



Mokwateh

INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT | ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC OPTIONS

Canadian Urban Institute

Prepared for:

Robert Plitt and Matt Buckman

Executive Summary & Introduction

Background and Context

Canadian society is going through a process of Reconciliation, learning our country's true history and facing our relationship with Indigenous peoples. Reconciliation is compelling policy makers, businesses, and society at large to invest time and effort in understanding and engaging with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. This document outlines strategic options that align with the evolving landscape of Indigenous economic development in Toronto and is rooted in our commitment to fostering meaningful connections and partnerships with this city's Urban Indigenous community as well as the local First Nations communities.

Indigenous economic development in Toronto has a complex history marked by both challenges and progress. The Indigenous peoples in Toronto have faced historical injustices such as land dispossession, forced relocations, and the impact of colonial policies prohibiting First Nations peoples from owning businesses, accessing education, or securing legal counsel. A significant legacy of these colonial policies has been the exclusion of Indigenous peoples from much of the Canadian economy. Despite historical challenges, progress has been made. Indigenous communities have played a pivotal role in revitalizing and fortifying economic development in the region. Confronting present-day socioeconomic disparities within Toronto's Urban Indigenous Community including systemic discrimination as a legacy of colonial dispossession, elevated unemployment rates, and housing insecurity, underscores the significance of ongoing collaboration and targeted initiatives.

We acknowledge the positive strides already accomplished and aim to contribute to a future which lives up to the commitment of Reconciliation through greater equity and prosperity through partnership.

Methodology

To begin to understand the current state of the Indigenous economy in Toronto, a three-pronged approach was implemented. Initially, an analysis of existing publications, strategy documents, commitments, and relationships between the City of Toronto and urban First Nations, Inuit, and

Métis peoples. This phase laid the groundwork for identifying strengths, gaps, and potential areas for improvement.

Following this, five discussion sessions were facilitated, bringing together key perspectives and subject matter experts. These sessions provided a forum for knowledgeable participants to share diverse perspectives, insights, and feedback on the current state and needs of the Indigenous economy in Toronto. The participants were all Indigenous peoples who currently reside in Toronto.

Lastly, the gathered information was synthesized to formulate actionable options for Indigenous economic development related to labour development, community consultation, and business development; specifically tailored to meet the needs of both the Centre for Urban Innovation (CUI) and the City of Toronto. The goal of this three-pronged approach is to foster more inclusive and mutually beneficial relationships between these entities and the Indigenous communities they engage with.

Current State Analysis

This section delves into the analysis of the current state of Indigenous communities in Canada, shedding light on both their strengths and persistent challenges. From a vibrant entrepreneurial spirit driving job creation to substantial contributions to the nation's GDP, Indigenous communities play a pivotal role in the economic landscape. However, as we explore further, it becomes evident that infrastructure gaps and a digital divide pose significant obstacles. The nuanced interplay of these factors emphasizes the need for targeted strategies to foster economic development and address pressing issues within Indigenous communities.

Canada

Entrepreneurial Spirit and Business Ownership:

Indigenous people, comprising 5% of the Canadian population, demonstrate a robust entrepreneurial spirit with approximately 50,000 Indigenous-owned businesses. This entrepreneurial activity contributes to economic diversity and job creation, showcasing the resilience and economic potential within Indigenous communities. The number of Indigenous peoples in Toronto is contested and there is very limited quantitative data on First Nations, Inuit or Metis businesses in Toronto.

Economic Contribution to GDP:

Indigenous communities contribute significantly to Canada's GDP, with an estimated \$48.9 billion. This highlights their substantial economic impact, spanning traditional sectors to emerging industries, fostering economic development and self-sufficiency.

Leadership in Clean Energy:

Indigenous communities rank as the third-largest owners of clean energy assets in Canada, reflecting their active participation in sustainable and environmentally friendly economic initiatives. This positions them as key contributors to the country's efforts in transitioning to cleaner energy sources.

Infrastructure Investment Needs:

A notable insight is the substantial \$349.3 billion investment required to close the infrastructure gap for First Nations communities. This underscores the persisting challenges related to inadequate infrastructure, emphasizing the need for targeted investments to improve living conditions and support economic development.

These insights collectively outline both positive achievements and ongoing challenges in Indigenous economic development and signal the importance of Economic Reconciliation. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive and collaborative approach, focusing on targeted investments, sustainable practices, and equitable access to essential services to empower Indigenous communities across Canada.

City of Toronto

Taking action on Economic Reconciliation has tremendous value for Indigenous and non-Indigenous businesses alike, enabling opportunities for shared economic prosperity and long-term business success. Indigenous businesses generally define success not only in terms of economic gains, but also as it relates to positive social impact on community well-being, cultural preservation, and the enduring prosperity of current and future generations.

Business, government institutions, and not-for-profit organizations across Ontario are increasingly recognizing the value of advancing Reconciliation, building mutually beneficial relationships with Indigenous Peoples, and supporting stronger Indigenous economic outcomes. In 2023, the City of Toronto (The City) developed a plan titled **Our Plan Toronto** focused on building relationships with Indigenous rights holders, businesses, and organizations; and understanding indigenous planning perspectives. The City views this plan as a key

opportunity to support Indigenous self-determination through Indigenous inclusion and reflection. As part of this effort, The City has engaged rights holders, Indigenous organizations, focus groups, the Community Leaders Circle (CLC) and participated at the Aboriginal Affairs Advisory Committee (AAAC) and the Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council (TASSC). Our Plan Toronto is the Official Plan review process that is provincially required to satisfy the Municipal Comprehensive Review and Growth Plan conformity exercise. The Official Plan is a city planning document that acts as The City's Roadmap for land use matters. It sets out the long-term vision, shared values, and policies that help guide decision making on land development, economic growth, the environment, and more.

The existing organizations are important groups representing Indigenous Torontonians, however for this project we have focused on gathering the ideas and opinions of business focused Indigenous professionals, representing a set of experiences and perspectives which are somewhat different from the front-line service providers engaged for the wider city of Toronto consultations.

Our Plan Toronto highlights several implications for Indigenous economic development:

1. **Enhanced Collaboration and Inclusion:** The City of Toronto's commitment to building relationships with Indigenous rights holders, businesses, and organizations, as outlined in "Our Plan Toronto," signifies a positive shift towards enhanced collaboration and inclusion. This engagement reflects a recognition of the importance of incorporating Indigenous perspectives into city planning, creating opportunities for economic development that align with Indigenous values and priorities.
2. **Support for Indigenous Self-Determination:** The City's emphasis on supporting Indigenous self-determination through Indigenous inclusion and reflection in the planning process indicates a commitment to empowering Indigenous communities. This approach suggests that economic development initiatives will be more closely aligned with the aspirations and priorities of Indigenous rights holders, fostering a sense of autonomy and control over economic activities.
3. **Informed Decision-Making:** The engagement with rights holders, Indigenous organizations, focus groups, the Community Leaders Circle (CLC), and participation in advisory committees such as the Aboriginal Affairs Advisory Committee (AAAC) and the Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council (TASSC) indicates a commitment to informed decision-making. This involvement ensures that Indigenous perspectives are considered and integrated into policy discussions, potentially leading to more nuanced and culturally sensitive economic development strategies.

4. **Integration of Indigenous Values in City Planning:** The integration of Indigenous planning perspectives within the Official Plan, a key roadmap for land use matters, suggests that Indigenous values and priorities will play a crucial role in shaping decisions related to land development, economic growth, and environmental considerations. This may result in economic development initiatives that are more sustainable, culturally respectful, and aligned with the long-term vision of Indigenous communities.
5. **Compliance with Regulatory Requirements:** The engagement in the Official Plan review process to satisfy the Municipal Comprehensive Review and Growth Plan conformity exercise indicates a commitment to regulatory compliance. This alignment with provincial requirements ensures that Indigenous economic development initiatives are conducted within the broader framework of regional and provincial planning, fostering a coordinated and cohesive approach.

The Plan suggests a positive shift towards inclusive and collaborative city planning that respects Indigenous perspectives and supports Indigenous self-determination, potentially leading to more culturally appropriate and sustainable economic development opportunities for Indigenous communities in Toronto.

In addition to Our Plan Toronto, The City of Toronto is working with the local Indigenous community to develop the **Indigenous Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (ICIE)**. The ICIE, slated to open in 2024, embodies a commitment to Indigenous Economic Reconciliation. This transformative project addresses the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls for Action 92 and aligns with the City's Reconciliation Action Plan. With over 22,000 sq. ft. of meticulously designed space, the ICIE will serve as a hub for Indigenous entrepreneurs, fostering economic development, cultural preservation, and community engagement.

The ICIE's unique governance model ensures Indigenous leadership in decision-making, with the facility being governed and managed by an Indigenous-led Operator. This approach not only aligns with the principles of Reconciliation but also highlights the City's commitment to authentic representation and self-determination within the Indigenous business community.

The establishment of a Leadership Advisory Circle (LAC) in 2019, comprising Indigenous entrepreneurs, professionals, and community leaders, further emphasizes the collaborative and culturally significant development of the ICIE. Beyond its physical space, the ICIE actively supports Economic Reconciliation by accepting expressions of interest from organizations looking to form partnerships or co-locate within the facility. This inclusive approach ensures a diverse range of

voices and perspectives, contributing to a vibrant ecosystem that goes beyond traditional business support.

In essence, the ICIE is positioned to be the City of Toronto's largest economic development Reconciliation project, creating a space where Indigenous entrepreneurs can thrive, collaborate, and contribute to the economic landscape. As a beacon of empowerment and cultural preservation, the ICIE reflects a progressive step towards Indigenous Economic Reconciliation, where economic development and cultural revitalization intersect to shape a more inclusive and prosperous future for Toronto's Indigenous communities.

Information Gaps in Indigenous Economic Impact Studies in the City of Toronto

Despite Toronto being a major urban center with a substantial Indigenous population, existing research has not adequately explored the specific economic impacts on these communities. There is a noticeable scarcity of comprehensive studies on the economic dynamics within this demographic. To fill this gap, a thorough research study, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, is essential. This research has the potential to offer valuable insights into the socio-economic challenges and opportunities experienced by Indigenous communities in Toronto. Ultimately, it can contribute to informed policy-making and resource allocation to support economic advancement and overall well-being.

Discussion Sessions – What We Heard

In an effort to foster inclusive and participatory decision-making, five discussion sessions were facilitated, serving as a cornerstone in the exploration of Indigenous economic development in Toronto. These sessions convened key representatives and subject matter experts, creating a dynamic platform for the exchange of diverse perspectives, insights, and constructive feedback.

This section delves into the outcomes and reflections derived from these discussion sessions, illuminating the collaborative spirit that informs the strategic options presented in this report.

Note that due to this project's short timeline, these discussions are not engagements or consultations. The discussions provided valuable insights into the perspectives of the Indigenous Subject Matter Experts we spoke with, but they do not represent the formal positions of their organizations.

Discussions were held with 5 subject matter experts:

To ensure the options presented are impactful and focused on promoting economic prosperity, the senior subject matter experts we held conversations with come from a range of Indigenous economic development organizations, focusing on professional development, small, medium and large business representation, culture and women's empowerment. All the subject matter experts are also entrepreneurs, currently or formerly running businesses in Toronto and hold Director level roles or above. The respondents represent a diverse set of backgrounds and perspectives, both Toronto born and newcomers to the city. All the respondents are also either First Nations, Inuit or Métis. Our conversations engaged both women and Two Spirited peoples.

Summary:

This table encapsulates key themes and perspectives that emerged during engaging conversations centered around Indigenous economic development in Toronto. Each quote serves as a poignant reflection of the challenges and opportunities voiced by participants, highlighting pivotal aspects such as governance dynamics, the imperative for comprehensive economic research, the urgency of Urban Reserve initiatives, and the significance of effective communication and engagement between the city and the Indigenous business community. By distilling these insights into a structured format, we aim to provide a clear overview of the multifaceted considerations that underscore the strategic options in this document.

Themes	Key Insight	Quotes
Governance and Relationship with the City	Identify Indigenous Champions to be involved in major planning and initiatives	I think it's inherently flawed that the stakeholders around the table are not Indigenous business owners. There is a lack of Indigenous representation with economic expertise as core gatekeepers for Indigenous affairs within Toronto.
Economic Development Research	Lead quantitative, longitudinal research initiatives	The foundation to build a viable economic development system can and should start with adequate research on what you're building upon, we are constantly being asked by the city, and people with work in the city about Indigenous entrepreneurs, how many there are in Toronto, and how they're performing.

		While a research initiative has been thought about, there has been little follow through. – I think there's a lot of opportunity here for a lot of work that hasn't been undertaken - no one's looked at it, and like who's going to pay to commission that? - I've been hearing that for years.
Urban Reserve Initiatives	Create an Urban Reserve in Toronto	Looking at the current Urban Reserve initiatives around Canada is the place to start. Toronto is behind the curve. 'Winnipeg, Edmonton, Thunder Bay, etc., all have reserves in town or proximate and it needs to be done in a fashion that doesn't destroy the relationships around you.
Communication and Promotion of Indigenous entrepreneurs within the City	City should promote the existing robust SMB Indigenous entrepreneurship ecosystem.	I think it's important for the city to communicate about the Indigenous business community and show success stories. Talk about the good things, successful Indigenous business. Tell good stories. Indigenous peoples for so long have looked at the world through a lens of scarcity, we need to talk about prosperity.

Gathering the prominent themes from the conversation, we heard resounding themes around multiple opportunities for the City of Toronto to uplift Indigenous economic development including:

1. A need for foundational research initiatives to give precise insight on what Toronto's Indigenous economics look like.
2. There has been little representation for Indigenous businesses at the table. Most of the representation excluding the actual Indigenous businesses themselves.
3. There are many examples of urban Indigenous development across Canada. Toronto has the opportunity to follow a path that has already been paved.

Best Practices – What We Found

Seeking valuable insights and strategic lessons to guide decision-making, we conducted robust desk research and analysis. Our approach, aligned with our discussion themes, involved a systematic exploration of prominent best practices across Canada. These examples are intended

not only to stimulate dialogue but also to serve as a roadmap, following in the footsteps of Indigenous champions, guiding our path forward.

Themes

Through our research, four (4) prominent themes emerged across major cities in Canada:

1. Urban Reserve
2. Community Involvement
3. Entrepreneurship
4. Engagement & Research

Urban Reserve

An urban reserve is a designated area within an urban or metropolitan setting that is recognized as Indigenous land. It typically involves a specific legal arrangement where an Indigenous community holds and manages the land within an urban environment. Urban reserves are a way for Indigenous communities to assert their presence and rights within urban centers, allowing for economic development, cultural initiatives, and community services while maintaining a connection to their traditional lands. These areas are subject to specific agreements and arrangements between the Indigenous community, municipal authorities, and often the federal government. The concept of urban reserves aims to address historical land dispossession and provide opportunities for Indigenous communities to thrive in both urban and traditional contexts.

1. Tsuut'ina (Calgary) - <https://tsuutina.com/>

- a. The First Nation is working on a [500-hectare, multibillion-dollar development](#) along the edge of the ring road called Taza that will include retail centres, entertainment and hospitality complexes, a research campus, and office developments with a health and wellness component
- b. The development is important for the nation to exert its independence and is part of a wider push to provide urban opportunities for the fast-growing Indigenous youth demographic who are gravitating to cities.
- c. the development is part of a long-term vision to create educational and employment opportunities on the First Nation and "allow generations of Tsuut'ina people to work and flourish, right here at home.

2. Sen'ákw (Vancouver-Squamish) - <https://senakw.com/>

- a. The largest Real Estate Development partnership with any First Nation in Canadian history.
- b. City-building: the Sen'ákw Lands will be a world class city building example of a transit-oriented project with purpose-built and highly sustainable rental housing delivered where it is needed.
- c. Climate Leadership on a global scale: the development will showcase climate leadership on a global scale as a showpiece NetZero project. Our Nation's deep connection to the environment and stewardship dates back millennia and is the foundation that will set a new standard for sustainability, including district energy and progressive, low carbon transportation options.
- d. A Legacy for the Squamish Nation: future uses on the site will tell the story of the Sen'ákw lands and reflect the ongoing legacy of the Nation by weaving our rich artistic tradition into the very architecture of the project.
- e. Significant economic benefit: long-term income will allow our community to meet its housing, education, and social service needs. It will help deliver improved health care, culture, language, arts and will include opportunities for member housing, that will help ensure the success and well-being of membership far into the future. The project will create employment opportunities for members at all stages of the development including the project's design, construction, public art, and in many other aspects.

Community Involvement

Community involvement refers to the active participation, engagement, and collaboration of Indigenous people in various aspects of community life, decision-making, and development. It encompasses a range of activities and initiatives through which community members contribute to and influence the well-being, cultural preservation, and sustainable development of their communities.

1. Permanent bilateral mechanisms

- a. The Government of Canada has established permanent bilateral mechanisms with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Nation leaders to identify joint priorities, co-develop policy and monitor progress.

2. Work with Indigenous consultants to better understand Toronto's Indigenous business community

- a. Several municipalities, provincial and federal departments have engaged Indigenous consulting firms, such as Rise, Acosys, Firelight Group, and

Mokwateh, to facilitate formal engagements and consultations with Urban Indigenous peoples as well as the proximate First Nations and Métis communities.

Entrepreneurship

Indigenous entrepreneurship refers to the establishment, ownership, and operation of businesses by Indigenous individuals or communities. It involves economic activities driven by Indigenous people with a focus on fostering self-sufficiency, cultural preservation, and community development. Indigenous entrepreneurship encompasses a wide range of ventures, including small businesses, enterprises rooted in traditional practices, and those engaged in contemporary industries.

1. Canadian Indigenous Business Accelerator 2024 (British Columbia)

- a. The NW Innovation Resource Center in partnership with Global Affairs Canada's Trade Commissioner Services, and Trade & Investment British Columbia is convening a new cohort of Canadian Indigenous innovators and early-stage startups interested in growing their entrepreneurial skills.

2. Indigenous Women's Entrepreneurship fund (IWEF)

- a. CCAB's Indigenous Women Entrepreneurship Fund 2023 was presented by LNG Canada with a contribution from Paper Excellence. The fund was open to Indigenous women-owned businesses that have encountered systemic barriers to lending relationships and have been disadvantaged because of the pandemic. The fund was administered through CCAB's Tools and Financing for Aboriginal Business (TFAB) program to enhance Aboriginal entrepreneurship through providing access to development and networks.

Engagement & Research

Engagement and research refer to the active involvement of Indigenous communities and individuals in key decision-making processes, and the systematic study of factors influencing their economic development. These processes are crucial for ensuring that economic initiatives align with Indigenous values, needs, and aspirations. The goal is to create sustainable and culturally sensitive economic development strategies that empower Indigenous communities, preserve cultural identity, and foster meaningful collaboration with external partners.

1. Indigenous Entrepreneurship in Toronto: Leveraging the Promise & Prosperity Research Initiatives

- a. Build on the high-quality research already conducted by the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business at the Federal and Provincial level to improve our understanding of Indigenous entrepreneurship in Toronto. Specifically, the Promise & Prosperity quantitative research projects which built robust Indigenous business lists and conducted surveys of these businesses.

Strategic Options / Next Steps

Based on an analysis of existing publications, strategy documents, commitments, and relationships, and discussions with senior subject matter experts from a range of economic development organizations, we have articulated 5 bold options for Indigenous Economic Development.

1. Elevate Indigenous Entrepreneurs:

- Create an impactful campaign to raise awareness about Indigenous entrepreneurs in Toronto, spotlighting their contributions and fostering a supportive community.
- Undertake targeted research directly with small Indigenous businesses, delving into their demographic and corporate makeup, sectors, sizes, aspirations, and challenges, providing a nuanced understanding of their unique needs within the City of Toronto.

2. Forge Economic Partnerships with Local First Nations:

- Integrate local First Nations in new urban developments through meaningful consultations, ensuring their perspectives shape and enrich the fabric of these projects.

- Mandate developers to collaborate with local First Nations on major projects, fostering partnerships that uphold Indigenous values and contribute to community prosperity.

3. Establish an Urban Reserve in Collaboration with local First Nations:

- Spearhead the creation of an urban reserve in Toronto, a collaborative effort between the city and local First Nations, providing a dedicated space for cultural preservation, economic growth, and community development.

4. Indigenous Centre for Innovation & Entrepreneurship (ICIE):

- Direct the Centre for Innovation to prioritize unlocking and supporting the prosperity of Indigenous peoples in Toronto by actively creating economic opportunities and pathways for innovation and entrepreneurship.
- Partner with locally based Indigenous businesses and business organizations to ensure the ICIE unlocks the economic opportunity it is designed for.

5. Commit to Robust Engagement with Urban Indigenous Peoples:

- Undertake a quantitative, longitudinal survey and research initiative on the urban Indigenous economy in Toronto, mapping the landscape of existing businesses, their locations, needs, goals, and growth challenges.
- Identify and engage Rightsholders and partners with specialized expertise in economic development and business growth.
- Ensure future City planning focused on economic development includes engagements with Indigenous subject matter experts in businesses, business oriented not-for-profits and human resource organizations. As well as with the economic development organizations representing local First Nations.

These options aim to foster greater awareness of Indigenous entrepreneurs in Toronto, stimulate meaningful partnerships with local First Nations on major projects, establish an urban reserve in collaboration with local communities, prioritize Indigenous prosperity through the Indigenous Centre for Innovation & Entrepreneurship (ICIE), and ensure robust engagement focused on economic development with the urban Indigenous population. Each option is strategically designed to address specific needs and challenges, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and thriving economic landscape for Indigenous communities in Toronto.

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Mokwateh

FOR MORE INFORMATION

PLEASE CONTACT:

JP Gladu

Principal

jpgaldu@mokwateh.com

416.801.9370

Max Skudra

Partner

mskudra@mokwateh.com

647.970.3160