

COMMUNITIES  
UNITED

# Impacts and Lessons Learned



from 6 years of Community  
Development in Northeast  
Edmonton



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# About this Report

**This report is not an evaluation. It is an attempt at mobilizing knowledge – sharing what was achieved, highlighting what has been learned, and, hopefully, inspiring others to utilize some of the approaches and strategies that follow.**



In 2019–2020, Communities United (CU) worked with Three Hive Consulting on an evaluation report. That report revealed that, amidst other outcomes, CU had developed a high degree of trust with partners, and that the next step in the work would be translating that trust into value. This report is an attempt at capturing and sharing the value of CU and the impact of trust put into action. While this report will provide a brief overview of the project, it will focus more heavily on the last few years of the initiative and will highlight key outcomes and lessons learned.

There are many audiences for this report and it might be of particular interest to those involved in community development, collaborative work, partnership development, or funders looking for creative ways to make an impact.

In addition to information provided by previous reports, evaluations, digital media, and CU staff, details for this report were gathered via 22 survey responses, 12 phone interviews, and 5 filmed interviews with CU partners and stakeholders.

## Setting

The work of Communities United was carried out primarily in Northeast Edmonton, Alberta, in the communities of Bannerman, Clareview Town Centre, Fraser, Hairsine, and Kirkness. These communities are located on Treaty 6 Territory and Métis Nation of Alberta Region #4.

The diverse Indigenous Peoples of this land include the Cree, Blackfoot, Dene, Anishinaabe, Nakota Sioux, Inuit, and Métis.

## Partners

This report was created by Matthew Taylor (MPT Nonprofit Consulting) and Marty Hennig (M. C. Hennig Research-Consulting), two former Communities United staff members, along with support from Bangel Public Relations, FILMR Media, Kelli Brunton, and the University of Alberta's Community-University Partnership (CUP).



# Background

**Communities United (CU) was a collaborative, community development initiative in Northeast Edmonton that began in 2016 and was supported financially by the Edmonton Community Foundation, City of Edmonton, and United Way of the Alberta Capital Region, who also provided administrative and logistical support.**



CU began as an initiative called 1000 Families, with an overt poverty reduction message. Through extensive community engagement and consultation, it was rebranded and reimagined as Communities United - a collaborative initiative embracing the principles of Asset Based Community Development. In 2018, in collaboration with community stakeholders, CU embraced a broad mandate with four priority areas: Thriving Youth; Boosting Household Income; Local Economic Development; and Community Connections.

CU held a unique role within the community as it was not a service provider, a referral agency, or a traditional funder. Rather, it was a multiyear initiative with a broad mandate, pulling together community stakeholders to collaboratively support and build initiatives and make the most of each partner's strengths and resources. It was intended to be different by supporting collaboration, breaking down barriers, and changing how we do business.

Part of what made CU effective was that it was never intended to be a permanent initiative. There would always be an end date, which challenged CU staff and stakeholders to invest in and support the development of projects, programs, and partnerships that would continue beyond CU's lifespan. Through community and stakeholder feedback, CU also found itself in a position to pursue a broad mandate without narrowly defined measures of success. This was not a common position to be in and it empowered CU to be creative and innovative in the work and projects it supported.



Although the intention of CU was to keep its paid staff to a small number, the reach and impact of CU was reflective of the incredible number of partners, groups, businesses, agencies, and community members deeply invested in the work. Nothing happened without collaboration, and CU's greatest achievements were the result of value driven people from all sectors of the community coming together to move on opportunities, embrace an entrepreneurial spirit, find creative ways to support what is happening in the community, and explore what's possible.

# Timeline

## 2016

- Key strategy meetings, engagement with community, and formation of working groups

## 2017

- Focus on community outreach, governance, and strategy
- Rebranding to Communities United
- Labour Market Partnership with Government of Alberta, focused on engaging with employers, employment opportunities, and training
- Environmental scan of the 5 neighbourhoods
- Development of community after school program
- 1st evaluation with [Three Hive Consulting](#)

## 2018

- Community engagement and development of Four Priority Areas
- Focus on supporting entrepreneurs
- Development and prototyping of Workforce Participation Program
- Ongoing support for school career fairs and financial literacy fairs

## 2019

- Pop-up markets
- Leaders of the Pitch program and youth employment activities
- Community engagement around Fraser land development
- Development of Communities United Theory of Change

## 2020

- Partnership with [MyMatchWork](#)
- Creation of [Food Works](#) program
- Support for [EdmontonEats](#)
- Support for entrepreneurs and partnership with [The Public](#)
- 2nd evaluation with [Three Hive Consulting](#)

## 2021

- Final full year of funding
- Development of Markets 101 and Markets 201
- Expansion of [Explore Edmonton Urban Farm](#)
- Continued support for youth employment and career development

## 2022

- Support for and launch of [STEMCEL](#)
- Wrapping up and transitioning of CU initiatives

2019

# Theory of Change



## Emerging Initiatives Support



**Community Connections**



**Local Economic Development**



**Boosting Household Income**



**Thriving Youth**

## With the ultimate goal of

**Families & individuals who are healthy, safe, and financially secure**

**COMMUNITIES UNITED** IS NOT a service provider, a referral agency, or traditional funder.

**COMMUNITIES UNITED** IS a community initiative that works across boundaries so people are connected to the organizations and systems that support them and in turn those systems and organizations are better connected to the people they support.

**COMMUNITIES UNITED** facilitates collaboration and connections among different people living or engaged in the community in order to co-create initiatives that address gaps, issues, and/or goals of importance to the community. This approach helps develop new ways of thinking about and working in communities and amplifies the potential impact.

# Approach to Community Development

## Listening drives action

- **True mobilization** can only occur around issues that are genuinely relevant to communities.
- **Listening is key.** The issues that rally a community may be hard to recognize from afar and need to be identified by communities themselves.
- Listening is also crucial for building the trust and reciprocal relationships required for sustainable community change.

## Learn by doing

- **You never know what works in a community until you try something.** We often don't know what we don't know. Small, calculated actions provide rapid feedback and help reveal relationships and community values, interests, and dynamics.
- Learning from what works and from what doesn't work is the key to effective strategy and adaptation.
- When an approach isn't working, or something we're trying comes to an unexpected end, we need the confidence and humility to let go, disband, and move on.

## Acknowledge & harness self-interest for mutual benefit

- Not everyone needs to have the same reason for being at the table, but understanding why they are there helps move towards common goals.
- Looking beyond the usual suspects (and the usual interests) creates the potential for new creative partnerships.

## Create something; make it real

- **Successful community development creates something that was not there before.**
- This may be something physical, like a service, housing, or infrastructure. Or might be a change to policy or legislation.
- It might also involve assets that are less tangible, such as new networks or bonds between people and institutions.

## Balance vision with effective organization

- While it is true that a vision is important to compel collective action, efforts cannot be sustained without goals, effective coordination, and organization.
- At the same time, a focus on structure at the expense of building momentum runs the risk of starving the vision. *"Committees are places where good ideas go to die."*

## Action is the oxygen of community development

- Effective community development requires thoughtful execution but planning at the expense of action can kill initiative.
- Anything that *"drags on too long becomes a drag."* Saul Alinsky

## Like attracts like & success attracts success

- Investing in something encourages and invites others to do likewise. Unrestricted funds are necessary to kick-start innovation and to unlock resources in the community. Often a relatively small injection of resources can spark imagination and create momentum.
- **The greatest assets in our communities are our people.** People are drawn to initiatives that are hopeful and optimistic - where there is a sense of mutual support and creative possibilities.

# 5

## STORIES OF SUCCESS

**But before diving into these, a quick note.**

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Communities United strove to remain in the background, work behind the scenes, and give away ownership - and this approach helped to achieve many **successful outcomes**.

The stories that follow are intended to highlight how CU's approach to community development unfolded, and reflect the strengths of the partners, collaborations, networks, and shared trust that CU was fortunate to be a part of.

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# 1

## Urban Farm Expansion

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**“When we first started looking at this site it was not delivering any value to the community. And now we have people that come to the urban farm that learn about pollination, they learn about chickens, they learn about composting and agriculture...It’s hard to believe that you’re in the middle of the city when you are here.”**

Jessie Radies – Director, Strategic Programs and Initiatives, Explore Edmonton Corporation

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## It started with a question.

**“Can you pay for the removal of \$60,000 worth of dirt?” The answer was obviously “no” but nobody dwelled on that. The question revealed an opportunity.**

...

The Explore Edmonton Urban Farm was a centrally located farm, along major transit routes, with a plot of underutilized land directly adjacent to it. Sure, it contained a massive pile of dirt, but the potential to expand by 100% (a quarter city block) was enough to look beyond the immediate obstacle.

Communities United engaged with different community groups and stakeholders, expressing that if the chance to expand were possible, CU and the Butler Family Foundation would provide funding for some of the costs of the expansion. That outward expression of interest encouraged an internal removal of dirt – and so the expansion moved forward. Throughout the bulk of this project, no contracts or MOUs were signed before work could progress. Instead, what was present was a high degree of trust and a willingness to make the most of the incredible opportunity available.

What is now happening (as of August 2022):

- 18 diverse community groups, 2 businesses, and 9 individuals have growing space
- 250 individuals are coming out to farm, gather, learn, and access programming
- Four 7' x 16' greenhouses have been added, along with a gazebo, chicken coop, rabbit hutch, irrigation systems, and beehives
- Funding from four more sources, amounting to over \$100,000
- The Urban Farm has become a thriving hub of activity – farmers, families, youth, artists, and educators are connecting, sharing, creating new networks and opportunities, and growing food.

### CU Approach

Create something; make it real

...

Action is the oxygen of community development

...

Like attracts like & success attracts success



# 2

## STEM Career Exploration Lab



**“Communities United is helping me to achieve a dream I’ve had for so many years, to actually create...pathways for young people to go into STEM.”**

**Funke Smith – Founder & CEO, Skillcity Institute**



Early on, Communities United worked hard to generate support for its efforts in Northeast Edmonton – with varying degrees of success.

In time, CU learned that it is vastly more effective, not to mention easier and more rewarding, to find out what the goals and aspirations are of others and to do whatever you can to support their success. This is exactly what happened with Skillcity Institute’s STEMCEL project (Science Technology Engineering & Mathematics – Career Exploration Lab).

CU staff had collaborated with Funke Smith, the Founder and CEO of Skillcity Institute, on a few different projects, and the more they worked together the more they realized how aligned they were in terms of values, goals, and approaches.

Skillcity had received funding for their STEMCEL project, but needed a location, additional partners, and additional financial resources to make the plan a reality.

CU was able to leverage its network and resources to broker a partnership between Skillcity and C5 (a collaboration of five social service agencies in northeast Edmonton), access a location for the lab in the local rec centre, and provide financial resources for items that were not covered by the funding that had already been received, items like digital subscriptions (difficult to fund but essential for equipping youth with the skills and programming needed to explore STEM fields).

As CU was winding down the STEMCEL was just getting started, carrying on the spirit of innovation and collaboration that helped, in a small way, to support its emergence. STEMCEL is now a fully equipped centre for learning and exploration, in a location where youth are naturally spending their time and gathering. Connections to more community, educational, and industry partners continue to be made – generating more opportunities for youth to develop the skills and strategies needed to thrive in the modern economy.

### CU Approach

Listening drives action



Acknowledge & harness self-interest for mutual benefit



Create something; make it real



Like attracts like & success attracts success

# 3

## Supporting Entrepreneurs

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**“Through CU we were able to obtain a professional video that helps for our marketing campaign, that otherwise would be almost impossible for a startup business.”**

Jhon Quijano - Roots of Colombia

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On a cold Saturday in February, with temperatures well into the -20s, it became clear that the two Communities United staff organizing the pop-up market had no idea what they were doing.

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Nevertheless, graduates of an Action for Healthy Communities' (AHC) entrepreneurship program had identified that they were interested in attending a pop-up market and on a cold day in February more than 20 different entrepreneurs came out to participate.

CU knew that additional opportunities were needed for the entrepreneurs they were connecting with and, over the next year, CU worked with community partners to organize a number of pop-up markets, workshops, and training opportunities.

2020 was going to be a big year of working with entrepreneurs but when COVID lockdowns made organizing events and markets difficult, CU needed to find additional ways to provide meaningful support during a very difficult time for small businesses. What emerged was a project focused on promotion - where the goal wasn't just to teach the value and importance of marketing, but where CU hired a local digital media company to create ads and promotional materials for 8 local businesses.

In addition to each business receiving a professional quality video, [FILMR Media](#) also developed accessible and affordable marketing services and products that helped fill an obvious need for businesses and local organizations.



### CU Approach

Listening drives action

...

Learn by doing

...

Create something; make it real

# 4

## Market Ready

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**“The model that Communities United uses is really to provide the resources, provide funding, provide guidance, but then trust us to deliver that program the way we know best.”**

Peter Keith - Director of Product Operations,  
The Public Food Hub Co.

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The origins of this project were in two earlier initiatives that emerged out of the Communities United neighbourhoods – Make It Bake It Grow It and EdmontonEats. These two initiatives identified and moved on community members’ concerns and hopes around food security, entrepreneurship, and building cultural connections, and they set the stage for future partnerships and projects focused on supporting local entrepreneurs.

For CU, the goal was not to organize or manage an ongoing market. The goal was to find ways to connect entrepreneurs to existing market opportunities, to enhance their business skills, and to work with professionals and organizations that already had market expertise.



Introducing, [The Public – Alberta’s Food Incubation Hub](#)

The Public – headquartered in Edmonton, Canada – is a community uniting food lovers & makers. Through a marketplace and network of kitchens, markets and retail locations, The Public brings people closer to their favorite brands, no matter your neighborhood, and works to serve entrepreneurs and support the growing local food economy.

In early 2020, CU and Action for Healthy Communities (AHC) were looking for local expertise and a connection to vibrant markets, and The Public was looking for new ways to engage with and support entrepreneurs. It was a perfect match.

With CU financial support, and AHC and CU connections to local entrepreneurs, The Public developed the curriculum for Market Ready, a hands-on, immersive program aimed at founders and startups building emerging food, hospitality, and retail brands. The Public delivered two rounds of programming in 2021 and, with the addition of some provincial funding that CU obtained, Markets 101 and Markets 201 were also developed.

CU was always clear that The Public would own these programs – as the goal was to have them continue beyond 2022.

This outcome is an example of partners focusing on what their strengths are, doing what they each do best, and coming together to create something innovative. Not only does The Public organize markets, they now have deeper connections to communities of new entrepreneurs and the tools to support and equip those entrepreneurs as they expand their market reach.

### CU Approach

Acknowledge & harness self-interest for mutual benefit



Create something; make it real



Balance vision with effective organization



Like attracts like & success attracts success



# 5

## The Grocery Run

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**“Communities United, true to their promise of building capacity, they helped us to connect with a team of very extraordinary...fund developers and communications colleagues. And we’re going to really heighten awareness among Edmontonians.”**

Yvonne Chiu - Executive Director,  
Multicultural Health Brokers Co-Op

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## Donate \$5,000 to a cause... or spend \$5,000 to get so much more?

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In early 2021, CU received an email from the Multicultural Health Brokers Co-op (MCHB) with information about their fundraising campaign for the Grocery Run - a program that provides weekly essential grocery hampers to refugees and immigrants who are experiencing chronic poverty. The message invited people to donate, share the opportunity with their networks, and take part in upcoming fundraising events.

CU did all of those things but also knew that, for an ambitious fundraising goal, more would be needed. Instead of supporting the campaign financially for \$5,000 (which would have had an impact - of course), what if that \$5,000 went towards hiring professional public relations and digital media companies to get the message out to new audiences? What might the impact be then?

CU took this approach, hiring a digital media company to create a program video and hiring a professional public relations team to get the message out broadly and to also help organize and promote a corporate challenge - inviting local businesses to support an amazing local cause.

The impact far exceeded \$5,000, as two businesses alone contributed \$22,000 via the corporate challenge, and Grocery Run stories in local radio and television shared their message to many new generous supporters.

The ability to use financial resources creatively and unrestrictedly, along with incredible collaboration, made this approach possible.

### CU Approach

Acknowledge & harness  
self-interest for mutual benefit

...

Balance vision with effective  
organization

...

Action is the oxygen of  
community development



# ADDITIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

**“If you have a good idea, they get behind it and help you and support you.”**

Andrea Streisel – Facilitator of initial WPP programming

Working with Action for Healthy Communities to develop and prototype the **Workforce Participation Program** – a program focused on empowering newcomers with the knowledge needed to excel in the Canadian workforce. AHC has received federal funding to keep running the program at multiple locations throughout Edmonton.

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**“Because of this early investment we were able to take the project to a national level, secure additional resources and pivot our org.”**

Omar Yaqub – Executive Director, IFSSA

Funding a research project, in collaboration with Islamic Family and Social Services Association and Mitacs, focused on using technology to create more efficient and client focused intake tools.

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**“There’s so much out there, but people don’t know what’s out there. And what Communities United does is bring all those pieces together.”**

Mary Yusep – Practicum Student, Communities United

Finding pragmatic ways to support local businesses. For instance, this included creating awareness and developing tipsheets to facilitate access to available government funding to hire students. In summer 2021 alone, 21 students were hired by local businesses.

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Connecting the *Edmonton Stingers* professional basketball team to schools, community groups, and organizations to support local causes and community events.

Forming strong partnerships with businesses – so much so that they were on CU committees, helped to interview prospective CU staff, openly explored ways to support the community, and even woke CU staff up with morning phone call requests to support initiatives like the *Heroes for Hunger* campaign.

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**“The amount of support that they gave us in terms of connections with northeast businesses, and northeast people that would be involved in our career fair was phenomenal. We wouldn’t have ever figured that out ourselves.”**

Sheri Long – Principal, J.D. Bracco School

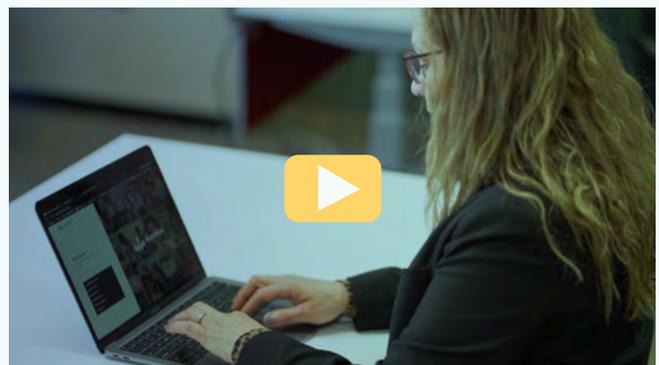
Organizing Career Fairs and Financial Literacy Fairs in junior high and high schools.

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Working with *MyMatchWork*, an Edmonton tech startup, to creatively engage with and support job seekers during the onset of COVID.

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Developing and delivering *Leaders of the Pitch: Volunteer and Leadership Program* – where 21 youth were trained as soccer referees, accessed skill-building workshops, and obtained three weeks of volunteer experience for their resumes.



# ADDITIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

**“They were willing to meet with our students and decide how they can have the greatest impact, what worked for both Communities United and our students. They were always looking for that win win solution.”**

David Schmaus – Instructor, NAIT

Always seeing students as a strength in the community and demonstrating this by finding ways to hire students, collaborate with post-secondary institutions, develop student employment and leadership programs, and connect employers directly to students.

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**“I think as a business owner and entrepreneur, that’s how we roll. We don’t have time to sit around and chit chat. We’re like, ‘Let’s do it.’ So I really loved working with them [CU].”**

Cindy Lazarenko – Chef & Program Facilitator

Working with a professional chef to develop and deliver the *Food Works Program* – a program focused on equipping high school students with pragmatic restaurant skills and knowledge, and a connection to industry.

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**“Without the money that they gave us for that, it would not have happened. I can say that quite conclusively. There was no other funding resources we could access at that time.”**

Liz Kalisvaart – President, Fraser Community League

Providing financial resources and connections to support the *Fraser Orchard* – an emerging project to create a publicly accessible orchard of edible plants in Fraser community.

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Supporting the development of *EdmontonEats*, an emerging social enterprise focused on food and cultural connections, and contributing funding towards the first two years of its operations.

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Working on a community engagement project with the Edmonton Community Development Company and Fraser Community League.

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Actively promoting youth employment opportunities via soccer referee training, arranging interviews with partnering businesses, and offering babysitting courses, entrepreneurship training, etc.

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**“[CU] helps us build connections with members from other organizations in order to find a common goal of uplifting our community.”**

Sam Elmi – Program creator & facilitator

Supporting the *First Steps in Coding* program with a local entrepreneur and Islamic Family and Social Services Association.

# COMMUNITIES UNITED

## Outcomes

**\$449,910**

leveraged in additional dollars  
to support local community  
projects and initiatives

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*RBC Foundation, Edmonton Community  
Foundation, Government of Alberta, Government  
of Canada, Butler Family Foundation*

**25** ongoing  
relationships

that CU intentionally helped  
to support and develop

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**33** partners/  
projects

supported financially at key times

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*E.g. \$3,500 for MD AIDE, \$5,000 for Fraser  
Orchard, \$20,000 for EdmontonEats,  
\$20,000 for Explore Edmonton Urban Farm*

**5** sustainable  
programs

that emerged from CU partnerships

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*Workforce Participation Program, Bannerman  
After School Program, Markets 101 & 201,  
Food Works, STEMCEL*

**1** community  
development model

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# 9

## LESSONS LEARNED

### - 01 -

In collaborative work, **trust** is more important than anything else. As the initiative progressed, CU took the time to build trust with partners and to understand what they wanted to see happening in their communities. Establishing trust was the invitation to explore, envision, and co-create in truly meaningful ways that resonated with partners.

### - 02 -

**There is a need for connectors - connections were the key to CU's biggest impact.**

Almost every CU partner highlighted how the greatest benefit of CU was its focus on making connections and brokering partnerships. The approach was always to ask "Who else needs to be here?", "Who can be helpful here?", "Who has this expertise?", and "What is already out there?" Bringing this mindset to each meeting, partnership, and opportunity enabled CU to always add value and to significantly support community partners just by intentionally making connections and seeing connections as an effective way to simultaneously problem solve and build community.

### - 03 -

**Strategies should empower, not limit.** In the early stages of CU, certain opportunities were lost due to a rigid understanding of the geographical target area. A strategy should guide and clarify but not be the barrier to an opportunity or needed change. CU was able to have a bigger impact and support more opportunities when the strategy reflected the dynamism and fluidity of community and people - this included a broad mandate, investing in priorities identified by community partners, and seeing the potential for partnerships and opportunities beyond the five initially identified communities (although efforts were always linked back to those communities).

### - 04 -

**It is easier to support the work of others than to get others to support your work.** Don't start by trying to get people interested in what you're doing and getting on board with your mandate. Go to where people are connecting naturally, go to each business, ask what they are doing and want to see happening in their community. If you're able, ask how you can support them. Deliver on that support, if possible.

- 05 -

**In community development, a broad mandate can be incredibly beneficial,** as it allows you to be entrepreneurial, prototype, follow the momentum, support what emerges in the community, and go where the opportunity is. It empowers you to have an impact where opportunity surfaces and where effort is needed. While this is not possible or recommended for every initiative, when possible a broad mandate with evolving measures of success can lead to incredible opportunities not initially known or identified.

- 06 -

**Businesses are so much more than just businesses.** Businesses are often owned by people deeply invested in the community, they are natural points of connection and gathering, they have access to insights that agencies and organizations don't, and they have goals and aspirations for themselves, their employees, their customers, and their communities. They can also struggle and be in need of collaboration and support. CU benefitted from having a number of businesses deeply involved in the work. Who else in a community talks to more people a day than a grocery store manager? The insight and awareness that comes with that is invaluable.

- 07 -

**You don't have to do everything yourself, and probably shouldn't.** If you don't have what you need, bring in the experts. When CU brought in a professional public relations company to help with certain projects, the impact was immediate and significant. Instead of struggling to keep organizing pop-up markets, CU found a partner already doing this. Expertise from others took the work of CU to a place it would never have gotten to alone.

- 08 -

**It is difficult for organizations and institutions to carry out meaningful community development.** To support the work of others and collaborate unreservedly, you have to step away from your individual position and enter a space of co-creation. It is difficult to do this if you have rigid measures of success, specific funding requirements, firm job descriptions, a detailed strategic plan, or a board to please. Letting go of the individual "what", "why", and "how" is essential but it requires trust, openness, and embracing a fair amount of uncertainty.

- 09 -

**Failure can be a good thing and an invitation to opportunity.** CU had its setbacks and disappointments but they often took the initiative to a better place. The project with MyMatchWork began in March 2020 and was focused on connecting with job seekers at events throughout the community. And then COVID happened. With initial plans now obsolete, CU tried different ways to still engage with job seekers with varying degrees of success (but mostly a lack of success). However, while trying something new, a collaboration with a student group led to a connection with a local social media influencer which led to a connection with Bangel PR - a company that helped transform a number of CU projects and collaborations going forward and during a pandemic - one of the most challenging contexts for communities.

# 10 TIPS

## FOR THOSE DOING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT WORK

### TIP 1

Listen, attentively and with interest – set aside your goals, mandate, and interests to find out what people are truly interested in and passionate about.

### TIP 2

Think - *“Where can I add value?”*  
*“Who can add value here?”*

### TIP 3

Leverage your entire network.

### TIP 4

Be a connector.

### TIP 5

Be creative and willing to go where the opportunities are – think and function like an entrepreneur.

### TIP 6

Use failure to learn and improve.

### TIP 7

Relinquish ownership.

### TIP 8

See businesses as part of the solution and intentionally embed them in your work whenever you can.

### TIP 9

Understand that youth are youth. Find ways to engage with them naturally, incentivize their participation, attach a tangible, practical perk – like a connection to a job.

### TIP 10

Always remember Tip 1.

# Recommendations

## FOR FUNDERS

### 1. There needs to be more multiyear, unrestricted funding opportunities.

- A broad mandate and flexible funding empowered CU to adopt an approach that supported community identified goals and opportunities, rather than focusing on prescriptive actions.
- Multiyear funding allowed CU to focus on the work and not on raising funds.
- Unrestricted funding allows financial resources to be used as needed.
- Unrestricted funds are necessary to support opportunities that emerge over time, to kick-start innovation, and to unlock resources in the community.

“It’s so very important that funders stop being so funder centric in how they give out money, and be more open to how communities need to spend their money.” **David Prodan – Strategic Analyst, e4c**

“Nonprofits need to be given the freedom and flexibility to work with community in the way that the community wants and needs from them – which often means that they need to be funded to support ongoing operations (rather than through specific program funding) that allows them to build enough capacity to be flexible and responsive to the community it serves.” – **CU Stakeholder**

### 2. The role of connector/relationship broker is essential and needs to be funded.

- CU’s main strength, as repeatedly identified by community partners, was intentionally making connections and thoughtfully bringing individuals from different sectors together to engage and collaborate around shared interests and goals.
- This role, ideally, needs to exist outside of a single organization/institution so that there is the ability and freedom to support community identified goals and not push an organization’s directive.
- The strategic positioning of this role enables individuals to think and work outside of systems barriers and promotes innovation.

“Their ability to be nimble and action orientated meant that momentum could be maintained in community and actions could be unmoored from funding cycles and specific program trappings that often cause resentment and confusion in community. It was/is special to have an organization like CU, especially since they can also identify systems barriers that other organizations and funders cannot/will not see.” **Brooks Hanewich – Manager Strategic Initiatives, EndPovertyEdmonton**

“They could bring people together without an agenda, or without a bias towards their own organizational goal. And I think that works really well. I think that people almost need to set aside their organization’s agendas in order to make stuff happen, because when they look at everybody’s kind of interest in something, it moves forward a lot faster than if they’re just worried about what their organization or their group is going to get from the collaborative.” – **CU Stakeholder**

# Recommendations

## FOR ANYONE DOING COMMUNITY WORK

### 1. Get to know your local business community and business owners.

- Visit businesses, find out what their interests and challenges are.
- Connect with business associations and learn about the local business climate.
- Don't just ask for sponsorship, offer something.
- See businesses as part of the solution.

### 2. Take every opportunity you can to support students and youth.

- Find ways to engage with students meaningfully.
- Sponsor a capstone project at a post-secondary institution.
- Become a practicum supervisor.
- Hire summer students and recent graduates and assign them meaningful work, give them responsibility, and provide plenty of feedback and support.



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# COMMUNITIES UNITED

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2022 by MPT Nonprofit Consulting  
[matthewtaylor@mptnonprofitconsulting.com](mailto:matthewtaylor@mptnonprofitconsulting.com)