

City of Toronto Guiding Principles for Commemoration

1. Overview

The Guiding Principles for Commemoration are used to inform how the City of Toronto commemorates people, places, or events in street names, property names and monuments. The Guiding Principles encourage greater equity and inclusion in place-making; promote a broader understanding of history and its legacy on communities; and confront the legacy of colonialism and systemic racism in City public spaces.

Commemoration is an intentional act of acknowledging the memory of a subject significant to a person or community. It can include positive and honorific celebrations of the past and present, as well as the tragic, controversial, and shameful dimensions of history and culture.

Civic commemorations are long-term, material markers intended to educate, encourage reflection, and remind passersby not to forget. They reflect community values by visibly showing how we choose to collectively honour the past, mark the present, and shape the future. Commemorations also symbolize who and what we collectively choose to include and exclude.

2. Why the Guiding Principles Matter

Toronto is one of the most diverse cities in the world. It is home to nearly 3 million people who represent many lived experiences, backgrounds, and identities related, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, class, gender identity, sexual identity, age, language, faith, disability, health, and immigration status.

However, commemorations in our public spaces do not fully reflect the city's rich histories, cultures, and diversity. Like in many other North American cities, most commemorations in Toronto celebrate the city's colonial history. This historic imbalance has meant that the stories of Indigenous Peoples, Black communities, and equity-deserving groups have been excluded or even erased from Toronto's public spaces and the decision-making that governs these spaces. The Guiding Principles are intended to address this gap in representation, while also recognizing and valuing the traditions, knowledge and insights of these communities, and incorporating them into the process of commemorating in public spaces.

3. Scope

The Guiding Principles inform decision-making and priority-setting for commemorative work undertaken by the City, specifically:

- Naming and renaming of public and private streets and lanes
- Naming and renaming of City-owned properties, including parks and civic buildings
- Developing or acquiring civic monuments

The Guiding Principles will not apply to certain forms of commemoration or recognition that have been designed to achieve specific objectives, including:

- Civic honours, awards, and tributes
- Assets named in the context of sponsorships or donations
- Fee-for-service programs, such as the Commemorative Tree and Bench Program
- Community-initiated memorials that are not owned or managed by the City
- Temporary community-initiated recognitions, including flag raising
- Programs commemorating those who have lost their lives in the line of duty

All commemorations in City of Toronto public spaces will be consistent with the City of Toronto Human Rights and Anti-Harassment/Discrimination legislation, by-laws, and policies.

3.0 Guiding Principles for Commemoration

The first three Guiding Principles relate to **process**. Principles #1 and 2 outline core requirements that must be demonstrated in order to proceed with a proposal for a commemorative street name, property name or monument, while Principle #3 includes requirements specific to commemorations of significance to Indigenous Peoples. The remaining three Guiding Principles relate to **outcomes**, including the types of commemorations that will be prioritized and ways that knowledge and stories behind commemorations can be shared.

1. Be informed by historical research, traditional knowledge, and community insights

Proposals for commemorations must be grounded in thorough historical and/or community-based research that is carefully and ethically undertaken. Research should consider a range of primary and secondary sources, such as history books, articles, peer-reviewed academic research, archival materials, and artefacts. Proposals could also be based on oral histories and traditional knowledge to provide for an authentic, local account of Toronto's history, and reflect community stories that may not be documented in other historical sources.

2. Be supported by communities through meaningful engagement

Proposals for new commemorations must include evidence of meaningful support from communities, accounting for the broad range of voices, perspectives, and experiences of residents. Community support can be demonstrated in a number of different ways, including letters of support, surveys, online engagement, or community dialogues.

Strategies for obtaining this support and the extent of support required may vary depending on the type and nature of the commemoration being proposed. It is also important to recognize that no one community speaks with a single voice, and to consider the multiple opinions and lived experiences within communities when designing community engagement processes.

The City will continuously learn from equity-deserving groups about what meaningful engagement means to them, and provide ample time and opportunities for them to participate in decision-making throughout the planning of the commemoration.

3. Honour Indigenous ways of knowing and being

Toronto is situated on the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat Peoples, and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples. Toronto is covered by Treaty 13, signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit and the Williams Treaties signed with multiple Mississaugas and Chippewa bands.

In alignment with the Reconciliation Action Plan, the City commits to developing commemorations of significance to Indigenous Peoples with Indigenous rights-holders, Elders, knowledge holders, language carriers, and urban Indigenous communities – helping to uphold Indigenous ways of knowing and being. The City will ensure space for Indigenous traditions and ceremonies when developing a commemorative street name, property name, or monument significant to Indigenous Peoples. For example, when Indigenous names are being considered for a street or property, Indigenous rights-holders, Elders, knowledge holders, and language carriers can be given opportunities to visit and walk the land under consideration, to offer ceremony, and to connect with the spirit of the place.

4. Prioritize commemorations significant to Indigenous Peoples, Black communities, and equity-deserving groups

Toronto's urban landscape should reflect the diversity of residents and a more authentic account of the city's history – especially recognizing the contributions of Indigenous Peoples, Black communities, and equity-deserving groups, such as racialized people including Asian and South Asian communities; 2SLGBTQ+ community members; immigrants, refugees, undocumented individuals; women; youth; people with low incomes; and persons with disabilities. To create public spaces that are more inclusive and representative of Toronto's diversity, the City will prioritize commemorations significant to Indigenous Peoples, Black communities, and equity-deserving groups, and give consideration to celebrating untold stories that are currently not represented in Toronto's public spaces.

Commemorative street names, property names, and monuments can acknowledge a diversity of subjects significant to Indigenous Peoples, Black communities, and equity-deserving groups, such as:

- A person or a community – alive or deceased; well-renowned or locally known; young or old; Canadians, immigrants, or refugees
- Moments in history – triumphant or tragic events
- The land and its natural features
- Values or concepts
- Cultural principles
- Languages

5. *Connect to Toronto, Ontario or Canada's histories and cultures*

Proposals for commemorative street names, property names, and monuments must highlight subjects with historical or cultural connections to Toronto, Ontario or Canada. Focusing on subjects relevant to Toronto, Ontario or Canada allows us to discover the many histories and narratives that have shaped the experiences of the communities that call Toronto home.

6. *Share knowledge and stories behind commemorations*

When something is being commemorated, it is important to tell the story of *why*, with particular recognition of the individuals and communities that inspired and advocated for the commemoration. Incorporating an educational component – such as plaques, digital resources, community dialogues, or interactive experiences – can share the knowledge and stories behind public commemorations. Sharing the stories of commemorations will help to foster a greater sense of understanding, belonging, and connectedness among Toronto's communities.