

Evaluating The Bentway's Impact

Final Report

12 December 2023



Land Acknowledgment

As settlers and students of decolonization, migrants either in this generation or in generations past, we acknowledge that The Bentway operates on the treaty lands of the Mississaugas of the Credit and the traditional territory of the Huron-Wendat, the Haudenosaunee, the Métis, and many other Indigenous nations. We have the privilege to live on Turtle Island and call Toronto home, but as settlers we acknowledge that our visibility, our ability to be seen in all of our intersectionalities and safety comes at the cost of colonization which continues to subject Indigenous communities to ongoing atrocities. Tkaronto, “the place in the water where the trees are standing”, is now home to many diverse Indigenous people. We recognize them as the past, present, and future caretakers of this land. We pay our respects to all who have gathered and will continue to gather in this place The Bentway calls home. We are grateful to have the opportunity to work together to advance The Bentway’s initiatives but recognize that public space is colonized space and must be foregrounded as such.

The first phase of The Bentway is located on lands that are part of Fort York National Historic Site, recognized by the Government of Canada as being of national significance.

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1

Executive Summary

1.0 Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to develop an impact evaluation framework by which The Bentway can measure the effectiveness of its programs and spaces from inception to present day. Since its unveiling in 2015 The Bentway has expanded its reach and thus understanding its impact becomes crucial. The evaluation framework is intended to: 1) Support The Bentway's efforts to continuously collect and analyze data in expanding programming initiatives, 2) develop a standardized methodology to report and show accountability to partners and the public, and 3) understand The Bentway's unique social, cultural, economic, and environmental impact.

Approach

How do we measure the impact of The Bentway?

The base research question for this framework is as follows:

This base question is imprecise, and must be expanded in order to be effectively operationalized. There are two key questions that must be asked to expand the base question. First, what do we mean by impact, and second, what is The Bentway?

To answer the question about what we mean by impact, we looked to the four (4) broad categories of social, environmental, cultural and economic impact. These categories were provided by The Bentway, however we have used urban theory to ground and interpret them as key performance dimensions of *any* institution impacting the public sphere. With this, four (4) new permutations of our research question emerged with each focusing on one of the four (4) performance dimensions of social, environmental, economic and cultural impact.

To answer the second question of 'what is The Bentway?' we examine claims made about The Bentway's function. By examining both claims that The Bentway makes about its own function, as well as claims about The Bentway's use through public discourse, four main functions emerged: 1) public space 2) cultural institution , 3) informal education space, and 4) space for the unhoused.

While these interpretations of The Bentway are not exhaustive, they speak to some of the dominant functions both in practice and in perception. These definitions of The Bentway further guide our core research question and provide direction for what literature and best practices that this evaluation framework can draw upon to effectively measure the impact of The Bentway.

Having undergone this defining exercise, there are now a total of sixteen (16) unique permutations of our base research question to guide our research as seen in Figure A. Our research focused on understanding best practices for each performance dimension. Under each performance dimension, we defined what it means to conduct an impact evaluation for said performance dimension, highlighted 3-4 key indicators and provided example metrics.

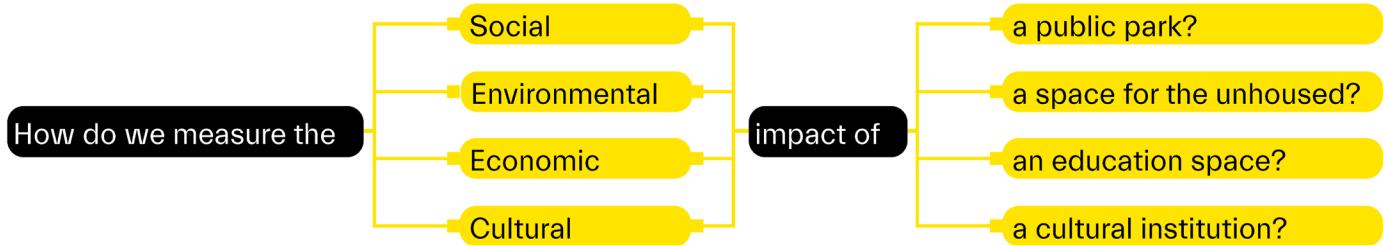


Figure A. Expanded research question.

Social Impact

Through research we have identified “Social Cohesion” to be an overarching theme of social impact evaluation. Social Cohesion can be understood through measuring the consequence of utilizing a public space for cultural events based upon how the community’s ability to live, work, play and relate to one another differs; it is dependent on the region and their concept of cultural event. Three (3) indicators have been identified:

Sense of Belonging

Research can be conducted to identify if and how The Bentway’s social programs provide space for community members, inclusive of marginalized individuals, youth and the unhoused to form networks and create a sense of belonging.

Diversity

Situated within a city known for its multiculturalism, interest should be taken on how purposeful The Bentway has been in their inclusion of various communities and social demographics of Toronto in order to create programming that reflects this authentic social mix.

Safety

The ability of an individual to feel safe from social and physical factors, be that traffic or crime, largely impacts how one perceives their sense of belonging. The Bentway must look towards how individuals are impacted by its actions thus the following metrics consider, form and function.

Economic Impact

Through an examination of The Bentway’s activities, goals, and missions, coupled with best practices addressing the economic impact of cultural spaces, non-profit organizations, tourism, and open/public spaces, the following indicators have emerged to evaluate the economic success:

Job Creation

The Bentway’s consistent provision of seasonal employment contributes to positive local economic opportunities tied to weather-dependent activities.

Equitable Development

While property value increase remains an important economic indicator for public space projects, it is important to prioritize equitable development. The Bentway has an opportunity to reshape the role of public spaces in urban development.

Revenue Generation

Revenue generation is a direct measure of The Bentway’s financial health. Indicating success in revenue generation can also attract further investment in The Bentway’s programming.

Environmental Impact

The Bentway has encouraged a shift towards the reconciliation of nature and the environment with the built city and thus an attempt to root its programs within a theme of an urban ecology framework. Four (4) indicators have been identified under this theme:

Material Reuse

Incorporating material reuse and education on circularity would assist in the creation of public and private networks of material reuse, which could encourage the flow of reusable materials across these networks in a bid to operationalize circularity.

Carbon Emissions

By reusing materials, increasing education on circularity and incorporating emissions avoidance into base level programming of initiatives, public spaces like The Bentway can play a role in overall carbon reduction mission in cities.

Green Infrastructure

Public spaces in cities can have a positive overall impact on the surrounding environment and support an urban ecology framework, through provision of sustainable green infrastructure.

Sustainability Education

Public infrastructure such as the Gardiner expressway can be used for urban placemaking, where citizens can come together and engage in broader dialogue and education about issues that are important for public benefit i.e. environmental issues.

Cultural Impact

Through best practice approach, cultural vitality emerged as a performance dimension for this evaluation. Cultural vitality is the evidence of creating, disseminating, validating, and supporting arts and culture as a dimension of everyday life in communities. Three (3) indicators have been identified;

Presence

This indicator looks at how The Bentway promotes and injects culture into peoples every day lives and creates opportunities for people to participate in cultural activities.

Participation

This indicator measures how many people actually participate in these activities and who they are. The goal of this indicator is to examine The Bentway's reach and ability to equitable distribute the benefits that culture has.

Support

This indicator looks at how The Bentway uses its funds and resources to support other cultural producers. This indicator is linked to the job creation indicator in the Economic Impact performance dimension.

Synthesizing Key Indicators

To synthesize the themes we combined various indicators and metrics to understand the relationships amongst across the performance dimensions. We identified commonalities across indicators to address efficiencies in conducting evaluations and assessed the relational proximity to address perceived conflicts and provide strategic approach for implementation. We then established a shortlist to efficiently organize the approach by which to operationalize the evaluation.

Operationalization

This section provides potential methods that The Bentway can employ to operationalize the framework laid out in this report. We have organized the methods by time-scale so that appropriate methods can be used depending on organizational capacity and needs.

Short-Term

- Hiring Survey
- Data Collection through partnerships
- Statistical Data
- Demographic Surveys

Medium-Term

- Economic Impact Studies
- Comparative Analysis
- Public Consultations
- Internal Policy Review

Long-Term

- Retail Business Surveys
- Real Estate Analysis
- Site Audit

Moving Forward

This report intends to support The Bentway in undertaking an Impact Evaluation Assessment to understand its effect on the surrounding community and GTA to develop a vision and identify goals for its next stage of growth. In doing so, we recommend internal review of strategic goals to prioritize performance dimensions by department, consider common themes and potential impacts and consideration of internal processes for cohesive incorporation and adaptation into the existing organizational ongoing practices

2

Purpose & Intent

2.0 Purpose and Intent

Beginning as a vision to transform the ‘unused’ space below the contentious Gardiner expressway, The Bentway is a unique public space and urban revitalization project. Affectionately described as a continuous work in progress since its unveiling in 2015, The Bentway’s inception was made possible by a philanthropic donation of \$25M by the Matthews Foundation. The initial goal of the project was simple: to create a vibrant and accessible park that would connect several neighbourhoods within downtown Toronto, and explore intersections of art and play to advance community collaboration. As The Bentway has grown, this simple goal has proven increasingly complex and expansive. Through controversially shared infrastructure, endless debate over spatial equity and innovative programming, the once clear outlines of what The Bentway is, what purpose it serves, and who it is for, begin to blur.

Since 2020, The Bentway, in partnership with the City of Toronto, is undergoing strategic development of the Under Gardiner Public Realm Plan (‘PRP’) to guide future development of adjacent spaces. As The Bentway expands its reach, understanding its impact becomes crucial to understand. But, what is The Bentway? How do we assess its overall impact? The ambiguity of its definition produces the challenge to utilizing an existing standardized framework due to its liminal and continuously evolving presence

The purpose of this report is to develop an evaluation framework through a set of performance metrics guided by normative criteria, by which The Bentway can measure the success and impact of their spaces and programs. Documenting and evaluating the overall impact of The Bentway in all its facets will be essential for continued investment in the organization’s capacity to fulfill a commitment to creating a shared space driven by partnerships amongst artists, community, knowledge-keepers, city animators and fellow urbanists connected under a shared goal of improving the public realm. The purpose and intent of this evaluation framework is to enable the following:

- **Support The Bentway’s efforts to continuously collect and analyze data to support efforts of expanding programming initiatives.**

- **Develop a standardized methodology to report and show accountability to partners and the public.**

- **Understand The Bentway’s unique social, cultural, economic, and environmental impact.**



3

Approach

3.0 Approach

According to the Canadian Evaluation Society, program evaluation combines both theory and practice to be used by organizations to gather information for planning, designing, implementing, and assessing results. Effective program evaluation combines methodologies of multiple sources of information to assist organizations in identifying best practices, learn from shortcomings and derive solutions for future success.

The overarching research question for this framework is as follows:

How do we measure the impact of The Bentway?

While this question forms the foundation of this report, it is broad and imprecise. This leads to more questions than answers at first. The question must be unpacked and expanded in order to be effectively operationalized. The first question that emerges from this exercise is: what do we mean by impact?

3.1 Defining Impact

The term impact can have several connotations depending upon the context in which it is being used. Impact often refers to the causal relationship between one thing and another, for example the impacts of an event on the overall economy. When discussing outcomes or results, impact can also be used to describe a significant or noticeable positive or negative effect. Additionally, impact can be used to describe the emotional or psychological effect of an experience, event or piece of information being absorbed. This report utilizes the four key elements of social, cultural, economic and environmental priorities to develop performance metrics. These metrics are guided by normative criteria encompassing societal expectations and stated values supported by scholar and grey literature and interpreted as performance dimensions whereby they can be evaluated and measured. As such, for the purposes of this report, impact refers to overall effectiveness, quality, significance, and influence on emotional or psychological experience.

This evaluation framework looks at four (4) performance dimensions of social, environmental, cultural and economic impact. These dimensions were provided by The Bentway, however, we have used urban theory to ground and interpret them as key performance characteristics of any institution impacting the public sphere, recognizing that the quality and effectiveness of this evaluation is due to the joint effect of the physical form and socio-spatial function of its use (Lynch, 1989). We define the public sphere as the overarching state of political and cultural life visible in a society's institutions, practices, media, and spaces (Mehta, 2023). The public sphere is where public opinion is formed (Ibid., 2023), whereas the public realm is defined by the public sphere, commonly associated with symbolic communication and spatial practices. It is at the intersection of public sphere and public space where real political action takes place (Ibid., 2023). Throughout the report we will utilize public sphere and public realm interchangeably based on the context within which it is discussed.

For the purposes of this report, we have re-conceptualized the four (4) performance dimensions of Social, Environmental, Culture and the Economy provided in terms of their impact on the spatial and temporal form of The Bentway. As a guiding principle, we have sub-divided the four performance dimensions (Lynch, 1989) referring to them as a cluster of qualities, which can be measured on an on-going basis.

Social Impact

Social impact has been sub-divided into three (3) performance dimensions referred to as sense, referring to the socio-spatial cohesion of the physical space and the ways in which they are perceived to foster a sense of belonging in relation to one's values (Lynch, 1989). Additionally, fit which refers to the form and capacity of The Bentway to encourage and control social performance.

Environmental Impact

We have sub-divided environmental impact across two performance dimensions including control, referring to the degree to which The Bentway's use of spaces, materials and provision of programming remain within their discretion to promote sustainable practice and justice, in reference to the impact of environmental benefits such as incorporation of green infrastructure are distributed among the public (Lynch 1989).

Economic Impact

We have elected to frame economic impact within the performance dimension of justice, however, within this context justice is in reference to equitable approaches to profit and fairness in development and the overall shared benefits of revenue generation.

Cultural Impact

Here, we refer to this dimension as a process that supports the vitality of the public realm supporting public survival through participation that celebrates difference. Lynch (1989) refers to this phenomenon as an aspect of health dependent upon social structure that differ across culture. Finally, access, in reference to individual accessibility to resources, programming, and services inclusive of their ability to reflect the communities they serve (Ibid. 1989).

With this, there are four (4) new permutations of our research question as seen in Figure B, with each focusing on one of the four (4) performance dimensions of social, environmental, economic and cultural impact.

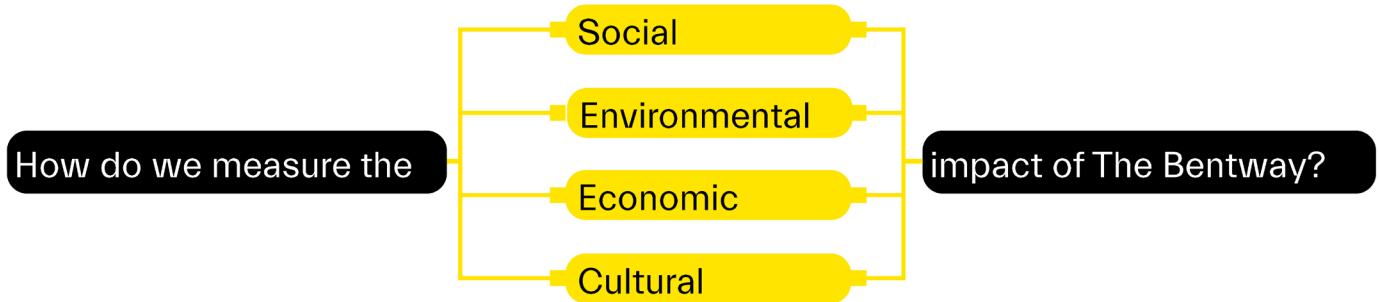


Figure B. Base research question with performance dimensions integrated

The second question that emerges in this exercise is: what is The Bentway? In order to evaluate something, it must be given some form. The Bentway is a multifaceted entity that blurs many conventional lines. It is both a physical site and an organization, both an infrastructure reuse project and an arts organization. Interpretations and definitions of The Bentway can vary drastically depending on who you ask.

3.2 Defining The Bentway

The Bentway is often seen as a positive example of urban revitalization, transforming an unused space into a dynamic area that fosters community engagement, cultural activities, and recreational opportunities. However, there are several conceptions and contestations of what The Bentway inherently is and is not. Some of these interpretations of The Bentway are stated explicitly and are core to its original vision, while others are implicit and a result of contestations of the space by users and public discourse. This ambiguity helps foster The Bentway's dynamism and energy, but creates challenges when attempting to evaluate its impact.

There were several objectives associated with the conception of The Bentway that went beyond transforming underutilized urban spaces into vibrant, accessible, and community-oriented areas. The following seven ⑦ pillars have been identified as key values within The Bentway's vision, and therefore, explicit claims about its own intended function:

- 1. Connectivity:** The Bentway aims to enhance connectivity in the city by transforming the area beneath the Gardiner Expressway, making it accessible for pedestrians and cyclists. The project seeks to bridge divides between neighborhoods and create a more interconnected urban environment.
- 2. Public Space:** The Bentway is designed to create a welcoming and inclusive public space where residents and visitors can gather, engage in various activities, and enjoy cultural events and programming. It aims to provide a hub for community engagement and social interaction.
- 3. Culture and Arts:** The project values the integration of culture and the arts into the urban fabric. It hosts a variety of cultural events, performances, and art installations, contributing to the city's cultural vibrancy and creative expression.
- 4. Sustainability:** Sustainability and environmental considerations are essential aspects of The Bentway's values. The project incorporates sustainable design and green infrastructure, promoting a more environmentally friendly and resilient urban environment.

5. **Community Engagement:** Community engagement and input are highly valued. The Bentway seeks to involve the local community in the decision-making process and programming to ensure that it meets the needs and desires of the people who live and work in the area.
6. **Accessibility and Inclusivity:** The Bentway is committed to providing accessible spaces for people of all ages and abilities. It aims to be an inclusive and welcoming place for everyone, regardless of physical limitations.
7. **History and Identity:** The project values the historical and cultural identity of the area it occupies. It may incorporate elements that pay homage to the history and heritage of the location.

Note. These pillars were compiled using design strategy documentation provided by WaterfrontTO during the conceptual phase.

Public Space/Infrastructure Reuse

Within these values, the most apparent interpretation of The Bentway is as a public space and infrastructure reuse project. The Bentway has been lauded for its success in reclaiming a formerly neglected and uninviting space and turning it into a vibrant and inclusive urban park. It won several awards and became a popular destination for families and individuals. Spanning approximately ten (10) acres of public space and 1.75km of walkable trail, The Bentway re-imagines how we experience, activate and value public space serving as an example of recovery and re-use of existing mono-functional infrastructure supporting new forms of public life operated, maintained, and programmed. It has contributed to the revitalization of the surrounding neighborhoods and has become a model for other cities looking to transform underutilized spaces into dynamic community assets. To many in the surrounding condo communities, The Bentway also serves as a defacto front yard to get some fresh air and walk their dogs.

Beyond explicit claims made by The Bentway, public perception supports this interpretation of The Bentway. In March of 2023 in partnership with the City of Toronto, The Bentway Conservancy shared public feedback garnered within the preliminary Public Realm Plan consultation summary. Within this engagement, it was noted that many like The Bentway and feel it is a creative use of previously underused space, and that many would like to see expansion of creative use of space and programming across other areas under the Gardiner.

Cultural Institution

Also noted explicitly in the values of its original vision, is the interpretation of The Bentway as a cultural institution. Throughout its years of operation, The Bentway has collaborated with various creative partners to provide on-site performances and artistic installations. Producing a multitude of public engagement events and initiatives, The Bentway has developed an expansive program offering, blurring the boundaries that distinguish its spatial categories beyond assumed capacity. As a cultural institution within a unique urban setting, The Bentway transforms the traditional perception of spaces intended for education, professional development, community engagement, artistic and cultural innovation.

Again, this interpretation is supported not only by explicit claims made by The Bentway, but also public perceptions. As noted in the PRP's consultation summary, "if The Bentway Phase 1 exists as a proof of concept that the spaces under the Expressway can function as vibrant community assets and productive ecologies, then each program serves as an active consultation opportunity, and a chance to build relationships with and learn directly from the community." The cultural programs that The Bentway produces are core to its function in the public eye.

Space for the Unhoused

Citing itself as being a radically accessible site, the vague interpretation lends itself to contentious and ambiguous contestations of who the space is for. The success of The Bentway as a public space project has not been achieved without critique. Notoriously, in 2019 Ontario Coalition Against Poverty's (OCAP) protested an event taking place on The Bentway site. This protest emerged in the context of a private, third-party luxury dinner event occurring at The Bentway, while further along also underneath the Gardiner, a homeless encampment had been displaced. While this displacement was not a direct result of The Bentway, nor was the private event associated with The Bentway in any way other than renting the space, it shifted public perception. Questions about who The Bentway was for and how inclusive or accessible it was became explicit.

While The Bentway is never explicitly positioned as a space for the unhoused, public perception as evidenced in early community engagements show that this interpretation is not new. The Bentway has also engaged with arts organizations like SKETCH Working Arts that focus on homeless youth.

Informal Education Institution

As for less explicit claims, The Bentway can also be conceived of as a space for education, albeit informally. Much of The Bentway's programming serves implicitly as educational content. The Bentway becomes a space for education in many ways, from projecting the site's history to the public through one-off artworks, to exploring broad concepts about the environment and sustainability through larger scale, seasonal installations and even developing more explicitly knowledge-sharing workshops and career development opportunities.

While these interpretations of The Bentway are not exhaustive, they speak to some of the dominant functions that The Bentway embodies both in practice and in perception. These definitions of The Bentway further guide our core research question and provide direction for what literature and best practices that this evaluation framework can draw upon to effectively measure the impact of The Bentway.

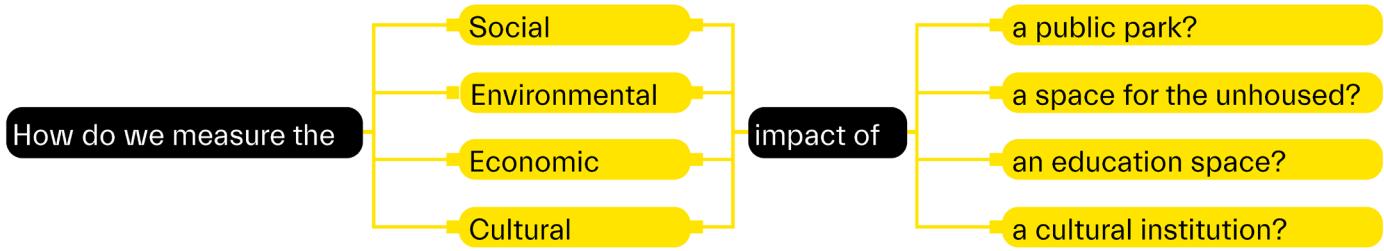


Figure C. Fully expanded research question

3.3 Reading this Report

Having undergone this defining exercise, there are now a total of sixteen (16) unique permutations of our base research question. With this, our research focused on understanding best practices for each performance dimension. Under each performance dimension, we defined what it means to conduct an impact evaluation for said performance dimension. Further, using scholarly and grey literature that supports best practices and guiding principles, we have identified a normative orientation for what it means to have positive impact within each performance dimension. Using this normative orientation we have identified three (3) to four (4) key indicators, each with a set of potential metrics that The Bentway can implement. These indicators and metrics are guided by literature but are intended to be a loose recommendation that The Bentway can adapt and refine as needed based on shifting organizational capacity and goals.

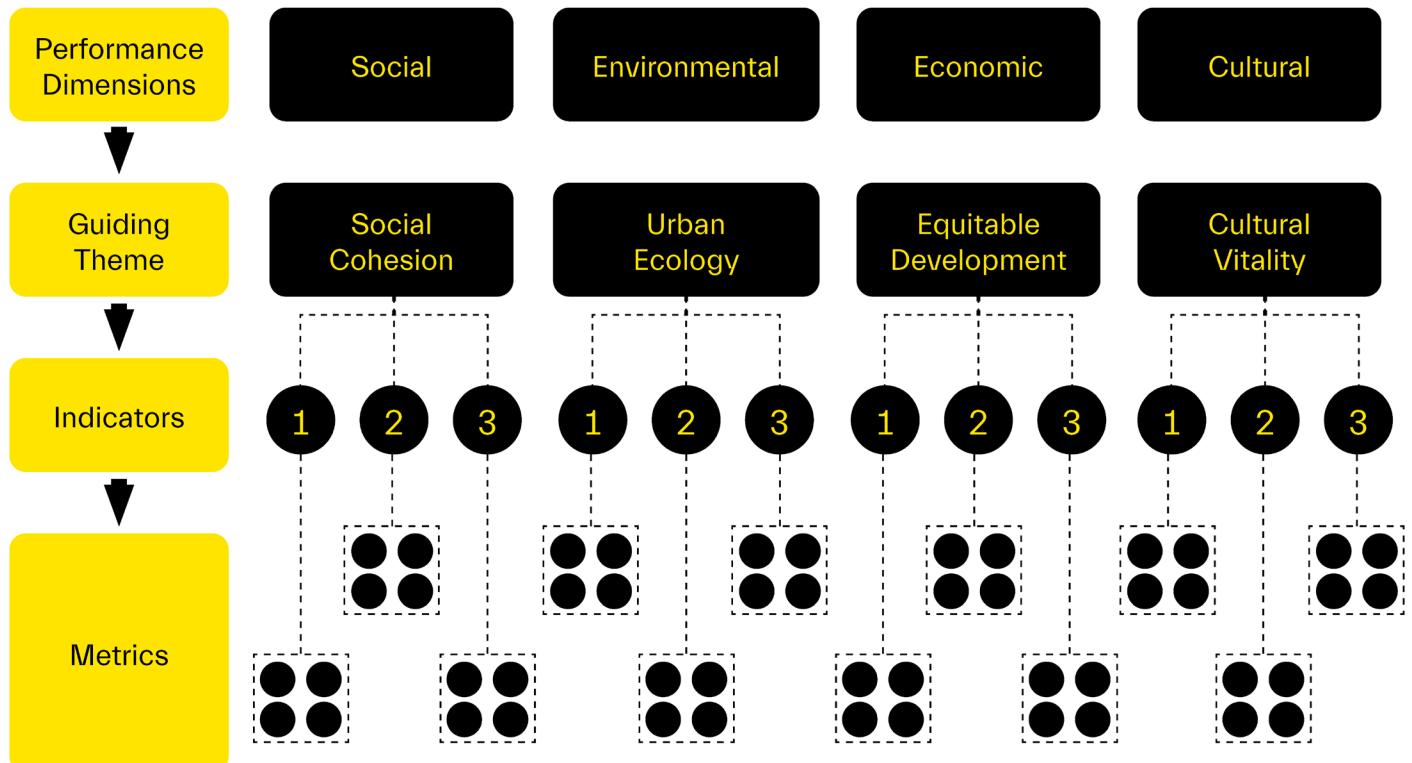
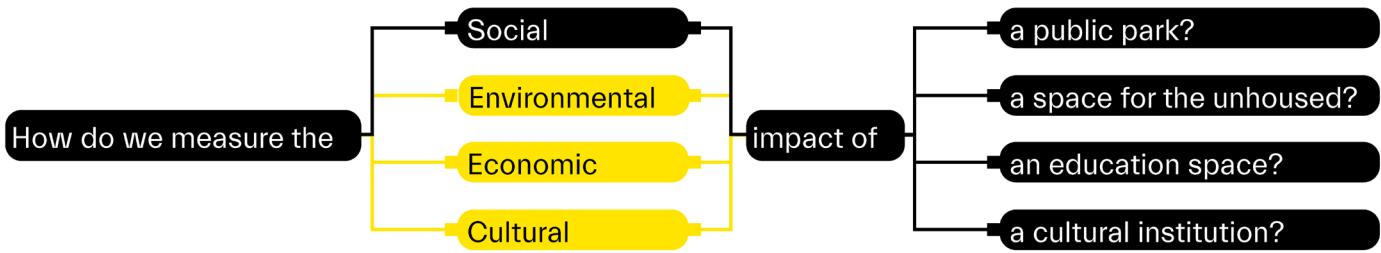


Figure D. Diagram explaining evaluation framework structure

4

Social Impact



What is Social Impact?

Burdge et al., (1995) refers to social impact as “the consequences to human populations of any public or private actions that alter the ways in which people live, work, play, relate to one another, organize to meet their needs...as members of the society” (p.59). This may involve a contribution to society that can be measured directly or indirectly. For the purposes of this report, social impact will follow an outline provided by an Environment, Social, Governance (ESG) Framework, often used within businesses and corporations. Due to the broad definition, and similar scholars that focus on monitoring social consequences, measuring outcomes and addressing consequential impacts, an ESG focus allows for Social Impact to be measured against a financial context. Within the ESG framework, ‘Social’ is broadly understood as an organization’s relationship with its stakeholders. In measuring the Social Impact of a space, it is especially important to isolate the measurement to exclude a focus on social-economic, socio-environmental or socio-cultural impact. Measuring the social impact of a space should hold a specific focus.

This report has bridged the academic understanding of Social Impact with the corporate model of “Social” within ESG to better reflect the motivations of The Bentway. However, alongside these two priorities, it is imperative to also reflect the community within this definition. As a result, Social Cohesion emerged as an overarching theme. In this way, the community alongside The Bentway benefits from the understanding and implementation of this definition.

Specifically, this report will analyze how The Bentway should manage its relationship with their stakeholders. In researching best practices and academic literature on community programming and spaces similar to that of The Bentway, this analysis has identified “Social Cohesion” to be an overarching theme for this framework.

Social Cohesion

The Bentway holds various programs on site, such as Neighborhood Nuit, Halloween, Neighborhood ReConnect and Beyond Concrete and thus operates as a form of an informal learning space, alongside a space that actively encourages community. As a site that has been purposeful of being inclusive of various communities and social demographics of Toronto to create programming that is authentic of the social mix found within the city, The Bentway positions itself as a site that must also promote Social Cohesion. Social Cohesion can be understood through measuring the consequence of utilizing a public space for cultural events based upon how the community’s ability to live, work, play and relate to one another differs; it is dependent on the region and their concept of cultural event.

There are three indicators that can be used to measure the social activities and spaces of The Bentway over its first five years.

Sense of Belonging

It is imperative to establish internal policy within The Bentway on matters that affect The Bentway and surrounding community. This policy should be focused on promoting social inclusion amongst the users that utilize The Bentway. In doing so, it is necessary to measure the relationship The Bentway has with the neighboring unhoused population and the relationship the unhoused population has with the surrounding Fort York community.

The idea of a sense of 'belonging' to a certain place must consider all individuals who use the site so as not to fall to counterproductive effects (Burdge & Vanclay, 1996). This includes marginalized individuals such as young people and unhoused people. It must focus on patterns of inclusivity and exclusivity alongside how the space enables dominance of some groups while others are pushed to the margins. Research can be conducted to identify if and how The Bentway's social programs provide space for community members to form networks and a sense of belonging. Metrics for this indicator can include:

- Number, location and operation time of Washrooms
- Physical layout of space to address several age groups
- Location and number of Benches
- Number and Cuisine of Food Trucks
- Representation of cultural groups
- % of attendance
- % of community representation

Diversity

The idea of 'belonging' to a certain place must consider all individuals who use the site so as not to fall to counterproductive effects. Similarly, measuring the social impact of The Bentway necessitates an analysis on the level and type of 'belonging.' Furthermore, support facilities should be implemented to meet the demand of these social interactions. This may include cultural food trucks, farmers market, or even benches (Sheng et al., 2021). The Bentway must review programming to ensure that it benefits various neighborhood groups. A focus should be placed on diversity due to the marketing The Bentway has conducted within the GTA, a city known for holding the title of most multicultural in the world. Interest should be taken on how purposeful The Bentway has been in their inclusion of various communities and social demographics of Toronto in order to create programming that reflects this authentic social mix. Metrics for this indicator can include:

- Distance traveled by participants/ visitors
- Dominant socio-demographic makeup
- Opportunities for social development
- Variety of programming/workshops offered
- Programming to consider activities for marginalized individuals
- Demographic of contractors and employees
- Presence and Intensity of internal policy

Safety

The ability of an individual to feel safe from social and physical factors, be that traffic or crime, largely impacts how one perceives their sense of belonging. Furthermore, safety impacts both individuals who may voluntarily choose to engage with The Bentway, and individuals who may frequent The Bentway site out of necessity. In this way, safety acts as a key indicator for the theme of “Social Cohesion” as it illustrates how the social impact of The Bentway can be measured for all individuals. To measure the social impact of space for unhoused populations, The Bentway must look towards how individuals are positively or negatively affected by The Bentway’s private or public actions. In this way, the following metrics include the location, style and function of The Bentway in their consideration. Metrics for this indicator can include:

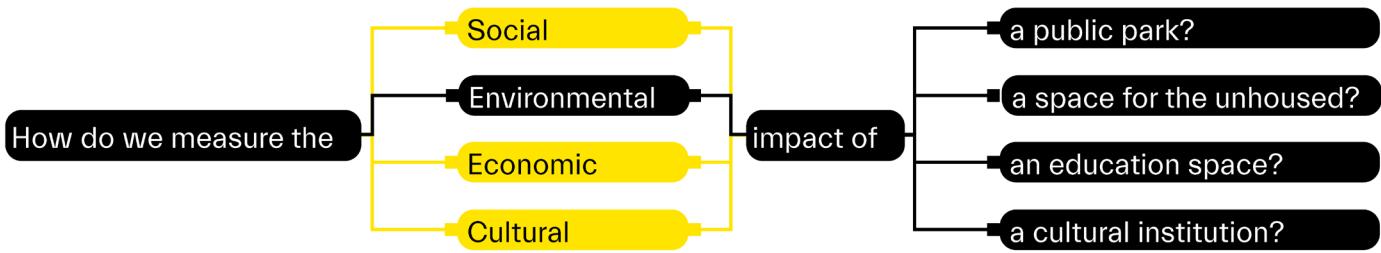
- Presence of hostile architecture
- Presence of surveillance in various forms
- Presence of safety measures such as lighting

- Favorable design aspects such as benches
- Number of green spaces and softscapes
- Intensity of policing



5

Environmental Impact



What is Environmental Impact?

In the book *Companion to Public Space*, Ken Greenberg re-imagines the city in its pre colonial form with a higher emphasis on the inclusion of natural features such as watercourses and topography. Discussing the emergence of institutions like The Bentway, Greenberg argues that in recent years the perception and management of public space has changed and is more fluid in nature which has allowed this shift towards the reconciliation of nature and the environment with the built city. Greenberg points out that it is critical for public space initiatives like The Bentway to maintain a sense of accountability to the public so that the “publicness” of public spaces is not compromised, and hence, the sections below aim to justify metrics that evaluate the environmental impact of The Bentway.

Urban Ecology

Why is an assessment of The Bentway’s environmental impact necessary? The institution roots many of its programs in an urban ecology framework, in an attempt to merge urban with the environment sustainably. This is exactly the city that Greenberg’s ideas are inspired by, but it is also necessary to then establish environment based metrics that can hold The Bentway’s initiatives accountable to their claims.

Material Reuse

Solid waste from construction, renovation and demolition activities account for one third of landfill capacities in Canada. Ella Hough, a Public Space Fellow at The Bentway argues that public spaces like The Bentway can play an important role in preventing the amount of solid waste that ends up in landfills through material reuse. Hough argues that through a community based approach which emphasizes material and infrastructure re-use as well as circular economy education through public art programs, The Bentway can play a role in trying to influence a larger municipal policy change towards recycling materials and preventing landfill waste generation. It is clear that public spaces alone cannot achieve these policy changes, but the point in incorporating material reuse and education on circularity would be to create public and private networks of material reuse, which could encourage the flow of reusable materials across these networks in a bid to operationalize circularity. Metrics for this indicator can include:

- Use of recyclable material for public furniture used on site
- Measure of reduction of waste that would end up in landfills as a result of employing reused material for public furniture on site
- Incorporation of circularity in Public Art initiatives

Carbon Emissions Reductions

Processing of raw materials is one of the biggest contributors to increasing carbon emissions. By reusing materials, increasing education on circularity and incorporating emissions avoidance into base level programming of initiatives, public spaces like The Bentway can play a role in overall carbon reduction mission in cities. For example, Carbon emissions avoidance is one of The Bentway's internal sustainability goals, and one of the ways they claim to avoid carbon emissions is through virtually collaborating with artists on their public art initiatives instead of flying them in, which would increase carbon footprint. The Bentway then collaborates with local artists who fulfill visions set out in virtual consultations. Metrics for this indicator can include:

- Reduction in CO2 produced from reusing materials on site
- Carbon emissions avoidance in strategic program design
- Carbon emissions education through public art initiatives

Provision of Sustainable Green Infrastructure

Public spaces in cities can have a positive overall impact on the surrounding environment and support an urban ecology framework, through provision of sustainable green infrastructure. The Toronto and Region Conservation Authority published a report on The Bentway's unique system for managing stormwater as well as rain water runoff from the Gardiner, known as Staging Grounds, under their Sustainable Technologies Evaluation program. The report found that the Staging Grounds initiatives employed Low Impact Development (LID) principles to sustainably manage on-site run off retention. Rooted in Urban ecology, rain/storm water is redirected through natural filtration chambers into experimental gardens with plant species that absorb metals and salts from the water runoff. Metrics for this indicator can include:

- Presence of green infrastructure initiatives for public space benefit
- Incorporation of LID principles in Green Infrastructure
- Use of plant species that can mitigate effects of air, soil and water pollution

Sustainability Education

Public infrastructure such as the Gardiner expressway can be used for urban placemaking, where citizens or in the case of The bentway, artists, can use public space to come together and engage in broader dialogue and education about issues that are important for public benefit i.e. environmental issues. The Bentway's public art initiatives intentionally employ reused materials to educate public and private networks on the potential for circularity in large scale art installations while raising environmental consciousness about circularity and carbon emissions.

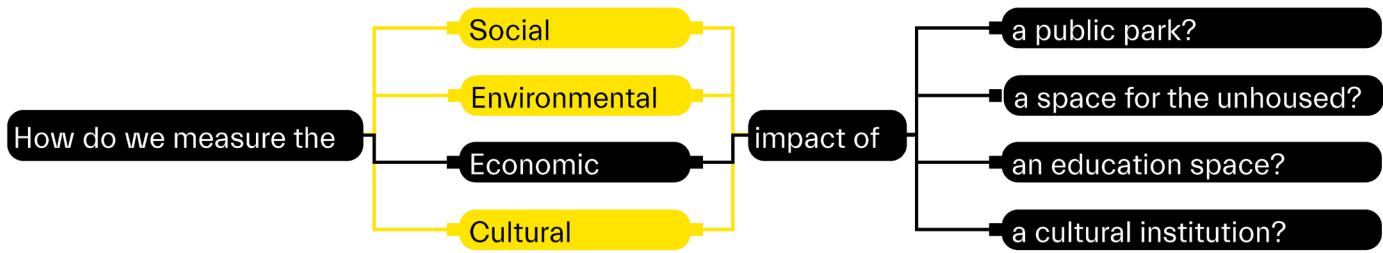
Through initiatives like the Staging Grounds, public spaces like The bentway also have the potential to educate the larger public on Indigenous knowledge of sustainability and environment. In managing stormwater runoff, The Bentway incorporated expert knowledge from indigenous horticulture experts on which plant species can best absorb pollutants from water. Metrics for this indicator can include:

- # of Environmental themed programs
- # of site tours
- Incorporation of indigenous knowledge in program initiatives



6

Economic Impact



What is Economic Impact?

Often, the economic implications of public spaces are not immediately considered when immersed in the simple joys of attending an event, strolling through a park, or relaxing in a public plaza. However, public spaces provide a center stage for economic, social, and cultural interactions also supporting businesses and residents at the same time. In fact, the social, cultural, economic, and environmental factors play a crucial role in supporting the dynamic growth of cities, contributing significantly to the productivity and well-being of their residents. From vibrant waterfronts to bustling urban parks, Toronto is known for its vibrant public spaces and neighborhoods that enhance the city's livability. Toronto's public spaces including Nathan Phillip Square, Toronto Islands, the Toronto Waterfront, High Park, and The Bentway not only provide opportunities for leisure and relaxation but also contribute to the city's economy by hosting events and festivals.

The Bentway is a focal point for the community, attracting visitors to local events and engaging the community. In 2022-23, The Bentway welcomed more than 200,000 people to participate in activities under the Gardiner. In the summer of 2022, The Bentway invited 102,000 people to enjoy free activities in a variety of locations, including under the Gardiner Expressway and along roads, sidewalks and public spaces in neighborhoods a proximity emphasizes the role.

Equitable Economic Impact

With increased recognition and advocacy around issues of equity and access, planners, policymakers, and leaders are recognizing the need to broaden their perspectives beyond traditional measures of economic return from urban developments. The benefits provided by these well-maintained and planned public spaces to all sections of society are now being discussed. Toronto is a diverse city and projects that consider equitable economic impacts are more likely to be successful in the long term. This changing approach supports citizens and services excluded from equitable public spaces. Moreover, it will help in building a positive relationship with the community and create a sense of ownership and pride among a diverse group of stakeholders. By harnessing the power of investing in public spaces to enhance the well-being of individuals across all sectors of society, the economic impact of The Bentway will guide equity-based indicators.

Through an examination of The Bentway's activities, goals, and missions from their website, coupled with an analysis of various scholarly articles addressing the economic impact of cultural spaces, non-profit organizations, tourism, and open/public spaces, a set of indicators has emerged.

Job Creation

The cultural sector plays a key role in job and wealth creation. The sector is experiencing rapid growth. Cultural facilities, from high-end art to offbeat nightclubs, serve as tourist attractions and form an integral part of the “compensation package” that maintains and attracts a skilled workforce.

In similar lines, nonprofit arts and cultural organizations contribute to local economies by employing individuals, purchasing supplies, and contracting services within their communities. The “Arts & Economic Prosperity III” study emphasizes that supporting the arts is an investment in economic well-being and overall quality of life. In addition, the audience of cultural organizations creates additional economic activity that benefits local businesses and creates a ripple effect that has a positive impact on the community (Americas for the Arts, 2007).

Therefore, by generating employment opportunities, The Bentway directly contributes to the local economy, and hiring locally will have a substantial positive impact on the local community. The Bentway’s economic impact is intricately tied to the larger story of the cultural sector’s impact on job creation and wealth creation in Toronto. Additionally, The Bentway’s consistent provision of seasonal employment opportunities tied to weather-dependent activities serves as a material illustration of this connection. Metrics for this indicator can include:

- Count of temporary employment created during specific events and seasons
- Economic contribution of The Bentway’s jobs to local and city-wide averages in the cultural industry
- Number of seasonal jobs filled by people from the local community

Equitable Real Estate Development

Property value appreciation is often seen as an important indicator of the economic impact of public spaces, such as urban parks and cultural development but it is important to plan development in the same way to prevent unintended consequences. Therefore, it is important to know if The Bentway is contributing to a form of economic growth that uplifts various demographics, instead of worsening the existing inequalities.

Several studies examined the relationship between open space and residential property values. A study of Pennypack Park in Northeast Philadelphia and Minneapolis-St. Paul revealed higher land values resulting from the park access, demonstrating the positive impact of urban parks, natural areas, golf courses, community parks, and protected open spaces on property values. Therefore, the potential for property values to increase raises concerns about green gentrification. To give an example of equitable development, in Washington, D.C. the Bridge Park project staff collaborated with community stakeholders, irrespective of their income and demographics to develop a joint development strategy, which aimed to promote inclusive development. This plan serves as a guide to make the park a catalyst for equitable economic growth, focusing on affordable housing, job creation, and the preservation of local businesses within neighborhoods.

While property value increase remains an important economic indicator for public space projects, it is important to prioritize equitable development. The Bentway with similar infrastructure is at an important crossroads where there is an opportunity to reshape the role of public spaces in urban development. Metrics for this indicator can include:

- Measure the change in property values in the vicinity before and after The Bentway's development
- Measure the increase or decrease of community-based retail in proximity to The Bentway since its inception.
- Measure the shift in demographic diversity within the vicinity of The Bentway.

Revenue Generation

Understanding the spending behavior and patterns of tourists is considered a crucial factor in gauging the economic ripple effect that a destination may experience through tourism engagement. For instance, in a study focused on the Christmas Market in Trento, it was observed that tourists spent more on products by local artists which in turn significantly boosts the local economy. Therefore, such insights are valuable in planning services and attractions to enhance the overall visitor experience and optimize economic benefits.

The relationship between public spaces and economic impact is not one-dimensional. There are other ways through which public spaces hosting a range of cultural and recreational activities generate revenue to sustain their operations, support their staff, and plan their programs. Programming requires funding from external sources like grants, government incentives, fundraising, private partnerships, and donations. A part of revenue generation requires charging fees for services provided along with hosting third-party events. While this raises an important question about the publicness of such spaces considering they are not accessible to everyone. The Bentway, presents a unique case where the majority of events are free with occasional third-party event hosting to support other programs.

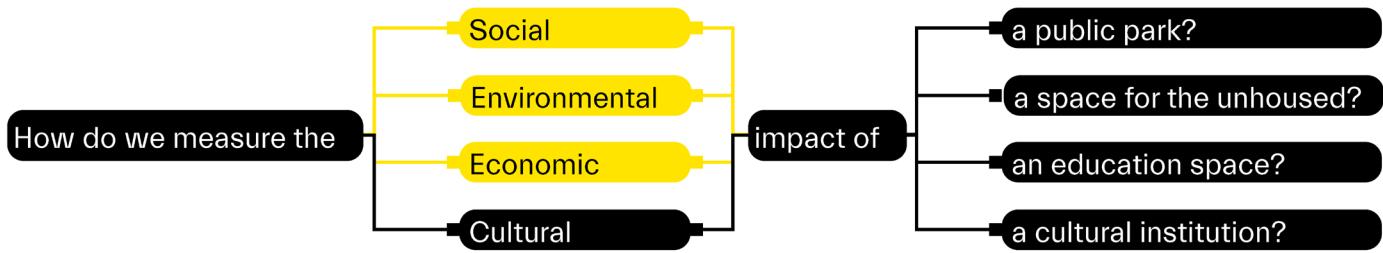
Revenue generation is a direct measure of The Bentway's financial health. Revenue generated is a tangible return on investment for all the partners and stakeholders. Indicating success in revenue generation can also attract further investment in The Bentway's programming. It is also crucial to periodically assess whether the organization's funding goals align with its programming objective to understand who is benefiting from the funded programs. An equitable approach would also consider the revenue generated by private events in comparison to other programs. Metrics for this indicator can include:

- Calculate income generated from hosting various events
- Collaborate with vendors and businesses to collect the spending data of visitors on various services.
- Revenue generated by third party events vs other programs
- Aligning program goals with programming goals
- Compare funding sources, revenue generated vs spending



7

Cultural Impact



What is Cultural Impact?

To measure The Bentway's cultural impact, we must first define what cultural impact means. Across conventional practice there are two dominant frameworks for defining cultural impact when looking at cultural institutions and their programs. These are the instrumental value of culture and the intrinsic value of culture. The instrumental value of culture refers to the impact of culture on wider policy areas, such as the economy, public health, or education. The intrinsic value of culture refers to the impacts that culture and cultural programming has on individuals at a psycho-somatic level.

Within the instrumental value model, some practitioners draw a distinction between economic value and social value, with social value referring to any policy area that does not fall under the economic umbrella. With this divide, the instrumental value of culture is often operationalized only in terms of economics. In doing so, what is being assessed is the impact of cultural programs on the creative or cultural economy and how this contributes to the overall economy. In contrast, given that the social value of culture can refer to any non-economic impact, this term is less precise. While this can mean the impact of culture on larger societal levels, this does not inherently exclude individual level impacts. It is not difficult to draw a line between the impact of culture on an individual's happiness, mood, or feelings of inclusion and the impact of culture on public health or community wellbeing. Thus, the notion of intrinsic value of culture is muddled. It is expanded from referring only to the value produced for an individual to the broader notion of culture for culture's sake because culture has intrinsic value at both the individual and societal level.

At its core, these dominant frameworks for evaluating culture examine the impact of culture, cultural institutions and cultural programming on two things: the economy and society. Deploying these frameworks would emerge sets of economic or social indicators, which are misaligned with the larger goal of evaluating The Bentway's cultural impact. This evaluation framework already proposes a set of economic and social impact indicators. The framework proposed in this section does not focus on what The Bentway's impact, as a cultural institution, on the economy or society is. Instead, it focuses on what The Bentway's impact on culture itself is.

Cultural Vitality

With a focus on measuring the impact of The Bentway on culture, specifically Toronto's culture, this report recommends a cultural vitality framework. This framework is adapted from The Urban Institute's Arts and Culture Indicators Project (ACIP). The ACIP's basic premises are that healthy places to live includes opportunities for and the presence of arts, culture, and creative expression, and that arts, culture, and creative expression are important determinants

of community wellbeing. With these premises, this framework presumes that culture has instrumental and intrinsic value, but these values are not what are being measured. As described by the ACIP, cultural vitality is the evidence of creating, disseminating, validating, and supporting arts and culture as a dimension of everyday life in communities.

There are three domains of indicators in this framework, The presence of opportunities for cultural participation, participation in culture, and support for cultural participation. These domains developed by the ACIP were intended to measure the cultural vitality of a city, geographic or administrative region. In the context of The Bentway, a single organization within a network of cultural organizations that all contribute to the cultural vitality of the city, the broad indicators remain the same, but the metrics are adapted.

Presence of Opportunities for Cultural Participation

This indicator was originally designed to look at the range of organizations, venues, and other opportunities for cultural participation in a city across sectors from non-profit to commercial to public to informal. Metrics relating to the quantity and range of organizations, venues and producers do not apply in the case of The Bentway as it is a single organization. Instead this indicator looks at how The Bentway promotes and injects culture into peoples every day lives and creates opportunities for people to participate. Metrics for this indicator can include:

- Diversity of audiences reached through social media
- Partnerships with retail arts venues—bookstores, music stores, film theaters, craft and art supply stores.
- Partnerships with non-arts venues for arts and cultural programming—parks; libraries; ethnic associations, societies, and centers.
- Festivals and parades
- Off-site/roaming installations/works
- Arts-focused media produced (print and electronic, including web-based venues)
- Arts education/capacity building workshops

Participation

This indicator looks at participation in cultural activities in all forms. If the Presence of Opportunities indicator largely measures the number of cultural activities The Bentway produces, this indicator measures how many people actually participate in these activities and who they are. Metrics for this indicator can include:

- Number of amateur art making events
- Number of collective/community art making events
- Audience participation in events
- Coverage/Discourse about The Bentway's cultural work in the media

Support

This indicator was originally designed to examine a city or administrative region's support for culture through financial or other resources. The Bentway, being a sole non-profit organization, is a recipient of the city's resources. Adapting this domain to The Bentway, we instead look at how The Bentway itself supports creative talent development at a more individual scale. This indicator focuses on how The Bentway uses its resources to support other cultural producers both locally and internationally. Metrics for this indicator can include:

- % of arts grants used for artist fees
- % of arts grants used for materials
- Volunteer roles created
- # of artists contracted



This was
glacial ice



Time changes

This was
warm water

Nature
is a
chain
reaction.

8

Synthesizing Key Indicators

8.0 Synthesizing Key Indicators

The previous sections focus on understanding themes, indicators, and metrics within each performance dimension. The purpose of this section is to support The Bentway's efforts to distill the proposed indicators into meaningful insight and assist with prioritizing metrics for evaluation. The process of synthesizing indicators involves combining and analyzing various indicators and metrics to gain a comprehensive understanding of its intended purpose and potential impact. Synthesis is often used in fields such as research, evaluation, and policy analysis to provide a more holistic view of complex issues.

This section synthesizes the themes across the performance dimensions thorough a series of steps that can be altered depending on the state of readiness of the organization. This involved identifying the common rationale of causal factors and patterns across the four (4) performance dimensions to form a more comprehensive and nuanced perspective by which to efficiently measure overall impact.

Identify Relevant Indicators

As we have identified indicators for consideration under the relevant performance dimensions, we recommend review by each department to consider existing qualitative and/or quantitative data that can be applied given the nature of study, as well adapting the appropriate metric to the organizations priorities.

Data Collection

Methods and approaches to data collection are identified within the Operationalization section, however note we encourage integrating existing practices and collaboration with third-party organizations to assist with creative approaches to collect tangible and intangible data. A critical step will be normalization and standardization to ensure all indicators are on a comparable scale.

Interaction

A key component of synthesizing indicators is that it is often an interactive process. This process is flexible and adaptive and we recommend this process be revisited as new data becomes available and priorities evolve.

Weighted Interpretation

We recognize that not all indicators will carry equal significance and thus recommend assigning weights to each indicator based on importance and relevance to each department. To assist, we have created an adjacency matrix model to understand the relationships amongst each indicator identified. We created a colour-coded system to assess the relational proximity of each indicator as a means of establishing a short list to efficiently identify and organize the approach by which to operationalize them.

		Social	Economic	Cultural	Environment								
		Safety	Sense of Belonging	Diversity	Visitor Spending	Equitable Development	Job Creation	Presence of opportunities for Cultural Participation	Participation	Support for the Creative Economy	Carbon Emissions Reduction	Green Infrastructure	Sustainability Education
Environment	Social	Safety											
	Economic	Sense of Belonging											
	Cultural	Diversity											
	Social	Visitor Spending											
	Economic	Equitable development											
	Cultural	Job creation											
	Social	Presence of opportunities for Cultural Participation											
	Economic	Participation											
	Cultural	Support for Creative Economy											
	Social	Carbon Emissions Reduction											
	Economic	Green Infrastructure Provision											
	Cultural	Sustainability Education											
Colour-coded legend													
Direct/Primary Relation													
Convenient/Secondary Relation													
Distance/ Remote Relation													
Negative Relation													
No Relation													

Figure E. Adjacency matrix used to synthesize key indicators.

Upon completion of this exercise, it was determined that the Cultural and Social performance dimensions have a direct relation, while Social and Economic performance dimensions have a secondary relationship. Given these relationships, it is recommended that these performance dimensions be operationalized in tandem.

9

Operationalization

9.0 Operationalization

This section provides potential methods that The Bentway can employ to operationalize the framework laid out in this report. We have organized the methods by time-scale so that appropriate methods can be used depending on organizational capacity and needs.

Short Term

Hiring Survey:

Temporary and seasonal hires can fill a form indicating which event and season they were hired for and also include their residency information.

Data Collection through partnerships:

Collaborate with business and event organizers to get a count of temporary hires during specific events and to measure visitor spending.

Statistical Data:

Gather statistical data on the number of arrests taken place in The Bentway and the surrounding Fort York community; this may help to mitigate any unintended consequences of the space. Furthermore, it may allow for The Bentway to integrate knowledge gathered to inform internal policy on the theme of social belonging necessary to a comprehensive analysis on the social impact of The Bentway.

Demographic Surveys:

Conduct surveys to understand the demographic changes in the area. This also supports understanding the context of The Bentway to understand how procurement processes align with the socio-cultural context.

Observation studies:

Observe and record behaviours, events, or activities in a natural setting or during events. This method is useful for studying social interactions, behaviours, and environmental conditions.

Social Media and Online Data collection:

Data can be collected from social media platforms, online forums and other digital sources to assess online opinions and trends.

Medium Term

Economic Impact Studies:

Analyze direct spending and salary with city wide data in the cultural sector.

Comparative Analysis:

Compare visitor spending of The Bentway with the city wide cultural sector visitor spending. Compare visitor spending behaviour across various events at The Bentway.

Public Consultations:

Conduct semi-structured and informal interviews, focus groups and surveys to gauge feelings of belonging. Direct impacts of The Bentway on users can be measured to identify commonalities and positive or negative impacts of the space.

Internal Policy Review:

Establish internal policy that directly tackles the issue of social inclusion, concurrently addresses feelings of safety from users. Internal policy should address all individuals that use and occupy the site and should address feelings of inclusion, belonging, and safety.

Field Trials and Pilot projects:

Conduct mock installations for pilot studies to test feasibility design, and methods before implementing larger studies to address tensions and conflicting opinions.

Sensor Data collection:

Sensors can be used to collect data in real-time, such as environmental condition monitoring to assess level of effectiveness, movement patterns to address safety and participation.

Long Term**Retail business surveys:**

Conduct surveys with local businesses to analyze the change in the number and type of retail stores.

Real Estate Analysis:

Use public records to analyze changing trends in property values over time.

Site Audit:

Implement uses that would tackle uneven power dynamics in the neighborhood. This can include the integration of warming centers and the incorporation of softer surfaces.

Storytelling:

Allow the public to engage in storytelling exercise to identify their most impactful events, programs, tensions and memories of The Bentway.

10

Moving Forward

10.0 Moving Forward

This report intends to support The Bentway's initiatives in undertaking an impact evaluation assessment to understand its impact on the surrounding community and Greater Toronto Area (GTA) for its next stage of growth. We have identified a list of indicators and metrics that have been vetted by scholarly and grey literature as priority criteria and potential benchmarks for best practices, which are intended to support the organizations performance relative to their desired outcomes.

As an immediate next step, we recommend an internal review of strategic goals to prioritize performance dimensions by department. Consider common themes and the potential of conflicting priorities that may arise based on annual targets and projected capital and operating budgets. Additionally, consider disruptive impacts to existing operations for execution of recommended short-term evaluations. Finally, and arguably most important, consideration internal processes for cohesive incorporation and adaptation into the existing organizational practices.





11

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