

Indigenous Youth Engagement Summary Report

City of Airdrie Southwest Recreation Centre

Summary of Workshop and Online Engagement Input

Prepared for planning discussions related to Indigenous youth recreation, spaces, and participation in Airdrie

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1. Executive Summary

The City of Airdrie is undertaking public engagement to inform planning for the future Southwest Recreation Centre. As part of this work, the City sought specific input from Indigenous youth and their families to better understand what would help Indigenous youth feel welcome, connected, and more likely to participate in future recreation spaces, programs, and services.

This work also supports the City's broader Indigenous Framework and reconciliation-related efforts by recognizing that Indigenous youth may experience recreation spaces, programs, and participation barriers differently than adults or the general public.

Input was gathered through three related engagement streams: an in-person Indigenous youth workshop, an online survey, and an online ideas board. Outreach included the *Involve Airdrie* platform, the SW Recreation engagement page, a news release, media coverage, Spotify advertising, posters, school outreach, and outreach through community partners including the Boys and Girls Club, Community Links, and Circle Connections for Reconciliation.

While participation was limited, the input received was meaningful and consistent. The findings should be understood as an early starting point rather than a complete picture of Indigenous youth perspectives in Airdrie. The engagement also highlighted a broader challenge: Indigenous youth in Airdrie are not a readily identifiable demographic group, and there is no existing centralized, opt-in communication pathway that allows the City to directly reach Indigenous youth and families who may wish to participate in future engagement, programming, or cultural initiatives.

Across the workshop, survey, and approved online ideas, four key themes emerged:

- **Relationship comes first.** Participation is closely tied to trust, familiarity, and feeling personally welcomed. Youth may be more likely to participate when friends are present, the setting feels informal, and the opportunity is introduced through trusted people, partners, or community connections.
- **Cultural connection supports belonging.** Culture, history, identity, arts, language, land, and teachings from Elders or Knowledge Keepers were identified as elements that can help Indigenous youth feel reflected and welcomed. This does not mean every program needs to be Indigenous-specific; rather, Indigenous youth should be able to see meaningful cultural connection, representation, and respect within programming, spaces, and partnership opportunities.
- **Spaces should support gathering, cultural visibility, and indoor/outdoor connection.** Youth described a preference for spaces that are open, flexible, connected to nature, and able to support both structured programming and informal gathering. Welcoming features included outdoor access, natural materials, room to gather, Indigenous artwork or language, and design elements that reflect culture, land, and community.
- **Participation depends on feeling welcome, reflected, safe, informed, and able to access the opportunity.** Practical factors such as transportation, cost, awareness, scheduling, and facility access matter. Social and relational factors also matter, including whether youth feel welcome, whether they see Indigenous people reflected in the space or programming, whether programs reflect Indigenous culture, and whether spaces are free from racism, homophobia, or other forms of exclusion.

The planning implications are organized around the three areas used to structure the engagement: programs, spaces, and participation barriers.

Programs: Future programming should support connection through recreation, culture, and social gathering. Input pointed to interest in recurring youth gatherings, cultural learning, beading and arts, land-based or outdoor activities, lacrosse, swimming, games, informal recreation, and opportunities to learn from Elders, Knowledge Keepers, artists, mentors, or Indigenous community members.

Spaces: Facility planning should support gathering, cultural visibility, and indoor/outdoor connection. This includes flexible gathering areas, multi-purpose rooms, natural light, outdoor access, natural materials, Indigenous artwork or language, and spaces that feel open, warm, and comfortable rather than cramped, institutional, or overly controlled.

Participation: The City should consider the conditions that make it easier for Indigenous youth to show up and return. These include welcoming first experiences, inclusive environments, Indigenous representation, culturally relevant programming, informal and social ways to try programs, trusted messengers, clear communication, cost supports, and transportation considerations.

Appendix E provides a supporting regional precedent through the Seven Chiefs Sportsplex & Chief Jim Starlight Centre on the Tsuut'ina Nation. While it does not replace local engagement, it offers useful points of comparison for the Southwest Recreation Centre. The Seven Chiefs example reinforces several themes heard in Airdrie, including flexible gathering space, cultural visibility, indoor/outdoor connection, multigenerational use, low-barrier programming, wellness integration, and community access. It also demonstrates how recreation facilities can function as more than sport venues by supporting cultural learning, wellness, youth development, and community identity.

Taken together, the findings suggest that the Southwest Recreation Centre can better support Indigenous youth by combining welcoming design, culturally visible spaces, accessible programming, and relationship-based participation approaches. They also point to the value of strengthening ongoing communication pathways with Indigenous residents and families over time. Future opportunities could include voluntary ways for residents to opt in to receive information about engagement opportunities, recreation programs, community events, and cultural initiatives through existing channels such as Airdrie.ca, community events, recreation programming, and partner organizations. Any approach should be voluntary, purpose-specific, and supported by appropriate privacy protections, particularly where youth and families are involved.

Overall, the engagement provides practical direction for planners, programming staff, architects, and City decision-makers. It points toward a recreation centre that is not only functional, but welcoming, culturally respectful, flexible, and easier for Indigenous youth and families to access and see themselves reflected in.

2. Introduction

The City of Airdrie (the City) is undertaking broader public engagement to inform planning for the future **Southwest Recreation Centre**. As part of this work, the City sought to gather specific input from Indigenous youth and their families to better understand what would help them feel welcome, connected, and more likely to participate in future recreation spaces, programs, and services at the new facility.

This engagement also aligns with the City's broader work to advance Indigenous relations and Reconciliation through the development of an Indigenous Framework. Gathering Indigenous youth perspectives is an important part of this work, as youth may experience recreation spaces, programs, and barriers differently than adults or the general public.

This engagement summary brings together input gathered through three related engagement streams: an **in-person Indigenous youth workshop**, an **online survey**, and an **online ideas board**. Together, these sources provide early

insight into the kinds of programs, spaces, and supports that may better reflect the interests, needs, and experiences of Indigenous youth in Airdrie, particularly as planning for the Southwest Recreation Centre moves forward.

The engagement focused on three central questions:

1. What **programs** would Indigenous youth actually show up for?
2. What makes recreation **spaces** feel welcoming, safe, or connected to belonging?
3. What **barriers** may affect participation?

The findings should be understood as an early starting point rather than a complete picture of Indigenous youth perspectives in Airdrie. Participation was limited, but the input received offers useful direction for Southwest Recreation Centre planning, continued relationship-building, and more culturally responsive engagement with Indigenous youth and families over time.

3. Engagement Approach and Outreach

Indigenous youth input was gathered through a combination of online and in-person engagement methods. An online survey and idea-sharing page were launched on April 13, 2026, through the City's online *Involve Airdrie* platform, supported by a news release, promotional poster, Spotify advertisement, and other public communications. Information and a link were also posted on the SW Recreation engagement page.

The City used several channels to raise awareness of the opportunity. Communications included a public news release, an article on Discover Airdrie, a social media post by Air 106.1, and a planned *myAIRDRIE* notification to public participation subscribers. A promotional poster, included as *Appendix D*, was also created to direct people to the online engagement page and was shared with Circle Connections for Reconciliation, Community Links, the Boys and Girls Club, and schools within the Rocky View School Division. A social media graphic was also prepared for distribution through participating community organizations.

In addition to the online engagement, an in-person workshop was held on May 4, 2026, from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. at Inspire in Airdrie. The workshop was facilitated by Dione McGuinness of IndigenUs Consulting Corp., with representatives from The City of Airdrie, Colliers, and GGA Architecture in attendance.

Several other outreach approaches were also explored to encourage Indigenous youth participation. These included exploring the possibility of hosting a session through the school system, asking schools to share information about the engagement opportunity, promoting the online survey and idea-sharing tools through *Involve Airdrie*, and reaching out through the Boys and Girls Club, Community Links, and Circle Connections for Reconciliation.

While these efforts were important, they also highlighted the limits of relying on formal, public, or institutional outreach channels alone. Indigenous youth in Airdrie are not a readily identifiable demographic group, and there is no existing census, registry, or centralized contact list that allows the City to directly reach Indigenous youth or families. Because the intended participants are youth, outreach also needs to be handled carefully and often depends on parents, guardians, schools, service providers, and trusted community partners.

This context is important when interpreting the level of participation. Limited response should not be understood as a lack of interest. The results point instead to the need for sustained relationship-building and stronger communication pathways with Indigenous residents, families, youth-serving organizations, and community partners over time.

4. Participation Summary

This summary reflects the number of responses received and included in the analysis for each engagement method.

Input Method	Participation / Responses
<i>In-person youth workshop</i>	2 Indigenous youth (both male, ages 14 and 17)
<i>Online Indigenous Youth Survey</i>	12 responses included in analysis
<i>Online Share Your Ideas tool</i>	5 approved ideas included in thematic summary

5. Part One: In-Person Indigenous Youth Workshop

5.1 Workshop Purpose and Format

The workshop was designed to gather direct input from Indigenous youth about the programs, spaces, and supports that would help them feel welcome, connected, and more likely to participate in future City or community-based opportunities.

Input was gathered through three discussion stations. Each station focused on a different theme: **program interests, welcoming and inclusive spaces, and barriers to participation**. The station themes were used to organize the analysis; during the workshop, participants were guided by the questions shown below rather than by formal theme labels.

Station	Guiding Questions
<i>Station 1 – Programs & Ideas</i>	What programs would you actually show up for? What would make it fun or worth your time?
<i>Station 2 – Spaces & Belonging</i>	What makes a space feel welcoming or safe? Where do you feel like you belong or not?
<i>Station 3 – Barriers to Participation</i>	What gets in the way of participating? What would make it easier to show up?

5.2 Workshop Findings: Programs and Ideas

Youth identified interest in programs that are cultural, active, social, and connected to identity. Specific program ideas included:

- Youth group focused on culture, history, and arts
- Concepts like a “Friday night gathering”
- Cultural programs, including learning about Indigenous culture, history, and heritage
- Learning from Elders
- Beading / beadwork
- Lacrosse
- Games, including capture the flag, tag, and hide-and-seek
- Outdoor gatherings
- Swimming / pool activities
- Cold plunge
- Hockey
- Activities connected to Nations, rather than generic “dancing”

Youth emphasized that programs would be more appealing if they are social, active, culturally meaningful, and not overly formal. Input suggested that youth are more likely to attend if friends are there, the gathering feels relaxed, the space allows movement and outdoor activity, and the group can grow over time as word spreads.

5.3 Workshop Findings: Spaces and Belonging

Youth repeatedly said that belonging is shaped more by people and relationships than by the physical space itself. Several notes pointed to the idea that “things don’t define spaces, but people do.”

Ideas for spaces included:

- A place where youth are with people they like, or where their friends are
- A gathering space that can grow as the group grows
- A room like the workshop room at Inspire, described as a comfortable gathering place
- A multi-purpose room
- A space connected to the outdoors
- A large space with room to move around
- A space that does not feel cramped, tight, or like a “metal cage”
- A space that includes cultural elements such as medicine wheel colours, teepees, animals, and symbols
- A place connected to landmarks, history, and culture
- A space where youth can be indoors but still have access to go outside

Youth described belonging as being tied to relationships, comfort, safety, culture, and the absence of racism or discrimination. Outdoor spaces, spaces connected to nature such as Nose Creek, and spaces where Indigenous youth can learn about culture, history, and heritage were described as supportive of belonging. Cramped, institutional, or harsh-feeling spaces were described as less welcoming.

Participants also shared that they have experienced racism in Airdrie and identified racism and homophobia as factors that can make spaces feel unwelcome or unsafe.

5.4 Workshop Findings: Barriers

The main barriers identified were access, transportation, lack of diversity, limited programming, and social/cultural disconnection. Specific barriers included:

- Transportation, walking distance, bus access, bike access, and passes running out
- Programs not being easy to access
- Lack of diversity
- Limited awareness of, or connection to, existing programs
- Winter conditions and lack of places to go in winter
- Racism and homophobia
- Shyness or hesitation among some Indigenous youth
- Lack of teaching about Indigenous history, heritage, and culture
- Lack of cultural programs and supports
- Feeling separated from other Indigenous people

Youth suggested that participation would be easier if programs were accessible, welcoming, social, and culturally grounded. A recurring youth gathering, with food, cultural activities, outdoor options, and transportation support, would respond to several of the barriers named in the notes.

5.5 Key Takeaways from the Workshop

- Relationships matter more than the physical space itself.
- Cultural connection, history, arts, and teachings from Elders were important program interests.

- Open, outdoor, and nature-connected spaces were preferred over cramped or institutional spaces.
- Transportation, access, cost, awareness, racism, homophobia, and social disconnection were identified as barriers.
- Small, consistent, low-pressure opportunities may be more effective than one-time formal programs that expect immediate high attendance.

6. Part Two: Online Indigenous Youth Survey

6.1 Respondent Demographics

The online survey included 12 responses. The included survey responses were largely from youth ages 12 to 14, with several responses submitted by parents or guardians of Indigenous youth. Respondents were able to select more than one identity or connection category, so totals may exceed the number of included responses.

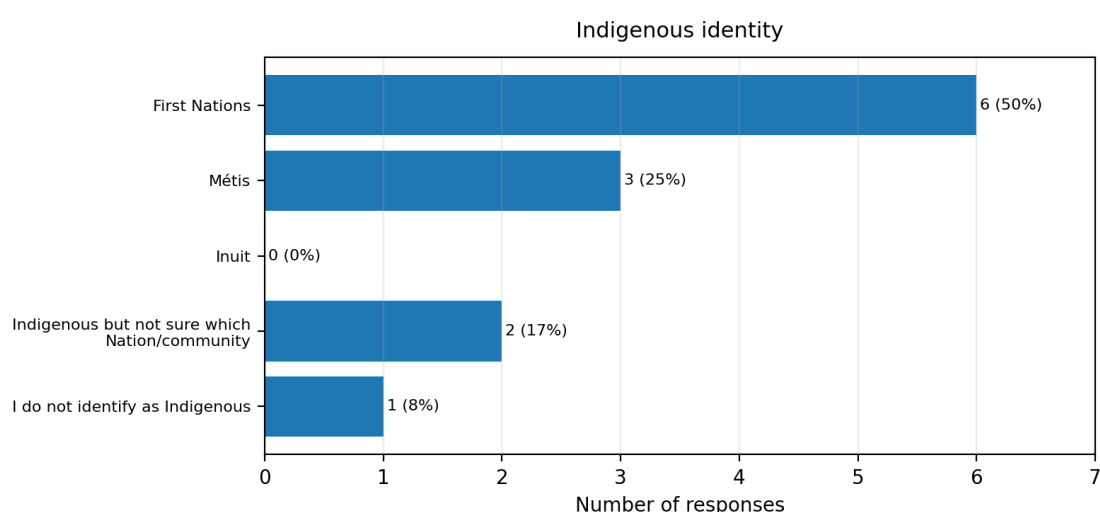


Figure 1. Indigenous identity selections among included survey responses.

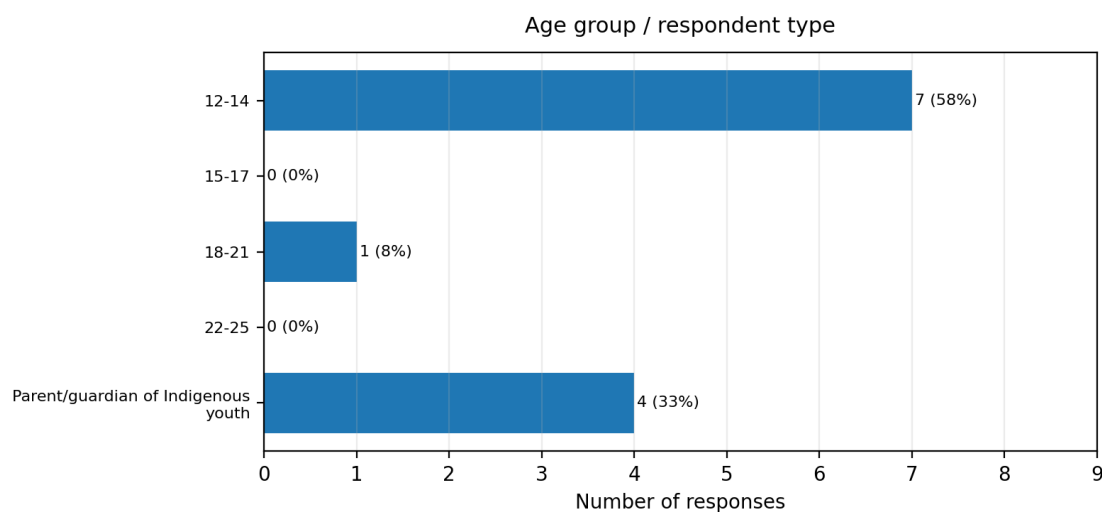


Figure 2. Age group / respondent type selections among included survey responses.

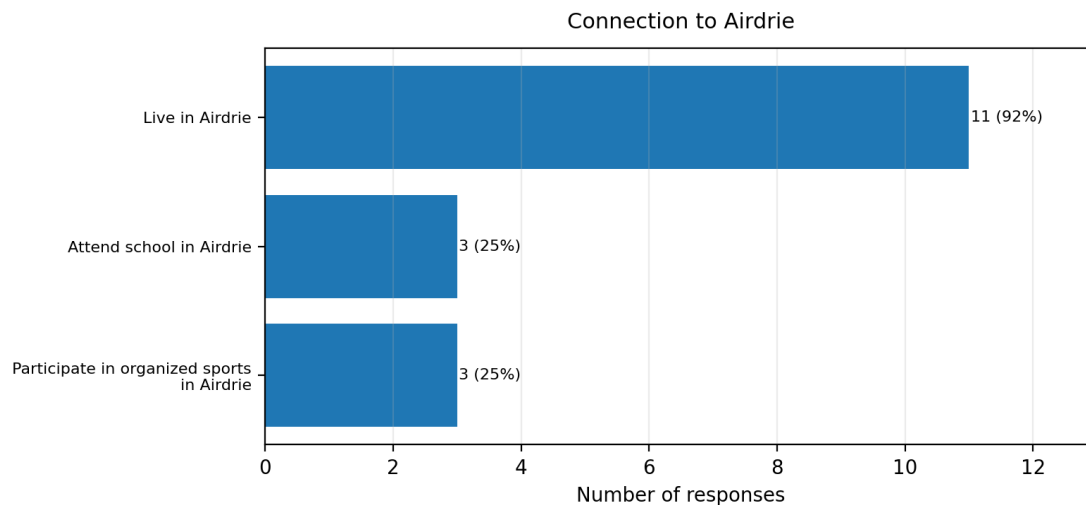


Figure 3. Connections to Airdrie among included survey responses.

6.2 Survey Question Summaries

How would you usually get to a recreation facility?

Driving was the most common travel method selected, followed by rides from family or friends. Walking, biking, and transit were each selected by one respondent. These results point to the importance of family transportation and the potential need to consider access barriers for youth who cannot drive themselves.

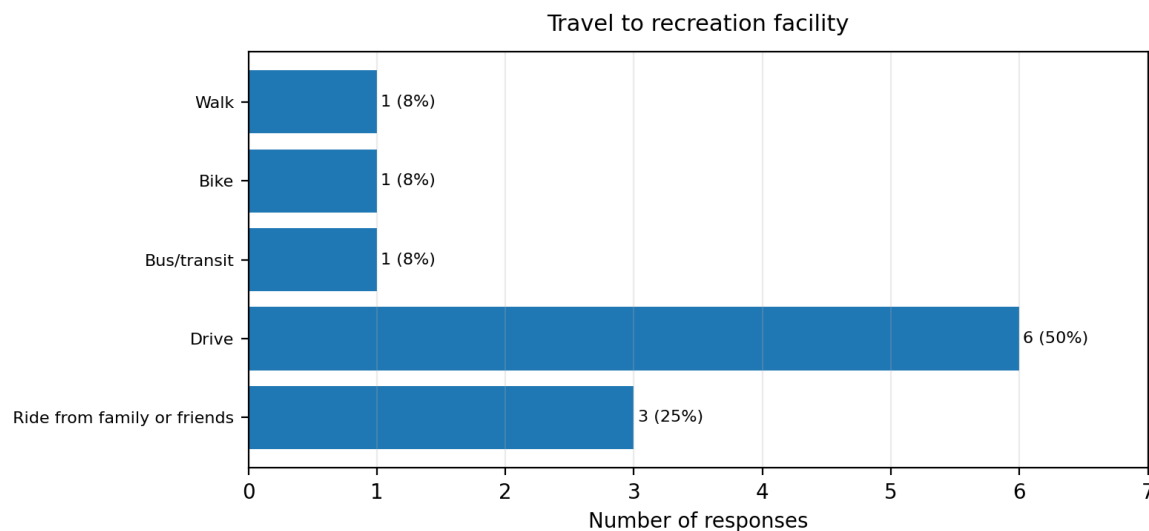


Figure 4. Usual travel methods to a recreation facility.

How often do you use recreation facilities?

Weekly and monthly use were the most common responses, though several respondents reported rare use. This suggests that recreation facilities are already part of some respondents' routines, but there may also be opportunities to increase participation through more relevant programming, lower barriers, and more welcoming spaces.

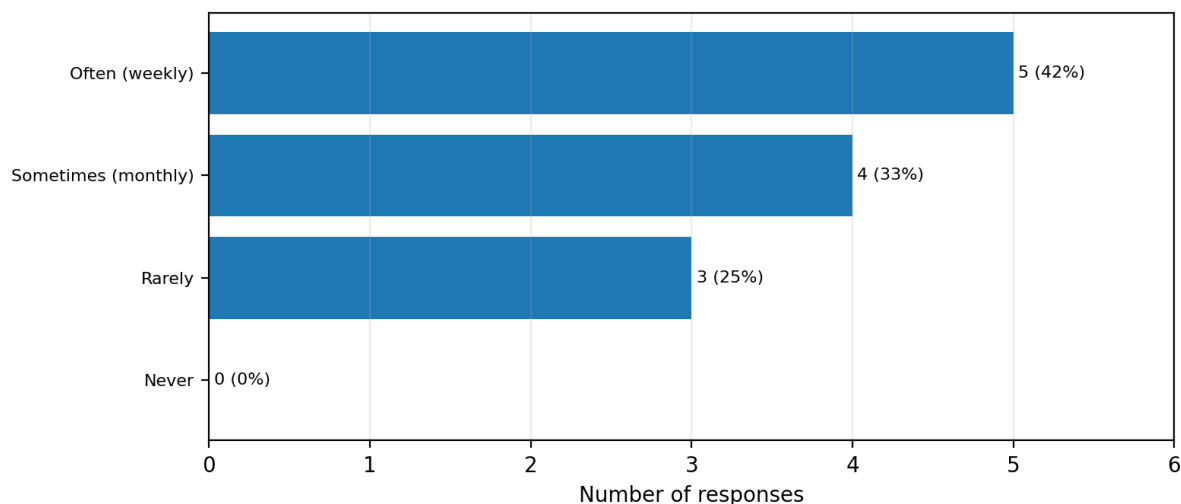


Figure 5. Frequency of recreation facility use.

What activities would you most like to see at the new recreation centre?

Drop-in sports were the most commonly selected activity, followed by fitness-based activities and cultural activities. Youth hangout spaces, outdoor activities, land-based learning, and ice-based sports also received support. The results point to the value of a mixed model that includes both general recreation amenities and Indigenous-specific cultural or land-based opportunities.

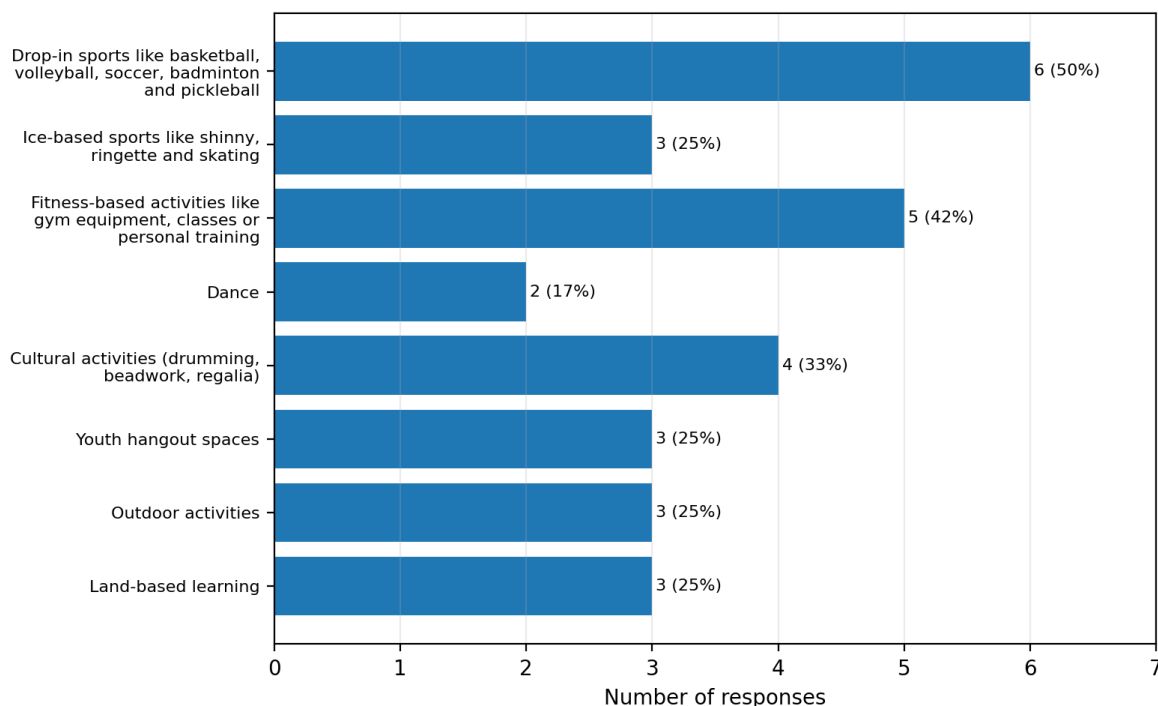


Figure 6. Activities respondents would most like to see.

What might make it hard for you or your family to use recreation spaces or participate in programs?

The most common barriers selected were cost, transportation, and programs not reflecting Indigenous culture. Other barriers included not feeling welcome or comfortable, not seeing Indigenous staff or role models, schedule conflicts, family responsibilities, safety concerns, and programs not being of interest. These results show that barriers are both practical and relational/cultural.

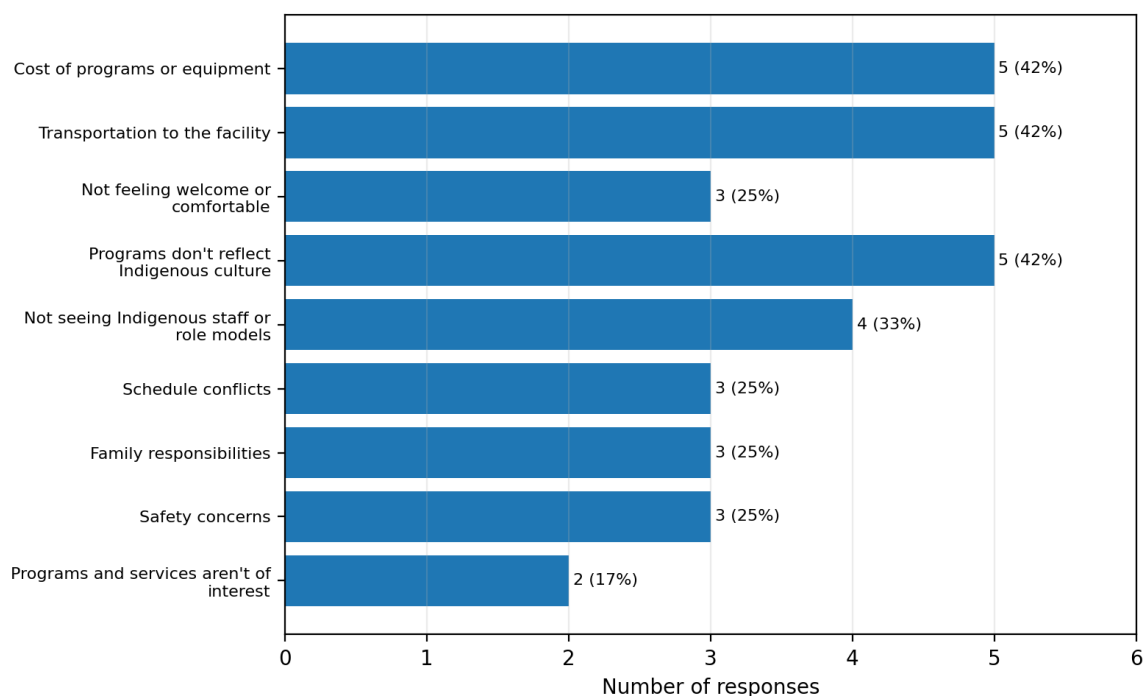


Figure 7. Barriers to recreation participation.

What would make recreation spaces feel welcoming for Indigenous youth?

Indigenous artwork or language in the building was the most strongly selected welcoming feature. Cultural programs, Indigenous staff or mentors, spaces for youth to gather, events for Indigenous families, outdoor cultural or land-based spaces, and quiet/reflection spaces also received support. The results suggest that representation, programming, gathering space, and cultural connection all matter.

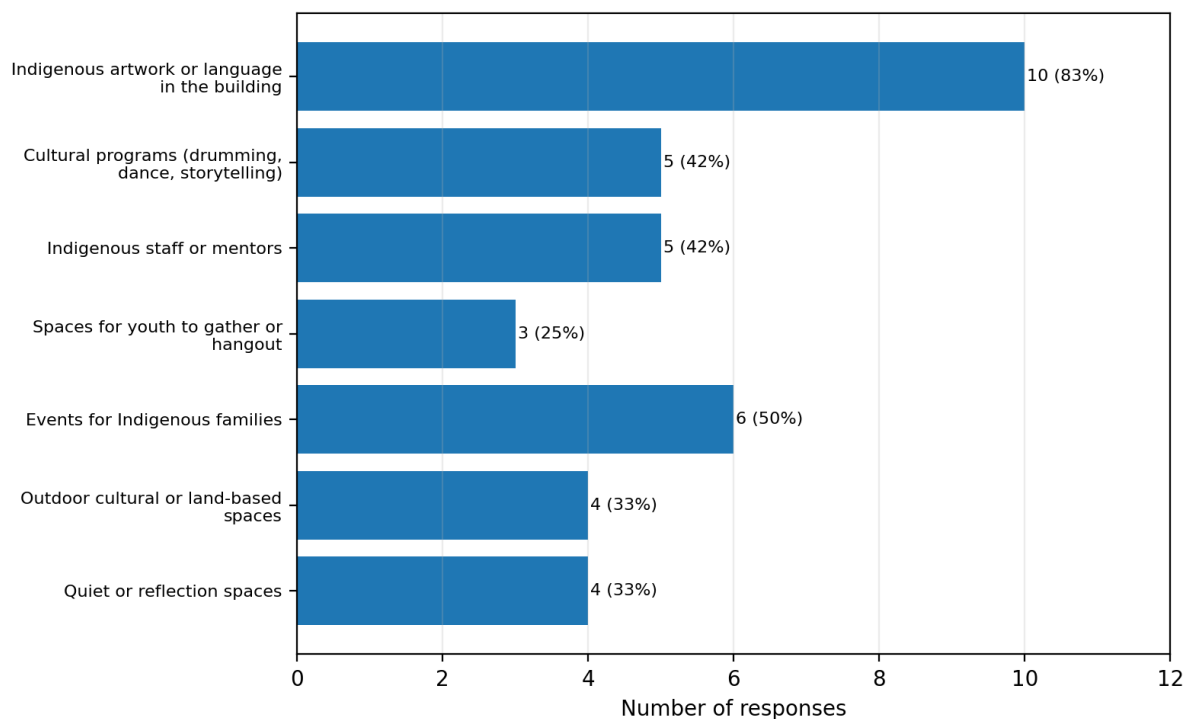


Figure 8. Features that would make spaces feel welcoming for Indigenous youth.

If you could include one thing in the new recreation centre just for Indigenous youth, what would it be?

There were 9 open-ended responses to this question among the included survey responses. Responses varied in specificity, but several themes were consistent with the workshop findings: safe and inclusive space, Indigenous youth gathering space, cultural supports, Elders or role models, sports/recreation amenities, and creative or art space.

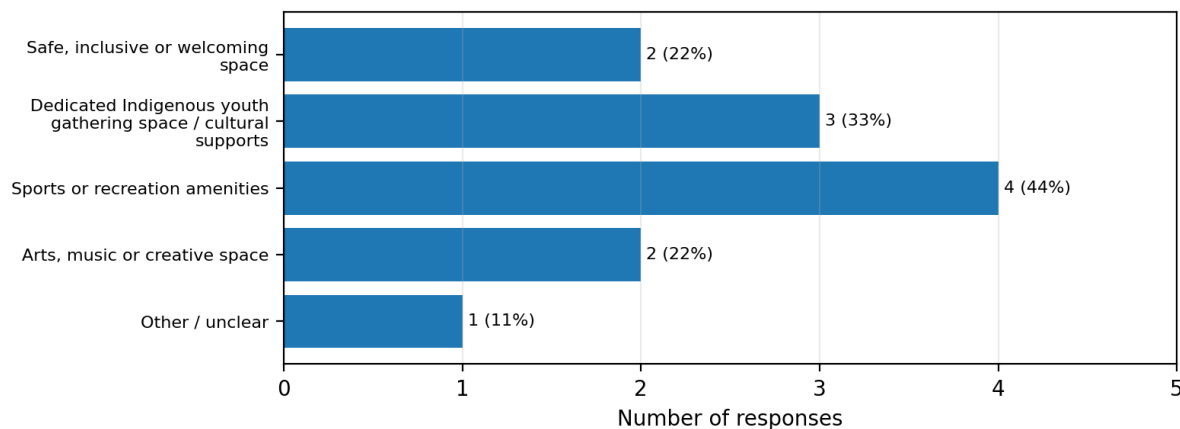


Figure 9. Thematic coding of open-ended “one thing” responses.

7. Part Three: Online Share Your Ideas Contributions

7.1 Purpose and Screening

The Share Your Ideas tool provided an open-ended opportunity for people to submit ideas related to Indigenous youth recreation, spaces, and participation. This tool was broader than the survey and does not appear to have been limited to Indigenous youth or parents/guardians. For that reason, the results are best understood as contextual community input rather than direct Indigenous youth feedback.

Five ideas were included in the thematic summary.

7.2 Summary of Ideas Submitted

The approved ideas reinforced several themes found in the workshop and survey, while also adding broader recreation and design suggestions. Ideas included cultural learning, Elders or Knowledge Keepers, beading, hoop dancing, language learning, land-based education, youth gathering spaces, free or low-cost youth access, indoor sport space, pool improvements, natural design elements, and Indigenous artwork or language.

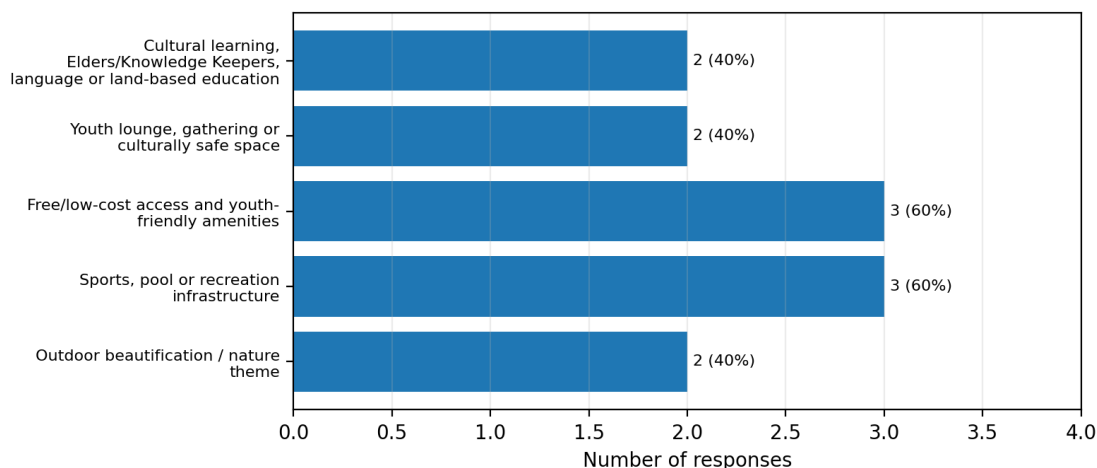


Figure 10. Themes identified in approved Share Your Ideas submissions.

7.3 Relationship to Workshop and Survey Findings

The Share Your Ideas input generally reinforced the importance of cultural programming, youth gathering space, low-cost access, welcoming design, and safe/inclusive environments. Some submissions were broader community recreation suggestions, such as covered tennis, park beautification, larger play areas, indoor field space, and pool amenities. These ideas may still be useful to planning, but they should be separated from direct Indigenous youth engagement findings when making decisions about Indigenous-specific programming or spaces.

8. Cross-Cutting Themes

8.1 Relationship Comes First

Across the workshop, survey, and approved open-ended ideas, participation was tied to trust, familiarity, and feeling personally welcomed. Youth may be more likely to participate when friends are present, the setting feels informal, and the opportunity has been introduced through trusted people or partners.

8.2 Cultural Connection Supports Belonging

Culture, history, identity, arts, language, land, and teachings from Elders or Knowledge Keepers were identified as important elements that can help Indigenous youth feel reflected and welcomed. This does not mean every program needs to be Indigenous-specific; rather, Indigenous youth should be able to see meaningful cultural connection, representation, and respect within programming, spaces, and partnership opportunities.

8.3 Spaces Should Feel Open, Safe, and Flexible

Youth described a preference for spaces that are open, flexible, and connected to nature. Welcoming features included outdoor access, natural materials, room to gather, Indigenous artwork or language, and design elements that reflect culture, land, and community. Input also suggested that spaces should avoid feeling cramped, institutional, or overly controlled.

8.4 Participation Depends on Access, Safety, and Relevance

Participation is affected by both practical and social factors. Transportation, cost, awareness, schedule conflicts, family responsibilities, and facility access may influence whether youth can attend. Feelings of safety and belonging also matter, including whether youth feel welcome, whether they see Indigenous staff or role models, whether programs reflect Indigenous culture, and whether spaces are free from racism, homophobia, or other forms of exclusion.

8.5 Outreach Requires a Longer-Term Relationship-Building Approach

Promotion through schools, *Involve Airdrie*, the Boys and Girls Club, Community Links, Circle Connections for Reconciliation, and broader public communications helped raise awareness, but these channels were not sufficient on their own to generate strong Indigenous youth participation. Future engagement will likely require a more sustained way to connect with Indigenous residents, families, youth-serving organizations, and trusted community partners over time.

9. Planning Implications

The workshop, survey, and online idea-sharing input were organized around three central areas: programs, spaces, and barriers to participation. The planning implications below are organized in the same way so they can be more easily applied to future Southwest Recreation Centre planning, programming, design, and engagement.

9.1 Programs: Support Connection Through Recreation, Culture, and Social Gathering

Input suggested that Indigenous youth are more likely to participate in programs that feel social, welcoming, active, and connected to culture or identity. Youth expressed interest in opportunities to gather with friends, participate in games or recreation activities, spend time outdoors, and learn more about Indigenous culture, history, arts, and teachings.

Planning implications include:

- **Regular youth gatherings:** Consider low-pressure recurring opportunities, such as a Friday evening youth gathering, where Indigenous youth can build familiarity with the space, staff, and each other over time.
- **Cultural learning opportunities:** Include opportunities for cultural learning, such as beading, arts, storytelling, language exposure, land-based learning, teachings from Elders or Knowledge Keepers, and activities connected to Indigenous history and identity.
- **Active and recreational programming:** Consider programs that combine cultural connection with recreation, including lacrosse, outdoor games, swimming, skating or hockey-related activities, fitness, and informal drop-in recreation.
- **Social connection:** Build programs around friendship, peer connection, food, and informal gathering, not only structured instruction or formal registration.
- **Flexible programming models:** Begin with smaller, consistent offerings that can grow as awareness and trust build. Low initial participation should not be taken as a lack of interest.
- **Partnership opportunities:** Work with Indigenous organizations, Circle Connections for Reconciliation, youth-serving agencies, schools, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, artists, and community members to shape programming that is relevant and respectful.

This does not mean all programs at the Southwest Recreation Centre need to be Indigenous-specific. Rather, Indigenous youth should be able to see options that reflect their interests, create cultural connection, and help them feel that the facility is also for them.

9.2 Spaces: Design for Gathering, Cultural Visibility, and Indoor/Outdoor Connection

Input suggested that the physical environment matters, but that belonging is shaped most strongly by people, atmosphere, and whether youth feel welcome. Youth responded positively to spaces that are open, flexible, connected to nature, and able to support both structured and informal gathering.

Planning implications include:

- **Flexible gathering areas:** Include spaces where youth can gather informally before, during, or after programs. These spaces should not feel overly controlled, hidden away, or strictly transactional.
- **Indoor/outdoor connection:** Consider design features that create visible and easy connections to the outdoors, such as access to outdoor gathering areas, views to natural spaces, natural light, and programming areas that can extend outside.
- **Room to move:** Avoid spaces that feel cramped or confined. Youth identified larger, open areas as more welcoming, especially for group activities, games, and gatherings.
- **Cultural visibility:** Consider Indigenous artwork, language, symbols, colours, materials, and design elements in ways that are meaningful and locally appropriate. These should be developed with Indigenous guidance rather than added superficially at the end.
- **Natural materials and softer design:** Where possible, use materials and layouts that feel warm, natural, and human, rather than harsh, institutional, or cage-like.
- **Multi-purpose use:** Include rooms that can support a range of activities, including cultural workshops, youth gatherings, Elder or Knowledge Keeper sessions, arts activities, small group discussion, and recreation-based programming.
- **Safety and comfort:** Design should support visibility, ease of navigation, informal supervision, and comfort without making youth feel watched, controlled, or unwelcome.

For architects and facility planners, the key message is that Indigenous youth are not only asking for “program rooms.” They are describing spaces where they can gather, move, connect with friends, see culture reflected, and feel comfortable entering and staying.

9.3 Participation: Create the Conditions That Make It Easier to Show Up and Return

Input showed that participation is shaped by more than interest in a program. Indigenous youth may want to attend, but still need to feel that the opportunity is welcoming, relevant, safe, and realistically accessible. Some barriers were practical, such as transportation, cost, awareness, scheduling, and access to passes. Others were social or relational, including not feeling welcome, experiences of racism or homophobia, lack of cultural relevance, shyness, and not seeing Indigenous people reflected in the space or programming.

Planning implications include:

- **Welcoming first experience:** While not always named as a “barrier,” the input strongly suggests that first impressions matter. Front desk staff, greeters, signage, program leaders, and volunteers can all influence whether youth feel comfortable entering the facility, asking questions, joining a program, and returning.
- **Inclusive environment:** Racism, homophobia, and other forms of exclusion were identified as factors that can make spaces feel unwelcome or unsafe. Future programming and facility operations should support an environment where Indigenous youth feel respected, included, and safe being themselves.
- **Representation:** Respondents identified the importance of Indigenous staff, role models, mentors, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and culturally relevant programming. Where possible, Indigenous representation should be considered in staffing, partnerships, programming, mentorship, artwork, and cultural learning opportunities.

- **Cultural relevance:** Input pointed to interest in culture, history, identity, arts, land, language, and teachings. Programs and spaces are more likely to feel welcoming when Indigenous youth can see culture and identity reflected in meaningful and respectful ways.
- **Informal and social ways to try programs:** Youth may be more likely to participate when opportunities feel informal, social, and easy to try. Drop-in, trial, or introductory opportunities may help youth attend without feeling singled out or locked into a formal program before they are comfortable.
- **Trusted messengers:** Promotion through public channels is helpful, but input and participation levels suggest that trusted people and organizations are also important. Youth may be more likely to attend when they hear about an opportunity through someone they know or a group they already trust.
- **Awareness and communication:** Awareness was identified as a participation issue. Future opportunities should be promoted through multiple channels, including schools, youth-serving organizations, *Airdrie.ca*, community events, social media, partner organizations, and opt-in communication with interested families.
- **Cost and pass access:** Cost, passes, and affordability were identified as practical barriers. Free or low-cost entry points, subsidized passes, drop-in options, and clear information about financial supports may help reduce barriers.
- **Transportation support:** Transportation, walking distance, bus access, bike access, and reliance on others for rides were identified as barriers. Transit access, bus passes, shuttle options, bike access, and safe walking routes should be considered as part of participation planning.

The core finding is that youth participation depends on more than program interest. It also depends on whether youth feel welcomed, reflected in spaces and programming, safe, informed, and able to access the opportunity in practical terms.

9.4 From What We Heard to What We Learned: Relationship-Building Considerations

The engagement findings suggest that future implementation will benefit from continued relationship-building with Indigenous youth, families, and community connectors in Airdrie. While the workshop, survey, and online ideas provided useful input for the Southwest Recreation Facility, they also highlighted the practical challenge of reaching Indigenous residents through public or institutional channels alone.

As a future consideration, the City may wish to explore voluntary ways for Indigenous residents and families to stay informed about engagement opportunities, programs, events, and cultural initiatives. This could include opt-in interest forms, sign-up opportunities at community events, or other communication pathways that allow people to choose whether they would like to receive future information.

These opportunities could be promoted through existing public and community channels, such as National Indigenous Peoples Day events, National Day for Truth and Reconciliation activities, *Airdrie.ca*, recreation programming, schools, partner organizations, and other community events.

Any future approach should be voluntary, purpose-specific, and supported by appropriate privacy protections, particularly where youth and families are involved. The intent would not be to create a formal registry, but to offer respectful and low-barrier ways for Indigenous residents and families who wish to stay connected with the City to do so.

Overall, the engagement points to the value of moving beyond one-time outreach toward more sustained communication and relationship-building over time. This would provide a stronger foundation for future Indigenous youth programming, engagement, and reconciliation-related initiatives in Airdrie.

Appendix A: Workshop Summary

Introduction and Workshop Context

As part of the broader engagement process, a workshop was designed to gather direct input from Indigenous youth in Airdrie about the kinds of programs, spaces, and supports that would help them feel welcome, connected, and more likely to participate in future City or community-based opportunities. The workshop was held May 4, 2026 from 4:00 to 6:00 pm, at Inspire in Airdrie. The workshop was facilitated by Dione McGuinness of IndigenUs Consulting Corp., with participants from The City of Airdrie, Colliers and GGA Architecture in attendance.

The workshop focused on three central areas: **programs and ideas**, **spaces and belonging**, and **barriers to participation**. These questions were intended to support the overall planning process by helping identify what Indigenous youth would actually show up for, what makes a space feel safe or welcoming, and what practical or social barriers may prevent youth from participating.

To raise awareness of the workshop and encourage participation, several outreach approaches were attempted. These included exploring the possibility of hosting a session at the school, asking the school to share event information, promoting the opportunity through *Involve Airdrie*, and connecting through the Boys and Girls Club. Despite these efforts, attendance was limited. Two Indigenous youth attended the workshop. Both participants were male, ages 14 and 17.

While the number of participants was small, the discussion provided meaningful insight into the importance of relationship-building, cultural connection, flexible gathering spaces, and practical access supports. The low turnout is also important feedback in itself. It suggests that there is foundational work to be done to identify, reach, and build trust with Indigenous youth and families in Airdrie. As such, the findings from this workshop should be understood as an early starting point rather than a complete picture of Indigenous youth perspectives in the community.

The notes below provide a summary of the workshop input, aligned with the three workshop stations and guiding questions.

Station 1 – Programs & Ideas

What programs would you actually show up for?

Youth identified interest in programs that are cultural, active, social, and connected to identity. Specific program ideas included:

- Youth group focused on culture, history, and arts
- Concepts like a “Friday night gathering”
- Cultural programs, including learning about Indigenous culture, history, and heritage
- Learning from Elders
- Beading / beadwork
- Lacrosse
- Games, including capture the flag, tag, and hide-and-seek
- Outdoor gatherings
- Swimming / pool activities
- Cold plunge
- Hockey
- Activities connected to Nations, rather than generic “dancing”

What would make it fun or worth your time?

Youth emphasized that programs would be more appealing if they are social, active, culturally meaningful, and not overly formal. Input suggested that youth are more likely to attend if:

- Friends are there
- The gathering feels relaxed and social
- Programs include culture and history, not just generic activities
- The space allows movement and outdoor activity
- Youth can learn from Elders or cultural teachers
- Programs help reconnect people who have “been separated a lot”
- The group can grow over time as word spreads

A key point is that youth may not show up right away in large numbers, but participation could grow once trust builds and people start hearing about it from others.

Station 2 – Spaces & Belonging

What makes a space feel welcoming or safe?

Youth repeatedly said that belonging is shaped more by **people and relationships** than by the physical space itself. Several notes pointed to the idea that “things don’t define spaces, but people do.”

A welcoming space was described as:

- A place where youth are with people they like, or where their friends are
- A gathering space that can grow as the group grows
- A room like one the workshop was held in (Room J, or Circle Room, at Inspire), described as a comfortable gathering place
- A multi-purpose room
- A space connected to the outdoors
- A large space with room to move around (accommodates at least 30 people, possibly with room for expansion)
- A space that does not feel cramped, tight, or like a “metal cage”
- A space that includes cultural elements such as medicine wheel colours, teepees, animals, and symbols
- A place connected to landmarks, history, and culture
- A space where youth can be indoors but still have access to go outside

Input strongly suggested that youth prefer spaces that feel open, flexible, relational, and connected to nature.

Where do you feel like you belong or not?

Youth described belonging as being tied to relationships, comfort, safety, culture, and the absence of racism or discrimination.

Places or conditions that support belonging included:

- Anywhere friends are
- Outdoor spaces
- Spaces connected to nature, such as Nose Creek
- Cultural spaces or spaces with Indigenous symbols and design
- Gathering spaces where Indigenous youth can reconnect
- Spaces where youth can learn about culture, history, and heritage
- Spaces where shy youth can ease in without pressure

Places or conditions that reduce a sense of belonging included:

- Cramped or tight spaces
- Institutional or harsh-feeling spaces
- Spaces that feel like a “metal cage”
- Places where youth experience racism or homophobia
- Places where Indigenous youth do not feel reflected, represented, or culturally connected

The two youth participants shared that experiences of racism have affected their sense of belonging in Airdrie.

Racism and homophobia were also identified as factors that can make spaces feel unwelcome or unsafe for youth.

Station 3 – Barriers

What gets in the way of participating?

The main barriers identified were access, transportation, lack of diversity, limited programming, and social/cultural disconnection.

Specific barriers included:

- Transportation
- Walking distance
- Bus access
- Bike access
- Passes running out
- Programs not being easy to access
- Lack of diversity
- Lack of youth awareness or connection to existing programs
- Some youth not accessing programs
- Winter conditions and lack of places to go in winter
- Racism
- Homophobia
- Shyness or hesitation among some Indigenous youth
- Lack of teaching about Indigenous history, heritage, and culture
- Lack of cultural programs and supports
- Feeling separated from other Indigenous people

What would make it easier to show up?

Youth suggested that participation would be easier if programs were accessible, welcoming, social, and culturally grounded.

Things that would make it easier include:

- Better transportation options
- More reliable access to bus passes or transit support
- More diverse and inclusive spaces
- Programs where youth can attend with friends
- Outdoor or indoor/outdoor spaces
- Larger spaces with room to move
- Cultural programming that feels relevant and real
- Learning opportunities with Elders
- Programs that reconnect Indigenous youth with one another

- A regular gathering time, such as a Friday night gathering
- A space that starts small but can grow as more youth hear about it

A practical interpretation is that youth may be more likely to participate through informal, relationship-based opportunities rather than formal programs that expect immediate high attendance. A recurring youth gathering, with food, cultural activities, outdoor options, and transportation support, would respond to several of the barriers and interests named in the notes.

Summary

The Indigenous youth workshop provided early but valuable insight into what may help Indigenous youth in Airdrie feel more connected, welcomed, and willing to participate in future programs or engagement opportunities. Although only two youth attended, their input was thoughtful and consistent across the three discussion areas.

A clear theme was that **relationships matter more than the physical space itself**. Youth emphasized that a place feels welcoming when they are with people they like, when friends are present, and when the atmosphere feels relaxed and safe. The notes suggest that Indigenous youth may be more likely to participate in spaces that feel relational, flexible, and low-pressure rather than formal or institutional.

A second strong theme was the importance of **connection to culture, history, and identity**. Participants expressed interest in learning more about Indigenous culture, history, heritage, arts, beadwork, and teachings from Elders. They also noted that many Indigenous youth have been separated from these connections and may not have been taught much about their own history or heritage. Future programming should therefore consider culture not as an add-on, but as a central part of creating belonging.

The youth also spoke about the importance of **outdoor, open, and nature-connected spaces**. They described liking outdoor areas, larger spaces, and places where people can move around freely. Cramped, tight, harsh, or institutional spaces were identified as less welcoming. Cultural design elements, natural materials, symbols, animals, and connections to landmarks or places with history were also seen as ways to make spaces feel more welcoming.

Several practical and social barriers were identified. These included **transportation, walking distance, bus access, passes running out, limited awareness of existing programs, lack of diversity, winter conditions, shyness, and experiences of racism or homophobia**. These barriers point to the need for both practical supports and a stronger sense of safety and inclusion.

Overall, the input suggests that a successful approach to Indigenous youth programming in Airdrie should begin with **small, consistent, relationship-based opportunities** that can grow over time. A regular gathering, such as a Friday night youth group with food, cultural activities, outdoor options, games, Elders or cultural teachers, and transportation support, would respond directly to many of the ideas raised. Just as importantly, the low turnout reinforces that outreach cannot rely only on formal channels. Continued relationship-building with Indigenous youth, families, schools, service providers, and community partners will be needed to build awareness, trust, and participation over time.

Appendix B: Online Survey Results

The tables below summarize the included online survey responses. For many questions, respondents could select multiple answers, so totals may exceed the number of included responses. The most frequently selected response in each category is shown in bold.

Indigenous identity

Response Option	Count	Percentage of Included Responses
First Nations	6	50%
Métis	3	25%
Inuit	0	0%
Indigenous but not sure which Nation/community	2	17%
I do not identify as Indigenous	1	8%

Age group / respondent type

Response Option	Count	Percentage of Included Responses
12-14	7	58%
15-17	0	0%
18-21	1	8%
22-25	0	0%
Parent/guardian of Indigenous youth	4	33%

Connection to Airdrie

Response Option	Count	Percentage of Included Responses
Live in Airdrie	11	92%
Live in another nearby community	0	0%
Attend school in Airdrie	3	25%
Participate in organized sports in Airdrie	3	25%
Other	0	0%

Travel to recreation facility

Response Option	Count	Percentage of Included Responses
Walk	1	8%
Bike	1	8%
Bus/transit	1	8%
Drive	6	50%
Ride from family or friends	3	25%
Would need transportation support	0	0%
Other? Please let us know.	0	0%

Facility use frequency

Response Option	Count	Percentage of Included Responses
Often (weekly)	5	42%
Sometimes (monthly)	4	33%
Rarely	3	25%
Never	0	0%

Preferred activities

Response Option	Count	Percentage of Included Responses
Drop-in sports like basketball, volleyball, soccer, badminton and pickleball	6	50%
Ice-based sports like shinny, ringette and skating	3	25%
Fitness-based activities like gym equipment, classes or personal training	5	42%
Dance	2	17%
Cultural activities (drumming, beadwork, regalia)	4	33%
Youth hangout spaces	3	25%
Outdoor activities	3	25%
Land-based learning	3	25%
Other? Please share with us.	0	0%

Barriers to participation

Response Option	Count	Percentage of Included Responses
Cost of programs or equipment	5	42%
Transportation to the facility	5	42%
Not feeling welcome or comfortable	3	25%
Programs don't reflect Indigenous culture	5	42%
Not seeing Indigenous staff or role models	4	33%
Schedule conflicts	3	25%
Family responsibilities	3	25%
Safety concerns	3	25%
Programs and services aren't of interest	2	17%
Other? Please share with us.	0	0%

Welcoming features

Response Option	Count	Percentage of Included Responses
Indigenous artwork or language in the building	10	83%
Cultural programs (drumming, dance, storytelling)	5	42%
Indigenous staff or mentors	5	42%
Spaces for youth to gather or hangout	3	25%
Events for Indigenous families	6	50%
Outdoor cultural or land-based spaces	4	33%
Quiet or reflection spaces	4	33%
None of the above	0	0%
Other? Please share with us.	0	0%

Open-Ended Survey Responses

The following entries have been reproduced exactly as written, including any spelling and grammatical errors.

Open-ended response
• A dedicated Indigenous youth gathering space within the recreation centre. This could be a welcoming lounge or room designed specifically for Indigenous youth to connect, relax, and feel represented. It should include Indigenous artwork, cultural elements, and opportunities for programming led by Elders, mentors, and community members. Having a space that feels culturally safe and specifically meant for Indigenous youth would help create a stronger sense of belonging and encourage participation in the centre as a whole.
• Inclusion and safe space to enjoy activities
• Drum sets and role models for younger indigenous
• A place for theirans [sic] to do quads and a art room for B.days
• ice hockey rink
• Indoor turf
• free gym access
• A space for them to hangout and have access to cultural supports/an Elder.

Appendix C: Share Your Ideas Detailed Submissions

The following entries summarize the approved **Share Your Ideas** submissions. These submissions are treated as contextual community input because the tool was broader than the survey and was not limited to Indigenous youth or parents/guardians.

“Creating Safe and Inclusive Recreation Spaces for Indigenous Youth”

My idea is to create a recreation space that feels safe, welcoming, and truly built for youth, especially Indigenous youth.

This space should be more than just sports courts or fitness equipment. It should include areas where youth can gather, connect with friends, and feel a sense of belonging. A youth lounge or drop-in space with comfortable seating, activities, and room for conversation would make the facility feel more inviting and encourage more participation.

It is also important that Indigenous youth see themselves reflected in the space. This could include Indigenous artwork, language, cultural design elements, and programming led by Indigenous community members, mentors, or Elders. Creating dedicated cultural programming and community events within the facility would help youth feel represented and supported.

Barriers such as cost, transportation, and fear of judgment should also be considered. Low-cost or free youth programming, accessible hours, and welcoming staff who are trained in cultural safety and inclusion would help make the space feel accessible to everyone.

Most importantly, safety should include both physical and emotional safety. Youth need to feel respected, included, and able to be themselves without fear of bullying, racism, or judgment.

Views: 12; Up votes: 4; Down votes: 0

“NPS Ideas”

We would like to see:

- Bigger play area accessible to older students
- Free gym access for students under a certain age
- Indoor Sports Field
- Bigger pool
- Meeting room for cultural events, with rooms named after animals
- Theme of nature, with a Turtle Island mural when you first walk in

Views: 1; Up votes: 0; Down votes: 0

“Land based education, beading and hoop dancing”

There are so many crafts and activities that can be done. Beading, drumstick making, hoop dancing classes, etc. Language classes would also be very good for our youth as the language is being lost. Land based education such as hide scraping and tanning would be wonderful for the youth to learn. A weekly drop in with knowledge keepers or an elder on site would be great. Make it fun and offer a pizza party at the same time. Our youth need to learn our ways. Medicine bag making, sewing a denim jacket with ribbons, ribbon skirts and ribbon shirts are also an idea. Weekly drumming classes, with drums provided, would be good too. You could also host drum making classes.

Views: 4; Up votes: 0; Down votes: 0

“Airdrie with beautiful outdoors”

Hi. I always go out to our parks for a walk and see how beautiful those places would be if they were well maintained with land scapes flowers rocks ... something organized and beautiful and pleasant to the sight.

This city has a lot of potential to become a well know city not only during Christmas time but also during winter summer and spring. A city were many want to spend a weekend and drink something like an ice-cream or coffee , empowering our local business.

“Beautiful Airdrie”

Views: 3; Up votes: 0; Down votes: 0

“Request to Include a Covered Tennis Court in the New Recreation Center:

I’d like to share a suggestion for the new recreation center that I hope you’ll consider.

Currently, Airdrie does not have any covered tennis courts. While there are facilities for pickleball, tennis players don’t have an indoor or weather-protected option. For families like mine, this really limits access. My son and I love playing tennis together, but we can only do it during the warmer months, and even then it depends heavily on the weather.

As it stands, the current setup feels limiting and not fully inclusive, as it doesn’t provide equal opportunities for residents who prefer tennis over pickleball.

Having at least one covered tennis court would make a meaningful difference. It would allow residents to stay active year-round and make the facility more inclusive for a wider range of users. Tennis is a lifelong sport, and providing access to it supports both youth development and long-term community health.

I hope you’ll consider including at least one covered tennis court in your plans. It would be greatly appreciated by many in the community.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Views: 1; Up votes: 0; Down votes: 0

The City of Airdrie
wants to hear from

INDIGENOUS YOUTH

and families who
live in or attend
school in Airdrie.

We're asking youth to share ideas about:



Activities they
enjoy



What helps them
feel welcome and
safe



What can make it
hard to participate
in recreation
opportunities

What you share will help guide future recreation spaces and
programs, including the SW Recreation Centre.

- Taking part is your choice
- Youth decide what they want to share
- In-person and online options available
- Open to Indigenous youth and families in Airdrie (participation is based on self-identification)



Learn more or take part:
airdrie.ca/indigenous-youth-recreation



Appendix E: Supporting Precedent Review — Seven Chiefs Sportsplex & Chief Jim Starlight Centre

Purpose of the Precedent Review

The Seven Chiefs Sportsplex & Chief Jim Starlight Centre on the Tsuut'ina Nation provides a relevant regional example of how Indigenous cultural identity, recreation, wellness, and multigenerational use can be reflected in facility planning, design, programming, and operations.

This appendix does not replace local engagement with Indigenous youth and families in Airdrie. Rather, it provides a supporting precedent that may help the City of Airdrie, project managers, planners, programmers, and architects consider how Indigenous design principles and recreation needs have been addressed in another major recreation facility in the region.

Because standard municipal engagement mechanisms, such as online surveys or formal public meetings, may not always generate strong participation from Indigenous youth and families, precedent review can help identify additional considerations for planning and design. The Seven Chiefs example offers useful points of comparison related to flexible gathering space, cultural visibility, indoor/outdoor connection, multigenerational use, low-barrier programming, wellness integration, and community access.

The following summary organizes the precedent information into three areas: design and facility planning considerations, programming and operational considerations, and project reference information. These considerations may be used alongside the workshop, survey, and online idea-sharing findings to inform future planning for the Southwest Recreation Centre.

Design and Facility Planning Considerations

The Seven Chiefs Sportsplex & Chief Jim Starlight Centre demonstrates how recreation facilities can be designed to support both athletic use and broader community gathering. The design considerations below highlight features that may be relevant to the Southwest Recreation Centre, particularly where the City is considering how to create spaces that feel open, flexible, culturally visible, and connected to the land.

Several of the design inputs align with themes heard through the Airdrie Indigenous youth engagement, including the importance of room to gather, connection to the outdoors, cultural visibility, and spaces that do not feel overly confined or institutional. These examples should not be copied directly, but they may help inform design conversations about how recreation spaces can better support Indigenous youth, families, Elders, and community members.

The considerations below are organized around spatial flexibility, acoustic comfort, indoor/outdoor connection, cultural integration, multigenerational use, community access, and environmental responsibility.

- **Complete Pillar-Free Open Geometry:** A strict structural mandate for a 50,000-square-foot clear-span fieldhouse to ensure completely unobstructed sightlines and total spatial flexibility for communal circle formations and large cultural gatherings.
- **Acoustic Separation and Zoned Audio:** A technical requirement for heavily zoned, high-intelligence audio systems to achieve total acoustic isolation between different areas of the facility, ensuring public address announcements or high-noise athletic zones do not disrupt adjacent quiet spaces, youth activities, or Elder gatherings.

- **Continuous Environmental and Landscape Connection:** An architectural directive to maximize natural glazing and intentionally borrow daylight, maintaining specific scenic views of the land from within the interior corridors so that visitors never feel entirely closed off from the outdoors.
- **Living Culture Integrated into Materials:** A design rejection of a static "museum-style" approach (artifacts behind glass) in favor of embedding cultural identity directly into the building's physical core through specific stone masonry styles, integrated local public art, and bilingual Dene/English signage.
- **Low-Barrier, Multigenerational Utility:** A requirement for multi-use spaces capable of adapting to all age groups simultaneously, reflecting a kinship model where youth activities, toddler care, and Elder comfort coexist within the same operational footprint.
- **Sovereign Booking Control and Priority Access:** An operational mandate for a structured, tiered booking policy that guarantees local community members protected priority access over outside regional user groups or visiting sports leagues.
- **Environmental Infrastructure Mandate:** Direct community support for eco-friendly building practices, resulting in the integration of solar arrays and high-efficiency energy retrofits to actively reduce the facility's carbon footprint. [1, 2, 3]

Programming and Operational Considerations

The programming and operational examples from Seven Chiefs show how recreation facilities can function as more than sport venues. They can also support youth development, wellness, cultural learning, social connection, and community identity.

This is particularly relevant to the Southwest Recreation Centre because the Indigenous youth engagement pointed to interest in programs that are social, active, culturally meaningful, and easier to try. The Seven Chiefs example offers a useful comparison for thinking about how recreation programming can combine sport, culture, wellness, mentorship, and low-barrier access.

The considerations below are organized around holistic youth development, cross-sector wellness partnerships, low-barrier sport discovery, culture and language integration, and sport development pathways.

- **The "Holistic Athlete" Model:** Direct youth and community input rejected standard "isolated athletics" in favor of multi-layered programming. Physical sports development must be intentionally coupled with life skills training, community cooking/nutrition, mental health support, and cultural education rather than existing purely as sport competition.
- **Cross-Sector Collaboration for Health & Wellness:** A programmatic framework requiring joint delivery between the recreation department and local health/wellness services. This ensures the facility functions as a centralized social support and preventive healthcare hub for youth, rather than just a venue for physical fitness.
- **Low-Barrier "Sport Discovery" Formats:** Strong demand for free, introductory, unorganized multi-sport programming (such as "All Sport One Day" or rotating weekly multi-sport drop-ins). This allows low-income or underrepresented youth to experiment with up to four different sports per camp in a non-competitive environment without committing to league fees or equipment costs.
- **Culture and Language Integration:** Input from community working groups mandated that youth athletic camps and training pathways build cultural identity. Programs are structured to incorporate mandatory

culture and language classes alongside physical training, reinforcing the recreation center as a mechanism for cultural preservation.

- **Targeted High-Performance Pipelines:** To address underrepresentation in elite sports, youth input demanded dedicated long-term development frameworks (such as the *7Chiefs Champions Athlete Development Pathway*). These pipelines leverage partnerships with regional sports science organizations (e.g., Canadian Sport Institute Alberta) to transition youth from recreational play to high-performance competition.

Project Reference Information

The project reference information below provides basic contextual details about the Seven Chiefs Sportsplex & Chief Jim Starlight Centre, including the project location, design and construction team, programming frameworks, and facility scale.

This information is included to help readers understand the nature of the precedent and why it is relevant to this report. The Seven Chiefs facility is distinct from the proposed Southwest Recreation Centre in governance, ownership, community context, and purpose. However, it remains a useful regional example of how Indigenous cultural identity, recreation, wellness, and community gathering can be reflected in a major recreation facility.

Project Profile:	Seven Chiefs Sportsplex & Chief Jim Starlight Centre (Tsuut'ina Nation, AB).
Prime Architect:	The Workun Garrick Partnership.
General Contractor:	Krawford Construction Inc..
Key Sub-Consultants:	SMP Engineering (Electrical & Lighting); TOA Canada (Acoustic Systems).
Programming Frameworks:	7Chiefs Champions Pathway; Tsuut'ina Health & Wellness Services.
Project Metric Reference:	228,000 sq. ft. multi-use facility, commissioned via Tsuut'ina Capital Projects and open for community operations as of June 2019.