



Stories have
always been
our governance

01

TO RIT



**INDIGENOUS STORIES
IN POLICY**



NUICC.CA
National Urban Indigenous
Coalition Council

INDIGENOUS STORIES IN POLICY



Coming together, **gathering stories**, creating change

WHAT ARE TOOLKITS?

TOOLKITS ARE BUNDLES OF RESOURCES

TNUICC is gathering and developing on different topics related to urban Indigenous governance, policy, politics and knowledge mobilisation. The toolkits are developed from conversations we are having with Indigenous knowledge workers and keepers, staff at Indigenous organisations and institutions, and most importantly, those who are most often the “subjects” of “research”—urban Indigenous people themselves. We acknowledge that little here is new knowledge. Instead, we gratefully and humbly acknowledge that these toolkits build from generations of knowledge carriers who have allowed this work to be possible.

Intended audience

Toolkits are open-access, but have been developed particularly to support knowledge sharing between coalitions from coast to coast to coast. Knowing what others have learned helps under-resourced and new coalitions integrate other communities’ lessons. We want to advance the work of urban Indigenous organisers, service providers, coalitions and policy makers to better understand how we can ethically and carefully carry Indigenous stories and storytelling into policy development. The purpose of this toolkit is to offer accessible solutions and approaches—through a variety of multimedia sources—to people advocating for and implementing change to lift up the needs of urban Indigenous communities.

TOOLKIT #1: STORYTELLING TO POLICY

Why is this toolkit important?

Policy relationships between Indigenous Peoples and the Canadian government have historically been and continue to be devastating for Indigenous Peoples, nations, and communities. The history of Indigenous policy in Canada is characterised by the goals of the domination and assimilation of Indigenous people by colonising powers, resulting in the marginalisation or exclusion of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples’ participation in society. Through racist and patrilineal

These toolkits build from generations of knowledge carriers who have allowed this work to be possible.

policy, Indigenous Peoples were not permitted to participate in society in a way that encouraged the freedom to pursue wellness, prosperity and quality of life equitable to that of non-Indigenous people. This was the case throughout this country’s history as it developed its social and economic systems, and is still the case today as Indigenous communities and local governments acknowledge the legacy of these policies in their efforts to find solutions. Research with Indigenous communities has mostly furthered the objectives of problematic policy, instead of lifting up



This toolkit is meant to provide some clarity on how Indigenous stories can be included in policy development, since our stories have always had a significant role in our governance.

solutions for improving the lives of Indigenous people in urban population centres.

In our current Canadian context of municipal, regional, provincial and federal governments and institutions, the task of developing policies that centre and ethically carry Indigenous knowledge, stories and futures is key to mitigating the harms and oppressions Indigenous Peoples face. With more Indigenous Peoples becoming leaders in both research and policy development, there are growing and diverse webs of knowledge that we can learn from. We have the insight, capacity and opportunity to bring our stories into policy development and implementation. This can ensure that policies reflect Indigenous worldviews, while also meeting our community and individual needs.

In this toolkit, we seek to build an understanding and gather resources for how urban Indigenous stories can become a part of public and urban policy in ways that are meaningful and ethical, and enhance the right of urban Indigenous people to determine their own futures. Creation stories, hunting stories, family and clan stories, stories about conflict resolution, stories about the land, transformation stories, and stories of Indigenous experiences are foundational parts of Indigenous governance. Indigenous stories hold great cultural, spiritual and political meaning, and so, it is important to ensure that they are handled carefully and ethically in the policy development and implementation process.

Speakers at a NUICC Hub event on engaging urban Indigenous youth noted that they have stopped making comparisons between the realities of Indigenous youth and non-Indigenous youth.

LeeAnne Ireland, Executive Director, Urban Society for Aboriginal Youth, explains that Indigenous people have different lived experiences and different historical experiences than non-Indigenous people. One of the things that we need to stop doing is expecting Indigenous people's communities, experiences, perceptions and worldviews to be the same.

Always needing to compare experiences has created a binary that continues to place Indigenous people in a deficit. It's okay to let the Indigenous experience stand on its own. Ms. Ireland states that she has stopped listing the ways that Indigenous people are made vulnerable and create narratives in which someone needs to come into communities to save us.

What's in the toolkit?

This toolkit provides readers with a range of approaches and recommendations for urban Indigenous people that can be a part of good policy development processes. Further, this toolkit is meant to provide some clarity on how Indigenous stories can be included in policy development, since our stories have always had a significant role in our governance.

Policy refers to a series of principles, strategies and pathways to achieve a desired outcome.

Like many things, there is no one-size-fits-all guide for how to do the work of carrying stories into policy, especially when urban areas hold a multitude of stories from different lands, nations and communities across the country. Instead, this toolkit should be understood as a compass to help navigate possible policy development scenarios and conversations that are likely to arise as urban Indigenous people engage in policy development.

URBAN INDIGENOUS POLICY: ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE

First off: What Is Policy?

Generally speaking, policy refers to a series of principles, strategies and pathways to achieve a desired outcome. While often associated with the work that governments do, policies are integral to shaping the culture and mandates of non-government organisations and businesses as well. Policies will oftentimes define the objectives and goals of an organisation, while also providing a set of principles, strategies and processes to achieve those stated objectives. In short, policies ensure that there are clear strategies in place to achieve specific outcomes, which in turn creates clear expectations for those who are identified in the policy.

What is Indigenous Policy?

Indigenous public policy can refer to two general situations; the first being policies crafted by non-Indigenous governments that will impact Indigenous peoples and communities. As mentioned earlier, while this can be viewed as a colonial approach, there have been significant shifts to ensure Indigenous perspectives are included through diverse consultation processes with some good cases to draw from. The second situation can refer to policies created by Indigenous governments or organisations themselves. In this context, Indigenous policy development is a reflection of an Indigenous community's capacity and authority to design and implement strategies to meet its own goals and aspirations.

What are Indigenous policies?

1. These can be policies crafted by non-Indigenous governments that will impact Indigenous Peoples and communities. As mentioned earlier, while this can be viewed as a colonial approach, there have been significant shifts to ensure Indigenous perspectives are included through diverse consultation processes with some good cases to draw from.
2. **OR**, policies that are created by Indigenous communities, organisations and governments themselves. In this way, Indigenous policy development reflects an Indigenous community's capacity and authority to design and implement strategies to meet its own needs and aspirations.

When developing policy, Indigenous governments, such as First Nations band councils or Inuit governments, often consult community members before and during the policy design and implementation process. Governance mechanisms, such as referendums or knowledge and opinion gathering processes, are some of the ways Indigenous governments hear community input when developing policy and law. This is not only an example of effective and democratic governance, but also aligns with how

A CASE IN STORY *Red Women Rising*

THE RED WOMEN RISING REPORT (2019) is based on interviews with 113 Indigenous women and 15 non-Indigenous women as a part of the submissions to the National Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls, and was undertaken through the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre. The report covers a range of policy and equity topics that urban Indigenous women have been advocating for over the last 40+ years including child welfare, health, poverty, labour, housing, Canada's legal system and more, with Indigenous women's voices directly telling these stories and providing recommendations for change.

Harsha Walia (settler) and Carol Muree Martin (Nisga'a -Gitanyow) are the co-authors of *Red Women Rising*. They took time to share about the building of the report and how the principles they carried became a part of their work.

What things did you consider about interviewing women in the Downtown Eastside (DTES) and bringing their stories into the Red Women Rising Report?

HARSHA: The specific call for the National Inquiry was driven over 30 years by Indigenous women and Elders across the country, but specifically from the Downtown Eastside. So that was the context—really wanting to deeply centre and

really focus on the experiences of Indigenous women, and the broader but also unique experiences of the Downtown Eastside. There were a lot of Elders who, for all of the different reasons related to intergenerational trauma and violence, wanted to share their stories with their children and their grandchildren, but were unable to do so in terms of

A lot of women used their names. So you have to think about what kinds of risks they are taking. And how you are going to support them not just now in that moment of sharing for a report, but into the future.

conversations. With the constant deaths in the Downtown Eastside, women very much feel like their stories are heard around the world, but that oftentimes, their families don't know. So there was a sense of really wanting to leave something for their family to know.

CAROL: An important thing to consider in this project and in all projects like it is thinking about what kinds of supports you are making for the women. This is hard stuff they are sharing—the violence of their lives, trauma, having their kids taken away, interactions with police... and a lot of women used



their names. So you have to think about what kinds of risks they are taking. And how you are going to support them not just now in that moment of sharing for a report, but into the future. I think another thing that not many people think about when doing a project like this is doing their own work before coming to the women. Like what are your own biases, your perception of yourself, of Indigenous women, of sex workers, of people in poverty that might show up in how you tell the stories. So you have to look inside yourself, do that hard work, so it's their stories that come through—not your perceptions.

A CASE IN STORY *Research 101*

RESearch CAN CAUSE HARM and often does. But it's not going to stop—in fact, good research is still really needed to address ongoing and historical realities. However, when so much funding is available and careers are being built through research happening in areas like the DTES, there needs to be a harm-reduction focus as a part of ethical research practices. This can be done through clarifying community expectations around processes, outcomes and ethics.

These issues are especially important given the high profile of

Much of this research considers community member's lived experiences with imposed poverty, mental health, addictions, sex work, and urban Indigeneity.

the DTES in the national and international context, the disproportionately large urban Indigenous population with little agency over their civic lives, the persisting structural state harm, and how much research is occurring there. Much of this research considers community member's lived experiences with imposed poverty, mental health, addictions, sex work, and urban Indigeneity. As pointed out in a presentation to NUICC on Nov 26th, 2021 by Nicolas Crier and

Scott Nuefeld, 447 academic articles focused on DTES communities, as well as 53 masters' theses and 47 PhD dissertations between 2010 and 2018. Nicolas and Scott further pointed out that many of these articles have been held behind academic paywalls and are otherwise inaccessible to those who have been instrumental in providing knowledge towards these projects.

As a Manifesto for Ethical Research in Vancouver's DTES, the Research 101 project was co-authored by 10+ individuals, many of whom are living in the DTES, and provides guidance for how our research practices can reduce harm. NUICC's Urban Indigenous Knowledge Mobilisation Hub is a proud supporter of Research 101.

Nicolas and Scott describe that a significant part of harm reduction in this context is empowering individuals and communities to say no to researchers and research projects, engaging in meaningful participatory action research, and demanding more from researchers by communicating community expectations and ethics. According to members of the communities in the DTES, in order for research to be based in harm reduction as well as reducing stigmas around people who use drugs or who are



houseless, *the project must be trauma-informed*. This means that researchers are thinking about:

- What certain questions might bring up for participants
- How to ensure participants can practice the freedom to not share if they feel triggered
- What kinds of supports need to be readily available (peer support, counsellors, etc.) and what their responsibility is to their participant moving forward if the research is triggering, and
- How they are communicating research so that participants are not just suffering subjects.

many Indigenous governments would traditionally make decisions. What we especially want to focus on is policy in urban population centres.

LISTENING TO STORIES: KEY PRINCIPLES AND APPROACHES

Indigenous stories have always carried, and continue to carry, significant importance within many Indigenous societies. Stories carry community knowledge, including how to respond to and resolve problems that often arise in social environments where people are living together. Listening to these stories, and the persons that tell them, is a significant way to ensure public policy can meet the needs of peoples in ways that are culturally appropriate.

Gathering stories (consultation)

“Consultation” is an expansive topic, but we want to talk about it from the perspective of being accountable to/from researchers, programmers, service providers and policy makers. We gather stories together, as this is an important part of how we carry them into policy

How we gather stories, and how they are included in policy development, should be co-developed with those who carry the stories.

work. Currently, urban Indigenous communities are consulted in ways that might be framed as obligations or “checking boxes.”

While consultation offers an opportunity for Indigenous voices to be heard, we feel the “duty to consult” is bare-minimum when assessing policy development and implementation. Consultation, when reframed as “gathering stories,” pushes us to recognise that consultation should be rooted in respectful relationships, ongoing dialogue, and connection with Indigenous Peoples. Urban Indigenous organisations advocate for collaboration from the onset of projects in which our communities are involved, which allows Indigenous methodologies to be incorporated.

A CASE IN STORY

Sharing Stories Across the Province

AS A PART OF REPORTING requirements for the provincial government, Regroupement des centres d’intérieures du Québec (RCAAQ) has decided to frame their “data collection” as visiting with staff at Friendship Centres about the work, initiatives, challenges and successes of the previous year. Rather than having staff across the province fill out spreadsheets or write reports about their work, RCAAQ calls every Friendship Centre to talk and share about what they are doing. Jean-Francois Côté of RCAAQ asks them questions to determine what barriers to justice look like, what staffing looks like, how funding is being used and who their partners are to paint a collective picture through questions and stories to provide government partners.

Côté explains that staff at the Centres “tell us their story of programming and services, and we do the rest of filling in the roadmap and reporting on our side. So it’s really easy for me to get everything that I need for our report and they have a nice day because their team members have the opportunities to order lunch, be together and share stories.” And then it’s up to Côté to translate and collectivise those stories into a report that is legible to the government.



A CASE IN STORY *Carrying Spirit Bear + Indigenous Youth into The Canada Human Rights Tribunal*

BIG DECISIONS were being made in Canada at the time this toolkit was written in the winter of 2022, including how it is that Indigenous children and families are to be compensated for decades of inequity and inequality. The First Nations Child and Family Caring Society led by Dr. Cindy Blackstock has been fighting for the rights of children to live without the trauma of colonialism. Blackstock is renowned for Canadian Human Rights Tribunal rulings that the federal government discriminated against First Nations children who lived on reserves through the chronic underfunding of family and child services in their communities. These rulings led to settlement

The First Nations Child and Family Caring Society led by Dr. Cindy Blackstock has been fighting for the rights of children to live without the trauma of colonialism.

with Canada in 2022, but in 2016, they forced the implementation of Jordan's Principle—a child-first approach to ensure all First Nations children in Canada can access the support they need.

The organisation accomplished this work through educational initiatives, public policy campaigns and by providing quality resources to support communities, but is perhaps best known for its groundbreaking work fighting the

Canadian government through the Human Rights Tribunal. In this way, the statistics and the stories and the education and the legal action become pointers to success. Similar to the Civil Rights movements and many community struggles for justice in the past, we can see that action, research and legal strategies are potent when coordinated together.

Jennifer King, Reconciliation and Policy Coordinator for the Caring Society, joined NUICC in the fall of 2021 to discuss Jordan's case, how it is that Indigenous lives and stories impact policy making, and ways Indigenous people can hold the government accountable.

It has taken many years for the case to get to the Tribunal hearing and the decision we heard in December 2021, which were difficult years for Cindy and the Caring Society who faced the bureaucratic structures and carried the stories of so many families facing inequities. Cindy was sharing her concerns with a fellow board member at the Caring Society who offered her the companionship of a fluffy white teddy bear, who many Canadians know now as Spirit Bear. At the time, Cindy thought this was not exactly what she needed or how it would help, but she took Spirit Bear and began bringing him to all the hearings to remind Tribunal witnesses of the focus on Indigenous children and families, and their lives and futures.



Cindy thought this was not exactly what she needed or how it would help, but she took Spirit Bear and began bringing him to all the hearings.

Youth began attending the Human Rights Tribunal when a local high school class came to observe the proceedings in Ottawa. In her presentation to NUICC on the Tribunal case, Jennifer King of the Caring Society explains that, as word began to spread and more youth wanted to be present to witness the hearings, by the time the federal court case came around they had to move proceedings to the supreme court building to accommodate the number of teachers and youth attending the proceedings. Cindy has stated that when the first youth came to witness, that's when she knew things were going to be okay.

How we gather stories, and how they are included in policy development, should be co-developed with those who carry the stories. Since stories hold such importance in Indigenous societies, it is important to ensure that this cultural and political context that surrounds Indigenous stories is respected throughout the policy development process. To make sure of this, there should be ongoing dialogue and relationship building between those seeking engagement and the urban Indigenous people. In this context of ongoing dialogue, it becomes possible, for example, to reach out to storytellers to confirm stories are being interpreted and utilised appropriately. Without this ongoing dialogue in place, policies that impact Indigenous Peoples may lack justification and legitimacy.

A Multitude of Stories

Cities and urban spaces in Canada are confluences of diverse Indigenous Peoples, with diverse cultures, stories and understandings. While this is the case now, it has also been like this since time immemorial. Looking back before Euro-Canadian settlement, cities are built upon spaces with complex legal and political histories that include competing and complementary Indigenous jurisdiction(s), trade and diplomacy, and resource sharing.

The establishment of Canadian cities, however, including the destruction of local indigenous social-economic and environmental systems, the transformation of the land through colonial-built material infrastructures, as well as narratives of Western civilisation and progress, have contributed to the erasure of rich and diverse Indigenous histories. Countering narratives of Indigenous backwardness and

There is no single Indigenous voice, but rather, there are multiple voices and experiences.

bringing Indigenous histories to light will be important, as it will provide points of reference when considering how to develop urban policies that meet the needs and cultural insights of diverse Indigenous communities.

There is no single Indigenous voice, but rather, there are multiple voices and experiences. Approaching urban Indigenous people as monolithic is undesirable and unethical, as this does not honour the diverse stories, experiences and perspectives that urban Indigenous people carry. At the same time, we can

A CASE IN STORY

Taking up Indigenous stories respectfully into policy

IT IS NOT ONLY CONSULTATION

that is a problem, but also what happens afterwards—where stories come to be taken up or not in policy work. For example, numerous Commissions have looked into issues faced by Indigenous Peoples, such as the recent National Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls, where the Commission heard thousands of stories graciously brought forwards by Indigenous Peoples.

However, there has been little action from governments to enact the clear recommendations that come from these stories. As Lorrain Whitman of the Native Women's Association of Canada stated, "Instead of a national action plan, we are left with a lack-of-action plan." In such processes, Indigenous voices are obviously integral, but to ask communities to repeatedly share their trauma and their visions

for pathways forwards and then to do nothing is disrespectful to Indigenous Peoples, and undermines any trust colonial governments could wish to build.



Native Women's
Association of Canada

L'Association des
femmes autochtones
du Canada

How will you honour the stories and the storyteller, keep the stories alive and intact, and care for them in a good way?

work to collectivise urban Indigenous stories to share as a guiding compass to point us where we need to go together.

Key questions to ask when gathering stories

- In what kind of spaces are stories being shared? Though sharing circles engage in discussions similar to focus groups, they may involve ceremony, special protocols before, during or after the event, explicit or unsaid rules of engagement and relationship responsibilities of participants and hosts to each other, as well as other Indigenous practices determined by the Knowledge Keeper or host.
- Is making “best” or “promising” practices from Indigenous stories ethical, given their specific context with communities and lands? What steps can you take to reduce harm that may come from fitting urban Indigenous stories into colonial policy?
- What does leadership mean in the group(s) you are working with? Who are leaders responsible to and how are they kept accountable?
- What are the relationships and responsibilities between story gatherers and storytellers? How is the storyteller supported? What protocols will be established to ensure stories are not be taken or used in a harmful, exploitative, extractive way, or used/distorted out of context?
- What does expertise mean to you? What kinds of “experts” are at the table and contributing to policy development or recommendations? By whose standards are individuals deemed experts?
- What will you do with the stories once the report or policy is written? How will you honour the stories and the storyteller, keep the stories alive and intact, and care for them in a good way?

Principles and Practices

The following table pulls from some of the key principles from the completed toolkit and provides some actionable practices that we can all begin to take up in our Indigenous policy work and advocacy.

Principles + Practices

PRINCIPLE

Gathering and bundling urban Indigenous stories for policy making

PRACTICES

Communicating clearly to individuals and communities how the stories and perspectives they are sharing will be used, as well as the limitations of the policy making process you might be in.

Being aware of protocols in the community you are working in (such as introduction formats, gifting/offering protocols, etc.). If they are not clear, asking can go a long way to demonstrating the desire to do things in a good way.

Letting communities lead the discussion or consultation.

Prioritising visiting and relational work over “data collection.”

Being humble when entering into conversation and accepting what is shared with you. Make space for the stories that need to be shared rather than the ones you want to hear.

Connecting stories to data and legal strategies for potent success.

PRINCIPLE

Reciprocal and ongoing relationships with urban Indigenous communities sharing stories

PRACTICES

Providing ongoing **opportunities for feedback** as recommendations and policies are being developed. This might look like providing draft documents for revision, making presentations or hosting sharing circles, and checking in at a future time to make sure you got the message right.

Ensuring **holistic inclusion of perspectives** and recommendations—sharing recommendations and policy drafts across sectors.

Ensuring that those who are sharing their stories are **properly and fairly compensated** or gifted, and credited/acknowledged as appropriate.

Following conflict resolution practices relevant to the communities you may be gathering stories with.

Knowing who is able to share and make decisions about **how any traditional stories are used**. This may be an Elder, a respected leader within the community, or someone appointed to carry and share that story.

Ensuring that stories shared do not stop with making policy recommendations. **Think about how to continue working with communities** to build on recommendations and make sure that the voices of the people are heard in the spaces your policy recommendations are going.

PRINCIPLE

Respecting urban Indigenous peoples and stories in policy development

PRACTICES

Not trying to fit Indigenous knowledge and story into shapes it was never meant to be in. It may be that constructing colonial policies or legislation from stories might not be the way to hold that story. This requires foundational changes in policy making and legitimacy.

Being a leader in **developing policy frameworks** that are neither framed by Eurocentric objectives nor bound by measurable indicators set by the government.

Not trying to create a single voice, instead **reflecting shared values** between diverse communities and nations.

JOIN THE NUICC URBAN INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE MOBILISATION HUB

Building a Community of Practice

The National Urban Indigenous Coalition Council's Knowledge Mobilisation Hub ("The Hub") is being built to support urban Indigenous coalitions across the country as we undertake and mobilize Indigenous knowledge to advance their policy and action priorities in community and beyond. <https://nuicc.ca/indigenous-knowledge-mobilisation-hub/>

Online Events

The Hub hosts a series of digital lectures, workshops, and discussions on a range of topics that engage Coalition members and the urban Indigenous research community on what Indigenous knowledge is and how we carry it into research, policy, and decision-making. By sharing our practices, successes, and challenges, we hope to foster research skills that lead to positive and meaningful benefits for urban Indigenous communities. Watch our website to register! <https://nuicc.ca/>

Stories Have Always Been Our Governance

As product of the Hub, we are a print and online journal – Stories Have Always Been Our Governance – that showcases the work of NUICC's Knowledge Mobilisation Hub in order to amplify, focus and disseminate emergent knowledge, practices and futures for urban Indigenous people. Contact us to receive a bundle of the journal via Canada Post for your school or centre.

communications@nuicc.ca

Collaborate

Interested in collaborating, meeting with your peers and joining a community of practice? Check our monthly online meetings of the Knowledge Hub Working Group. To join, please email us a quick message about what you are working on for a meeting invite and Zoom link to indigenousknowledge@nuicc.ca

Submit your work online

If you are currently working on research related to knowledge, governance, practices and rights of urban Indigenous people, we invite you to consider submitting your work and pitching ideas to this Journal. This is an open call for stories, reports, papers, op-eds, songs, podcasts, and creative knowledge – all of which we want to amplify! We invite our communities to share their urban work and we'll post it on social media and share from our website. See guidelines included in the submission form here: <https://bit.ly/callfor submissionsform>

Hiring Research Assistants

NUICC is looking for Research Assistants in Eastern Canada and in Western Canada who will advance the rights and visibility of the urban Indigenous population across Canada. Join us in this unique, flexible, part-time remote role that supports projects advancing public policy on the challenges of urban Indigenous peoples.

Current Hub projects

We are working on an environmental scan of urban Indigenous research; support building our urban Indigenous journal, Stories Have Always Been Our Governance, through an open publishing platform. We are also hiring a RA position at Simon Fraser University, where we are delivering a series of briefs on ways urban Indigenous knowledge mobilisation is affecting policy in 16 Canadian cities. Info at <https://bit.ly/nuiccra2022>



NUICC.CA

National Urban Indigenous
Coalition Council