

Inclusive Voices: Indigenous Traditional and Ecological Knowledge Systems in Climate Change Adaptation
across Canada. Indigenous Climate Change Adaptation Gathering
(March 18-19, 2019, in Ottawa, Ontario)

Final Report

Prepared by:



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Introduction

This final report provides a brief summary of the Indigenous Climate Change Adaptation Gathering 2019 (ICCAG 2019) held on March 18-20, 2019 in Ottawa, Ontario. Building upon ICCAG 2018, this report provides insight, knowledge and Indigenous worldviews on best practices and challenges relating to climate change adaptation in First Nations across Canada. In addition, the report provides a 'behind the scenes story' of the gathering and is intended to provide valuable data for First Nations communities, the First Nation Adapt program and other federal departments and agencies interested in pursuing partnerships, sharing data and co-designing Indigenous-led climate change initiatives.

Planning and Preparation

Focus on Theme and Planning

In preparation for the ICCAG 2019, the planning team reviewed last year's participant recommendations and identified three potential themes to consider.

ICCAG 2019 Themes

1. Indigenous Traditional and Ecological Knowledge and recognizing the value of the Indigenous worldview
2. Youth inclusion in science and technology professions and Community Climate Change initiatives
3. First Nation Climate Change Adaptation projects – First Nations-led project documentary series

The ICCAG 2019 would be hosted by Okwaho Equal Source at the Delta Hotels located in Ottawa's City Centre. An additional day was scheduled (March 20) for the ICCAG Advisory Circle at the same location. A brief summary of the Advisory Circle meeting will also be provided in this report. Okwaho Equal Source would complete all event logistics and planning for the three days and design a dedicated gathering information webpage at <https://IndigenousClimateHub.ca>

The Gathering

On March 18th and 19th 2019, the ICCAG took place in Ottawa, Ontario. The event was attended by First Nation Adapt community participants from across the country. Similar to last year, the two-day gathering provided an effective platform for a national dialogue on current community projects. Five formal presentations were given by representatives from British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario and Quebec. Regional roundtable discussions took place and were photographed and graphic recorded. The photographs will be accessible on the IndigenousClimateHub.ca website and will be provided to the First Nations community participants involved in the First Nation Adapt program.

ICCAG Day 1 Summary

Similar to the first day of the ICCAG 2018, Indigenous participants and First Nation Adapt program staff signed waivers and release forms. These forms provided information on what would be collected and for what purposes (i.e. for a final report). The release forms also asked for participant permission to record the event. Special arrangements were made for participants if they did not want to be photographed or recorded. Breakfast and networking took place between 8:00am-9:00am on both days. On day one, after breakfast, gathering participants were welcomed by the host, Okwaho Equal Source, and each participant received a gift in honour of their long journeys and willingness to knowledge their sharing. Upon receiving these gifts, gathering participants were invited to join a large sharing circle. The sharing/talking circle was chosen to start both days of the gathering because it provided grounding and a

culturally appropriate safe space for all participants to enter the day in ceremony. Ojibway-Cree Elder Bernard Nelson provided an introduction and a traditional opening by welcoming all the participants to the traditional unceded territory of the Anishinaabe (Algonquin) people and shared a traditional prayer and song. The participants were then invited to participate in a smudging ceremony. While the smudging ceremony was occurring, Erica W., First Nation Adapt Program, (Acting) Manager provided opening remarks and welcomed all the First Nation delegates to the gathering. Erica's message included an invitation for all participants to share and learn from the experiences and knowledge at the gathering and to take this knowledge home to their respective communities. In addition, tobacco was offered by Erica to all of the participants around the circle to honour them for their journeys and their commitments to share their knowledge and worldview with everyone. The offering of tobacco by the First Nation Adapt program was a meaningful gesture and a sign of good faith to form long-term relationship building and friendships with the participants. The offering tobacco is a traditional Indigenous practice that is very honorable and respectful peacebuilding practice. After the sharing circle, lead facilitator Shyra Barberstock provided an overview of the agenda and introduced the event team. In addition, the ICCAG participants were also introduced to Jennifer Shepherd of Living Tapestries who provided information on her role as a graphic recorder. The graphic recorder was hired for the two days upon the recommendation of the First Nation Adapt program for the purposes of capturing key themes in a visual format. Indigenous Traditional and Ecological Knowledge presentations were shared with the group on both days, which demonstrated specific Indigenous community and/or cultural connections to the land and climate realities. The presentations were impactful and contained insightful information and captured the importance of Indigenous knowledge in climate change adaptation. The presentations were integrated into the two-day workshop at the request of the First Nations community/organization representatives. Presenters included:

- Mark Biagi of Kitsumkalum Fish and Wildlife Operations
- Jeff Eustache of First Nations Emergency Services
- Stan Kapashesit of Moose Cree First Nation
- Danny Chilton of Conseil de la Nation Atikamekw

For most of the afternoon, the ICCAG participants participated in interactive group sessions in small regional groups of 5-7 people. These small groups were created to ensure that all participants would have time to share their stories and learn more about the other participants' projects. After the group activities, one project leader from each group shared key themes with everyone. These themes were captured on flipchart paper and were collected by Okwaho Equal Source so that themes could be incorporated into this final report. The key themes are summarized later in this report (see 'Key Themes'). After the group activities, Jennifer Shepherd of Living Tapestries shared the graphic recording for the day and invited the participants to come up with a name for what was captured. The day closed with a talking circle so that ICCAG participants could share their experiences and insights from the day. Elder Bernard Nelson provided a closing prayer so that all participants could enjoy the rest of their evening with a 'good mind.'

Introduction of the IndigenousClimateHub.ca Website

After lunch, a presentation by Dr. Paul Chaput and film debut of the Indigenous Climate Change Adaptation Gathering 2018 film documentary he created was shown. The response and feedback from participants after watching the film was well received. Following the film, Shyra Barberstock introduced to the participants the new IndigenousClimateHub.ca website <https://IndigenousClimateHub.ca>. During this introductory session, Shyra with the assistance of her team demonstrated the functionality and online capabilities of the website including the Member Network Portal that was created in response to recommendations and feedback from the ICCAG 2018 participants. The website demonstration offered an opportunity for participants to provide suggestions on how to improve the website and most important explore ways in which they can contribute content to the website. In conjunction with the website debut was a workshop on marketing and branding, to encourage participants to contribute their stories on the website and leverage the online platform as a primary climate change resource.

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ICCAG - Day 2 Summary

The second day of the ICCAG similar to day one, started with breakfast and networking. After breakfast, participants were again invited to the sharing circle. Elder Bernard Nelson opened the circle with a traditional prayer and smudging ceremony. The participants were then invited to share their thoughts and experiences from the previous day.

Similar to ICCAG 2018, organizing the tables by region proved to be an effective method for sharing information as there were many synergies and commonalities explored. Having First Nation Adapt representatives join the roundtable discussions was well received by the participants whom were all eager to share their community challenges and triumphs in combating climate change in their traditional lands.

To close the gathering, participants were invited to join the sharing circle to share any last insights and feedback from the whole event. Although many participants were tired after the two full-days, the circle was very energetic and impactful, and a lot of heartfelt messages were shared. Overall, participants provided positive messages with those around the circle, including messages about the importance of coming together as a community, supporting one another, about hope (that had arisen from relationship-building at the ICCAG), and how the story of what happened at the ICCAG now needed to be shared. Acknowledgement and thanks were given by the participants to Elder Bernard Nelson, the organizers (Okwaho Equal Source), the First Nation Adapt program, and to Creative Consulting for capturing the gathering on film.

Elder Bernard Nelson closed the circle with a traditional prayer and a hugging circle. This special closing allowed everyone – ICCAG participants, First Nation Adapt program staff, Okwaho Equal source staff, and the Creative Consulting team to close the circle as friends, family, and most importantly, community.

Key themes

In this section, the main key themes from the group sessions are summarized. The key themes include:

1. Communication
2. Traditional Knowledge and Culture

Communication

Overall, the most prevalent theme was the need for value-added communications strategies and a collective interest by the First Nation participants to increase networking opportunities and share knowledge.

Numerous recommendations were offered on how to increase local, regional and national Indigenous climate change awareness. A focus on sharing 'real time' information and the suggestion of an 'app' or dedicated social media plan and external website specific

to the First Nation Adapt program was also discussed. The communication theme also sparked discussion on ways to increase community engagement efforts. An emphasis on the establishment of a First Nation community-based climate change network or local Indigenous-led chapters was a topic of great interest by many. Communication barriers were also discussed more so on how to resolve known and existing barriers in First Nations communities in general. Of notable interest, participants observed and shared similar stories of communication breakdown at the political level and socio-economic issues that negatively impact their respective communities. Many participants agreed, that the need for dedicated communications plans that are inclusive of community-based initiatives such as climate change projects would enhance awareness at the community and regional levels.

Traditional Knowledge and Culture

The recognition and inclusion of traditional knowledge and ways of knowing into climate change strategies was another significant theme brought forward. Participants acknowledged that the cultural and spiritual connections and linkages to the land are valued and command the same respect as scientific findings. Further, participants recognized Elders and Knowledge Keepers of holding great influence in not only culture and its protection and preservation but as timekeepers that could provide context to historic ecosystems and attest to the imbalances and changes impacting the land. Community-based cultural education and traditional learning programs were identified as many participants believed that an integral part to the protection of the land was to connect with the land through cultural identity, more specific, learning the language and traditional practices. Another related topic was the creation of a regional based traditional knowledge exchange that could bring together youth and elders from neighbouring communities to live on the land, listen to the stories of the land and encourage youth to explore ways they can preserve and protect their traditional territories and prevent further harmful impacts brought on by climate change.

After the ICCAG - recommendations and lessons learned

Lessons and Recommendations - from ICCAG Participants

The prominent key themes have been shared in this final report. However, during the event additional feedback was shared, which can provide the foundation for steps moving forward post-ICCAG. One of the main feedback points made was the request for an online platform to share information on First Nation climate change adaptation projects as they unfold. Having an online platform would provide First Nation Adapt participating communities and organizations with a 'one-stop-shop' for resources, contact information (e.g. helpful contact information for contact in government and complementary support organizations for climate change), and a place to connect (virtually) with other First Nation Adapt participating communities for collaboration, knowledge sharing, and for learning about best practices. This feedback has been helpful to the First Nation Adapt program and to Okwaho Equal Source and plans for the development of a dedicated online interactive website portal for the First Nation Adapt program, is underway.

Reflections, Lessons and Recommendations – from Okwaho Equal Source

As an Indigenous-owned and operated consultancy, it was an honour to design, coordinate and facilitate the Indigenous climate change adaptation gathering. As a company, we did our best to have every aspect of the gathering be Indigenous-led. For example, our staff at the gathering included two Haudenosaunee facilitators from Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory and an Anishinaabe facilitator from Kebaowk First Nation in Kipawa, Quebec. Our film crew was Métis-led. The sound company hired for the event was owned by a Mi'kmaq entrepreneur. And, the catering company for the dinner was Indigenous owned.

On a professional and personal level, we appreciated the openness, warmth and progressive nature of the First Nation Adapt team members that we had the opportunity to develop a relationship with during the development of the ICCAG. We are pleased to share that it was the First Nation Adapt team that first requested an Indigenous facilitator for the gathering, understanding that Indigenous-led was the best way to create a culturally appropriate and safe space for their First Nation Adapt participants. It has truly been a pleasure working with the First Nation Adapt team. And, it was an honour to meet and be in the presence of so many impactful Indigenous climate change leaders. Although the two days were quite busy, we had the opportunity to have several meaningful discussions and felt like we became part of a new community.

From this experience, we feel that the 'best practices' include having an Indigenous climate change gathering that is Indigenous-led. This allowed for cultural competency training for INAC staff and for Indigenous methodologies (i.e., such as talking circles, knowledge sharing and storytelling) to be integrated. Film was also an effective way to capture the stories and 'spirit' of the gathering.

One of the shortcomings of the event was a miscommunication regarding the French translation services. Okwaho Equal Source had originally planned to have French/English translator present, however, a miscommunication with the sound company resulted in having a translation booth, without a translator. This is a 'lesson learned' for the next event. As a company, we recognize the importance of the inclusion of bilingual translation services and we will insure that these services are available at the next event where there are both English and Francophone participants.

Overall, the Okwaho Equal Source team felt inspired by the ICCAG and we look forward to being part of the next steps to bring participating First Nation Adapt communities and organizations together virtually, on the upcoming online platform. In addition, we look forward to sharing the final report and film with the communities that participated with the ICCAG.

Final Discussion and Recommendations

The ICCAG was a special event that created a strong sense of community and family among the members. For this reason, we hope to see more ICCAG gatherings for future cohorts of First Nation Adapt program projects.

Another opportunity that could be explored is having a larger symposium which integrates First Nation Adapt program 'cohorts' from previous years. This symposium could be scaled up as a national initiative, where several communities and organizations could present their projects and connect with climate change experts, researchers, and support organizations and academic institutions. As events such as the ICCAG are effective at finding synergies and identifying key themes, another opportunity would be to follow up with specific regions and have focused design-thinking/open innovation/'hackathon' events to tackle specific issues that are shared by several First Nation communities in those regions.

In closing, the ICCAG was an impactful event and there are several opportunities and spin-offs that could occur as a result of the event. By bringing together Indigenous climate change leaders it has provided rich opportunities for further relationship building and knowledge sharing; and it demonstrates the resilience, creativity, innovation and sophistication of Indigenous communities and organizations to adapt to climate change.

Chi Miigwech (thank you) to the First Nation communities and organizations that travelled near and far to Ottawa/Gatineau for the ICCAG. Thank you also to the First Nation Adapt team for providing the resources to make this happen.



Contact Information:

Okwaho Equal Source Inc.
683 York Rd., PO Box 164
Tyendinga Mohawk Territory, ON
K0K 3A0

Website: <https://okwaho.com>

Tel: (613) 243-9777

Email: admin@okwaho.com

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