



WHAT WE HEARD

REPORT FROM THE PROVINCIAL URBAN
INDIGENOUS LEADERS ONLINE
GATHERINGS



EXPLORATORY ONLINE DISCUSSIONS
ABOUT ORGANIZING URBAN INDIGENOUS
VOICES IN THE CONTEXT OF UNDRIIP

SEPTEMBER 2023





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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all the participants and organizations who attended the February 22nd online gathering and June 1 follow-up gathering, who generously shared their ideas and wisdom.

We are grateful to Elder Mark Atleo for opening and closing our gatherings in a good way.

We acknowledge the members of the Greater Victoria Urban Indigenous Community Leadership Table and BC Coalitions, who provided advice to the project team in developing our approach to this work.

We thank the Victoria Native Friendship Centre staff who supported this work as well as all project team members from BC-based firms including, Roundtable Consulting; Reciprocal Consulting; COYA Productions; Strong Circle; and BC-based Artist Jamin Zuroski.

We would like to recognize the staff at the BC Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation who worked with the project team to secure the funds for this work and who supported this work to proceed using a community-informed and community-led approach.

The efforts of this initiative are intended to be a catalyst for conversation and dialogue and to provide the opportunity for connections to occur. This report and its activities are only a snapshot of the work, and the hope is these efforts may propel and expand in the future.



Jamin



Zuroski



About the Report Authors

This report was developed by Reciprocal Consulting, who attended the February online gathering and follow-up gathering, and produced this summary report.

ABOUT THE ARTIST AND THE DESIGN

Jamin Zuroski was contracted by the project team to attend the gatherings and document the collective experience with a visual, displayed on the cover page of this report.

Jamin holds mixed ancestry with Ukrainian and Polish on his father's side and 'Nām̓gis First Nation on his mother's side. For the past 26 years, Jamin has practiced and worked with a variety of artists, community members, organizations, businesses, schools, Friendship Centres, and government on a variety of projects, initiatives, workshops, events and conferences.

The following is Jamin's description of the event visual, which is also featured below:

This design was created to capture a variety of discussions, thoughts and feelings related to our special zoom gathering on February 22, 2023. We first acknowledge the ancestral territories we all live, work and play on. We thank our Elder for welcoming us in a good way. We thank our hosts and organizers for this special and important gathering.

In the design you'll prominently see a spiral, which acknowledges all of the teachings our ancestors passed on to us and how we continue to practice them, with how we walk on the lands and with the tools we use for ceremony and protocols. The spiral also acknowledges the pressures and hardships Indigenous people's have had along that journey and how they want to find new ways of building community and governmental partnerships, to make sure the values, traditions and rights of Indigenous peoples are respected and supported, by whatever means are collectively set forward and agreed upon.

The Orca shooting out of the spiral acknowledges the momentum and push to continue on with this good work and do what's right for today and generations to come.

We understand that our conversations are living discussions and as we take note of this moment today, we also prepare ourselves to learn, grow and have deeper sharing and community connections in our upcoming gatherings together. The Orca also acknowledges the leaders in our community. An orca pod's leader is most commonly the eldest female, being their natural caregiver and matriarch.



The Infinity symbol around the eyes, feathers in the mouth/arms and the ulu within the spiral each acknowledge our ancestral roots and our unique diversity and cultural connection to our ancestors.

It's been said that we can sometimes be called Indigenous peoples in some context, but to acknowledge that we didn't pick that word, we are of our own identities, like Métis, First Nations and Inuit peoples.

The words highlighted in the design, were common discussion themes that still needed attention and follow up today and always. These discussions opened up many emotional stories of how we need to continue to build trust, honesty, commitment, relationships, and unity, so Indigenous peoples can thrive in this world and not just survive.

The feather/handshake symbol in the mouth, symbolized the relationships that were being made live, during the zoom session. Every participant showed happiness, patience, respect, an openness to learn, and an eagerness to continue these important discussions.

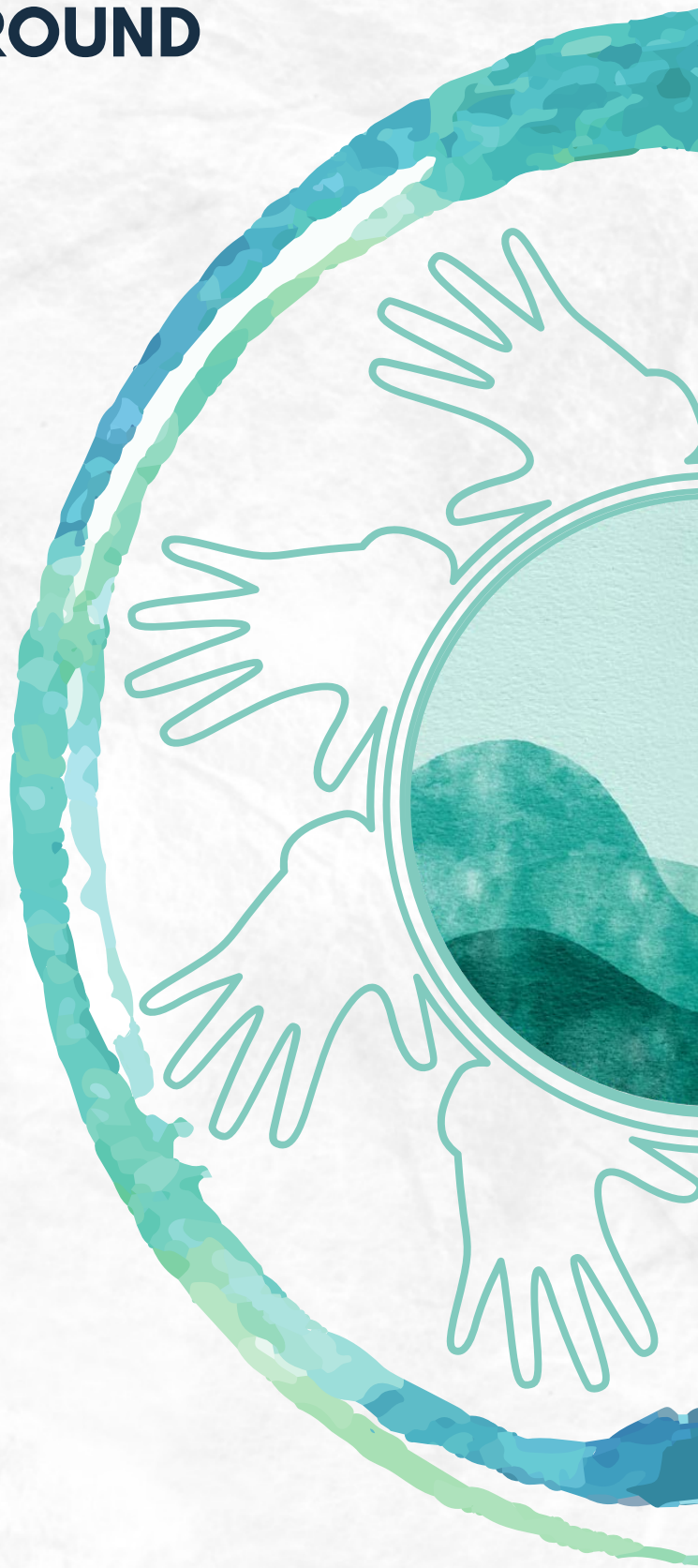
Jamin also created an additional visual rendering, shown below, and granted permission for the image to be used for branding. Jamin's visual renderings are a reflection of the gatherings and not intended as a collective representation of urban Indigenous people.



1.0 BACKGROUND

The Urban Indigenous Voices Project was an opportunity to connect individual leaders from across the province who self-identify as Indigenous and have a demonstrated passion for supporting urban Indigenous people. These connections were encouraged through a series of three online events which sought to initiate an exploratory dialogue around organizing urban Indigenous voices in hopes of creating better outcomes for Indigenous people living in urban areas across British Columbia.

As a funding partner, The Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation (MIRR) understood the necessity of Indigenous people having their own space to speak candidly about their experiences and hopes for the future. While contributing as an advisor to the process and attending to meet guests at the beginning of the online Provincial Gathering in February 2023, MIRR representatives did not participate in the gatherings. Any BC Public Service employees who stayed for the remainder of the gathering did so as community members and not as government representatives.



PROJECT NEED

In November 2019, BC became the first province to enact legislation specific to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. In follow up, an Action Plan was developed to enable and monitor progress on BC's Declaration Act on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (BC's Declaration Act).

The urban Indigenous people of BC were not consulted prior to the enactment of BC's Declaration Act, and when brought in during consultations on the Action Plan, it became clear that a piecemeal response could be garnered at best. There is no organized system of communication for urban Indigenous people across BC, and only a few local pockets of organization in the larger urban centres. Where organization exists, it focuses on social services over government relations.

Once the Action Plan was finalized, it did make reference to urban Indigenous Peoples and included four specific Actions related to the urban population, however the overarching reference to distinctions-based approaches challenges the situation since the urban community reflects all distinctions and requires some thoughtful unpacking if we are to see how it can work for the urban community.

Urban Indigenous Peoples need the space and time to thoughtfully consider how they may organize for better communication of needs within their community, but also to external partners like governments, businesses, and complex systems such as healthcare, justice, education, etc. This Project takes the first step.



PROJECT FUNDING

MIRR organized the provincial funding to convene this initial series of online events and dialogues with urban Indigenous leaders. This Project was a multiyear commitment from January 2022 to August 2023, allowing for the flexibility and time necessary to respectfully invite people into the conversation.

PROJECT HOST

The Victoria Native Friendship Centre (VNFC) coordinates the Greater Victoria Urban Indigenous Community Leadership Table, who provided two responses during the development of BC's Declaration Act Action Plan. Also, VNFC hosts the Victoria Urban Reconciliation Dialogue, a project that included gathering more than 300 members of the community over a series of events to discuss reconciliation and that resulted in the Victoria Reconciliation Blueprint. Both these areas of work were supported by MIRR.

MIRR approached VNFC to host this initial dialogue with urban Indigenous leaders because of the existing relationship and because of VNFC's experience and recent successes in this space. VNFC accepted the opportunity because this work is important and VNFC felt they could help with the initial steps for community. However, this work is a long undefined journey and other agencies, or even a new agency, may be better suited to guide this work in the future. It is for the community to decide. The VNFC's role for now is to help coordinate this community-led work.

PROJECT TEAM

It took many hands to bring this Project to success, and to ensure all the necessary skills were available as needed. VNFC coordinated this Project alongside facilitators and community engagement consultants from BC-based firms including, Roundtable Consulting; Reciprocal Consulting; COYA Productions; and Strong Circle.

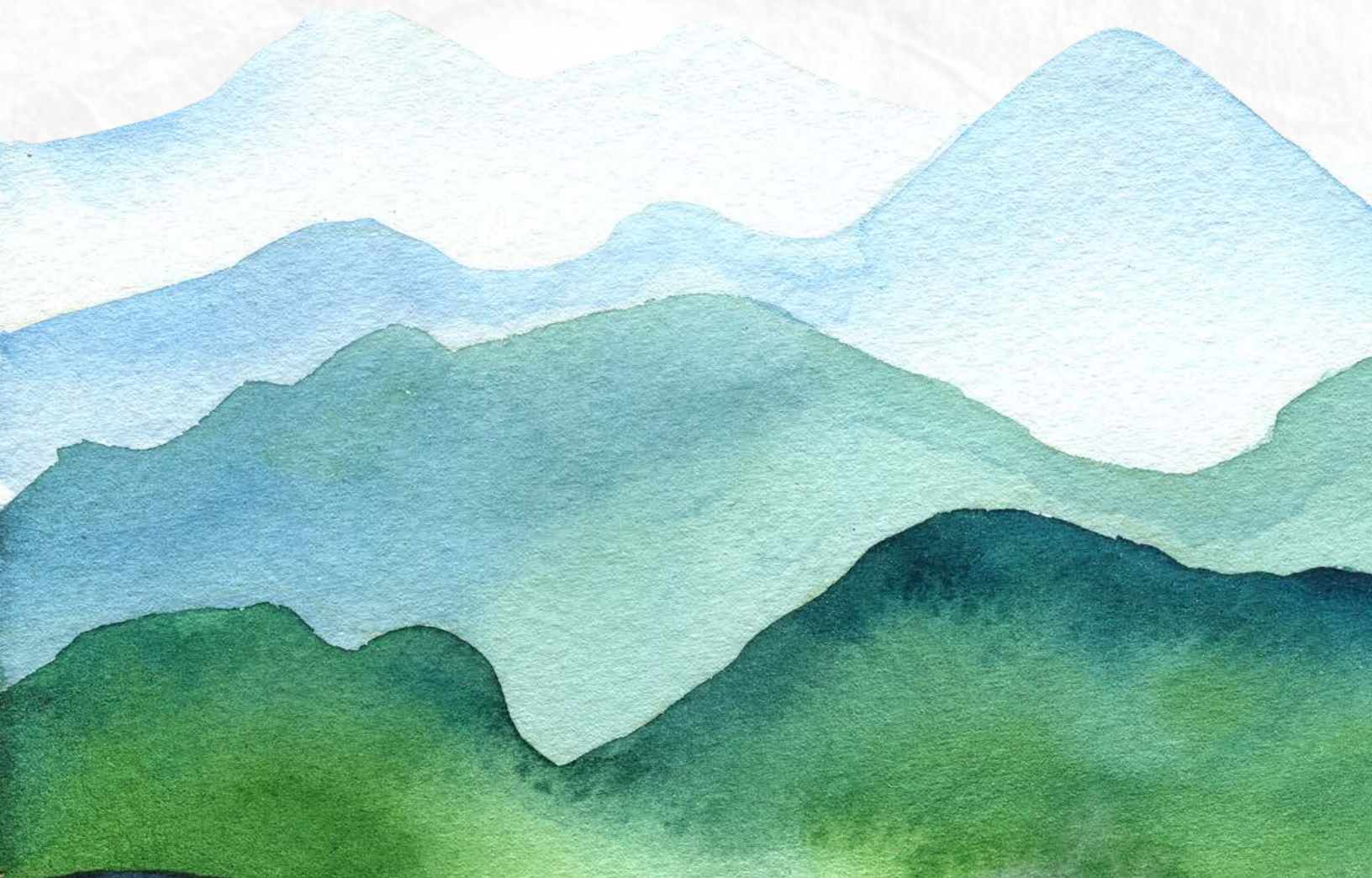
There was also a need for direction and guidance throughout the project including consultation on the invitation process to cultural safety and inclusion. The Project received guidance from two main sources, the Greater Victoria Urban Indigenous Community Leadership Table which includes Elders, educators, young adults, artists, and service providers, as well as the BC Coalitions (federally funded by Indigenous Service Canada) which includes groups from Victoria, Vancouver, Surrey, and Prince George.



2.0 PROJECT PURPOSE AND APPROACH

This report summarizes the approach and process used to engage urban Indigenous Peoples across BC in an exploratory online dialogue around organizing urban Indigenous voices and what was heard from participants in the gatherings.

The purpose of the February 22, 2023 Gathering was to hear from urban leaders about what it means to be “urban Indigenous” and how communities would like to organize to advocate for their rights and needs. This can help to shape how governments engage with urban Indigenous Peoples as part of their commitments to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). While urban Indigenous people have many reasons to organize, specifically the provincial government is seeking direction regarding four key actions within the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan 2022-2027, as shown on the next page.



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. (Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction)

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 (see Action 4.21), to discuss successes, innovations, and challenges of supporting the social, cultural and economic needs of urban Indigenous Peoples. (Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation)

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. (Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation)

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. (Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation)

The Provincial Urban Indigenous Leaders Gathering provided a safe and accessible forum as an initial step to informed government policies and programs that better meet the needs of urban Indigenous communities.



INVITATION PROCESS

When mapping out the various elements of the invitation process within the urban Indigenous voices project, six key considerations emerged:

1. Relationality
2. Commitment
3. Diversity and Inclusion
4. Safety
5. Reciprocity
6. Data Sovereignty

It was important to consider how these invitations were grounded in relationality. That is, through consultation in the planning meetings a key priority emerged to invite urban Indigenous community leaders in a slow, intentional, and purposeful way.

Thought was also given as to how we invite urban Indigenous leaders into an on-going conversation on UNDRIP legislation and urban Indigenous identity, rather than solely offering an invitation to a one-time event or a one-time conversation.

Another key consideration of the invitation process was to ensure that all voices were included in the conversation and that space was created for a complexity of perspectives and identities to join the conversation around urban Indigenous leadership. In this regard, when planning the gathering and subsequent events, space was created to look for voices that might be missing on the invitation list and intention was set to include the voices of youth, Elders, people displaced by family circumstances, people displaced by the Sixties Scoop, and voices to represent children in care. Additionally, there was intention given to inviting in participants from different Nations and people who have connections to many different identities, languages, and cultures.

Safety was another main consideration of the invitation process, with a commitment to invite urban Indigenous leaders into a safe space by avoiding colonial models and creating opportunities for all voices, including quieter ones. Feeling welcomed was a priority identified in terms of the approach to invitations.

Reciprocity was another vital component of the process. In recognition of the gifts of knowledge and time provided by the participants, honouraria was made available for all of the participants for all of the events. Participant gift packages were also mailed to everyone with items promoting wellness and cultural activity while engaged online.

The final but perhaps most important consideration of the invitation process was to be intentional regarding the sharing of information on consent and data collection. This approach included setting up clear processes for gathering data, asking for consent, ethics, and methodologies, in order to have this information readily available for the leaders who were being invited into conversations.


In summary, the invitation process for the Urban Indigenous Voices Project was anchored within fundamental considerations of relationality, inclusion, safety, and OCAP principles, so participants would feel safe and welcomed to engage, while the enacted events and methods for dialogue were designed to open a wide conversation across BC regarding UNDRIP and urban Indigenous identity, including the backgrounder documents and honouraria.

An outline of the invitation process was developed and made available to participants through the [Urban Voices website](#) prior to the gathering.

APPROACH AND TIMELINE

To achieve our goal of inviting 50 urban Indigenous community leaders into dialogue, a series of events and engagement sessions were held, as shown below, to ladder people into the conversation. The additional engagement session was hosted through local project work of the Greater Victoria Urban Indigenous Community Leadership Table. While this was an in-person Victoria specific event, it was live streamed to create access for those across BC.

Events	Title	Date Held
First Event	An Information Session with the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation	December 1, 2022
Additional Engagement	The local Urban Indigenous Community Engagement Panel hosted at Norway House	February 9, 2023
Second Event	The Provincial Urban Indigenous Community Leaders Gathering hosted online	February 22, 2023
Third Event	The Provincial Urban Indigenous Community Leaders Follow-up Gathering, hosted online	June 1, 2023



The purpose of the December 1 online Info Session was to gather known urban Indigenous leaders to hear about the project and share their feedback on who should be invited into the conversation regarding urban Indigenous leadership, UNDRIP, and the government Action Plan; to ensure invitations to join the conversation were spread widely across the province and solicit recommendations of names; and to share information regarding the upcoming second and third events.

We were clear in our invitation to this first event any person who self-identifies as urban Indigenous and has a voice to share is welcome and there was no restricted access. Equally, we acknowledged that other urban leadership spaces exist (Métis Nation of BC, BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres, North West Indigenous Council) and that some may choose to engage in multiple spaces. The provincial urban Indigenous leaders who attended this event participated alongside representatives of MIRR. This first session functioned as both a focus group and pre-engagement session with the aim of ensuring the work being done around urban Indigenous identities was carried out in a good way.

The additional engagement session held on February 9, 2023, was an Urban Indigenous Community Engagement Panel hosted by the VNFC at Norway House. The site was chosen to encourage new faces into the space as Norway House is located in a different neighbourhood than VNFC.

This engagement session was open to all community members and included a meal. The panel was filled with local Victoria urban Indigenous leaders who shared their personal journeys of urban Indigenous identity and having voice. Additionally, this engagement panel spoke with community members afterwards and invited them into the conversation about how Victoria can organize and make their collective voices heard in relation to UNDRIP, alongside provincial and federal legislation.

The panel discussion was live streamed through Facebook to ensure the greatest access possible by the greater Victoria urban Indigenous community, and also provincially for those communities not ready to host their own dialogues but seeking to deepen their understanding of the conversation

A [recording of the panel](#) is available through the VNFC Facebook page.



URBAN INDIGENOUS IDENTITIES AND VOICES

Organizing to improve our future and well-being
in the context of UNDRIP legislation

Hosted by the Victoria Native Friendship Centre

IN PERSON EVENT IN VICTORIA

FREE TO ATTEND FOOD PROVIDED EVERYONE WELCOME

Speakers



KIM VAN DER WOERD

Owner and Lead for Strategy and Relations at Reciprocal Consulting



RY MORAN

Associate University Librarian at the University of Victoria, founding director of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR)



JANICE SIMCOE

Janice Simcoe (Ojibwe), former Director of Indigenous Education at Camosun College



RON RICE

Executive Director of the Victoria Native Friendship Centre



JACE MEYER

Panel Moderator
Owner of COYA productions



TRISTAN PARISIAN

Panel Moderator

Event Details

TIME	ACTIVITY
5:00 PM	Doors open Elder opening prayer and blessing Food
6:00 PM	Welcome Panel discussion Audience question & answer
8:00 PM	Closing remarks Social & Networking

CONTACT INFO:

(250) 384 - 3211

URBANVOICES@VNFC.CA

The second event was the Provincial Urban Indigenous Leaders Online Gathering, hosted to talk about urban Indigenous voices and to explore how these voices can inform the BC government's work with UNDRIP. This online event was accompanied by an interactive web-based platform (urbanvoices.ca) that sought to foster dialogue and connection with urban Indigenous leaders and to create a space where leaders could contribute to furthering the conversations held at the February 22nd event and afterwards. The site included information about the process and background documents, as well as an interactive project site which was open one week before the event and remained open two weeks after the event. This offered an additional way to invite leaders into conversation and to reduce barriers for participation in dialogue.

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@vncf.ca.

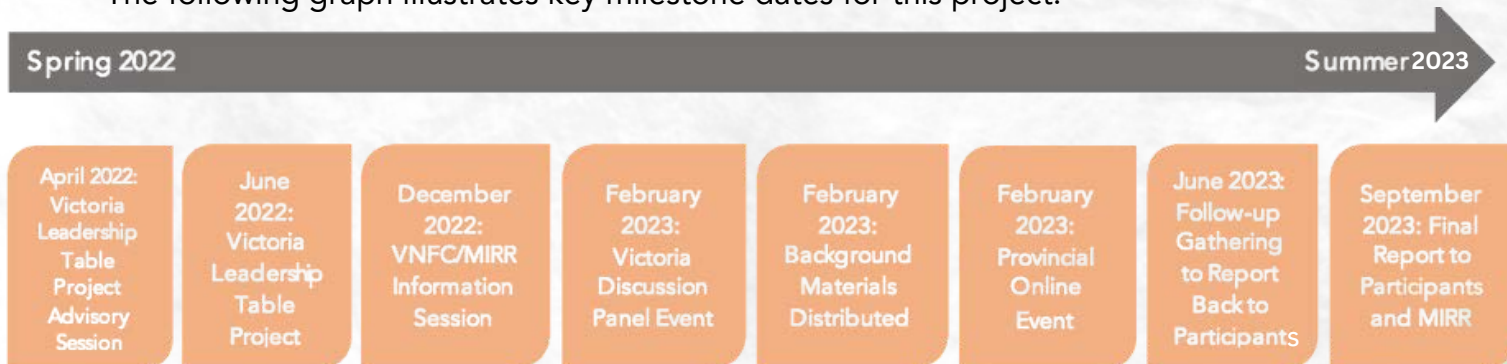


Artwork by Jamin Zuroski

In support of the events and to prepare participants for the gathering, the project team developed a series of backgrounders covering topics including, Urban Indigenous Identities and Realities; BC's Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan and the Urban Indigenous Community; Data Sovereignty-Sharing our Stories; and Indigenous Organizing Over the Past 100 Years, which can be found on the [Urban Voices website](http://UrbanVoices.ca).

MILESTONE DATES

The following graph illustrates key milestone dates for this project:



DATA COLLECTION AND STEWARDSHIP

The Provincial Urban Indigenous Leaders Online Gathering, held on February 22, 2023, comprised of morning group discussions with the following guiding questions:

- What's important for you for this meeting today?
- How do we define ourselves in this space?
- Is the term 'urban Indigenous' on the right track? Does it resonate?
- How do we ensure that no one gets left behind?
- How do we ensure that Indigenous people and values lead the space?

In the afternoon, open space dialogues were facilitated by the project team and volunteer participants on some topics relating to the morning discussions and some that participants developed:

- Ways to achieve consistent engagement and maintain momentum and not have this watered down to fit a western lens
- Federal Political Accord for Urban Representation
- Data Sovereignty
- Open Dialogue – any topic or conversation
- First Nations, Metis, Inuit and the Conversations Between
- Physical Spaces to Gather for Urban Indigenous People
- Urban Coalitions

Notetakers from the project team recorded approximately 100 pages from the discussions and open space dialogues. The notes were then synthesized, and a thematic analysis was conducted. Resonant themes and discussions were drawn out to create the findings in this report.

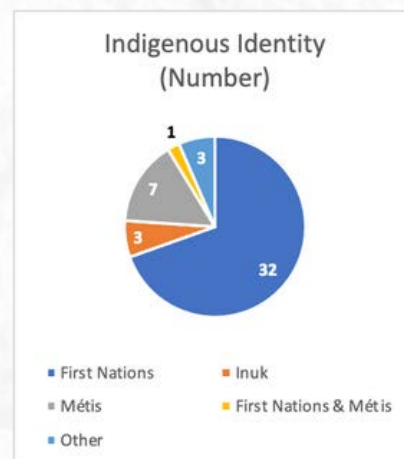


ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS

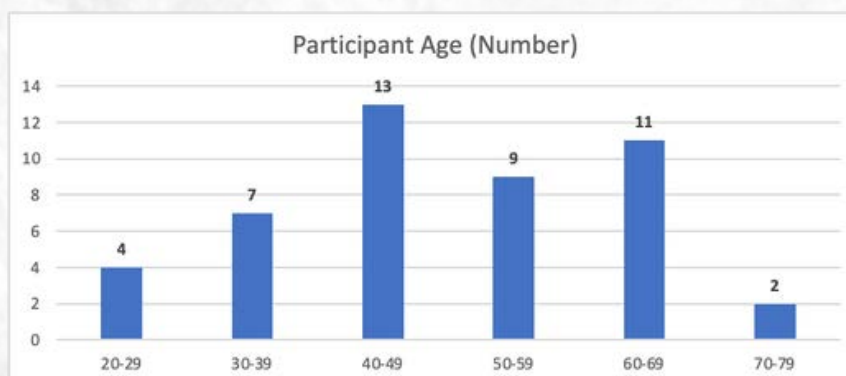


In total, 51 participants attended the February Provincial Urban Indigenous Leaders Online Gathering. Of those participants, 48 individuals shared demographic information. The graphs below illustrate how these individuals identified.

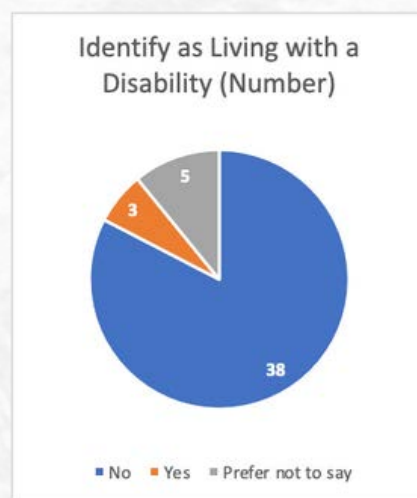
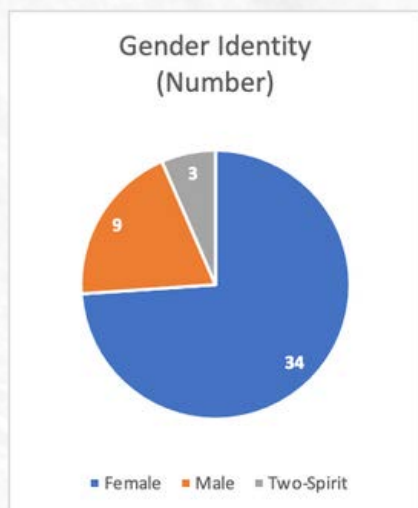
The largest number of participants were located in the Metro Vancouver Region (14), followed by Vancouver Island (10), and Northern BC (8). All but 3 people identified as Indigenous (First Nations, Métis, and Inuk), with the majority of participants identifying as First Nations.



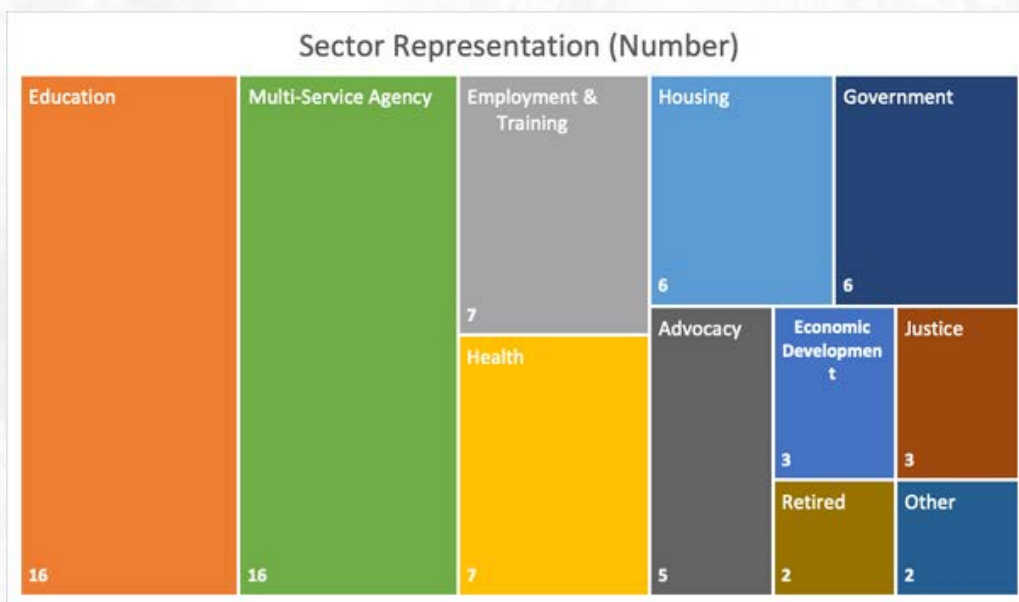
Of the 46 participants who shared their date of birth, ages ranged from 23 to 77 with an average age of 49.



The majority of participants identified as female and did not identify as a person living with a disability.



Participants reflected a broad range of sectors, with the majority of participants identifying their work sectors as education and multi-service agencies (16 respectively). Participants from the government sector include representatives from the municipal/regional, provincial, and Indigenous governments.



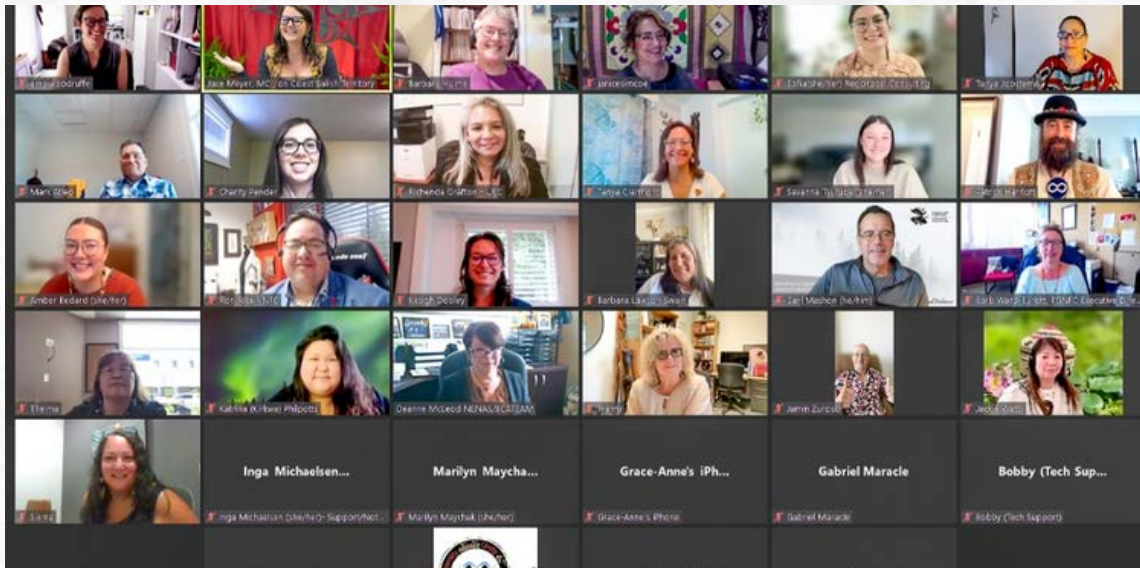
JUNE FOLLOW-UP GATHERING

Following the February Provincial Urban Indigenous Leaders Online Gathering, the project team created a draft report based on conversations and discussions from the day. The draft report was shared with participants and a follow-up gathering was held on June 1, 2023, providing February Gathering participants an opportunity to share their feedback. Participant feedback from the June Gathering is also included in the findings below.

A behind-the-scenes shot of the June Gathering host set-up. Pictured below is MC Jace Meyer.



A screenshot from Zoom of the June Gathering facilitators and participants.



A behind-the-scenes shot of artist Jamin Zuroski presenting his visual rendering, for branding use, to the June Gathering participants.



3.0 WHAT WE HEARD

A variety of insights and learnings emerged during the Gatherings held on February 22 and June 1, 2023. While these insights cannot be siloed or compartmentalized from each other, as many of the insights are connected or overlapping, for the purpose of this report some of the main insights gleaned from the gatherings have been organized, by most frequently mentioned into six overarching themes:

1. Community
2. Terminology and Language
3. Connection to Lands, Waters, and Territories
4. Youth and Elders
5. Rights and Sovereignty
6. Processes of Engagement

The insights gained from these six themes are summarized in the following pages. While not presented as themes, a special acknowledgement must be given to the residual impacts of Indian Residential Schools and the legacy of colonialism on the identity and wellbeing of Indigenous Peoples.



COMMUNITY

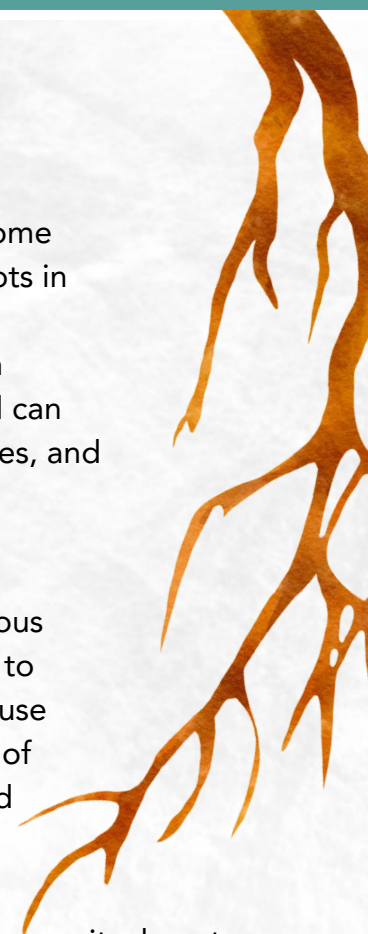
Establishing community can feel challenging when living in urban settings. Some participants felt that one must establish their own identity and know their roots in order to overcome the challenges of living away from one's home territories. Participants also shared that when generating a sense of community in urban settings, a space to gather is vital: a space where every voice is welcome and can share their own understandings and teachings from their communities, families, and grandparents.

While creating a sense of community was described as challenging for many participants, it was also described as a need of great importance for Indigenous peoples living in an urban setting. Participants shared that not having access to traditional knowledge, territories and food is not only challenging but can cause one to question their authenticity as an Indigenous person. Creating a sense of community, therefore, was seen as an important step in affirming identity and preventing a sense of disconnection from one's culture, homelands, and community.

A number of participants further wondered about the best ways to create community, how to generate and share learnings about building community and how voices that join the community are being "vetted" in a respectful way in order to ensure safe spaces for Indigenous Peoples. When reflecting on how to create a sense of community, some participants had these suggestions:

- flexible spaces that are also open evenings and weekends in order to provide opportunities for gatherings that can accommodate a range of schedules,
- developing practices of knowing each other, knowing what is happening in community, building consistency, building trust, and celebrating when great things are happening within the community,
- having culturally safe spaces, both in-person and online, with open door policies which allow for newer community members to explore their Indigeneity and grow their cultural knowledge.

While there is a need to build community, there is also a need to avoid fostering a feeling of a "pan-Indigenous nation." Participants shared that creating a sense of community needs to work in tandem with ensuring the diversity of Indigenous Peoples is reflected in the community spaces being created or supported. One participant suggested creating spaces for gatherings that reflect the diversity of peoples in the community, while also hosting gatherings for urban Indigenous people belonging to particular groups, for example, hosting Inuit specific gatherings.




There was also clear messaging that building community will still require social repair, programs that seek to immediately meet the needs and improve the lives of Indigenous people, so these same people can contribute to the community in which they live in meaningful ways. It was shared that survival and strength have come from a sense of togetherness in the past, such as with Indian Residential Schools or the reserve mobility restrictions, so this feeling can therefore be drawn on to move forward in the future if we can empower our community members.

Additionally, participants felt it important to build off the strengths of existing organizations that have already nurtured community in good ways within urban settings. However, when reflecting on building community and the connection to existing organizations, one participant shared that large numbers of Indigenous people are being left behind and to address this there is a need for reconciliation and a fostering of relationships within Indigenous communities, between organizations and a need for a re-birth of tribal nations.

Another important note from participants was the need for local Indigenous community to lead the design of what that community looks and feels like. Participants believed if the government wants to implement BC's Declaration Act in a good way, then the interactions and conversations cannot be based on colonial methods. Participants further said having a good understanding of BC's Declaration Act and UNDRIP will be important in order to guide implementation in a good way and a way effective in supporting the urban Indigenous community. One participant shared that urban Indigenous spaces can be advocated for in official government and community plans because of BC's Declaration Act and further, that advocating on behalf of community is necessary to see the forward movement so many are hoping for with regards to BC's Declaration Act.





When it comes to funding for community needs, people shared that more spaces are needed to connect Indigenous leaders to community processes and community needs to have control of the resources for these spaces. Some commented on the barriers to getting funding to community, band offices and independent tribal knowledge keepers due to legal and institutional processes. We also heard of the need to hire community-based researchers and organizers to inform how needs are assessed and that data gathered about community needs to be stored on independent servers based in community such as community-controlled cloud systems that are not sitting in the hands of other institutions who would not follow community or nation protocols.

Participants additionally described that communities themselves wish to receive training for research and the processes required to collect data in a way aligned with community protocols. Participants shared that tangible actions are needed in order to make a difference in communities and that institutions have a duty to support in-community training and the community systems and protocols that are already in place. When referring to research processes, it was shared that the relationship between institutions, the government, and community requires building trust.

TERMINOLOGY AND LANGUAGE

Many participants recognized that the term “urban Indigenous” is a complex and at times limiting term as many participants do not assign a label to their identity, and because the term can be inclusive while also causing erasure to other nested identities.

Participants noted some challenges with the term “urban Indigenous.” For some, being labeled as ‘urban Indigenous’ feels colonial or it is not a term they identify with themselves. Rather, participants shared they identify with their Nation and they happen to be living in an urban community at present. Weariness was shared regarding how urban Indigenous terminology is used, as one participant shared another “group of people” is not being created and each individual has their own identity and connections to their communities or territories in Canada.

When thinking about how the term “urban Indigenous” is used today, participants felt terminology and clarity with language will inform youth and the next generations and so having terminology that is not over-complicated will make it easier for youth to claim their identity.

Other participants felt terminology to describe an experience or group is necessary, while simultaneously acknowledging the terminology is complex. Additionally, hesitations were expressed regarding the lines of distinction being drawn in language-use by the government, and there was a hope for government to move beyond black and white thinking which was described as an approach which imposes limitations. Ultimately, many participants felt it useful to develop clarity in language but there was hesitancy on focusing upon where people currently live. Many participants hoped to find language that was encompassing, inclusive and did not reinforce colonial limitations, labels or systems.

Participants did note however, the term “urban Indigenous” can be helpful when building relationships with municipalities and navigating city planning and policies, and could be used to hold municipalities accountable for their decisions. Additionally, some participants felt the term was broad and therefore more inclusive. One participant further noted a glossary of terms and context, including Nations and reserves, within the “urban” definition could be beneficial.

When thinking about how the term “urban Indigenous” would be implicated within government policies, some participants described a need for consistency in language and to be aware of how language and terminology lines up with other governmental documents such as the Indian Act. Relatedly, participants reflected that urban Indigenous Peoples aren’t considered “bands” and or fit in the funding structures according to the Indian Act. Therefore, having written commitments to UNDRIP through BC’s Declaration Act with legal implications, is required to recognize urban Indigenous experience and rights. It was noted that regardless, the Indian Act is discriminatory and there are implications and likely negative outcomes if Indigenous communities are told what language they need to use by government bodies.

The distinctions-based work carried out by government has been a barrier and has left a lot of people out of the engagement process and much of the Action Plan. Participants shared the need for capacity building to run programs and services and to build a foundation for the next generation of leaders so we can build sustainability and inclusion for those who have been left out . Distinctions-based terminology was also described by one participant as connected to the provincial governments' hyper-focus on First Nations peoples with a lack of understanding regarding the need for broader conversations. Similarly, one participant felt the government chose to include the term “distinctions-based”; however, the participant felt there was no accountability regarding what was meant by “distinctions-based” terminology and how it should be interpreted in an urban space.

While discussion around finding the appropriate terminology was acknowledged as complex and challenging, some examples of alternative options emerged such as employing the term “diaspora” to describe Indigenous peoples living in urban spaces or avoiding terminology and language altogether by employing the use of a symbol.

Overall participants agreed on the importance of having discussions around what terminology is used and how it is used for collective purposes. One participant noted the need for each community to have a conversation on terminology. Participants also shared that people will all choose to identify in different ways and that it would be beneficial to find language that acknowledges the complexity of experiences. Participants described that many people are in “flux” and do not stay in one environment long-term or move around due to their work or school. For example, participants shared that university students might live in an urban setting only while they are taking classes.

CONNECTIONS TO LANDS, WATERS, AND TERRITORIES

Creating a sense of connection to land and natural places was an important theme raised by those living in urban settings as many shared the challenges of not feeling rooted in their territories. Therefore, a sense of connection to the land and to each other is important to create a sense of belonging.

Some felt community dialogues must include the voices of those who feel they do not have a connection to the land, or whose connections to their home community have been disrupted. Disruptions of this sort included those who may not live on their home territories due to the foster care system, trauma, family violence, or lack of education and job opportunities. More important than defining who is urban is the need to support Indigenous Peoples to feel connected to the land and to each other wherever they are, including recognizing their own stewardship responsibilities for the land on which they live and the Nation who is the traditional steward.

Additionally, when thinking about remaining connected to the land in an urban setting, participants shared the challenges of getting home to their own territory. Participants reflected on how to bring ceremony to those living in urban settings and how to pass on or learn the traditions of their ancestors while living in a different location from their own community. Connection to traditional medicines was also of noted importance as participants described how city planning and development were barriers to carrying out a connection to the land and its medicines.

Participants expressed the necessity of honouring protocols and teachings of their host Nation(s) and having meaningful relationships and dialogue with the host Nation(s) where they live, as well as the importance of honouring the local Nation(s)' primary relationship and responsibility of the territory. Further, it was noted that urban Indigenous people are not taking away from the local territory holders but seeking recognition and inclusivity as Indigenous people of Canada who have rights.

Participants shared the following reflections at the June Gathering:

We acknowledge where we are, and we are here too.

We know where we are, and the discussion later on rights and sovereignty flows from that, we really need to understand where we are, and we need to be claiming our rights at the same time.

We are on someone else's territory and how do we express our rights... How do you not step on rights of nations we are living, and how important that is.

Participants further shared the need to understand what responsibilities they share for the territory on which they live, particularly when moving to a new urban area, and noted the importance of learning about the territory but also recognizing the growing digital expressions of people living outside of their communities. Relatedly, participants wondered about the best way to have a voice on these lands and to contribute meaningfully within these urban settings, and therefore ensuring protocols are honoured is an important consideration for those living in or moving to urban areas.

One participant at the June Gathering shared an Ojibway teaching, *"We can be at the places we're at on the Earth and we can be home and completely together when we look at the sky."*

It was also proposed to add the sky to the recognition of land and water.

Lastly, a participant shared about the importance of connecting to land and noted that in urban settings there is a lack of sacred space to practice culture. The needs are not met by the government when it comes to creating sacred space and a lack of funding prevents finding the necessary land-based healing coordinators to facilitate health and wellness in relation to the land on which people are living.

YOUTH AND ELDERS

Participants noted that young people and Elders were missing voices from the conversations held at the Provincial Urban Indigenous Leaders Online Gatherings and emphasized the importance of including youth and Elder perspectives to inform the conversation moving forward. Participants understood these conversations need to happen with youth and Elders, in spaces that are welcoming, inclusive, and safe, and meet Elders and youth where they are at.

Participants recognized the need for safe spaces for inclusion of our young Two-Spirit and 2SLGBTQQIA+ communities as well, and further shared the importance of gender diversity, as well as the inclusion of differing abilities. It was suggested to invite youth to a separate engagement session, not part of the adult session, as an opportunity to allow youth to share in ways that feel good to them when it comes to discussing what it means to be “urban Indigenous”. Further, one participant suggested a process of youth first listening to these conversations before contributing, and went on to note:

What do we mean when we say we want youth engaged? Do we have an evidence-based approach that we can use?

Other participants shared observations that youth do feel the responsibility to stay connected to the land and their communities and particularly, to stay connected with the language of their community or Nation. Participants also observed youth feeling a responsibility towards the language of the territory they are guests in. There is great importance for youth to know their identity and to realize that connections to their identity can be made, but it is their own personal responsibility.



When discussing how to foster feelings of connection for both youth and Elders, it was suggested to connect groups of people through an online portal or when in gatherings such as the Urban Indigenous Leaders gathering, create breakout rooms to give space for specific lived experiences to be shared, such as the experiences of Elders and youth, therefore ensuring all voices can be heard. Also, participants suggested ongoing support, such as tech support, for Elders to join gatherings such as the Provincial Urban Indigenous Leaders Online Gathering.

Additionally, a resource, *Our Place, Our Home, Our Vision: Youth Voices of East Vancouver*[1], was shared in the Zoom chat during discussions around youth engagement.

When sharing reflections regarding UNDRIP, there was a suggestion to create a platform for Elders to share guidance and coordinate next steps when implementing UNDRIP. Additionally, observations were shared of youth feeling some distrust towards UNDRIP as it is new and feels unknown.

RIGHTS AND SOVEREIGNTY

Participants expressed the need to unite efforts and mandates collectively, to advocate for federal and provincial partnerships and to advocate for community rights to self-government. Indigenous Peoples need to access their rights no matter where they live and these rights and responsibilities need to be considered even when living on land outside their own traditional territory. Additionally, it was shared that there is a need to understand international rights of Indigenous peoples and not only focus on understanding land-based rights. One participant described the importance of understanding how these rights interact under the colonial matrix of power.

[1] <https://alivesociety.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/alive-youth-policy-report-V02.pdf>

Participants also expressed the importance of not overriding the sovereignty, rights, and titles of the local Nations on which the government operates and to not erase the diversity of the peoples whose land is occupied. Participants therefore expressed the responsibility to each other to uphold and advocate for rights and protocols related to the land on which they live, and additionally to define the rights and responsibilities of those living in urban settings and to establish a collective sense of togetherness for such communities. One participant shared there were many conversations around recognizing people's rights but expressed the need for more conversations around working together.

I think that as we explore this topic we need to lift up title holders, if we lift up each other's rights we are all stronger together. – June Gathering Participant

Urban Indigenous people still have rights, even if they are not title holders. Some examples of these rights are – mobility rights; non-specific site rights; rights to communities, culture and language; the right for youth to grow up in community and not be scooped; and portable rights. Participants agreed Indigenous people's rights are portable and can be exercised anywhere, including urban areas. Participants also emphasized the need for government to better engage and consult urban Indigenous communities as over 75% of Indigenous people live in urban communities, off reserve. Additionally, one participant emphasized inclusivity, not taking away anyone's rights but being included.

It was also noted that First Nations bands and communities have political and resource-based rights that most Indigenous people living in an urban or off reserve setting do not have. Participants shared the need to honour and be responsible to each other and to recognize the mobility rights of other Nations. It was expressed that there is a need to dig into the details of what is missing from the dialogues related to rights-based topics.

Rights-based conversations are challenging due to how "urban Indigenous" is defined and considered within political contexts. One participant shared a discussion of rights related to someone living in an urban setting is complex as rights do not end when one leaves their reserve, community, or territory. Another participant noted the importance of places-based distinction as well as recognizing how people are divided by distinctions-based structures.



Some participants further suggested revisiting BC's Declaration Act as a rights-based framework for reconciliation alongside understanding everyone's rights are unique, therefore conversations on land rights and title rights are also necessary. Other participants felt BC's interpretation of UNDRIP and BC's Declaration Act was extremely restrictive. For example, the voices of urban and rural Indigenous people were not heard in the process to develop BC's Declaration Act and the Action Plan and that it would be preferable to have distinctions beyond the three main distinctions – First Nations, Métis and, Inuit Peoples noted in BC's Declaration Act.

Further, a question on how to make the distinctions-based definition more accessible was posed. Participants shared their optimism of government seeing the need for these changes and for urban Indigenous leadership to be there in the process. Participants also expressed the desire to make UNDRIP a part of the next generation's everyday understanding of rights. It was also shared that Canada's distinctions-based framework should be challenged.

Lastly, when discussing sovereignty, participants explained that sovereignty, particularly over data, has real implications in community especially in terms of where the resources are being placed. Sovereignty over decisions and data, alongside where data is kept and how it is analyzed and understood, is needed so outcomes reflect that community's needs. To do this, a deeper understanding of data sovereignty needs to be made accessible to the larger community.

Many participants expressed interest in learning more about data sovereignty and how contributions and stories should be honoured and stewarded throughout this work. At the February Gathering data sovereignty was a topic which many participants were eager to discuss. Participants also expressed appreciation in Reciprocal Consulting's presentation on data sovereignty and wondered if it was a tool available for all to use. Additionally, a data governance resource was shared in the Zoom chat during discussions around data sovereignty[2].



[2] <https://animikii.com/news/databack-now-available>

PROCESS OF ENGAGEMENT

Participants noted a clear barrier connected to the urban discussion of Indigenous engagement; “urban Indigenous” is not a legal identity. Relatedly, there are barriers to accessing funding and resources when it comes to applying for urban Indigenous initiatives. One participant expressed the need to prioritize a presentation of urban Indigenous Peoples to the government, as the attention of government is needed to receive funding for urban Indigenous people. Also, many expressed the need for a plan to acquire funding for community-led and regional conversations, including funding for local engagement and for the next gathering. One participant felt the important resources needed by urban Indigenous Peoples to engage with the Action Plan has not been considered by government or set aside for urban Indigenous people.

Engagement will also necessitate elaborate recruitment to bring in youth, Elders, and cultural leaders. Participants wondered about how to reduce barriers related to engagement that limit inclusion in the process, with some sharing that information on events are not widely accessible. One concern expressed was around ensuring an inclusive environment without the collective voice being overrun with people claiming false identities. Some participants questioned the absence of people and groups, noting northern communities get left out of conversations and need to be included in conversations moving forward. Some participants also expressed the following at the June Gathering:

Lots of groups that should be here are not here today. [We] need a provincial gathering with more groups and people at the table.

Voices of individuals within a community are not being looked to, and the same external voices are always relied on.

The next step is to include a broader voice, to hear a collective voice.

Participants wondered how to accommodate varying needs and responsibilities to those who would like to participate in dialogue on the topic of urban Indigenous experience. Some participants suggested that reports, documents, and information should be summarized in clear and accessible language and distributed. Another participant suggested a video format summary, with closed captioning, of this report.

Some participants expressed the need for establishing safety and protocols to move forward in a good way and to recognize that nations have different moral views which inform the different ways of communication and interaction with one another.

Participants suggested the following ideas to increase engagement:

- An outreach campaign with a multi-modal, multimedia approach that accurately reflects urban Indigenous people
- Creating a brand in order to push urban Indigenous voices forward
- Including the work of other artists who have expressed interest and providing people outside of the “typical artist” an opportunity to be involved
- Create or connect into a network based on priorities and ideas of urban Indigenous people
- A social media campaign led by youth

Additionally, some participants expressed time is needed for organization, engagement, discussion, and to gather feedback to create an approach for this work. One participant further shared the need to ease the pressure of organizing through capacity, specifically with Inuit groups as there is renewed pressure from governments and agencies to now include Inuit groups in consultation where previously left out.

Some participants reflected on in-community engagement processes in urban settings and shared the perspective that provincial and national Coalitions[3] are colonial structures. In contrast, other participants felt Coalitions are about building friendships and expanding the conversation about decolonization to new people including immigrants and people of colour as these populations have faced similar experiences under different time periods and contexts. Further, some felt the provincial government has no noticeable commitments to BC’s urban Indigenous Coalitions and there is a need for funding these Coalitions and new ones. One participant posed the question on whether an urban Coalition would be a political entity. Relatedly, a question was raised around province participation in discussions on the impacts of local areas.

Participants felt gathering is an important way for communities to speak on their own behalf and ultimately, it would be helpful to get community organizations together once or twice a year to discuss community needs. Participants shared the idea of holding larger provincial gatherings once a year with smaller gatherings held a few times a year, with the inclusion of workshops discussing specific topics. Another participant expressed the need for a third gathering to be organized this year, suggesting the First Nations Leadership Gathering in November as a possible option. It was also noted by participants these are the first of many gatherings, not the end.

[3] Coalitions are funded by Indigenous Services Canada through Urban Programming for Indigenous People (UPIP) and are multi-partnered collaborative spaces where the local urban Indigenous community leads a shared attention towards topic(s) important to their local community. There are 33 Coalitions nationally and four BC Coalitions: Metro Vancouver, Prince George, Surrey and Victoria.

A need also expressed for more opportunities for urban Indigenous leaders to sit at the same table as the decision-makers and ministers within the government. The concept of community action teams was shared as a model that could work instead of Coalitions, as the perspective was these teams do what is most needed in community. Participants also explained that Indigenous people are diverse and each community is different, therefore different approaches are needed. Questions arose around a need for a provincial Indigenous association of non-profits, a need for the Action Plan to better address and include people from Indigenous communities living outside reserve lands (urban, rural, or remote), and a need for additional alternatives to Coalitions such as Indigenous controlled organizations.

Another participant raised the opportunity around organizing a collaborated urban Indigenous group in BC and what it would look like, objectives of the group, and whether it would be political or non-political. Participants expressed frustration at the disproportionately low level of funding available for urban Indigenous populations which represent the largest segment of Indigenous peoples, and the need for the government to better fund urban actions in the Action Plan. Another participant expressed the need for a sustainability plan as backup in the instance of government changes.

Participants stressed a need for continued conversations both locally and regionally, with some participants highlighting the importance of discussions at the local level. There is a desire for different groups within local communities to learn more about UNDRIP, engage more, and lend their voices to different processes happening in community, with some expressing the need to personally deepen their knowledge and understanding of UNDRIP. Participants coming to gatherings such as the Provincial Urban Indigenous Leadership Gatherings can speak on behalf of their own experience and community, but limitations exist to capturing the diversity of experiences. Additionally, one participant proposed creating regional hubs, as materials and resources required to support this work will vary by area.

One participant also acknowledged the opportunities for well-supported and/or informed communities to be guides and the possibility of growing influence and support through more established communities. The following perspectives were shared about mentorship and influence at the June Gathering:

[We] can take each other under our wing then we can get greater advancement.

What can we influence and how can we influence it? What can we affect and how?

One participant expressed concern around the entire process, sharing the following at the June Gathering, *"We should be making the decisions, choosing the people, and choosing the process."*

Another participant of the June Gathering raised the question of the purpose and goal of urban Indigenous coming together, *"Why we are here, what do we hope to achieve."* They also noted the importance of centring the work around Indigenous philosophy.

Identifying similar work being done across Canada and engaging in more knowledge gathering to avoid duplicating past efforts is necessary. One participant noted the work of Inuit done in previous years can help inform the context in BC and provide background to create fulsome decisions for this work.

Participants expressed the need for different forms of engagement while recognizing the inaccessibility of the internet for some and the importance of ensuring Elders are not left behind. Participants also noted the need to achieve consistent engagement, to have access to adequate multiyear funding, and to maintain momentum while not having the process watered down to fit a colonial lens.

Some participants shared their challenges of being the sole Indigenous person in a space and the expectations and responsibility that follow, including the expectation they be subject matter experts. Relatedly, many shared how urban Indigenous people wear many hats and hold multiple identities and have necessary specialized skills. One participant acknowledged the need to respect the time of everyone.

When thinking about engaging other voices for future gatherings, attendees shared the following communities or groups to be included:

- Youth not affiliated with any community groups or organizations, and youth in-care
- Justice community
- Early learning childcare
- K–12 and post-secondary education
- Two-Spirit and LGBTQQIA+
- Disability community
- Healthcare community (physical and mental)
- Unhoused community

One attendee expressed the need to include the voices of people taken away from communities and families due to various scoops as well as including adoptees who have unique and important experiences.

A participant at the June Gathering shared the following about engagement, “We need to bring everyone together to get them to be able to share how they want to represent all together and how we can lift us all up.” This participant also described the need for shared agreements to facilitate urban Indigenous people coming together; sharing visions, common understanding, and protocols on how to support themselves and each other. Relatedly, another shared the need for a document describing the implementation process of the urban Indigenous perspective.

When thinking about sustaining engagement related to urban Indigenous leadership, one participant highlighted the need to communicate efficiently and effectively throughout the engagement process alongside creating well-developed communication tools and well-maintained systems. Further, some participants stressed the importance of determining the next steps including wanting to see actionable next steps, as opposed to “check marking a box”, determining who will lead the next steps, and who will lead the process of building connections with Indigenous groups.

A question was also raised about how to continue the conversation after the creation of this report, as this report only begins the conversation. Further, it was noted that there is an absence of a plan regarding the implementation in urban local settings, including what the process will look like.

4.0 CONSIDERATIONS FOR NEXT STEPS

The Provincial Urban Indigenous Leaders Online Gatherings connected the voices of a broad range of participants from BC urban Indigenous communities, many of whom are recognized leaders in different aspects of their community. The approach taken to engage participants and leaders in this dialogue was a strong way to begin this journey. Participants feel relationships are the foundation of this work and taking the time at the start to grow an informed and accessible conversation is essential to any long-term success and impacts.

We must acknowledge participants and leaders could not speak as representatives of their urban Indigenous communities, as there is limited organized infrastructure in place for urban Indigenous people to hear from their community and then to speak in one voice on behalf of their community to government and other valuable partners. The place we are beginning from is focused on shaping the structures needed to enable not only the right conversations, but access to those conversations for all community so future urban Indigenous leaders can speak from a strong foundation of engagement with their community regarding decision-making, policy development, or other issues.

Growing access to this conversation will seemingly require more local dialogues amongst the urban Indigenous grassroots communities across BC. Adequate funding is valuable and necessary to engage urban Indigenous people across BC as current funding allocations do not adequately support diverse and inclusive gatherings and dialogues. To ensure equal access, special consideration will be required to provide all urban Indigenous people across BC with the same opportunity to organize and accept that each community may design something different to meet their unique needs. Urban leaders we engaged want openness to other ways of organizing beyond hierarchical Eurocentric systems and also the time necessary to identify those ways.

The Provincial Gathering provided an initial step in a long journey of finding the structures necessary to ensure a strong, informed, and clear voice for urban Indigenous Peoples. Based on the feedback provided by the 51 participants at the Provincial Urban Indigenous Leaders Gathering, and the themes described in this report, the following six considerations for next steps have been drawn out.

COMMUNITY ACTIONS

Based on input from Gathering participants, these steps could be developed and delivered by Indigenous people at all levels of the urban community; local, regional, and provincial. While this tends to work best when based in local community-led spaces, consideration must be given to the reality that most urban Indigenous people and agencies are participating in this conversation at their own expense and progress will be slow until this work is properly resourced and accessible by the most rural and remote people of the province. Adequate funding is required for urban Indigenous communities to organize and engage in conversations about UNDRIP and BC's Action Plan.

1. Plan additional gatherings to build on the conversations that began at the Urban Indigenous Leaders online gathering on February 22nd, 2023, in a way that is accessible to all urban Indigenous Leaders. For example, by:

a. Hosting both in-person and virtual gatherings and providing tech support for those who choose to participate virtually.

Ensuring that all urban Indigenous voices are included with an extra emphasis on including those whose voices have traditionally been left out of past engagement processes such as Elders, youth leaders, community leaders from the Two-Spirit and LGBTQQIA+ communities, and the groups described below:

- Youth not affiliated with any community groups or organizations, and youth in-care
- Two-Spirit and LGBTQQIA+
- Justice community
- Early learning childcare
- K–12 and post-secondary education
- Disability community
- Healthcare community (physical and mental)
- Unhoused community

b. Ensuring a safe space for specific lived experiences to be shared, such as the experiences of Elders, youth, and the 2SLGBTQQIA+ community to ensure that all voices can be heard.

c. Focusing next discussions on the topics and questions raised by dialogue participants, such as:

- How to create a sense of community when living in an urban setting that overcomes the challenges of living away from one's home territory, to remain connected to one's culture, land and community, to access traditional knowledge and traditional food, and other forms of connection and belonging.
- How to support urban Indigenous Peoples to remain connected to nature in and around an urban setting, including connections to traditional medicines and teachings around the responsibilities for stewarding the land on which they live in honour of the protocols and teachings of the host Nation.
- How to access indoor and outdoor culturally safe spaces for urban Indigenous Peoples that are accessible, flexible in their availability, and in which all people are welcome, including sacred spaces to practice culture.
- How to bring ceremony to those living in urban settings.
- What language and terms to use including how to define "urban Indigenous Peoples" in a way that is encompassing of the diversity of Indigenous peoples living in urban settings, provides clarity, and is not limited by colonial perspectives, jurisdictions or labels.
- How to understand and apply a distinctions-based engagement approach in an urban space.
- How to ensure that urban Indigenous Peoples and leaders voices are not excluded from rights-based discussions.
- How to conduct research in urban communities in a way that respects Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP); Ownership, Control, Access and Stewardship (OCAS); and Inuit Qaujmajatuqangit principles and sovereignty over data.

2. Establish approaches to guide the implementation of BC's Declaration Act and UNDRIP in urban settings:

a. Create a platform for Elders and seniors to share story, deepen their understanding and provide guidance, particularly in regards to traditional governance structures and ways of organizing.

b. Develop and implement education sessions for urban Indigenous communities regarding BC's Declaration Act and UNDRIP to increase peoples understanding of these declarations and to gather their feedback regarding how to implement these declarations in a good way within urban settings.

c. Create plain language and accessible communication materials that explain BC's Declaration Act and UNDRIP and how it relates to and what it means for urban Indigenous Peoples.

CO-CREATED ACTIONS

These steps require a shared responsibility between community and government. They must be Indigenous led but strong partnerships built on respect and commitment will be necessary to make this work successful.

3. Create well developed communication tools and well-maintained systems that support the sustained engagement of urban Indigenous Peoples and urban Indigenous leadership.

a. Develop multi-modal and accessible materials to reach a breadth of the urban Indigenous community.

b. Provide regular communication updates amongst urban Indigenous community, and between community and key partners such as the provincial government.

4. Work toward the formation of an advisory system by having government and urban Indigenous community co-design and co-develop the structures (including those described within this report and those that will emerge through future discussions) that are necessary to hear from urban Indigenous Peoples through their identified leaders in a meaningful and consistent way. Urban Indigenous voices require a space as clearly defined as other Indigenous communities when shaping how governments honour their commitments to UNDRIP. Considerations for the formation of an urban Indigenous advisory system include:

a. Who is considered an urban Indigenous leader? How can we enable communities to identify their own urban Indigenous leaders?

b. How do we provide for diverse methods of organization locally and/or regionally while also enabling a shared voice at the provincial level?

c. How can we ensure the broadest demographic of voices of urban Indigenous people are being filtered towards leaders who can collaborate with governments in an informed way?

d. How do we best place the development, organization, and administration of this structure for success?

e. How do we ground this work in Indigenous ways that strengthen our communities and avoid ineffective and divisive colonial models?

GOVERNMENT ACTIONS

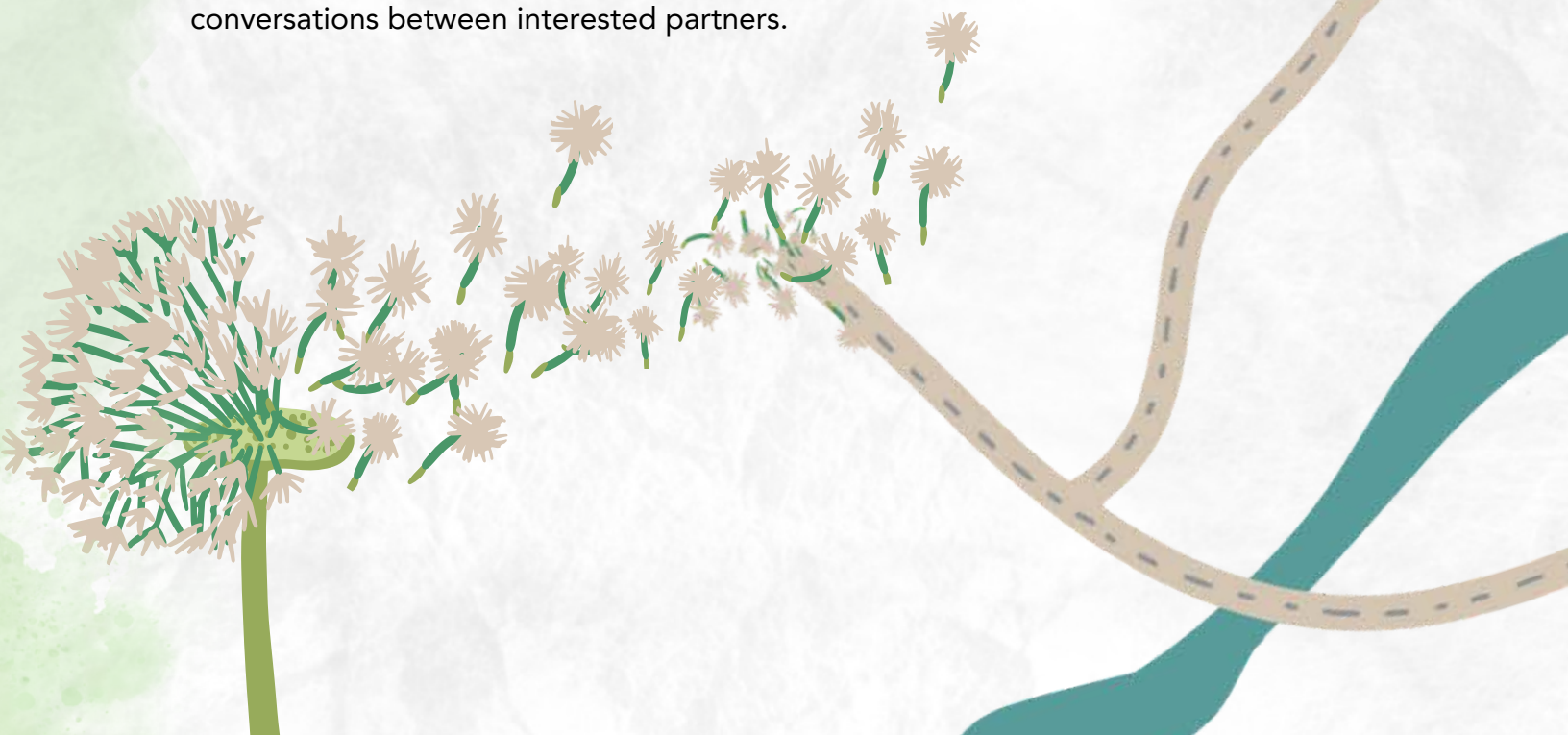
The following step sets the foundation for the other work and is primarily within the scope of government to achieve.

5. Support and resource the formation of community-led groups within urban Indigenous communities (such as justice and community action teams, or other self-directed organizations) to ensure that the voices of community members are heard, and, to connect these groups to decision making opportunities such as provincial and federal policies, funding allocation decisions, and city planning decisions to ensure that the needs of Indigenous peoples in urban settings are met.

a. Advocate for support and sufficient resources for these groups to conduct their own engagement that can inform priorities, processes, and decision-making.

b. Investigate the potential of developing an open-source server so any information gathered by the province or contractors of the province may be accessible to the urban Indigenous community in a way that aligns with the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA) and data sovereignty principles.

6. Champion relationship building with urban Indigenous communities across ministries and at all levels, including facilitating the introduction and initial conversations between interested partners.



CONSIDERATIONS AND RISKS

While there are plans and possibilities for the actions and steps needed going forward, there are some considerations and risks to consider as well.

One of these considerations and risks include aspects of the work related to funding. For example, the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation and the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction continue to be the only funding partners. Having a broader range of funders would be one way to ensure the sustainability of the work being carried out. Additionally, in the current organizational structure, no funds can be allocated to local communities nor to other relevant gatherings.

Related to organizational structure, the levels of turnover of government employees who attend to this work is much higher than Indigenous community members who are engaged in this process. Therefore this puts the responsibility of sustaining the work and relationships onto the Indigenous community members who are involved with the tasks and actions at hand.

Similarly, considerations in terms of overlap in scope with other spaces such as those created by The Métis Nation Government in British Columbia and The Northwest Indigenous Council will be needed in order to determine the best and most useful next steps.

Lastly, it is worth noting the risks and considerations that come with the fact that some First Nations object to the plans being made as a result of the Urban Indigenous Leaders Online Gathering.

CONCLUSION

This project provided a necessary opportunity for urban Indigenous community leaders to gather and give voice to how the provincial government will engage with urban Indigenous Peoples as part of their commitment to UNDRIP.

Dedicated time, funding, and focused attention were necessary to move this important work forward. The project's funding partner was receptive to an extended timeline to ensure the work was informed by community and advisors, and done in an intentional and good way. Participants would like this open process to continue in the future.

The additional time also allowed for the recruitment of the necessary capacity to manage the scale of the event and the complexity of the topic through consultants and subject matter experts. A virtual gathering was a new way to occupy space for many, requiring various strengths and perspectives. By concentrating a diversity of skills, knowledge, and lived expertise on the project team, the advisors and participants who took part in the gathering were able to share meaningful insights, which we could gather and share back to the community.

Often, advocacy for the urban Indigenous community or development of governmental relations falls on the non-profit sector, which is already under-resourced and struggling with capacity issues. Further, the non-profit sector may not have all the necessary assets to move this work forward, such as research partnerships or governmental relationships. The urban Indigenous community deserves dedicated resources and spaces to have these conversations and to build their systems of engagement.

