



# Governing Sustainable Municipalities

Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy

## Summary Report / September 2023

**JOHNSON  
SHOYAMA**   
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY  
UREGINA ▾ USASK

 **FutureSkills** Centre  
Centre des **Compétences futures**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES .....	iv
LIST OF TABLES .....	iv
<b>1. INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2. SASKATCHEWAN PUBLIC POLICY CONTEXT.....</b>	<b>3</b>
2.0 Introduction .....	3
2.1 Municipal Governance Context .....	3
2.1.1 Saskatchewan Municipal Governance Context.....	3
2.1.2 Municipal Fiscal Policy Overview .....	4
2.1.3 Sociodemographic Statistics .....	4
2.2 Municipalities and Sustainability Policy .....	5
2.2.1 Municipal Advocacy .....	5
<b>Chapter 3. METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>6</b>
3.0 Introduction .....	6
3.1 Quantitative Design and Data Collection .....	7
3.1.1 Selection of Indicators .....	7
3.1.2 Classification and Selection of Municipalities .....	7
3.1.3 Index Scoring of Policy Documents.....	8
3.1.4 Training for MSI Assessment .....	8
3.1.5 Collaborative Validation Process.....	8
3.1.6 Quantitative Data Analysis Strategy .....	9
3.2 Qualitative Design and Data Collection.....	9
3.2.1 Roundtables .....	9
3.2.2 Focus Groups.....	9
3.2.3 Forum.....	9
3.2.4 Qualitative Data Analysis Strategy.....	9
3.3 Data Triangulation.....	10
3.4 Case Exemplars .....	10
3.5 Summary .....	10
<b>Chapter 4. FINDINGS .....</b>	<b>11</b>
4.0 Introduction .....	11
4.1 Quantitative Findings .....	11
4.1.1 MSI Document Search and Analysis .....	11
4.1.2 MSI Overall Scores.....	11
4.1.3 MSI Mean Sustainability Scores .....	12
4.1.4 MSI Actual Sustainability Scores.....	13
4.2 Qualitative Overview .....	14
4.2.1 Funding.....	15
4.2.2 Legislation .....	17
4.2.3 Planning .....	18

4.2.4 Authenticity .....	19
4.2.5 Community .....	20
4.2.6 Partnerships .....	22
4.2.7 Skills .....	24
4.2.8 Education .....	26
4.2.9 Communication .....	28
4.2.10 Outreach .....	30
4.3 Cities .....	35
4.3.1 Quantitative Snapshot .....	35
4.3.2 Qualitative Distinctness .....	35
4.3.3 Cities Exemplar: Yorkton Green Pathway Project .....	36
4.4 Small Urban Municipalities .....	38
4.5.1 Quantitative Snapshot .....	38
4.5.2 Qualitative Distinctness .....	38
4.5.3 Small Urban Exemplar: Lumsden Solar Projects .....	39
4.5 Rural Municipalities .....	41
4.5.1 Quantitative Snapshot .....	41
4.5.2 Qualitative Distinctness .....	42
4.5.3 Rural Exemplar: Enterprise RM No. 142 Waste Management .....	43
4.6 Northern Municipalities .....	45
4.6.1 Quantitative Snapshot .....	45
4.6.2 Qualitative Distinctness .....	45
4.6.3 Northern Exemplar: La Ronge Highway 102 Economic Master Plan .....	46
4.7 Summary .....	48
<b>Chapter 5. KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION .....</b>	<b>49</b>
5.0 Introduction .....	49
5.1 Sustainable Municipalities Stakeholder Database .....	49
5.2 Public Talk Series .....	49
5.3 SUMA Tradeshow 2023 .....	49
5.4 Media .....	50
5.5 Additional Knowledge Mobilization Activities .....	50
5.6 Issue Briefs .....	50
5.7 Community of Practice .....	50
<b>Chapter 6. FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR SASKATCHEWAN MUNICIPAL SUSTAINABILITY .....</b>	<b>51</b>
6.0 Lessons from the GSM Project .....	51
6.1 A Saskatchewan Vision of Municipal Sustainability .....	52
6.2 Recommendations to Realize Saskatchewan’s Vision of Municipal Sustainability .....	54
6.3 Summary .....	57
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>58</b>

**LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure 3.1: Research design (multiple case studies and communities of practice) .....14  
Figure 3.2: Mixed methods core design of convergence .....14  
Figure 4.1: Distribution of MSI total scores .....24  
Figure 4.2: Distribution of policy status in cities (n = 6) by indicator .....58  
Figure 4.3: Distribution of policy status in small urban municipalities (n = 15) by Indicator ..... 61  
Figure 4.4: Distribution of policy status in rural municipalities (n = 10) by indicator .....65  
Figure 4.5: Distribution of policy status in northern municipalities (n = 5) by indicator .....69

**LIST OF TABLES**

Table 3.1: The four municipal categories used for the GSM project .....13  
Table 3.2: Definitions of policy, program, and plan.....13  
Table 3.3: MSI scoring system.....18  
Table 4.1: Mean number of documents reviewed and percentage of communities with OCP.....24  
Table 4.2: Mean scores for the MSI for all municipal classifications.....25  
Table 4.3: Mean MSI scores by total and sustainability domain .....25  
Table 4.5: The shared core themes surrounding facilitators and barriers to municipal sustainability. .28

# Chapter 1. Introduction

Municipalities in Saskatchewan play a key role in the advance of social, economic, and environmental sustainability initiatives. Saskatchewan has 766 municipalities with different levels of preparedness, facing diverse facilitators and barriers that affect sustainable development. It is therefore necessary to determine the specific factors that promote or hinder the conception, development, administration, and communication of municipality-level sustainability projects, policies and plans. Policymaking is an important tool for sustainable development, but it must accommodate the unique characteristics of local communities in order to be truly effective.

In that spirit, the *Governing Sustainable Municipalities (GSM)* project was designed to help municipalities achieve their sustainability targets by identifying obstacles and potential avenues for advancement, cultivating communities of practice, and increasing the focus on municipal sustainability. We learn about sustainability in a broader context by understanding the elements of governance in Saskatchewan, including funding and infrastructure, allowing us to position the discussion on municipal sustainability. Accordingly, we can achieve a Saskatchewan-centered vision for municipal sustainability and develop a set of practical recommendations for relevant stakeholders to support and advance this vision.

The GSM team is a group of academic researchers and executive-in-residence practitioners at the Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy (JSGS), a joint initiative between the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Regina. The GSM team worked closely with an Advisory Committee to ensure the project was subject to review and advice from the municipal sector. This committee comprised representatives of the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association (SUMA), the Urban Municipal Administrators Association of Saskatchewan (UMAAS), the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities (SARM), New North (Saskatchewan Association of Northern Communities), the Rural Municipal Administrators' Association (RMAA), and the Saskatchewan Ministry of Government Relations.

Collaborations and partnerships are necessary to achieve progress towards the sustainable development of municipalities in Saskatchewan. The GSM project supports this approach and has produced a policy assessment tool, database, issue briefs, and best practice suggestions, as well as the grounding for a municipal community of practice. The GSM project has also contributed to our understanding of municipal preparedness for sustainability by answering four key research questions:

**1. What is the current state of municipal preparedness for sustainability?**

- a. What policies, resources, and governance capacities do the municipalities have available for sustainability?

**2. What are the key facilitators of (and barriers to) sustainability in the municipal sector?**

- a. To what extent do legislation, regulation, and policy (procurement practices, governance, and regulations) facilitate or impede progress toward sustainability?
- b. To what extent do local politicians and public servants indicate that progress towards sustainability is limited by the knowledge, skills and competencies of (i) elected decision-makers; (ii) public servants; and (iii) contractors or suppliers who work with municipalities (skills training gaps)?
- c. To what extent is progress towards sustainability limited by the misalignment of priorities?

**3. How can municipal sustainability initiatives engage underserved groups, particularly Indigenous peoples, racialized peoples, members of the LGBTQ2S+ community, and people with disabilities?**

- a. How can skills training assist municipalities with the engagement of underserved groups?

**4. What strategies can help us to move forward with municipal sustainability in its broadest context?**

- a. How can different sectors work together for success?
- b. What are the next steps for skills training?

# Chapter 2. Saskatchewan Public Policy Context

## 2.0 Introduction

Municipal governments can make significant contributions to sustainability, but a clear understanding of facilitators and barriers that influence municipal preparedness requires prior knowledge of the governance structure and policies in Canada. The relevant literature describing the policy and various implications of sustainability initiative investments in the Saskatchewan municipality context is summarized in this chapter.

## 2.1 Municipal Governance Context

In Canada, the government follows a hierarchical federal–provincial–municipal structure. The province establishes municipalities, which have multiple responsibilities such as providing local services, managing waste disposal, funding libraries, maintaining roads and public transportation systems, creating parks, and developing recreational facilities. Municipalities can significantly advance and promote sustainability by controlling planning aspects such as land use, zoning, and property taxation within their jurisdiction. They can also act as central points for larger local or regional partnerships and often work closely with the commercial and industrial sectors.

### 2.1.1 *Saskatchewan Municipal Governance Context*

In 2007, the Government of Saskatchewan established a policy platform that aims to achieve economic growth while providing services that focus on the needs of people. The government committed to enhancing the financial support provided to local governments in the region, resulting in the establishment of the Municipal Revenue Sharing (MRS) program. This initiative has become essential to the continued relationship between the province and its municipalities.

Saskatchewan has 766 municipalities, among which 445 are classified as urban, 296 are rural, and 25 are northern. The governance structure and administrative framework of these municipalities are defined in three different acts: The Cities Act (2002), The Municipalities Act (2005), and The Northern Municipalities Act (2010). The Cities Act regulates municipalities incorporated as cities. This applies to 16 communities in the province. The Municipalities Act applies to small urban and rural municipalities. The Northern Municipalities Act applies to the Northern

Saskatchewan Administration District (NSAD). This act governs incorporated municipalities within the NSAD as well as unincorporated areas.

Every municipality has an elected council responsible for hiring staff to oversee daily administration and maintain municipal services. However, the unincorporated areas in the NSAD fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Government Relations. The Minister is designated as the mayor and council for these areas, whereas ministry personnel handle the administrative roles.

Each act sets out the authority of municipalities to create and implement bylaws within their jurisdictions, and outlines municipal responsibilities to maintain order, promote good governance, ensure the safety and welfare of citizens, protect people and property, and establish and maintain public spaces, transportation, utilities, and security measures through policing, neighbourhood planning, infrastructure development, business initiatives, and incentive programs. The acts also cover animal control and the preservation of flora and fauna.

### *2.1.2 Municipal Fiscal Policy Overview*

Municipalities require the financial and skills capacity to develop sustainability initiatives. Achieving sustainability requires a dedicated and ongoing effort to implement suitable policies, plans and programs, build capacity, establish partnerships, secure resources, and adopt an integrated governance structure. Financial constraints are significant because municipal governments must balance the policy decisions made by higher levels of government with the needs and interests of their communities. On average, nearly half of municipal revenue is generated from local taxes, but a significant part of the budget also comes from the upper levels of government. The provincial government provides important revenue to municipalities in MRS grants, aiming to support effective governance at the local level. In 2023/2024, the MRS will transfer \$298 million to municipalities. According to Saskatchewan Regulation 32/2019 Municipal Grants Regulations (Government of Saskatchewan, 2009), 47.9% will be distributed to cities, 16.2% to urban municipalities, 28.5% to rural municipalities, and 7.4% to northern municipalities.

### *2.1.3 Sociodemographic Statistics*

Saskatchewan has a population of 1.2 million people, ~63% of whom are in the working-age group of 15–64 years. About 13% of the population comprises immigrants, 74% of whom were admitted under the economic category, revealing their importance for the province's economic development. This group's distinct viewpoints, expertise, and varied life experiences significantly contribute to the region's progress and expansion. Another 17% of the population is defined as Indigenous. This group is younger



than the non-Indigenous population, with 32% aged 14 and under (compared to 18% of the non-Indigenous population).

## 2.2 Municipalities and Sustainability Policy

Governing sustainable municipalities in Saskatchewan requires the careful consideration of many economic, social and environmental factors. The province is rich in renewable and non-renewable natural resources, giving it a solid economic position globally and making it an attractive location for international resource development. Saskatchewan covers an area of 651,036 square kilometers (251,366 square miles) of which 591,670 km<sup>2</sup> (228,450 sq mi) is land and 59,366 km<sup>2</sup> (22,921 sq mi) is water. Within this vast area, its ecosystems include boreal forest, prairie grassland, and sand dunes, so the province offers great potential for a sustainable tourism industry. Saskatchewan communities are equally varied, with diverse socio-cultural and political agendas for municipal governments to balance at the local level. Municipal administrators require a broad range of skills and knowledge to implement successful sustainable development policies, plans, and programs, and the role is becoming more complex over time. Work on sustainability policies, programs, and plans must consider many different specialist elements. Accordingly, Saskatchewan communities are encouraged to engage in partnerships to take effective action on larger regional projects such as new shared water treatment plants, solid waste management systems, or recreation facilities.

### 2.2.1 *Municipal Advocacy*

In Saskatchewan, there are three municipal advocacy groups. The Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association (SUMA) advocates for all urban municipalities. The Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities (SARM) focuses on the priorities of rural municipalities. The Saskatchewan Association of Northern Communities (New North) advocates for incorporated municipalities and settlements in the NSAD. Although they have individual responsibilities to their members, New North, SARM and SUMA often collaborate on projects, demonstrating how these organizations support each other in their efforts to promote the interests of all the municipalities in the province.

One of the most significant associations is the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), which advocates for municipal programs and policies across Canada. It represents more than 2100 Canadian municipalities and their elected officials, including mayors and councillors. The FCM established the Green Municipal Fund (GMF) in 2000 to prioritize sustainable development. Currently, the GMF is valued at \$1.65 billion and is fully funded by the Government of Canada. Its primary aim is to help municipalities adopt sustainable practices and policies that benefit their communities.

# Chapter 3. Methodology

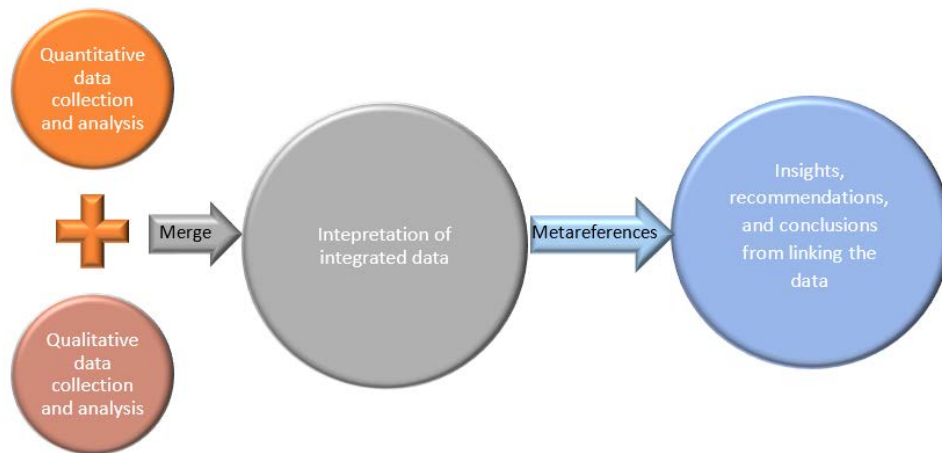
## 3.0 Introduction

The GSM project adopted a mixed methods research approach (Figure 3.1) following approval from the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board (Behaviour). Amendments were submitted as required for approval. Quantitative methods were used to develop the Municipal Sustainability Index (MSI) and qualitative elements included round tables, focus groups, and the *Skills for Sustainability Forum*. Following convergence (Figure 3.2), the quantitative and qualitative findings were analyzed together to offer a more complete understanding of sustainability in municipalities across Saskatchewan (Creswell, 2022; Halcomb & Hickman, 2015; Ivankova & Plano Clark, 2018).

Figure 3.1: Research design: multiple case studies and communities of practice.



Figure 3.2: Mixed methods core design of convergence.



### 3.1 Quantitative Design and Data Collection

#### 3.1.1 Selection of Indicators

The MSI created as part of the GSM project balanced the three sustainability principles (economic, social and environmental) to avoid the dominance of any one policy area (Bruntland, 1987). Twelve indicators were established, four for each domain.

#### 3.1.2 Classification and Selection of Municipalities

Table 3.1: The four municipal categories used for the GSM project.

GSM CATEGORY	GOVERNING ACT	NOTES
City	<i>Cities Act (2002)</i>	Largest municipalities, includes the capital, Regina, and Saskatoon.
Small urban	<i>Municipalities Act (2005)</i>	Urban municipalities with a population below 5000, often hubs for regional growth providing supporting infrastructure for large industries (e.g., mining).
Rural	<i>Municipalities Act (2005)</i>	Rural municipalities often engaged in agriculture and small business, which drive their economy. This category included all incorporated smaller towns and villages within the municipal boundaries of the RM, such as resort villages. All the corresponding authorities were contacted and voluntary feedback was requested.  For the purposes of the research, it was determined to consider other municipal entities within RM boundaries due to the importance of cooperation and collaboration. The GSM research team acknowledges that the reason was to provide a more balanced approach to the analysis. However, it does not negate the importance or significance of smaller urban municipalities acting independently.
Northern	<i>Northern Municipalities Act (2010)</i>	Varying population sizes, economy often driven by outdoor pursuits and extraction of natural resources.

### 3.1.3 Index Scoring of Policy Documents

The MSI assessment focused on identifying, reviewing and scoring publicly available online documents, including policies, programs, and plans that were categorized using the definitions in Table 3.2. To obtain quantitative data for statistical analysis, municipalities were allocated a numerical score for each of the 12 indicators: 2 for *developed*, 1 for *emergent* and 0 for *absent* (Table 3.3). The maximum score for any single indicator was 2 and the minimum score was 0. Therefore, the maximum score for the full index of 12 indicators was 24 (documents scored as *developed* on all indicators) and the minimum was 0 (documents scored as *absent* on all indicators).

**Table 3.1: Definitions of policy, program, and plan.**

<b>Policy</b>	Final approved policies including by-laws from a municipality, focusing on issues under the jurisdiction of that municipality.
<b>Program</b>	Documents prepared by the municipality for the future development of the municipality.
<b>Plan</b>	Documents covering the program or set of activities conducted under the policy, or other official documents setting out the corresponding objectives.

**Table 3.2: MSI scoring system.**

SCORING CATEGORY	SCORE	DESCRIPTION
<b>Developed</b>	2	Official policy document: incentive/tax/regulation and/or program in place
<b>Emergent</b>	1	Administratively focused: municipality has public communications regarding intentions, working group or committee in place, issue is mentioned but issue-specific plan remains to be developed.
<b>Absent</b>	0	No policy or administrative actions identified.

### 3.1.4 Training for MSI Assessment

Training was undertaken by all GSM team members involved in the quantitative research, including research associates and research assistants, to ensure a sound understanding of sustainability concepts, the indicators, and how to apply the assessment and allocate scores in a consistent manner. One of the selected municipalities was chosen as a test case and assessed by all GSM team members to ensure inter-coder reliability.

### 3.1.5 Collaborative Validation Process

When each municipal assessment was complete, it was checked by another member of the research team for validity. The final results were then sent to the relevant municipality to check if any plans, policies, or programs had been missed, revised, or redacted, a process known as the member check. Following any feedback and suggestions, the MSI score was revised if necessary and then finalized.

### 3.1.6 *Quantitative Data Analysis Strategy*

The MSI dataset was analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies, cross-tabulations and proportions so that the MSI assessment results could be presented in an accessible format.

## 3.2 **Qualitative Design and Data Collection**

Qualitative data for the GSM was obtained in discussions and semi-structured interviews that took place in roundtables, focus groups, and a forum with 92 municipal representatives and other stakeholders, discussing issues of capacity, inclusion, skill needs, and facilitators and barriers to success.

### 3.2.1 *Roundtables*

The initial focus for the qualitative data collection was a series of four in-person roundtables planned in four communities across the province. The first roundtable was moved online due to a low number of registered participants, and the second went ahead in a hybrid format (in-person and online). After the first two roundtables, the in-person roundtables were replaced with six invitation-only focus groups held online. This change was approved by the University of Saskatchewan's Research Ethics Board (Behaviour) following consultation and the submission of a revised application.

### 3.2.2 *Focus Groups*

The focus groups were attended by municipality representatives and other stakeholders from across the province. They were actively engaged and shared in-depth, rich experiences, exploring their diverse perspectives.

### 3.2.3 *Forum*

The *Skills for Sustainability Forum* was held to discuss facilitators and barriers affecting municipal skill sets and to determine the training and future directions needed to support sustainable development in Saskatchewan. The forum connected the post-secondary and training sector with key stakeholders, providing valuable professional networking opportunities in addition to our research data.

### 3.2.4 *Qualitative Data Analysis Strategy*

Thematic content analysis was applied to the qualitative data. All events were recorded, transcribed, and transferred to NVivo for the creation of a master file. The qualitative analysis included coding (translating question responses and participant stories to specific categories), categorization (creating meaningful cases into which the units of analysis – words, phrases, sentences – can be placed, such as the municipal category the participant represents), comparison (making links between coding and cases), and

concluding (identifying emergent themes, patterns, and trends from which to draw conclusions).

### **3.3 Data Triangulation**

The GSM project utilized three triangulation methods. First, the preliminary MSI results were presented at the roundtables which gave participants an opportunity to provide valuable comments and feedback on the preliminary findings. Second, the preliminary MSI results were sent to all the selected municipalities for voluntary feedback via the member check process. Third, regular meetings were held with the GSM Advisory Committee for feedback throughout the research, including two comprehensive meetings towards the end of the project to discuss the project findings and their implications.

### **3.4 Case Exemplars**

The GSM project aims to expand knowledge and provide practical information to help municipalities in their sustainability initiatives. An exemplar is therefore provided for each category of municipality as a best practice reference, to provide inspiration and encourage a forward-thinking mindset.

### **3.5 Summary**

The GSM project adopted a mixed methods research approach that was completed following approval from the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board (Behaviour). The quantitative element (MSI) was complemented by qualitative deliberative dialogues based on roundtables, focus groups, and a forum. During the development and implementation of both methods, comments and feedback were sought from the GSM Advisory Committee and the municipalities selected for inclusion. This robust approach to the research ensured the collection of rich quantitative and qualitative data.

# Chapter 4. Findings

## 4.0 Introduction

The mixed methods research approach produced a combination of quantitative and qualitative data that was used to assess the current state of municipal preparedness for sustainability in Saskatchewan. This chapter summarizes the quantitative data analysis and results obtained from the MSI, followed by the results from all three qualitative methods.

## 4.1 Quantitative Findings

### 4.1.1 MSI Document Search and Analysis

The MSI was completed by analyzing 934 documents, comprising unique plans, programs and policies related to 12 indicator areas, including official community plans (OCPs). The mean number of documents reviewed for each municipal category and the proportion with OCPs is shown in Table 4.1.

**Table 4.1: Mean number of documents reviewed and percentage of communities with an OCP.**

Classification	Mean number of documents reviewed	Percentage of municipalities in sample with an official community plan
Cities	63	100%
Small urban	17	67%
Rural	17	30%
North	24	80%

### 4.1.2 MSI Overall Scores

The highest individual assessment score for the MSI was 23.0 and the lowest was 3.0, with an average of 15.4 (Figure 4.1). The largest cluster (33% of all municipalities) had scores in the range 19–21. Comparing municipal categories, *cities* achieved the highest average score at 21.5 and *rural* municipalities the lowest at 10.6 (Table 4.2).

Figure 4.1: Distribution of total MSI scores.

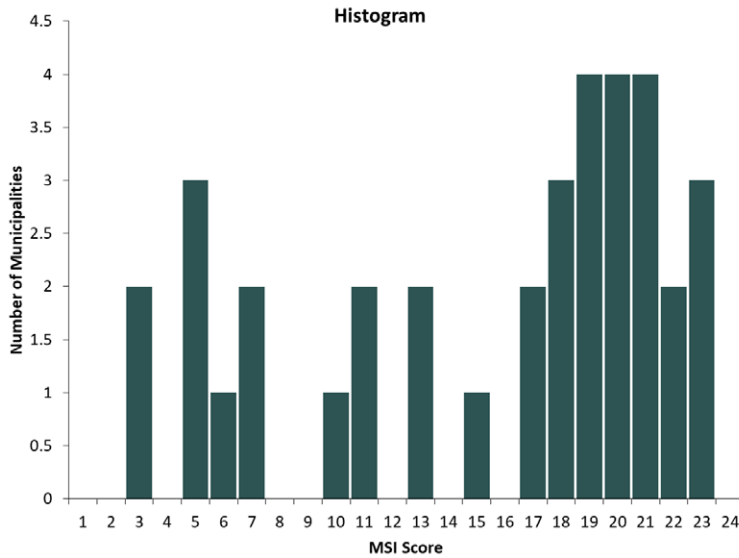


Table 4.2: Mean MSI scores for all municipal classifications.

Municipal classification	Cases (n)	STATISTICS		
		Mean score	Min	Max
Cities	6	21.5	19.0	23.0
Small urban	15	15.7	3.0	21.0
Rural	10	10.6	3.0	22.0
Northern	5	16.8	5.0	22.0

#### 4.1.3 MSI Mean Sustainability Scores

The MSI allows the analysis of scores under each sustainability domain (economic, social, and environmental) to determine if overall sustainability efforts are balanced (Table 4.3). The mean MSI scores for economic, social, and environmental sustainability were balanced in *cities* and *small urban* municipalities, whereas *rural* municipalities underrepresented environmental sustainability and *northern* municipalities overrepresented economic sustainability.

Table 4.3: Mean total MSI scores and scores divided by sustainability domain.

Municipal Classification	Cases (n)	Total	Economic	Social	Environmental
Cities	6	21.5	7.3	7.2	7.0
Small urban	15	15.7	5.4	5.4	4.9
Rural	10	10.6	2.6	2.8	1.7
Northern	5	16.8	6.4	5.2	5.2



#### *4.1.4 MSI Actual Sustainability Scores*

The maximum total score for each indicator is 72 (2 x 36 municipalities) and the maximum total score for each sustainability domain is 288 (72 per indicator x 4 indicators).

##### **Economic Sustainability**

The economic domain includes indicators for green and public spaces, job creation and enterprises, reduced waste generation, and sustainable tourism. For all municipalities included in our analysis, the economic MSI scores ranged from 20 to 60 out of 72. The highest scoring indicator (60) was reduced waste generation. Job creation and enterprises, and access to green and public spaces, were also high scoring sustainability areas, whereas sustainable tourism was the lowest scoring indicator in the full MSI. The total score for all four indicators in the economic domain was 196 out of 288.

##### **Social Sustainability**

The social domain includes indicators for access to information, decision-making processes, partnerships, and safe and affordable housing. The social sustainability indicators ranged between 41 and 57. Saskatchewan municipal policy relating to partnerships was the highest scoring indicator, whereas the lowest was safe and affordable housing. Equitable decision-making processes and access to information were mid-scoring indicators. The total score for all four indicators in the social domain was 192.

##### **Environmental Sustainability**

The environmental domain includes indicators for access to modern energy, climate change and adaptive capacity, integrated water management, and terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems. Environmental sustainability indicators ranged from 29 to 54. Policies relating to integrated water resource management scored highest in the environmental domain. The indicators relating to municipal preparedness for climate change and the preservation of terrestrial and freshwater ecosystems were both mid-scoring environmental sustainability indicators. Access to modern energy was the lowest scoring policy indicator. The total score for all four indicators in the environmental domain was 167.

## 4.2 Qualitative Findings

The qualitative data obtained from discussions with 92 municipal representatives through a series of roundtables, focus groups and the forum revealed a wide and diverse understanding of sustainability principles and engagement with sustainability initiatives across the province. For the qualitative analysis, participants were classified based on the category of the municipality they represented.

The meaning of sustainability to stakeholders depends on the political, social, and/or environmental context. This was evident during the discussions, all of which began with an opportunity for participants to share their perceptions of sustainability as a concept and their municipality or organization's current position in terms of economic, social, and environmental sustainability. There was general acceptance that all three pillars should be considered when planning policy and decision-making, but a noticeable lean towards the economic factors. However, a few participants strongly advocated for critically important social and environmental issues.

The narratives heard in the discussions and drawn from the subsequent analysis emphasize that personalities and political will are major influencers when attempting to create a balanced approach to economic, social, and environmental sustainability. These narratives also bring to light the importance of establishing an open-minded culture within municipal governance that considers diverse, contrasting, and often conflicting perceptions and opinions.

*"That's one of the big obstacles of sustainability is every municipality and every person themselves has what they identify as the most important items; and that changes over our lifetime too, based on our experiences and what we're going through."* (CITY PARTICIPANT, 2023)

Despite the individual municipal nuances (discussed further in **Sections 4.3–4.6** below), there were many shared experiences and opinions concerning the factors that facilitate or hinder Saskatchewan municipalities attempting to explore and implement sustainability initiatives. These **facilitators** and **barriers** were consistently viewed by participants across all the municipal classifications as fundamentally two sides of the same coin (i.e., a facilitator can also be a barrier). Ten core themes were identified and are discussed below: funding, legislation, planning, authenticity, community, partnerships, skills, communication, education, and outreach. The shared core themes emerging from the qualitative analysis, and their corresponding facilitators and barriers, are summarized **Table 4.4**.

**Table 4.4: The shared core themes concerning facilitators of and barriers to municipal sustainability.**

THEME	SECTION	FACILITATOR	BARRIER
<b>Funding</b>	4.2.1	Funding opportunities from other levels of government	Cost of sustainability initiatives and restrictive funding
<b>Legislation</b>	4.2.2	Support and weight to sustainable development and initiatives	Overly restrictive and domineering
<b>Planning</b>	4.2.3	Having a clear, forward-thinking approach to planning	Lack of planning for the future and lack of clarity in terms of objectives
<b>Authenticity</b>	4.2.4	A strong sense of identity and community authenticity	Resistance to change
<b>Community</b>	4.2.5	Community-driven initiatives	Lack of engagement with community
<b>Partnerships</b>	4.2.6	Effective partnerships	Reluctance to engage with other municipalities and/or organizations
<b>Skills</b>	4.2.7	Training opportunities	Lack of resources, training, knowledge, and capacity
<b>Education</b>	4.2.8	Programs, resources, and knowledgeable educators	Accessibility and cost
<b>Communication</b>	4.2.9	Active communication	Lack of transparency
<b>Outreach</b>	4.2.10	Openness and proactivity	Discrimination and lack of understanding

### 4.2.1 *Funding*

The issue of finance was a clear and strong theme emerging from the qualitative data analysis. The cost of sustainability initiatives, in terms of initial capital investment, implementation, and/or compliance with environmental legislation costs was identified by many participants as a significant barrier for the development of sustainability policies. This is particularly true for green infrastructure or green logistics with respect to energy, waste and water management, smart and clean technologies, and manufacturing that may have long payback periods due to sustainability practices.

#### **Facilitators**

To support the limited revenue options for municipal authorities, municipalities often rely on provincial and federal funding. The application of this funding to different projects may be flexible within relevant, localized contexts. Although comments relating to funding were weighted towards barriers, some also acknowledged the positive role that financial capacity can and could have on municipal governance.

*“Government funding is always very helpful. They’ve had some good funding opportunities that have come out in the past few years... The MEEP [Municipal Economic Enhancement Program] funding was excellent. Just enabled us to get some of the projects done that we’ve kinda been putting aside, and it was nice that it wasn’t very strict on its requirements.”* (RURAL PARTICIPANT, 2023)

## **Barriers**

Many spoke of the financial struggles they face in maintaining essential municipal services such as roads and water supplies, which prevent them from exploring new sustainable initiatives even if they would like to. If funding is inconsistent or rigid, it can constrain how sustainability is actualized at a local level. The implications of restrictive funding can fracture and divide sustainability efforts, and although more funding generally goes to larger communities, this increased level of funding also means increased control on how the funding is used. Some opined that should sustainable development models become mandatory, the only option for them would be to raise taxes, which would be very unpopular with the community. Others expressed frustration that municipalities are expected to deliver a lot of services, often with only property tax funding, whereas the federal and provincial governments have more ways to generate revenue.

*“...it’s really difficult to play the game of catch up. That’s where I see one of the big things for sustainability is just getting the funding for sustainability. And having sustainable funding streams.”* (CITY PARTICIPANT, 2023)

Alternative sources of funding were discussed with reference to both federal and provincial streams, and common threads included the challenges presented by the unpredictability of grants and the corresponding application processes. Questions were also raised as to whether large federally or provincially funded initiatives are genuinely sustainable. For example, the funding stream may enable the building of a new, green community centre, but the responsibility then falls on the municipality for its maintenance, staffing costs, and insurance. Even if funding was successful, challenges then arose with the unpredictable nature of contracting the work, with inflation increasing the costs of fuel, materials, and other expenses. This can result in the project costing more than originally budgeted and funded, leaving a shortfall to be picked up. One participant shared their experience with obtaining quotes:

*“Our biggest challenge... is the unpredictability with expenses when we’re trying to get quotes on project... No company... will hold a quote more than two weeks cause they don’t know what the price of fuel is gonna do...”* (RURAL PARTICIPANT, 2023)

## 4.2.2 Legislation

Legislation, regulation, and policy (such as procurement practices and governance processes) can have a significant impact on the ability of municipalities to engage with sustainability initiatives. They can provide structure and strength but can also be restrictive and perceived as irrelevant to local context.

### Facilitators

Few participants brought up the role of legislation in facilitating sustainability, but those who did referenced its use in placing mandatory standards on councils that would otherwise reject sustainable development plans. Some participants expressed frustration at being unable to discuss issues such as climate change and reported that swings between political approaches when new council members are elected lead to a lack of stability, and they felt that clear legislation could help to bridge these gaps. Others welcomed legislation that helps the province to grow in a sustainable way.

*“... honestly the key facilitators for sustainability would be the provincial and federal government putting policies in place that we have to follow... So, if your council changes... [that] provides some stability.” (RURAL PARTICIPANT, 2023)*

### Barriers

Conversely, other participants saw any form of legislation as restrictive, on a sliding scale from those who reported legislation as inconvenient to those who saw no place at all for any form of provincial or federal government control over their individual plans and actions. Several participants mentioned the negative impacts of the provincial landfill decommissioning project. One participant mentioned the challenges caused by moving policy timelines, and another indicated that they see it as a misalignment of priorities, limiting their ability to proceed with other initiatives that are more locally relevant. Several participants mentioned energy production policies and targets for energy efficiency measures that have been set by the federal government. Some participants saw the move away from fossil fuels as idealistic and believed that, if it did ever happen, it would be many years in the future. Others reported the potential impact on municipalities and communities of losing multiple forms of employment in quick succession.

*“... a lot of communities... if they have to pay for that landfill decommission, it'll bankrupt them. So that's an example of a regulatory burden. Or a program structure burden that is totally screwing up what could be good stuff.”*

(SMALL URBAN PARTICIPANT, 2023)

*"This is one of the best places I've ever lived, but out in the middle of nowhere. If we lose 300 jobs, there's no place to replace those 300 jobs unless we can find something, and that doesn't happen without huge local government expense."*

(RURAL PARTICIPANT, 2023)

### 4.2.3 Planning

Sustainability is rooted in long-term strategic and succession planning. The Brundtland report, *Our Common Future* (Brundtland, 1987), defines sustainability as "development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." In that sense, the very essence of sustainability is the preservation of Saskatchewan communities and municipalities. The narratives shared by participants on planning issues highlight some ongoing and pervasive tensions in achieving a balanced approach to economic, social, and environmental priorities in Saskatchewan.

#### Facilitators

The need for long-term municipal strategic and succession planning was emphasized by many participants as a primary facilitator of sustainable development. Alongside this, having management and councils that are open-minded and receptive to new ideas was viewed as important to ensure that plans were turned into actions. Recognition of the potential impact of not planning for the future was also noted, along with the need for modernization and innovation. The latter involves a degree of uncertainty and risk, and one participant stated that their municipality is taking this approach to ensure that they are modernizing as much as possible. Another is looking into bylaw changes to assist residents who find themselves unable to stay in their current home but wish to stay in the area, for example by allowing the construction of garden suites or tiny homes in the grounds of family homes. This would provide both young and old with a financially viable and/or practical option rather than having to move away due to property prices or care needs.

*"We've got people within our city management that are very forwards thinking... That is what has helped us all along... Not just for tomorrow but thinking five years down the road as to how we're going to do it."* (SMALL URBAN PARTICIPANT, 2023)

#### Barriers

A lack of planning was widely reported as a significant barrier to sustainability. Several participants mentioned the lack of strategic or even project-based plans in their municipality and indicated that any actions tend to be reactive rather than proactive. This often requires an immediate response and removes the potential for any long-term planning. There were also varying definitions of the term *forward thinking*. For some representatives, forward thinking was having a committed plan that outlined

future directions, but for others it meant progressive and innovative thinking that sought to modernize approaches to governance and implement sustainability initiatives. There were many different perceptions of what constitutes sustainable development, or even if it is a legitimate objective. Creating and implementing planning strategies based on unclear foundations and potentially unresolved conflicts in personal opinions can be challenging. Community priorities can change swiftly, and it is not always possible for governance to keep up with such trends. Some participants also reported that they are being pressured into decisions by lobby groups outside their municipalities.

*"[Some municipalities] don't have such a thing as a strategic plan. They don't have plans about what they're going to do next year or the year after; five years down the road, 10 years—nothing like that. There's no planning."*

(SMALL URBAN PARTICIPANT, 2023)

*"We always talk about proactive versus reactive. And I think a lot of what we do is all reactive. We're not proactive thinkers... We don't know what's happening through trends that's coming up in the future."* (SMALL URBAN PARTICIPANT, 2023)

#### 4.2.4 Authenticity

A community's sense of authenticity is important to ensure the identification and preservation of the local culture and environment, both natural and man-made. It has close links to community and planning but emerged as a separate and more nuanced concept during data analysis. To be successful, sustainability initiatives must be locally relevant with community support. To be relevant, the authentic nature of the area needs to be established beforehand. And to be authentic is to be true to the culture, values, and spirit of a place, and acknowledge that every place and community is unique. For example, the cultural diversity of a large city municipality will generally be different and on a larger scale than that of a small rural municipality.

**Place-based governance** is an effective strategy to build on the authenticity and identity of a place and its community. It can help to engage communities, activating (or strengthening) a sense of belonging, and subsequent motivation to become more involved with activities and municipality initiatives. Informed decision-making based on the best information available, and involving the community throughout the process, can help to ensure that not only is the authenticity of the municipality identified, but also that sustainable development plans are implemented to ensure that authenticity is preserved into the future.

## Facilitators

The need to acknowledge the uniqueness of individual municipalities was noted by several participants, who saw it as an opportunity for the planning system to build on the strengths of the various stakeholders in their communities:

*“... communities have to define who they are and then, approach their challenges with authenticity... authenticity is one of the most important things... If we... have honest discussions, then we can work together to build a better community.”*

(SMALL URBAN PARTICIPANT, 2023)

## Barriers

Several participants spoke with great passion about the perceived lack of knowledge and practical understanding on the part of the federal and provincial governments about life in small rural communities. They explained that it was essential to emphasize that every municipality is unique and that treating them in the same way and expecting them to deliver outcomes to the same standard and at the same time – a so-called cookie-cutter policy – is not a suitable approach.

*“...people are not understanding in the Saskatchewan context.”*

(SMALL URBAN PARTICIPANT, 2023)

### 4.2.5 Community

To build strong, resilient, and vibrant places, municipalities must understand the concerns of their communities and build good relationships with them. It is the community that will live with the impacts of planning decisions, so it is vital to involve them at every stage of a sustainability initiative, from the concept through the decision-making process to the development. This ensures that they understand the value of such projects and that their aspirations and concerns are acknowledged and incorporated where possible. It can also foster additional grassroots initiatives and local networks, resulting in a larger benefit than originally anticipated. The concept of public engagement in developments is widely encouraged, but the planning system is a complex mechanism controlled by statutory requirements and filled with jargon. This can result in people being overwhelmed, feeling unable to contribute or feeling they have little impact. As such, to reach and engage with the whole community, municipalities may need to be creative in their approaches and must ensure that public communication is clear, relevant, and accessible. These aspects will be discussed in more detail in **Sections 4.2.8–4.2.10**.



## Facilitators

Many participants acknowledged the important role of the community in creating policy and directing initiatives, with some noting that a change in thinking may be required to fully implement successful sustainable development. One participant noted that the sense of community can play a large role in encouraging new residents to stay and engage with local activities:

*"...[if they] feel like a part of the community it's the best place to start, and if they feel welcome and if they feel like they're making a difference they're gonna stick around."*

(SMALL URBAN PARTICIPANT, 2023)

## Barriers

Several strong community barriers were discussed, including the current lack of community interest in engaging with local governance and recruiting volunteer positions. Many also noted that community involvement typically revolved around the same group of people who had been active for a long time, or small vocal minority groups who are not fully representative of the municipality's community.

*"It's hard finding volunteers... everybody wants these services and wants everything but aren't willing to volunteer. ...things just have to be put on the side until we do get volunteers stepping up... it's not sustainable. It's not affordable."*

(SMALL URBAN PARTICIPANT, 2023)

Participants from across the municipal categories noted that a major concern for residents was the lack of transportation opportunities and its impact on community wellbeing and sustainability. Participants from rural areas had the strongest views, primarily citing the cost of running a motor vehicle and the recent cancellation of the provincial rural bus system. The loss of this bus system, and the subsequent impacts, was reported by a wide range of participants, highlighting the importance that all Saskatchewan municipalities place on transport links. Participants from cities and larger urban areas noted that their transportation issues were challenging due to their authentic need to cater for residents varying in socio-economic status. Some residents were concerned with the reduction of inter-provincial air travel options and the termination of Western Canadian routes by a large coach company, while others worried about local bus services and safe walking routes. The Saskatchewan weather must also be taken into account when considering transport issues in all areas of the province, particularly in the winter when temperatures often fall below  $-40^{\circ}\text{C}$ .

*"... more and more people saying, 'Listen, I can't afford to drive into the city every day.' I have a 20-minute commute but still I might spend \$500 dollars a month on fuel. That's quite a bit for some people."* (RURAL PARTICIPANT, 2023)

*"We used to have a provincial transportation system and... I know of some seniors who have had to move from smaller communities into a city to get access to health services cause they used to take the bus and they can't do that anymore."*

(CITY PARTICIPANT, 2023)

Another significant barrier that emerged during the discussion of transport is the limited access to healthcare services experienced in many Saskatchewan municipalities. Accessing healthcare was identified as a particular concern for the aging population in Saskatchewan, many needing frequent or continuous medical attention and supported housing. While rural and smaller urban participants conveyed the greatest concern with the lack of local facilities, staffing shortages and long travel times to hospitals (linked to the transport issues discussed above) also affected the cities and larger urban municipalities. For example, although a large city may have several hospitals within its boundary, they must serve populations in the tens of thousands, so wait times in emergency rooms can often exceed 6 hours. One rural participant reported that their community sees a lot of residents go into healthcare training but then stay where they trained (usually a city), move elsewhere, or are unable to return to their home community due to the lack of employment options:

*"... we have a lot of people from the area that go into healthcare, but then they don't come back. ...limitations around housing, jobs, loss of the health centre, I guess, primary care centres are being closed down in smaller communities."*

(RURAL PARTICIPANT, 2023)

It is also challenging for municipalities to improve their engagement with underserved groups in the community and encourage their involvement in planning and decision-making processes. This is discussed in **Section 4.2.10**. The final topics discussed under the theme of community were demographic and population trends. They result in positive and negative impacts, and differences in priorities between the municipal categories. They are discussed individually in **Sections 4.3–4.6**.

## **4.2.6 Partnerships**

Municipalities are increasingly expected to take on more roles and responsibilities in a wide range of areas, which is easier to accommodate for municipalities with large budgets and populations but seemingly impossible for some smaller communities that are faced with population decline and small budgets. Furthermore, large-scale sustainability initiatives can cross jurisdictional boundaries or be outside a single municipality's scope. Partnerships can overcome obstacles that stand in the way of successful sustainable development, through aspects such as joint funding, knowledge sharing, and networking opportunities. There is also a growing trend that many larger funding organizations and higher levels of government expect to see some form of collaboration on sustainability proposals, such as partnering with a neighbouring

municipality, a nonprofit group, or a local business. Collaborations can offer many opportunities, but they also need careful management. Participants from all municipalities shared their experiences of partnerships, reporting varying opinions and degrees of success. The creation of shared goals can be complex and messy, particularly considering the unique authenticities of Saskatchewan municipalities (Section 4.2.4), but it is important to move away from individualistic thinking and remember the short-term and long-term benefits for all.

### Facilitators

Many participants reported positive benefits they had experienced from working in partnerships, with some offering practical advice to facilitate an effective partnership. A common recommendation was to ensure that everyone involved understands why the project is being initiated and everyone joins with a genuine desire to improve their community now and in the future. This included putting personal or historical conflicts to one side and being resilient in the face of failure.

*"You have to throw that ego out and understand that what you're trying to do is the betterment for your citizens and for your future. Right? ... what you do now, any decision you make now, is what you do for the future."* (SMALL URBAN PARTICIPANT, 2023)

One participant suggested that a central organization could be established to provide expert technical advice to municipalities, noting the challenge of access to knowledge. Another acknowledged that the small municipalities in their area had limited budgets, and considered how they can build relationships that may lead to partnerships. One possibility was the central organization also being a networking hub.

*"It's unrealistic to expect every single municipality to have someone who's an expert in water and water treatment. It's setting up a system where ... many different municipalities can access that expertise."* (RURAL PARTICIPANT, 2023)

The use of partnerships to create policy and guidance publications, as well as material initiatives, was also discussed. One participant explained how their municipality has successfully worked with neighbouring municipalities, local service providers such as the police and fire fighters, community organizations, and funding partners, to produce an emergency plan for disaster scenarios such as extreme weather events. This extremely valuable document, which potentially saves lives, would not have been possible without the creation of the partnership.

*"... we have the emergency plan ... and we're funding that with a lot of different communities so that we can put all our equipment together, all our resources together."* (RURAL PARTICIPANT, 2023)

## Barriers

Partnerships are not always successful – they can be difficult to build and easily fall apart. Several barriers preventing the use of partnerships to achieve sustainable governance and development were identified by the participants, including the challenge of establishing such relationships. For some this was a logistical or geographical challenge, and for others it was the reluctance of neighbouring councils to collaborate in local efforts. Changes in staff or council membership were cited as a barrier to sustainable development due to the resulting change in attitudes and policy approaches. This included both the participants' municipalities and partnering municipalities, which often led to disagreements that blocked sustainability initiatives.

*"It's all good to talk about partnerships. But if your closest partner is 80 miles away, it's a little tough."* (SMALL URBAN REPRESENTATIVE, 2023)

One participant explained that they share a town office with another municipality, which achieved greater efficiency and fostered a feeling of a large, joined community. But this raised an issue for other participants, who noted a fear that engaging in partnerships will open the way for mandatory municipal amalgamation by the provincial government, which some municipalities strongly oppose. The fragility of partnerships was discussed by one participant, stressing the need for careful, focused direction and management.

*"... there are things that work well at regional level and there's things that work well at a community level. ...There are places where we should cooperate, and there's places where we should do our own thing."* (RURAL PARTICIPANT, 2023)

*"All it takes is one bad apple. I've seen it where one guy is elected who wants to argue and then things deteriorate really fast."* (RURAL PARTICIPANT, 2023)

### 4.2.7 Skills

Knowledge and skills capacity was identified as a major factor influencing the success or failure of sustainable development for many participants. For the purposes of this research, *skills* refer to professional and/or governance knowledge and capabilities, whereas public awareness is considered in **Section 4.2.8** under *education*. The lack of suitably qualified and experienced personnel was seen as a considerable barrier to sustainable municipalities by a wide range of participants. In particular, the concept of sustainability was discussed, and how different perceptions and attitudes can affect the progress of initiatives.

## Facilitators

The main facilitator identified under this theme was to ensure that municipalities have a sufficient number of staff in place, and that sustainability training opportunities are

relevant and accessible. There is a recognized need to improve awareness and knowledge of sustainable development principles, which could involve both formal training (such as qualifications) as well as informal approaches such as work shadowing. Some participants considered future staff training, raising the need to engage younger generations and encourage them to explore opportunities within the sector. This will help to reduce the current skills gap and retain resident workers in Saskatchewan. Some participants furthered discussions by considering the individual skills that would greatly benefit the municipality and help administrators to carry out their roles, including skills such as negotiation, media engagement, and event planning.

*"We want to gain some of those high school students so that they can understand and learn that municipal administration is a great career choice."*

(ORGANIZATIONAL PARTICIPANT, 2023)

## Barriers

The shortage of suitably qualified and experienced staff was a major concern for many of the participants. Many relayed the challenges they have experienced, or are experiencing, in recruiting and retaining staff, particularly qualified administrators.

*"Experience! Experienced administrators... there are no administrators out there."*

(RURAL PARTICIPANT, 2023)

*"Our biggest sustainability issue right now, I believe, is finding people to do the work. ... if there's no one there to fix it, we're screwed basically. Administrators, grader operators, utility guys. That's our biggest issue."* (RURAL PARTICIPANT, 2023)

One aspect of the current skills gap discussed by many participants was grant writing. Applications for grants can be technically complex and time-consuming and are often sensitive to nuanced changes in trends that determine whether or not a project is successful. It is therefore challenging for municipal staff to complete applications while also performing their many other duties.

*"You have to manage that grant, it takes capacity... It's a whole administrative process, so it's not just the writing, it's the whole shebang of it."* (CITY PARTICIPANT,

2023)

Several participants brought up the often-unrealistic expectations that are placed on municipal staff in terms of skills. For example, one person's work week can consist of responsibilities in finance, engineering, and ecology, each of which is a specialist profession. Some participants were keen for their administrators to attend training, but they are so tied up with their day-to-day duties that they do not have the free time to research suitable courses or to be away from the office. The issues of succession planning and the municipal retention of skills and knowledge were also discussed, with many participants agreeing that they had experienced it to some degree.

*"I'm the only person in my office, so every time there's a new change, every time there's new regulations or a grant that needs to be written or different programs out there, ... it all falls on me to learn."* (RURAL PARTICIPANT, 2023)

*"It's pretty tough to grow and be proactive when you're just putting out fires."*  
(SMALL URBAN PARTICIPANT, 2023)

Many participants commented that the expertise of councillors is necessary to lead and manage municipal initiatives. Councillors need to be champions to drive sustainability in their municipalities, but some are more forward-thinking than others. Several participants discussed the challenges they had experienced in attempting to educate councillors and mayors on current issues, such as sustainability, by getting them to attend training courses. This lack of knowledge and awareness leads to possibly one of the largest barriers preventing the province-wide development of sustainable municipalities in Saskatchewan: the refusal of some municipal governments to engage with sustainability initiatives. Participants shared how this ranged from individuals following the path of least resistance through inaction, to climate change denial and blunt refusal to acknowledge sustainable development as a worthwhile concept. Unfortunately, this could result in substantial negative impacts for the whole community, ranging from tokenistic policies to a heightened risk in communities should an extreme weather event occur with no emergency plan in place.

*"I have an entire council that just came on board, and not one, Mayor down, would take it [training course]."* (RURAL PARTICIPANT, 2023)

*"My council, they're old school. I don't know if I've got even one on council that really believes that climate change is a thing. It's a struggle in rural Saskatchewan."*  
(RURAL PARTICIPANT, 2023)

#### 4.2.8 Education

Education was discussed in the context of public awareness and knowledge surrounding sustainability. Its importance was recognized not only for its intrinsic value, but also that the provision of public education will ultimately lead to a community that understands and respects sustainable development approaches. This will hopefully lead to individuals who are willing to support sustainability initiatives and are active in local governance, either as volunteers or trained personnel for the municipality. **Value education** is one of the most powerful and proven vehicles for action on sustainability. It can facilitate holistic teaching and learning strategies that are equitable and inclusive, while also attending to the strengths and needs of diverse learners. It promotes both technical skills for sustainability and respect for peoples' varying beliefs, values, and attitudes, with the aim of helping to create a more reflective, compassionate, and just society. Education should not just be about what you know

but also how to think, which includes the development of reasoning, enquiry, and big-picture skills, all of which are essential when considering sustainable development.

### Facilitators

Municipalities can play an important role in public awareness and education. Public education on sustainability facilitated by local governments and stakeholders, in consultation with wider provincial organizations, is essential to ensure that the information being provided is relevant and correctly targeted to its authentic audience. It must also be accessible, bringing education and training opportunities to the community rather than requiring community members to seek them out. This approach can facilitate a network of awareness and knowledge sharing that connects a wide variety of community groups. It allows everyone to find their own understanding of sustainability and what is important to them.

*“...that’s what I thought sustainability was... trying to live in a more peaceful harmony with Earth and to... coexist with nature... and keep Earth sustainable for future generations.” (RURAL PARTICIPANT, 2023)*

All municipality publications, such as bylaws and meeting minutes, are public-domain material, but those with potentially the greatest educational value in terms of sustainability awareness are the official community plan (OCP) and the emergency plan (EP). The OCP provides a comprehensive policy framework to guide the physical, environmental, economic, social, and cultural development of the municipality and can facilitate understanding by placing sustainability goals and actions into the local context. The EP is crucial for public safety and provides an opportunity to explore why natural hazards and disasters are becoming more frequent and what can be done to increase community resilience to the effects.

*“...we had a tornado touch down... so being ready ...has been really important for us in terms of sustainability... and other extreme weather events we’re trying to mitigate.” (RURAL PARTICIPANT, 2023)*

Some participants discussed the role of sustainability education in agricultural areas. The conversations were respectful to farmers and considered the perspective of farmers along with those of the participants. Discussion centered on the lack of awareness of ecological damage that can be caused by some agricultural activities, and why this matters. One participant noted that they see very little pollution in their municipality, so it can be difficult to visualize and appreciate the big-picture combined effects of polluting activities. A respectful education program that acknowledges the local context but also advises of any legal requirements could be one approach to reach these communities.

*"We live in an area where we don't see a lot of pollution. We don't have a lot of understanding of why this top-down rule make sense for us, so the buy-in is probably a little limited..."* (RURAL PARTICIPANT, 2023)

## Barriers

Despite recognition of the importance of sustainability awareness and education for all municipal residents, there are several barriers that prevent its implementation. Due to the large physical size of the province and the small population size, Saskatchewan has many small and remote communities. Several participants mentioned this and the need to ensure that they are not forgotten during the implementation of any educational programs. The socio-economic status of communities across the province also varies, with one in five children living in poverty. Many children thus miss out on sustainability-based educational opportunities due to issues such as a lack of suitable transport. The sad irony of this situation was noted by one participant, who also conveyed the disappointment felt by her staff.

*"...we can't attract the underserved... because there is ...no ability to participate. ... an education program that serves only those that can afford to pay for it, doesn't sit very well with any of my staff."* (ORGANIZATIONAL PARTICIPANT, 2023)

One participant recalled how she used to go on school field trips as a child, which helped her to develop a connection to the land. In recent years, due to the risk of legal action and conflicts with parents, these have largely now been phased out, meaning that children are missing out on memorable experiences that may help them to appreciate the natural world and understand the importance of sustainable development. Emerging from discussion around school experiences, one participant highlighted the rates of literacy in the province and how this could have a serious impact on the effectiveness of any educational programs that rely on printed texts, such as pamphlets.

*"It is absolutely a barrier... as soon as you see a huge reduction in funding... those extracurricular or experiential learning programs are starting to go by the wayside..."* (ORGANIZATIONAL PARTICIPANT, 2023)

*"... through a literacy lens. A startling statistic is that one of three adults in our province struggles with literacy."* (ORGANIZATIONAL PARTICIPANT, 2023)

### 4.2.9 Communication

Effective communication with residents and taxpayers is necessary for municipalities if they are to create and maintain good relationships and engage communities in planning and sustainability initiatives.



## Facilitators

One participant shared the view that the whole communication process should be open and transparent throughout the levels of government to facilitate progress towards sustainability. They felt that this would help to alleviate some of the doubt and suspicion surrounding decision-making in governments.

Another participant noted that effective internal and stakeholder communication is also essential for a sustainable municipality. The ability to network and share knowledge and ideas can be invaluable, and the creation of a Community of Practice (CoP) can facilitate this. Further information on this approach and its application to sustainable municipal governance can be found in **Section 5.7**.

*"I think that networking is huge, huge. Especially for a newcomer [to a municipal administrator role]." (Rural participant, 2023)*

## Barriers

Access to technology and the ability to understand it were identified as barriers by several participants. They explained that, although they try to keep up with modern advances in communication such as email, many of their residents prefer more traditional methods such as town halls, newsletters, and notices in places such as the convenience store or church.

*"...we've also got a demographic, many of whom are less computer literate than I am. Some of them don't have computers at all; wouldn't know what to do with them; how to turn them on." (SMALL URBAN PARTICIPANT, 2023)*

In keeping with the discussions surrounding communication technology, many of the participants discussed the role of social media in the planning process and reported how they had experienced it quickly changing from a friendly, convenient, and efficient way of engaging with the community to a platform for hate speech and harassment. This included the distribution of false or misleading information, negative political comments, fearmongering, and attempts to create a mob mentality within the community. Several participants explained that their municipality reluctantly only used social media now as a form of electronic noticeboard, inactivating the commenting and sharing functions. Even those municipalities that still managed to maintain an interactive social media presence acknowledged that they had experienced the negative side.

*"It's terrible. The trolls are everywhere. It's almost to the point where nobody even wants to be in this business anymore. It's like, the misinformation and the crowd mongering. Add that to the barriers, for sure." (CITY PARTICIPANT, 2023)*

The need to consider the intended audience and the subsequent communication methods and language accessibility was also raised by one participant. It can be difficult to engage with underserved groups in the community and encourage them to be involved in the planning and decision-making process. This particularly affects residents whose first language is not English (Section 4.2.10)

#### 4.2.10 Outreach

As discussed above, relationship building, communication strategies, and education programs are needed when engaging with communities to ensure the success of sustainable development initiatives. However, communities include diverse people with varying cultures, religions, languages, gender identities, accessibility requirements, and long-held traditional connections to the land. These underserved groups may be marginalized or even excluded when utilizing standard governance engagement methods. Municipalities have an ethical responsibility to ensure that all members of their communities can engage with sustainability initiatives if they wish, so additional efforts are required to support their inclusion. This section considers how municipal sustainability initiatives can engage with underserved groups to ensure that the whole community is represented, and some of the corresponding barriers. The discussions surrounding engagement of underserved groups are presented individually to allow for strategic analysis of the data, but inclusivity by definition should embrace and celebrate all forms of diversity simultaneously.

*“There’s challenges with engaging underserved groups. The key thing to remember is that it takes time. ...there is years and years of mistrust to overcome. ... I think there is great potential to engage all of these groups going forward.”*

(CITY PARTICIPANT, 2023)

#### New Canadians

Many participants discussed their engagement with newcomers to Canada in a very positive way, acknowledging and appreciating the diversity they bring to communities. Some brought up employment opportunities for newcomers to Canada, with several participants stating that they had successful newcomer employees. One participant expressed disappointment that some newcomers are not allowed to continue their previous career paths, particularly those in healthcare, which is a disadvantage for the whole community. The need to consider different cultures is important when engaging with newcomers. Although some come from culturally similar regions, such as the United States or Europe, there are nuanced differences such as colloquial terminology for everyday items, or preferences on sports facilities. Others experience a more dramatic change from their original culture and may have very limited English language skills. Community groups are extremely important in these scenarios by providing guidance on cultural norms and acting as interpreters for day-to-day items

such as food labels. Building relationships with such community groups can be extremely positive because this can provide information.

*"Why does it have to be so difficult for people who are trained- well-trained- in other countries to be able to find a job here? It's almost like we don't want them here to have these good jobs. ...there's work for 'em."* (RURAL PARTICIPANT, 2023)

*"They want different recreational amenities than our typical group wants. ...they want, say, basketball... So, having conversations and acting with them is what I would [advise]."* (CITY PARTICIPANT, 2023)

One approach to engage newcomers in sustainability initiatives is to encourage volunteering, because newcomers are often keen to find out about where they live, to integrate into the community, and to make new acquaintances. Volunteering offers a path to achieve these social goals and raises awareness of municipal issues, potentially inspiring newcomers to become involved in local politics and sustainable development. One participant brought up the uncomfortable reality that newcomers may experience racism when attempting to build their new life in Canada. It is essential that municipalities recognize this and act upon it, ensuring that such attitudes do not proliferate by educating staff about different cultures and producing material in a range of languages and formats.

*"...especially [for] newcomers... the best place to get together and feel welcomed is volunteering... creating that inclusive space where people... feel like a part of the community."* (SMALL URBAN PARTICIPANT, 2023)

## **2SLGBTQ+ community**

The engagement of the 2SLGBTQ+ community in municipal sustainability initiatives was discussed by a small number of participants. One shared how their municipality has initiated a project focused on improving engagement with the 2SLGBTQ+ community, and another noted that they have adapted their facilities to include gender-neutral washrooms. There was also an awareness that inclusion is extremely important to many young people, with one participant advising that they believed elements, such as the use of pronouns, will soon become the norm in everyday working environments. Municipalities need to ensure that they are educated in these aspects and that they are completely open to these ongoing cultural changes if they wish to have effective engagement with the 2SLGBTQ+ community, and all young adults in the near future.

*"...there is a project... making sure that we are inclusive of LGBTQ2S+ people. So, they are looking at our policies and a number of other issues. ...it's to hear from people with those lived experiences."* (CITY PARTICIPANT, 2023)

*"...kids don't want to work in environments where there's a refusal to use pronouns..."*

(ORGANIZATIONAL PARTICIPANT, 2023)

## People With Disabilities

Most participants spoke positively about their municipality's efforts to facilitate accessibility, with many adapting public facilities like washrooms. One participant described a community-led project that has ensured access to parts of their recreation facility that were previously inaccessible. No participants described how they would engage more people with disabilities in sustainable initiatives and governance, but the proactive and positive approach shown by many municipalities will help to foster good relationships that lead to high levels of engagement. Municipal partnerships with local organizations can also play a role by indirectly encouraging interest in governance. For example, one organizational participant described how accessibility is very high among their priorities, enabling people with a disability to experience their mission and work. Visitor engagement and action could then be encouraged in a related area, such as wildlife conservation or waste management.

*"[they created] a long sheet of patio stones from the start of the park all the way into the beach water so that anybody can go through the grass... even into the water and just enjoy a bit."* (ORGANIZATIONAL PARTICIPANT, 2023)

*"Any new swimming pool that is being built now is like a beach access ...you can just walk in. ...So, trying to make all of our facilities a lot more accessible is really important."* (CITY PARTICIPANT, 2023)

## Seniors

Seniors were identified as an underserved group by many participants, but this primarily reflected the lack of access to local healthcare (**Section 4.2.5**). Some participants mentioned the need for adaptations when considering engagement with seniors, but these were concurrent with general communication strategies (**Section 4.2.9**). One participant noted the importance of encouraging seniors to engage with sustainability initiatives and decision-making because this would benefit from their historical knowledge and lived experience.

*"We shouldn't overlook the wisdom and the experience of our... seniors... how valuable they are to our communities and the amount of knowledge they can give back to us."* (RURAL PARTICIPANT, 2023)

## Youth

Conversations surrounding municipal engagement with youth centred mainly on the role of education (**Section 4.2.8**), the use of technology, awareness of active social politics, and acknowledging their value to a project. One participant noted

that everybody likes to feel acknowledged and valued, and youth are no different, so engagement strategies aimed at youth should focus on and celebrate the unique perspectives, abilities, and approaches that they bring to a sustainability initiative. The use of technology was mentioned frequently, with several participants agreeing that the use of websites and social media had helped them to reach a younger audience. But it was noted that technology changes rapidly and, for example, municipalities need to be prepared to adopt new social media platforms quickly.

*"... the perspective of simply having the innovation and the ideas that youth can bring."* (SMALL URBAN PARTICIPANT, 2023)

*"The younger people... appreciate the website and the social media influence; the information that goes out through there."* (RURAL PARTICIPANT, 2023)

Society is political, so a sustainability challenge that appeals to youth can encourage them to speak out and engage with the governance process. For example, many rural municipalities are facing a depopulation crisis, partly due to the youth leaving in search of employment or because they do not have the financial capacity to compete with the corporations when purchasing land to begin farming. Some may want to move to a city, but others may be reluctant to leave family, friends, and the security of a social or religious community. Communicating with these young residents and raising awareness of sustainability goals may encourage them to engage with the municipality and the governance process on these issues.

*"I think it's not so much of wanting to live in the city, it's having to live at the city... you remove them from our communities."* (RURAL PARTICIPANT, 2023)

*"What can we be doing together that's going to help the whole region... so we don't lose our kids when they graduate grade 12 to other centers; so they come back?"*  
(SMALL URBAN PARTICIPANT, 2023)

## **Low Socio-Economic Status**

The engagement of residents with a low socio-economic status was discussed widely, covering a broad range of traditional demographics. For the purposes of this research, low socio-economic status focused on extreme poverty, such as food insecurity and/or homelessness. This can arise due to poor governance, such as inadequate social policies. Residents with a low socio-economic status may therefore have a negative view of the municipality, making them unwilling to engage in sustainability initiatives. The use of creative engagement strategies that respect and genuinely value their contribution, reaffirming their humanity, can help to build communication pathways.

*“...when you’re trying to discuss policies with people who for instance, are experiencing houselessness, you actually have to go out there and find them where they are and talk to them ...you gotta think a little bit outside the box.”*

(CITY PARTICIPANT, 2023)

*“...we’re the people who see the effect, we see the results of poor social policy and of poor budgeting, and people because they live on our streets and they can’t feed their families in our town.”* (SMALL URBAN PARTICIPANT, 2023)

## Indigenous People

The engagement of Indigenous people in municipal sustainability initiatives was discussed to a limited extent for two reasons. First, the research focused on the municipal governance sector, which is a separate level from the tribal council governance and the federal governance related to reserves. We acknowledge that there is a spectrum of organic engagement between municipal governments and Indigenous people, with some municipalities enjoying successful joint initiatives with neighbouring reserves, but this was beyond the scope of the research. Second, we anticipated input from northern municipalities concerning an Indigenous perspective and knowledge, but we received few responses to invitations.

Some municipalities, particularly the largest cities, have substantial Indigenous populations and must engage effectively with these communities to achieve successful sustainability initiatives. Some participants explained how they worked with Indigenous communities via community hubs and partnerships, or by including Indigenous representatives in the planning process.

*“Working with... First Nations and Metis communities... I see when everybody works together a lot of great things can be done. And a lot of great things within sustainability can be done.”* (ORGANIZATIONAL PARTICIPANT, 2023)

*“Prior to us starting the OCP and zoning bylaw rewrite, we reached out. We invited each different [Indigenous] group to our council meetings... it was very valuable... and I think they [council] learned that the challenges we’re all facing are a lot more similar than what council believed.”* (SMALL URBAN PARTICIPANT, 2023)

Other participants did not recognize a need to consider specific engagement with Indigenous people because they consider them part of the same one community by default. Although this attitude may be well-intentioned, it ignores the need for Indigenous engagement to be respectful of the traumas experienced due to traditional colonial-based governance practices. Municipal engagement strategies should be based around a flexible framework, enabling changes that will come from communication, openness to other ways of knowing, and approaching challenges in new ways such as storytelling.

“...we don’t talk about it very much because we consider that they are included.”

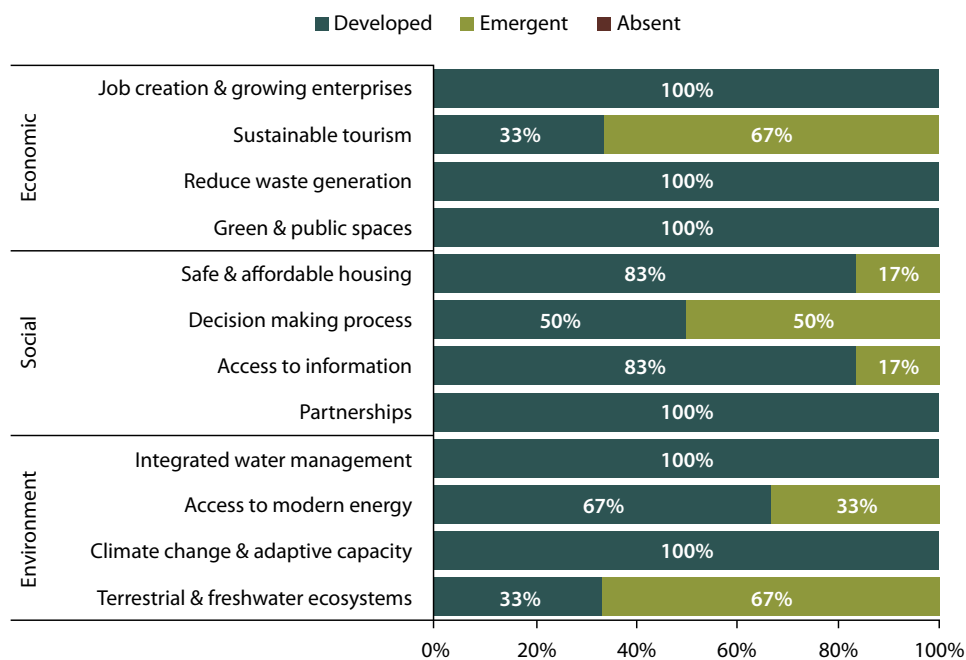
(SMALL URBAN PARTICIPANT, 2023)

“...we need to try and make them feel part of the community, then help them with the challenges they face with respect... but also ensuring that we’re working together for the betterment of the entire community.” (CITY PARTICIPANT, 2023)

## 4.3 Cities

### 4.3.1 Quantitative Snapshot

Overall, Saskatchewan’s cities have proactively engaged with sustainable development principles. The results show that Saskatchewan’s cities are achieving equilibrium in the three sustainability areas, with no *absent* scores for any indicator. Further work is required in areas relating to sustainable tourism and biodiversity conservation. A breakdown of the analysis for city municipalities is shown in **Figure 4.2**.



**Figure 4.2: Distribution of policy status in cities (n = 6) by indicator.**

### 4.3.2 Qualitative Distinctness

In addition to the shared core themes discussed in **Section 4.2**, city participants discussed the values of biodiversity and the environment, specifically open spaces, and parks, and how management that incorporates sustainability principles can have multiple benefits. The contribution of green spaces to resident wellbeing was

acknowledged, as well as the importance of ensuring that any development considers potential negative impacts on wildlife.

*"...the more we can make our designed, engineered facilities mimic what Mother Nature does in the area, the more likely she will take it over for us and run it and maintain it for us."* (CITY PARTICIPANT, 2023)

*"People need reprieve from concrete in the city. They like the green public spaces. It's part of a healthy community."* (CITY PARTICIPANT, 2023)

### 4.3.3 CITIES EXEMPLAR: YORKTON GREEN PATHWAY PROJECT



Logan Green Park celebrates its opening (LANG, 2023).

<https://regina.ctvnews.ca/a-real-little-gem-city-province-unveil-new-pathways-project-at-logan-green-park-1.6423781>



A worker applies the finishing touches to the newly paved portion of path on Logan Green (OFF, 2022).

<https://www.sasktoday.ca/central/yorkton-this-week/section-of-logan-green-path-paved-5703726>



(BEFORE) Logan Green Pathway Paving Project: City of Yorkton's Recreation and Community Services Department (CITY OF YORKTON, 2021).

<https://www.yorkton.ca/en/index.aspx>



(AFTER) Logan Green Pathway Paving Project: City of Yorkton's Recreation and Community Services Department (CITY OF YORKTON, 2021).

<https://www.yorkton.ca/en/index.aspx>

### OVERVIEW:

Yorkton, the sixth largest city in Saskatchewan, has a population of more than 16,000 people and is continuously growing with a young workforce (Statistics Canada, 2023). The community is highly skilled in sales, as well as trades, transportation, and equipment operations (Statistics Canada, 2023). Many residents also work in business/finance, health, education, law, and societal or government services occupations (Statistics Canada, 2023). Overall, Yorkton is a diverse municipality with a strong balance between manufacturing, commercial, industrial, and agricultural operations (City of Yorkton, 2020).



## LOGAN GREEN PATHWAY CHALLENGES:

Yorkton has clearly prioritized green and public spaces for enjoyable aesthetic and recreational purposes. With over 30 parks, there are plenty of opportunities for all residents to explore and appreciate the outdoors in a safe, inclusive, and beneficial way (City of Yorkton, 2015). Most notable is Logan Green, the city's largest park. The Logan Green Park contains 6 km of pathway weaved throughout a variety of amenities including community garden plots, six multi-use fields, an event staging/warm-up area, a botanic garden, the City of Yorkton tree nursery, the Logan Green commemorative park, the Rotary memorial gardens, and an educational water reclamation site and water management system (City of Yorkton, 2020).

The *Hearts in Motion* Pathway in the Logan Green Park is 'perfect for walking, hiking or cycling' (City of Yorkton, 2015). As of 2021, a portion of the previously gravel pathway was paved with asphalt to better accommodate all users, especially wheelchairs, roller blades, skateboards and strollers. Another new upgrade was the installation of 'solar powered lights every 35 meters along the pathway to ensure public safety and comfort, particularly during the winter months when daylight hours are much shorter' (Off, 2022). The total cost of the project was \$884,835.00 and was split between the federal, provincial, and municipal governments (City of Yorkton, 2021). The federal government's *Investing in Canadian Infrastructure Program* covered \$353,934.00 under the COVID-19 Resilience Stream (City of Yorkton, 2021). This stream was created to assist provinces and territories with funding quick-start, short-term projects that might not otherwise be eligible under existing funding streams. The City of Yorkton used the revitalization of the pathway to implement a flexible, expanded, and accelerated project (Off, 2022). The provincial government contributed \$295,916.00, whereas the City of Yorkton funded the remaining \$235,985.00 (City of Yorkton, 2021). This is an exemplar sustainability project because it encourages the use of green spaces, improves transportation options, supports accessibility and inclusivity for all, increases safety, and strives for energy efficiency.

## RESULTS:

- Increases the utility of the green space by encouraging citizens of Yorkton to be active outdoors.
- Allows for other amenities within the space such as the development of gardens, sports fields, educational water reclamation sites, etc.
- The Logan Green Park can be accessed from Laurier Avenue, Tupper Avenue, Gladstone Avenue and Queen Street, and there are also several parking lots available.

## 4.4 Small Urban Municipalities

### 4.4.1 Quantitative Snapshot

The MSI results for small urban municipalities show a mixed picture of engagement with sustainable development principles. Many plans, policies, and programs were identified as *emergent*, suggesting the issues covered by the indicators are being considered by the municipalities to some extent. The best performance overall was observed for waste management (no *absent* scores) and the poorest was sustainable tourism (53% *absent* scores). A breakdown of the analysis for small urban municipalities is shown in Figure 4.3.

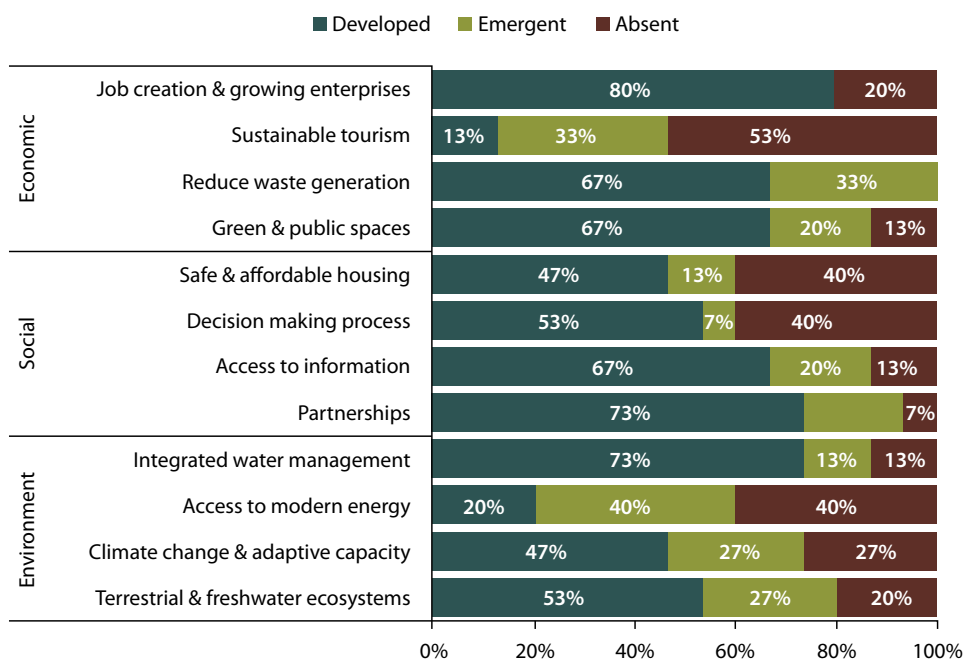


Figure 4.3: Distribution of policy status in small urban municipalities (n = 15) by indicator.

### 4.4.2 Qualitative Distinctness

In addition to the shared core themes discussed in Section 4.2, the participants from small urban municipalities identified many opportunities for growth. This gives the participants optimism for the future, but they also have concerns about the level of housing stock for people moving to their municipalities. Sustainability principles must therefore be incorporated into their planning strategies, ensuring that long-term plans are created so they are prepared for the growth.

*"We have people moving from all over the place [and] there's always growth opportunity and partnership opportunity for us." (SMALL URBAN PARTICIPANT, 2023)*

### 4.4.3 SMALL URBAN EXEMPLAR: LUMSDEN SOLAR PROJECTS



Wastewater Lift Station, Second Ave. (LAST MOUNTAIN TIMES, 2023).

<https://www.lmtimes.ca/lumsden-takes-first-place/>



The solar array in Lumsden is the size of two football fields (ODLUM, 2022).

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/saskatchewan-town-soars-with-solar-and-charts-new-path-1.6430589>



The free EV charging station at Kelln Solar in Lumsden (ODLUM, 2022).

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/saskatchewan-town-soars-with-solar-and-charts-new-path-1.6430589>



The site of solar panels in Lumsden (WIENS, 2020).

<https://regina.ctvnews.ca/lumsden-to-install-solar-panel-array-the-size-of-2-football-fields-1.5077221>

#### OVERVIEW:

The town of Lumsden is a small urban community in the Qu'Appelle Valley, approximately 26 km northeast of Regina (Tourism SK, n.d.). The population of more than 1600 people foster a friendly, vibrant, growing, and progressive community (Tourism SK, n.d.). It is well known as a creative community for artists, which can be observed quickly with one quick drive around the town (Odlum, 2022). Lumsden is also a community that sees environmental matters as a high priority. Most residents have a clear appreciation for the “aesthetic appeal of the nature valley” and “issues of river water pollution, energy conservation, waste reduction, and recycling” (Town of Lumsden, p. 26, 2002). Among many ongoing municipal development initiatives, the town’s implementation of solar energy is the most impressive.

#### LUMSDEN SOLAR PROJECTS CHALLENGES:

The town’s involvement with solar energy began in 2016 when it needed to make some upgrades to its facilities. Mayor Bryan Matheson believed that planning for the future was important and “going solar just made sense” so the town started looking into alternative forms of energy (Odlum/CBC, 2022). Looking at both wind and solar, it was solar panels that ultimately prevailed in the environmental assessment of the area, and this developed into a project (Odlum, 2022). Starting with solar panels that produce 15,000 kWh of energy a year on average, the River Park community building reduced its reliance on SaskPower’s supply by 54% (Odlum, 2022). Not only did this save money monthly, but it was also projected to save \$21,000 over the panels’ lifespan, which is usually more than 20 years (Odlum, 2022). Most people from the community welcomed and supported the project, particularly the young people (Odlum, 2022).

Following this success, the Lumsden town council approved a second solar project in 2020 that would power the local recycling depot and two sewage lift stations (Odlum,

2022). This was a \$1.1 million project funded by Environment and Climate Change Canada's Low Carbon Economy Fund, which is meant to "reduce carbon pollution, save money, and create good jobs" (Government of Canada, 2020). Not only was this project larger than the first, but it is also grid tied and completely net zero (Odlum, 2022).

Next came a much-needed project for the town of Lumsden – replacement of the water treatment plant. At this point, the treatment plant was no longer environmentally safe and did not pass an inspection, allowing new development in the area (Odlum, 2022). The town council weighed their options and determined that "replacing the old facility with something similar was not feasible" due to the increase in water levels from the 2010–2014 wet cycles (Odlum, 2022). With the size of the lagoons containing hazardous contaminants and infiltration into sewer tiles, the town knew the problem must be addressed urgently (Odlum, 2022). Building on their solar experience once again, the town installed an environmentally friendly wastewater treatment facility in 2022 powered by "a solar array the size of two football fields" (Odlum, 2022). This facility produces 616 kW of electricity that can be saved to a 1.2 MW battery energy storage system, which can treat wastewater to accommodate about 2500 people (Last Mountain Times, 2022). It also has room to expand, which could serve more than twice Lumsden's current population (Last Mountain Times, 2022). Using microbes that digest waste followed by exposure to ultraviolet light, levels of contamination in the effluent are in some cases lower than that in the river (Odlum, 2022). As a result, the process is helping to improve local waterways such as the Qu'Appelle River, which has a history of contamination (Silverthorn, 2021). To cover the costs of this \$21 million project, Lumsden applied for funding from both the provincial and federal governments and the cost was split evenly between the three levels of government.

## **RESULTS:**

Together, the three solar projects earned the town of Lumsden first place at the 2023 Saskatchewan Municipal Awards (Philip, 2023). They have also inspired locals in the Lumsden area to take on their own solar or energy-saving projects, such as the following.

- Homeowners added solar panels to their homes.
- Local business Kelln Solar now offers a free EV charging station.
- The local grocery store stopped using plastic bags without government intervention.
- The biathlon training center invested in an environmentally safe snowmaking machine, unique to the province.
- Neighbouring Cowessess First Nation and Muskoday First Nation have active solar projects.

The town of Lumsden prides itself on being a leader in the adoption of solar energy and urges other communities to step up as well. The mayor believes that what Lumsden has done is “achievable everywhere” (Odlum, 2022). With collaboration, tips, and support from leaders such as Lumsden, other municipalities can get started on securing funding, understanding the facilities, developing projects, and bettering their communities in the long term. As of April 26, 2022, Lumsden had begun the process of getting solar-powered streetlights installed and would eventually like to get the arena solar powered too (Odlum, 2022).

## 4.5 Rural Municipalities

### 4.5.1 Quantitative Snapshot

The MSI results for rural municipalities show a mixed picture of engagement with sustainable development principles. The best performance overall was observed for access to information (no *absent* scores) and again sustainable tourism was the poorest (70% *absent* scores), tied with access to modern energy, and climate change and adaptive capacity. A breakdown of the analysis for rural municipalities is shown in Figure 4.4.

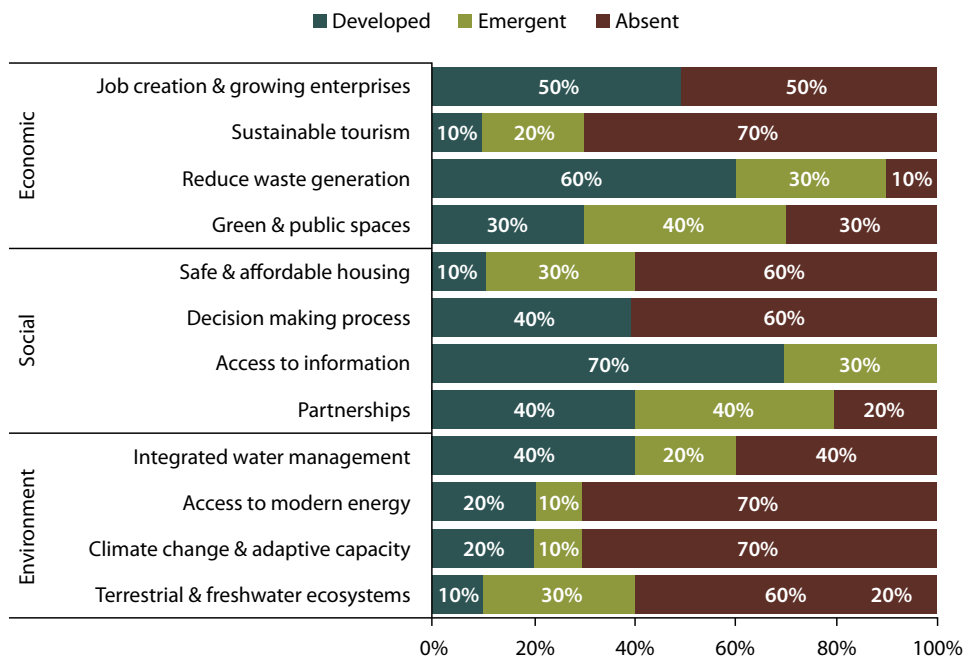


Figure 4.4: Distribution of policy status in rural municipalities (n = 10) by indicator.

## 4.5.2 Qualitative Distinctness

In addition to the shared core themes discussed in Section 4.2, participants from rural municipalities discussed two additional barriers they faced when considering sustainability: access to the internet and depopulation. The lack of reliable internet access was raised by one participant, who noted that it contributed to feelings of disconnection and caused frustration for many residents. But this was countered by another participant, who reported that the Starlink internet service was available to even the most remote areas, and while it was initially prohibitively expensive, the cost has come down substantially in recent years. They suggested that maybe more awareness of internet providers was needed and that some are still under the impression that it is very expensive. The expansion of high-speed internet to rural areas in the province is a significant focus for SARM and SUMA in conjunction with a major service provider.

The primary unique barrier to rural municipal sustainability was strongly expressed as depopulation (population decline). Many rural participants spoke passionately about the causes, effects, and dire future predictions. Issues such as lack of services and job opportunities were driving the younger generations away from farms and into built-up areas. This reduces demand for services and causes their subsequent loss, affecting the next generation who then move away, and the downward cycle continues. One participant felt that it was important to understand the geography of the province, and the scale of the distances involved to some remote communities with low populations. Some participants expressed the feeling that their municipality is just hanging on, trying to be resilient and staying viable. One participant shared their experience of watching a community decline and spoke of the profound negative impact that it has on the environment and sense of place, as well as the people.

*"People are being forced to pack up and sell and move to the city. ... there used to be a thriving community with a combined population of almost a thousand people and that was 30 years ago. Now, combined in the area, 20 people."*

(RURAL PARTICIPANT, 2023)

*"I don't know if the word is sustainability or survivability for some of us."*

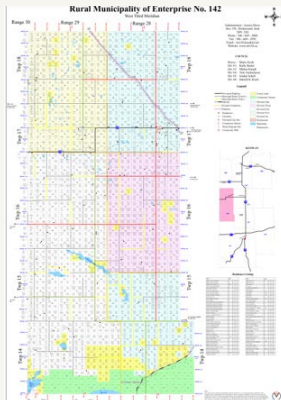
(RURAL PARTICIPANT, 2023)

*"If I'm looking at my community shrinking by... two-thirds... we might as well start rolling up sidewalks... because there'd be nobody here to sustain it."*

(RURAL PARTICIPANT, 2023)

*"I don't know how to describe it but... once it happens to a division, unless it's happened to you, you're not aware of exactly how the whole landscape changes on every level." (RURAL PARTICIPANT, 2023)*

## 4.5.3 RURAL EXEMPLAR: ENTERPRISE RM NO. 142 WASTE MANAGEMENT



Map of Enterprise  
(RM OF ENTERPRISE #142, N.D.)

[https://www.rm142.ca/  
map-of-enterprise](https://www.rm142.ca/map-of-enterprise)



Landfill Information (RM OF  
ENTERPRISE #142, 2023)

[https://www.rm142.ca/  
recycling-landfill](https://www.rm142.ca/recycling-landfill)



RM of Enterprise (RM OF  
ENTERPRISE #142, 2023)

<https://www.rm142.ca/>



RM Recycling | Village of  
Richmond (2023)

[https://www.richmond.ca/  
garbage-pick-up](https://www.richmond.ca/garbage-pick-up)

### OVERVIEW:

The Rural Municipality of Enterprise No. 142 is a small rural community in the south-west corner of Saskatchewan (RM of Enterprise #142, 2023). It is home to approximately 110 people and consists of the Village of Richmond and McLaren Lake Regional Park (RM of Enterprise #142, 2023). Agriculture, oil, and gas are the main resources contributing to the economic prosperity of the area (RM of Enterprise #142, 2023).

### SUMMARY:

As of October 2019, RM No. 142 has had a detailed landfill policy in effect (RM of Enterprise #142, 2023). The three-page document summarizes the key information for its residents such as the landfill's hours of operation and a breakdown of waste-specific fees, followed by 10 descriptive regulations that clearly indicate the types of waste that are acceptable under set conditions (RM of Enterprise #142, 2023).

The regulations:

1. All household garbage **MUST** be bagged.
2. All **CLEAN** wood **MUST** be dumped in the designated pile (includes trees and grass clippings) - Gyproc may be dumped in the garbage pit, please ensure it is at the bottom of the pit. **NO CARDBOARD, PLASTIC, OIL FILTERS, STYROFOAM ETC. CLEAN WOOD ONLY IN BURN PIT!!!!**
3. All asphalt shingles **MUST** be dumped in the designated pile.

4. All white metals MUST be dumped in the designated pile, as indicated by the signs provided.
5. All ratepayers MUST adhere to and pay attention to the signs posted in the landfill site; signs indicate the materials to be dumped in a designated area.
6. Site operator shall indicate the designated areas and MUST be adhered to.
7. No Contractors SHALL be allowed to enter premises on any other days other than on the days and the hours of operation as indicated.
8. Absolutely NO USED TIRES; CEMENT or DEAD ANIMALS can be deposited at the site.
9. Chemical jugs and containers MUST be triple rinsed and disposed of in a designated area.
10. Anyone who does not comply with the regulations will receive a letter of non-compliance and will be prohibited from using the landfill.

There is a site operator on the landfill premises whose role is to assist users in sorting their materials appropriately and will encourage users to only put what is necessary into the waste area (RM of Enterprise #142, 2023). By assisting landfill users, non-compliance contamination is reduced, and non-waste items may be responsibly diverted from the landfill. For example, usable appliances, couches, clothing, etc. can be donated to various groups, such as the Diabetes Foundation or the Salvation Army to be re-used (RM of Enterprise #142, 2023).

A key feature of the landfill policy is a mission statement that affirms that the RM of Enterprise No. 142 recognizes the harm that previous waste disposal processes have had on the environment and is committed to improving their waste management practices for the benefit of future generations.

*"We are in the process of changing the public perception to become more conscientious about the negative effects that improper waste disposal has on the environment. Part of that process is to present landfill as a cleaner, less contaminated, vermin free alternative to the way garbage was dealt with in the past."*

(RM OF ENTERPRISE #142, P.1, 2023)

### **ADDITIONAL DETAILS:**

- A Landfill Committee is appointed each year and consists of three members of the council from the R.M. of Enterprise No. 142 and one member of the council from the Village of Richmond.
- This committee is responsible for dealing with problems as they arise, being consulted on policies for the landfill, and may make recommendations for changes to the landfill, which would be addressed by a resolution of the council of the RM of Enterprise No. 142.



## 4.6 Northern Municipalities

### 4.6.1 Quantitative Snapshot

The MSI results for northern municipalities show a mixed picture of engagement with sustainable development principles, with a slightly higher performance on economic indicators. All northern municipalities were *developed* in terms of job creation and economic growth, but work remains to improve decision making processes and access to modern energy. A breakdown of the analysis for northern municipalities is shown in Figure 4.5.

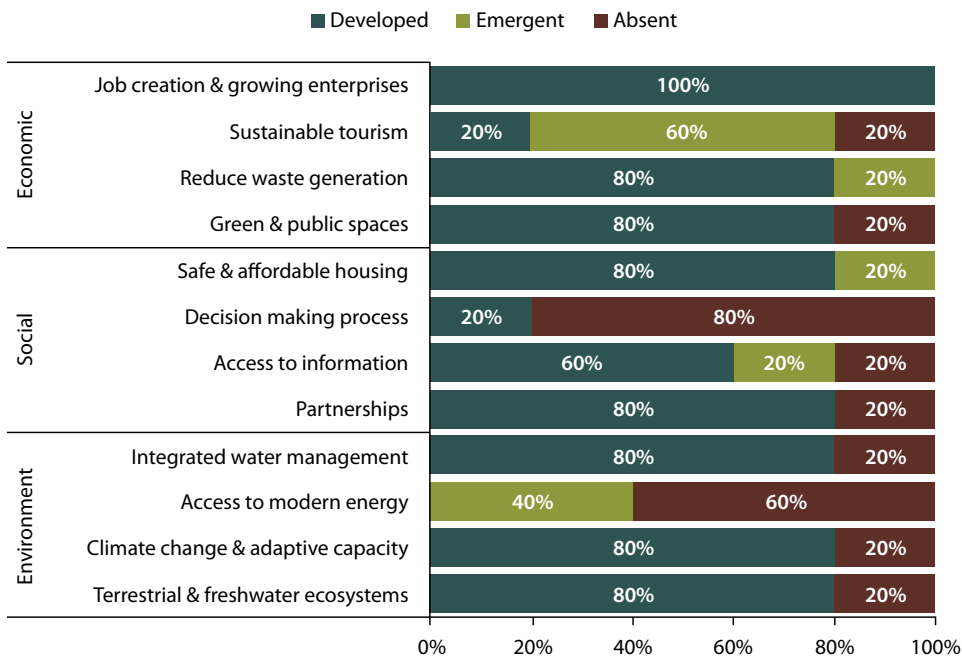


Figure 4.5: Distribution of policy status in northern municipalities (n = 5) by indicator.

### 4.6.2 Qualitative Distinctness

In addition to the shared core themes discussed in Section 4.2, the participants representing northern municipalities discussed the general perception of sustainable development and the differing viewpoints on the commercialization of traditional Indigenous knowledge for tourism.

*“There is this [idea] that sustainability isn’t something that [Northern] people think about... It’s really important to them, but because the word that’s always used is ‘growth’... [and they don’t perceive it in that way].” (ORGANIZATIONAL PARTICIPANT, 2023)*

*"I know there's different viewpoints within the Indigenous community in terms of commercializing, bringing people in, and teaching them... I know there can be a bit of friction... on whether to commercialize that or not."*

(ORGANIZATIONAL PARTICIPANT, 2023)

### 4.6.3 NORTHERN EXEMPLAR: LA RONGE HIGHWAY 102 ECONOMIC MASTER PLAN



Town of La Ronge  
(TOURISM SK, N.D.)  
<https://www.tourismsaskatchewan.com/community/17/la-ronge#sort=relevancy>



The first phase of the Highway 102 Economic Corridor Master Plan.  
(CORNET, 2022A)  
<https://larongenow.com/2022/09/09/highway-102-economic-plan-calls-for-8m-in-municipal-investment/>



The Highway 102 economic plan will be implemented in a several phases over many years. (CORNET, 2023)  
<https://larongenow.com/2023/03/15/highway-102-economic-corridor-plan-calls-for-development-of-truck-stop-in-first-phase/>



The Highway 102 Economic Corridor Master Plan will create a welcoming entrance to the Town of La Ronge.  
(CORNET, 2022B)  
<https://www.westerninvestor.com/british-columbia/la-ronge-envision-8-million-economic-corridor-on-hwy-102-5809012>

#### OVERVIEW:

As a central hub, La Ronge is the largest full-service community in Northern Saskatchewan. It is located on Treaty 6 Territory and the Homeland of the Woodland Cree. La Ronge is approximately 370 km north of Saskatoon and 240 km north of Prince Albert, making it an important resource access point for remote communities further north (Town of La Ronge, 2023). Regional and community efforts are strong, such that the Town of La Ronge works in co-operation with the nearby communities of the Northern Village of Air Ronge and the Lac La Ronge Indian Band (LLRIB) on a variety of initiatives (Town of La Ronge, 2023). Together, the population of the three communities has remained at approximately 5200 (Town of La Ronge, 2023).

Surrounded by Boreal Forest and Lac La Ronge, travellers and visitors from the north or south must pass through the community of La Ronge, giving it the nickname 'the gateway to the north' (Town of La Ronge, 2023). In recognizing the importance of economic development within the Town of La Ronge and the current state of Highway 102, in March 2023 the Town of La Ronge crafted a plan to utilize its 10-year capital budget (Town of La Ronge, 2023). This included the completion of a thorough, 112-page report on the Highway 102 Economic Master Plan to leverage the opportunity for immediate and long-term growth of the town and surrounding area (Town of La Ronge, 2023).

## LA RONGE HIGHWAY 102 CHALLENGES:

The La Ronge Highway 102 Economic Master Plan fosters economic diversity and resilience (Town of La Ronge, 2023). Although the forestry and mining sectors remain essential pillars of the local economy, the plan seeks to nurture other industries, such as tourism, hospitality, and renewable energy, to create a more balanced and sustainable economic landscape.

### Master plan objectives:

- **Infrastructure Enhancement:** Improve and expand the existing roadways, bridges, and transportation networks, including Highway 102, to enhance accessibility and support economic activities.
- **Tourism Development:** Promote La Ronge as a premier destination for eco-tourism, adventure tourism, and cultural experiences, leveraging its proximity to pristine lakes, forests, and Indigenous heritage sites.
- **Investment Attraction:** Encourage private and public investments in key sectors, such as renewable energy projects, value-added forestry, and agri-business, to foster economic growth and job creation.
- **Workforce Development:** Invest in education, skills training, and workforce development programs to equip residents with the skills needed for emerging job opportunities.
- **Sustainable Resource Management:** Embrace sustainable practices in the forestry and mining sectors, ensuring the responsible use of natural resources and promoting environmental stewardship.
- **Cultural Promotion:** Celebrate and preserve Indigenous culture, traditions, and knowledge, fostering a stronger sense of community and attracting cultural tourism.

### Proposed Results:

- The La Ronge Highway 102 Economic Master Plan is expected to attract investments from various sectors, boosting job opportunities and economic growth in the region.
- Improved infrastructure and transportation networks will enhance connectivity and accessibility, attracting businesses and tourists to La Ronge.
- The town's natural beauty and cultural heritage will be leveraged to establish La Ronge as a premier destination for eco-tourism and cultural experiences.
- Emphasizing sustainable resource management will ensure the long-term viability of local industries while preserving the environment for future generations.

## 4.7 Summary

Our findings show that Saskatchewan municipalities are well aware of sustainability initiatives and the concepts of sustainable development, but that uptake and implementation are not always straightforward. Overall, Saskatchewan municipalities have a sound base on which to build new or enhanced policies and plans. The quantitative data (MSI) showed that, from the 36 case studies, city municipalities have the highest average score (21.5) and rural municipalities the lowest (10.6) with small urban municipalities (15.7) and northern municipalities (16.8) occupying similar mid-range positions. The qualitative data revealed that Saskatchewan municipalities differ significantly but share a core group of common experiences relating to factors that facilitate and hinder municipal sustainability initiatives, albeit on a sliding scale.

# Chapter 5. Knowledge Mobilization

## 5.0 Introduction

Knowledge mobilization is necessary for successful research, and it played a key role in our GSM project. The GSM team worked with staff at the JSGS to engage policy-makers, community leaders, researchers, and other stakeholders with the research questions, and transfer our findings to a wide audience. We also fostered the development of a community of practice, enabling discussions and learning to continue beyond the life of this project.

## 5.1 Sustainable Municipalities Stakeholder Database

The Sustainable Municipalities Stakeholder Database (SMSDb) was developed to help the municipal sector remain engaged and enable them to form valuable partnerships as they continue to develop and govern local-level sustainable development. The SMSDb includes more than 1200 stakeholders in 10 different sustainable categories: climate action; consumption and production; economics; energy; innovation; institutions; life on land; partnerships; sustainable communities; and water and sanitation. The SMSDb also includes training programs that develop the skills needed to create sustainable communities, organized in the same manner as the stakeholders.

## 5.2 Public Talk Series

A series of **public talks** was organized to enable public engagement on the topic of sustainability. JSGS faculty and executives-in-residence spoke about sustainability from social, environmental, economic and governance perspectives.

## 5.3 SUMA Tradeshow 2023

Several members of the GSM team attended the 3-day SUMA convention and trade show in April 2023. The objectives of the GSM project were promoted to delegates and vendors, and an additional 50 participants were recruited to take part in the focus groups. Keith Comstock, JSGS executive-in-residence and member of the GSM leadership team, participated in a panel presentation (*Building Trust in Local Government*) at the convention. He was able to use this opportunity to promote the GSM project to more than 100 SUMA delegates.

## 5.4 Media

A comprehensive promotion and advertising campaign was launched, including traditional media (print and radio) and modern digital components. Combining the two approaches helped us to expand our reach to different segments of our target audience in a visible and timely manner. Alternative channels such as a webpage and social media were also utilized to make information more accessible, thus encouraging participation in our events. The advertising campaigns were discontinued on all channels and platforms from 30 March 2023 due to changes in the project format and focus, and the two final public lectures were cancelled.

## 5.5 Additional Knowledge Mobilization Activities

We launched the GSM project with a press release that was distributed by the University of Saskatchewan. We have scheduled interviews with VIPs who attended the roundtables and forum, we have kept JSGS staff, faculty and executives-in-residence engaged with the GSM project via bi-weekly email updates, and we have prepared professionally filmed and edited videos of the events, summary and final reports, and publications for peer-reviewed journals. We conduct regular outreach activities to connect with others working with sustainability. The GSM Advisory Committee members have also promoted the project in their networks where possible.

## 5.6 Issue Briefs

Four plain-English issue briefs have been produced to introduce the concept of sustainable development and explain how it relates to municipal governance. Each issue brief discusses a different area of sustainability, covering *Municipalities and Sustainability*, *Sustainability and Underserved Communities*, *Building Financial Capacity and Skills for Municipalities*, and *Facilitators and Barriers to Municipal Sustainability*.

## 5.7 Community of Practice

Communities of Practice are informal networks where professionals come together to discuss shared problems or challenges. Networking in this manner can be a cornerstone of successful sustainability initiatives. The GSM project created a province-wide community of practice that allowed Saskatchewan municipal administrators to come together by establishing the SMSDb and hosting data collection events. Although the GSM project encouraged and supported the development of a province-wide community of practice, the resources necessary to set up and maintain this informal learning network would need to come from organizations and levels of government at and beyond the municipal level. However, the management and operation of a community of practice must be driven by its members to ensure its success.

# Chapter 6. Future Directions For Saskatchewan Municipal Sustainability

## 6.0 Lessons from the GSM Project

The GSM project will help municipalities achieve their sustainability efforts by identifying obstacles to progress and potential avenues for advancement, cultivating communities of practice, and focusing attention on municipal sustainability. Chapter 4 provided a detailed breakdown of our findings. Here, we summarize four overarching lessons arising from these findings, reflecting a Saskatchewan-centered vision of municipal sustainability. Finally, we offer practical recommendations for stakeholders to support and advance this vision.

***Lesson 1: Saskatchewan municipal governments take a (relatively) balanced approach to sustainability, with municipal categories strongly influencing the level of preparedness.*** Our assessment of a purposively selected sample of municipalities revealed that Saskatchewan municipal policies, plans, and programs reflect a relatively balanced approach that takes into consideration the economic, social, and environmental aspects of sustainability. Levels of municipal preparedness for sustainability vary considerably by municipal size, with northern, small urban and rural municipalities having less developed sustainability planning than cities.

***Lesson 2: Official community plans matter.*** Our research showed that one key factor influencing the level of municipal sustainability planning is the presence or absence of an official community plan (OCP). These are growth management blueprints that allow municipalities to set development and maintenance goals for available land and resources and establish how these resources are to be used. OCPs are not required by legislation but they can provide a framework for zoning bylaws, which are required by legislation. In our sample, municipalities with clear evidence of publicly available OCPs have more sustainability policies, plans and programs than municipalities without an OCP. This suggests that municipal OCPs serve as a comprehensive policy framework that can promote sustainable development.

***Lesson 3: Fiscal and labour/skills capacity places limits on municipal sustainability planning.*** We listened closely to the voices of municipal representatives at our roundtables, focus groups, and forum. An overarching issue was longevity and survivability in the face of fiscal pressures and skills shortages. There is a clear tension between the maintenance costs of traditional services that meet local needs and expectations to advance sustainability programs, particularly for smaller and rural municipalities with

limited budgets and declining tax-based funding due to depopulation. Municipalities also raised concerns about human capacity and employee retention, specifically a lack of experienced administrators. There is a desire for municipal sustainability but uncertainty about staff availability to achieve it.

*Lesson 4: Collaboration and partnership are seen as necessary for sustainability.*

Municipal representatives also reported a desire to share responsibilities with neighbouring municipalities and engage in partnerships while maintaining reasonable local control over decision-making. Increased regional (inter-municipal) and community collaboration was frequently identified as a key strategy that helps Saskatchewan municipalities to overcome some of their funding challenges and to achieve sustainable development. However, many respondents noted that collaboration can be limited to municipalities in close geographic proximity, and some voiced concerns about balancing collaboration and partnership with the need to understand local contexts. Despite a long-standing and well communicated provincial government policy of discouraging forced municipal amalgamation, for some, the potential benefits of increased collaboration continue to be overshadowed by the fear of mandatory (provincially imposed) consolidation.

## 6.1 A Saskatchewan Vision of Municipal Sustainability

As we listened to Saskatchewan municipal voices, we heard a Saskatchewan-centered vision of municipal sustainability. Simply put, Saskatchewan's vision of municipal sustainability uses **local collaboration to establish and realize authentic community plans for economic, social, and environmental longevity**. This vision emphasizes three elements: longevity, balance, and local understanding.

**LONGEVITY: the survivability of municipalities is paramount.** We heard a lot of concerns about municipal finances, fiscal responsibility, and asset management. The ability to maintain services and meet local needs is seen as the starting point for discussions of sustainability:

*"Sustainability falls along the lines of that you're making fiscally responsible decisions on services that will continue to be able to be offered in a sustainable way."*

(CITY PARTICIPANT, 2023)

This can involve difficult planning decisions about future capacity:



*“Sustainability in most simply said is acting in a way today that ensures the ability to carry on tomorrow. And it certainly is something that is very present at our council table. It brings to mind our discussions on asset management. There’s no point in building if you can’t sustain an asset. You have to look to the future to see how much it’s going to cost in the future and then, you have to plan accordingly. But it comes down to more than that.”* (SMALL URBAN PARTICIPANT, 2023)

A successful vision of Saskatchewan municipal sustainability requires local needs to be met in the face of demographic changes and economic challenges.

**BALANCE:** local interactions between the three pillars of sustainability must be appreciated. We regularly heard that economic, social, and environmental sustainability must all be present for municipal sustainability to succeed. Some propose that the three areas must be evenly balanced:

*“To me that [sustainability] would be on everything that you listed. You had social, economic, environmental. That would be everything all encompassing.”*  
(SMALL URBAN PARTICIPANT, 2023)

Others propose that one area of sustainability (economic for some, environmental for others) is the foundation on which the others are built.

*“We tend to really focus on the economic and the social and put the environmental piece in the background even though, from my perspective, the environment is almost like the foundation of the other two... Sometimes that we talk about the three legs, but I think for me at least, the one leg is even a little bit thicker because if that one goes, the other two go.”* (ORGANIZATIONAL PARTICIPANT, 2023)

And for others, the three areas of sustainability are intertwined:

*“Sustainability goals for our municipality right now, growth of small business and new and existing enterprises is of course always important here. Provides jobs for our residents and future residents, but we need safe and affordable housing to attract new residents and expand of course. It’s a chain that keeps going around...”*  
(RURAL PARTICIPANT, 2023)

Regardless of how participants perceived the relationship and balance between the three areas of sustainability, it was clear they felt that each required attention for true municipal sustainability.

**LOCAL UNDERSTANDING:** sustainability must be locally defined and situated. There is considerable interest in municipal sustainability strategies that are designed as a collaborative effort between stakeholders:

*“Sustainability for me means that our community can remain thriving and that involves the environment, various different businesses, organizations, government, the whole shebang. Sustainability means to me, working together to ensure prosperity for everyone involved.” (CITY PARTICIPANT, 2023)*

A locally developed approach is seen as a way to ensure meaningful planning:

*“Of course, the official community plan has to do with sustainable planning and sustainable direction. But really the communities have to define who they are and then, approach their challenges with authenticity. And when it comes right down to it, authenticity to me is one of the most important things that we can be and do.”*

(SMALL URBAN PARTICIPANT, 2023)

With this vision of Saskatchewan municipal sustainability in mind, we were able to draw up a list of recommendations for stakeholders – including provincial and federal governments, municipal associations, community associations, post-secondary institutions, and of course municipal governments themselves – enabling them to support Saskatchewan municipalities in the use of effective governance structures and practices for the realization of authentic plans for economic, social, and environmental longevity.

## **6.2 Recommendations to Realize Saskatchewan’s Vision of Municipal Sustainability**

The GSM project showed that sustainability policies are emerging across Saskatchewan municipalities, but there are significant barriers hindering the vision of municipal sustainability and these must be addressed. Saskatchewan municipal governments have considerable willingness and ample opportunity to advance municipal sustainability, but they struggle with issues of capacity and coordination. Our 10 recommendations will help to address these issues.

### **VISION AND LONG-TERM PLANNING**

**RECOMMENDATION 1: The municipal sector should hold sector-wide conversations about local economic, social, and environmental longevity.** Municipal governments should share information about strategies and best practices to create community plans. Municipal associations play an important leadership role as conveners. This may take the form of sessions at annual conferences and regional or other meetings. This could lead to a provincial summit on local economic, social, and environmental longevity, conducted in partnership with the Government of Saskatchewan and key stakeholders such as economic development authorities, community organizations, and environmental organizations.

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** Municipal governments should create or update their official community plans to establish frameworks for local economic, social, and environmental longevity. Authentic locally defined community visions will help to advance municipal sustainability. A common vision and long-term planning provide the necessary foundation. Local meaning should underpin work towards longevity because this will help to establish a collective vision of sustainability. Community strengths and community pride can boost cooperation within municipalities, build resiliency with strong economic, social, environmental foundations, and make municipalities more attractive to residents. Municipal councils can act as leaders to advance their community's wellbeing by initiating and developing planning processes that incorporate community engagement, including consultation with underserved populations.

## **PARTNERSHIPS, GOVERNANCE, AND SKILLS**

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** Saskatchewan municipal associations should foster municipal capacity and understanding by collecting and sharing information about success stories and best practices in sustainability and/or inter-municipal cooperation. Municipal associations play a critical leadership and convener role within the provincial municipal sector. SUMA, SARM, and New North are trusted by their memberships and are in touch with their members' initiatives. They also have the organizational strength that individual municipalities lack. The associations are well positioned to share information with their members. Working in partnership with academic researchers, SUMA, SARM, and New North also have the potential to initiate original and locally grounded research on collaboration and best practices in Saskatchewan municipal sustainability. The Saskatchewan Municipal Awards program could be the foundation of a larger effort in this regard.

**RECOMMENDATION 4:** The municipal sector, in partnership with stakeholders and the Government of Saskatchewan, should develop a strategy to support training and education initiatives designed to increase municipal governance skills. This strategy should help to assemble the necessary resources, consultation, and expertise on economic, social, and environmental sustainability and inter-municipal cooperation and collaboration.

**RECOMMENDATION 5:** Saskatchewan's post-secondary institutions should work collaboratively with the municipal sector to identify and address skill needs. Our research identified many post-secondary programs related to municipal governance and/or sustainability. These should be aligned with municipal sector needs by considering accessibility beyond the main cities and ensuring that programs emphasize both knowledge and real-world skills in their learning outcomes. Cooperation was identified as a key opportunity to advance municipal sustainability. Willingness and

also governance skills are required for the initiation, development and maintenance of cooperative inter-governmental relationships. These skills development programs could be launched in partnership with Saskatchewan post-secondary institutions via extension programs, executive education programs, and/or micro-credential programming.

## FUNDING

**RECOMMENDATION 6:** The Government of Saskatchewan and Government of Canada should create substantial and accessible funding incentives for inter-municipal cooperation. For grant and funding programs that engage or impact municipal governments, higher-level governments should prioritize projects that include inter-municipal partnerships. Given the need for local autonomy, these incentives should allow for municipal self-determination by ensuring room for innovation and flexibility in the structure of such collaborations.

**RECOMMENDATION 7:** Existing Government of Saskatchewan and Government of Canada funding programs should prioritize community projects with sustainability outcomes. For the Government of Saskatchewan, this would include amending the Targeted Sector Support Program to include sustainability initiatives as a priority. For the Government of Canada, this would include providing municipalities with better support and more clarity on how to apply for funding from programs such as the Canada Community-Building Fund (formerly known as the Federal Gas Tax Fund). Existing programs should also be assessed to address barriers to access, particularly the often burdensome administrative requirements.

**RECOMMENDATION 8:** Municipal governments should make full use of their existing fiscal tools to support their local economic, social, and environmental longevity. These tools include legislatively established mechanisms such as regional planning districts, development levies, servicing agreements, and local tax tools. Many of these are poorly understood and/or applied unevenly or inappropriately at the local level.

## LEGISLATION

**RECOMMENDATION 9:** The Government of Saskatchewan should create strong incentives for municipalities to have an official community plan or another policy framework that creates a balanced approach to local economic, social, and environmental longevity. OCPs or other policy frameworks could play a key role in Saskatchewan's municipal sustainability. The government has OCP templates that should be reviewed to ensure that they deliberately and explicitly incorporate longevity, balance, and local understanding. To assist municipal governments in creating or

updating their OCPs, the provincial government should consider providing funding and other support such as training and access to experts.

**RECOMMENDATION 10:** The municipal sector, in partnership with stakeholders, the Government of Saskatchewan, and the Government of Canada, should develop a strategy to consolidate information and resources about programs, strategies, tools, legislation, and regulations related to municipal sustainability. Given the capacity issues in many Saskatchewan municipalities, it can be challenging for municipal governments to stay on top of provincial and federal regulations that affect them. We frequently heard that it can be challenging to identify and apply for the support available to municipal governments. Consolidating information would help municipalities to understand the requirements of the provincial and federal governments.

### 6.3 Summary

We have provided recommendations to advance municipal sustainability efforts in Saskatchewan. This made-in-Saskatchewan approach emphasizes the four key lessons of our research on the current state of municipal sustainability: (1) Saskatchewan municipal governments take a (relatively) balanced approach to sustainability, with municipal categories strongly influencing the level of preparedness; (2) official community plans matter; (3) fiscal and labour/skills capacity places limits on municipal sustainability planning; and (4) collaboration and partnership are seen as necessary for sustainability. Our approach advances a Saskatchewan-centered vision of municipal sustainability, which emphasizes longevity, balance, and local understanding. It led to 10 recommendations to help achieve the vision of local collaboration as a means to establish and realize authentic community plans for economic, social, and environmental longevity.

The future of sustainability in Saskatchewan requires sustainable municipalities. The results of the GSM project and the corresponding recommendations should help municipalities to achieve sustainability targets now and in the future.

# REFERENCES

- City of Yorton. (2015). 'Community Profile'. <https://www.yorkton.ca/en/build-invest-and-grow/resources/Documents/Yorkton-CommunityProfile-late2015.pdf>
- City of Yorkton. (2021). 'Logan Green Pathway Paving Project'. <https://www.yorkton.ca/en/news/logan-green-pathway-paving-project.aspx>
- City of Yorkton. (2020). 'Logan Green Pathway Map'. <https://www.yorkton.ca/en/build-invest-and-grow/resources/Documents/LoganGreenPathways.pdf>
- City of Yorkton. (2020). 'Industries'. <https://www.yorkton.ca/en/build-invest-and-grow/industries.aspx>
- Cornet, D. (2022). 'Highway 102 economic plan calls for \$8M in municipal investment', La Ronge Now. <https://larongenow.com/2022/09/09/highway-102-economic-plan-calls-for-8m-in-municipal-investment/>
- Cornet, D. (2023). 'Highway 102 Economic Corridor Plan calls for development of truck stop in first phase', La Ronge Now. <https://larongenow.com/2023/03/15/highway-102-economic-corridor-plan-calls-for-development-of-truck-stop-in-first-phase/>
- Cornet, D. (2022). 'La Ronge envisions \$8 million economic corridor on Hwy 102'. Western Investor <https://www.westerninvestor.com/british-columbia/la-ronge-envisions-8-million-economic-corridor-on-hwy-102-5809012>
- Creswell, J.W. (2022). A concise introduction to mixed methods research (2nd Ed.). SAGE
- Ivankova, N. V., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). Teaching mixed methods research: using a socio-ecological framework as a pedagogical approach for addressing the complexity of the field. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 21(4), 409-424.
- Halcomb, E. J., & Hickman, L. (2015). Mixed methods research. *Faculty of Science, Medicine and Health - Papers: part A*. 2656. <https://ro.uow.edu.au/smhpapers/2656>
- Brundtland, G. (1987). Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future. United Nations General Assembly document A/42/427 <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/5987our-common-future.pdf>
- Government of Canada (2020). 'Government of Canada investing in solar panels in Lumsden, Saskatchewan'. <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/news/2020/08/government-of-canada-investing-in-solar-panels-in-lumsden-saskatchewan.html>
- Government of Saskatchewan (2009) The Municipal Grants Act. <https://publications.saskatchewan.ca/api/v1/products/28546/formats/35644/download>
- Lang, B. (2023). "A real little gem": City, province unveil new pathways project at Logan Green Park, CTV news. <https://regina.ctvnews.ca/a-real-little-gem-city-province-unveil-new-pathways-project-at-logan-green-park-1.6423781>
- Last Mountain times (2022). 'New wastewater treatment and solar project in Lumsden', <https://lmtimes.ca/sections/business-agriculture/new-wastewater-treatment-and-solar-project-in-lumsden/>
- Odlum, F. (2022) 'Lumsden using solar energy to become Saskatchewan's most sustainable small town', CTV News. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/saskatchewan-town-soars-with-solar-and-charts-new-path-1.6430589>
- Off, T. (2022) 'Section of Logan Green path paved', SaskToday. <https://www.sasktoday.ca/central/yorkton-this-week/section-of-logan-green-path-paved-5703726>
- Philip, C. (2023). 'Lumsden takes Saskatchewan municipal award for solar projects'. CTV News. <https://saskatoon.ctvnews.ca/lumsden-takes-saskatchewan-municipal-award-for-solar-projects-1.6304414>
- RM of Enterprise #142 (2023). 'Landfill information'. <https://www.rm142.ca/recycling-landfill>
- RM of Enterprise #142 (2023). 'Landfill policy'. [https://www.rm142.ca/files/ugd/8c07da\\_03f0135295c2470d805a169d-744cd27f.pdf](https://www.rm142.ca/files/ugd/8c07da_03f0135295c2470d805a169d-744cd27f.pdf)
- RM of Enterprise #142 (2021). 'Bylaw no. 02'. [https://www.rm142.ca/files/ugd/8c07da\\_5220835e167c-4375b0c53573f9403556.pdf](https://www.rm142.ca/files/ugd/8c07da_5220835e167c-4375b0c53573f9403556.pdf)
- RM of Enterprise #142 (2023). 'About #142'. <https://www.rm142.ca/>
- Silverthorn, C. (2021) 'Algae blooms becoming more intense, lasting longer in Qu'Appelle Valley lakes: U of Regina biologist', CBC. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/saskatchewan/lakes-toxic-blue-green-algae-qu-appelle-valley-1.6041144>
- Statistics Canada (2023). 'Demographics and Statistics, City of Yorkton'. <https://www.yorkton.ca/en/build-invest-and-grow/community-profile-demographics-and-statistics.aspx>
- Tourism SK. (n.d.) 'Lumsden'. <https://www.tourismsaskatchewan.com/community/135/lumsden#sort=relevancy>
- Tourism SK (n.d). 'La Ronge'. <https://www.tourismsaskatchewan.com/community/17/la-ronge#sort=relevancy>
- Town of La Ronge (2023). 'Highway 102 Economic Corridor Master Plan'. <https://laronge2022.municipalwebsites.ca/ckfinder/connector?command=Proxy&lang=en&type=Files&currentFolder=%2F&hash=c-245c263ce0eced480effe66bbbede6b4d-46c15ae&fileName=Highway%20102%20Economic%20Corridor%20Master%20Plan%20-%20March%2C%202023.pdf>
- Village of Richmond (2023). 'Recycling instructions'. <https://www.richmound.ca/garbage-pick-up>
- Wiens, C (2020). 'Lumsden to install solar panel array the size of 2 football fields'. CTV news. <https://regina.ctvnews.ca/lumsden-to-install-solar-panel-array-the-size-of-2-football-fields-1.5077221>



**JOHNSON  
SHOYAMA**



**GRADUATE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY**

**URREGINA ▼ USASK**

**[schoolofpublicpolicy.sk.ca](http://schoolofpublicpolicy.sk.ca)**

**f t i @JSGPP**

For more information on the  
Governing Sustainable Municipalities  
project, please visit [www.jsgs-gsm.ca](http://www.jsgs-gsm.ca).



**Future Skills  
Centre**

The Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy's  
Governing Sustainable Municipalities project is funded by  
the Government of Canada's Future Skills Centre.