

OTTAWA PEOPLE'S COMMISSION

WHAT WE DID.

WHAT WE LEARNED.



JULY 2023

The Ottawa People's Commission is a grassroots effort to promote healing and justice after the convoy occupation of Ottawa-Gatineau in 2022. OPC is a program of the Centretown Community Health Centre.



Table of Contents

- [Executive Summary](#)
- [Introduction](#)
- [Overview and context](#)
- [Genesis](#)
- [Governance](#)
- [Community Engagement](#)
- [Commissioners](#)
- [Hearings](#)
 - [Logistics](#)
 - [Safety plans](#)
- [Community Consultations](#)
- [Reports](#)
- [Advocacy](#)
- [Outreach and marketing](#)
- [Administration](#)
- [Funding and fundraising](#)
- [Evaluation](#)
- [Documentation](#)
- [Conclusion](#)

Appendices

- [Timelines and milestones](#)
- A [Organizing Committee Mandate](#)
- B.i [Role and Selection of Commissioners](#)
- B.ii [Commissioners' Profile](#)
- B.iii [Commissioners' MOU Template](#)
- C [Safety Plan](#)
- D [Social Media Metrics](#)
- E [Overview of Revenue and Expenses](#)
- F [Key Indicators](#)

July 2023

The Ottawa People's Commission is a grassroots effort to promote healing and justice after the convoy occupation of Ottawa-Gatineau in 2022. OPC is a program of Centretown Community Health Centre.

This report was written by Robert Fox, Co-Chair of OPC's Organizing Committee, with input from Gaëlle Muderj, Alex Neve, Lew Auerbach and others. The views expressed are generally those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Centretown Community Health Centre.

Executive Summary

The Ottawa People's Commission (OPC) was an important part of the community's response to the disruption and trauma caused by 2022's convoy occupation of Ottawa-Gatineau.

OPC was the first major Canadian citizen's inquiry of the digital age, with the goal of showing who was most affected, how they were affected and how they were failed by governments in the face of violence, hate and human rights violations that accompanied the convoy protests.

The occupation aggravated an already polarized political dynamic, COVID confounded traditional organizing norms, and OPC had few models. So OPC's process of co-creation was highly incremental, and identifying metrics or indicators for inputs, outcomes or impact was challenging.

An extraordinary group, broadly representative of the community, came together to shape this process. Volunteers with skills, experience and connections who could commit significant time and talent were critical to its success, as were capable, versatile and dedicated staff.

The credibility and independence of the Commissioners were key, as were their diversity and evident empathy. Their cohesion and spirit of cooperation were a bonus.

Public hearings, in-person and online, provided a crucial venue for community members to come forward to tell their stories. Consultations with targeted communities, co-organized by trusted leaders, created critical safe spaces for the most vulnerable to share their experiences. Those who came forward felt validated, contributing to their healing.

Given security and COVID concerns, special efforts were made to assure public safety, protect identities, and create trauma-informed spaces for engagement. Counseling and support were offered to those who came forward, and accommodations made to meet special needs.

Despite best efforts, outreach to marginalized and racialized communities – whose daily experience of discrimination and harassment from police and others was only heightened during the occupation – fell short. Their increased risk in coming forward, combined with the extraordinary demands on their organizations and leadership to represent their communities and tackle the daily crises confronting them, made it difficult for them to engage with OPC.

OPC reports documented residents' experiences, amplified their voices, and championed their calls for redress. They also offered an analytical framework and human rights lens, connecting

personal experience with systemic failings and solutions. Feedback from community leaders resulted in more focused, concrete and time-bound recommendations.

OPC's website, social media posts, a crowd-sourced interactive timeline and other digital outreach supplemented media coverage and other avenues for engagement. All public documents were digital and available in English and French, facilitating access while reducing costs and waste.

At various points, ambitious plans had to be scaled back because of tight timelines, limited capacity, and funding constraints. For example, we were unable to realize our vision for a corps of citizen journalists who would go out into the community to capture stories of residents, workers and business owners who were unlikely to come forward to participate in hearings.

OPC saw itself as a channel for the community rather than a political actor. It came together to capture the community's stories and amplify their voices, without supplanting community representation and organizations. OPC convened an Inner City Stakeholders Group to bring together downtown community associations, agencies and allies, who have the ongoing responsibility and legitimacy to advocate for change. That said, a shortcoming of the OPC process was that producing OPC's reports consumed our time and bandwidth, pre-empting planning and execution of a multi-pronged advocacy strategy to assure follow-up on OPC's recommendations.

While OPC attracted funding from foundations and unions, its nature and novelty limited our ability to raise funds from corporations, family funds and donors, some of whom saw OPC as overly political, especially in a municipal election year.

Centretown Community Health Centre played an essential role in assuring OPC's success. The active support of the Executive Director and Board was critical, but equally crucial was CCHC's policy, program, administrative and infrastructure support. CCHC offered financial support from the outset and covered the significant shortfall in funding to assure completion of this project.

OPC filled a void, offering an outlet that most in the community were not yet aware they needed – a space to come together, to share their stories, to name those who failed them, to recommend remedial action, and to begin the healing process of knitting the community back together. It is too soon to judge OPC's impact but not too soon to consider where we might learn from its experience and build upon it.

Ottawa People's Commission

What we did. What we learned.

This report documents the experience of organizing the Ottawa People's Commission on the Convoy Occupation (OPC). Its goal is to summarize our structure and ways of working as an aid to those who wish to learn more about our approach, and in particular, those who may wish to organize a people's commission or similar initiative in their own communities.

People's commissions are not new, but it has been some time since a people's commission was organized in Canada. Most notably the People's Food Commission in the late 1970's delved into the food system, considering issues related to the production, processing and commodification of food and its impact on farmers, fishers, consumers, workers and people in the Global South. Citizen-led inquiries have also looked at unemployment in Newfoundland and Labrador, the conduct of police during G20 protests in Ottawa (2002) and immigration security measures (2006).

OPC was the first people's commission in Canada in the digital age, conducted at a time of heightened polarization, while the COVID pandemic continued to affect how people organize. It may be years before we can assess OPC's impact but more immediately, lessons can be drawn that may serve others who are considering the potential of people's commissions as a vehicle to bring communities together to tackle challenging issues.

Public confidence in government-led consultation processes is increasingly strained – for good reason. The openings for public input into such inquiries and reviews, often by means of online portals, are seen as superficial and pro forma. Neither universities nor corporations can credibly fill the void. In contrast, people's commissions may be able to play an important role in hosting community conversations, exposing underlying power dynamics, and offering positive, proactive recommendations to address burning issues such as homelessness and encampments, climate chaos and just transition, community safety and well-being, or truth and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. Such citizen-led actions create an important space for individuals directly impacted by events to share their story – an important dynamic in our human experience.

Overview and Context

The Ottawa People's Commission was a community-driven, non-partisan initiative intended to give voice to the community's experience, concerns and recommendations for action in the aftermath of the convoy occupation of Ottawa in 2022.

Local residents were traumatized by the three-and-a-half-week siege of their downtown and surrounding neighbourhoods. They were looking for a venue to share and address that trauma and their losses – but also to hold to account those who failed to end the occupation and protect public health and safety.

Official inquiries at the local and federal level were limited in their scope and ambition. They gave no confidence there would be a substantive, independent review – or that residents' voices would be heard.

OPC helped fill that void. Its purpose was to rebuild and renew our community, inspire hope and healing, hear from affected community members, identify underlying issues and systemic solutions, press authorities for remedial action, and promote lasting benefits.

Genesis

The idea of a people's commission in the aftermath of the convoy occupation originated with freedom-of-information advocate and community activist Ken Rubin. Ken was concerned that governments at all levels had badly failed local residents and believed it was important – indeed essential – that the community come together to organize a citizens' inquiry to assure scrutiny and accountability.

Ken had experience with the People's Food Commission and knew the power of people coming forward to share their stories in a public forum. He understood that offering their testimony and recommendations for redress could be validating and healing for many who had felt isolated and ignored during the occupation; collateral damage in a battle that was not theirs. And he knew that government-led inquiries, for partisan or bureaucratic reasons, were unlikely to address residents' key concerns.

Reaching out to a range of community leaders and activists from diverse backgrounds and politics, a core of concerned citizens quickly came together to constitute an organizing group which then developed the concept further and spearheaded its implementation. That group included people who were directly affected by the occupation, people active in community organizations and agencies; Indigenous, union and business leaders; and people with experience in citizen participation and organizational development, journalism and communications, diversity, equity and inclusion, and governance and fundraising.

These efforts were significantly boosted by the engagement and support of the Centretown Community Health Centre (CCHC), which took on OPC as a CCHC initiative, offering resources and administrative services but most importantly aiding legitimacy and community connection.

Governance

The name of the group providing leadership and direction to OPC shifted from Organizing Group to Steering Committee to Advisory Committee over the course of a year, yet its mandate and composition remained relatively consistent. For the purposes of this report, we will refer to the leadership team consistently as the Organizing Committee.

The mandate of the Organizing Committee was to oversee OPC's work, confirming direction, strategy, objectives and timelines, and then assuring accountability to the community for successful implementation of the project. [See Appendix A] This group reported to CCHC's Board of Directors through CCHC's Executive Director, who sat on the Organizing Committee as an *ex officio* member.

Responsibilities included: developing an action plan with goals and objectives, timelines and deliverables, and a budget and funding plan; confirming terms of reference and appointing Commissioners; approving a plan for outreach and public hearings; overseeing fundraising, staffing and spending; securing a sponsoring organization; promoting positive relations with stakeholders; and reporting to the community on progress and results.

The Organizing Committee was composed of a dozen or so members, with eight or more in attendance at most meetings. Members brought a mix of backgrounds, perspectives, skills and experience, assuring diversity and links to different elements of the community. *Ex officio* members included the CCHC Executive Director and a representative of the Ottawa Community Foundation. The Project Coordinator also attended.

The Organizing Committee operated by consensus, assuring collective ownership of decisions. In the start-up phase, the Organizing Committee met bi-weekly, moving to meetings every three weeks and then monthly as staff were hired and the Committee's role shifted from planning and decision-making to input and oversight.

The Co-Chairs were in regular communication, anticipating issues and following up on decisions. Ad hoc groups came together around certain tasks, such as the recruitment of Commissioners. Two committees met regularly, a Communications Team, which provided advice and support to messaging and media relations, and a Fundraising Committee.

Community engagement

OPC arose from the community and was led by members of the community. If it was to have an impact, resulting in changes in attitudes, policies and practices, it was important the community have a sense of ownership over the process and outcomes.

At each stage in its development, efforts were made to ensure the community knew who we were, what we were doing, and why; and knew their input was welcome, and how to provide it.

Taking full advantage of the contacts and credibility of Organizing Committee members, significantly boosted by CCHC's profile and programs, OPC reached out to community leaders and members from associations, agencies, faith groups, unions, businesses, equity-seeking groups and others, providing information and promoting participation. Using the OPC website and social media channels, regular updates on the process, timelines, hearings and reports were widely disseminated. Input and feedback was encouraged and facilitated.

OPC also convened an Inner-City Stakeholders Group, composed primarily of representatives from affected neighbourhood associations and community agencies, yet open to leaders from faith communities, business groups and unions, and organizations representing diverse groups — especially those confronting hate, discrimination and marginalization. The ICSG met monthly over the course of a year, offering advice and support to the Organizing Committee and helping anchor OPC's work in the realities and priorities of the community, while also building a deeper sense of common cause and a shared agenda for action.

Early on meetings were convened with the network of community agencies that work with people directly impacted by the occupation. This included community health and resource centres and organizations working with seniors, people who are homeless, women seeking safety, street-involved youth, people with disabilities, racialized and stigmatized communities, and others. These contacts helped inform the OPC process and findings, but they also opened pathways for individuals from vulnerable populations to come forward to OPC to present their views — and assure them follow-up support.

Mindful that OPC was being organized on the unceded and unsundered territory of the Algonquin Anishnaabeg, plans were made to convene a Circle of Indigenous elders to offer their counsel and support, helping ensure the Commission operates in a good way, respectful of those whose lands we occupy and inclusive of First Nations, Inuit and Metis peoples.

While there was strong, valuable input from Indigenous leaders at critical points in the OPC process, the vision for the Indigenous Circle was never realized, in part because those who might have participated in such a space were themselves too busy dealing with other pressing issues. The same can be said for leadership from many other groups whose attention and engagement OPC had sought.

While OPC's mandate arose from an acute crisis – the convoy occupation of Ottawa's downtown communities – many of the people most affected are daily confronting an ongoing crisis, and leadership from these communities is overtaxed and under-resourced. They are struggling to advance their own organizational priorities and community's interests, so they must focus their energies. And they face overwhelming demands to represent their community and be at every table yet see little return on this investment. So, there's skepticism about yet another space for what is too often co-opted consultation.

As a result, leadership is stretched and wary. So, while there was interest and support for OPC and its mission, it was a challenge to secure and sustain the time and attention of leaders from the Indigenous, Black, 2SLGBTQIA+ and other communities that are under ongoing siege. And without their active encouragement and counsel, it was then more challenging to reach and engage community members from the communities they represent.

Outreach to workers through unions and business owners through BIAs and other networks, was also less productive than had been expected. In part, this reflects the same issue as that above: leadership that is over-extended and memberships that are struggling. But there was an added dimension that arose from the contested nature of the convoy occupation and COVID. Within unions and among business owners there are divergent views on COVID mandates, and even though many welcomed the OPC and its focus on the impact of the occupation, they were reticent about being seen to take sides, stoking further division or sparking consumer boycotts.

Another factor that had an impact on public engagement with OPC was the municipal election. The convoy occupation was in February. The municipal election was in October. OPC hearings began in September and continued to December. [There was also a provincial election in June.] While OPC was non-partisan, there is no question its work was also political, with some people welcoming increased scrutiny of the City's response while others were anxious to put it behind them. This likely served as a deterrent for some, discouraging their participation. It also may have limited or skewed media attention, in turn curbing engagement.

It can also be said that formal government inquiries, in particular the legislatively-mandated Public Order Emergency Commission, chaired by Justice Rouleau, generated significant media attention and may have overshadowed OPC and reduced public engagement.

Commissioners

Commissioners constitute the public-facing leadership of the inquiry and so it is important they be respected, capable and empathetic. In addition to their time, skills and effort, they lend their credibility and wisdom, which are crucial to success.

It is important that commissioners represent the diversity of the community and are seen as open and fair-minded. While staff or volunteers can play key roles in organizing outreach and hearings, the commissioners must be able to create a safe and productive space for people to come forward and share their experience and views.

Commissioners operate at arms-length from the Organizing Committee and Sponsoring organization and their independence must be respected.

After discussion of the role and responsibilities of commissioners, a process for recruitment and selection was confirmed [See Appendix B.i] and a 'job profile' developed. [See Appendix B.ii].

Organizing Committee members were invited to identify prospects. For each candidate, a short biography was developed. Community leaders, academics, former judges, Indigenous elders and change makers were identified as prospects. Care was taken to ensure diversity in gender, race, age, religion, abilities, and background.

Prospects were then approached to gauge interest and availability. The profile was shared to help clarify roles and expectations. The confirmation process was iterative as the Selection Committee sought diversity and balance within the panel, a decision on one impacting the ranking of other prospects.

The Organizing Committee then confirmed the recommendation of the Selection Committee, and a Memorandum of Understanding was drafted to clarify responsibilities of the commissioners, Organizing Committee and sponsoring organization. The MoU confirms the commissioners' independence, outlines duties, assures support to their efforts, sets honoraria, and addresses issues of safety and other concerns. [See Appendix B.iii]

OPC appointed a panel of three commissioners, which we later expanded to four. Most often there were three commissioners in attendance at each hearing, though there were some with all four and a few with only two. Sharing duties created a more welcoming and inclusive dynamic and promoted a wider range of follow-up questions. Biographies of each commissioner are available [here](#).

The Commissioners met independently to confirm ways of working, coordinate schedules, consider issues and evidence, and develop their reports and recommendations. One of the Commissioners served as a point person, meeting weekly with a Co-Chair of the Organizing

Committee and the Project Coordinator to assure open communication and coordination of staff and volunteer support to OPC's work.

Hearings

People were offered a variety of opportunities to share their stories and present their views. Four in-person and eight online public hearings and one private hearing were organized. [Details about public hearings and outreach activities, as well as information on who came forward and what issues they raised, are available [here](#).] Written submissions were also accepted.

Commissioners were open to hear from any local resident, worker, business or organization affected by the convoy. People could inquire about making a presentation through a contact form on OPC's website, via social media and email. Presenters were invited to fill out an online form collecting contact information, demographic information and background information on their testimony. A staff member or volunteer would schedule a phone call with presenters to learn more about their experience and inform them of the logistics of the hearings. Based on their answers, witnesses could be grouped into sessions by theme; for example, sessions dedicated to people with disabilities, convoy supporters, journalists, etc.

Each hearing opened with the Commissioners offering a greeting, a land acknowledgement, and an explanation of the OPC's mandate before reviewing the rules of engagement for the session. Presenters were invited to make a five-minute statement following which Commissioners would ask clarifying questions.

Public hearings were scheduled for two hours, accommodating five speakers and a short break. They were open to the public and recorded for access on YouTube. Simultaneous interpretation to English and French was provided. (While ASL and LSQ interpretation was considered, it was not logistically feasible.) Closed captioning was available for taped and online hearings.

While OPC staff and volunteers verified and retained the name, address and contact information of all those who appeared at public hearings, whether in person or online, presenters were free to protect their identity in public, using only their first name or an alias/avatar and giving a generic description of their address. Commissioners, in asking questions of presenters, were mindful to protect their privacy, and video recordings did not show their faces.

Only authorized recording and photo-taking by media and OPC volunteers was allowed in public hearings. Members of the public were not permitted to take photos or record images within the hearing room or premises. Media were asked to request permission to use names or take

images that would allow presenters to be readily identified. Attendees at in-person public meetings were asked to sign-in, providing their name and contact information. Attendees to Zoom meetings were required to register, providing an email address.

Every effort was made to remove barriers to participation and ensure OPC was open and accessible to all, providing interpretation and other supports where needed. Support from trauma counselors was also offered.

A counselor or other person with training and experience in providing emotional support to people under stress was present at in-person OPC hearings. Individuals requesting support, or in apparent need of support, were also connected with community resources for reassurance and counseling. Culturally appropriate counseling support was made available through a local counseling network, and other community resources were available on OPC's website.

Out of respect for those who were traumatized by and potentially triggered by convoy supporters, efforts were made to protect those impacted by creating separate spaces where convoy supporters would be heard by the Commissioners.

Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, all those in attendance at in-person public hearings were required to wear a properly fitted mask. Masks and hand sanitizer were made available. Wherever possible, efforts were made to assure proper ventilation and fresh air circulation. Most public hearings were held virtually, accommodating those unable to wear masks, yet there was still resistance from some attendees to wearing masks at in-person hearings, which created tensions and added to the stress of others in attendance. Care was taken to ensure all venues for in-person hearings were accessible and seating arrangements prioritized physical distancing.

Those who came forward to share their stories and views were drawn from a wide cross-section of backgrounds – including people of different ages, incomes, education and circumstance. They were 'expert witnesses' in recounting their own experience, offering rich, compelling testimony and providing powerful insights and information that informed OPC's findings and grounded its recommendations.

For the most part, however, they were not subject matter experts on emergency response or police oversight or human rights protocols who could cite with authority precedence or best practice, or state what local authorities should have done to address this crisis. And unlike governmental inquiries, OPC lacked the power to subpoena witnesses or documents to delve more deeply into the inner workings of governmental and police decision-making.

As a result, OPC had a rich body of evidence related to the impact of the convoy occupation, but heard less about what might have been done and what recommendations might be made. That said, it was a challenge to synthesize the input to OPC and distill its essence and wisdom. It would likely have been helpful if a summary of each presentation/hearing had been prepared with annotated transcripts, as an aid to the writing of the reports.

Logistics

For in-person hearings, venues were selected to accommodate up to 50 attendees with space for media, tables for sound technicians and booths for interpreters. Commissioners were seated at the front of the room facing the presenter's table and the audience.

At online hearings, a staff member would provide introductory remarks indicating how to activate closed captioning and interpretation. Using attendee and panelist permissions within Zoom, a staff member would activate presenters by promoting them as panelists, allowing them to turn their mic and camera on to make their statement. Afterwards, the presenter's status was reset to attendee, removing mic and camera permissions. The chat function was only available to Commissioners, speakers, staff and volunteers during hearings to troubleshoot technical issues if needed.

Following their presentation, presenters would receive a 'thank you' note containing community resources for counseling support as well as a feedback form to collect data on their experience of OPC's process. As well, all received copies of OPC's reports to keep them informed and assure them their input had been captured and reflected.

Safety plans

OPC arranged for volunteers with experience in monitoring public gatherings, protecting safe spaces and de-escalating tensions to be present at public in-person hearings. Police would not be called unless there is a potentially violent situation that could not be managed by OPC staff and volunteers on site. An ever-green safety plan was shared with volunteers and staff ahead of the hearings. [See Appendix C]

We reserved the right to restrict access to the hearing room and premises, and ask anyone perceived as a threat or potentially disruptive to leave.

Images, slogans or text on clothing or elsewhere that promoted hate, violence or was likely to give offence were not be permitted in the hearings room or premises.

Signs, placards, flags and banners, other than those of the OPC or those authorized by the OPC, were not permitted in the hearing room or premises.

Part of a trauma-informed safety plan was also having counselors available to support individuals after their testimony, as well as referrals to community supports if required. A counseling protocol was developed to ensure appropriate trauma-informed support.

Community Consultations

Many people who are Indigenous or Black or a person of colour, members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, younger folk or older, people with disabilities, migrants, people living rough, and others, face daily discrimination and hate — before, during and since the occupation. OPC did not want to increase the risk they might be targeted or trolled.

So OPC approached local organizations serving equity-deserving groups to learn more about the impact on their members/clients and staff. OPC also identified service providers affected by the convoy occupation. We would then propose to co-host a community consultation with an organization or community groups in a space that was familiar to their members.

OPC worked with community leaders from diverse groups to create safe spaces where people could come forward to share their stories and reflect on their collective experience. This input proved invaluable to the Commissioners in deepening their understanding and informing their recommendations.

Eight community consultations were held, targeting specific groups including people experiencing homelessness, Asian seniors, 2SLGBTQIA+ community members and others. It was not possible to arrange community consultations with some communities we had hoped to engage more deeply, including Indigenous, Black and Muslim groups and street-involved youth, though we did hear from members of these communities at our public hearings and through written submissions. As we discuss above, there are several possible explanations for this but a key element is almost certainly the state of ongoing crisis these communities find themselves confronting and the excessive demands on their leadership.

The host organization would designate someone to facilitate the community session and outline rules of engagement. Two Commissioners were generally present. Sessions were scheduled between 90 minutes and two hours, some in person, some online. Commissioners prepared a short list of guiding questions and allowed conversations to flow organically. A note-taker was present, though comments were not attributed to specific participants to protect their privacy.

Creation of these safe spaces allowed Commissioners to hear directly from people who would never have come forward to appear at a public hearing; in particular people who have had to deal with stigma and discrimination and have a distrust or fear of police and local authorities.

Reports

OPC produced two reports: one released on January 30, 2023, entitled *What we heard* and another released April 4, entitled *After the Occupation: Change*.

The original plan had been that OPC would issue a summary of its preliminary findings in October 2022, in advance of the municipal election, with a final report in January 2023, in anticipation of the first anniversary of the convoy occupation. The intent of the October report was to focus public attention in the weeks leading up to the election on the failings of the City in its handling of the crisis, with a view to informing discussions and promoting accountability. The second report was timed to ensure the community's experience and recommendations for redress were part of the public debate as political and media attention returned to the convoy and its impact.

In the end, this timeline wasn't feasible. Public hearings did not start until September so it was too early and too rushed to issue a preliminary report in October. And hearings continued until mid-December, which meant it was not realistic to produce a final report for January.

So instead the Commissioners wrote an [op-ed](#) that ran in the *Ottawa Citizen* on October 11, encouraging local residents to consider six pivotal questions about the City's handling of the convoy occupation as they go to the polls. And the final report evolved to a Part I, released at the end of January, and a Part II, released in early April.

[Part I, *What we heard*](#), amplified the voices of local residents, including more than 170 direct quotes from testimony at public hearings and written submissions. These quotes provided eloquent, concrete and compelling evidence of the impact of the convoy occupation on those who were most affected.

These statements were organized within a framework developed by the Commissioners to capture and analyze the different dimensions of the crisis from the perspective of residents, workers and local businesses. After an introduction that reviewed OPC's origin, mandate and process, and highlighted overarching issues related to Indigenous rights and human rights, the report organized its analysis around five statements:

- It was an occupation
- It was violent
- The people were abandoned
- The community mobilized
- The convoy was not without its supporters

For each theme, the Commissioners provided an overview analysis of the issue and its impact, with the latter brought to life by the powerful statements of those who came forward. With a few exceptions, the identities of the witnesses were anonymized.

As well, Part I included statements written by each of the Commissioners that offered some personal reflections on the crisis, doing a deeper dive on the nature of invisibility, occupation, human rights obligations and hypocrisy. It concluded with a short summary of OPC's findings. *What we heard* was released at a well-attended news conference. It was also posted to the OPC website and emailed to all those who made submissions to the Commission and to community leaders, elected representatives, relevant authorities, donors and supporters.

The release of the Part I report was a week late to feed into retrospective media stories leading up to the convoy anniversary but fell right on the anniversary of the day it became incontestable that the protest was dug in for the long haul. There was excellent media coverage, echoing the report's key messages and focusing public attention on the impact on residents – weeks before the release of the federally-mandated Public Order Emergency Commission's report.

Most importantly, there was a sense of validation and vindication for local residents who saw their own stories profiled after more than a year of feeling abandoned, devalued and ignored. Just as the hearings had been cathartic and healing for many, offering the first opportunity for them to tell their stories in public, seeing their own words captured in the report was affirming. Many others who had not come forward recognized their own experience in the testimonies of their neighbours and were pleased their trauma and losses had been documented.

The [Part II report, *After the Occupation: Change*](#), was released nine weeks later, offering the opportunity not only to reflect more deeply on the testimony and possible remedies, but also to consider the reports and recommendations of the federal Public Order Emergency Commission and the City's Auditor General, who produced reports on the City's response but as well those of the Ottawa Police Service and Ottawa Police Services Board.

It also offered the opportunity to consult with members of the Inner-City Stakeholders Group and other community leaders, including witnesses with particular expertise, about the framing and priorities of recommendations and redress.

Part II offered further analysis and insight on the occupation and its impact, acknowledging this was an occupation of already occupied Indigenous lands, discussing the nature of the convoy,

and clarifying that human rights are not hierarchical but “universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated”. The report also challenges assumptions and debunks stereotypes, highlighting the high proportion of people at risk in the affected neighbourhoods. It also recaps OPC’s ways of working and acknowledges its constraints. For example, as a people’s commission OPC did not have the power to subpoena witnesses or access documents internal to government. At the same time, OPC was able to leverage its rootedness in community to create safe spaces where people could come forward to share their stories.

The Part II report then does a deeper dive into each of the themes of occupation, violence, abandonment, community mobilization and support for the convoy, documenting impact and noting who were more vulnerable, identifying gaps and failures, and contrasting the response to this situation with others.

Flowing from this analysis, the Commissioners delivered four conclusions, described as ‘what we’re learned and what needs to change’: there is an urgent need for human rights protections and guarantees, new models of leadership and civic engagement, improved responsiveness to crises, and fostering dialogue and building community. In support of each of these conclusions, the Commissioners cite evidence, solutions and precedence.

The Part II report made [25 recommendations under eight calls for action](#): earn trust; uphold the rights of Indigenous Peoples; protect human rights; prioritize support for disadvantaged and vulnerable groups; keep the community safe; strengthen emergency response; address hate, build community and advance inclusion; and ensure accountable follow -up. A timeline for action provides target dates for progress on each of the recommendations.

The report concluded with thanks and acknowledgements and attached appendices that review the OPC’s origins and mandate, summarize the biographies of the Commissioners, offer data and analysis on the hearings and consultations, and provide a demographic overview of the neighbourhoods most affected by the convoy occupation. An executive summary was added.

Again, the report was released at a news conference and widely distributed by email and promoted extensively through social media and again, there was good media interest, coverage and feedback.

Each of the reports was produced as a digital document in English and French, about 75 pages in English and 85 in French. The Part I report contained links to video highlights from the public hearings, and summaries of each report were posted to the OPC website.

Releasing the report in two parts provided two opportunities for media coverage, each with a distinct focus, and allowed OPC to meet an early target date to share testimonies while making production less daunting. It also resulted inevitably in some repetition, adding to the length of the reports.

Responsibility for drafting the reports rested with the Commissioners, with one taking the lead and others providing commentary and drafting their own contributions. The initial plan to have staff do background research on best practices and precedents across Canada and globally was not realized. But staff and volunteers did assist with compiling demographic data, identifying key themes, helping organize the content, and editing and designing the reports.

As noted above, community leaders and key informants were invited to review and provide feedback on draft recommendations. Based on their input, the content, number and structure of the recommendations were changed, and timelines were added.

Advocacy

From the outset, OPC understood its work was political but non-partisan. As well, OPC saw its role as limited and short-term, creating a space and producing an outcome that would make it possible for others to press for action from different levels of government.

OPC recognized there were already many actors – community associations, activist groups, political parties, networks and coalitions – that existed before the convoy occupation and would continue long after, who had the mandate, capacity and legitimacy to mobilize and lobby at the municipal, provincial and federal levels. Ottawa did not need another activist organization to pursue redress for the damages arising from the convoy. But there was a need for a group to come together to capture, document and amplify the diverse voices in the community who had been most affected by the occupation.

Given this, OPC did not seek meetings with senior government officials or centre itself as an advocate in the aftermath of the convoy. Instead, it set out to empower existing organizations and campaigns with information, insights and recommendations that they could then use to represent the interests of their members – and the broader community – in seeking redress and remedial action.

OPC played a valuable role in advancing advocacy by working to keep this issue in the public eye, creating a safe space for people to come forward to share their stories, and producing reports with ambitious yet actionable recommendations. But OPC shied away from taking public stances or commenting on topical issues when its comments could not be rooted in the

testimony and evidence that emerged through the hearings process. As much as their role was to hear and distill the experiences and views of the community, Commissioners were positioned as independent and above the fray.

Much of the responsibility for building relations with community allies was undertaken by members of the Organizing Committee, with support from CCHC as the sponsoring organization, and staff. The Inner-City Stakeholders Group was key to ensuring two-way communication with key allies, but there were also communications with a wider range of community associations and actors. As well, there were formal and informal contacts with elected representatives and others who played a role in the community response to the convoy occupation and would have a role in determining next steps.

So for much of its life, OPC's role in relation to advocacy was largely limited to helping create an enabling environment for others to pursue justice. This changed somewhat when OPC issued its Part II report with recommendations for action. There was now something specific for which to advocate. But again, OPC saw its role primarily as empowering others to prosecute the calls for action, because it is they who have the relations, credibility and clout to make change.

For some community organizations, OPC recommendations are central to and advance their ongoing advocacy agenda. For others, the recommendations are in addition to or may cause them to rethink their advocacy agenda. For neighbourhood groups, issues of emergency preparedness and community safety may be top of mind. For community agencies, it may be better meeting the needs and protecting the rights of vulnerable populations – and their staff. For those representing communities who are marginalized or stigmatized, it may be the recommendations related to the human rights charter, action against hate or initiatives in support of equity, diversity, accessibility and inclusion that are of paramount urgency. For some activist groups it will be recommendations related to oversight and accountability. For those most directly affected by the occupation, redress and compensation may top their list.

As noted above, OPC did not have great success in securing the participation of community members from conservative or corporate circles. So it had limited capacity to engage these powerful sectors or to leverage their contacts to influence decision-makers.

So OPC focused its attention on equipping community allies with the evidence, analysis, recommendations for action and timelines for progress. The plan had been to prepare an advocacy kit with key messages, tips and tools that would be distributed with the Part II report to members of the public – including those who made submissions – and community groups. Unfortunately, this proved impossible, given limited time and resources. So instead OPC has

relied largely on media coverage, its own social media channels and other means to encourage the public to pick up the advocacy mantle.

The Inner-City Stakeholders Group will continue to play an important role in advocating for action on relevant OPC recommendations, and collaboration with other community allies continues. Complementing this community-based advocacy, Commissioners and members of the Organizing Committee will meet with elected representatives and other decision-makers. And through its website and other channels, OPC will continue to keep the public informed, chronicling progress – and inaction – on OPC recommendations.

Outreach and Marketing

While an obvious choice, the Ottawa People’s Commission on the Convoy Occupation was confirmed as OPC’s name only after some consideration. We wanted a name that was rooted in the community’s experience rather than parroting the language of the “Freedom Convoy”, and we needed to acknowledge that Ottawa, as for Canada as a whole, is occupied Indigenous land, so added the qualifier “convoy” to clarify which occupation. In French, *Commission populaire d’Ottawa sur l’occupation par le convoi* (CPO) was used.

Having confirmed a name, OPC then adopted a logo, selecting a pictogram representing the diversity of the communities affected with the acronym and name in English and French. And as an invitation to engage and call to action, the tagline *Make your voice heard/Faites entendre votre voix* was adopted.

In the days before the public launch a website was developed, focused on inviting community members to come forward to share their stories and offer their support, building community confidence in the process and people behind OPC, and anticipating and addressing questions from friends and foes. The site was easy to navigate and the messaging was clear and direct.

Over OPC’s life, the content and structure of the site evolved. From an initial focus on basic information needed to support the launch and enlist participation, listings of upcoming hearings and highlights from testimonies were added through the autumn; then an interactive timeline of the occupation, incorporating content submitted by community members, was added, and once released, the OPC reports and demographic information on the communities affected. In its current form, the site is more retrospective, highlighting reports, documenting testimonies, and explaining the OPC process, providing an enduring record of the occupation and its impact.

The website opc-cpo.ca (English and French) served as the spine of OPC's communications. Community members, journalists and others were directed to the site for information and updates. Social media, news releases, OPC's bi-weekly newsletter and other communications incorporated links to the site.

OPC accounts were created on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. While the number of followers was not very high, these channels allowed OPC to promote key messages and provide timely information to an ever-broader circle of followers, many of whom were active community leaders. Staff and volunteers leveraged trending topics arising from coverage of other convoy inquiries to position OPC as the community's voice. Twitter quickly became OPC's best performing platform and live-tweeting guides were developed to enable volunteers to provide live updates during public hearings. In light of frequent Twitter outages and changes to the platform in 2023, content and calls to action focused on redirecting people to the website or to sign up to the bi-weekly newsletter. As well, links were provided to the [OPC YouTube channel](#), providing the opportunity to watch recordings and highlights of the public hearings. [See Appendix D]

Design work produced *pro bono* by a communications firm headed by an Organizing Committee member provided a template used for posters promoting the first public hearings. This design was then adopted as a distinct brand/look for OPC, subsequently used for banners, signage, social media and reports. All official documents, communications and signage were produced in English and French, though social media content skewed English.

Posters and leaflets were distributed in neighbourhoods surrounding public hearings venues. As well, OPC tabled at community fairs, raising its profile and providing an opportunity to speak directly with local residents, encouraging their participation and addressing their questions.

Media played a key role in supporting OPC's outreach. While it's a challenge to secure ongoing coverage of community initiatives, especially given under-staffed newsrooms and a fragmented media environment, OPC generated very good coverage for its launch and the release of each of its reports. Media and public interest in the convoy occupation was high, though attention waned as different inquiries issued their reports and the risk of a repeat appeared to diminish.

OPC was greatly assisted by the expertise and dedication of knowledgeable and well-connected volunteers who constituted the Communications Team within the Organizing Committee. Their advice and support on communications strategy, messaging and media relations proved key.

OPC also benefited greatly from Commissioners who were articulate, sympathetic, available and media-savvy. In addition to participating in news conferences, Commissioners authored op-eds, did television and radio interviews, participated in podcasts, were active in social media, and generally made themselves available to serve as spokespersons and commentators.

Members of the Organizing Committee, in particular Ken Rubin, OPC's instigator, and Brenda Knight, OPC Co-Chair, also served as media spokespersons. That said, given its commitment to amplify community voices, OPC's role was often to help connect media to community members so they could tell their stories directly.

OPC staff were highly skilled in communications, updating the website, leveraging different social media platforms, writing articles for community newspapers, designing OPC reports and producing newsletters and other promotional content. As well, they served as spokespersons, in English and French, conducted interviews and handled day-to-day media relations.

Administration

A critical element of OPC's success was the active engagement and support of the [Centretown Community Health Centre](#) (CCHC) which served as OPC's sponsoring organization.

When the Organizing Committee first came together, it was recognized that OPC would need resources and to accept donations. To do that it would need a bank account and would benefit from having the ability to issue charitable tax receipts, which in turn would require that it be incorporated. Wishing to move quickly and concerned that the process of incorporating, developing by-laws, setting up accounting processes and confirming HR policies would be onerous, diverting volunteer energies from OPC's mission, the decision was made to approach existing organizations to seek their sponsorship.

Two local agencies confirmed their interest in serving as OPC's sponsoring organization, receiving and receipting donations, and providing administrative systems and support. Of the two, CCHC was the better option. CCHC had been directly affected by the convoy occupation and had been considering how best to respond at a systemic level to the trauma experienced by many of their clients – beyond the personal support already being offered by CCHC counsellors. It was a well-established and respected community leader with robust policies and procedures for finance and staffing. And it could offer OPC advice and support in assuring its hearings and consultations were trauma-informed and responsive to the community's needs.

From that initial expression of interest, the relation with CCHC evolved such that OPC was recognized formally as a program of CCHC by the Centre's Board. While the Organizing

Committee operated with a high level of autonomy – able to take initiative and move forward in a nimble manner – CCHC’s Executive Director participated in Organizing Committee meetings as an *ex officio* member and reported regularly on progress to the CCHC Board.

OPC staff were employees of CCHC, hired through their internal processes, with participation from a representative of the Organizing Committee, and covered by their HR policies, benefits and protections. This relieved OPC of the responsibility to develop policies on the range of HR issues expected of a responsible employer and facilitated the orientation and oversight of staff.

As well, CCHC provided administrative support, managing payroll, paying invoices, reporting on income and expenses, offering tech support, providing office space, etc. In addition, CCHC provided funding and bridge financing, and received and processed all donations.

OPC reports were shared in advance with CCHC for their information, but the Commissioners operated at arms-length from CCHC as with the Organizing Committee. The reports include a disclaimer that the opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of CCHC.

Given OPC’s iterative nature – being designed as it was being implemented, and responding to changing circumstances – and given there were no comparable precedents to cite, the budget adopted by the Organizing Committee was preliminary. Expenses included costs related to the hearings, communications and fundraising, as well as staffing costs and honoraria for the Commissioners – and revenues were uncertain.

Hearings gave rise to rental fees for community venues, which were relatively modest, and professional fees for English/French interpreters as well as sound equipment and interpretation devices, which were more costly. A video crew recorded in-person hearings. Online hearings used Zoom, avoiding rental fees, sound and video expenses, but still incurred expenses for interpretation. The decision was taken not to provide ASL/SQL interpretation because of the expense and uncertain demand. Zoom hearings allowed captions and all hearings were posted to YouTube, facilitating access.

Communications expenses included design support to the website, production of banners and pop-up signage, printing posters and limited copies of the report, and some strategic advice, though this was largely provided *pro bono* by volunteers. Fundraising expenses consisted of a contract for a fundraising consultant.

The greatest expense was for salaries and benefits for staff. For the first six months (from March to August 2022), OPC relied totally on volunteers. But the Organizing Committee

determined early on that OPC would need the support of a Project Coordinator who could undertake the day-to-day work of organizing hearings, processing submissions, supporting communications and assisting the Commissioners. And if there were sufficient funds, an Administrative Assistant, Communications Officer and Research Officer would also be hired.

The initial budget range was identified as up to \$250,000, depending on revenues and staffing levels. This was then raised to \$350,000, when in-kind contributions of staff time from CCHC and the Ottawa Community Foundation were included as well as overhead recoveries by CCHC.

In the end, expenses totaled approximately \$250,000, of which \$130,000 was spent on staff salaries and benefits, \$35,000 on honoraria for Commissioners, \$35,000 on translation and interpretation, \$15,000 on meeting expenses, \$15,000 on fundraising expenses, \$6,000 on communications, \$8,000 on other program expenses and \$10,000 to corporate services. Revenues amounted to approximately \$160,000 with CCHC covering the deficit. [See Appendix E]

Over the summer of 2022, job descriptions were developed and three of the positions were posted. While salaries and benefits were competitive, it was a challenge to recruit staff, resulting in delays. The Project Coordinator started in early August with the Administrative Assistant starting in October and a part-time Communications Officer starting in November. The Research Officer post was also filled in November. From its peak of 3.5 positions, staffing was then scaled back after hearings concluded and the Part I report was released, with the Research Officer continuing to the end of April and the Project Coordinator continuing into May 2023.

While a lot of heavy lifting was done by Organizing Committee members, OPC would not have been possible without staff support. Their focus, continuity, preparation and follow-up was critical to gaining the trust and sustaining the participation of the community. Their attention was integral to the quality and safety of the participants' experience of the public hearings and consultations. And their professionalism and skill contributed hugely to the quality and impact of OPC's reports and communications.

While OPC staff reported directly through the Project Coordinator to the CCHC Executive Director, one of the Organizing Committee Co-Chairs acted as *de facto* managing director, providing day-to-day oversight, direction and support to the staff, while ensuring coordination with the Organizing Committee and the Commissioners.

From the outset, OPC recognized its responsibility to be accountable to the community. As a people's commission critical of governments and local authorities, OPC should be held to a high

standard of accountability and transparency – in relation to its process, practices, decisions and spending. Information on its budget and sources of funding was made available on request. CCHC will release an audited financial statement after its fiscal year-end.

The OPC website indicated Organizing Committee minutes were available to the public. This proved complicated as minutes were not drafted with this level of transparency in mind, in some instances citing personal or confidential information. For that reason, only summaries of minutes could be made available upon request.

This report is itself a means to promote accountability and transparency in relation to OPC and its ways of working.

Funding and fundraising

Fundraising for OPC was a challenge. The decision was taken from the outset that OPC would not seek or accept funding from governments to assure its independence. Yet because of its short-term nature, concentrated geography and political sensitivity, it doesn't fit the mold for charitable giving.

As a registered charity, CCHC is a 'qualified donee', meaning it could receive donations from foundations and other charities, and offer receipts for tax purposes to individual and corporate donors.

But most private foundations shy away from initiatives that have a political dimension, giving priority to supporting service delivery and development in health, social services or the arts. Corporate funders are more cautious still. So philanthropic funding for innovative programs promoting citizen engagement, human rights, advocacy and accountability is limited.

As well, foundations and corporations tend to fund groups with a proven track record and don't offer funding retroactively, preferring to commit funding this year to projects planned for next. OPC was a start-up, short-term venture and needed the funding immediately.

Luckily, OPC had a lead donor, the Ken and Debbie Rubin Public Interest Advocacy Fund, endowed by OPC founder Ken Rubin and his wife. Ken and Debbie committed \$25,000 to OPC and introduced OPC to the Ottawa Community Foundation, which administers their fund. As well, CCHC committed \$25,000 from its own resources to support OPC. And an anonymous donor pledged \$12,500 from a donor-directed fund with MakeWay Foundation. This initial support gave the Organizing Committee confidence to move forward.

Through a contact facilitated by one of the Commissioners, Maytree expressed interest in learning more about OPC's vision and ways of working. Seeing strong links to other work they were supporting relating to cities and human rights and intrigued at the potential of this pilot to offer lessons on community-led democratic action, Maytree committed \$35,000. This was significant – and promising – as Maytree is a Toronto-based national foundation and a thought leader in the philanthropic sector.

With projected expenses amounting to \$250,000+ and uncertain prospects for local fundraising, the decision was taken to retain a fundraising consultant. A request for proposals attracted little interest, but John Bouza, a local consultant with many years of experience was contracted to bring focus and professional experience to the task. A case for support was developed, prospects identified and proposals drafted. This work was supported by a Fundraising Committee drawn from Organizing Committee members and others.

Success was hampered because few OPC volunteers had strong connections to people with wealth, local foundations or corporations. Efforts to secure participation and support from leaders within the business sector or philanthropic circles failed, whether because of the innovative nature of the OPC project, the divisive nature of the convoy occupation, or the prospect of holding politicians and police to account. We had thought we might secure gifts from property owners and businesses affected by the convoy, or from family foundations they control, but that was not the case, perhaps because they were cautious about alienating convoy supporters or anxious to put this crisis behind them.

From the outset, OPC had support from the Ottawa Community Foundation, which recognized OPC's potential to contribute to healing, cohesion and social infrastructure. The Foundation sat on the Organizing Committee for its initial eight months and approved a \$20,000 grant from its Community Grants Program. It also helped promote OPC to local donors. But this connection did not result in additional gifts.

While many foundations were preempted by their priorities, criteria or timelines, applications were made to more than 20 national and local foundations. The Montreal-based McConnell Foundation, supportive of OPC's ambition and vision, committed \$35,000.

Like Maytree, McConnell was interested in OPC as an innovative pilot that could perhaps be replicated in other communities grappling with challenging issues. Other requests proved unsuccessful.

OPC's commitment to human rights, justice and accountability resonated with unions, concerned about an emboldened right and the suffering and losses of residents and workers. With support from Organizing Committee members and veterans of the labour movement, appeals were sent to a number of national unions and to union locals in Ottawa. The Public Service Alliance of Canada committed \$10,000, the National Union of Provincial and General Employees committed \$5,000 and the Ontario Division of the Canadian Union of Public Employees committed \$5,000. As well, union locals from CUPE and Unifor made donations.

CCHC also reached out for contributions from other community agencies working with affected residents.

OPC also received donations from individuals. The OPC website had a 'donate' button linked directly to CCHC's online donations portal through CanadaHelps. A drop-down menu allowed donors to designate their gifts to CCHC's OPC program. More than 60 persons made donations, ranging from \$20 to \$1,150 for a total of \$1,067.

While all communications from OPC included an invitation to donate, there was never a concerted public fundraising campaign. In part this reflects the economics of fundraising where costs can exceed returns, especially for one-off initiatives which don't have the opportunity to recoup expenses over the long term. In part it reflects a concern that our public messaging be focused on the impact of the convoy occupation on the community and that we not compete with our community partners for funding or create barriers for people without means to come forward to share their stories. And in part it reflects the interests and energies of volunteers.

Under other circumstances and for projects focused on less polarized issues more could perhaps be done to generate contributions from the local community. Donations could be solicited at hearings. A more robust appeal for contributions could be made at the launch or coincide with the release of reports. And with longer timelines and more participation at an earlier stage in the process, local funders from a diverse range of sectors could more readily be secured.

In total, OPC raised \$180,000, primarily from foundations, with strong support from CCHC and from unions. By reducing staffing levels after the release of the Part II report and limiting expenses, revenues were sufficient to cover most of OPC's expenses, with CCHC covering the deficit.

Evaluation

It will be some time before OPC's impact can be assessed. After a year or two it may be possible to evaluate the extent to which OPC's reports and recommendations changed public discourse or perceptions, or informed advocacy demands and priorities of community groups, or resulted in changes in policy and practice at the City or strengthened social infrastructure and resilience. Causality will be hard to prove in any case unless the changes are explicitly attributed to OPC.

Even at the level of outputs and outcomes, the Organizing Committee struggled with the challenge of identifying metrics and key indicators for OPC; in part because there were few examples to inform benchmarks for outputs, and in part because many of the outcomes were very personal, at the level of individuals while others were systemic, at the community level. [See Appendix E.i]

Participants were invited to comment on their experience and from those who responded, the feedback was largely positive.

- 23 participants had positive comments about OPC's process
- 6 said OPC gave residents a voice
- 5 said the process was triggering
- 3 said the process was healing
- 1 said the process helped them realize they weren't alone
- 2 had negative comments about OPC's process

As well, members of the Organizing Committee were asked to provide comments on OPC's operations, outputs and outcomes, identifying both positive comments and areas where there are lessons to be learned.

Things that were identified as having gone well:

- Contributions and support from CCHC, especially its Executive Director. (5)
- The selection and performance of the Commissioners. They were respectful and attentive to witnesses, clear in their thinking and communication, collaborative in spirit, and generous with their time. (4)
- Steering Committee members made time for meetings, took leadership of different tasks, offered good advice and strategic direction, extended their reach and resources, and had respectful exchanges and collaboration. (3)
- There was strong outreach and engagement with Ottawa residents. The decision to hold neighbourhood-centric hearings – while challenging – and to hold private community consultations proved to be a powerful way to build links and trust. (3)

- The ability to deliver a grassroots commission within a one-year timeframe – starting from scratch – is an incredible testament to the work that was done. (2)
- Reports were powerful and compelling. (2)
- Project Coordinator’s support and versatility. (3)
- Consulting with the community on the recommendations ensured community feedback was integrated into the final result. (1)
- The decision to ground the analysis and reporting of the commission in human rights was an excellent decision. It provided a clear framework within which to consider the events of the convoy occupation and to provide clear, grounded recommendation. (1)
- Selection of staff and Steering Committee members. (1)
- Media attention garnered. (1)
- Regular meetings and clear agendas. (1)

Things that could have been improved include:

- We did not have the bandwidth or resources to properly set the stage for post-report advocacy, lacking a clear plan and tools to strategically engage community allies in pressing for action on recommendations. (3)
- Outreach to marginalized communities was a challenge, particularly African, Caribbean and Black communities, Indigenous groups, and street-involved youth. We did not manage to engage them meaningfully. Had there been greater community engagement in the initial planning stage, OPC may have had more success. (4)
- More could have been done to define roles and expectations of Organizing Committee members at the outset. Much of the decision-making and support between meetings fell on a few members, though that may have been the best way to get things done and keep momentum going. (3)
- Better media coverage. (1)
- Reflecting the diversity of the communities affected in the Organizing Committee was challenging, although successful efforts were made to compensate for this in how public consultations were carried out. (1)
- More interaction with and comments on the Auditor General and Rouleau reports in OPC reports. (1)

- Greater attention could have been dedicated to securing more engagement from the business sector at the outset, which would have been beneficial to overall outreach, fundraising and advocacy. (1)
- More time to review recommendations. (1)
- Long-term planning and exploring possible funding of Inner City Stakeholders Group. (1)
- Organizational structure proved to be challenging and required massaging. (1)
- Fundraising was relatively slow to yield sufficient donations to cover the full costs of the commission, creating some anxiety and thoughts that perhaps OPC's scale and costs could have been more conservatively planned. (1)
- The relationship with founder Ken Rubin eventually became somewhat strained. (1)
- More support staff and Steering Committee members who took on a more active role. (1)

In addition to the survey of Organizing Committee members, Lew Auerbach, a member of the Organizing Committee, conducted short 45- to 60-minute interviews with the Commissioners and key administrative leads:

Alex Neve, Commissioner
 Leilani Farha, Commissioner
 Debbie Owusu-Akyeeah, Commissioner
 Monia Mazigh, Commissioner
 Michelle Hurtubise, Executive Director CCHC
 Robert Fox, Organizing Committee Co-chair
 Brenda Knight, Organizing Committee Co-chair
 Gaëlle Muderer, Project Coordinator
 Ken Rubin, Project Initiator and first funder

The premise of the interviews was to identify what these key people felt made the commission work well, what might have been improved, and what its legacy might be.

To do this, the interviews addressed the following general themes and questions:

- What were some of the reasons that made the commission successful? And lessons learned that similar inquiries could benefit from?
- What were some obstacles and how were they overcome, or not?
- What were some of your, and others', particularly noteworthy contributions?

- What was unique and what not?
- What were the short-term impacts?
- What do you hope the long-term impacts might be?
- Any regrets or improvements you would implement the next time or suggest to others considering something similar?

Some common themes emerged from the interviews. As well, Ken Rubin offered observations about the degree to which the People's Commission met his original expectations.

Some of the observations included:

- Human rights framework needed going forward
- Community voice needs to be respected, heard
- Specific people played key roles
- Several things could have been done better

Recordings, transcripts and highlights of these interviews have been included in the Documentation Project and are available for study.

Documentation

As the first Canadian example of a people's commission in the digital age, OPC was committed not only to delivering on its vision and mission but also to documenting its experience and sharing it with other communities.

This report is one dimension of that commitment, accessible for public review through OPC's website and circulated to interested parties. In addition, OPC has been in touch from time to time with community leaders and activists in other communities with their own experience of convoy protests and related activities that threaten human rights and public safety. Members of the Organizing Committee will continue to be available to provide advice and support to groups in other communities interested in learning from our experience.

As well, OPC's records, including testimonies and written submissions, will be deposited with the [City of Ottawa Archives](#), to ensure they are available for historical, research and educational purposes. Where appropriate, evidence will be coded to protect the identity of witnesses.

Conclusion

The Ottawa People's Commission created a safe space where people who had been affected by the convoy occupation could come forward to share their experience and views. Their input informed a series of recommendations with the potential to assure systemic transformation of the City's future response to emergencies, grounded in justice, human rights and democratic action. More immediately, the OPC process provided a measure of validation – and healing – to those who came forward to share their stories.

OPC was an ambitious, intense undertaking, spanning less than 16 months from conception to completion. Key to its success were its rootedness and focus on the community's interest, its ability to engage the time and talent of remarkable community leaders, the strong support of CCHC and its staff, and its commitment to capturing and amplifying voices that are often overlooked, ignored or silenced.

From the outset, OPC was seen as a learning opportunity, reviving and testing a model of active citizenship to see how it might be adapted to the digital age – and what it might offer other communities confronting different challenges. Our hope is that by documenting OPC's experience, we might encourage others to consider whether a people's commission – or an alternative citizens' inquiry – might help them hold difficult, important discussions with a view to building community and charting a path forward.

Appendices

Timelines and milestones

January 28 - February 20, 2022	Convoy occupation of Ottawa-Gatineau
February 8, 2022	Discussions begin on creating people's commission
March 30, 2022	First meeting of Organizing Committee
April 2022	Initial work to identify Sponsor Organization, potential funders and prospective Commissioners
May 2022	Confirming CCHC as Sponsor, recruiting Commissioners, developing work plan and timelines
June 2022	Confirming Commissioners, developing communications plan, budget and staffing plan
June 27, 2022	Public launch of OPC with news conference and website
July-August 2022	Hiring staff, planning for public hearings, fundraising
September 21, 2022	Beginning of public hearings (Summary of outreach activities available here).
November 21, 2022	Launch of crowd-sourced convoy timeline on opc-cpo.ca
December 10, 2022	Public hearings conclude
January 30, 2023	Release of OPC report Part I – What We Heard
March 20, 2023	Focus groups reviewing draft recommendations
April 4, 2023	Release of OPC report Part II – After the Occupation: Change
May 2023	Wrap-up staff support
July 2023	Release of OPC report What we did. What we learned.

Appendix A

Organizing Committee Terms of Reference

Mandate

The mandate of the Organizing Committee is to oversee the work of the Commission, confirming direction, strategy, objectives and timelines, and then assuring accountability to the community for successful implementation of that plan.

The Organizing Committee will:

- Develop an action plan confirming goals and objectives, timelines and deliverables
- Develop and approve a budget and funding plan
- Confirm terms of reference and appointments of Commissioners
- Approve a plan for public hearings
- Approve communication strategy and materials
- Support production of the Commission's report(s)
- Endorse reports released by the Commission
- Oversee fundraising and grant applications
- Oversee spending and review financial statements
- Participate in recruiting staff or consultants
- Oversee performance of staff in concert with [Sponsoring organization]
- Assure positive collaboration with [Sponsoring organization]
- Create and assure positive collaboration with stakeholder groups
- Report to the community on progress and results

Membership

The Organizing Committee will have up to [15] members, not including *ex officio* members.

Representation on the Organizing Committee will be drawn from individuals and community groups who live, work or have businesses in the impacted areas, as well as community leaders and key supporters.

Equity-deserving communities such as Indigenous, Black, People of Colour, 2SLGBTQIA+, people with disabilities, women and youth will be represented.

Ex officio members include: Executive Director of [Sponsoring organization] and Project Coordinator (when selected).

Ways of Working

- The Organizing Committee will operate on consensus.
- Co-Chairs to be selected from among the membership.
- Quorum will consist of 50 percent plus one of the members.
- Meetings will be held every [three] weeks, or more frequently if required.

The Organizing Committee may choose to select and hold to account a core executive group of not more than [five] members who will perform executive functions, assuring timely follow up on urgent matters. This group would meet at least once a [week], with a quorum of [three] required to make decisions. Decisions will be taken by consensus.

The Organizing Committee will promote best practices. Inappropriate actions by Organizing Committee members are to be addressed by the committee, taking follow up action as required.

Transparency

- Minutes of Organizing Committee meetings will be publicly available.
- The Commission's budget and balance sheet will be publicly available.

Appendix B.i

Role and Selection of Commissioners

This document outlines the rationale for commissioners, criteria for their selection, and their terms of reference and ways of working. After approval of this document by the Organizing Committee, a selection committee will be struck to approach and interview candidates and return with recommendations.

What do commissioners do?

Commissioners are an integral component of this citizen inquiry, with responsibility to convene and preside as a formal panel over community hearings, and issue reports. They will run respectful and fair hearings, capture the community's stories and concerns, analyze and report on what they heard, and make recommendations to the community.

How do commissioners relate to the Organizing Committee and among themselves?

Commissioners operate with a high degree of independence, yet receive guidance and administrative support from the Organizing Committee.

Commissioners set the tone for civility at hearings to be held in a safe, secure and trauma-informed manner, ensuring time for diverse witnesses to have a fair hearing. They are responsible for pulling together public testimonies and developing a clearly written report that offers recommendations for strengthening institutional and community responses. While they will seek consensus, a minority report may be issued. Commissioners should be available to comment on their findings and offer community presentations.

Criteria and selection of commissioners

Commissioners should reflect the community and its diversity, and be respectful of diversities, viewpoints, concerns and community needs. They should be respected, above-the-fray, distinguished members of the community; personable, flexible and fair-minded team players, with knowledge of the community, who are able to run hearings.

They ideally would be bilingual, in good health and prepared to devote one to two days a week to the job for the duration of the process.

They will be selected by a special committee after the Organizing Committee has solicited names of candidates. All non-selected candidates from the list should be approached to be involved in the OPC in some capacity.

There could be two, three or more commissioners, with a chair as required.

What assistance can commissioners expect?

The Organizing Committee, supported by staff and volunteers, will be responsible for notifications, logistics and security related to hearings, and provide support to report writing and production and media relations. Were it helpful, an advisory committee of distinguished people with inquiry experience and community leadership could be struck.

Honoraria

Given the time commitment and importance of the role, honoraria will be offered.

Resignations and replacement

Should a situation arise where a commissioner must resign, a public explanation will be offered and if warranted, a replacement will be appointed.

Appendix B.ii

Commissioners' Profile

We are looking for respected, independent and empathetic Commissioners, reflective of our community, to:

- convene and chair public hearings where local residents, community groups and agencies, public authorities and experts can offer testimony
- oversee research and lead preparation of one or more reports with recommendations for action
- publicly represent the People's Commission and help articulate its purpose

Hearings will provide a forum to share stories, perspectives, evidence and proposals on:

- the impact of the occupation on residents, businesses, services and workers
- the response of governments and authorities at all levels – and that of the community
- actions that could be taken to build trust, and reduce the risk and impact of future occupations and prolonged protests

Commissioners will:

- Ensure hearings are welcoming, orderly and productive
- Set a tone of civility, ensuring divergent views are heard
- Establish bounds, disallowing hateful or libelous statements
- Distill public input into an accessible report that offers recommendations for strengthening institutional and community responsiveness and resilience
- Assure their independence while seeking consensus among themselves
- Offer direction to and take guidance from the steering group and support staff

Commissioners will receive an honorarium and can expect to dedicate a day or more a week, over the course of the next year. Prospective Commissioners will be interviewed by a small team to explore interest and fit and will be confirmed by the Organizing Committee.

Commissioners can count on support from the Organizing Committee, staff and volunteers in convening and conducting the hearings, report writing and production, community liaison and media relations, and administrative services.

The public-facing work of the Commission is expected to begin in June, with hearings in late summer and autumn. Our plan is to present the final report in the first quarter of 2023.

Appendix B.iii

Commissioners' MOU Template

CONTRACT FOR SERVICES

between

[Sponsoring organization and/or Organizing Committee]

and

[Commissioners]

Background

Following the decision of the *[Sponsoring organization and/or Organizing Committee]* on *[date]* to appoint *[names]* as Commissioners for the *[Commission name and acronym]*, this agreement, dated *[date]*, sets out the responsibilities and expectations of the Commissioners and the *[Sponsoring organization and/or Organizing Committee]*.

Duration

The appointment as Commissioner commences on *[date]* and continues for a term not to exceed *[date]*.

Role

The role and responsibilities of the Commissioners is to:

- maintain independence and impartiality, including declaring and addressing any potential conflicts of interest that may arise in the course of their work
- prepare for and chair trauma-informed consultations and public hearings where local residents, community groups and agencies, public authorities and experts can offer testimony
- oversee research and preparation, and write a report with recommendations for action
- publicly present the Commission's report

Commissioners will normally hear submissions as a panel but may also convene sessions separately. Commissioners are expected to hear submissions in both official languages, with the help, where needed, of translators.

Commissioners are to function as independent commissioners but commit to meet their responsibilities to the *[Sponsoring organization and/or Organizing Committee]*. Commissioners will have autonomy to appoint advisors or advisory bodies, and to determine the process they will follow in carrying out their work.

Commissioners will collaborate and work by consensus. If necessary, a Commissioner may present a minority report. The Commissioners will, on average, devote the equivalent of one day per week to their work with the Commission, recognizing there will be weeks when they are involved for several days and other weeks when they are not.

Deliverables

The Commissioners will endeavour to report publicly on their work and findings on *[x]* occasions:

- a public statement offering an overview of progress to date and any emerging key issues and recommendations will be released *[x]* months after commencing their work;
- an interim report will be released to coincide with *[event]*; and
- a final report will be produced by *[date]*.

Security, risk and conflict

Commissioners will hear views from all segments of the community and may be subject to criticism and public attack. This concern arises as well for staff assigned to the Commission and volunteers supporting its work. One of the Commissioners and a member of the Organizing Committee will be designated to prioritize the development of a “Security and Safe Environment Protocol” applicable to the Commissioners, the Organizing Committee, staff assigned to the Commission and volunteers.

Support to the Commissioners

The work of the Commissioners is arms-length and independent of the opinions of *[Sponsoring organization]*.

One member of the Organizing Committee will be designated as the point person for ongoing communication with the Commissioners.

In aid of their role, Commissioners will receive administrative and technical support from *[Sponsoring organization]* staff. *[Sponsoring organization]* shall raise funds to hire staff dedicated to support the Commission and the work of the Commissioners.

Alternates

[Sponsoring organization], in consultation with the Organizing Committee and the Commissioners, may appoint individual(s) to serve as an Alternate Commissioner to assist the Commissioners with hearings as required.

Termination

Commissioners recognize they will be subject to public scrutiny and will conduct themselves in an ethical and respectful manner. Their appointment cannot be terminated without cause.

Should a Commissioner have to resign or step back from their responsibilities, one month’s notice will be given. In that event, *[Sponsoring organization and/or Organizing Committee]*, after consultation with the Commissioners, can appoint a replacement Commissioner.

Honorarium

The Commissioners will be offered an honorarium of \$10,000.00 each in recognition of their contribution. One half of the honorarium will be paid when hearings commence and one half when the final report is prepared.

Capacity

Commissioners are being retained by *[Sponsoring organization and/or Organizing Committee]* in the capacity of independent contractors. *[Sponsoring organization and/or Organizing Committee]* and the Commissioners acknowledge and agree that this Agreement does not create a partnership, joint venture, agency, employment, mandate, representation or delegation between them and the Commissioners shall not represent the relationship between them and *[Sponsoring organization and/or Organizing Committee]* to third parties as such.

Signed this *[n]th* day of *[month]*, *[year]*

Commissioners

Name _____

Name _____

[Sponsoring organization and/or Organizing Committee]

Name _____

Witness

Name _____

Appendix C

Safety Plan

OPC is committed to creating a welcoming environment in which local residents from a variety of backgrounds can come forward in safety and security to share their stories, express their opinions and make recommendations for action.

To respect and protect the health, well-being and privacy of those who come forward, OPC offers a range of avenues for engagement, including community consultations, written submissions, and private meetings, as well public hearings, both in-person and online.

OPC will work to provide a safe space for participants, ensuring their views will be respectfully received and reducing the risk they will be targeted or harassed, while meeting reasonable expectations of transparency and accountability.

Civility and respect

OPC reserves the right to restrict access to the hearings room and premises, and may ask any person(s) who is perceived as a threat or potentially disruptive to leave.

Images, slogans or text on clothing or elsewhere that promotes hate, violence or is likely to give offense will not be permitted in the hearings room or premises.

Signs, placards, flags and banners, other than those of the OPC or those authorized by the OPC, will not be permitted in the hearings room or premises.

Safe spaces and security

Attendees at public meetings will be asked to sign-in, providing their name and contact information. Attendees to Zoom meetings will be required to register, providing an email address.


Out of respect for those who were traumatized by and potentially triggered by convoy supporters, efforts will be made to protect those impacted by creating separate spaces where convoy supporters will be heard by the Commissioners.

OPC will arrange for volunteers with experience in monitoring public gatherings, protecting safe spaces and de-escalating tensions to be present at public hearings.

Police will not be called unless there is a potentially violent situation that cannot be managed by OPC staff and volunteers on site.

Privacy

While OPC will have and retain the name, address and contact information of all those who appear at public hearings, whether in person or online, presenters will be free to protect their identity in public, using only their first name or an alias/avatar and giving a generic description of their address. Commissioners, in asking questions of presenters, will be mindful to protect their privacy.

Only authorized recording and photo-taking will be allowed in public hearings. Members of the public will not be permitted to take photos or record images within the hearing room or premises. 

Media outlets recognized by the Parliamentary Press Gallery will be admitted to public hearings. Other media outlets may be accredited by contacting info@opc-cpo.ca. To respect and protect the privacy of people who appear before the OPC, media are asked to request permission to use names or take images that would allow presenters to be readily identified.

Counseling Support

A counselor or other person with training and experience in providing emotional support to people under stress will be present at OPC hearings. Individuals requesting support, or in apparent need of support, will be connected with this resource for reassurance and counseling.

As well, efforts will be made to provide support as needed in preparation for presentations to the OPC and follow-up as required, including a wellness-check where appropriate. Culturally appropriate counseling support will be made available through the Counseling Connect network.

COVID

All those in attendance at public hearings will be required to wear a properly fitted mask that covers their nose, mouth and chin. Those unable to wear masks will be welcome at hearings held over Zoom. Accommodations can be made in private meetings.

Masks will be made available to those without masks, and hand sanitizer will be available.

Wherever possible, efforts will be made to assure proper ventilation and allow fresh air circulation.

Security Protocols

- No obvious convoy supporters present
 - Marshals monitor the room and the entrance to the venue.
- Convoy supporters arrive at the venue
 - Marshals do not confront them immediately, but alert other marshals and tail them inside.
 - If they are holding banners or signs, tell them that these are not allowed inside the venue and ask that they leave them behind.
- Convoy supporters are present but not disruptive
 - Marshals position themselves near them and make it clear that they are being observed without confronting them directly.
- Someone attempts to film/stream or take intrusive pictures
 - Marshals remind them that recording by the public is not permitted and ask that they stop.
 - If they refuse, marshals position themselves in front of camera and ask them to leave.
- Someone takes the microphone out of turn
 - OPC staff/volunteer explains that they are not in line to speak.
- Convoy supporters are disruptive (speaking, shouting, interrupting proceedings, holding signs or banners)
 - Marshals close in on them and ask them to leave.
- Someone refuses to leave when asked
 - Marshals attempt to corral them towards the door (hands and eyes up – no sudden movements)
 - Stick together and stay close to deny them space and get them to retreat
- Someone is being argumentative with OPC volunteers about masking or other requirements
 - Marshals intervene in the discussion to shut it down and ask them to behave or leave (e.g., “If you have a problem with the rules, you’re free to leave or to complain in writing.”)
- Someone becomes violent
 - Marshals position themselves between the person and their target.
 - OPC volunteers call 911

Appendix D

Social Media Metrics (November 2022 - May 2023)

- Facebook
 - Reach: 2598
 - Page visits: 773
 - Followers: 63

- Instagram
 - Reach: 32,246
 - Profile visits: 1183
 - Followers: 276

- Twitter
 - Impressions: 777,123
 - Engagement: 3.65%
 - Link clicks: 1808
 - Retweets: 2708
 - Likes: 10,015
 - Replies: 1949

- YouTube
 - Views: 3231
 - Subscribers: 63
 - Impressions: 29,357

- Paid advertising (Facebook and Instagram) - 40\$ total
 - Reach: 5054
 - Impressions: 8679

Appendix E

Overview of Revenue and Expenses

Statement of Revenues and Expenses

June 1, 2022 to May 31, 2023

Revenues

Foundations	
Rubin Public Interest Advocacy Fund	25,000
MakeWay Foundation	12,500
Maytree Foundation	35,000
McConnel Foundation	35,000
Ottawa Community Foundation	20,000
Unions	
Public Service Alliance of Canada	10,000
NUPGE	5,000
CUPE Ontario	5,000
CUPE 503	503
UNIFOR 2025	250
Community Health and Resource Centres	
Centretown Community Health Centre	87,860
Vanier Community Resource Centre	1,500
Orleans-Cumberland Community Resource Centre	1,000
Individual Donors	10,067
Total	248,680

Expenses

Salaries and benefits	131,148
Commissioners' honoraria	35,000
Meeting expenses	13,268
Interpretation/translation	32,963
Communications	5,659
Fundraising	13,012
Program expenses	7,630
Corporate services	10,000
Total	248,680

Appendix F

Indicators and Metrics

The Organizing Committee considered various key indicators, both for planning and budgeting purposes, and with a view to securing support, including funding, and assessing results. In the absence of precedence and benchmarks, this proved challenging.

The first set of indicators related largely to deliverables and engagement.

	Target	Actual
Public hearings	10	13
Presenters	72	56
● Attendees	400	307
Community consultations	12	8
● Attendees	180	95
Written submissions	200	91
YouTube views (hearings)	1000	2077
Visits to opc-cpo.ca	12,000	19,760
Downloads of OPC reports	1000	215
Views of OPC reports		733
Media citations		75

As well, more substantive Indicators included:

- people/groups who came forward to share their story and views with OPC – 233
- community groups that partnered with OPC to host gatherings/conversations – 8
- amount of media coverage and social media interest generated
- extent to which OPC efforts were cited by decision-makers and opinion-shapers
- feedback from participants at public hearings and community consultations
- extent to which findings and recommendations were cited in public discourse
- extent to which community ties were strengthened among groups and organizations

- extent to which OPC secured the required funding