



# CLIMATE SOLUTIONS THAT WORK:

BRINGING COMMUNITY BENEFITS  
AND CLIMATE ACTION TOGETHER

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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Through the Atkinson Decent Work Fund, the foundation is supporting community efforts to tackle growing income and wealth inequality. Since 2014, the Atkinson Decent Work Fund has invested in organizing communities to protect workers' rights, create decent work, and share the benefits of public investment and economic growth more equitably.

The support of the Atkinson Foundation has allowed the project partners to research and identify best practices for leveraging publicly-funded climate actions to create a range of community benefits. With climate change and poverty being two of the greatest challenges of our time, finding solutions that achieve multiple outcomes and help connect decent work and climate justice movements together is key.

Many jurisdictions are ahead of Ontario and this research project allowed us to learn from their experiences and identify common elements that are key to success. We would like to thank all of the research informants who contributed to this learning process and gave us permission to share their stories. You are an inspiration!

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## INTRODUCTION

Governments around the world are grappling with the urgency to address climate change. Every level of government has a role to play in ensuring we reduce greenhouse gas emissions and prepare communities for the impacts of climate change. In recent years, the City of Toronto, the Province of Ontario and the Government of Canada have all made major announcements on their plans to invest in climate actions. The Province of Ontario has committed to investing \$5-9 billion by 2020 through the climate action plan to be paid for by Ontario's new cap and trade system. As a result of these government plans, billions of dollars will be invested in our communities which presents an opportunity to create a wide-range of community benefits such as job creation, poverty reduction, and improvements to social housing and public health.

To explore how to leverage this unique opportunity, we began a cross-sectoral partnership between the CEE Centre for

Young Black Professionals, Social Planning Toronto and the Toronto Environmental Alliance. With support from the Atkinson Foundation, we undertook a research study to identify best practices for leveraging climate actions to create a range of community benefits.

Over the course of nine months, we researched and identified more than twenty projects across North America and the United Kingdom that have helped achieve environmental and social benefits. We conducted in-depth interviews with participants from a select number of the case studies which helped us identify key approaches and best practices for designing projects that implement climate actions to achieve community benefits.

This report highlights key approaches and best practices that will be essential within Toronto and Ontario to leverage community benefits from investments in climate actions.



## THE OPPORTUNITY

Within the City of Toronto and the Province of Ontario, many initiatives and projects are already looking to leverage community benefits from major infrastructure projects. In Toronto, the negotiation and approval of the Community Benefits Framework for the Eglinton Crosstown transit expansion has helped pave the way for greater government interest and involvement in this approach.

Community benefits agreements and frameworks are a newer approach in Ontario. However, this approach has been used in many other jurisdictions over the last few decades. A community benefits approach involves communities negotiating with governments or private developers who are investing in developments. Through these negotiations, the goal is to create opportunities for concrete benefits to local communities that are being impacted through the development such as hiring targets for equity-seeking groups, social procurement opportunities, creating new

affordable housing and local environmental improvements.

So far, most local discussions on community benefits have been focused on major infrastructure projects. However, we see the opportunity to leverage a community benefits approach to climate investments as a way to achieve a triple bottom line: improved social equity, increased community wealth, and a substantial reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. Many climate change actions such as deep retrofits of existing buildings and creating new renewable energy systems will offer job opportunities that can be made accessible to a broad range of people currently excluded from the labour market.

Working with governments, industries and local stakeholders, we can ensure that these investments can be leveraged to create community benefits including creating decent work, reducing poverty and improving social equity.

## Ontario's Climate Change Action Plan

Ontario's five-year climate action plan outlines actions up to 2020 that will pave the way for achieving our greenhouse gas reduction target of 80% by 2050. The new cap and trade program will generate \$5 - 9 billion that will be invested in the projects and programs to help reduce greenhouse gas pollution. These actions will include retrofitting buildings, supporting the expansion of electric vehicles and boosting renewable energy production. Already, the Province has announced an investment of \$650 million for social housing repairs and retrofits in cities including Toronto to help deal with aging community housing infrastructure.

## TransformTO: Climate Action for Toronto

The TransformTO plan outlines the actions the City of Toronto needs to take to reduce our emissions by 80% by 2050. The plan provides the City with the opportunity to leverage many community benefits including job creation, poverty reduction, and improvements to social housing and public health. Some of the bold new goals in the plan include:

- Retrofitting 100% of buildings by 2050
- 75% of energy comes from renewable or low-carbon sources by 2050
- Helping to create over 327,000 new person years of employment



## BEST PRACTICES FOR LEVERAGING COMMUNITY BENEFITS FROM CLIMATE ACTIONS

The research activities of this project involved examining dozens of case studies in North America and the United Kingdom and conducting in-depth interviews with a smaller group of project staff. Through this process, we were able to identify some of the key best practices and approaches

that have helped programs implementing climate actions create a wide range of benefits for communities. The following best practices offer insights on what conditions we need to foster in Toronto and Ontario to leverage opportunities and create similar community benefits.

- **Seize the opportunity to implement building retrofit and weatherization programs to address greenhouse gas emissions and improve living conditions for families**
- **Implement green projects that break the cycles of poverty by creating job opportunities for marginalized people and reducing energy poverty**
- **Design programs with wrap around training and support for marginalized and racialized communities to access job opportunities in the green economy**
- **Partner with employers and unions to help break down the barriers to employment in the green economy and help build long-term career pathways for marginalized communities**
- **Work with government leaders and political champions to foster support for programs and projects that invest in climate actions that leverage community benefits**
- **Build a broad-based diverse coalition to guide the design and implementation of programs and engage the wider community in the process**



## RETROFITS AND WEATHERIZATION PROJECTS WITH A TRIPLE BOTTOM LINE

Communities in Ontario are already experiencing many of the impacts of climate change through severe weather including more frequent storms, flooding events and extreme heat events. The impacts of climate change are also being disproportionately felt by low-income communities. For example, extreme heat events are already posing a public health concern for communities living in aging houses and high-rises that have no access to air conditioning. During extreme weather events and storms, flooding, property damage and other negative impacts are more dire for people without the means to afford the expensive interventions necessary to resolve these issues.

Retrofit and weatherization programs have been used in many jurisdictions as a way to address some of the more immediate impacts of climate change while also reducing greenhouse gas emissions and creating a range of other community benefits.

## What are retrofits?

Building retrofits and weatherization programs involve improving a building's systems that consume energy. These measures help reduce overall energy consumption, optimize energy efficiency and also protect a building and its residents from the elements, including precipitation, wind, and other extreme weather impacts. Retrofits and weatherization actions involve low-cost measures/modifications to full overhauls or replacement of major systems. Retrofit and weatherization actions may include:

- wall insulation
- roof insulation
- caulking windows
- upgrading lighting
- replacement of heating equipment
- replacement of cooling system
- installing low-flow toilets
- updating exterior facades of a building
- replacing boilers

Both Toronto and Ontario's climate change plans identify retrofits as a major opportunity for emissions reductions. The City of Toronto's TransformTO plan identifies that improving building efficiency will provide the greatest reduction in greenhouse gas emissions in the City (approximately 3.86 million tonnes of emissions over the next 30 years) . The plan also commits to an ambitious goal of retrofitting 100% of existing buildings by 2050.

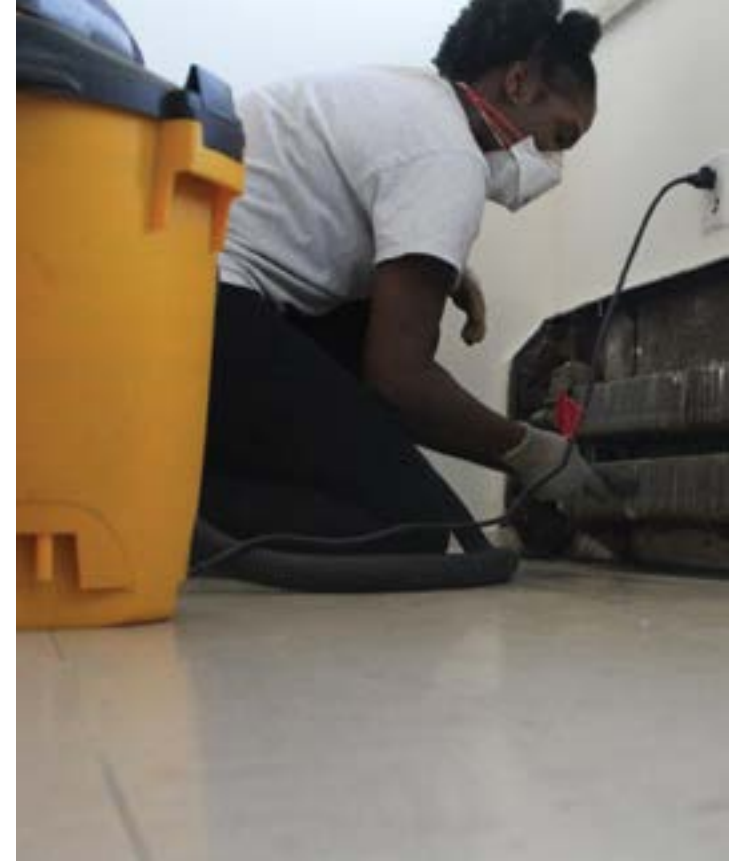
## Case Study

Rising Sun Energy Center (Rising Sun) is a non-profit organization that is leading green training, employment, and residential efficiency work in Northern California. Their workforce development model focuses on the intersection between climate change resilience and economic equity. They offer two main streams of work: GETS and CYE. Green Energy Training Services (GETS) offers a pre-apprenticeship training program for low-income adults who are interested in starting a career in the union building trades, as well as job training for solar careers. More than 70% of participants in the program have found employment, typically attaining roles as entry-level solar installers, construction trades workers and as apprentices with unions. Rising Sun also offers the California Youth Energy Services (CYES) program, which employs youth (ages 15-24) each summer to visit local residents and provide them with free water conservation, small-scale retrofits, and energy efficiency education. More than 42,000 homes have been served through the program.



## Retrofit and weatherization programs can offer many community benefits, including:

- Reducing energy costs for families
- Improving the quality and comfort of homes
- Improving health conditions inside of homes
- Leveraging repair and retrofit efforts to maximize investment and increase efficiency
- Improving the resiliency of buildings in the case of extreme weather events



## BREAKING CYCLES OF POVERTY WITH GREEN BUILDING PROJECTS

Addressing poverty in our communities is a priority area for many governments. Investments that create employment opportunities through climate actions can also help reduce poverty in our communities.

In 2015, the City of Toronto adopted a new poverty reduction strategy in response to the stark reality of how poverty is impacting our communities. Some of the shocking statistics include :

- **15 neighbourhoods have poverty rates of 40% or higher**
- **Recent immigrants (46%), Indigenous people (37%), and members of racialized groups (33%) have higher rates of poverty than the general Toronto population**
- **Between 1970 and 2005, the percentage of low-income neighbourhoods grew from 19% of all Toronto communities to 53%**

The Poverty Reduction strategy identifies that a key objective for addressing poverty will be creating good quality jobs in our city and ensuring that other City programs support poverty reduction efforts. Large government investments provide an opportunity to create good quality jobs that can help people out of poverty. Designing workforce development programs that break down employment barriers for marginalized people can help low-income residents capitalize on those job opportunities and break the cycles of poverty.

Retrofits, weatherization programs and renewable energy projects have been an important tool used to address energy poverty in other jurisdictions such as Oakland, California and Winnipeg, Manitoba. Furthermore, for families who are experiencing growing costs, rising energy prices are a major concern. Introducing programs and incentives to participate in retrofits and weatherization actions gives low-income individuals the ability to improve their homes, reduce their energy costs, lower their cost of living and make their homes a lot more comfortable.

## Case Study

BUILD Inc is a social enterprise non-profit contractor and a training program for people who face barriers to employment. Their model aims to lower utility bills, employ local people, cut crime, and decrease greenhouse gas emissions. BUILD Inc provides paid training opportunities to vulnerable and marginalized communities of people to help them build their employability and break the cycles of poverty. Through partnerships established with Manitoba Housing and Manitoba Hydro, they have been able to grow and strengthen their work. Manitoba Housing has hired on BUILD Inc to deliver energy retrofits, insulation and water efficiency services to their housing stock. This will save Manitoba Housing \$2.5 million a year on their utility bills. BUILD Inc's work will also save low-income families more than \$50 million over the next 25 years. These partnership opportunities have provided job opportunities for many marginalized community members in Winnipeg. They have found that for each dollar invested through their program, the payback is \$1.65 in social returns to society. Based on the success of BUILD Inc, this model has also been replicated in other Canadian cities including Toronto (Building Up) and St.John's (Choices for Youth's Impact Construction) and Brandon (Brandon Energy Efficiency Program – BEEP).



**Building retrofits, weatherization programs and renewable energy projects can help reduce poverty in communities by:**

- Breaking down employment barriers for marginalized people to access jobs in the growing green economy
- Lowering utility costs for families can reduce energy poverty

## TRAINING AND SUPPORT FOR ACCESSING JOBS IN THE GREEN ECONOMY

Many of the job opportunities that can be created through climate actions require specialized training to help get people prepared for these career pathways. For marginalized communities and people who have been previously incarcerated, job training programs with robust wrap around supports are key in helping overcome employment barriers. The goal of many projects focused on workforce development activities has been to create decent work opportunities and help build skills for long-term employability.

To move beyond the scope of short-term jobs and create long-term career pathways for individuals, wrap around supports are essential. In addition to providing job-specific technical training, many programs provided classroom components that would help trainees enhance their basic literacy and math skills. Many programs found it very

valuable for long term success to go beyond this scope to provide additional supports in the form of workshops on nutrition and well-being, financial planning, social supports and preparing participants for interviews.

Another key feature of many successful programs is paid training opportunities. For individuals living in poverty, this allows them to access and benefit from these opportunities while addressing many personal challenges they may be faced with (e.g. housing, travel costs, loss of income from other jobs). Though not every project is able to offer paid training opportunities to their participants, it is widely recognized that paid training opportunities provide more positive outcomes in terms of program completion, retention and graduation rates, as well as the number of trainees that are successfully placed in job placements.

## Case Study

BladeRunners, a training program based out of Vancouver, BC, focuses on supporting street-involved youth who face significant barriers to employment. Approximately 95% of the youth they serve are homeless when they first begin the program. To help these youth overcome many challenging barriers, BladeRunners provides a wide range of wrap-around supports to help youth obtain experience in the building trades. They have even created BladeRunners Place, which provides housing for participants who successfully complete the program; many of whom are transitioning from homelessness. Their many wrap around supports include hot meals (breakfast and lunch) during the training period, completion bonuses, and a personal job coach to support them before and after job placement. The program also embeds Indigenous cultures and traditions into the program to better serve the many Indigenous participants in the program.



### Wrap around supports for job training can include:

- Assistance with finding housing
- Compensation for travel costs
- Educational components to help trainees complete their GEDs
- Training and educational support to help participants pursue certification
- Workshops focused on nutrition and wellbeing
- Financial planning classes
- Providing essential equipment for entering the workforce (hard hats, boots etc)
- Financial support for paying initial union dues



## BUILDING BRIDGES WITH EMPLOYERS AND UNIONS

In designing and implementing workforce development projects, having the union and employer's participation, support and insights are key. Each case study reflected different approaches to working with local employers and unions. Most projects showed that these partners were effective in helping build support and supporting the creation of workforce development models. In addition, select employers and unions became key partners for program delivery to help ensure job placements for trainees and future long-term employment opportunities. These partners, when less engaged, could also have a negative impact as gatekeepers, making their participation a key factor in success.

In the case of unions, they were a particularly important stakeholder in helping overcome the sporadic nature of some energy efficiency and weatherization work. Some

employment programs are only able to offer trainees with short-term contracts. However, many training programs with direct links to unions, were able to offer more stable, long-term employment with decent wages and benefits.

Many social enterprise and non-profit organizations that have directly led workforce development programming have still found opportunities to leverage some of the shorter term employment options. In working with specific contractors or developers, these programs have been able to place trainees to help them receive work experience. When working with trainees who face many obstacles to employment, these contracts serve as an excellent starting point for helping them build the skills, experience and resumes they need to move into more long-term employment opportunities.

### Case Study

The Los Angeles Department of Water and Power's (LADWP) Utility Pre-Craft Training program (UPCT) is a model for entry-level workforce training in the green economy. The program was developed through a collaboration between the utility and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 18. The program provides pre-apprenticeship training for entry-level workers in weatherizing the homes of low-income utility customers, while also learning a variety of skills, exploring career options within the utility, and preparing for the civil service examinations. The program focuses on getting trainees into long-term careers with family-supporting wages and benefits, including healthcare, pension, and career training. Over 88 percent of trainees are still employees within the UPCT program or as full-time permanent employees of the City.



## FOSTERING GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP AND POLITICAL CHAMPIONS

Government interventions play an important role in supporting environmental programs that also achieve a number of social benefits. Nearly all of the case studies we examined showed that governments employed a range of tools including direct financial support, policy changes and incentive programs that helped significantly boost the success of these programs. Sustained government leadership and support has allowed many programs to successfully expand within their own communities and into other jurisdictions.

Political champions can play a number of roles in helping direct investment into projects that help achieve a number of positive social and environmental outcomes. In many cases, local politicians helped attract funding and support for local community projects by acting as political champions through government channels. Local politicians and government officials were particularly effective champions in helping secure resources and building political support for policy changes. For example, in the case of Portland, the local Mayor's office helped steward the creation of a High Roads Agreement to ensure specific standards for employment and greater access to jobs for

disadvantaged communities through the Clean Energy Works program.

Both municipal and provincial governments can also play an important role in policy changes to support a community benefits approach to climate action. In the case of Portland, Los Angeles, Berkeley and many other cities in the United States, local municipal governments helped ensure the success of programs by providing incentives. For instance, some cities provided incentives for low-income homeowners to participate in retrofit and weatherization programs. State level governments were also key in supporting the expansion and sustained growth of projects. In both British Columbia and Manitoba, the provincial housing departments have directly partnered with groups like Blade Runners and BUILD Inc to provide employment opportunities through repairs and retrofits for their housing stock.

One of the key takeaways from our research is that political and government champions can exist in various departments and within different levels of government. Seeking out diverse political support can help build a stronger case for implementing climate actions with community benefits.

## Case Study

GRID Alternatives is a non-profit organization that works to make renewable energy technology and job training available to underserved communities. Originating in Oakland, California, they now work across many cities in the United States. GRID Alternatives provides low-to-no cost solar installations to affordable housing providers and families that qualify as low-income, and provides job training to help people secure jobs in the growing solar industry. In 2008, the California Public Utilities Commission selected GRID Alternatives to serve as the statewide program manager for its \$162 million Single-family Affordable Solar Homes (SASH) incentive program. This allowed GRID to quickly expand across the State and then later into other cities across the United States. GRID Alternatives has trained over 34,572 people, installed more than 9,253 solar electricity systems, and prevented more than 821,254 tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions.



## Government can implement a range of interventions that support the work of projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and produce community benefits, including:

- Negotiating a High Roads Agreement or a Community Benefits Agreement
- Creating incentive programs for low-income homeowners to participate in retrofit and weatherization programs
- Partnering or providing long-term contract to organizations delivering workforce development training for disadvantaged workers
- Setting hiring targets for disadvantaged workers as part of government retrofit and construction projects
- Requiring utilities to invest in energy efficiency programs that create community benefits
- Removing employment barriers for civil service positions to provide greater access to disadvantaged workers

## COALITIONS PAVING THE WAY FORWARD

Broad-based coalitions play an important role in driving forward the agenda to create projects that will achieve a triple bottom line. Many of the case studies we examined showed that coalition work was important for helping secure government support and resources to create programs that achieved positive social and environmental outcomes. In the cities of Portland, Los Angeles and Vancouver, community coalition work was key for securing initial support for designing a program to achieve multiple priority outcomes.

The strongest coalitions are the ones that engage and partner with a diverse network of stakeholders. Many coalitions that have successfully pushed for policy changes have brought together cross-sector allies including community organizers, organizations providing social services,

environmental groups, industry and employment partners, unions and other labour groups, policy-focused organizations and political champions.

Many coalitions in the United States have played an important role in engaging the wider community to design and implement projects and programs. For example, the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE) and Green for All coalition from Oakland have played important roles in helping communities negotiate and design projects with a wide range of social and environmental benefits. LAANE was an important coalition partner that helped bring together community and union perspectives to support the development of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power's pre-craft utility training program.

### Strong coalitions have a diverse range of partners and allies including:

- Local community organizers
- Neighbourhood associations
- Social service agencies
- Environmental groups
- Industry and employment partners
- Unions and labour groups
- Policy-focused organizations
- Local businesses
- Political champions and government leaders

## Case Study

Enhabit (formerly Clean Energy Works) is a non-profit organization based in Portland, Oregon, that delivers social impact through better living spaces. In 2009, Enhabit began as a City pilot program - one of the first in the United States - to save energy, improve a home's comfort and value and reduce carbon emissions while creating high-quality jobs for local residents in need.

The original pilot coalesced government, non-profit and private partners and ultimately secured a \$20 million grant from the U.S. Department of Energy's Better Building Neighborhood Program to expand service to more than 80% of Oregon's homeowners. The same coalition also worked with the City of Portland Mayor's office to negotiate a High Road Agreement to inform the work. Green For All, an organization that works to build a green economy while simultaneously lifting citizens out of poverty partnered with the City and local community groups to support the original discussions around creating a High Road Agreement. The program helped create hundreds of construction jobs, retrofitting 500 homes in the city – growing to 6,000 homes across the State of Oregon. A State of Oregon evaluation found that nearly 50% of the work hours were delivered by people of color and 75% of employees were provided health insurance.



## BRIDGING THE OPPORTUNITIES IN TORONTO

The best practices and approaches used in many jurisdictions to achieve greenhouse gas reductions while also maximizing community benefits offer useful insights for shaping our work in Toronto. Each case study offers key lessons and insights that can be adapted to meet the needs of communities in Toronto and Ontario.

There are already many initiatives and projects looking to leverage community benefits from major infrastructure projects. The negotiation of the Community Benefits Framework for the Eglinton Crosstown transit expansion is a recent victory that is helping pave the way for similar approaches. Through the work of the Toronto Community Benefits Network, a community-

labour coalition, there is momentum to focus on creating opportunities for economic prosperity and removing employment barriers for disadvantaged and underserved communities.

Building on this momentum, there is an opportunity to leverage a community benefits approach to climate investments as a way to achieve a triple bottom line: improved social equity, increased community wealth, and a substantial reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. The work of some local organizations already have a head start on this approach, and now require the right supports to expand their work as we make the shift to a greener economy.

## Case Study

Building Up is a local non-profit social enterprise focused on connecting individuals with employment barriers to careers through contracts in greening buildings and other employment opportunities. Following the model used by BUILD Inc in Winnipeg, Building Up began their work in Toronto in 2014. Building Up works to address environmental efficiency, affordable housing stock, and most of all – to create a real pathway for individuals experiencing barriers to enter apprenticeships and careers in the trades. Participants in the 16 week paid training program are able to learn on the job through construction contracts and in-class training to prepare individuals facing barriers to employment for successful careers in the trades. The program participants receive 8 weeks of in-class training and 8 weeks of on the job training experience.

The program exposes participants to learning opportunities that provide skills in water retrofits, general labour and general contracting. More than 85% of participants have secured full-time employment following their training, and more than 90 participants have been trained so far. The demand for spots each round in the program exceed their capacity, with more than 200 applicants competing for approximately 20 spots.



## CONCLUSION

While climate change is inevitable, climate justice is not. Now that each level of government has committed to curbing climate change and is beginning to invest billions of dollars, it's important that we turn our attention to climate justice. We need to ensure that social equity and community benefits are part of Ontario's and Toronto's climate action plans.

As governments work to invest billions of dollars in climate actions over the coming years, this is an opportunity to strengthen our communities in a number of ways. The right policy tools and community supports can help design climate action programs that create a wide-range of community

benefits such as job creation, decent work, poverty reduction, affordable high-quality housing, and improved public health.

Toronto is at a very exciting moment as we continue to build momentum for a community benefits approach that builds a better city. Building on existing successes, we have the opportunity to design climate solutions that uplift communities. Through stronger coalitions, fostering political champions and bringing the right stakeholders on board, we have the opportunity to ensure that climate actions help achieve a number of community benefits for the people of Toronto. Let's get to work.



## PHOTO CREDITS

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