

Indigenous Advisory Circle Meeting #3 Summary Report

Parkland Strategy and the Parks and Recreation Facilities Plan
Phase 1: Indigenous Community Engagement
March 5, 2025

Dr. Kiera Brant-Birioukov, RRTC – Indigenous Engagement Lead
Dr. Anton Birioukov-Brant, RRTC – Indigenous Engagement Support
Gabrielle Ayotte, RRTC – Researcher and Writer





Attendees

City of Toronto Staff

Danielle DeMarsh (Host) (Parks Department)

Matt Bentley (Co-host) (Recreation Facilities)

Ridge Road Training & Consulting

Kiera Brant Birioukov (Co-Host)

Gabrielle Ayotte (Note Taker)

Indigenous Advisory Circle Members

Kyle M.

Tonie O.

Cara M.

Crystal S.

Jess R.

Andrew M.

Overview of Indigenous Advisory Circle

The Indigenous Advisory Circle (IAC) consisted of 11 Indigenous members as of December 2024 – growing to 12 members in January 2025 – which was comprised of individual Indigenous community members and Indigenous community members who also work with and represent Indigenous organizations in the City of Toronto. The purpose of the IAC was for members to meet with representative from the City of Toronto's Parks & Recreation (P&R) division and Ridge Road Training & Consulting to provide comments, opinions, and suggestions for what features should be maintained, changed, and/or added to the Parkland Strategy and Parks and Recreation Facilities Plan. The IAC members' contributions help to ensure Indigenous peoples and communities feel represented, safe, and connected in recreation facilities and parks.

Not every IAC member was able to attend the meeting, and the meeting was scheduled based on the availability of the majority of members. Honoraria was offered to each IAC member who attended the meeting.

For more information about the project and the Parkland & Recreation Facilities Strategies: Community Engagement, please visit <https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/accountability-operations-customer-service/long-term-vision-plans-and-strategies/parkland-recreation-facilities-strategies-community-engagement/>

Overview of P&R Introduction

City of Toronto Parks & Recreation (P&R) staff and Ridge Road Training & Consulting (RRTC) staff provided a brief review of the discussions from previous IAC meetings. They emphasized the distinction between equity, inclusivity, discourse, and reconciliation. They highlighted IAC members' calls for Indigenous place-making, spaces, and initiatives, such as Indigenous art and fire-keeping spaces. They discussed the importance of Indigenous language visibility and intersectional representation. And they recalled the need to address settler myths, stigma, and to reframe land reclamation discussions.

In the previous two IAC meetings, the City of Toronto's P&R division presented an overview of the Parkland Strategy and the Parks and Recreation Facilities Plan, and offered a brief refresher explanation of the Phase 1 Engagement with the Urban Indigenous community since October.

The overarching purpose of the Strategy and Plan is to adapt current and create new recreation facilities and park spaces that respond to the changing needs of a rapidly and continuously growing City population. The Strategy and Plan review and consultations are done every five years over the course of a 20-year vision for building, changing, and improving recreation facilities and park spaces, all including the aims of incorporating more Indigenous voices and representation.

The key principles guiding the Strategy and Plan are **Quality, Innovation, Sustainability, Equity, Expansion, Improvement, Connection, and Inclusion.**

The Strategy and Plan guide:

- Reinvestment in existing recreation facilities and parks
- Addressing recreation facility and park gaps
- Responding to future recreation facility and park needs

This P&R project is working to create active spaces and people places—recreation facilities and park spaces that improve quality of life by inspiring participation, meeting resident needs, and strengthening communities.

With the key principles as the guide, there are four overarching considerations P&R make for developing high-quality recreation facilities and park spaces: **Prominence & Visibility; Identity & Character; User Experience;** and **Physical Characteristics & Thermal Comfort.**

Based on prior engagement with the Urban Indigenous community, this meeting focused on three key themes from what P&R and RRTC have heard from Indigenous participants. The three themes are: **Repairing & Rebuilding Relationships with Land; Improving Accessibility;** and **Educational & Cultural Programming.**

P&R staff recalled from previous discussions ideas of Indigenous community centers, including features like ceremony spaces, community building spaces, and outdoor access. They also brought up points of ceremonial sites and spaces, and barrier-free access to green spaces, all of which connected to broader topics of cultural safety and various forms of accessibility (physical, financial, cultural).

P&R and RRTC staff provided links for:

Free & Lower Cost Recreation Options: <https://www.toronto.ca/explore-enjoy/parks-recreation/how-to-use-our-services/how-to-register-for-recreation-programs/free-lower-cost-recreation-options/>

Swimming & Water Play: <https://www.toronto.ca/explore-enjoy/parks-recreation/program-activities/swim-water-activities/swimming-water-play/#location=&lat=&lng=&zoom=>

Drop-In Skating: <https://www.toronto.ca/explore-enjoy/parks-recreation/program-activities/ice-snow-activities/public-leisure-skating/#location=&lat=&lng=&zoom=>

Welcome Policy – Recreation Fee Subsidy: <https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/employment-social-support/child-family-support/welcome-policy-recreation-fee-subsidy/>

Post-Introduction Discussion Questions

1. Which of these themes or needs feel the most urgent to address? Why?
2. What would meaningful action look like to address these priorities?

3. What are potential barriers to implementation, and how might they be addressed?

Summary of Key Points/Themes Shared During Discussion at Meeting

Training:

- Training can be a barrier. Training should be implemented before those recreation and park spaces are set up.
→ Example: Jobs (this is what a smudge is, understanding that there are many different Indigenous nations and communities here.)
- It's important to make sure that barriers aren't unintentionally created for Indigenous peoples due to a lack of understanding. Many non-Indigenous peoples create obstacles based on misinformation or secondhand knowledge.
- It's important to address widespread misconceptions, like the belief that Indigenous peoples no longer exist or misunderstandings about governance and leadership structures.
- It's important to educate people on both specific job-related concerns and broader Indigenous history and presence, especially in a city as diverse as Toronto.
- We need to include anti-Black racism training for everyone including Indigenous peoples. Worries about a continuing problem that Afro-Indigenous folks do not go to this type of training.
- City to understand that Indigenous spaces will not always be used year-round. Indigenous people have the right to choose how they use these spaces and how often.

Pow Wow Spaces:

- Huge Indigenous population in Scarborough but not enough spaces. There is need to create a space for a pow-wow
 - Shared resource: <https://www.canadianarchitect.com/muscowpetung-powwow-arbour/>
 - Mention of Gabriel Dumont who sits on the planning committee for Scarborough East
 - Having a pow wow in Scarborough will allow people to feel like there is an Indigenous space there. There is a stigma attached to holistic services that prevent a lot of people from accessing those services.

- Mention of Wigwamen building by the Malvern library.
- **Question from City staff to IAC member C who knows about pow wow planning in Scarborough:** What is that current planning process of holding a pow wow?
- **IAC Member C:** Space is enormous. It's a makeshift space so you always have to—there is no harbour or permanent set up because it's a school. In terms of infrastructure, the City can do a better job at setting a better space for these things. I don't know if that's something that we just create. Our people are resilient and will use everything that they can to make sure that something can happen. There needs to be higher level engagement. Maybe this space at the school gets redesigned for bigger purposes instead of these makeshifts. There is a yearly budget. The feast cost \$7,000 for all those peoples. We gift the pow wow because we believe that culture-based foods are so important when doing ceremony. The infrastructure needs to be designed to accommodate the vision that we are trying to do as Indigenous peoples.
- **IAC Member A:** Just because we are doing it this way doesn't mean it's the right way to do it in permanence. We are community members; we are part of the City. The City should be making these spaces available. Scarborough is unserved; they make up their spaces. Same thing on west side. The Na-Me-Res pow wow is at North York and it works but it's not permanent. Everything has to come up and down. Native organizations end up taking on these expenses. The city should be supporting pow wow as a part of what they do, and it should be considered as part of Parks and Rec.
- **IAC Member C:** Non-Indigenous organizations who support these pow wows often take ownership over our pow wows. Non-Indigenous peoples are guests in this space. Need to have Indigenous peoples at every level of the process, from building to the research on impact on the land.

Communication pieces

- How do these conversations continue after these are done?
- What is the commitment to continue those conversations and dialogue with the City of Toronto?

Programming fees

- Making space rental free for Indigenous peoples, not just for low-income Indigenous peoples.

Cultural Safety (Improving accessibility)

- Knowing what cultural events are happening in the city.
- Using QR codes to provide educational information about Indigenous practices and ceremonies
- **Thinking about:** What role does the city play when we are talking about cultural safety? Whose responsibility is it to develop frameworks for cultural safety.
- How do we engage the Indigenous Affairs Office with this work?

Top Priorities Identified

- Hiring Indigenous staff
- Prominent treaty and land acknowledgements
- Establishment of Indigenous community centers and all that goes into this process

Post-Meeting Process

During each IAC meeting, a representative from Ridge Road Training & Consulting (RRTC) takes notes to record the comments and suggestions provided by the IAC members. These comments and suggestions are kept confidential (i.e., no names are attributed to specific comments, as shown in the previous section).

The meeting notes are then formatted for easy readability and circulated to IAC members for review. In review process, IAC members are given one week to read over the notes and provide feedback to ensure they agree with the content and accuracy, and/or if there are any points raised in the meeting that are missing from the notes. At the end of one week, RRTC staff finalize the notes by making any necessary adjustments, so the notes properly represent the IAC members' contributions. Once the notes are finalized, they are shared with the City's P&R representatives to be made available for public viewing.

While the notes are reviewed by the IAC members, P&R and RRTC representatives meet to discuss potential dates for the next IAC meeting. Once two to three dates have been selected, IAC members are contacted to indicate their availability and preference of the dates proposed. IAC members are given one week to indicate their preference, and then RRTC staff schedule and send out invitations for the next meeting based on the majority preference.