Implementation Plan 2026

Reconciliation Action Partnership: The Pathway Forward

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Introduction

In 2024, the Reconciliation Action Partnership (RAP) developed *The Pathway Forward*, a document that set the intentions and actions of this collaborative group of municipal representatives. In *The Pathway Forward,* RAP is situated in the following way:

> "Based in Waterloo Region, situated on the traditional territories of the Anishnaabe, Chonnonton, and Haudenosaunee peoples, within the Haldimand Tract Treaty of 1784 and Between the Lakes Treaty (No. 3) of 1792, RAP is committed to planting and nurturing the seeds that will create and grow the roots, which will spread beneath the trunk to stand firm when supporting its branches. As the branches grow upward and onward so will our collective Spirit, Heart, Mind, and Body, amplifying respectful and meaningful relationships with Indigenous communities." (p. 2)

This Implementation Plan document is a companion to *The Pathway Forward*. Readers are encouraged to review *The Pathway Forward* as it provides the framework for RAP's work, which is rooted in Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe ways of knowing. The Implementation Plan identifies an organizational structure and priorities that will guide progress on the Actions identified on the three the medicine wheels (pp 15-17, from here on referred to as "the Actions"). Taking this approach will help us track our progress, which in turn will help us remain accountable to ourselves, and most importantly, to local Indigenous communities.

Truth and Reconciliation is not a destination, but a continuous journey. The harm caused over centuries cannot be undone overnight, it will take generations to heal. This work will continue, as constant and cyclical as the changing seasons. To reflect this we will use language such as "progress made" rather than "items completed" in this document and in future updates.

The Implementation Plan

This document presents 14 Focus Areas. Each Focus Area brings related actions together and identifies the next steps and tasks that will help RAP members make progress on those Actions. A risk of creating Focus Areas is that responses to the Actions become siloed. RAP members will remain mindful of this risk and will keep the connections between the Focus Areas top of mind. It may be that one phase of work on an Action fits best with one Focus Area, then it is passed on to other Focus Areas for future phases.

In most cases, the work of each Focus Area will be done by a committee of staff from across the member municipalities. This approach helps build connections between RAP Actions and the mandates of existing municipal departments. It also supports

collaboration by ensuring input from multiple municipalities. In the spirit of the Two Row Wampum, each committee is facilitated by an Indigenous staff person and a non-Indigenous staff person. This format provides a tangible reminder that each group has a distinct role, and it is essential to work together and support one another on our reconciliation journey.

In 2026, RAP's priorities and workplan will concentrate on Focus Areas 1 through 9. Work in these areas either has strong momentum or has been discussed at RAP. As a result, a vision for next steps has already been more clearly articulated.

Many of the Actions in Focus Areas 10 through 14 require leadership from staff who are not currently connected to RAP. Over the next few years, RAP members will work on building connections to relevant staff teams and identifying steps and tasks that will be outlined in future iterations of the Implementation Plan.

RAP staff anticipate providing an update in late 2026 or early 2027. This update will report on progress made as well as priorities for the next reporting period.

Role of RAP

The priorities identified in this Implementation Plan, and RAP's work in general, do not replace the responsibilities of individual municipalities to make progress on Truth and Reconciliation. Rather, this Implementation Plan focuses on work that should be done collaboratively or consistently across municipal governments in Waterloo Region. Some examples include:

- Hosting one community feast instead of eight.
- Ensuring all staff and elected officials have access to the same training and information.
- Dividing research responsibilities and sharing the findings (e.g. legislative requirements, promising practices) that will inform policies, frameworks and approaches that need to be developed by each municipality.

An additional essential function of RAP is not directly addressed in the Focus Areas, Actions or tasks. RAP provides a space for staff to build connections and support one another. Indigenous staff generously share their knowledge and lived experience with staff from all municipalities. Non-Indigenous staff are able to ask questions and receive important feedback. Building trusting relationships among staff is central to making progress on Truth and Reconciliation within our organizations and in the community.

1. RAP Administration

Led by: RAP Guiding Circle

Facilitators

- Brian Hill – Co-chair, City of Waterloo**
- Anastasia Lyons – Firekeeper**

Members

- Paula Whitlow, Region of Waterloo
- Stacey-Anne Bryenton, Region of Waterloo
- Justine Kennedy, City of Kitchener
- Rumina Morris, City of Kitchener**
- Zohra Wali, City of Cambridge
- Sanjay Govindaraj, City of Waterloo**
- Michelle Poissant, Township of North Dumfries**
- Amy Harron, Township of Wellesley
- Rachel Greene, Township of Wilmot
- Rae Ann Bauman, Township of Woolwich

**member of Governance Sub-Committee (time-limited, January – June 2026)

Operational Support:

- **Communication** – Led by City of Waterloo
    - Communications Liaison – Shirley Luu, supported by all communications teams
- **Finance** – Led by City of Waterloo
    - Finance Liaison – Julie Koppeser
- **Shared files host** – Led by City of Kitchener
    - Shared files Liaison – Sue Weare
- **Strategic Planning** – Led by Region of Waterloo
    - RAP Strategic Planning Liaisons – Kaylagh Vanwyck, Van Vilaysinh

Responding to Actions:

- *The Pathway Forward* does not include administrative actions, but the next steps section (p. 18) recommends a review of RAP governance and development of a plan to guide implementation.

Progress Made:

- RAP Shared budget established in 2022.
- *The Pathway Forward* completed in 2024, sets direction for RAP.
    - Shared with Indigenous community members at 2024 Fall Feast.

Priorities for 2026:

1. Share Implementation Plan and 2026 Priorities with local Indigenous communities and municipal staff.
2. Revise RAP Terms of Reference to reflect current practices and to support implementation of *The Pathway Forward*.
3. Review RAP Budget Allocation and revise as needed.

2. Firekeeper Liaisons and Supports

Led by: Liaisons from each member municipality

Facilitators/Supervisors

- Brian Hill, City of Waterloo, host municipality
- Sanjay Govindaraj, City of Waterloo, host municipality

Members

- Zohra Wali – City of Cambridge
- Rumina Morris – City of Kitchener
- Paula Whitlow – Region of Waterloo
- Michelle Poissant – North Dumfries
- Amy Haron – Wellesley
- Rachel Greene – Wilmot
- Rae Ann Bauman – Woolwich

Responding to Action:

- Hire and Retain an Indigenous Firekeeper for RAP (Goal 1 – Spring).

Progress Made:

- Vision for Firekeeper first articulated in 2022.
- Model of host municipality with support of all members developed, City of Waterloo accepted role of host in 2024.
- Anastasia Lyons started as Firekeeper in June 2025.

Priority for 2026:

1. Provide initial onboarding and ongoing support to the Firekeeper.

3. Relationship-building and Community Engagement

Led by: Relationship-building and Community Engagement Committee

Facilitators

- Sue Weare, City of Kitchener
- Justine Kennedy, City of Kitchener

Members

- Zohra Wali – City of Cambridge
- Emma Goulding – City of Waterloo
- Maritza Yawching-Robertson – Region of Waterloo (Public Health)
- Deb Bergey – Region of Waterloo
- *Open – Township Representative*

Collaborators: Communications Content Committee, Engaging Treaty Partners

Responding to Actions:

- Host RAP's annual Community Feast (Goal 1 – Winter).
- Continue ongoing community engagement to learn the needs and interests of Indigenous community (Goal 3 – Spring).
- Maintain relationships by attending community events hosted by Indigenous partners (Goal 1 – Winter).
- Amplify Indigenous organizations and their events (Goal 1 – Winter).
- Invite Indigenous voices, knowledge keepers and elders to collaborate and advise on RAP actions (Goal 1 – Spring).
- Embed Indigenous traditions and practices into municipal processes, structures and policies (e.g. benefits, council protocols, strategic planning (Goal 3 – Autumn).

Progress Made:

- Hosted 4 Community Feasts (June 2023, June 2024, November 2024, June 2025).
- Input received on 2024 and 2025 Every Child Matters (ECM) bus wrap artwork submitted by local Indigenous artists; input on *The Pathway Forward* document.
- Purchase of 2025 ECM licensing.

Priorities for 2026:

1. Establish an annual cycle for Community Feasts.
2. Hold Community Engagement Days in each municipality, starting with the four Townships
3. Maintain and build relationships with local Indigenous communities.

4. Bring the voices of Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers and community members to the work of RAP.

4. Communications

Led by: Communications Content Committee

Facilitator

- Anastasia Lyons, Firekeeper

Members

- Neisa Long, City of Kitchener
- Jenna Mayne, Region of Waterloo
- Rae Ann Bauman, Township of Woolwich
- Amy Haron, Township of Wellesley

Collaborators: Communications Liaison, All RAP Committees

Responding to Actions:

- Establish a collective communications strategy to guide and align Indigenous related communications across municipalities (Goal 2 – Spring).
- Support Days of Significance (Goal 2 – Summer).

Progress Made:

- Web presence established – 2023.
- Days of Significance Briefing Notes completed – 2023.
- Community Feast Posters designed and distributed – 2023, 2024.
- Extending ECM bus wrap licensing for year-round use.

Priorities for 2026:

1. Increase RAP's presence in the community and among municipal staff.
2. Recognize Indigenous Days of Significance.

5. Learning and Development

Led by: Learning and Development Committee

Facilitators:

- Stella Appau, Region of Waterloo
- Paula Whitlow, Region of Waterloo

Members:

- Brian Hill, City of Waterloo
- Stacey-Anne Bryenton, Region of Waterloo
- Tara Eykens, City of Kitchener
- *Open – Township Representative*

Collaborators: Indigenous Voices and Perspectives: Council and Committees

Responding to Actions:

- Provide training for municipal staff on applying Indigenous approaches (Goal 2 – Winter).
- Share monthly Indigenous teachings at RAP (Goal 2 – Winter).
- Integrate inclusive practices into RAP through teaching circles and land-based training (Goal 1 – Summer).
- Educate municipal Councils on Indigenous knowledge, ways of doing and practices (Goal 3 – Spring).
- Utilize RAP website to offer resources and education (Goal 1 – Summer).
- Develop a long-term Truth and Reconciliation education strategy for municipal staff including ongoing training on Indigenous history, culture, tradition and knowledge (Goal 1 – Spring).

Progress Made:

- Provided coordinated training to staff on the following: Foundational Knowledge, Territorial Acknowledgements, Métis History and Culture (2021/2022).
- Provided Foundational Knowledge training to all Council members (2023).
- Facilitated RAP section of *Reconciliation: Implications for Settler Peoples* course (first cohort completed in 2024, second cohort in progress as of May 2025).
- Design and deliver coordinated lunch and learns, Brave Conversations (started Jan 2025, in progress to Dec 2025).
- Four Seasons of Reconciliation online course launched June 2025.

Priorities for 2026:

1. Deliver training to and share teachings with staff.
2. Work with Area Clerks to design and deliver training as part of New Council Orientations and beyond (refer to Focus Area 7).
3. Develop an online resource library (refer to Focus Area 8).

6. Honoraria and Reciprocity

Led by: Honoraria and Reciprocity Committee

Facilitators:

- Pam Albrecht, City of Waterloo
- Justine Kennedy, City of Kitchener

Members:

- Zohra Wali, City of Cambridge
- Symone Prince, City of Kitchener
- Heather Baxter, Region of Waterloo
- Rae Ann Bauman, Township of Woolwich

Collaborators: Communications, Learning and Development

Responding to Actions:

- Establish honoraria and reciprocity practices (Goal 3 – Summer).

Progress Made:

- Research on promising practices, Canda Revenue Agency requirements.
- Created preliminary guidelines as a starting point for municipalities.
- Kitchener approved: *Honorarium and Reimbursement Policy for Advisory and Quasi-Judicial Committees of the Council* in 2024.
- Cambridge adopts a guideline for engaging with Indigenous Elders, which includes information on honoraria, 2025.
- Waterloo approved: *Honorarium and Compensation Policy*, 2025.
- Kitchener completed resource for staff on implications for people on Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and Ontario Works (OW), 2025.

Priority for 2026:

1. Support development of policies and procedures related to providing honoraria and compensation in each municipality.

7. Indigenous Voices and Perspectives: Council and Committees

Led by: Area Clerks

Facilitator:

- TBD

Advisor

- Anastasia Lyons, Firekeeper

Members:

- City of Cambridge Clerk
- City of Kitchner Clerk
- City of Waterloo Clerk
- Region of Waterloo Clerk
- North Dumfries Clerk
- Wellesley Clerk
- Wilmot Clerk
- Woolwich Clerk

Collaborators: Relationship-building and Community Engagement; Learning and Development

Responding to Actions:

- Educate municipal Councils on Indigenous knowledge, ways of doing and practices (Goal 3 – Spring; Shared with L&D).
- Support and advocate for Indigenous representation on municipal Councils (Goal 3 – Autumn).
- Promote Indigenous representation on municipal committees (Goal 3 – Winter).
- Support Indigenous community on advocating and participating in municipal decision-making (Goal 3 – Spring).

Progress Made:

- Training for all council members (2023).
- Update on *The Pathway Forward* to all council members (2024).

Priorities for 2026:

1. Explore ways to support Indigenous community involvement in municipal decision-making processes.

2. Work with the Learning and Development Committee to design and deliver training as part of New Council Orientations and beyond (refer to Focus Area 5).

8. Community Support

Led by: Firekeeper

Supported by: Committees as noted

Collaborators: All RAP Committees

Responding to Actions:

- Establish a resource library open to communities with Indigenous knowledge processes, approaches, stories and methodologies (Goal 1 – Summer).
- Create opportunities for Indigenous communities to share their culture and traditions (Goal 3 – Winter).

Progress Made:

- Development of resources for staff, including Brave Conversations videos, Days of Significance resources.
- Privately owned soap stone carvings collection displayed at multiple municipalities in Waterloo Region.

Priorities for 2026:

1. Develop an online resource library (refer to Focus Area 5, Learning and Development).
2. Develop internal municipal processes that improve access to community Sacred Fires.

9. Access to Spaces

Led by: Access to Spaces Committee

Facilitators:

- *Open*
- *Open*

Advisor

- Anastasia Lyons, Firekeeper

Members:

- Neisa Long, City of Kitchener

Collaborators: Safe and Inclusive Spaces Action Table, an initiative of Waterloo Region's Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan, chaired by Paula Whitlow, Region of Waterloo and Danielle Manton, City of Cambridge

Responding to Actions:

- Support the creation of outdoor Indigenous gathering spaces for ceremonies, events and celebrations (Goal 2 – Summer).
- Co-design spaces based on community needs, wants and interests with Indigenous ways in mind (circular spaces, access to smudge, and Indigenous Children and Youth spaces) (Goal 2 – Spring).

Progress Made:

- Fee waiver for Indigenous groups (2020).
- City of Kitchener engagement on outdoor spaces (2022).
- Region of Waterloo Indigenous Space Needs Assessment (2023).
- Planning sacred fire space at Region of Waterloo (2024/2025).

Priorities for 2026:

1. Gather data around current spaces and make that information available to community.
2. Support the work of the Safe and Inclusive Spaces Action Table, by bringing community partners together to identify resources to expand access to culturally safe community spaces.

Additional Actions

The following Actions require further consideration by RAP. Many require leadership from staff who are not currently connected to RAP. Over the next few years, staff will work on building internal connections to relevant staff teams and identifying steps and tasks that will be outlined in the next iteration of the Implementation Plan.

The cycle of the seasons will guide our work on these Actions:

- Winter – Rest/Reflecting & Learning: build relationships and connections with staff teams across the Region responsible for the work; proposed approach of sharing more about RAP and wanting to support staff teams in their work
- Spring – Planting/Planning: compile the current state of the work, e.g. initiatives being worked on, policies practices and procedures that already exist
- Summer – Growing/Implementing: work with staff teams to explore opportunities for collaborative initiatives or harmonizing shared practices
- Autumn – Harvesting/Monitoring – report progress to RAP along the way
- Continue the cycle to make further progress – e.g. get feedback from RAP/staff teams on next steps (Winter); make plans to implement an initiative that will advance the action (Spring); implement the initiative (Summer); report back and evaluate (Autumn)

10. Embedding Indigenous knowledge and approaches

Responding to Actions:

- Embed Indigenous traditions and practices into municipal processes, structures and policies (e.g. benefits, council protocols, strategic planning) (Goal 3 – Autumn)
- Develop a toolkit for two-eyed seeing, community engagement and co-design based on Indigenous teachings and approaches (ex. Honorarium and compensation practices) (Goal 3 – Summer)
- Utilize community based evaluation approaches that draw on Indigenous culture and ways of learning (Goal 1 – Autumn)

Progress Made

- Format and approach of *The Pathway Forward*.

11. Engaging Treaty Partners

Responding to Actions:

- Create a shared municipal process for consulting and engaging treaty partners (Goal 3 – Summer).

Progress Made

- Work of Indigenous Engagement Community of Practice (IECOP) offered direction on distinction between consultation and engagement (2022)
- Inter-municipal gathering to share staff learnings related to engagement with Indigenous communities (June 2024)
- Planning departments across the Region have developed relationships with Six Nations. They have collaborated on a Protocol for Engagement to provide Planning staff with guidance on consulting and engaging with Six Nations. This Protocol is understood to be a living document (2025).
- Planning departments are pursuing similar work with Mississaugas of the Credit (ongoing).

12. Recognition: Indigenous Art

Responding to Actions:

- Promote Indigenous art in more public spaces (Goal 2 – Winter)
- Support municipal open spaces to incorporate Indigenous art and education (for example – City Hall, recreation centres, and parks, etc. (Goal 2 – Winter)

- Encourage Indigenous recognition and acknowledgement throughout municipalities (**murals, art**, plaques, naming municipal assets, etc.) (Goal 1 – Autumn)

Progress Made

- Arts and Culture / Creative Industries teams across the Region have been engaging Indigenous artists for some time
- Every Child Matters bus wrap (2023, 2024, 2025 in progress)

13. Recognition: Heritage and Naming

Responding to Actions:

- Encourage Indigenous recognition and acknowledgement throughout municipalities (murals, art, **plaques, naming municipal assets**, etc.) (Goal 1 – Autumn)

Progress Made

- Discussion with community members in Kitchener

14. Hiring and Retention Practices

Responding to Actions:

- Review hiring and retention practices to ensure they are inclusive and welcoming for Indigenous applicants (Goal 3 – Autumn)

Progress Made

- Some municipalities have done an employee census to develop a baseline for staff complement, allowing tracking of retention in future