



Equity & Inclusion Community Conversations: What We Heard - February 2026



Executive Summary

The Municipality of Kincardine engaged a small, targeted group of community members and organizations to better understand the experiences, concerns, and ideas of people who may face inequities. This engagement process focused on those with lived experience and groups that support equity-seeking populations. The goal of this work is to continue to inform municipal actions to enhance inclusion, diversity, equity, and access (IDEA) across programs and services.

Feedback was gathered through two primary avenues:

- **Community Roundtable:** A facilitated virtual discussion with participants representing a range of lived experiences and the organizations that support marginalized communities, including youth, seniors, newcomers, racialized residents, people living with disabilities, and 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals.
- **Survey:** An online tool provided an opportunity for participants who could not attend the roundtable to share their experiences, identify barriers, and suggest opportunities for improvement related to municipal programs, services, and spaces.

The insights gathered from this engagement are presented in four areas of focus:

1. **Awareness** – building understanding of inclusion, diversity, equity, and access.
2. **Service** – facilitating social inclusion, access, and participation in programs, services, and the built environment.
3. **Engagement** – listening to the voices of people experiencing inequities.
4. **Reconciliation** – taking actions to address truth, healing, and reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples.

The findings and suggested action items summarized in this report will be shared with department managers and municipal staff to inform ongoing discussions and potential initiatives. This ensures that the insights from participants are considered in planning, service delivery, and decision-making across the organization.

Focus 1: Awareness

Build awareness and understanding to address inclusion, diversity, equity and access.

What we heard:

While many residents described the Municipality of Kincardine as welcoming, participants also identified attitudinal and systemic barriers to inclusion. Implicit assumptions, microaggressions, and historical inequities continue to influence daily interactions and access to municipal programs and services across youth, seniors, newcomers, racialized residents, people with disabilities, and 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals.

Key examples included:

- **Representation gaps:** A lack of diversity in municipal leadership, committees, and business ownership left some residents feeling unseen or “othered.”
- **Discriminatory behaviors:** Subtle and overt actions were reported, including staring, exclusion in public spaces, and offensive language in recreation programs. Youth advocates noted that bullying or discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, or race can lead to anxiety, social withdrawal, or disengagement.
- **Historical and ongoing inequities:** Participants highlighted the need for greater awareness of systemic issues, including the legacy of colonization and structural barriers affecting newcomers, seniors, and racialized communities.

Participants noted that visible and symbolic actions can influence community perception, including land acknowledgments, Pride events, inclusive signage, welcoming murals, diverse imagery in municipal publications, and communication tools such as visual aids, multilingual materials, and captions for council meetings.

Participants also expressed strong interest in ongoing education for staff, council, and volunteers to recognize unconscious bias, promote inclusive behaviours, and build awareness of historical and current inequities. Consistent messaging and visible indicators of inclusion, such as signage, highway banners, and social media content, were identified as important for fostering a stronger sense of belonging.

Suggested Actions:

Suggested Actions
<p>1.1: Celebrate and recognize diversity Communicate and support community groups to celebrate and recognize dates of significance, e.g. Pride month, Emancipation Day, religious dates of significance, etc.</p>
<p>1.2: Implement IDEA training sessions for staff Provide learning opportunities related to IDEA work for municipal staff, council, businesses, community groups, and the public. Cover a range of topics, including race, culture, accessibility, sexual and gender identity, and reconciliation. This can include formalized training, webinars, Lunch & Learn, and guest speakers.</p>

Suggested Actions

1.3: Develop inclusive language guide and glossary

Promote inclusive language through development of a municipal guide to inclusive language and a glossary of terms.

1.4: Use diverse imagery and pictograms

Incorporate diverse imagery and visual aids, such as images and icons, in communications and signage (e.g. image of a toilet instead of just using the word “washroom”).

1.5: Host and participate in inclusive public-facing initiatives

Promote, support, and host events that signal inclusivity for diverse populations within the municipality (e.g., Multicultural Celebration, Afro Caribbean Youth Awards, Pride Parade).

1.6: Make Council meetings more accessible

Promote how to watch council meetings and add instructions on our website on how to enable closed captions on YouTube.

1.7: Increase inclusivity through visual displays

Increase community visibility and inclusivity through welcoming signage in municipal facilities, highway signage, murals, and promotional campaigns that reinforce an “Always Welcome” message. Develop a crosswalk and long-term art policy if needed for community organizations/groups looking to install semi-permanent art fixtures.

Focus 2: Service

Facilitate social inclusion, access and participation in programs, services and the built environment.

What we heard:

Residents identified barriers to accessing municipal services, programs, and public spaces, many stemming from structural or process-based inequities rather than intent. These challenges affect youth, seniors, newcomers, low-income residents, and people with disabilities or mobility limitations.

Key concerns included:

- **Registration and program access:** First-come-first-served models, online-only processes, and limited registration windows were seen as inequitable. Seniors, newcomers, single parents, and residents without flexible schedules, reliable internet, or digital literacy can be disproportionately disadvantaged. Cost barriers were also noted, particularly for youth, seniors, and low-income residents. Participants suggested exploring sliding-scale fee structures beyond families with children, providing multiple registration windows, and clearly communicating online, in-person, and phone registration options.
- **Physical accessibility:** Barriers included icy walkways, partially accessible washrooms (such as missing grab bars, high sinks, or limited seating), and automatic doors that were not consistently activated. Participants suggested signage indicating who to call for assistance and highlighted the importance of consulting affected populations when designing or renovating facilities. Accessibility concerns were also raised over access to and maneuverability within businesses. Parking for people with disabilities was also raised, including a suggested “forgiveness policy” allowing tickets to be rescinded if proof of permit is provided within 24–48 hours.
- **Transportation and mobility:** Limited municipal and regional transportation options affect participation in programs, events, and essential services, particularly for youth, seniors, and residents with mobility challenges.
- **Safety, belonging, and visibility:** Some participants questioned whether municipal spaces feel safe and welcoming for 2SLGBTQIA+ residents, racialized residents, and people with disabilities. Hateful language, exclusionary behavior, and inconsistent staff awareness can contribute to feelings of isolation or reluctance to engage.
- **Recreation accessibility:** Program-specific concerns included pool temperature. Participants requested warmer water to improve accessibility for therapeutic purposes. Staff confirmed the pool is maintained at approximately 83°F, a regulated safety metric that is lower than therapy pool temperatures to maintain chemical balance and operational safety.
- **Technology as both a necessity and a barrier:** As digital access becomes more common for services such as registration, residents noted barriers related to digital literacy, privacy concerns, and a preference to speak with a person rather than navigate complex online systems.

Suggested Actions:

Suggested Actions
<p>2.1: Improve access to community recreation programs Review registration processes for recreation and community programs and explore possible improvements to address concerns.</p> <p>Explore sliding-scale fee structures for recreation programs to reduce cost barriers for all low-income residents, regardless of family structure.</p>
<p>2.2: Accessible entrances to municipal buildings Reinforce checking all automatic doors to ensure working order as part of facility opening duties</p> <p>Consider adding stickers/signage at entrances for accessibility support (e.g., “Call for assistance: [number]”) and improve complaint/reporting procedures.</p>
<p>2.3: “Forgiveness policy” for accessible parking Explore the possibility of a “forgiveness policy” for parking in accessible spaces if proof of permit is provided within 24–48 hours.</p>
<p>2.4: Connect with BIA and AAC Share accessibility concerns regarding access to businesses with the BIA. Support the BIA and AAC to improve access to downtown businesses.</p>
<p>2.5: Support digital literacy programs Promote and support existing digital literacy programs (e.g., Active Living 55+).</p>
<p>2.6: Using municipal buildings as information hubs Distribute municipal information for residents through “hubs” in municipal buildings with updated municipal materials for residents in accessible formats.</p>
<p>2.7: Incorporate inclusivity into community programs and events Incorporate diversity and inclusion into community programs and special events organized by the Municipality and encourage community special event organizers to use an inclusion lens in their planning by providing tools and resources to organizers.</p>
<p>2.8: Translation on municipal website Explore possibility of putting instructions for translating the municipal website through different internet browsers’ existing translation services.</p>
<p>2.9: Pool temperature Review pool operations to explore possibility of raising the water temperature, so long as it aligns with safety standards.</p>
<p>2.10: Transportation Options Expand transportation awareness and options by advocating for improved services. Work with existing providers (e.g., Saugeen Mobility) to increase level and scope of services.</p>
<p>2.11: Offer Welcome Packages in multiple formats Update Welcome packages on our website for newcomers and create physical packages that can be distributed through municipal channels and community partners.</p>

Focus 3: Engagement

Listen to the voices of people experiencing inequities

What we heard:

Participants emphasized the need for proactive, relational, and accessible engagement with those experiencing inequities, including youth, seniors, newcomers, racialized residents, people with disabilities, and 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals. Engagement should be ongoing to allow voices to meaningfully influence municipal decisions, programs, and spaces.

Key points included:

- **Youth engagement:** Youth organizations and parents highlighted the importance of informal opportunities for input. Barriers include privacy concerns, stigma, transportation, and accessibility. Feeling “seen and heard” was closely tied to equity and inclusion.
- **Seniors and newcomers:** Seniors raised concerns about healthcare, transportation, affordable housing, and social inclusion. Newcomers stressed the importance of clear, accessible information and pathways to participate in community life.
- **Volunteer coordination and advisory structures:** Existing volunteer programs and advisory committees rely on informal networks and individual knowledge. Participants expressed a need for clear, systematic processes to connect volunteers efficiently and inclusively.
- **Coordination and resource gaps:** Overlapping programs can create confusion. Centralized resources and clear communication are critical for residents to navigate services, programs, and volunteer opportunities. 211 was identified as an underutilized tool for connecting residents to information and services.
- **Welcome Packages:** Participants suggested tangible packages for newcomers and residents undergoing life transitions (e.g., new parents, new homeowners), including information on municipal programs, services, and community groups. Effective distribution could include municipal spaces, community organizations, and realtors.

Suggested Actions:

Suggested Actions
<p>3.1: Create an inclusive public engagement framework Create a framework that includes tools and processes to encourage two-way dialogue, build trust and support effective and inclusive public engagement. Consult with affected communities during design process to ensure accessibility features meet needs (washrooms, ramps, automatic doors).</p>
<p>3.2: Host Equity & Inclusion roundtables Host two inter-organizational roundtables per year to share information and foster collaboration; include a learning component such as marketing, using 211, and volunteer recruitment.</p>
<p>3.3: Promote 211 services Increase awareness about 211 as a central resource for information, volunteer opportunities, and referrals. Explore ways to expand its reach and impact, including online and physical promotion.</p>

3.4: Support diverse representation in positions of power

Explore options to increase diversity in municipal staff, council, and committees.

3.5: Create a staff resource hub for IDEA

Provide IDEA-related resources for staff through the employee portal called the Kintranet.

3.6: Support volunteer recruitment

Explore possible volunteer portals to connect community organizations with prospective volunteers and promote viable options (e.g. 211).

Focus 4: Reconciliation

Work towards actions to address truth and reconciliation



JOURNEY TO RECONCILIATION

What we heard:

Participants emphasized the importance of deepening the Municipality's understanding of and action on reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. Reconciliation should be integrated alongside broader IDEA priorities rather than treated in isolation.

Key points included:

- **Commemoration and recognition:** Residents highlighted acknowledging Indigenous histories, contributions, and injustices through public commemorations, signage, and programming. Suggestions included exploring culturally significant commemorations in addition to National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, Indigenous History Month, and MMIWG Day.
- **Education and awareness:** Ongoing education for council, staff, and the public on Indigenous history, systemic inequities, and reconciliation strategies was viewed as essential to foster respectful relationships and strengthen community trust.
- **Inclusive policies and practices:** Participants noted the potential value of municipal policies supporting cultural practices, such as a smudging policy for municipal buildings. They emphasized that planning, programming, and engagement processes should be inclusive of Indigenous perspectives and that reconciliation principles should inform municipal decision-making across departments.

Suggested actions:

Suggested Actions	TRC Call to Action
4.1: Recognize significant dates Continue to recognize significant calendar dates and explore additional culturally significant Indigenous commemorations.	#57. Educate public servants on the history of Indigenous peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Indigenous rights, Indigenous law, and Indigenous–Crown relations.
4.2: Provide training and learning opportunities Provide municipal staff and council with training and workshops on Indigenous history, systemic inequities, and reconciliation strategies.	#57
4.3: Waive rental fees Explore the possibility of waiving rental fees for municipal spaces used for Indigenous cultural and ceremonial events.	#47. We call upon federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to repudiate concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous peoples and

Suggested Actions	TRC Call to Action
	lands, such as the Doctrine of Discovery and terra nullius, and to reform those laws, government policies, and litigation strategies that continue to rely on such concepts
<p>4.4: Create a guide for honorariums Develop a guide for paying for honorariums and simplify the process for paying honorariums that allows for Indigenous partners to be paid the day the service is provided.</p>	#47
<p>4.5: Provide opportunities for community engagement Host Indigenous-related events and learning circles, put out displays during significant time periods, and share resources to encourage community reconciliation efforts. Partner with community groups where possible to encourage community collaboration.</p>	#57
<p>4.6: National Day for Truth and Reconciliation Support and promote NDTR to allow for time and space to reflect on the atrocities committed against First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples.</p>	#80 We call upon the federal government, in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, to establish, as a statutory holiday, a National Day for Truth and Reconciliation to honour Survivors, their families, and communities, and ensure that public commemoration of the history and legacy of residential schools remains a vital component of the reconciliation process.

Additional Observation: Housing

Addressing community concerns related to affordable and accessible housing.

What we heard:

Participants emphasized that housing is a critical concern in the Municipality of Kincardine, particularly regarding affordability and availability for seniors, newcomers, youth, and residents in transition. While housing is provincially mandated, residents expressed frustration that progress locally has been limited.

Key points included:

- **Affordability and accessibility:** Rising housing costs outpacing incomes make it difficult for some residents to access safe, appropriate, and stable housing.
- **Community momentum and advocacy:** Participants suggested the Municipality could raise awareness, share information on housing programs, and support community efforts to address local housing needs.

"Housing is a major concern—without affordable options, people feel like they have no place to stay in the community."

Suggested actions:

Suggested Actions
<p>5.1: Research housing solutions Research housing initiatives and best practices from other communities to identify potential solutions.</p>
<p>5.2: Seek out external funding opportunities Explore potential housing grants or funding programs to support affordable housing initiatives.</p>
<p>5.3: Hold a housing forum Hold a housing forum to engage county representatives, stakeholders, developers, and service providers in discussing housing needs, opportunities, and solutions.</p>

