



MEASURING WHAT MATTERS

**Indigenous Perspectives
from Treaty 7 & Moh'kinsstsis
(Calgary)**

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Angela Bear Chief, a member of Siksika Nation, is a Bachelor of Arts (General Studies) student at St. Mary's University in Calgary who will be graduating in June 2022 and is planning to enter the after-degree Bachelor of Education (Elementary) program in Fall 2022. Angela is a mature Indigenous student with 4 children and 6 grandchildren, and is an advocate for further education and inclusion. She also runs a home-based business as an Indigenous Entrepreneur creating Indigenous jewelry and clothing. Currently, Angela is an intern with the Director of Indigenous Initiatives, Michelle Scott at St. Mary's University, where she incorporates facilitation skills and talents as a beader in a series created by both Michelle and Angela called Beading, Bannock and Banter.

FORWARD

When I first joined *Measuring What Matters* project with Mount Royal University as a summer student, I had not fully grasped what was expected of me and all the research that was involved. To begin this journey of asking questions, finding answers and exploring data, I first had to understand what is meant by “*measuring what matters*”. To me, it is about understanding “community”. It also includes Indigenous people within Calgary, and how we move forward together. How do we be inclusive and resilient, promoting not just reconciliation but also ReconciliAction within all of Calgary's communities (whether geographic or demographic).

The Institute for Community Prosperity defines *community prosperity* as “the cultural, economic, social, and ecological conditions necessary for human potential to flourish”. This is a definition that resonates with an Indigenous lens. This work has led me to search for answers to the following questions: How is Calgary reaching its potential of measuring what matters from the viewpoint of urban Indigenous communities? Is there room for improvement? How do we include Indigenous people in the identifying, collecting and analyzing data, or is there readily available data that already exists?

I had the opportunity over the period of compiling this paper to be invited to various events and meetings, either Indigenous-led, or where the Indigenous perspective was part of the sharing process. These meetings raised concerns, ideas, process suggestions and challenged my thinking in many ways. I hope to relay many of these here, with the aim that “measuring what matters” is a task we take seriously, carefully and with collective commitment.

MEASURING WHAT MATTERS

Measuring What Matters is an independent community forum for nurturing dialogue and critical conversations associated with community performance metrics. Our community forum is open to all - commercial, social, civic groups, and citizens are all invited to participate in conversations about measuring community prosperity. *Measuring What Matters* is a project of the CityXLab, hosted and powered by the Institute for Community Prosperity at Mount Royal University. This work has been guided by a Steering Committee of passionate, engaged Calgarians.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the spirit of respect and truth, we honour and acknowledge the traditional Treaty 7 territory and oral practices of the Blackfoot confederacy: Siksika, Kainai, Piikani, Aamskapi-piikani, as well as Tsuut'ina Nation and the Iyarhe Nakoda Nations which consist of the Bearspaw, Chiniki and Wesley First Nations. We also acknowledge that this territory is also home to the Métis Nation of Alberta, Region 3. We acknowledge all Nations – Indigenous and non-Indigenous - who live, work and play on this land, and who honour and celebrate this territory, known as Moh'kinsstsis (Calgary), where the Elbow River meets Bow River. We acknowledge the importance of relating to this territory as a place to call home for all generations past, present and future.¹

I want to thank Mount Royal University for the opportunity to partake in this project as a summer student. It has been an honour being part of a vital project of inclusion and understanding, and exploring well-being for the First Nations communities and other Indigenous peoples living in and around Calgary. Acknowledging Calgary as part of, and home to, the Treaty 7 Nations, including the Blackfoot Confederacy, is a sign of respect. It is also the adopted home of to other First Nations, Metis and Inuit people. Keeping an open mind with regard to the Indigenous community's role, and respectfully engaging diverse Indigenous voices in conversation will not only lend vital insight to better understanding community prosperity; it will also solidify relationship-building necessary to measure what matters well.

INTRODUCTION

Most indexes of community well-being, particularly internationally, but more troublingly even in Canada, fail to acknowledge or adequately include Indigenous perspectives. In the relatively rare cases where Indigenous-labelled indicators or data sets are used, they are typically limited to pro-forma datasets; for example, Indigenous education attainment, income, life expectancy, or health or employment statistics. While these may be useful to include in certain indices, it is rare to encounter a process that is actively engaging Indigenous people or Indigenous organizations in the development of an index or measurement system.

To understand how Calgary is really doing, we need to get serious about measuring Indigenous community prosperity. Yet, part of the context for *measuring what matters* is the historic and contemporary exclusion of critical voices in shaping Calgary's community prosperity, as well as placing the narrative and experience of Calgary in the context of Treaty 7.² Calgary's community prosperity is enabled by Treaty 7 and our collective ability to honour the intent of the Treaty. More broadly, it is important for all Canadians, and all settler institutions, whether public, private or non-profit, to act upon reconciliation and the pursuit of right relations.

This paper outlines some important considerations for including Indigenous voices meaningfully in *measuring what matters*, probes the kinds of measures and broader practices worth considering, and outlines some of the existing efforts already underway locally, nationally and internationally, from which we might draw inspiration or learning. In compiling this report, I have reached out to Indigenous organizations and knowledge keepers, including but not limited to Indigenous members of Treaty 7 Nations, to deepen our shared understanding.

The metro Calgary area is currently home to 1,581,000 people³, which is a 2.2% increase from 2020. This number includes Indigenous people, multi-generational settlers and newcomers.

Calgary's Aboriginal population grew from 62 to 26,575 people between 1951 and 2006.

In 2016 – the last year that census data is available — Aboriginal people made up 2.84% of Calgary's total population (41,000 people). 56% of the Indigenous population identified as Métis, and 41% as First Nations. The motivations for moving into the city include jobs, family dynamics, and education/skills training before returning to their prospective home territory, whether in Alberta or elsewhere in Canada.⁴

WHAT MATTERS?

The Truth and Reconciliation Committee's *94 Calls to Action* are informing many different frameworks for reconciliation or decolonization within and across institutions. The report sets out what Canada needs to do in terms of reconciliation, with and within Indigenous communities. It has been said that it will take at least 7 generations to begin to heal from the trauma that has been inflicted on Canada's Indigenous communities by the Residential Schools system that was in place for more than a century. With the current findings of the lost souls of our children in areas such as Kamloops Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation, Cowessess First Nation and more such findings to come for other First Nations across Canada, this step forward in awareness has meant a step backwards in the healing process. Yet it has become evident that the process of finding those lost souls via ground-penetrating radar, must continue to be able to bring our lost children home. These findings have re-opened many wounds, not only for the Elders in our communities, but for all those who have attended Residential schools across Canada, for their children, and for their children's children. Once again, the process of healing across generations is an important part of *what matters*. Municipalities and civic-minded organizations all have a role to play in this truth-seeking, healing and reconciliation. At the forefront of all that has happened in the recent findings of these lost children, this truth-telling and healing is what matters.

Encouragingly, municipalities are now becoming more inclusive, and are engaging Indigenous communities more frequently and more respectfully. For example, former Calgary Mayor Naheed Nenshi consulted local/regional Elders on the appropriateness and format of this year's Canada Day celebrations. The City of Calgary has initiated an engagement process. In May 2016 a report called White Goose Flying Report was tabled by the Calgary Urban Aboriginal Initiative Committee (CUAIC) to give an overview of issues or concerns, and recommendations are slowly being acted upon by the city of Calgary.⁵ The White Goose Flying Report will be covered in more detail later in this paper. *Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples: A Holistic Approach* is a toolkit created recently for municipalities as a guide to begin engaging with Indigenous Peoples within Canada.⁶

Aaron Franks, Senior Advisor for First Nations Information Governance Centre, generously shared some insights on how to move forward with respect to measuring community wellbeing and prosperity, some of which are recounted in this report. One important such topic is "vocalization". This refers to Indigenous voice and validation so their concerns, issues and ideas can be raised in another government context, and addressed with respect. Vocalization in action means taking on an advocacy role, whether, for example, one works within or external to the City of Calgary.

The past year and a half the world was dominated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Elders spoke often about how this pandemic had a huge impact to the Indigenous population both on and off reserve. The impact to mental health, the feeling of disconnection from social activities, and loss due to higher death rates for those that have been impacted. The Indigenous people are a resilient people, but COVID-19, has brought a new way of living that has been challenging for everyone within the Indigenous communities, as well as among the general public.

Elders also shared concerns about having to turn to technology to stay connected. Learning a new skill, such as using the online meeting platforms Zoom, Teams, and Google Meet was made harder for the Elders due to having limited interactions to family members who were more technically savvy. Once Elders understood how to connect via online platforms, virtual circles became an important means for sharing their stories and concerns. This new means of social interaction had become a lifeline to keeping engaged with others socially, emotionally and intellectually.

Now that vaccination uptake has increased and the pandemic in Canada has begun to subside, society is returning somewhat back to normality. Interactions between the Indigenous community and non-Indigenous people will return more frequently to in-person conversations. This can help foster a more coherent and generative discussion. Conversations and actions can take place more frequently in Calgary that address the chronic and systemic lack of inclusion, which characterizes virtually any issue that may arise.

Inclusivity of all Indigenous peoples across the board, to be given a voice and validation of their concerns has been the forefront of any issues regarding *what matters*. Continuing with open dialogue and addressing of concerns must be done so in a way that includes voices from all members of the surrounding Treaty 7.

Another theme that has been shared from Elders and others consulted include the implementation of language, as this is a barrier in determining how to express an oral tradition. It will be a unique challenge as we think about *measuring what matters* to include the oral traditions and languages of the Indigenous community that Calgary serves.

WHAT THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY IS SAYING

After being with the Indigenous community over the spring and summer and listening to their insights and concerns about *measuring what matters*, following is a list of important emphases and recurring themes:

- **Belonging and identity:** In the month of May 2021, St. Mary's University held the *Virtual Indigenous Voices Series* with facilitators such as Casey Eagle Speaker, Edmee Comstock, Evelyn Good Striker and Tim Fox. The series focused on the COVID-19 pandemic, resiliency, and how we collectively move forward with guidance from the Elders and Knowledge Keepers during the past year. Belonging and identity were central themes of these discussions. Steve Kootenay-Jobin, Aboriginal Housing Coordinator at Mount Royal University, noted that many Indigenous students who move to the city for education encounter culture shock. This culture of entering an educational setting impacts the individual's coping mechanism, and can hamper their ability to succeed.
- **Engagement and inclusion:** Many gatherings, circles, and meetings have occurred over the last decade with the Indigenous community. The topic of how to include Indigenous people has been approached from many different dimensions, and is always in a turning motion, like that of the medicine wheel. The continuing questions of how to engage and incorporate Indigenous perspectives into any conversation recurs in every forum, and the Elder's state repeatedly that the time to stop talking is over – it is time to act and re-act. Many advised that that it's important to including Indigenous voices not just for Indigenous well-being, but for *everyone's* well-being, and in order to achieve a better future with understanding and inclusivity.
- **Appreciate the Indigenous worldview:** It is important to ingraining Indigenous ways of knowing; which requires opening conversations respectfully, acknowledging and respecting their truths, and moving forward in partnership. Steps must be taken to understand and empathize with how an Indigenous person sees his/her world around them and where they belong in society.
- **Engage Elders and be prepared to listen differently:** Elder engagement, along with engaging other community members, will open up conversations to new possibilities. It is vital to hear concerns and perspectives on matters like education, health, and social supports. Organizations, researchers and citizens should be respectful when engaging the Elders for guidance. Assumptions can cause more harm, so it is important to be direct in conversation to find the way towards a more cohesive outcome. Researchers, analysts, data scientists and evaluators often expect linear flows of logic and narrative. Elders, however, typically gift and share stories in an elliptical or other non-linear way, where insights can remain hidden and facts and figures don't lie in plain sight. One must have strong listening skills, patience, a deep sense of wonder and be comfortable with metaphor, anecdotes and complex narratives in order to gain insight into what matters to Elders.
- **Acknowledge Indigenous diversity and avoid pan-Indigeneity:** Calgary is generally on the right track with regard to including urban Indigenous citizens/residents, but also in understanding that categorizing urban Indigenous population under one pan-Indigenous umbrella needs to be changed. The urban population consists not only of First Nation members of the Treaty 7 Confederacy (who in turn belong to specific nations), but also includes Metis, Inuit, and Status and Non-status First Nations peoples from other areas from coast to coast to coast in Canada who have come to call Calgary home. Under the umbrella of "Indigenous", we cannot speak for each other mainly because we are all different. We can only speak for ourselves and our own nations. Again, being able to sit with, and share in the gifts of, an Elder or other individual within a different cultural identity, is a sign of respect and essential to seeking a deeper truth.
- **Understand history and context:** The Elders are clear that before you can help others, you need to educate yourself and understand what you are trying to accomplish. Understand Canadian history regarding the First Peoples of this land, read about the Residential Schools, and listen to the stories of the people with respect and an open mind.
- **Decolonize data collection:** The question of who is the data collector and who is the subject of data collection is important. What does this *look* like? We have to visibly exist – both as data collectors and data subjects - in a good way. We belong here, it is our home too. When I mention this, I am interpreting what conversations the Elders have expressed in the form of inclusion, and in every aspect of communication. The truth is that our population has so much to offer in how to work together. But if the same questions are continually asked at every circle, and in every 'research' process, then this truth begins to unravel and become misinterpreted. It is also important to understanding that data does not fully measure an Indigenous perspective, and data as the power to either hinder or help the community.
- **Relationships over data:** Professional relationships must also be authentic and meaningful. Be correct and be truthful. Intentions have to be certain for the people you are with and who else comes to the table in conversation. Be mindful when you create relationships with people, and ensure that your intentions are true.
- **Recognize that boundaries are fluid:** Issues of services for both on and off reserve Indigenous peoples must be addressed regardless of whether the focus is on "Calgary" per se. The city boundary should be seen as much more porous, as many people call both Calgary and on-reserve settings home (and, after all, Calgary is embedded in Treaty 7).

INCORPORATING INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES

Assuming Measuring What Matters proceeds beyond the feasibility stage, it is vital to consider the following principles and practices with respect to incorporating Indigenous perspectives:

- Stay connected with the Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers. Keep the circle strong and growing.
- Engage youth in conversation, so they can have a voice currently and for the future.
- Choose how to remain active (as well as proactive) in the approach to Indigenous inclusivity. Educate and prepare yourself so you can then include others.
- Be ready, alert, and well prepared for ever-deeper conversations in terms of well-being. (The Indigenous community is in constant flux and dynamics are constantly changing).
- Explain what the project is about in terms that the Indigenous community can find meaning and purpose in. Avoid overly academic or bureaucratic language, share in concrete 'layman's terms' how this will relate to, or be helpful within, the Indigenous community.
- Continue to be active and part of the TRC's 94 Calls to Action. Choose one call to begin with and share how you want to use the TRC's 94 Calls to Action to better understand the true context.
- Mandate cultural sensitivity training for non-Indigenous members/entities and/or training with respect to understanding Indigenous Peoples and the history and impacts of colonization. Be proactive in honoring all Indigenous peoples who call Calgary home.

METRICS TO CONSIDER

It is important to note that this paper has not been focused on surfacing specific metrics. It is more important, as we consider *measuring what matters*, to spend time focusing on *what matters*. The metrics and indicators will flow from this over time.

Indicators on measurements are also transitional and may possibly take years to develop, or in some cases may never fit a western system of understanding. There are important challenges with respect to how one translates knowledge in an oral tradition into measurable indicators, or whether it is even appropriate to attempt to do so.

The following are some important considerations when thinking about metrics and indicators:

- Co-develop metrics and indicators with Indigenous partners and participants.
- Understand that Calgary is constantly changing, not only demographically and physically, but with regard to its relationship to the surrounding areas, as well as to Treaty 7.
- Collaborate with those entities – such as Indigenous community organizations, health authorities, etc. - that are already collecting or providing statistics. Work with the City of Calgary to improve their own inclusivity practices and thinking around Indigenous data and metrics.
- Engage Calgary's police force, in helping define and revisit some measurements. Understand better what is needed in terms to providing safe environments, again in partnership with the Indigenous community.
- Explore the degree to which Indigenous nations are honoured and recognized during events. Clearly, this is on the rise, but can we glean more meaningful insights than “X percentage of events now include an Acknowledgement of Territory”, for example.
- Consider incorporating social media data. With the use of platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, we may be able to gain richer insight into how, for example, reciprocity is enacted, evaluated and in constant flux.
- Data is in constant flux, is not stagnant, is not necessarily neutral, and is in constant change either for the good or the bad. How data is used and interpreted is important to consider.
- Each new generation of Indigenous people bring new perspectives and capacities, so the approach to data collection may be tentative and extremely cautious now given who (or which institutions) tend to control and interpret data. But this may change over as more Indigenous people lead research, lead community coalitions, and lead municipal and other forms of decision-making.
- As we journey further along in measuring what matters, there are other cities, places and contexts that might have insights to offer. The New Zealand Living Standards Framework, for example, used a decade-long co-design process, and looks specifically at the prosperity well-being of Maori, Pacific Islanders and other Indigenous groups. This may or may not be useful for our context, but there is much out there to explore.

Sometimes the most important things are impossible (or nearly so) to measure. It is worth considering first and foremost what is important to both urban and rural Indigenous population before evaluating whether what is important is amenable to being measured. Being an indigenous person within a western context is challenging enough. Adhering to what the Elders have already spoken about, but then trying to fit that into a western frame is all the more challenging.

APPENDIX A: GOVERNMENT-SOURCED MEASURES OF WELL-BEING

An important consideration is looking at the degree to which existing ‘off-the-shelf’ data and efforts to collect, compile and analyze that data. To what extent is it suitable for measuring Indigenous community well-being and prosperity. This section will focus in on two such efforts, one at the national level and one at the municipal level.

This past year (2021) the National Census was conducted, where population data will be updated and made available upon completion to Canadians. The Community Well-Being (CWB) Index, which is based on Census data, “is a measure used to assess socio-economic well-being for Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities over time.” A national overview of the CWB Index was released in 2019 and is updated annually, and this report includes all First Nation, Inuit and Non-Indigenous communities within Canada. The data for the Metis population is currently excluded from this report, as the sample size of Metis settlements is too small (i.e., only eight settlement areas within Alberta). The index includes statistics categorized into 4 components:

1. Education
2. Labour Force
3. Income
4. Housing

Within this index the definition of Well-Being is as follows:

“Well-being means different things to different people and the CWB is not intended to be the only or the best way of defining well-being in all circumstances. The CWB includes the 4 components described above because they are widely accepted as being important to well-being.” (pg.3)

The National Census will also help urban communities understand gaps and increasing shifts in both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous population to enhance their own capacity to achieve well-being within their own communities. This census, however, is not fully reliable as an accurate picture of how communities are doing and what they are experiencing. It is not clear as well that we are collecting the information necessary to plan for a better future.

In 2017, The City of Calgary’s Indigenous Policy and Indigenous Policy Framework was created by the Calgary Aboriginal Urban Affairs Committee (CAUAC). The report that this is based upon - *White Goose Flying* (2016) - is accessible on the City of Calgary website for all to view. This policy and framework is a step forward toward reconciliation for non-Indigenous stakeholders in working with Treaty 7 and Urban Indigenous communities within the boundaries of Calgary. This framework clearly underscores all the areas that need to be addressed by the City of Calgary in particular. The handbook given to City Council will help those individuals who are in positions of authority and influence to actively engage, listen to, and ultimately implement concerns that are brought forth by the Indigenous community. Some of the key findings in the White Goose Flying Report include the following:

- Indigenous Calgarians struggle to find their cultural identity. The Indigenous experience, is highly fluid and context-specific, meaning there are countless examples of what such cultural pluralities can look like. The City of Calgary’s Indigenous population, jumped by a staggering 75% between 1996 and 2006, and will continue to expand in the coming years. The increased growth of the population will also have an impact on Indigenous peoples’ identity and the direction the city of Calgary will need to move forward in terms of inclusivity with the urban indigenous population.

APPENDIX B: PEOPLE CONSULTED

I would like to thank the Treaty 7 community, Elders and other nations who have been wonderful in taking time to let me take part in their circles of conversations. There have been numerous Elders and community members within the city of Calgary who have shared their thoughts on what they understood well-being means for community as a whole. I would also like to thank all the organizations that took the time to meet with me during this project.

Elders and knowledge keepers:

- Hayden Melting Tallow (Siksika)
- Rachel First Rider (Siksika)
- Doreen Spence (Saddle Lake Cree)
- Tim Fox (Kainai)
- Norton & Alvine Eagle Speaker (Siksika)
- Martin & Pam Heavy Head, (Kainai)
- Dakota Eagle Woman (Calgary)
- Evelyn Good Sticker (Kainai/Lakota/Dakota)
- Casey Eagle Speaker (Kainai)

Others:

- Dawn Boustead, Kirby Redwood - Miskanawah Family Resource Network,
- Michelle Scott - Indigenous Initiatives Director, St. Mary's University
- Aaron Franks, Peigi Wilson and Melissa Dane - First Nations Information Governance Center
- Anna Ross - Native Info Exchange (NIE)
- Jacie Alook - Native Counselling Services, Calgary
- Rob St. Denis - Community Futures Treaty 7 (CFT7),
- Whiley Eagle Speaker - The Alex Community Health Centre,
- Katharine McGowan - Mount Royal University

APPENDIX C: REFERENCES AND RESOURCES CONSULTED

- Calgary Aboriginal Urban Affairs Committee (CAUAC). *White Goose Flying: A Report to Calgary City Council on the Indian Residential School Truth and Reconciliation, Calls to Action*, May 2016. City of Calgary.
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ENDNOTES

1. Calgary Foundation Land Acknowledgement, long version, modified and edited to include a more meaningful statement.
2. Measuring What Matters, Project Plan, Mount Royal University. This project aims to enhance access to information through indicators that helps to understand the question, “How is Calgary really performing as a city?”
3. Calgary, Canada Metro Area Population 1950-2021, web accessed July 2, 2021. This page is an indicator of how Calgary as a city has grown over the 71 years and expected rates of increase in population.
4. City of Calgary website accessed July 2, 2021. Home: Social programs and services, Community services, Indigenous peoples, Aboriginal, First Nations, Métis and Inuit. This site indicates the most current statistic of the population of the Indigenous population in the city of Calgary.
5. White Goose Flying Report, this document is Calgary’s response to the final report of Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendations. This report has identified where Calgary has Identified Five Calls to Action by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, as containing the word ‘municipal’ in them. CAUAC felt these were very important and should be implemented in due course.
6. Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples: A Holistic Approach. Toolkit for Inclusive Municipalities in Canada and Beyond. United Nations educational Scientific and Cultural Organization. June 2019.

