



What Municipal Leaders Can Do To Better Support Indigenous Residents And Neighbours At This Time

August 23, 2021

A question we have been hearing from members is how can municipal governments leaders and staff be more supportive and be part of the healing, learning, and restoration needed to support reconciliation with Indigenous friends, neighbours, and communities. Municipal leaders are being looked to in order to set the tone and be part of the constructive societal change that is needed and expected.

To set the context, municipal governments are not [part of] the Crown under the Canadian Constitution, the Federal and Provincial governments are. As such, municipal governments are not able to address outstanding rights and claim issues, but we are able to be better neighbours and partners with Indigenous friends and communities.

- 1. Start by listening.** Actively listen to the many Indigenous leaders, elders, and speakers who are sharing their perspectives, advice, and wisdom at this time. Listen locally if you can to Indigenous neighbours and at Friendship Centres. Although there are common elements, each survivor and each community has a unique story to share. Learn from what is shared voluntarily but don't ask Indigenous colleagues or friends to educate you.
- 2. Educate yourself** about residential schools through the many stories of survivors. May wish to virtually visit the [Woodland Cultural Centre](#) which was formerly the Mohawk Institute Indian Residential School, one of the few remaining residential schools in Canada. Be compassionate and self-reflective as survivors and their communities grieve with the recent discoveries of several unmarked children's' burials – with likely more discoveries to come.

Educate yourself on the broader area of Indigenous history and perspectives including Indigenous rights under the Canadian [Constitution Act, 1982](#) and [treaties](#) as a start. More informational links can be found at the end of this document.

- 3. Speak up thoughtfully.** Consider what your and your council's informed contribution will be to the public discussion in support of Indigenous peoples. Although there is a growing frustration with both silence and platitudes, a sincere and heartfelt statement may take some time to develop which should be accompanied with a follow through implementation strategy. Be particularly careful about the use of social media as it is often not the best forum for thoughtful discussion.
- 4. Call for action.** As stated above, municipal governments can't solve issues related to rights and claims. However, they can add their strong voices in support of a call for action to the federal government.

In particular, they can support the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) calls to action on residential schools, including the need to fund this essential work. The TRC's recommendations 71-76 ask the federal government to accurately detail the number of children who died, establish a National Residential School Student Death Register, and to locate the bodies of children who died so that they can be respectfully memorialized.

As well, there needs to be a requirement that there is an immediate release all of documents and records related to residential schools in Canada including the names of all missing children – be they federal, provincial and/or church records.

5. **Create a Declaration of Mutual Commitment and Friendship** with the local Friendship Centre. During AMO's 2020 Virtual Conference, the [*Declaration of Mutual Commitment and Friendship*](#) was signed by the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres and AMO.

Developed and led by the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC) ([link https://ofifc.org/](https://ofifc.org/)) and AMO's memberships, the Declaration highlights the relationships and work being done to improve the quality of life of Indigenous people across Ontario's municipalities. The Declaration emphasizes the leadership of collaborating Friendship Centres and municipal governments and raises the bar for increased future dialogue and partnership. The agreement is designed to help municipal governments and Friendship Centres build relationships in order to improve supports and services for Indigenous people in their communities.

Throughout Ontario, 85 per cent of Indigenous people live in urban and rural municipalities. The OFIFC represents the collective interests of 29 Friendship Centres in cities and towns across the province – places for community members and Indigenous people living in urban spaces to gather, connect with one another, and receive culturally-based services. The centres support and encourage equal access to, and participation in, Canadian society while respecting Indigenous cultural distinctiveness, and have existed in Ontario communities for more than half a century ([*Declaration of Mutual Commitment and Friendship*](#)).

6. **Create urban Indigenous-municipal advisory committee** (if one doesn't already exist) where there is no Friendship Centre in the municipality. This advisory committee could work collaboratively with municipal service providers and staff with respect to municipal services and programs related to the social determinants of health (e.g., housing, child care, senior services, public health) to make sure that they are being planned, delivered, resourced, and evaluated in a way that serves the urban Indigenous community appropriately and in partnership.

This may also be, or evolve into, a forum for Indigenous and municipal service providers to work together in human and social services areas where program integration and cooperation would benefit all peoples receiving such services in the municipality.

7. **Create or renew Relationship Agreements** between a municipal government and neighbouring First Nation(s) and/or indigenous communities. Many municipal governments have formal or informal inter-government agreements with neighbouring First Nation(s) and/or Indigenous communities covering how they will work together on areas of mutual interest such as economic recovery, tourism, land use planning, and environmental issues. These are different from service agreements on items such as fire protection services, animal services, solid waste, or water/sewer provision. They are the agreements that provide a framework for how all parties will work together on local issues and how dispute resolution can occur if needed.

AMO staff is looking into developing a template framework that includes the key elements in relationship agreements later in 2021 so that it can be available to assist members, First Nations, and Indigenous communities in local discussions about their own Relationship Agreements.

8. **Support Indigenous colleagues and staff.** It is not a usual time. Know that Indigenous colleagues and staff may need time for themselves, their families, and their communities. If possible, employers should try to make sure that employees have access to culturally appropriate employee support programs or counselling.
9. **Attend memorial events or ceremonies** where non-Indigenous people are invited. Wear orange to demonstrate support for survivors and their families. The *National* Day for Truth and Reconciliation, also known as Orange Shirt Day, on September 30th is now a federal statutory *holiday*.

Municipal governments are encouraged to fly the “Every Child Matters” orange flag for the month of September leading up to the *National* Day for Truth and Reconciliation.

Resources: Too many to list, but a start of a web-based resources list.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

<http://www.trc.ca/>

The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. June 2019

<https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/final-report/>

2020 Status Update on Reconciliation

<https://yellowheadinstitute.org/trc/>

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html>

POLIS Water Sustainability Project list of resources

<https://poliswaterproject.org/2021/06/03/reconciliation-resources/>

Indian Residential Schools Survivors Society (B.C. based organization)

<https://www.irsss.ca/home>

Indigenous Ally Toolkit

https://reseaumtlnetwork.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Ally_March.pdf

Legacy of Hope Foundation

<https://legacyofhope.ca/>

Orange Shirt Society

<https://www.orangeshirtday.org/orange-shirt-society.html>

Reconciliation Canada

<https://reconciliationcanada.ca/>

First Nations Child and Family Caring Society

<https://fncaringsociety.com/>

Yellowhead Institute – First Nation-led research centre based at Ryerson University in Toronto

<https://yellowheadinstitute.org/>

<https://www.cbc.ca/books/35-books-to-read-for-national-indigenous-history-month-1.5585489>