



Information Backgrounders - Provincial Urban Indigenous Leaders Gathering

**Exploratory Online Dialogues around
Organizing Urban Indigenous Voices**

22 February, 2023

Hosted by the Victoria Native Friendship Centre

Overview of the *Information* *Backgrounders*

This document was developed by the project team for participants of the Provincial Urban Indigenous Leaders Gathering taking place online on February 22, 2023. It was created with the intention of offering a range of information to help frame the discussions on the gathering, and also to serve as a “conversation starter” for participants. It can be read as one whole document, or in four separate parts, including:

Backgrounder #1: Urban Indigenous Identities and Realities

Backgrounder #2: BC’s Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act *Action Plan* and the Urban Indigenous Community

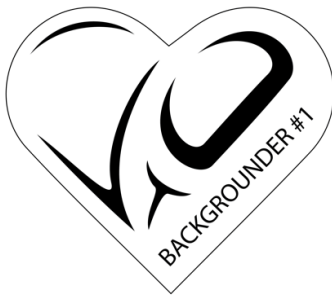
Backgrounder #3: Data Sovereignty-Sharing our Stories

Backgrounder #4: Indigenous Organizing Over the Past 100 Years

We invite you to review the backgrounders and welcome any edits or contributions you’d like to make to the document. We hope the backgrounders are useful for you! If you have any edits or suggestions, feel free to send them to urbanvoices@vnfc.ca.



Artwork by Jamin Zuroski



Urban Indigenous Identities and Realities

What does it mean to be an Urban Indigenous Person? It seems that the response depends on who is doing the asking, and who is doing the telling. The definition of urban Indigenous identities is found in the unique and diverse voices of our Indigenous community – how we choose to identify ourselves to each other, and to the outside world.

Is there such thing as a collective definition of an “urban Indigenous” identity? The complex task of trying to define an urban identity relies on ensuring opportunities exist for all our Indigenous community members to speak into the space, and to ensure all voices are heard.

In the past, government, and other non-Indigenous folks, have at times defined Urban Indigenous People as living “off-reserve”: Our urban identities have been defined for us as being tied to living outside of the geographic reserve boundaries imposed on our Nations through the Indian Act and beyond. This has proved problematic for a range of reasons, including for the reserves that fall within urban areas.

At other times, urban identities were assigned through incorrectly linking “urban” to being a non-status “Indian”, reflected in federal and provincial funding practices that show higher funding for Indigenous services on-reserve (arguably still underfunded). This has proved an issue for so many reasons, including for the status First Nations that have lost out on much needed funding when not living on-reserve.

According to Statistics Canada, **over 81%** of us now live in urban cities and towns throughout BCⁱ. Over the past 15 years, there have been more of us (64% more to be precise) moving “off reserve” and into towns and cities, including moving into small rural and remote communities.

We move to pursue a job, go to university, pursue love, care for loved ones, access specialized healthcare. We move because we were taken into foster care as young ones, we flee relationships, we flee poverty, we flee family breakdown. Those of us that are Métis from the Red River Valley have been moving for more than 138 years since the Riel Rebellion when our land was dispossessed.



In 2022, the Greater Victoria Urban Indigenous Community Leadership Table shared the following about urban Indigenous identities:

“

Our voice is critical. We carry diverse perspectives, knowledge, and priorities but we are bound together by our love for and commitment to our communities, both those in which we live and those from which we sprang. We carry the memories, strengths, and tragedies of our ancestors within our bodies and within our hearts. For myriad of reasons, we are here now in urban spaces, pushed from our homelands by colonial forces, taken by residential schools and social workers, searching for education and opportunity, but left to find our way. Today we seek to build new urban communities grounded in our old ways because we carry our ancestors with us, and they encourage us.”

“

As urban Indigenous people, we are all ages, babies to Elders. We are all genders. We are well off. We are poor. We know our culture. We do not even know our ancestry. We have come here from our home communities. We have never left the city. We live in wonderful homes. We live on the street. We are committed to serving our communities. We cannot see beyond our own needs. Our bodies are strong and athletic. We are bent with illness. We celebrate. We mourn. We love. We hit each other. We adorn ourselves with beads or cedar proclaiming our ancestral pride. We hide in corners hoping people will think we are anything but Indigenous. We exist in so many spaces on so many levels and with so much hope and so much despair. What we all are is beautiful. What we all are is vulnerable. What we all have is a voice.

-Janice Simcoe, member of the Greater Victoria Urban Indigenous Community Leadership Table



BC's Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan and the Urban Indigenous Community

In March 2022, the BC government invited “key Indigenous urban leaders” to form an advisory table and help develop a five-year plan to address “the priorities of urban Indigenous Peoples”. This invitation was a part of the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act 2022-2027 Action Plan* (“Action Plan”)¹, which emerged from the Province’s Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act.

In addition to the invitation to form an Urban Indigenous Advisory Table, there are 87 other actions within the plan, some specific to “urban Indigenous peoples”, others targeted to First Nations communities, First Nations Leadership, and to the Métis Nation.

The *Action Plan* raises important questions that have been discussed, debated, and dialogued for more than 100 years in the lands that are now referred to as British Columbia: Who speaks on behalf of Indigenous people living here? What is the “urban” community? Who is an urban Indigenous “leader”? What are “urban Indigenous priorities”? Addressing these questions is complex and can impact relationships, policies, whose voices are heard, and who and what gets funded.

Context to the Action Plan and the Urban Community

The Action Plan was developed as a “province-wide, whole of government approach” to achieve the objectives of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People. The Plan takes a “distinction-based approach”, which:

“...requires that the Province’s dealings with First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples be conducted in a manner that acknowledges the specific rights, interests, priorities and concerns of each, while respecting and acknowledging these distinct Peoples with unique cultures, histories, rights, laws, and governments.” (Action Plan, p.3)

Action 4.21- Bring together key Indigenous urban leaders to create a provincial urban Indigenous advisory table to develop and implement a five-year plan to address the priorities of urban Indigenous Peoples, including a focus on Elders, youth, children, women, men, 2SLGBTQQIA+ and persons with disabilities.

¹ For copy of Action Plan, please see https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/government/ministries-organizations/ministries/indigenous-relations-reconciliation/declaration_act_action_plan.pdf

Action 4.22 - Ministers and executives across the provincial government social sector will meet annually with urban Indigenous service organization leaders, such as the provincial urban Indigenous advisory table to discuss successes, innovations, and challenges of supporting the social, cultural, and economic needs of urban Indigenous Peoples.

Action 4.23 - Undertake a cross-government review of provincial supports and services for Indigenous Peoples in urban settings and develop a plan with clear timelines that will provide greater collaboration and coordination to meet needs.

Action 4.24 - Expand support to Aboriginal Friendship Centres and other urban Indigenous organizations that serve the needs of urban Indigenous people in B.C. while also acknowledging that Aboriginal Friendship Centres and other urban Indigenous organizations play a vital role for those that wish to connect to their cultures and traditions.” (Action Plan, p.26)

Through a sufficiently resourced Indigenous-led approach, these *Action Plan* items hold the potential to advance meaningful dialogue and actions towards improving outcomes for Indigenous people living in urban areas.

An Invitation from Community

In December 2022, an invitation was issued by the Victoria Native Friendship Centre (VNFC) to Indigenous community leaders who have “passion for supporting urban Indigenous people” to gather in a virtual setting to explore what a coordinated urban Indigenous leadership network could look like².

The planned gathering on February 22, 2023 is an opportunity to hear from each other – to speak into the spaces that continue to define what is needed to move forward in the interest of the urban Indigenous community. In considering the path forward, it can be helpful to revisit our collective past to help us navigate our future and listen to one another about the various ways “urban” Indigenous is defined, and how our communities have organized over the past one hundred years.

² VNFC was asked by the BC Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation to host this initial dialogue because of an existing relationship formed when VNFC launched the Victoria Urban Reconciliation Dialogue (VURD), a community reconciliation dialogue with partners across sectors. VNFC does not hold any control or ownership over the Provincial online gathering and engagement process. VNFC is stewarding this first step and looks forward to watching this work expand into other regions or into the hands of other people as it grows.



DATA SOVEREIGNTY

HOW DO WE NAVIGATE AND HONOUR THE SHARING OF STORIES?

An important part of collecting data is understanding the ethics and consent process



UNDRIP

Article 31 of UNDRIP states

"[Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions.]"

BC's Declaration Act

"The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (Declaration Act) establishes the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN Declaration) as the Province's framework for reconciliation, as called for by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action." (Government of BC, 2022)

OCAP

The First Nations Principles of OCAP® state:

Ownership: "This principle states that a community or group owns information collectively in the same way that an individual owns his or her personal information."

Control: "affirms that First Nations, their communities, and representative bodies are within their rights in seeking to control over all aspects of research and information management processes that impact them."

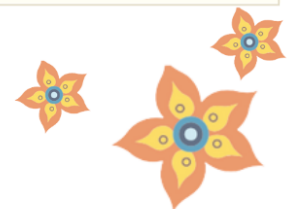
Access: "refers to the fact that First Nations must have access to information and data about themselves and their communities regardless of where it is held."

Possession: "While ownership identifies the relationship between a people and their information in principle, possession or stewardship is more concrete: it refers to the physical control of data."

SEVEN Rs

Seven R's of research: respect, reciprocity, relevance, responsibility, relationships, resistance, reflection and refusal.

(Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Simpson, 2007)



**HOW DO WE ENSURE DATA UPLIFTS AND SUPPORTS
INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE SELF-DETERMINATION?
E.G. IN URBAN AREAS WITH MANY DIVERSE INDIGENOUS
VOICES AND NATIONS?**



WHY ?


Externally imposed methods for data collection, analysis and reporting on Indigenous communities has often reinforced systemic oppression, barriers and unequal power relations.

(Open North & the British Columbia First Nations Data Governance Initiative, 2017)



WHAT?

Sovereignty means that Indigenous peoples have authority and control over their governance and that includes their data. This means that all Indigenous peoples own their data and stories alongside having the right to determine how this data is collected, analyzed, stored, and applied.



"...Indigenous data is any information that is from or about any Indigenous person or their community, territory or nation, including but not limited to their languages, Knowledges, customs or traditions, intellectual property and ideas. Indigenous data are also relational and reciprocal, and need to reflect and be held by the community as a collective, and are equally as important to pass down through generations as a part of lifelong journeys of coming to be."

(Indigenous Innovations Initiative, 2021)





Indigenous Organizing Over the Past 100 Years.

As Indigenous people living in BC, we have a long and detailed history of joining together with others to assert our rights and title and to strengthen our families and communities. At times over history, as status and non-status First Nations, Métis and Inuit people, we have been unified in our efforts, and at other times, groups have stood alone.

Together, we have rallied to assert Indigenous rights and title, stood up to protect our children and keep our families together, fought to address our shared issues and struggles resulting from colonization, and formed provincial coalitions to strengthen our efforts.

As history has influenced our identities, where we live, and where we feel at home, it may be useful to revisit our collective past to help us to navigate our future as urban Indigenous people and review the complex range of circumstances that gives way to the “urban Indigenous identity”.

There are significant points in time that shape the story of the “urban identity”, including rising urban migration after the lifting of the travel ban on all Indigenous people when the pass system was fully eliminated in the 1940s. Implemented in 1885 due to white settler fears over increased Indigenous mobility and further resistance such as the Northwest Resistance in the Red River Valley, the Pass System required written permission from the local Indian Agent to leave the reserve. Other influences on “urban identity” relate to the way government has defined *Indian Status* through the *Indian Act* and resulting changes to the definition in 1985 through Bill C-31, when women who had previously lost their status through marriage could have it restored, along with their children, followed by bills C-3 in 2011 and S-3 in 2017 which granted status for grandchildren and other descendants.

The following timeline offers the early beginnings of a “conversation starter” towards documenting some of the memories of the moments in BC-specific history that help to shape and define the urban Indigenous identity. The intention is to invite others to build upon this and co-create a story that gives rise to the framing of our urban identities. To start, the following chronology offers a high-level summary of both provincial and regional efforts to organize across the province, related to land, rights, women, children, health, and social supports for the past 100 years³.

³ Efforts are underway to continue the timeline and address gaps in our collective knowledge. The list only addresses province-wide and regional efforts.

1909. One of the first attempts at organizing all First Nations in the province with the formation of the *Indian Tribes of the Province of British Columbia*.

1911. The *Indian Tribes of the Province of British Columbia* holds its first conference in Victoria. Roughly one hundred chiefs and leaders from all parts of BC meet Premier McBride to demand acknowledgement of Indigenous rights and title. Chief Chiekleets of Douglas Lake heads the delegation, and Peter Kelly (Haida) is appointed as speaker to the groupⁱⁱ.

1912. *Allied Indian Tribes of BC* is formed, led by Peter Kelly and Andrew Paull (Squamish), in response to the McKenna-McBride Commission that will result in new reserve boundaries and the loss of valuable land from certain reserves, referred to as "cut-off lands", mostly in urban areasⁱⁱⁱ.

1920. *Allied Indian Tribes of BC* travels to Ottawa to protest Duncan Campbell Scott's Bill 14 - legislation that would make it legal to enfranchise any adult Indian without their consent, and to force First Nations children to go to school. After the protest, the law is not repealed but it is never put into practice^{iv}.



Jane Constance Cook, Great Grandmother of Chief Wedlidi Speck, is the only female delegate with the Indian Allied Tribes representing her community.

1923. *Allied Indian Tribes of BC* petitions the federal government to assist in repealing the 1920 provincial Act implemented from the recommendations contained within the McKenna-McBride Commission. Peter Kelly, Andrew Paull, and 12 other leaders meet with Charles Stewart and Duncan Campbell Scott. Kelly writes about this visit: "the power of unity that existed among all BC Indian Tribes at that time"^v. In 1929, the *Allied Indian Tribes of BC* dissolved after government made it illegal to pursue land claims.

1931. The *Native Brotherhood of British Columbia* is born, beginning on the fishing grounds of the North Coast. Andrew Paull and Peter Kelly continue to serve as leaders. The *Native Brotherhood* successfully meets goals to improve lives of First Nations people, tirelessly

battling for better education, housing, and health care services. The Native Brotherhood gives way to local chapters including Native Sisterhoods throughout communities across the province^{vi}. The Native Brotherhood eventually shifts into the BC Assembly of First Nations.

1959. *North American Indian Brotherhood* forms by George Manuel, building on earlier activities of Andrew Paull^{vii}. The North American Indian Brotherhood eventually evolves into the Assembly of First Nations.

1950-1970s. Various Tribal and District Councils form including: Southern Vancouver Island Tribal Federation; West coast Allied Tribes of the Nuu-chah-nulth; Nishga Tribal Council led by Frank Calder; Gitksan-Carrier; Kwawkgwelth District Council; Terrace District Councils^{viii}.

1950-1970s. Emergence of Friendship Centres across BC including Williams Lake, Merritt, Smithers, Fort St John, Fort Nelson, Prince George, Prince Rupert, Duncan, Kamloops, Terrace, Kelowna, Mission, Vernon, Port Alberni, Quesnel, Chetwynd, Dawson Creek, Nanaimo, Vancouver, Victoria and Lillooet.

1969, March. H.A. Butch Smitheram, a non-status Indigenous man from Penticton, forms the *British Columbia Association of Non-Status Indians (BCANSI)*. Butch believes that non-status Indians and Métis are entitled to same benefits as status Indians. BCANSI membership is open to any person of "one-quarter or more Indian blood" who is not a status Indian. 70+ local chapters emerge throughout province^{ix}.



1969, May. *Indian Homemakers' Association* is founded by Dr. Rose Charlie of Chehalis^x.

1969, November. The *Union of BC Indian Chiefs* is formed in response to the federal government's "white paper" aiming to assimilate First Nations people. UBCIC's main goal is to attain a comprehensive land claims settlement for First Nations in BC. In 1977 George Manuel becomes president^{xi}.

1972. *Native Courtworker Association of BC* is formed.

c.1974. *BC Native Woman's Society* forms^{xii}.

1975. BCANSI changes name to *United Native Nations* (UNN) and alters its membership criteria, extending membership to "status Indians" and anyone with "one-quarter or more Indian blood"^{xiii}. The UNN dissolved in 2013.

1976. *Alliance of BC Indian Bands* forms, composed initially of Musqueam, Squamish and Westbank (Okanagan) Bands. Joe Mathias (Squamish) and Delbert Guerin (Musqueam) are speakers. Dissolved in 1982^{xiv}.

1977. Joe Mathias (Alliance), Ed Newman (Brotherhood), and Bill Wilson (UNN) form the *BC Coalition of Native Indians* as a "coordinating forum" (as opposed to forming a new organization). The Coalition aims to coordinate provincial efforts of each member organization regarding land claims action and other issues for Indigenous people^{xv}.

1978. *Aboriginal Council of British Columbia* forms to replace the Coalition of Native Indians. The Council consists of two delegates, one status and one non-status, from each tribal group and is designed to coordinate land claims activity by the individual tribal groups^{xvi}.

1980. The "*Regional Forum*" is created, (sponsored by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development), for the purpose of regular communication between groups and government. Members included the UNN, the Alliance, Indian Homemakers, Native Woman Society, Native Brotherhood, and district/tribal councils^{xvii}.

1980. Wayne Christian, chief of Spallumcheen Band, launches an initiative to challenge the removal of Indigenous children to non-Indigenous homes and leads the "Indian Child Caravan" and march to Vancouver home of Minister of Human Resources. UBCIC begins to vigorously lobby Ottawa regarding the removal of Indigenous rights and title in the constitution. George Manuel and others lead the Constitution Express to Ottawa and Europe.



"The shift at that time was to see ourselves as a larger collective - a larger group of people - trying to press governments and the media to change the way that they treated us, to change the way that people viewed us"

-Lorna Williams, 2017 (quoted in *All Power to the Native Voice: The Road Forward, a Musical Documentary*)

1982. BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres is founded to support the growing number of Friendship Centres that are emerging throughout BC.

1990. The First Nations Summit forms with an original mandate to advance discussions with the governments of Canada and BC to support First Nations in conducting their own direct treaty negotiations with Canada and BC.

1992-1999. A range of provincial based organizations emerge to support various efforts in education, child welfare, housing and more:

- First Nations Education Steering Committee
- Caring for First Nations Children Society, (now operating as the Indigenous Perspectives Society)
- Aboriginal Financial Officers Association of BC
- Aboriginal Housing Management Association
- BC Aboriginal Child Care Society
- Federation of Aboriginal Foster Parents
- Aboriginal Head Start Association of BC

1996. Métis Provincial Council of BC was born, later to become the Métis Nation BC (MNBC).

2000-2009. More provincial organizations emerge by and for the Indigenous community:

- BC Elders Communication Center Society
- Aboriginal Infant Development Program
- First Nations Health Council
- Indigenous Sport, Physical Activity and Recreation Council (I-SPARC)

2005. First Nations Leadership Council formed through working relationship between BC Assembly of First Nations, First Nations Summit, and Union of BC Indian Chiefs. Council enters into New Relationship with the Province of BC to “restore, revitalize and strengthen First Nations and their communities and families to eliminate the gap in standards of living with other British Columbians, and substantially improve the circumstances of First Nations people in areas which include: education, children and families, and health...”

2006. MNBC signs Metis Nation Relationship Accord to strengthen relationship with Metis people and close the gap in quality of life for Metis people in BC.

2007. First Nations Health Council establishes to support BC First Nations in implementing the Tripartite First Nations Health Plan.

2010. First Nations Health Directors Association forms to advance health planning and service delivery on behalf of First Nations in BC. First Nations Health Authority establishes.

2009-2021. Various urban coalitions emerge in BC representing leadership from range of urban Indigenous organizations in social, cultural, economic, health, housing, human resources and education: Metro Vancouver Aboriginal Executive Council (MVAEC), Prince Georg's Urban Aboriginal Working Group (UAWG); Victoria Urban Reconciliation Dialogue (VURD); Surry Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee (SUILC).

2011. BC Friendship Centres' successful lobby results in Off Reserve Aboriginal Action Plan (ORAAP) announcement in BC's Speech from the Throne, acknowledging importance of the off-reserve and urban Indigenous populations in BC.

2015. Northwest Indigenous Council forms as a provincial advocacy organization to act on behalf of BC's urban and off-reserve Indigenous population and be the political voice for BC's urban Indigenous community.

2019. BC passes the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, resulting in five-year Action Plan designed to meet objectives of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

2022. Efforts by various groups such as urban coalitions successfully lead to in the inclusion of actions specific to addressing the needs of urban Indigenous people and communities within the BC the Declaration Act Action Plan.

End Notes

ⁱ 2021 Census available at:

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=9810026401&pickMembers%5B0%5D=1.11&pickMembers%5B1%5D=2.1&pickMembers%5B2%5D=3.1&pickMembers%5B3%5D=4.1&pickMembers%5B4%5D=5.1>

ⁱⁱ Campbell K., Menzies, C., Peacock, B. (2003). BC First Nations Studies. BC Ministry of Education, p.105, available at https://greatbearrainforesttrust.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Textbook_BC_First-Nations-Studies.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Campbell K., Menzies, C., Peacock B., p.123

^{iv} Campbell K., Menzies, C., Peacock B., p.125

^v Campbell K., Menzies, C., Peacock B., p.126

^{vi} Campbell K., Menzies, C., Peacock, B., p.130

^{vii} Tennant, P. (1983). Native Political Activity, 1969-1983. BC Studies No.57. Available at <https://ojs.library.ubc.ca/index.php/bcstudies/article/view/1153>

^{viii} Tennant, P.



^{ix} Tennant, P.

^x See https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/indian_homemakers_association/

^{xi} Tennant, P.

^{xii} See <https://nwac.ca/about-us>

^{xiii} Tennant, P.

^{xiv} Tennant, P.

^{xv} Tennant, P.

^{xvi} Tennant, P.

^{xvii} Tennant, P.