

Subject: Advancing Indigenous Relations in the City of Ottawa

File Number: ACS2026-CSS-GEN-005

Report to Finance and Corporate Services Committee on 3 March 2026

and Council 11 March 2026

Submitted on February 20, 2026 by Clara Freire, General Manager, Community and Social Services

Contact Person: Thivjan Tharmaratnam, Director, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Indigenous Relations

343-961-5364, thivjan.tharmaratnam@ottawa.ca

Ward: Citywide

Objet: Faire progresser les relations avec les Autochtones à la Ville d'Ottawa

Numéro de dossier : ACS2026-CSS-GEN-005

Rapport présenté au Comité des finances et des services organisationnels

Rapport soumis le 3 mars 2026

et au Conseil le 11 mars 2026

Soumis le 2026-02-20 par Clara Freire, Directrice générale, Services sociaux et communautaires

Personne ressource : Thivjan Tharmaratnam, Directeur, Équité, Diversité, Inclusion et Relations avec les Autochtones

343-961-5364, thivjan.tharmaratnam@ottawa.ca

Quartier : À l'échelle de la ville

REPORT RECOMMENDATION(S)

That the Finance and Corporate Services Committee recommend that Council receive this report for information and approve the path forward for Indigenous Relations for the City of Ottawa, as outlined in the report.

RECOMMANDATION(S) DU RAPPORT

Que le Comité des finances et des services organisationnels recommande au Conseil de prendre connaissance du présent rapport et d'approuver la voie à suivre concernant les relations avec les Autochtones à la Ville d'Ottawa telle qu'elle y est décrite.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report outlines a refreshed approach to City-wide Indigenous relations and reconciliation, building on the completion of the objectives outlined in the Reconciliation Action Plan Final Progress Update ([ACS2025-CSS-GEN-013](#)).

This refreshed approach includes reaffirming the City's commitment to advancing Indigenous-led priorities as defined through relationships and formal engagement with Indigenous partners; developing internal training and guidance documents to support staff awareness and improvement; and improved internal coordination and reporting on progress through the establishment of a formal internal Indigenous Relations Interdepartmental Working Group.

The approach is grounded in meaningful engagement with Indigenous partners and communities that leads to a co-designed renewed path forward that is sustained by strengthened internal collaboration and adoption of key engagement principles. Through better coordinated internal structures and strengthened relationships, the City can advance reconciliation, uphold Indigenous rights and take meaningful steps to ensure that Indigenous voices shape and inform municipal policies, projects, and decision-making.

Overall, this refreshed path forward strengthens the City's ability to uphold Indigenous rights, respond to community priorities and embed reconciliation into municipal practices.

RÉSUMÉ

Le présent rapport expose une approche renouvelée pour l'ensemble des relations et des efforts de réconciliation de la Ville avec les Autochtones, dans la foulée de l'atteinte des objectifs établis dans le *Rapport final d'avancement du Plan d'action de réconciliation* ([ACS2025-CSS-GEN-013](#)).

Cette approche renouvelée réaffirme l'engagement de la Ville à faire avancer les priorités menées par les Autochtones, telles qu'elles émergent des relations et des mécanismes officiels de mobilisation avec les partenaires autochtones. Elle prévoit

également l'élaboration de formations et de guides internes pour renforcer la sensibilisation et le perfectionnement du personnel, ainsi que l'amélioration des processus internes de coordination et de suivi des progrès grâce à la création d'un groupe de travail interservices dédié aux relations avec les Autochtones.

Cette approche repose sur une mobilisation significative des partenaires et des communautés autochtones visant l'élaboration conjointe d'une trajectoire durable, soutenue par une collaboration interne renforcée et par l'adoption de principes d'engagement clés. En consolidant ses structures internes et en renforçant ses relations, la Ville pourra promouvoir la réconciliation, défendre les droits des Autochtones et prendre des mesures significatives pour s'assurer que leurs voix façonnent et éclairent les politiques, projets et décisions municipales.

Dans l'ensemble, cette voie renouvelée renforce la capacité de la Ville à défendre les droits des Autochtones, à répondre aux priorités communautaires et à intégrer la réconciliation dans ses pratiques municipales.

Recognition of Territory

Odàwàng kì ombàkonigàde ega wìkàd kà mìgiwàniwang Màmìwininì Aishinàbe-wakì. Pimàdizìg Màmìwininì Anishinàbeg kàgìgekamìg kì abìg ondaje akìng. Odanishinàbewiziwiniwà obimàdjiwowiniwà ogì nanegàdjichigàdànàwà nanàj ako nongom iyo abinàs.Kìchi Odenaw Odàwàng okikàdjìyàwàn pimàdizìn Màmìwininì Anishinàben kaye okikàdjìtònàwà iyo akì.

Ottawa is built on un-ceded Anishinabe Algonquin territory. The peoples of the Anishinabe Algonquin Nation have lived on this territory for millennia. Their culture and presence have nurtured and continue to nurture this land. The City of Ottawa honours the peoples and land of the Anishinabe Algonquin Nation. The City of Ottawa honours all First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples and their valuable past and present contributions to this land.

Ottawa est bâtie sur un territoire non cédé de la Nation Anishinabe Algonquine. Les peuples de la Nation Anishinabe Algonquine vivent sur ce territoire depuis des millénaires. Leur culture et leur présence l'ont enrichi et l'enrichissent toujours. La Ville d'Ottawa rend hommage aux peuples et au territoire de la Nation Anishinabe Algonquine. La Ville d'Ottawa rend hommage à toutes les Premières Nations, à tous les Inuits et à tous les Métis, de même qu'aux précieuses contributions passées et présentes à cette terre.

BACKGROUND

The City of Ottawa is [built on the traditional and unceded territory of the Anishinabe Algonquin Nation](#). The City is committed to fulfilling its responsibilities to the Anishinabe Algonquin Nation as they relate to land, rights, stewardship, history and continued presence.

Ottawa is also home to a large and diverse Indigenous population, including First Nation, Inuit and Métis community members. Many Anishinabe Algonquin Nation members are urban Indigenous residents of Ottawa. Additionally, Ottawa includes many Indigenous service organizations, including those represented by the Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition, and a range of cultural, academic and community organizations.

The City is [committed to reconciliation](#) with all Indigenous peoples and to building a city that reflects Indigenous belonging, representation, and rights. Over more than two decades, the City has endeavored to strengthen relationships with Indigenous communities and continues to learn from these relationships.

City of Ottawa Reconciliation Action Plan

In October 2025, an Information Previously Distributed memorandum to the Finance and Corporate Services Committee ([ACS2025-CSS-GEN-013](#)) reported that the actions outlined in the Reconciliation Action Plan were completed or embedded into City practices. Five additional reconciliation-related actions reported in 2022 to Community and Protective Services ([ACS2022-CSS-GEN-005](#)) were also marked as completed or embedded into City practices.

The Reconciliation Action Plan represented the initial step towards reconciliation and truth-telling. Since its implementation, City departments have continued to work with Indigenous partners and the Indigenous Relations branch to inform plans, policies, by-laws, projects, funding decisions, practices and support for Indigenous community events. As these practices embed across departments, they uphold Indigenous rights and strengthen Indigenous reconciliation. The approach has highlighted the importance of the City's commitment to reconciliation alongside an understanding that Indigenous relations spans beyond this commitment. Today, Indigenous relations commitments encompass government to government relationships, Indigenous participation in municipal life and decision making, service delivery and community wellbeing, and responsibilities related to land, environment, stewardship, equitable access to resources, and cultural and historical representation.

With the Reconciliation Action Plan now complete, the next step is to collaborate with the Anishinabe Algonquin Nation, urban Indigenous communities and organizations to codevelop a renewed path forward that embeds the priorities of the Anishinabe Algonquin Nation and all First Nation, Inuit and Metis residents of Ottawa. Growing departmental interest in Indigenous engagement and codesign has further highlighted the need for consistent approaches and principles, stronger internal coordination, and increased access to learning opportunities and guidance, to maintain sustainable relationships.

Current Indigenous Engagement Landscape

Engagement with Indigenous partners continues to inform and shape City projects and policies. These engagement opportunities are led by the corresponding City department and range in scope and application from development or infrastructure projects to Indigenous dedicated service delivery, to cultural representation or programming. This work is sometimes approached through established working groups or other similar forums like the [Anishinabe Algonquin Nation Consultative Culture Circle](#) and the [Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition Indigenous Women's Safety Table](#). When these formal engagement forums are not established, or when topics of engagement are not aligned with the terms of reference of those tables, staff engage as required through direct conversations and meetings with Anishinabe Algonquin leadership and/or consultation teams, or urban Indigenous organizations. Examples of recent engagement activities are outlined in the Reconciliation Action Plan Final Update memorandum ([ACS2025-CSS-GEN-013](#)).

Currently, the way each department conducts Indigenous engagement varies depending on the scope of the policy or project, affected parties, existing engagement protocols, the experience or awareness-level of the team conducting the engagement, knowledge or awareness of Indigenous rights and their application, legislative requirements, and intended impact or result. Many City teams consult the Indigenous Relations team for guidance regarding their engagement approach.

Legislative Requirements and the Duty to Consult

Municipal work is often subject to requirements mandated by the Province of Ontario or the Government of Canada. For example, land use decisions must comply with the Ontario [Planning Act](#), which can create specific Indigenous engagement requirements for City projects.

The [Government of Canada](#) holds the duty to consult, and where appropriate, accommodate Indigenous groups when actions may affect Aboriginal or Treaty rights. This duty, and the use of the term Aboriginal in this context, are derived from Section 35 of Canada's *Constitution Act, 1982*, which recognizes and affirms Aboriginal and Treaty Rights. For municipalities, the duty to consult does not automatically apply to all work unless formally delegated by the Crown; for example, the province can delegate the duty to consult to third parties. In Ontario, there is limited provincial guidance around respectful processes and requirements to implement the duty to consult effectively. When delegation occurs, the Ministry identifies the First Nations the City is required to engage. Municipalities do not have constitutional authority or resources to address the full range of complexities of Aboriginal and Treaty Rights.

Despite these challenges and others outlined by the [Association of Municipalities of Ontario](#), the City of Ottawa remains committed to maintaining positive relationships with Indigenous communities. The City will continue to provide all necessary information to First Nations identified through duty to consult processes and to share information with its Indigenous partners. This approach ensures that delegated requirements are met upholding established relationships with Indigenous communities and partners and respecting their rights and territory.

DISCUSSION

Previous approaches to Indigenous relations were primarily departmental, with City-led external tables designed for collaboration with Indigenous partners. Multiple factors have created the need to re-envision internal City interdepartmental governance, collaboration, and engagement approaches as they relate to Indigenous communities. This is driven by the creation of the Indigenous Relations branch with a corporate mandate, the increased requirement to respect Indigenous self-determination, and calls from Indigenous partners for greater coordination between City departments.

Beginning in 2026, the City will refresh its internal approach to address identified challenges, meet emerging requirements, and formalize engagement principles citywide. Aligning engagement processes with what has been heard from Indigenous partners, communities and staff will help the City better support Indigenous partners and honour Indigenous rights and engagement protocols as legislative landscapes evolve.

Role and Approach of the Indigenous Relations Branch

The Indigenous Relations branch has a corporate mandate to support Citywide commitments to Indigenous relations, engagement, and reconciliation through learning

and development, consultation, policy development, document review, and mentorship. The team acts as a resource for all City staff, providing tailored Indigenous engagement advice to teams who are seeking to incorporate Indigenous engagement in their project or document. Indigenous Relations also facilitates corporate alignment and resource sharing when Indigenous engagement opportunities can be appropriately matched, to reduce strain on engagement partners and avoid duplication of efforts.

Since its establishment in 2022, the Indigenous Relations branch has been deliberate in its approach to carry out this mandate successfully by taking the time to build relationships and trust across the organization and with external Indigenous partners. These relationships are strengthened through participation in events, tables and meetings, as well as through supporting multiple initiatives across the City of Ottawa. The Indigenous Relations team also participates in existing collaborative practices and relationships, including the [City of Ottawa - Anishinabe Algonquin Nation Civic Cultural Protocol and Implementation Plan \(2022-2027\)](#) and with the Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition.

Each year, the Indigenous Relations branch conducts approximately 200 internal and external consultations and reviews approximately 100 documents related to policy development, engagement and inclusion strategies, and similar work. All City departments have accessed this support, demonstrating an ongoing and organizational-wide need for Indigenous-related support and an expanding scope of focus.

The Indigenous Relations branch strives to document protocols and procedures around engagement to ensure relationships are respected and engagement is inclusive and appropriate. As the demand for Indigenous engagement increases, the Indigenous Relations branch has continued to promote corporate alignment and respecting protocols developed by the Indigenous groups that are engaged. This approach ensures engagement respects Indigenous rights and self-determination, increases the impact of existing resources, reduces delays, addresses emerging priorities and supports both internal and external capacity.

Through this work, the Indigenous Relations branch has identified best practices and opportunities for improvement. The strategies outlined in this report were developed in response to these best practices and opportunities and aim to establish a foundation for respectful, coordinated and effective Indigenous relations across the City. These are reflected in three important actions the Indigenous Relations branch will lead in the refreshed path forward:

1. Reaffirming the City's ongoing commitment to advancing Indigenous-led priorities.
2. Advancing the corporate mandate of the Indigenous Relations branch.
3. Establishing an internal Indigenous Relations Interdepartmental Working Group.

The following sections describe these three areas of focus.

1. Reaffirming the City's ongoing commitment to advancing Indigenous-led priorities

The City has spent several years establishing relationships and engaging with Indigenous partners to understand and support Indigenous-led priorities. While engagement on City priorities and projects remains important and is sometimes legislatively required, it is also critical to advance priorities previously articulated by Indigenous partners. Examples of these ongoing priorities include:

- Increasing cultural representation and respect for the rights of the Anishinabe Algonquin Nation as the Host Nation in Ottawa.
- Increasing access to welcoming City spaces that support Indigenous practices, for Anishinabe Algonquin Nation members as well as First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people.
- Supporting priority service and advocacy related actions identified by the Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition through the Indigenous Women's Safety Table and other working groups and projects.

The Indigenous Relations team, in collaboration with all City staff, will continue to ensure these priorities are advanced, while continuing to engage with Indigenous partners to further define and refine specific actions and outcomes the City will commit to in future years.

This report's reaffirmation of the City's commitment to advancing these priorities does not involve changes to existing municipal funding or service agreements already in place with Indigenous partners. Indigenous organizations will also continue to be eligible for other municipal funding programs, for instance under the [Community Funding Framework](#). This renewed commitment reflects a need to collaboratively identify and advance additional efforts and resources to support Indigenous-identified priorities over and above existing budgets, that will be identified through future budget cycles.

2. Advancing the corporate mandate of the Indigenous Relations branch

The Indigenous Relations team's corporate mandate includes advancing internally focused actions designed to support City staff and City initiatives that align with Indigenous priorities. This includes working collaboratively with many City teams to advance related areas such as Indigenous employment, including improved hiring practices for Indigenous candidates and community-focused procurement. This work is informed by internal and external relationships and is grounded in key areas including Indigenous rights, governance, engagement, self-determination, truth and reconciliation, and the City's application of UNDRIP principles ahead of the 20th anniversary of UNDRIP in September 2027. In addition, three priority corporate mandate items will be addressed in 2026:

- An Indigenous learning and development strategy to meet City staff learning needs, co-designed with Anishinabe Algonquin and urban Indigenous leaders and partners and funded in the 2026 budget cycle.
- Guidance to reduce barriers to Indigenous ceremonial practices in City spaces for Indigenous staff and Indigenous guests, with a goal of broadening ceremonial access for Indigenous communities.
- Guidance on Indigenous identity verification for City staff to apply in internal scenarios where Indigenous identity is a requirement, such as designated job postings or cultural funding opportunities.

These tools will be finalized in collaboration with appropriate City departments, the newly established Indigenous Relations Interdepartmental Working Group, Anishinabe Algonquin partners, and urban Indigenous partners including the Ottawa Aboriginal Coalition.

3. Establishing an internal Indigenous Relations Interdepartmental Working Group

In 2026, Indigenous Relations will establish an internal Indigenous Relations Interdepartmental Working Group to support internal coordination, information sharing, alignment, consistency and staff competencies related to Indigenous cultural awareness. Coordinated by Indigenous Relations through the General Manager of the Community and Social Services Department, and reporting to the Finance and Corporate Services Committee, the Working Group will be responsible for activities such as the following:

- Developing and committing to a coordinated citywide approach to Indigenous relations
- Developing City wide Indigenous engagement principles to ensure engagement is consistent and respectful of Indigenous partners
- Assessing and reporting on existing engagement and funding processes to ensure processes meet the needs of the corporation and of Indigenous partners
- Identifying required resources to support meaningful engagement and reconciliation efforts
- Supporting the Indigenous Relations team in implementing its corporate mandate and informing future corporate strategies
- Informing in an internal baseline review of existing engagement practices and approaches and contribute to improvement recommendations
- Build City capacity to plan and respond in a manner that advances reconciliation and aligns to Service Excellence commitments, Corporate and Council priorities
- Serve as a community of best practice for staff doing Indigenous relations work and provide interdepartmental peer support

As Indigenous engagement occurs citywide, several key engagement requirements underpin the need for this coordinated approach, including the need for engagement to be consistently and equitably resourced, the need for clarity around roles and responsibilities for increased accountability, and the need for dedicated capacity and knowledge for meaningful relationships.

Through this improved coordination, Indigenous Relations aims to strengthen the City's approach to truth-telling and reconciliation. The City of Ottawa's evolving approach to Indigenous relations reflects a sustained commitment to reconciliation, accountability and Indigenous communities. This renewed direction reinforces the City's responsibility to honour Indigenous voices, respond to specific calls for City action from Indigenous communities, and ensures reconciliation continues to shape municipal policies, projects and decision-making in a consistent and respectful way.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications as the path forward for Indigenous relations will be implemented within existing budgets.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal impediments to receiving this report for information.

ACCESSIBILITY IMPACTS

The City of Ottawa operates within a legislative accessibility framework that includes compliance with the *Integrated Accessibility Standards Regulation* (IASR) under the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005* (AODA), along with the City's Accessibility Policy and its Accessible Formats and Communication Supports Procedure. While these frameworks have led to significant progress in building a more accessible Ottawa, gaps remain between the needs of Indigenous people with disabilities and existing legislation and policy.

For Indigenous people with disabilities, racism and ableism intersect in ways that create distinct barriers. These barriers differ from those experienced by non-Indigenous people with disabilities. The AODA defines disability through a deficit-based lens; however, many Indigenous communities do not view disability in this way. In a number of Indigenous languages and cultures, there is no single word for "disability." Instead, diverse needs, traits, abilities, and differences are understood within the collective context of community, where relationships and interdependence among all living beings are valued and celebrated. To ensure that City projects and initiatives are culturally relevant, a deeper understanding of the unique barriers, perspectives, and lived experiences of Indigenous people with disabilities is essential. Although the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) references the rights of Indigenous persons with disabilities, there remains a risk that, like the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and other accessibility laws and policies, it can be applied through a single-identity lens. Staff are encouraged to consider how these instruments can complement one another to ensure that no voices or identities are erased.

The Council approved 2023–2026 Term of Council Priorities from the 2023–2026 City Strategic Plan, which emphasizes meaningful reconciliation and collaboration with the Anishinabe Algonquin Nation and Urban Indigenous communities. This includes addressing systemic and emerging issues, supporting Indigenous-led approaches, and improving City services for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people. In alignment with these priorities, there is a duty to consult with members of the Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC) on this initiative and related projects. In addition, direct engagement

with Indigenous people with disabilities and their service providers is necessary to ensure that resulting projects accurately reflect their intersectional lived realities.

TERM OF COUNCIL PRIORITIES

A city that has affordable housing and is more liveable for all.

DISPOSITION

Upon approval, staff in Indigenous Relations will advance the work outlined within the report with the collaboration and support of all City of Ottawa departments.