

## University Student Housing: Addressing the Affordability Challenge

In 2015-2016, the presidents of the four Toronto universities funded and collaborated on the project [StudentMoveTO](#) in order to develop the first-ever comprehensive survey of university student travel behavior, trends and needs across seven campuses in the GTA.

The four presidents' second collaborative initiative is now underway and addresses questions around housing affordability and access to affordable housing for students, a challenge that has by all accounts reached a crisis point in the Toronto region.

Implications of a lack of affordable housing for students are significant and include greater economic precarity, hidden homelessness, longer daily commute times, lower levels of campus engagement, and potentially compromised health and safety. Given that such a large proportion of the students attending the four Toronto universities come from lower-income families, the lack of affordable student housing can, at worst, act as a barrier to university attendance, further amplifying income disparities and negatively impacting upon future opportunities for increased prosperity.

In February 2017, the four presidents released a call for proposals from multi-university, multi-disciplinary teams comprising students and faculty to:

1. Document the nature and extent of the current student housing affordability challenge, including the unique housing challenges faced by students; and
2. Identify creative initiatives that might address these housing challenges. Improved affordability may depend on zoning changes, innovative design solutions, novel financing mechanisms, social entrepreneurship or other shifts in municipal, provincial or federal policy.

Based on the excellent quality of proposals received, the four presidents opted to merge two proposal teams to undertake this initiative. Combined, the new project team – StudentDwellTO - is impressive in its depth, breadth and expertise.

The project team includes nearly 100 people representing:

- Students (both undergraduate and graduate) from all four universities;
- Faculty and instructors from all four universities;
- Interdisciplinary scholarship and expertise in Architectural Science, Architecture & Landscape Design, Art, Education, Engineering, Environmental Design, Environmental Studies, Geography, Psychology, Real Estate Management, Social Sciences, Urban Development, Urban Planning and Urban Studies.
- Partners from government, non-profit, community and private sector organizations and firms.

Key elements of the activities to be undertaken focus on supporting research and formulating potential solutions to address housing affordability for students. StudentDwellTO proposes to lead and undertake the following initiatives:

- Student-led research projects embedded within existing courses at each university to develop case studies highlighting best practices in affordable student housing strategies from around the world;
- Public events at each university including affordable housing charrettes;
- Engaging and mobilizing students through focus groups and data analysis that draw out narratives surrounding students' lived experiences with respect to housing;
- Mapping & data visualization work, including interactive maps and visualizations from and for students and other constituents, to develop affordable housing strategies that include typologies of affordable housing sites and building types in the GTA, and enable location-specific analysis; and
- Activate research and mobilize students and affordable housing advocates through community arts programming and communication tools (such as student videos on personal housing stories, research dissemination hub) developed through a central website that invites and expands student and community engagement.

The StudentDwellTO team plans to launch the initiative with an event in Fall 2017. In addition, a series of interim events are planned to be hosted at each university during the anticipated 18-month timeline. The project will include a series of events to showcase and share findings, recommendations and solutions.

In light of the expanded scope of work being proposed, the four presidents have raised the total budget from \$40,000 to \$70,000 in cash and \$5,000 of in-kind contributions. StudentDwellTO has also leveraged significant additional funds to support this work.

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