

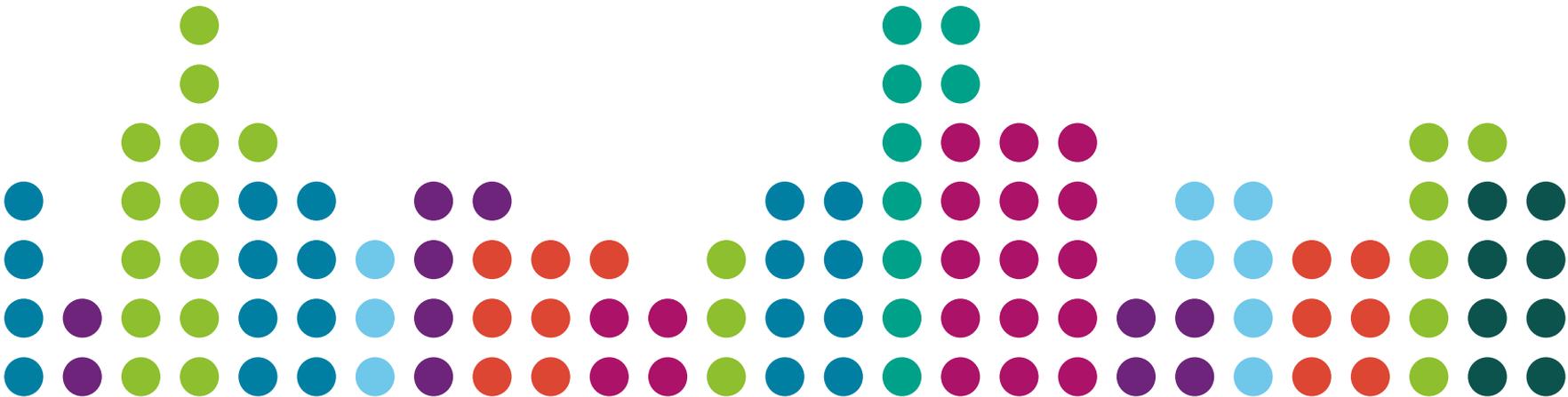
# SCHOOL OF CITIES

# STRATEGIC PLAN 2021-2026

MAY 2022



**The School of Cities teaches the world why cities matter for sustainability, prosperity, inclusion and justice. In its next five years, the School will be focused on deepening partnerships to foster innovation that responds to the key urban challenges of our time.**



# BACKGROUND

**Faculty at the University of Toronto collectively formed the School in 2017 to address the University’s strategic priorities, in particular to take better advantage of our location in one of the world’s most vibrant, culturally diverse and economically dynamic regions for our mutual benefit, while strengthening global partnerships.**

A School of Cities that works across institutional and disciplinary boundaries, leveraging the expertise of hundreds of faculty researchers across the university’s three campuses, will play a critical role in addressing urban and societal challenges relating to climate change, inequality, systemic racism, and more broadly, our ability to thrive in 21st century cities.

Animating the School of Cities is its location in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA). As an Indigenous and immigrant city, Toronto models inclusion for the world – though much work remains, as evidenced by the socio-economic segregation of its racialized suburbs. The fourth largest city-region in North America, the GTHA is growing rapidly, fueled by a powerful innovation ecosystem. Ensuring that this growth is sustainable and equitable requires not just extraordinary creativity in planning and city building, but community engagement and empowerment. As it incubates solutions for Toronto, the School of Cities will showcase Canadian urbanism – and evidence-based urban policy-making – for the world.



**... we need to identify our most successful examples of community outreach and partnership, and scale them up to generate more opportunities for our students and faculty, and more benefit for our local partners. We must seek new opportunities to open up our campuses to the city around us, using our physical spaces to convene public discussions of the most pressing and compelling urban issues of the day. We have a social obligation not just to host, but also to inform and to elevate, public debates on these topics by ensuring that we bring our expertise, our evidence, and our networks of colleagues to bear on these conversations.**



**President  
Meric Gertler**

UNIVERSITY OF  
TORONTO  
INSTALLATION  
ADDRESS

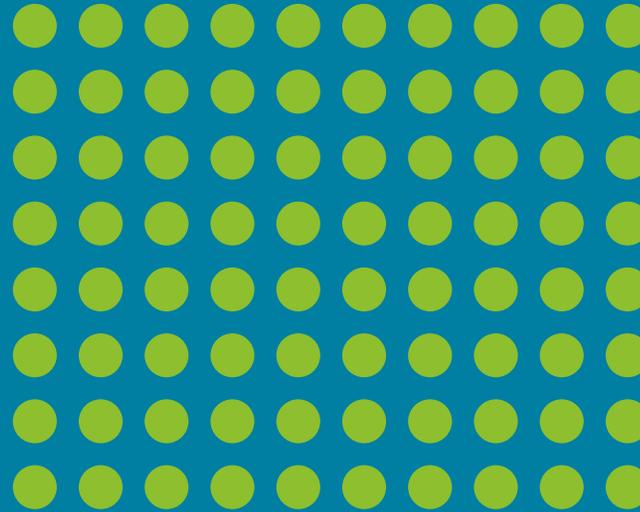
NOVEMBER 7, 2013



# CONSULTATION

This strategic plan grows out of consultations with faculty, students, and staff at the U of T, as well as external stakeholders in the GTHA and beyond. Altogether, as described in the Appendix, over 100 faculty, 10 staff members, 80 students, and 20 external leaders helped us reflect on our accomplishments and envision the future.

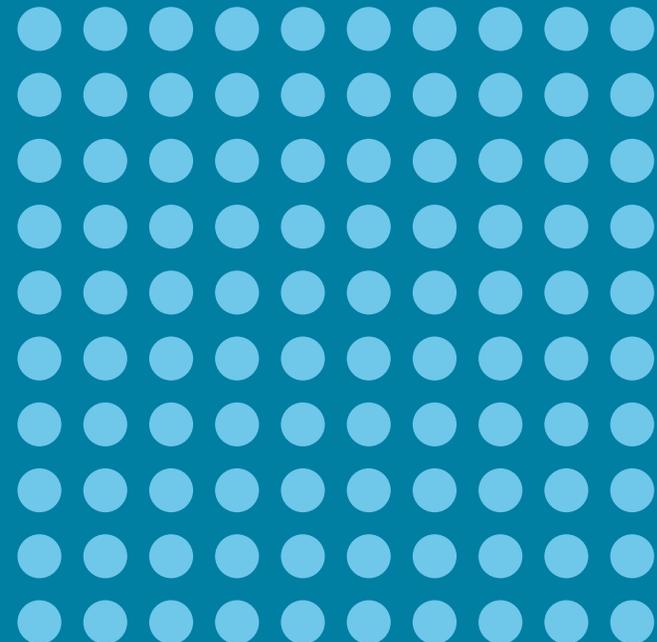
80  
STUDENTS



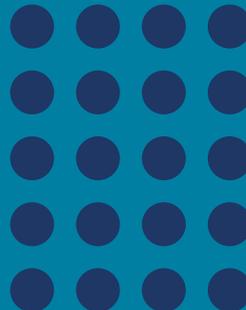
10  
STAFF  
MEMBERS



100+  
FACULTY



20  
EXTERNAL  
LEADERS



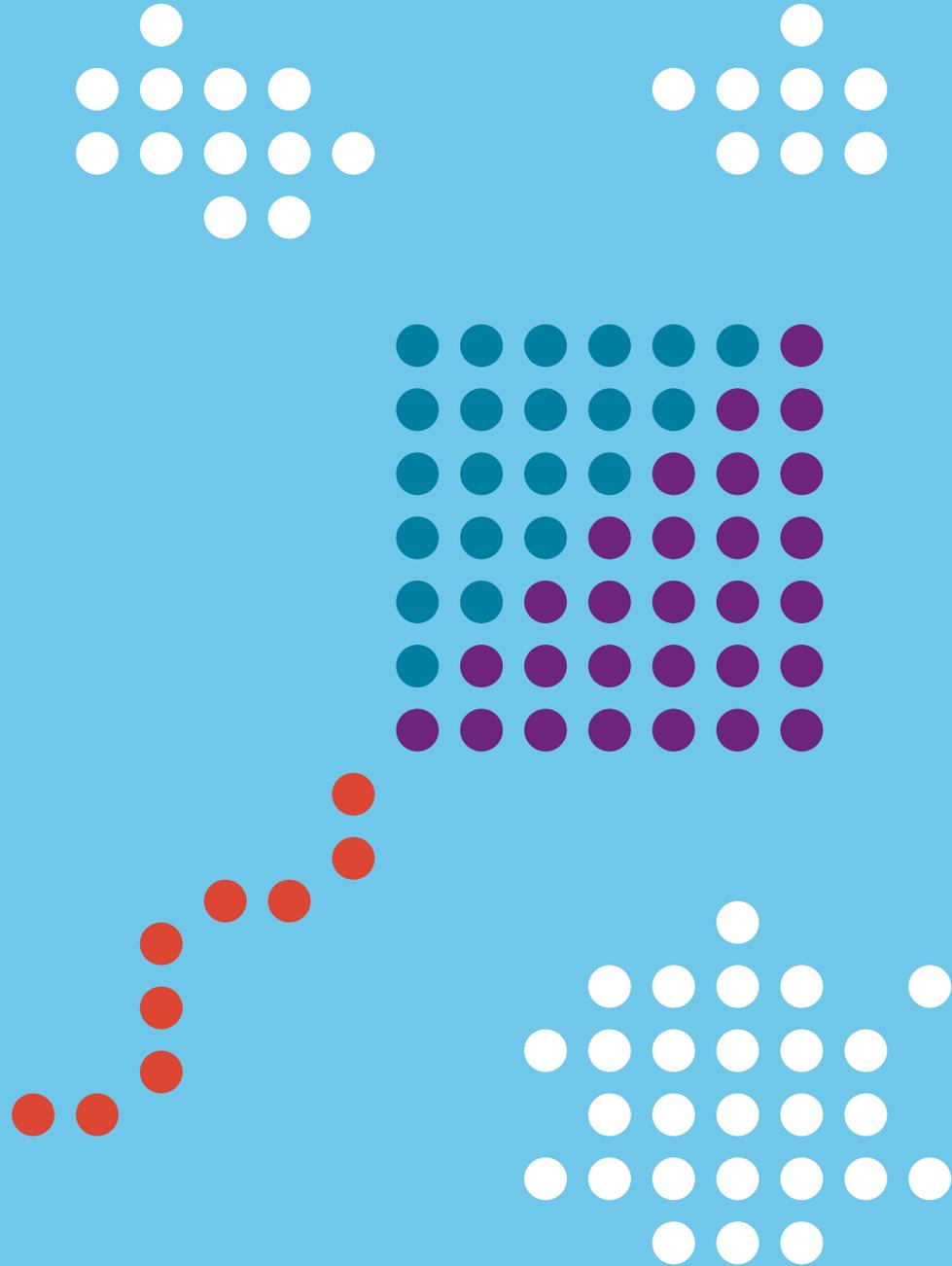
# OVER THE NEXT FIVE YEARS



## VISION

**The School of Cities will be a world-leading centre for innovative multi- and inter-disciplinary urban research, education and engagement. It is where diverse communities will come together to spark new insights and design creative ways for cities and their residents to thrive.**

The solutions to society's most intransigent problems lie in cities, and the School of Cities thus has the potential to help create and enhance humanity's urban future. With the planet at a tipping point, cities are critical to our survival. Even though cities produce a disproportionate share of greenhouse gas emissions, they are innovating the path to emissions reduction. Vibrant urban economies help drive inequalities, but they also offer potential for social integration and upward mobility. The divide between urban and rural may be polarizing the electorate, but cities host the institutions, large and small, that educate and empower tomorrow's leaders. Location in Toronto – one of the world's most interesting urban experiments in inclusion – affords the School of Cities a unique advantage and opportunity to understand how to welcome diverse immigrants and cultures while fostering more sustainable growth.



## VISION

This vision shapes our strategic focus areas, which are key to success. Achieving the promise of the School of Cities means crafting approaches that address three questions:

**How can the university and its communities construct and share knowledge collectively?**

The School of Cities must develop models for collaboration that co-creates knowledge via extensive networks and capacity-building across public, nonprofit, and private sectors.

**How can the university and its communities create and nurture solutions to complex urban challenges together?**

The School of Cities must develop a model for innovation that combines the multidisciplinary expertise of the university with the lived experience of communities in order to build and mobilize urban knowledge and craft evidence-based urban policy.

**What is the pathway to success?**

Accomplishing these objectives will require overcoming multiple barriers: the institutional disincentives for collaborating across disciplines, the competition for faculty time and energy, the mistrust of the university and academic expertise among many communities, the disdain of academia for applied research, institutional processes that stifle innovation and agility, and the need to stand out among many worthy causes in order to raise significant funding.

## Four strategic objectives support these focus areas:

### 1

#### CITIES-IN-ALL APPROACH

To address the planet's challenges, as well as the growing demands of urbanization, requires disciplinary and epistemological diversity, as well as different types of knowledge and knowledge production. In other words, we must highlight and support cities across and within all of our disciplines. The School of Cities will support multi- and inter-disciplinarity by encouraging, sustaining, spearheading, and promoting urban-relevant proposals and research across and within disciplines in the social sciences, natural sciences, humanities and arts, and professional schools. The drivers that help cities thrive – including healthy environments, cultural expression, economic opportunity, and good governance, among others – are often beyond the purview of city and community builders. Thus, to adopt a cities-in-all approach, we will examine the urban aspects of knowledge creation and policy generation for all disciplines.

### 2

#### KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION

Due to the siloing of disciplines and the insularity of academia, our understanding of cities often fails to translate into robust scholarship and transformative societal impact. The School of Cities will ensure that new urban knowledge produced at the university is rigorous, grounded in lived experience, and accessible for a broad audience. Its programs will integrate research, education, and outreach so that we work in partnership to address urban challenges, mobilizing knowledge both from academia to community and from community to academia. By building a culture of collaboration and exchange with partners beyond the University, the School of Cities will become a leading voice in creating knowledge about and policy for cities and regions.

## Four strategic objectives support these focus areas:



### CAPACITY-BUILDING

The School of Cities is first and foremost a School, with education at our core. The path to making cities better, and improving the lives of those within them, is through empowerment via knowledge and skills. The School of Cities will deliver programs that develop and strengthen the skills and capabilities of faculty, students, urban leaders, practitioners, and the general public. Working with the public sector, we will disrupt conventional, siloed approaches to governance and service delivery that impede effectiveness and erode public trust. We will also develop more systematic data collection and evaluation methods in order to build a more scientific and rigorous framework for urban policy-making.



### NETWORK-EXPANSION

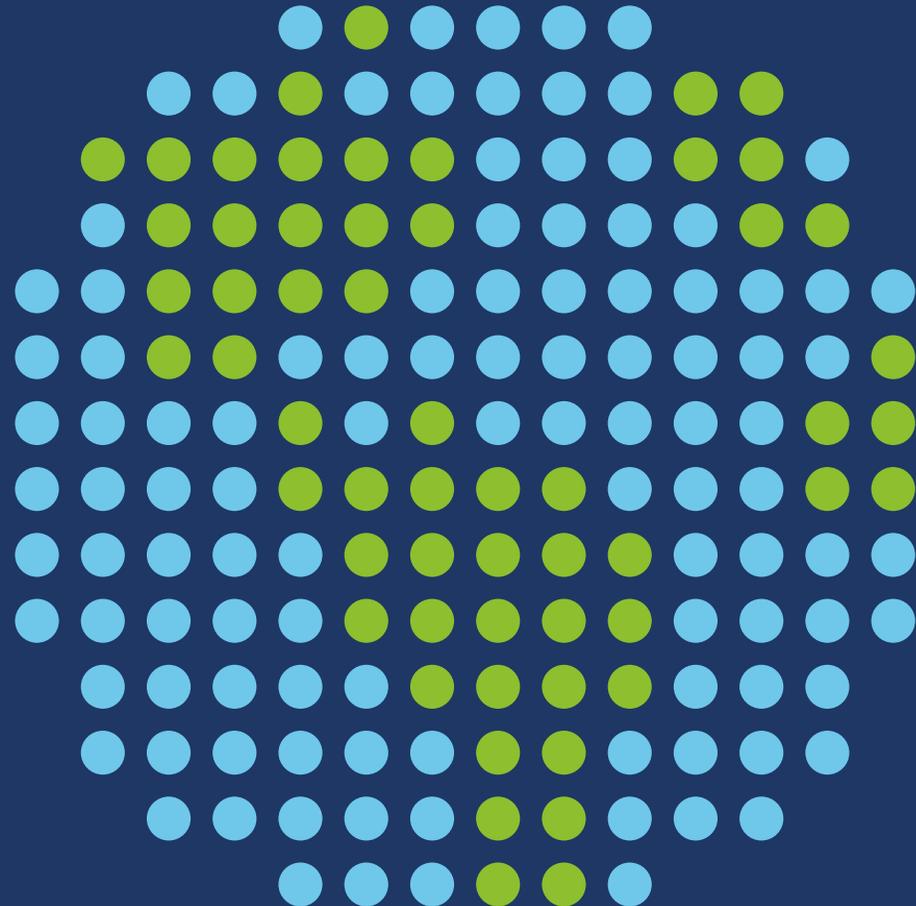
To foster informed debate and exchange of ideas across generations, disciplines, sectors, and institutions, we must expand and fortify our networks. Expanding local, national and global networks is key to the School becoming a recognized hub that diverse stakeholders will turn to for collaborations, insights, capacity-building, knowledge co-creation, and more. The School of Cities will convene and connect U of T researchers and students to communities in the GTHA and around the world. To stimulate and connect a dynamic constellation of collaborators, the School will embrace diverse perspectives, foster new partnerships, and proactively attract stakeholders to engage in our events, trainings, and research.

## MISSION

**The School of Cities is a solutions incubator for urban-focused researchers, educators, students, practitioners, institutions, and the general public to explore and address the complex global challenges facing urban centres.**

A living laboratory, the School leverages urban data and lived experience to improve policy and decision-making, and collaborates with communities around the world to make cities and urban regions more sustainable, prosperous, inclusive and just.

Our strategic objectives – cities-in-all, knowledge mobilization, capacity-building, and network expansion – suggest a menu of activities that will support our focus areas of collaboration and innovation. Each year, we will create an annual plan that helps to prioritize activities and guide the allocation of resources across the objectives. Through these formal activities, as well as more informal social gatherings such as bike tours and book clubs, we hope to strengthen relationships and spark serendipitous collaborations and knowledge creation.

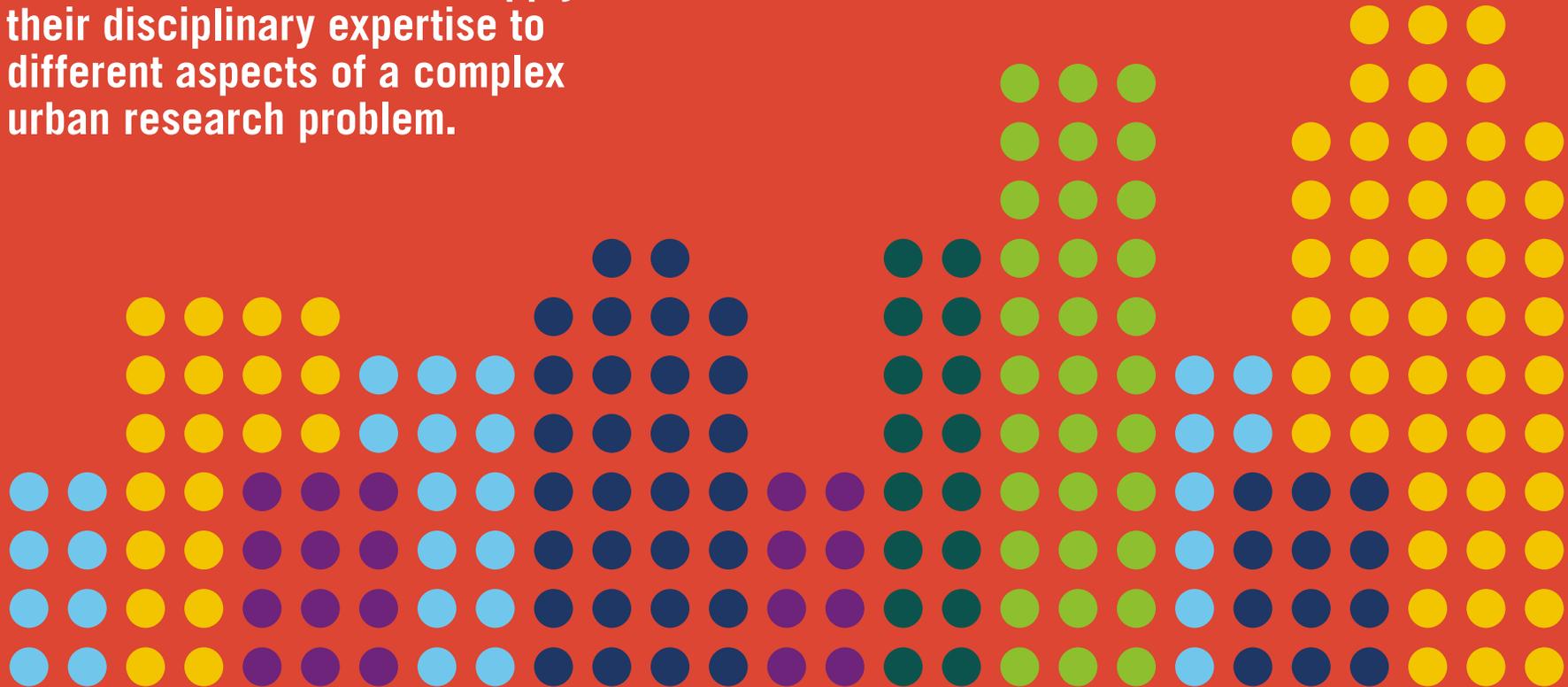


## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: CITIES-IN-ALL

To encourage interdisciplinarity, the School of Cities will convene faculty and students from across the tri-campus U of T starting in Year 1 of the plan. We will provide flexible, gap funding to faculty in the form of research grants, many around a timely theme, with the idea that researchers apply their disciplinary expertise to different aspects of a complex urban research problem.



In the Methods Atelier, University of Toronto students from disciplines including business, education, engineering, health, information, music, and many others across the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences come together to learn about different epistemologies and methodological approaches from local and global experts.



## **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE:** **CITIES-IN-ALL**

We will initiate a faculty fellows program for those who need resources and space to jumpstart their own research projects. Our project-based learning and methods workshops will attract urbanists from multiple disciplines. We will also provide a home for initiatives such as the Institute for Municipal Finance and Governance, which focuses on the fiscal health and governance challenges facing large cities and city-regions; the Mobility Network, a multidisciplinary research collaboration helping cities to evolve into more sustainable, equitable, and resilient urban forms and mobility systems; the Infrastructure Institute, a training, advisory, and applied research hub that aims to build global expertise in infrastructure planning, decision-making and delivery; the Creative Communities Commons, which fosters conversations about arts and culture among academia, the arts sector, community organizers, and civic leaders; and the Urban Data Centre, which enhances the design, planning and operations of cities by addressing challenges and expanding the opportunities in data.

After five years, the School of Cities will attract several mega grants, gifts, or appropriations and become the go-to place for urban researchers across disciplines to tackle challenges, much like the MIT Media Lab, the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, or the Rockefeller Foundation – Bellagio Center.

### **Measures of Success (to be assessed via Key Performance Indicators)**

- **Contributions to knowledge and understanding of the world**
- **Grants across disciplines and campuses**
- **Unique engagements with faculty across disciplines**
- **Unique engagements with students across disciplines/ programs**
- **Seeding and ensuring sustainability of sub-initiatives**
- **New divisional partners and commitments**

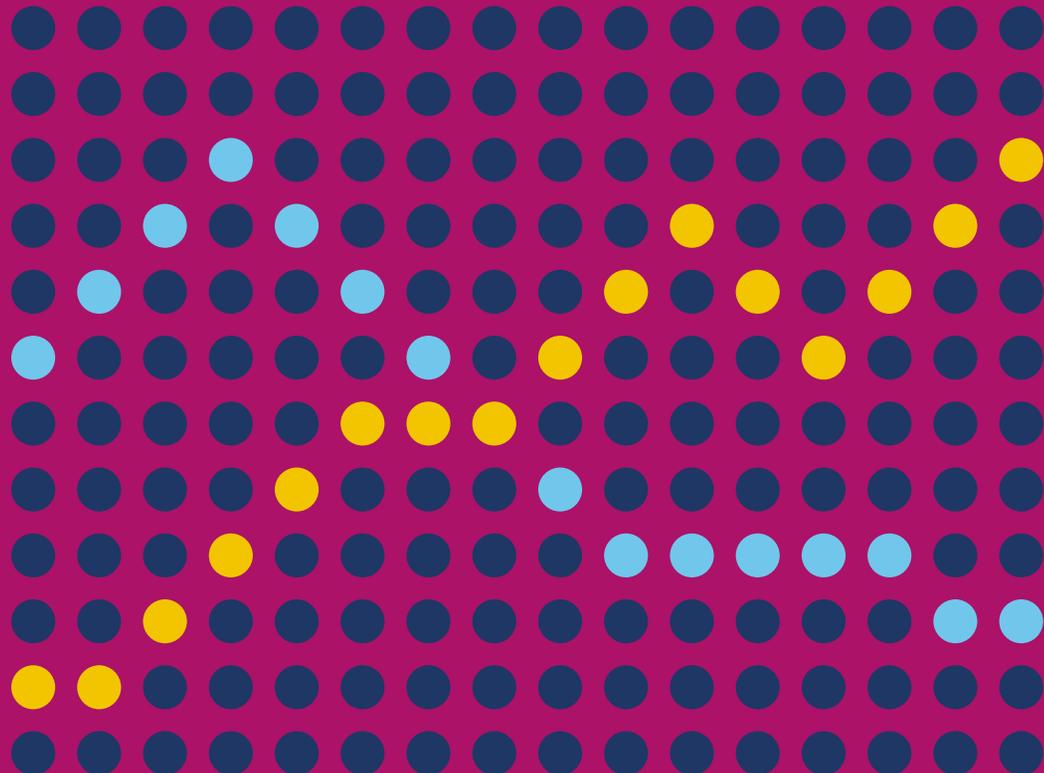
## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION

To support knowledge mobilization (KM), the School of Cities will launch a series of public-facing and accessible products, including videos, policy briefs, blogs, op-eds, project websites, data visualization, and exhibitions, starting in Year 1 of this plan.



Responding to the transformation in how people acquire information, the School of Cities

produces knowledge from academia and community alike via accessible media such as short explainer videos, interactive maps, and blogs.



## **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION**

This series will not just showcase the work of faculty and students affiliated with the School, but also lift up work from our local and global communities, propelling creative means to incorporate multiple voices and perspectives. This mobilization will thus be two-way, encouraging communities to engage the School in their issues. An ongoing policy roundtable will convene researchers from across disciplines, including international experts, to address questions from local and federal policymakers, and a rapid response shop will provide assistance to local public and nonprofit sector organizations that need quick policy ideas or support. A concurrent speaker series will become the venue of choice for Canadian urban leaders from both academia and civil society.

After five years, the U of T faculty will see the School of Cities as its dissemination arm, and legislators around the world will look to its policy advice, much as they currently follow the work of the United Nations' intergovernmental panels, or think tanks like Brookings. The School will then launch its signature summit on cities, modelled on the Aspen Ideas Festival and attracting participants from around the world.

### **Measures of Success:**

- **Engagements with expert practitioners across sectors**
- **Engagements with communities locally and globally**
- **KM products grounded in lived experiences and/or alternative ways of knowing**
- **KM products pioneering data visualization or other ways of making meaning**
- **Policy-oriented KM products**
- **General knowledge capacity building KM products**
- **KM products relevant and accessed globally**
- **Impact of KM products on adoption of policies and programs**

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: CAPACITY-BUILDING

To foster capacity-building, the School of Cities will introduce an array of project-based courses for both U of T students and the broader community, beginning in Year 1 of this plan. For experiential learning, students will address problems for a civic client either in multidisciplinary project courses or internships.

By training community members in skills such as leadership and social purpose real estate, the School of Cities positions a broad array of actors to advance social change.



## **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: CAPACITY-BUILDING**

Students will engage in fellowships to develop their work in multidisciplinary seminars, joined by grad students from around the world in our summer urban methods workshops. The School will develop course curricula around urban data science, data visualization for social change, community empowerment, anti-racism, equitable development, and other topics, which we will deliver in the form of online courses, community-based workshops, and bespoke training for organizations. Workshops will build the capacity of leaders in the public sector to craft urban policy based on evidence and data while also creating a space for peer learning.

After five years, the School of Cities will be seen as the place for students of all kinds to learn about equitable development and evidence-based policymaking for cities. The School will be known around the world as a Khan Academy for all topics urban.

### **Measures of Success:**

- **Students matriculated from around the world**
- **Launch of new online courses**
- **Introduction of new local/national trainings**
- **Course completions**
- **Revenue from capacity-building programs**
- **Enrollment of disadvantaged students via cross-subsidies**

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: NETWORK-EXPANSION

To expand our networks, we will foster exchanges across academia and communities beginning in Year 1 of this plan. Our visitor programs will attract faculty, students, and urban leaders across Canada and globally to collaborate with our community, and in turn these visitors will connect the School to their own networks.

 The Global Urban Network connects the School of Cities to sister urban institutes around the world, creating a learning network of thousands of academics and policymakers.



## **STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE: NETWORK-EXPANSION**

Our experiential learning opportunities will spawn new connections with organizations across sectors and communities. The Global Urban Network, consisting of over 40 urban institutes from around the world, will co-host events, courses, and other initiatives. The School of Cities India will pilot project-based courses and international research collaborations that we will replicate in other countries.

After five years, the School of Cities will have reciprocal partnerships for knowledge creation in most countries around the world, collaborating actively in venues like the United Nations and the World Urban Forum.

### **Measures of Success:**

- **Collaborations with North American and non-North American institutions**
- **Collaborations with GTHA and non-GTHA regions and municipalities**
- **Partnerships with multilateral institutions**
- **Students and faculty participating in exchange programs**

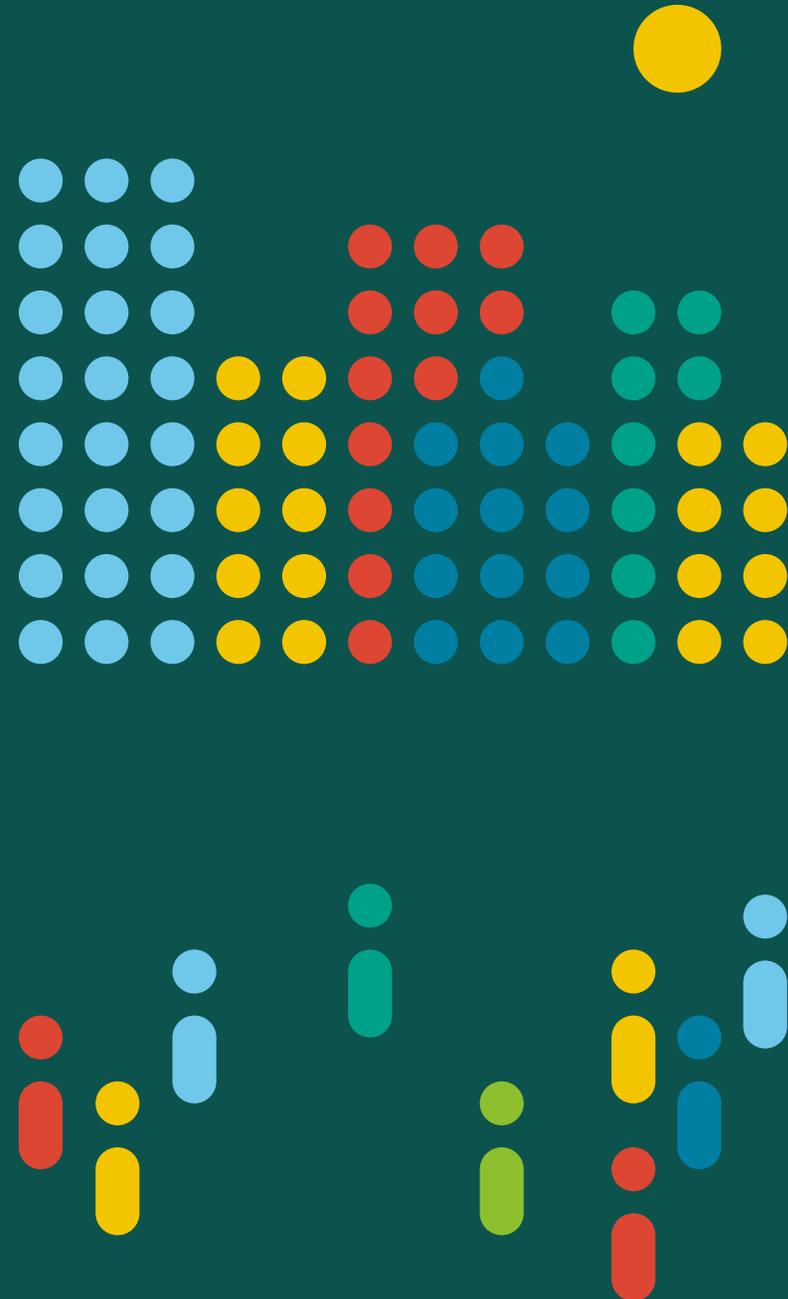
## THEMES

**The urban realm presents innumerable challenges that we might address at the School. To achieve our greatest impact, we will focus our efforts on several key research priorities or themes in the next five years.**

We select these themes as the areas in which cities can make the biggest difference in helping the world and its communities thrive: climate change, belonging, and inequality. Not all disciplines are engaged in urban research on these topics, but we expect that by convening researchers on each theme, we will begin to see new connections and spur innovation.

We expect to support and fund knowledge creation and mobilization in other topic areas as well, but absent major shifts, we expect that these three themes will be what the School of Cities is known for globally. We will elevate these priorities via our research grants, speaker series, policy roundtables, project-based learning, urban leaders program, and knowledge mobilization generally.

We launch the theme, climate and justice, in the first year of our plan. After 18 months, we will add a second theme – belonging, migration, and thriving – and after another 18-months, we will add a third – inequality, data, and democracy. We frame each to encompass a wide array of disciplines, based on the conviction that to solve complex problems requires wisdom from across the university. Working together on common problems will draw in new researchers, spur conversation among unlikely partners, and help us find unique connections between ideas.



# THEMES

## Climate and justice (July 2021- )

Climate change is the defining challenge of our time, simultaneously requiring the transformation of infrastructure, the reconfiguration of financial systems, the mobilization of the electorate, and more. Cities – in their role as incubators of innovation, drivers of the economy, magnets for talent, and birthplace of social movements – are poised to lead the way in both devising and implementing solutions.



**Urban challenge grantees from over 20 University of Toronto departments are currently examining the relationship between climate change and justice, from the disparate environmental impacts on vulnerable communities, to unequal access to environmental amenities, to the challenge of reducing greenhouse gas emissions without harming the disadvantaged, to the need to build community capacity to deal with climate injustice.**

## Climate and justice (July 2021- )

Yet, the various forms of climate action also have the potential to unleash injustice, e.g., to create disproportionate harm for vulnerable populations. With its remarkable and diverse faculty expertise across its divisions and campuses, the University of Toronto and its School of Cities are poised to lead the national and international conversation about how best to adapt to climate change while promoting inclusion and justice.

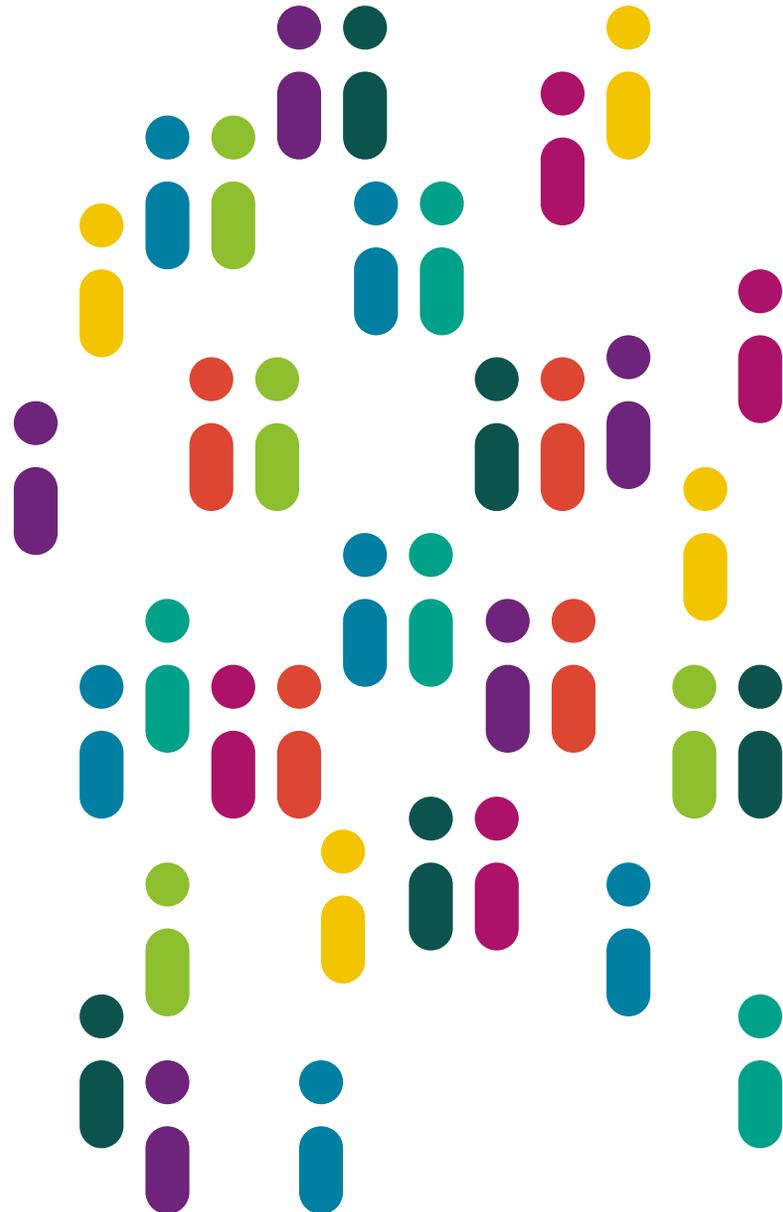
Climate, justice, and cities is a theme that spurs research across many different disciplines, including the natural sciences, engineering and technology, urban policy and planning, business, public health, the arts, and the social sciences. Climate scientists are currently researching a wide array of topics related to cities and justice, such as uneven vulnerability to wildfire hazards, the relationship between heatwaves and mortality, the role of urban parks in carbon sequestration, and how climate change disrupts food security. Economists,

geographers, and business faculty are exploring issues related to climate justice such as the impacts of temperature fluctuations on labour productivity, the social cost of carbon, a just transition to the green economy, restructuring financial and insurance systems in light of climate risk, and the economics of climate adaptation in the developing world. Faculty in public health, sociology, environmental psychology, and the arts are delving into how place attachment affects the adaptive capacity of communities in the face of climate change, the equity implications of climate mobilities, and the issue of Western culpability. Philosophers, anthropologists, legal and feminist scholars, among others, are examining questions of intergenerational, multispecies, and restorative justice in the context of climate change. Faculty in political science, public policy, planning and other fields study the vulnerability and resilience of communities and their infrastructure. The corpus of research is expanding fast, but barely meeting the needs of a world that must act now. This thus becomes the inaugural theme of the School of Cities.

## Belonging, migration, and thriving (January 2023- )

Across species, communities form, reform, and devise ways of handling difference and facilitating thriving. The social and physical infrastructure of cities can either support or divide communities; it can either cultivate diversity or foster segregation in nature and society. The built, technological, and natural environment of the city, as well as its institutions, can create a sense of belonging among its inhabitants that gives them the opportunity to develop their capabilities, participate and thrive. How we design these environments and institutions, including dismantling the systemic structures that underpin racism, shapes our ability to thrive. Cities emerge from migration, and the ability of cities to integrate new arrivals is key to the world's future.

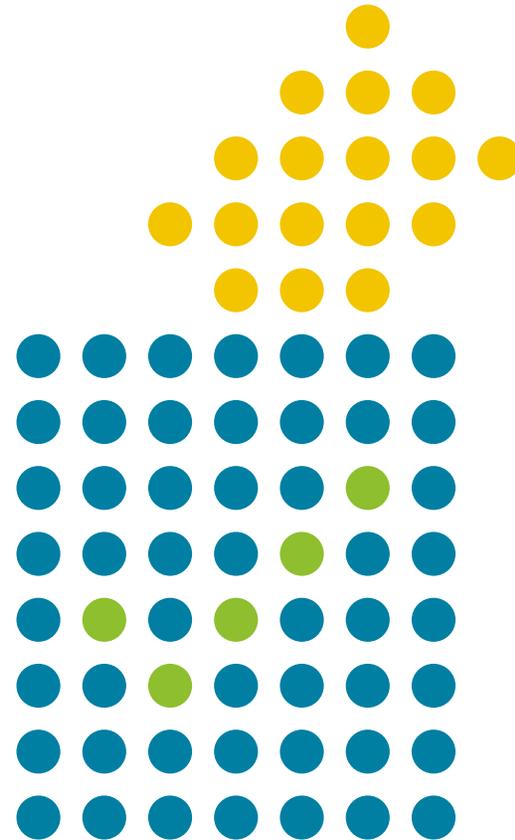
Researchers across disciplines are engaging with the idea of thriving, seeking to support vibrancy in cultural, natural, and economic life. From psychology to the humanities, research focuses on the attachment to place and community, along with the struggle to belong and express differences. Sociologists, political scientists, legal scholars, and others develop understandings of marginalization, the importance of agency, and the ability to intervene for more equitable outcomes. Scientific research examines diversity and inclusion among different species, while computer scientists and engineers tackle these issues via studies of algorithmic bias and accessibility, among other topics.



## Inequality, data, and democracy (July 2024- )

Cities are laboratories for democracy. Cities house the people, institutions, and venues to spur vigorous discussion and debate, innovate technology to include new voices in decision-making, and deploy data to increase equity, efficiency, transparency and accountability. Yet, socio-economic inequalities increasingly divide cities, polarize communities, and marginalize vulnerable groups, creating new challenges for participatory democracy and institution-building.

Recent years have seen the explosion of urban data available across disciplines, from mobile phone traces to social media interactions to administrative data on health, housing and more. Researchers and policymakers are only just beginning to capitalize on the availability of data to create new knowledge, design more rigorous policies, and empower communities. New data offers the opportunity to innovate ways of understanding human behavior and interaction in cities, as well as to make activity at the margin more visible and thus empower the most vulnerable. Yet this means it is critical to foster collaborations around urban data beyond social science and law, with humanists to raise challenging questions on ethics and self-expression, computer scientists and engineers to improve access and address algorithmic bias, and natural scientists to identify connections with the physical environment.

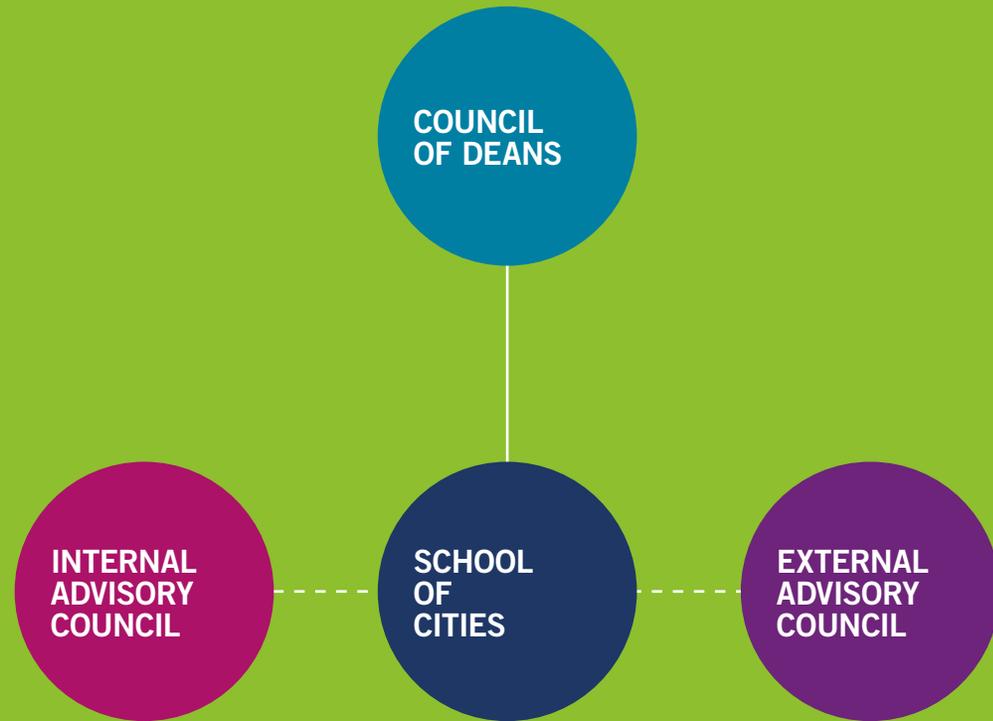


## GOVERNANCE OF THE SCHOOL OF CITIES

Governing the School of Cities is a Council of Deans. Chaired by the Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Science, this Council includes representatives from the Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering, the Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape, and Design, the Rotman School of Management, the Faculty of Information, the Faculty of Music, the U of T Mississauga, the U of T Scarborough, the Division of the Vice-President & Provost, and the Division of the Vice President, Research & Innovation. The Council of Deans meets twice per year and is responsible for approving the School's strategy and budget.

An internal Advisory Council consists of at least ten faculty members (from across divisions and campuses), two students (undergraduate and graduate), the directors of the School's research centres (ex-officio), the Academic Director and Administrative Executive Director of the School (ex-officio). This Council meets three times per year.

An external Advisory Committee, to be launched late in 2022, includes three members from the public sector, three from the nonprofit sector, and three from the private sector, all renowned urban experts. This body meets twice per year.



# CONCLUSION

**If we succeed,  
what difference  
will we make  
after five years?**

**We will:**

- **Extend our reach into hundreds of cities around the world via our partners**
- **Elevate the rigor of urban discourse globally**
- **Train tens of thousands of public officials and community activists, along with U of T students**
- **Innovate new approaches to a just climate transition, belonging and reparative justice, and democratization of data**

In other words, we will create a new ethos of knowledge and evidence-based policy-making by, for, and of cities. We are the *School of Cities*, since we create and mobilize knowledge about the urban domain. We are the *School for Cities*, because we produce the theories and practices that catalyze urban change. And we are the *School by Cities*, because we educate the world about the critical role of cities, we learn from the lived experience of our residents, and we empower city residents to take responsibility for their communities.



## APPENDIX

# STRATEGIC PLAN CONSULTATION PROCESS

**This appendix outlines the strategic plan consultation process; strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) of the School of Cities; and competitor analysis.**

Faculty, who participated in one-on-one meetings with the director, see a variety of different opportunities emerging from the School of Cities, but emphasized its potential to connect with communities, locally and globally, and to act as a portal helping to lift up U of T research. Faculty also illuminated how the School could be more effective and play a more prominent role on campus and beyond.

A SWOT analysis conducted by staff revealed the joys and challenges of the School of Cities' work. Its potential lies in its brand, connections (particularly to marginalized communities), and location at the university and in the GTHA. Yet, it faces barriers in terms of lack of sustainable funding, uneven faculty engagement, and the lack of recognition for its projects due to their collaborative nature (among others, see Appendix). Staff also identified ways to better integrate equity, diversity, and inclusion into the School's workplace and community.

### Strengths

- Connection to communities in Toronto
- Existing local, national, and international networks
- Human capital: Local / global faculty, staff, and students
- New and flexible initiative
- Role as incubator for projects and research
- Strong and authentic brand
- Successful launch with interim leadership
- Toronto and St. George location

### Opportunities

- COVID-19 transformative moment
- Lack of research translation capacity at the U of T
- Need of both university and public sector for community-engaged research
- Place for marginalized communities to find voice
- Potential to develop sustainable funding streams
- Role as a model hub, connector and platform
- Toronto uniquely ready to take on challenges of the future
- Educating students within and outside the community



### Weaknesses

- Invisibility of School of Cities role in collaborative work
- Lack of sustainable funding
- Nominal faculty engagement
- Limited academic and local partnerships
- Little reflection or evaluation of programs thus far
- Siloed organizational structure
- “Urban” brand incoherence, everything for everyone
- Media presence

### Threats

- Adjustment to hybrid space
- Competition for funding in crowded landscape
- Globally uneven pandemic recovery
- Other opportunities competing for faculty and partner attention
- Potential changes in senior leadership
- Structural obstacles to developing revenue streams
- Uncertainty in the face of climate change
- Ability to retain talent and scale up

External stakeholders, primarily regional leaders from across sectors, asked for the School of Cities to take more of a leadership role in urban policy and dialogue, and emphasized the need for engagement in marginalized communities in Toronto and its suburbs, Canada, and the Global South. A “competitor” analysis of 50 urban institutes housed at universities around the world found that they focus primarily on infrastructure, climate change, and smart cities/big data; the European centres often include social inequalities and governance in addition. The majority offer degree programs, event programming, and a publication series, and most seem to partner with their local governments. Few are multidisciplinary, and those that are, tend to partner only within the urban disciplines (e.g., planning and architecture). Across these competitors, there seems to be minimal community engagement, and among Canadian institutions in particular, there is little emphasis on knowledge translation for policy-makers.

The School of Cities also sought insight directly from students and alumni in creating the School’s strategic plans. In October 2021, a Microsoft Forms survey of previous SofC program participants garnered 70 responses from both current students and alumni. Separate focus groups on undergraduate and graduate SofC programming took place in a virtual and hybrid format in November 2021.

Students emphasized how the School had given them the opportunity to work on their own research while learning from students from many other disciplines. They recommended that the School clarify its role as a hub for all things urban, provide more structure in its programs, and conduct more effective outreach.

Based on all responses, the top three positive things about SofC programming that stood out were: the opportunity to conduct individual research, getting to meet new people, and being in a collaborative and multidisciplinary environment. The top three things that require improvement were: better branding, specifically around what the SofC is and what it does, leveraging the alumni network and including alumni in ongoing programming, and having better structure and/or guidance during programming. Lastly, the top three things that stood out to engage in better outreach were: reaching out to students through faculty, making announcements at the beginning of classes, and creating a hub within the SofC for urban issues.

## When you think of the School of Cities, what are the first three words or phrases that come to your mind?

### SURVEY

Many survey respondents had participated in the Student Fellows/Academy program (33 individuals), and 31 of these individuals recommended the program, highlighting its opportunity to carry out original research. Strengths of other programs included: their interdisciplinary nature, the ability to make connections and network, skill development, and new learning. Graduates across programs mentioned the new opportunities opened up, including jobs, research grants, media attention, and networks. Respondents suggested that the SofC also provide virtual communities, online networking opportunities, in-person seminars, job postings, alumni programming, boot camps, mentorship programs, and collaborative partnerships. Over half (37) of the respondents said that the SofC experience did not lead them to other opportunities, while 34 said it did.

Based on these survey responses, it is clear that the SofC has room for improvement in engaging alumni and creating a better network that provides opportunities for both alumni and current students. Former program participants emphasized the need for better branding and outreach across disciplines in order to maintain the interdisciplinarity of the initiative and its programming.



Source:  
School of Cities  
student survey,  
2021.

## UNDERGRADUATE FOCUS GROUP

Most of the seven undergraduate students in the focus had either participated in the Student Fellows/Academy program, or the Multidisciplinary Urban Capstone course. Students were most appreciative of the opportunity to conduct their independent (and funded) research at the SofC. These opportunities helped some individuals realize what they were passionate about, while also building their resume and developing relevant skills. To improve these programs in the future, students would have appreciated more structure to the programs, specifically for group meetings, and mentorship on the projects. Undergraduate students felt that the SofC generally could create more networking and mentorship opportunities and build more of a sense of community. In order to reach undergraduate students, the focus group individuals suggested improving SofC branding to specify what opportunities are available, making announcements at the beginning of classes, posting about opportunities on Quercus, and asking Faculties to introduce programs to their students.

## GRADUATE FOCUS GROUP

Most of the four graduate students in this group had participated in the Student Fellows/ Academy program. They primarily highlighted the positive interdisciplinary experience they had through the SofC programs, with great appreciation for the exposure to different urban-related ideas that different students and faculty were studying. The graduate students noted some ambiguity around what the SofC is and what it does, and suggested more focus and better branding, along with more structured programming. They also requested better engagement and relationships with alumni. To better support graduate students during their studies, the SofC could create a hub for urban issues, as well as create a space for project acceleration. Lastly, for the SofC to better reach graduate students, they could take advantage of administrative channels, reach out to students through faculty and supervisors, and do advertising about programming in classes.

Based on these focus groups, the SofC should highlight and strengthen the alumni network of the Student Fellows/Academy program, offer more mentorship opportunities, and conduct more effective outreach to students across the university.

