

Meeting in the Middle Annual Gathering

Summary Report

November 6, 2019



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Introduction

The *Meeting in the Middle Annual Gathering Summary Report* provides an overview of the jointly organized meeting that took place on Oct 28th between the City of Toronto, Shelter, Support & Housing Administration Division (SSHA) and local Indigenous organization leaders at the Waterfront Neighbourhood Centre, Toronto.

The annual gathering between SSHA and leaders of Indigenous organizations honours Commitment #7 of the *Meeting in the Middle Engagement Strategy and Action Plan* (2018). The report was co-developed by SSHA, the Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council (TASSC), and the Indigenous Community Advisory Board (CAB) to document their collective commitments to relationship-building, provide statements of accountability, and uphold the City of Toronto's Statement of Commitment to the Aboriginal Communities of Toronto. The report indicates, "Annually, we will gather to evaluate our independent and collective progress on achieving our accountability statements."

In response, SSHA and the leaders of Indigenous organizations agreed to hold a gathering annually, to review the progress made in the previous year. Each gathering will be aligned with Indigenous ceremonial and cultural procedures to honour and demonstrate the importance of the shared commitment to addressing homelessness and the housing needs of Indigenous communities in the City of Toronto.

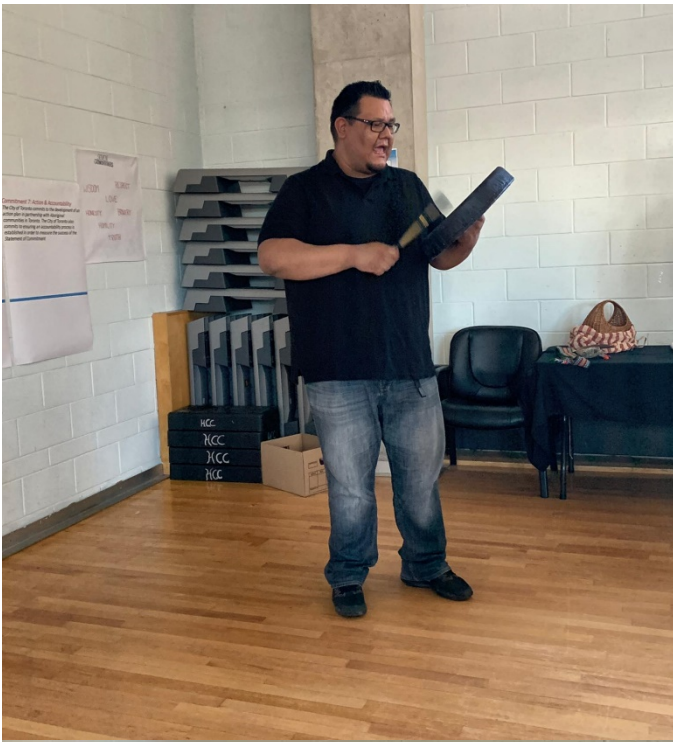
Overview of Meeting in the Middle Annual Gathering

The first annual gathering was held in the afternoon of October 28th at the Waterfront Neighbourhood Centre. It was attended by twenty-five (25) individuals, including SSHA directors and staff and leaders and staff from Indigenous organizations in the housing and homelessness sector.¹ There were sixteen (16) individuals representing nine (9) Indigenous organizations, and four (4) directors and four (4) staff representing SSHA. The manager of the City of Toronto's Indigenous Affairs Office was also present (1). Ten (10) individuals attending were the original partners in the strategic planning and co-creation of *Meeting in the Middle* in 2017. Four (4) new Indigenous organizations were also present to support and learn about the collective work between SSHA and Indigenous partners. SSHA welcomes their participation and looks forward to engaging with them more proactively in the future.

Ceremonial and Cultural Procedures

The Gathering was opened with a smudge and blessing by Frances Sanderson, Executive Director of Nishnawbe Homes. Local Indigenous community member, Gabe Gaudet, provided an opening song to commemorate the event. Suzanne Brunelle, Senator of the Toronto and York Region Métis Council, brought the Métis sash and read a blessing. Meeka Uniuqsarag, from the Toronto Inuit Association, was invited to conduct the Inuit lighting ceremony but was unable to attend. Laural Raine, Director of Service System Planning & Integrity, SSHA, provided a land acknowledgement and opening statement including last minute regrets from General Manager Mary-Anne Bedard that she could not attend.

¹ All participants are listed at the end of this report.



After a facilitated session and discussion, Steve Teekens, Executive Director of Na-Me-Res, performed a pipe ceremony. Larry Frost, Executive Director of the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto, provided a closing blessing, and Gabe Gaudet performed also performed a closing song to indicate the end the Gathering.

Facilitated Discussion

Attendees participated in an introductory icebreaker exercise after which they collectively indicated if the action items outlined in *Meeting in the Middle Strategy* had been reasonably fulfilled. In total, 67 responses per commitment were gathered (approximately 10 indicators per commitment). Participants were encouraged to articulate their reasons for their selections.



Next, the participants discussed patterns emerging and proposed actions for the following year.

Discussion Points Organized by Commitments

SSHA and Indigenous partners agreed that relationship building was progressing positively and many of the action items addressed by each group were a direct outcome of a robust collaboration between SSHA and the Indigenous CAB. All stakeholders were proud of *Meeting in the Middle* and its potential to be considered as a best practice for other interest groups to adopt. The annual

gatherings were recognized as an avenue to measure outcomes and ensure accountability



The City commits to creating training opportunities for the Toronto Public Service to learn about the history and its current day impacts from Aboriginal Elders and other Aboriginal partners. The City also commits to working with Aboriginal communities to improve public awareness of Aboriginal life in Toronto.

Commitment #1: 9 of 9 participants expressed that collective actions exceeded expectations. SSHA's commitment and role in supporting cultural competency training (ICCT), was an important factor in contributing to the success in addressing commitment 1.



The City commits, when working with the Aboriginal communities in Toronto, to learning about the elements of an Aboriginal holistic approach from its Aboriginal partners. The City further commits to supporting this approach in the belief that this will provide the greatest benefit to the community being served.

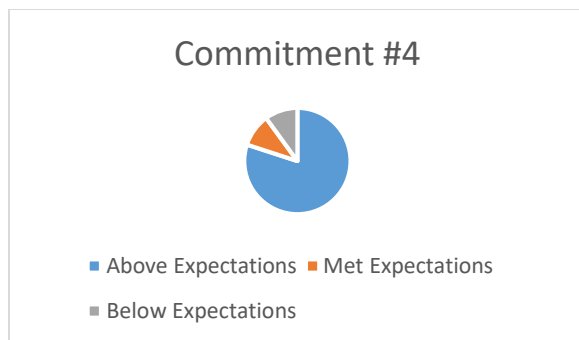
Commitment #2: 7 of 8 participants indicated the collective actions were above expectations; 1 participant indicated actions met expectations.



The City commits to working with Aboriginal partners to explore ways to strengthen the capacity of Aboriginal organizations and associations to plan, lead, and deliver initiatives for local Aboriginal communities.

Commitment #3: 8 of 9 participants indicated the collective actions were above expectations; 1 participant indicated actions did not meet expectations.

- The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between SSHA, the Indigenous CAB, and the Indigenous Community Entity (CE) was provided as an example of honouring the capacity of Indigenous organizations to lead and deliver initiatives
- There was agreement that the implementation of the MOU will be a priority in the upcoming year



The City also commits to engaging Aboriginal communities in the City's decision-making process, to removing barriers to civic participation, and to increasing the representation and role of Aboriginal people on municipal boards and committees.

Commitment #4: 8 of 10 participants indicated the collective actions were above expectations; 1 participant indicated actions were met; 1 participant indicated actions were below expectations.

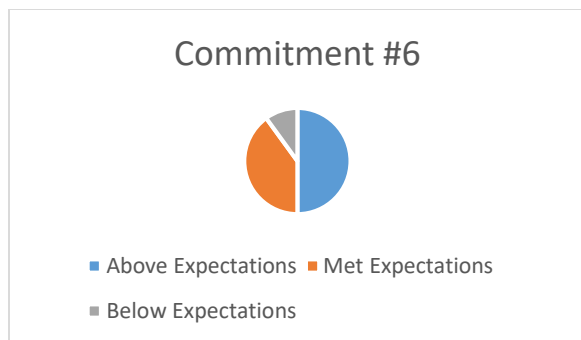
- Street Needs Assessment (SNA) was seen as an opportunity in 2020 to engage the Indigenous community. It was acknowledged that engagement with the Indigenous community may be focused around a learning and development component and cultural safety in the current iteration of the SNA.



The City of Toronto commits to implementing employment practices that ensure that opportunities for employment are accessible to Aboriginal people and increases the number of Aboriginal employees at all occupational levels.

Commitment #5: 4 of 10 participants indicated the collective actions were met; 6 participants indicated the collective actions were below expectations.

- There was an acknowledgement that hiring Indigenous people was a City of Toronto corporate-wide issue, and SSHA has made some positive strides in hiring Indigenous employees
- There was a suggestion and consensus about a potential meeting between SSHA and Miziwe Biik (or any other appropriate Indigenous organization) to discuss the provision of training opportunities and remove barriers to Indigenous employment.



The City of Toronto commits to working formally and informally with all orders of government and other municipalities, institutions, and community organizations to continue exploring promising practices and opportunities for collaboration on Aboriginal initiatives and to promote the interests of Aboriginal people in Toronto, as defined by the Aboriginal communities.

Commitment #6: 5 of 10 participants indicated the collective actions were above expectations; 4 participants indicated expectations were met; 1 participant indicated actions were below expectations.

- Street Needs Assessment (SNA) was acknowledged as using an evidence-based approach to support the need for additional funding for addressing Indigenous homelessness

The SSHA Service Plan and priority setting was identified as an opportunity to include Indigenous priorities in the five-year plan

- The co-development of a data strategy with the CAB was proposed for greater data sovereignty

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The City of Toronto commits to the development of an action plan in partnership with Aboriginal communities in Toronto. The City of Toronto also commits to ensuring an accountability process is established in order to measure the success of the Statement of Commitment

Commitment #7: 9 of 10 participants indicated the collective actions were above expectations; 1 participant indicated the actions met expectations.

- A sense of pride was expressed about *Meeting in the Middle*
- The annual gathering was seen as a bold action and step as it measures progress and fosters accountability
- The monthly CAB meetings were seen as being integral to maintaining and developing open communication between partners.

Priorities for the Upcoming Year

COMMITMENT NUMBER	ACTION
#3	Implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for providing 20% of program funding.
#4	Meaningful inclusion of Indigenous agencies and community members in the 2020 Street Needs Assessment
#5	SSHA to discuss with Miziwe Biik or other Indigenous organizations about best practices for training and employment opportunities
#6	Collective advocacy around the National Housing Strategy
#6	Indigenous input into SSHA 5-year Service Plan
#6	Development of a data strategy for Indigenous data and statistics



“As we learn to embrace our unique characteristics and acknowledge the constraints we face, we must stand united in addressing the needs of the people we serve, always remembering that relationship-building is an ongoing process”

- Meeting in the Middle Engagement Strategy and Action Plan (2018)

Participant List

Indigenous Partners:

Randy Pitt, Aboriginal Labour Force Development Circle
Chris Maracle, Aboriginal Labour Force Development Circle
Sam Maracle, Aboriginal Labour Force Development Circle
Kanda Rodgers, Aboriginal Labour Force Development Circle
Larry Frost, Executive Director, Native Canadian Centre of Toronto
Jeff Schiffer, Native Child and Family Services of Toronto
Steve Teekens, Native Men's Residence
Frances Sanderson, Nishnawbe Homes
Lindsay Kretschmer, Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council
Talitha Tolles, Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council
Suzanne Brunelle, Toronto and York Region Métis Council
Theo Nazary, Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre
Chantal Maru, Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre
Liana Canzian, Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre
Bryan Winters, Toronto Inuit Association
Tanner Tootoosis, Wigwamen Incorporated

Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, City of Toronto:

Laural Raine, Director, Service System Planning & Integrity,
Doug Rollins, Director, Housing Stability Services,
Gord Tanner, Director, Homelessness Initiative & Prevention
Darren Vermeersch, Acting Director, Program Support
Hussain Haider Ali, Manager, Business Services
Linda Wood, Manager, Service System Planning & Integrity
Hillary Keirstead, Housing Consultant, Housing Stability Services
Mehereen Bhajiwala, Toronto Urban Fellow, Service System Planning & Integrity

Indigenous Affairs Office, City of Toronto:

Selina Young, Manager, Indigenous Affairs Office, City of Toronto

