

TECH RESET CANADA

January 27, 2021

To the City of Toronto Executive Committee,

Thank you Mayor Tory and Executive Committee members for the opportunity to speak with you today.

My name is Bianca Wylie, and I'm here on behalf of Tech Reset Canada, and my colleagues Saadia Muzaffar, Jennifer Evans, and April Dunford. We're a volunteer group that works on policy issues related to technology, economic development, society, and democracy.

To many in our tech community, the ConnectTO program represents an exciting opportunity to build different technology futures with and for the people of Toronto. Technology is not serving us all equally, which is what public infrastructure should do. But there is nothing inevitable about the problematic situation we're in.

This report opens the door to putting many more of us in charge of how our technology works. We can develop a civic technology approach for internet policy that puts and keeps democratic and community power in the hands of the people it impacts. This is an opportunity to build new business models for internet access, to develop deeper technical capacity and literacy in our communities, to support and grow different kinds of technology products and markets, and to reduce discriminatory technology practices.

This report represents an obligation to deliver on equity and inclusion. It represents a way to uphold our treaty obligations by creating infrastructures that support sovereignty and self-governance. We have the power, using public governance, to do better for the many that our technology policies are failing.

I used to be part of a company that built software. And one day when we were working on the software I asked if something was possible. My colleague told me to reorganize my question. They told me to say what I wanted, rather than asking what was possible. This is called requirement writing. Define the things you want then build them. We should all be civic product managers for our internet policies.

We have all the things we need. Communities have been working on them globally for decades - protocols, standards, rules and approaches to build and govern technology differently. The problem has never been technology because tech doesn't fall out of the sky. It's been a lack of sustained public involvement in how our systems work and are governed. It's been a history of habits that entrench public private power asymmetries. This is a chance to break those habits and figure out what we want to keep from current models and what we need to change. People sit at the heart of the changes we need to make. And the city should use its public institutional capacity to put people-centred technology models into practice.

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This report shows the City is willing to help us salvage things we should keep from our current models and make space to build differently. The procurement process for this pilot is a place to put these requirements. The people of this city have so much technical talent and knowledge to draw on to do this, part of why this is so exciting.

Thanks to City staff, particularly Alice Xu, for engaging with our community continuously. This is a creative report that thoughtfully responds to the moment we're in and the need to protect and grow public power. We expect to see this continuous care in the creation of the City's digital infrastructure plan. We look forward staying involved to hold each other accountable in how we do this together.

And thank you to ACORN Canada for their leadership and years of work to get affordable internet to residents.

Thank you,
Tech Reset Canada
Bianca Wylie, Saadia Muzaffar, Jennifer Evans, April Dunford