



# Indigenous Gathering Place in Surrey

*"Coming together is healing.  
Culture is medicine."*

*Sam Jack, Surrey Urban Indigenous  
Leadership Committee Co-Chair*

# Background

The City of Surrey is the second largest city in British Columbia and has a diverse and growing population that includes a large population of urban Indigenous people. Yet, unlike other cities of similar size, Surrey lacks a community gathering place for Indigenous people to come together for community support, cultural events, ceremonies and services.

One of the characteristics of poverty, as defined by the Indigenous community in Surrey, is the **absence of opportunities to connect with other urban Indigenous people in Surrey and share cultural practices, teachings and kinship**. Unlike Vancouver, where a dynamic community of Indigenous people, service providers, and cultural spaces and places already exist; Surrey has little to no Indigenous community-based infrastructure.

Indigenous community members in Surrey have reported feeling invisible, isolated, and alone. On this point, community members have spoken: Surrey needs a purpose-built Indigenous centre that can accommodate Indigenous cultural activities and community connections.

The vision for the gathering place includes:

- A place that can accommodate a drum night, a pow-wow, a regalia class, a potlach, or an Indigenous graduation ceremony;
- A place for offices and meeting rooms that can be used by Indigenous service providers and break down barriers that Indigenous people face when trying to access support and community services;
- A place that can facilitate and support social and cultural connections; and
- A place that gives visibility to the Indigenous presence in Surrey.

***“More and more people want to come to our beading nights and regalia-making, but often we don’t have the space to accommodate our numbers and we have to meet on zoom.”***

*Ravina Morgan, Skookum Surrey  
Team Lead*

An Indigenous gathering place in Surrey would be a central hub for Indigenous cultural connection, learning, and services, and provide opportunities for all people to connect with the Indigenous community.

The Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee (SUILC) has worked with the community and completed a vision for a gathering place in the [\*Indigenous Mixed Use Space: Preliminary Vision & Program Report\*](#). We are now ready for the next step: to mobilize partners and move forward with the development.

*"Our son loves to drum, and we don't know anywhere to go, and he is two years old...we don't have any way of teaching him."*

## Examples

The following is a list of examples of other community Indigenous gathering spaces in cities across Canada that can be used as a reference or examples to better understand how an urban Indigenous gathering place could be an asset for the City of Surrey.



## Ottawa

### WABANO

Wabano is a medical centre informed by Indigenous cultures and a place for Indigenous communities to host events. It facilitates training and programming and access to health and wellness for urban Indigenous people.



## Winnipeg

### CIRCLE OF LIFE THUNDERBIRD HOUSE

The Circle of Life Thunderbird House is an Indigenous community center, event venue and ceremony grounds located in the heart of Winnipeg's inner city. It is a space for Winnipeg's First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities, as well as all peoples within the broader community of the inner city Village, to gather for ceremony, feasts, meetings, conferences, weddings, memorials and events of all kinds.



## Toronto

## TORONTO COUNCIL FIRES NATIVE CULTURAL CENTRE "GATHERING PLACE"

The goal of Toronto's "Gathering Place" is to lower social isolation amongst the Indigenous community members and breakdown barriers for Indigenous people to access programs and services. It offers a safe community space and is open to the public 365 days of the year, including access to basic needs and supports.



## NATIVE CANADIAN CENTRE OF TORONTO

An Indigenous Community Centre that offers a wide range of programs and services based on Indigenous cultural traditions and teachings. All are welcome. It's a key meeting place for all people, of all nations, from across Canada and all over the world and provides social, recreational, cultural and spiritual services for the Indigenous community and visitors alike.



## Vancouver

### **VANCOUVER ABORIGINAL FRIENDSHIP CENTRE SOCIETY**

Located in Vancouver's downtown eastside, the centre provides programs in health and welfare, social services, human rights, culture, education, recreation and equality for all genders and ages of Indigenous people.



### **UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA LONGHOUSE**

Located at the main UBC campus, the First Nations Longhouse serves as a "home away from home," as well as an academic, social, spiritual, and cultural hub for Indigenous students attending UBC. It includes Sty-Wet-Tan Great Hall, a dramatic 3,600 square foot multi-purpose space that is adorned with beautifully carved house posts and beams, all of which provides a wonderful setting for any gathering.



## Victoria

### CAMOSON COLLEGE – NA'TSA'MAHT THE GATHERING PLACE

An open-air space that is suitable for social gatherings, ceremonies or celebrations of life.



## UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA – FIRST PEOPLES HOUSE

The First Peoples House (FPH) is a social, cultural and academic centre for Indigenous students at UVic and serves as a safe and welcoming place that encourages the building of community.



## ROYAL ROADS UNIVERSITY – ABORIGINAL GATHERING PLACE

The Aboriginal Learning and Cultural Centre, known as The Gathering Place, at Royal Roads University enjoys an inspirational setting on the edge of Esquimalt Lagoon. The design converts a wood frame boat storage building into a vibrant multi-purpose space: a focal point for Aboriginal students, ceremonies, counselling and teaching programs.

