

Building Back Stronger: Report of the Economic and Culture Recovery Advisory Group

December 2020





Over the last nine months, we have seen partners in business, culture, and government come together like never before to face the challenges presented by COVID-19. Together, through collaboration and partnership, we will build back better – with a renewed, stronger economy, a dynamic, revitalized arts scene, and opportunities for all Torontonians, in all corners of the city.

- Deputy Mayor Michael Thompson, Co-Chair

Image: Detail of *Patterns for the People* by Danilo Deluxo McCallum, on Toronto sign at Nathan Phillips Square.

City of Toronto Economic and Culture Recovery Advisory Group Members

Co-Chairs:

Deputy Mayor Michael Thompson, Chair, Economic and Community Development Committee, and Councillor, Ward 21, Scarborough Centre

Blake Goldring, Executive Chairman, AGF Management Limited

Members:

Agapi Gessesse, Executive Director, CEE Centre for Young Black Professionals

Andrea Elliott, Executive Vice President, Moose Knuckles Canada

Camille Usher, Executive Director, Aboriginal Curatorial Collective

Dori Tunstall, Dean, Faculty of Design, OCAD University

Eliza Chandler, Assistant Professor, School of Disability Studies, Ryerson University

James Dodds, Senior Vice President, Stakeholder Relations, TD Canada Trust

Joe Manget, Chairman and CEO, Edgewood Health Network

Julien Lutz (Director X), Film and Music Video Director and Producer

Lekan Olawoye, Founder, Black Professionals in Tech Network

Mark Bennett, Managing Partner, Cassels

Mark Grimes, Toronto City Councillor, Ward 3, Etobicoke-Lakeshore

Mike Yorke, President, Carpenters District Council of Ontario

Nadine Spencer, President, Black Business and Professional Association

Rafael Gomez, Professor and Director, Centre for Industrial Relations and Human Resources, University of Toronto

Rusul Alrubail, Executive Director, Parkdale Centre for Innovation

Steve Gupta, Chairman, The Gupta Group

William Robson, Chief Executive Officer, C.D. Howe Institute

Zabeen Hirji, Executive Advisor - Future of Work, Deloitte

The contribution of all Advisory Group members is gratefully acknowledged. The recommendations and comments presented in this report reflect the discussion and consensus of the group. Group members participated in their personal capacities; their affiliations are provided for identification only.

Message from the Co-Chairs

Toronto has, like many cities around the world, been impacted in countless ways by COVID-19. Families have lost loved ones, many workers have been laid off and businesses have closed their doors, and the social and cultural fabric of our neighbourhoods has been stressed by the cancellation of events and challenges of not seeing each other in person.

But, we are a strong, diverse, and resilient city. We have deep and powerful community, cultural and economic foundations. We are committed to building a Toronto with opportunity for all, and addressing long-standing social inequities that have been further exacerbated by COVID-19. We will build back, and we will build back stronger.

This report, the work of 20 engaged and committed individuals who were part of the City of Toronto's Economic and Culture Recovery Advisory Group, describes clear, action-oriented steps that will help move us towards the shared objectives of a stronger economy, a more vibrant cultural and artistic fabric, and a skilled and globally competitive workforce. Our Toronto intentionally and purposefully includes all Torontonians and gives us all the opportunity to thrive and prosper.

Our report offers a series of recommendations that are grouped into four main areas – economic recovery, anti-racism and inclusion, workforce and talent, and arts and culture. Each of these areas is critical to our ongoing rebuild and recovery efforts, and will require the combined efforts of all orders of government, the business community, the non-profit sector, our universities and colleges and the efforts of many individual Torontonians. Together, we are confident that we can meet the challenges ahead. We can keep Toronto on the path toward being a globally leading city with an economy that works for the benefits of all and a cultural dynamism that inspires and connects us with each other. We thank the City Manager for considering the recommendations outlined in this report as part of Toronto's recovery framework.

Michael Thompson, Co-Chair
Deputy Mayor
Chair, Economic and Community
Development Committee
Councillor, Ward 21, Scarborough Centre

Blake Goldring, Co-Chair
Executive Chairman
AGF Management Limited

Context

Cities around the world are contending with an unprecedented global crisis arising from the COVID-19 pandemic that continues to present considerable economic, cultural, fiscal, and operational challenges. In this unpredictable environment, it has become clear that economic and cultural recovery can best be achieved with strong, decisive leadership and a coordinated public health response. The impacts on individuals, businesses, organizations, and communities continue to evolve, requiring innovative, accelerated responses from governments. The City of Toronto has risen to this challenge, but there is much more work still to be done.

Cities and regions that have successfully fought back against COVID-19 have also created the conditions to return to work safely, and are now positioned for the quickest economic recovery. This includes cities like Seoul, with its world-leading system of contact tracing, along with countries like New Zealand and Australia, where sustained government action on COVID-19 has allowed near-normal economic conditions to resume, leveraging their unique geographic conditions. Now is the time to ensure that our city is among these global leaders, and take action to jumpstart Toronto's economic and cultural recovery.



The City of Toronto launched a rapid economic response to the pandemic, offering a range of innovative new programs for business and culture to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 and help residents safely reconnect with their city. The City also established the Toronto Office and Recovery and Rebuild (TORR) to undertake comprehensive stakeholder engagement to inform Toronto's recovery. In the coming months, the City will need to continue to deliver short-term actions to provide immediate support and relief to businesses and cultural organizations. At the same time, it is equally important to advance long-term planning, recognizing that the work ahead is substantial and will need to address long-standing, systemic issues.

To put us on a path to reignite our economy, Deputy Mayor Michael Thompson convened an Economic and Culture Recovery Advisory Group to build on this work and identify priorities for how the City can best empower businesses and culture organizations coming out of the pandemic. This document includes the Advisory Group's 18 recommendations to prioritize the most important aspects for business and culture, grouped into four focus areas:

1	Economic Recovery	Strategic actions to help businesses reopen, expand and thrive, while still safeguarding the public against risk of infection.
2	Anti-Racism and Inclusion	Specific interventions to make meaningful structural change and ensure that Black, Indigenous, and equity-deserving groups have better access to the city's economic and cultural benefits and opportunities.
3	Workforce and Talent	Collaborative approaches to workforce development and skills training to make Toronto talent among the most competitive in the world.
4	Arts and Culture	Opportunities to support one of the hardest-hit segments of Toronto's economy, while empowering diverse, creative expression.

Implementing these recommendations will result in more resilient businesses and cultural organizations and provide useful insight on how to confront the challenges facing this city. The recommendations reflect a broad perspective on economic development that is inclusive of all people. Policy areas like public health, child care, housing, education and others are critical to economic prosperity and recovery, enabling and enhancing the equity and resilience of our city.

COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted racialized, Indigenous and equity-deserving communities and deepened existing inequalities. The pandemic is widely described as a trend accelerator that revealed the severity of our structural challenges. Inequity, poverty, climate change, racism, and the unevenness of Toronto's rapid growth all existed well before spring 2020. Many of the communities and sectors disproportionately hit by COVID were vulnerable prior to the pandemic. Recovery, in turn, is impossible without fostering progress for vulnerable groups and confronting the most glaring inequities.

The group's recommendations reflect their shared belief in a recovery founded on equity and inclusive economic growth, training and upskilling, care for our most vulnerable, and increased access to opportunity for youth, women, and racialized groups. Recommendations include support to improve access to economic and cultural opportunities for all Torontonians, as well as direct strategic assistance to support Indigenous, Black and equity-deserving communities city-wide.

As noted by City Manager Chris Murray, "while COVID-19 exacerbated many existing challenges and inequities, it also created conditions for accelerating good ideas". Capitalizing on this moment will require inclusive, forward-thinking actions along with rigorous, ongoing consultation with communities across the city. The recommendations included in this report are intended to be part of a broader recovery roadmap, and will enable business and culture to emerge from this pandemic positioned for success.

Advisory Group Mandate

The Economic and Culture Recovery Advisory Group was convened in June 2020 to provide objective, informed and constructively critical advice on priorities for recovery. The Advisory Group was comprised of 20 community leaders in business and culture, and was co-chaired by Deputy Mayor Michael Thompson and Blake Goldring, Executive Chairman of AGF Management Limited. Members were asked to develop a list of actionable recommendations to increase support for businesses and culture, and address some of the longer-term impacts of the pandemic on economic development and culture. Members brought a broad base of knowledge, expertise and experience to the table as they discussed current challenges and the City's role in recovery.

To develop their recommendations, Advisory Group members met regularly as a group, reviewed ongoing work, and exchanged ideas with co-chairs and staff both in and between meetings. The group established a collaborative online forum, where members developed ideas and shared new research and resources on COVID recovery and broader civic issues, including youth engagement, housing affordability, and more. The group also invited leaders in business and government to attend their meetings and learn from their experience working on COVID recovery, including Mayor John Tory,

City Manager Chris Murray, Chief Financial Officer Heather Taylor, Saad Rafi and Dr. David Mowat of the Toronto Office of Recovery and Rebuild, and Goldy Hyder, President and CEO of the Business Council of Canada.

The group focused on identifying actions that can be led by the City. For a number of the recommendations, coordinated action and commitments of resources from all orders of government will help to achieve the best results – but recognizing that this may not always be possible, many of the recommendations can also be acted on by the City alone to make immediate progress for Toronto communities.

Elevate and Accelerate Existing City-Building Initiatives

Since the start of the pandemic, partners in government and the private sector, such as the [Toronto Region Board of Trade](#), have carried out a significant amount of work to develop strategies and plans to rebound from the impacts of COVID-19. For the City of Toronto, this work culminated in the release of the Toronto Office of Recovery and Rebuild's [COVID-19: Impacts and Opportunities Report](#) in October 2020. TORR identified 83 strategic recommendations to build a renewed Toronto, based on extensive research on best practices, and comprehensive engagement with residents, communities, and other stakeholders. Advisory Group members stressed the importance of acting on TORR's recommendations as quickly as possible to capture the momentum and goodwill built up among community partners, and to seize the once-in-a-generation opportunities presented during this period of transformation.

Though the group's mandate was limited to identifying economic and cultural recovery actions, members recognized that making progress on other city-building work is an important precursor to achieving economic and cultural vitality. Many of these broader issues were identified as priorities in TORR's recovery framework, and are being addressed through other City strategies and plans. These include:

- **Pursuing stronger intergovernmental partnerships** (an 'all government' approach), with greater recognition of the important role that the City plays in advancing public policy priorities and improved support for Toronto's infrastructure and social services network;
- **Achieving greater financial sustainability for the City of Toronto**, which members recommended could include the implementation of new revenue tools and tax policies, such as road tolls, rideshare fees, and optimizing City assets;
- **Undertaking immediate action to achieve equity goals**, including steps to combat anti-Black racism, advancing reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, and supporting LGBTQ2S+ communities;

- **Tackling the affordable housing crisis** by expanding and diversifying the City's supply of affordable housing, and ensuring that the city remains accessible and affordable for seniors, newcomers and youth;
- **Fostering safer neighbourhoods** through violence and harm reduction, improved mental health supports, and continuing work with police and community groups to address issues of community safety and support greater collaboration;
- **Building complete communities** with a sustainable supply of affordable housing, pedestrian and event-friendly public realm design, opportunities to animate the city in the wintertime, and a long-term strategy for climate change; and
- **Strengthening the synergies between City-sponsored initiatives and Toronto's education system** by expanding support systems for students, and enhancing partnerships between the City and higher education institutions.

To build a stronger economy and a renewed cultural sector, it is critical to make progress on related city-building initiatives such as these. This report's recommendations are intended to complement and build on this crucially important work being advanced by TORR, and by other City divisions and agencies. The recommendations presented in the following sections offer concrete, actionable proposals that will help to achieve shared goals of city-wide prosperity and growth.



Recommendations

Economic Recovery

Economic prosperity is an essential foundation for a healthy society. As it becomes clear that some COVID-related restrictions will remain in place for the foreseeable future, especially until after a vaccine is made widely available, it also becomes increasingly important to chart a course for Toronto businesses to open, expand, and thrive in this new normal, while still safeguarding against the threat of the pandemic. Recognizing the need for immediate action to support the economy, the Advisory Group offers the following recommendations to jumpstart economic recovery in the near term.

- 1. Lead North American cities in linking safety to productivity.** Broad economic recovery will be impossible without restoring public confidence in economic participation. To achieve this, we must find a way to return to work safely, while protecting people from infection. The City of Toronto can lead within North America by working with private sector and government partners on a plan to encourage and incentivize major employers to return to work safely, especially in the city's downtown core. This plan could include City- and industry-led pilots, and a long-term communications strategy focused on restoring public confidence in business and culture, grounded in clear public health guidance.
- 2. Work with the TTC and major employers to develop marketing and communication efforts and possible incentives to encourage a safe return to work using public transit.** Restoring confidence in the commute to work will require innovation and cooperation from government, TTC and employers. Tactics could include off-peak fares, employee discount programs, and encouraging the staggered arrival of employees. In parallel, the City should continue to advocate to the province for funding to support the TTC's efforts to mitigate crowding and advance new transit projects.
- 3. Keep commerce moving with a coordinated approach to traffic and public realm improvements.** Public realm improvements and programs like ActiveTO have helped to animate our streets during these challenging times, while CafeTO's curb lane patios have provided an important lifeline for small businesses. As the City looks toward maintaining and enhancing such improvements over the longer term, it will be important to collaborate and consult with businesses on ways to keep traffic moving alongside these improvements, taking into account seasonal changes such as road clearing. This partnership is essential to facilitating business deliveries and goods movement, supporting a greater quality of life for residents, and mitigating the risk of gridlock as the city reopens for business.

4. **Expand and enhance existing initiatives to rebuild local tourism.** Toronto has a wealth of places to discover, offering residents a chance to explore the world in their own backyard. The City's ongoing ShowLoveTO campaign invites Torontonians to reconnect with the city, and stay safe while having fun. Recognizing the likelihood of a long recovery period, the City should work with partners in the hospitality sector to maintain and grow such programs, leading to tangible benefits for businesses, cultural organizations, and residents alike. As travel restrictions are gradually loosened, these campaigns led by Destination Toronto can be expanded to attract visitors from across the province, country, and, eventually, internationally.
5. **Incentivize and facilitate local retail innovations** to promote local resilience during the recovery period and expand opportunities for small businesses. Future initiatives can build on the success of current COVID recovery initiatives, such as the expansion of Digital Main Street and the introduction of ShopHERE, among others. To make this a reality, and sustain it in the longer term, the City can work with private partners and sponsors to establish a fund for business innovation, and help to improve access to working capital by partnering with financial institutions to ensure that small businesses can qualify for favourable rates. These initiatives would build on federal and provincial financial support programs which remain critical to offsetting the short and mid-term liquidity challenges of businesses badly damaged by COVID-19's public health constraints and consumer and employee protection measures.

Anti-Racism and Inclusion

The pandemic has highlighted intolerable inequalities in our society. To build a stronger Toronto, institutional racism and discrimination must be addressed. We know that the status quo is not working, and strongly urge new ways for Toronto to foster sustainable diversity and inclusion.

For too long, too many people have been shut out of economic opportunities because of institutionalized racism and discrimination. It is these same vulnerable groups who are most at risk of being left behind amid the economic turmoil of the pandemic. Looking ahead, there is an opportunity to use the recovery period to make meaningful structural change within Toronto's economy and cultural sector. The following actions are necessary steps that work towards improving equity and inclusion not only for Toronto's economy and culture, but in all aspects of city life.

6. Pursue a program of **specific community investments to promote the encouragement, scaling and sustainability of business and cultural enterprises led by Black, Indigenous and equity-deserving groups**. The City's investment in Black-led business and culture during the COVID-19 pandemic has been described as a "down payment" for future partnership – maintaining this momentum, and building on it to break down barriers for other communities, will be central to building a more resilient and inclusive economy.
7. **Improve access to technology and capital for BIPOC-led non-profits, businesses, and entrepreneurs**. It is crucial that the City use its convening power to gather resources for Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC)-led enterprise, through partnerships with incubators and accelerators, unlocking City spaces for community use, driving improved broadband connectivity and maintaining and enhancing the City's own business advisory services.
8. Co-develop programs and initiatives with Indigenous partners to **amplify the presence and impact of Indigenous-led businesses in Toronto** and work towards greater Indigenous representation in the workforce, as well as fostering a more equitable workplace. As part of a commitment to co-developing such programs, specific actions should be identified through collaboration led by the Indigenous community in partnership with the City using financial and staff resources for implementation.
9. Collaborate with employers and community partners to **break down barriers to the participation of persons with disabilities in the workforce**. The City can lead in this area by advocating for employers to maintain pandemic-era measures that increased access to work, including work-from-home options and enhanced digital access, and by committing ongoing engagement of persons with disabilities in the development of economic support programs.
10. **Recognize child care as a cornerstone of a gender-inclusive economic recovery**. Working parents depend on access to affordable, reliable childcare. As the fight against the pandemic continues, it is essential to support Toronto families with access to childcare options, and ensure that schools and childcare centres can be kept open in a safe way. To enhance these supports in Toronto over the longer term, we encourage the City to work with the provincial and federal governments on a child care plan focused on access, affordability, inclusion, and high-quality care. At the same time, to facilitate progress at the local level, the City itself can support greater access to quality childcare by enhancing efforts to help families find and access child care; offer funding and resources for Toronto-based agencies to deliver programs; and help communities plan and develop services tailored to their unique needs.

Workforce and Talent

The pandemic has rapidly accelerated changes to the way we work, with thousands of companies pivoting to remote work, and collaboration taking place across virtual platforms. At the same time, as thousands have lost their jobs because of COVID-19, there is an urgent need to help workers upgrade their skill sets to re-enter the labour market. Faced with these drastic changes, it is essential that the City act now to develop a proactive workforce development strategy to ensure that Toronto talent is among the most competitive in the world. The actions below are first steps for the City to develop a coordinated approach to workforce and talent development, in collaboration with educational institutions, other governments, and community partners. With sustained action over the long term, these actions will also address underrepresentation of marginalized groups and youth in the economy and labour force.

11. Work with federal, provincial, Indigenous, higher education, professional associations, trade unions and business counterparts to bring all orders of government together to create a **long-term, strategic approach to workforce development and training**. Different government and community partners all play important roles in advancing workforce development and skills training in Toronto. Only together can we optimize our approach to maximize benefit for Toronto residents. The City should bring these different players to the table to develop and deliver on a coordinated strategy for workforce development that responds to the training and labour market challenges presented by the pandemic, and beyond.
12. **Encourage collaboration among industry partners to champion support for workers as a foundation of economic recovery**. The pandemic has brought attention to a number of important issues facing workers, such as health and safety conditions, the continued rise of precarious work, and the need for a living wage. Issues such as these have disproportionately impacted vulnerable workers, including women, racialized people, and other equity-deserving groups who make up a high percentage of the workforce in some of the hardest hit sectors. To build back better, there is a need for major institutional actors like the City to work with partners in business and labour to develop shared commitments to confronting these challenges, and to use their influence to enact positive change.
13. **Establish a Youth Economic Recovery Table** with a particular focus on youth employment, training, and more equitable access to opportunity. Youth have been hit hard by this crisis, and need specific support from the City and community partners to recover. Data from Statistics Canada shows that the city of Toronto's unemployment rate among youth aged 15-24 is more than double that of the population as a whole, at approximately 22% compared to 10% in October 2020. At

the younger end of this spectrum, youth that are still in school need access to better training opportunities to improve their long-term employment prospects, such as continued access to co-ops, apprenticeships and other experiential learning. Creating more opportunities for youth will not only strengthen labour force participation and competitiveness, but will also help to address issues of underrepresentation in the workforce among racialized communities and newcomers over the longer term. The Table's membership should reflect the city's cultural, racial, and geographic diversity and transition into a longer-term commitment once the "recovery" mandate is no longer relevant.

Arts and Culture

Toronto's arts and creative industries are among the sectors hardest hit by the impacts of COVID-19. With so much of their business linked to in-person gatherings and events, it is likely that they will be among the last segments of the economy to fully recover. TORR's report identified several key actions to advance recovery in the culture sector. The recommendations below build on these efforts to further accelerate and renew creative activity in Toronto, with emphasis on creating equitable opportunities for cultural participation and artistic work.

14. Design an **arts-focused fund-matching program** for private foundations and other major donors, with a focus on cultural recovery efforts, and encouraging partnerships and representation for BIPOC artists and initiatives. This program would direct new resources to small and emerging arts organizations, while encouraging existing institutions to form new partnerships and open their spaces to a new generation of talent.
15. Co-develop with community partners a **training and leadership development program for the arts**, with an emphasis on empowering diverse, emerging BIPOC voices in the sector. A targeted program will help to develop and match skills to labour market needs in the fast-growing creative industries.
16. Continue to advance **opportunities for cultural engagement in all parts of the city, year-round**. Historically, Toronto's cultural sector has been concentrated in the downtown core. Recent efforts by the City and cultural organizations have helped to expand the sector's footprint city-wide, allowing for more residents to engage with the arts closer to home. These efforts must continue as recovery advances, with additional focus on new opportunities for cultural programming in the winter months.

17. Support creative industries with funding and infrastructure for digital adaptation. The pandemic has accelerated a shift to digital work in the cultural sector, which many see as part of a new normal going forward. To help the creative industries remain competitive, and for cultural work to be sustainable, the sector will need to be supported with world-leading digital infrastructure, funding and training support.

18. Preserve existing and create new, affordable spaces for culture across the city. Toronto's affordability has long been an issue for the cultural sector, and has long threatened to lead to an exodus of artists and cultural venues from the city. Existing efforts by the City to protect and create affordable spaces and housing must be enhanced to ensure that Toronto's cultural scene can continue to flourish. Continued action is needed on property tax relief for the creative sector, unlocking City-owned spaces for cultural uses, and funding support for capital projects and improvements.



Image: *Dia de los Muertos* by Emma Lopez and Pedro Narvaez, with OCAD University student collaborators Mohammed Abdullah, Rebecca Van Fraassen, Simone Northey, Peter Rahul, and Gabriel Masewich. Part of the BigArtTO program at R.C. Harris Water Treatment Plant, 2020. Photo credit: Alan Ye.

Next Steps: From Ideas to Action

To transform the Advisory Group's ideas into action, the recommendations in this report are being submitted to the City Manager to review as part of the implementation plan for the City's recovery and rebuild framework. The Advisory Group's recommendations can be used to build concrete actions and opportunities to advance the important work launched by TORR. They complement and align with the directions proposed across all six pillars of TORR's recovery plan, including public health, the social determinants of health, increasing prosperity, infrastructure and mobility, resilience, and City services.

An important component of the implementation process will be identifying results-based outcomes that reflect what we hope to achieve as Toronto recovers from the impacts of the pandemic. Examples of potential outcomes can be drawn from the four focus areas of this report – supporting a prosperous economy; making meaningful progress on equity and inclusion; empowering a stronger workforce; and fostering a creative city.

And finally, to challenge ourselves to reach and exceed our goals, the Advisory Group recommends establishing and promoting a recovery dashboard to track indicators of the City's economic and cultural health. This can include existing indicators, such as employment rates and economic output, as well as new ones, including equity-based measures, to monitor our progress on the above-noted outcomes and provide another level of public accountability. This model can also be expanded to include measures for recovery in other relevant policy areas, such as housing targets and educational attainment.

Economic and cultural recovery will not happen in isolation. Achieving results will require a coordinated effort that engages partners including artists, businesses, and residents in all part of the city. It is this group's hope that leaders in government, economic development, and culture will work together to make this vision of city-wide prosperity and growth into a reality.

Toronto entered this crisis from a position of economic strength – one made possible by the innovation, diversity and goodwill of our city's remarkable business and cultural communities. The road ahead will not be easy, but I am confident that together we will build a more prosperous, resilient and successful Toronto.

- Blake Goldring, Co-Chair

