

## **#MakingCentsTO**

### **Equitable Cities**

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Moderator: Hi, everyone, I'm Kristyn Wong-Tam, and it's great to see all of you here today. We are here for the fourth instalment of the Process for Progress Virtual Speaker Series.

Of course we've been trying to design a panel discussion with subject matter experts, and we bring all of this to you, largely because we want to demystify the city of Toronto's budget process. Because we know that every dollar matters, and how we spend these limited dollars are very important, not just to City Council, but to residents across our great city.

I'd like to begin by acknowledging the land that we are gathered on, and of course, many of us could be coming from different places across Canada. If you are doing this video in a different place other than Toronto, I hope that you can also reflect upon where you are as well, and then give that some consideration.

I'd like to begin by acknowledging the indigenous people of all the lands that we are gathered on today. While we meet today on a virtual platform, I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge the importance of this land, which we all call home.

We do this to reaffirm our commitment and ability in improving relationships between First Nations, and to improve our own understanding of local indigenous peoples and their cultures. From coast to coast to coast, we acknowledge the ancestral and unceded territories of all of Inuit, Métis and First Nations people that call this nation home.

Please take a moment and reflect on how you can do this work as individual, how we can do this work collectively, and how we can all consider our path and our journey as we move towards true reconciliation and truth and collaboration.

Our speakers today are dynamic, and I'm very keen to introduce them very shortly. The subject today for this discussion is about equitable cities. We know that the pandemic has been just devastating in every possible perspective of how it's actually impacted the City of Toronto.

But we also know, as we've spoken before, is that the pandemic has not affected us all equally. There are some individuals and some community members that have been feeling the fierce impact of the pandemic. It has left individuals in our community homeless, it has left people further

impoverished. There are some individuals in our communities that have not experienced the break, and they're not all the essential healthcare workers that we think they are.

Sometimes they're retail workers, they're grocery workers, they're people living and providing care for seniors. There are all sorts of individuals who have really felt this pandemic.

And in particular we know that disproportionately, the pandemic has hit women, black, indigenous communities hard, and this is something that we'd like to talk about today, is, how do we address the inequities in our society? The inequities that have been shone upon even brighter by the pandemic.

And then, moving forward, recognising that we have big budget process of the City, how do we actually do the very best we can to use the budget process to address those structural and social inequities.

Let's just talk off the top, right off the bat. I think there are some things for us to know. We know that 56% of the women workers are concentrated in occupations known as the five Cs; this is women who are offering care, who are cashiers, who are working in catering, hospitality services, cleaning and clerical functions.

And those particular people, we are aware of, and because statistics have shown that they have actually been impacted in ways that will make it very difficult for them to recover, if we don't drive true investments and structural change into making sure that their work is valued in different ways. So in order for us to see how we can support them, we need to understand what is happening to this group.

37% of single mother-led families in Toronto are living in poverty. That is a whopping number for us, especially for those who live in Toronto Centre, which is the area that I'm privileged to represent. Toronto Centre shamefully has the highest poverty levels of child poverty. And of course, Toronto holds that [monocle 00:04:32] across the country.

There are many more statistics that we could cite. I won't do it all at this point in time, because I think at this stage of the pandemic – we're almost nine months in – there are probably a lot of other things that can be said, and we have some experts in who joined us today, that I know are very keen to share their thoughts.

So I'm just going to hand over to my bio notes. Sorry folks, my bio notes have just disappeared. I'm pulling back on my screen. This is a reality of working online.

If I can just get the panellist to give us a hat tip or a nod when I read their names, we will be hearing from you very shortly.

Anjum Sultana is the National Director of Public Policy and Strategic Communications at YWCA Canada. This is the nation's largest and oldest gender equity organisation. Anjum is the primary author and operations lead for a feminist economic recovery plan for Canada. And of course, it is the first nationally-focused plan of its kind in the world.

Wow, that is amazing. Thank you very much.

Liv Mendelsohn is the Director of Accessibility and Inclusion at the Miles Nadal Jewish Community Centre. She's the Artistic Director of ReelAbilities Toronto Film Festival. She is the recipient of the City of Toronto's 2019 Disability Access Award. She is currently – and I'm very proud to say – a member of the City of Toronto's Accessibility Advisory Committee, and she also works and supports the work at the Diversity, Equity and Accessibility Committee through the City of Toronto museum inclusion.

So Liv, welcome and glad to have you here.

Jessica Ketwaroo-Green holds a Bachelor of Arts in Politics and Governance at Ryerson University. She is a rising star to be watched – I've been watching her star rise for some time. She's got an academic career focus on gender justice, gender equity and policy studies. And through her career, she has worked primarily in the non-profits coordinating sector, on a personal mission to advance social, political and economic position of women and gender-diverse people in Canada.

Jessica also directs advocacy and policy with the Canadian Women Chamber of Commerce. Thank you, Jessica, thank you so much for being here.

We've got two more speakers, and please bear with me, but these are very important bios. And I should also say that none of what I'm saying is actually not already contained on our website. I'm just giving you a tiny little snippet about who our speakers are, and you can look them up on our website afterwards.

Sarah Blackstock is the Manager of Social Policy for the City of Toronto in the Social Development, Finance and Administration Division. She's working with residents, community groups and other stakeholders. She leads the development of social policy focus on increasing equity and inclusion. Thank you, Sarah.

Today Sarah told me – I'm going to share with you – is that equity budgeting is her favourite file. I thought that she's going to bring a lot of enthusiasm to this discussion.

And then finally, last but not least, Prabha Khosla. She has a Master's degree in Urban Planning, twenty years of experience working in cities,

and she does this work globally. She works with women's groups and local communities, governments, utilities and other urban stakeholders.

Her work focuses on gender equality, women's rights, democratising local government, public services, infrastructure, reduction of urban inequities and participatory budgeting.

So this is our panel. Thank you all of you for being here today. This is a very important discussion.

So I think I'd like to start off by just sort of helping us set the ground for what is equity, and what does equity mean to you? I'm going to start off with this question, I'm going to go straight to Anjum.

Anjum: There are so many different definitions, and I know often times there is this conversation about what is equity, what is equality. And for me, at the heart of equity conversations, is a conversation about fairness, about justice, about how do we actually – you know, in the conversation we're having, the City of Toronto, how do we make it so everyone is able to achieve their full potential?

Because unfortunately right now, there are barriers in place, both direct and indirect, that prevent people from achieving that, through no fault of their own, but because of the society and the way it's been constructed.

And then when we think about, you know, aspects of one's identity that create those barriers, or the way society reacts to those parts of ourselves. So you know, talking about sexism, talking about anti-black racism, talking about anti-indigenous racism, talking about ableism.

So these are some of the things that have been created because of society, but people – people – are being impacted by it.

But you know, I often talk about public policy as being in many ways, the rules of society, the way we decide collectively how we want to govern ourselves. And a lot of the issues that we see, those inequitable outcomes, or those unjust outcomes, it's because of human decisions, or human choice.

And so we actually have the power, if we prioritise correctly, to address that. And that's where community groups come in, that's where public service comes in, that's where political will comes in.

But for me, equity is really about addressing the injustice of society and doing it in a systematic way.

Moderator: Yeah, Anjum, thank you. I think you raise a really important point around the issue of fairness and social justice, and I just want to be able to unpack this a little bit further. Because Toronto often describes itself –

and it's on all our tourism materials – that we are the most diverse city in the world, one of the most dynamic and diverse cities in the world.

But that's not always the only measurement that we need to count on. And maybe if I can just invite Liv into this conversation. The issue around equity, how do people living with disabilities, for example, see themselves in that conversation? And what is an equity lens to you?

Liv: I think, you know – I think people with disabilities are often left out of conversations around equity. I think it's one of the – ableism is one of the systems of oppression that often kind of is left to the side.

But as we take more intersectional approaches, and as this epidemic has just ravaged across so many groups, we're seeing more and more opportunities to have people work together, and attack and dismantle together across multiple areas.

But I think an equity focus or an equity lens, you know, it's one thing to have diversity, it's one thing to be able to say, we have a lot of diverse people in the room or in the city, but equity and justice is about, are we doing right by all of those people? Does everybody have a chance, as Anjum said, to reach their full potential?

Does the City have a chance to reach its full potential by being able to take advantage of all the contributions that could be made, that aren't being made, because of barriers?

Moderator: Mm-hmm, thank you . So with respect to what you've just described as, like, you know, recognising the inequities, is one thing. Making sure that everyone is included, who is a group that's probably disadvantaged, is another. But it sounds to me we're going to need some tools, and this is where I'm going to turn to Sarah for a bit.

Sarah, you've been working on equity-responsive budgeting at the City. It's definitely an issue that I've been championing since 2016/17/18. There's been a number of motions that have been adopted by Toronto City Council.

With respect to your work and what you've been empowered to do, what is an equity lens, and what is equity-responsive budgeting?

Sarah: So think if we step back for a minute, an equity lens tool is actually a tool we wish we didn't have to use. And we need an equity lens tool, because so often policies, programs and budgets are built and evaluated without adequately considering the needs of people who have been historically marginalised, oppressed, indigenous, black and equity-seeking people.

So it is a tool that is in response to the prevalence of injustice and marginalisation.

At the City we have a number of equity priorities, and we have equity priorities, of course, that Councillor Wong-Tam and many other councillors have championed, often fed and fuelled by community groups who are saying, it's all well and good that the city is a wonderfully diverse city, but if we're going to enable those diverse residents to thrive, then we need to make sure that our policies and programs acknowledge the very different experiences and needs of that diverse population.

Councillor Wong-Tam started off reminding us that COVID has hit the City and people across the city in very different ways. And to be very blunt, I think part of the challenge with the City's initial response was that we had a one-size-fits-all approach. We shut down everything and that was very beneficial for some people in Toronto.

In Toronto we saw the rates of COVID dip and flatten in many parts of the city. And in others, particularly in the northwest of the city and for black and low-income Torontonians, it had virtually no effect. So that reminds us that an equity tool has to be something that we use in all the work that we do.

The City of Toronto does have an equity lens tool, and it does a number of things; it supports staff to engage with information about the different equity-seeking black and indigenous residents in Toronto. So information about the kinds of barriers that they may face, and their lived experience. And it takes them through a process of analysing how their policy or program might be able to diminish some of the barriers, or mitigate any barriers that a particular policy or program or budget decision might be resulting in.

When it comes to the budget, it is mandatory that every budget proposal – and a budget proposal is a change in the budget. So if there's going to be a cut or if there's going to be an investment, it's mandatory that that budget proposal include an equity impact analysis.

And part of what's happened over the last two years, because of the work of folks probably listening in and members of this panel, is that decision-makers, both on the staff side and on the political side, are having to engage with that equity impact analysis throughout the life of the budget. So that by the time it gets to Council and the public is able to engage with it, there is a lot of information and analysis that can inform not only Council's decision about the budget, but residents' decisions.

Moderator: Sarah, thank you. I think you raise some really good points, and I have to say, some of the conversation and the tools is kind of big thinking. But does it translate to real operational enhancements and service needs that are met on the ground? And for that, I'm going to turn it to Jessica.

Jessica, if you can just respond to what Sarah has provided, because Sarah of course, is part of the policy-making machine at the City, trying

to do good work, but whether or not that good policy implementation and development, is it making a difference here on the ground in the communities that you're working with and for?

Jessica: Yeah, I think that that's a very important question, and Sarah brought up many reasons why a gender equity lens is so important. And it's specifically because things don't work on the ground evenly. Much of our policy, much of our work is a one-size-fits-all approach, and unfortunately we are leaving out communities as a result of that.

And I did want to start or preface the answer to your question by saying that for me, I think an equity lens, it's a methodology for critical analysis, and ensuring that we're including different perspectives.

But I also like to tell people who aren't necessarily aware, or have engaged in an equity lens, that it's almost a little common sense, that when you put out a policy in a program, it makes sense to engage and see how everybody feels about it. What is everyone's perspective on such policy or program. Because in my experience, and what I'm seeing, is that we're not doing enough equity, or we're not doing enough critical analysis.

A lot of it is very symbolic and we use language that feels really good. We use language that sounds like it's equitable, but it's not transformative change, where we're seeing people in their day-to-day lives feeling, yes, this one program is supporting me, I got exactly what I needed from it. And we're not really getting to developing policies and programs where the outcomes are equitable.

And so I think that we need to take another step forward in creating an equity lens when we are doing, or creating programs, making sure that we're not just engaging communities in these conversations, but we're meaningful incorporating their suggestions into things that we build.

I'm thinking, as an example – and you know, Kristyn, you started this conversation talking about COVID and how there have been sort of changes in Toronto, unfortunately, which the sort of shut-down, how it's impacted different communities differently.

And the same thing could be said for when we look at equity-seeking groups, not only are we talking, are we considering what – like, equity or intersectionality overall, I think that sometimes with this conversation, we just think intersectionality, and that means there's a dominant voice there. We're not always looking at the different individual groups within them, as Live mentioned.

Sometimes ableism gets pushed to the side, sometimes the opinions of young people get pushed to the side, and there are dominant voices

unfortunately, when we are talking about intersectionality. Or sorry, when we're talking about gender equity.

I always turn to our sort of founder of the term intersectionality, Kimberle Crenshaw, to speak to this, that there are dominant voices. And I think it's about being aware of who's being dominant in these spaces, to ensure that their perspectives aren't the ones that are only leading our equity work through a policy and a programs perspective, because it's still leaving gaps for other communities.

Moderator: Thank you. You know, you really raise some good points. There's the theory and the practice, and then there's what's happening at the ground in terms of community and evaluation. And also, I think we need to measure outwards, so like, is it working, and are there best examples perhaps in other places that we can borrow from?

I'm going to invite Prabha into this conversation, because Prabha, you've been doing this work, not just in Toronto. You recently left us – we're very sad to know that you're on the West Coast, which is where you're joining us for this call today.

But you've also done this work around the world, and you've been sort of [unintelligible 00:21:30] inserting yourself into this conversation in cities around the globe, on how to advance women's equality and place women into the urban agenda. Which is, of course, where many women are living these days and where many girls and non-binary folks are finding themselves calling it home.

And cities, often times municipal governments, deliver a level of service where people are feeling the most directly close to their government.

Based on what Sarah has provided and what Liv and Anjum, and now what Jessica has said in terms of the theory and in the practice and implementation, how do we actually try to address those gaps, and is there another city in the world that we can learn from, or cities that we can learn from?

Prabha: Thank you, Kristyn, and thank you to all the panelists for your comments. I think one of the first things I want to say is that when we are looking at inequalities – and I prefer to use the word equality and inequalities, just because it's part of the international legal framework of human rights conventions. And there is a reason for why we use the word equality. But anyways, on the side.

I think a really important point here is that we need to see and understand what is power and who has power and how is power situated in the structures of governance in our society.



And if we do not really look at power as the central organising principle, we cannot really change those power relations to be more equal, so we all have a say and we all have a voice.

But moving from that, in terms of what's happening in other countries, one of the things I feel that has happened, is that if there are not legal requirements by the municipality or the provincial government or the federal government, to really make change and start to create a change in the structures of ruling, there will not be a change.

Because what happens is, then, if you have progressive mayors or councillors, and you have push from civil society, you get piecemeal projects that will go X,Y,Z systems, and then they kind of stop. And if you have a change of government and you get more a right-wing government, you kind of lose all that momentum and all the good work that the staff has done and people have put in.

So for example, even in terms of budgeting, Austria and Albania, for example, require – it's a law in these two countries that there be gender-responsive budgeting at the national level and the municipal level. And what happens is, over time you start to build that capacity and you build the knowledge and you start to shift how money is spent and how money is making a difference or not.

But I also want to talk about the UK, where there are national laws that require all local governments to make anti-racism action plans, and gender equality action plans, and any combination of the two. They're required to make them annually and they have to report on the implementation annually.

So I feel we need really strong legal requirements, because otherwise sometimes the gains are short-lived and they do not necessarily create institutional change, and the structures of governance don't always change.

Moderator: That's fascinating, Prabha, to know that there's these legal requirements that the national government would have to set forward. And of course, the national government here in this case, in Canada, has touted itself as a feminist government, and our Prime Minister has been very proud about proclaiming himself a feminist. And even to the fact that they have put forward a gender-responsive budget.

So I guess the question – or gender-based analysis budget, they call it, the GBA Plus – I guess the question is, if the federal government under Prime Minister Trudeau was to make it a requirement that if you were to receive federal dollars for infrastructure, whether it's transportation, road-builds, hospital-builds, school-builds or any other type of builds, including housing, and municipal dollars flow through the provinces, they can do so. Is that not right?

So they can put all sorts of conditions, as they often times do, in terms of who gets the benefit of those dollars, how quickly is it spent? So this is entirely possible with the political window of opportunity that we have right now.

But Prabha, maybe I'm just going to come back to you for a second; why do you think that that hasn't happened so far? Because this government has received a lot of pushback. The federal government has received a lot of significant pushback whenever they tried to advance gender equality, or even putting an intersectional gender analysis approach to their work in budget.

Prabha: I think one of the reasons is that the women's movement is at a low ebb in this country. I think that we took a very heavy toll under Harper, and all the cutbacks of funding to women's organisations, and many women's groups have disappeared. And what we're left with is largely a feminist social services sector, right.

And one of the things I really want to say is that, you know, the oppression of women and girls crosses all of the kinds of social relations. So whether we're looking at race or ability, disability, ethnicity, location, age, the oppression of women crosses across all those. And I feel that that is a conversation we need to bring back.

So even in the community of folks with disabilities, I can bet you anything that women have a much more difficult time. And if you're racialized and women and older, for example, you'll have an even harder time in accessing services.

And I feel like what has happened is that we have seen a disappearing of women as a category of analysis, and I think that it behooves all of us to put that back on the table. And especially if we have the government currently, who says they're feminists, but I just want to take the moment of the crisis to say that this is an unfortunate opportunity.

So for example, if you look at the kind of money that the federal government is spending right now, why is it not being spent in a manner that very specifically identifies focus communities that we know from all our data, we know from talking to women and men, and younger and older, and LGBT communities on the ground, who is disadvantaged and how?

How come that money is not being tailored and specifically targeted to the communities that we know are in need, whether you're in rural areas, your indigenous people. Think of all the indigenous communities that don't have water and sanitation, right. Think of police services – where is their accountability to that?

So I think that this is where we can say, and cities can say, okay, if we are getting , you know, \$60 million for housing, this is how we want our sixty million to go, so that we have a more equitable, equal, inclusive Toronto, just to give you an example.

Moderator: Great, and I see Jessica was nodding enthusiastically when you were speaking, Prabha. Jessica, did you have something to add perhaps, to support Prabha's position there?

Jessica: Absolutely. Prabha, I think you brought up so many points, I felt like my head might have fallen off after. But the one thing that I did want to highlight as you were speaking, and it made me think about this, that I think with the sort of Canadian culture, if you will, we grow really comfortable with complacency, and we like to – and I know I mentioned this before – have these conversations that are very symbolic.

And the first thing that comes to my mind is this rhetoric in Canada, that you know, as a Canadian, sometimes you'll hear that we tout this, we talk about, oh, we're so diverse, we're so – we don't have racism here, we're so integrated and we're all equal here in Canada.

But many marginalised communities know that that's not the truth. But it's a narrative that we like to promote in Canada. And I feel that a lot of this – and I think it starts at the federal government, or the federal level, where we had GBA Plus.

And if we want to encourage other governments, if we want to encourage other programs, policies, programs, it starts by removing ourselves from this complacency that our symbolic language, our symbolic speeches, whatever have you, is not enough, and that we need to, yes, be very mindful and we need to say that this is a requirement.

It's unfortunate that we have to say that that's a requirement, but I think that as part of our Canadian culture, we get very caught up in the complacency and to say, oh, we're a feminist government. And then that's that and we move on with life, and that's sufficient and we feel comfortable with that.

Moderator: Jessica, you're getting some nods from Liv as well. Live, I think Prabha raised a couple of issues, and I just want to highlight them. Maybe you can help unpack it further.

Is the marginalisation of those who are also living with disabilities, and how one person could probably be impacted in a multitude of ways. And when government is already spending its money, I mean, one way or the other, the City of Toronto has to deliver services. One way or the other, so does the Province and so does the national government.

What can happen that could be significant with respect to a policy shift, that will allow all governments to be able to better serve people who are living with disabilities, especially those who are women, who are maybe black or racialized, or perhaps older, just as Prabha has cited?

Liv: Yeah, I think Prabha hit the nail dead on. I couldn't agree more. I think first of all, we have a huge issue when we're trying to use equity lenses in policy, in that we don't have data. We don't have data, as Prabha was pointing out, that disaggregates and not how things impact women and girls, particularly with disability data.

We don't know, as a City, where people with disabilities live in this city, what their needs are – we don't collect that data. And during the pandemic, that's been a huge issue around public health. Toronto Public Health has started – just started – to disaggregate data around race. That needs to happen on other dimensions of identity. It's really crucial if we're going to make informed decisions.

I think there's also been, you know, in the speed to recovery, and I think a lot of the groups that we're talking about are not in recovery, we're still in active crisis.

But as the city starts to look to recovery, we also have to look at unintended consequences. You know, when we're creating new programs designed to meet the needs of [unintelligible 00:33:49], as Sarah was saying, when we shut everybody down, some parts of the city were really impacted and there was an uneven consequence.

I think when you expand city programs, allowing dining on the sidewalk, that's wonderful, but that has a huge impact on people with disabilities trying to navigate through the city. So we need a way to ask the right questions, to look at what the unintended consequences will be, especially when we're moving so quickly.

And the other thing I would say is that there are some cities that have had some success in starting to look at budgeting, not just in terms of okay, what did we get from the federal body and what do we get from the provincial body, and how much did this area get last year, but really looking at outcomes, budgeting for outcomes.

I know that's something that's been happening in the US in Baltimore, and in some other places, really sitting down as a City and saying, what are our goals in terms of equity and justice? What kind of city do we want to have? And then, how does this budget – what kind of outcomes do we need to see after a year, three years, five years of this budget? How will things look different?

You know, I think it's something that we are already doing, but to do in a really systematic way, whether it's legal requirement – Prabha, that

would be amazing – but even if that’s not a possible policy tool, at least identifying where we want to be, and connecting the budget to that, rather than just having the budget be a set of needs in a document.

Moderator: Mm, thank you. I’m going to bring Anjum and then Sarah back into this conversation, because I think to me, it’s fantastic to be able to sort of hear from the real needs and experiences and observations on the ground, but also coming back to the issue around policy development.

And Sarah, [unintelligible 00:35:42], you know, I’m going to leave this one for you right after Anjum. But you know, you’re tasked with development of policy, and Anjum, you’ve helped co-author a paper or a report recently, and that report was specifically to put a feminist lens over the COVID recovery response. And I know that we invited you into the City of Toronto to speak directly to Mr [Sodwaukee], who was actually tasked with writing this report for the City.

But you actually gave him a lot to think about, specifically around what does a feminist response to COVID recovery look like? Do you want to speak to the policy work that you’ve now just created, and also just to help us tie up what some of the conversation components that have come forward both Liv, Prabha, as well as Jessica?

Anjum: Yeah, you know, this is such an important conversation, and I want to pick up on the thread that Prabha raised around the erasure of that gender lens. And I think it’s really important that we do not lose sight of it.

You know, this year was supposed to be a very, very significant year for gender equality, not just in Canada, but globally. It was the twenty fifth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. But at this point in time, we actually are risking potentially three decades’ worth of progress in this one year, right, in Canada and globally, and across cities in this country, including Toronto.

And I think one of the reasons why we put forward this report, this plan was, we wanted to make the gendered impacts of COVID-19 undeniable, right. Because you know, one of the questions, or one of the points Liv raised, was around the lack of data.

The data we do have is very clear; there are significant gendered impacts on economic outcomes, as well as social outcomes; from gender-based violence to housing and homelessness, to jobs and the sectors, that we actually –

You know, the sectors that are currently suffering, we don’t know if they’ll come back. You know, look at Toronto, it is a beacon of hospitality, tourism, entertainment. Many of the folks that occupy those roles are women. And so we don’t know right now, there isn’t a clear-cut

plan for, if those jobs aren't coming back, how are we going to transition folks to other jobs, right? How do you put a gender lens on it.

You know, I wanted to just raise a point – and Prabha raised this – around the lack of directing investments to where it's needed the most. When I think about equity, when I think about equality, I think about who is hurting the most? Where is the pain? And we need to direct our funding to where the pain is.

But unfortunately we don't do that, and you know, there's perhaps many different reasons, but what it actually does, it actually impedes our recovery.

So right now – you know, the point was raised – some communities are still in crisis, some are going into recovery, and what economists are saying is that we might actually experience a key recovery, as in, we might actually have some communities going back to pre-COVID levels, but we will have other communities that will experience deepening and deepening inequality.

So that's actually one of my big fears for this city. We already knew before the pandemic there was a great deal of inequality, right. People weren't able to achieve their full potential. What will actually happen in the recovery phase, unless we do something is, we'll see that gap widen more and more between women and two-spirit gender-diverse people and men, between various equity-seeking groups. We'll see that division in the city.

I think when it comes to the need for disaggregated data, we can't be guided by guesswork, we can't just estimate our way out of this crisis. We actually need to be very focused and data-driven, and have those metrics, and actually use those metrics to guide action.

So I just want to share a thing that has come out of the state of California. It's a health equity metric, and they've actually mandated that before different parts of the state, different counties, go into more and more relaxed public health measures, they actually have to look at this health equity metric score.

And they look at, you know, are the communities that have disproportionate numbers of various equity-seeking groups – you know, don't look at a generic, overall number, look at the experiences of specific communities, and use that to drive economic recovery.

I know at the start of September, a lot of parents were very upset with the lack of coordination between back to school, and also economic recovery and lifting lockdowns. I think that in itself demonstrates what happens when you don't put all of these considerations at the same time.

The thing I'll leave with is, how do we measure success? I think right now, what this crisis has done, is shown us what is important. Now I think the next step is actually embedding what is success, including equity, in how we move forward?

And so not just, has the GDP gone back to pre-COVID levels, but is there less inequality, for example for income? But similarly, not just looking at jobs and wages, but also looking at housing, gender-based violence and other aspects of social inequities in our measures of success.

I'll leave it there, but I think we have real opportunity for Toronto to be a leader, and that's what I'm hoping we push the City, come this budget process.

Moderator: Okay, so there is so much to unpack there. Every single one of you has given us, I think, a little bit of a picture. This is almost a collaborative painting; you've all put your paintbrushes on the canvas, and there's a few strokes, each one.

Now we've got to figure out how to complete that picture, if it's ever going to be complete to anybody's sort of eyes.

Sarah, this one's going to be big for you. Sarah has the fortunate job of helping City Council navigate the ship. So essentially in terms of developing the equity lens, which is a tool that's supposed to be placed over the budget, so therefore divisions can actually reflect upon whether or not their budget is actually going to be delivering an outcome that's equitable. And whether or not it's measured – let's just leave that for now, I don't think we've done a great job about it yet, but it doesn't mean it's not a work in progress.

But let me just sort of tee it up this way: the City of Toronto has a \$13.5 billion operating budget in 2020. We know that as we're heading towards the end of this year, by December 31<sup>st</sup> this year, we will be facing a \$1.5 billion deficit.

Now, as we get ready to open up the 2021 budget process, which is literally, you know, weeks away, we are now staring at a fiscal deficit opening pressure, of 1.8, almost 12.9 billion dollars. During my time at City Council, I've not faced any of these necessarily quantum challenges before, but this is part of COVID reality.

So now, with scarce dollars, it usually means that we are going to have to figure out how to balance that budget. And because municipalities, unlike provincial and federal governments, we are – this is interesting – we are legally bound – this is where the legal requirement is – we are legally bound to balance our budgets.

So Sarah, we need to stretch a diamond to a dollar. We don't have the ability or the advantage of borrowing our way out of this. The mayor has already floated some propositions in terms of, you know, potential service cuts. I think he said this sort of in the context of threatening, you know, the provincial and federal government, if they don't come up with some financial support.

But he did site some services that he would have to cut. And those services general, for everyone's knowledge, is services are often times relied upon very heavily by women; services to daycare facilities, services to library facilities, recreation supports or facilities, as well as housing supports and shelter supports. A lot of those services make the difference for women.

Sarah, moving forward in 2021, and even as we try to reconcile the deficit that's before us, how can the equity-responsive budgeting work that you're working on, be able to meet the needs of the next year, as we get over this fiscal hump? And then following that, how do we position ourselves into a forward-looking direction that can borrow the collective ideas that have been shared with us today? And so therefore, you can advance this work to City Council?

Sarah: Thanks for the easy question, Councillor.

Moderator: You're welcome.

Sarah: One of the things that I have heard throughout this conversation is the importance of distinguishing between policy tools and policy priorities. So at the City, the equity lens tool is a policy tool, and we can overlay that on all of the budget proposals that are being explored, as well as any other policy or program.

But let's talk about the budget. So that's a tool that we can use so that councillors and residents know that if they make X-service cut, these are the implications.

Where I think the conversation gets more interesting is when we talk about policy priorities. So the City has several equity priorities; we have a action plan to confront anti-black racism, we have a commitment to accessibility, we have a poverty reduction strategy.

Those policy priorities should be guiding the kinds of budget proposals that staff are tasked with coming up with, so that then, Council and residents can make decisions about what is most important.

In this environment of scarce resources and incredible pressure, I think we need to have a conversation about what are our policy priorities. When everything is a priority, nothing can be a priority. And I would



hazard to – I would risk saying that it's actually a tool that can be used to avoid advancing equity, right. [Background noise]

Moderator: Sorry, this is real life and real time, and that is my seventeen-month-old son crying. So I'm going to put myself on mute. I am listening, but I'm going to mute myself right now.

Sarah: So really my point was just that there needs to be policy priorities. And our policy tools can help us establish those, and they can help us determine if we are achieving those priorities.

I will just note that the City is actually coming forward with the disaggregated data strategy next month. It's relatively modest, to be honest, because we want to make sure we get it right. We want to make sure that we don't create service barriers before we know how to collect and use this data.

And as many of the panelists have suggested, though, it's all well and good to have, to be collecting data, but we have no business collecting that data unless we A, commit to using it, and B, why we're using it. What precisely are the outcomes that we're trying to achieve, and how are we going to measure whether or not we're achieving those – and data can be useful there.

But again, it all comes back to what the policy priorities are, and that requires the active engagement of Council and residents.

Moderator: Sarah, thank you. I know that Prabha wants to jump in here, and I think she's going to probably give you a little bit more to think about – all of us a little bit more to think about.

Before you do so, Prabha, just to share with you, the Sodwauke Report, that's all about the Toronto Recovery and Rebuild – and this is the report that the City of Toronto is using as a blueprint to sort of rethink and re-tool our economy and everyone involved – it was almost four hundred pages.

And to Sarah's point, and something I'd like you to respond to on top of the things that you'd like to say, is that it really was very curious to not see major priority themes. So we had a lot to say about a lot of things, but we didn't identify the priorities.

If you can just respond to Sarah, but also a little bit more about what happens when a city doesn't set priorities? And then, can we still achieve the equity outcomes without them?

Prabha: My first question was to Sarah, to make sure that I understand what the equity lens does, which is, that it is focused to either cutbacks to the

existing budget, whatever the category is, or to enhancements to existing categories, right.

So my question is then, who is looking at that budget line from before, like, when it was established, and the terms and conditions of the use of that money, who does the analysis? So if childcare, you know, was ten million, right, and now we're looking at cutbacks of three million, that means this too will only analyse the proposal for the three million cutback.

But what about the larger analysis of that big budget line in the first place? And I don't mean daycare – we can look at something else as well.

But Kristyn, coming to your points is, I think that's why the question here is that it's political. Priority-setting, policy setting is political. We need political decision-making. This is not about a technical issue or a staff issue.

If we are seriously committed to having a more equitable and inclusive Toronto, I just want to raise the issue of poverty, okay. Like, there's so much data around poverty in Toronto. We have priority neighbourhoods, we know what housing is like, we know the lack of transit, we know how not having transit does not enable one to get work. We also know it's not good for women's safety, right, women who do shift work, women who are coming home at night.

This pandemic is going to seriously increase poverty in existing poverty pockets of Toronto. So really, it's shocking to hear that the City's done all this work, and priority – that poverty-reduction or whatever language you want to – how come that is not a priority? Because that will immediately give you a context: you have data as a city.

I agree, it's not all disaggregated by some of the variables that we would like, but surely having a poverty-reduction lens would enable us to better spend the money where we are looking at infrastructure or services, and will raise the level of – you know, the living standard of all kinds of Torontonians in different geographical locations.

So I think it's almost shameful in not doing that.

Moderator: Thank you. Sorry, sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt you, Pradha.

Pradha: No, no, that's good.

Moderator: Yeah, no, thank you. You raised some excellent, excellent points in terms of where are our political priorities, and I think there's a capital P with respect to politicians. But there's also, you know, where are the resident priorities when the mayor stands up and says, there's no appetite for new

revenues for this reason or that reason. We need to be able to sort of lean into that discussion a little bit harder, I think.

I think Prabha, you had a question for Sarah, and Sarah, would you like to answer Prabha's question? Because I know that Anjum wants to also pipe in with a thirty-second comment. And then I want to bring Liv in just to go back in here.

Sarah: Yeah, I'll just take a really quick second. So Prabha's absolutely right; the process right now only is looking at the changes in the budget. That said, the City Manager and Chief Financial Officer do this fantastic analysis every year, and it generates these wonderful pie graphs that give residents and councillors a very good picture of where money is going. So you can see how much is going to community and social services, how much is going to infrastructure, how much is going to police.

So that does provide a bit of an opportunity to make some decisions that are informed by the equity priorities of the City.

Moderator: Mm-hmm, thank you. Anjum, go ahead.

Anjum: Thanks. What I wanted to say is, you know, a lot of these decisions about what matters, the table is already set, and then afterwards people are asked to come and participate, to sort of decide where things go.

But who is actually deciding what goes on the table in the first place, right? And this has been the challenge we faced when we have been looking at the federal government, for example, so you know, fantastic to see, for example in the Throne Speech, a commitment to a feminist and intersectional approach to this recovery and response.

But even, you know, the policies that have come out in this pandemic, it's been really because communities have said, this is a priority. And so it always happens after the fact, and for example, take CERB, a lot of communities could not access CERB, could not access EI even, right, the systems that have already been built.

And when community, civil society said, hey, by the way, this is not working, then there was a feedback group then that helped to course-correct. But why is that not part of the consideration in the first place, right?

So I think a lot of the policy-making that's happening is done ad hoc, or is done after the fact, but we really need to evaluate our assumptions from the get-go. So I think what Prabha was saying is, like, who gets to decide what is even part of the menu of options, right, when it comes to policy and investments. So that's one thing I want to share.

An example, very quickly is, in New Westminster, BC, they actually have a social equity policy and they're doing this at the City level around also resident engagement. So who actually gets to participate in setting the table? So I'll leave it there.

Respondent: Yeah, no, Anjum, thank you. I think this is – I mean, we can really go on for some time, this is such an important issue. And I have to say, as someone who sits through a lot of committee meetings and even through the Council debate, I really wish that your voices were heard louder and more clearly in that committee and at Council.

But because it's not going to be the case right now, maybe we can leave this discussion with a couple of notes, and I want to be able to sort of bring Jessica and Liv and everybody else back into this discussion, as we wind up our conversation here.

With respect to front-ending the community input – because we've already established that you know, priorities will have to be set at the political level. But how do we ensure that we don't sort overstep what the community is looking for? And so my question to all of you as we wind up is, how do we front-end the political input from citizens and residents, small business owners, those who don't see themselves as part of the political process, so that they can see themselves reflected in the outcomes and investments of a budget?

It's a long question, but really it's, how do we front-load, how do we front-end the community input? Who would like to go first?

Prabha, go ahead, and then I'm going to stop picking on you.

Prabha: Okay, I mean, I think that one thing is that it does require civil society as communities to also be organised. And we need to link across the different sectors that we are all a part of, right, the different communities, the different thematic and interest focus.

But I think if you look at, for example, Barcelona, there has been an incredible mobilisation of communities from different neighbourhoods, different thematic areas, everything from housing to public spaces, disability rights. Then we become the challenge to the elected officials, okay.

The other thing is, we get rid of them when they are failing us. And we need to ensure that there's a better representation at the Council decision-making, that reflects the many of us who are currently not reflected on Council. So there are many approaches.

And if we actually had a coalition of the many of us, we have good people elected and we organise and we put out the priorities. And we consult in our different networks. And I think, again, a lot of this exists.

We don't have to reinvent the wheel, we just need to have a better strategy to take on the current political decision-making structures.

Moderator: Thank you, Prabha. Sarah, you don't have to answer this question, because you might get into trouble – not –

Sarah: You know, let me tell you something though, that –

Moderator: Okay, thirty seconds. Go ahead.

Sarah: Yeah, as a policy-maker, if I bring something to Council and I haven't consulted adequately, call me out on it and talk to the councillors and have the councillors call me out on it, and send me back to do my job properly. And that does happen once in a while.

Moderator: Okay, thank you very much, Sarah, thank you. I don't think you're the one that we need to necessarily worry about, but we are going to get to it.

Liv?

Liv: I think Prabha's so right. Once again, I feel like this whole panel is, like, as Prabha said. But I think, you know, there is a huge role for us to work together and to revive networks that maybe have become more dormant. I think it's a real challenge right now, because the people we need to hear from the most, are also the people who've been hardest hit. And the organisations and agencies we need to hear from the most, are the ones who are struggling the most to do the work on the ground and to do direct support.

So I think there needs to be acknowledgement of that in the process, because there is absolutely a problem with engagement after the fact. And while the recovery report did involve a lot of engagement, not all of that engagement seemed to make its way into the report. And I think that's worth flagging and noting.

And I think that's part of the issue of not identifying priorities, because if you did have themes and priorities, it would be easier then to look back and report back that these are the communities that identify these priorities, and these are the ways that they're being hit.

And that's not something we saw enough of in that report, I have to say.

Moderator: Mm-hmm, thank you, Liv. I'm going to give the last word – there's two last words, really – but I'm going to give the last word to Jessica. And Anjum, I think - did you want to speak again?

Anjum: Yeah, to say –

Moderator: - Okay, Jessica, you hang on, you're getting the last word, Jessica. Go ahead Anjum, go.

Anjum: So I think we need to really come from a starting point that the current system or the current state of affairs is unfair. And unless we're actively doing something to address that unfairness in society, we're actually contributing to it.

So I think about the work around anti-racism, and you know, it's not enough to say you're not racist, unless you're doing something actively to address the systemic racism, the systemic inequity, the systemic oppression, you're actually contributing to that system, being inequitable, unequal.

So I think we really call our politicians and elected officials, what are you doing to make the city more fair? And if you're not doing anything, then you're part of the problem.

Moderator: Fair enough. Jessica, over to you.

Jessica: Thank you, and I feel kind of special to have the last word. But I think that there's two things; one is – and it's a theme that this whole panel has discussed, and I absolutely agree. And the first is, yes, we need to do community organising, we need our politicians to listen to equity-seeking groups.

But the thing for me is that I need our politicians to have the political will to, once you do engage, what are you going to do with that information? And that's the thing I feel like a lot of equity-seeking groups, we get tired; we've been studied over and over and over, we've been engaged over and over and over.

And truly, when you think about what's coming out, or what the requests are, they haven't really changed over time. Do I think they've become more intensified as a result of COVID? Absolutely. But this pandemic has been as ground-breaking as it has been, because of the – as my colleague Anjum here has said – because of the inequities that existed long before, and they've gone unaddressed.

And so do I think we kind of know what we need to do to make things more fair? Absolutely. I think that mobilisation – community mobilisation coalitions are part of it, but we're not hollering for new requests. We're saying the same things we've been chanting out on the streets for decades, years, and that hasn't changed.

So what we need is the political will to say, we hear you, we're listening, this pandemic has highlighted what you said, and here are the things that we're going to change, as Liv mentioned. Here are our priorities.

And the last thing that I want to mention is rethinking what we think is important. Somebody had mentioned – I think it was Prabha – you had mentioned, who even sets the list of options to begin with? And the fact that we have to go back [unintelligible 01:02:45] policies and processes, you know, we realise, uh-oh, this group isn't being supported, and that's because through –

And I think that that stems from the fact that, when we do – where we want to focus on when it comes to budget and when it comes to policy priorities and program priorities.

The first thing that came to my mind is actually another thing that my colleague Anjum here has said. And it was about investments in community. So when we talk about post-COVID – post-COVID recovery – what industries are we going to see, or what sectors are we going to see the most investment?

Likely it will be infrastructure, likely it will be road [blaze 01:03:33] and so on and so forth, some of those more traditional areas of investment for communities. Because we've come from this narrative that, oh, that's where the money is, this is –. We need to rebuild our economy, and this is the way forward.

Anjum has told me, and it kind of blew my mind, but if a government were to invest more money into childcare, or care services, they would actually end up generating more jobs, and they'd end up generating more income as a result. Versus the traditional ideologies of investments into infrastructure and so on and so forth.

So it's again then thinking about, we need to really consider where our priorities are in a budget, and it's looking at and challenging the belief that we hold that, oh, social services are an add-on, and we need to focus on the economy.

No, no, no, social services are about rebuilding the economy, they are about putting people first, they are about getting us back to a place that's way better than when we started before the pandemic. And I think that's where I'm going to leave it off, but what it boils down to is rethinking where our values are and really taking the transformative action to incorporate the marginalised, the equity-seeking groups into budgeting, into public policy, into our programs.

Moderator: Wow, there was just so much there, and Jessica, thank you. I think you summed it up for us beautifully, that the call to action is really, I think, not just here, but it's got to be right across the city.

And I hope that for those who are tuned in to watch this panel discussion, of course this is the fourth out of five, and hopefully you would have

enjoyed and learned a few things. And please share this with your family and friends, your colleagues.

We know you're watching, but we also want you to also not just watch, but then afterwards, take some action.

Our next panel discussion will be on November 23<sup>rd</sup> and it's really about the COVID recovery. What happens next? We've kind of got a little bit of a snapshot of where we need to go, but the next panel discussion, we're going to dive really deep into the technical where and who. Who gets to go there?

I want to thank our panel discussion – our panelists today. Thank you so much, you're all so incredibly busy and talented. But also, the fact that you've brought so much of your personal passion and heart to this discussion. I know as someone who is moderating a discussion, you've given us a real gift. Every single one of you has so much value to share with us in terms of the talents that you go about your daily day, we're so blessed and gifted to have you here today.

We will see you on the other side, folks. Please check us out online, [krisylwongtam.ca/makingsense](http://krisylwongtam.ca/makingsense). And of course, we will be also launching the Budget Town Hall, which we are going to be doing something very dramatically different this year. We're actually bringing the whole Town Hall – virtual Town Hall – online.

Because of the pandemic we've got to do things differently, but we want to make sure it's dynamic and participatory. And that's something that we care deeply about, because as every single one of our panelists have noted, your voices do matter. And if we can somehow crowd-source all that energy and all that amazing thinking into one place and bring it to City Council, I'm pretty confident that my colleagues, or MI, will be forced to listen. And that's a good thing.

So see you on the other side. Please take care and be well, everybody.

[End of recorded material 01:07:15]