



Statement of Community Engagement

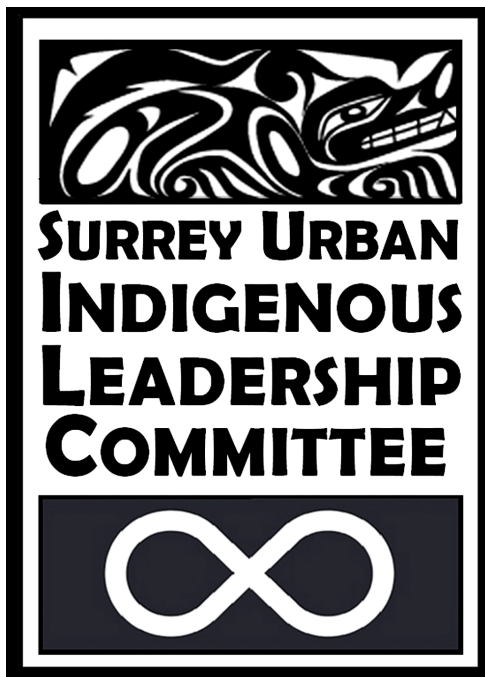
THE SURREY URBAN INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP COMMITTEE

April 2020

PURPOSE

This statement clarifies the expectations of the Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee when non-Indigenous organizations, governments, or researchers seek to engage or consult with urban Indigenous people in Surrey.

WHO WE ARE



The Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee (SUILC) is a coalition of Indigenous organizations (and some non-Indigenous organizations) based in Surrey.

We came together in 2015 and formalized our governance in 2018.

Our mission is to be a collective voice for the more than 13,000 urban Indigenous people living in Surrey. We advocate on behalf of all urban Indigenous people in Surrey and work collaboratively with other governments, organizations, and individuals that are committed to understanding and achieving our vision.

Our guiding vision and strategy for the future we want to create is contained in the 2017 “All Our Relations Social Innovation Strategy”.

Visit our website and go to Our Work - All Our Relations Strategy:

<https://surreyindigenousleadership.ca/our-work/all-our-relations-strategy>

STATEMENT OF RECOGNITION

Our work takes place on the traditional territories of the Coast Salish including the Semiahmoo First Nation, the Kwantlen First Nation, the Katzie First Nation, the Kwikwetlem First Nation, the Qayqayt First Nation and the Tsawwassen First Nations.

We recognize their connection to this land and acknowledge that we are newcomers to Surrey like everyone else. Our group, the Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee does not represent these landbased First Nations and we are careful not to speak on their behalf. Instead, we represent urban Indigenous people that have moved here from all over BC and in fact from all over Canada to make Surrey their home.

Our focus is making Surrey a great place for Indigenous people living in the city – regardless of where they come from, their legal status, or their particular cultural heritage. As we do this, we endeavor to live in a good way with the land-based First Nations that have called this land their home since time immemorial.

BACKGROUND

The urban Indigenous population in Surrey has grown significantly in the last 20 years. Since 2011 the urban Indigenous population has grown approximately 23%.

While still only accounting for about 3% of the total population in Surrey, we estimate that the current urban Indigenous population in Surrey is now the largest Indigenous population of any city in the province. Furthermore, growth projections indicate that Surrey's urban Indigenous population will nearly double the second largest urban Indigenous population in the next 15 years.

A profile of the Indigenous population in Surrey is available on our website:

<https://surreyindigenousleadership.ca/our-work/facts-and-reports>

This dramatic population growth has been a wake-up call to decision-makers and funders. Historically, there has been little attention paid to providing funding or services to Indigenous people in Surrey.

The result is that there are few policy, or program supports for Indigenous people living in Surrey. There are even fewer Indigenous directed social service providers in Surrey. The few that exist are under-funded and stretched to adequately provide the breadth of services the community is seeking.

At the same time but at a national level, Canada has started to assess its history of settler colonialism and cultural genocide. Through the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls, Canadians are seeking to reconcile their relationship to Indigenous peoples.

In this context, more and more organizations and governments are seeking to deepen their understanding on how to engage diverse and under-represented voices in public policy and decision-making processes. Indigenous people are one of those under-represented voices – especially in Surrey.

BACKGROUND CONT'D

The net result of these community level demographic trends and national level conversations is that more and more organizations, funders and governments are seeking to understand the needs and interests of Indigenous people in Surrey. While we encourage this to continue, we are also aware of challenges that are emerging.

At one end of the spectrum are organizations attempting to engage Indigenous people by doing the same thing they do for non-Indigenous engagement. This rarely works, and Indigenous people often do not participate.

Alternatively, some organizations realize they do not have the competency to engage the Indigenous community and they are seeking to partner with Indigenous organizations to access the Indigenous community. This could be ideal, except that Indigenous organizations in Surrey are under capacity and already stretched to deliver their own programs and services.

As a result, they often are not able to meet the demands of other organizations and governments to “engage” the urban Indigenous community on important matters. In this scenario, both parties who want Indigenous people to be engaged may end up frustrated or disappointed.

Finally, many Indigenous people themselves are becoming frustrated with engagement as it seems like an extractive process: Indigenous people give, non-Indigenous people, consultants, or researchers take, and the knowledge and power imbalance continues without returning anything of value to the participants or community.

As a result of these stories, SUILC has developed this statement on community engagement as a way to guide non-Indigenous organizations, governments and researchers who seek to learn from or about urban Indigenous people in Surrey.

SCOPE

This statement is intended to guide public policy professionals/consultants and decision-makers when they are designing engagement processes for the purposes of community-based research, or informing policy and strategy, or making decisions that will impact urban Indigenous people as a community of interest.

For the purposes of this statement, “engagement” does not include formal processes related to the Crown’s duty to consult with Aboriginal governments or to accommodate the infringement of Aboriginal title or rights. As a collective group, urban Indigenous people living in Surrey do not have Surrey-based Aboriginal rights or title. Urban Indigenous people, therefore, cannot speak for First Nation governments with Aboriginal title or rights. Anything related to the Crown’s duty to consult must be directed to the appropriate land-based First Nation governments.

SUILC will not mediate a relationship with First Nation governments for the purposes of facilitating consultation or accommodation with those First Nation governments.

Finally, this Statement on Community Engagement is a living document and SUILC will update or amend this document as it learns about and responds to the needs and interests of the urban Indigenous community in Surrey.

SUILC Recommendations for Engaging the Urban Indigenous Community in Surrey

SUILC RECOMMENDATIONS

Urban Indigenous voices in all engagements.

Indigenous people must be a part of public policy development and decisions that will affect them. It is important to invite urban Indigenous voices to be included in all engagement activities. They will choose whether or not to be involved. A great first step is to review your proposal for urban Indigenous engagement with the Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee. They will have constructive suggestions for making the engagement a success and may want to formally support your engagement.

Build on other engagements done recently with the urban Indigenous community in Surrey.

There have already been some deep engagements with urban Indigenous people in Surrey. For example, use the SUILC “All Our Relations Social Innovation Strategy” as a reflection of what the Indigenous community has already articulated about its needs and interests.

Another example, the Skookum Lab “Progress Report 2018/2019” has significant findings about Indigenous poverty in Surrey.

<https://surreyindigenousleadership.ca/downloads/skookum-progress.pdf>

Indigenous people should have access to specifically designed engagement activities and processes to facilitate their participation and inclusion.

This may mean deviating from normal engagement practices. For example, there are significant numbers of Indigenous people that live in Surrey Center, Guildford, Cloverdale and South Surrey. Meetings may need to be held in these specific areas to facilitate participation. In other cases, residents may have socioeconomic barriers to participation. Providing subsidies for child care or transportation may be required to facilitate participation. Literacy may also be an issue for some and so engagement should include alternatives to text heavy methods like surveys.

SUILC RECOMMENDATIONS

Indigenous people should have access to specifically designed engagement activities and processes to facilitate their participation and inclusion *continued*:

Another good practice is to rent out space and time from Indigenous organizations when they are already planning meetings or events. Skookum Lab, for example, covered the food costs of the Nova Métis AGM in exchange for an hour on their agenda to discuss Indigenous child poverty in Surrey. Sharing the costs of events has also been successful at community events like pow-wows or National Indigenous Peoples Day. These are only some of the options that should be considered when designing Indigenous specific engagements in Surrey.

Reimburse individuals for their contribution to your work.

Reimbursement could be formal acknowledgement in your report, appropriate gifts or gift cards, or honoraria. The wisdom of the community is valuable and it should be acknowledged accordingly. This aspect of engagement is too often overlooked by public policy professionals or researchers.

Partner with Indigenous organizations based in Surrey.

If you do not have knowledge of working with the urban Indigenous community in Surrey and do not have a network of relationships required to be successful then you may want to partner with Indigenous organizations based in Surrey. If you do, be prepared to provide Indigenous organizations the resources they need to support appropriate engagement. In essence you are paying for your access to their community specific knowledge and relationships – so you should compensate them accordingly.

SUILC RECOMMENDATIONS

Partner with Indigenous organizations based in Surrey *continued*:

The work to support your engagement may also be displacing the energy and resources that Indigenous organizations have to support their own respective mandate. As a result, it is important to compensate Indigenous partners when leveraging their knowledge, network and resources.

Getting approvals for engagement and partnerships at appropriate levels.

Partnerships require formal agreements. The onus is on you to understand the organizations you engage with and seek appropriate approvals. For example, it is not reasonable to ask front line staff in an Indigenous organization if they are supportive of your funding application, policy or program without seeking permission from the proper authority within that organization. Your “questions” to front line staff will not constitute formal support for your work or a partnership that you can leverage for funding. The only way you can be sure to have the support of Indigenous organizations is to have an appropriate organizational partnership documented in advance.

Design an approach to engagement that specifically reflects Métis culture and community.

The largest single Indigenous cultural group in Surrey is the Métis community. 43% of the urban Indigenous population in Surrey is Métis. While Métis individuals may participate in Indigenous engagements, it may still be necessary to design an approach to engagement that specifically reflects Métis culture and community.

Use Indigenous methodologies for hosting engagements and conversations.

This means honoring local protocols, celebrating cultural practices while recognizing that the Indigenous population in Surrey is very diverse, centering Indigenous wisdom, and using trauma informed design and facilitation. Doing this appropriately costs money. Do not undervalue the cost of doing this work in a good way.

SUILC RECOMMENDATIONS

Design engagement activities that build community.

To avoid extractive, nonreciprocal engagement, be sure to design activities that build community. Skookum Lab (an Indigenous Social Innovation Lab convened by the SUILC) has developed four criteria that it recommends be included in all community activities directed to the urban Indigenous community in Surrey. They are: increase community belonging; strengthen connections to family; include cultural awareness and visibility; and facilitate financial security. Engagement that includes these four criteria will build community resiliency for individuals and families.

Ensure transparency with regard to OCAP principles.

OCAP stands for ownership, control, access, and possession. OCAP is an Indigenous-centered ethical guideline for research that involves Indigenous people. Your engagement activities, programs and reports need to be clear about your adherence to these principles.

Share control over the knowledge generated by co-developing the report recommendations.

We think your engagement results will be richer if you allow Indigenous people and voices to represent themselves in your analysis, interpretation, and presentation of findings.

Hire Indigenous consultants – preferably based in Surrey.

Part of building capacity in the community is encouraging and providing opportunity for competent Indigenous individuals to earn a living. There are also innovative social enterprises like Transform(N)ations) that are based in Surrey and can design, lead, and facilitate community engagements.

CONCLUSION

For too long, the Indigenous community in Surrey has been invisible. SUILC and our partners are committed to changing this and giving the community a voice.

We are very encouraged by the number of organizations, governments and researchers that are finally turning their attention and resources to understanding and meeting the unique needs and interests of the community.

We want to ensure that this attention results in meaningful improvements in the lives of community members and not just a check-box in an engagement report. As a result, SUILC has developed this statement on community engagement and provided our recommendations for making engagement with the urban Indigenous community successful and beneficial to all.

We encourage you to connect with us at indigenousleadership@surrey.ca to discuss your specific project or to learn more about our activities.

All Our Relations.