



UNIVERSITY OF  
TORONTO

SCHOOL  
OF CITIES 

# ANNUAL REPORT

Narrative highlights from the School of Cities  
JULY 1, 2023 – JUNE 30, 2024



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The School of Cities (SofC) is a unique multidisciplinary hub for urban research, education, and engagement both across the University of Toronto and between the University and urban communities, researchers, policymakers, and activists.

This year, SofC experienced considerable growth in its staff contingent and capacity. As a result, we were able to grow the volume of our outputs, deepen our foci, and strengthen our networks and partnerships.

Application numbers and calibre grew considerably for our courses and programs – including for half a dozen graduate seminars, our data science summer internship, our Capstone course, and our Visiting Experts program.

We hosted several high profile and timely events – including a screening of our film on anti-Black racism in Canadian urban planning, a summit on housing for the City of Toronto, and the launch of a playbook on metropolitan governance – while strengthening the reputation and awareness of established series, including Knowledge Café and our book talk series.



Our research and mapping & data visualization teams had a busy year. Our work on post-pandemic economic recovery of North American downtowns grew in scope and depth, and garnered over one hundred media interviews along the way. Our work on approachable visual representation of complicated urban data put us on the map for our unique approach to telling stories about urban infrastructure and governance in ways that are clear, interactive and imaginative. We distributed grants large and small for work on migration, belonging and thriving amongst a variety of undergraduates, graduate fellows and faculty members; and leveraged research grants of over \$4.7 million for research into climate migration and resilience, housing affordability and innovation, post-pandemic economic recovery amongst women, and youth and in downtowns, among other topics.

The School of Cities continues to meet and build on its mandate to bring urban-focused research, teaching and knowledge mobilization to students, faculty, policymakers and communities and into the public debate and conversation. Below is a selection of highlights from our work during this reporting period (July 1, 2023-June 30, 2024). The aim in this narrative report is to reflect the impact, range and variety of our work through examples and highlights. It is not comprehensive or complete.



# RESEARCH IMPACT

The School of Cities undertook and funded significant amounts and types of research this year. There was a focus on our two themes of climate & justice and migration, belonging & thriving, but ongoing research continued into areas of particular strength amongst our research team and/or urgency in urban-related fields – including but not limited to housing, post-pandemic recovery, and governance structures.

Our **City Research Insights** (CRI) appear quarterly and bring in-depth team research from across the university to more public and policy-oriented audiences. This year we published CRIs on urban parks, climate resilience, and rainwater harvesting, and based on research conducted in Mexico City, Canada, and South East Asia.

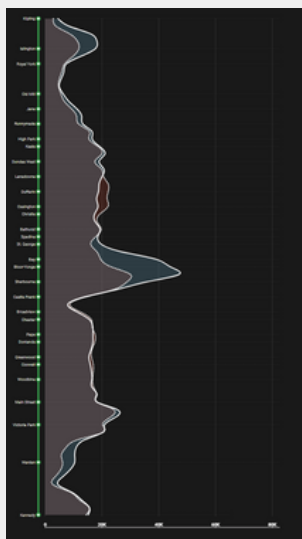
During the period of this report, our **downtown recovery project** entered its 4th year of analyzing economic activity and post-pandemic recovery in North American cities using mobile phone data. The team expanded the range and depth of their analysis this year, using their findings to draw lessons about recovery by building type, according to definitions of ‘downtown’, and as a result of proximity to public transit. These new angles, combined with the cumulative insights offered by the original and ongoing data analysis, saw the work grow in reach – enquiries from journalists, academics, policymakers and municipal leaders and staff continued to grow, seeking insight into the data methods, outputs and findings. During this year, the work was cited in more than 200 news stories across U.S. and Canadian media outlets.

## Where the School of Cities has been featured

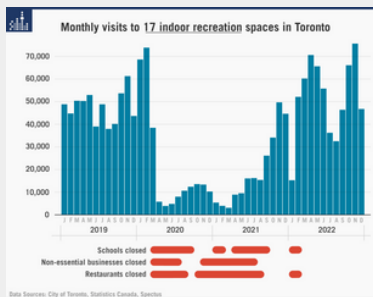
The New York Times	Canadian Press	University of Toronto News	Canadian Architect	Fox 9	The Real Deal
The Wall Street Journal	Hawai'i Public Radio	CTV News Toronto	Penticton Herald	KSDK	EurekaAlert!
Washington Post	Las Vegas Sun	Chicago Business Journal	CityNews Toronto	The Business Journals	SAP Center
BBC News	Las Vegas Review-Journal	Milwaukee Journal Sentinel	24SSports	The Heartlander	cleveland.com
Financial Post	Houston Business Journal	Patch	The Deep Dive	RCR Wireless News	NeoTrans Blog
Toronto Star	San Francisco Examiner	CHCH	The Sun	CBC Lite	Sports Business Journal
The Globe and Mail	The Baltimore Sun	KSL	Oregon Capital Insider	The Good Men Project	The Christian Science Monitor
National Post	Axios	Newstalk 1010 iHeart Radio	California Globe	Daily Camera	Any Uak Media
CBC	The Associated Press	Zoomer Radio	Powerline	IPE Real Assets	BCIT News
CTV News	NPR	The Hill Times	The Messenger News	Cincinnati Enquirer	Casino
Global News	Montreal Gazette	MENAFN	Yale Insights	Ontario Construction News	KETV
Fox News	Business Insider	UNLV	gmtoday	CTV News (Vancouver)	StarTribune
Yahoo News	SFist	Cincinnati Business Courier	Planetizen	The Free Press	San Francisco Chronicle
Yahoo Finance Canada	City News	Racket	Governing	Baltimore Business Journal	GlobeSt.com
NBC Bay Area	Vox	Floor Focus	GV Wire	Money Talks News	Greater Greater Washington
Fast Company	Politico	Hoodline	The Bhrrat Express News	KARE 11	SiliconValley.com
CBS News	Brookings	NewGeography	The Hour	KSBY	
The Guardian	Cision	Second Wave Michigan	WDAY	ConstructConnect	

The Mapping & Data Visualization team at the School of Cities grew in strength and numbers this year. The team, led by our Senior Research Associate, has a robust capacity to identify, access and represent underused or complex sets of publicly-available data that tell us stories, big and small, about how cities work, what residents want and require, how budgets are (mis)allocated, and more. Striking, approachable, and engaging maps and charts tell the stories and explain the numbers in ways that resulted in a lot of clicks and conversation in social media and on our website; media enquiries; and requests for mapping and data viz services from within and outside the university.

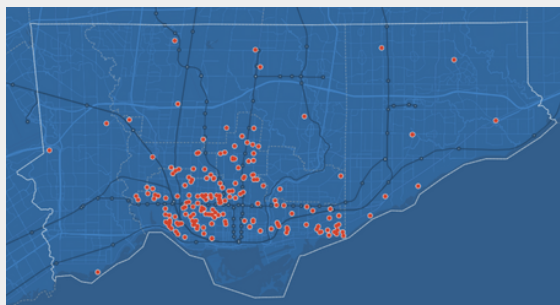
**25 Years of Transit-Oriented Development in Toronto: What Has Changed?**



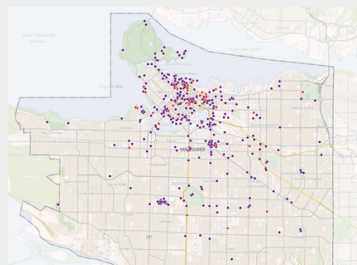
**The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Toronto's parks: Why it matters**



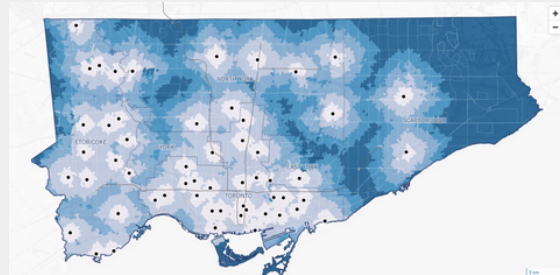
**Reno-ductions: Loss of Gentle Density in Toronto**



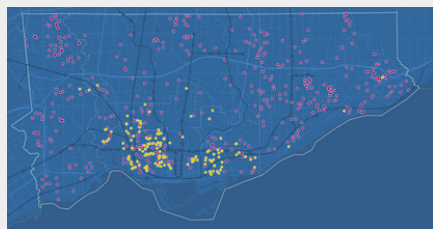
**Vancouver Public Art Map**



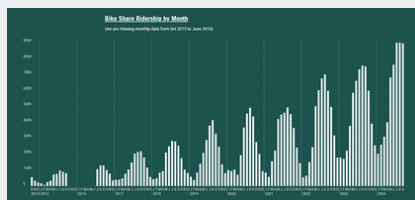
**The Geography of Toronto's Outdoor Skating Rinks**



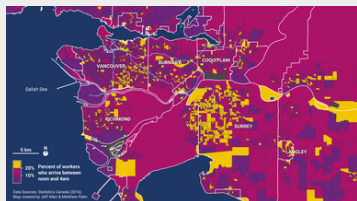
**Tracking Gentle Density in Toronto: Visualizing Building Permit Data From 2013 To 2023**



**Exploring Bike Share Growth in Toronto**



**Transportation Justice for Night and Evening Shift Workers in Canada**



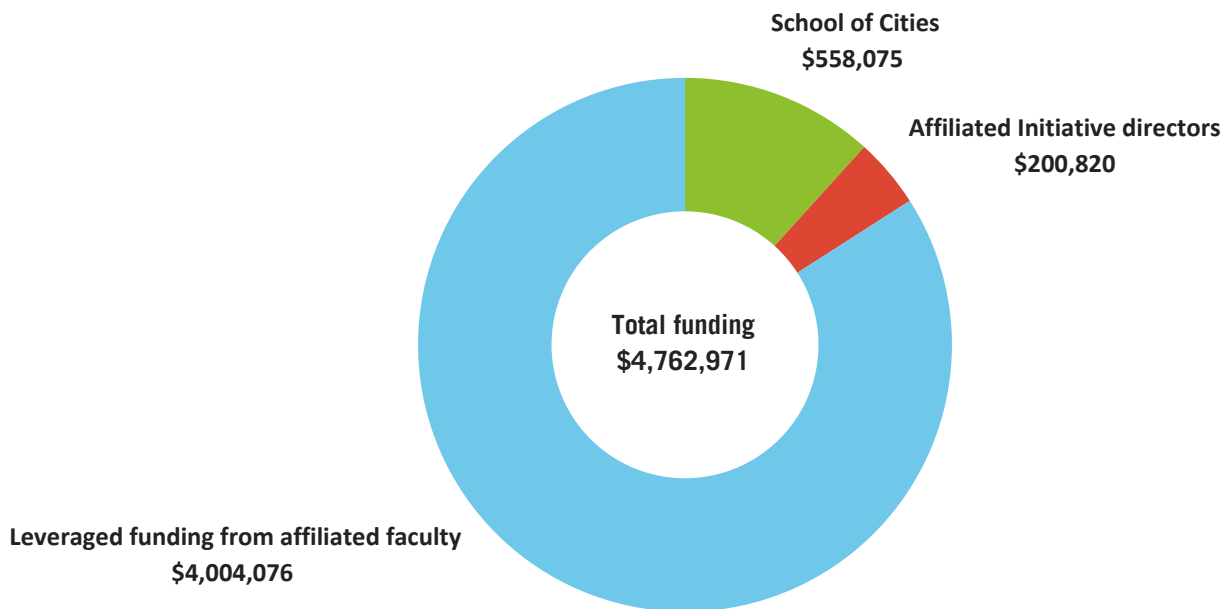
**Analyzing traffic violations on the King Street Transit Priority Corridor in Toronto**



The launch of the **Metropolitan Mindset Playbook** marked an important moment in the conversation about municipal governance in Canada and how it must change and adapt in the face of urgent challenges – such as housing, transit and traffic – that are not limited to the confines of municipal boundaries. The work is also an example of SofC’s capacity for, and commitment to, bringing together experts from within and outside the university, and leveraging knowledge from across sectors and experiences: the work is co-led by Gabriel Eidelman, assistant professor at U of T’s Munk School and Don Iveson, former mayor of Edmonton and current Chair of the Board of Directors of CMHC, and grew out of their collaboration in teaching a SofC graduate seminar course on urban governance in 2023.



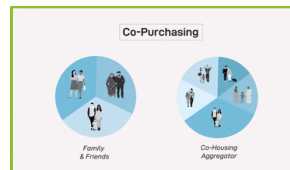
One of the core objectives of the School is to create and foster a research ecosystem that facilitates urban research across disciplines. The research activities of the School of Cities and our affiliated initiative directors, combined with leveraged funding from faculty recipients of the School’s Urban Challenge Grants, secured total external funding exceeding \$4.7 million. This incredible success at winning grants funds critical urban research spanning topics including socially-just housing alternatives; legacies of injustices in Toronto’s transportation infrastructure development; achieving a sustainable built environment; transportation hub air quality sampling; the supply and performance of bikeshare; and exploring student well-being and loneliness in post-secondary settings. These figures represent research activities by researchers from all three campuses, in sociology, biology, engineering, geography, public policy, and public health.



# KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION

Knowledge mobilization is a core principle and practice of the School of Cities. We exist in part to communicate urban experience, data, research, and debate to an audience outside the university, and to bring local and sectoral work and knowledge to campus. This year we continued to grow the avenues and tools through which we do this: launching several engaging animated videos and an impactful feature documentary film; hosting 25 free and publicly-accessible events; launching policy brief and working paper series; releasing monthly blog and data visualization stories on urban phenomena large and small; and alerting an audience of over 22,000 to our outputs and findings through hundreds of social media posts and monthly newsletter engagements.

## Top videos from the School of Cities (linked)



Our three most successful events included a film screening by, for, and about Black urbanists and urban activists; a community exhibition of Capstone and graduate research into local issues affecting cities and their residents; and an academic symposium on greenhouse gas emissions embodied in built housing, infrastructure, and construction. These all shared some traits: they shed light on some of the most urgent debates in urban policy and practice; they involved partnerships between the SofC, U of T and local, not-for-profit and policy partners; and they attracted large and diverse in-person audiences – over 150 attendees each – including faculty, students, policymakers, not-for-profit and municipal staff, and community activists and residents.



**Average attendance per event**

**56**

**Attendance**

**1,416**

**Total registrations**

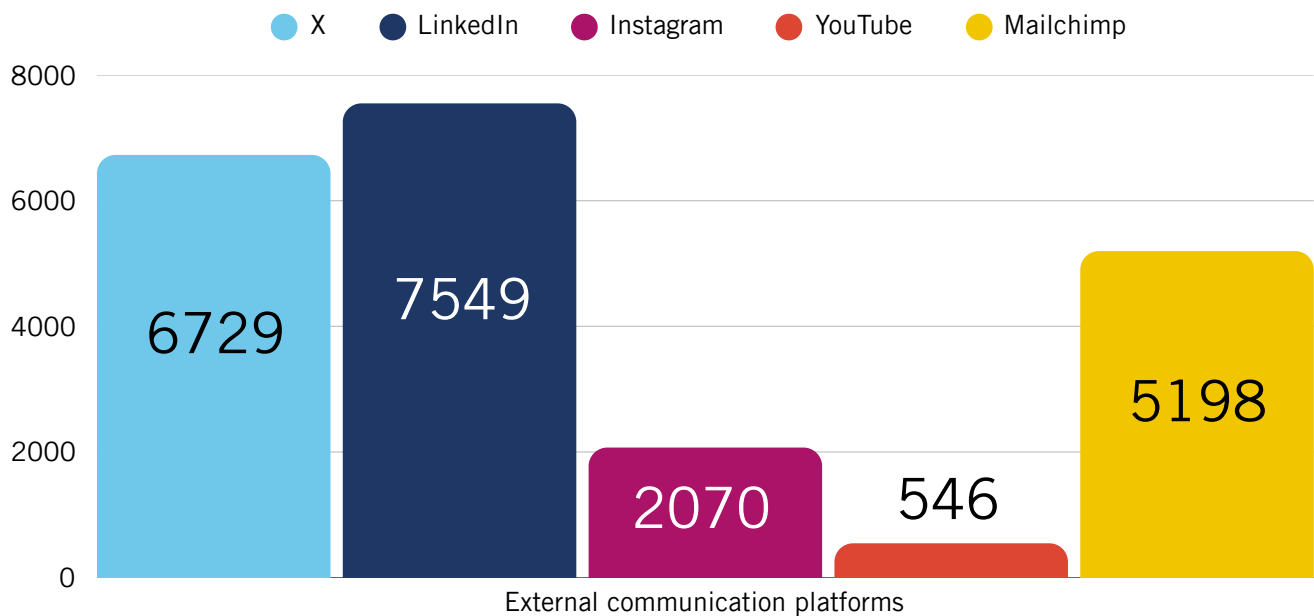
**3,039**

**New newsletter subscribers**

**825**



School of Cities released over 60 knowledge mobilization products this year, in a variety of formats. These were shared with the widest possible audience, including through our very active social media channels and amongst our engaged newsletter and website readerships.

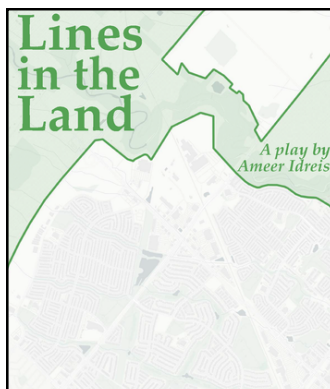
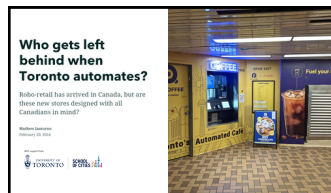
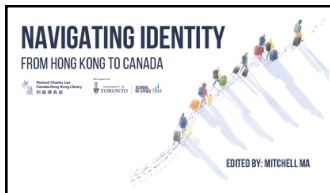


# FUNDING & PARTNERSHIPS

The School of Cities runs multiple annual funding programs, aimed at supporting research expansion and leadership development. We also partner with many urban-focused organizations throughout the city and across the country and globe, including universities, not-for-profits, and community, private and public sector organizations. Some of these are highlighted below in the Training Programs section.

This year we continued to build our four core funding programs, described below. Application numbers for all of them have increased year-over-year, as awareness of the programs continues to spread throughout the university and the urban sector in Toronto and beyond.

We distributed 22 grants to graduate students as part of our **Graduate Fellows** program this year, representing 13 faculties and departments from across all three U of T campuses. The program supports students who are working on urban-focused research projects – be that an independent project or a component of their thesis or dissertation – with an emphasis on supporting the knowledge mobilization of projects of an applied, translational, or policy-oriented nature. This year’s grant recipients used the funds to produce KM tools including a play script, a comic book, an interactive map, a bibliography, a policy brief, a teaching kit, a boardgame, a podcast, a photo essay, a tapestry, and a story map.



During the course of this year, 13 research teams representing 18 U of T departments launched major research projects on the theme of migration, belonging and thriving funded by the School of Cities **Urban Challenge Grants (UCG)** program.

The UCG program funds timely research, knowledge dissemination and community engagement to address emerging research questions, and provides seed funding for pilot studies that could ultimately lead to transformative or high-impact research. Anticipated results of the Urban Challenge grants include research and academic outputs with potential implications for motivating public policy, professional practice change, or community action. Participating researchers work closely with School of Cities staff on ways to maximize the impact of their research through relevant dissemination events – ranging from exhibits, public performance, documentary film production or storytelling to policy briefs and data visualization. This year, from science and engineering to health and the humanities, the research is focused on the attachment to place and community, along with the efforts to belong and express differences.

This year, the School of Cities also funded ten **visiting experts** to join the School for up to a year, to pursue a research or community project, and in return to share their expertise, networks and vision with School and university students and faculty, community and policy initiatives, and members of the media.

Visiting experts are influential practitioners in civil society, the arts, business, media and government; members of the global urban academic community; and emerging leaders in their urban-related sectors. While at the School of Cities they engage in intellectual, cultural and artistic exchange; nurture experimentation and new ideas; and support research, collaboration and knowledge creation across geographies, disciplines and communities. This year's program included 5 visiting professors – experts in public health, urban planning and design, land use ecology, and real estate and community planning. Our Urbanists-in-Residence are experts on, and advocates for, cycling and mobility, community-and human-centered design, and community development for and among Black, Indigenous, and racialized youth. Our Early Career Canadian Urban Leader is deeply embedded in the national movement towards more and stronger community land trusts, and our Canadian Urban Leaders program includes a sitting mayor (of Yellowknife) and two mayoral candidates (for Toronto), who are undertaking research and reflection on complex housing and governance issues in their communities.

SofC also distributed 23 **small grants** this year. These grants of under \$5,000 support teaching and educational initiatives focused on cities and urban studies, and enhance students' learning experience and faculty curricular innovation, art practice, and creative pedagogies. Grants contributed to efforts by faculty, postdocs and students to host symposia and workshops, travel to conferences, and organize events and exhibitions, amongst other research and knowledge mobilization activities. Small grant applications covered a wide array of urban-related work, including access to housing and water, Indigenous urban lives, cycling and ride-share research, Black digital and feminist events, and research into campus food and food co-ops.

Finally, this year the School of Cities also distributed one-time postdoctoral matching grants to eight faculty supervisors for the funding of postdoctoral fellows at U of T. Proposals for postdoctoral matching funds were assessed by program staff and the Director, based on research alignment with our key themes of climate justice and belonging, migration and thriving. With nearly \$300,000 in grants, we aimed to lift the work of emerging scholars and advance the research of our colleagues across disciplines, including in engineering, sociology, theatre and performance studies, biology, public health, psychology, and statistics.

Among our signature external partnerships is one with the Canadian Urban Institute. Together we launched the inaugural Annual Summit on the State of Canada's Cities, on November 20, 2023 in Ottawa. The conference drew hundreds of federal and provincial policy leaders, city managers from across the country, private sector CEOs, community-builders, Indigenous leaders, and researchers to engage in dialogue on the state of our cities, equitable development, opportunities for growth, and governance challenges.



# TRAINING PROGRAMS

Through a series of undergraduate, graduate, leadership and community-focused training programs, the School of Cities is building capacity in the next generation and up-skilling the existing one.

Undergraduate students have the opportunity to hone their nascent skills in data science through our **Urban Data Science Corps (UDSC)** summer internship program, where this year we offered 12 students, out of an applicant pool of 172, a place in our intensive three-day urban data bootcamp, followed by a paid 12 week placement with a public or not-for-profit organization working on a real world data science challenge.

This year over 100 undergraduate students applied to our **Multidisciplinary Urban Capstone Project (MUCP)**, and 93 completed the full-year academic course, whereby they are placed in multidisciplinary teams and matched with a community client that has identified an existing urban challenge that they would like the students to consult on. Over the course of the academic year, teams research, propose, and ultimately prototype an intervention to address this challenge.

Both of these undergraduate training opportunities are open to students from any discipline or campus. Both present unique opportunities to work with specialized urban data; troubleshoot urban problems and collaboratively devise urban solutions; and work across disciplines and in real urban-focused offices and organizations.

This year, graduate students from across disciplines and campuses could choose from six **Multidisciplinary Urban Graduate Seminars (MUGS)** supported by the School of Cities and delivered through departments across the university in public health, geography and planning, psychology, and environmental studies. The course content is newly developed by faculty pursuing a new area of research or one specifically focused on an urban dimension, and often involves innovations in teaching and community engagement. The MUGS courses taught a combined total of 77 graduate students on topics including wildfires in Yellowknife; public health and social prescribing; developing affordable housing; main street economic development; 'happy' urban spaces; and food systems, security and movements.

School of Cities also prioritizes the training of staff, leaders and community-builders in the urban sector. This year we launched Leading Urban Change, a professional development program and project accelerator for mid- to senior-level leaders across the public, private, and not-for-profit sectors. This first cohort included 26 learners from across Canada, who completed this intensive six-week program taught by U of T faculty members and leaders in the municipal and policy sectors and

aimed at developing their leadership, networking, collaboration, and problem-solving skills in the specific areas of urban project management and development.



This year we also supported 54 social justice leaders and activists in their GTA-based workplace or community through the **The Leading Social Justice Collective (LSJC)**, a cross-sectoral leadership development program for individuals engaged in social justice transformation. Learners come to the program in teams and bring with them a specific challenge in their workplace or community that they would like to work through by developing increased leadership skills, new network connections, and new skillsets in action planning, ecosystem mapping, and critical and reflexive practice.



The **Equitable Development Data Insight Training Initiative (EDDIT)** launched this year, helping 36 participants from six organizations learn to refine their narratives and leverage data so that they can make the best possible case for their equitable development work to their community and stakeholders. Working with equity-focused non-profit, community, and local government organizations in small and mid-sized cities in the U.S. and Canada, EDDIT offers 7-9 months of personalized data analysis and storytelling training to help them advance and build public and political will for equitable development projects.

## EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT

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## DATA INSIGHT TRAINING

# AFFILIATED INITIATIVES

This year the School of Cities continued to host and collaborate with six affiliated initiatives: Infrastructure Institute, Institute on Municipal Finance and Governance, Housing Justice Lab, Urban Data Research Centre, Mobility Network, and Creative Communities Commons. With these exciting initiatives, the School of Cities strengthens its position as a hub of cutting-edge research and scholarship in key areas that impact the lives and experiences of city-dwellers - access to human-centric infrastructure design, understanding of urban data and its applications, and building of sustainable mobility systems.

## Infrastructure Institute

The Infrastructure Institute at the School of Cities, University of Toronto is a training, advisory, and interdisciplinary research hub aiming to build local and global expertise in integrated planning for civil and social infrastructure, decision-making, and project delivery. Led by Professor Matti Siemiatycki, the Infrastructure Institute seeks to refine collaboration between public, private and the not-for-profit sectors, and become Canada's hub for infrastructure training and interdisciplinary knowledge.



## Institute on Municipal Finance & Governance

IMFG focuses on the fiscal health and governance challenges facing large cities and city-regions. The Institute's mandate is to conduct independent research, spark and inform public debate, and to engage the academic and policy communities around important issues of municipal finance and governance. In Canada and abroad, cities are central to the economic prosperity and social vitality of countries. To create the conditions for economic competitiveness and offer a high quality of life that will attract and retain residents and businesses, cities need to build and maintain infrastructure, and deliver a wide range of services.



## Housing Justice Lab

The Housing Justice Lab is a pioneering research initiative committed to exposing, analyzing, and improving housing justice across North American cities. Under the leadership of Principal Investigator Professor Prentiss A. Dantzler, our lab engages in community-centered research with an aim towards capacity building, knowledge mobilization, and policy advocacy.



## Urban Data Research Centre

The mission of the Urban Data Research Centre (UDRC) is to enhance the design, planning and operations of cities by expanding the opportunities presented by data, and to address the challenges inherent in data. To achieve this mission, the Centre is pursuing the development of a Canadian Urban Data Repository, standards for the representation of urban data, tools for the management of urban data, tools to support the analysis and interpretation of urban data, and a national Urban Data Network.



## Mobility Network

Mobility Network is a network of mobility researchers from across University of Toronto, committed to seeing that in this "First Urban Century," mobility must enable all people to achieve their potential while protecting our planet.



## Creative Communities Commons

The CCC exists to provide a node of open participation and the free exchange of intellectual resources and expertise among academia, the arts sector, community leaders, civil society, the private sector, and the public sector.





# ADVISORY COUNCIL

The School of Cities' Advisory Council meets three times per year and consists of faculty members from across divisions and campuses, an undergraduate and graduate student, and the directors of the School's affiliated initiatives. We extend our warmest thanks to the Council members for their guidance, ideas, and support.

- **Rohan Alexander** – Assistant Professor, Faculty of Information & Department of Statistical Sciences
- **Erica Allen-Kim** – Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream, John H. Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape, and Design
- **Prentiss Dantzler** – Director, Housing Justice Lab; Associate Professor, Department of Sociology
- **Heather Dorries** – Assistant Professor, Centre for Indigenous Studies & Department of Geography & Planning
- **Steven Farber** – Interim Director, Mobility Network; Professor, Department of Human Geography, UTSC
- **Richard Florida** – Distinguished Scholar-in-Residence, School of Cities; University Professor, Rotman School of Management
- **Mark S. Fox** – Director, Urban Data Centre; Distinguished Professor, Urban Systems Engineering; Professor, Department of Mechanical & Industrial Engineering
- **Farzaneh Hemmasi** – Assistant Professor, Faculty of Music
- **Anita McGahan** – University Professor and George E. Connell Chair in Organizations and Society, Rotman School of Management
- **Nasim Niknafs** – Co-director of the Creative Communities Commons; Associate Professor of Music Education, Faculty of Music; Associate Dean, Research and Coordinator of Music Education
- **Chelsea Rochman** – Assistant Professor, Ecology and Evolutionary Biology
- **Laura Rosella** – Associate Professor, Dalla Lana School of Public Health & Temerty Faculty of Medicine
- **Shoshanna Saxe** – Associate Professor, Department of Civil & Mineral Engineering
- **Matti Siemiatycki** – Director, Infrastructure Institute; Professor, Department of Geography & Planning
- **Daniel Silver** – Co-director of the Creative Communities Commons; Professor, Department of Sociology, UTSC
- **Karan Singh** – Associate Director, School of Cities India; Professor, Department of Computer Science
- **Enid Slack** – Director, Institute on Municipal Finance and Governance
- **Tara Vinodrai** – Associate Professor, Department of Geography & Planning

We would also like to thank the divisions at the University of Toronto that support the School of Cities and our work: Faculty of Arts & Science; Faculty of Applied Science & Engineering; John H. Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape, and Design; Rotman School of Management; University of Toronto Scarborough; University of Toronto Mississauga

# GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

## Council of Deans

- Office of the Provost
- Faculty of Arts and Science
- Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering
- University of Toronto Mississauga
- University of Toronto Scarborough
- Office of the Vice-President, Research and Innovation

## Internal Advisory Council

- Faculty of Information
- Rotman School of Management
- Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Design
- UTSC Human Geography
- UTM Historical Studies
- FAS Geography and Planning
- FASE Civil and Mineral
- FAS Ecology and Evolutionary Biology
- FASE Mechanical and Industrial
- UTSC Sociology
- Faculty of Law
- Dalla Lana School of Public Health
- Faculty of Music

## External Advisory Council

- Atkinson Foundation
- Canadian Urban Institute
- Co-operators
- Daniels Corporation
- New York City Housing Authority
- Wellesley Institute

## School of Cities India Advisory Council

- FASE – Civil and Mineral
- Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Design
- FAS – Computer Science
- FAS – Geography and Planning
- FASE – Mechanical and Industrial
- FASE - Chemical
- Office of the Vice-President, International

# SCHOOL OF CITIES 2023-24 ANNUAL REPORT

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