

West Toronto Junction Area
Preliminary Report: Urban Indigenous Engagement
Draft 1.0
November 13, 2025

Introductions

This report summarizes the outcomes of the Indigenous Engagement Session held on September 15, 2025, as part of the West Toronto Junction Heritage Conservation District (HCD) Study. The purpose of this session and of this report is to ensure that Indigenous voices, teachings, and perspectives are meaningfully integrated into the study's findings, recommendations, and future planning processes.

By capturing community input, cultural teachings, and priorities shared by Elders, knowledge keepers, Indigenous residents, and local partners, this document aims to support the City of Toronto and EVOQ Architecture in advancing heritage planning that is inclusive, respectful, and aligned with reconciliation principles.

This report not only documents what was heard during the engagement session but also identifies opportunities for action from immediate steps to longer-term strategies that will help embed Indigenous perspectives into the cultural fabric and planning decisions of the Junction.

About Acosys Consulting

Acosys Consulting Services Inc. is a 100% Indigenous-owned consulting firm specializing in community engagement, strategic planning, and reconciliation-driven project delivery. Since its founding, Acosys has partnered with governments, municipalities, Indigenous nations, and private-sector organizations to advance initiatives that promote economic reconciliation, cultural inclusion, and social impact.

Our work is rooted in Indigenous worldviews and guided by the principles of respect, reciprocity, and relationship-building. We support organizations in co-creating solutions that honour Indigenous knowledge systems, strengthen partnerships, and deliver meaningful outcomes for communities.

Meeting Overview

The Indigenous Engagement Session and the development of this report were led by a multidisciplinary team from Acosys Consulting, bringing together expertise in Indigenous engagement, heritage policy, research, facilitation, and project coordination.

Our team included:

David Carrière-Acco – President and Owner
Julie LePage – Vice President and Owner
Moema Cavalcanti – PMO Lead
Laurent Lavigne – Senior Research Consultant
Tamara Brotton – Project Coordinator

Together, this team worked closely with Elders, knowledge keepers, and community members to ensure the engagement process followed appropriate cultural protocols, reflected Indigenous

priorities, and produced outcomes aligned with reconciliation and heritage planning best practices.

West Toronto Junction Heritage District Study

The West Toronto Junction Heritage Conservation District Study is a collaborative initiative led by the City of Toronto in partnership with EVOQ Architecture. The study aims to identify, protect, and celebrate areas of significant cultural heritage value while guiding future growth and development in a way that respects the neighbourhood's character and layered histories. Historically an important cultural, economic, and transportation hub, the Junction is also situated within a landscape that holds thousands of years of Indigenous presence, knowledge, and cultural practice. Indigenous communities have lived, traded, travelled, and held ceremony on this land long before European settlement — shaping its cultural and ecological character in ways that remain visible and deeply significant today.

The engagement session and the insights captured in this report are a critical part of this broader study. They ensure that heritage planning moves beyond built form to include cultural landscapes, oral traditions, and living Indigenous knowledge, laying the foundation for a future in which Indigenous voices are central to decision-making and visible throughout the Junction's evolving story.

Engagement Strategy and Methodology

Planning

The Indigenous Urban Engagement Session was designed to meaningfully center Indigenous voices, knowledge, and priorities within the West Toronto Junction Heritage Conservation District Study. The engagement approach was grounded in Indigenous-led methodologies, cultural protocols, and collaborative planning principles, ensuring that every phase of the process reflected respect, reciprocity, and relationship-building.

The planning process was organized into four key phases, each building on the previous to ensure culturally safe, inclusive, and effective engagement

Phase 1: Pre-Engagement and Relationship Building

The first phase focused on establishing a strong foundation for meaningful dialogue by initiating relationships with Indigenous communities, Elders, and knowledge keepers. Activities included: Early coordination with the City of Toronto and EVOQ Architecture to define engagement objectives and desired outcomes.

Outreach to local Indigenous organizations, Friendship Centres, educators, and community leaders to share information about the project and invite participation.

Identifying and inviting respected Elders and knowledge keepers to guide the engagement design and ensure cultural protocols were embedded from the outset.

Phase 2: Engagement Design and Preparation

With relationships established, the second phase focused on designing the engagement process to be culturally grounded and accessible. This included:

Selecting an Indigenous facilitator experienced in circle-based engagement practices.

Designing session formats that would centre storytelling, teachings, and collective dialogue, rather than conventional consultation methods.

Coordinating logistics such as venue selection, accessibility considerations, ceremonial protocols (opening and closing), and honouraria in alignment with Indigenous best practices.

Developing outreach materials and communication strategies using inclusive language and

culturally appropriate messaging.

Phase 3: Engagement Delivery

This phase culminated in the September 15, 2025 Indigenous Engagement Session, which brought together Elders, knowledge keepers, community members, and local residents. The session followed a circle process guided by cultural protocols, including:

Opening ceremony and welcome by an Elder and project leaders.

Knowledge sharing through presentations by Indigenous historians, artists, and speakers.

Collaborative dialogue through facilitated discussion circles, storytelling, and community mapping activities.

Interactive exercises designed to gather both qualitative input (teachings, stories, priorities) and actionable ideas (such as signage, cultural spaces, and education initiatives).

Phase 4: Reflection and Synthesis

Following the engagement session, Acosys facilitated a period of reflection and analysis to ensure all contributions were accurately captured and respected. Key steps included:

Reviewing notes, transcripts, and Miro board data from the engagement session.

Synthesizing key themes, community priorities, and actionable recommendations.

Preparing the “What We Heard” report to share findings with participants and guide next steps in the Heritage Conservation District study.

Implementation

Following the completion of the planning phase and the approval of the engagement workplan, Acosys Consulting began targeted outreach to key Indigenous individuals, community members, and organizations connected to the West Toronto Junction area. The purpose of this outreach was to introduce the Heritage Conservation District (HCD) study, share project goals, and invite Indigenous participation in shaping how cultural heritage, land-based knowledge, and historical narratives are represented within the evolving planning framework.

Initial outreach involved direct emails, phone calls, and distribution of project information to Indigenous-serving organizations, Friendship Centres, educators, and cultural networks. While these early efforts helped raise awareness of the project, initial response and participation levels were lower than anticipated. This indicated the need to adapt outreach methods to ensure they were accessible, culturally appropriate, and responsive to the needs and realities of the urban Indigenous community.

To strengthen engagement, Acosys collaborated with the City of Toronto Heritage Planning team to refine the outreach strategy. This included diversifying communication channels, creating clear and engaging messaging, and expanding promotion through community newsletters and social media platforms. Short video messages and digital event invitations were also developed to communicate the project's significance and encourage broader participation.

These adjustments helped build awareness and ensured that the opportunity to contribute was widely shared across community networks.

As part of the implementation phase, Acosys and the City team engaged directly with community partners, youth organizations, and Elders to gather feedback on how to best support inclusive participation. These conversations emphasized the importance of shared decision-making, culturally sensitive facilitation, and the recognition of both on- and off-reserve Indigenous perspectives. They also highlighted the need for flexible participation options, such as online tools and accessible feedback mechanisms, to accommodate diverse schedules and capacities within the community.

In response to this feedback, a range of engagement tools was introduced to support broader involvement. Online surveys were launched to collect community insights and personal reflections on the Junction's cultural significance. Digital engagement materials, including informational posters and short video explainers, were circulated across Indigenous-focused platforms to reach a wider audience. An online RSVP process also allowed participants to easily register for events and stay informed about project updates.

The centrepiece of the engagement process was the Indigenous Urban Engagement Session held on September 15, 2025. The session brought together Elders, knowledge keepers, Indigenous residents, and local community members for a day of dialogue, reflection, and shared learning. Guided by cultural protocols, the event began with opening words and teachings from Elders, followed by a presentation on the Junction's historical and cultural context. Participants then took part in facilitated discussion circles, storytelling sessions, and collaborative mapping exercises, which captured a rich range of ideas, teachings, and priorities.

Following the session, participants were invited to provide additional feedback through digital surveys and online forums. This ensured that perspectives from those unable to attend in person were still included in the engagement outcomes. All contributions were compiled and analyzed to inform the "What We Heard" report, which documents key themes, recommendations, and community priorities for the next phase of the HCD study.

The implementation of the engagement process underscored the importance of flexibility, trust-building, and culturally grounded approaches. By adapting outreach methods, creating multiple avenues for participation, and centering Indigenous-led facilitation, the project fostered meaningful dialogue and ensured that Indigenous voices, knowledge, and teachings remain integral to heritage planning for the West Toronto Junction.

Engagement Session Summary

September 15, 2025

In-Person Engagement Session – Annette Street Public Library, Toronto

5:00pm – 8:00pm

The Indigenous Engagement Session on September 15, 2025 marked a significant milestone in ensuring Indigenous voices, teachings, and perspectives are embedded within the West Toronto Junction Heritage Conservation District (HCD) Study. The purpose of the session was to gather stories, priorities, and recommendations from Indigenous Elders, knowledge keepers, community members, and residents to guide how Indigenous presence, histories, and cultural knowledge are represented and honoured in the future of the Junction.

Hosted in collaboration with the City of Toronto and EVOQ Architecture, the session brought together participants for a full day of dialogue, storytelling, and collaborative exercises. Invitations were extended to a broad range of Indigenous organizations, urban community members, educators, and families. Outreach included direct invitations, community postings, and public circulation to ensure accessibility and representation from diverse voices within the Indigenous community.

The session began with an opening prayer and words of welcome, grounding the engagement in cultural protocol and setting the tone for a respectful and collaborative discussion. Participants were then welcomed by project representatives, who provided an overview of the

West Toronto Junction HCD Study including its objectives, scope, and the importance of Indigenous leadership and knowledge in shaping its outcomes.

A highlight of the session was a presentation by historian and artist Philip Cote, who shared teachings about the land, its history, and the deep cultural significance of the Junction. This included stories about traditional travel routes, sacred ecological features such as buried rivers and springs, and the enduring importance of the area as a site of connection, trade, and gathering for Indigenous peoples.

The facilitated discussions that followed created space for participants to reflect on and share their own stories, priorities, and aspirations for the future of the Junction. Through circle-based dialogue, storytelling, and collaborative mapping activities, attendees explored key themes such as visibility and recognition of Indigenous presence, reclaiming original place names, embedding cultural teachings in public spaces, and strengthening opportunities for intergenerational learning. These conversations also identified specific ideas, such as the development of cultural signage, sacred teaching spaces, storytelling apps, and educational resources for schools.

Interactive mapping exercises further enabled participants to visualize how Indigenous knowledge could be integrated into the physical and cultural landscape of the Junction. Ideas ranged from renaming streets and trails to reflect Indigenous languages and histories, to planting traditional medicines along walking paths, to creating designated gathering places for ceremony, teaching, and cultural exchange.

The session concluded with a closing circle and reflections from Elders and community members, emphasizing the importance of continued dialogue, sustained collaboration, and accountability in advancing the work that follows. Participants were invited to share additional feedback through follow-up surveys and email submissions, ensuring that voices not captured during the session would still inform the project's next steps.

Overall, the September 15 engagement session served as a foundational step in building meaningful relationships, co-creating knowledge, and ensuring that Indigenous presence is not only visible but central to the West Toronto Junction Heritage Conservation District Study. The stories, teachings, and ideas shared during this session form the basis for the “What We Heard” analysis and will directly shape the recommendations and actions outlined in the next phase of this project.

Summary of What We Heard

The Indigenous Engagement Session held on September 15, 2025, provided valuable insights into how Indigenous histories, teachings, and community priorities can shape the future of the West Toronto Junction Heritage Conservation District (HCD). Through storytelling, collaborative dialogue, mapping exercises, and open discussion, participants shared perspectives that reflect both deep cultural connections to the land and a forward-looking vision for how Indigenous presence should be recognized, celebrated, and embedded into the area's evolving identity.

A key message that emerged throughout the session was the recognition that the Junction is more than a geographic location—it is a place of ongoing cultural significance, spiritual connection, and intergenerational knowledge. Participants emphasized that any future planning must reflect this living presence and move beyond traditional, colonial definitions of “heritage” to

include oral traditions, ecological knowledge, language, ceremony, and cultural practices. Several major themes and recommendations surfaced consistently throughout the engagement:

Cultural Recognition and Visibility: Participants called for visible recognition of Indigenous presence throughout the Junction, including the use of Indigenous languages in signage, public art reflecting Indigenous teachings, and territorial acknowledgements integrated into public spaces. There was also strong support for renaming streets, trails, and landmarks currently carrying colonial or outdated terms, and for reclaiming original Indigenous place names.

Storytelling and Education: Education was identified as a vital tool for reconciliation. Participants highlighted the importance of sharing oral histories, teachings, and Indigenous perspectives in schools, community programs, and public spaces. Suggestions included the development of storytelling tours, interpretive signage, and digital platforms that allow residents and visitors to learn about the land's Indigenous history and significance.

Land-Based Learning and Ecological Stewardship: Deep respect for the land and its natural systems was expressed throughout the session. Participants emphasized the need to protect and celebrate natural features — particularly the Junction's underground waterways, freshwater springs, and remaining green spaces. There were recommendations to incorporate Indigenous plants and medicines into public landscaping, and to use ecological restoration projects as opportunities for cultural teaching and community engagement.

Spaces for Ceremony and Gathering: Many participants stressed the importance of creating dedicated cultural spaces, such as teaching lodges, gardens, and community gathering areas. These spaces would support ceremony, language revitalization, intergenerational teaching, and cultural exchange — not only for Indigenous communities but as places of shared learning and reconciliation for the broader public.

Ongoing Engagement and Shared Decision-Making: A recurring theme was the call for Indigenous leadership and collaboration in all stages of planning and implementation. Participants emphasized the need for ongoing dialogue, formalized advisory structures, and transparent decision-making processes that centre Indigenous voices beyond the engagement stage.

Community mapping activities further enriched the discussion by capturing detailed, site-specific ideas. These included the creation of storytelling apps and self-guided walking tours, installing cultural markers along trails, planting Indigenous medicines in public parks, and highlighting historical water systems that have been buried over time. These recommendations reflect a shared vision of the Junction as a place where history is not just commemorated but actively lived and taught.

Participants also underscored the importance of intergenerational learning and collaboration, noting that the involvement of youth is essential to sustaining cultural knowledge and ensuring the continued vitality of Indigenous presence in urban spaces. Many attendees shared that reconciliation must be approached not as a one-time project but as an evolving, long-term partnership rooted in trust, reciprocity, and respect.

Overall, the engagement session demonstrated a powerful collective desire to reimagine the Junction as a living cultural landscape — one that honours the histories, teachings, and contributions of Indigenous peoples while building a shared future founded on collaboration,

visibility, and respect. The insights and priorities shared during this process provide a strong foundation for the next phase of the HCD study and will guide concrete actions toward a more inclusive and meaningful approach to heritage planning

Issues Encountered & Mitigation Strategies

Throughout the engagement process, several challenges were encountered that influenced participation levels, shaped the nature of feedback received, and highlighted broader systemic barriers to Indigenous involvement in municipal planning initiatives. These challenges do not represent shortcomings of the project team or the engagement design but rather reflect ongoing realities faced by Indigenous communities when invited to participate in planning processes that may not always align with their immediate priorities or capacity.

A primary challenge identified was the level of participation, particularly during the early outreach phases. Despite direct invitations, targeted communication, and collaboration with Indigenous-serving organizations, initial engagement was more limited than anticipated. Many Indigenous organizations and community members are approached regularly to contribute their perspectives to a wide range of municipal, provincial, and federal initiatives, often with minimal capacity or resources to do so. As a result, participation may be lower in projects perceived as having indirect or long-term impacts on daily community life.

Additionally, many participants shared that traditional engagement models such as one-time sessions or standard consultation formats can feel extractive and transactional, leading to hesitancy in participating. To meaningfully engage Indigenous communities, processes must move beyond simple input-gathering and instead demonstrate a commitment to ongoing relationship-building, shared decision-making, and tangible outcomes.

Another factor influencing participation was the urban context of the project. Because the West Toronto Junction HCD Study focuses on a densely built environment with fewer visible natural features, some community members expressed difficulty in connecting deeply with the study area. For many, cultural engagement is most meaningful when it is tied to land-based activities, ecological features, or spaces with direct historical and spiritual significance. This highlights the importance of broadening heritage discussions to include intangible cultural elements, such as oral histories, language, and ceremony, rather than focusing solely on physical heritage structures.

Mitigation strategies to address these challenges focus on building trust, creating more meaningful engagement opportunities, and adapting outreach approaches to better meet community needs:

Centering Relationship-Building: Establishing early and sustained relationships with Indigenous organizations, Elders, and knowledge keepers is critical. Engagement should not be treated as a single event but as part of a longer-term partnership that extends beyond the life of the project.

Increasing Accessibility and Flexibility: Offering multiple engagement opportunities — including virtual sessions, community drop-ins, and informal dialogue circles — can make participation more accessible. Providing adequate notice, compensating participants for their time, and aligning event times with community availability are essential steps.

Culturally Grounded Facilitation: Incorporating ceremony, teachings, and storytelling into engagement sessions builds trust and demonstrates respect for Indigenous knowledge systems. These approaches make engagement more meaningful and reduce perceptions of

extractive consultation.

Clear Communication and Follow-Up: Ensuring that participants see how their input informs tangible outcomes fosters a sense of ownership and trust. Sharing updates, reporting back to communities, and maintaining ongoing communication are key strategies for strengthening relationships.

Broader Definitions of Heritage: Expanding the scope of heritage planning beyond physical structures to include cultural landscapes, oral histories, traditional ecological knowledge, and language revitalization ensures that Indigenous worldviews are fully integrated into the planning process.

Finally, it is important to recognize that meaningful engagement requires time, patience, and flexibility. Building trust and deepening relationships cannot be rushed. While participation numbers may fluctuate, the quality and depth of the insights shared during this engagement underscore the value of continuing this work with care and intention. By addressing the barriers identified and implementing the strategies outlined above, future engagement efforts can foster deeper collaboration, stronger partnerships, and more impactful outcomes rooted in Indigenous leadership and knowledge.

Positive Aspects of the Engagement Planning and Execution

While the engagement process encountered several challenges, it also demonstrated numerous positive outcomes that highlight the strength, adaptability, and effectiveness of the overall approach. The City of Toronto, EVOQ Architecture, and Acosys Consulting remained committed throughout the process to creating a respectful, inclusive, and meaningful space for Indigenous voices to shape the West Toronto Junction Heritage Conservation District (HCD) Study.

One of the most significant strengths of the engagement process was the flexibility and responsiveness of the project team. When initial outreach efforts did not yield the anticipated level of participation, the team quickly adapted its strategies expanding communication channels, revising messaging, and developing new tools to reach and engage the community more effectively. This willingness to pivot ensured that Indigenous perspectives were still meaningfully represented, even in the face of participation barriers.

The project also benefited from the strong collaboration between City staff, EVOQ, and Acosys Consulting. This partnership facilitated clear communication, effective coordination, and a shared commitment to reconciliation and relationship-building. All partners remained receptive to feedback from participants and demonstrated a willingness to integrate suggestions into the project's evolving engagement approach.

Online outreach proved particularly effective in reaching a broader audience. The circulation of digital materials, social media posts, and online surveys significantly increased visibility and participation from urban Indigenous community members, including those who may not have been able to attend in-person sessions. This blended approach allowed for more flexible participation and ensured that a diversity of voices contributed to the engagement outcomes. The in-person engagement session on September 15, 2025, was a key highlight of the process. It created a welcoming environment for open dialogue, knowledge sharing, and cultural exchange, bringing together Elders, knowledge keepers, and community members in a space grounded in respect and reciprocity. Participants shared stories, teachings, and

recommendations that enriched the project with cultural depth and insight. The incorporation of ceremony, storytelling, and collaborative activities not only enhanced the quality of the discussions but also fostered a sense of shared ownership and connection among participants.

The use of collaborative tools such as community mapping exercises and interactive discussions further strengthened the engagement. These activities helped participants visualize their ideas, identify opportunities for cultural recognition, and co-develop recommendations for how Indigenous history and presence can be embedded within the Junction's evolving landscape.

Logistics and event planning were also handled effectively, with attention paid to accessibility, cultural protocols, and participant comfort. The provision of food, appropriate materials, and flexible participation options contributed to a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere. Additionally, clear communication and ongoing follow-up with participants demonstrated accountability and respect for the knowledge shared during the session.

Overall, the engagement process successfully laid the foundation for stronger relationships between Indigenous communities, the City of Toronto, and project partners. It showcased how thoughtful planning, cultural humility, and responsive approaches can lead to meaningful dialogue and impactful outcomes. These positive elements will serve as valuable lessons for future engagement efforts and reinforce the importance of centering Indigenous voices in heritage planning processes.

Suggestions/Next Steps

The West Toronto Junction Heritage Conservation District (HCD) Study is currently in the planning and development phase, providing an important opportunity to integrate the perspectives, priorities, and recommendations shared during the Indigenous Engagement Session into the next stages of decision-making. The insights gathered from Elders, knowledge keepers, and community members reflect a clear vision for how Indigenous knowledge, values, and presence can be embedded within the planning process not as an addition, but as a foundational element of the project's success.

While some ideas shared during engagement extend beyond the traditional scope of HCD planning, they nonetheless represent meaningful directions for future collaboration and reconciliation-focused heritage work. These include the recognition of cultural landscapes, revitalization of Indigenous languages and place names, creation of culturally significant spaces, and inclusion of Indigenous-led approaches to land stewardship and public education. Incorporating these ideas where possible will ensure that the project reflects a holistic understanding of heritage one that honours both tangible and intangible cultural dimensions.

As the City of Toronto and project partners move forward, it will be critical to maintain the momentum built through this engagement process. Continued dialogue, transparent communication, and long-term relationship-building will help ensure that Indigenous voices remain central to heritage planning and decision-making.

Key recommendations and considerations include:

Review and integrate all feedback, stories, and recommendations gathered during the Indigenous Engagement Session into the next phase of the West Toronto Junction HCD Study. Incorporate Indigenous priorities and cultural values into policies, planning guidelines, and interpretation strategies, ensuring that they inform both the current project and future heritage initiatives.

Maintain ongoing communication with Indigenous organizations, Elders, and community members who participated in the engagement, providing updates on project milestones, decisions, and outcomes.

Ensure that future public communications, reports, and web updates are shared directly with Indigenous partners and networks who expressed interest or participated in the process. Continue to involve urban Indigenous communities in future HCD studies, municipal planning initiatives, and policy development efforts, ensuring that their knowledge and leadership continue to shape the cultural fabric of Toronto.

Explore opportunities to co-develop educational tools, interpretive signage, storytelling platforms, and public art installations that bring Indigenous histories and teachings into the public realm in visible and accessible ways.

By implementing these steps, the City of Toronto and its partners can continue to build on the progress made through this engagement process. Doing so will not only strengthen the cultural depth and authenticity of the West Toronto Junction HCD but will also serve as a model for how Indigenous perspectives can lead and inform heritage planning across the city.

Appendix A - Engagement Summary Notes

Engagement Session: September 15, 2025

Time: 10:00 AM – 4:00 PM

Location: Annette Street Public Library, Toronto

Attendees:

Acosys Consulting Services
Elders, Knowledge Keepers,
Community Members
Indigenous Residents
Metis Nation of Ontario
Mount Dennis
Humber River
Friends of Allan Gardens
Runnymede United Church

Overview

On September 15, 2025, the City of Toronto, EVOQ Architecture, and Acosys Consulting hosted an Indigenous Urban Engagement Session as part of the West Toronto Junction Heritage Conservation District (HCD) Study. The session aimed to gather stories, teachings, and perspectives from Indigenous community members, Elders, and knowledge keepers to guide the future of the Junction and ensure Indigenous voices are meaningfully embedded into the planning and policy-making process.

The session provided a culturally grounded space for dialogue, reflection, and knowledge-

sharing. Invitations were extended to Indigenous-serving organizations, urban community groups, educators, and families. The engagement design prioritized accessibility, cultural protocol, and relationship-building, with activities designed to honour oral traditions, support collaborative idea generation, and document actionable community priorities.

Session Structure and Activities

The engagement session began with an opening prayer and welcome from an Elder, grounding the day in ceremony and setting a tone of respect and collaboration. Project representatives then provided an overview of the Heritage Conservation District Study, including its objectives, timeline, and the importance of Indigenous leadership and knowledge in shaping the project's outcomes.

A keynote presentation by Indigenous historian and artist Philip Cote followed, exploring the cultural, historical, and ecological significance of the Junction. This included discussion of traditional travel routes, the region's sacred water systems, Indigenous place names, and the area's long-standing role as a site of gathering, trade, and ceremony.

Participants then engaged in a series of facilitated activities designed to capture their stories, priorities, and visions for the future of the Junction:

Storytelling Circles: Participants shared oral histories, teachings, and personal connections to the land, emphasizing the importance of cultural continuity, language, and ceremony.

Collaborative Mapping: Using large-format maps, participants identified culturally significant locations, historical pathways, and opportunities for future recognition.

Visioning Discussions: Small group discussions explored ideas for how Indigenous knowledge and presence could be embedded into public spaces, signage, education, and programming.

Idea Sharing and Reflection: Participants contributed written responses and visual notes, which were collected for inclusion in the "What We Heard" analysis.

Discussion Themes and Participant Insights

The conversations during the session were rich, wide-ranging, and deeply rooted in Indigenous values. Several recurring themes emerged from participant contributions:

1. Indigenous Presence and Visibility

Reclaim original place names and rename streets, trails, and parks to reflect Indigenous languages and history.

Integrate Indigenous public art, storytelling installations, and commemorative signage into public spaces.

Incorporate territorial acknowledgements into built infrastructure, interpretive materials, and community programming.

2. Education, Storytelling, and Knowledge Transmission

Develop educational tools such as mobile apps, signage, and self-guided tours that share Indigenous histories and teachings.

Collaborate with schools and community organizations to integrate land-based learning and cultural education into curricula.

Preserve and share oral histories through storytelling installations and public events.

3. Land-Based Learning and Stewardship

Protect and restore natural features, including underground rivers, springs, and green spaces, which hold cultural and ecological significance.

Incorporate Indigenous plants and traditional medicines into landscaping and public gardens.

Create teaching gardens and outdoor classrooms to support intergenerational learning and cultural revitalization.

4. Spaces for Ceremony and Community

Establish dedicated gathering areas for ceremony, teaching, and cultural exchange.

Design inclusive public spaces where Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities can come together to learn, share, and build relationships.

Explore opportunities for community-driven programming focused on cultural revitalization and reconciliation.

5. Ongoing Engagement and Co-Governance

Ensure Indigenous voices are involved in all future stages of the HCD planning process.

Create formal advisory structures and working groups to support shared decision-making.

Commit to continued collaboration, transparent communication, and accountability.

Acosys Consulting Takeaway

The engagement session was a meaningful and successful step toward integrating Indigenous voices into heritage planning for the West Toronto Junction. The collaborative and culturally grounded approach created a space where participants felt valued, respected, and heard. The depth and breadth of insights shared reflect a strong desire for visible Indigenous presence, authentic representation, and shared leadership in shaping the future of the Junction.

Participants emphasized that meaningful engagement must go beyond consultation — it must lead to action, partnership, and systemic change. The recommendations and priorities identified during this session provide a strong foundation for that work and should guide the City of Toronto, EVOQ, and Acosys in the next stages of the HCD process.