

# **UBC President's Roundtable on Supporting Non-Market Housing Innovation**

*Summary Report of Ideas*



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

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# Message from Prof. Santa J. Ono

Dear friends,

It was a pleasure meeting you at the *UBC President's Roundtable on Supporting Non-Market Housing Innovation* on April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2019. Thank you again for joining Dr. Penny Gurstein and I and generously sharing your experience and perspectives.

We set out to learn what those with deep experience in the sector think UBC should do to support non-market housing innovation in the region. We wanted UBC leadership to gain a better understanding of how to align our efforts in the short and long-term.

We came away understanding that there's a large role for UBC to play in a variety of areas, including:

- Making the case for the sector with research, case studies, policy analysis, and other supports
- Building capacity in the sector helping to develop a community of practice
- Developing a cohesive career path into housing, in general, and non-market housing, specifically

Now is the time for us to follow-up, to clarify, to plan, and to execute on some of the ideas you suggested. As I mentioned in my opening remarks, we may not be able to do it all but we needed to understand where the gaps are and why. This report seeks to capture the major themes of our discussion, and to identify next steps.

I also want to thank you for highlighting that we should always strive to:

- Inform our actions with compassion and a human-rights approach
- Be wary of one-size-fits-all solutions without understanding specific needs of specific communities
- Meet communities where they are at and let them lead the process where possible

Thank you for sharing these perspectives. We will try to make sure they guide our work.

I want to offer thanks to members of the planning table—Jill Atkey, BC Non-Profit Housing Association, Kira Gerwing, Vancity Credit Union, Karen Hemmingson, BC Housing, Joyce Rautenberg, City of Vancouver, Margaret Pfoh, Aboriginal Housing Management Association, Chris Fay, UBC Campus and Community Planning, and Penny Gurstein—with special thanks to Ryan Brown, advisor in the UBC Community Engagement Office, and Craig Jones, coordinator for the Housing Research Collaborative, for their careful attention to the planning of the event.

I look forward to continuing this important work together.

Sincerely,



Prof. Santa J. Ono  
President and Vice Chancellor, University of British Columbia

# Background

On April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2019, UBC President and Vice-Chancellor Santa J. Ono and Dr. Penny Gurstein of the Housing Research Collaborative hosted the *UBC President's Roundtable: Supporting Non-Market Housing Innovation in Metro Vancouver*. The Roundtable convened representatives from non-profit organizations and local governments, as well UBC leadership, to explore opportunities for collaboration and action in the non-market housing sector.

The Roundtable was facilitated by Kathryn Gretsinger, veteran journalist and lead instructor in the UBC School of Journalism's Integrated Journalism program. More than 40 participants attended from UBC and across the region (see Appendix II for full participant list).

The conversation unfolded in two parts:

## **Part I. Exploring Opportunities:**

- What is driving excitement and energy in the non-market housing sector?
- What's next and how might UBC better partner in this work?

## **Part II. UBC Contributions:**

- How can UBC contribute to non-market housing innovation?
- What can UBC continue to do, do better, or start doing?

This report seeks to capture the voices, ideas and themes of Roundtable participants. It is intended to be a high-level summary of the conversation to inform possible opportunities.

The report also lists some actions already underway, and ends with two appendices: a list of research topics and ideas shared by Roundtable participants, and a full list of organizations that participated.

# What We Heard: Perspectives from the Roundtable

## Part I. Exploring Opportunities

“What are you excited about? What are the current innovations and where are the emerging opportunities?”

In the first part of the conversation, representatives from non-profit organizations and local governments shared their thoughts on the above questions. What follows is a summary, organized into dominant themes.

### 1. B.C. leads the nation

On B.C. as a leader in non-market housing innovation, and where it looks to for guidance:

- Don't underestimate the ability, power and vibrancy of the B.C. non-market housing sector. The sector could do so much more but is sometimes hindered by limiting operating agreements.
- The sector has developed strong partnerships and been innovating since long before the current crisis.
- B.C. is changing the definitions of what non-market housing means and is leading the country in innovation.
- B.C. still has much to learn from the rest of the world and needs to find ways to tap into other networks.
- The B.C. non-profit sector is about five per cent of the housing market. Internationally, for a city like Vancouver, it needs to be near 30 per cent. We need to figure out the roadmap to make it to that scale.

### 2. Beyond the usual suspects

On new players and partners entering the sector:

- Different money—from individuals and foundations—is coming into the non-market housing sector.
- Many of these new investors are more interested in **impact investing**—investing in projects that may have a lower financial return but a higher social, cultural, or ecological return.
- Community-based landowners—such as churches and non-profits—are putting their land into play not just to further their own mission but to contribute to the community.
- Because the housing crisis is starting to hit the middle-class, new voices and a new urgency are emerging.
- BC Housing has developed a new department called the “[HousingHub](#)” to tackle the middle-income product, which the government has expanded, not only for the social and affordable housing part of the market but also for the middle-income portion of the market.
- The community housing sector, which was comprised largely of distributed, mission-drive delivery organizations that mainly managed assets is starting to develop intermediary vehicles for aggregating

distributed assets. That makes the community housing sector not just delivery agents but partners.

- All power comes from the land. UBC, Vancity, the provincial government, churches, legions, public institutions—have control of land. Openness about control over the land must be part of the conversation for meaningful reconciliation.

### 3. The return of federal and provincial commitments

On the return of the federal government to the housing sector and recent commitments from the province:

- Alignment at the political levels—federal, provincial, municipal—is exciting and presents a real opportunity for progress.
- New federal and provincial investments—and changing types of investments—are energizing the sector. How the money flows—who controls it, who decides, and so on—is another question.
- In the City of Vancouver, more than 1,000 units of affordable rental and 1,000 units of non-market housing recently opened. That supply was in the works five to six years ago but is more affordable because of the federal and provincial dollars. Seeing projects like this finally come to fruition is energizing.
- Despite how much money the federal and provincial governments are putting in right now, it's not enough. And the housing sector is traditionally very bad at making the argument [for more].
- There's a pool of public dollars... but what kind of capital should be coming to the table to address what kind of needs. Who gets it? Who decides? We need to have this conversation.

### 4. One size doesn't fit all

On understanding the needs of diverse communities by meeting communities where they're at:

- Different organizations have different capacities and serve different kinds of populations—whether Indigenous youth exiting care, refugees, or people with disabilities. The development process must meet the needs of diverse groups.
- The best results come from long-term engagement and relationship building, often off-campus, often in unstructured environments.
- The federal government is opening up conversations with groups that are over-represented in social housing, specifically addressing anti-black racism through systemic institutions.
- Disaggregated data is essential for diverse groups to make their cases for funding and specific housing needs.

## 5. Optimize the supply chain

### On rethinking the supply chain:

- Building takes time. By the time an idea gets completion, the supply-and-demand equation no longer applies. Projects must come to market sooner at a lower cost.
- The non-market sector understands the full supply chain for getting things built and is well situated to rethink it.
- Each of the four parts of the chain can be reworked—**access** to land (who owns, who stewards, how do we cede power?), **construction** (what are the innovations in construction, design, who gets employed?), **finance** (who generates wealth, where does it get pooled, how does it get distributed?), **occupancy** (who lives in these places?).

## 6. Policy barriers for charities and others

### On how anxiety is the flip side of the excitement for some charity organizations:

- Some policies and programs are not well suited to charities and non-profit organizations. Innovation is required and is exciting but creates anxiety when long-term commitments are required in a fragile environment.

## 7. “Rent” or “own” are not the only options

### On investigating innovative approaches to ownership:

- One of the biggest income disparities is between people who own homes and people who don't. Can we look at models that allow renter households to put some of their investment into where they live?
- There are other models—not just renting and owning—but they're not being practiced or investigated.

## 8. Compassion must precede innovation

### On how a human-rights approach must precede innovation:

- “Innovation” can sound like a technocratic approach to building cities and housing, which often fails people when it doesn't take a human-rights based approach. Technocratic solutions have failed Indigenous communities, racialized communities, and low-income communities.
- We need to have the conversation not about “innovation” but about “compassion.”
- A better innovation is to empower grassroots communities to lead these conversations.
- The academy doesn't always address these concerns and often strips people of their colour and lived experience.

## “What’s next and how do community groups and policymakers think UBC could better partner in this work?”

In the second part of the Exploring Opportunities part of the discussion, representatives from non-profit organizations and local government shared ideas for how UBC could better partner with the sector. The following covers broad suggestions; see Appendix I for a list of specific research suggestions.

### 1. *Broad suggestion: Make the case for the sector*

- Innovation exists throughout the sector but the sector doesn’t have the capacity to study that innovation, communicate it, and learn from it. We’re in the middle of a crisis. It’s not a 50-household problem it’s a 50,000-household problem. There’s a role for UBC to tell that story—which is very expensive for community groups to do—and scale it.
- UBC could develop more pilot projects, research, case studies, or do policy analysis, and so on that proves the case that non-market housing improves the lives of individuals and health of cities.
- UBC could make a housing argument that’s similar to the transit argument. A lot of the benefits of transit investment are actually housing benefits that are incorrectly owned by the agencies working in that field.
- UBC could help small organizations serving diverse community groups produce the research they need.

### 2. *Broad suggestion: Build capacity in the sector & a community of practice*

- UBC could help build capacity of the entire sector, in addition to individual organizations or projects.
- This includes building capacity in the industries that support the sector, like the financial sector, non-profit sector management, and so on.
- UBC could help build a roadmap to get from five to 30 per cent non-market housing in the region—this is the scaling that’s required.
- This includes graduating students with the necessary skillsets for these areas. See below, “Develop cohesive career path, better prepare students.”
- SCARP is a great benefit to the sector and a strong foundation but more could be done to build the capacity.
- The ecosystem should be based on a re-thinking of four pillars—**access** (who has access to capital and power), **assets** (how can we build assets driven by compassion and a mission), **capacity** (all the institutions around the sector, from finance to universities, to align resources), and **advocacy** (what policies are in place for what reason, where can they be streamlined, especially in terms of the new players in the market, like charities).
- UBC could help the sector tap into networks outside the region. It’s difficult as a community land trust, as a co-op or non-profit housing provider to tap into these other networks, not just in B.C. but across the country.
- UBC could investigate and challenge existing paradigms around land tenure.
- UBC could investigate and challenge existing policies that handcuff charities, non-profits, and community land trusts and the industries that support them with an eye toward how to streamline. Host conversations around who has access to homes, capital, and power.

### 3. *Broad suggestion: Develop cohesive career path, better prepare students*

- Housing does not tend to be an intentional career path. There are a lot of great players in the university in housing but very disparate—geography, SCARP, business—but no real cohesion.
- UBC could better prepare students to understand the complexity of the system and remember it’s all about people—how to marry sustainability, design, regulation, and make it financially feasible so that at the end of the day people have a comfortable, stable place to live. Education needs to focus on the ultimate goal: building homes for people with diverse needs not just “housing.”



- UBC could foster an environment where students feel more comfortable bringing their lived experiences into the classroom [and learning sites] so that a diverse set of voices and experiences are represented. There are current pressures on students to strip themselves of their lived experience to confirm to the existing pedagogy.

#### 4. *Broad suggestion: Better reflect diverse communities*

- UBC could support and follow community-led processes when it comes to developing housing for diverse communities.
- UBC could take these conversations further, directly to the people affected, and develop trusting relationships with people in diverse situations and let them lead.
- UBC could make more space for people to come into the institution and inform how it thinks.
- UBC could provide disaggregated data that meet the needs of diverse groups.

#### 5. *Broad suggestion: Reflect on student, faculty and staff housing on campus*

- UBC could provide more non-market faculty, staff and student housing and generally reflect on how to add more housing.
- UBC could develop roommate pairing services.
- UBC could convene conversations with other large employers in the region to tackle housing issues.

#### 6. *Broad suggestion: Better access to university resources*

- UBC could do a better job of communicating available tools, resources, student placement and collaboration opportunities. (Note: this was noted more so in the following section of the conversation.)

## Part II. UBC Contributions

### “How can UBC contribute to non-market housing innovation? What can UBC continue to do, do better, or start doing?”

In Part II of the conversation, UBC leaders joined the representatives from non-profits and local governments at the roundtable to discuss the above suggestions, point to current projects that may meet some of the expressed needs, and discussed future directions and possibilities:

- For undergraduate students, UBC could make use of new work-integrated learning funding from the federal government (Federal Student Work Placement Program) to develop opportunities to partner with community groups.
- For graduate students, the [Public Scholars Initiative](#) may be an option to connect PhD students with community groups for specific research goals.

#### What is the Public Scholars Initiative?

The UBC Public Scholars Initiative started in 2015 as a way to support doctoral students to discover, integrate and mobilize knowledge using collaborative approaches with partners in other academic disciplines, communities, and organizations outside the academic sector.

Numbering more than 150 in four years, PSI Scholars are engaged with more than 100 distinct partnerships in over 30 countries with other scholars, think tanks, communities, corporations, civil and government agencies, and others.

See: <https://www.grad.ubc.ca/psi>

- The [UBC Centre for Community Engaged Learning](#) is developing workshops and events like “The Collaboratory,” which can help connect community groups with UBC students to problem-solve pressing issues from an interdisciplinary approach.
- UBC can do a better job generally of communicating work-integrated learning opportunities, like the previous two bullets, and help community groups navigate the university.
- UBC offers [CampOut](#), a social justice summer camp for LGBTQ2+ and allied youth ages 14-21—an example of UBC’s commitment to designing an education that interferes with politics of inequality.
- UBC can investigate devoting a Canada Research Chair to housing. A research chair is a high-level professorship that can lead research initiatives that might make the case for the sector on non-market housing.
- UBC can continue looking at how it’s using its land.

Recently UBC has:

- Continued delivering innovative projects through its “Campus as a Living Lab” program, within which UBC can build pilot projects on campus to test innovative housing models (See also: [Tallwood House](#)).
- Started investigating how to aggressively ramp up the number of student housing units.
- Explored increasing UBC community housing options including more neighbourhood rental housing and faculty home ownership options.
- UBC is also actively starting to look at programs to build shared equity for employees.
- Explored how to add more neighbourhood housing on campus through consultations with the UBC community and Musqueam.
- Introduced a rent-geared-to-income program for up to 100 staff (not mentioned at Roundtable).

**NOTE:** For more information on UBC affordable housing initiatives, see this [explainer](#).

- UBC can help develop and host good data. The Housing Resource Collective is working on a data portal project that is intended as an initiative to provide access to housing data to researchers at UBC and other universities.
- UBC could help demonstrate the evidence of health benefits of housing to help build the case for non-market housing.
- UBC is developing [nano-units](#) on campus but needs to develop the associated research to assess results.

### What is The Collaboratory?

The Collaboratory is an innovative workshop model that invites community groups and university members to collaborate on solutions to pressing social and environmental concerns.

Developed by the [UBC Centre for Community Engaged Learning](#), it’s a bottom-up, interdisciplinary approach where we can learn from one another, apply existing solutions, or co-create new solutions in a shared effort to address complex challenges.

To learn more about this model and whether it might work for your organization, contact [Susan Grossman](#) ([susan.grossman@ubc.ca](mailto:susan.grossman@ubc.ca)).

### About UBC Co-op Programs:

For over 40 years, UBC’s co-op programs have provided diverse community partners with tens of thousands of students from programs in Arts, Business, Engineering, Forestry, Kinesiology, and Science.

To post a job or to learn how co-op students can support your special projects or peak work periods, visit [www.coop.ubc.ca](http://www.coop.ubc.ca).

# Next Steps & Actions Underway

The purpose of the conversation was to surface both immediate actions and broad alignment. For the former, the next steps may be more immediate and obvious; for the latter, next steps may involve discussion, reflection and time. The following section identifies a few initiatives where there is already movement. We will post updates on these and more on the [President’s Roundtable website](#).

1. Tools for community-university partnering			
<i>Description:</i>	<i>Addresses:</i>	<i>Owner:</i>	<i>Status:</i>
<p>The <b>Housing Research Hub</b> is intended to act as an automated platform to connect various actors interested in activating housing research, within and outside of the university. We anticipate that the platform will be a place where ongoing initiatives can be posted, along with projects in need of funding or research capacity. Individual researchers or groups can post their expertise and interests to connect with organizations in need of housing research.</p>	<p>6. Better access to university resources</p>	<p>HRC</p>	<p>Planning underway.</p> <p>Contact: Penny Gurstein: penny.gurstein@ubc.ca</p>
<p><b>Community-University Help Desk:</b> UBC has committed through the new strategic plan to improve mechanisms for external communities (public, private and NGO partners and the engaged general public) to access and navigate the university. This will include in-person and virtual supports. In the interim, external communities are encouraged to contact <a href="mailto:community.engagement@ubc.ca">community.engagement@ubc.ca</a> for assistance.</p>	<p>6. Better access to university resources</p>	<p>UBC Community Engagement</p>	<p>Planning underway.</p> <p>Contact: <a href="mailto:community.engagement@ubc.ca">community.engagement@ubc.ca</a></p>

## 2. Funding for university-community partnerships

<i>Description:</i>	<i>Addresses:</i>	<i>Owner:</i>	<i>Status:</i>
The UBC Office of the President has allocated \$10,000 to support new and existing partnerships between community groups and the university, and furthering the conversation on non-market housing innovation.	2. Build capacity in the sector 6. Better access to university resources	UBC Community Engagement Office.	Dedicated Partnership Recognition Fund (PRF) for non-market housing has been approved. Dates and details will be <a href="#">here</a> when available.  Contact: <a href="mailto:community.engagement@ubc.ca">community.engagement@ubc.ca</a>

## 3. Housing data portal

<i>Description:</i>	<i>Addresses:</i>	<i>Owner:</i>	<i>Status:</i>
The housing data portal will be a curated collection of housing data for B.C. from various government and research sources. The public-facing side of the portal is to provide a value-added resource for researchers, students and the public to efficiently discover, understand and analyze housing data for BC.	1. Helps make case for sector	HRC	Discussions underway among UBC senior leadership about putting institutional resources behind this.  Contact: Penny Gurstein: <a href="mailto:penny.gurstein@ubc.ca">penny.gurstein@ubc.ca</a>

## 4. Continue conversations on workforce housing

<i>Description:</i>	<i>Addresses:</i>	<i>Owner:</i>	<i>Status:</i>
Over the last two years, UBC has convened two conversations with major public sector landowners on workforce housing. These conversations will continue to share best practices.	5. Reflect on UBC land-use	UBC Human Resources	Ongoing  UBC is open to more conversations if there is interest from other employers. Contact Lisa Colby: <a href="mailto:lisa.colby@ubc.ca">lisa.colby@ubc.ca</a>

## 5. Create a Canada Research Chair in housing

<i>Description:</i>	<i>Addresses:</i>	<i>Owner:</i>	<i>Status:</i>
A Canada Research Chair is a high-level professorship funded by the federal government as a way to attract top talent in a specific field.	1. Helps make case for sector	HRC	Discussions underway.  Contact: Penny Gurstein: <a href="mailto:penny.gurstein@ubc.ca">penny.gurstein@ubc.ca</a>

## 6. Leverage UBC brand as objective voice to convene public discussions

<i>Description:</i>	<i>Addresses:</i>	<i>Owner:</i>	<i>Status:</i>
UBC has tools and resources to convene public discussions on housing.	1. Helps make case for sector	HRC	Discussions underway.  Contact: Penny Gurstein: penny.gurstein@ubc.ca

## 7. Support roommate pairing services

<i>Description:</i>	<i>Addresses:</i>	<i>Owner:</i>	<i>Status:</i>
Opportunities to support services that pair students with off-campus housing, including seniors with available space.	5. Reflect on student, faculty and staff housing on campus	Student Housing and Hospitality Services	Exploration underway.  Staff from UBC and West End Seniors Network have met to discuss how UBC can support these programs.  Contact: Andrew Parr andrew.parr@ubc.ca

## 8. More housing on UBC campus

<i>Description:</i>	<i>Addresses:</i>	<i>Owner:</i>	<i>Status:</i>
Exploring additional development, new tenure types, and additional student housing on campus.	5. Reflect on student, faculty and staff housing on campus	Student Housing and Hospitality Services, Campus + Community Planning	A number of initiatives are underway. For more information, see <a href="#">this explainer</a> .  Contacts: Andrew Parr, Michael White <a href="mailto:andrew.parr@ubc.ca">andrew.parr@ubc.ca</a> <a href="mailto:michael.white@ubc.ca">michael.white@ubc.ca</a>

# Appendix I: Research Ideas and Suggestions

Below is a list of research areas noted to be of interest to Roundtable participants. In some cases, these were mentioned in previous sections. They are included here for ease of reference. Note that some of the suggestions came from written submissions on the cue cards that were given out at the end of the event.

## *Ideas for research included...*

- Explore models of shared equity ownership to bridge the divide between renting and owning.
- What is behind BC Housing's occupancy standards? Can they be challenged?
- Expand research on community land trusts.
- How can CRA's rules for charitable organizations allow innovation in housing development and operation?
- How can the three levels of government streamline requirements for housing delivery?
- Connect with Hogan's Alley Society on research initiatives that can centre grassroots organizations and marginalized communities.
- Animate a community of practice among community housing providers to aggregate and leverage assets in land to create housing and build community wealth.
- Research opportunities associated with launch and use of nano-units: health, community, planning, architecture.
- How can we use LEED/REAP third-party policy to address affordability as part of a systems approach.
- Research tenure models. There are other models—not just renting and owning—but they're not being practiced.
- Develop case studies not just for projects but for the entire sector. How would this affect our economy, our health, etc.
- Research how to reduce costs and bring projects to market sooner.
- Can Canada issue public bonds or provide tax breaks as a way to finance public housing?
- Research how living conditions may impact the student experience and other wellbeing indicators.
- Research the advantages, disadvantages and trade-offs of nano-units—living units with 140 square feet of space—might be designed to maximize wellbeing while reducing the private space available in each unit.

# Appendix II: List of Participants

Representatives of the following organizations were at the Roundtable:

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BC Housing
BC Non-Profit Housing Association
Catalyst Community Development Society
City of Surrey
City of Vancouver
Co-op Housing Federation of BC
Hogan's Alley Society
Metro Vancouver
Real Estate Foundation of BC
S.U.C.C.E.S.S.
UBC Campus + Community Planning
UBC Centre for Community Engaged Learning
UBC Community Engagement
UBC Cooperative Education
UBC External Relations
UBC Faculty of Education
UBC Faculty of Applied Science
UBC Faculty of Medicine
UBC Faculty of Science
UBC Government Relations
UBC Housing Research Collaborative
UBC Human Resources
UBC Sauder School of Business
UBC SEEDS Sustainability Program
UBC Student Housing and Hospitality Services
UBC Research + Innovation
United Way of Lower Mainland
Vancouver Coastal Health

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Vancity Credit Union

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West End Seniors' Network

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YWCA Metro Vancouver

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