

Get READI Plan

2025-2030



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Territorial Acknowledgement

As immigrants and settlers on this land, the non-Indigenous members of the READI team humbly acknowledge the land that the City of Waterloo is situated on and the Peoples who have cared for, and continue to care for, this land.

For us, the process of Reconciliation starts with educating ourselves on the history of Indigenous Peoples, and on the consequences of colonization that continue to this day. We understand that this means unlearning what we have been taught, including that the name of where we live and work is in the Region of Waterloo. We learned that this Region includes 3 cities and 4 townships, before we learned that this Region is part of Treaty 3, the Haldimand Tract, which encompasses six miles on either side of the Grand River from the mouth near Dundalk to where it empties into Lake Erie at Port Maitland. We acknowledge and understand that this land is known as the Dish with One Spoon Treaty territory and has been traditionally cared for by the Haudenosaunee, Anishnaabe, and Chonnonton Peoples.

This land was promised to the Haudenosaunee Confederation of the Six Nations of the Grand River in October of 1784, to compensate them for the loss of their lands in upstate New York when they allied with the British, who were defeated in the American Revolutionary war. We recognize and acknowledge that this land was not land for the British or any other government body to give or take away. Today, this land is home to Indigenous Peoples from many distinct First Nations, as well as to Métis and to Inuit.

Reconciliation also involves reflection and conscientious examination of how we as settlers may maintain and uplift colonial practices, and how we can disrupt those practices when they come to our awareness. The Region of Waterloo is known for being an important epicentre of innovation in information and digital technology development. It is also known as a post-secondary education leader, for having stunning landscapes that have been featured in cinema, and for the St. Jacob's Farmers' Market. We would additionally like to instead recognize this part of the Haldimand Tract for its beautiful rolling landscapes, its immersive and rich conservation spaces, its peaceful and scenic trails, its flowing rivers and comforting breezes. This land has become our home. It has shaped our identities. It has brought us peace of mind and heart in difficult times. It provides us with the motivation and courage to endure many challenges of life so that we, and our loved ones, can thrive.

Reconciliation occurs in the daily interactions we have at the personal, community, and institutional levels, and this is where we seek to make a difference. With deep humility, we acknowledge the enduring presence and deep traditional knowledge and philosophies of the Indigenous Peoples with whom we share this land today. With gratitude, we offer this acknowledgement as one small act of Reconciliation as part of the long journey ahead which we desire to travel, together.

Executive Summary

The Get Reconciliation, Equity, Accessibility, Diversity, and Inclusion (READI) Plan is a tool to guide all City of Waterloo¹ divisions as they plan, budget, and provide services and programs for residents and visitors. This Plan is the result of a joint effort involving the City of Waterloo’s READI team, community members, and staff teams across the City divisions. This community-influenced plan will guide the City of Waterloo on its journey to embed READI into the values and work of the corporation.

This collaborative document resulted from working closely with organizations representing equity-denied groups² and City of Waterloo staff to establish priorities and goals for advancing READI initiatives. The project was carried out in three phases. First, an internal and external document scan was conducted to review existing strategic plans that included READI, as well as past community consultations and documents. Second, several months were dedicated to engagement sessions with the community and staff, with a focus on working closely with members of equity-denied communities to understand their most important needs. Finally, the third phase involved collaborating with the community, staff, and Council to refine draft versions of the Get READI Plan.

This Plan reflects the collective priorities and goals of the various groups involved. It incorporates input from 40 organizational representatives, spanning non-profits, grassroots organizations, and advocacy groups serving equity-denied members, as well as insights shared by individuals from across 27 staff teams at the City of Waterloo. Additionally, it integrates findings from 40 existing documents, including the City of Waterloo’s 2023-2026 Strategic Plan, summaries of findings from previous consultation projects that took place across the Waterloo community, reports created by community groups, and federal and provincial documents.

1 Henceforth, the corporation shall be referred to as the City of Waterloo or “the City”, while the municipality shall be referred to as Waterloo community.

2 Equity-seeking, equity-deserving, and equity-denied describe communities and groups facing significant barriers to fully participating in society. These barriers may be rooted in attitudes, history, social relations, institutional, and environmental factors that have developed negative consequences for one’s social characteristics, such as age, ethnicity, disability, economic status, Indigenous identity, gender identity and expression, nationality, race, religious identity, sexual orientation, and others. Acknowledging the evolving nature of language, we adopt the term equity-denied to refer to these communities. This term identifies those who encounter barriers to equal access, opportunities, and resources due to disadvantage and discrimination while actively advocating for social justice and reparations. This term is chosen over equity-seeking and equity-deserving, as both imply an ownership of these groups to “seek” or “deserve” equity. On the other hand, the term equity-denied takes this responsibility away from these groups and places it on those in positions of power (source: University of British Columbia. (2023, July 5). [Equity and inclusion glossary of terms](#). UBC Equity and Inclusion Office.)

CONTINUED

Executive Summary

Based on the themes that emerged through consultations and the scan, six priority areas for advancing READI across the Waterloo community were identified. These priority areas include:

- Improve Indigenous relations and foster Reconciliation.
- Enhance the built environment.
- Cultivate a culture of belonging.
- Increase diversity of staff and leadership.
- Focus on equitable distribution of resources.
- Build trust through systems of accountability.

Using these priority areas, the Get READI Plan will help guide the work of the City of Waterloo for the next five years. This Plan's timeline is set by the renewal periods of the Multi-Year Accessibility Plan, which is incorporated into the Get READI Plan. This timeline is also intended to bring the Plan closer to being in line with the City's municipal budgeting process.

The goals in each priority area include short, medium, and long-term aspirations that may extend beyond the timelines of this plan. While the City of Waterloo will work towards achieving these goals within the specified timelines, some may require long-term planning and resources. Therefore, not all goals listed in the Plan will be completed by the time of renewal.

Introduction

Throughout 2022-2023, community engagement sessions and surveys for the City of Waterloo Strategic Plan (2023-2026) demonstrated a strong desire from Waterloo residents to address READI meaningfully. Top priorities for the community included:

- Building strong, inclusive communities and neighbourhoods;
- Enhancing the built environment;
- Improving services for equity-denied groups;
- Increasing diverse representation across the City of Waterloo; and
- Tackling the affordability crisis.

In response to these priorities, the City of Waterloo, led by the READI team, has prioritized making the Waterloo community more inclusive, equitable, and accessible. A main objective of the READI team is the establishment of this Plan, which is designed to steer the City of Waterloo's READI work in a strategic manner.

This Plan is the first of its kind for the City of Waterloo. It has been intentionally designed to reflect the diverse voices in Waterloo's growing community. It is a humble attempt to incorporate the input of multiple community groups to ensure its direction is community-based and specific to people across the Waterloo community. Community input was embedded through consultations and an extensive document scan. Included in the community consultations were:

- Waterloo community residents and groups serving equity-denied communities;
- Indigenous communities;
- A number of City of Waterloo staff across departments;
- Advisory and Working groups at the City of Waterloo and the Region of Waterloo; and
- Reports from different levels of provincial and federal government in Canada.

Through this input, the Get READI Plan brings to life a collective direction for creating a Waterloo where all residents and visitors can equally engage and participate without encountering barriers, including those based on race or ethnicity, gender, sexuality, age, religious identity or practices, economic and housing status, and / or disability.

Overview of the Waterloo Community

Located in Southwestern Ontario, Waterloo is situated on the land traditionally cared for by the Haudenosaunee, Anishnaabe, and Chonnonton Peoples. Waterloo is one of three cities in the Region of Waterloo, along with the cities of Cambridge and Kitchener. It is situated near multiple townships, including North Dumfries, Wellesley, Wilmot, and Woolwich.

With a population of 147,350 (including students) as of 2021, Waterloo is a vibrant city experiencing rapid growth in both residents and job opportunities. Home to three post-secondary institutions, it attracts top talent from across Canada and the world. With a strong foundation in innovation and technology, Waterloo is also home to multiple think tanks, finance and insurance companies, a booming financial-technology sector, and a start-up culture.

Waterloo is home to a broad diversity of people, many who identify as belonging to equity-denied groups. According to data from 2021, Waterloo's population includes individuals from non-Christian faith-based communities (16.5%), those whose mother tongue³ is neither English nor French (30%), people who speak neither official language (1.7%), Indigenous groups (1.3%), immigrants (27.5%) inclusive of refugees (4.1%), and racialized populations non-Indigenous to Canada (35%)⁴. Waterloo has an aging population with about 15% of its citizens being adults aged 65 and older. It also has a significant population of people with disabilities, with about 21% of individuals in the Waterloo Region identifying as having a disability in 2019. These statistics only begin to form an impression of the diversity that describes the vibrant character of the Waterloo community.

With its rapidly growing and diverse population, the City of Waterloo is committed to fair and equitable opportunities for all residents in social, political, economic, and cultural areas of life. The City of Waterloo supports diversity by recognizing and celebrating differences in the ways that it plans and makes decisions. By prioritizing READI, considering the intersecting needs of its residents, and impacts of decisions, City of Waterloo staff and leaders aim to dismantle discrimination and systemic oppression, reconcile past injustices with present opportunities, and ultimately, foster a more just and inclusive community.

3 [Mother tongue](#) refers to the first language learned at home in childhood and still understood by the person at the time the data was collected. If the person no longer understands the first language learned, the mother tongue is the second language learned. For a person who learned more than one language at the same time in early childhood, the mother tongue is the language this person spoke most often at home before starting school.

4 Data calculated from: Statistics Canada. (2023, February 1). [Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population](#).

The READI Team

In January 2022, the City of Waterloo formally established the Reconciliation, Equity, Accessibility, Diversity, and Inclusion (READI) team in response to a community-driven need for system level change focusing on reconciliation, anti-racism, accessibility, and equity. This need was highlighted through a series of prominent movements including the local Black Lives Matter movement following the tragic murder of George Floyd in the United States, and through the O:se Kenhionhata:tie Land Back Camp located in Waterloo Park.

While these two events increased public awareness of the need for systemic changes, the City of Waterloo further recognized that the everyday experiences of many community members in Waterloo demanded action towards equity and belonging. Notably, in 2017, the need to understand diversity and inclusion in the City of Waterloo's workforce was made clear through requests by staff. A Diversity and Inclusion Taskforce was formalized by the Chief Administrative Officer. The Task Force recognized the importance of demographic data as a starting point, which led to the City of Waterloo's first ever Diversity Census and Inclusion Survey of City staff, conducted in March 2019. The survey results informed the creation of internal, cross-departmental Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) working groups.

As the work of the DEI working groups progressed, the READI team was developed to support ongoing, sustained embedding of Reconciliation, equity, accessibility, diversity, and inclusion into all policies, processes, programs, and services offered by the City of Waterloo. The intention of the READI team is to transform the corporate culture of the City of Waterloo to be more inclusive by improving support for equity-denied communities in Waterloo.

The READI team is also tasked with advancing the City of Waterloo's strategic priority of enhancing READI initiatives throughout the City of Waterloo and pursuing the Calls to Action outlined by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

The Get READI Plan is the direct result of engagement with community members and City of Waterloo staff to obtain feedback and learn from unique individual experiences, and better understand how to serve the community. Following this Plan, the READI team, in collaboration with City staff, will also develop an Implementation Plan, and a Measurement and Monitoring Framework that will guide and record the City of Waterloo's progress over the next five years.

Team member portfolios

The READI team is made up of six staff who lead the work of READI initiatives at the City of Waterloo. The team collaborates with various representatives and organizations in Waterloo community to gain insight into the lived experiences of individuals who identify as Indigenous, Black, racialized, disabled, seniors, youth, persons living with mental health and/or addiction challenges, women, 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, religious minorities, or those living unsheltered.

DIRECTOR

Leads the portfolios of the READI team. Their objective is to guide the City of Waterloo's work on READI and create strong relationships with City of Waterloo staff, organizations across Waterloo community, and community members. They are accountable for meeting the team's goals.

INDIGENOUS INITIATIVES ADVOCATE

Works to support actions that reconcile the historical systemic issues that have affected Indigenous Peoples. They educate on how past decisions continue to impact local and urban Indigenous communities today. They seek recognition for these issues by providing education and training opportunities to City of Waterloo staff. They also identify gaps, support problem solving, and assist in implementing actions towards Reconciliation between the City of Waterloo and Indigenous communities who have cared for these lands since time immemorial.

ACCESSIBILITY ADVOCATE

Ensures that the City of Waterloo follows the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) and goes beyond the minimum standards where possible. They work with the Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee (GRAAC) and all departments across the City of Waterloo to amplify the needs and the experiences of people with disabilities. The Accessibility Advocate also promotes and supports implementation of accessible programs and services.

ANTI-RACISM AND SOCIAL JUSTICE ADVOCATE

Builds relationships with community partners to bring awareness and action on community priorities at the City of Waterloo. They engage in community-based restorative justice work towards ending hate-related incidents in Waterloo community (e.g., Anti-Hate education). They facilitate education and training opportunities about anti-oppression, anti-racism, and the Ontario Human Rights Code for staff at the City of Waterloo, in addition to supporting policy and program development.

PROJECT COORDINATOR

Organizes and streamlines ongoing and defined initiatives within the three portfolios of the READI team. They provide oversight of all activities to coordinate supports and resource needs, while supporting the READI team to achieve collective goals and strategic objectives. They work on initiatives and projects specific to City of Waterloo staff, which improve the working culture of the City of Waterloo.

CO-OP STUDENT

Provides necessary administrative, research, policy development, and project management supports to the three portfolios of the READI team. They help increase the READI team's capacity on projects and ongoing initiatives, while infusing creativity and new perspectives into the work.

Team guiding principles

Throughout 2022-2023, the READI team set the vision, mission, and goals that would guide their work. They also began working on recommendations by:

- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action (2015).
- National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Calls for Justice (2019).
- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (2007).
- Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA, 2005).
- Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion's DEI recommendations to the City of Waterloo (following a staff Diversity Census and Inclusion Survey in 2019).

Team vision statement

The READI team will lead the City of Waterloo to foster a sense of belonging for all through a commitment to Reconciliation, equity, accessibility, diversity, and inclusion.

Team mission statement

To support the City of Waterloo with knowledge, tools, and strategic partnerships to disrupt and dismantle all forms of discrimination, and to work towards eliminating barriers to justice, equity, and inclusion.

Team values

The READI team models their core values on the Seven Grandfather Teachings of the Anishinaabe and the Great Law of the Haudenosaunee. The Seven Grandfather Teachings are a set of Anishinaabe guiding principles passed down from generation to generation to guide the Anishinaabe in living a good life in peace and without conflict. The Great Law of the Haudenosaunee is a set of principles that guide human relationships with the natural world to establish collective unity and harmony.

The following lifestyle characteristics are included in these Indigenous Teachings. The READI team will role model these values to encourage teams to build capacity to learn about and to embed them in daily practices.

Mnaadendimowin

(RESPECT)

Being open and honest in learning, sharing, and partnering.

Zaagidwin

(LOVE)

Celebrating our differences and accepting our uniqueness.

Debwewin

(TRUTH)

Operating with integrity in all our engagements.

Dbaadendiziwin

(HUMILITY)

Fostering healthy conversations with an emphasis on listening – creating a safe space to have healthy and sometimes difficult conversations.

Nibwaakaawin

(WISDOM)

Creating opportunities to learn and grow with each other through sharing of knowledge, understanding, and life experiences.

Aakwa'ode'ewin

(BRAVERY)

Always speaking truth to power in a way that brings about change.

Gwekwaadziwin

(HONESTY)

Being honest with our words and actions. Knowing and accepting who we are reminds us to not try to be someone who we are not.

Team goals

The READI team's overarching goal is to create an inclusive and welcoming culture at the City of Waterloo. To embed the principles of READI across the City, the team supports:

- Building trusting, respectful, and reciprocal relationships between the City of Waterloo and equity-denied communities for meaningful and sustainable change.
- Identifying and dismantling colonial legacies and systemic barriers to foster equitable re-distribution of resources and opportunities.
- Measuring and monitoring progress on the advancement of this Plan to be transparent in our progress and understand gaps and opportunities.
- Incorporating Indigenous teachings and practices into everyday life, to create and maintain mutually respectful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples.
- Implementing actions that respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action for municipalities, with a commitment to acknowledging harms, atoning for the effects of those harms, and changing behaviour to ensure an equitable future.

These vision and mission statements, core values, and goals are the guiding principles that have led the development of this Plan.

Guiding Groups

The READI team works alongside committees and working groups that align with the team's goals. The members of these committees and groups have provided input throughout the development of this Plan. Some important groups to highlight include:

The Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee (GRAAC)

According to the AODA (2005), municipalities with a population of 10,000 or more must have an Accessibility Advisory Committee to advise Council on how to prevent, identify, and remove barriers for persons with disabilities. The Grand River Accessibility Advisory Committee (GRAAC) is a joint committee of the Cities of Waterloo and Kitchener, Region of Waterloo and the Townships of North Dumfries, Wellesley, Woolwich, and Wilmot. GRAAC advises the participating municipalities on the development of Accessibility Plans, including accessibility of buildings, structures, or premises under control of the municipalities. For example, GRAAC reviews site plans and drawings for new municipal buildings or developments. The Built Environment Sub Committee of GRAAC was formed to manage the many building projects brought to GRAAC meetings.

Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) Working Group

In late 2020, the Region of Waterloo, the Cities of Waterloo, Kitchener, and Cambridge, and the Townships of North Dumfries, Wellesley, Woolwich, and Wilmot established the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) Working Group to develop a Reconciliation Action Plan for Waterloo Region. This Action Plan identifies strategies that will strengthen Indigenous engagement and consultation processes across Waterloo Region. Additionally, RAP applies Indigenous governance models, principles, and teachings to all its work.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Structure

This Structure is a working group consisting of various DEI Project Teams that work collaboratively. The teams consist of members of the READI team and City staff. This collective Structure focuses on advancing DEI initiatives and addressing specific DEI-related issues within the City. The Structure supports the corporate commitment outlined in the Strategic Plan (2023-2026) and contributes to employee well-being by creating an inclusive environment, promoting education and awareness, and providing opportunities for collaboration among employees from diverse backgrounds to work towards creating an equitable and supportive workplace.

Guiding Documents

Multiple legislative documents and reports guide the work of the City of Waterloo and have been incorporated into the Get READI Plan. These documents include:

[Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 \(AODA\)](#)

The AODA aims to improve accessibility in buildings, outdoor spaces, employment, procurement, training, customer service, information and communications, and transportation through legislation. The AODA applies to private and public sectors, including municipalities. The City of Waterloo is responsible for the implementation and compliance of accessibility standards to achieve accessibility for people with disabilities in all aspects of society.

[The Independent 4th Review of the AODA Interim Report](#)

On December 14, 2023, the Province of Ontario published the independent 4th review of the AODA. This report involved consultations with 34 interested and impacted groups and a jurisdictional scan of accessibility-related successes. This document criticizes the Ontario Government's poor implementation of the AODA and calls on the government to improve accessibility across the province. The report highlights that improvement is needed in collecting disability-related data, enforcing the AODA, and improving the built environment across Ontario.

[Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's 94 Calls to Action](#)

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) records and acknowledges the harm done to Indigenous Peoples across Canada through the Indian Residential School System. In 2015, the TRC published 94 Calls to Action that describe actions required by all levels of government to repair the lasting harm caused by residential schools.

[The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls \(MMIWG\)](#)

The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls was started in 2016. The Inquiry is a Government of Canada initiative to end violence experienced by Indigenous women and girls. The Inquiry's final report and Calls for Justice describe how the Canadian government can stop the ongoing violence.

[The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous people \(UNDRIP\)](#)

Originally enacted by the United Nations in 2007, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act was formally adopted by Canada in 2021. This legislation is a key step in renewing the Government of Canada's relationship with Indigenous Peoples.

The Ontario Human Rights Code

The Human Rights Code is a law in Ontario that protects and promotes human rights and aims to prevent people from experiencing discrimination and harassment. It focuses on protecting people from discrimination when finding housing or employment.

The City of Waterloo's Strategic Plan (2023-2026)

The City of Waterloo's Strategic Plan was developed through engagement, understanding, and discussion with Council, community, and City staff. The Strategic Plan outlines actions needed to meet Council's key principles. An objective of the 2023-2026 Strategic Plan is to create an inclusive city that considers diversity in planning, decision-making, and service delivery.

Creating the Get READI Plan

In Spring 2023, the READI team hired Taylor Newberry Consulting (TNC) to develop the Get READI Plan. Over eight months, the consultants worked with the READI team to carry out a three-phase project to learn more about the Waterloo communities' needs in relation to READI. The first phase consisted of a document scan of City of Waterloo strategies, previous community consultations, and community-published documents. For a list of documents included in this scan see [Appendix 1](#).

The second phase consisted of community engagement sessions with representatives from community and grassroot organizations, activists, and members of equity-denied groups in Waterloo. A number of City of Waterloo staff (from approximately 27 staff teams) were also asked about the incorporation of READI in projects and work they are conducting during staff engagement sessions. For more details of the approach to both the document scan and engagement sessions see [Appendix 2](#).

In the third phase, the READI team gathered feedback on earlier versions of the Get READI Plan from community representatives and City of Waterloo staff to ensure that the Plan reflected their collective needs and voices.

Key themes from the documents scan

There were notable key themes that emerged through the analysis of the documents that have influenced the development of this Plan. This section describes those key themes in detail.

Reconciliation

Previous community consultations, such as those informing the City of Waterloo's Strategic Plan (2023-2026), point out several solutions to systemic barriers identified by Indigenous communities. Amongst these solutions are:

- Creating low-barrier bookable spaces exclusive to Indigenous communities.
- Enhancing public education on Indigenous histories and practices.
- Recognition for days of significance related to Indigenous peoples.
- Addressing symbols related to colonial legacy (e.g., street names, monuments, imagery).

The scan also highlighted the importance for the City of Waterloo to continue efforts in addressing the TRC's 94 Calls to Action, UNDRIP, and the MMIWG's Calls to Justice.

Inclusivity and sense of belonging

The City of Waterloo has made ongoing efforts to promote inclusivity. Several documents have uncovered these efforts. For instance, the Neighbourhood Strategy Plan outlines initiatives focused on promoting neighbourliness. These initiatives include developing community connector programs and fostering neighbourliness through partnerships with local groups. Additionally, various City of Waterloo plans emphasize the integration of cultural practices into community spaces. This is demonstrated by initiatives such as providing spaces for cricket matches and organizing culturally inclusive events that celebrate different holidays while accommodating dietary restrictions, as outlined in the Outdoor Sports Field Strategy.

A common theme across documents is the need for more community spaces for people to come together, interact, and celebrate their culture. The consultations for the City of Waterloo's Strategic Plan (2023-2026), for example, highlighted that religious and racialized groups would like spaces to connect with others in the community and share in cultural and religious celebrations. The City of Waterloo's Older Adult Recreation Strategy also states there is a need to address the accessibility-barriers in city-led programs and spaces for people with various physical and mental abilities and age groups.

The City of Waterloo can enhance the sense of belonging among community members by improving City facilities to be more accessible and inclusive. This can include adding all-gender washrooms. To increase visibility of equity-denied communities, the City can install and maintain symbols of inclusion, such as rainbow crosswalks and raising the pride flag.

Discrimination

Since the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a noticeable increase in the reporting of hate incidents and discrimination. In particular, Statistics Canada reports show high levels of discrimination against Black, Indigenous, 2SLGBTQIA+, Muslim, and Jewish communities. Discrimination towards these groups was also reported during community consultations for the City of Waterloo's Strategic Plan (2023-2026). Data from Statistics Canada shows that police-reported hate crimes have been steadily increasing across Canada since 2014, and in 2023, the Kitchener-Waterloo-Cambridge Metropolitan Area had the highest rate of police-reported hate crimes among Canadian cities^{5, 6}. It is worth noting that some communities and individuals may not feel comfortable reporting these incidents to the police, so these numbers may not be an accurate representation of the extent of hate and discrimination.

Experiences of discrimination have also been highlighted in regional surveys. According to the Regional Youth Impact survey, a survey on youth aged 9 to 18 in the Region of Waterloo, around half of the respondents reported experiencing some form of discrimination, with 12% reporting discrimination based on their gender identity and sexual orientation. Similarly, a survey on the experiences of gender nonconforming people in the Region of Waterloo (i.e., The Outlook Survey) reports that 81% of transgender people in the region feel unsafe in public washrooms, 77% feel unsafe in community centers, and 83% feel unsafe in gyms. Additionally, community consultations conducted for the City of Waterloo's Strategic Plan (2023-2026) highlighted encounters of racism, antisemitism, and islamophobia. These reports demonstrate the need to address hate and discrimination throughout the Waterloo community.

The Sulah Project and the Hate Crime Project, two community-based initiatives in the Region of Waterloo that tackle hate-based incidents toward the Muslim community, propose strategies for empowering victims of hate-based crimes. They emphasize restorative justice approaches and increased community education, alongside recommendations for implementing bylaws to effectively combat discrimination.

5 Source: Statistics Canada. (2024, February 8). [Areas with high rates of hate crime also report lower scores on quality of life indicators.](#)

6 Source: Statistics Canada. (2024, November 11). [Police-reported Information Hub: Hate crime in Canada.](#)

Equitable resource distribution

Housing affordability was highlighted as a major challenge for many groups across the Waterloo community. This is particularly the case for equity-denied groups, such as youth, immigrants, racialized individuals, single-parent households, Indigenous households, and renting seniors, as outlined in the City of Waterloo's Affordable Housing Strategy discussion paper. Additional challenges with housing arise for people with disabilities due to the limited number of available housing units that are completely accessible⁷.

In addition to housing insecurity, finding meaningful employment is another key challenge that drives inequities. The community consultations for the City of Waterloo's Strategic Plan (2023-2026) emphasized that particular groups are experiencing difficulties obtaining meaningful employment. Immigrants and ethnic minorities reported that it is difficult to have their education credentials be recognized by employers, and that they sometimes experience language barriers.

⁷ Please note that while equity-denied members have reported struggles with finding affordable and accessible housing, the City of Waterloo has a lower level of housing insecurity in comparison to the national average.

Engagement

The documents scan identified a need for engagement processes to shift focus and become more collaborative with the community. Past community consultation notes for the City of Waterloo's Strategic Plan (2023-2026) and the Waterloo Region's Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan have offered suggestions on how engagement practices could be shifted⁸:

- Involving community representation earlier in the planning and development stages of strategic plans.
- Prioritizing community-based and Indigenous-focused methods for evaluating success and developing strategic plans. For example, allowing community groups to collect data on their own populations and share data with the City of Waterloo.
- Implementing feedback loops. Feedback loops are crucial for building trust and driving systemic change. Feedback loops allow those who have contributed to solutions to know how their input has been used to influence the outcomes.
- Collaborating with different municipalities and the Region of Waterloo on engagement efforts to avoid duplication of engagement questions and mitigate participation fatigue for communities.

The Waterloo Region's Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan also stressed the importance of ensuring community-led strategies and programs are adequately funded and resourced throughout the Waterloo community. The same plan stresses the need to review existing funding models to maximize the impact of grassroots organizations and upstream prevention and intervention opportunities.

8 These suggestions come mainly from feedback provided during community consultations conducted for the [Waterloo Region's Community Safety and Wellbeing report](#).

Representation

The Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion Diversity Census Report is the first-ever internal census and survey for staff at the City of Waterloo. Conducted in 2019, this internal report highlighted key areas where the City of Waterloo can develop welcoming and inclusive spaces for staff, community members, and visitors to all City of Waterloo buildings and facilities. The report also highlighted areas where representation can be improved among staff at all levels of the City. This report made several recommendations to address underrepresentation, including fostering an organizational culture that is more welcoming, ensuring that accommodation policies and practices are applied equitably across the organization in a culturally sensitive manner, and ensuring equity, diversity, and inclusion learning programs are available and accessible to the City of Waterloo workforce.

In 2024, a second Census and Survey was completed, administered by Diversio. Increased mentorship opportunities, greater diversity in leadership roles, more READI-related training, and enhanced hiring, promotion, and career development practices were requested by staff. Actions to meet related recommendations, as well as to continue advancing recommendations spotlighted in 2019, have been presented to leadership and will be captured in the Implementation Plan that will complement the Get READI Plan. Some initial progress has been identified by the READI team, and there is recognition that substantial change is needed to meet the goals set out by the City of Waterloo. Employee Resource Groups have been explored for underrepresented and equity-denied groups, and there is an ongoing assessment of recruitment and advancement practices to understand contributing factors for representation gaps.

Key Themes from community and staff consultations

This section provides a summary of key themes that arose from discussions with community representatives and with City of Waterloo staff. The comments and themes presented here offer a snapshot of the two broad communities' perspectives at that time. It is important to note that these insights are based on the individuals who participated and are not representative of an entire community group or the City of Waterloo as an organization.

The themes that arose from the document scan were used as starting points for these discussions, however, many comments made during these consultations introduced new ideas or ideas not mentioned in existing reports. During these sessions, participants often suggested actions that they felt the City of Waterloo could or should take. While some of these suggestions are not within the City of Waterloo's mandate, and may not be actionable, they are recorded here as they were shared, in an effort to create a feedback loop that demonstrates to participants that all feedback was documented and considered.

Reconciliation

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Engagement with the Indigenous community received varied feedback regarding how it was conducted. During one session in which Indigenous community members were gathered in a private space and led by the Indigenous Initiatives Advocate, some participants expressed discomfort with Reconciliation discussions being held separately from non-Indigenous participants. However, as Indigenous guests began sharing, they found the format to be effective. In a different session, Indigenous participants were invited to join the larger community group discussion, which sparked concerns among some Indigenous community members about mixing Reconciliation efforts with other READI initiatives. The mixed reactions to the consultation efforts reveal a need for the City of Waterloo to consider how engagement should be conducted in the future with Indigenous communities.

Indigenous community members offered concrete suggestions about how engagement processes could be improved. They asked the City to keep in mind the ways in which intergenerational trauma stemming from the Residential School System shapes their needs and requests from the City of Waterloo. They recommended initiating discussions privately with Indigenous community members before transitioning to public forums. Additionally, they stressed the importance of the City of Waterloo following-up on previously raised concerns, such as a lack of Indigenous employees, and the need for private ceremonial and rent-free meeting spaces. They said that addressing these longstanding issues is crucial for building trust and accountability with Indigenous communities. Indigenous community members also called for the City of Waterloo to develop a separate action plan for Reconciliation.

CITY OF WATERLOO STAFF FEEDBACK

Staff discussed the need for a cultural shift in how the City of Waterloo engages and works with Indigenous communities. Specifically, they expressed a need to build positive, working relationships with the wider Indigenous community, and to ensure that these relationships are built on a foundation of trust and understanding. Indigenous staff identified a number of concrete actions that could be taken to begin to build these relationships. A key part of building trust is including Indigenous communities in decision-making processes. Indigenous staff also suggested that relationship building must also include reciprocity. Reciprocity ideally involves meaningful gifts offered by the City of Waterloo to thank the Indigenous communities for their knowledge and teachings. Honorariums are also acceptable to reciprocate for shared knowledge. Building trust also requires acknowledging that Indigenous Peoples are often over-consulted and over-researched⁹. It is important to provide evidence of the progress made toward Reconciliation before seeking additional consultations with Indigenous communities.

Additionally, Indigenous staff members said that a cultural shift in engagement strategy requires that the City move away from viewing Reconciliation as a mere checkbox activity and to begin to view it as an ongoing commitment. This shift requires a greater emphasis on internal learning opportunities about Indigenous practices and perspectives. It also requires an unlearning of some of the ways that the City of Waterloo has conducted its work.

⁹ This comment was made in recognition of the fact that Indigenous community members have previously vocalized their concerns about consultation requests and felt that little action has resulted from those consultations.

Community engagement strategies

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Non-Indigenous community members also raised similar concerns with current engagement strategies, indicating wanting a cultural shift in how the City of Waterloo engages with them. To have this shift, the community members advocated for taking community-based research approaches, where engagement and data collection focuses on collaborative efforts with community groups. In addition, community members wanted engagement to be more welcoming. Suggestions to be more welcoming included:

- Reaching out for one-on-one conversations with community members and leaders instead of surveying¹⁰.
- Providing honorariums for the sharing of lived experience.
- Providing incentives for consultations.
- Working with consultants from equity-denied groups.
- Having the option for virtual or hybrid engagement.
- Making consultations more personal (e.g., having consultants talk about their own experiences; meeting in welcoming, public spaces; and having food during consultations).

Finally, community members also asked that the City of Waterloo find ways to establish openness, trust, and accountability with communities. Community members suggested using feedback loops to help build this trust.

CITY OF WATERLOO STAFF FEEDBACK

The City of Waterloo's staff teams are actively working to build relationships with communities in Waterloo. For example, facility upgrades are reviewed in consultation with organizations serving equity-denied members to ensure that community spaces are inclusive of all community members. Staff also implement multiple communication methods and use multiple languages when engaging with the Waterloo community.

During consultations, staff also made suggestions for improving engagement with the Waterloo community. One of these suggestions is to streamline engagement approaches across all City divisions to ensure that engagement is consistent for all community members. Another suggestion is to have more frequent and ongoing engagement sessions with the Waterloo community to stay informed on what is happening in the community. Frequent engagement was also seen as a way to build relationships and trust with community members.

10 For example, one participant mentioned going to universities and speaking with different groups of students to hear about their experiences. Another participant mentioned reaching out to community groups and local non-profits to have sit down conversations about their experiences. Overall, participants vocalized that surveying approaches (especially those conducted online) felt informal and are overused. A balance between the two is welcomed.

Accessibility of the built environment and programs / services

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Community members highlighted the importance of having accessible physical spaces for all. They identified numerous actions that could be taken to reduce accessibility barriers in both indoor and outdoor spaces, including enhancing snow removal practices, adding universally accessible change rooms and washrooms, expanding parking facilities for people with disabilities, installing adult-sized changing tables and lifts in public washrooms, and creating sensory-friendly spaces for those who are neurodivergent. Community members also suggested that approaches to making these facilities accessible should be consistent across all buildings, and that one building should not be more accessible than another.

Some participants in consultation sessions felt that the City of Waterloo does not provide or promote existing programming for residents with disabilities or complex needs. Current program sign-up processes were identified as too competitive and restrictive, especially for those with lower incomes. Several community members also highlighted the lack of interpretation support for those who are hearing impaired and would like interpretation services being offered throughout recreational activities and programs.

Those representing people with disabilities, low-income communities, newcomers, and the 2SLGBTQIA+ community expressed concern about the lack of accessible transportation and affordable housing options, notably in the Lakeshore South area. To mend this issue, they suggested that the City of Waterloo work to expand transportation services and support measures that enable more affordable housing. Organizations that represent the 2SLGBTQIA+ community also highlighted the need to provide housing designated for youth who are displaced from their homes due to lack of acceptance towards their gender or sexual identity.

A recommendation was put forward by GRAAC to ensure that housing is not only affordable, but also accessible to different abilities and age groups. The committee had highlighted how conversations around housing tend to forget the need for more housing options that are affordable and have accessibility considerations for people with disabilities.

Accessibility of the built environment and programs / services

CITY OF WATERLOO STAFF FEEDBACK

Staff described their current efforts towards enhancing indoor and outdoor spaces for people with disabilities. For outdoor spaces, staff discussed their work around creating a network of accessible trails and sidewalks, widening trail access/pathways for active transportation users, fixing curb ramps to meet regulation, and ensuring pathways are barrier-free. For indoor spaces, staff shared their ideas for building more universal washrooms and adding tactile strips within buildings to aid in wayfinding.

Staff are also taking efforts to ensure that communications, meetings, and engagement sessions are accessible. For example, some staff teams noted their work on ensuring that any public-facing documents and presentations are compliant with the AODA. Staff teams have also begun to collaborate with GRAAC to learn more about accessibility.

Despite this work, staff acknowledged that accessibility remains an ongoing challenge across the City of Waterloo. Staff recognized that upgrades to facilities are urgently required, and that challenges of time, costs, prioritization, and staff capacity make it difficult to address these upgrades in a timely manner. Staff further recognized that some aspects of accessibility are the responsibility of the Region of Waterloo and require greater collaboration and advocacy to better meet the needs of all residents and visitors. In some cases, upgrades to buildings may require collaboration among all levels of governments, including provincial and federal levels

Inclusivity and sense of belonging

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Community members expressed a need to improve the accessibility of existing public gathering spaces and to increase these spaces throughout the Waterloo community. It was unanimously agreed among those consulted that the City of Waterloo should invest in creating neutral, bookable public spaces that are free or available at a low cost for non-profits and neighbourhood groups. These spaces should be fully accessible, with features such as universal and all-gender washrooms, cooking spaces, private rooms for breastfeeding and prayer, adequate lighting, and accessible parking. Additionally, the City of Waterloo should simplify the process for booking these spaces, as some community members find the process difficult to navigate.

Community members also want the City to expand or promote existing programming that focuses on improving sense of belonging. Some of the suggested areas for expansion include:

- Educational events or programs facilitating open and non-judgmental discussions on social justice topics (e.g., transphobia, homophobia, racism, colonialism, sexism, etc.) to dispel harmful ideas and myths about equity-denied groups.
- Programs addressing social isolation, particularly during the winter.
- Initiatives to help integrate newcomers into the community.
- Programs directly or indirectly supporting READI.
- Projects aimed at breaking down social, political, and economic barriers within the community.
- Grants for small businesses, especially those focused on improving accessibility.

Additionally, community members suggested that the City of Waterloo should play a supportive role in initiating or expanding programs (rather than leading them). The City can do this by promoting existing programs hosted by community organizations and providing funding and other resources.

Inclusivity and sense of belonging

CITY OF WATERLOO STAFF FEEDBACK

Staff shared how the City of Waterloo has been working to foster a sense of belonging for all community members. For example, some staff teams are addressing some registration barriers for recreational programs by offering free or low-cost services. The City of Waterloo has also launched a real-time interpretation service available to all visitors at City facilities and a multi-language translator on the City's website. These services help staff engage community members who speak languages other than English, as well as people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Several limitations regarding the built environment have made it difficult for City staff to make programs and spaces more inclusive. For example, community programming and events for people with mobility-based disabilities requires substantial building and facility upgrades, which may take a greater period of time to address.

Staff also shared suggestions on how to make the City and Waterloo community feel more inclusive. These suggestions include:

- Expanding use of pronouns.
- Inclusive storytelling at the Museum.
- Engaging with community partners to increase cultural appropriateness of spaces and programs.
- Supporting and implementing more inclusive hiring practices.
- Ensuring staff are trained prior to launching new initiatives.
- Enhancing supports for newcomers (e.g., recreational programs).
- Increasing access to low-cost programs for households and persons with low income.
- Increasing access to translation options across City of Waterloo software.
- Advertising READI work on fleet vehicles through vehicle wraps to help promote the work of the City of Waterloo.
- Creating grants for people to purchase safety equipment and other tools to get jobs at the City of Waterloo.

In addition to these suggestions, a few staff called for additional funding to be allocated toward cultural awareness education. This funding could be used to offer new learning/unlearning opportunities or to compensate local organizations who provide cultural sensitivity and awareness education.

Discrimination and harassment

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Community members discussed the persistence of discrimination throughout the Waterloo community, at both individual and institutional levels. On an individual level, discrimination occurs when stereotypical assumptions are made based on an individual's race/ethnicity, religious affiliation, gender, abilities, and/or sexual orientation. These negative interactions may become heightened for certain groups when world events occur, making them targets for harassment. To help reduce these negative behaviours, some community members suggested using education as a tool to dispel myths and bridge communities together.

On an institutional level, community members identified the ways that discrimination is embedded into the City of Waterloo's operations. One example shared was that the City of Waterloo's policies, documents, and practices often neglect the realities of equity-denied groups and need to incorporate more lived experiences.

Community members also highlighted how finding employment is difficult for racialized newcomers and youth with disabilities and complex needs. Newcomers experience difficulties transitioning into the labour market due to language barriers or bias against non-Canadian credentials. Similarly, those working with individuals with intellectual disabilities emphasized how social stigma makes it difficult to transition these individuals into employment opportunities. To help these community members find employment, it was suggested to create an incentive program for employers to hire newcomers and individuals with disabilities, as well as to provide resources (e.g., English language classes) to help them develop the necessary skills for the job market transition.

Discrimination and harassment

CITY OF WATERLOO STAFF FEEDBACK

Staff recognized and understood that community members from equity-denied groups are often exposed to discrimination, marginalization, and trauma. Staff would like to increase their training and education to improve their service delivery to those who experience discrimination and marginalization. Some topics areas that staff expressed an interest in expanding their knowledge on included:

- How to engage with community members compassionately, especially those who are newcomers or are part of the unsheltered population.
- Building cultural sensitivity and inter-cultural competence to understand and appreciate nuances across cultural practices, traditions, and cultural needs.
- How to consider Accessibility and implement beyond the AODA.
- Continued training for staff on Indigenous traditions, practices, and histories (especially around the history of the Indian Act, Residential Schools, the 60's scoop, and the TRC's 94 Calls to Action).

Additionally, staff suggested alternative ways the City of Waterloo can format training sessions. These suggestions included:

- Open-dialogue sessions in a space where there is lack of judgement.
- Having guest speakers and workshops on READI topics.
- Virtual forms of training.
- Self-directed training using the Learning Management System.

Staff discussed ways the City of Waterloo can address institutional discrimination through initiating internal policy and practice changes. An example that was shared was Human Resources practices becoming focused on equitable hiring and retention strategies. These include enhanced return to work processes and ensuring employment candidates are committed to practicing READI principles.

Representation and allyship

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

Community members disclosed that the City of Waterloo could improve its representation of equity-denied groups in staffing and leadership roles. For instance, they suggested that the READI team should include a full-time 2SLGBTQIA+ advocate and increase the representation of 2SLGBTQIA+ people among staff. Community members also noted the lack of visibly racialized individuals in Council positions and City staff. To address this, they suggested implementing targeted recruitment strategies, such as recruiting from the Canadian National LGBT+ Chamber of Commerce.

Furthermore, the community expects the leaders within the City of Waterloo to openly support READI initiatives and speak out against discrimination and inequities. They also hope that leaders will advocate for issues beyond their legislative responsibilities, such as improving healthcare, policing, education, and housing.

CITY OF WATERLOO STAFF FEEDBACK

Feedback and input from staff related to diversity is intentionally captured through the internal Census and Survey initiatives. Thus, staff were not asked questions on diversity during consultations. When reflecting and sharing on the other questions that were asked, staff did not report on challenges or concerns with diversity at the City of Waterloo during these specific discussions.

How key themes informed priority areas

After analysing data from the documents scan and consultation sessions, the identified draft themes were discussed with directors at the City of Waterloo. The leadership team carefully considered these themes to determine the top priorities and goals for the City to address.

In the summer of 2024, community engagement sessions were held to review a draft of the Get READI Plan, which included the priority areas and goals considered by the leadership team. During these sessions, community members provided feedback and offered direction on the Plan. Staff were also asked to review the Plan and provide their input. Based on conversations with staff and the community, the following priority areas have been confirmed to advance READI at the City of Waterloo:

- Improve Indigenous relations and foster Reconciliation.
- Enhance the built environment.
- Cultivate a culture of belonging.
- Increase diversity of staff and leadership.
- Focus on equitable distribution of resources.
- Build trust through systems of accountability.

These priority areas are intended to serve as guides for departmental planning and future decision-making. They will form the foundation for setting goals, defining objectives, and outlining deliverables and performance metrics across all municipal planning processes. These priorities are designed to be interconnected, facilitating collaborative planning across all City of Waterloo divisions.

While it is acknowledged that these priorities may not encompass all the feedback gathered, they aim to identify those areas where the City has the potential to achieve the greatest impact within existing resources and capacity.

The Get READI Plan

PRIORITY AREA 1

Improve Indigenous relations and foster Reconciliation

The process of Reconciliation entails acknowledging and learning the systemic oppression inflicted upon Indigenous Peoples through settler colonialism. Community consultations have highlighted the need for the City of Waterloo and the community it serves to actively engage in this unlearning process and to deepen their understanding of Indigenous experiences and perspectives. Consultations with both staff and community members have also emphasized the importance of building relationships and trust with Indigenous communities. A crucial step in building and repairing relationships with Indigenous communities is the recognition that Reconciliation initiatives need to be separate from other diversity, accessibility, inclusion, and equity initiatives, and should be centred on the lived experiences of Indigenous communities in Waterloo Region.

To respond to these needs, the City of Waterloo will work towards shifting its approach to ensure culturally appropriate, reciprocal, and respectful engagement with Indigenous communities. This will involve expanding education and learning opportunities to integrate Indigenous worldviews, practices, and experiences into city operations, and fostering genuine, trust-based relationships rooted in reciprocity and respect.

The City will also seek to develop its own Reconciliation Action Plan that will be dedicated to monitoring and tracking the implementation of the TRC's Calls to Action, the MMIWG Calls to Justice, and the UNDRIP. This plan will align with the Reconciliation Action Plan Working Group's Strategy, A Pathway Forward, and will center the lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples.

Goals

- 1.1** Provide staff with educational opportunities to learn about the histories, practices, worldviews, and experiences of Indigenous Peoples.
- 1.2** Increase public awareness of the histories, practices, worldviews, and experiences of Indigenous peoples.
- 1.3** Improve and build relationships with local Indigenous communities and organizations.
- 1.4** Honour, support, and celebrate Indigenous cultures, by collaborating alongside Indigenous Elders, Knowledge keepers, leaders, artists and creators, and communities on projects and programs that benefit Indigenous communities.
- 1.5** Develop a Reconciliation Strategy and Implementation Plan for the City of Waterloo that focuses on addressing the TRC's Calls to Action, the MMIWG Calls to Justice, and the UNDRIP.

PRIORITY AREA 2

Enhance the built environment

The City of Waterloo is dedicated to improving its built environment to ensure that people of all ages, disabilities, and needs can thrive. As part of this commitment, special attention is needed to upgrade the interior and exterior of City facilities. There is an urgent need to enhance accessibility and inclusion, such as through upgrades to curb ramps, swales, building exits, emergency systems and washroom facilities, as well as improving snow removal processes. Additionally, upgrades must be consistent across all City of Waterloo facilities to ensure equality in experience of each space.

The City of Waterloo aims to enhance the sense of belonging for people with disabilities and additional equity-denied communities by prioritizing funding for improvements to the built environments that aim to support the broad spectrum of disabilities. As a commitment towards grounding this Plan in the experiences of community members, the focus of upgrades will be toward optimal designs that surpass alignment with legislative requirements and to concentrate efforts into actions based on needs identified in this community. For example, creating sensory-friendly spaces across City facilities, as well as quiet rooms and spiritual spaces. The City's goals reflect the recommendations from the Abilities Centre Accessibility and Inclusion Review, the GRAAC, and the disability community.

Goals

- 2.1** Work towards a funding plan to upgrade interior spaces to be accessible and inclusive for all community members.
- 2.2** Work towards a funding plan to upgrade exterior spaces to be accessible and inclusive for all community members.
- 2.3** Continuously assess the needs of the built environment, ensuring that proactive actions are taken to meet complex needs of the broad spectrum of disabilities.

PRIORITY AREA 3

Cultivate a culture of belonging

Municipalities have a responsibility to ensure that residents are treated with respect, feel included, and are welcomed in their city. Insights from community consultations highlighted several actions that the City could take to foster this sense of belonging. Creating more accessible community spaces, particularly for Indigenous community members, is one important example. There are also calls from the community for the City to actively support organizations already providing programming for equity-denied groups. Community members expressed a desire for the City to tackle issues of harassment and discrimination, especially related to racism, transphobia, homophobia, sexism, and ableism. Strategies to tackle these issues include boosting education and awareness among City staff and the public, as well as adopting restorative justice approaches for handling hate-based incidents.

To cultivate a culture of belonging, the City of Waterloo will work towards developing and promoting accessible public spaces and programming where various community members can meet and gather. Collaboration with community groups will be pivotal in these efforts, with the City providing resources to support initiatives when possible.

Furthermore, the City will work towards reducing discrimination and harassment through education and development of policies, frameworks, and/or guidelines to proactively address hate. Restorative justice approaches will be considered when designing any policy, framework, or guideline.

Goals

- 3.1** Develop, promote, and/or evaluate free/low cost, accessible, inclusive, age-friendly public spaces for equity-denied community members.
- 3.2** In partnership with Indigenous leaders, Knowledge keepers, and communities, provide permanent spaces that promote the wellbeing and safety of Indigenous communities.
- 3.3** Identify and remove barriers that prevent participation of equity-denied groups in municipal-led programming.
- 3.4** Partner with community organization to expand, adapt, and increase awareness of programs and resources that support equity-denied community members.
- 3.5** Support region-wide efforts towards reduction in hate-based incidents through education and development of policies, frameworks, and/or guidelines to proactively address hate.

PRIORITY AREA 4

Reflect diversity in staff and leadership

It is crucial for residents to have representation that understands and reflects their identities. If residents are reflected throughout the City staff and leadership, and if leaders are speaking to the issues that matter to them, they are more likely to identify with and feel a sense of belonging in the community.

Moving forward, the City of Waterloo is committed to enhancing representation of equity-denied groups across all levels of the organization. This will involve a thorough review of the City's employment practices to eliminate barriers for these groups. Furthermore, the City will collaborate closely with Council members and leadership to integrate READI principles through comprehensive education and training programs. By equipping leadership with tools, the City aims to promote meaningful engagement with residents and cultivate a community built on trust and inclusivity.

Goals

- 4.1** Work with Council and leadership to provide training on READI principles with the intention of reducing harmful biases, perceptions, and worldviews that impact equity-denied community members.
- 4.2** Support Council and leadership to build and enhance meaningful connections with equity-denied communities.
- 4.3** Review and reconstruct the employment life cycle, where required, to remove barriers for equity-denied groups.
- 4.4** Enhance and promote leadership career advancement opportunities to increase diversity in management positions.

PRIORITY AREA 5

Focus on equitable distribution of resources

The key to developing thriving cities is making sure that all residents have equitable access to resources and opportunities. In particular, the community consultations and documents scan highlighted gaps in the realms of housing, employment, and access to services.

To fill these gaps, the City of Waterloo will work towards expanding programming to:

- Bring employment opportunities to those facing employment barriers;
- Improving language interpretation services; and
- Investigating accessible and affordable housing options that are designed and developed to allow everyone, especially people with disabilities, ease of movement.

The City of Waterloo's approach to equity will focus on providing resources to meet the unique needs of every resident.

Goals

- 5.1** Expand opportunities for equity-denied groups to find meaningful employment throughout the Waterloo community.
- 5.2** Advocate towards providing accessible and affordable housing options that enable movement for people with disabilities.
- 5.3** Evaluate and expand availability and accessibility of interpretation services.
- 5.4** Explore, advocate for, and make available accessible and affordable resources that support aging in place.

PRIORITY AREA 6

Build trust through systems of accountability

All residents of Waterloo should be able to voice their needs, have those needs recognized, and participate in decisions affecting them. Based on the community consultations and documents scan, it is evident that approaches of engaging with and gathering feedback from the Waterloo community need to become more inclusive and accessible. The City of Waterloo is committed to developing an engagement framework that prioritizes and centers the lived experiences of equity-denied groups. This framework aims to enhance engagement with these groups, build trust, and foster lasting relationships. The City is dedicated to providing support or compensation for participants throughout the engagement process and to ensuring that data collected through engagement efforts is accessible, when possible, and meaningful to communities.

Transparency and accountability are key components when building trust. Creating an Implementation Plan for the Get READI Plan will help to keep the City accountable, ensuring that it sticks to its goals. The City of Waterloo will also develop a Measurement and Monitoring Framework that will identify ways to track progress made towards achieving the goals in this Plan.

The City commits to regular public updates on the progress of this Plan, using the Implementation Plan and the Measurement and Monitoring Framework as points of reference. These communication opportunities will generate dialogue with communities so that actions align with community needs and interests.

Goals

- 6.1** Create a Community Engagement Framework that considers trusted practices for consulting with equity-denied individuals and communities across the age spectrum.
- 6.2** Adopt community-based research approaches when engaging with the Waterloo community towards a more collaborative engagement process.
- 6.3** Appropriately compensate community representatives for their time, efforts, and knowledge.
- 6.4** Support organizations and community groups with collecting their own data on the populations they serve.
- 6.5** Build City of Waterloo's capacity to effectively implement the Get READI Plan.
- 6.6** Build an Implementation Plan to monitor progress of the goals listed in the Get READI Plan.
- 6.7** Develop a Measurement and Monitoring Framework to track progress on the outcomes of the Get READI Plan.

APPENDIX 1

Document scan

The following table provides a list of documents that were included in the documents scan. This list includes Regional, provincial, federal, and City of Waterloo strategic plans, as well as community-based documents that were created by organizations throughout Waterloo Region. Also included are notes from previous community consultations.

All titles, dates, and notes reflect information available at the time the documents scan was completed.

[A Profile of Wellbeing in Waterloo Region \(2018\)](#)

Owned by The Canadian Index of Wellbeing and the University of Waterloo

The Canadian Index of Wellbeing provides a portrait of wellbeing in Waterloo using the Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIW). The report presents the results of eight indicators of the CIW for the City of Waterloo.

Accessibility and Inclusion Review Waterloo Improvement Plan Final (Ongoing)

Owned by The Abilities Centre

A draft of the Accessibility and Inclusion Plan. The plan is used to help inform strategy and planning to develop leadership and employment relations that focus on accessibility and inclusion across the Waterloo city staff.

[Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act \(AODA\) \(2005\)](#)

Owned by The Ontario Provincial Government

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 (or “the Act”) is a provincial law. Its goal is to make Ontario accessible for people with disabilities by 2025 through developing and enforcing accessibility standards.

[Affordable Housing Strategy Discussion Paper \(2022\)](#)

Owned by The City of Waterloo

A discussion paper meant to help form and drive a Strategy for affordable housing in the City of Waterloo. The Discussion Paper identifies some of the key drivers of declining affordability and proposes six goals and 30 actions the City could take to address the housing crisis.

Asset Management Plan (2020)

Owned by The City of Waterloo

The asset management plan assists with data-driven decision-making for the City of Waterloo's assets. The asset plan includes the consideration of installation, maintenance, rehabilitation, and replacement of the City's infrastructure. An [updated version](#) of this document was produced and made available to the public in 2024.

CCDI (Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion) Diversity Census Report (2019)

Owned by The City of Waterloo

The City of Waterloo conducted a Diversity Census to develop a better understanding of its workforce demographics and the inclusion experiences of its people. The information collected from the census informs the City of Waterloo on issues of diversity and inclusion that may exist in its organization and may help develop its workforce. The survey focuses on the internal staff of the City.

[Cemetery Services Bechtel Park Master Plan \(2009\)](#)

Owned by The City of Waterloo

A plan outlining development to Bechtel Park, including improving trails, walkways, and wayfinding throughout the park.

[City of Waterloo Business Plan \(2023\)](#)

Owned by The City of Waterloo

The 2023 Business Plan lays out the support for existing programs and services. The Plan focuses on fostering a vibrant, thriving economy with strategies on retaining business, families and seniors and promoting tourism.

[City of Waterloo Community, Culture and Recreation Services Master Plan \(2008\)](#)

Owned by The City of Waterloo

This is the master plan for all recreation and leisure across the City of Waterloo. The Plan's objective is to incorporate the City's key principles and objectives into the recreation design.

[City of Waterloo Economic Development Strategy \(2019\)](#)

Owned by The City of Waterloo

An action plan to help inform business planning and prioritize business development throughout the city.

City of Waterloo Official Plan (2022)

Owned by The City of Waterloo

The Official Plan is the primary long-range, comprehensive municipal planning document that outlines a framework for land use decision-making for the City of Waterloo. The Plan sets a broad, coordinated vision for all lands within the City. It supports the goal of achieving a healthy community built on diversity and adaptability, accessibility and equity, connectivity, health, and vitality. This document was updated February 2024, the most recent version can be accessed [here](#).

[City of Waterloo Older Adult Recreation Strategy \(2015\)](#)

Owned by The City of Waterloo

The Official Plan is the primary long-range, comprehensive municipal planning document that outlines a framework for land use decision-making for the City of Waterloo. The Plan sets a broad, coordinated vision for all lands within the City. It supports the goal of achieving a healthy community built on diversity and adaptability, accessibility and equity, connectivity, health, and vitality.

[City of Waterloo Park Master Plan \(2009\)](#)

Owned by The City of Waterloo

This report describes the conceptual context of the Waterloo Park Master Plan that will guide the future development of parks in Waterloo over the next 20 years.

[City of Waterloo Parkland Strategy \(2022\)](#)

Owned by The City of Waterloo

The Parkland Strategy is a comprehensive document that lays out the vision, goals, and actions to guide decision-making for the City managed parks and open spaces for the next 10 - 15 years.

[City of Waterloo Transportation Master Plan \(2020\)](#)

Owned by The City of Waterloo

The City of Waterloo's Transportation Master Plan outlines the Complete Streets Policy approach, which focuses on designing and implementing safe street access for all users.

[City of Waterloo Uptown Public Realm Strategy \(2019\)](#)

Owned by The City of Waterloo

An action plan to help redesign public spaces in Uptown, Waterloo.

City of Waterloo's Culture Plan: A Catalyst for Culture (2014)

Owned by The City of Waterloo

A plan that focuses on defining the community's vision for culture in the City of Waterloo over the next ten years and identifying the city's role in supporting local cultural development to achieve the community's vision.

City of Waterloo's Neighbourhood Strategy: Support Resident-led Neighbourhood Community Building (2018)

Owned by The City of Waterloo

A strategy for resident-led neighborhood community buildings in Waterloo and the city's role in aiding that Strategy.

Creating Equitable Services for Muslim Women in the Region of Waterloo (2021)

Owned by The Coalition of Muslim Women of Kitchener- Waterloo

A community needs assessment focused on addressing the programming needs of Muslim women within the Waterloo Region. Address barriers and opportunities for service delivery.

Fire Plan (Ongoing)

Owned by The City of Waterloo

A website providing an update on the development of the Fire Safety Plan.

Hate Crime Project (Ongoing)

Owned by The Coalition of Muslim Women of Kitchener- Waterloo

A report that outlines the Hate Crime Project - an initiative to help raise awareness of hate crimes towards Muslim (particularly Muslim women) communities and to discuss strategies to reduce hate-based incidents.

HUQU Community Report (2020)

Owned by The Coalition of Muslim Women of Kitchener- Waterloo

A report that outlines the results from a survey conducted with 53 Muslim women in Kitchener-Waterloo and addresses the discrimination Muslim women face in areas of work, housing, and services in the Waterloo Region.

[Independent 4th Review of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005 \(AODA\) \(2019\)](#)

Owned by The Ontario Provincial Government

The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act must be reviewed regularly by an independent party. This report details recommendations based on the Act's 4th review. It also outlines the findings of a scan and public consultations.

Local Indigenous communities around space needs – PIS Principles and Report (Ongoing)

Owned by The City of Waterloo

A document listing the principles for designing Indigenous permanent spaces, as well as addressing barriers and challenges for Indigenous people having safe and accessible spaces.

[Mapping United Nations Sustainable Development Goals to Canadian Index of Wellbeing \(2016\)](#)

Owned by The Canadian Index of Wellbeing and The University of Waterloo

A document that maps out the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals onto the Canadian Index of Wellbeing.

[Mayor's Advisory Committee for Age-Friendly Waterloo: Report to the Mayor \(2011\)](#)

Owned by The City of Waterloo

A report that highlights five engagement opportunities for making Waterloo an age-friendly city. The report also shares sub-committee recommendations for developing Waterloo as an age-friendly city. This report will also be used as a tool to engage community partners in operationalizing the action plan contained in this report.

[Museum and Collections Heritage Strategy \(2015\)](#)

Owned by The City of Waterloo

The report provides the Council and the community with a proposed final Museum and Collections Strategy. The Strategy is built on the public engagement that has occurred to date, which has garnered feedback from over 350 individuals/groups, alongside research on successful community museums in other municipalities.

The Outlook Survey (2023)

Owned by The Region of Waterloo

The Outlook Survey explores the wellbeing of LGBTQ+ communities throughout the Region of Waterloo. This survey particularly explores the wellbeing of gender nonconforming participants.

Reconciliation Action Plan Working Group (Ongoing)

Owned by The Region of Waterloo

This refers to multiple documents outlining the work that the Reconciliation Action Plan Working Group has completed. These documents include a discussion on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action, and which of these calls are specific to the municipality and a roadmap to developing the Reconciliation Action Plan, as well as several corporate memos.

Recommendations for the Federal, Provincial, and Municipal Governments to address Islamophobia

Owned by The Coalition of Muslim Women of Kitchener- Waterloo

A list of recommendations from community consultations with Muslim organizations and community members for addressing Islamophobia. The report outlines key recommendations for the Federal, Provincial, and Municipal governments to effectively prevent and address Islamophobia at structural, systemic, and interpersonal levels.

Sulah Program Report (2021)

Owned by The Coalition of Muslim Women of Kitchener- Waterloo

Overviews the results of an evaluation on the Sulah Project - a community-based program that uses restorative responses to tackle identity-based harm towards equity-denied groups.

The City of Waterloo Outdoor Sports Field Strategy (2012)

Owned by The City of Waterloo

This master plan emphasizes the need to improve the quality and use of existing sports fields before developing new ones.

The Federal 2SLGBTQI+ Action Plan (2022)

Owned by The Canadian Federal Government

The Federal 2SLGBTQI+ Action Plan outlines the federal government's plans for advancing rights and equality of Two-Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and additional sexually and gender diverse (2SLGBTQI+) people in Canada.

The Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women Calls to Justice (2016)

Owned by National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

Detailed are the 231 Calls for Justice formulated by the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls that were established by the federal government in 2016.

[The Truth and Reconciliation Commission 94 Calls to Action \(2015\)](#)

Owned by The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation

The 94 Calls to Action are actionable policy recommendations meant to aid in restorations by recognizing the harm and trauma caused by the residential school system and developing systems to prevent future abuse.

[Transform Waterloo Region \(2021\)](#)

Owned by The Region of Waterloo

This Strategy is the Region of Waterloo's official response to climate action. The response is a 30-year climate action strategy to achieve an 80 percent greenhouse gas reduction by 2050.

[Uptown Improvement Plan \(2021\)](#)

Owned by The City of Waterloo

The Uptown Public Realm Strategy guides the overall approach to the design and planning of Uptown's public spaces.

[Waterloo Region's Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan report \(2022\)](#)

Owned by The Region of Waterloo

A framework for developing the safety and wellbeing for all in the Region of Waterloo. The framework is intended to be a shared vision of safety and wellbeing that articulates the core elements, conditions, and things to grow, create, and explore barriers to achieving the vision. It is the foundation upon which concrete action and outcomes can be built. The goal is to enable every person who calls Waterloo Region home to feel safe, cared for, and thrive.

[Waterloo's Strategic Plan \(2023\)](#)

Owned by The City of Waterloo

The strategic plan serves as a roadmap for the new term of Council to guide decisions, planning, and budgeting for the next four years. The strategic plan reviews current city plans and strategies and outlines the city's demographic composition and socioeconomic development.

[Youth Impact Survey \(2023\)](#)

Owned by The Region of Waterloo

A report on a survey conducted in 2021 on youth aged between 9 to 18 (also known as YIS). Included in this report's findings are young people from the cities of Cambridge, Kitchener, and Waterloo, as well as the townships of North Dumfries, Wellesley, Wilmot and Woolwich. The consultant team also looked over the snapshots for gender and experiences of discrimination because of one's sexual identity.

APPENDIX 2

Methodology

Over an eight-month period, the READI team, along with consultants from Taylor Newberry Consulting (TNC), carried out a three-phase project. Details on the methods used in each phase are described below:

PHASE 1

Scan of documents

There are many reports and community feedback notes shared with the City of Waterloo that reflect on themes related to equity and inclusion. The TNC team wanted their consultation process to build on this previous work. They also incorporated findings from relevant regional and government reports. The scan included nearly 40 documents, including strategic plans from the City of Waterloo, community-based documents, regional surveys, provincial and federal strategies, and any available previous consultation notes. The scan focused on learning about READI projects across Waterloo and gathering any previously provided community feedback. The scan also guided consultations with City of Waterloo staff and community members. For an overview of the documents included in the scan, please refer to the [Appendix 1: Document Scan](#).

The scan was analyzed using a deductive thematic analysis approach. This approach creates “themes” prior to reviewing documents. A theme is a pattern or topic area that is important to the project’s outcomes. For this scan, themes were created using the strategic objectives of the READI team. Then, the documents were reviewed to identify where the City of Waterloo is achieving outcomes and where there are gaps in the identified themes.

A report of the scan’s findings was presented to the READI team in July 2023. The team provided feedback throughout the summer of 2023 to inform the scan’s findings.

PHASE 2

Community and staff consultations

Two rounds of consultations were held with community organizations that serve members of equity-denied groups in Waterloo. These discussions took place in November 2023 in a hybrid format (in-person and online). The goal of these consultations was to better understand the experiences and ideas shared by communities in Waterloo, while also acknowledging and sharing what was learned from previous consultations.

The READI team invited over 100 individuals and community organizations to take part; 40 community representatives from organizations that work alongside equity-denied groups in Waterloo attended. During the consultations, participants sat in roundtables (or were placed in breakout groups if virtual), where they discussed challenges with READI that emerged for the groups they represent. Prior to these discussions, the READI team presented what was learned from the scan report.

During their presentation, the READI team shared learnings from past consultations, including that members of the Indigenous community want to be engaged in a more personal manner. Indigenous community members were invited to discussions led by the Indigenous Initiatives Advocate on the READI team. The intention behind these discussions was to provide a more culturally appropriate format.

The READI team also conducted staff consultations with a sample of staff across 27 City of Waterloo teams. During these discussions, the READI team asked staff participants about their short-term and long-term goals towards READI, as well as current successes, key areas of focus, and challenges and opportunities in doing this work. These consultations offered a unique insight into the mindset of staff and demonstrated a desire to work towards shared goals of a more inclusive, respectful, and welcoming environment for all.

Unlike the scan analysis, these consultation notes were analyzed using an inductive thematic analysis. This method helps researchers find and understand patterns, or themes, in the data. An inductive thematic analysis technique was chosen because it is flexible and can consider different viewpoints and experiences. This approach enabled the synthesis of perspectives from both City of Waterloo staff and community members. To do the thematic analysis, consultants read the notes from the community and staff consultations. They then highlighted parts of the notes that had similar ideas or topics. On a chart in Excel, they kept track of which colours represented which themes, and recorded examples from the notes under each theme.

Following data collection and analysis, the consultants worked towards triangulating the data. Data triangulation involves taking the analysis from all three sources (documents scan, community consultations, and staff consultations) and identifying the common themes that arise from all of them. Triangulation adds credibility to qualitative data analysis and helps to identify the themes that are most important. This was seen as a more appropriate analytical approach than using the number of people who responded in the same way to judge importance.

These themes are identified in the key findings section and were used to identify priority areas that are grounded in the data from the consultations and scan.

PHASE 3

Plan development

Following the initial draft of the Get READI Plan, the READI team solicited feedback from community representatives and City of Waterloo staff to ensure that the Plan represented their collective needs. The READI team also conducted further community engagements in the summer of 2024 to loop the community into what was being done after previous engagements.

The team presented a draft of the Plan to Council in September 2024 for feedback, which was incorporated into the final version of the Plan. The final Plan was presented to Council and approved on December 16, 2024.

A complementary Implementation Plan and Measurement and Monitoring Framework for the Get READI Plan will be developed by the READI team as next steps. The Implementation Plan will outline actions taken by the City of Waterloo to advance goals listed under each priority area of this Plan. The Measurement and Monitoring Framework will describe and track advancement on relevant metrics that record the overall health and well-being of the City of Waterloo.