Assembly of First Nations

3rd National Climate Gathering:

Catalyzing First Nations Climate and Conversation Leadership for Transformative Change

Youth Gathering Summary Report

October 7, 2024 • Calgary, AB

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Executive Summary

In collaboration with the AFN National Youth Council (NYC), a preparatory Youth Gathering was held for all youth delegates attending the 3rd AFN National Gathering on October 7, 2024. The Youth Gathering was designed to create a welcoming and supportive space for youth to understand the content being presented at the Gathering, and to prepare for a Concurrent Session on Day 1, hosted by the AFN NYC and chaired by Hailey Rose from Mosquito Grizzly Bear's Head Lean Man First Nation, Treaty 6 Territory. The Youth Gathering opened in a good way with songs from Babyflatz, performances from youth dancers, and an opening prayer from Elder Charlie Crowchild from the Tsuut'ina Nation. Over 25 youth participants from across Turtle Island congregated in Moh'kinsstis (Calgary), on the traditional territories of the Blackfoot Confederacy, and the Tsuut'ina and Stoney Nakoda Nations.

The Youth Gathering offered an opportunity for participants to come together, gain understanding, and discuss youth-driven solutions to the largest threat to their futures – the climate crisis. The Youth Gathering also sought to hear from First Nations youth from coast-to-coast-to-coast on what they need to feel supported to advance their own climate action efforts.

Through presentations and facilitated breakout discussions, youth were able to share with one another their concerns, ideas, and solutions related to climate change. It was heard loud and clear from all participants that First Nations youth voices are essential in advancing First Nations-led climate solutions. The unique perspectives of youth must be actively included in advancing climate action efforts at all levels and capacity-building and mentorship initiatives must be prioritized through long-term funding for implementation.

To uplift First Nations youth, cultural and land-based education is critically important so they can learn about medicines, gathering, hunting, fishing, different cultural practices, and advance language revitalization. All endeavors for youth to advance self-determined climate action must be supported by communities and First Nations leadership.

Many themes were discussed throughout the day, with three emerging: i) relationship-building between youth and leadership through mentorship; ii) the importance of uplifting First Nations youth through different types of capacity support; and iii) the revitalization of language, ceremony, teachings, and culture.

AFN 3rd National Climate Gathering Logo

"The power to change" by Eruoma Awashish

The heart symbolizes what drives us all as living beings.
At the center, the growing leaf embodies hope and medicine to heal our planet.
In my language, this plant is called Maskominanatikw, the bear plant.
For us, the bear represents strength - a strength we need to take the necessary actions to heal Mother Earth.

The orange bursts in a vibrant cry, signaling the urgency to act.
The seven flowers surrounding the heart represent the seven priorities outlined in the National Climate Strategy and the seven future generations.
As the mother of a seven-year-old girl,
I emphasize the urgency of safeguarding
the future for future generations.

We are all interconnected and share the responsibility of protecting what is sacred.

Eruoma Awashish is an Atikamekw Nehirowisiw mother and artist who is committed to her nation. She works in a variety of mediums, including painting, installation, performance, video, silkscreening and traditional dance. Awashish grew up in the community of Opitciwan. She is now established in Pekuakami (Lac-Saint-Jean), and her studio is located in the Ilnu community of Mashteuiatsh. She holds an interdisciplinary Bachelor of Arts from the University of Quebec at Chicoutimi.

Opening Prayer and Ceremonies

The Youth Gathering of the 3rd AFN National Climate Gathering welcomed over 25 youth participants from across Turtle Island to Moh'kinsstis (Calgary), in Treaty 7 territory, home to the Blackfoot Confederacy, Blackfoot First Nations of Siksika, the Piikani, the Kainai; the Stoney Nakoda First Nations of Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Goodstoney; and the Tsuut'ina First Nation.

Photo 1: Youth drum group, Babyflatz, from Treaty 7 Territory, opening song for the Youth Gathering.

The Youth Gathering opened with four songs by Youth Drum Group Babyflatz and youth dancers. Babyflatz is a group of youth drummers, all 11 years and under with singers as far as Kansas and Arizona. They are the youngest drum group on Turtle Island, having competed in some of the largest Pow Wows in North America. After their performance, Elder Charlie Crowchild and David Menguinis from the Tsuut'ina Nation opened the Youth Gathering with a prayer and welcome song.

Photo 2: Opening song by Elder Charlie Crowchild and David Meguinis, Tsuut'ina Nation.

1. Welcome, Introduction, and Overview of the Day

Hailey Rose, Chairperson from Mosquito Grizzly Bear's Head Lean Man First Nation, Treaty 6 Territory, Saskatchewan, began the morning by acknowledging the Creator and the participants at the Youth Gathering. This Youth Gathering follows a tradition of the last two National Gatherings, creating dedicated space for First Nations youth in advance of the full Gathering to chat, build relationships, and reflect on the uniqueness of First Nations youth within climate action. Having this dedicated and safe space for youth to share their perspectives on climate change and learn from one another is important to prepare them for the days ahead.

This year, the Youth Gathering program was designed to center around urgent action and began with some examples of First Nations youth advancing climate action in their lands, waters, and territories. Following this, youth were invited to participate in a facilitated discussion on what climate action means from a youth perspective, and how to advance that action collectively. The day ended with a panel of academics and industry professionals in the areas of policy, law, philanthropy, and professional development, which led to networking and dedicated breakout discussions to create space to turn those discussions into action.

The AFN NYC Co-Chair, Isaiah Bernard, New Brunswick, and Environment and Water Portfolio Holder Nikita Sawrenko Bailey, Yukon Territory, provided opening remarks to the Youth Gathering participants. Isaiah thanked the Elder and Babyflatz for opening the gathering in a good way and welcomed participants to the third Youth Gathering.

Nikita shared information from the Yukon perspective. She explained that her Elders told stories of how increasingly difficult it was to access their traditional food, the king salmon. With food sovereignty issues exacerbated in the north due to climate change, it has become increasingly difficult for communities to access fresh food, contributing to malnutrition and issues related to diabetes. Nikita expressed worry that younger generations may not be able to attend salmon camps, nor learn about proper hunting protocols because summers were becoming longer, leading to shorter timeframes to receive supplies as winter roads were not freezing as long. Nikita finished by thanking the youth participants for joining them today.

2. Setting the Context: Hearing from First Nations Youth

Following the welcome and opening remarks, two presentations were made by First Nation youth. The presentations provided an opportunity to share their work in advancing youth climate action and helped set the context for the Youth Gathering.

File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council (FHQTC) Youth Advisory Council

File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council Youth Advisory Council ('FHQTC Youth Advisory Council') members, Robby Thomson-Bear, Tianna Starblanket, Kenton Francis, and Jayda Koochicum were invited to speak on the climate action work they are advancing in their communities.

The FHQTC Youth Advisory Council worked on a resolution that was passed by Treaty 4 Territory youth advocates to recognize, uphold, and assert their inherent Treaty Rights for their lands, waters, territories, species, and medicines that are being impacted by climate change. The resolution formally supported the creation of the Youth Advisory Council, supporting their assertion that youth must be consulted before federal, provincial, municipal, and international government decisions or actions. The resolution spoke to data sovereignty within their Nation, identified the effects of climate change on their territories, referenced work

on climate action towards the protection of their water and waterways, and called on Treaty 4 Chiefs to work with the Treaty 4 Youth to protect their environment for generations to follow. Working with the Lands, Resources, and Environmental Stewardship department, the FHQTC Youth Advisory Council members actively work to advance climate action within their territories.

"This resolution was passed with the Chiefs of the Treaty 4 Territory for a Youth Council within the Treaty 4 Nations – this resolution was to recognize, uphold and assert our inherent treaty rights to our lands, water, territories, species and medicines and the impacts of climate change." - FHQTC Youth Advisory Council

The panelists provided information on climate projects they have worked on, including one in collaboration with the Faculty of Science at the University of Regina where they tested the water quality in the Qu'Appelle lakes. They lead the installation of weather stations and air quality monitors which enabled communities to collect their own data and advance research of climate change effects within their territory. The Youth Advisory Council has also explored various capacity building initiatives, including attending forums and bringing knowledge learned back to their Nations.

The Youth Advisory Council spoke about their Land Revitalization Initiative, where they engaged language keepers in five different languages, to connect and honour the ancestral knowledge through oral mapping and history. The council recently hosted a Youth Climate Forum on September 10 & 11, 2024, where the main outcome called for urgent protection of their waters and action to address climate change issues. The Youth Advisory Council invited participants to attend their concurrent session during the 3rd National Climate Gathering for a more in-depth presentation.

Serena Mendizabel, SevenGen Energy

Serena Mendizabel, Wolf Clan, from Six Nations of the Grand River, opened her presentation with an explanation that the Six Nations Development Corporation had previously been one of the top 10 emitters in the country, but the Nation wanted to change the narrative and now has one of the largest clean energy portfolios with approximately 198 projects. As a young person working in the field, Serena explained that she noticed many gaps, including limited youth inclusion in project development, decision-making, and project implementation and construction. Serena explained that because of the 20 dams on their river and a pipeline through their territory; they were living the impacts of colonization and needed to do things better.

Serena then transitioned into a presentation on SevenGen Energy, beginning with the history of the organization and their gatherings. In 2019, they hosted its 1st National Gathering, which was designed for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis youth to work towards clean energy futures. For more information, please refer to: https://sevengenenergy.org/past-summits. Identifying further gaps, Seven Gen wanted to implement solutions and founded three programs: a National Youth Summit, bringing together Indigenous youth from across the country to access opportunities nationally and internationally; bringing delegations of Indigenous youth to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change; and the Imagination Program for youth project development and implementation.

In early October 2024, SevenGen Energy hosted another summit in Iqaluit, Nunavut, to bridge conversations between northern and southern youth. Serena noted that the discussions were not only centered around renewable energy, but also eco-housing; food sovereignty; language and culture; hunting, planting, and gathering; protection of their lands and waters; holding space for 2SLGBTQ+, 100% equity ownership in projects, and following their hearts and leading with love.

"To bring their young people closer to spirit was to actively bring young people into policy decision-making spaces and governance." - Serena Mendizabel Wolf Clan, Six Nations of the Grand River

Serena wanted to bring this message forward and work towards building solidarity through Nation-to-Nation relationships. She said that our connection to the Creator was more evident when young people were included in those spaces and conversations. Serena ended by inviting the participants to the concurrent session she was hosting at the Climate Gathering on just transition for further conversations.

3. Facilitated Discussion – Climate Gathering Presentation

Following a lunch break, participants were divided into three groups for a series of facilitated discussions on the following three (3) questions:

1. **How can leadership support youth-led climate action?**
2. **What do you want to see in your community in the next five (5) years?**
3. **What is important for others to know? / What do youth want?**

The breakout groups reported back to the plenary through a sharing circle where participants discussed key outcomes. Their responses are summarized below:

Question 1: How can leadership support youth-led climate action?

- Youth participants shared that leadership must meet youth advocates where they are and be open to hearing youth perspectives on climate action. They stressed the need to be invited to leadership discussions while creating defined expectations for such meetings and supported through pre and post-meeting briefings. Youth need to understand their role and be empowered with their participation as climate action activists.
- Community Leadership must bring youth alongside them to different climate action spaces and actively work towards stronger relationship building. Participants emphasized that youth-friendly engagement is required, and youth must also be leading these important discussions. There is a need to create plans that involve youth, with clearly identified roles and capacity supports.
- A major theme identified was capacity building and youth need more opportunities to learn about climate action with other youth. Youth require adequate and long-term support in accessing funding for different climate action initiatives and projects. Participants also stated that there should be enough funding for everyone to participate, particularly those youth from rural and remote communities. Funding should be available for youth to attend events, such as the AFN National Climate Gathering. Programming must also focus on preparing youth to be in climate adaptation spaces.

- Legislation was raised and different policies were created at various government levels. Participants noted it was important to ensure that youth were also considered in legislative development and that there was accountability to youth within these different legislative and policy processes.
- Finally, youth participants noted that they need to be supported through cultural and land-based education so they can learn about medicines, gathering, hunting, fishing, and different cultural practices, among many others. Language revitalization was emphasized as a critical component in advancing climate action for youth.

Photo 3: Chairperson Hailey Rose recording outcomes of the facilitated discussions.

Question 2: What do you want to see in your community in the next five (5) years?

- Youth participants identified that capacity building is needed in communities, such as dedicated community or regionally based youth councils to share information and participate in broader discussions. This would provide the opportunity for youth from across the country to have discussions regarding potential climate issues. Youth participants stressed that investing in youth should be a top priority, which would enable them to build their communities up to advance climate action in renewable energy.
- Participants noted that programming is already happening, and it was important to collaborate with others who are already doing the work. Ensuring everyone has equitable access to different programs was also essential, as were longer-term initiatives and youth projects. There is a push for stronger inclusive communication and coordination as many great initiatives are happening in communities.
- Infrastructure, although a broad concept, also needs to be discussed with youth and what it could look like for communities (i.e. food sharing initiatives). This would also allow collaboration for different forms of economic growth. It was also noted that internet and connectivity were essential.
- Capacity for climate data sovereignty is required as having support for the collection and analysis of climate data.
- Youth gathering participants shared that cultural camps are required for both on-reserve and urban youth, and that education was also key, particularly for high school-age youth. This could include education for proper recycling programs, eco-centres, and conservation efforts. There is a call to de-westernize education and implement land-based learning and teachings from Elders and Knowledge Keepers.
- Youth participants emphasized that no judgment crisis centers are essential in communities. These centers should also support harm reduction programming.

Photo 4: AFN's Environment Sector, Junior Policy Analyst Skw'akw'as Dunstan-Moore, leading breakout discussions.

Question 3: What is important for others to know? / What do youth want?

- Canada needs to be more accountable and not make unilateral decisions – 'no decisions about us, without us.' Youth gathering participants stated that they needed to occupy legal spaces and empower themselves to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (UNDA), whether Canada wanted to follow up on its commitments or not. First Nations make their laws and have their practices in place, including Natural Law, and Canadian laws must not supersede these laws. Combating environmental racism through climate action and phasing out fossil fuels is critically important.
- Gathering participants highlighted the importance of creating accessible spaces for everyone, including youth from all different walks of life; everyone should be included. It was recommended that youth should not be afraid to take up space or have emotions. Youth must be empowered to be proud of who they are and assert their inherent rights.
- Advancing youth education was also noted, as many First Nation communities have schools. Participants shared that schools must work towards Indigenizing their education systems while uplifting Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

It was announced that the AFN would be developing a First Nations Youth Advisory Council on Climate Change and would be looking for representation from across the country. To close the facilitated discussion session, chairperson Hailey Rose explained that the AFN NYC would be presenting the outcomes of the breakouts to Climate Gathering participants on day two of the Gathering.

4. Panel and Breakout Discussions on Policy, Philanthropy, Professional Development and Academia

Chairperson Hailey Rose invited guest speakers to briefly share their thoughts and experiences with policy, philanthropy, professional development, and academia as it pertains to climate. Youth gathering participants were then asked to join the guest speakers at their various tables for further discussion and networking. Youth were invited to use this opportunity to gain knowledge in these areas and turn those discussions into action within their territories.

Photo 5: AFN Youth Gathering Coordinators, Mel White and Nikita Kahpeaysewat shared their perspectives during the report back.

Policy – Sarah Houde, Co-Chair, Net-Zero Advisory Body (NZAB)

- Sarah began her position as Co-Chair a few months ago and shared that the NZAB released a publication they had been working on over the past year that included recommendations to reach the 2030 target and recommendations for 2035. Sarah shared that she was looking forward to discussing those recommendations with the Youth Gathering participants and learning more about how they could achieve those targets, limit the climate crisis, consider the impacts of climate change on Indigenous Peoples, and integrate more Indigenous knowledge into their recommendations.

Philanthropy – Lori Rissling Wynn, Alberta Ecotrust Foundation

- Lori provided a philanthropic perspective on the discussion. The Alberta Ecotrust Foundation has been funding environmental projects across the province in the areas of nature-based solutions and conservation, climate emissions reduction, resilience, and adaptation. Lori shared that they had funded Indigenous communities to work across the province to steward the landscape into the future. The Alberta Ecotrust Foundation is a solutions-focused organization, and they looked to the communities that they served to help support and implement their work.

Professional Development – Nathan Polard-Yopek, Assembly of First Nations

- Nathan from the AFN Emergency Management team, said he was keen to connect with the participants and answer any questions in the areas of navigating going from working at the grassroots level to pursuing different interests including professional landscapes. This includes technical or academic levels where participants could specialize in preparing First Nations for climate adaptation.

Academia – Dr. Deborah McGregor and Dr. Angele Alook

- Dr. McGregor from Whitefish River First Nation shared that she just transitioned to the University of Calgary where she is the Canada Excellence Research Chair in Indigenous Ways of Climate and Water Sustainability for Planetary Health and Well-Being. Dr. McGregor stated that her work is centered on what First Nations asked her to do; generally, she did not wonder what the priority was, because communities told her the priorities. Dr. McGregor explained that she recently developed a Carbon Economy Report for the Chiefs of Ontario (COO) to raise awareness of the carbon and conservation economy.

- Dr. Alook, a Professor in the School of Gender, Sexuality and Women's Studies at York University, did her PhD in Sociology, where her research focused on issues of Indigenous Peoples, the land, the climate crisis, and the oil industry. She comes from Bigstone Cree Nation and her community is surrounded by the Athabasca Oil Sands. As a sociologist, Dr. Alook was interested in looking at how strong their communities were including the strength of their women and two-spirit members.

Youth Gathering Closing and Prayer

Chairperson Hailey Rose thanked the Youth Gathering presenters, facilitators, and participants who came together for this important event. She thanked the youth for taking the time to participate and shared her pride in the work they were all doing in their communities. She left participants with something she was taught growing up "that they did not own the land, but rather the land owned them, and that taking care of the land and taking care of each other was important."

The Youth Gathering was closed by Knowledge Keeper Dr. Gwen Point from the Stó:lō Nation. She encouraged the participants to not only have a good heart and good mind, but a strong heart and mind to carry on the good work. She finished her closing with a song.

"Walk in a good way, you don't have to walk alone…call to spirit to walk with you, hear you, and guide you. You become a light now and a force for the work you're doing in climate change." - Knowledge Keeper Dr. Gwen Point from the Stó:lō Nation

5. Lessons Learned

The Youth Gathering participants discussed many themes throughout the day. The top three include: i) relationship building between youth and leadership through mentorship; ii) the importance of uplifting First Nations youth through different types of capacity support; and iii) the revitalization of language, ceremony, teachings, and culture.

Relationship Building Through Mentorship

The participants were clear in their call for increased mentorship for First Nations youth. Supporting the transmission of knowledge and experiences to First Nations youth is a vital investment in the continuation of the advocacy of First Nations and a commitment to the protection of the rights of First Nations. Youth was clear that leadership must meet them where they are, needing concrete invitations to participate in important discussions and meetings, while also offering support to prepare for, and after, the session. Spaces, where climate discussions occur, must also be accessible for all, where youth should not be afraid to take up space and be proud of who they are. This will support their participation and empowerment as climate action activists.

Uplifting First Nations Youth Through Capacity Building and Supports

Another major theme was capacity building, committed to uplifting the voices and leadership of First Nations youth. The youth participants emphasized the importance of capacity building, discussing the concrete role of establishing Youth Advisory Councils at the community or regional level. This would enable First Nations youth to share knowledge and work with one another and advance youth-led climate projects in their communities. Dedicated funding for these initiatives should also enable both community and rural youth to participate. Investing in First Nations youth should be a top priority.

Revitalization of Language, Ceremony, Teachings and Culture

As the final major theme, Youth Gathering participants emphasized centering climate action in their identity as First Nations through their special connection to the land, languages, and cultures. First Nations youth must be supported through cultural and land-based education so they can increase their understanding of medicines, gathering, hunting, fishing, different cultural practices, and their languages. Speaking their languages, and learning their songs and culture is essential to advancing youth climate action and connecting youth to ancestral knowledge. Participants noted many initiatives are already happening, and it's important to build stronger communications with other Nations already doing this important work.

6. Moving Forward

First Nations Youth Advisory Council on Climate Change

As part of the AFN National Climate Strategy, the AFN will be working to advance the creation of a First Nations Youth Advisory Council on Climate Change and will be looking for representation from across the country. During the Youth Gathering, participants emphasized the importance of youth voices in legislative development that includes clear accountability to First Nations youth within these different legislative and policy processes. This council would serve to create a space for First Nations youth to participate, learn from, contribute to, and lead discussions at the regional, national, and international levels on climate change. Work is currently ongoing, and the AFN, in collaboration with the NYC, will share more information with First Nations youth in due course.

The AFN would like to thank all the youth who participated in this important gathering and for sharing their stories, knowledge, and guidance on how to advance First Nations youth climate leadership. We acknowledge and uplift all the important work that youth across Turtle Island are undertaking to protect their lands, waters, and territories in the face of climate change.

ANNEX 1: YOUTH GATHERING AGENDA

Monday, October 7, 2024 *TELUS Convention Centre*	
Time	**Activity**
8:00 a.m.	**Hot Breakfast**
9:00 a.m.	**Opening Prayer & Ceremonies** • Grand Entry: Drum Group – BabyFlatz & Dancers • Opening Prayer: Elder Charlie Crowchild and David Menguinis, Tsuut'ina Nation
9:30 a.m.	**Welcome, Introductions, & Overview of the Day** • AFN National Youth Council: Isaiah Bernard, Co-Chair, and Nikita Sawrenko-Bailey, Environment Portfolio Holder
10:00 a.m.	**Setting the Context – Hearing from First Nations Youth** • File Hill Qu'Appelle Tribal Council Youth Advisory Council • SevenGen
10:30 a.m.	**Health Break**
10:45 a.m.	**Facilitated Discussion – Climate Gathering Presentation** • Workshop: Roundtable Discussion and Introductions
12:15 p.m.	**Lunch Provided**
1:00 p.m.	**National Gathering Agenda Walkthrough and Preparation for Concurrent Session**
2:30 p.m.	**Health Break**
2:45 p.m.	**Putting Discussion into Action: Facilitated Networking Session** • Policy • Philanthropy • Professional Development • Academic
5:00 p.m.	**Adjourn**