100 COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS
BC RESIDENTS READY TO ENGAGE

At first blush, asking British Columbians to participate in a conversation on the future of this province’s economy seems like a daunting proposition. The issues are complex, the rhetoric is polarizing, and the sheer scale and scope of the subject matter can prove a barrier to even the most financially savvy individual.

But throughout the process of coordinating our 100 Community Conversations, SFU Public Square found that residents of this province in fact are clamoring to have their voices heard and join the conversation on our economic future. From boardrooms to dinner tables, alongside family, friends and co-workers, people came together to share their hopes, dreams, and fears about the current state of our provincial economy and brainstorm strategies for our collective future.

Those conversations have helped shape our second annual community summit, Charting BC’s Economic Future, and the feedback will assist in developing a Citizens Agenda for BC’s Economic Future.

While there is still a significant amount of data to review, a sampling of the feedback provided to this point demonstrates a keen desire to have a sophisticated long-term discussion that explores the issues of wealth creation, social equity and environmental protection. BC residents want to better engage with Aboriginal communities, they want to include the marginalized in the conversation, and they expressed a desire for diversity in job creation that would provide economic stability over the long-term.

Perhaps most encouraging, British Columbians felt empowered after being brought into the discussion and are ready to further probe the issues and develop a shared economic vision for the province.

TESTIMONIALS

The reduction of inequality is essential for true economic growth and has the potential of releasing enormous energy into the economy. An economy built around meeting human needs will lead to the growth of well-being. They should be the focus for the future.

Bill Bargeman

“In a multicultural society like Vancouver, it is incredible that visible minorities who make up 27% of BC’s population do not have more of a voice in the BC economy. Newcomers have a passionate desire to engage in the community, and to create a sense of belonging in Canada. This is what motivated me to organize four Community Conversations with my peers at VCC and the YMCA in Vancouver.”

Chris Dong

“Testimonials

The youth forum gave us a sense of freedom that we could be part of the decision making process for BC’s economic future, instead of being limited to following the conventional system.”

Hafsa Salihue

SFU Public Square’s 100 Community Conversations embraced diversity in BC. These conversations allowed us to contribute to a road map where we all had an opportunity to share our views, ideas, and values. The outcomes from these conversations will help create sustainable communities for our children and grandchildren.

Pauline Terbasket

Hafsa Salihue

Bill Bargeman

Chris Dong

Pauline Terbasket

SFU Public Square’s 100 Community Conversations embraced diversity in BC. These conversations allowed us to contribute to a road map where we all had an opportunity to share our views, ideas, and values. The outcomes from these conversations will help create sustainable communities for our children and grandchildren.
In thinking about the future of BC’s economy, British Columbians from around the province, including leading economic thinkers, express optimism because of the many assets they feel we own, and because they can see countless opportunities to build upon our solid economic, social, and political foundations.

1 BC’s Human Capital

British Columbia’s economy benefits from having a highly skilled workforce, comprising well-educated individuals who bring a variety of talents to the work they do. As a province which is able to attract people from around the world, BC’s cultural diversity helps strengthen its connections to foreign markets. The linguistic competence and cultural understanding prominent among BC’s diverse population offers opportunities for enhanced economic development and investment in multiple markets, bringing the world to BC, and BC to the world. Real opportunities to enhance BC’s economic development also arise from the skills and knowledge of a growing and educated aboriginal workforce.

2 BC’s Natural Capital & Location

British Columbia is home to an abundance of natural resources, an enviable location on Canada’s west coast with access to markets in North America and Asia, and natural beauty which attracts tourists and talent from around the world. By taking advantage of our natural capital and location as an economic gateway for Canada and North America, we can maximize opportunities to build global trading relationships and export BC products and services to existing and yet to be accessed markets. Moreover, working with BC’s Aboriginal peoples to resolve long standing issues related to land title in the province stands to bring greater certainty to BC’s land base, and create significant opportunities for economic development to the benefit of all British Columbians.

3 BC’s Social and Economic Infrastructure

British Columbia has invested heavily in its social and economic infrastructure over the past half century or so. From hydroelectric dams, transmission lines, telephone wires and fibre optic cables, to transit systems, sewers and water treatment plants, hospitals and schools, this infrastructure supports and enables the smooth running of BC’s economy. Moving goods, people, and ideas around the province and abroad, and keeping our workforce educated and healthy, BC is able to create wealth and sustain prosperity. Investments in infrastructure create opportunities for fueling economic growth around the province, reinforcing ties between regions and people, and educating professionals and skilled workers who are the backbone of the economy.

4 BC’s Knowledge Industry

Home to a world-class education system with premiere post-secondary institutions, BC boasts a knowledgeable and skilled labour force. BC is also home to a number of knowledge industries that can be tapped for development and innovation, and can position the province as a leader in many fields. These include, among others, green/clean technology, environmental remediation, digital media and technology, transportation and warehousing logistics, local food economy, tourism, education services, biotechnology and biomedical. With green/clean technology, in particular, British Columbia can build upon its existing comparative advantage in energy resources and policies to develop innovative products and services in response to climate change and to the need to transition to a carbon neutral economy.

Participants at Our Future, Our Voice are Eager for Change

On September 28th, young people from across Metro Vancouver braced the rain to attend the Our Future, Our Voice youth forum. Throughout the day, participants challenged the notion that youth are disengaged, and contributed their ideas for charting a more equitable and sustainable economic future.

The day began with moderator, Kai Nagata, instructing participants to “move to the right side of the room if you are concerned about the direction our province is headed (economically).” Move left if you are optimistic, and stay in the middle if you are undecided.” The room shifted to the right.

Indeed, throughout the day, youth voiced many concerns about the BC economy, most relating to affordability and employment. There was an obvious uneasiness about the rising cost of education, housing, and living in general, and discussions of employment were fraught with anxiety and frustration.

Generally speaking though, participants at Our Future, Our Voice were confident that the situation can and will improve. With a view to supporting that improvement, the majority showed a profound openness to change—change in the way we count and consider wealth; in the way we structure and access education; in the way we produce and consume; in the way that we deal with waste; in the way that we produce and consider resources and policies to develop innovative products and services in response to climate change and to the need to transition to a carbon neutral economy.
COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS HAVE POSITIVE IMPACT ON ECONOMIC LITERACY

Survey results from Community Conversation participants show that they did a much better job than British Columbians as a whole in identifying which industry sectors contribute most to BC’s GDP (Financial Services—65% of Community Conversation participants vs. just 2% of BC population), which sectors employ the greatest number of workers in the province (Wholesale & Retail Trade—32% vs. 21%). And, they were more successful in identifying the top 2 sources of revenues for the provincial government (Personal Income Tax—59% vs. 41%; HST—30% vs. 25%).

AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

We are proud to say that the results of our 100 Community Conversations and of consultative research with economic thought leaders has provided scope for charting a course for BC’s economic future. Through our Community Summit, we have broken new ground by inviting citizens and representatives from across the province to identify existing strengths and weaknesses, as well as potential opportunities and threats for BC’s economy.

Still, there is work to be done. The following are areas for further research we have identified through this process:

- Create an inventory of existing infrastructure
- Gather statistics of local economies and their contributions to the provincial economy
- Create alternative measures of economic performance [i.e. beyond GDP]
- Create measures of economic literacy to test/monitor the BC population’s knowledge of how the BC economy works
- Gather statistics on the “invisible economy” and its contribution to the provincial economy
- Gather statistics on the diversity of BC’s economy
- Gather statistics/Create measures to monitor “mismatch” between jobs and skills
- Gather information on the economic impacts of a transition to a low carbon economy
- Explore initiatives to engage citizens more actively in ongoing discussions about BC’s economic future
- Explore the reestablishment of the BC Progress Board

The Community Conversations research initiative is integral to enabling decisions which reflect the economic realities of our province and views of BC’s residents from all regions of the province. Since the dissolution of the BC Progress Board, there has been no organization in British Columbia dedicated to conducting this kind of research on a continuous basis, nor is there a formal mechanism that we could identify through our research to enable ongoing cross-sector dialogue and collaboration.

THANK YOU TO OUR COMMUNITY PARTNERS AND HOSTS

Campbell River Economic Development Corporation • Okanagan Nation Alliance • Venture Kamloops • Nelson and District Chamber of Commerce • Kitimat Chamber of Commerce • Initiatives Prince George • North Peace Economic Development Commission • Greater Victoria Public Library • Science Policy Congress • Gabriola Commons • SFU Bitcoin Club • Laurie Anderson • Phil Hall • SFU Semester in Dialogue • CCEC Credit Union • Kaslo Chamber of Commerce • Gordon Neighbourhood House • YMCA Okanagan • Italian Cultural Centre • Haida Gwaii Community Futures • Vancouver Community College • Inner City Economic Strategy • SFU MPP Alumni • Seedstock Community Currency • LatinCouver Cultural & Business Society • Sustainable SFU • Check Your Head • DVBIA • Vancouver Public Library • SFU Philosophers Café • Powell River Voices • Cedar Cottage Neighbourhood House • Okanagan Regional Library • Surrey Leadership Youth Council • Parksville BIA • Northwest Community College • Christ Church Cathedral Vancouver • Federation of North Vancouver Community Associations • Acumen • Taiwanese Canadian Cultural Society • North Vancouver City Library • Little Mountain Neighbourhood House • Windermere Secondary School • Comox Valley Chapter Council of Canadians • Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives • My Voice • SFSS • SFU Surrey TD Community Engagement Centre • YMCA Vancouver • The Sociable Scientists • Surrey Public Library • Conversations for Responsible Economic Development • SFU Alumni • Frog Hollow Neighbourhood House • Vancouver Kingsway Federal Liberal Riding Association • Sunshine Coast Regional District • Gen Why Media • SPARC • Donna Stewart • Skeena Diversity Society • Tofino • Poets and Writers • Lift Philanthropy Partners • SPFIRG • Hastings Crossing BIA • Vancouver Economic Commission • RADIUS • SFU Masters in Public Policy • Vancity • Graduate Liberal Studies Alumni • Strathcona Business Improvement Association • City Studio • Decoda Literacy Solutions • Dawson Creek and District Chamber of Commerce • Cloverdale BIA • Lake Trail Neighbourhood Connections