

First Nations Women's Leadership Summit 2023: Sharing our Strengths

Summary Report

Ontario First Nations women leaders share their experiences, challenges, and achievements in community leadership.



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Acknowledgements

The Chiefs of Ontario First Nations Women's Council and the Women's Initiatives sector extend their gratitude to all participants at the Summit for sharing their successes and challenges, and for their positivity in uplifting each other.

Special thanks to the Elders and Knowledge Keepers who supported everyone throughout the Summit and shared their teachings each day.

Our sincere appreciation goes out to each of the presenters who dedicated their time to provide such informative presentations based on their work in communities, and to the vendors and service providers whose presence supported the wellbeing of participants.

We would also like to recognize Indigenous Services Canada for their generous support with this event.



Chiefs of Ontario First Nations Women's Council Members, 2022-23

Donna Debassige – Elder

Rebecca Timms – Anishinabek Nation

Deputy Grand Chief Stacia Loft – Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Sydney Lockwood – Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

Debbie Lipscombe – Grand Council Treaty #3

Lyndia Jones – Independent First Nations

Chief JoAnn Swamp – Mohawk Council of Akwesasne

Chief Sarah-Lee Sunday Diabo – Mohawk Council of Akwesasne

Deputy Grand Chief Anna Betty Achneepineskum – Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Loretta Sheshequin – Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Sandra Montour – Six Nations of the Grand River

Introduction

This report is a summary of the 2023 Chiefs of Ontario First Nations Women's Leadership Summit. The Summit took place in Toronto from March 7 to 9, 2023 and brought together over 100 First Nations women from across Ontario including elected women Chiefs and Councillors, women Elders and traditional leaders, women in unelected leadership positions, and youth. This gathering was organized by the Women's Initiatives sector of the Chiefs of Ontario under the guidance of the First Nations Women's Council, an advisory council to the Ontario First Nations Chiefs in Assembly.

The theme of the Summit was Sharing our Strengths, in keeping with the mandate of the Chiefs of Ontario Women's Initiatives sector - to support First Nations communities in reducing gender-based violence as well as to promote the empowerment and wellbeing of First Nations women, girls and Two Spirit and gender diverse individuals (2SLGBTQQIA+ people).

Through a range of presentations, self-care supports, and Elders' teachings, First Nations women leaders from across Ontario came together to share their stories, reflections and firsthand insights as leaders. Their comments provided a window into the important work they are doing on behalf of their community, and reflected their ongoing commitment to addressing present and future needs within those communities.

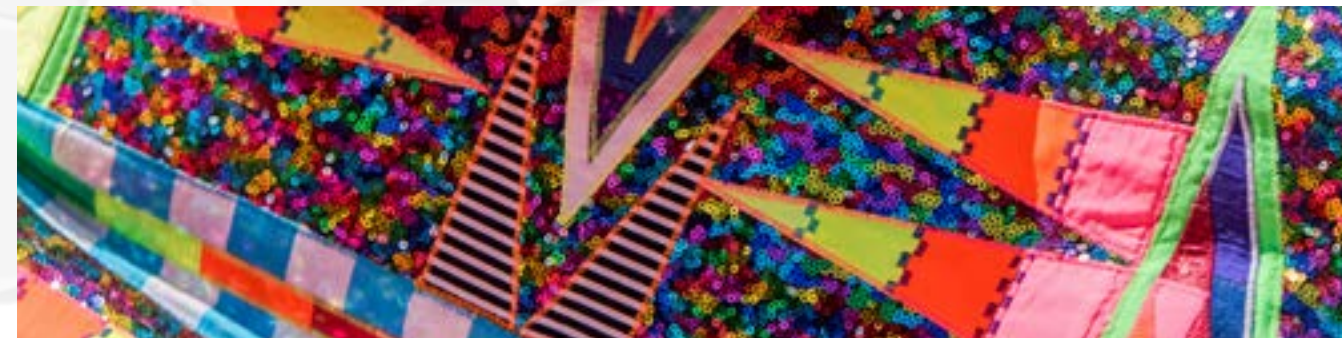


Purpose of the Summit

First Nations leadership have long recognized that to achieve the goal of stronger, healthier, more inclusive communities, more women Chiefs are needed. Ontario Chiefs-in-Assembly Resolution 06/16 mandated the First Nations Women's Council to coordinate a forum for First Nations women leaders to discuss strategies for enhancing community wellness and achieving gender balance in Ontario First Nations political processes.

The inaugural summit of Ontario First Nations women leaders took place in 2018 and focused primarily on the objective of gender equity. Based on the success of this gathering, the Chiefs-in-Assembly passed Resolution 41/18 which mandated the First Nations Women's Council conduct a follow-up summit to continue the work. It was delayed due to the COVID 19 pandemic and lack of dedicated funding and human resources.

In 2022, following the establishment of the Women's Initiatives sector at the Chiefs of Ontario secretariat (COO), planning got underway for the second Women's Leadership Summit. In discussion with the First Nations Women's Council, it was clarified that this Summit should promote networking among women leaders from First Nation communities and organizations across Ontario and to allow them to showcase their strengths and achievements. The theme for the 2023 Summit that emerged through these discussions was *Sharing our Strengths*. The 2023 Summit was intended to provide a safe space for First Nations women in elected, traditional, managerial and volunteer roles to share their personal stories of leadership to inspire, uplift, and inform one another about their unique successes and challenges.



Event Information

Social and Cultural Elements

The Summit agenda was designed to allow time for participants to interact and exchange ideas in a variety of ways including during tabletop discussions and networking breaks. Given the many roles and responsibilities of the women leaders, it was also important to foster their wellbeing by providing several social and cultural supports.

All participants received a conference swag bag containing soaps, notebook, candles, tea packets, and other health and beauty products at registration to welcome them and promote a sense of comfort and inclusion. Meals were provided and craft vendors were also on site. Self-care was also incorporated into the event by providing opportunities for participants to sign up for complimentary services including massage, Reiki, reflexology or time with a traditional knowledge keeper/seer.

Cultural protocols included access to a sacred fire on the grounds each day and an opening and closing prayer. The First Nations Women's Council medicine bundle was present throughout the proceedings, while women Elders/Knowledge keepers shared their teachings and experiences. An evening social gathering and dinner featured traditional drumming and dancing led by a local Indigenous women's hand drum group.

Logistics

This event was timed to coincide with International Women's Day on March 8th. Toronto was identified as the preferred location. Invitations were shared with First Nations women Chiefs and women's councils across Ontario, and all Ontario First Nations leadership received advance notice of the Summit. It was agreed that in addition to women Chiefs and councillors, the Summit would welcome other unelected First Nations women leaders such as Elders/knowledge keepers, managers of Ontario First Nations community-based organizations, and female members of the Ontario First Nations Young Peoples Council.



The agenda was designed to allow group presentations by women leaders from each of the political territorial organizations and independent communities across Ontario. They spoke about their experiences, along with the challenges and achievements in their work and communities from their perspectives as Chiefs, Councillors, Elders/Knowledge Keepers, and members of women's councils/other leadership positions.

Most participants attended the Summit in person, although virtual participants were also accommodated. A total of 109 people participated, including speakers, staff, and cultural supports.

Highlights of Proceedings

Opening

Following the opening prayer on day one, the facilitator shared the theme and purpose of the Summit, noting that it was designed for First Nations women leaders to network and support each other and to talk about their many roles and responsibilities as women in leadership. The Chiefs of Ontario staff welcomed participants and introduced the members of the First Nations Women's Council. Ontario Regional Chief Glen Hare provided welcoming remarks by video.

Panel Presentations

Over the first two days of the Summit, a total of seven panel presentations were provided by representatives of First Nations political-territorial organizations and Independent First Nations. A total of 24 women, representing each region, presented their experiences, challenges and achievements as women leaders. Many were Chiefs, former Chiefs and elected Councillors. Several of the women were members of women's councils serving communities in their territories. Three were directors of organizations serving Chiefs and Councils or the community directly. Highlights of their presentations are as follows:

Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Members of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) Women's Council noted the various portfolios they hold including education, health, infrastructure and housing, policing, and MMIWG/Human Trafficking. Some of the NAN Women's Council members are current or former Chiefs/Councillors. They described the work they are doing to support women in their communities such as a NAN Women in Leadership media campaign, and a recent Women's Gathering for all NAN communities. They noted there has been an uptick in the number of women Chiefs in their territory over time.

Some of the challenges they identified included a lack of funding to support the work and the cost of travel particularly in the remote communities; infrastructure issues such as internet access; and balancing the responsibilities and competing needs of work and family.



Anishinabek Nation

Members of the Anishinabek Nation's Kwe-Wuk Council described their experiences as former Chiefs/Councillors and as community leaders and grandmothers. The Kwe-Wuk (Women) Council supports the Anishinabek Nation's overall plan for political action, and addresses priorities such as children and youth, supporting young mothers, and addressing drug use in communities through community action groups.

Presenters talked about the importance of uplifting women in their communities in order to counteract the effects of intergenerational trauma and manage grief. In working with their communities, they strive to provide children with the tools to make good decisions and take on the responsibilities of parenthood. As leaders, they aim to promote healthy lifestyles and traditional practices such as smudging at Council meetings, and discussed the importance of asking other communities for mutual support and advocating on behalf of those who are not able to do so.

“Leadership is more than just service: it is the ability to take what is available to you and build something good and better than what was there before.”

– Jocelyn Formsma, Moose Cree First Nation, NAN Women in Leadership Campaign

Grand Council Treaty #3

The Executive Director of Grand Council Treaty #3 presented the Grand Council's four directional model of governance in which seven of their 28 Chiefs sit on each of four Chiefs Committees corresponding to the four directions - these are: social, environmental, cultural and economic. Each of these committees includes one or more women Chiefs, which ensures the women's voice is represented in each of the four areas. GCT#3 also has four Constituent Councils that are traditionally selected: a Women's Council, Youth Council, Men's Council and LGBTQ2S+ Council. Each of these Councils have representatives on the four Chiefs Committees. Grand Council Treaty #3 sees the benefits of this model as ensuring regional representation where all voices are heard; and the best practices and collaborative opportunities are discussed.

They have hosted events focused on MMIWG, including four family gatherings, and recently hosted a Women's Empowerment gathering. Dialogue with Summit participants clarified how the traditional selection process occurs. This includes the offering of sema (tobacco) to individuals believed to be good potential members of these Councils and hosting a gathering where they each have an opportunity to speak about why they think they would make a good candidate. Participants noted how empowering it is to have these gatherings occur in ceremonial structures such as the Roundhouse; it is important that women support the building of these facilities in communities. It was also noted that there is gender balance and diversity on the Grand Council Treaty #3 Chiefs Committees and Board of Directors. The Chiefs passed a Resolution to support work in the area of empowering 2SLGBTQQIA+ by establishing a Constituent Council.

Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians

The Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians provided a virtual presentation in which two women leaders, Chief Laurie Carr of Hiawatha First Nation, and Deputy Grand Chief Stacia Loft interviewed each other about their experiences in leadership. Their conversation highlighted several issues including balancing motherhood and family responsibilities with their work; the influence of parents or family members who were leaders; and the importance of having supportive staff in addition to personal support. They spoke about the need for more gender balance among the Ontario First Nations leadership (29 percent of Ontario First Nations Chiefs were women in 2023).

Their experiences included feeling gendered pressure; for example having to think about what to wear and how to act in order to be seen as a Chief. Over the past fifteen years they have seen more women in leadership and have observed progress in several areas. Issues such as child welfare and the lack of housing and clean water remain dominant however, at a time when communities are experiencing significant population growth.

“ Tell me every reason why we can't do it, and let's figure out how we can. ”

– Chief Laurie Carr, Hiawatha First Nation



Independent First Nations

The Director of Health for the Independent First Nations noted that some of the earliest First Nations Resolutions to end violence against women and children were passed by the Independent First Nations. Although the Independent First Nations do not have a Women's Council in place, their joint priorities include ending violence against women and girls, MMIWG and human trafficking.

The Independent First Nations work together based on a protocol of mutual respect and support for each other. These communities span across Ontario. Their collaborative work on ending violence against Indigenous women and girls included an environmental scan and educational toolkit including a logo, posters, and educational video. The poster series, "Embrace Love" was created from a positive perspective (campaigns on ending violence are often framed from a negative lens). An excerpt from the campaign video was shown along with a short video of First Nations youth promoting cultural identity.

Mohawk Council of Akwesasne

Three elected women Chiefs from the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne shared that of their current Council of 12 Chiefs, more than half are women and most of the departments within the community are also led by women. As elected leaders, they select the committees and portfolios they will be assigned to based on their experience, interests, and goals for the community. They then focus on lobbying to ensure these departments and portfolios (such as health, social services, education and housing) have the necessary resources for success. Their community extends from Ontario into Quebec and New York. They shared that to be a leader in the community, you need to lead with heart and have thick skin as people have placed their trust in you and will question your choices. They support each other and act with empathy in advocating for those who do not have a voice. From their perspective, leadership means believing in themselves and the strength they have as women. There is also a lot of support behind the scenes and strong administrative leadership, as well as active participation from community members. They urge future women leaders to use their voice and speak out, and to exercise kindness and compassion.

They also acknowledged some of the challenges in this role, such as being a new Chief and immediately stepping into the role without a transition period. Three-year terms of office are also a challenge as this is not enough time to do all the work. They are working together to break down silos and make significant changes in the community. They are dealing with issues such as drugs and sex/human trafficking, and not all districts in the community have essential services such as ambulances.

Six Nations of the Grand River

The Executive Director of Ganohkwasra Family Assault Support Services at Six Nations of the Grand River spoke about her experience as a leader of this agency since its inception. She shared that Ganohkwasra (which means "love among us") provides a wide range of family-based services including a shelter. This name reflects the wisdom of the women who started Ganohkwasra, who knew that eradicating violence in our families would need to come from a place of love. She acknowledged the many women who have uplifted other women, as well as the male leaders who have supported this work. Having the support of the men in the community was recognized as vital for achieving the goals of Ganohkwasra.

The presentation featured a video of women leaders including clan mothers, counsellors and educators speaking about their various roles and what they see for the future of the community. They noted that internalized oppression and lateral violence is a big challenge. They spoke about the importance of compassionate leaders working together in kindness and with intention to support healing, instead of patriarchal and hierarchical leadership systems. Changes they want to see in the community include revitalizing the languages and raising our children to recognize the gifts that they carry, so that the people will flourish and our leaders will have pride and confidence.

Other Featured Presentations

In addition to the panel presentations, the Summit featured several dialogue sessions and additional presenters along with Elders' teachings which are highlighted below.

Throughout the Summit, three online polls were conducted using Mentimeter, which generated responses to the following:

1. What three words describe First Nations women's leadership
2. What contributes to women's power
3. What challenges or barriers do First Nations women leaders face

Teachings: Women's Roles and Responsibilities

Two First Nations women Elders shared teachings on the roles and responsibilities of women based on their own personal stories: Elder Teri Fiddler, Anishinaabe and Elder Annie Metatawabin, Mushkegowuk. They acknowledged the Creator and participants, and noted that International Women's Day (March 8) is a time to celebrate women across the Nation and the world including our First Nations women leaders.

Both Elders shared memories of being raised on the land, respecting the natural world, and the strong role women had in shaping their lives. They spoke about the teachings they received and the language they learned growing up. Elder Teri's mother was a midwife, and she often accompanied her for her work and when she collected medicines. Elder Annie talked about the legends and stories she learned as a child from her mom and her aunts. At that time, the women's role was to care for the home and children; the men and boys were out on the land. Women were the caregivers, supporting each other and sharing responsibilities and resources. Extended families took care of one another's children when needed. Marriages were arranged in some instances. Children learned how to snare rabbits, pick medicines and harvest food.

Although Elder Teri's siblings were taken to residential school, she never went - somehow her father protected her. She was able to maintain her Ojibwe and Cree language and her teachings. Elder Annie was taken away to residential school at the age of six and was there for 11 years. She survived a lot of violence but through it all she never lost her teachings or her Cree language.

"Before we are born, Creator gives us a spirit. It is up to us to take care of that spirit, to nurture that spirit inside of us."

- Elder Teri Fiddler, Sandy Lake First Nation

Both Elders talked about their children, their gifts and their life experiences including grief and loss, and how it impacted their lives. They also commented that women's roles have changed since their childhood. Women now need to make a living. Some of the milestones Elders Teri and Annie experienced included relocating, going back to school later in life, being elected to Council and pursuing meaningful work supporting others' healing. They noted that Women leaders also have a responsibility to continue caring for, and looking after not only their families and community but also mother earth, to keep her healthy; this is why we need to keep our teachings and pass them onto the next generation.

Keynote: Building our Inner Fires: Gaining and Sharing Knowledge with First Nations Leaders

Randi Ray (PhD, Flying Post First Nation), Founder of Miikana Consulting and Noojimo Health, shared a presentation based on her doctoral research on strengthening capacity of First Nations leaders. Her own father was a Chief for over 25 years.

Randi's research led her to think about wise ways to support First Nations elected leaders. Feedback from leaders indicated that once they got elected they would often ask, now what - what do I do? Current governance systems do not encourage new leaders to take time to identify the gifts they bring; instead, western-based hierarchical leadership can make First Nations leaders feel inadequate.

Randi recommends a "kitchen table approach" as a learning model for First Nations leaders. In her view, leadership comes from our inherent knowledge; it is about knowing our gifts and using them; doing the work to know and understand that who you are is enough and understanding what you bring to the table. She developed a visual model of this approach that could be used to guide First Nations leadership development processes.

In this model, culture is the foundation for First Nations leadership. It is comprised of many things including our understanding of the land; our families' stories; our languages and our teachings.

Advice for First Nations Leaders:

Acknowledge personal strengths and take inventory of relationship ties and communication skills; understand broader First Nations history, community history and direction, and lateral kindness approaches; clarify governance including roles/responsibilities, policies and practices.

Randi suggested other recommendations for supporting elected leaders, such as ensuring the community has information about candidates; prioritizing timely, relevant training; and creating space for former leaders to help mentor new people to support continuity.



Figure 3 Kitchen table approach to learning for First Nations leaders. Randi Ray. <https://miikana.ca/>

Who will she/they be in 20 years?

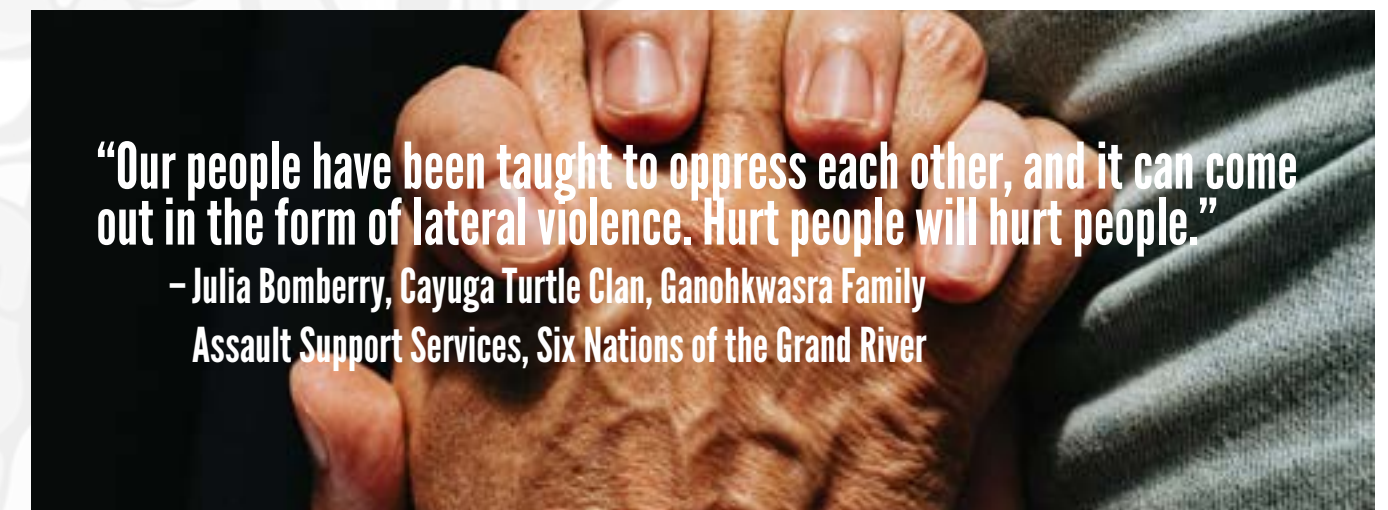
- Will be a language speaker with a deep understanding of culture.
- She has a team supporting her and never feels alone.
- Ready and prepared - without having to heal so much; she will be equipped for the different challenges - our daughters will know how to take care of their families and communities with courage.
- Our future leaders are continuing to find their voice while growing stronger through the support and guidance of leadership - having role models and mentors.
- The next generation of leaders will ensure that their children lead and provide support to their grandchildren, preserving culture and minimizing the need to take time away from family.
- Will have safe and accessible places to do the work, where gender parity and pay equity are standard.
- Future leaders will continue breaking down barriers, being more inclusive both on and off reserves.
- Recognized for the diversity in women's leadership, and the depth of their contributions to society.



Challenges and Assets

The discussion highlighted challenges facing First Nations women leaders individually and within their communities as a whole, and noted some positives to build upon. For example, women leaders are often trying to maintain work life balance while raising a family, in many cases as a single parent, while also making time to attend community events and fulfill women's council duties (which are often voluntary). Internalized oppression and conflict are also ongoing concerns, as noted by presenters.

Leaders also continue to face issues such as the prevalence of drug addiction in communities and the devastating impacts on young people and their families. The side effects of unregulated development are visible in communities being inundated with cannabis stores. Violence against women, sexual abuse and the need for healing are ongoing priorities. Many individuals remain unhoused due to the lack of quality housing and backlog of housing repairs needed. There was consensus that despite these challenges there are strong women leaders backed by strong administrative supports in all First Nations regions and sectors across Ontario. A number of participants called for women leaders to gather in working sessions to look at how to manage all of these and other priority issues collectively. The need for women to lead their communities through these many critical issues with compassion, kindness and understanding cannot be overstated.



How can First Nations Women Leaders build their strengths?

The dialogue highlighted many of the strengths that First Nations women leaders bring to their roles. Collectively they envision a future where women leaders are fully equipped and supported in optimal working environments that reinforce cultural identity, and are prepared to guide positive community change and mentor the youth as the next generation of leaders. Gatherings such as this Summit help to advance the changes needed.

Many of the stories shared over the three days were proof that growth and healing could happen resulting in positive change within women leaders themselves, their families and their communities. Through the Summit, women's leadership journeys were found to be healing journeys that reverberate across our territories for others to gain and learn from.

“The leadership role comes from within, it’s nurtured by everyone that’s here, it’s nurtured by people around you even though you don’t think it... you’re going to learn something, you’re going to take that with you on your path.”

– Chief Cindy Francis-Mitchell, Mohawk Council of Akwesasne

Teachings: Women in Leadership, An Entrepreneur’s Journey

Dayna McDougall, Onyote’a ka/Oneida Nation of the Thames, Turtle Clan introduced herself. She is the founder of Spirit Earth Holistics Inc. and co-founder of 13 Moons Land-based Learning. She shared that women are life givers and nurturers. It is also the role of women to respect our men; to uphold them to their roles and their responsibilities in a kind and gentle way.

Her business handcrafts wellness products. She and her partner started it in order to have the freedom to uphold and share the language and ceremonies with their family while contributing to people’s wellness and inspiring other First Nations people. Over the years, her business has transitioned as she has transitioned. She recently opened up a hunting camp to provide a space for children and youth to regain their language and identity on the land, where healing happens. She is passionate about resiliency and believes that self-awareness and healing are crucial to any success.

“ I love myself for who I am today, and I just love meeting all of you ... my sisters, my extended family, knowing that we all stand here together as one helping each other. ”

– Evelyn Stone, former Chief, Michipicoten First Nation, Kwe-wuk Women’s Advisory Council member

Where do we go from here?

A final plenary discussion took place to summarize the dialogue and provide the opportunity for participants to share observations and suggest next steps.

Overall, the comments demonstrated the need for more gatherings such as this one that spotlight women leaders, where women can come together, speak freely and share advice. Participants appreciated the openness and felt it was empowering to hear other women in leadership share their stories of overcoming obstacles and achieving their goals. They are the best mentors for other First Nation women leaders because they know what has to be done. Leadership in communities occurs in many ways, not only at the political level.

There was a focus on needing a more nurturing approach in First Nations leadership; this is something women can bring. It is important that leaders value our people and help them believe in their own worth. Participants felt a shared sense of solidarity and felt they could take a lot of tools and ideas home from this gathering.

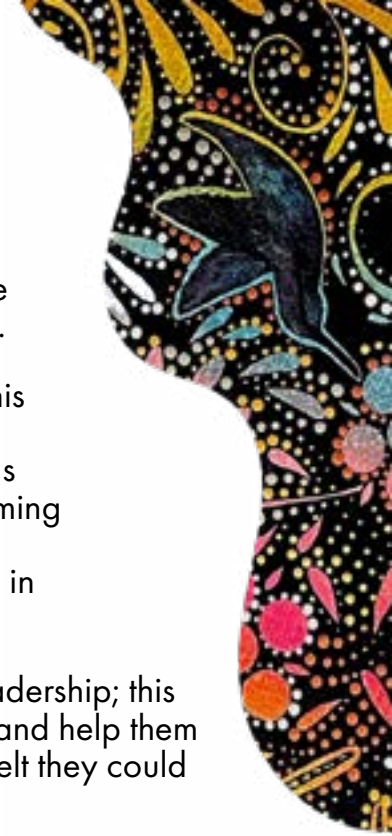
The discussion identified several specific approaches that women leaders could take such as: advocating for more traditional practices including use of the languages, ceremonies and permanent gathering structures in communities; sharing lived experiences to nurture and enable new leaders to grow to their full capacity; reaching out to youth and engaging with them at Council meetings and forums to elevate their voice; staying connected with other communities and enhancing internal communications between community members and programs.

As women leaders they also identified the need for grief supports and recovery programs; training in mediation; safe spaces to work and more funding to ensure not only that community programs are adequately supported but that leaders are also appropriately compensated for their contributions. Many of these same suggestions were noted in a survey of participant feedback on the Summit (see Appendix).

“Learning about the wise practices, portfolios and structures across PTOs, opportunities to hear and share stories, dialogue and celebrate alongside strong women leaders.”

A participant’s response to the survey question, ‘What were some of the most meaningful moments for you and why?’

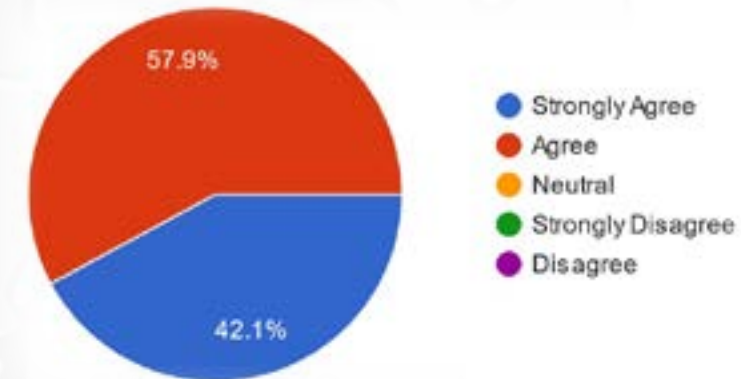
Participants reinforced the importance of continuing to network with each other to provide support, share information and develop collective responses to common issues. In concluding remarks the organizers noted that feedback from participants will inform future initiatives in support of First Nations women leaders, including leadership development approaches that will be shared online.



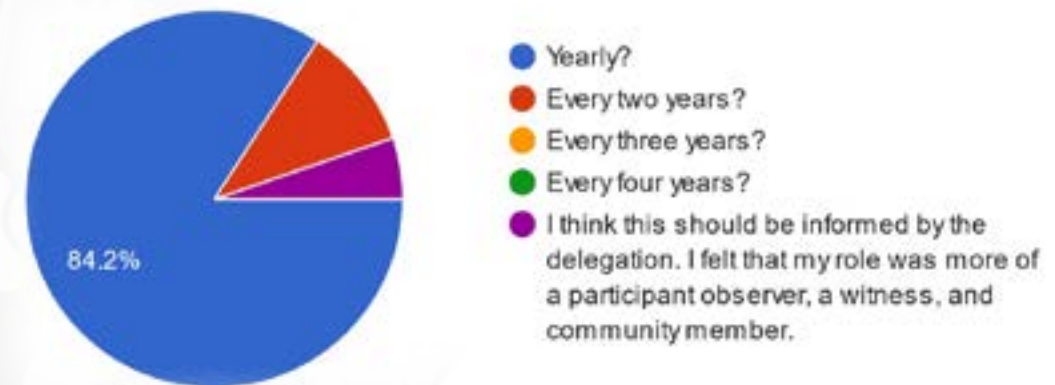


APPENDIX: SURVEY FEEDBACK FIRST NATIONS WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP SUMMIT 2023

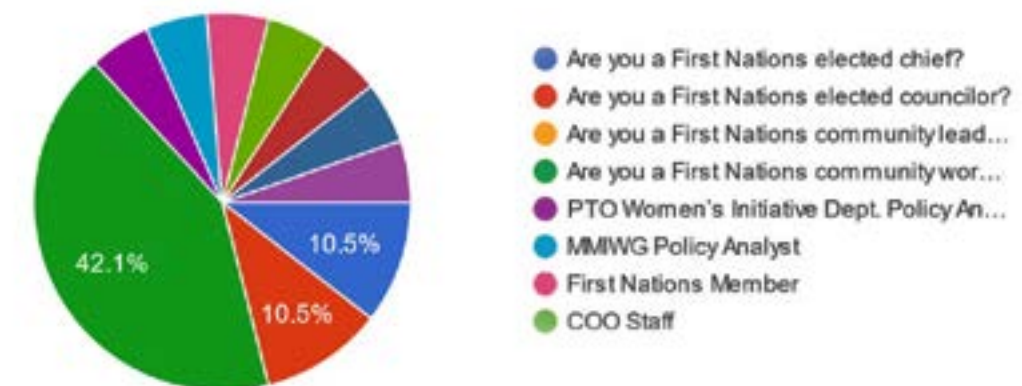
Do you feel the Summit was informative?



How often should we hold a First Nations Women's Leadership Summit?



How do you identify yourself?





WHAT WERE SOME OF THE MOST MEANINGFUL MOMENTS FOR YOU AND WHY?

- IFN update; discussion at our tables.
- Questions about the experience of chiefs and past chiefs - hearing of the challenges (political and social) were important and needed more time to be discussed.
- The story of the elders and how they overcame many obstacles and were able to achieve their goals.
- Overall - the three days.
- Sharing, discussions and hearing personal stories on what we went through and how we came to be.
- Spending time together.
- Storytelling. Helped me hear the opportunities of growth from the speakers. Plus, hearing their personal stories, felt real.
- The 3 Chiefs of Awkwesasne.
- Hearing from the woman in leadership roles in their community.
- That is hard to answer, there was so much that was meaningful. For me, Annie Metatawabain provided us with a real life view of recovery from trauma, to healed, and now healing others.
- Some of the most meaningful moments were listening to the stories of the elders and the women of all the speakers because each and every one of them have an experience and a strength to share. It was so inspiring.
- Presentations – hearing some of the life experiences, and never giving up through challenging times.
- I enjoyed the healing journey stories.
- Connecting with others.
- Realizing that we all share similar challenges. The self-care recommendations were very helpful. Emphasis on stress and health balance.
- To know that there are women councils across the province. At times, we need some help or someone to speak to in today's world. Getting advice from these leaders are beneficial.
- The self-care piece, meeting and greeting new people, and all the help I received from the organizers.
- Getting to know new women leaders and old acquaintances.
- Learning about the wise practices, portfolios, and structures across PTOs; opportunities to hear and share stories, dialogue and celebrate alongside strong women leaders.





AS A FIRST NATION WOMAN LEADER WHAT KIND OF SUPPORTS DO YOU NEED FROM THE STRUCTURE YOU WORK IN, FOR EXAMPLE A WOMEN'S COUNCIL OR OTHERS?

- More funding.
- Women's council, training on mediation and dealing with difficult conversations/ addressing misogyny.
- Mentors for first time women leaders.
- I am just learning about this and would love to know more about the women's council.
- This is my first time attending women's leadership conference and it's good to know that I'm not alone... Ki-chi mee-qweetch.
- Lateral kindness.
- Women's council yes, with support from mentors. Providing those mentors with an honorarium as well.
- Support and prayers.
- Conferences like this - getting women together.
- Support is needed to create a women's council for our area so we can work collectively and bring issues and changes to the surface to make change happen for a better surface.
- We are in a process of starting a women's council and I am excited about the support and direction the women's council will play in our area. As a woman in my position (executive director), it was encouraging to be part of the summit and to know the women in leadership are on the rise. Connecting would be good after a summit with the ladies in this type of position.
- Grief supports.
- Building relationships with other First Nations that have similar issues.
- I believe the current council structure supports my role and meets the needs of the community.
- I have a lot of support where I am today and am very grateful for it.
- More experience and resource sharing - I think would be great.
- A women's council: so many elders who were leaders in community aren't being utilized.
- Structures such as school boards require a distinct and deliberate portfolio tied to Indigenous education and council members to represent and speak to "Indian control of Indian education" in a governance structure that is parallel to the board of trustee's governance structure. This aligns with TRC #43, utilizing UNDRIP as a pathway toward reconciliation.



OVERALL, WHAT DID YOU LIKE THE MOST ABOUT THE SUMMIT?

- Being empowered by other women leaders.
- Three days was necessary - I loved the opportunity to have a reading, reiki or massage done. Self-care is so overlooked! Also the opportunity to network and connect with the other participants!
- Safe, positive space to share without fear of criticism.
- The whole 3 days in the summit were very informative.
- First time being in a women's leadership, and not required to be a council member to attend.
- Council members as guest speakers.
- Being able to attend virtually was a great option, as I fell ill.
- Kept to the time frames.
- Hearing from all the women in leader roles.
- The skills and knowledge shared, and the trust gained.
- Meeting strong women from other First Nations, connecting and networking.
- To be able to gather with other Women from different parts of Ontario.
- I like that everyone was brave and humbled to be known as they are.
- Bringing together leaders in the relaxing atmosphere.
- I loved the opportunity to meet other female leaders.
- Listening to the women speak about their journeys to where they are today.
- The laughter, sharing, and meeting other strong ladies who are fighters of the strong hold...
- The time spent getting to know new leaders, and the laughter.
- In addition to what has already been stated, opportunities for us to think about the importance of self-care and making space for us to think about how we can bring reiki, massages, prayers, meditations, etc., into our daily/personal practice.

WHAT COULD WE IMPROVE UPON NEXT TIME?

- Curated questions, or interview style to get more from the panelists. These were great opportunities to find out more of how they handle challenges as well as how they face adversity.
- More vendors.
- Nothing that I can think of.
- Housekeeping, sharing circles, debriefing, daily meditations to clear space, an on-site counsellor if anyone needs a resource, because we all go through stuff.
- More ceremony and time to just relax with one another.
- Virtually, being able to hear and see the presentations.
- Self-care services.
- Nothing!
- As suggested, include youth.
- To have presenters from various parts of Ontario that COO provides services to, and to have more ice breakers in between session. Also, to interact with other first nations within the summit, to build relationships, connect etc.
- Continue having our own people do the presentations - we have a lot to offer to each other.
- Keep the traditional teachings and elders focused on passing on the knowledge, some are unaware of these.
- To have icebreakers, more self-care and activity sessions, more traditional teaching and practices, and more vendors.
- I feel that it would be great to have elders available for one-on-one consultations around triggers, provide new coping skills, etc. As women we are water carriers, I feel that we should be acknowledging the water (water song). It would be nice to have a sweat or a ceremony to start the conference the evening on the first day, also to have a smudge every morning to start off each day with positivity.
- Having a two-hour break for rest in the afternoon, and work in the evening. It can be tiring emotionally and physically to do all the interactions socially.
- I appreciate and am grateful for this opportunity. A difficult take away for me was the reality of trauma that is entrenched in our colonial structures and affects our ability to practice empathy and compassion. Council member(s) attending the summit while having to forfeit their pay, members having to miss meetings without pay due to harsh realities and traumatic experiences they must navigate, in addition to the many hats they wear and roles and responsibilities they take on. Recommended that all councils consider their policies, practices and procedures to be less punitive and more human, thus, in alignment with our original teachings and laws.

