

WHAT WE DID AND WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

CITY OF EDMONTON'S INDIGENOUS (First Nation, Métis & Inuit) FRAMEWORK



Background

The purpose of this project is to understand how the City of Edmonton can build strong, healthy relationships with Indigenous communities in Edmonton. Over the last three years, this work has been co-created with [40+ Indigenous organizations, not-for-profits, post-secondary institutions and government entities](#). Through previous engagements, four roles (Advocate, Connector, Partner, Witness) were identified as a means of how the City of Edmonton and its roughly 14,000 employees can best support Indigenous communities in Edmonton. Along our journey, we have had the opportunity to work closely with Elders and Knowledge Keepers, to host an Elders and Knowledge Keepers gathering, and come together in ceremony. Over the summer and fall of 2019, the City hosted five community engagement events where Indigenous community members, including Elders and youth, were invited to help refine the work that has been done to date. This report outlines the community engagement process and what we heard.

Event dates and locations

Community Engagement Sessions:

July 24, 2019	Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society (11648 85 St)
August 7, 2019	Edmonton Intercultural Centre (9538 107 Ave)
August 20, 2019	MacEwan University (10700 104 Ave)
August 27, 2019	The Orange Hub (10045 156 St)

Youth Engagement Session:

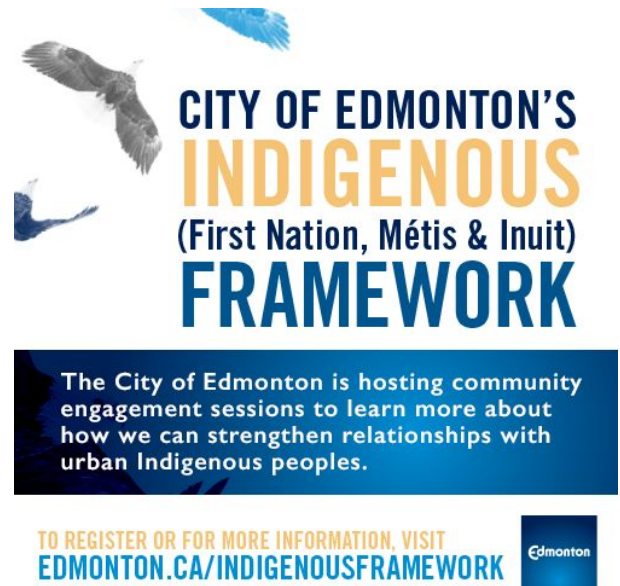
October 10, 2019	Rundle Family Centre (OA2, 2903 113 Ave)
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1. What We Did

In March 2019, the City of Edmonton held an Elder and Knowledge Keepers gathering, in partnership with 40 organizations/institutions previously engaged, to understand how we can build healthy relationships and better serve Indigenous Peoples and their communities living within an urban context. Through the advice of Elders and Knowledge Keepers and through sitting in Ceremony, the City was directed to hold community engagement sessions and work intergenerationally with youth to learn how we could serve better as Advocates, Connectors, Partners and Witnesses. Over the span of two months the City co-hosted, with community partners, four events that focused on each of the four roles in the Framework. An additional event was held with high-school students from Edmonton Public and Edmonton Catholic schools in October that explored what an ideal relationship between City Administration and Indigenous Communities would look like.



Events were held on the following dates:

- **July 24:** City as Advocate. Co-host: Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society
- **August 7:** City as Connector. Co-host: Creating Hope Society of Alberta
- **August 20:** City as Partner. Co-host: kihêw waciston MacEwan University
- **August 27:** City as Witness. Co-host: Yellowhead Tribal College
- **October 10:** Youth engagement with Edmonton Public and Edmonton Catholic high school students along with youth from Enoch Cree Nation and Nîkâniw Indigenous Youth Leadership Program.

To help promote the events, a communications toolkit (poster, sample email messages, social media messaging and graphics) were shared with all 40+ project partners to personally invite everyone within their networks.



The communications toolkit also included a City of Edmonton website detailing the purpose of the event and relevant details, as well as Eventbrite open invitations online. For the youth engagement, the project team worked specifically with the two school divisions to invite students from over 12 schools.

In total over 300 individuals, including Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Indigenous community members, youth and City staff, attended the five events.

At each of the four summer events, an Elder or traditional Knowledge Keeper was chosen by the co-hosts, and opened with a prayer and smudge. Over the course of the event, there were facilitated conversations on how the City of Edmonton can strengthen existing and build new relationships between City staff and Indigenous communities in Edmonton and how our understanding of the Roles (Advocate, Connector, Partner, Witness) can contribute to this goal.

Indigenous artists also attended each of these four events. Receiving inspiration through the stories and ideas that were shared, each of them created a different piece of art that is reflective of the specific role that was discussed at each event. Their artwork will be featured within the final document that will be released in 2020.

At the youth engagement session in October, Indigenous high school students discussed what their current interactions with City staff are like through the creation of empathy maps. They then explored what a supportive, healthy relationship between the City of Edmonton and Indigenous Peoples could look like through the creation of art sculptures. The intention for this event, as recommended by the Elders and Knowledge Keepers, was to have intergenerational and intersectional learning take place. Hence students were accompanied by Elders, Knowledge Keepers, teachers, City of Edmonton leadership, and facilitators at each of the tables.



“I really enjoyed having the opportunity to voice my experience and opinions as an Indigenous youth. It was really nice to have people listening so attentively and respectfully.”

2. What We Heard

In designing these events, one of the main goals that the City of Edmonton wanted to achieve was to strengthen existing and build new relationships between City staff and Indigenous Peoples who live, work and play in Edmonton. At each event, numerous City staff from across the corporation came to listen and start the relationship building process. It is impossible to document all the heartfelt stories and wisdom that was shared as events like these need to be experienced in-person, firsthand. Nevertheless, it is important to share some of the main themes that were discussed.

Even though each of the events had a different focus on the respective roles (Advocate, Connector, Partner, Witness), the themes surfacing from conversation circles were very similar. As a result, all the feedback was combined together then sorted according to a variety of themes that are listed below. Each theme represents the thoughts and ideas of participants across all the sessions. The themes have intentionally not been prioritized because, as we heard, 'all this information is important'. By listening to and understanding the breadth of input we can then identify solutions that are necessary for lasting change.



Building kinship - We are all related

- The intention of this initiative can best be described by the Cree word 'Wahkotowin' which can be translated as 'we are all related'
- As we strengthen our relationships the City needs to be sure to understand what that means from an Indigenous perspective
- Relationships are the cornerstone of this work but it will take time, honesty, and vulnerability
- Timelines and deadlines can rush relationships, it is important to put the relationship first

The City should be more focused on the strength of the relationship instead of specific outcomes as it is about the journey and our collective transformation

- Sometimes the City needs to participate without an agenda- to just show up and invest in the relationship
- The City should be more focused on the strength of the relationship instead of specific outcomes as it is about the journey and our collective transformation
- Analogy of a 'pot of soup' where everyone represents a different ingredient. Separately we may just be potatoes, carrots, or beef but when we come together we can form something great
- The City and Indigenous communities need to be equally accountable and committed to building relationships
- Can't fulfill any of the four roles without having a relationship



Importance of embracing and recognizing culture

- It is critical for Indigenous Peoples, **especially youth**, to be able to have access to and connect to culture
- Need to recognize the wide diversity of languages and cultures among the Indigenous populations that live, work, and play in Edmonton
- Encourage City staff to experience Indigenous culture firsthand. It is difficult to fully understand Indigenous Peoples without experiencing the vibrancy of culture
- Suggestion for the City to host cultural events (e.g. pow wow)
- City Departments need to understand what cultural safety means to their work
- More opportunities to smudge in City facilities

Need for Education

- The importance of educating City staff on Indigenous history, culture, beliefs, and worldview was **one of the most widely discussed topics** at all 5 events
- Participant quoted Hon. Justice Murray Sinclair, "Education has gotten us into this mess, and education will get us out."
- Education is a great opportunity for healing, learning, and building of relationships
- Need to have City staff complete honest self-reflection in order to address personal biases and to build empathy and understanding
- Should have a variety of opportunities for educational opportunities (e.g. Bannock & teachings, Indigenous Canada MOOC, etc.)
- "Learning is not a one or two day thing. Learning takes a lifetime."

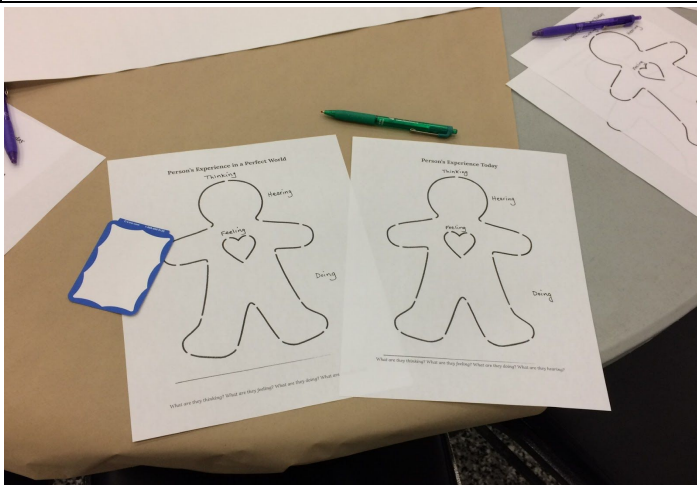
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Discrimination exists

- Numerous heartfelt stories were shared of how attendees continue to experience discrimination and racism in their everyday lives
- We all need to speak up and out when we witness racism and discrimination

Indigenous high school students, at the October 10th event, painted a vivid picture of how they currently experience life in Edmonton and described how they would like it to be. Below are samples of the candid responses that were shared. To view the original artwork that was created for this exercise [click here](#).

How Indigenous youth currently experience life in Edmonton	How Indigenous youth would like Edmonton to be
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Questioning if I am valuable ● Scared of being arrested ● I often get profiled ● I live in constant fear ● Hear things like, 'She will become an unsolved case', 'They get everything for free', or 'Are you drunk?' ● Constantly living on the edge and am defensive ● I am hungry ● Experience prejudice and discrimination ● I have built up walls around myself ● When I see a peace officer I am uncertain of how the interaction will go ● I have low expectations ● I am worried and afraid often ● "It's hard to get out" ● I help others ● I practice my culture when I can ● I feel angry and confused ● People make assumptions on who I am ● Often hear promises that lead to nowhere 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● I have access to cultural and traditional teachings ● I am involved in my community, my school, sports, hobbies, and programs run by the City of Edmonton for Indigenous youth ● I have pride in myself and feel worthy ● I am an equal, accepted for who I am and am open to express myself ● There are equal opportunities for all people ● I am connected to the land and the natural environment ● I am working towards my own personal goals ● I feel safe, secure and am respected ● I have healthy relationships with others and friends who have my back ● The bus/ LRT and libraries are considered safe places ● I know my language and my roots ● I live in a city where equity exists



"I liked the interactions with the Elders and everyone. I also enjoyed meeting new people that are struggling with the same things."
 -Youth participant

Desire for ongoing engagement

- Strong desire, especially from the youth, for ongoing community dialogues, and building of relationships. Should have large community-wide events at least once or twice a year
- It is important for City leadership and Council members to attend future dialogues
- Make sure that the City is doing something with the information that is shared at any engagement events
- Need to advertise future events more in order to bring in more people to the conversations

It is Important for City leadership and Council members to attend future dialogues

Hiring in the City of Edmonton

- Should hire more people who have compassion, understanding, and a willingness to treat people with respect and dignity
- Need more representation of Indigenous Peoples in the City of Edmonton
- Should examine Human Resources policies, processes and necessary qualifications that can be a hindrance in the hiring of Indigenous People
- Need more Indigenous People in decision making roles

Alignment to other important documents

- Need to align this work to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) Calls to Action, and the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) report and Calls to Justice

Building empathy

- "The City needs to have more compassion and less judgement regarding intergenerational trauma"
- If you are able to teach empathy to City staff that will help remove biases
- To foster respect and build relationships requires the person to see the other as an equal
- The City needs to 'rehumanize the relationship'

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Improve communication

- Would like to see the success stories of how relationships are being built, shared more
- Need a diversity of methods to help get the word out to City staff and to the public
- It is difficult to find information on the City website
- It is important to tell our common story of the importance of Treaty



Create welcoming spaces and places for Indigenous People

- We need to see land based teachings, reflections on Indigenous history, culture, language, symbols and art in all City spaces
- Making Indigenous culture more visible in City facilities will inspire more dialogue
- The City should Indigenize more of its spaces that they have control over
- “How can City Hall (and other buildings) look like a welcoming space for Indigenous youth?”

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Accountability

- Should have an annual report on the progress being made
- Transparency is critical
- Should consult Indigenous communities on the appropriate evaluation metrics/methods
- Need to have accountability to one another
- We’ve been here before, what will be different this time?
- All of this planning is good but we need to make sure that actual change occurs.

Importance of understanding Indigenous worldviews

- Need to value Indigenous worldviews the same as the western worldview when approaching this work
- Must be willing to change and adapt City processes to account for the relational nature of the Indigenous worldview
- How do we incorporate Indigenous knowledge into City decision making?

Need to value Indigenous worldviews the same as the western worldview when approaching this work

Creating a hub for Indigenous peoples and culture

- Strong support and desire for the Indigenous Culture and Wellness Centre that is currently being worked on

Role of City senior leadership

- The City needs to have their senior leaders (someone with authority to make things happen) to be part of these dialogues otherwise it is a disingenuous effort
- City senior leaders need to set the tone and lead by example to ensure there is buy-in at all levels
- Leaders can be the ones to help educate staff
- Need the presence of elected officials at these events





Intergenerational learning opportunities

- When possible, bring together multiple generations to have this discussion including Elders and youth
- Need to consider the 7 generations principle when planning

Naming of public infrastructure and neighbourhoods

- There should be more Indigenous names for our neighbourhoods, streets, buildings, etc.
- “When you come to Edmonton you should know that you’re in Treaty 6/ Métis territory like you see in Calgary.”

Importance of simply listening

- When engaging, one must listen with open ears and open hearts
- The City needs to be active listeners- Indigenous Peoples are the experts in our own lives, communities, and nations
- Hearing the experiences that Indigenous Peoples face is helpful in moving toward reconciliation

When engaging, one must listen with open ears and open hearts

Celebrate and share the success stories

- Need to start highlighting what is working well and to celebrate and acknowledge success
- Instead of always sharing the trauma and historical injustices we should recognize and promote the beauty of Indigenous culture, showcase the people who are making a real difference and honor the resiliency of Indigenous Peoples
- Can showcase and tell the positive stories through a number of different ways

The proper process is important

- Doing things in an Indigenous way is not the same as the western way
- Relationship building and reconciliation won’t happen overnight, it takes time and willingness
- Important to know and follow proper protocols



- “Nothing about us without us!”
- Must be adaptive, willing to take risks, and not rush the process

Additional support for Indigenous initiatives is needed

- Need to empower and build capacity with Indigenous communities, organizations, businesses, and individuals so they can help themselves
- Need to adequately resource Indigenous led programs and services in the community
- Living within Edmonton can be unaffordable, especially housing, and more needs to be done to make education, jobs, and services more accessible
- Indigenous People are overrepresented in homelessness statistics, this needs to change
- Current funding models are creating divisions where people are not working together- it creates competition instead of unity

System level changes are required

- Together we need to dismantle the privilege and power dynamics that have been ingrained into our society since colonization
- If we are to meaningfully address poverty and homelessness we need to address intergenerational trauma
- There are a lot of barriers that Indigenous Peoples face as they interact with the City

Strong sense of urgency needed

- In order to be successful, this must be a priority! The City needs to walk the talk
- The City needs to take action. We have talked about this for long enough, now is the time to act
- All City staff need to understand the importance of the Framework and be empowered to take action

“I always enjoy learning from Elders. I like that youth were included- I’ve never been included in something like this before.”



At each of the sessions, we received input on how the City can deepen its understanding of each of the four roles and what it means to live out the role. The comments below include feedback received in respective of each role.

Role: City as an Advocate

- City of Edmonton staff need to be empowered to be advocates for Indigenous Communities
- Need to balance advocacy by the City and self-determination of Indigenous Peoples
- Important to be an Advocate for 7 generations

Role: City as a Connector

- About building connections to one another based on kinship
- City to help facilitate points of connection between all the players and the mass distribution of information
- ‘Connector’ between Indigenous Peoples and their aspirations
- Need to connect to one another and to the environment

Role: City as a Partner

- Must be seen as equals in the partnership with shared responsibility and accountability
- Being in partnership means investing in the success of those you’re in a relationship with
- Trust and transparency are important components of successful partnerships
- Critical to expand partnerships with other agencies, governments, allies, academic institutions, etc.
- Partnership must evolve over time

Role: City as Witness

- Overall, the term ‘Witness’ did not resonate with people
- Witness feels too passive when compared to the other roles
- There are negative connotations associated with the legal system; going to court to be a ‘witness’

Did you know?

91% of attendees support the City of Edmonton as they continue to co-create the Framework with Indigenous communities.

3. How Will The City Honour Community Feedback And What's Next

All of the information that was shared at the five engagement sessions will help the project team create a final guiding document with all four roles refined, a project website, and project videos that will be shared with all City of Edmonton staff and with City Council.

From the event held on August 27, we heard that 'Witness' did not resonate with people. Before the final guiding document is released we will work with Elders to confirm a new role to replace 'Witness'.

4. Thank you!

Thank you to all of our community partners, our event co-hosts, and to the hundreds of people who shared their knowledge, wisdom and insight on how the City of Edmonton can strengthen its relationship with Indigenous Peoples and their communities living within an urban context.

For more information including future updates on our progress, please visit edmonton.ca/indigenousframework.

