



Project Insights Report

Future City Builders



PARTNERS

Evergreen Brick Works



LOCATIONS

Across Canada



INVESTMENT

\$200,037



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Executive Summary

Young people face challenges entering the labour market – getting stuck in low-skill, low-wage jobs with few opportunities for advancement. This is especially true for young people who are immigrants, are racialized, have a disability or are 2SLGBTQ. The widespread closures that accompanied COVID-19 hit young people particularly hard and there are concerns about how this period will scar young people over the longer term.

Future City Builders was a four-month program that supported youth to work collaboratively to develop real-world solutions for healthier and more equitable cities. By engaging in collaborative projects, participants were expected to gain knowledge and skills that made them more employable, better able to create their own employment opportunities, and use their newly developed skills throughout their career and life to contribute to sustainable cities.

Future City Builders enrolled 112 participants across 5 virtual cohorts in Toronto, Winnipeg, Edmonton, Kitchener-Waterloo area and New Brunswick.

The project encourages decision-makers to consider building-in cooperative, project-based skill building and networking opportunities into programs and funding frameworks, and encourages longer time horizons to understand the impact of these types of initiatives on the career trajectories of young people.

KEY INSIGHTS

- 1 Competitive program elements like pitches and picking winners can inadvertently challenge the effort to create supportive and inclusive environments that foster teamwork and collective problem-solving.
- 2 80.6% of post-program survey respondents reported that they felt better prepared for the workforce immediately upon completing Future City Builders.
- 3 Systems and design thinking offer young people a valuable framework for understanding the broader systems and structures that contribute to community challenges, as well as the need to address power imbalances and center Indigenous perspectives.

▶ The Issue

Young people often end up in a difficult workforce cycle: lack of job experience keeps them from meaningful work. They accept lower-skill positions and underpaid work because they have to, but in those positions they don't get the "right" experience and have difficulty transitioning to roles that are more desirable, that leverage their education and experiences and cultivates their potential. Youth who are immigrants, are racialized, have a disability or are 2SLGBTQ face even more barriers getting out of this cycle.

Young workers are also the last hired and the first fired or laid off – a trend confirmed with the widespread job loss experienced by young people from COVID-19 measures. [Research](#) shows that graduating into a recession has long-term consequences for young people, and that high youth unemployment during a recession risks the well-being and social inclusion of that generation. The long term impacts of the pandemic on young people's careers is cause for concern.

The pandemic also impacted the delivery of skills development programs for youth, many of whom relied on in-person services. Organizations offering these programs needed to quickly pivot their programming and pilot virtual delivery to be able to counter the devastating impacts of widespread closures on young people.



What We Investigated

This project tested the virtual delivery of an existing in-person program called Future City Builders that began in 2018.

Future City Builders is a four-month program that supports youth ages 18 to 29 to work collaboratively to develop real-world solutions for healthier and more equitable cities.

Program participants work in teams and pitch their ideas to a panel of judges. The winning team receives \$5,000 in seed funding to work through the ideation and prototyping phases of their project.

Project participants are expected to come away from the project with knowledge and skills in areas that have been identified as key to the future of work, including design and systems thinking, project development and pitching, grant applications, developing and sharing personalized land acknowledgments, resume building, job searching, and digital fluency.

The goal of Future City Builders is to empower youth with the knowledge, skills, and experience to improve the health of their cities. As a result of the program, youth are more employable, better able to create their own employment opportunities, and can use their newly developed skills throughout their career and life to contribute to sustainable cities.

The project was testing several ideas, including the effectiveness of virtual program delivery, the value of incorporating design and systems thinking, the importance of networking and community engagement, and the impact of the Future City Builders program on participants' skills and career vision.

Virtual cohorts of Future City Builders were held in Toronto, Winnipeg, Edmonton, Kitchener-Waterloo area and New Brunswick.

✔ What We're Learning

The program enrolled 112 participants across the 5 virtual cohorts. 80.6% of post-program survey respondents reported that they felt better prepared for the workforce immediately upon completing Future City Builders.

Longer term outcomes for the full Future City Builders program noted:

- 83.9% of program alumni surveyed reported that their participation in Future City Builders had helped them to work well in teams.
- 67.7% said they felt their participation in Future City Builders had provided them with opportunities to network and build relationships with professionals in their community.

Implementation insights that support program improvement include:

- **Rethinking competition.** Participants expressed a desire for less competition and more collaboration and community engagement. This highlights the need to create a supportive and inclusive environment that fosters teamwork and collective problem-solving.
- **Systems and design thinking.** The program successfully introduced design thinking and systems thinking frameworks to participants, allowing them to explore issues and solutions from the perspective of the communities they were engaging with. This approach helped participants develop a deeper understanding of complex problems and informed their future career choices.
- **Outcomes of networking extend beyond the program.** The program provided opportunities for participants to network and build relationships with professionals in their communities. In alumni reflections, networking not only increased participants' comfort in engaging with professionals but also opened doors for future career opportunities.

Program elements to increase equity. Some participants had to drop out because scheduling conflicted with their jobs, or they had unreliable internet connection. Some form of income support and cost reimbursement would have decreased drop out, while a suite of wrap-around supports or referrals could help participants address barriers outside the program impacting their success. Ideas were also shared in how to modify the project development process itself to put the communities most impacted by challenges in the driver seat.

★ Why It Matters

Success in the workplace is increasingly linked to a set of core skills that are remarkably similar across sectors and occupations – things that project-based collaborative programming can help to develop.

Policymakers can use these findings to inform the development of effective policies and programs that address the needs and aspirations of youth, including funding organizations to deliver locally-based skill development programs focusing on core skills like teamwork, partnership development and problem-solving.



The findings also emphasize the value of incorporating systems thinking and design thinking into youth programs. Policymakers can explore ways to integrate these approaches into educational curricula and workforce development initiatives to equip youth with the skills needed to address complex community challenges.

State of Skills:

Enhancing Career Prospects and Well-Being for Canadian Youth

Focus on early career guidance programs to introduce youth to a range of career paths, empowering them to make informed decisions with a strong emphasis on inclusivity and accessibility.

[Read Thematic Report](#)

Additionally, the insights on the importance of networking, community engagement, and diversity, equity, and inclusion can inform policies and practices that facilitate meaningful connections between youth and professionals, promote inclusive participation, and amplify diverse voices.

By considering and implementing the project findings, policymakers and practitioners can better support youth in their efforts to contribute to positive community change and become workforce-ready, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and empowered generation.

Have questions about our work? Do you need access to a report in English or French? Please contact communications@fsc-ccf.ca.

How to Cite This Report

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