

# Indigenous Action Plan

**2025/26 – 2027/28**



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary .....	3
Strategy.....	3
Collaborative Journey.....	4
Risk Analysis.....	5
Action Plan.....	8
Reporting .....	11
Concluding Remarks.....	11



## Executive Summary

The approach for this action plan is a synthesis of the principles outlined in the Framework: Creating Culturally Responsive Initiatives in the Indigenous Justice Sphere (the Framework) and Legal Aid Alberta (LAA)'s Strategic Plan 2023-26.

This first action plan, drawn from the Framework, is designed as a foundational beginning with which LAA will continue to build on in the years to come. By focusing on core actions that establish strong relationships, cultural competency and creating feedback and accountability mechanisms, this plan sets the stage for more advanced initiatives that will evolve as the organization deepens its engagement with Indigenous communities.

The foundational actions in this plan are critical to creating an infrastructure that will support ongoing improvements in quality, access and accountability.

Executive attendance at community events and gathering feedback from internal and external stakeholders are early steps in cultivating the deep, trusting relationships necessary for long-term collaboration. These efforts will be the keystone required to co-develop future initiatives with Indigenous communities.

Creating internal and external websites and focusing on feedback management through a dedicated CRM system will lay the groundwork for future service expansion that can reach even more communities.

Developing a data-driven approach and reporting structures will set clear standards for transparency and responsiveness.


## Strategy

The actions outlined in this foundational plan were selected based on their ability to lay the groundwork for long-term success and alignment with the guiding principles of the Framework. These actions are designed to address the pressing challenges Indigenous clients and communities face when engaging with the justice system. We aim to create a strong and adaptable foundation that allows for continuous growth and improvement.

### Quality

Our focus on quality centers on ensuring that all services provided to Indigenous communities are of the highest standard, culturally competent and reliable. The following actions ensure that LAA provides consistent, dependable and respectful services:

- Rollout of Indigenous engagement framework, with working sessions to assist integration and assessment.
- Creation of training on the Indigenous Court and Indigenous Communities, cultural empathy and resources.

- 
- Direct work with Siksika Nation to evaluate and improve Indigenous representation in that community.

### Access

Improving access to justice for Indigenous communities is a core objective of this foundational plan. The actions chosen are intended to remove barriers, especially for remote or underserved communities, and ensure that our services are flexible and responsive:

- Create internal and external websites.
- Apply the Engagement Framework to the Indigenous Pilot Projects.
- Feedback management through a client relationship management system.

### Accountability

Accountability and transparency create a structure that strengthens our dependability and relationships with Indigenous communities, ensuring the success of our projects. By codifying internal and external reporting factors, we can be confident in our collaborations and the success of future projects.

- Executive attendance at targeted communities and events.
- Develop a data-driven approach and regular reporting.
- Creating a client feedback mechanism.

## Collaborative Journey

Over the past several years, LAA has engaged in meaningful dialogue with Indigenous Nations across the province. These conversations have helped shape our understanding and approach to delivering culturally responsive legal services.

The following Nations have been part of this journey:

- Alexander First Nation
- Alexis Nakota Sioux First Nation
- Bigstone Cree Nation
- Blackfoot Confederacy (Kainai, Piikani, Siksika)
- Enoch Cree Nation
- Louis Bull Tribe
- Ermineskin Cree Nation
- O'Chiese First Nation
- Stoney Nakoda Nation (Bears paw First Nation, Chiniki First Nation, Goodstoney First Nation)
- Suncild First Nation
- Tsuut'ina Nation



As we move forward, we remain committed to deepening these relationships and building new connections with Indigenous Communities across Alberta.

## **Risk Analysis**

As with any strategic initiative, the success of the plan depends on a variety of external factors that can either facilitate or hinder its implementation. Examining Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal and Environmental (PESTLE) factors, we can start to understand the broader landscape in which this plan will operate. This PESTLE analysis will provide insight into potential risks and opportunities, allowing LAA to anticipate challenges, adapt strategies and capitalize on strengths to achieve its objectives in serving Indigenous clients and communities effectively.

### **PESTLE**

#### **Political**

The current provincial political climate supports Indigenous initiatives, such as the Court of Justice Indigenous Justice Strategy. However, community-level support varies depending on the priorities of the local Chiefs and Councils. Changes in leadership at provincial, community or organizational levels pose a risk to policy stability. Building and maintaining strong relationships with Indigenous leaders is crucial for successful execution of the plan, especially for community-based initiatives like in-community duty counsel office time.

#### **Economic**

While internal funding appears sufficient to support ongoing programs, external resources may vary across regions. Local organizations or programs might be available to supplement efforts, though their presence is inconsistent across the province. Economic disparities within Indigenous communities greatly impact access to and sustainability of programs, necessitating adaptable service delivery models tailored to the economic realities of each community.

#### **Social**

Communities may challenge the sincerity of efforts, doubting the long-term commitment to making a difference. There is a need for relationship building to address long-standing mistrust. Consistent presence and communication are key to overcoming this. Within the broader legal community, there's a need for greater understanding of the importance of culturally sensitive approaches when working with Indigenous clients. Flexibility and open communication will be essential to fostering trust and success.

#### **Technological**

Not all areas have the infrastructure to support digital solutions. In regions lacking technological support, alternative approaches, such as in-person services or mobile legal teams, may be



necessary. Creative and flexible methods are crucial to ensuring access to justice in technologically underserved communities.

## **Legal**

Existing legal agreements, such as the Memorandum of Understanding with Siksika Nation, may constrain flexibility in service delivery. Flexibility in our service delivery is needed rather than a strict interpretation of the agreement. This may require revisiting and modernizing agreements to provide culturally relevant and innovative legal approaches. Also, the climate is right to look outside the scope of the western justice system for more innovative and culturally relevant approaches to justice/healing and using the Gladue principles to their fullest intent.

## **Environmental**

Clients in geographically remote communities may receive fewer legal services; however, LAA can commit the people and resources when there is a willingness to help.

## **Internal Analysis**

Legal Aid Alberta operates in a complex environment shaped by external factors such as population growth, crime rates, political shifts and policy changes. These dynamics require us to remain adaptable and responsive to ensure that our services align with the objectives of a fair, efficient and accessible justice system. Similarly, our internal environment is marked by competing priorities and reliance on various departments, creating additional challenges.

Internally, reluctance or inability to prioritize significant action items, such as those related to quality improvements, could diminish the impact of our plan. Additionally, we face reliance on other departments with competing schedules, change fatigue and potential resistance to new initiatives, which may hinder progress.

## **Risks and Challenges**

In both the external and internal environments, our capacity to adapt to these challenges is key to ensuring the continued progress of our Indigenous Action Plan. The result of missteps, errors or a mid-project pivot may break the confidence of the communities we are attempting to serve, ultimately damaging our ability to effect meaningful change.

## **Policy Change**

The new Governance Agreement has a new consultation process conducted by the provincial government. This may have unknown implications on government policy.

Additionally, LAA has previously experienced unilateral changes to the government's funding. While this is not anticipated, the fact that it has occurred elevates the risk of it occurring again.



The portion of the LAA budget provided by Alberta Law Foundation has risk associated to it as its funds are subject to fluctuations.

Finally, LAA is frequently required to pivot to changes initiated within the provincial system, making strict adherence to project timelines difficult at times due to competing priorities.

Mitigation:

- Observe government activities to prepare for changes in advance.
- Ensure community members are fully integrated in the delivery of any project and can therefore be apprised of risk and risk monitoring activities. Allowing the community to be part of risk mitigation and solutioning whenever possible.

### **Executive / Leadership Alignment**

Integrating a flexible approach in collaboration with the Indigenous communities may create some difficulties through the organization, particularly with leadership who are accustomed to using data-driven models to apply effort. This paradigm shift may cause some understandable difficulties both in choosing and executing projects.

Mitigation:

- Always focus on becoming experts in what we can offer and how we can express our offering, allowing the Indigenous communities and their needs to drive the relationship and various projects.

Organizational change projects in other areas may affect the execution of a project in an Indigenous community, or the funding for projects in these spaces.

Mitigation:

- Determine an organizational criterion for project selection that can be applied to all optional projects, Indigenous client and community projects included.
- Manage all projects affecting Indigenous clients and communities holistically to ensure we have the necessary funding to satisfy the greatest need.

### **Interdepartmental Dependencies**

Adding projects to departments that have many and varied obligations already may create an obstacle to achieving the objectives in this plan.

Mitigation:

- Ensure the plan is created with reasonable dates and expectations with full attention on risk and mitigation strategies.



- Prior to initiating a project, create thorough work plans, timelines, milestones and risks to deployment or ongoing support, allowing for a full review of current and potential competing priorities.

## Relationship Management

"Always showing up. Always following up."

The importance of our attitude, our service and our every interaction cannot be overstated. The ultimate effect of any missteps or fractured relationship creates the opposite effect to our goals of equal and quality representation, as clients will not access our services when they don't trust the service we're providing.

Mitigation:

- It is important to ensure that only what can be completed is in this and every subsequent plan. Success and follow-through will safeguard the trust relationship.
- Build evaluation and iteration into any pilot project to ensure that we are capturing sustainability and lessons learned, and applying them to the next project. Create continuous feedback methods for completed projects to ensure longevity.

## Action Plan

Pillar	Objective	Action
Quality	Implement the Indigenous Engagement Framework across the organization to foster improvements to day-to-day applications and initiatives.	Develop workshop materials that define the core components, alignment with values.
		Develop a set of tools and approaches to support departments in assessing and reflecting on their alignment with the Indigenous Engagement Framework.
		Facilitate sessions to introduce the framework where teams can reflect on past projects or challenges and brainstorm where the Framework could have added value and how to monitor their success in the future.
Quality	Create in-house education/training offered twice yearly including court procedure, Gladue principles, geographic locations, available resources, and cultural empathy for staff	Gather resources and experiential data from internal and external sources to inform training content.
		Develop training materials that incorporate Gladue principles, cultural empathy and Indigenous legal procedures.





	and certificate lawyers working with Indigenous clients and communities.	Schedule and initiate bi-annual live training sessions for all lawyers involved in Indigenous Court.
Quality	Work alongside the Siksika community to examine how legal aid services are experienced locally, identify key breakdowns affecting Indigenous clients, and test practical, culturally responsive changes to improve legal outcomes and accountability.	Involve relevant Nation governance (e.g. Chief, Council, Elders) in shaping the pilot's direction, ensuring community voices guide decision-making, oversight, and culturally appropriate approaches.
		Track legal outcomes (e.g. resolution times, types of cases, outcomes), gather qualitative case stories, and listen to client feedback to build a full picture of how Legal Aid services are working for Siksika clients.
		Partner with General Counsel Advisory Services, and other relevant operational teams, to review key processes, develop responsive training, and support practical service improvements based on findings.
Access	Increase Indigenous content on the employee intranet, public website and social media.	Create an Indigenous landing page on public website with targeted content for Indigenous clients.
		Implement a communication strategy that reaches Indigenous communities.
		Develop a calendar of cultural events and development opportunities and keep it updated for staff.
Access	Review and report on the Indigenous Pilot Projects, establishing adherence to the engagement framework.	Create strategy and reporting documents for each pilot project
		Provide a methodology document to guide future pilots.
Access	Research and implement a client relationship management system (CRM) to track Indigenous community engagement and feedback.	Research CRM options and create a business case.
		Finalize and implement CRM.
Accountability	Executive attendance at targeted communities and events.	Schedule and attend at least three targeted community events and meetings annually with key leaders and organizations.



		Develop a quarterly report on meetings and outcomes.
Accountability	Create a data collection model to track service delivery metrics, client feedback and community engagement that can be used to formulate a regional approach model to engagement or transparent reporting.	Develop a model that will capture intent, actions, feedback, and outcomes with regular statistics and reports that can be used for all initiatives.
		Develop educational material for the indicated communities to be used for internal training or engagement and presentations, where required.
		Develop a reporting format that can be used internally for regular project reporting.
Accountability	Create and implement a standardized client feedback process to track quality and provide targeted training.	Collaborate with internal departments to design feedback method.
		Test the process with a pilot group of clients before wider rollout.
		Develop targeted training programs based on recurring client feedback themes.

### Other activities

The following activities are initiatives that have been started or are suggestions that are at an exploratory phase. As such, they do not form part of the plan but, where possible, the Indigenous Liaison will support these activities through the principles of the Framework as they undertake these initiatives.

**Tariff Structure** – Develop and recommend Indigenous justice-specific tariffs, i.e. sentencing circle facilitators, Elders, etc.

**Family Law Services** – Feasibility study to explore using Gladue reports for Indigenous Child Welfare matters with the intent of initiating a pilot project.

**Human Resources** – Feasibility study to determine how to expand LAA’s internal cultural programming, such as expanding health and wellness benefits for self-identified Indigenous staff to attend community events: all staff to attend cultural events (pow wows) or cultural centers.

**Justice Services** – Develop a rotation of staff lawyers to ensure continuity of service to maintain relationships in the communities.

**Roster and Staff Recruitment** – Work with the communications team to develop information sessions for universities and other recruitment event strategies in the Indigenous space.



**Indigenous Liaison Position** – Evaluate the department to understand the need for a second position or other additional support.

## Reporting

To ensure transparency and keep leadership and stakeholders informed, we will implement a consistent reporting structure as part of this plan. Bi-annual status reports, accompanied by executive summaries, will be presented to the executive team. These reports will offer detailed insights into our progress, challenges and any adjustments made to the action items.

In addition to the executive-level reporting, we will deliver quarterly executive summaries to the leadership team. These summaries will be tailored to provide a high-level overview of the plan's progress, highlighting key milestones, engagement efforts and outcomes.

Finally, general information will be regularly updated on the Loop and this will be pushed to the building through work with the communications team, as outlined in the Access section of the plan.

## Concluding Remarks

This plan sets the stage for a transformative approach to how LAA serves Indigenous communities. We are building the essential structures that will allow us to establish trust, foster collaboration and continually improve our services.

This plan represents the first steps in a long-term commitment to reconciliation and justice. By taking these foundational steps, LAA will be able to provide more responsive and equitable services through future collaborations and partnerships.



Legal Aid Alberta

