

Indigenous Centre for Innovation & Entrepreneurship

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PROJECT MANAGER, INDIGENOUS CENTRE FOR INNOVATION & ENTREPRENEURSHIP
AT THE CITY OF TORONTO

Artist rendering of ICIE exterior — Dundas and George St. view



Source: Images provided by the Indigenous Design Studio of Brook McIlroy

Michele Baptiste is Bear Clan and a member of the Algonquin First Nation of Pikwakanagan in Golden Lake, Ontario. She is a visionary, result-driven leader with over 25 years of promoting and stimulating Indigenous community development at the local and national levels.

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The Indigenous Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (“ICIE”) in Tkaronto (Toronto) will be an Indigenous-led, City-owned space designed to give Indigenous communities an opportunity to advance their entrepreneurial aspirations by providing business programming, advisory services, mentorship supports, meeting and shared co-workspace, community event space and connections to business networks. The development of the ICIE presents a significant opportunity to connect First Nations, Inuit, and Métis entrepreneurs across Toronto, Ontario, and Canada to critical business development resources and to one another.

An estimated 70,000 First Nation, Inuit, and Métis peoples call Tkaronto home. Economic success is recognized as a key plank in driving reconciliation, decolonization, and self-determination for Indigenous Peoples. Along with education, training, and the removal of systemic barriers to employment, a key component of Indigenous economic empowerment is the development of an entrepreneurship eco-system to support Indigenous-owned and operated businesses. The City of Toronto is working with the local Indigenous community to develop the ICIE to meet this need.

Indigenous perspectives, from both residents and entrepreneurs, have been central to the process of imagining, co-developing, and now building a business incubator to encourage and support Indigenous entrepreneurship in Toronto.

The idea for an Indigenous business incubator in Toronto began as a community conversation in 2012 with local Indigenous community members and the local City Councillor. A study was then commissioned by the Native Women’s Resource Centre of Toronto to assess the feasibility of creating an Indigenous Business and Cultural District along Dundas Street East. The Aboriginal Economic Development Project held a series of consultations and interviews with Indigenous leaders and business owners in Toronto. These consultations culminated in the Indigenous community’s recommendation to create a business incubator in Toronto in order to develop and support Indigenous entrepreneurs.

In 2018, The Pontiac Group, an Indigenous consulting firm, was retained by the City of Toronto to lead additional consultations with the Indigenous community in Toronto to further develop the model for the incubator — now called the Indigenous Centre for Innovation and Entrepreneurship (ICIE). Engagement with Indigenous entrepreneurs and residents on the ICIE’s vision, business needs, and physical layout included:

- Design-Thinking Workshops — a series of design-thinking workshops were developed and launched to engage Indigenous entrepreneurs;
- Indigenous Entrepreneur Online Survey — the development and launch of an online survey to gather input from Indigenous entrepreneurs from across Canada; and
- One-on-One Consultations — a large number of one-on-one consultations were undertaken with Indigenous entrepreneurs and professionals, as well as other Indigenous community members.

By embedding Indigenous voices into these community consultations, this process provided key Indigenous design elements to inform the planning of the space, parameters for the establishment of the ICIE Leadership Advisory Circle, and broad guiding principles to inform the development of the ICIE.

The Leadership Advisory Circle (LAC) was formed in 2019. It consists of local Indigenous entrepreneurs, business professionals, community leaders, and Elders and has been providing advice to the City of Toronto on key principles to inform the project and the process to develop the ICIE.

RESPONDING TO THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION CALLS FOR ACTION

This project is a central pillar of the City of Toronto’s collective reconciliation commitments and strategies and concretely addresses the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Call to Action 92, which states: “Ensure that Aboriginal peoples have equitable access to jobs, training, and education opportunities in the corporate sector, and that Aboriginal communities gain long-term sustainable benefits from economic development projects.” The ICIE project has been endorsed by the City of Toronto’s Aboriginal Affairs Advisory Committee (AAAC) and Toronto City Council.

THE SPACE

The ICIE facility will be situated in a street-accessed commercial and community space located in a multi-storey hotel and condominium building at 200 Dundas St. E. Indigenous cultural elements are designed and embedded throughout the interior and exterior space. When construction is complete, it will comprise over 22,000 square feet of commercial space spread over three floors:

- Ground floor: Retail (4,789 sq. ft.)
- Second floor: Event space and meeting rooms (10,933 sq. ft.)
- Third floor: Office/Work spaces (7,673 sq. ft.)

Ground Floor

Reflective of the communities served, the ground floor is the primary entrance to the Centre, with its own dedicated doors, lobby areas, and elevators. There are three principal spaces on the ground floor — one of which is the main entrance and lobby. The use of these spaces will be determined by the operator of the ICIE.

Artist rendering of ICIE second floor community event space



Source: Images provided by the Indigenous Design Studio of Brook McIlroy

Second Floor

The focus of the second floor will be creating spaces of engagement and embedding Indigenous art and design from the reception area to the offices, and with a focal piece in the event space. This includes all the meeting spaces and boardroom.

Through a collaboration with Ryerson University's Design Fabrication Zone (one of the four incubator programs of the Creative Innovation Studio) and Creative Technology Lab, the ICIE project will engage Indigenous students who will work with Indigenous designers from the Indigenous Design Studio at Brook McIlroy to design, build, and install a **traditional lodge** structure in the second floor community event space.

The lodge is a free-standing, pavilion-scale gathering space; its function is to act as a flexible, mobile, and more intimate meeting space within the larger atrium. In concept it references the form of both the Anishinaabe Lodge and the Haudenosaunee Long House. Made of wood, it has an ovular domed structure with built-in perimeter seating. It can segment into three to four independent modules that can be positioned throughout the atrium, independent of each other, to form cove-like seating spaces that may be reserved for Elders, special events, and ceremonies.

Third Floor

The third floor is accessible to members and is isolated from noise by any activities on the second floor, including the event space, by a catwalk with floor to ceiling windows.

A series of permanent and day-use desks are located throughout the floor; they include daily rentable hot desks. The administration offices are also located on this floor. A training room with flexible seating for up to 20 people will also be located on this floor.

Additional information is available at the City of Toronto website: <https://www.toronto.ca/business-economy/business-start-ups/incubators/indigenous-centre-for-entrepreneurship/>

THE ICIE PROGRAM MODEL

The purpose of the ICIE is to provide culturally safe spaces, connections, supports, and resources for Indigenous entrepreneurs. The goal is to offer a suite of supports, space, and programming that will be relevant and useful for Indigenous entrepreneurs, whether they are at the pre-incubation or complete build-out stage of their business or social enterprise journey. The ICIE is meant to be an entrepreneurial resource centre by and for the Indigenous community, providing a focused set of programs, advisors and funding pathways for Indigenous ventures in an engaging, culturally supportive space.

The following are some of the key elements that consultations with Indigenous communities and business leaders have identified as desired components of the ICIE; however, in the spirit of self-determination, these elements will be reviewed, built upon, and refined by the Indigenous-led operator once it assumes responsibility for the facility and its programming:

- Support Indigenous entrepreneurs in Toronto, Ontario and beyond through coaches and mentors, and spaces for work collaboration and special events that align with Indigenous values and cultures.

- Be a leading centre of accessible online learning supporting Indigenous entrepreneurs regardless of their stage of growth or venture type (for-profit, not-for-profit, social venture, etc.).
- Provide a space that facilitates and encourages cross-community and cross-market-sector (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) engagement focusing on economic empowerment that leads to a better understanding of Indigenous culture and increased economic opportunities.
- Provide youth with an opportunity to explore their entrepreneurial aspirations through learning programs, coaching, and mentorships.
- Help navigate funding sources and build financial skills to manage a business.
- Combat feelings of isolation by creating a place that fosters a sense of community for Indigenous entrepreneurs.

GOVERNANCE

In order to ensure that the ICIE reflects the many unique values, principles, and needs of an incredibly diverse Indigenous business and entrepreneur community, it will be governed and operated by an Indigenous-led operator.

The LAC provided advice on a number of governance options, including working with an existing Indigenous organization or establishing a new Indigenous organization. The LAC recommended that the ICIE governing body should have the following attributes:

- Be an Indigenous-led entity;
- Be able to make decisions independently, using Indigenous ways of governance;
- Have skills and experience related to the operations of the ICIE, including entrepreneurship, innovation, and property management; and
- Be established through a transparent process.

It is anticipated that the governing model for the ICIE will be in place by 2022.

With unexpected delays due to the pandemic, the opening date for the ICIE is estimated to be in 2023.