

# 4S06 Final Report: Identifying Barriers to Indigenous Inclusion within the Governance of Environmental Organizations in Hamilton

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## Context of Indigenous Relationship to Land:

The City of Hamilton is situated upon the traditional territories of the Erie, Neutral, Huron-Wendat, Haudenosaunee and Mississaugas. This land is covered by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, which was an agreement between the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabek to share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes. We further acknowledge that this land is covered by the Between the Lakes Purchase, 1792, between the Crown and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation.

Today, the City of Hamilton is home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island (North America) and we recognize that we must do more to learn about the rich history of this land so that we can better understand our roles as residents, neighbours, partners and caretakers. (City of Hamilton, 2019)

## Project Context and Goal

Several city-wide community engagement initiatives identified the need for increased Indigenous leadership within the environmental sector including the city's Our Future Hamilton 25-year Community Vision and Urban Indigenous Strategy (City of Hamilton, 2017; City of Hamilton, 2018). Engagement findings from the 2018 Our Future Hamilton Summit further supported this need, with over 430 attendees identifying increased community representation as a top recommended action for improving civic and democratic engagement in Hamilton. Given these priorities, the goal of our project was to identify barriers to Indigenous inclusion within the governance of environmental organizations in Hamilton.

## Review of Best Practices:

Through an online search for best practices of Indigenous inclusion by environmental organizations in the provinces of Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia, we determined very few examples. See Appendix A for a list of organizations we reviewed. This gap in best practices signals that this is not only an issue in Hamilton, but in provinces across the country. While our search did not provide a significant number of best practice examples, we searched some more and found two that really stood out. Land Trust New Brunswick and our own Environmental Hamilton. Land Trust New Brunswick strives for diverse representation, including members of the Indigenous community, by recording and making transparent the different voices represented at their decision-making table. By way of goal-setting and making their progress transparent, they are also ensuring that they are asking and encouraging others to ask, 'who is not at the table?' As we learned through our online search and was confirmed through in-person interview, Environment Hamilton is a source of local best practices. They are making very good strides towards improved diversity and inclusion, namely through providing training

on diversity and inclusion to members of their board and staff teams, by ensuring transparency of their board recruitment process, and by valuing lived experience in addition to professional skills and qualifications at the board level. Environment Hamilton currently has representation from an Indigenous person on their board and actively engages members of the Indigenous community in their events.

### Methods:

Our project scope focused our investigation on environmental organizations that engaged in stewardship of land and/or water in the greater Hamilton area. We identified and researched thirteen organizations in Hamilton. Following research of practices of environmental organizations in British Columbia, Ontario and Alberta, we developed a research study that would help us answer our research question. We consulted research ethics about our study and it was confirmed that we did not need research ethics because we were asking for information about an organization's structures, values, practices, and processes, rather than personal perspectives from an individual. We then contacted all thirteen organizations via email, requesting their participation in our study by taking part in a personal interview. Specifically, we were interested in speaking with a member of their board of directors.

### The Interviews:

Six board members and one department director, representing different organizations, responded to our request and set up an interview with us through our online Calendly app. Two team members conducted and recorded the interviews on their personal cell phones and by supplementing with handwritten notes. The interviewer used the interview questions as a guide, but also went on to ask for more elaboration if need be. The interviewer then saved the notes in a secure file for next steps in transcription.

### Transcription of Interviews:

One team member listened to the interview recordings and used the interview notes to summarize key quotes from each interview question. These interviews were not transcribed verbatim because of the scope of the study. Our goal was to pull out relevant main themes, as opposed to recording direct quotes from each interview, see (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006). Any notes that were unclear were either clarified by re-listening to the audio recordings or by consulting with the team member that conducted the in-person interviewer.

## Results and Discussion

### Results

The average size of the governance structures was 12.7 members. The average term length was approximately 2.9 years for board members. Four organizations advertised their board membership positions online and three advertised via word of mouth (while online and word of mouth were the main ways, organizations did mention that they advertise in multiple ways). Only two organizations had a specific protocol set up for a standard application in which

potential board members can apply through. Only one organization held a seat for professional qualifications and only one held a seat for someone with lived experience. All interviewed members value diverse representation at their board level. Two organizations held space for Indigenous people. Three organizations utilized diversity and inclusion resources. Out of all the organizations that value diverse representation at their board level, three have made an effort to engage with Indigenous communities in the past.

From our study, 42% of participants felt that they did not know who to contact within the Indigenous community, and (28%) felt a general lack of resources to support respectful and appropriate engagement efforts. Additionally, 28% of participants felt a lack of education and awareness regarding the importance of Indigenous people's traditional knowledge and distinctive relationship to land. Of these responses, three main themes emerged: (1) awareness and education, (2) resources, and (3) relationship building.

#### Discussion:

In order to get a sense of what kind of barriers the environmental sector faces, in terms of engaging with the Indigenous community, we considered four themes in our analysis. The first theme was *awareness and education*. This category includes organizations that recognize the importance of engaging with the Indigenous community, but they do not know who to contact directly in order to increase their engagement. The second theme identified *lack of resources*, which can include lacking time, money and people to invest in engaging with the Indigenous community. The third theme was *about the importance of relationship building*. This category includes organizations that do not recognize the importance of engaging with the Indigenous community or organizations that do not have knowledge of Indigenous relationships in relation to their organization. We also feel it important to engage in discussion of our fourth theme of community engagement and relationship building. This category represents organizations that reported that Indigenous engagement is mutual, in that not only do environmental organizations have a role in initiating engagement conversations, but the Indigenous community themselves should also play a part in reaching out to learn more and participate in board governance. This speaks to the need for diversity and inclusion training as well as information about how to respectfully engage with marginalized communities.

In summary, four organizations reported consulting with the Indigenous community in the past. Three organizations did not know who to contact for Indigenous engagement. Two organizations lacked resources for engaging with the Indigenous community. One organization was unaware of the importance of Indigenous engagement with respect to land stewardship. Importantly, some organizations had overlapping themes based on the interview responses that they gave. Based on the thematic analysis, the most common barrier to engaging with the Indigenous community was not knowing who to contact.

To address these barriers, we hosted an event that brought together members of the Indigenous community and environmental organizations to share our findings, make connections, identify resources, and learn about Indigenous relationships to land. Following a presentation by traditional knowledge keepers, we shared our research findings, and then

engaged in group discussions to identify actions to address the three identified barriers. This event was attended by 37 participants, composed of environmental organizations, public community members, and Indigenous community members. Participants worked together and came up with 19 actions related to the barriers identified. While lots of actions were identified, the majority spoke to the importance of attending open community events, lectures, and celebrations to listen, learn, and engage. For example, upcoming events that were shared include National Aboriginal Day (June 21) and National Truth and Reconciliation Day (September 30). Attendees were excited to learn that these events were open and welcoming to Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals alike. Contact information was exchanged at the event and our team distributed a list of contacts of officially recognized Indigenous organizations in Hamilton. Following the event, we shared our summary report with all participants as well as contact information for all local environmental and Indigenous organizations in the Hamilton area.

#### Limitations:

Given our focus on environmental sustainability as well as the timeline of our course, the main limitation of our research was that we only interviewed board members of environmental organizations, and we did not include members of the indigenous community. Another limitation in this interview analysis was that not all organizations interviewed answered the interview questions fully, even with prompting, suggesting that some interviewees did not have complete knowledge or history of their organization to provide a fulsome response to each question. Additionally, some organizations gave approximations of their board size, so the average for the size of governance structure does contain some accuracy error.

#### Future Research and Recommendations

For continuation of this work, our first recommendation would be to talk to members of the Indigenous community. Consideration should be given to ensure that researchers are appropriately prepared to engage in such discussions as well as to ensure that time and effort is given to respectful and meaningful relationship building, before any research is embarked upon. With respect to replication of this study, it may be more practical to interview two different individuals from each organization to potentially gain more representative information since some individuals may have a different level of knowledge of the organization's history than another. In other words, the quality of the analysis would be more accurate and reliable.

Our main recommendations, from this study, are (1) to invest in diversity and inclusion training; (2) take part in meaningful community engagement efforts, such as by attending events, listening and learning; (3) utilize available resources, such as the Urban Indigenous Strategy; and (4) build relationships with representatives of Indigenous organizations.

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## References

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Appendix A  
Environmental Organizations Assessed and Evaluated for  
Best Practice of Indigenous Inclusion

Alberta

- Alberta Ecotrust
- Friends of Fish Creek
- Alberta Wilderness Association
- Alberta Prairie Conservation Forum
- Weaselhead/Glenmore Park Preservation Society

British Columbia

- British Columbia Environmental Network (BCEN)
- British Columbia Environmental Industry Association (BCEIA)
- Allan Brooks Nature Center
- Ministry of Environment & Climate Change Strategy
- The Regional District of North Okanagan
- Habitat Conservation Trust Foundation
- Naturescape British Columbia

Ontario

- Ontario Environment Network
- Emerging Leaders for Biodiversity
- Ontario Biodiversity Council
- Conservation Ontario
- Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry
- Natural Heritage Information Centre
- Ontario Clean Water Agency
- Resource Productivity and Recovery Authority