



EMPOWERING CHANGE

A Report by Core for
CCWESTT

**Environmental scan and
comparative analysis of
union structures and
Community Benefit
Agreements across
different Canadian
jurisdictions**

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Executive Summary

This jurisdictional scan offers a comprehensive comparative analysis of union structures and Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs) across all Canadian provinces and territories, examining how these two mechanisms intersect to shape the landscape of public infrastructure development, workforce participation, and equitable economic growth. While union density, collective bargaining power, and employment standards vary widely across jurisdictions, CBAs have emerged as a flexible tool for embedding local economic and social objectives into major capital projects—often functioning as a compensatory policy lever where legislative labour protections are weak or unevenly enforced.

By mapping the presence, structure, and influence of trade unions alongside the evolution and implementation of CBAs or equivalent agreements (such as Impact Benefit Agreements and socio-economic monitoring agreements), this scan identifies patterns in how infrastructure investment can be used to deliver targeted workforce development, inclusive hiring practices, and community wealth-building.

Special attention is given to how provincial governments, Indigenous communities, municipal authorities, and developers are leveraging (or bypassing) these tools to address systemic inequities in access to good jobs, training pipelines, and procurement opportunities—particularly for equity-seeking and historically excluded groups. This analysis serves as a foundation for future policy development, providing insight into both best practices and missed opportunities in using CBAs and union capacity to advance a more inclusive, resilient, and community-rooted infrastructure economy across Canada.

Methodology

Our research draws on a cross-jurisdictional review of publicly available legislation, policy frameworks, procurement guidelines, industry association reports, and case studies. For each province and territory, we examined:

- The strength and density of union presence within the construction and skilled trades sectors
- The existence and administration of CBAs or analogous agreements (e.g. Impact Benefit Agreements, socio-economic monitoring agreements)
- The role of government (provincial/municipal/territorial) in formalizing community benefit expectations
- Example projects demonstrating real-world application of CBAs and labour-community partnerships

This scan also references over 30 unique sources, including legislative records, sector white papers, and procurement documents, to ensure accuracy and contemporary relevance.

Key Comparative Findings

- Unionized provinces with high labour standards (e.g., BC, Ontario) tend to embed CBAs through public infrastructure mandates, leveraging union capacity to implement training, apprenticeship, and workforce equity targets.



- In provinces with low or uneven employment standards (e.g., Alberta, Saskatchewan, PEI), unions and CBAs often operate as policy gap-fillers—providing prevailing wage protections, no-strike clauses, and targeted hiring practices even when provincial legislation does not.
- Territorial governments and Indigenous communities have pioneered innovative hybrid models—like socio-economic monitoring agreements and Impact Benefit Agreements—that function similarly to CBAs and emphasize local employment, capacity-building, and cultural inclusion.
- Jurisdictions with emerging CBA frameworks (e.g., Manitoba, Newfoundland and Labrador) are using infrastructure projects as pilots for new inclusive procurement and local training mandates.
- While municipal-level innovation is common (e.g., City of Vancouver, City of Winnipeg), a lack of consistent provincial policy in many regions leads to fragmentation and limited enforcement mechanisms.

Framing from a Labour and Equity Lens

While unions and Community Benefit Agreements (CBAs) are separate mechanisms, they often work in tandem. Union structures provide the workforce and enforcement infrastructure that make CBAs viable, while CBAs introduce additional policy tools (e.g., hiring targets, local benefits) that extend union impact into broader equity outcomes.

In the Canadian context, unions are not only vehicles for collective bargaining and workplace rights, they are also critical partners in advancing social equity. Through their participation in Community Benefit Agreements (CBAs), especially in infrastructure and construction, unions have increasingly become active agents in shaping equitable economic development. These agreements often connect public investments to social outcomes, such as training for marginalized groups, local hiring, and long-term employment pathways.

From a labour perspective, CBAs offer a tangible framework for ensuring that government subsidies, tax credits, and infrastructure dollars do more than build roads: they build equity. They create on-ramps to secure, unionized work for equity-deserving communities, including women, Indigenous peoples, racialized workers, people with disabilities, and youth.

Unions as Strategic Partners in CBAs

Unions, particularly Building Trades Unions (BTUs), have played an instrumental role in negotiating, implementing, and advocating for CBAs across Canada. Their involvement ensures not only quality control and safety on job sites, but also access to benefits, apprenticeship pipelines, and lasting career pathways.

CBAs typically include:

- Mandatory union wages (prevailing wage)
- Apprenticeship targets and training provisions
- Equity hiring goals
- Local hiring quotas
- Community consultation processes



As noted by the BC Building Trades Council, CBAs prioritize “jobs for local residents and ensure employment opportunities for apprentices, Indigenous workers and women, and provide union wages and benefits.” BTUs see CBAs as a way to align their social justice goals with concrete project outcomes. Engineering professionals, often classified under self-regulating colleges, are notably under-unionized, with little structural support for collective representation. Unlike trades workers, engineers rarely fall under collective agreements and may face exclusion from CBA-linked employment opportunities, especially when project funding criteria include union labour participation.

This heightens their vulnerability and makes the case for:

- Greater exploration of hybrid professional-union models;
- Inclusion of equity clauses that apply across both union and non-union roles in CBAs;
- And clearer policy guidance encouraging union-CBA partnerships in engineering-led infrastructure projects.

Federal Momentum: A Policy Shift in 2024

In June 2024, the Government of Canada introduced labour conditions and community benefit requirements to access Investment Tax Credits, including:

- A mandatory prevailing wage requirement
- Apprenticeship ratios and local employment targets

This marked the strongest federal intervention in decades to tie infrastructure spending to labour equity. The Canada’s Building Trades Unions (CBTU) praised the move, urging broader adoption across all federal procurement and in partnership with provinces.

Jurisdictional Snapshot: Where Are CBAs Happening?

Province	CBA Usage	Union Involvement	Prevailing Wage Law	Notable Examples
BC	Common in public infrastructure	Strong BTU involvement	Via project agreements	Broadway Subway, Pattullo Bridge Replacement
ON	Increasing use at municipal level (e.g. Toronto)	Supported by Labour Councils	No province-wide prevailing wage	Eglinton Crosstown (Metrolinx)
QC	Limited formal CBA framework	High union density; equity built into agreements	Sectoral bargaining often covers wage floors	Hydro-Québec, infrastructure projects
MB	Some use in pilot projects	Mixed union involvement	No prevailing wage law	Manitoba Hydro
AB	Rare to non-existent	Weak political support; low union density	No prevailing wage	Opposition from UCP government
Federal	2024 ITC reform includes apprenticeship & prevailing wage requirements	Endorsed by CBTU	Applies to select federal funding streams	Green infrastructure, energy retrofits



Union Density and Access: A Cross-Provincial Look

In provinces with higher union coverage (e.g., Quebec, Newfoundland, Manitoba), there is a stronger institutional base for implementing CBAs. Union density correlates with the feasibility of delivering large-scale, equity-centred workforce targets — including women and equity-deserving groups in the trades. We can infer union leverage through:

- High worker protections aligning with high union density
- Regulatory enforcement capacity
- Sectoral bargaining structures

Examples

Province	Union Coverage (2024)	Worker Protection Strength	Notes
Québec	39.3% (highest)	Strong protections	3 weeks vacation after 3 yrs; high rest protections; sectoral norms in construction
Manitoba	34%	Moderate-strong	40-hour week, overtime at 1.5x regular wage, 3 weeks after 5 years
Alberta	23.5% (lowest)	Weak-moderate	Sub-minimum wages, high exemptions, 44-hour week, minimal rest
Newfoundland & Labrador	38.9%	Mixed	Low holiday count, low vacation access, weak overtime rules

In jurisdictions with low baseline protections, unions and CBAs are essential in raising the floor for marginalized and precarious workers — particularly in construction, trades, and (potentially) tech and clean energy sectors.

- New Brunswick & Newfoundland: Overtime paid at 1.5x minimum wage. CBAs can secure 1.5x regular wage and access to benefits.
- Nova Scotia & PEI: 48-hour work weeks, delayed vacation access. CBAs can limit work hours and offer faster benefits through union agreements.
- Alberta: Low union density, high sub-minimum wage use. CBAs with strong labour terms (prevailing wage, apprenticeship guarantees) can counterbalance provincial deregulation.

Province	Union Coverage Rate (2024)
Quebec	39.3
Newfoundland & Labrador	38.9
Manitoba	34.0
Prince Edward Island	33.2
Saskatchewan	33.2
Nova Scotia	30.8
British Columbia	30.4



New Brunswick	30.2
Canada	30.2
Ontario	26.0
Alberta	23.5

Alberta's low union density and political resistance to labour protections have made it an outlier in adopting CBA models. In contrast, Quebec benefits from industry-wide bargaining structures and more cohesive labour governance.

While the specific union coverage rate for NWT in 2024 was not accessible for the purposes of this report, it's reasonable to assume that the public sector, which is a significant employer in the territory, likely has a higher coverage rate than the private sector, similar to the national trend.

Engineering: A Glaring Gap in Union Access

Unlike trades and construction, engineering professionals typically do not have union representation. They are governed by self-regulating bodies (e.g., APEGA in Alberta, PEO in Ontario), which prioritize public safety and licensure, not labour rights or workplace conditions.

This structural exclusion means that:

- Engineers, especially women and racialized engineers, have no formal mechanism to address discrimination or unsafe conditions.
- There are no sector-wide bargaining agreements that address pay equity or parental leave.
- CBAs currently do not cover engineers — missing an opportunity to integrate equity into professional sectors as well as trades.

Recommendations from a Labour and Equity Lens

1. Mandate CBAs in federally funded infrastructure projects, with clear local hiring and equity targets.
2. Expand the 2024 prevailing wage and apprenticeship rules to all federal procurement and provincial-federal agreements.
3. Create inclusive CBA models that extend beyond trades, incorporating professional services such as engineering — with appropriate accountability mechanisms.
4. Support multi-stakeholder CBA planning, including unions, equity organizations, municipalities, and training providers.
5. Fund apprenticeship and mentorship pathways specifically for women, the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, racialized workers, newcomers, and people with disabilities.
6. Study the potential for alternative collective representation models in engineering and other un-unionized SETT professions.



Comparative Analysis of Union Structures Across Canadian Jurisdictions

To understand how feasible union engagement is across Canada, especially in emerging or underrepresented sectors, we must first examine how union certification works, and where structural barriers remain. Union certification in Canada is governed at the provincial and federal levels, with each jurisdiction defining its own thresholds, procedures, and safeguards. While the principles of labour organization are shared, the level of accessibility, democratic engagement, and employer restrictions varies widely, impacting the ability of workers, particularly in SETT sectors, to organize and benefit from collective representation.

Thresholds for Certification

Most provinces use a two-tiered system for union certification:

- Initial threshold: A minimum percentage of employees must sign union membership cards to initiate a vote.
- Automatic certification: If a higher percentage of support is demonstrated, a union can be certified without a vote.

Alberta and British Columbia have relatively progressive automatic certification thresholds ($\geq 65\%$ and $\geq 55\%$, respectively), allowing unions to bypass a ballot when worker support is strong, reducing opportunities for employer interference.

New Brunswick offers similar flexibility: automatic certification is granted if over 60% of workers sign cards, while 40-60% triggers a vote. In Quebec, automatic certification is even more accessible at 50%+1, showcasing the province's long-standing support for labour rights.

In contrast, Nova Scotia, and Ontario require a mandatory vote, even if a supermajority has already signed cards. This extra step can become a site of employer influence or delay, especially in unregulated sectors or marginalized workplaces. Newfoundland and Labrador introduces a unique challenge: certification only occurs if 70% of the unit participates in the vote, an unusually high turnout requirement that creates an additional procedural barrier.

Ballot Procedures and Privacy

All jurisdictions maintain confidentiality of union membership card signers, ensuring employers cannot retaliate against organizing efforts. Ballots, where required, are secret, which safeguards democratic participation.

Yet the requirement of a vote, where not offset by an automatic certification clause, may still place workers in a vulnerable position, especially in non-unionized SETT fields like engineering, where organizing is rare, and employer retaliation is often implicit, if not direct.

Union Leverage in Low-Standard Jurisdictions

When mapped against provincial employment standards (from the Employment Standards Canada mapping), jurisdictions with weaker worker protections often place greater procedural burdens on unionization.



- Alberta ranks low on minimum standards like vacation, termination notice, and wage protections. However, its relatively flexible automatic certification clause (at 65%) gives unions a critical path to organizing — particularly important in construction, trades, and energy sectors where CBAs (Community Benefit Agreements) are most common.
- Ontario and Nova Scotia, while more robust in employment standards, require a mandatory vote, introducing friction for organizing in sectors like tech or engineering where unionization is rare.

CBAs serve as a parallel equity tool where government regulation falls short, and their success often depends on the strength and accessibility of union structures within a given jurisdiction. Where legislative protections are minimal, union density and CBAs fill the gap, through mechanisms like:

- Apprenticeship clauses that support skill development for underrepresented groups.
- Job targets for equity-deserving populations.
- Prevailing wage clauses that reduce the racialized pay gap.
- Hiring hall models that reduce discrimination in job allocation.

This interplay between employment standards, union certification mechanisms, and the strategic deployment of CBAs illustrates how labour structures can either reinforce or hinder equity efforts. To better understand how these dynamics manifest across Canada, the following table summarizes the key labour legislation, union certification models, and union security provisions in each jurisdiction. This comparative overview provides a foundational lens for assessing the enabling environment for union-led equity tools—like CBAs—and for identifying where policy shifts might improve access and outcomes for underrepresented workers.

Comparative Table: Legislative Union Structures by Jurisdiction				
Jurisdiction	Key Labour Legislation	Union Certification	Union Security	Distinctive Features
Federal	Canada Labour Code	Card-check (≥55%) or vote	Rand Formula	Covers ~6% of workers
Ontario	Labour Relations Act, 1995	Mandatory vote	Rand Formula	Some rollback of card-check in 1990s; renewed sectoral bargaining discussions
British Columbia	Labour Relations Code	Card-check (≥55%) or vote	Rand Formula	Progressive model; reinstated card-check in 2019



Alberta	Labour Relations Code (amended 2022)	Card-check (≥65%) or vote	Modified formula	Recent changes reduced union powers (e.g., picketing, dues info limits)
Saskatchewan	Saskatchewan Employment Act	Mandatory vote	Voluntary check-off allowed	2008 Essential Services law (ruled unconstitutional, later revised)
Manitoba	Labour Relations Act	Card-check ≥50% + 1 → automatic	Rand Formula	Considered union-friendly
Quebec	Labour Code	Card-check ≥50% + 1 → automatic	Rand Formula	Strongest union tradition; sectoral/industry-wide bargaining common
Nova Scotia	Trade Union Act	Vote-based	Rand Formula	Traditional model, moderate union density
New Brunswick	Industrial Relations Act	Vote-based	Rand Formula	Conservative but stable framework
PEI	Labour Act	Vote-based	Rand Formula	Small-scale union presence
Newfoundland and Labrador	Labour Relations Act	Vote-based	Rand Formula	Strong in construction, public sector
Yukon	Labour Standards Act, Public Service Labour Relations Act	Vote-based	Rand Formula	Governed like provinces
Northwest Territories	Public Service Act, Labour Standards Act	Vote-based	Rand Formula	Federally influenced model



Nunavut	Labour Standards Act, Public Service Act	Vote-based	Rand Formula	Often mirrors NWT legislation
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- **Wikipedia.** *Rand Formula.* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rand_formula
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- **Cardus.** *Community Benefits Agreements: Toward a Fair, Open, and Inclusive Framework for Canada.* <https://www.cardus.ca/research/work-economics/reports/community-benefits-agreements-toward-a-fair-open-and-inclusive-framework-for-canada/#:~:text=Further%2C%20this%20report%20questions%20whether%20CBAs%2C%20asand%20labour%20spectrum%20while%20excluding%20the%20rest>
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- **Canadian Labour Congress.** *Employment Standards.* <https://canadianlabour.ca/employment-standards/>



A Deeper Analysis of Community Benefit Agreements and Their Applications

As Canada continues to invest heavily in infrastructure and development, a new framework is reshaping how those dollars translate into social value: the Community Benefit Agreement (CBA). While public spending has long been justified by economic growth and job creation, CBAs offer a more intentional, equity-driven approach, ensuring that major projects don't just build physical structures but uplift the communities around them.

At its core, a CBA is a contractual tool used to embed social outcomes into construction, infrastructure, and development projects. These outcomes may include inclusive hiring, training and apprenticeships, local and social procurement, and broader community development targets. CBAs can be legally binding or structured as formal policy frameworks, but their intent remains consistent: to ensure that the benefits of development extend to equity-deserving populations.

Designing Social Impact into Development

CBAs typically follow a three-stage process: Mandate, Design, and Implementation.

- Mandate refers to the authority that compels inclusion of community benefits—this might come from government policy, procurement rules, or grassroots negotiations between stakeholders.
- Design involves setting measurable targets (e.g., 15% equity hires or 25 apprenticeships), engaging communities, and aligning on accountability mechanisms.
- Implementation requires continuous action—training staff, tracking outcomes, working with community partners, and adapting to the project's changing scope.

This structured approach has allowed CBAs to become a scalable solution for equity in infrastructure—especially in sectors historically dominated by non-diverse workforces, such as the skilled trades.

Labour Market Access

One of the key strengths of CBAs is their ability to mobilize underutilised labour pools. By partnering with employment agencies and nonprofits, project owners can connect with workers who face systemic barriers to employment—including women, the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, racialized workers, newcomers, and people with disabilities. These agencies also offer “wraparound supports,” such as coaching, subsidized wages, and apprenticeship grants that reduce onboarding risk and increase retention. When combined with training programs and inclusive onboarding processes, CBAs help diversify not just who gets hired, but who stays and thrives. CBAs also engage social value suppliers—businesses with a social purpose or inclusive ownership—to meet procurement goals. In doing so, they expand the definition of economic success to include social and cultural well-being.

CBA Formats

Community Benefit Agreements (CBAs) may be united by principle, but their execution takes on multiple forms across Canada's development landscape. From resource extraction to public infrastructure, from private real estate to social procurement, CBAs adapt to the regulatory, geographic, and community contexts in which they're embedded. As their use grows, so does the importance of understanding how they're designed, who they include, and what mechanisms they rely on to deliver impact.



CBA fall broadly into three structural categories:

1. **Private CBAs** are negotiated directly between developers and community groups. These are often used in private-sector projects where local advocates negotiate hiring targets, procurement practices, and community investments directly with developers.
2. **Public CBAs** embed benefit requirements into Requests for Proposals (RFPs) and public procurement processes. In these cases, the government becomes the enforcer of community-focused outcomes.
3. **Hybrid CBAs** involve multi-party agreements between governments, developers, and community stakeholders. These offer the highest potential for alignment and accountability, though they also require more complex coordination.

Supporting Models

While CBAs are a leading model for social value in development, they don't operate alone. A host of adjacent policies and agreements function alongside—or in place of—CBAs, often advancing similar goals:

- **Social Procurement Programs (SPPs):** In cities like Toronto and Vancouver, local governments have pioneered Social Procurement Programs that embed supplier diversity and social value into purchasing. These programs create accessible pathways for social enterprises and small businesses to enter public procurement ecosystems that traditionally favour larger, more established vendors. By leveraging purchasing power, SPPs redistribute opportunity and stimulate local economic resilience.
- **Project Labour Agreements (PLAs):** PLAs are widely used across Canada's construction industry. These agreements, typically between project owners and one or more unions, outline worksite rules and preempt labour disputes. Increasingly, PLAs incorporate equity hiring targets and apprenticeship requirements, aligning well with CBA goals. When paired with community engagement, PLAs can serve as a powerful delivery vehicle for labour equity.
- **Impact and Benefits Agreements (IBAs):** IBAs are most often seen in the resource sector, particularly in projects involving First Nations communities. These agreements go beyond economic benefits to recognize Indigenous rights, land title, environmental stewardship, and constitutional obligations. While distinct from CBAs, IBAs share a common ethos: development must account for those it affects. In fact, many Indigenous nations are now moving beyond IBAs toward equity ownership in major projects—a trend with powerful implications for economic reconciliation.
- **Targeted Training & Apprenticeship Measures:** In jurisdictions where CBAs are not legislated, governments have adopted policy tools that serve similar purposes. British Columbia, for instance, mandates apprenticeship hiring on large infrastructure projects over \$15 million. Prime contractors must engage registered apprentices across the Red Seal trades, ensuring long-term workforce development. Manitoba once had similar laws—but repealed them in 2021, citing procurement flexibility concerns. This underscores a key tension: equity enforcement vs. procurement deregulation.

The Pillars of CBA Impact

Ultimately, the value of a CBA lies not in its format but the four pillars where CBAs consistently drive community value:



1. **Employment and Training:** Including first-source hiring and apprenticeship targets for local, equity-deserving workers. Many CBAs aim for 10–25% equity hiring, including professional and technical occupations (PAT jobs).
2. **Supplier Diversity:** Leveraging social procurement to engage businesses owned by racialized individuals, women, the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, newcomers, or people with disabilities—groups often shut out of large-scale procurement.
3. **Economic Development:** Supporting social enterprises and local development initiatives that ensure project dollars circulate within communities long after construction ends.
4. **Community Improvements:** Funding lasting assets—childcare centres, affordable housing, community centres—that directly respond to local needs in areas affected by development.

Cited Resources

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How Community Benefit Agreements Differ Across Canada: A Comparative Overview

While Community Benefit Agreements (CBAs) are still relatively new in the Canadian policy landscape, they are rapidly gaining traction as a tool to advance inclusive economic development and equity outcomes through infrastructure investment. As public sector procurement becomes more aligned with broader social value mandates, CBAs are emerging as one of the most concrete mechanisms to operationalize these goals. Although their adoption remains uneven across provinces and territories, a clear trend is taking shape: jurisdictions are increasingly using CBAs to address skills shortages, diversify the construction and trades workforce, strengthen apprenticeship pipelines, and ensure that public dollars deliver localized and equitable returns.

Rather than a one-size-fits-all model, CBA implementation is being shaped by provincial labour market conditions, political will, union influence, and pre-existing procurement frameworks. In practice, this has resulted in a mix of legislative mandates, policy frameworks, project-specific agreements, and municipally driven initiatives.

Provinces like British Columbia and Nova Scotia have adopted formalized mandates with enforceable targets, while others—such as Ontario—have embedded CBA principles within broader infrastructure planning laws.

At the municipal level, cities like Toronto and Vancouver are using social procurement programs and community benefit frameworks to pilot and scale CBAs in ways that reflect local community needs. Across the board, CBAs are increasingly recognized not only as a means to mitigate harm from development projects but also as a proactive strategy for workforce development, economic inclusion, and community resilience.

Alberta

Alberta's foray into CBAs was more tentative and political. In 2018, under Premier Rachel Notley's NDP government, Alberta signalled its intent to integrate CBAs into cost-shared infrastructure projects under the federal Investing in Canada Plan, citing benefits for local hiring and apprenticeships. However, with subsequent changes in government, the extent of implementation has been unclear. Alberta continues to lag behind other provinces in unionization rates and has fewer formal provincial CBA mandates. Much of the momentum around CBAs in Alberta has relied on federal frameworks and municipal initiatives rather than a provincial policy backbone.

British Columbia

British Columbia is widely seen as a national leader in CBA implementation through the establishment of BC Infrastructure Benefits (BCIB)—a provincial Crown corporation that provides a skilled trades workforce for public infrastructure projects governed by CBAs. These agreements emphasize unionized labour, apprenticeship training, and targeted hiring of underrepresented groups. The province's approach is considered centralized and formalized, often using project labour agreements (PLAs) to embed CBA targets. The model has faced both praise and criticism for its strong union alignment, but it has clearly institutionalized community benefits within major infrastructure planning.

Newfoundland and Labrador

Newfoundland and Labrador has focused its CBA efforts within the structure of project labour agreements (PLAs). These agreements include community benefit targets, particularly those aimed at increasing



women's participation in the trades. Trades Newfoundland has pushed for targets of 15 to 20% women's participation, exceeding the provincial average of 13–14%. While not legislated through a broader CBA policy framework, these targets embedded in PLAs represent a pragmatic route to equity-focused outcomes on public projects.

Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia has taken a policy mandate approach to CBAs, establishing a clear threshold: as of March 2020, every provincially procured project over \$100,000 must include a CBA. These agreements must meet specific requirements:

- 25% of craft hours worked must be performed by registered apprentices,
- 10% of apprentice hours must come from underrepresented groups,
- 10% of the overall workforce must come from underrepresented groups.

Nova Scotia's approach is notable for its clarity, enforceability, and alignment with labour development priorities. It stands out as a province that has embedded CBA targets directly into procurement policy without relying on parallel labour agreements or ad hoc negotiations.

Ontario

Ontario's approach to CBAs has been more legislative and policy-driven. The province passed the Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act (IJPA) in 2015, which mandates that infrastructure planning must consider social value objectives, including apprenticeships and community benefits. Bidders on provincial projects are required to outline plans for apprenticeship utilization, and the province has emphasized alignment with broader equity, diversity, and inclusion goals. Ontario has also experimented with municipal and pilot CBAs, particularly in Toronto, where local governments have developed Community Benefits Frameworks (CBFs) and partnered with advocacy coalitions. This makes Ontario one of the few provinces to approach CBAs through both provincial statute and local-level innovation.

National and Municipal Trends

At the federal level, the Community Employment Benefits (CEB) Framework provides guidance for federally funded projects to include workforce development and equity outcomes. However, enforcement is inconsistent, and much of the implementation falls to provinces or municipalities.

Municipalities like Toronto and Vancouver are also key players in advancing CBAs, often through social procurement policies and community benefit frameworks. These local strategies sometimes act as test beds for broader provincial policy adoption. Cities have focused especially on inclusive hiring, small and social enterprise procurement, and local economic development—recognizing their proximity to community needs and organizing efforts.



Case Studies

Alberta

While Alberta has not legislated a province-wide CBA framework to date, the province has shown growing interest in the utility of Community Benefit Agreements as a strategic tool for aligning private development with public and community interests. The potential for CBAs in Alberta lies in their ability to bring together developers, local communities, businesses, and unions under a shared framework that advances mutual benefits—particularly in a province where development, energy infrastructure, and economic diversification are top-of-mind policy issues.

CBAs in Alberta are positioned as win-win solutions: they can streamline permitting and approvals for developers, while delivering tangible, lasting value for the communities impacted by major projects. Developers benefit from predictability and local goodwill, including access to skilled trade labour with no-strike clauses, tax incentives, and more efficient permitting processes. Local communities, in turn, can secure employment and training opportunities, direct investment in community infrastructure, and environmental protections. There is also an explicit emphasis on expanding opportunities for local businesses and trades—especially through contract disaggregation (breaking large contracts into smaller pieces), apprenticeship provisions, and workforce diversification that includes Indigenous workers and women in trades.

From a policy perspective, CBAs are seen as an opportunity for the Government of Alberta to align major infrastructure builds with broader social and economic goals—without creating entirely new legislative regimes. By embedding CBAs within existing regulatory and planning processes, the province can support compliance, reduce delivery costs, and catalyze skilled labour development while enhancing community resilience and expanding its tax base.

A flagship example is the Fort McMurray West 500-kV Transmission Project, recognized nationally for its financing model and socio-economic outcomes. The project integrated Indigenous equity ownership and contracting, awarding \$85 million in contracts to Indigenous businesses. These investments generated employment, skills training, and business growth, while reinforcing the model of collaborative, benefit-driven development. Though not a formalized CBA under provincial law, the project demonstrates how Alberta's infrastructure sector can effectively apply the principles of CBAs—particularly through public-private partnerships (P3s)—to yield inclusive, community-level returns.

In a province often characterized by tensions between industrial development and social outcomes, CBAs represent an emerging opportunity to bridge that divide—providing a roadmap for equitable growth that aligns local labour, Indigenous reconciliation, and economic diversification.

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British Columbia

British Columbia has implemented one of the most expansive and centralized approaches to Community Benefits Agreements in Canada, transforming what are traditionally project-specific, negotiated agreements into a province-wide framework. Rather than treating CBAs as flexible tools customized to the needs of a local community or project, British Columbia has institutionalized them through a top-down model designed to meet provincial workforce, inclusion, and procurement goals—primarily through major infrastructure development.

At the core of this framework is BC Infrastructure Benefits Inc. (BCIB), a Crown corporation established to act as the employer of all workers on applicable government-funded infrastructure projects. BCIB is responsible for hiring, managing payroll, and deducting union dues. While this model offers administrative consistency and centralized enforcement of inclusion targets, it has been criticized for disrupting traditional contractor management structures. Contractors no longer act as the primary employers on their own projects—an inversion of standard procurement and project management practices.

British Columbia's CBA framework sets clear workforce targets:

- Workers must be hired within a 100-kilometre radius of the project.
- Priority hiring is mandated for Indigenous peoples, women in trades, and other equity-deserving groups.
- A 25% apprenticeship ratio is targeted.
- All workers must be paid union wages under a structured agreement, with wages increasing annually by 2% through 2024.
- A strict no-strike, no-lockout clause is enforced.
- Workers must join one of 19 approved building trades unions within 30 days of employment.

These requirements closely mirror a Project Labour Agreement (PLA) in structure and effect, which raises questions about the distinction between a PLA and a CBA in this context. Critics argue that BC's model risks conflating the two, emphasizing labour regulation over community-driven benefit negotiation. While the inclusionary aims are laudable—centring local employment, diversity in trades, and social procurement—the BC model has faced pushback. Cost overruns, labour supply constraints, and reduced competition in bidding are recurring issues. For example, on the Cowichan District Hospital Replacement Project, only two bids were submitted, and the project has already seen cost overruns of \$559 million. Indigenous contractors have also raised concerns about being excluded from participation due to the union membership requirement, a contradiction that undermines the CBA's stated equity objectives. In at least one instance, the government granted an exemption, tacitly acknowledging the rigidity of the framework.

To address some of these issues, British Columbia has also introduced Enhanced Inclusion and Development Agreements (EIDA)—performance-based agreements with financial incentives for contractors and subcontractors who exceed workforce inclusion targets or promote Indigenous economic participation.

Municipal initiatives have added another layer to the province's CBA ecosystem. The City of Vancouver has implemented a CBA policy for large-scale rezoning projects over 500,000 square feet, requiring:



- 10% local employment (with a focus on equity-deserving groups),
- 10% social procurement from equity-seeking or impact-focused businesses,
- 10% local procurement from within Metro Vancouver or British Columbia.

These municipal CBAs are enforced through permit conditions, and the City has reserved the right to withhold permits from non-compliant developers. Similar models are being piloted across Vancouver Island via the Coastal Communities Initiative, including the Comox Valley Regional District, which has incorporated federal Community Employment Benefits (CEB) targets into its procurement processes. The legacy of CBAs in BC traces back to the 2010 Vancouver Olympic Village, where a CBA negotiated by the nonprofit Building Opportunities with Business (BOB) helped secure jobs and procurement opportunities for inner-city residents and businesses. However, the province's current model diverges sharply from that grassroots, community-led origin.

In sum, BC's approach reflects a deliberate policy shift toward institutionalized inclusion via infrastructure, but it also reveals tensions between standardization and flexibility, inclusion and control. While it has created a clear mechanism to promote workforce diversity and local economic development, its rigid structure, high costs, and union exclusivity pose challenges to broader participation and long-term sustainability.

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Manitoba

Manitoba's approach to Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs) has been shaped by a targeted effort to support Indigenous inclusion, rural infrastructure, and regional equity through procurement-driven mechanisms. Manitoba's model highlights how CBAs can strategically bridge infrastructure gaps while furthering Indigenous reconciliation and economic mobility. Though lacking a formalized province-wide CBA policy, Manitoba's public agencies and Crown authorities have proven that procurement policy and infrastructure planning can be leveraged to embed employment equity and regional development goals. In particular, the ESRA's model demonstrates a best-practice blueprint: proactive consultation, targeted hiring mandates, and investment in local community enterprises. These lessons hold value across



jurisdictions—especially those with similarly remote, underserved, or Indigenous-majority regions. Manitoba has developed powerful localized and project-based applications, particularly through its East Side Road Initiative and municipal procurement practices in Winnipeg.

Manitoba has utilized project-specific CBAs administered through both provincial authorities and municipal governments. These agreements have been deployed either *independently* or as part of broader initiatives like the Aboriginal Procurement Initiative, which seeks to increase Indigenous participation in public-sector procurement.

At the municipal level, the City of Winnipeg has taken a proactive stance. In a notable move, the city passed a motion through Council to include community benefits requirements in future tenders—a step toward embedding equity considerations in public infrastructure investment. The North End Water Pollution Control Centre is an example of a major infrastructure project expected to carry community benefits language in its future bid requirements.

The most ambitious and structurally impactful use of CBAs in Manitoba has come through the work of the East Side Road Authority (ESRA). Established to deliver a 30-year development project connecting remote communities on the east side of Lake Winnipeg, ESRA embedded community benefit agreements directly into its road and bridge construction projects.

These CBAs were not symbolic; they channeled over \$80 million into First Nations communities, and included enforceable employment and training clauses, including:

- 30% of total in-scope contract hours for road construction to be worked by residents of east side communities
- 20% of total hours for bridge construction to follow the same rule
- Direct contracts and capacity-building for community-owned construction companies
- Skills training in construction, heavy machinery operation, and labour

The agreements resulted in 600+ job opportunities, and strengthened local capacity to manage and contribute to infrastructure projects. Infrastructure improvements under the ESRA umbrella—like the Red Sucker River Bridge, Loon and Longbody Creek bridges, and the Wanipigow River Bridge—extended transportation access, created training pipelines, and began to permanently connect isolated communities like Bloodvein First Nation to Manitoba's all-weather road network for the first time in decades.

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New Brunswick

There is little to no public evidence of formal Community Benefits Agreements currently in use within New Brunswick. Unlike jurisdictions such as British Columbia or Ontario, New Brunswick has not institutionalized CBAs through municipal policy or provincial frameworks. However, there are adjacent government programs that echo the spirit of CBAs—namely, federal-provincial infrastructure investments that prioritize equity, growth, and labour development.

While not technically a CBA, the Canada Housing Infrastructure Fund (CHIF) and its implementation in New Brunswick reflects federal interest in embedding equity and economic inclusion into major public infrastructure. Under CHIF, New Brunswick will receive \$150.5 million to support water, wastewater, stormwater, and waste infrastructure that enables future housing development. These funds are targeted through a 10-year agreement and overlap with other programs such as the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP).

Together with the Atlantic Growth Strategy—which focuses on skills, clean growth, innovation, and infrastructure—these funding mechanisms are injecting capital into sectors typically associated with CBAs in other provinces, like housing and construction. While no formal CBA policy exists, these investments reveal a strong potential for future CBA-style approaches, especially if local governments or community coalitions advocate for more targeted equity measures.

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Newfoundland and Labrador

In Newfoundland and Labrador, community benefits practices have historically centred on Impact Benefit Agreements (IBAs) tied to large-scale resource and energy projects, with a particular emphasis on prioritizing Indigenous employment, training, and community investment. While the province does not yet operate under a formal, province-wide CBA policy or procurement framework like British Columbia or Ontario, its track record reflects strong use of project-specific CBAs, especially where Indigenous communities and resource extraction intersect.

A significant example of this approach is the Muskrat Falls Project, part of the Lower Churchill hydroelectric development. The project includes clear and binding community benefits provisions, especially around employment equity and training for the Innu Nation. Under the collective agreement governing the project, hiring priorities were designed in tiers, explicitly prioritizing:

1. Innu persons from Labrador,
2. Qualified residents of Labrador,
3. Qualified residents of Newfoundland,
4. Other Canadians, and finally,
5. Other international workers.



This hierarchy reflects a meaningful and enforceable commitment to local and Indigenous labour inclusion, offering not only jobs but also pathways to training, advancement, and long-term career development. The project design also included community investment elements intended to bolster economic development and local infrastructure in impacted regions.

These practices are reinforced by the work of CEIBA—the Centre of Expertise on Impact and Benefit Agreements—which operates jointly for Quebec and Labrador. Established by the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Sustainable Development Institute (FNQLSDI) in 2016, CEIBA supports Indigenous governments in the negotiation, administration, and implementation of benefit agreements. In the context of Newfoundland and Labrador, CEIBA has been particularly important in ensuring that First Nations and Innu communities can meaningfully engage with resource developers, assert their rights, and maximize benefits tied to ancestral lands and industrial developments.

Through both CEIBA and project-based IBAs, Newfoundland and Labrador has effectively leveraged resource development as a vehicle for employment equity, training, and reconciliation, even in the absence of a standardized provincial CBA policy. Its approach demonstrates how labour agreements and benefit frameworks tailored to Indigenous priorities can function as de facto CBAs—ensuring not just mitigation of harm, but the creation of sustained local value.

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Northern Territories

In Canada's North, the application of Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs) and related socio-economic frameworks is tightly linked to the imperatives of reconciliation, environmental remediation, regional capacity building, and equitable participation in resource development. While these territories do not yet have formalized CBA legislation akin to Ontario's IJPA or British Columbia's BCIB model, the use of project-specific agreements — often initiated through resource development projects or government remediation work — provides a functional parallel to CBAs.

They often take the form of Socio-Economic Monitoring Agreements (SEMAs) negotiated between private industry, Indigenous governments, and territorial or federal authorities. A foundational example is the 1999 agreement between Diavik Diamond Mines Inc. (a Rio Tinto subsidiary), five local Indigenous organizations, and the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT).

This agreement formalized Diavik's commitments to:

- Provide training, employment, and business opportunities to NWT and West Kitikmeot (Nunavut) residents
- Establish clear mechanisms for monitoring social and economic outcomes
- Share benefits equitably with surrounding Indigenous communities



The agreement has become a widely cited example of what industry-Indigenous partnership can achieve when proactive benefit-sharing, employment guarantees, and community investment are made core project commitments.

Another illustrative case is the Giant Mine Remediation Project. In 2021, the Government of Canada signed three formal agreements with the Yellowknives Dene First Nation, including a Community Benefits Agreement valued at \$20 million over ten years. While the agreement's main signatory was a government actor (rather than a corporation), the structure and goals aligned with CBA principles:

- Direct capacity-building funding for the community
- Long-term partnership for environmental remediation
- Commitments to employment, training, and decision-making participation

This adaptation of CBA principles to a remediation context emphasizes how CBA frameworks can be used flexibly—especially in regions where the legacy of environmental harm and colonial extraction has disproportionately impacted Indigenous peoples.

Though smaller in population and infrastructure investment volume, Nunavut has participated in benefit agreements primarily through joint projects with neighbouring jurisdictions and resource developers. The Diavik SEMA mentioned above also covered the West Kitikmeot region of Nunavut, affirming regional collaboration across territorial lines.

These agreements are vital in Nunavut due to its limited internal infrastructure and governance capacity. Where large-scale industrial development occurs, CBAs or similar frameworks are often the only viable tools to ensure local hiring, Indigenous procurement, and community investment.

As of now, Yukon does not have a formal CBA policy or widely publicized examples equivalent to Diavik or Giant Mine. However, growing awareness of CBAs through national policy trends and federal infrastructure funding programs is beginning to spark interest in embedding community benefits into territorial infrastructure procurement.

Given Yukon's strong network of modern treaties and Indigenous self-government agreements, there is natural alignment between the values of CBAs and the territory's negotiated governance landscape. This suggests strong potential for the use of CBAs — or CBA-adjacent structures — in future infrastructure or environmental remediation efforts, particularly where partnership with First Nations governments is required.

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Ontario

A major shift toward community benefits in Ontario was initiated by the passage of the Infrastructure for Jobs and Prosperity Act (IIPA) in 2015. The Act mandates that infrastructure planning in the province



must not only be evidence-based and strategic but also designed to support job creation, training opportunities, and long-term economic growth. One of the Act's key provisions is the requirement that, during the procurement process for major public infrastructure projects, proponents must submit a plan outlining the number of apprentices to be engaged and the support available to equity-seeking groups — specifically women, newcomers, Indigenous peoples, at-risk youth, and veterans. While the Act does not prescribe a rigid CBA format, it embeds equity goals in the project lifecycle, pushing contractors and developers to operationalize inclusive hiring and workforce development within procurement.

The Long-Term Infrastructure Plan (LTIP) released in 2017 builds on this mandate by providing a strategic roadmap for applying community benefits to public infrastructure across the province. It commits the province to developing a comprehensive community benefits policy framework, including:

- Workforce development goals for underrepresented workers and local residents;
- Social procurement strategies to source goods and services from local or equity-focused enterprises;
- Supplementary community benefit initiatives tailored to the needs of affected neighbourhoods.

The LTIP also sets out a plan to pilot community benefits projects, refine best practices, and scale the framework to all major infrastructure builds by 2020. Although implementation has been uneven, these documents represent a significant provincial-level shift toward integrating CBAs into the broader infrastructure ecosystem.

Ontario's commitments have been applied through agencies such as Metrolinx, Infrastructure Ontario, and various municipal procurement arms. Projects like the Eglinton Crosstown LRT and the Finch West LRT incorporated CBA-style clauses requiring apprenticeships and equity hiring targets. These projects have functioned as pilots for testing workforce readiness, labour-community coordination, and the monitoring of CBA outcomes.

At the local level, the City of Toronto has become a leader in operationalizing CBAs through both policy and procurement. Its Community Benefits Framework, adopted in 2019, applies to city-led procurements, land sales, and rezonings. The policy requires early identification of potential benefits and defines mechanisms for monitoring, accountability, and stakeholder engagement. The city also works closely with intermediaries like the Toronto Community Benefits Network (TCBN), a grassroots coalition that has played a central role in brokering CBAs, coordinating job readiness initiatives, and ensuring that community voices shape project design and delivery. The framework prioritizes employment and training for equity-deserving communities, local hiring, social procurement, and community agency participation, especially on infrastructure projects valued over \$5 million. Notably, the City reserves the right to require community benefits from private developers as part of land use and zoning approvals, especially when public land is involved.

Example Projects

- Eglinton Crosstown LRT: A flagship example of a CBA in action, Metrolinx included clauses requiring the contractor to offer at least 10% of trade and craft hours to apprentices and journey persons from historically disadvantaged communities. This project was supported by the Toronto Community Benefits Network (TCBN), which helped to coordinate workforce readiness efforts with local employment agencies and training providers.



- West Park Healthcare Centre Redevelopment: As part of Ontario's Infrastructure Ontario procurement, a CBA framework was used to engage local communities in employment and training pathways related to the hospital redevelopment.
- Woodbine Casino Expansion: The City of Toronto negotiated a community benefits agreement with the developer, requiring local hiring, union partnerships, and job access for racialized and Indigenous people, people with disabilities, and youth.

Despite strong policy foundations, Ontario's CBA landscape has faced challenges in enforcement, data collection, and accountability. While the IJPA and LTIP create enabling conditions, neither mandate detailed community consultation, and public reporting on CBA outcomes remains limited. Much of the implementation work has fallen to municipalities, nonprofit coalitions, and project-specific working groups. As a result, CBA uptake and quality vary significantly across the province.

Still, Ontario remains one of Canada's most active CBA jurisdictions, with a layered framework that combines legislative backing, agency leadership, and community mobilization. Its experience suggests that intermediary infrastructure (such as coalition organizations and workforce networks) is essential to turning policy intentions into measurable outcomes — especially in the absence of a province-wide enforcement mechanism.

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Prince Edward Island

In contrast to provinces with top-down, government-led community benefits programs, Prince Edward Island's approach to CBAs is grassroots-led and civic in character. While the province has not yet enacted formal legislation or mandated CBAs in public procurement or produced a large-scale CBA akin to those seen in Ontario or BC, the Community Benefits Network functions as a proactive civic mechanism for



shaping development outcomes. The network promotes three-way agreements between local residents, municipal councils, and developers. These agreements are often linked to goals like affordable housing provision, community amenities, or local initiatives are laying the groundwork for a community benefits framework, particularly in regions undergoing development pressure. As PEI municipalities move toward meeting commitments to affordable housing, the CBN encourages developers to embed affordability requirements directly into their planning submissions—ensuring that new projects align with local social policy objectives.

One of the most promising examples comes from Prince Edward County, where the Prince Edward Learning Centre (PELC) and Thrive PEC have established a Community Benefits Network (CBN). Funded by the County Foundation and the United Way, this initiative brings together residents, developers, businesses, and municipal leaders to negotiate CBAs for both public and private development projects.

This network is not government-mandated but represents a community organizing and advocacy tool. The aim is to ensure that future developments—particularly those involving land use, infrastructure, or housing—generate tangible returns for the people who live there. The model emphasizes inclusive engagement, especially for historically excluded or underserved populations. Administration of community benefit efforts remains decentralized and driven by local non-profits and community groups. However, these early experiments may form the foundation for broader provincial uptake in the future, especially as climate adaptation, rural infrastructure renewal, and housing affordability rise on the policy agenda. The province's small scale and tight-knit civic environment may actually serve as an advantage in piloting more integrated, participatory CBA models. Should provincial or municipal governments choose to formalize the approach, they would be building on strong local precedents.

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Quebec

In Quebec, the use of formal Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs) is less widespread than in provinces like British Columbia or Ontario, where public infrastructure projects often embed CBA frameworks into procurement policy. Instead, Quebec's approach to community benefits has evolved through project-specific, sectoral, and regionally tailored initiatives—particularly in the natural resource sector and in collaboration with Indigenous communities.

One of the most notable examples is the Restor-Action Nunavik Fund, a partnership-driven initiative that reflects the spirit of CBAs even if it doesn't follow the conventional model. Established to address environmental degradation from former mineral exploration activities in northern Quebec, this fund was financed jointly by the Government of Quebec and mining companies, and administered with participation from the Kativik Regional Government. The purpose of the fund was twofold: to reclaim abandoned mine sites and to generate employment and training opportunities for local communities—particularly Inuit populations.

Through this work, the fund has bolstered community readiness and local capacity, showing how environmental restoration can also serve economic and social development goals. It exemplifies a practical, community-forward approach that blends environmental justice with long-term employment strategies—a hallmark of many successful CBAs.



In a broader context, Impact Benefit Agreements (IBAs) have been a dominant vehicle for community benefits in Quebec's resource extraction sectors. These agreements are typically negotiated between mining, forestry, or energy companies and Indigenous governments or communities, and are designed to ensure that local populations share in the benefits of developments occurring on their lands. Provisions often include:

- Hiring priorities for Indigenous workers
- Training programs to develop a local skilled workforce
- Contracting preferences for Indigenous-owned businesses
- Revenue sharing or equity arrangements
- Cultural protections and environmental safeguards

Recognizing the complexity and importance of these negotiations, the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Sustainable Development Institute (FNQLSDI) established the Centre of Expertise on Impact and Benefit Agreements (CEIBA) in 2016. CEIBA supports Indigenous communities across Quebec in developing negotiation strategies, understanding legal frameworks, and asserting their interests in resource development agreements. By building local negotiation capacity, CEIBA plays a key role in ensuring that benefit-sharing agreements are equitable, enforceable, and aligned with community priorities.

Overall, while Quebec does not yet have a formal province-wide public infrastructure CBA policy like Ontario or BC, its model of regional funds, sectoral agreements, and Indigenous-led capacity building shows a strong alignment with CBA principles. The province's experience highlights how localized, culturally attuned agreements—particularly in Indigenous contexts—can yield tangible environmental, economic, and employment benefits rooted in community priorities.

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Saskatchewan

In Saskatchewan, the concept of Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs) has been a site of active political and economic tension. Unlike provinces that have formally integrated CBAs into their infrastructure and procurement legislation, Saskatchewan's use of community benefits has evolved through a mix of temporary policy instruments, stakeholder pressure, and reactive revisions. The result is a patchwork landscape where CBAs have been implemented inconsistently—and sometimes controversially.

Saskatchewan briefly integrated community benefits criteria into its public procurement through SaskBuilds and Procurement, the provincial body overseeing infrastructure investments. These criteria, introduced in the wake of COVID-19 as part of a \$7.5 billion capital stimulus package, allowed extra bid



points for proponents using Saskatchewan labour. The intention was clear: stimulate local employment and recovery by incentivizing local hiring, procurement from Saskatchewan-based businesses, and participation from underrepresented groups.

However, the government's commitment to this approach has wavered. A 2020 agreement between the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure and the road construction sector to remove CBA criteria from specific tenders signalled a retreat. This decision drew criticism from business advocacy groups, particularly the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce (SCC), which had championed CBAs as a vital tool to level the playing field for Saskatchewan companies and foster long-term provincial competitiveness. The SCC has since called for the province to mandate CBAs in all tenders, expand their scope beyond local labour, and enhance transparency and accountability across interprovincial procurement systems. The province's back-and-forth approach illustrates the tension between regional economic development goals and the constraints of interprovincial trade agreements like the New West Partnership Trade Agreement (NWPTA) and the Canadian Free Trade Agreement (CFTA). While the government attempted to design benefits criteria that comply with trade rules—framing them around local labour usage rather than direct geographic preferences—this balance has proven precarious.

These tensions culminated in a bid protest arbitration case involving Alberta-based contractor West-Can Seal Coating Inc., which alleged that Saskatchewan's tendering process systematically favoured local bidders. The Ministry of Highways' use of a weighted scoring rubric that allocated up to 25 points (out of 110) for local labour benefits was central to the dispute.

In the case of contract HWY-H20126, the arbitrator found that Saskatchewan's community benefits criteria breached trade obligations by creating a de facto preference for Saskatchewan-based companies. The ruling emphasized the difficulty of implementing CBAs in a jurisdiction where open, non-discriminatory procurement is legally mandated across provincial borders. This decision has had a chilling effect on further CBA development in the province, reinforcing hesitation among policymakers.

CBAs in Saskatchewan, where used, have typically been administered through SaskBuilds and Procurement or directly through line ministries such as Highways and Infrastructure. The province experimented with formal points-based systems assessing declared local labour usage, assigning penalties for non-compliance and rewarding bidders who prioritized Saskatchewan workers. In theory, these mechanisms aligned with CBA best practices—tying contract performance to economic development outcomes.

However, enforcement was uneven, and the lack of transparency in procurement outcomes frustrated businesses. The SCC has urged the province to implement reporting mechanisms for tender results, to better understand where Saskatchewan companies lose out and how to support them in future bids. Labour considerations have also included proposals to embed apprenticeship opportunities, Indigenous employment, and sustainability goals—but these broader definitions of community benefit have yet to be adopted systemically.

The province's \$7.5 billion capital plan following the pandemic was a clear opportunity to institutionalize CBAs. Investments in highways, schools, hospitals, utilities, and municipal infrastructure were pitched as economic recovery tools that could deliver social and employment benefits. However, a lack of sustained policy support has limited the scale of implementation. The removal of CBAs from certain tenders—especially in sectors like road construction—has undercut efforts to position community benefits as a standard feature of public investment.



Instead, CBA principles have often remained discretionary or dependent on political will, rather than embedded in legislation or enforced through consistent procurement practice.

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