



City of Toronto Urban Indigenous Engagement Toolkit 2023

CREATED BY THE TORONTO ABORIGINAL SUPPORT
SERVICES COUNCIL (TASSC) FOR THE CITY OF TORONTO



Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council
(TASSC)
in Partnership with the
City of Toronto



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BACKGROUND

In the Fall of 2022, the Toronto Aboriginal Support Service Council (TASSC) worked with the City of Toronto (the City) to create this Toronto Urban Indigenous Engagement Toolkit in support of meaningful, inclusive, and equitable engagement with Indigenous peoples and communities. This will support City staff in understanding how Indigenous community members living in Toronto choose to be involved from start to finish.

The City seeks to better engage with the Indigenous people and communities to amplify our voices and support meaningful contribution to the City's decision-making. TASSC subsequently facilitated community engagement sessions on behalf of the City with 101 participants: and each member represents various degrees of diversity within the construct of Indigeneity. This toolkit presents what community members shared in six areas: building trust, Indigenized communication, outreach, selection approach, approved cultural protocols, and implementation.

City Council requested staff to develop recommendations that supports meaningful and equitable engagement with Torontonians, particularly Indigenous, Black, and equity-deserving communities. While Indigenous people and communities in Toronto face inequities, they are not considered to be an equity-seeking group. Indigenous peoples and communities are the original inhabitants of what is today called Toronto, and have unique status and rights recognized under Section 35 of the Constitution.

"35 (1) "The existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed. (2) In this Act, aboriginal peoples of Canada includes the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada."

Indigenous peoples are self-determined, and hold distinguished cultural practices and ways of living, being and seeing, these must be acknowledged by the City and City staff must approach Indigenous peoples and communities accordingly. This Toronto Urban Indigenous Engagement Toolkit was developed to support City staff to begin the process of Indigenous engagement.

Public Engagement is a priority for the City and it takes many forms, including meetings, surveys, advisory committees, and workshops. When the City engages with the community it supports relationships, trust, and accountability. People are invited to get involved and contribute to the City's decision-making through public engagement.



METHODOLOGY

This toolkit aims to provide City staff with tools and approaches to support direct engagement with Toronto's urban Indigenous peoples and communities. These tools were formed through a community-based approach in collaboration with 101 urban Indigenous participants and two urban Indigenous facilitators from TASSC. The collection of information was completed in an online (Zoom) platform, that included youth, adults, and seniors. In addition to the general engagement sessions a single session was held specifically for the 2Spirit+ community. This was done to ensure that all participants were included and felt safe to share their experiences, needs and feedback. However, those who self-identified as 2SLGBTQ+ were not deterred from participating in other available sessions.

Each Zoom circle was conducted in the presence of a community Elder or Traditional Knowledge-holder. Elders/Traditional Knowledge-holder ensured that each session was opened and closed in a culturally relevant way. They provided feedback and insight during the sessions and ensured a safe space for the sessions to proceed. They were also from Toronto's Urban Indigenous community.

Five Circles were held over a variety of dates (October 20th, 24th, 27th, November 1st and 3rd, 2023) and times ranging from morning, afternoon, and evening. Each participant was provided a written communication of the expectations of the circle and an overview of the circle. (See Appendix A). Each participant also received a cheque or a gift card in the amount of one hundred dollars for their participation and were verbally recognized for their contribution to the circle. The only exception to participation compensation applied to a City staff person who joined the session and observed, but did not contribute and therefore elected to not receive their respective participation honoraria. A slide deck for the Zoom circle can be found in Appendix B.



WHAT WAS SHARED

BUILDING TRUST

Meet us where we're at!

"It would be really great to get City of Toronto representatives out to our spaces as opposed to us always going to their spaces. Have them come out, introduce themselves. You know, let us know what their roles and responsibilities are in the city. So, we can understand how to contribute properly."

For city staff to "come with agency" (agency is the capacity for individuals to act independently and make their own free choices), leave the confines of the colonial bureaucratic institution behind when you enter Indigenous spaces.



WHAT WAS SHARED

BUILDING TRUST

Meet us where we're at!

"To get involved in any kind of meeting or even this, this virtual meeting that we're having today. I think it's fantastic that we're actually talking about it, this is a really important topic, that effects me, and putting my voice forward empowers me as an Indigenous woman. I really wish there were more Indigenous employees, then we could interact with them."

"One thing I just wanted to make the point of is, when I was living on the reserve, a lot of the news that I learned about, like the new staff or whatever was happening in community when we all came together as one people, like Round Dances, ceremonies, pow-wow's, or other decisions that needed to be made. I think that's really important to bring in all Indigenous people together as with medicines, music and the drum. Gatherings are really important, and its where all our voices are heard, its really, really important. And then if you wanted to invite you know, the City of Toronto, they want to get involved. It's like, you know, that's one way for them to get involved. They need to be seen because otherwise they're aliens. Like, who are we talking to? Can we see them? Whose making these decisions?"

Be active (present) in the community, before consultation is requested in all levels of the community, and this includes but is not limited to programming, gatherings, celebrations, and learning opportunities.

Expectations of building trust include being visible, approachable, non-judgmental, dependable, consistent, and committed to relationship building.

WHAT WAS SHARED

BUILDING TRUST

Meet us where we're at!

"Be more involved, be part of the community attending community events. That's really great, to actually show up before they need us, otherwise we don't even know who these people are the speak on our behalf. They can come on their own! They don't necessarily always have to be invited right to our community events or to our community socials. Maybe more meetings or open houses on their turf too, maybe at City Hall. You know, we were talking about having an Indigenous Affairs Office, it's time to have a meet and greet with those members at this point, considering that the majority of the folks in this session are not aware of this office or what they do. Plus, go to housing complexes, and not in suits! There's a lot of trauma at times with formalities, so come as a human being. Come to us and to begin to build these relationships."

"Continuing with a connection that they make, so it's not just the one-off engagement, it should be continued on and we should be continued that involvement in that commitment."

"Okay, first of all, education, education, education. The more that people are engaged in our ways of life and what we think and do, then the less problems there are, I feel. Also, we all love to eat, food always brings people together in a good way, maybe have a feast, and invite specific groups of people from the city of Toronto. They could come in and we can talk and eat and have fun, in a more relaxed way. Then there's not a whole lot of uncomfortable people or people who don't want to engage because they're, you know afraid and intimidated."

Reciprocal Integrity - Creating conditions that encourage personal and organizational integrity.

This could be demonstrated by:

- o Leading by example
- o Commit to full reciprocal participation in the process
- o Never giving the impression that you don't care
- o Be discrete and demonstrate confidentiality where necessary.
- o "What is shared in the circle stays in the circle"

It is necessary to acknowledge and understand that repetitive consultations can often result in the decline of First Nation, Inuit, Métis (FNIM) communities' health and wellbeing which can result in:

- o Emotional Fatigue
- o Cultural Fatigue
- o Elder Fatigue

WHAT WAS SHARED

INDIGENIZED COMMUNICATION

First Nations, Inuit and Metis (FNIM), communities would prefer complete transparency; to have a full and thorough understanding of the project from inception to implementation.

The embedding of Indigenous language:

- o Languages not only identify our origin or connection to community, they carry the ethical values and attitudes of our ancestors. Therefore, it should be embedded in communication with community, thus, is an extension of building trust.

Community stated their preference of using clear and direct wording. This is important as FNIM languages are complex, in comparison to the English language which could be perceived as limiting.

Trusting communication management:

- o Active listening
- o Ask open ended questions
- o Request clarification "be attentive"
- o Summarize
- o Paraphrase
- o Reflect feelings, be attuned
- o Ask probing questions
- o Be non-judgmental
- o Don't interrupt
- o Don't impose your opinions or solutions

Before approaching community come with a clear statement of what is being asked.

The community suggested the following methods of communication:

- o Indigenous service providers
- o Hard / Physical copies of communication materials
- o Academic institutions
- o In person community outreach
- o Online Indigenous directory

It is important to recognize that the FNIM community is multifaceted. There is not one universal pocket (location) in Toronto where the FNIM community can be reached. FNIM people in Toronto are ubiquitous.



WHAT WAS SHARED

OUTREACH

Meeting us where we are at and not where the City expected us to be. For instance, not all Indigenous people attend pow wows, so consider visiting an Indigenous EarlyON or an Indigenous seniors home.

"Without any social media, the only thing is ideally emails and text messages, but I guess they'd have to be some kind of Indigenous database or some sort of something where you can reach the Indigenous community that doesn't have social media. So, for those of us who don't go on social media, I find out through community; through friends and family, about things that are happening, otherwise I wouldn't even know."

"Maybe an easy to access Indigenous database, but not buried!"

"In the past, organizations would send out maybe send out paper flyers, because I'm not really on social media or know how to find things on there. I find out through the community, if you're actually part of the community, you'll find out like, you know, by word of mouth through workers and staying in touch with Indigenous agencies, the City of Toronto doing that would be good too."

"Definitely going through our Indigenous service providers."



WHAT WAS SHARED

OUTREACH

Example shared on how one participant had conducted outreach in their place of employment:

“What I did was they probably make a new poster every week. And then I would email them to like 40 different Indigenous organizations. Also, we've emailed them to the Indigenous department at universities and colleges. We shared on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and when we email them to the Indigenous organizations, they would always email back and they'd be like, yeah, we'll let our clients know about this, or you know, their clients. So that could be through email, word of mouth. It could be women staying in shelters. So, I think that was a pretty good way to get the word out just because we did have a good turnout.”



WHAT WAS SHARED

OUTREACH

First Nations, Inuit and Métis City representatives partnering with Indigenous service providers.

- Needs to be representative of the community, meaning not an over representation of one nation, ensuring that the ratio of FNIM is accurately represented.



"I agree with diversifying who is sitting around the table. And the example I can give there is about the Indigenous Affairs Office in Toronto, which is great, and I'm all for that action but the problem there is, that almost everyone though it's not representative of diverse, Indigenous peoples, right, just one segment."



WHAT WAS SHARED

OUTREACH

Recognition that FNIM people have many gifts that extend beyond the stereotypical and/or implicit bias that non-Indigenous folks may perceive.

Toronto's large and diverse urban Indigenous population is inclusive of numerous individuals that hold unique expertise in multiple disciplines.

Tokenism; the misuse of "Indigeneity" resulting in "showmanship". The community expressed that only contributing in a performative manner could be perceived as stereotypical and/or tokenistic.

"I just feel from what I've seen, the city represent about our culture and showing our different ways is kind of been very performative in my opinion, and that it hasn't really actually done much for us as a community, and that if they want to show that our knowledge is actually valued, that they use our knowledge and our traditions to actually put forward real and effective environmental plans, and other social services for Indigenous youth and Indigenous people in general in our city that are currently not being served. So yeah, I just think that often, we aren't being represented the way we should."

"Our surface level culture shouldn't always be used to represent diversity and inclusion, that's just a microcosm of First Nations culture, pow-wow isn't what we're all about or even about at all! At the core of it, you know, that's just my opinion. There's so much diverse Indigenous representation."

"Is it just bringing out a show? A curtain opener? Are you doing an opening for something or is it actually taking some of our knowledge and using it to develop policy and procedures or something beneficial? Because there is actually more to us, when we just dance and don't get to share the origin or meaning or share more, how is it actually helpful?"



WHAT WAS SHARED

SELECTION APPROACH

Implementing an equitable vetting process, and therefore, ensuring there are no false claims of FNIM identity.

When considering the inclusion of community Elders/knowledge holders, ensure the vetting process is developed by the FNIM community.

Engagement fatigue

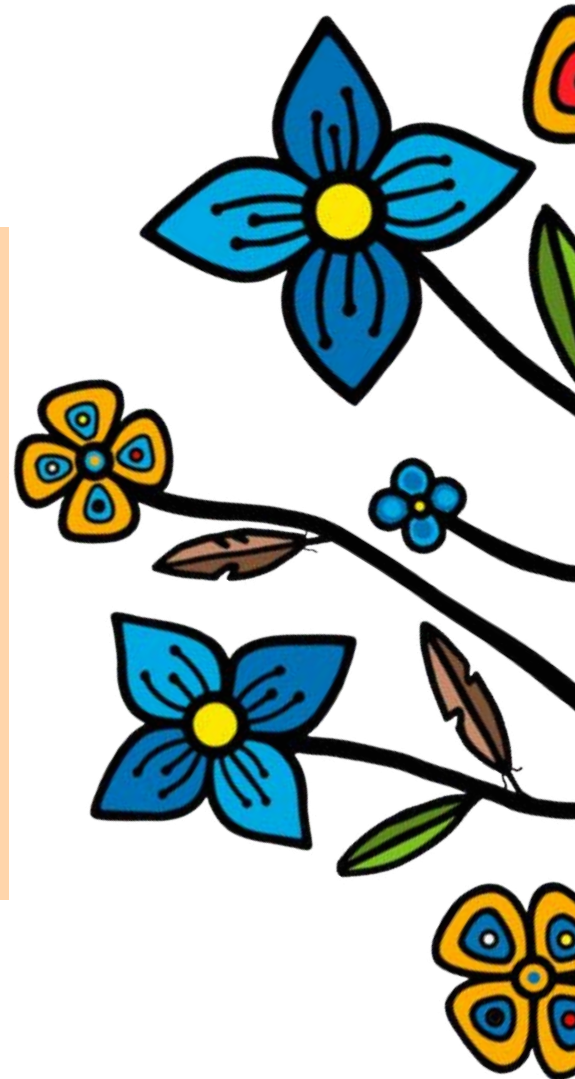
- During engagement session participants spoke of “consultation fatigue”, where the same group of FNIM people are continuously consulted resulting in exhaustion and overrepresentation of one lenses and or perspective.
- Elder/knowledge holder fatigue: it has been recognized in the community that the same circle of Elders are constantly being called on for consultation, therefore creating an “Elder drain” in the community. The overuse of one Elder/knowledge holder can cause damage to the Elder/knowledge holder, who as community we are traditionally responsible for their health and well-being. This can also result in an imbalance of traditional knowledge and expertise.
- It was also shared that people should not only be selected to participate for their FNMI identity but for the specializations.
- FNIM diversification, is essential to establishing accurate representation of the community, inclusive of Youth, Adults, Elders, and 2SLGBTQ+.
- Consultation should be representative of the diverse FNIM community, ensuring that one nation is not overrepresented in consultation, and another is underrepresented.



WHAT WAS SHARED

SELECTION APPROACH

"I don't know if this is very controversial, but I think that there should be some parameters to qualify as an Indigenous person. Sometimes, I just feel there should be some sort of select selective process with maybe an evaluation criteria, maybe a short Q&A survey to ensure the right fit, maybe a one on one interviewer. There has to be some sort of standard set. I don't know if the city would like it because the city is all about their bureaucratic standards too, right? But I feel there should be some sort of criteria set."



"It needs to be highlighted that this is a safe space, and that's a valid concern and a vetting system for participants so we and they know exactly who's coming to the table. If people identified as First Nation, Métis, or Inuit opposed to Indigenous, then that's something that could be looked at as well, as well as to whatever the question is that the division wants to make sure that you're involved in that area in that sector somehow, to get a good response to be able to get some good feedback."



WHAT WAS SHARED

COMMUNITY RECOMMENDED CULTURAL PROTOCOLS

It is encouraged to follow cultural protocols; many Indigenous nations recognize tobacco as an activator in communication. It is used in many ceremonies and recognized as a form of communication within itself. It is said that tobacco opens doors and allows communication to take place. When tobacco is offered, we communicate our thoughts and feelings through it. Community stated that the City should consider offering tobacco when beginning dialogues with the FNIM community. Any staff that will be handling the tobacco should ensure they offer it in a culturally competent manner.

Equitable compensation

- The contribution of the Indigenous community should be reciprocated with fair and impartial compensation.
- The community stated that the City should demonstrate how their knowledge is being utilized.
- Honoraria is a recognition of the unique knowledge carried by the Indigenous community; this includes the sharing of personal and community narratives of lived experience. These contributions can often cause re-traumatization, which could result in emotional fatigue, Elder drain, and unbalance of the mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical states of community contributors. In the spirit of understanding the impacts of colonization, the City should demonstrate the value of Indigenous knowledge by providing practical compensation to all who contribute.



WHAT WAS SHARED

COMMUNITY RECOMMENDED CULTURAL PROTOCOLS

“I believe that building coalitions with Indigenous people would provide a unique perspective between environment and culture. I also believe that their knowledge with determining the appropriate action to be taken such as bridging the gap between policy and practice. We have a long historical data and experience with interacting with the natural surrounding, so you know, our input can help to develop solutions. That are culturally acceptable to our community, and as a society, that decision making should recognize and include vital input from the Indigenous community.”

“When our feedback is given and put into use, the input that we share shows us the value we bring.... considering our perspective”

“The City of Toronto should pay people for their time. They should give people an incentive to want to give their feedback and your experiences and say hey, we really value your opinion”



WHAT WAS SHARED

IMPLEMENTATION

Through shared decision making and a mutually collaborative partnership the Indigenous community stated, that they should be rooted in community consultations from beginning to end, including planning, delivering/implantation, and evaluation to create positive outcomes and results. “Nothing about us, without us” summarizes the general feedback of the community.

“Really take our input into consideration and use it because it does seem like there's a lot of there's a lot of ask for input, and then nothing ever gets done...it put on the backburner. It just seems like the city needs to implement the suggestions that our community has. A lot of people are going on the same line of what they would like to see, but it doesn't seem like the city ever does anything about it”



WHAT WAS SHARED

MUNICIPAL REPRESENTATION

How City staff represent themselves when interacting with the community

- When starting a consultation, it is culturally relevant to introduce yourself not only with your employment title but as a person such as where you are from and your familial (kinships) title to help personalize your introduction.
- Municipal Indigenous offices were requested to be transparent with the community. The community finds it difficult to identify who holds which roles and responsibilities.
- City staff must continue to receive updated Indigenous cultural sensitivity/awareness training on an annual/bi-annual basis, not limited to the point of hire.
- There needs to be an accurate representation of the Indigenous community within the City.



COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

LEADERSHIP CONTRIBUTIONS

The Executive Directors of TASSC identified that tools should also be developed for engaging the Urban Indigenous organizations of Toronto.

Relationship Building

The urban Indigenous community voice was echoed by Urban Indigenous community leaders. Both the community and organizational leaders expressed a need and want for City staff to build trust and mutual respect within the community on all socio-economic levels.

Leadership spoke to a current void recognized between City representatives and the urban Indigenous community, that requires a need for a deeper understanding and recognition of the unique status and rights recognized under Section 35 of the Constitution. Indigenous leaders expressed an obligation of City staff to incorporate Indigenous content and approaches in their engagement/consultation. Engagement/Consultation must be informed by an understanding of Indigenous epistemologies (how knowledge can be known) and pedagogies (how knowledge can be taught). This would support the removal of barriers and gaps, in order to bridge access, opportunity, advancement and healthy outcomes for urban Indigenous communities.

Community has repeatedly vocalized the need to understand intention and purpose prior to the actual consultation, as well as the importance of transparency of the engagement process and the expected outcomes and/or results.



COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

LEADERSHIP CONTRIBUTIONS

Over-Consultation Exhaustion

A common thread woven throughout consultation with Indigenous leadership was the theme of being "over-consulted" or "over-consultation exhaustion." This understanding spoke to an overwhelming number of requests that had been received by Indigenous organizations and/or community tables. The organizations and/or community tables recognized the importance of these consultations, however it was conveyed by some leadership and community tables that a duplication of presentations and/or information was being shared repeatedly, which resulted in over-consultation exhaustion.

It was also suggested there be potential to open a conversation and develop guiding principles specifically for land-related consultations, to build efficiencies and enhance awareness of the interconnectivity and interrelationship of all Toronto-based projects associated to Land-related consultations.

Additionally, there are concerns pertaining to the presenters and that the proper research and documentation wasn't completed. As a result, City representatives were not aware that the same leaders were at each table. It was suggested that the City and Indigenous leaders designate a specific time of year when all land-related consultations are scheduled and presented. This would allow leadership to take autonomy of their time, energy and knowledge, therefore providing true feedback that could support a project and subsequently benefit the community.

Finally, there was also a desire to eliminate the perception of these engagements as "checking a box" off an equity to-do list.



COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

LEADERSHIP CONTRIBUTIONS

Opportunity to Own Land – Sole Proprietorship

There was frequent dialogue regarding land ownership as Indigenous organizations have a need, want and caretaking responsibility to own the land that these organizations, housing and resources reside upon. It was shared that a fatigue is developing where leadership and staff have grown tired and uneasy of continually being offered opportunities to become involved in land leasing but not ownership, whereas an opportunity for proprietorship is vital.



APPENDIX A - ADVANCE CORRESPONDENCE WITH PARTICIPANTS

OVERVIEW

TASSC is working with the City of Toronto in support of the Indigenous community to create a City of Toronto Indigenous Engagement Toolkit to help city staff to understand how Indigenous community members living in Toronto want to be engaged. The City of Toronto would like to better engage with the Toronto urban Indigenous community to amplify our voices; to contribute and support to meaningful and inclusive engagement in decision-making. TASSC will be facilitating community engagement sessions on behalf of the City.

TASSC Participant Community Guidelines:

TASSC recognizes how important it is for people to feel empowered to communicate, express ideas and to have a voice. TASSC also acknowledges the importance of maintaining a safe and respectful place for sharing and connection for everyone, in a safe and suitable environment. For this reason, TASSC will not support participants who are not willing or able to respect the following guides and protocols and, in an effort, to keep the space safe for all included, we will respectfully remove anyone who is not able to communicate calmly, respectfully and in a good way. We also encourage all participant voices and as such we ask folks to be mindful of the time taken to share thoughts and ideas in a positive manner and in creating space for others to share as well.

We are mindful of triggers and want to keep the space safe for all and so we respectfully ask that the spreading of misinformation, gossip rumours and lateral violence towards community members and/or organizations be avoided as there is no place for this kind of behaviour; and this gathering is not the place nor platform for this. While people may have their personal opinions, TASSC will not support lateral violence towards community members and/or organizations intended to support our community.

We will not tolerate yelling, profanity, slander, hate-speech, threats, accusations, racism, negative behaviour and/or behaviour that is deemed to be unkind or not aligned with our organizational values.

Failure to be mindful of these community standards may result in a person/s removal from the virtual gathering and ineligibility of the \$100.00 participation honoraria.

It is in this spirit that we ask members of the session/community to always follow these guidelines to ensure the wellbeing of all participants our Elder and our facilitators. We want to ensure a positive and safe space for all in attendance and for folks to connect and enjoy the session and togetherness in a good way.

Should you have questions comments or concerns we respectfully invite you to email

APPENDIX B - CIRCLE SLIDE DECK

Urban Indigenous Community Engagement Project

In partnership with Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council & City of Toronto

Community Introductions

Facilitators:



Overview:

- TASSC is working with the City of Toronto in support of the Indigenous community to create a City of Toronto Indigenous Engagement Toolkit to help city staff to understand how Indigenous community members living in Toronto want to be engaged. The City of Toronto would like to better engage with the Toronto urban Indigenous community to amplify our voices; to contribute and support to meaningful and inclusive engagement in decision-making. TASSC will be facilitating community engagement sessions on behalf of the City.

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- It is in this spirit that we ask members of the session/community to always follow these guidelines to ensure the wellbeing of all participants our Elder and our facilitators. We want to ensure a positive and safe space for all in attendance and for folks to connect and enjoy the session and togetherness in a good way.

Project Understanding:

- The City of Toronto would like to better engage with the Toronto urban Indigenous community to amplify our voices; to contribute and support to meaningful and inclusive engagement in decision-making.

What exactly is Public Engagement?

- Public Engagement takes on many forms:
- In-person meetings
- Virtual meetings
- Online surveys
- Hard copy surveys
- Advisory committees
- Workshops etc....



APPENDIX B - CIRCLE SLIDE DECK

Why is Public Engagement Necessary?

- Deeper and more meaningful conversations
- Identifying relevant and priority topics
- Discussion of sensitive issues in kind and safe ways
- Urban Indigenous folks are part of setting the agenda and can help create the engagement
- Urban Indigenous leadership are a part of and included in creating solutions using community strengths and resources

Why is Public Engagement Necessary?

- There is transparency about how decisions are made, what resources are available, and who has access to the resources
- There are spaces for discussion that are mostly or entirely for the urban Indigenous community, especially for topics important to urban Indigenous folks
- To ensure our urban Indigenous voices contribute to the development of city policies, programs, and priorities

Getting Involved

- How could or should members from the urban Indigenous community be selected in an inclusive way?

Getting Involved

- How could the city demonstrate that Indigenous knowledge is valued?

Getting Involved

- How should the urban Indigenous community be notified about community consultations in an inclusive and accessible manner?
- methods
- times
- dates
- honorariums
- representation

Getting Involved

- How could the City strengthen relationships and build trust with the urban Indigenous community?

Miigwetch
Aiy-Aiy
Nia:wen
Nakurmiik
Thank-you

APPENDIX C - KEY WORDS

First Nations, Inuit, Métis

- The original people of Turtle Island (now known as North America), also referred to as: Indigenous, Aboriginal, First People, (formally referred to as Indian)

Indigenous

- Relating to the earliest known inhabitants of a place that was colonized by a now-dominant group. In the context of this report Indigenous is in reference to the first people of this land Turtle Island (Now know as North America), FNIM

Emotional Fatigue

- In reference to this document emotional fatigue, is the wearing down of a person's emotional state. This can be attributed to the emotional stress experienced for the re-telling/sharing of former events (often one that has or is in relation to have negatively impacted that person). Also referring to carrying weight of others shared stories, and the over exposure to those stories.

Cultural Fatigue

- In reference to this document cultural fatigue is the wearing down of cultural practices, as well as the over utilization of a nation's cultural teachings. Also, the constant explanation of the cultural relevancy of actions and teachings. This could possibly result in loose understandings and meanings and the overuse of specific cultural teaching.

Elder/Traditional Knowledge Holder Fatigue

- In reference to this document Elder Fatigue, is the over usage/exertion of an Elder/Traditional Knowledge Holder. These revered folks carry a unique gift and are cared for by their community. They can become overworked when there is a constant demand for their skills and knowledge. Sometimes organizations may continuously request the support of the same Elder, therefore contributing to the wearing down or burn out of an Elder/Traditional Knowledge Holder. Additionally this can lead to limited views and or understandings if the same Elder is continuously utilized.

