

The logo for the City of Edmonton, featuring the word "Edmonton" in white sans-serif font on a dark blue rectangular background.The cover of the report features a large, abstract geometric design. The background is composed of various shades of blue and green, with a prominent yellow and green pattern on the left side. A dark blue rectangular area on the right contains the title and logo. A thin white vertical line is positioned to the left of the title text.

# EndPovertyEdmonton Evaluation Report 2021

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents	PG 2
1.0 Executive Summary	PG 3
2.0 Introduction	PG 6
2.1 Purpose of the Evaluation	PG 6
2.2 Background	PG 6
2.3 Evaluation Methods	PG 8
3.0 Evaluation Findings	PG 9
3.1 Understanding Poverty	PG 9
3.2 Current Measures of Poverty	PG 10
3.3 The Impact of COVID-19	PG 11
3.4 EPE Secretariat and Early Challenges	PG 12
3.5 Challenges with the Road Map	PG 13
3.6 EPE Road Map Progress and Successes	PG 15
3.7 Engaging Stakeholders	PG 18
3.8 Measurement	PG 19
3.9 Governance and Role Clarity	PG 21
3.10 Future Direction	PG 27
3.11 Current and Future Challenges	PG 27
4.0 Recommendations	PG 29
Conclusion	PG 30
Appendix A: EPE Road Map Actions & Leads	PG 31
Resources	PG 33

## 1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Defining poverty is complicated and often focuses on human development outcomes such as income, health, education, and nutrition. There are also socio-cultural differences and qualitative elements such as powerlessness, stigma, discrimination and racism, and isolation to consider. Some people may be chronically poor (living in poverty for years at a time), while others can transition in or out of poverty based on changing circumstances.

Poverty is heavily associated with inequality and research has shown that the root of poverty in Canada and elsewhere is largely systemic in nature and stems from inequality in economic and social resources.

In an effort to address this complex social issue, a Council Initiative for the Elimination of Poverty was convened by the City of Edmonton in 2013 and later elevated to a Mayor's Task Force. The Task Force convened multiple Working Groups to identify a number of actions aimed at reducing poverty. In December 2016, Edmonton City Council approved investment in the launch of EndPovertyEdmonton (EPE) to steward the vision of eliminating poverty in a generation and a Road Map was developed with a number of actions to help achieve that vision.

As EPE finishes its fifth year of its original funding agreements, Citizen Services requested support from the Citizen Services Department Strategy section to evaluate the EPE initiative and the implementation of its Road Map actions. Using a combination of research, document reviews, and interviews, the evaluation aimed to collect insights and feedback on the Road Map, its implementation and to provide direction for poverty reduction work moving forward. In evaluating EPE, several themes were revealed that would indicate that although the initiative has progressed in a number of ways, there have also been challenges, which may have prevented it from having as much impact as originally intended.

This evaluation has five recommendations that are offered to enhance the work of EPE. These recommendations are not listed in order of importance or priority and include:

**Set clear priorities:**

The majority of existing poverty strategies by all orders of government, have focused on reducing poverty by providing those affected with benefits that bring them up to or above the poverty line. Current evaluations and reviews of these strategies point out that these approaches and programs do not typically impact the systemic causes of poverty. As a result, their impacts on long-term poverty trends are modest at best. However, these efforts are still important supporting those currently living in poverty and addressing their immediate needs. Moving forward, EPE would benefit from prioritizing work that is different from the programs and services offered by other poverty reduction partners and stakeholders and then leverage the work of those partners to have increased collective impact at a systems level.

**Strengthen the evaluation methods to better track and measure progress:**

Given the complex nature of poverty and the fact it can be difficult to attribute poverty statistics to any particular program or initiative, assessing the impact of EPE is challenging and it may take years before any impact becomes apparent. As we have learned in the past few years, strategies like the Road Map can be adversely impacted by challenges such as the pandemic and the economy, which can significantly impact data like poverty rates, making it even more difficult to determine the success of the initiative. However, the need for ongoing measurement is critical to transparency and accountability.

**Review the governance structure to clarify roles and responsibilities between the various structures within EPE:**

Clear roles and responsibilities that outline what work falls under the jurisdiction of the Secretariat, versus what will be the responsibility of other partners and agencies, is needed in order to maximize resources and effectiveness. This will help demonstrate that EPE is performing a specifically defined role while addressing gaps in poverty reduction efforts. The need for clarity extends to the Stewardship Roundtable who has been acting as a governing body.

**Ensure the new funding agreement with the United Way clearly defines roles, responsibilities and accountabilities:**

A new memorandum of understanding and financial contract between the United Way, the City and EPE could be strengthened to create a more effective relationship and help manage risks and responsibilities.

**Find a place in the initiative to include people with lived experience:**

The voices of those with lived experience need to be at the table in a thoughtful and respectful manner. While working on systemic problems, it is important for EPE to stay connected to those living in poverty today.

As a large and complex initiative, EPE has and will likely continue to face various challenges related to jurisdiction, measuring and attributing impact, as well as being able to convene all of the right partners. The initiative has made good progress on several significant pieces of work, including living wage policies, early learning and care efforts, reconciliation, and other projects still underway. Though impacts will take years to realize, those involved in the work believe that there is momentum and that it may only be a matter of time before Edmonton is seen as a leading practice in poverty reduction efforts. Those who are part of the initiative believe that this can be achieved through focusing on issues and initiatives that other jurisdictions may not.

During these past five years, numerous relationships have been built both within and outside of Edmonton and several pieces of work directly address identified gaps in poverty reduction efforts. The evolution of EPE will continue and lessons learned in the first five years are valuable.

## 2.0 INTRODUCTION

The Social Development Branch within Citizen Services requested support from the Citizen Services Department Strategy section to evaluate the EndPovertyEdmonton (EPE) initiative and the implementation of its Road Map actions. The purpose of this document is to provide a summary of evaluation findings as well as recommendations for making program improvements moving forward.

### 2.1 Purpose of the Evaluation

The purpose of this evaluation is to:

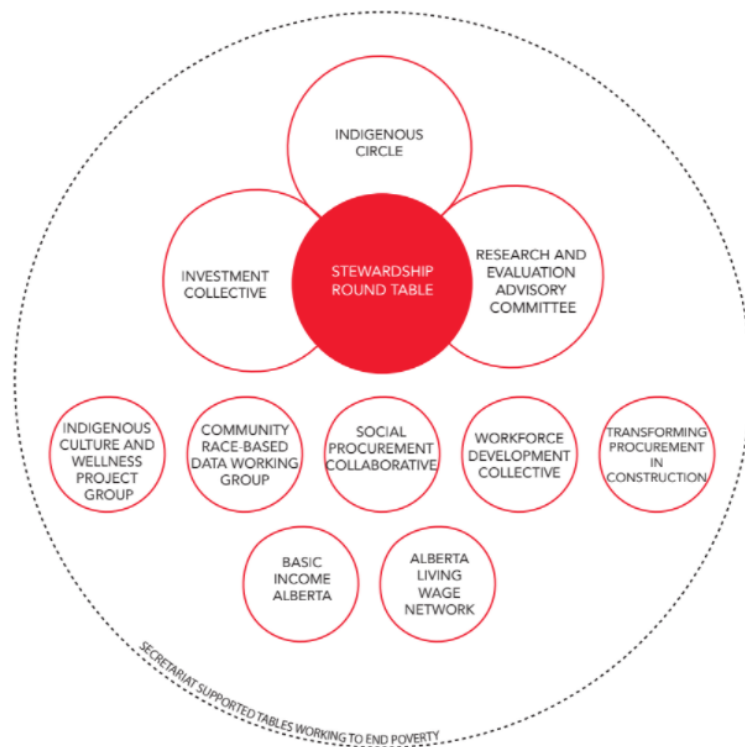
- Ascertain how effective the City has been in achieving the City-led actions within the EPE roadmap and what potential impact those actions may have had on poverty in Edmonton.
- Assess to what extent the intended purpose of the End Poverty work has been achieved and whether the approach used for this work and the City's relationship with its partners has been effective.
- Determine whether the City-led EPE actions are appropriate and aligned to relevant measures of poverty reduction.
- Provide recommendations regarding the City-led actions in relation to the City's investments in this work.

### 2.2 BACKGROUND

In 2013, a Council Initiative for the Elimination of Poverty was convened by the City of Edmonton and later elevated to a Mayor's Task Force. Over the next couple of years, the Task Force convened multiple Working Groups to identify a number of actions aimed at reducing poverty. These actions were aligned to six different Game Changers, priority areas identified as having significant and positive impacts on poverty. These identified Game Changers are:

1. Eliminate racism
2. Liveable incomes
3. Affordable housing
4. Accessible and affordable housing
5. Affordable childcare
6. Access to mental health services and addictions support

In December 2016, Edmonton City Council approved investment in the launch of EndPovertyEdmonton to steward the vision of eliminating poverty in a generation. To support this work, the EPE Secretariat was created to convene, coordinate and broker innovative partnerships, advocate for policy change, and build the capacity of Edmontonians to take action to end poverty. Additionally, the Stewardship Round Table (SRT) was created as the leadership table for the community collaborative, providing oversight to the Road Map and reporting progress back to the community at large. A diagram illustrating an overview of EPE's structure developed by the Secretariat is included below and discussed in more detail in the section on governance and role clarity.



Across various service packages and other sources, the City of Edmonton has invested almost \$10M into EPE, including the establishment of the Secretariat (\$750K per year with the United Way serving as the fiscal agent) and funding for various Road Map actions. A list of the initial EPE Road Map actions as well as their intended leads is attached as Appendix A.

## 2.3 EVALUATION METHODS

With a focus on evaluating the implementation and progress of the EPE initiative, this process-focused evaluation utilized a combination of two methods to gather data and develop observations and recommendations.

### Document Review

Multiple documents related to EPE, including project background information, existing reports, documentation related to each of the Road Map actions and project reports were reviewed. These documents served as a basis for understanding the original intention of the initiative and how it was to be implemented. Various progress reports provided insights on the current status of the Road Map actions and helped inform topics for evaluation interviews such as collective impact and governance as well as confirm whether previously identified issues from previous reports were still a concern. Additionally, existing poverty data and academic research was reviewed to provide context for current leading practices and realities in poverty reduction.

### Evaluation Interviews

In order to gather qualitative feedback and insights regarding EPE and the Road Map, a total of 16 key informant interviews were conducted with various individuals associated with the initiative, including EPE Roundtable members, Road Map action leads, EPE Secretariat members and the United Way. The names of specific individuals interviewed and their direct quotes are not included in this report in order to maintain confidentiality.

Interviews were free-form in structure to stimulate honest discussion with questions focused on the following:

- The selection of Road Map actions, the effectiveness on alleviating poverty or other potential impacts, and the alignment to the identified Game Changers
- The implementation of the Road Map actions, including challenges and successes, and
- The governance of EPE and the effectiveness of the model



## 3.0 EVALUATION FINDINGS

### 3.1 UNDERSTANDING POVERTY

Defining poverty is complicated and often focuses on human development outcomes such as income, health, education, and nutrition. There are also socio-cultural differences and qualitative elements such as powerlessness, stigma, discrimination and racism, and isolation to consider. Some people may be chronically poor (living in poverty for years at a time), while others can transition in or out of poverty based on changing circumstances.

Poverty is heavily associated with inequality and research has shown that the root of poverty in Canada and elsewhere is largely systemic in nature and stems from inequality in economic and social resources. Inequality can be observed from two perspectives, each possessing several indicators of poverty. Inequality of outcomes can include a person's level of income or education while inequality of opportunities can result from differences in background, social treatment and conditions, as indicated by unequal access to factors such as employment or education. Systemic issues related to power and influence in society, and in the workplace, can result in inequality in wages and benefits, in tax structures that favour the wealthy and powerful, and in the unwillingness of governments to act on the provision of economic and social security for all Canadians. As a result, poverty reduction can face barriers or stagnation as the underlying root of poverty is never fully addressed.

Despite evidence showing the importance of addressing these systemic issues, the majority of existing poverty strategies by all orders of government, have focused on reducing poverty by providing those affected with benefits that bring them up to or above the poverty line. Current evaluations or reviews of these strategies point out that these strategies and programs largely do not impact the systemic causes of poverty. As a result, their impacts on long-term poverty trends are modest at best, though it is recognized that these efforts are still important supporting those currently in poverty. Another roadblock for eliminating poverty through programs is that existing programs can sometimes be difficult to access or have strict eligibility requirements that result in people not

accessing the programs and remaining within the poverty cycle. Typically, countries with less inequality in power and influence also have lower poverty rates. This does not prove that anti-poverty strategies and programs do not have any value, but does highlight there may be gaps in the way that Canada aims to reduce poverty rates through typical programs.

In reviewing the Game Changers that were developed by the original Task Force, they do align well with strategies and initiatives that need focus in order to address long-term poverty. However, the original Road Map contains minimal policy-focused actions resulting in many remaining gaps in addressing systemic poverty. A review of various Canadian strategies completed by the University of British Columbia highlights these gaps and notes that Edmonton has undertaken some actions that focus on addressing the distribution of economic resources, such as the call for a living wage, but notes the majority of actions focused on making life more bearable for those already living in poverty in Edmonton. Although these actions are worth implementing, the review notes that they would not be expected to have a significant long term impact on the sources of poverty and poverty elimination.

### **3.2 CURRENT MEASURES OF POVERTY**

There are two primary measures of poverty used in Canada, both based on income. These are the Low Income Measure After Tax (LIM-AT) and the Market Basket Measure (MBM). Both measures rely on establishing a threshold and then calculating the percentage of people whose income is under this level. The LIM-AT's focus is on the family's income and whether it falls below 50% of the national median income, adjusted for family size. The LIM-AT is a commonly used measure and is therefore useful for international comparisons. The MBM is based on the cost of a basket of goods and services the Government feels is sufficient for standard living. The content of the basket may be adjusted and its value is adjusted for inflation annually. Those who fall below the threshold of being able to afford this basket are said to be living in poverty. Canada has opted to adopt the MBM as its official measure of poverty on the basis it accounts for regional differences in costs for basic necessities. The table below shows

the most current data on these measures for Edmonton, based on Statistics Canada data.

<b>Statistics Canada Poverty Data for Edmonton (% of Edmontonians below poverty threshold)</b>				
	<b>2016</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>
<b>LIM-AT</b>	6.7%	6.9%	6.1%	7.3%
<b>MBM</b>	9.2%	10.2%	7.5%	10.1%

As the data shows, there has not been a significant decrease in poverty in Edmonton since 2016 and that levels in 2019 were higher. This lack of an overall decrease in poverty can have multiple explanations, as strategies aimed at systemic drivers of poverty can be more effective than programs aimed at alleviation, but impacts can take years to appear.

### 3.3 THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting shutdown of many businesses has resulted in a significant loss of employment across the country, with current job losses nationally exceeding 2.2 million jobs since the pandemic began. While this is affecting many workers, it is disproportionately impacting some workers. According to the Canadian Poverty Institute, the effects of the economic shutdown are exacerbating pre-existing labour market inequalities for workers from particular equity groups such as migrant workers, visible minorities and Indigenous workers where these groups were already disproportionately employed in low wage precarious work. People in poverty are more likely to work in front-line and service industries, live in inadequate housing, access limited healthcare resources, and struggle with food insecurity and chronic disease. All of these factors further reduce productivity and raise living costs, leading to deeper poverty. As a result, the COVID-19 pandemic deepens the gap between the haves and have-nots and has likely delayed any impacts on Edmonton's poverty numbers EPE may have had up to this point.

In discussions with those involved with EPE, the COVID-19 pandemic was also identified as an obstacle that interfered with EPE's work and their ability to engage with partners to address issues of poverty. Despite the

challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic brings, several of those interviewed noted that it also provides a unique opportunity in that the pandemic has brought forth many conversations about economic recovery.

### **3.4 EPE SECRETARIAT & EARLY CHALLENGES**

The EPE Secretariat was originally created as an entity that would be separate from the City of Edmonton to oversee the implementation of community Road Map actions. However, the Secretariat faced a number of obstacles during the first five years of the EPE initiative and has evolved from its original form, though eliminating poverty in a generation is still the overall vision.

During the early implementation of the Road Map, the Secretariat regarded the work as “very bumpy” with numerous challenges. From their point of view, they had minimal capacity and a lack of experience in some areas, which left many feeling directionless in terms of the work they would be doing. Additionally, the Secretariat underwent a change in Executive Director in 2019 that delayed much of their work. This change in leadership also resulted in them reexamining their priorities, budget, and other elements which they feel have helped them become more efficient and effective.

As a result of the Secretariat’s capacity challenges and refocused direction, they pivoted away from several of the Road Map actions and scaled the scope back to focusing on a smaller number of actions tied to the Game Changers that they believed had a higher potential for impact while also being achievable. This has resulted in the EndPovertyEdmonton Umbrella Framework, which is still being developed but is intended to provide the second phase of EPE’s strategy to end poverty for the years 2021-2026, building on the experiences and learnings from the first Road Map. The benefits of an umbrella framework are that it allows more flexibility with broad parameters of an approach, such as intended results, guiding principles, and/or leverage points around which to organize more specific initiatives and activities. According to the Secretariat, an umbrella approach is useful in the following situations:

- innovators have a good idea of at least some of the ways a problem might be solved;

- they are still building trust and can only agree in the broadest terms about how to work together;
- the original poverty strategy has too many “moving pieces” to capture in a fixed plan;
- strategy partners are working in diverse sites and need flexibility in how they contribute to the change effort; and/or
- context can be so dynamic that it is difficult – even unhelpful – to develop a detailed strategy.

The Secretariat’s umbrella framework will prioritize a smaller number of pieces of work for each of the Game Changers with newly developed strategic objectives to help in monitoring and assessing their progress towards each of those Game Changers. These actions are also more systemic focused than some actions they abandoned, emphasizing their focus on eliminating long-term drivers of poverty. By adopting an umbrella framework, EPE is moving towards a model designed less around implementing concrete actions and instead around identifying gaps in poverty reduction work and developing potential solutions through advocacy and partnerships. This direction aligns well with existing research and leading practices identifying the need for poverty strategies to focus more on systemic issues. Overall, those within EPE feel the Secretariat has restructured relatively successfully and many feel progress has been made since refocusing their work.

### **3.5 CHALLENGES WITH THE ROAD MAP**

In addition to the Secretariat’s issues with capacity and direction early on, there were also concerns over the Road Map actions themselves, whether the ones selected were the most appropriate, and if they were developed with the clarity and guidance needed to enable them to succeed.

During one-on-one interviews with those associated with the initiative, there was concern about the relevance of some of the actions selected. Several of those interviewed expressed concerns with the process of selecting the actions and thought that the process was completed too quickly and without sufficient due diligence. As a result, some expressed that the original actions may not be the most effective at advancing the original Game Changers, as actions were not necessarily chosen based on

what would have the most impact or what could be reasonably achieved with available resources. In terms of assigning actions to the City or other stakeholders, some of those interviewed thought that this process also could have been handled more strategically with some indicating it was not clear how or why actions were distributed between the City and the Secretariat, other than actions which were already in progress or specifically under City jurisdiction. Another comment from interviews noted that the original intent of the EPE initiative was to bring various groups together where poverty is at the root of their work, but that an unintended result of assigning Road Map responsibilities was that the work became splintered and was therefore not living up to the spirit of EPE.

Another challenge identified with the original EPE Road Map implementation was that the actions lacked some details that would help those tasked with the actions to actually move that work forward. As explained by one interviewee, the Road Map was developed as a broad public engagement exercise and so the selected actions were very specific to the pieces of work that were being recommended, but at the same time provided little guidance and people had to rely on vague descriptions of the actions in trying to implement them. The result of this was that if roadblocks were encountered there was little direction in how to address or overcome them and some actions may have taken longer than expected to make any real progress.

As mentioned previously, the Secretariat has pivoted their work away from the original Road Map and are now focusing on fewer Game Changers. In addition to alleviating issues with capacity, an added benefit of this change was that it reduced the chances of duplicating the work of other agencies or organizations. As the Secretariat does not have the capacity to run any programs, ensuring there is less duplication of efforts is seen as a positive move for EPE. An example of this issue discussed by an interviewee was an early action where they found the recommended work was duplicating other efforts in the City and that this not only was a resource challenge, but had the potential to create tensions with those stakeholders as well.

The most common concern expressed by those interviewed concerning the Road Map was that there were likely too many actions, making it difficult to

achieve all of them. Several interviewees noted that having such a large list of actions had led to individual pieces of work not being adequately resourced and that this would continue to be a concern if scope was not kept in check. As for why there were so many actions, one potential reason was that there was an assumption that other stakeholders/organizations would be taking on larger pieces of work. However, the Road Map may not have accounted for the capacity of the Secretariat and other partners to take on this work. Some of those interviewed commented that without proper financial or people resources, it is difficult to convince others to take on major pieces of work. From the Secretariat's perspective, although they were largely tasked with just coordinating these actions, they found it hard to do so without adequate funding. As a result, some actions that involved new initiatives or programs suffered or even fell to the wayside, which made them clear options to drop when the Secretariat pivoted away from the Road Map to focus on a smaller number of projects.

Overall, when discussing the Road Map, there is a belief that the last five years was certainly a learning experience and that those within EPE are ready and willing to apply those lessons to future Road Maps or similar plans. Moving forward, the timing may be right to step back from the original Road Map and look at the roles of those involved with EPE and the overall strategy moving forward, which can then inform what priorities and pieces of work should be focused on.

### **3.6 EPE ROAD MAP PROGRESS & SUCCESSES**

Of the total 35 Road Map actions, 22 were City-led or City-funded (in-kind or through a service package). The other actions were either led or overseen by the EndPovertyEdmonton Secretariat. Of the City-led actions, 4 are complete, 14 are still in progress and on track, 1 was recently initiated and 3 were deferred. Given that 3 of the actions were deferred, the City of Edmonton currently tracks only the 19 actions they have either completed or initiated. In comparison, the EPE Secretariat has pivoted away from the Road Map and is focusing on 2 actions still in progress while deferring or stopping 7 other actions.

Although the implementation of the EPE Road Map has had its share of challenges, EPE has either completed or shown strong progress on a

number of the original Road Map actions. When asked about particular pieces of work that help illustrate the strengths of EPE's unique approach and have shown strong momentum, those interviewed identified several pieces of work. Each of these projects are unique in that they are not in the realm of poverty reduction programs or services, but instead aim to work towards the goal of ending poverty in a generation by addressing several of the systemic problems prevalent in poverty.

### **Living Wage**

Directly tied to the EPE Game Changer of livable incomes, a Road Map action around the development of a living wage policy was developed and completed through a collaborative effort between the Secretariat and the City of Edmonton. Living wage represents what a family's earner needs to earn in order to sufficiently provide the basics to their family. A living wage policy was approved in October 2018 by City Council and a plan to implement a living wage policy for contracted services was developed and reported to Council Dec 2019. Additionally, EPE's living wage work has resulted in the development of the Alberta Living Wage Network, made up of community organizations and municipalities with the goal of advancing a coordinated living wage movement in Alberta. The network assists communities in their annual living wage calculation and provides certification to qualifying living wage employers.

### **Social Procurement**

An extension of the Living Wage work has been EPE's efforts to develop a Social Procurement framework and policy for the City of Edmonton. This framework helps to ensure that social value is included as a weighted evaluation criteria in procurement activities, to the extent permitted by the City's obligations under existing trade agreements.

The City of Edmonton has met with several local non-profit and public organizations to discuss and plan for impacts to the local community that may arise from implementing a social procurement approach. Implementing this work has been a joint effort with EPE, who has worked on doing outreach and coordinating organizations and employment groups in order to help them figure out logistics with the new social procurement policy and navigate the policy into actual practice.



**Early Learning and Care**

Having high-quality, affordable, and accessible early learning and care was one of EPE's original Game Changers and is an important aspect of poverty reduction as it helps to reduce the effects of poverty on children, which is a key driver of systemic poverty. The Early Learning and Care Council working group, created through EPE, developed a variety of actions for 2020, the majority of which have been completed, including commissioning early learning and care research, conducting focus groups, developing communications, and engaging with municipal and provincial partners. The Council has also developed a set of outcomes and actions for 2021 through 2025 and are currently in progress of implementing these various pieces of work.

**Indigenous Work**

A major focus of EPE has been its work in support of Reconciliation, which can be strongly linked to racism, making it a key piece of work for the Game Changer focused on eliminating racism. It is reported that in Canada, one quarter of Indigenous people now live in poverty and that unemployment rates among Indigenous peoples are at least three times higher than the Canadian average. The EndPovertyEdmonton Indigenous Circle (IC) was developed to be a fluid and open membership table inclusive of all Indigenous peoples and communities. It includes Elders, knowledge keepers and cultural resource people and encourages the participation of Indigenous youth and those who have experienced poverty. Although development was a long process, the IC has helped advise, inform and influence the work of EPE as well as the SRT and is seen as essential in EPE's Reconciliation work.

In addition to the Indigenous Circle, EPE has made progress on several other Indigenous projects such as the design and planning of an Indigenous Culture and Wellness Centre, which is currently developing a governance body as well as a business case that will inform the Centre's concept and design.

**Race-Based Data**

EPE has thus far done some significant work on racism in the form of its Indigenous work, but there are still opportunities for actions aimed at reducing racism, whether from an Indigenous perspective or other forms of racism. Despite being a topic with many complications and challenges, many of those interviewed see it as an area that EPE can continue to make progress in.

A piece of work EPE has started working on and would like to continue to make strides in is in the collection of race-based data. Data is an effective tool that can provide insights and evidence in supporting a number of policy and strategic decisions. However, the collection and use of race-based data, which could be instrumental in providing data for racism-based poverty actions and initiatives, is currently limited. EPE, however, has begun engaging with other jurisdictions on gathering race-based data and gathering leading practices. Although a difficult initiative to implement, this data could help a large number of programs and services become more effective.

### **3.7 ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS**

One of the central aims of EPE was to convene various stakeholders associated with poverty in order to create collective impact. Whether collective impact was taking place was a primary focus of a previous review of EPE and it was found that collective impact did not yet exist and this was confirmed to still be an issue during this evaluation. Although many stakeholders were initially involved during the early conception of the Task Force and creation of the Game Changers, there has not been as much engagement and collaboration during implementation of the Road Map and many of those involved would like to see increased representation within EPE. Business was noted as one example of a stakeholder group that now has less representation than they did early on, which could be viewed as a gap in current EPE activities.

One of the primary groups EPE had intended to have more involvement from, but has not had much success in is engaging those with lived experience. Originally, EPE wanted more engagement and communications with this group in order to gain their perspectives. Instead, several of those interviewed feel like EPE has remained largely bureaucratic and that

engagement with those with lived experience has not been an intentional focus. There was also concern that although EPE has done some significant work with the Indigenous community and some of the Road Map actions that supported Reconciliation and reducing racism, EPE could do more to integrate Indigenous groups in various other pieces of work.

Another current gap in stakeholder involvement is with the Provincial Government. EPE can work towards reducing poverty at a municipal level, however changes to systems that will have long-term impacts on poverty will require actions at a provincial and/or federal level. Although many would like to see additional stakeholders involved in EPE, the reality is that there are many players involved in poverty work and some exclusion is bound to happen. Despite that limitation, EPE has continued to strive to work with other stakeholders, including other municipalities and these relationships are expected to become stronger as EPE moves forward.

### **3.8 MEASUREMENT**

One of the early issues identified with EPE and its work was a lack of evaluation or measurement system before the work on the actions began and this has been a significant roadblock for EPE. Being able to effectively measure and track EPE's progress is critical to showing accountability. Given that the Secretariat and the initiative as a whole relies on funding and support from the City, Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF) and the United Way, it is essential that EPE is able to show not only how money and resources are spent, but that these efforts are having meaningful results.

The EPE Investment Collective, made up of representatives from funders and other stakeholders, was formed in part for reporting accountability and the Secretariat had been tasked with developing an evaluation framework. However, many of the Road Map's actions were deemed difficult to assess for impact and evaluation after the fact can be a challenge, particularly when it can involve data collection from multiple organizations, which can be a significant request. As a result, much of EPE's measurement work has been delayed, though EPE has been able to complete some minor evaluation work related to some of the actions that have helped inform certain pieces of work. The strategy, however, still lacks an overall framework that would enable a consistent approach to assessing their

impact or progress or provide a means to communicate their efforts as part of the overall EPE strategy. The introduction of the Umbrella Framework will allow the Secretariat to begin developing some high level outcomes, but improvements to reporting are still needed.

There are, however, challenges to establishing an evaluation framework for EPE. As mentioned, evaluation of poverty reduction is difficult for a number of reasons. Most efforts to reduce poverty are aimed at alleviating those living in poverty, which has been shown to have minimal impact on long-term poverty numbers while systemic efforts can take years to see any meaningful impacts. Another issue is that poverty is multifaceted and touches a large number of sectors so any impact can be difficult to attribute to a single program, project or initiative. Considering that the EPE's work is not centered around programs or services and they are not the ones directly developing policies, it is difficult to attribute impact to their work. A related challenge for the initial Road Map was that while coordinating certain pieces of work and trying to report on progress, EPE was sometimes misconstrued as taking credit for the work undertaken by other agencies or organizations. In order to reduce this issue moving forward, EPE will need to ensure they are not attributing overall impacts to their work.

The Secretariat has noted that there is currently a gap in efforts to reduce systemic poverty and would like to work towards long-term systems-level changes, which are the most difficult to measure. Additionally, the EPE Secretariat itself views their work as enabling the policies and systems-level changes that will impact long-term poverty reduction rather than creating them themselves. In developing evaluation frameworks with outcomes and measures, they should reflect the specific work being done and what EPE has control over rather than broad outcomes and measures of poverty where attributing impacts to specific work can be more difficult.

Ideally the evaluation frameworks and tools would have been developed early in the initiative in order to monitor progress and make changes if needed. The issue of long-term impacts being a challenge will remain relevant and in these situations it is helpful to focus on outcomes and measures that capture their efforts and incremental change, rather than any broad outcomes such as reducing the total number of those

experiencing poverty. Although those broad measures may likely still be a long-term goal for the initiative, a focus on tracking yearly progress on smaller outcomes is beneficial for actually tracking the progress of EPE's work. Being able to capture what is happening at a local level in communities can help shape what kinds of outcomes and measures to use for each piece of work.

In terms of establishing outcomes for the initiative, it will be important to remain flexible and able to pivot to new pieces of work when needed, which may require new outcomes and evaluation frameworks to be developed when appropriate. As new priorities are identified or a particular area becomes a focal point with the public or government, EPE should be able to exercise flexibility and address those issues so that EPE's efforts remain relevant in the world of poverty reduction.

### **3.9 GOVERNANCE & ROLE CLARITY**

Governance is a topic often covered in evaluations and reviews as strong governance can often mean the difference between an initiative achieving its goals or not. This is particularly true in collaborative partnerships where effective governance can prevent many obstacles related to communication, equity, and accountability that can cause partnerships to break down and prevent the achievement of outcomes and goals. EPE's governance lacks clarity and transparency, especially regarding SRT and Secretariat roles. Additionally, despite EPE being a collaborative initiative, collaboration amongst partners was not seen as being as systematic as it should be under a collective impact model.

A primary issue with EPE and its overall governance is the lack of clarity around roles and responsibilities. Based on findings from the collective impact report, the intended purpose of both the EPE Secretariat and the Round Table may not be clear to all of those associated with the initiative. This finding is still relevant and is supported by many of the evaluation interviews conducted, with many noting improved role clarity could go a long way to making EPE a more effective initiative.

#### **EPE Secretariat Roles and Responsibilities**

Given that there has been some confusion over the direction of the Secretariat and EPE itself, the evaluation aimed to collect feedback from those involved in the initiative on this topic. When asked about the role the EPE Secretariat should play moving forward, many of those interviewed saw EPE and the Secretariat as having a bigger picture, systems role focusing on advocacy, policy change and similar issues that often get overlooked by the mandates of other more program-focused organizations. While other organizations have an affinity for project work, EPE is better positioned to focus on system level changes and broad poverty issues and many of those interviewed for this evaluation support that notion. Based on feedback from those interviewed, potential roles for EPE moving forward could include:

- Incubating project work or developing new strategies to pass on to other organizations in a better position to implement that work. This approach could have the potential to significantly impact poverty levels as time goes on through true collective impact.
- Regularly review poverty and its drivers via research and leading practices and try to apply those learnings to the Game Changers in order to ensure that the EPE's work is up to date and relevant.

The Secretariat adopting an umbrella framework for their work will help them focus on achievable and impactful work and those interviewed felt more positive about the Secretariat's direction moving forward and that momentum was finally being gained through these discussions. In addition to this momentum, the development of formal roles and responsibilities to establish what kinds of work the Secretariat will undertake, versus what the City of Edmonton or other partners will undertake would help focus EPE work further and inform future Road Maps or similar documents.

### **The United Way**

As the Secretariat was established as an entity that would be separate from the City of Edmonton, it was necessary to have a fiscal agent in order to handle the Secretariat's finances. The United Way, who had been involved with EPE since its early Task Force days, was selected to fill this role as they had the resources, space and capacity to accommodate the Secretariat's various needs. Their involvement is also seen as helping ensure EPE is not just a City initiative, but a joint effort across many stakeholders. However,

there are differing opinions within EPE on whether the United Way relationship is a good fit. The primary point of contention centers around the Secretariat's mandate and autonomy versus the United Way's mandate as a charity. Given that this difference in direction could potentially result in both parties having competing interests based on how they interact with certain stakeholders (e.g. charity vs advocate), some of those interviewed believe that it may be time to review new options for fiscal oversight of the Secretariat moving forward.

There was agreement among those interviewed that increased clarity was needed on the role of each party in poverty reduction and jurisdiction. There are concerns based on stakeholder feedback that there may be confusion regarding the Secretariat's alignment to the United Way and whether they are their own entity or actually a part of the United Way. The close ties to the United Way and their differing mandates was also cause for concern that the United Way's position as a charity may be a roadblock to the Secretariat's advocacy work and policy initiatives, which may be a priority in their future work as they focus on systemic and policy issues related to poverty.

Despite the concerns expressed, many agree that the relationship is an important one with mutual benefit. While some may not find the partnership with the United Way to be an ideal situation, the support the United Way provides to EPE is invaluable. As a partner, the United Way has helped EPE and the Secretariat via the scope and scale of their stakeholders as well as their brand. Beyond supporting the EPE and the Secretariat in making important strategic connections and driving specific pieces of work, the United Way provides in-kind support in the form of space, resources, and other necessities in order for EPE to function. While the Secretariat's benefits are more obvious, the United Way recognizes that EPE can often provide a voice on topics that the United Way cannot due to their status as a charitable organization. Additionally, EPE's work has the potential to inform the United Way's work, ensuring that both parties are complimenting the work of the other. Despite some early challenges, the United Way feels they are heavily invested in EPE's success and sees the potential for strong synergy now and in the future. The United Way sees itself as connecting to communities and creating engagement while EPE

elevates major issues. An example of this is the social procurement work described earlier in this report where EPE acted as the voice highlighting what was in need of change and why, while United Way was able to engage stakeholders in developing potential solutions. Overall, they want to enable EPE's work, regardless of what that support might look like.

In terms of increasing the effectiveness of the relationship, clearly establishing the role of the Secretariat and the overall goals of EPE would be beneficial to helping partners like the United Way to see how they can best align with that work. When the relationship with the United Way was started, an Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was created, but it was largely surface level (covering space, utilities, resources, etc) and did not contain many of the recommended components in a partnership agreement that would help ensure an effective relationship such as communication, conflict resolution, and roles and responsibilities.

With the funding agreement coming up for renewal, it is an opportune time to update the MOU to enhance and clarify the relationship. These roles and responsibilities could then be included in an updated MOU. Although it may be possible to pursue alternative fiscal agent options in the future, the majority of those interviewed agreed that the relationship has largely been beneficial, outweighing any negatives.

### **EPE Stewardship Round Table**

The SRT would also benefit from a review of their role in supporting EPE. Based on the experiences of those interviewed, the role of the SRT was described inconsistently, illustrating that role clarity is an existing challenge for them. Generally, the SRT was seen as a necessary component of EPE, but many felt their potential was not being maximized and that clear roles and responsibilities would be beneficial.

Although seen by many as a central governing body for EPE, several of those who have been with EPE from the beginning mentioned that this was not its original intention, which was to act as one of several tables with a specific purpose to bring stakeholders together. Over time, however, the SRT has taken on some aspects of being a governance body while leaving other aspects to the Secretariat or the United Way, which has caused



several people to question where responsibility lies for choosing and prioritizing work and other key decision making responsibilities. Another challenge associated with the SRT is that they are a large body, with some interviewees commenting on the difficulty of being able to engage with all members due to the size of the group. This is in contrast to the previously identified issue of the SRT possibly not having enough diversity of representation, particularly from those with lived experience.

Regarding decision making power, SRT could potentially focus on systems and policy conversations only to help determine priorities and focus areas for EPE and the Secretariat. The benefit of this option would be that the SRT would not have to change dramatically from the current model and instead simply streamline their efforts. Although it was agreed that the SRT should have the ability to weigh in on decisions regarding priorities, many of those interviewed feel that the SRT is better suited to convening partners and acting as backbone support for the Secretariat and other partners via their connections and advocating for the EPE within their own organizations.

In terms of potential roles for the SRT moving forward, there are several components of EPE that the SRT can be effective in. When asked what support from the SRT would look like in an ideal situation, responses could generally be categorized under two main areas.

- The SRT could act as the source of organizational experts and champions that could help transform ideas and strategies into tangible actions with identified partners and resources.
- The SRT can support EPE via its convening abilities and utilizing the connections of each member to elevate this work through advocacy and promotion while ensuring that partners are able to effectively work together. As noted earlier, there are a number of challenges or roadblocks that can stall or delay this work and the SRT can play an important role as champions to help push work forward from within their own organizations.

As mentioned, the SRT may be lacking in diversity of representation, particularly from those with lived experiences. In order to best leverage their role as experts and champions, they will need to likely expand their ranks and have more involvement from a larger pool of stakeholder groups.

One possible solution is to have that pool of experts or champions be divided further based on area of interest or expertise. Doing so would help streamline the process of engagement between the Secretariat and SRT when they are seeking input or guidance on a particular issue or problem while also allowing for involvement from additional voices on the SRT. Additionally, this model would provide opportunities for each sub-group to have more involvement in supporting particular Game Changers, shaping actions, and assessing progress.

Despite the challenges around role clarity and decision making, those working within EPE have noted the SRT has provided meaningful support for the initiative. One such example was the SRT helping the Secretariat pivot from the original Road Map to focusing on fewer Game Changers when capacity and limited resources were identified as roadblocks. Another area they have helped EPE is in their work to add more diversity to the SRT, though the challenges and shortfalls mentioned previously still exist and more work can be done to improve on those identified gaps. It was noted that the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic likely has had an impact on the SRT's ability to expand and diversify. Another challenge related to the COVID-19 pandemic is the resulting budgetary concerns facing many organizations, making it difficult to focus efforts on EPE and its work.

### **The City of Edmonton**

During the first five years of EPE, the City of Edmonton has played a pivotal role in this work as both a primary funder and lead on many of the original EPE Road Map actions. As the initiative has evolved and now plans for the future, it is now time for the City of Edmonton to review how it can best support the initiative moving forward. Originally, many pieces of the City's work were included under EPE and it will be important for the City to continue with projects related to poverty under the City's jurisdiction. However, the need for EPE to differentiate itself from the poverty work of other organizations, including the City of Edmonton, is essential. As the EPE Secretariat focuses more on systemic issues and seeking partners to push that work forward when needed, the City, like other partners, may be most effective in this role as well, rather than being a major focus of EPE.

In addition to being a partner and convener like others on the SRT, the City of Edmonton is the primary funder and has an obligation to hold EPE accountable for its work. As mentioned, EPE does not have a clear governance structure meaning it can be seen to lack accountability both in terms of measurement and reporting requirements. The City of Edmonton could adopt a larger role within EPE's Investment Collective and act as an agent EPE reports outcome progress and measures to in order to maintain accountability.

### **3.10 FUTURE DIRECTION**

As EPE continues, it will be crucial for the initiative to prioritize work that will have the greatest potential impact on Edmonton's poverty while accommodating EPE's budget and resources. A deeper review of EPE expenditures may be warranted in order to find potential spending efficiencies if EPE wishes to expand its scope. Overall, there was agreement that EPE would be most effective by concentrating on fewer actions that are strategically prioritized. For the Roadmap itself, there was some general agreement that the existing Roadmap does not necessarily need to be abandoned, but instead be reviewed with a lens for what has gained traction or has the potential for real momentum. By keeping the Roadmap and updating it as needed, actions are not forgotten, but can be selected as a priority depending on which specific actions may be more appropriate at the time. Regardless of the direction EPE moves in, there was an overwhelming consensus that EPE should be unique and not attempt to duplicate the efforts of other organizations who may be better positioned to do certain work.

### **3.11 CURRENT & FUTURE CHALLENGES**

EPE as an initiative is continuously growing in terms of establishing itself within poverty reduction efforts and engaging with other partners. During this growth, however, the EPE initiative has experienced a number of challenges and will continue to do so. Governance and role clarity are a primary concern for the initiative, but other roadblocks may impact EPE's potential impact and the COVID-19 pandemic has only complicated things further. EPE will likely continue to face a number of challenges in furthering its poverty reduction work, some of which are discussed below.

**Current and Future Capacity**

Although the EPE Secretariat is able to shift the scope of their work to focus on fewer priorities, capacity is still seen as an issue with those interviewed as the Secretariat's small number of staff ensures an expected capacity for the foreseeable future, which may dictate the scope of their work. The EPE Secretariat has commented that what they prioritize in terms of Game Changers and their related pieces of work is heavily dependent on current and expected capacity and resources. The Secretariat has commented that an increased budget would be beneficial in allowing them to broaden their scope, which could be used to hire additional experts who could be dedicated to particular issues. However, a more significant review focused on expenditures would be required first. In the meantime, the Secretariat believes they can effectively continue momentum on their focus areas within current resources and believe they are able to shift priorities if the need arises.

**Jurisdictional Limitations**

One of the central challenges facing EPE, particularly in their work on systemic poverty is that many policies and other critical pieces of work fall outside of the jurisdiction of the City of Edmonton. This means that although EPE can identify and propose a number of strategies or solutions, putting them into action would require investment and involvement from other orders of Government, especially the province of Alberta, which up until now has had limited involvement with EPE. Another complexity is that poverty reduction is an initiative that overlaps across several ministries making the required collaboration and participation more complex.

EPE will also need to be prepared for potential shifts in focus on poverty reduction as a result of elections at multiple levels of government. Both municipal and provincial elections can often bring a shift in priorities and EPE will need to build their future strategy to accommodate possible changes. There may be some concern from those within EPE that the initiative may not receive as much support in the future, but it will be critical for EPE to remain resilient and advocate for this critical work to support equity for all Edmontonians.

## 4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

The EndPovertyEdmonton initiative was created with a vision of ending poverty in a generation and a Road Map was developed with a number of actions to help achieve that vision. In evaluating EPE and the implementation and progress of the EPE Road Map, several themes have been revealed that would indicate that although the initiative has progressed in a number of ways, there have also been challenges, which may have prevented it from having as much impact as originally intended.

To ensure that EPE continues to make progress and one day have long-term impacts on Edmonton's poverty, the initiative will need to take steps to be as effective and efficient as possible and this will require addressing some of the themes discussed in this evaluation. The following are a list of recommendations for making improvements to EPE as this work moves forward.

**Recommendation 1:** Set clear priorities by prioritizing systems and policy efforts that are unique from the programs and services offered by other poverty reduction partners and stakeholders and then leverage the work of those partners to have increased collective impact at a systems level.

**Recommendation 2:** Strengthen EPE's evaluation methods to better track and measure progress, which will be critical to transparency and accountability.

**Recommendation 3:** Review EPE's governance structure to clarify roles and responsibilities between the various structures within EPE, including both the Secretariat and the Stewardship Roundtable who has been acting as a governing body.

**Recommendation 4:** Ensure the new funding agreement with the United Way clearly defines roles, responsibilities and accountabilities.

**Recommendation 5:** Find a place in the initiative to include people with lived experience.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

EPE has and will likely continue to face various challenges related to jurisdiction, measuring and attributing impact, and being able to convene all of the right partners. That being said, the initiative has made good progress on several significant pieces of work, including living wage policies, early care and learning efforts, Reconciliation work, and other projects still underway. Though impacts may still be a ways out, those involved in the work believe that there is momentum and that it may only be a matter of time before Edmonton is seen as a leading practice in poverty reduction efforts.

Overall, the EPE initiative has experienced growing pains in finding its identity during its initial five years, but has shown signs of momentum, even during the pandemic, and many of those interviewed stressed the importance of not letting these important pieces of work fall through the cracks. During these past five years, numerous relationships have been built both within and outside of Edmonton and several pieces of work directly address identified gaps in poverty reduction efforts. A major risk of ending this work is that EPE has become ingrained in a number of major relationships or pieces of work and that this work may suffer or even stop completely if EPE ceases to exist. Letting these relationships falter could impact the level of trust other organizations working in these fields have in the City of Edmonton.

## APPENDIX A: EPE ROAD MAP ACTIONS & LEADS

Action	Lead	Status
1. Design and plan a new Indigenous culture and wellness centre	City of Edmonton/Citizen Services/SD	In progress
2. Create spaces, events and opportunities to show and grow the talents of Indigenous Edmontonians.	Citizen Services/SD	In progress
3. Review of City Programs using an Indigenous lens.	Citizen Services/SD	Deferred
4. Launch a Community Witness Program	Citizen Services/SD	In progress
5. Host an annual city-wide Day of Dignity to recognize and honour human rights and dignity for all.	Citizen Services (in partnership)	In progress
6. Provide opportunities and support to vulnerable populations to participate in all City committees.	Office of City Clerk	Initiated
7. Support and promote training opportunities to build understanding and end stigmatization between vulnerable people and law enforcement personnel.	Citizen Services (w/ETS)	In progress
8. Review and amendment of City policies and bylaws for minor infractions.	EPS	Completed
9. Implement a social lab project to generate ideas and test prototypes to end racism.	EPE/ Edmonton Community Foundation	Deferred
10. Work with local Indigenous and refugee youth on an anti-racism public awareness and action campaign.	EPE	Deferred
11. Expand intercultural competency, anti-racism and historic trauma training as mandatory for City staff.	Employee Services/ SD	Deferred
12. Incentivize business, educational institutions and not-for-profit employers to implement intercultural competency and anti-racism training.	EPE	Deferred
13. Implement the "1,000 Families" initiative in five Edmonton communities.	United Way	Deferred
14. Draft a living wage policy for all City of Edmonton staff and contracted services to be approved by City Council.	Financial and Corporate Services	In progress
15. Actively encourage local employers in all sectors to learn about and implement living wage policies.	EPE	In progress
16. Expand the spectrum of financial empowerment programs.	Citizen Services/SD	In progress
17. Initiate a community dialogue to remove systemic barriers and improve coordination of training and employment opportunities.	EPE	Deferred

18. Implement a low-income transit pass at 60% discount for eligible low income transit customers.	City Operations	In progress
19. Provide free passes for agencies to distribute to vulnerable youths and adults.	Citizen Services/SD	Complete
20. Feasibility study on free transit to children 12 years and under.	City Operations	Complete
21. Evaluate ETS Night Owl services and expand/improve services as appropriate for shift workers.	City Operations	Deferred
22. Community Bridge Program	Bissel Centre	In progress
23. Revisit and renew affordable housing agreements with other orders of government, and initiate a Centre of Excellence for social housing.	Citizen Services/SD	In progress
24. Research leading practices on housing design and innovation and an awareness campaign on the right to affordable housing.	Citizen Services/SD	In progress
25. Resource the Edmonton Mental Health Steering Committee to implement coordinated mental health action plan.	Citizen Services and United Way (chairs)	Deferred
26. Advance partnerships to support the implementation of the Edmonton Suicide Prevention Strategy and the Managed Alcohol Program.	Citizen Services/SD	In progress
27. Advocate to increase funding and access to mental health services including the expansion of full service hours for multi-disciplinary mental health services.	Edmonton Mental Health Steering Committee	Deferred
28. Apply an integrated poverty lens to guide decision-making and operations in the City of Edmonton.	Citizen Services/SD	Complete
29. Resource a new Early Learning and Care Steering Committee to guide the implementation of an integrated system and strategy for ELC in Edmonton	EPE/United Way	In progress
30. Resource and grow the All in for Youth wrap-around initiative in five school sites.	Citizen Services/ United Way/ REACH	Separated out from EPE
31. Establish a Community Development Corporation to invest in affordable housing and community economic development.	CDC	Separately funded
32. Advance the development and stability of local food system providers through access to appropriate business skill training, mentoring, and capital sources (both for start-up and to scale).	EPE	Deferred
33. Support ongoing work and facilitate discussion amongst Edmonton's and Alberta's financial systems players, business support agencies and post-secondary institutions to collectively address barriers faced by low income Edmontonians when starting or	EPE	Deferred



growing their own businesses.		
34. Create a "Design by Doing" action lab to catalyze grassroots community-led projects as prototypes to end poverty.	EPE	Deferred
35. Produce participation toolkits that enable different groups (i.e. faith communities, business sector, community leagues, etc.) to engage and empower them to action. <sup>35</sup> .	EPE	Deferred

## RESOURCES

Canada Without Poverty 2018, *2017 Poverty progress profiles*.

<<http://www.cwp-csp.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/2017-Poverty-Progress-Profiles318.pdf>>

Canada Without Poverty 2015, *A true reconciliation: close the poverty gap*.

<<https://cwp-csp.ca/2015/06/a-true-reconciliation-close-the-poverty-gap/>>

GSRDC Applied Knowledge Services 2016, *Poverty and inequality topic guide*.

<<https://gsdrc.org/topic-guides/poverty-and-inequality/>>

Raphael, D 2020, 'Anti Poverty Strategies and Programs' in *Poverty in Canada, Third Edition Implications for Health and Quality of Life*

The Canadian Poverty Institute 2020, *The Employment Impact of Covid-19 on Canada's Equity Seeking Workforce*.

<<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/595d068b5016e12979fb11af/t/5efa00ea20e6720ff3d16b8b/1593442542289/Vulnerability+Assessment+-+Employment+-+Canada+and+Provinces.pdf>>