

City of Edmonton Stakeholder and Partnership Insight Report: Indigenous Procurement Framework

The objective of the Indigenous Procurement Framework (the Framework) is to provide equitable access when Indigenous businesses attempt to sell to the City of Edmonton. The recommendations from the Framework require corrective action on the part of the City which will be felt by many stakeholders and partners of the City.

A key factor for success of the Framework is awareness and support from the City of Edmonton's partners and stakeholders. Hence the need to share the draft framework with a broader audience in a process that had two key goals:

1. Raise awareness about the Indigenous Procurement Framework and the upcoming report to the Executive Committee on June 29.
2. Build and enhance relationships to support the process of gathering feedback to help adjust the framework and inform implementation.

City staff began to connect with stakeholders and partners in May 2022. Prior to this, the City engaged extensively with members of the Advisory Committee to draft the Framework. This engagement is intended to inform changes to processes, support implementation, and garner continued support.

Methodology

The primary method for engaging with partners and stakeholders is through virtual meetings with the businesses, organizations and advocacy groups. If partners or stakeholders were unable to meet or did not respond to a meeting request, they were either offered a discussion guide or a follow-up to the original request.

At the meetings, City staff provided a short presentation outlining the background, recommendations and next steps of the Indigenous Procurement Framework. The team then took questions from the participants to ensure clarity and understanding. Having built and strengthened these relationships, participants were invited to connect with City staff if they have further questions or feedback.

Questions Asked

As stakeholders and partners analyzed the framework (either through the discussion guide or the meeting presentation) they were asked to consider the following questions:

- What is most clear and what needs more information or explanation?

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- Do you have any concerns or issues? If so, can you describe what concerns you the most and why?
- How will the framework fit into the work you already do?
- Are there opportunities you see for your organization, business or members of your association?
- How do you see this being implemented for your organization/business or association members? What challenges do you anticipate?
 - Is there anything we could do to alleviate these challenges?

Stakeholder List

Partners and stakeholders were identified based on their business/organization mandate and relationship with the City of Edmonton. The criteria included:

- organizations with a strong connection to Indigenous businesses and employment opportunities,
- businesses and associations who were or are currently suppliers to the City.

Administration also asked partners if there were other stakeholders that should be engaged, and further contacts were made and are still being made. At the time of writing the report, the City has connected with the following stakeholders and partners:

Stakeholder/Partner	Status
1. AKSIS - Edmonton's Aboriginal Business & Professional Association	Provided discussion guide, offered a meeting and is an Advisory Committee member
2. Alberta Construction Association	Provided discussion guide and met with
3. Alberta Roadbuilders & Heavy Construction Association	Provided discussion guide
4. Business Link	Provided discussion guide
5. Chandos Construction Company	Provided discussion guide
6. Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations	Offered a meeting and is an Advisory Committee member
7. Edmonton Chamber of Commerce	Provided discussion guide and met with
8. Edmonton Construction Association	Provided discussion guide and met with
9. End Poverty Edmonton	Provided discussion guide and met with

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10. Explore Edmonton	Provided discussion guide
11. Government of Alberta (Ministry of Infrastructure and Ministry of Transportation)	Provided discussion guide
12. Indigenous Workforce Development Collaborative	Provided discussion guide and met with
13. Metis Nation	Offered a meeting and is an Advisory Committee member
14. PCL	Provided discussion guide

What We Heard

Building on the strong input from the Indigenous Procurement advisory group, the feedback from the additional stakeholders and partners provided insightful feedback.

Common Questions

The team is committed to working closely with partners and stakeholders to ensure clarity, dispel misinformation, and prepare for future questions from other partners. The following were the common questions that came up during meetings with partners:

- What have other jurisdictions done?
- Do we know how many Indigenous businesses are available and have the capacity to meet the demand?
- Who drafted the framework? Were they Indigenous and do they have connections to industry?
- How will the City monitor the success of the framework?
- How will the City qualify proposals and hold businesses accountable?
- Will the City create targets and what will they be?

Opportunities

Stakeholders and partners are hopeful that changes in City processes in procurement can lead to positive change and outcomes for Indigenous businesses, the community of Edmonton, and suppliers. The following opportunities were raised at meetings:

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- There will be more of an incentive to increase capacity and networks for Indigenous owned businesses and suppliers as the demand increases.
- There may be opportunities to partner with other levels of government for grants and support, including educational support and work integrated learning opportunities to increase capacity in the needed sectors.
- There is opportunity and excitement to work with Indigenous businesses who can support and/or lead innovative and niche projects.
- Incorporating Indigenous practices into the procurement processes have been beneficial to Indigenous businesses by reducing barriers. An example of this includes placing more emphasis on the interview portion of a procurement proposal.

Challenges and Concerns

Most stakeholders and partners wanted more details, especially on processes and implementation. They understood that within a framework, high level direction is set and that details will come later. However, the concerns they shared can be considered as the City takes on the next steps to implement the Indigenous Procurement Framework. Many of the concerns included the following themes:

- **Capacity:** many Indigenous owned businesses are small and therefore do not have the people power to do many of the things larger companies can. There was concern that there are only so many Indigenous owned businesses available, and it might create a bottleneck if the same businesses are being asked to participate on several projects.
- **Cultural Awareness:** is an important factor in increasing the participation of Indigenous businesses in the market as both buyers and suppliers need to be aware of the barriers and racism many Indigenous people still face at work.
- **Accountability:** concerns about Indigenous businesses being engaged only to check a box on the bid proposal were raised. All of the partners want to know how the City will monitor the success or missteps of implementing the Framework.
- **Overly bureaucratic or onerous:** partners raised concerns that being inflexible and adding more processes that require time and resources on the side of the potential supplier will create barriers and disincentives.
- **Resources:** more will be required from industry and government to increase capacity to support the demand. Many large companies are happy to work with Indigenous owned businesses, as long as they meet a level of standard, which many small businesses struggle with.

- Targets: how will targets be established? Will these include, for example, what percentage of Indigenous owned businesses will be targeted as suppliers for the City or what percentage of Indigenous employees with a supplier's company will be required? These are concerning, especially for small businesses who may not have the capacity to meet these targets.

Suggestions for Implementation

Many partners provided recommendations on ways to alleviate concerns and leverage opportunities. The following were some of the suggestions:

- Implement Indigenous practices into the procurement process, especially with the set-aside projects. This means leveraging verbal communication and relationships during the proposal process, providing cultural awareness to City staff and other partnering businesses, and being authentic throughout the process.
- Provide or offer Indigenous Awareness Courses to suppliers.
- Partner with organizations/associations who want to increase the capacity of Indigenous owned businesses through training and network building.
- Create flexibility in the process. A one-size fits all approach will not benefit many businesses, especially the smaller ones.
- Find ways to measure success and create accountability without being overly bureaucratic.

Next Steps

If approved, Administration will move forward with implementing the recommendations of the framework and any other direction received from Council.

The City will continue to work with stakeholders and partners to ensure an appropriate policy is drafted and insights are considered as internal processes are adjusted. The relationships formed through the initial conversations in the Spring of 2022 and throughout the summer will enhance conversations about policy development and process changes. The City will continue to listen to partners and stakeholders in an effort to make changes, learn from others and help ensure the success of the Indigenous Procurement Framework.