



BRIEF: Informed Community Engagement

Strategic Priority: Celebrating and Embracing Culture

Definition

Uplifting all aspects of a city's local culture, including Indigenous peoples' cultural histories and practices, the cultural histories and practices of all residents, and formal institutional arts and cultural expressions. Also, contribute to creating an inclusive, welcoming and prosperous culture that creates the conditions for harmonious demographic and economic growth.

Research Shows...

Culture is a broad and inclusive concept that enables people of all identities and lived experiences to both share their identities and lived experiences while creating spaces where collective cultures are created. Effective, successful city planning is deeply rooted in local history and culture: "Deliberative practice and participatory processes will fail if planning analysts pay so much attention to technique or 'substance' that they ignore and dismiss the history and culture, the self-perceptions and deeply defining experiences, or the citizens involved."¹ Arts and culture also serve as "a catalyst for urban economic growth and improved quality of life."²

Key Facts and Considerations

- » Owen Sound, once a major 19th-century port, has transformed from its industrial roots into a regional centre for arts, nature and tourism. Known as the [Scenic City](#), it now draws in visitors with its beautiful landscapes and historical sites.
- » At 7.3% of its total population, Owen Sound has the largest [landed immigrant population](#) in the combined counties of Grey and Bruce.
- » The total visible minority population of Owen Sound grew from [840 in 2016](#) to [1,200 in 2021](#), which represents a 50% increase. Visible minorities account for approximately [4%](#) of Owen Sound's total population.
- » According to the [2021 Census](#), 4.1% of Owen Sound's population identify as Indigenous, with the majority claiming Anishinaabe and Ojibway ancestry.

¹ Borup, T. (2020). *The power of culture in city planning*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429327582>

² Goldberg-Miller, S. (2017). *Planning for a city of culture: Creative urbanism in Toronto and New York*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315309255>

- » Owen Sound, a key stop on the Underground Railroad, saw its African American population [grow from 88 to 667](#) between the 1860s and 1880s. The city also hosts the [longest-running Emancipation Day Festival in North America](#), which, in 2024, marked its 162nd year.
- » In 2023, Grey County launched the [Black History Map](#), an interactive map of Black history sites in the county, following its [2021 pledge](#) to do more to promote the region's Black history. The map includes descriptions of important sites, archival images and links to further resources.
- » [Urban Indigenous populations in Canada](#) are slightly older than rural Indigenous populations. Relatedly, 62.8% of Indigenous youth reside in urban areas, compared to 84.8% for non-Indigenous youth.

Precedents from Other Communities

The following precedents may be aligned with current initiatives in Owen Sound and may be reviewed to assess local approaches and/or serve as inspiration for possible future initiatives.

- » The City of Thunder Bay has an [Indigenous Relations Office](#) within their municipal government that focuses on training to help improve city staff and business relations with Indigenous Peoples. The city is also forming an Indigenous Advisory Council that will include elders, youth, knowledge keepers and two-spirit individuals.
- » The [New Canadians Centre](#) is a non-profit organization in the Peterborough area that helps newcomers adjust to life in Canada. The centre offers services like short-term housing help, information about immigration laws and English lessons. It also provides help with school registration, citizenship applications and the obtaining of other important identity documents.
- » Stratford Police Services has created the [Community Equity Action Team](#) (CEAT), which is an advisory panel created to rebuild trust between the police and communities that have historically been treated unfairly in terms of the law. The CEAT advises the police on how to connect better with these communities, improve culture within the police force and meaningfully respond to incidents of racism.
- » The City of Kingston hosts an [Intercultural Arts Festival](#), which is a celebration of the unique cultures and traditions of the city. The festival includes dance and musical performances, workshops, an international marketplace and cuisine representing Kingston's diverse population.
- » The City of Sudbury's [Multicultural and Folk Arts Association](#) operates a settlement program for newcomers, in addition to promoting cultural diversity and unity through the sharing of cultural traditions and resources within the community.

Note: This brief is not intended to be complete or exhaustive. It is an informative community engagement preparatory tool. Special thanks to the students of URB432H in the Department of Urban Studies. Instructor: Daniel Fusca