



Executive Summary: Building an Urban Indigenous Engagement Model

March 2026



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Between September and November 2025, four regional gatherings were held with more than 50 urban Indigenous leaders who serve and engage with 18 urban, rural, and remote communities in and around Kamloops, Fort St. John, Prince Rupert, and Nanaimo. Hosted by local Friendship Centres in partnership with Strong Circle Leadership & Governance Society, the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres, and the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, these gatherings were convened to inform the development of a provincial engagement model with urban Indigenous peoples, as outlined in B.C.'s *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (Declaration Act) Action Plan*.

Leaders at all four regional gatherings described shared systemic challenges, including the ongoing marginalization of urban Indigenous voices in decision-making, deteriorating and transactional relationships with municipal, provincial and federal levels of government, and inadequate, short-term, and inequitable funding models. These challenges are occurring in the context of sharply increasing service demand related to housing insecurity, food security, health, education, child and family services, and crisis response – pressures that urban Indigenous organizations are frequently expected to absorb without corresponding resources.

Despite these challenges, urban Indigenous leaders emphasized that meaningful, Indigenous-led, and relationship-based engagement is both necessary and achievable. Participants consistently highlighted the importance of strengthening collaboration among urban Indigenous leaders at regional and provincial levels, deepening relationships with local First Nations, and establishing sustained, accountable engagement with all levels of government. Across all gatherings, there was a clear and consistent interest in forming regional coalitions, networks, and regular gatherings of urban Indigenous leaders. Central to this work is the need for Indigenous-controlled urban data to support planning, funding, advocacy, and policy development, while respecting Indigenous data ownership and autonomy.

Drawing on the combined insights from all four gatherings, leaders articulated a clear vision for an Urban Indigenous Engagement Model that is Indigenous-led, relationship-based, and structured through interconnected regional and provincial tables:

1. **Ongoing Engagement must be grounded in Indigenous values** and ways of being, with relationship-building understood as long-term, intentional, and trauma-aware.
2. **Regional Urban Indigenous Tables** with dedicated capacity funding to address region-specific priorities and realities, including rural and remote contexts, and:
 - a. Collaboration among urban Indigenous leaders, local First Nations, and local governments;
 - b. Support for development and maintenance of an annually updated directory of urban Indigenous organizations.
3. **Provincial Urban Indigenous Network Table** with dedicated capacity funding to support consistent, accountable engagement between government and urban Indigenous leadership, monitoring of the *Declaration Act Action Plan* commitments, and:
 - a. Regular quarterly meetings;
 - b. Annual in-person gatherings with ministers and senior officials;
 - c. Federation of all urban Indigenous organizations serving off-reserve populations.
4. **Indigenous-controlled urban data strategy** that provides access to reliable, community-governed data to support collaboration, funding applications, planning, advocacy, and policy decisions. Data systems should be governed by Indigenous principles and reflect the diverse realities of urban Indigenous communities across regions.
5. **Dedicated provincial urban Indigenous affairs office** within the Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, with decision-making authority and responsibility for ongoing engagement, coordination across ministries, Indigenous-led data collection, and liaising with urban Indigenous communities and regional tables.

Together, these recommended actions provide a practical, Indigenous-led pathway for strengthening engagement, accountability, and collaboration between the Province of British Columbia and urban Indigenous peoples. Implementing these next steps will support more equitable, informed, and effective decision-making and contribute to the meaningful realization of the *Declaration Act* for Indigenous people living off reserve or away from their homelands.