

ACCESSING DECENT WORK

Perspectives from Indigenous
Support Services in Toronto

2018



TORONTO ABORIGINAL
SUPPORT SERVICES
COUNCIL

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Key Themes

Lateral Violence, Cultural
Supports, Perception of
lower wages

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Commitments**

For immediate
implementation
(6 month – 1 year)

Action Items

Grant-makers and funders

WHO IS TASSC?

The Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council (TASSC) is a not-for-profit research, policy, and advocacy organization that addresses the social determinants of health to improve and enhance the socio-economic prospects and cultural well-being of Aboriginal peoples living in the City of Toronto.

Membership

TASSC is made up of 12 local Indigenous support service organizations and 4 associate members. The executive directors and their designates provide governance and direction to TASSC.

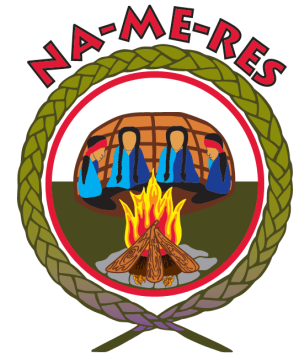
(Logos of our members listed to the right)



Oahas
ONTARIO ABORIGINAL
HIV/AIDS STRATEGY



WIGWAMEN



PROJECT FUNDER

Since 2014, Atkinson has invested over \$7.5 million in organizing communities to protect workers' rights, create decent work, and share the benefits of public investment and economic growth more equitably.

ATKINSON FOUNDATION



Atkinson
Foundation's
Decent Work Fund

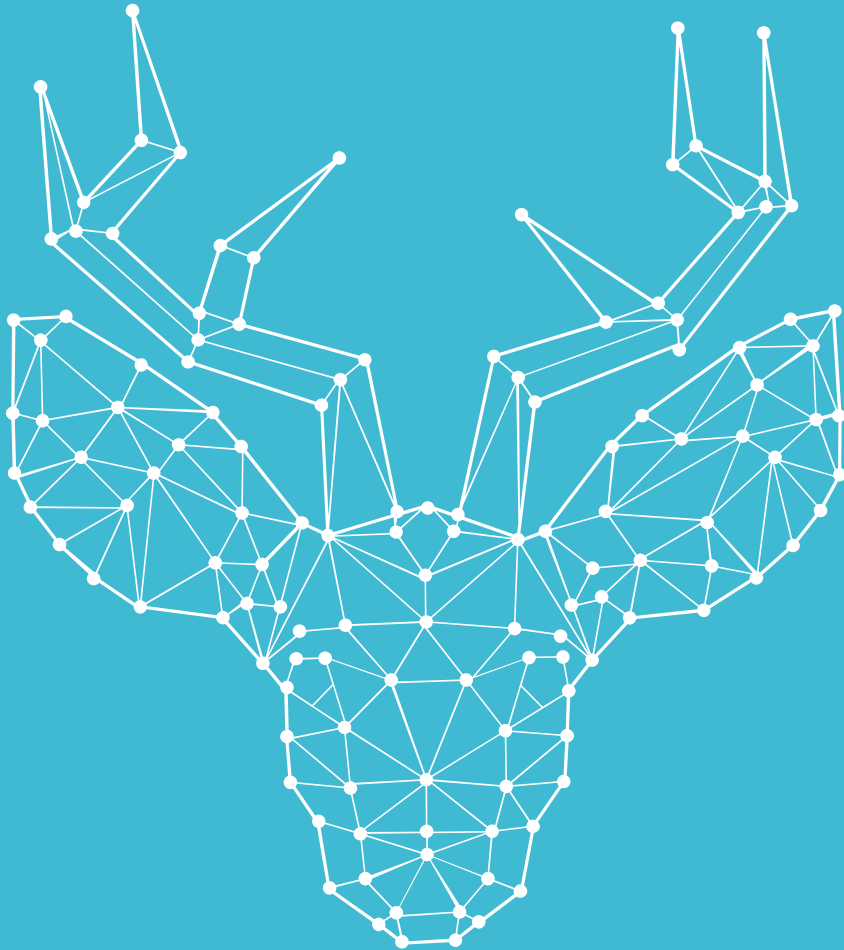


Jenn Miller, Director of Social Investment,
Atkinson Foundation

TASSC acknowledges that this project was made possible by the encouragement, dedication, and financial support of the Atkinson Foundation.

SETTING THE STAGE

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Indigenous peoples have been living on the land that is now known as Canada (Turtle Island) for over 15,000 + years. It is only in very recent history that Indigenous peoples have entered into the wage economy.

PRIOR TO THIS...

Traditional work was and remains inextricable from worldviews. It is embedded in languages, cultural practices, and roles and responsibilities. Our work honoured our relationships to the land and the connectivity to all things; All My Relations.



The concept of the wage economy was imposed during the times of colonial settlement. These sudden changes to work disrupted gender roles, governance, and relationships with the land and each other.

PROJECT GOALS

Action-based

Overarching Goals

- To provide community-driven change to support the wellbeing of employees working in local Indigenous agencies
- To advance long-term, strategic and measurable shifts toward providing decent work in the Indigenous non-profit sector
- To contribute to decent work narratives through Indigenous ways of knowing

Specific Goals

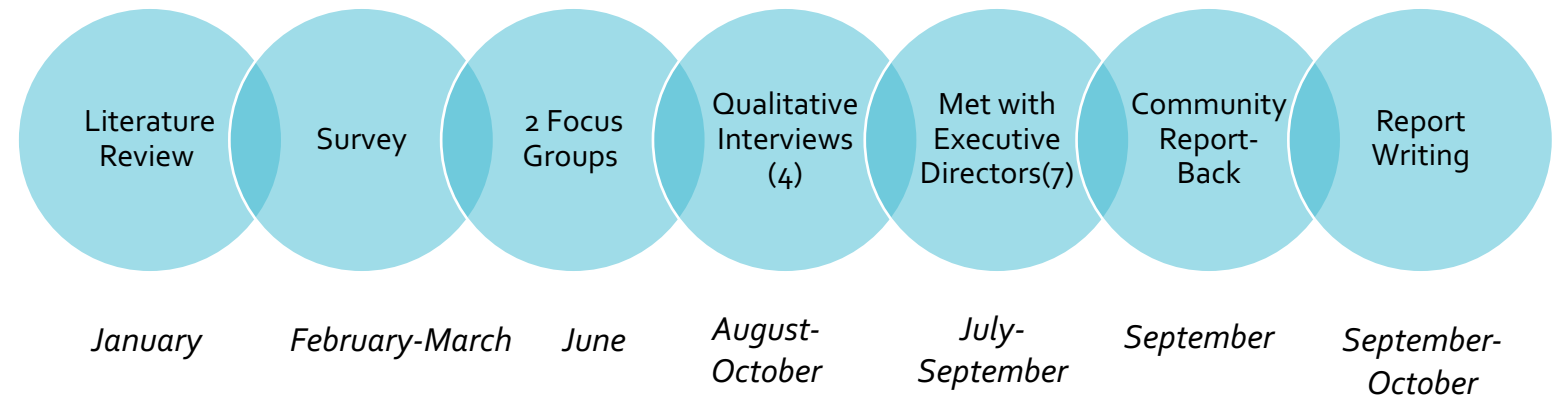
- Understand how employees view, value and experience decent work
- Showcasing decent work in local Indigenous agencies
- Providing employees with opportunities to explore decent work concepts

Despite limited resources, how can we create opportunities to support greater equity, stability, and well-being for our employees?

B. PROCESS/ METHODOLOGY

TIMELINE 2018

Monthly reporting to Council for feedback and direction



WHY?

To Explore Decent Work From Indigenous Perspectives:



Local Indigenous support service agencies are culturally-based.

How might cultural differences in the work place shape how decent work is viewed and experienced?

WHY?

Demonstrated Need To Explore Decent Work From Indigenous Perspectives:

oooo

It is the responsibility of employers to ensure that our decent work practices contribute to the well-being of our community considering ...

90% of Indigenous people in Toronto live below the Low Income Cut Off

(Our Health Counts Toronto, 2017)

Local Indigenous support service agencies are some of Toronto's largest employers of Indigenous people

650 + employees and contract workers

DEFINING DECENT WORK

*Do employees of local
Indigenous non-profits
define decent work
differently than
employees of non-
Indigenous non-profits?*

DEFINING DECENT WORK

*The International
Labour
Organization*

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has 4 pillars that make up Decent Work:



“Decent work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives. It involves opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men”

– *International Labour Organization (2015).*

DEFINING DECENT WORK

Indigenous Staff Perspectives

“Workplace that is lateral violence free, using medicine wheel teachings and 7 Grandfather Teachings, fairness and the ability to use my strengths”

Survey Respondent

“Able to live sustainably, with pay, health, RSP, pensions, cultural and equality”

Survey Respondent

“Fair Wages, Safe Workplaces, no discrimination, fair hours”

Survey Respondent

“Traditional governance systems, culture days, professional development, women in leadership”

Survey Respondent

“Economic practices that strengthen independent individual autonomy, free of government & private sector dominance”

Survey Respondent

“One that helps me to perform to the best of my abilities and helps me with the worst of my abilities”

Survey Respondent

DEFINING DECENT WORK

Indigenous Staff Perspectives

“My definition or concept of decent work would be to be employed by those who support you in all aspects of mental, physical and spiritual well-being. Being able to approach your employer and speak with them candidly and openly. Fair and equal pay. Respect your employees and they work twice as hard, I always say”

Survey Respondent

“Ongoing feedback and support. A respectful work environment that is not based on a traditional hierarchy”

Survey Respondent

“A paid position that provides a fair income for the job requirements. A secure position that you do not have to fear losing your job due to lack of funding. Respect from the employer and recognition”

Survey Respondent

“A place free from lateral violence”

Survey Respondent

DEFINING DECENT WORK

Staff Perspectives

Cultural
Awareness

“Working at Indigenous agencies is important to me. I would rather make less money at an Indigenous agency that is culturally aware, staffed with Indigenous folks and provides services to Indigenous people in Toronto. Then make more money, with benefits in culturally unaware organization”

Survey Respondent

“I feel the individual contributions of employees is something that needs to be recognized, praised and awarded, there are many elements of the First Nations' Culture, such as the Medicine Wheel that would be incredibly beneficial, if they were implemented here”

Survey Respondent

Unions

“I sometimes wonder if my workplace would benefit from a unionized environment - to protect the needs of the employees and safeguard them from mistreatment”

Survey Respondent

STAGE I: CONTENT ANALYSIS

- *Governance models, annual reports, organizational policies & procedures*

GOVERNANCE MODELS

We analyzed 7 of our member agencies' governance documents, policies and HR procedures to understand where **VALUES** may impact decent work:



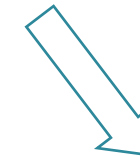
Culture is embedded in governance models



Varied across agencies



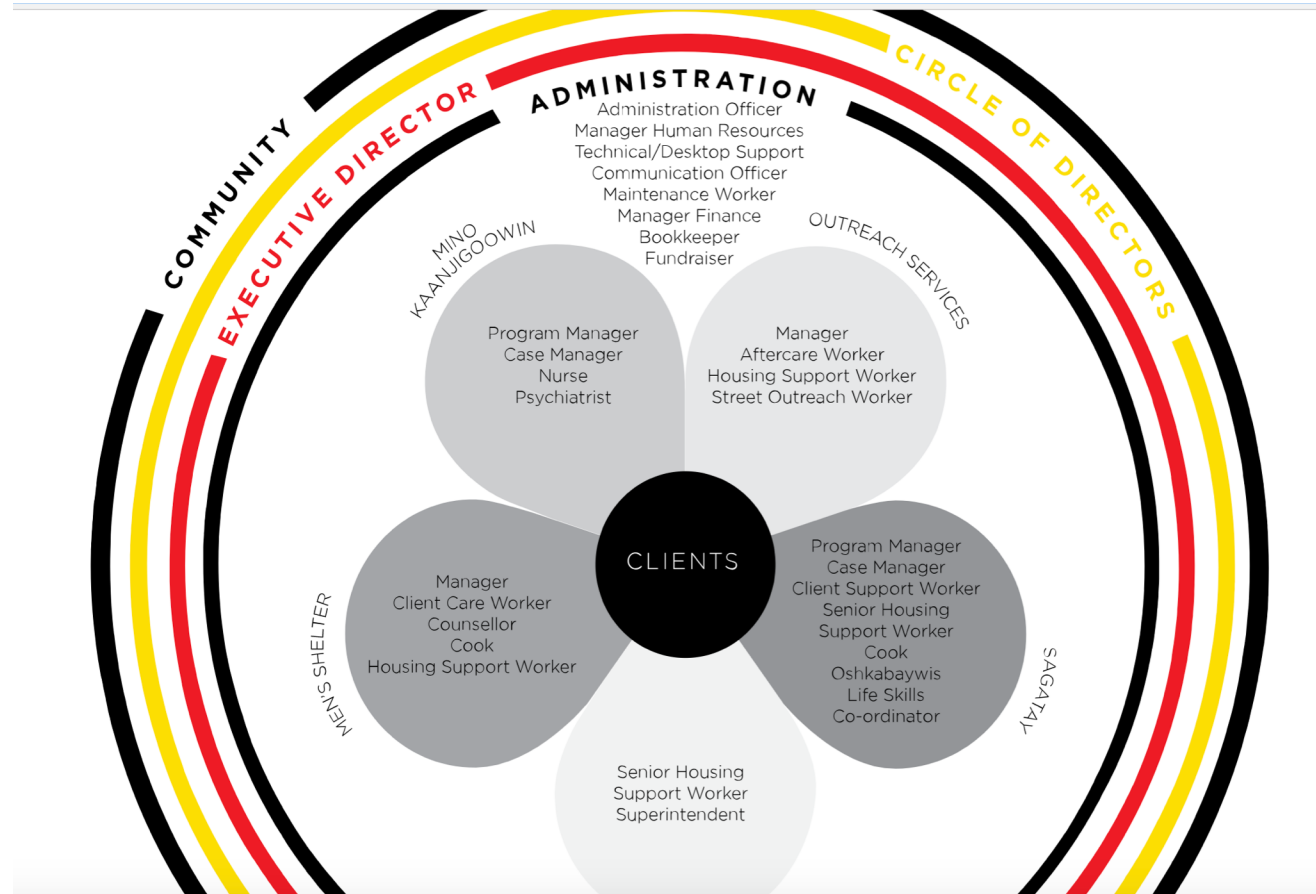
Often embedded, but not necessarily formally stated



Supplements and reinforces agency mandates

Difficulties of “fitting” a cultural model into the standard non-profit incorporation model was expressed often throughout the project

Native Men's Residence Governance Model



A medicine wheel approach is used to illustrate a governance model. Explains roles and responsibilities and interconnectedness of all positions.

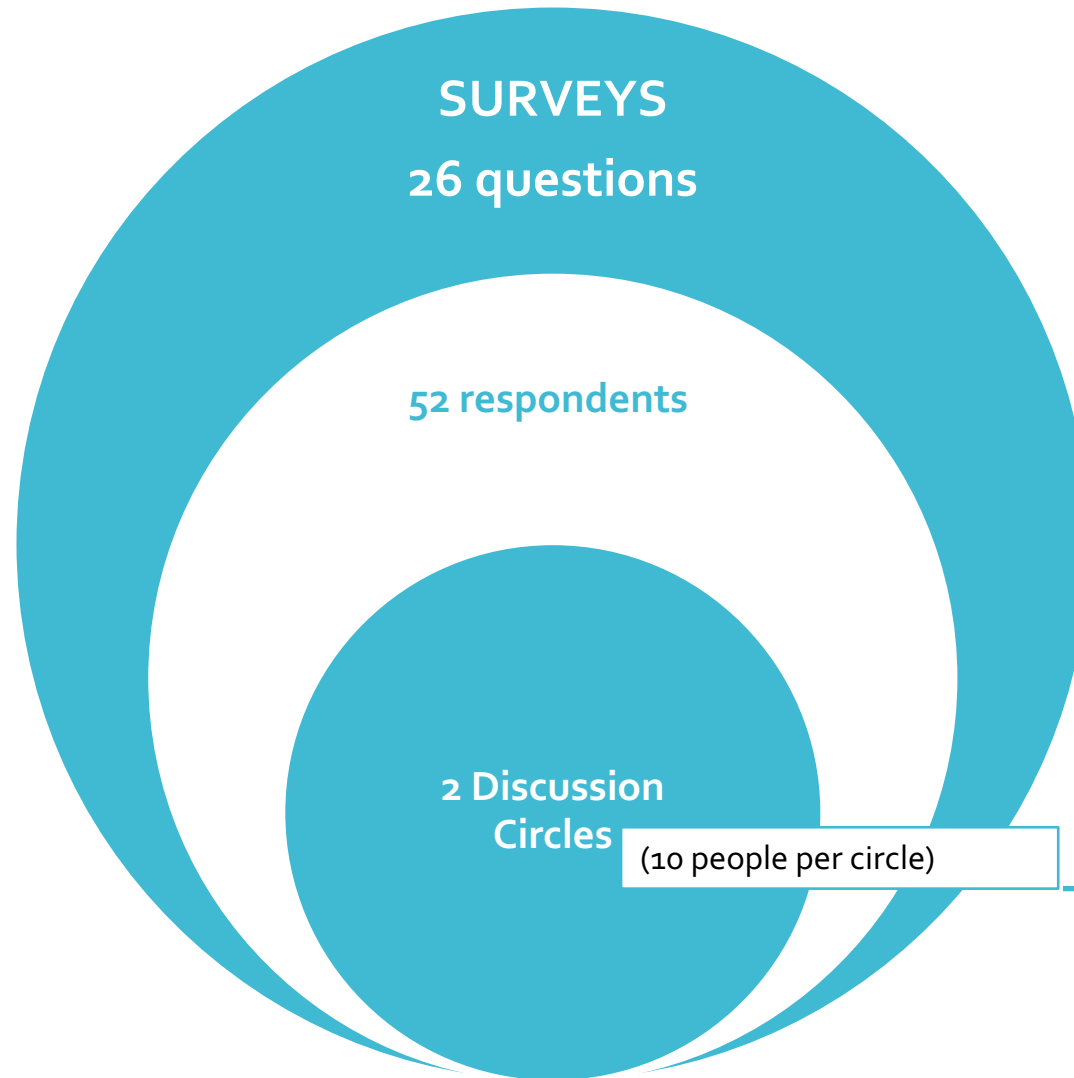


STAGE II:
Surveys, Discussion
Circles, and Key Informant
Interviews

- *Online anonymous surveys*
- *1 discussion circle with front line staff*
- *1 discussion circle with management staff*
- *Qualitative interviews with Elders & Traditional Knowledge Carriers*

SURVEY ANALYSIS +DISCUSSION CIRCLES :

OVERVIEW

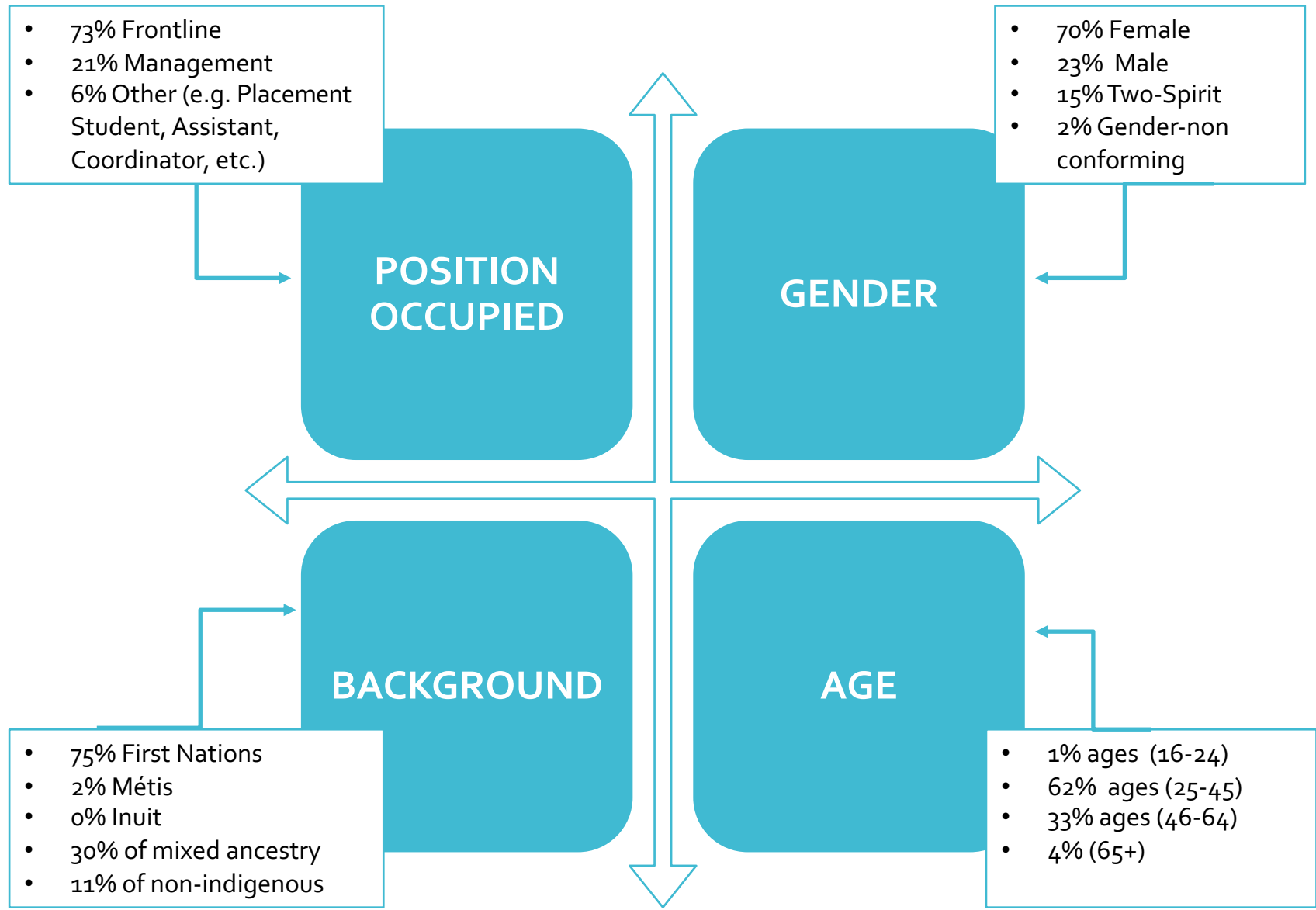


(10 people per circle)

Provided context to
survey results and
supported general
themes

SURVEY ANALYSIS:

DEMOGRAPHICS



(Respondents were able to select all identifiers that applied, meaning % will not add up precisely to 100%).

SURVEY ANALYSIS:

AREAS OF INTEREST

Access to culture and working for an agency with an Indigenous governance model were top two reasons for accepting employment

ACCESS TO CULTURE

ADDRESSING LATERAL VIOLENCE

Lateral violence ranked in top 3 areas of importance in addressing workplace safety

MENTORSHIP

Access to a Mentor was ranked highest in importance under professional development

CULTURAL SUPPORTS

Access to Elders or Healers was ranked highest under options for cultural supports

SURVEY ANALYSIS:

AREAS OF INTEREST

Gaining access to professional training was 3rd reason given in leaving for another job

ACCESS TO TRAINING

INDIGENOUS AGENCIES PROVIDE SAFETY

Respondents felt Indigenous agencies offered more safety, training, and self-care practices than non-Indigenous agencies

NEED FOR COST OF LIVING WAGE INCREASES

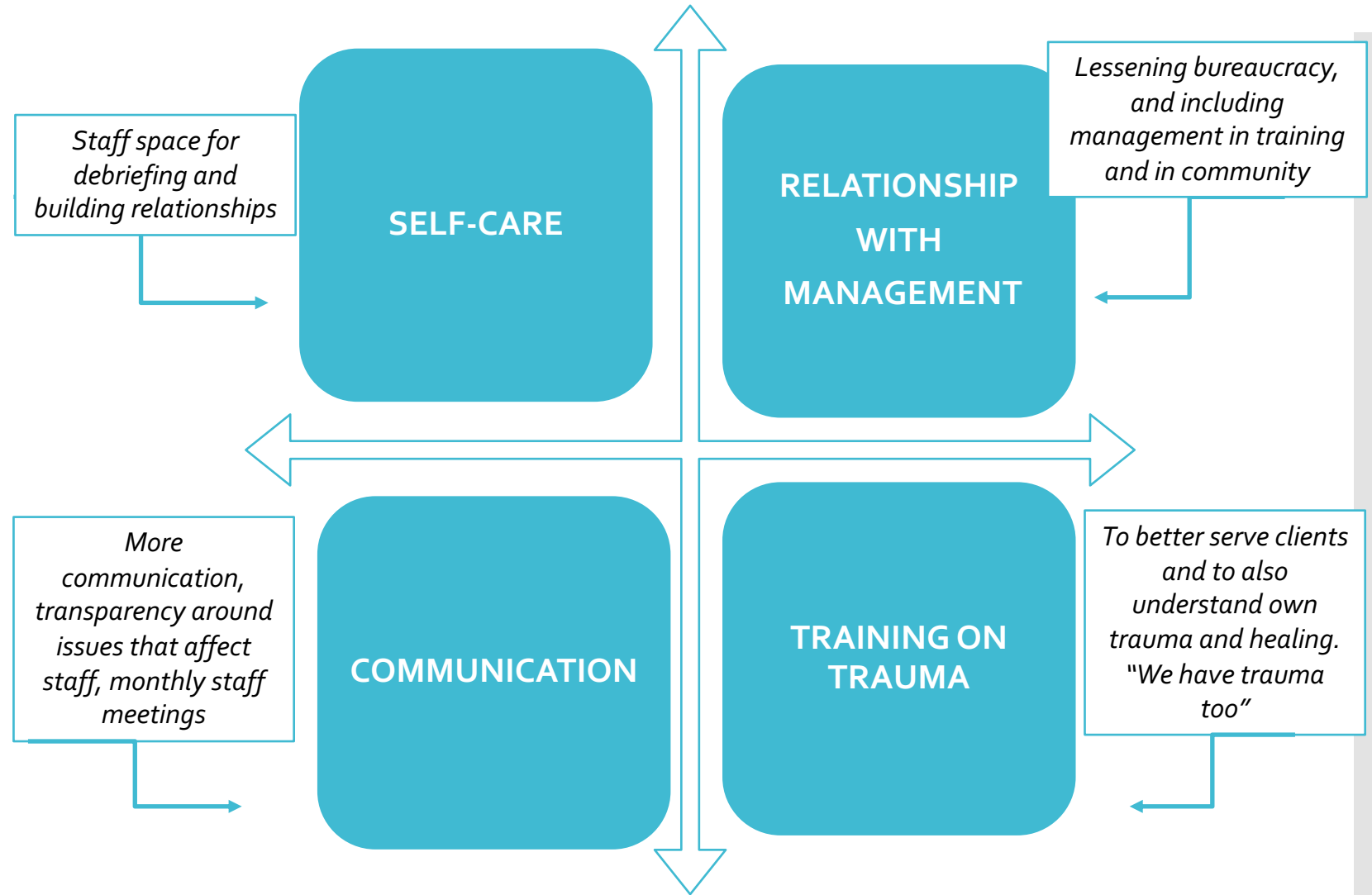
57 % of respondents did not feel their wages were keeping up to cost of living

FLEXIBLE HOURS

Flexible scheduling of work hours was ranked #1 importance under self-care

DISCUSSION CIRCLES:

AREAS OF RECOMMENDATION



DECENT WORK
THEMES:

SPECIFIC TO
INDIGENOUS
SECTOR



The need for
cultural
supports

Addressing
lateral
violence

Perception
of lower
wages

NEED FOR CULTURAL SUPPORTS

Unique to Indigenous Agencies

In our survey, when asked what is your top reason for accepting employment at an Indigenous agency, the top response was:
“Access to a cultural environment”

“The ability to learn about your culture while in a work setting. Exchange of knowledge while helping others”

Survey Respondent

“Practicing culture at work and access to services”

Survey Respondent

“Understanding of culture, community and the ability to contribute to my community in sustainable ways”

Survey Respondent

“There is so much invisibility of native people in Canadian culture and society it is nice to be around people who have similar worldviews and values”

Survey Respondent

“Immersed in cultural knowledge and able to access traditional gatherings”

Survey Respondent

“Working with Indigenous folks, clients are Indigenous, non-Indigenous staff that I encounter in my line of work for the most part are culturally aware. Smudging is in the office, cultural leave (is encouraged) and Aboriginal Day is booked off”

Survey Respondent

NEED FOR CULTURAL SUPPORTS

*Unique to
Indigenous
Agencies*

“The problem with ensuring Indigenous knowledge-keepers and elders, although we value their knowledge in community, it is not seen as real knowledge in the mainstream. We are not able to adequately pay them for the work that they do. Their work is not like a 9am to 5pm. Being an Elder, you are always on. It takes a lot of emotional labour, along with still healing from their own trauma. There is still more that we can do”.

- Interview with Traditional Knowledge Carrier



LATERAL VIOLENCE

*Unique to
Indigenous
Agencies*

" A workplace that is lateral violence free, using medicine wheel teachings and 7 grandfather teachings, fairness and the ability to use my strengths"

Survey Response to: What does decent work mean to you?

Lateral violence is a phenomenon that is the result of colonization, oppression, intergenerational trauma, racism and discrimination.

Colonization forced culture underground, broke up families, dislocated people from their land and traditions and imposed assimilation onto children via residential schools, which created the legacy of a multigenerational disconnect from culture.

Lateral violence is a learned behavior and can be evident in the workplace, communities and within homes.

Native Women's Association of Canada: Lateral Violence Fact Sheet

"It is pointing out what is wrong instead of pointing out what is right, which is a good way at keeping us at war with each other. It stems from a lack of self-awareness and promoting competition"

Interview with a Traditional Knowledge Keeper

"It is feeling less than, and finding fault in others –always having to defend who you are"

Interview with a Traditional Knowledge Keeper

PERCEPTION OF LOWER WAGES

“Even with the RGI housing I am still paying half my wages to rent. If I was paying market rent, I would have nothing (or just about) for food, never mind a hobby or going out.” – **Survey respondent**

Do you feel your rate of pay is (less than, greater than, or equal to) non-Indigenous non-profit workplaces?

61% of survey respondents stated, “less than”

What would make you leave an Indigenous agency for a non-Indigenous workplace?

Greater pay was the most common response in survey

“There is a false sense of humbleness our people have. Our currency is in money. If you don’t recognize that, you are oppressing your own people” – **Interview with a Traditional Knowledge Keeper**

BARRIERS TO ADDRESSING DECENT WORK

What we heard from local Indigenous support service agencies

Limitations and perceived inequity in funding to support better practices

Lack of HR resources for staff support and training

Rigidity of unions does not support Indigenous values

Higher than average needs of clients creates atmosphere of burnout

BARRIERS TO ADDRESSING DECENT WORK

What we heard from local Indigenous support service agencies

Community members with a criminal record do not apply for jobs that require a reference check

Difficult to hire within community when high academic qualifications are demanded

Funding for cultural programming/services is scarce. Staff miss out on cultural opportunities

Accessing Elders is more difficult than before. Indigenous agencies can't compete with large institutions. Elders aren't available to the community during the day and are burning out

TAKING ACTION TO ADDRESS DECENT WORK

*A primary goal of
Indigenous research is
to be **community-
driven.***

Addresses the goal: *To
find creative and quick
solutions to support the
wellbeing of
employees working in
local Indigenous agencies*

ACTIONABLE COMMITMENTS FOR IMMEDIATE IMPLEMENTATION

Commitments are based on feedback from employees, key informants, and reviewed by TASSC members



The Challenge:

Which of the short-term commitments can your organizations act on to enhance decent work for your employees?

*Note:

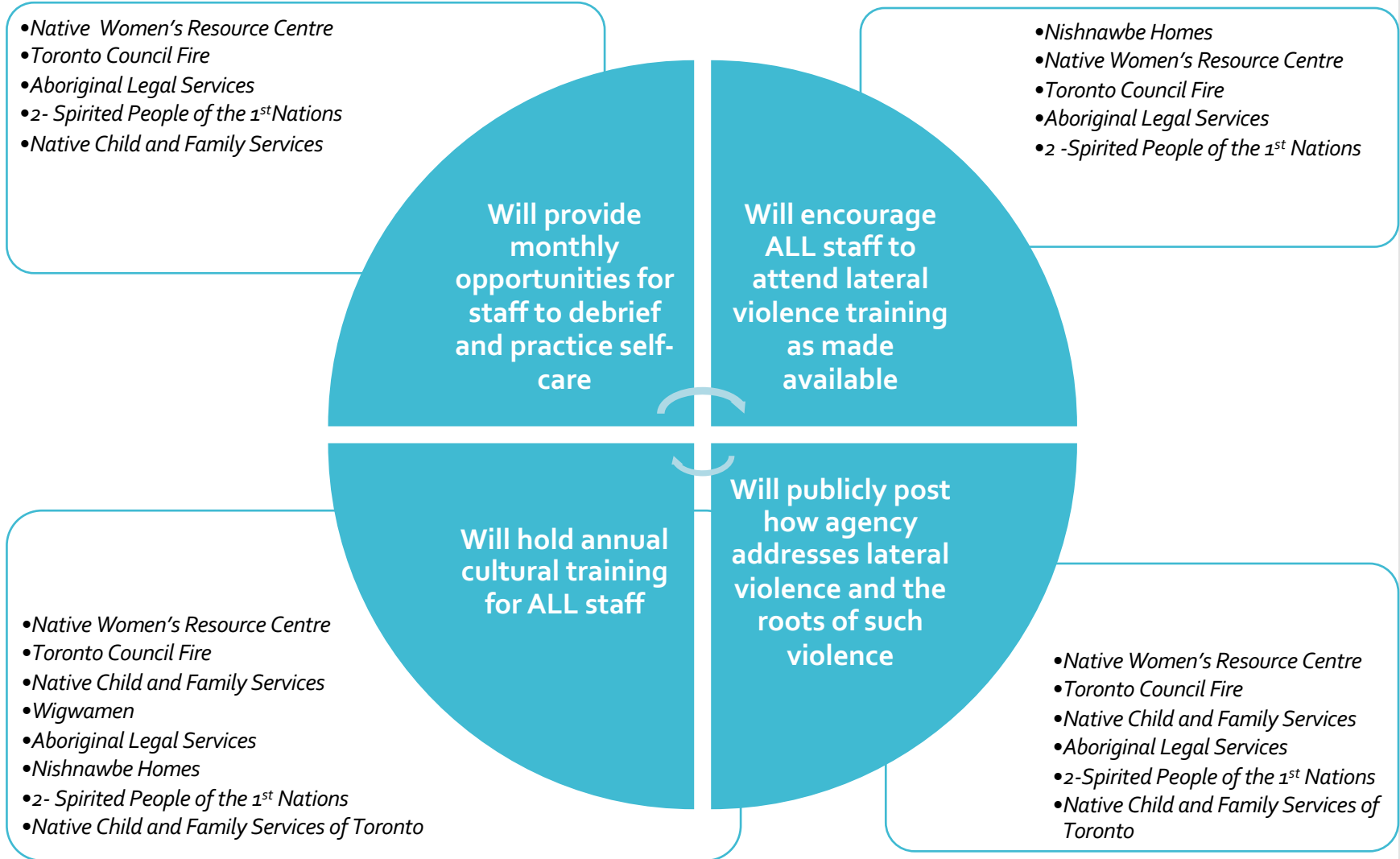
Organizations were asked to only take on commitments that they weren't currently addressing to their full satisfaction.

The Results:

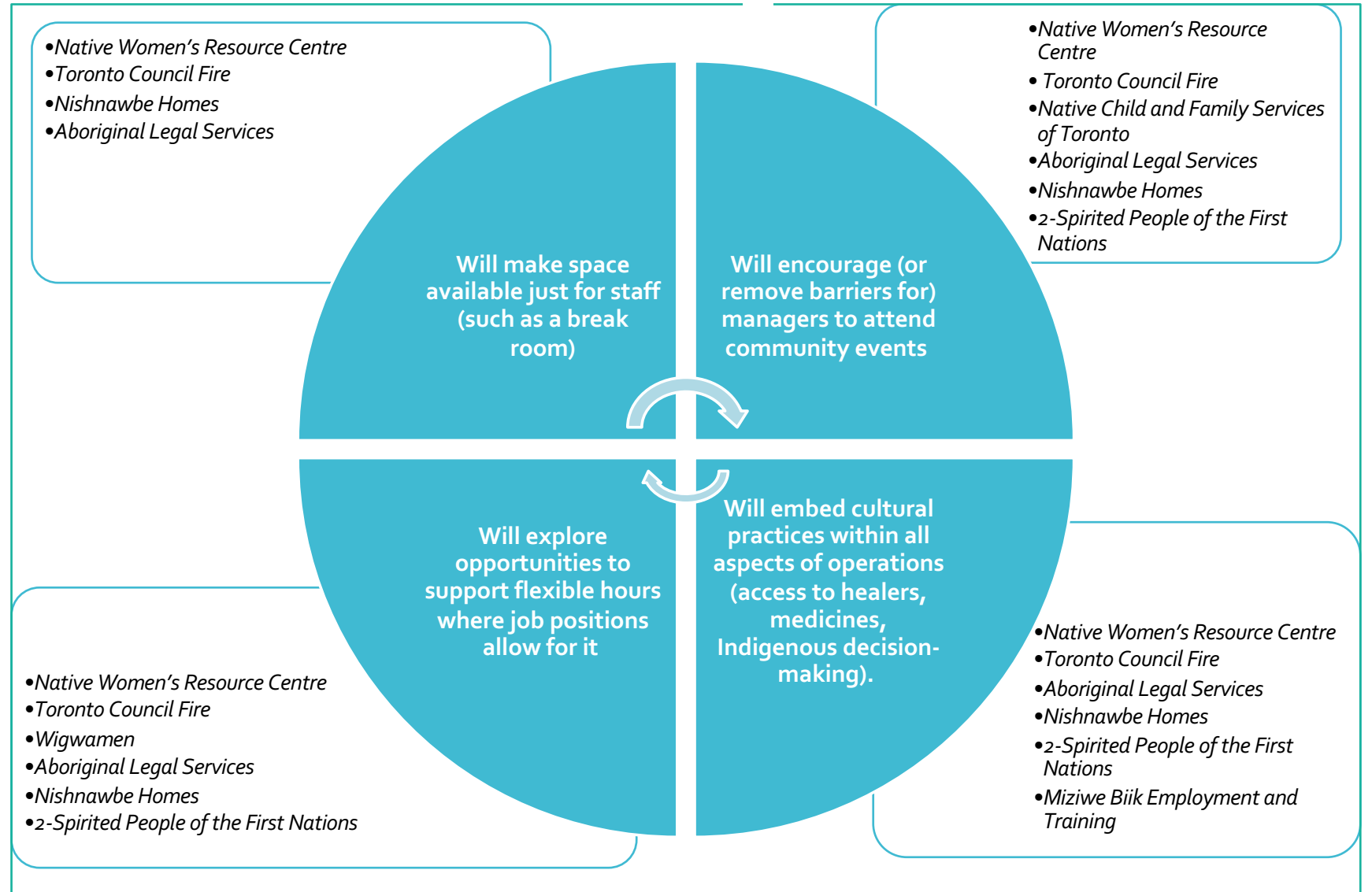
80 actions have been taken up by 8 member agencies participating in this project.



Council Commitments



Council Commitments



Council Commitments

- Native Women's Resource Centre
- Toronto Council Fire
- Aboriginal Legal Services
- 2-Spirited People of the First Nations

Will provide mentorship opportunities to staff

Will provide training that will build skillsets and increase employability

- Native Women's Resource Centre
- Toronto Council Fire
- Native Child and Family Services
- Aboriginal Legal Services
- Nishnawbe Homes
- Miziwe Biik Aboriginal Employment and Training

Will explore financial models to provide cost of living annual increases in salaries

Will increase direct communication and transparency with staff on issues that affect them (operations, funding)

- Native Women's Resource Centre
- Toronto Council Fire
- Wigwamen
- Aboriginal Legal Services

- Native Women's Resource Centre
- Toronto Council Fire
- Aboriginal Legal Services
- 2-Spirited People of the First Nations

Council Commitments

Will increase direct relationships across the organization to avoid bureaucracy

- *Nishnawbe Homes*
- *Aboriginal Legal Services*
- *2-Spirited People of the First Nations*
- *Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto*

Will coordinate with TASSC to present Decent Work findings to agency's board of directors

- *Nishnawbe Homes*
- *Aboriginal Legal Services*
- *2-Spirited People of the First Nations*
- *Native Child and Family Services*
- *Native Women's Resource Centre*

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

*Themes that emerged
from this research but
were out of scope for
this project to fully
address*

- **Professionalism:** How can lived experience be measured so that it is comparable to academic qualifications?
- **Professionalism:** Explore how young people can be hired in a sector that requires numerous years of experience and specific qualifications for entry positions.
- **Governance:** Further exploration on how Indigenous non-profits can establish governance models outside of western models and continue to benefit from non-profit/charitable status.
- **Gender:** Further exploration with equity lens around single parent households with gendered analysis.
- **Expectations for Decent Work:** Further exploration on Indigenous employees' expectations of decent work and how this may be different from non-Indigenous expectations.
- **Collective Organizing:** Explore how Indigenous worldviews, principles, and values may inform future notions of collective organizing.

TAKING ACTION TO ADDRESS DECENT WORK

*Indigenous research is meant to **affect systemic change.***

Addresses the goal:
To advance long-term, strategic and measurable shifts toward providing decent work in the Indigenous non-profit sector

THE WAY FORWARD

Calls to Action

We have shown that
decent work looks
different from local
Indigenous support
service agencies in
Toronto



TASSC Council
members have
committed to
taking action



We now look to
our partners.

This is an
invitation to join
us in this
movement!



1) Recognizing that Indigenous agencies desire to hire people with lived local experience, build leadership skillsets, and honour individual's gifts; this may require flexibility in funding criteria, longer timelines, and enhanced resources (ex. HR support).

2) Investment in on-going cultural support for Indigenous agencies to ensure culture remains embedded and accessible. This includes recognizing the value Indigenous agencies place on our knowledge carriers and the need to ensure the work of our knowledge carriers is respected through well resourced, sustainable positions in the community.

3) Creating deep relationships with Indigenous agencies to better understand the reality of meeting the decent work needs of staff and volunteers

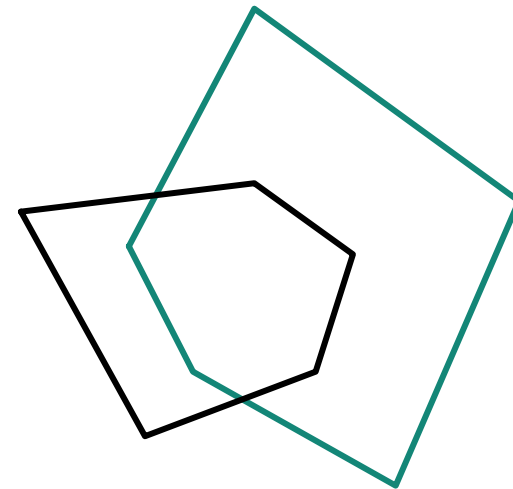
4) Collaborative sharing of resources (Ex. Ensuring Indigenous knowledge carriers remain accessible to community during their employment in non-Indigenous institutions)

CALLS TO ACTION:

GRANT MAKERS AND FUNDERS



We call upon all **public grant-making institutions** to conduct a review of their funding models to ensure equitable funding for Indigenous agencies in large urban centres. This includes the following four calls to action:



MIIGWETCH

NIA:WEN

MARSI

TASSC would like to thank the employees of our member agencies who have their time and knowledge to this project; the Executive Directors of TASSC Member Agencies who provided many hours of careful consideration and guidance; and the Traditional Knowledge Carriers who provided another cultural lens to this work.

This project was made possible by the encouragement, dedication, and financial support of the Atkinson Foundation.

For more information on this project, contact TASSC at:

16 Spadina Road, Toronto, ON M5R 2S7

info@tassc.ca

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