Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services

For Indigenous, By Indigenous Advocacy: Lessons Learned

Sally Ledger, Interim CEO, OAHS
NICHI Capacity Event | November 2025

Building Homes, Empowering Communities

Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services

Who We Are

Largest **Urban Indigenous** Housing Provider in Ontario

$80 million program funding administered in 2024-2025.

70-80% of OAHS staff identify as Indigenous.

13 offices, **8** departments, and **115** staff.

Incorporated in **1994** with a proven track record.

Membership consists of **3 largest off-reserve Indigenous organizations** in Ontario.

Ontario Native Women's Association

Métis Nation of Ontario

OFIFC
Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres

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Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services

OAHS Programs & Services

Property Management:
- Housing Services (Rental Applications)
- Collections Services
- Property Maintenance

Supportive Housing Services:
- Tenant Support Services
- Mkaana'aa wii-giiwe'aad Program

Programs & Research:
- Government Funding Administration
- Assisted Homeownership and Home Repair
- Research Services

Information Technology:
- Security
- Security Administration
- ERP Administration
- Help Desk

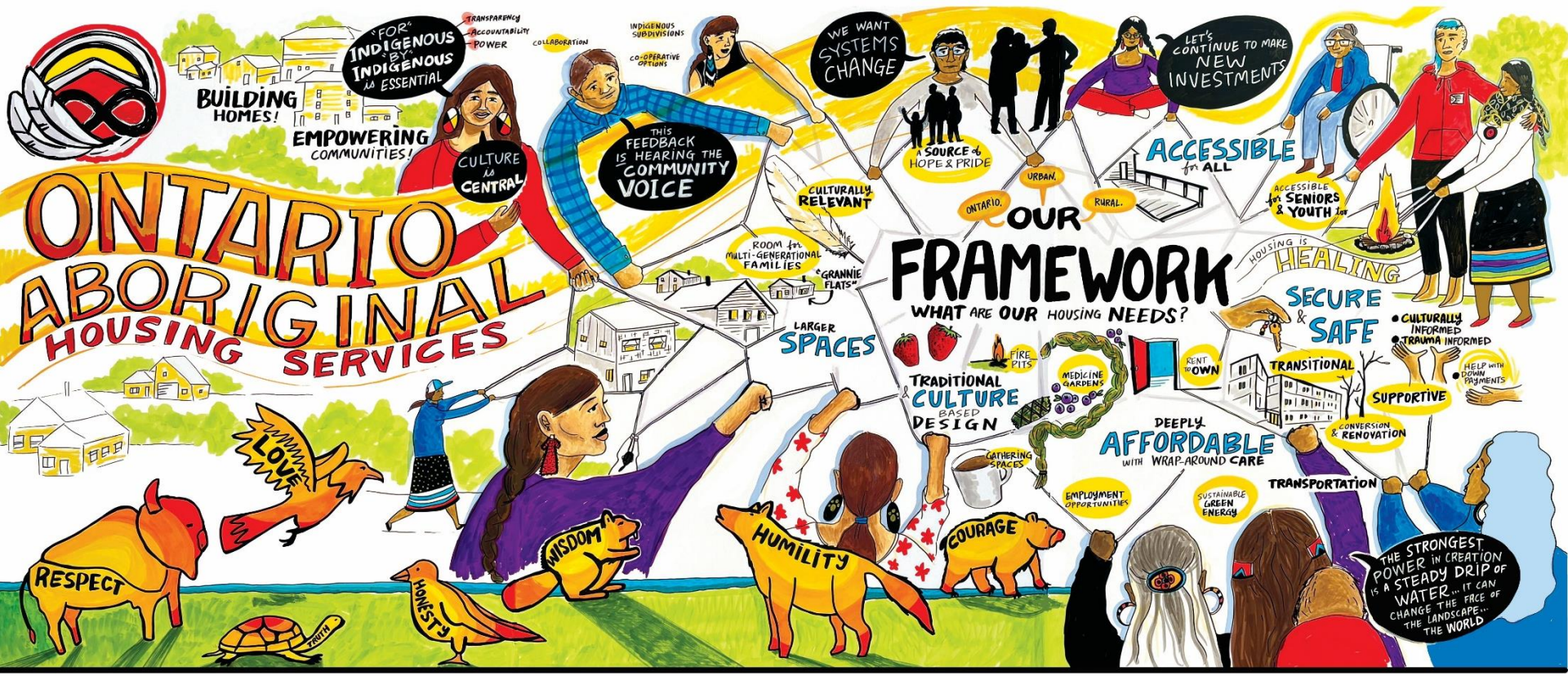
Technical Services:
- Asset Management
- Internal Maintenance
- Energy Services
- Administrative Services

Housing Development:
- New Construction
- Title Services

Finance:
- Accounts Payable
- Financial Planning & Analysis
- Financial Reporting
- Debt / Treasury Management

Policy and Stakeholder Relations:
- Policy & Government Relations
- Partnership Development
- Communications

Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services



Our Impact:

$4.5 Million Paid in Property Taxes Annually

2,750 + Rental Properties Owned and Managed

11,000 People assisted with housing every day

> $20 Million Paid to Contractors Annually

400 + Homes Repaired

900 + Indigenous families enabled to realize their dream of home ownership

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Advocacy Lessons Learned

1) Target Both Politicians and Bureaucrats

- Build and maintain strong relationships with bureaucrats (ministerial "staffers").
- Politicians set direction, but bureaucrats are the ones who move things forward day-to-day.
- Politicians change frequently, while bureaucrats often stay in place for years.
- Diversify your relationships across a range of staff within a Ministry so you're not dependent on a single contact.

- TIP: Build trust with the people behind the scenes, they're the ones shaping the advice and doing the work

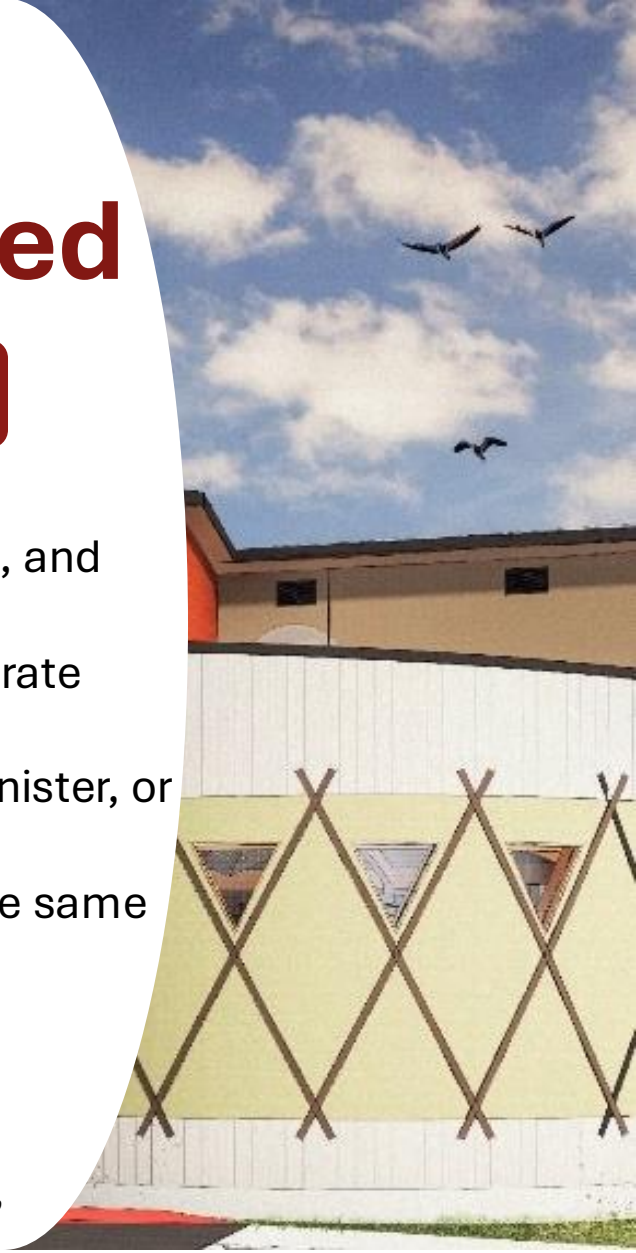
Advocacy Lessons Learned

2) Be Positive and Bring Solutions

- Lead with optimism and be solutions-focused.
- Avoid framing your advocacy from a “victim” perspective. Instead, highlight how your organization contributes to solutions.
- Connect your goals to government priorities whenever possible.

TIP: Frame challenges as opportunities. How can your work help the government meet its objectives while *advancing yours*?

Advocacy Lessons Learned



3) Craft Your Elevator Pitch

- Make a solid impression in your first 3-5 minutes
- Share clearly and confidently: who you are, what you do, and why it matters.
- Use grassroots stories to illustrate impact and demonstrate community need.
- Tailor your pitch to your audience: a Deputy Minister, Minister, or staffer each care about different things.
- Brief your team before meetings so everyone delivers the same key message.
- Encourage junior staff to echo the pitch in their own conversations with more junior bureaucrats.

- TIP: Practice your elevator pitch in advance. Be concise, authentic, and consistent across your team.

Advocacy Lessons Learned

4) Be Prepared: Gather Data & Create a Connection

- Always come prepared: read their bio, understand their riding or file, and identify any personal connection, or connection to their territory.
- Bring both data and stories
  - data builds credibility;
  - stories create empathy.
- Use facts that connect directly to their priorities or their constituency.
- It needs to be personal: as it relates to them, their connection, their constituency or territory

- TIP: Do your homework. Preparation builds confidence and earns respect.

Advocacy Lessons Learned

5) Be Purposeful - Have a Key 'Ask'

- Ensure every meeting has a specific purpose.
  Have one key 'ask' that's simple, actionable, and supported by data.
- Frame your ask as a solution to something the government cares about (e.g., helping address a local housing shortage or advancing their ministry's goals).
- Clarify next steps and offer to follow up.

- TIP: Share a 'leave behind' document after the meeting:
  - The 'leave behind' should demonstrate your vision and provide the rationale for the ask in your meeting

Advocacy Lessons Learned

6) Authenticity Matters: Be Yourself

- Above all, be yourself. Authenticity builds trust and credibility.
- Don’t try to present yourself as someone you’re not.
- Be genuine in your tone and presentation.
- For example, don’t feel pressured to wear a suit if it doesn’t reflect who you are.

TIP: Be real, be respectful, and let your passion for the work come through, that’s what makes an impression.

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