

Report Summary



Building Accountability to Indigenous Communities

Original Report by Nicole Eshkakogan Ph.D. (c) and Thulasy Lettner B.Sc.
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Project Overview

In Spring 2019 CommunityWise Resource Centre began the *Building Accountability to Indigenous Communities Project* as part of their Anti-Racist Organizational Change (AROC) and Equity Framework initiative. The key goals of the project were:

- To increase organizational awareness on the systemic issues experienced by Indigenous people and communities in the Treaty 7 region.
- To identify what is needed to strengthen the organizational structures and culture of CommunityWise to be more sensitive and responsive to those issues.
- To identify how to build accountability to Indigenous people and communities.
- To identify a resource tool CommunityWise can develop and implement to use and share on how to build accountability to Indigenous communities.



Design and Methodology

The project was designed and headed by CommunityWise Equity Framework Coordinator Thulasy Lettner B.Sc. and Indigenous Organizational Consultant Nicole Eshkakogan Ph.D(c), and was supported by an Indigenous Advisory Group made up of one Elder (Jackie Bromley) and six community members living in the Treaty 7 region. Additionally, members of the CommunityWise Board of Directors and Staff Collective acted as participants, providing valuable feedback throughout the project.

The Indigenous Organizational Consultant and Indigenous Advisory group worked together to develop tailored self-assessment tools, based on existing surveys, in order to evaluate the level of Indigenous Cultural Competency among members of the CommunityWise Board and Staff Collective. Members were asked to complete the customized self-assessment, participate in two training workshops, and to complete follow-up evaluations. The findings from these assessments were then reviewed by the Indigenous Organizational Consultant and the Indigenous Advisory Group and used to make recommendations about what specific steps could be taken by CommunityWise in order to build accountability to Indigenous communities.

Organizational Assessment

An internal literature review was conducted by the Indigenous Organizational Consultant, who found that the inclusion of a smudging policy, employment equity policy, and the consistent inclusion of Treaty 7 Land Acknowledgements in documents, online content, and at events since AROC was launched in 2016 were positive first steps toward building accountability to Indigenous Communities.

In addition to the literature review, an Indigenous Cultural Competency Assessment was completed by the CommunityWise staff collective and board members. The assessment found that while board members and staff were aware that Indigenous people faced systemic discrimination but were less informed about the specific nature of anti-Indigenous racism under colonialism. Participants generally acknowledged that gaps existed in their understanding of Indigenous people, cultures, history, and identities. Respondents said they were interested in learning more in order to be more personally and professionally accountable to Indigenous communities. They expressed an especially strong interest in increasing their understanding and awareness of the ongoing impacts of colonization and intergenerational trauma, learning about culturally informed communication methods and protocols, and in finding ways to best support decolonization efforts and engage as allies in the workplace.

Training and Impact Assessment

CommunityWise Staff and Board members, as well as members of the Indigenous Advisory Group, participated in the KAIROS Blanket Exercise and the Treaty 7 Indigenous Ally Toolkit & Designing for Progress and Transformation Workshop. These training resources were chosen based on the results of the Organizational Indigenous Cultural Competency Assessment.

Evaluations were provided to the 12 people who participated in the trainings in order to assess the impact of the workshops. Participants reported that they had learned a great deal about the ongoing systemic issues faced by Indigenous people as a result of colonialism and about the intergenerational nature of trauma. They also indicated that in coming to realize that colonization is an ongoing process and that this helped them to unlearn harmful misconceptions and understand the differences in the lived experiences between Indigenous people and settlers. Participants also expressed that they had come to better understand what they can do both as individuals and as part of CommunityWise to help build accountability to Indigenous people and communities thanks to the training.

Feedback Evaluation

Upon reviewing the feedback provided by participants in their final evaluations four key themes were identified. 1) The need to develop and implement a specific Indigenous accountability framework, 2) the need to establish, enhance and sustain meaningful relationships with Indigenous people and communities, 3) the need to be deliberate in creating an inclusive environment for Indigenous people and 4) the need to continue to provide Indigenous education and training opportunities for the CommunityWise board and staff, especially training focused on anti-Indigenous racism. By building on the existing AROC Framework these goals are both measurable and achievable with the resources available to CommunityWise.

Recommendations

“The Final recommendation of the report is that CommunityWise should enhance the Anti-Racist Organizational Change (AROC) and Equity Framework in order to build accountability to Indigenous communities by incorporating decolonizing and anti-racist practices which are rooted in the local indigenous cultures and communities of diverse Indigenous identities that make up Treaty 7, setting measurable goals, and dedicating the necessary resources to capacity building, sustainability and developing long-term solutions.”

The findings of the final report identified several key recommendations to help CommunityWise expand on the existing AROC Framework and provided a list of suggested next steps to achieve them:

Recommendation	Suggested Steps
Incorporating the Treaty 7 Land Acknowledgement throughout all program documentation and knowledge translation activities by CommunityWise.	Conduct a review of all CommunityWise documents, including website and social media sites, and update them to include a Treaty 7 Land Acknowledgement.
Creating spaces for self-determined and Indigenous-led solutions and services within the Framework.	Continue to have the Indigenous Advisory Group (or a member of the Advisory Group) work with CommunityWise on enhancing the Framework.
Working with Indigenous organizations and partners to receive ongoing training, education, and awareness in areas including, but not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Legacy of Colonialism and impacts on intergenerational trauma and disadvantage. • Indigenous anti-bias and anti-racism. • Local Indigenous cultures, communities and Indigenous identities with a focus on engagement and relationship building protocols. • Indigenous gender wellness and 2SLGBTQQA issues. 	Develop an Indigenous education and training plan, drawing upon existing community connections and relationships to ensure that education efforts are ongoing and sustainable. Amend the CommunityWise policies and procedures to include up to 4 working days per year specifically for staff training and education on Indigenous issues. Continue to seek out funding sources to develop training tailored to the needs of CommunityWise.
Scaling up the CommunityWise Anti-Racist Organizational Change Toolkit to include Digital Indigenous Storytelling to provide culturally informed education and training on how to implement Indigenous decolonizing and anti-racist organizational practices.	Recruit up to 5 Indigenous people of varying backgrounds to share their thoughts and experiences of organizational racism and how it can be addressed. Participants should represent and be able to speak to a diversity of gender and sexual identities, as racism is also a gendered experience.



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