



# Charting the Path:

## Eight insights on a solutions-based economy for Saskatchewan

November 29, 2021



*Twenty-eight leaders from across Saskatchewan accepted our invitation to a future focused dialogue held on September 14, 2021. The hybrid meeting was prefaced by an on-line survey requesting participant input to key questions. Participants received verbatim survey responses prior to the meeting and these comments were integrated into breakout group discussion.*

*This document reflects the critical role which qualitative data plays in community economic development. Participants see their language in the work, creating ownership, buy-in and acceptance. It also drives others to consider perspectives and worldviews that are outside of their norms.*

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*With respect and gratitude, we serve Treaty 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 10 territories, the ancestral lands of the Cree, Saulteaux, Dene, Dakota, Lakota and Nakoda peoples, and the traditional homeland of the Métis.*



## **Advancing a solutions-based economic approach in Saskatchewan will drive more inclusive and equitable prosperity, positioning the province to outperform its peers.**

As the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed a variety of individual, community and institutional vulnerabilities, many jurisdictions are seeking alternate methods to balance a range of socio-economic interests. Complex issues such as food security, climate change, diversity and inclusion, digital access and adoption, healthcare and workforce development all continue to affect public, private and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), yet these issues cannot be addressed in isolation. A solutions-based approach, however, is one that seeks to apply multidisciplinary expertise and market-driven solutions to address pressing societal problems.

The Saskatchewan Economic Development Alliance (SEDA) actively pursues a mandate of accelerating generational prosperity. Through years of engagement with partners, agencies, organizations and communities, SEDA understands that the most resilient economies are those that encourage creativity and problem-solving efforts that serve a variety of stakeholders and beneficiaries.

As jurisdictions look to emerge from the pandemic and to further discussion towards a holistic, solutions-based economic approach for Saskatchewan, SEDA convened sector leaders to discuss present challenges and opportunities, including the potential for cross-sectoral

*“In today’s new ‘solution economy,’ solving social problems is becoming a multidisciplinary exercise that challenges businesses, governments, philanthropists, and social enterprises to think holistically about their role and their relation to others - not as competitors fighting over an ever-shrinking pie, but as potential collaborators looking to bake something fresh that serves as many stakeholders as possible.”*

*Deloitte Insights*

and collaborative approaches towards socio-economic policies, practices and values.

This discussion paper presents eight potential areas of focus for leaders in the public, private and non-governmental sectors to consider.

Together, they present a unique view of some of the issues currently facing Saskatchewan and the potential for an inclusive, resilient and solutions-driven economic resurgence that empowers individuals to realize their ambitions, businesses to prosper and communities to thrive.



## Why Now?

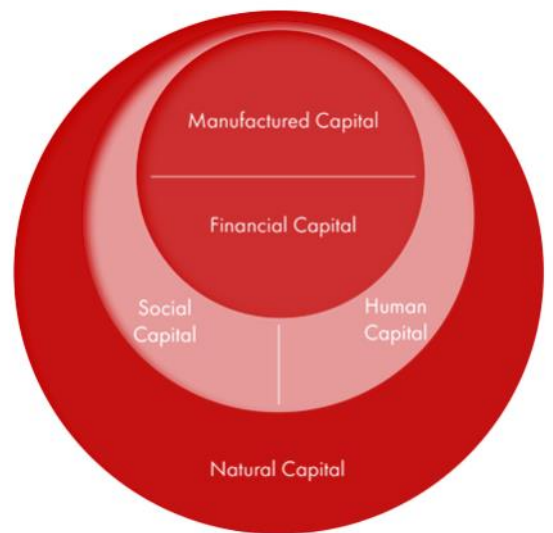
**The relationships between individuals, businesses and communities are shifting, with disruptions and changing market dynamics altering economic outcomes.**

As these shifts are being felt across Saskatchewan’s urban, rural and remote communities, leaders understand that concerted action is needed to increase broader economic participation and prosperity.

*The Five Capitals* model of sustainable development, which illustrates the interconnectedness of the various types of capital that create value, was used as the framework for discussion. Within this context, leaders were asked to consider:

- what gaps exist that hamper inclusive growth;
- how ‘change drivers,’ such as those occurring in science and technology, the environment, demographics and physical resources, are impacting Saskatchewan;
- examples of innovation across sectors;
- the potential for integrating values-driven solutions; and
- how - or if - potential solutions should align to provincial or federal strategic direction.

Resulting discussion confirmed that Saskatchewan’s economy has solid foundations from which to build a commitment to generational wellbeing and prosperity. As the province emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, key sectors remain stable or indicate growth potential. And to those committed to making a difference in their respective areas, circumstances suggest that the time is right to sustain and scale Saskatchewan’s economic gains, while also fostering strategic opportunities for more inclusive and long-lasting prosperity.



*The Five Capitals, Forum for the Future*

## Eight Insights

The following eight themes are derived from insights shared by leaders and include reflections on innovation, leadership and values-driven work.

### 1. The Five Capitals Model

The five capitals are intrinsically linked. Although there is much focus on cultivating financial capital, value from this capital can only be realized if we optimize human and social capital. If meaningful socio-economic outcomes are to be achieved, then it is important to consider them in political, environmental and social contexts.

*“The gap that exists between the wealthy and the poor is the most pressing to be addressed, to ensure both an inclusive and sustainable future. This gap has the most significant impact on children, the elderly and minority populations, and it affects both urban and rural communities.”*

Using our natural capital more effectively was suggested, via leveraging opportunities in areas such as environmental industries, renewables, uranium and more regionalized food supply systems. Greater opportunities

to develop value from natural assets was also raised, such as using community park systems to support biodiversity efforts, mitigate heat, sequester carbon and purify water.

### 2. A Question of Values

While participants agreed potential solutions should be value-driven, gaining clarity on both the values and the interpretation of value statements across sectors and organizations, is challenging.

An opportunity to find common ground may be evident in Saskatchewan’s motto: *from many peoples, strength*. This statement speaks to inclusivity as a common value, one that connotes energy, cooperation and resilience. It also speaks to actualization, channelling strength from Saskatchewan’s multicultural heritage to build a better future for all its citizens.

*“Resilience and self-reliance holds opportunity for alignment and may therefore be worthiest of amplification. Although these are not new values to embrace, I’d suggest that tied to the value of community and individual resilience/self-reliance, there is an opportunity to increase the value of leadership.”*



### 3. Leadership is Key

The indispensable ingredient in determining whether we overcome obstacles and seize opportunities remains the same as it has been throughout history: leadership.

Participants expressed concern that issues tend to be addressed from a current mindset or context, instead of focusing on sustaining value and enhancing prosperity for future generations. There was an implied reliance on all levels of governments for our collective socio-economic future.

*“An overarching vision is required to steer us toward the changes required, rather than maintain focus on a million different, short-term priorities.”*

A lack of diversity in policy matters and decision-making was also expressed. Gender diversity, black, Indigenous, and people of colour (BIPOC); immigrants – persistent representation gaps still exist.

*“There is typically only 20% of the population represented at the input table, consequently we are operating by exclusion.”*

### 4. Future-focused Collaboration

An essential need for increased collaboration across all sectors was widely expressed.

*“There is a need for holistic approaches across issues and geographies to tackle systemic challenges.”*

*“We build silos – what we need are bridges between sectors.”*

*“There is a lot of duplication going on. There needs to be a way to change the mindset that if one sector is moving forward, it is not necessarily at the detriment of another. How can that movement forward benefit other areas? For instance, resources and the environment.”*

*“There is a lack of inter-municipal or inter-municipal-Nation collaboration and a lack of sustainable, regional economies. Communities, organizations and industries are operating in silos. We need to move from competition to coopetition.”*

*“I think that in small circles of control and influence, there is aggressive pursuit of solutions. However, I wonder if the actions being undertaken are more focused on incremental change and addressing symptoms versus the root cause. The existing systems associated with the Five Capitals appear to be what is holding us back. Changing the systems, which are interconnected, is often seen as such an insurmountable task that it’s difficult for any single organization or group to know where to begin.”*

Projects and initiatives can achieve successful outcomes across multiple sectors and capitals, sometimes with a single solution. However, bridging collaborative intent to integrated decision-making models and action remains a challenge. Reference was made to former, inter-sectoral roundtable activity, where information was regularly exchanged and mutually beneficial action amongst sectors was encouraged.

### 5. Long-term Commitment

Top-down, short-term, single-sector approaches cannot deliver long-lasting impact in a complex system.

*“There is a need for innovative approaches with long-term potential to tackle complexity, but they may come with a greater risk of failure.”*

*“History has highlighted that short-term thinking is a validated approach; it overlooks the opportunity value of engaging others.”*

Simply put, when opportunities for economic, environmental and societal aspirations are considered together, the outcomes are improved for all.



## 6. Shared Language and Understanding

A lack of common understanding around key language was evident. For instance, the term ‘economic’ has retained its connotation from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, where it was focused exclusively on financial and built capital. Since then, ‘economic development’ has evolved to include a more comprehensive, community-driven philosophy, bringing together elements from public, private and non-governmental sectors. ‘Wealth,’ ‘inclusion’ and ‘capacity’ are also examples of terms that are frequently used, yet mean different things to different people.

The reality, especially across Saskatchewan’s predominantly rural regions, is that our provincial economy is reliant upon, and already functions with, various levels of interconnectedness between the financial, human, social manufactured and natural capitals presented by the Five Capitals model.

In addition, comments suggesting “governments set the course of private enterprise via the provision of grant funding” points to a possible misrepresentation of the intent of such funding; that is, governmental funding policy often supports sector initiatives, but rarely directs non-repayable financial support to individual businesses.

A common and agreed-upon language to describe collaborations, partnerships and non-financial benefits will add clarity to multi-stakeholder initiatives and is important to ensuring investments made in socio-economic activities reflects and delivers value for a range of agencies and organizations.

## 7. Addressing the Data Deficit

The lack of Saskatchewan-centric data, on a number of levels, is not a new observation. This is a long-standing cross-sectoral gap that needs to be addressed in order to drive responsive policy, business adaptation and community action. And while “data pockets” exist in government, post-secondary and provincial agencies and organizations, they are fragmented and difficult to access. The pandemic, too, has highlighted increased societal skepticism and distrust of public institutions, data quality and expert advice, which will remain challenging for all sectors to address.

However, advancing project, initiative or policy outcomes only amplifies the importance of having key data in place, so that appropriate monitoring can occur.

Of note, the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) model proposed by the *Indigenomics Institute* presents a holistic methodology for data collection and analysis. With several community-driven data initiatives currently underway in the province, the GPI model could offer alignment, providing a common framework for these initiatives to rally around in their efforts to provide inclusive, reliable, the Saskatchewan socio-demographic and socio-economic information.

Participants agreed that accessing quality data, will help deliver quality outcomes.

*“Studies have shown that reducing inequality is the biggest driver to a population’s happiness and contentment. Saskatchewan has just over 1 million people, but we export a tremendous amount of food, energy, resources and even technology. We are a very productive society, but we are plagued by growing inequality, poverty and systemic racism. We do not have a production problem or a wealth problem. We have a distribution problem.”*

## 8. Cultivating Innovative, Inter-connected Ecosystems

Innovation is central to economic prosperity, yet creating transformational change will require us to approach innovation broadly, using a variety of integrated approaches. For instance, current challenges in meeting workforce demand were acknowledged, with the obligation for developing skilled tradespeople and future knowledge workers crossing educational, industry and social boundaries. Tackling this problem effectively means involving post-secondary education and training institutions, businesses and entrepreneurs, government agencies, human service organizations, accelerators and even influencers.

Reference was also made that additional funding for technology start-ups is needed. This was countered with the view that there is currently enough public and private investment capacity in this sector, even though it doesn't always appear to translate into large, high-profile company success. And while fewer numbers of large technology firms does not denote a lack of success or growth in the province's tech sector, it highlighted the common need for all sectors to engage in ongoing communication and information-sharing – especially when good things are happening.

However, this topic also brought to light inconsistent, or absent, development policies that include Indigenous communities. Without policy alignment or clearly communicated policies or initiatives that support

Indigenous development across Saskatchewan, these communities lack access to the same processes and supports as the rest of the province. Varying efforts across all sectors to implement the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action also exist.

*“Stop trying to achieve year-over-year growth and focus on equitable participation in our economy which, if done right, will lead to growth anyway.”*

Addressing the digital divide, both in terms of equitable access to broadband, as well as the integration of digitization across business, industry and society, was a dominant theme. The demand for well-rounded, 'process integration' in this area, rather than simply investing in firms or select initiatives, was clearly communicated so that all sectors were better equipped to meet the future head-on.

*“Drivers such as decarbonization and forms of digitalization are already transforming industries. These opportunity drivers do not recognize traditional boundaries between different sectors of the economy.”*

To aid creative, solutions-based approaches to problems, increasing the breadth and depth of incentives for small-to-medium-sized businesses and social enterprises was recommended.





## Where to go from here

A prosperous economy, is an inclusive economy.

There is an economic and moral imperative to the pursuit of inclusive growth. Evidence tells us that inequalities negatively impact economic growth prospects, demonstrated by decreased attainment of education and training, poorer health outcomes and social dislocations that carry increased costs and burdens.

*“I had hoped that the pandemic would remind Saskatchewan people of our connectedness, but I continue to be surprised at the displays of selfish and entitled behaviour. We need to restore trust and faith in our government and community and replace the words ‘other’ and ‘them’ with ‘us’ and how ‘we’ can benefit together.”*

Nationally, provincially and regionally, the concept of transformational change remains a recurring theme. And, repeatedly, public consultation regarding such change links the ability to generate meaningful outcomes to cross-sector collaboration – we know that a strong, sustainable Saskatchewan means working together to create prosperity for all citizens.

The time is right to:

- a) Invite public, private and non-governmental leaders to roll up their sleeves in a collective effort to address our growth potential now, and for future generations. We are long past the point of striking Advisory Councils, or relying on others to prioritize this undertaking, and need committed individuals, businesses, agencies and organizations to advance this work together.

A provincial working group, representative of major employers, Indigenous communities, governmental bodies, social agencies and educational and training institutions, is a starting point from which to drive collaborative efforts.

- b) More clearly map out areas where sectors can work together, to leverage work that’s already underway, or to turn cross-sectoral challenges into problem-solving opportunities that are framed around a holistic, five capitals approach.
- c) Based on the outcomes from the provincial working group, strike an inter-sectoral task force, charged with developing a socio-economic charter to drive long-term, solutions-focused collaborative action for Saskatchewan.

Together, building a solutions-based, inclusive economic approach for our province will provide a strong foundation for individual and collective resilience, aspiration and growth.

*“Unlike projects, systemic solutions typically do not fit into election cycles or onto the pages of annual reports. But ultimately, it is systemic change that leads to real transformation.”*



## Participating Stakeholders

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Laurie Bouvier, Executive Director, Aboriginal Friendship Centres of Saskatchewan

Jennifer Brooks, Carlton Trail Regional College

Monica Brunet, Manager Community Economic Development & Community Engagement, SaskMétis Economic Development Corporation

Kristin Catherwood, Director of Living Heritage, Heritage Saskatchewan

Ashley Charles, CEO Prince Albert Regional Economic Development Alliance)

Colleen Christopherson-Cote, CEO Triple C Consulting

John Desjarlais Jr., General Manager of Great Plains Contracting

Eric Dillon, CEO Conexus Credit Union

Celine Favreau, Director of Operations & Planning, Mid Sask Municipal Alliance

Isobel Findlay, Professor Emerita, Edwards School of Business; University Co-Director, Community-University Institute for Social Research

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