

People, Innovation & Collaboration Services Report to
Intergovernmental Affairs Committee
2025 March 20

ISC: UNRESTRICTED
IGA2025-0096

Memorandum of Understanding – The Blackfoot Confederacy and The City of Calgary

PURPOSE

This report follows up on the Council-directed Protocol Agreement drafted for the Blackfoot Confederacy and City of Calgary (IGA2024-0941). Administration is seeking Council's approval of the agreement and a commitment to its implementation.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL DIRECTION

That the Intergovernmental Affairs Committee recommend Council to direct Administration, in support of The City of Calgary's commitment to the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action, to: Scope out and identify the resources needed to support Protocol Agreements with Nations; Begin with scoping and identifying the resources for a Protocol Agreement in response to the request made through the Mayor's Office 2023 November 16 by the Blackfoot Confederacy; Report back to Council on the results of the scoping work and the resources required through the Intergovernmental Affairs Committee no later than the end of Q2, 2024; Direct Administration to commence Protocol (Relationship) Agreement development with the Blackfoot Confederacy and report back with the agreement for approval, no later than Q3 of 2025. Approve Administration's request to apply to the Government of Alberta's Alberta Community Partnership Fund to access matching grant dollars for protocol implementation. Develop a sustainment plan for Protocol (Relationship) Agreements beyond 2026 and report back in Q1 of 2026.

RECOMMENDATION(S):

That the Intergovernmental Affairs Committee recommend that Council:

1. Approve the Memorandum of Understanding on Communication and Cooperation and direct Administration to begin implementation.

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER/GENERAL MANAGER COMMENTS

General Manager Chris Arthurs concurs with this report and recommendations.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), also referred to as a Relationship Agreement or Protocol Agreement, outlines how municipalities and Indigenous groups will engage with one another and establish a collaborative relationship.
- The City of Calgary does not currently have an MOU or Protocol Agreement with any First Nation or Indigenous group and The City has received two requests for the development of MOUs since November 2024. The Province of Alberta has reached three First Nations agreements since 2019.
- With Council direction provided in October 2024, Administration has worked collaboratively with the Blackfoot Confederacy to co-develop an MOU on Communication and Cooperation which has included working with an Elder and drafting

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a corresponding Terms of Reference for Administrative oversight and agreement implementation.

- The City plans to host a Pipe Ceremony and public event to sign the agreement upon Council approval.
- In anticipation of future requests, The City is committed to meeting with any local Indigenous Nation who requests an MOU with The City. Timelines for development will depend on the number of requests in queue and the resources available at the time of the request.

DISCUSSION

Background

On 2023 November 16, the Mayor's Office received a letter from the Blackfoot Confederacy requesting that The City of Calgary enter negotiations to develop of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) (see Attachment 1). MOUs, also referred to as Relationship Agreements or Protocol Agreements, are legally non-binding agreements that outline how local Indigenous groups and municipalities engage with one another and establish a cooperative relationship. Each agreement varies depending on the aspirations of its signatories, and may include guiding principles, areas of mutual interest and convening conditions for meetings and discussions. The Federation of Canadian Municipalitiesⁱ recommends that municipalities establish Protocol Agreements with surrounding Nations because they:

- Present a clear long-term joint vision for the community-to-community relationship;
- Show a willingness to heal past wrongs and renew the relationship between communities;
- Create a formal commitment that protects the relationship from a change in leadership, and signals its importance to staff; and
- Bring together community members in joint celebration to build positive interpersonal relationships.

The Blackfoot Confederacy is the first group to request an agreement of this kind from The City, setting the precedent for other Nations. In November 2024, The City received additional requests from Tsuut'ina (EC2024-1320) and Bearpaw Nations (EC2024-1335). The development of these agreements is currently underway. Administration will consider any future requests from local Indigenous groups and commence work in the order requests are received.

Agreement Development

To better understand how MOUs are developed, City Administration undertook scoping work to capture other municipalities learnings to support initial conversations with the Blackfoot Confederacy regarding a development approach. An Elder was identified early in the process to provide guidance on agreement content, ceremony and cultural protocols that would serve as parallel processes throughout the work. Following Council's approval on 2024 September 23, collaborative drafting began through regular meetings between the Confederacy and City Administrative staff.

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Proposed Agreement

The agreement developed is organized in two corresponding documents. The first, the Memorandum of Understanding, provides an overarching principle-based agreement that commits to good intentions and future collaboration. The MOU title is used instead of protocol agreement to signal a partnership, as opposed to a guide for cultural protocols. Once approved, this document will be signed by the Mayor and Blackfoot Chiefs.

The second administrative document, the Terms of Reference, outlines the logistical details for meeting and implementation via the establishment of a Technical Committee who oversees the work and includes intergovernmental leaders from both partners. The Terms of Reference provides greater flexibility by allowing Administration, through the committee co-chairs, to update the terms as the work evolves. This format also borrows from The City's Intermunicipal Committees' Terms of References for its regional partners.

Resourcing

In September 2024, Council directed Administration to apply to the Government of Alberta's Alberta Community Partnership Fund to access matching grant dollars for protocol implementation. Administration applied to the fund at the end of January 2025 and is awaiting a decision. If received, funding will be used to pilot convening mechanisms including a hosting budget for working table meetings, ceremonies or gatherings, and over time pay for coordination, feedback integration and evaluation. Funding will also support the Confederacy by removing the administrative costs of convening and piloting implementation structures.

Last fall, Council also directed Administration to develop a sustainment plan for Protocol Agreements beyond 2026 and report back to Council through the Intergovernmental Affairs Committee in Q1 of 2026 (Refer to IGA2024-0941). Administration will use learnings from its first year implementing The City's MOU with the Blackfoot Confederacy to inform this plan.

Next Steps

With Council's approval of the MOU, Administration will proceed with the planning and implementation of a Pipe Ceremony and signing. This will serve as a parallel process marking the commitment to the agreement from City leaders, Blackfoot Chiefs and Elders.

Following the Ceremony and signing, Administration will convene its first Technical Committee meeting to begin planning for implementation. This will include establishing collaborative working tables around areas of mutual interest.

EXTERNAL ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Public engagement was undertaken | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Dialogue with interested parties was undertaken |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Public/interested parties were informed | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public communication or engagement was not required |

IMPLICATIONS

Social

MOUs create conditions for mutual respect and sustained collaboration with local First Nations. By building trust and strengthening communication, The City is a better neighbour and partner to the Blackfoot Confederacy. MOUs are intended to be longstanding commitments that extend beyond political terms. They are a mechanism that ensures social, environmental and economic priorities are regularly discussed and advanced for both partners.

Environmental

MOUs can facilitate joint environmental initiatives and practices that result in more effective environmental stewardship.

Economic

In 2021-2022, Indigenous-owned businesses generated approximately \$552 millionⁱⁱ in revenue in Calgary and on Treaty 7 First Nation lands. Indigenous-owned businesses operate on and beyond First Nations lands and are active across every sector. In building and strengthening relationships with Indigenous Nations, agreements offer an opportunity to diversify and expand the city's economy through new businesses and partnerships.

Service and Financial Implications

Existing operating funding - one-time

In September 2024, Council directed Administration to develop a sustainment plan for Protocol Agreements beyond 2026 and report back to Council through the Intergovernmental Affairs Committee in Q1 of 2026 (Refer to IGA2024-0941). With the current pace of agreement requests exceeding Administration's resource capacity, there may be delays in commencing agreement development. To manage in the interim, work will be initiated on agreements in the order requests are received and as capacity is created.

RISK

- There is a reputational and relational risk for The City if it declines the proposed agreement or does not invest adequate resources in its implementation. This may be perceived as disrespectful and erode trust in The City's commitment to Reconciliation and its collaboration with First Nations.
- There is a risk that other local Indigenous groups may perceive that the Blackfoot Confederacy received special treatment from The City since they are the first to sign an agreement.
- There is a risk that implementation may be unsustainable with current resources.
- There is a risk that once this agreement is complete, other local First Nations may request an agreement, fostering stronger relationships and collaborative opportunities, though resulting in additional work and resource limitations.

ATTACHMENT(S)

1. Blackfoot Confederacy Protocol Agreement Request
2. Memorandum of Understanding on Communication and Cooperation
3. Presentation

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Department Circulation

General Manager/Director	Department	Approve/Consult/Inform
Chris Arthurs	People, Innovation & Collaboration Services	Approve

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ⁱ *Strong Together Tool Kit*, September 2015, Federation of Canadian Municipalities, p.18. [stronger-together-toolkit-cedi.pdf](#)

ⁱⁱ *Indigenous Economic Contribution Study*, December 2023. Calgary Economic Development, The City of Calgary and MNP LLP, p. 19. [CED2023_Indigenous-Economic-Contribution-Study.pdf](#)