

The Challenge

Communities across Canada are grappling with issues around a lack of affordable, quality housing:

- Young people are worried about their future as they are priced out of the market. Seniors are struggling to find appropriate housing to downsize or meet their mobility needs.
- Businesses are struggling to attract and retain employees.
- The housing stock in some communities is aging and redevelopment may be challenging.
- Visible homelessness and risk of homelessness is increasingly prevalent in communities of all sizes.

Solutions to these challenges are not always obvious or simple because housing is about more than just building new infrastructure: housing is about how people make their homes and where they feel welcome. Homes enable personal and community well-being and allow people to grow roots in our community. Successful projects require input and partnership across multiple sectors, meaning local governments, non-profits, and developers must come together to craft solutions. Increasingly, we are seeing other non-traditional actors join these partnerships: churches, school districts, and employers, to name a few. The Urban Matters Housing Lab Practice works with this broad cross-section of stakeholders, ensuring any lab we undertake has a systems perspective integrated into it from the outset.

Our goal is to spark dialogue across sectors and scale solutions as we strive to improve the social determinants of health in our communities.

What it Means to Work with Urban Matters CCC

We are a Community Contribution Company (CCC). Our business model aligns with our mission to achieve positive outcomes in the communities where we live and work. That is why a minimum of 60% of our profits are invested into innovative community projects in Canada.

We are part of a big family. Urban Matters CCC belongs to a family of companies within Urban Systems Ltd. This means we can draw from various expertise and a wide network of over 450 professionals to deliver integrated services that suit our clients' needs.

Our Approach to Community Housing

Our community housing team looks at how social and cultural factors intersect with housing infrastructure.

- We convene, consult, and create to understand how planning processes and housing projects can strengthen communities and create opportunities for individuals to find their home and their place of belonging. We work for First Nations, local, Provincial and Federal governments, non-profits, and developers, including creating cross-sectoral partnerships.
- We support the spectrum of our clients' needs. We combine local knowledge with quantitative data to assess, strategize, and implement.
- We help incubate new ideas through research and program design, and work with partners to build projects.
- Drawing on the expertise and experience of residents and stakeholder groups, we support communities as they make decisions and build partnerships.

By our very structure as a CCC, we exist to explore and test sustainable approaches to solving complex issues.

What We Offer

We support communities in building their capacity as they move from identifying issues, to developing strategies, to implementing solutions. With a particular focus on community housing, our team leads the following processes:

Lab Creation and Design



- Logistical support in planning for and organizing labs, including selecting participants
- Workshop design services tailoring the engagement approach to the audience
- Prototyping support to test emergent solutions

We also provide specialized research and policy support in the areas outlined below.

Needs Assessments



- Assemble a local understanding of housing needs
- Support the implementation of housing related OCP goals
- Position local governments and non-profits to apply for senior government housing funding
- Achieve upcoming legislative requirements for housing needs reports in BC (which will be required as part of 2019 updates to the BC Local Government Act)

Policy & Strategy Development



- Convene partners to develop innovative and locally relevant solutions
- Develop actions, strategies, and policies
- Identify how strategies will be implemented, monitored, and evaluated.

Implementation



- Convene partners to collaborate on housing projects and implement solutions
- Support successful funding applications
- Support the scoping of affordable housing concepts through development consulting
- Complete financial analysis, assess feasibility, and build robust pro formas
- Develop innovative partnership frameworks, such as land trusts and backbone organizations

Recent Projects

CLIENT: [City of North Vancouver, District of West Vancouver, and Squamish Nation](#)

PROJECT: [Balanced Housing Lab](#)

The Balanced Housing Lab (BHL) is an innovative partnership of the City of North Vancouver, District of West Vancouver, and Squamish Nation. The purpose of the BHL is to generate new models of collective action to address housing challenges for moderate to middle-income households in the workforce. Starting in September 2019, the BHL has been bringing together a diverse cross-section of North Shore residents, workers, employers, professionals and academics with expertise in housing to identify solutions that could readily be implemented by the three project partners and other stakeholders in the community. The project is being overseen by a Steering Committee and managed by a Project Working Group. Four lab workshops were held between December 2019 and April 2020 that brought together a diversity of perspectives on housing and development on the North Shore.

The project is currently implementing prototypes across 3 areas:

1. Re-imagining the Development Approvals Process
2. Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Partnerships
3. Flexible Delivery Models for Affordable Living

CLIENT: [Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee / Skookum Lab](#)

PROJECT: [Housing Solutions Lab – Research and Facilitation Support](#)

Urban Matters developed an in-depth research report on urban Indigenous housing needs in Surrey for Skookum Lab's work on housing solutions. This Indigenous-led project (guided by the Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee) showcased our team's collaborative approach to research and implementation of OCAP principles. The final report provided much needed documentation of the housing needs of urban Indigenous households in Surrey. Following the report, our team facilitated a series of multi-stakeholder workshops to dive into the findings and imagine potential solutions.

CLIENT: [YWCA](#)

PROJECT: [Housing Solutions Lab on Deeply Affordable Housing for Single Parents](#)

Urban Matters partnered with the YWCA to convene local and provincial governments, non-profit housing providers, and private developers to work together towards removing barriers for deeply affordable housing for single parents. Our team brings both facilitation and research know-how. Our work included facilitating a series of multi-stakeholder workshops, conducting research into the challenge and solutions landscape, and developing a diverse set of prototypes that address multiple levels of the housing system.