



# Anchor YorkU

An Anchor Institution & Community Benefits  
Framework



## Introduction

York University is a comprehensive, diverse university—a leading organization and key driver of social and economic development within the three geographical communities its campuses are located within and shares relationships with. As the plans are underway to build and open a new campus in Markham, and the Keele and Glendon campuses continue to grow, York University is committed to recognizing and respecting the mutual support and reciprocity that exists between the university and the community. We see ourselves as contributing to the surrounding neighbourhoods with the goal of promoting and advancing local sustainability in its broadest sense. Recognizing York in an anchor role requires an institutional outlook that extends beyond solely serving ourselves, but one that requires the institution to also hold the interests of the surrounding communities as our own.

This document was created to acknowledge and outline York's significant role within the broader communities of which we are a part, through the adoption of an anchor institution framework. Created by the Human Rights and Social Justice Working Group, under the President's Sustainability Council, this framework will define "anchor institution", as well as establish four target areas as the foundation of the framework at York University. These target areas are: Employment, Engagement, Infrastructure and Social Procurement, and will be discussed in the context of current and future initiatives, and the potential beneficiaries of these targets will be established. This document concludes with suggested next steps in order to implement specific objectives to realize this framework.

Universities are complex organizations. We acknowledge that when thinking of sustainability and the realities of financial and resource management, the struggle to maximize development opportunities along with respecting broader community interests will create tension. It is the goal of this framework to spark a dynamic discourse around the growing development of mutually favourable community benefits. This approach will help propel York to the forefront of progressive and innovative approaches to sustainability among universities worldwide and enhance York's reputation as a sustainability leader.

## Defining Anchor Institutions

Canada is increasingly becoming defined by rising levels of income inequality and decreased access to wealth. In 2013, 4.65 million Canadians were living on incomes that were, on average, one third below the poverty line—a poverty gap that Statistics Canada estimates at a value of 16.9 billion dollars<sup>1</sup>. Within Toronto specifically, income inequality is particularly prevalent, as the city has the second largest income inequality gap in the country. Without action, an estimated 60 percent of Toronto neighbourhoods will be classified as low and very low income communities by 2025<sup>2</sup>. An “anchor institution” approach is an encouraging, proactive response to counter growing inequality through building community capacity, community wealth and localized economic opportunity<sup>3</sup>.

Anchor institutions are defined as “entities such as colleges and universities, hospitals, military bases and local business that are deeply embedded in a community and could not easily move elsewhere (Holden, 2013 p. 2). Such institutions share an “interdependent relationship with their communities, and are important players in community e @ Š M M

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greater overall focus on social justice have found to have significantly higher ratings of environmental quality (as measured by concentrations of air and water pollutants and access to clean water and sanitation) than those with fewer rights, civil liberties, lower income distribution and literacy levels<sup>9</sup>. Also significant, greater inequalities in the distribution of privilege and power in society were found to be

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ACE program, within the Faculty of Education. ACE is an initiative to increase access to post-secondary education for local high school students. They enroll in an introductory university course and earn a co-op credit for their Ontario secondary school diploma by working in various work settings on campus. They receive credit towards an undergraduate degree—while simultaneously fostering the academic skills necessary for success within post-secondary education.

Expanding local employment opportunities to qualified local residents is another pathway towards the target of employment. Institutionally, the Human Resources department employs a Diversity and Inclusion Consultant to monitor and attract a diversified talent pool. This important role and work continues to evolve. Due to the size of the York University workforce, opportunities exist to integrate a community hiring strategy within its human resource requirements. Targeted hiring, with a benchmark set of eligible employees from surrounding postal codes, would contribute jobs that could have a significant impact at the community level.

It could also be considered that emerging enterprises could be supported to develop locally to meet the demand of institutional need. For example, cooperatives emerged in a Cleveland community near a hospital, providing needed services such as laundry, while creating jobs for local workers with a reliable market<sup>12</sup>.

## 2. Engagement

York University and its surrounding communities share an intrinsic, reciprocal relationship. While the focus is often on what the university has to offer the community, there must also be an acknowledgement of the many resources that York gains from the community which strengthen and benefit the existing learning environment provided by York (i.e. experiential education opportunities and field based practicums for students, research opportunities for students/faculty). The future of the university and communities are intertwined, emphasizing the importance of engagement within this anchor institution and community benefits framework.

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<sup>12</sup> Serang, F., Thompson, J. P., & Howard, T. (2013). The anchor mission: Leveraging the power of anchor institutions to build community wealth. College Park, MD: Democracy Collaborative. Retrieved from <http://community-wealth.org/sites/clone.community-wealth.org/files/downloads/UH-composite-online.pdf>



One of the opportunities for civic engagement included within this framework is increasing access to community use of university space, a need that has been frequently voiced by the community. There have been a number of recommendations from the President's Sustainability Council that merit being integrated into this target of the framework. For example, recommendation 17 aims to "Improve access to York facilities such as the library system, buildings, sports complexes and laboratories. In particular, a number of days each year should be designated as 'community use days'." At present, community members are able to access the library system on a day-use basis and purchase community memberships for athletic/fitness facilities. Nevertheless, progress to increase community use of university space (particularly among smaller external community groups) has been slow and sometimes impeded by negative perceptions

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beneficial avenue to increased engagement for businesses within York Lanes and the community. The new subway is anticipated to increase opportunities for community engagement

Engagement opens opportunities to strengthen both the university and the resident communities. The York-TD Community Engagement Centre remains a key initiative of York towards supporting engagement with the local community

### 3. Neighbourhood Building: Developing physical, social and environmental infrastructure.

York has recognized the importance of infrastructure in the past. The 2008-2009 President's Sustainability Council annual report outlined York's role to maintain, promote and develop social, physical and environmental infrastructure. The role would also require a commitment to protect local ecosystems within the communities York inhabits, as well as building social connections, community collaborations and social supports to alleviate the inequities and injustice as they currently exist within the surrounding Black Creek/Jane Finch Community, thereby contributing to thriving, sustainable neighbourhoods<sup>13</sup>.

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ethics states that York will “encourage suppliers to consider sustainability and social responsibility in

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terms of the well-articulated priorities identified in the plan relating to social equity, as well as education and skills.

However, the primary focus of this framework, and the resulting impact, is envisioned to be primarily with the Black Creek/Jane Finch community—the community surrounding the York University Keele Campus where York University was first established almost 60 years ago. Jane-Finch is a community with substantial human assets and strong aspirations for positive change, but the existing shortage of resources has continually acted as a barrier to facilitate this change<sup>20</sup>. Social injustices and inequity are particularly prominent within this neighbourhood, as economic opportunities have been unable to keep pace with the needs of the co

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