

MEETING
IN THE
MIDDLE
THIRD
ANNUAL
GATHERING
SUMMARY REPORT

2021



Land Acknowledgement for Toronto

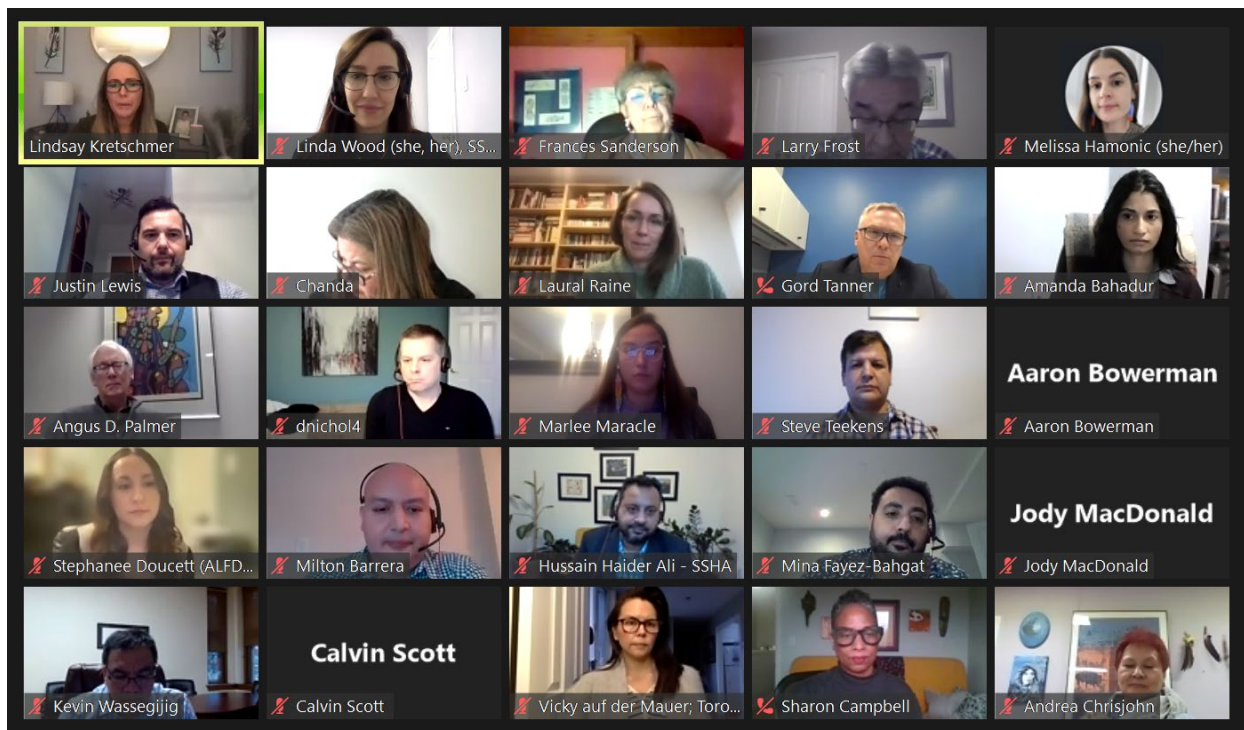


We acknowledge that our work takes place on the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. We also acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit, and the Williams Treaty signed with multiple Mississaugas and Chippewa bands.



Introduction

The *Meeting in the Middle 3rd Annual Gathering Summary Report* provides an overview of the online discussions that took place on January 12, 2022 during the jointly organized virtual gathering, between leadership from the City of Toronto's Shelter, Support & Housing Administration Division (SSHA) and the Indigenous housing and homelessness service providers located in Toronto. The annual gathering is an opportunity to assess, celebrate, and recommit to the relationship building process, and the seven commitments outlined in the [Meeting in the Middle Engagement Strategy and Action Plan \(Meeting in the Middle\)](#).



Co-Planning the Annual Gathering

In the spirit of *Meeting in the Middle*, every year the annual gathering is co-planned. A sub-committee was formed of both TICAB and SSHA representatives, who volunteered their time and knowledge to assist with planning the annual gathering. The sub-committee and facilitator developed relationship building activities, and an overall plan for the meeting. Leadership from TICAB and SSHA provided input into the draft agenda. In addition, in advance of the gathering, progress reports were completed by both SSHA and TICAB identifying actions implemented in 2021 to advance *Meeting in the Middle*.

Culture and Ceremony

The gathering was opened and closed with a prayer by Larry Frost, to honour the unification of the many different minds and commitment to including Indigenous ceremonial and cultural procedures to honour and demonstrate the strength in relationship between SSHA and the TICAB. Following the opening prayer, a drum song was shared by Steve Teekens (TICAB Co-Chair) and a land acknowledgment was given by SSHA's Acting General Manager, Gord Tanner. The TICAB opening remarks were given by Steve Teekens, followed by Gord Tanner on behalf of SSHA. Gord Tanner shared that Mary-Anne Bedard, General Manager with SSHA would be retiring in February 2022 and acknowledged Mary-Anne for her leadership and commitment, both personally and professionally, to *Meeting in the Middle*.

Process

The gathering was facilitated by Lindsay Kretschmer. As an ice breaker, participants were asked to go around in a virtual "circle" and introduce themselves, where they are from, and share one hope for the future of *Meeting in the Middle*. The facilitated discussion then included a review of outcomes for goals and accountability from the previous and was then concluded with a conversation about hopes and goals for each of the seven commitments for 2022.

Facilitated Discussion

The facilitated discussion was designed intentionally to reflect on the previous years' collective goals and whether they had been met, identify areas for improvement, and set new hopes and goals for the future. Menti™ was used as an online engagement tool to enable all participants to have a voice in the discussion. Participants were asked to share what they value most in the relationships between TICAB and SSHA. Principles such as "respect, transparency, collaboration, honesty support, commitment, and trust" were a common theme, when thinking about the collective mind.

What do we value in our MITM Relationships?



Participants were asked to think about what impact of *Meeting in the Middle* will have on Indigenous communities in the future for housing. From this, a powerful list of responses was generated including "reduce misunderstanding of the homeless", support "additional units for Indigenous persons in Toronto", push for "more deeply affordable housing with supports".

What impact will MITM have on communities in the future for housing?



Commitment 1: Learning & Development (Cultural Knowledge)

Collectively both SSHA and Indigenous partners felt that despite progress made, there is "always room for growth" and "room to improve". There was mutual agreement that *Meeting in the Middle* has now become a "benchmark" for other City divisions and sectors to strive for a more culturally based relationship building model. There was a resounding consensus that participants are hopeful for more co-developed and "mandatory Indigenous cultural training" for City staff. As well as, more "opportunities to

do lunch and learns with SSHA staff/bringing practical ways to enrich programming” to light, and more support around “financial literacy to assist in economic reconciliation”.

Commitment 1: Learning & Development



2022 Hopes and Goals for Commitment 1: Learning & Development



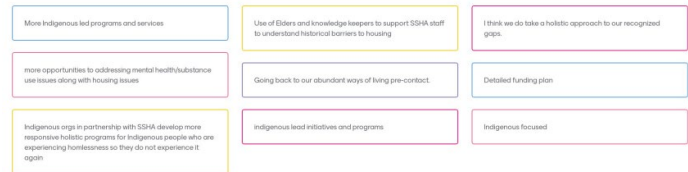
Commitment 2: Integrating Holistic Approaches

Based on the Menti results, participants indicated that City initiatives like the Streets Needs Assessment, SSHA service plan, and the Coordinated Access working group made notable progress in co-development and inclusion of Indigenous holistic approaches. At the same time, participants hoped for more future opportunities for “Indigenous led initiatives and programs”, continue “ensuring Indigenous consultation” is being done from start to finish, and the “use of Elders and Knowledge Keepers to support SSHA staff understand historical barriers to housing”.

Commitment 2: Integrating Holistic Approaches



2022 Hopes and Goals for Commitment 2: Integrating Holistic Approaches



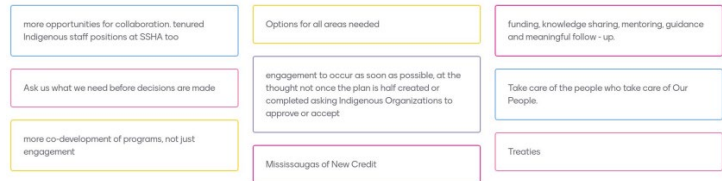
Commitment 3: Supporting Capacity Building

Both groups noted that the “20% set aside” of grants funding at SSHA allowed for the development of more Indigenous-led programs/projects in Toronto. TICAB partners acknowledged a need for SSHA to identify “more opportunities for collaboration” and “co-development of programs”. One participant specifically noted that Indigenous engagement needs to occur early “at the thought, not once the plan is half created or completed” and another noted that SSHA should engage “before decisions are made”.

Commitment 3: Supporting Capacity Building



2022 Hopes and Goals for Commitment 3: Supporting Capacity Building



Commitment 4: Meaningful Engagement (Decision Making)

Overall, both TICAB and SSHA highlighted initiatives such as the Coordinated Access prioritization policy, SSHA's service plan and the Street Needs Assessment as examples of meaningful engagement and collaboration. Participants noted that the relationship between TICAB and SSHA felt “genuine”, “natural not forced”, with one participant noting that there has been “definite improvement” when it comes to meaningfully engaging with Indigenous partners and communities.

Commitment 4: Meaningful Engagement



2022 Hopes and Goals for Commitment 4: Meaningful Engagement



Commitment 5: Employment Practices

It was a general consensus that participants agreed that there needed to be more consistency with Indigenous recruitment and retention within the City. Participants identified the need for more “permanent full time Indigenous job opportunities, with full benefits and pension plan. No short-term contract”. Participants specifically pointed out that there is a lack of Indigenous representation in “both management and frontline positions”. One participant identified the need for the City to develop “policies and guidelines around Indigenous recruitment” to ensure more “Indigenous voices within SSHA” are being brought to the forefront.

Commitment 5: Employment Practices



2022 Hopes and Goals for Commitment 5: Employment Practices



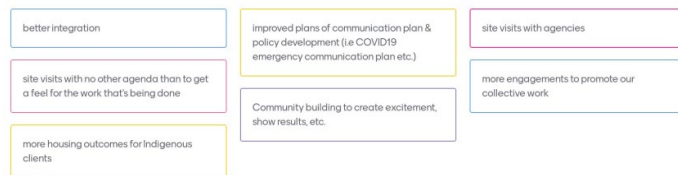
Commitment 6: Opportunities for Collaboration

Both groups noted that despite not being able to meet in person, being able to stay unified virtually allowed for new ways to collaborate and “helped to connect”. Initiatives such as the Canada-Ontario Housing Benefit program and the Toronto Housing Allowance program were highlighted as successful collaborations. While one participant felt that they were kept informed throughout the year, another felt this area needs improvement, better integration and “improved plans of communication and policy development” moving forward. Overall, participants were hopeful that there would be more in person meetings in 2022, including intentional site visits to shelters, and more engagements to promote collective work.

Commitment 6: Opportunities for Collaboration



2022 Hopes and Goals for Commitment 6: Opportunities for Collaboration



Commitment 7: Action & Accountability

There was mutual agreement that there needs to be more frequent reporting on Indigenous homelessness (i.e., “report card” style follow ups or a “performance dashboard for targets on commitments”) and more specific measurable targets and milestones established to reduce Indigenous homelessness. Participants felt that by eliminating “silos”, both sides could achieve a “deeper understanding of the diversity of the community members' experiences”. One TICAB member stated that “we are on the right track” but we must “stay the course and agree to value our collective working relationship”.

Commitment 7: Action & Accountability



2022 Hopes and Goals for Commitment 7: Action & Accountability



Final Summary

The annual gathering reminded TICAB and SSHA members why this work is important and that we can achieve more by working together collectively. By going back to the

roots of what originally inspired *Meeting in the Middle*, participants were reminded of the values the relationship brings, and enabled participants to recommit to "collaboration, respect, honesty, understanding, transparency and commitment" in unity together. Participants mentioned that with a deeper understanding of "transparency, truth and reconciliation, learning from the past to improve the future", TICAB and SSHA can collectively "bridge the gap experienced by Indigenous-led homeless services". The guided discussions provided a fulsome overview of our progress (both collectively and independently) and where we need to be headed. The discussions reconfirmed the important principle of "working together" and that *Meeting in the Middle* is a "living document" that continues to shift, and mold to meet the unique needs of the Indigenous homelessness community in Toronto, with action and accountability.

Appendix A: Participants and Contributors

Report prepared by:

Marlee Maracle, Policy Development Officer, SSHA

Participant List:

Cultural Knowledge Support

Larry Frost, Knowledge Keeper

Facilitator

Lindsay Kretschmer

Toronto Indigenous Community Advisory Board

Amanda Bahadur, Program Coordinator, Anduhyaun

Andrea Chrisjohn, Board Designate, Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre

Angus Palmer, General Manager, Wigwamen Incorporated

Frances Sanderson, Executive Director, Nishnawbe Homes Inc.

Jody MacDonald, Manager, Gabriel Dumont Non-Profit Homes Inc.

Kevin Wassegijig, Executive Director, Native Canadian Centre of Toronto

Melissa Hamonic, Associate Director, Native Child and Family Services of Toronto

Pamela Hart, Executive Director, Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto

Sarah-Mae Rahal, Thunder Woman's Healing Lodge Society

Steve Teekens, Executive Director, Native Men's Residence (Na-Me-Res)

Suzanne Brunelle, Senator, Toronto & York Region Métis Council

Tanner Tootoosis, Assistant General Manager, Wigwamen Incorporated

Vicky Auf der Mauer, Toronto Inuit Association

Toronto Indigenous Community Entity

Marlee Maracle, Reaching Home Manager, Aboriginal Labour Force Development Circle

Stephane Doucett, Indigenous Programs Coordinator, Aboriginal Labour Force Development Circle

Shelter, Support and Housing Administration Division

Aaron Bowerman, Indigenous Youth Research Associate, Strategic Programs

Calvin Scott, Indigenous Youth Research Associate, Infrastructure Planning and Development

Chanda Kennedy, Policy Development Officer, Strategic Programs

Don Nichols, Manager, Housing Stability Services

Gord Tanner, Acting General Manager

Hussain Haider Ali, Manager, Business Services
Justin Lewis, Director, Infrastructure Planning and Development
Laural Raine, Director, Service Planning and Integrity
Linda Wood, Manager, Strategic Programs
Milton Barrera, Project Director, Homelessness Initiatives and Prevention Services
Mina Fayez-Bahgat, Director, Program Support
Sharon Campbell, Acting Director, Homelessness Initiatives and Prevention Services
Sinead Canavan, Project Director, Issues Management

Annual Gathering Planning Sub-Committee

Chanda Kennedy, Policy Development Officer, SSHA
Frances Sanderson, Executive Director, Nishnawbe Homes Inc.
Linda Wood, Manager, SSHA
Stephanee Doucett, Indigenous Program Coordinator, Aboriginal Labour Force
Development Circle