work continues today as United Way-funded community benefits networks in Toronto (TCBN), and Peel (PCBN) lead and advocate for Community Benefits on other major infrastructure projects, such as the Hazel McCallion LRT and Ontario Line.

Community Benefits present a unique opportunity for governments to maximize the impact of public funds already being spent to foster more inclusive and equitable economic growth.

They can strengthen neighbourhoods and provide greater employment and economic opportunities to groups who historically have not proportionally benefitted from these investments.

This approach is critically important at a time when the region faces significant economic and social challenges that are widening the gap between low- and high-income neighborhoods, making it increasingly difficult for low-income earners to afford even the basic necessities of life.

United Way Greater Toronto was pleased to be invited to provide input into the draft Brampton Community Benefits Policy in August last year. Drawing from both experience and best practice, we provided five (5) recommendations to maximize the impact of community benefits for Brampton residents and equity-deserving groups.

We feel that these recommendations and best practices could be more explicitly reflected in the Community Benefits Policy being presented to Brampton Council for approval today. To maximize the impact of Community Benefits across the City, we urge Council to consider the following recommendations.

First, outcomes from past Community Benefits Agreements in Canada, the United States, and abroad have demonstrated that setting clear and measurable targets are the most effective in ensuring that tangible benefits are delivered for the target groups identified¹².

When vendors have discretion to determine their own targets, or set aspirational rather than mandatory targets, they are not as successful in achieving results. Therefore, we recommend that the Policy provides clearly defined minimum targets for community benefits.

It is important, however, to ensure that the targets set are reasonable, measurable, achievable and can be delivered without risking quality, unduly increasing costs, or lengthening the project timeline³. This can be achieved through close collaboration between the construction industry, trade labour unions, and employment and community agencies to identify reasonable and achievable targets.

Second, the scope of the Policy could be expanded to include non-construction related jobs to provide greater opportunities to more job seekers.

A range of skill sets and expertise across various professions are needed to successfully deliver major construction projects. Projects require not only tradespeople and skilled labourers to build infrastructure, but also professional, administrative, and technical (“PAT”) positions to oversee functions such as project design, finance, and administration.

¹ D. Graser (2016). Atkinson Foundation. [Community Benefits in Practice and in Policy: Lessons from the United States and the United Kingdom](#).

² Galley, A. (2015). Mowat Centre and Atkinson Foundation. [The Prosperous Province: Strategies for Building Community Wealth](#).

³ Graser, D., Macfarlane, R., Myers, K., Pasolli, K. (2018). Human Services Planning Board, York Region. [Community Benefits in York Region Research Report](#).

To maximize the opportunity for connecting Brampton residents to good jobs, the Policy could be expanded to include all workers required to deliver a project, including PAT positions. This would provide significant additional opportunities for residents to access employment, as the number of PAT jobs created by a project may be equivalent to the number of trades and skilled labour jobs created.

Third, Community Benefits Agreements provide an opportunity for the City and vendors work in partnership with community and across sectors to ensure that the process to deliver community benefits is inclusive and collaborative.

Developing a Community Benefits Policy is the first step in creating an environment where community benefits can be defined and realized in an inclusive, collaborative, and sustainable way.

All partners, including the City, residents, vendors, contractors, unions, employment and community agencies, must work collaboratively throughout the lifecycle of the project to ensure that the defined benefits are being realized by the targeted groups.

Brampton residents, specifically those from equity-deserving groups, must be meaningfully engaged from the beginning of the project to the end project to ensure that the needs of the community are adequately identified, embedded into community benefits targets, and ultimately realized.

We recommend the City also consider establishing a mechanism for sharing best practices and addressing emerging challenges among all partners to enable continuous improvement and the delivery of benefits for the community.

Fourth, we recommend that effective and inclusive workforce development pathways are created to train and support jobseekers.

Developing effective pathways to employment is a key component to ensuring that residents and equity-deserving groups benefit from the jobs created by construction projects.

Government, contractors, unions, and employment and community agencies, all play a critical role in creating effective workforce development pathways to support community benefits hiring.

In some cases, partners have invested in developing a new central entity that can act as an intermediary and coordinate the recruitment, training, and placement of jobseekers hiring⁴. In

⁴ Ibid.

other cases, vendors have leveraged existing employment agencies and pathways to support community benefits hiring⁵.

Regardless of the method, creating a pipeline of qualified workers, paired with inclusive and supportive recruitment and retention practices, will yield the most favorable employment outcomes for residents.

And lastly, we recommend specific mechanisms are put into place to ensure accountability and transparency for all processes and outcomes related to the Policy.

Public infrastructure is delivered by public dollars. The importance of ensuring an equitable and transparent process for delivering projects with community benefits is paramount to building public trust and accountability.

The Policy lacks clarity around how projects will be selected as Community Benefits Projects, leaving the decision to the sole discretion of the Director of Purchasing. We strongly recommend that the City develops clear and consistent criteria around the selection of Community Benefits Projects and includes those criteria within the Policy to ensure that the selection process is fair and transparent.

To further protect the integrity of the process, all community benefits documents, negotiations, and outcomes should be made publicly accessible, with the results tracked and regularly reported.

In conclusion, this is a crucial opportunity for the City to develop a Community Benefits Policy that will leverage public spending to reduce economic inequality and generate additional social and economic benefits for Brampton residents. We urge Council to consider incorporating the recommendations we have made today to strengthen the Policy and maximize the impact for Brampton residents at a time when access to good jobs and economic opportunities is increasing inequitable.

Thank you again for the opportunity to share our recommendations. United Way Greater Toronto remains available to provide further feedback or support as the Policy is finalized and put into practice.

⁵ Ibid.