

COLUMBIA INSTITUTE: CENTRE FOR CIVIC GOVERNANCE

Strategic Plan 2024-2028



Columbia
I N S T I T U T E



INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2023, Columbia Institute engaged our board members and key stakeholders/partners in a strategic planning conversation to help focus our efforts and identify the priority initiatives that would create the biggest impact. After a few years of being lightly resourced and without an Executive Director, we have received substantial funding, have an Executive Director and full-time staff in place, and are ready to hit the ground running. The strategic planning process has helped us to clarify our vision and mission and the strategic initiatives to deliver on them.

The strategic planning process involved a short questionnaire of the attendees at our 2023 reception at UBCM, and an online survey to board members and key partners. A scan of related organizations was also done to learn where there were potential synergies and opportunities for partnerships as well as areas that may be duplicative. The responses to the questionnaire and survey helped inform the development of the strategic plan framework, which was then used to guide the conversation at the full-day strategic planning session in November 2023. Columbia Institute is grateful for the participation of the following individuals in the strategic planning session:

Hermender Singh Kailley – Board Member/BC Federation of Labour

Arzeena Hamir – Former Board Member/Formal Regional Director

David Levi – Board Member & Former ED

Ela Esra Günad – Advisory Council Member/ Hospital Employees' Union

Michael Clague – Advisory Council Member/ Advisor on adult education, community development, & social planning

Seth Klein – Advisory Council Member/Public Policy Researcher

Ken Melamed - Advisory Council Member/ Former Mayor of Whistler and Board Member, WCS Engagement + Planning

Christine Boyle – Elected/City of Vancouver

Jenny Tan – Elected/City of Maple Ridge

Alison Gu – Elected, City of Burnaby

Tiffany Ottahal – Partner, Vancity

Tariq Tyab – Partner, Foundation for a Path Forward

Lee Loftus – Partner, BC Building Trades

This strategic plan provides direction for Columbia Institute over 2024-2028 and will be reviewed on an annual basis.



BRIEF BACKGROUND

Columbia Institute: Centre for Civic Governance (“Columbia Institute”) was founded in 2000 and has enjoyed 24 years of work focused on research and support of progressive elected officials. Notable past successes include:

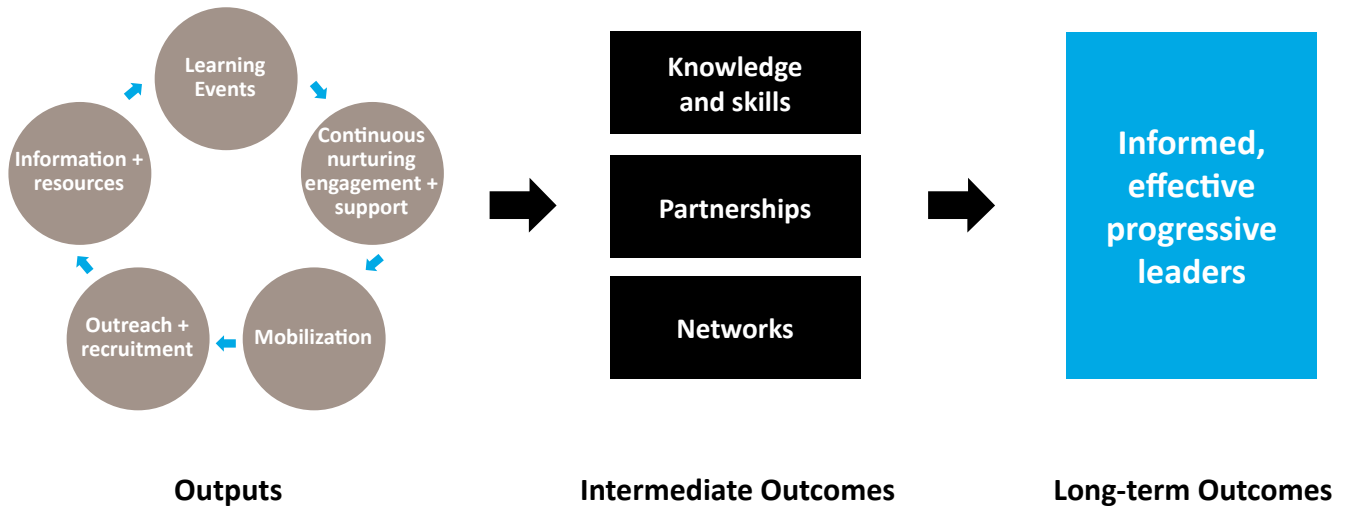
- Publishing 37 research reports such as Good Jobs, Clean Skies, Back in House: Why Local Governments are Bringing Services Home, and This Green House
- Assisting with the passing of UBCM resolutions on topics such as affordable housing, public transit and climate action
- Developing and establishing High Ground, our annual conference for elected officials that is now highly anticipated; 19 High Ground conferences have been held in BC
- Supporting local electeds in SK and ON through conferences and capacity building
- Building a network of local electeds across provinces
- Delivering training and education for local government councillors and school trustees
- Supporting educational opportunities through scholarships

Through our background research and conversations with people in our networks, we have confirmed that our support of elected officials is needed now more than ever. We have heard that crises impacting local governments are both intensifying and amplifying each another, and that challenging issues are becoming increasingly polarized and complex. Local electeds feel the need for more support: knowledge and information as well as emotional.

Columbia Institute is poised to provide that support to local elected officials by building on our past efforts while focusing on today and tomorrow and delivering on new projects and initiatives that have been identified as most valuable and impactful to our elected local elected leaders and partners.

THEORY OF CHANGE

To inform our strategic planning discussion, we identified a Theory of Change to confirm our long-term desired outcomes, the intermediate outcomes needed to be in place, and the initiatives (outputs) required to achieve the intermediate – and eventually – the long-term outcomes. A Theory of Change supports a strategic planning process by helping to identify the long-term desired outcomes and then mapping out the steps to get there. Our Theory of Change is described in the graphic below.

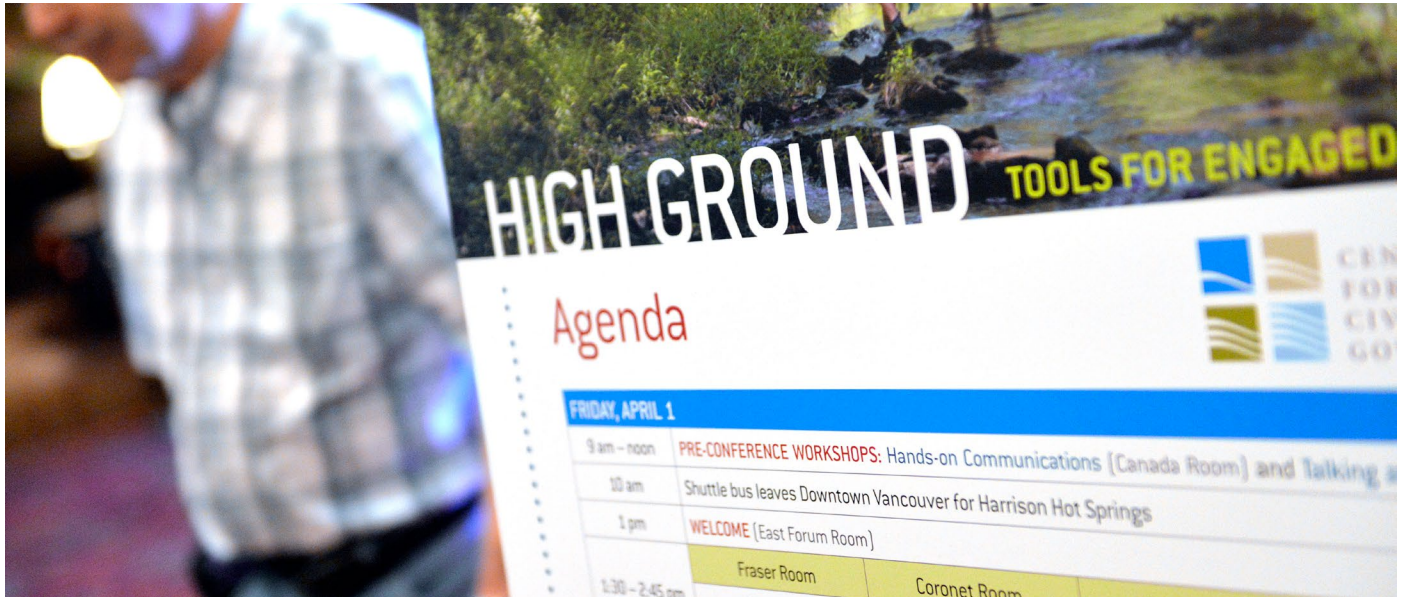


OUR VISION

Communities that value social justice, the environment and strong local economies are healthier and happier places to live.

OUR MISSION

Grow, foster and support progressive leadership to advance equitable, inclusive, and resilient communities across Canada.



FOCUS AREAS

Through our engagement process, we identified four areas in which we wish to focus our work:

Capacity Building

Community of Practice

Research and Policy Implementation

Organizational Capacity

Each Focus Area is described below, along with a goal and the strategic initiatives we will undertake to meet the goals. Lower priority strategic initiatives (i.e., to be implemented when resources allow) are identified in smaller font.

Capacity Building

Columbia Institute has been a cornerstone in helping elected officials build their understanding and capacity on key progressive issues since its inception, and this area of work continues to be an essential role for the Columbia Institute to play.

Goal

To better equip progressive leaders with knowledge, strategies and tools to more effectively advance progressive initiatives in their communities.

Strategic initiatives

- Develop and offer ongoing training programs and resources for elected officials
- Partner with other NGOs to deliver topic-specific webinars
- Work with regional partners to identify region-specific topics and deliver capacity building initiatives
- Rethink design of High Ground to provide deeper dives into topics
- Build relationships with Indigenous communities and engage progressive elected Indigenous council members
- Develop a central resource/service for elected officials to reach out for information and strategy needs
- Continue to provide scholarships from unions to new elected officials to participate in High Ground
- Participate in development of a climate cooperative, and deliver climate training for elected, labour, and cooperative leaders

Community of Practice

A Community of Practice (CoP) is a group of people who share common challenges or an interest in a topic and who come together to share learnings, problem-solve and identify new ideas. There is a strong interest and desire for Columbia Institute to create and support a more established CoP of progressive local elected officials.

Goal

- To connect progressive local leaders to each other and progressive experts to a broader ecosystem that provides support, resources and peer accountability.

Strategic Initiatives

- Develop and implement a strategy to identify, develop and gain support for crucial progressive UBCM resolutions
- Develop and implement a strategy to attract and recruit progressive local elected officials
- Work with regional partners to co-host region-specific capacity building/networking events
- Develop a strategy to nurture and strengthen the network pre-, during and post-High Ground
- Continue to host UBCM receptions
- Identify ways to provide emotional support to progressive local electeds in the CoP

Research and Policy Implementation

We understand that curating crucial, timely information and policy positions and providing easily digestible content and messages is critical to supporting local elected officials in their work. We may not undertake specific research all the time, but we can take the research done by partner organizations and package it for our electeds.

Goal

To provide local elected officials with timely, evidence-based content on urgent issues that help them implement progressive action.

Strategic Initiatives

- Provide support for electeds to implement passed progressive UBCM resolutions
 - Deliver a “Concierge Research” strategy
 - Research financial barriers (i.e., salaries) to running for office and advocate for increasing salaries
 - Understand conservative strategies and how to counter them, including key messages
 - Create Green Jobs BC policy templates/briefing notes from previous Green Jobs BC work and disseminate
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Organizational Capacity

In order to deliver on our mission and goals, we need to ensure that our organization has sufficient capacity. This Focus Area is about getting our organization set up for success.

Goal

To be a well-resourced organization, governed by an engaged and diverse board, and strengthened through strategic partnerships.

Strategic Initiatives

- Develop longer-term funding strategy including donors, federal government, private foundations and unions
- Identify staffing needs and build capacity
- Nurture current partnerships and identify, seek and develop new partnerships to deliver key initiatives where partners have greater/existing expertise
- Renew board and advisory council to increase diversity
- Rebrand Columbia Institute

Columbia Institute: Centre for Civic Governance

Suite 440, 789 West Pender Street, Vancouver, BC V6C 1H2 | 604.695.2034

 CivicGovernance |  civicgovernance |  the_columbia_institute

www.columbiainstitute.eco

Unceded territory of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish),
Səlilwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tseil-Waututh) Nations

