

The background of the cover features a vibrant aurora borealis in shades of green and purple, set against a dark, starry night sky. In the foreground, the dark silhouettes of evergreen trees are visible against the glowing light of the aurora.

Indigenous Relations
Office

Edmonton

Preliminary Program Evaluation 2023

Indigenous Relations Office
https://www.edmonton.ca/city_government/indigenous-relations-office

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How did the work of the Indigenous Relations Office change hearts and minds in the city and in the community?

Below: Engagement with City of Edmonton youth by staff members of the IRO.



INTRODUCTION: Indigenous Relations Office 2023 Program Evaluation

In March of 2024, the Indigenous Relations Office (IRO) hired an Indigenous Evaluation Specialist to better understand how the City of Edmonton can both meet and understand the needs of Indigenous community members and staff members better, more thoroughly, and in a different and comprehensive way that includes and embraces the traditional knowledges, storytelling and the incorporation of different methods of both collections and distribution of sacred knowledge and data in these communities.

The evaluation focuses on three interconnected areas: Truth and Reconciliation/Procurement, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives (MMIR), and the Indigenous Framework (IF). These efforts collectively advance reconciliation in Edmonton.

Questions

The IRO began a brief evaluation 'in house' and initially asked the questions:

- What work was done in 2023?
- How can we better tell the city council about the work done in the IRO?
- How did your work change the hearts and minds of others?
- How did you know your work achieved this?

After a first round of interviews done with the IRO staff members involved in the TRC, Procurement, IF and MMIR staff leads and members, a second round of questions was proposed by the IRO leadership team:

- What were the goals of your program?
- Do you think you've met the goals of your program?
- Why? Why not?
- What processes did you employ to create these outcomes? What were the factors of success?
- What tensions did you encounter in your work?

Challenges to the Evaluation

The absence of key staff members during 2023 posed challenges in capturing the year's initiatives. Despite this, significant groundwork laid in 2023 set the

stage for subsequent progress in 2024. The expanded IRO team now facilitates the fulfilment of TRC, MMIR, and IF commitments.

This brief evaluation will focus on what the staff focused on in their storytelling and the goals that the IRO determined for the 2023 year, with some mention of the 2024 work, either in progress or completed at this time. The IRO team has almost doubled since 2023, which now allows for the completion of key work outlined in the TRC/MMIR/IF commitments, but that was not possible without an expansive team of specialists and experts in each of the fields.

In the following pages each page has a space specifically for relationships. In the discussions with the IRO team, a common and powerful theme of the importance of relationship arose and I give space to give time to speak about how this work cannot be completed without relationships, and how they are integral to the everyday work of the IRO, to the point that they are a specific outcome/goal in the work of the IRO.

The work of the Indigenous Relations Office can not be done without strong relationships built within the city and across the community.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission & Procurement

The City of Edmonton's TRC Municipal Response Plan includes over 90 commitments that directly align with the 94 calls to action outlined by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission completed in 2014. While not all of these commitments fall under the responsibility of a municipality, the City of Edmonton has committed to supporting and advocating for these efforts. Procurement heavily relates to the TRC as it demonstrates and fulfils the economic reconciliation commitment and is listed as an action point.

Indigenous Procurement is new to the City of Edmonton. Related programs include the Indigenous Set Aside Program. However, no successful Indigenous procurements were achieved in 2023.

2023 Highlighted Goals

Goal	Progress	Additional Information
Work with City Communications to develop a public consumable document for the TRC and MMIWG plans	Completed March 2024	Truth and Reconciliation Dashboard Tableau Public
Translate the remaining TRC Calls to Action into municipal work	In progress as of 2024	
Develop and Advocacy Plan and Strategy	In progress 2024	
Work with the new PIO1 Communications Positions to develop a Communications Strategy for the Indigenous Framework, TRC and MMIWG	In progress 2024	
Provide Quarterly and Annual Updates	Completed March, May, and December 2023	Q1 Update Q2 Update Q3 Update

“How many coffees did you enjoy with your coworkers this year?”

2023 Unexpected Outcome

We received recognition through a cultural commitment award which underscored the progress we have made in advancing this work.

Relationships

“Our work is to get our colleagues and the city to better understand the TRC, MMIR, IF and their role as listeners, connectors, partners, and advocates. I do this by offering a gift of time and coffee to meet and discuss, either by being asked or reaching out. By creating these relationships, hearts and minds are changed.”

“If we were to ask colleagues what MMIR, IF, TRC were, would they know?”

“For procurement we need to build relationships and in some cases repair them where Indigenous business owners feel that they have been left out or behind from city contracts previously.”

Next Steps and Questions

Exploring audit or survey methods to gauge community understanding of IRO initiatives. Tailoring questions for community grantees to better align with organisational goals, regardless of budget size. Building and repairing relationships with Indigenous business owners remains crucial for successful procurement initiatives. Engagement through events and partnerships fosters community goodwill.

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives

In November of 2022, the MMIR Action Plan was approved by Edmonton city council. In February of 2023, a Strategic Planner position was filled to move the work forward. There are 231 Calls for Justice outlined in the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Final Report published in 2019. While many Calls to Justice are being addressed with the current MMIR strategy within the City, the program has much room to grow and evolve in the coming years.

2023 Highlighted Goals

Goal	Progress	Additional Information
Begin the creation of a podcast that allows community with lived experiences to tell their stories in relation to MMIR	In progress, expected release 2024	
Best determine what is needed from an MMIR Action plan in the City	In progress as of 2024	Missing & Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, & 2SLGBTQIA+ City of Edmonton
Provide Report to City Council for December 2023 session	Completed December 2023	

I want Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives on the minds and lips of every person in the city. I want to get them to care.

Okisikow Way creation	In progress 2023/24, completed June 2024	Okisikow (Angel) Way City of Edmonton
Create a 5 part reading circle in collaboration with the library to read the Calls to Justice	Completed over the 2023 year	MMIWG2S Calls for Justice Reading Circle Events Edmonton Public Library

2023 Unexpected Insights

“How do I get people to care?”
 “Some of the people I work with die... How am I supposed to do this work?”
 There are specific challenges in raising awareness and fostering community engagement in this work that highlight the ongoing need for relational approaches.

Relationships

“My work doesn’t work without relationships. None of these people would talk to me if I didn’t build relationships with them. I go to most events around and connect to be in good relation with one another.”

“People know and recognize me in the community. To have community members come to me and feel safe and cry with me is more important than anything.”

Next Steps and Questions

“I want MMIR on the minds and lips of people in the city”
 We aim to create a community of care, with continuing efforts to raise public awareness and foster community empathy towards MMIR issues.

Indigenous Framework

The Indigenous Framework seeks to answer the question: “How can the City of Edmonton best support and build strong relationships with Indigenous Peoples in Edmonton?” The IF is a living document that evolves and grows with the city as we explore our shared relationship and commitment to reconciliation.

The IF is married to every action within the IRO. It guides the work, the IF action item work of our colleagues, and lays out a Framework in which every Edmonton City Staff member can be responsible for their response to

reconciliation. Through the 4 roles and seven commitments that the IF lays out, we work together to build a better city.

2023 Highlighted Goals

Goal	Progress	Additional Information
Permanent City Hall Artwork Installed	Completed June 2023	Indigenous Framework Artworks City of Edmonton
Completion of the 2023 Indigenous Framework's 'What We Heard' Report	Completed 2023	Indigenous Framework City of Edmonton
Engagement events to hear feedback from the community on the Indigenous Framework	Completed 2023	What We Heard Report
Support the Edmonton Transit Service Indigenous Art Bus Wraps	Completed 2023	Braiding an ETS bus with Indigenous artwork City of Edmonton
Orange Shirt Day Walk/Run Event	Completed 2023	

2023 Surprises

We're here to serve, with both feet and both hands. It is an honour to be asked to help.

The 2023 Orange Shirt Walk/Run saw a remarkable turnout, bringing together a diverse group of staff and community members who collaborated to make the event a success. Contributions came from various teams including the Fire Department, Parks team, and numerous city staff who volunteered their time. The support from the city manager's office was particularly impactful, ensuring everyone understood the significance of the day.

Reflecting on the event, one staff member expressed how the experience inspired them to deepen their understanding by taking courses and participating in additional events.

Relationships

"It is not my role to correct or argue, but to listen. We are here to serve and listen. Tensions occur when I don't listen enough."

“Learning the difference between acknowledging and agreeing. This is not about me, it is about building a foundation of trust.”

“Always say yes to the asks.”

Next Steps and Questions

Continue to support the growth of the IF. Develop a way to better measure the impact of the IF through community feedback.

How are the participants feeling? Did our events meet the outlined purposes?

Looking Forward

Looking into 2024 and beyond for the IRO, 5 major themes and 3 asks arise from this brief evaluation.

Themes:

- Reconciliation and Relationship Building
- Community Engagement and Empowerment
- Accountability and Transparency
- Continual Learning and Adaptation
- Cultural Respect and Recognition

The work of the Indigenous Relations Office (IRO) in Edmonton is characterised by several prominent themes that underscore its approach to reconciliation and community development. Foremost among these themes is reconciliation and relationship building, evident in the IRO's efforts to foster trust and understanding between the City of Edmonton and Indigenous communities. This commitment is central to initiatives addressing Truth and Reconciliation, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Relatives, and the Indigenous Framework, emphasising healing and meaningful engagement. Additionally, the IRO prioritises community engagement and empowerment, actively involving Indigenous communities in policy-making through initiatives like the Indigenous Framework and the MMIR Action Plan. Accountability and transparency are also core values, as demonstrated by rigorous program evaluation and regular updates to City Council, ensuring responsiveness to community needs. The office's dedication to continuous learning is evident in its adaptive approach, learning from past initiatives to set new goals effectively. Finally, cultural respect and recognition permeate the IRO's work,

integrating Indigenous knowledge and practices to honour heritage and build bridges across diverse cultural communities in Edmonton. Together, these themes reflect a comprehensive and inclusive strategy towards reconciliation and holistic community development.

Asks from the IRO staff:

- Recognition of the importance of relationship in this work
- Show up in community when asked
- The need to better understand the impact of the work of the IRO

IRO staff members emphasize several key points in their roles. Firstly, they stress the critical importance of cultivating relationships within their work. Recognizing that trust and mutual respect are foundational to effective Indigenous relations, they prioritize building and maintaining strong connections with community members and stakeholders. Secondly, IRO staff consistently demonstrate their commitment to active participation in community events and initiatives. They understand the value of showing up when called upon, whether for ceremonial gatherings, consultations, or collaborative projects, reinforcing their dedication to meaningful engagement. Lastly, there is a shared recognition among IRO staff of the ongoing need to deepen their understanding of how their efforts impact Indigenous communities. They strive to continually assess and evaluate their initiatives, seeking to enhance their effectiveness and ensure positive outcomes for the communities they serve. These principles guide the IRO staff in their daily efforts to foster reconciliation, promote cultural understanding, and support Indigenous empowerment within Edmonton.

