

HANDBOOK

A Toolkit for Local Electeds Climate Action

Beyond Consultation with Indigenous Nations, Peoples, and Communities

A Part of The [Community Engagement Councillor's Handbook](#)



Stay tuned for the up-to-date version of this resource!

This document is undergoing fact checks and updates... you will be able to access the new version in September 2025.

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Introduction

Engaging Indigenous populations on climate action is essential for ensuring a comprehensive, inclusive, and effective response to the challenges posed by climate change. It recognizes Indigenous knowledge, rights, and contributions while promoting a more just and sustainable future.

Meaningful Indigenous engagement respects Indigenous rights, including rights to self-determination and the protection of traditional territories, as well as their cultural heritage and identity. Collaboration on climate action ensures that Indigenous perspectives, values, and interests are considered in decision-making processes that affect their lands and resources. This is also important for social justice, since Indigenous communities often bear a disproportionate burden of climate change impacts, given their close relationship to the land and reliance on natural resources. Finally, working collaboratively enables a combining of Indigenous knowledge with scientific expertise that can yield more effective strategies for addressing climate challenges.

Climate change is an issue where we are all impacted. Climate or environmental challenges that are common between a nation and a local government could be a good place to start. These can lead to partnerships and joint initiatives that benefit both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

Specific Challenges Faced by Indigenous Populations

- [Indigenous populations are particularly sensitive to climate change](#) because they tend to live in regions **experiencing rapid change** and they have a close relationship with the land.
- Natural hazards and unpredictable and extreme weather events, can lead to **temporary or long-term evacuations** from traditional territories.
- [Climate impacts force a cultural change](#), including lifestyle, land skills, and opportunities to transfer knowledge to youth, for Indigenous populations.
- **The health impacts** of climate change Indigenous peoples are interconnected and far-reaching resulting from direct and indirect impacts of climate change that exacerbate existing inequities, and affect food and water security, air quality, infrastructure, personal safety, mental well-being, livelihoods, and identity, as well as increase exposure to organisms causing disease.
- Climate impacts will **disrupt the livelihoods of Indigenous peoples**, families and communities, affecting their sense of identity and cultural continuity and compounding existing mental health issues.
- Carbon-intensive economies continually demand an endless supply of resources, which are often extracted from Indigenous peoples' lands.
- Climate change exacerbates the social, cultural, and environmental changes brought about by colonialism.
- Climate activism may be deterred by repercussions in the justice system that are more severe for Indigenous peoples.

Engaging Indigenous Populations

Urban Indigenous vs First Nations engagement

- Engaging with Indigenous populations includes Urban Indigenous populations within your local government, as well as First Nations that are neighbouring or with whom you share land.
- It is important to engage with both of these groups and the methods and type of engagement will look different for each of them.

Building and nurturing relationships is the foundation of Indigenous engagement

- Engagement must come from a good place and not be task-oriented.
- The outcomes of engagement should remain focused on collective community knowledge, adding value to the lives of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, building capacity and reflecting cultural ways of knowing.
- Be prepared to move at the speed of trust and to build strong relationships before asking for anything.

Indigenous engagement is not stakeholder work

- Indigenous sovereignty and decision making is a constitutionally protected right, so engagement with Indigenous peoples is nation to nation, not stakeholder work.

Overlap with [engagement for those experiencing homelessness](#)

- Given the overrepresentation of Indigenous people among the populations experiencing homelessness in Canada, Indigenous communities are critical in addressing homelessness.
- Don't assume that the organizations addressing homelessness or youth homelessness are aligned with Indigenous infrastructure and its relations with governments economic development and on-reserve and urban reserve development.
- Review the [homeless hub's questions to consider in developing an engagement approach with Indigenous people](#).

Best Practices for working with First Nations

Do your homework

- There are things you can learn from like books, movies, court cases etc. that paint the future the Nation wants.
 - Go to their website and read reports
- Update yourself and learn before meeting.
- Do this before you ask Indigenous people to educate you
- Remember, they are governments too!
- Check out our resource on [Decolonizing Climate Policy at the Municipal Level](#) and [Aligning Local Climate Action with UNDRIP](#)

Prepare your local government

- Do some hands on training:
 - What are lived experiences of Indigenous people

- Hold or attend workshops on what Indigenous communities are doing
- Cultural sensitivity training for all staff on decolonization
- Do a land based retreat focused on Indigenous world view

Relationships are not transactional

- If they are not built already, now is a good time to start.
- The best time to build these relationships is when you are not asking for anything.
- Show up to be part of the community and learn
 - “[Accept invitations](#) to craft fairs, powwows and other less community-initiated events lets you get to know and build relationships with people away from a decision-making table.”
- Follow the lead of municipalities who have gone above and beyond (see our [Aligning Local Climate Action with UNDRIP](#) Handbook)
- It is not enough to simply build the relationship, you also have to practice it

Be patient!

- First Nation governments are often operating well beyond capacity. They are inundated with requests from all levels of governments, and they have a hard time keeping up.
- Work on building relationships before you need something so when the time comes for consultation, the relationships are already established.

Be mindful of what you are asking and what you are offering

- Again, First Nation governments are often operating beyond capacity. Be aware of how much you are asking for and the timing.
- Do your homework on their community calendar and other big community events.

Determine how you want to work together

- Do you want an MOU? Some type of engagement framework so you are setting the rules together
- When you have something to talk about there is a framework and now imposing a timeline or request that isn't a shared objective

Be humble

- In building these relationships, you are inevitably going to make mistakes. Come at it humbly and ready to learn and unlearn.
- Colonialism makes us uncomfortable making mistakes, but that often leaves us frozen in fear of saying or doing the wrong thing.
- It is ok to be corrected, to apologize, and to be uncomfortable.

Barriers to Indigenous engagement

Barrier	Solutions
Uncertainty about engaging the hereditary or Indian Act Band Council.	• Build relationships within the Nation and develop an understanding of the complex politics and relations • Once relationships have been built, ask who is best to engage on different projects • Work on developing more one on one relationships between
Indigenous people have their guard up from lived experience of colonialism.	• Relationships really matter and make sure you are building them from a neutral place. • Consider why you are reaching out and understand what your own agenda is, if you have one, and be clear about that from the outset.
Reconciliation is a long and ongoing process, and it is going to take a long time to adequately address. For many, this can feel overwhelming.	• Research reconciliation, including the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Report, and understand what reconciliation is and what your role is. • Make a list of what you can do on a personal and professional level.

Indigenous people with intersecting identities

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- Indigenous people often identify with more than one characteristic leading to oppression. This could include their gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, whether they are housed or unhoused, and more.
 - Ensure you are creating spaces that are safe for participants of all identities.
 - Ask questions about accessibility and how you can make space for everyone to participate.
 - Provide anti-oppression and decolonization training for anyone supporting the groups.

- Youth may require additional orientation to help them prepare and contribute to discussions with those already familiar with and involved in specific projects.

Initiatives for engaging Indigenous populations

*Resource expertise level:



Green = beginner



Blue = Intermediate



Black = advanced



Double black = expert

****Climate Caucus has ranked the following initiatives from beginner to expert, based on Complexity to implement, Staff time & expertise, and Political capital. Please note, these rankings are our own best judgements.*

Develop an Indigenous engagement strategy

The Basics:

- An Indigenous Engagement Strategy is a coordinated approach to ensuring that neighbouring First Nations and urban Indigenous populations are engaged meaningfully in the local government's decisions that affect them.
- Your strategy should include a set of guiding principles to engage and build trust with First Nations and/or urban Indigenous communities.
- Strategy development is an opportunity to engage with neighbouring First Nations and urban Indigenous communities and to make commitments to improve engagement moving forward.

Examples:

- [City of Toronto Meeting in the Middle](#) - Engagement Strategy and Action Plan
- [City of Edmonton Indigenous Framework](#)
- [City of Hamilton Urban Indigenous Strategy](#)

- [Islands Trust First Nations Engagement Principles](#)

Learn from Indigenous communities

The Basics:

- Attend a local Pow Wow, attend a market, observe an annual general meeting, or any other gathering that welcomes the public.
- This is a good way to learn about the community and build relationships outside of a specific project or grant proposal.

Examples:

- [City of Toronto, Indigenous Climate Action Grants](#), ON
 - After two years of engagement this grants program was co-developed with Indigenous groups to support local Indigenous projects that help address the climate crisis.

Provide anti-oppression and cultural training for staff and elected officials

The Basics:

- Learn and understand the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report and Canada's historic and ongoing genocide.
- Learn about historical and current impacts the local government has had on the Indigenous community or First Nation.
- Learn about the Indigenous community or First Nation's goals, visions and plans for the future.

Examples

- [Indigenous Corporate Training](#)
- [Indigenous Canada by University of Alberta](#)

◆ Host an Aboriginal Affairs Committee

The Basics:

- This is an advisory body to the City Council.
- Members include Executive Directors and/or Designates from the organizations and institutions in the region serving local Indigenous communities.
- Provide reimbursement for meeting-related expenses.

Examples

- [City of Toronto](#)
- [City of Vancouver Urban Indigenous Peoples' Advisory Committee](#)

◆◆ Create an UNDRIP task force

The Basics:

- Create a UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) Task Force in partnership with the local Indigenous Nations.
- Ask the task force to develop recommendations on how the local government can implement the [UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People](#) as an integral aspect of its work on Indigenous relations and reconciliation.
- Ensure the task force:
 - Collaborates with neighbouring First Nations,
 - Considers Urban Indigenous communities, and
 - Engages a diverse population of Indigenous voices.

Examples

- [City of Vancouver](#)

Additional Resources

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- [23 Tips on What Not to Say or Do When Working Effectively with Indigenous Peoples](#)
 - [A Toolkit for First Nations-Municipal Community Economic Development Partnerships](#)
 - [Indigenous Municipal Relationship Agreements a Guide for Municipal Leaders](#)
 - [Indigenous-Municipal Legal and Governance Relationships](#)
 - [Land Acknowledgements and why they matter](#) - Video
 - [UNDRIP and you](#) - Webinar recording
 - [Aligning Local Climate Action with UNDRIP](#) - Climate Caucus Handbook
 - [Handbook Release Panel Discussion](#)

Did you know Climate Caucus offers an “Ask Us Anything” service for elected officials in the network?

You could ask questions like “can you help me find this resource?” “Do you know of funding for X?” “Do you have examples of X policy language?” or “can you connect me with an expert in X?”

[Send us your questions here!](#)

Climate Caucus Resources:

[Climate Caucus Municipal Grants List](#) - detailed list of relevant municipal grants

[Policies and Resources Library](#) - list of motions, bylaws, council reports and briefing notes