



TOGETHER | ENSEMBLE

2025

**Collective Action for a
Sustainable Future:**

Collaboration Across Generations,
Sectors and Knowledge Systems

**Action collective pour
un avenir durable :**

collaboration entre générations,
secteurs et systèmes de connaissances

CONFERENCE REPORT

MAY 26–27, 2025

TERRITORIAL LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The University of Calgary, located in the heart of Southern Alberta, both acknowledges and pays tribute to the traditional territories of the peoples of Treaty 7, which include the Blackfoot Confederacy (comprised of the Siksika, the Piikani, and the Kainai First Nations), the Tsuut'ina First Nation, and the Stoney Nakoda (including Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Goodstoney First Nations). The City of Calgary is also home to the Métis Nation of Alberta (Districts 5 and 6).

The University of Calgary is situated on land Northwest of where the Bow River meets the Elbow River, a site traditionally known as Moh'kins'tsis to the Blackfoot, Wîchîspa to the Stoney Nakoda, and Guts'ists'i to the Tsuut'ina. On this land and in this place we strive to learn together, walk together, and grow together "in a good way."

Buffalo on prairie landscape



Together | Ensemble 2025

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Together | Ensemble 2025 aimed to capture diverse perspectives through its overarching theme, Collective Action for a Sustainable Future: Collaboration Across Generations, Sectors, and Knowledge Systems. This report captures various themes with the focus on the following four main topics:

- Indigenous Knowledge and Paths for Sustainability
- Planetary Health and Youth Leadership
- Pluralistic Perspectives and Governance
- Water Innovation, Science, and Policy

Each of these topics are followed by key lessons learned, barriers, and opportunities identified during the conference. Learnings from this year's conference will inform the planning of the event in 2026. The report also outlines feedback from collaborative partners, including Université Laval (ULaval), who led the conference's French programming, and the Government of Canada's SDG Unit. The findings are meant to guide and empower Canadians to take collective action towards a more sustainable future.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to our partners and supporters who helped bring Together | Ensemble 2025 to life. Our collective efforts continue to inform and mobilize progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals in Canada.

PRESENTED BY



FRENCH PROGRAMMING



FUNDED BY

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of Canada



SPECIAL THANK YOUS

Pipe Ceremony Leaders: Elders Virgle Stephens and Ollie Benjamin

Masters of Ceremony: Henry Panghulan and Kevin Vibat

Opening Remarks: Mayor Jyoti Gondek, Dr. Sandra Davidson, Dr. Christine Daly, Dr. Katrina Milaney, and Dr. Ian Gates

Smudge, Blessing and Remarks: Dr. Elder Kerrie Moore

Hoop Dance Performance: Dr. Melanie Kloetzel and Sandra Lamouche

Round Dance Drummers: Ryan Poucette and Newton Poucette

UCalgary Elders' Circle for Sustainability
Youth Leadership Advisory Council
Conference planning committee
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Disclaimer: The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

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SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



SDSN CANADA

SDSN Canada is part of the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), which mobilizes the world's largest knowledge community to develop science-based solutions for sustainable development. With over [2,000 participating institutions and 58 national and regions networks](#), SDSN operates under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General, advancing the [UN Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#) and the Paris Climate Agreement at all levels, ranging from international to local.

In Canada, SDSN Canada builds pathways to achieve these goals through research, outreach, and collective action. Founded in 2018, SDSN Canada was initially hosted by the University of Waterloo (UWaterloo). As of July 1, 2024, the University of Calgary (UCalgary) became the new host, continuing the work of its predecessor. UCalgary's Office of Sustainability (now part of the Office of Institutional Commitments), supported by institutional leadership, led the successful proposal to host SDSN Canada and aims to catalyze and convene Canada's universities, colleges, and knowledge institutions to foster practical solutions and joint learning opportunities toward achieving the SDGs.

 **45,000+**
 SOCIAL MEDIA IMPRESSIONS



Masters of Ceremony — Heny Panghulan (left) & Kevin Vibat (right)



TOGETHER | ENSEMBLE

[Together](#) | [Ensemble](#) is Canada's annual national conference dedicated to tracking progress on the SDGs. It represents an all-of-society approach to addressing Canada's most pressing sustainable development challenges, bringing together Indigenous Peoples, the private sector, academia, government, and civil society.

In 2025, SDSN Canada continued to take an inclusive and collaborative approach in building a sustainable future, guided by UCalgary's Indigenous Strategy *ii' taa'poh'to'p* (2017), and its parallel paths framework. This approach supports understanding and advancing sustainability from both Indigenous and pluralistic perspectives.

Together, we are building capacity for intergenerational leaders and a sustainable future for all through research and policy, education, Indigenous and youth leadership, and community engagement. The words for "together"—Wicìhitowin (Cree), Ohkanipiyai (Blackfoot), Bârhâchiyâbi (Stoney), Aansaamb (Michif), and Dzinisi guja (Tsuut'ina)—were provided by the UCalgary Elders' Circle for Sustainability to support inclusion of Indigenous languages and concepts for sustainability from Treaty 7 in southern Alberta, where this year's conference was hosted.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



This year marked the 7th annual gathering of Canada's premier SDG conference. Hosted by SDSN Canada and UCalgary, and building on a legacy established by the Alberta Council for Global Cooperation which was further advanced by the UWaterloo, the event convened a diverse community under the theme:

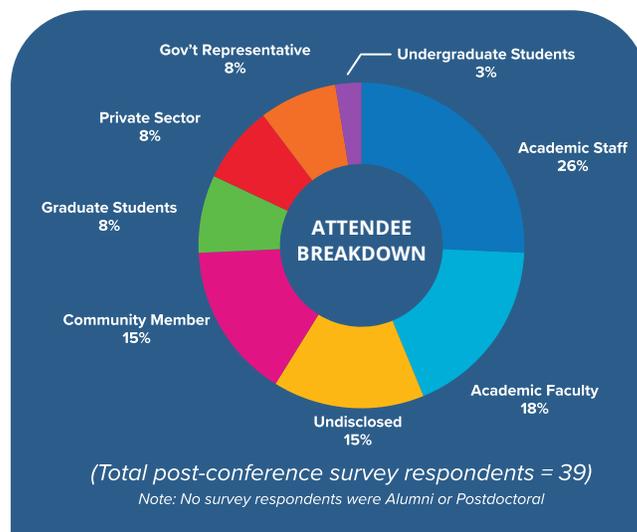
“Collective Action for a Sustainable Future: Collaboration Across Generations, Sectors and Knowledge Systems.”

The hybrid conference had 500+ total registrants, 247 in-person and 162 online attendees, engaging intergenerational voices from Indigenous communities, academia, governments, civil society, and the private sector, and reaffirming the commitment to inclusive dialogue. Indigenous Knowledge systems and perspectives explored sustainability holistically, emphasizing the deep interconnection between the SDGs. The Programming aligned with SDGs 3, 8, 10, 14, and 17, and priority areas from the UN Pact for the Future, including youth and future generations, science, innovation and digital cooperation, and global governance transformation.



Program development was led by a diverse coalition, including the UCalgary Elders' Circle for Sustainability, a Youth Leadership Advisory Council, and an interdisciplinary Planning Committee. Together, they created an ethical space for meaningful dialogue and collective action, reflecting the urgent need for collaboration across generations, knowledge systems, and sectors in Canada.

The conference was also deeply informed by the parallel paths framework defined in *ii' taa'poh'to'p*. This framework guided the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives, knowledge systems, and teaching methods throughout the event, grounding the program in values of respect, reciprocity, and relationality—principles reflected in both the content and the planning process.



INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGES AND PATHS FOR SUSTAINABILITY

Creating inclusive and participatory forums that foster meaningful exchange between Indigenous and pluralistic perspectives is crucial for building a more just and sustainable future for generations to come. Together | Ensemble exemplified this commitment through ongoing intercultural learning, rooted in respectful collaboration with Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and youth.

As Calgary Mayor Jyoti Gondek noted in her opening speech, the value of sustainability is a means to maintaining the rights of both people and the land. Therefore, reconciliation is a necessity for a sustainable future.

Guided by the UCalgary Elders' Circle for Sustainability, the conference featured Indigenous scholars, a Fireside Chat with Elders, protocols, and ceremony, which included Tin Îyâbi (meaning 'we're going within'), an Indigenous Pipe Ceremony to open the conference. The ceremony validated Together | Ensemble, welcomed participants, set the tone of the conference, and highlighted values of kinship, reciprocity, and intergenerational responsibility.

Indigenous perspectives on sustainability were featured throughout the conference, with planetary health and water keynotes from Dr. Nicole Redvers and Dr. Deborah McGregor, respectively, discussion panels on the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and a Fireside Chat with Indigenous Elders. Dr. Yvonne Vizina and Dr. Yvonne Poitras-Pratt guided participants through a workshop on Decolonizing Education for Sustainability. The speakers emphasized that the path towards sustainability lies together—in reconnecting with not only the land, but with each other and ourselves.

While learning from Elders and Knowledge Keepers is a step forward for sustainability, we must continue to create ethical spaces for parallel paths in a meaningful way. Embracing Indigenous teachings and knowledge systems is essential for fostering impactful sustainability action. A call to include Indigenous Elders, teaching methods, and their ways of knowing in university curricula and other learning environments, such as early childhood education, is vital to reconnecting ourselves to the planet.



Hoop dance performance by Sandra Lamouche, Member of Bigstone Cree Nation, Champion Hoop Dancer & Indigenous Education Leader

BARRIERS & CHALLENGES

- Ongoing loss of Indigenous languages, associated biocultural diversity, and limited institutional adoption of Indigenous protocols, teaching methods, and Elders' lessons make learning from Indigenous knowledge difficult.
- The practice of recording/livestreaming and the intimate sharing of sacred Indigenous teachings and traditions makes certain event formats challenging, limiting sharing of Indigenous ways of knowing.
- Dominant Western policies and practices often overlook Indigenous perspectives and values for sustainability.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Embed Indigenous oral knowledge, especially Elders' teachings, languages, and traditional teaching methods in curricula and policy.
- Fund Indigenous-led governance initiatives, develop truth and reconciliation toolkits, and co-produce governance models to better integrate Indigenous Peoples and perspectives into decision-making.
- Continue to establish safe and ethical spaces for Indigenous learning approaches and teachings, including ceremony and Elders to guide the next generations.
- Adopt Indigenous-defined progress indicators as part of tracking progress.

PLANETARY HEALTH AND YOUTH LEADERSHIP

Planetary health—the interdependence of human health and the health of natural systems—and the health of future generations are deeply intertwined. Youth, especially, are eager to act for the healthy ecosystems we all depend on. However, it is up to the current generation of decision-makers to lay the systemic and institutional foundations to support planetary health and youth leadership. Empowering youth aligns with a commitment to intergenerational equity.

Achieving the 17 SDGs and planetary health requires increased awareness of our interconnectedness and collective action. Cultivating a healthy relationship with ourselves, our communities, and the planet is vital to sustainability. This Indigenous way of being and connecting teaches youth that planetary health is foundational to our well-being today and for future generations. Known as ‘Seven Generations’, the Indigenous philosophy follows the concept of making decisions today with an awareness of their impact seven generations into the future.

WHICH OF THE 17 UN SDGs IS MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU?

(Together | Ensemble 2025 SDG Survey Results. Total respondents = 41)



Furthermore, the active involvement of youth was evident throughout Together | Ensemble with over 50 youth participants attending the conference as speakers, Masters of Ceremony, workshop leads, volunteers, and participants. A Youth Leadership Advisory Council was assembled to support the conference and program planning, including creating the conference theme and numerous workshops. Seven youth story writers and rapporteurs reported on their experiences. Their final reports informed this post-conference report and will aid in the planning of future iterations of Together | Ensemble.

BARRIERS & CHALLENGES

- Exclusion of diverse perspectives in sustainable development decision-making leads to a disconnect between global policies and unequitable, lived realities.
- Siloed policy and academic structures prevent the required interconnectedness for solving these complex issues, including a lack of open-source data to allow for meaningful collaboration across disciplines.
- Lack of stable funding to support long-term sustainability initiatives, particularly on the SDGs.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Revive Indigenous cultural practices and intergenerational learning to sustain traditions, teachings, and values for sustainability.
- Consider youth climate summits, venture funds, and co-design efforts, like the SDSN Canada National Water Challenge, to bring fresh ideas, perspectives, and seed-money to problem-solving.
- Explore opportunities to link well-being to environmental stewardship, reaching and engaging broader audiences.
- Advance AI-driven climate models to track planetary health, improve localized predictions, and identify vulnerable regions for growing community resilience.

PLURALISTIC PERSPECTIVES AND GOVERNANCE

Throughout the conference, there was an emphasis on the importance of diversity and incorporating inclusive perspectives in governance models. To bring this to life, there needs to be a collective effort to dismantle the systems of oppression that exclude a plurality of voices.

Dr. Dawn Martin-Hill, panel speaker for 'Transforming Global Governance – UNDRIP and the UN SDGs', expressed that Canada needs to start investing in Indigenous-led research and education in order to achieve the SDGs. Indigenous-led environmental and conservation practices are proven to be more effective than conventional one—and Dr. Martin-Hill's contributions are an example of that in sustainability. Yet Indigenous Knowledge Keepers are consistently excluded from decision-making, resulting in detrimental consequences for Indigenous communities. Panelists also highlighted how UNDRIP serves as a framework for rebuilding relationships with Indigenous Peoples and has links with SDG 10 (Reduce inequality within and among countries).

Hybrid keynote, 'Inclusive Governance and Ambitious Futures', by Dr. Bharwani and Dr. Michael Youash, identified polarization as a key issue in governance. Focusing solely on our differences rather than similarities creates division—we must embrace diversity to ensure a sustainable future for all.



In the workshop titled Bringing Cognitive Justice into Collective Action for a Sustainable Future, Dr. Catherine Alum Odora Hoppers delved into highlighting the role of cognitive justice in the context of sustainable development and education, calling for an urgent paradigm shift in learning systems to “promote ethical, ecological, and pluralistic thinking that embraces diverse knowledges without coercion,” while Dr. Monetta Bailey explored how discourse shapes knowledge systems entrenching discriminatory ideologies.

For Together | Ensemble 2025, SDSN Canada and UCalgary collaborated with ULaval to include French programming on the SDGs, recognizing the unique and valuable contributions of Franco-Canadians through a hybrid panel and two virtual workshops.

BARRIERS & CHALLENGES

- Limited perspectives in SDGs and sustainability across all sectors and levels—including underrepresentation of youth and equity-deserving groups in institutional forums which limits their ability to provide input and influence.
- Focusing solely on top-down systems and constant growth is insufficient. Real progress requires changes to how things are structured and shifts in how people think and act.
- Current climate and sustainability policies overlook health-environment co-benefits.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Co-construct spaces for engagement of youth, Indigenous, Francophone, and other equity-deserving groups, resulting in forward-thinking approaches and alignment of objectives across multiple sectors.
- Integrate cultural and environmental considerations into governance systems to ensure effective decision-making, such as health policies.
- Foster learning and practical solutions for sustainability and SDGs through interdisciplinary collaboration and real-world applications.
- Support multi-generational thinking and participatory SDG transformations by adopting critical and reflective educational practices.

WATER INNOVATION, SCIENCE, AND POLICY

Water security is one of the most urgent environmental issues the world faces today, but the way it has been understood has led to inconsistencies in how to protect and sustain it. Water is more than just a resource. It is a source of life, and a living entity with a spirit and rights.

The keynote speaker, Dr. Deborah McGregor, called for “earth-based reconciliation” and urged participants to act with a sense of responsibility to water, community, and spirit promoting a broader commitment to shifting Canadian water policy to one that applies Indigenous ontologies, spiritual relationships with water, and ethical frameworks of traditional ecological knowledge. By applying this Indigenous framework and passing on this way of knowing to the next generation, we can ensure resilient water systems.

Facilitated by the United Nations University (UNU) Water Hub, UCalgary Office of Signature Learning Experiences, and SDSN Canada, the ‘National Water Challenge Co-Design Workshop’ elevated student and young professional voices to foster cross-sector collaboration and highlight the complexity of achieving water security in Canada. SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) further reinforces the need for an interdisciplinary approach that spans generations.

The panel, ‘Water Science, Innovation, Governance, and Policy’ moderated by Dr. Kerry Black, reinforced the need for diverse opinions while emphasizing the importance of cross-sector and intercultural voices. Genuine partnership is essential in honouring Indigenous Knowledge systems and governance structures. Participants were encouraged to advocate for stronger water policies, to engage in community-based monitoring, and to build networks that connect diverse stakeholders and rightsholders.

“Sustainability is reinforced when water is seen not just as a commodity, but as a dynamic element with social, cultural, and ecological significance.

— Nneka Jk-Onyeka, Story Rapporteur on National Water Challenge Co-Design Workshop with UNU Water Hub & UCalgary Office of Signature Learning



BARRIERS & CHALLENGES

- Different, potentially conflicting, perspectives and focus on water—dominant legal views and Indigenous ontologies.
- Jurisdictional fragmentation in water governance leads to a lack of trust and inconsistent practices.
- Lack of youth and equity-deserving group representation and structured follow-up.

OPPORTUNITIES

- Leverage public-private partnerships to fund research on water rights and sustainable management practices, including on water governance software that integrates scientific data and Indigenous Knowledge.
- Promote inclusive, science-policy dialogues around water equity.
- Use water as an entry point to mobilize action on health and climate.
- Implement inter- and transdisciplinary approaches to water systems and infrastructure.
- Design truth and reconciliation-focused training for water policy stakeholders.

COLLABORATOR HIGHLIGHTS

ULaval: Franco-Canadian Perspective on Sustainability and the SDGs

As the current SDG implementation period nears its end, the Franco-Canadian community plays a unique and vital role in advancing the SDGs and wishes to contribute to the reflections on the post-2030 agenda.

One of the French sessions featured dialogue with the authors of the newly released book called, *The Sustainable Development Goals: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Authored by researchers from ULaval's Institut en environnement, développement et société (Institut EDS) and Centre interdisciplinaire de recherche en opérationnalisation du développement durable (CIRODD), this hybrid panel showcased the value of interdisciplinary approaches to sustainability and the potential for collective action. The French programming emphasized the need for a multigenerational, inclusive approach, cross-sector partnerships, strong networks, and the Franco-Canadian community as a mobilizing space for advancing the SDGs.

Increasing Hope for the Future: Empowering Action & Resilience with Dr. Julie Drolet (Co-Designed by the Youth Leadership Advisory Council)



A standout moment of one of the French sessions was the spotlight on valuable SDG resources, such as the newly released book, *The Sustainable Development Goals: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* ... It showcased the depth of interdisciplinary work being done to advance sustainable development in Canada and beyond.

— Government of Canada's SDG Unit's perspective on ULaval's Panel: *The Sustainable Development Goals: Interdisciplinary Perspectives: A Dialogue with Authors*

Government of Canada SDG Unit's Perspective on Together | Ensemble 2025

The 2025 Together | Ensemble Conference offered exceptional opportunities to connect, collaborate, and build new relationships within a vibrant and diverse community. Featuring inclusive sessions tailored for all audiences and sectors, including Indigenous Peoples, the Francophone community, and youth, the conference ensured a space for meaningful dialogue and shared learning.

Conference panelists highlighted that the Government of Canada should remain committed and persistent in strengthening public participation in sustainable development, despite disengagement and other challenges. Collaboration and inclusivity should be treated as foundational good practices. While it may not always be possible to have every voice at the table from the beginning, it is crucial to start the conversation and continuously welcome and integrate new participants as they become available. This dynamic and evolving approach will help ensure that decisions are more representative, equitable, and impactful.



Mother Earth never forgets who she is; only humans forget who we are.

— Elder Dr. Kerrie Moore from Panel: *Fireside Chat with Indigenous Elders: Sustainable Development & Seven Generations*

APPENDIX

EVENT SCHEDULE

DAY 1: MAY 26, 2025

- 8:00 a.m. **REGISTRATION AND COFFEE**
- 9:00 a.m. **Land Acknowledgement: *Tin Îyâbi*, ('we're going within') – an Indigenous Pipe Ceremony for Welcoming and Gathering followed by Opening Remarks from Leadership**
- 10:35 a.m. **BREAK**
- 11:05 a.m. **Hybrid Keynote: Dene Ch'anié ('the path we walk'): Indigenous Perspective on Planetary Health**
- 12:00 p.m. **LUNCH BREAK**
Virtual French Panel: The Franco-Canadian contribution to the future of the SDGs
- 1:00 p.m. **Hybrid Keynote: Inclusive Governance and Ambitious Futures**
- 1:15 p.m. **Virtual French Workshop (Concurrent): The Co-benefits of Acting on Health and Climate Change**
- 1:45 p.m. **Panel: Transforming Global Governance – United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals**
- 2:30 p.m. **BREAK**
- 3:00 p.m. **Action-Oriented Workshops**
- | In-Person | Virtual |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bringing Cognitive Justice into Collective Action for a Sustainable Future• Decolonizing Education for Sustainability | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Safeguarding Planetary Health• <i>Just Breathe, Okâwîmâwaskiy</i>: Collaborating Across Cultures and Knowledge Systems Through Place-Based Artistic Practice |
- 4:15 p.m. **END OF DAY 1**
- 5:00 p.m. **Networking & Refreshments, including Hoop Dance from *Just Breathe, Okâwîmâwaskiy*, a collaborative project led by Cree artist, Sandra Lamomuche and settler artist, Melanie Kloetzel**

▶ For more details, please visit togetherensemble.ca.

APPENDIX

DAY 2: MAY 27, 2025

8:00 a.m.	REGISTRATIONS & COFFEE <i>Virtual French Panel: The Sustainable Development Goals: Interdisciplinary Perspectives: A Dialogue with Authors</i>				
9:00 a.m.	Smudge, Blessing & Remarks				
9:15 a.m.	Fireside Chat with Indigenous Elders: Sustainable Development & Seven Generations				
10:00 a.m.	Panel: Future of Child Health in Canada				
10:45 a.m.	BREAK				
11:00 a.m.	Hybrid Keynote: Indigenous Perspectives on Water, Science, Innovation, Governance and Policy				
12:00 p.m.	LUNCH BREAK				
1:00 p.m.	Panel: Water, Science, Innovation, & Policy				
2:00 p.m.	BREAK				
2:30 p.m.	Action-Oriented Workshops				
	<table border="0"> <tr> <td>In-Person</td> <td>Virtual</td> </tr> <tr> <td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing Hope for the Future: Empowering Action & Resilience National Water Challenge Co-Design Workshop </td> <td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> An Introduction to the UN SDGs and Sustainability Communication Shaping the Future: Youth Skills & the Future of Work </td> </tr> </table>	In-Person	Virtual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing Hope for the Future: Empowering Action & Resilience National Water Challenge Co-Design Workshop 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An Introduction to the UN SDGs and Sustainability Communication Shaping the Future: Youth Skills & the Future of Work
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing Hope for the Future: Empowering Action & Resilience National Water Challenge Co-Design Workshop 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An Introduction to the UN SDGs and Sustainability Communication Shaping the Future: Youth Skills & the Future of Work 				
3:30 p.m.	Conference Closing Remarks & Round Dance				
4:00 p.m.	END OF DAY 2				

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



▶ For more details, please visit togetherensemble.ca.