

DEWEMAAGANNAG

**A Guide for
Research with
Indigenous
Peoples and
Communities**

MY RELATIONS

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TERRITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Concordia University is located on unceded Indigenous lands. The Kanien'kehá:ka Nation is recognized as the custodians of these lands and waters. Tiohtiá:ke/Montreal is historically known as a gathering place for many First Nations. Today, it is home to a diverse population of Indigenous and other peoples. We respect the continued connections with the past, present and future in our ongoing relationships with Indigenous and other peoples within the Montreal community.

ABOUT THE OFFICE OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT (OCE)

This document is produced by the Office of Community Engagement (OCE) at Concordia University. The OCE is a service unit that assists students, staff, faculty, and community members involved or interested in community-university partnerships. We engage in community-based research, experiential learning activities and in efforts to define the best practices in community-engaged scholarship. With social justice as a core value, we prioritize groups that have been excluded from or dismissed by institutions, and support collaborations that address inequalities in innovative ways. More specifically, we apply the university's commitment to building long-term and meaningful relationships with Indigenous communities as described in the Indigenous Directions Action Plan.

This is a living document that was written to support non-Indigenous researchers at Concordia in building respectful, impactful, and ethical research collaborations with Indigenous Peoples and communities. We intend to update the text to correct any errors and to include any new information, perspectives, and practices as needed.

Learn more about the [Office of Community Engagement \(OCE\)](#)

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THE GUIDE

THE GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

In this research guide, we expand on the [Dewemaagannag My relations guide](#) (2023) to reflect on how universities and non-Indigenous researchers and students can honour relationships with Indigenous partners by respecting research principles of different Indigenous groups. Through this guide, we emphasize collaboration, partnership, and research ethics.

This guide is created to:

- Increase Concordia's capacity to establish ethical and mutually beneficial partnerships in research with Indigenous communities, collectives, organizations, and individuals;
- Support Indigenous-led research within the institution and build capacity for Indigenous community-based research;
- Promote collaborative research and guide non-Indigenous researchers towards impactful and ethical research with Indigenous communities, in line with Concordia University's [Pathways to Impact](#) initiative;
- Offer guidance to non-Indigenous researchers who prioritize the “co-generation of knowledge that is of direct use to Indigenous Peoples and our communities”, in line with the Indigenous Futures Research Centre's [mission](#);
- Encourage reflection by non-Indigenous researchers on the motivation for soliciting Indigenous communities and providing guidance on ways to move from reflection towards action.

METHODOLOGIES

We are guided by and touch upon Indigenous methodologies throughout the document. Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Māori Literature Trust, 2023) navigates Indigenous methodologies as an “approach to cultural protocols, values and behaviours as an integral part of a methodology” (McMaster University, 2023, p. 7). By engaging with Indigenous methodologies, we gain an awareness of how we, as researchers with different life

experiences, are in relation with our own and other beings' minds, bodies, and spirits (McMaster University, 2023, p. 7).

A core Indigenous methodology is relational accountability, which that non-Indigenous researchers build meaningful relationships with the communities they engage with, encouraging mutual respect and a desire to benefit the collective, rather than being extractive (Wilson, 2001).

We believe that non-Indigenous researchers engaged in Indigenous-centred research should:

- Recognize the historical and contemporary systemic barriers that exist in academic and research spaces.
- Protect the self-determination of Indigenous Peoples, the right to control and govern research activities that concern us (Indigenous Research Level of Engagement Tool, First Nations University).
- Respect the research principles of different Indigenous groups (as seen in *Dewemaagannag My Relations*, 2023).
- Acknowledge that any research involving Indigenous Peoples and communities should ideally be done by Indigenous researchers, using Indigenous research methodologies and ways of knowing (Indigenous Research Level of Engagement Tool, First Nations University).
- Address priorities defined by Indigenous Peoples, centre Indigenous worldviews and expertise, and be done in accordance with Indigenous research principles.
- Promote collaboration, co-learning, capacity building, and empowerment of Indigenous Peoples.
- Use a strength-based approach: this conceptual framework capitalizes on Indigenous resilience and wellness, whilst remembering the historical and social realities of Indigenous individuals and communities. An example of this is “analyzing, not the deficits, but the strengths of both individuals and communities... [and aims to] profile potential solutions, positive programs and initiatives taking place in communities. It would seek out potential paths forward. Ultimately, such research will enhance the quality and level of data used for advocacy” (First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2020, p. 4).



WHY DO WE NEED THIS GUIDE?

As part of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015), Canadian post-secondary institutions are required to decolonize their research. As a response to this, Concordia University created the [Indigenous Directions Action Plan](#) (2019) in collaboration with special Indigenous advisors from the Indigenous Directions Leadership Group (IDLG). This plan outlines actions that researchers can take to integrate Indigenous knowledge and reconciliation principles into their work, whilst supporting Indigenous-led and centred research (Indigenous Directions Action Plan, 2019, p.46).

Although the Action Plan is a step towards decolonization, academic research concerning Indigenous Peoples is still largely carried out by non-Indigenous researchers. This creates a power imbalance as non-Indigenous researchers can exploit the resources and knowledge of Indigenous Peoples, while simultaneously removing the agency of Indigenous Peoples to discover and distribute this knowledge for the benefit of their own communities and groups.

With this research guide, our main goal is to provide academic institutions and researchers with inspiring practices, informed by Indigenous expertise, to counteract the gaps and challenges of institutional research and ethics. We also aim to facilitate information finding for those engaging with Indigenous research.

WHO IS IT FOR?

We recognise that most of our readers are non-Indigenous researchers who want to understand how to collaborate respectfully with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit groups and individuals in a research capacity.



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DEFINITIONS

DEFINITIONS

As we move through this guide on Indigenous-centred research, it is important to provide definitions of key terms we will be using. This will help in establishing a mutual understanding between our readers and the Indigenous Peoples and communities with which they work in a research capacity.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

In Canada, Indigenous Peoples refers to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit who are the original inhabitants of the land. Each group has distinct histories, languages, and cultural and spiritual beliefs and practices. In this guide, we recognize colonization as an ongoing process that affects the ability of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples to engage in respectful and equitable relationships and the dismissal of Indigenous histories and knowledge by and within institutions, including universities.

INDIGENOUS RESEARCH

Research led by Indigenous Peoples, within and outside of the institution, often on and with the land. It is conducted by Indigenous Peoples, for Indigenous Peoples. This is not the same as Indigenous-centred research, which may be co-led by non-Indigenous researchers. Research led by non-Indigenous researchers without consultation or collaboration with Indigenous community is not Indigenous research or Indigenous centred.

RIGHTSHOLDER

“Indigenous peoples are rights holders, not stakeholders; and Indigenous communities have the right to say “no” to research that does not benefit the community or challenge colonial ideals” (Bull, 2019, p. 11).

COMMUNITY

In this guide, the term *community* refers to individuals, groups, or a population. It may take various forms, including a geographic community, a non-profit organization, a grassroots initiative, or any collective of people connected by a shared experience, concern, identity, or circumstance related to the issue under investigation.

Non-Indigenous researchers sometimes use the word “community” freely in their work, without specifying which type of community they refer to (Bull, 2019, as cited in Bergier, 2022, p. 42). This creates an issue when it comes to the accurate representation of Indigenous Peoples within research, as it neglects their distinctiveness.

We believe the best practices for defining community include:

- Using the name of a specific Indigenous Nation or Inuit group, and in their original languages, when applicable (i.e. the Wendat Nation of Wendake or the Eeyou Nation).
- Acknowledging that Indigenous communities and groups are non-monolithic. For example, non-Indigenous researchers should consider the layered experiences of Indigenous Peoples with intersectional identities, such as the urban queer Indigenous community. Whilst each member of this group is queer, they may come from different Indigenous groups (First Nations, Métis, and/or Inuit).
- Acknowledging the different statuses Indigenous Peoples may have, such as First Nations living off-reserve, urban Inuit, non-status First Nations, etc.

“There is a narrative around urban Indigenous communities not being real communities. But this isn’t true because we are in the community, we have created it, and we are active in the community. Being in community is being together with a common purpose.”

– Dr. Mel Lefebvre

CANADIAN TRI-COUNCIL & INDIGENOUS RESEARCH

Canada's Tri-Council is made up of the three main funding bodies (Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) (Government of Canada, 2025). These funding bodies have created “The Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans” (Government of Canada, 2022), which lays out the ethical approaches that all human-based research in Canada must follow.

In the Tri-Council Policy Statement (Government of Canada, 2022) outlines how to approach research involving First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples. Here, they define “Indigenous research” as the following:

- Where recruitment criteria include Indigenous identity as a factor for the entire study or a subgroup in the study.
- If the research is about a community’s cultural heritage, traditional knowledge or unique characteristics.
- If Indigenous identity or membership in an Indigenous community is used as a variable for the purpose of analysis of the research data.

- Where interpretation of research results will refer to Indigenous communities, peoples, languages, history or culture.
- If the research is conducted on and is about Indigenous lands, e.g., studying traditional place-based knowledge, fishing ecology, or mining practices.

The Tri-Council has acknowledged that research involving Indigenous Peoples in Canada has typically been defined and practiced by non-Indigenous researchers. As such, the council requires evidence of community engagement in any instance of Indigenous research, ranging from a consultation with an Indigenous delegation, through to a specialized research ethics board. They also specify the importance of funding programs created for the development of Indigenous research (Government of Canada, 2022).

While the TCPS’s Chapter 9 provides a general framework for how research that engages with First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities and groups should be conducted, it is not intended to replace ethical guidelines offered by Indigenous Peoples and their governments.



CONCORDIA'S DEFINITION OF INDIGENOUS-CENTERED RESEARCH

At Concordia, we go beyond the Tri-Council's definition. To us, Indigenous-centered research is done by or with Indigenous Peoples, and intentionally and meaningfully centres First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples. It is characterized by the following:

- **Reflection & positionality:** Before any action is taken, non-Indigenous researchers must ask themselves whether their research is needed, was it asked for by Indigenous community members, what is their motivation, and if there are potentially harmful power dynamics at play between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples involved.
- **Pre-engagement knowledge:** Prior to the research design, non-Indigenous researchers should develop a holistic understanding of the community or group that could be involved in the research project. This includes understanding the community or group's history, concerns, tribal council affiliations and priorities (Indigenous Corporate Training, 2018). Non-Indigenous researchers should also think about how this knowledge translates to their written work, such as a research proposal or thesis statement (including how Indigenous names and concepts are spelt and capitalized) (Younging, 2025).
- **Community consent:** Non-Indigenous researchers need to meet with the community at the centre of the research to explain the nature of the proposed research project and obtain consent to conduct the research. Without consent, the research should not move ahead.
- **Needs based:** Indigenous-centred research must be led by or in direct partnership with Indigenous communities and groups to ensure this research is relevant and beneficial to the community or group involved in the research (FNIGC, 2020, p. 23).
- **Positive community impact:** Indigenous organizations have stated that research should provide benefits to communities and groups, contribute to capacity building, and protect research participants (INSPQ, 2023, p. 14).
- **Centring Indigenous knowledges and methodologies:** With permission from community members, implementing Indigenous research methodologies based on Indigenous knowledges (Kovach, 2019) can help to deconstruct Western research approaches. This can also build trust between the non-Indigenous researchers and community partners.
- **Relational accountability:** All researchers have a responsibility towards all of their relations – including community members, non-human beings, the land, and future generations. Researchers should consider the relationship they have to community partners and be accountable to them as they provide their knowledge and experiences for the purpose of research. Relational accountability also extends to anticipating and mitigating the potential disruption of a researcher's presence, equipment, and activities on community members, fauna, and the environment. (Wilson, 2001, p. 177).
- **Data governance:** Non-Indigenous researchers should ensure that Indigenous participants and community members have ownership over the application and use of any data generated from research (Carroll et al., 2020, p. 3). Ownership of data also implies that the research results are returned to the community in an accessible language and format. This should be discussed in the design phase of the research and in consultation with Indigenous community members.



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A BRIEF HISTORY OF WESTERN RESEARCH AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES



A BRIEF HISTORY OF WESTERN RESEARCH AND INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

In the early 20th century, research studying Indigenous Peoples served the best interests of the settler-colonial state (Lawford & Coburn, 2019, p. 1), causing harm, dispossession, and exploitation of Indigenous Peoples in Canada (Kardashevskaya et al., 2024, p. 4). Anthropology contributed to this patronizing approach to Indigenous cultures, assuming it was “essential to record information about the Indigenous Peoples” as they would either die out, or their original customs would be permanently altered upon their contact with settlers (Miller, 2022).

Research in various disciplines employed the “parachute or helicopter” approach where settler researchers extracted the data they needed and promptly deserted communities without reciprocity, collaboration, or accountability (Tobias et al., 2013, p.131 as cited in Kardashevskaya et al., 2024, p. 4). This bolstered colonization by misrepresenting or erasing Indigenous worldviews and perpetuating harmful stereotypes (Gaudry, 2011; Kovach, 2021; LaRocque, 2010; Smith, 2021; Wilson, 2008 as cited in Kardashevskaya et al., 2024, p. 4)

In addition, Indigenous Peoples have faced violence at the behest of the Canadian “education” system run by the

Church and the state. From 1876 to 1920, First Nations individuals were removed from their band lists if they obtained a university degree (Assembly of First Nations, 2020, p. 1). This meant that individuals could not obtain post-secondary education if they wanted to keep their “Indian” status, reminding First Nations communities that the validity of their Indigenous identity was controlled by the state.

The Indian Act also made attendance at Indian Residential Schools mandatory for Treaty-status children between the ages of 7 and 15 (The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, 2026). Despite research showing that the schools were ineffective by the mid-20th century, the federal government increased the number of Residential Schools in the north for Inuit children (Fraser, 2020). Métis children were also forcibly admitted, which has often been omitted from historical accounts of the schools (Legacy of Hope Foundation, 2014, pp. 1-3). As a further tool of control, day schools continued to operate on reserves until 2000, as an extension of the Residential School System (Pind, 2026).



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CONTEMPORARY INDIGENOUS RESEARCH

CONTEMPORARY INDIGENOUS RESEARCH

WHAT IS INDIGENOUS RESEARCH?

Indigenous scholars created spaces to question these exclusive and damaging educational practices in the second half of the 20th century. In 1970, Loyola College (which eventually became Concordia University's Loyola Campus) introduced the "Native Peoples of Canada" course. This embedded critical social and civil rights discourse on the campus, making the newly formed Concordia "a site of activism, decolonial thought and pedagogical experimentation" (Gaudet, 2021, pp. 22-23). By the end of the 1970s, approximately 4,100 "Registered Indians" were attending colleges or universities in Canada (Université du Québec, 2003, p. 22).

The presence of Indigenous scholars within academia made space for the consideration and implementation of Indigenous worldviews, knowledges, and methodologies. Authors like Linda Tuhiwai Smith in her seminal book *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999) challenges the Western settler-colonial ideals of Indigenous-centred research, which continues to be harmful. As such, Marie Battiste (1998) found that research could be decolonized when Indigenous knowledges and languages were preserved and incorporated into education systems (Battiste, 1998). Indigenous scholars also found that research and education involving Indigenous Peoples should be based on the 4R's: respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility in place of earlier extractive research (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991).

"In 2004, the *Journal of Aboriginal Health* introduced health researchers working with Indigenous communities in Canada to something called OCAP®" (Schnarch, 2004 as cited in Anderson & Cidro, 2019, p. 222) - Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession of Indigenous data and information. The same year, Marlene Brant Castellano published a paper on the "Ethics of Aboriginal Research", documenting self-determining and ethically conscious research practices (Brant Castellano, 2004 as cited in Anderson & Cidro, 2019, p. 223).

Overall, a growing body of literature "positioned a new ethic in conducting research with Indigenous communities, an ethic that was invested in and supportive of the self-determination of Indigenous Peoples" (Ball & Janyst, 2008; Bull, 2008; Ermine, 2007; Singh & Major, 2017 as cited Anderson & Cidro, 2019, p. 223).

International recognition of Indigenous Peoples' rights with the adoption of The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2007 further asserted "the right to self-determination" and "free, prior, and informed consent" which applies to the sphere of research. In Canada, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2008) received \$72 million in federal funding to research the experiences of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples in Residential Schools (National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, 2026). This led to 94 policy recommendations ("Calls to Action") - one of which asked the federal government to establish a national research program with multi-year funding to advance the understanding of reconciliation (Government of Canada, 2026).

More recently, Indigenous data governance principles like the [CARE](#) Principles for Indigenous Data Governance emerged as a way to uphold Indigenous sovereignty regarding ownership and authority over community data, including knowledge systems, customs, or territories (Kukutai and Taylor, 2016 as cited in International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, 2026).

Increasingly, Nations and groups are creating structures to manage and lead research activities, focused on self-determination, community-based research practices, capacity building (Anderson & Cidro, 2019) in the research space, and consulting community members to ensure that research is in line with community needs and is conducted respectfully. For example, the Cree Nation Research Institute Project is a first step towards "reappropriating the management of research and developing research strategies of their own through community-based initiatives or codeveloped research projects."

In contrast to these promising changes, recent years have shown cases of Indigenous impersonation at universities in Canada – by both professors (Chen 2026) and students (Taylor, 2024) to obtain employment, grant, or scholarship funding. Indigenous and academic community members (Gabel et al, 2024 and Pedri-Spade, 2025) have called out universities to tackle this issue. As an attempt to rectify this, Canadian universities are now implementing ancestry-verification policies where individuals who want to apply for opportunities reserved for Indigenous Peoples must show proof of membership or belonging to an Indigenous community (Gabel et al, 2024).

At Concordia, we have made significant strides related to Indigenous-centred research practices: We provide information on Indigenous data governance principles ([Concordia University, 2026a](#)) and we have a verification policy for individuals who are eligible for Indigenous scholarship and grant opportunities ([Concordia University, 2026b](#)). We also champion Indigenous community-based research practices through the Community-engaged learning fund for Indigenous students (CELFIS) ([Concordia University, 2026c](#)).

Yet, to move past institutional recommendations, we must consult with Indigenous Peoples and centre Indigenous perspectives to achieve best practices in Indigenous-centred research. We will focus on this throughout this research guide.



INDIGENOUS RESEARCH PRINCIPLES

AN OVERVIEW

Indigenous research principles are specific criteria based on how Indigenous Peoples relate within communities and towards other Nations. These principles guide Indigenous-centred research towards relational accountability.

The 4 Rs of Indigenous Research were identified by Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) as Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, and Responsibility. These principles highlight the differences between Indigenous realities and institutional perspectives in education while promoting transformations in higher education to create more welcoming learning environments for Indigenous students that are based on their own relational ways of being, thus increasing Indigenous engagement.

Since then, Indigenous organizations and communities have explored and published their own principles to raise awareness of the ethical issues related to research activities and to restore balance from historically extractive research led by non-Indigenous academics (Institut national de santé publique du Québec, 2023, p. 5), thus encouraging respectful collaborative practices between Indigenous groups and external researchers (Institut national de santé publique du Québec, 2023, p. 13).

An analysis of research documents published by Indigenous organizations demonstrates that eight main principles consistently emerge (Institut national de santé publique du Québec, 2023, p. 13). These are:

Figure 1.

Indigenous Research Principles



Note. [Institut national de santé publique du Québec](#), p. 14

“I think we really gave a lot of consideration to how we were going to do this project in a respectful way. We would really centre what Kahnawà:ke Survival School wanted for their students – and that’s how we’ve run it all along. They’ve decided what form it takes, what classes we work with, and what grades we are working with. They determine the timelines.”

– Kristy Snell, Associate Professor

Depending on the Nation or group, principles are often titled differently and are sometimes presented in the form of values or statements (Institut National de Sante Public du Québec, 2023, p. 13). The Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, for example (an organization that protects and advances Inuit rights in Canada), presents its research principles as practices, which adopt priority areas of action (ITK & NRI, 2006). Every Indigenous Nation or group will have a different approach depending on their priorities and worldviews.

Similarly, urban Indigenous communities are made up of many Nations and have varying needs. In Quebec, for example, the *Observatoire des réalités autochtones urbaines* was created in 2022 to collect and disseminate data on urban Indigeneity, conducted by, with and for Indigenous Peoples (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2025). This project embodies the Indigenous research principle of self-determination, where Native Friendship Centers carry their own research projects in collaboration with academics (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2025).

INDIGENOUS RESEARCH PRINCIPLES AT CONCORDIA

Concordia follows seven Indigenous research principles, outlined in Dewamaagannag/My Relations ([Sioui & Shawayahamish, 2023, p. 3](#)). These are:

- Listening.
- Respecting Indigenous expertise.
- Relating in reciprocity.
- Being accountable.
- Compensating.
- Obtaining consent.
- Positionality.

For a greater understanding of these principles, readers are invited to consult the [Dewamaagannag/My Relations Guide](#).



5

PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

An essential part of Indigenous-centred research is forming partnerships with the communities at the centre of the research. This may involve Indigenous organizations, community groups, government agencies, individuals like Elders and knowledge holders, and/or other stakeholders, giving non-Indigenous researchers access to resources, expertise, and networks that will undoubtedly impact their work (Research Impact Canada, 2026). Ethical research partnerships recognize Indigenous experience as expertise, broadening and enhancing the research project. Non-Indigenous researchers need to prioritize community engagement and knowledge co-construction to establish reciprocal and mutually beneficial research relationships.

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

“Relationship is grounded in complex layers of Indigenous identity and relationship with land, nature, ancestors, community, and future generations. It is founded on kinship and accountability, built on mutual honesty and trust, and shapes Indigenous realities” (Cajete 2000; Kovach 2008; Wilson 2001, 2008; Kimmerer, 2013 as cited in Tsosie et al., 2002, p. 3).

The first step to forming a research partnership is relationship building. Non-Indigenous researchers need to learn about the interests, goals, and concerns of the Indigenous community to confirm the project’s relevance before initiating the research (First Nations University, n.d.). Researchers “must be honest and clearly identify the purpose and motivation behind the research. Researchers are responsible and accountable to all relationships” (Brayboy & Maughan, 2009; Cajete, 2000; Kovach, 2008 as cited in Tsosie et al., 2002, p. 3).

Building relationships and trust with Indigenous communities does not happen overnight. Non-Indigenous researchers should not interpret an initial contact, expression of interest, or application submission as automatic acceptance to participate in a project. Meaningful engagement is grounded in reciprocity and trust, which often require significant time, ongoing commitment, and learning community protocols. Indigenous protocols refer to how individuals interact with Indigenous Peoples whilst respecting and upholding traditional ways of being ([University of Windsor, 2026](#)). “They range from hard rules and laws to softer customs such as good manners (...) As the primary guardians and interpreters of their cultures, most Indigenous communities have well-established Protocols (...). However, many communities have had their Protocol administration disrupted by aggressive assimilation, and they are slowly recovering those ways of doing and being” (CARFAC, 2021, p. 7).

Protocols are learned through relationships, they are part of community engagement, and complementary to community research ethics that set out guidelines for how research should be conducted. As a non-Indigenous researcher, “Following protocols is a significant sign of respect and awareness. It shows that you are taking the time to learn about Indigenous cultures and are challenging the often-unconscious bias that everyone should interact in the way that mainstream settler culture dictates” (Antoine, Mason, Mason, Palahicky & Rodriguez de France, 2018, p. 29).

In practice, establishing these relationships may take weeks, months, or even years, depending on the community, context, and history of engagement. This reality should not be viewed as a barrier to research, but rather as an essential component of ethical, effective, and respectful research practice. Researchers are encouraged to incorporate sufficient time and resources from the outset for project planning, timelines, funding proposals, and expectations. It is highly recommended to build a research relationship before applying for ethics. For example, Queen’s University suggests a “pre-review model” which requires consultation with an Indigenous community to align to its needs prior to the development of a research proposal and ethics review (Bergier, 2022, p. 10).



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Within a university research context, community engagement is required for any form of research that is likely to affect the welfare of an Indigenous community or communities who participate in research (Government of Canada, 2022). The Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS) defines it as “an interaction between a researcher (or a research team) and the Indigenous community relevant to the research project” (Government of Canada, 2022).

According to the TCPS, to carry out community engagement effectively, researchers are required to invest time in understanding the perspectives and priorities of the community (and whether this is compatible with the objectives of the research) and to have consultations with the relevant community to determine the nature and extent of community engagement.

Researchers inform their university's Research Ethics Board (REB) "how they have engaged, or intend to engage, the relevant community" (Government of Canada, 2022) by providing written documentation of approval from the community concerned. The REB determines the nature and extent of community

engagement and may waive the requirement of a community engagement plan if (1) the research participants are not identifiable as part of a particular community, or (2) when the welfare of the relevant community is not likely to be affected by the research project (Toronto Metropolitan University, p. 6).

Even if a project involving Indigenous Peoples does not require a community engagement plan, individual consent from community members is still required (Toronto Metropolitan University, p. 6).

When considering secondary data, a best practice is to collaborate with “Indigenous partner(s) if the findings are anticipated to impact Indigenous communities” (Bergier, 2022, p. 22) even when data is publicly available. Research should be “preceded by consultations with specific communities, experts in the field and Indigenous advisory bodies established in different institutions that hold Indigenous People's data (e.g., museums, archives, health institutions, universities)” (Bergier, 2022, p. 22) in recognition that Indigenous data and Knowledges belong to Indigenous Peoples. Moreover, it is possible that secondary data needs updating or was collected without consultation. In all cases, the best source is the community itself.

INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES ON COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Beyond the definition and requirements of the TCPS 2, Indigenous perspectives of community engagement centre around respectful relationships and reciprocity, the process for which includes “both research review (akin to the REB process) and community consent (akin to individual informed consent to research)” (Brunger & Wall, 2016, p. 1866). As mentioned, timelines and expectations need to be flexible as relationship building takes time and commitment.

“Relationships built prior to and throughout the research process are foundational to conducting research in a good way, meaning the research respects and recognizes Indigenous inherent sovereignty; is culturally centered; relational; participatory; asset based; anti-racist; decolonizing; trauma-informed; survivor-centered; and engages free, prior, and informed, consent and Indigenous methodologies” (Gordon, H.S.J., Around Him, D., 2025).

While the TCPS 2 establishes important baseline requirements, it can result in only minimal community engagement by non-Indigenous researchers. We recommend a more robust approach that situates community engagement within the framework of Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination, including meaningful involvement in research governance, decision-making, and knowledge stewardship.

Communities can choose a variety of engagement levels: from simply acknowledging research and registering no objection to it taking place to an active participation and collaboration; with shared leadership of the research

project (Government of Canada, 2022). Brunger & Wall (2016) point out that “saying “no” may look like overt resistance to unethical research (and in some cases it is); however, it may be a form of resisting in a context of research fatigue where the researcher burden on a community is overwhelming” (p. 1870).

KNOWLEDGE CO-CONSTRUCTION

Knowledge co-construction in research takes root in the rights of Indigenous Peoples to make decisions and require clear consent. This is now enshrined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP, 2007). “We cannot take the colonial system as a starting point and simply “integrate” representatives of the other system or bring them in to merely “participate.” We must “co-construct” legal and political norms as well as the production of knowledge. The populations concerned (or individuals from those communities) must—at the very least—share in the governance of the projects that affect them” (translated from Université de Montréal, 2025, p. 8).

Co-producing knowledge can bring together the best of Indigenous and Western worlds. Broadly, this approach respects Indigenous knowledge systems, shares power and purpose, produces more relevant, robust research, creates a reciprocal flow of knowledge, and supports Indigenous self-determination and data sovereignty (Wilson, 2008). Non-Indigenous researchers will find themselves challenging assumptions, developing more culturally responsive methods and methodologies, and creating lasting, collaborative relationships.

“When I reached out to the community, they were excited about the idea of a repatriation, but they told me to slow down – they believe the museum to be a colonial space and were hesitant to explore [a research collaboration]. Research has got to go in their [the community’s] direction.”

– Wade Paul

“With Land as Our Teacher, we brought a collection of researchers, students, and professors together to create different land-based activities for youth. One of the challenges we had was to respect the agency of the youth, so we encouraged them to form a youth advisory group.

Everything would go through that youth advisory. This made sure we were responding to and taking care of them, so that the entire process had accountability – both for the folks who were partaking and for the folks who were organizing. Part of this was also navigating the reality of us being from so many different Nations.”

– Dr. Mel Lefebvre

STRATEGIES FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Researchers conducting research that will directly or indirectly impact First Nations, Inuit or Métis should genuinely interpret and utilize community engagement principles. "The fundamental premise of community-engaged research is that community stakeholders have critical, useful and intimate understandings of the concerns, values, assets and activities in their communities" (Pasick, 2010, p. 4). The following are ideas towards meaningful community engagement.

PARTNER WITH AN INDIGENOUS RESEARCH CO-APPLICANT

One way to engaging community members ethically is to collaborate as co-applicants in a research grant. In this scenario, the Indigenous partner is eligible for research funding, which is explicitly reserved for the research project. In the current funding landscape, however, if an Indigenous partner is a “co-applicant” and accepts research funding, individual remuneration for their work and individual expertise is not allowed. This can create an equity issue as the Indigenous co-applicant is expected to contribute to the research without compensation.

Conversely, if the Indigenous partner is a “collaborator” on the research project, they are eligible for remuneration, but not research funding. Indigenous partners are compensated for their individual expertise but are unable to use research funding to advance their project, relying solely on the main applicant (who may not be Indigenous) to use their funding for Indigenous-centred research.

FORM A RESEARCH ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Researchers can foster Indigenous community engagement through the creation of an Indigenous advisory committee. This committee enables First Nations, Inuit or Métis individuals to advise researchers on their study, giving first-hand insight into how it may affect Indigenous communities ([Government of Canada, 2025](#)) and best practices. This ensures that the rights, interests and perspectives of Indigenous Peoples are acknowledged and asserted. Members of the advisory committee should be compensated, and this strategy should be developed with respect to Indigenous research principles such as consent, recognition of expertise, reciprocity, and accountability.

ASSESS THE LEVEL OF ENGAGEMENT

Community engagement can be viewed as a spectrum where the degree of community involvement varies. At the simplest level, researchers inform the community of the project and ask for their feedback. The project is designed by the researcher, and community members assist with discrete steps like participant recruitment (Pasick, 2010, p. 3). A deeper level of engagement

facilitates the active participation of community members in all aspects of research including defining the study question, the funding proposal, analysing results, and disseminating findings. An even better practice sees Indigenous communities owning and leading research projects with support from researchers.

Researchers can review the spectrum of engagement below and situate themselves:

Figure 2.

Indigenous Research Level of Engagement Tool

SCPOR Saskatchewan Centre for Patient-Oriented Research		IRLET Indigenous Research Level of Engagement Tool				
Criteria	Score	1	2	3	4	5
Partnership with Indigenous Stakeholder(s)	Score	1	2	3	4	5
	Description	Indigenous stakeholders are informed by research teams about projects but are not invited to engage in any phase of the project. The project appears to offer no lasting or tangible benefit to the Indigenous stakeholders. The budget does not meet the needs of the Indigenous stakeholders.	Indigenous stakeholders are named as team members who are consulted throughout the project in regard to research priorities and outcomes. The project offers limited, short-term benefits to the Indigenous stakeholders. It is unclear whether the budget meets the stakeholder's needs and/or financial supports are not identified.	Indigenous stakeholders are named as team members who are involved throughout the project in identifying research priorities and outcomes. The project offers tangible benefits to the stakeholders, although limited and short-term. The budget meets some of the stakeholder's needs and some financial supports are identified.	Indigenous stakeholders are active partners who collaborate with team members throughout the research project. The project offers a numerous and long-lasting tangible benefits to the stakeholders. The budget meets many of the stakeholder's needs and financial supports are identified. The project proposal is attainable and accountable.	Indigenous stakeholders are equal partners with decision-making autonomy over attributes of the research project (e.g. use of Indigenous research methodologies). The project offers meaningful and lasting benefits to the stakeholders. This includes long-term training and capacity building, policy change. The budget meets all of the stakeholder's needs and numerous financial supports are identified. The project proposal is attainable and accountable.

IRLET helps researchers evaluate the level of Indigenous engagement and leadership in research projects.

Note. From [Indigenous Research Level of Engagement Tool](#) course, n.d. IPHRC/SCPOR and First Nations University of Canada

“An ideal score in this category would have Indigenous stakeholders who are equal partners with decision making autonomy over attributes of the research project. Also, the project would offer meaningful and lasting benefits to the stakeholders. This includes long-term training and capacity building, and policy change. Furthermore, the budget needs to meet all of the stakeholder's needs and numerous financial supports are identified” (First Nation University, n.d.).

ADAPT THE MODES OF ENGAGEMENT

After consultation with the community, researchers should adapt their modes of engagement to reflect the community's desired level of engagement. In a lower level of community engagement, researchers consult through surveys, focus groups, and interviews, adapting the

research to the local context. In “community driven and owned” research (Tamarack Institute, 2020), researchers invest time and resources to increase community capacity by offering training, mentoring, and coaching, and they use participatory research methods such as action research.

Figure 3.

Tamarack Institute's Spectrum of Community-led Approaches

	Community Owned	Community Driven	Community Shaped	Community Informed
	Local visions for change are defined and implemented by the community, who are in control of all resources, parameters and decisions.	Local visions for change are created in partnership with community members and organizations, who share resources and collaborate to set parameters and make decisions.	Local visions for change are defined by the community within a set of parameters that provided by an organization to achieve shared goals.	Visions for change are adapted to suit the local context through community consultation.

A continuum showing how communities can move from consultation to leadership and full ownership of initiatives.

Methods of engagement	Community Owned	Community Driven	Community Shaped	Community Informed
	- Relationship building - Working groups/ action teams - Recruiting - Training	- Community members hired to lead initiatives - Leadership comprised of community members - Relationship building - Learning about the local context through data and asset mapping - Capacity building – training, coaching, mentoring - Participatory engagement, action planning, and evaluation - Inclusive, dialogue-oriented approaches - Working groups/action teams - Training	- Representative community members recruited - Learning together ensures all participants are well informed - Sharing perspectives – small group discussions, presentations + discussion, storytelling - Aligning on a shared vision or goal – workshopping, visioning - Building ideas – ideation, discussion, ranking, voting - Deciding on solutions – workshopping, deliberation, scenario testing, ranking, - Action planning - Training	- Focus groups, kitchen table talks, online forums - Interviews - Surveys, polls, voting, comment boxes - Mass communications – emails, newsletters, social media

A continuum showing methods to engage community in research.

Note. [Tamarack Institute](https://www.tamarackinstitute.org/) is a Canadian registered charity dedicated to ending poverty. 2020.

DEVELOP A RESEARCH AGREEMENT

A research agreement “serves as a primary means of clarifying and confirming mutual expectations, and where appropriate, commitments between researchers and communities” (TCPS 2, 2014, p. 209 In TMU, p. 7). “The exact content of a research agreement will vary based on the nature of the research project as well as the values and priorities of the community that the researcher or research team plans to engage with” (TMU, p. 7).

“Indigenous research guidelines in Canada exhibit a move toward embracing ‘research agreements’, including ‘data sharing agreements’” (Morisano, Robinson, Rush & Linklater, 2024, p. 6). In fact, requirements for research agreements vary from one university to the next. At Concordia University, research agreements are not mandatory for research with Indigenous Peoples. In comparison, Toronto Metropolitan University requires for all research involving Indigenous Peoples, where a community has formally engaged with a researcher or research team, to include a research agreement where the terms of research and its expectations are set out – prior to participants being recruited (TMU, p. 7). In cases where the Indigenous partner requests a research agreement, it should be completed in collaboration with the researcher's institution.

The agreement could change the scope and methods of research in line with an Indigenous group or community's recommendations. Researchers should keep communication open with their Indigenous community partners (Brunger & Wall, 2016, p. 1866), so that both parties are updated on changes in the research, and contingency and safeguarding plans. This creates a framework that is built on clear and effective communication plans, ethical data collection and use, and a knowledge translation plan that will be beneficial for all parties involved in research (First Nations University, n.d.). Research agreements are an effective way to ensure that Indigenous self-determination is honoured, as Indigenous Knowledges are put into practice in the research design (Indigenous Research Level of Engagement Tool, First Nations University, n.d.).

Consult an example of an Indigenous research agreement by Memorial University [here](#).

Researchers at Concordia University can consult the [Contract Research Handbook](#) for general information about research agreements and contact the Office of Research – [Partnership, Intellectual Property and Security team](#) for assistance about research agreements with Indigenous partners.



CREATE A COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PLAN

In Canada, some major research grants, such as the Canada Excellence Research Grant (CERC), require researchers to establish a clear community engagement strategy whereas smaller grants might not. A community engagement plan is a strategy developed with Indigenous partners that outlines how Indigenous communities and groups will be collaborated and consulted with, before, during and after research takes place (National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, 2023, pp. 2-3). This plan must be appropriate regarding the characteristics of the community and the nature of research, in line with guidance from the TCPS (Toronto Metropolitan University, n.d., p. 6).

Some universities are moving towards making community engagement plans mandatory when doing research with Indigenous Peoples and communities. For example, Nipissing University's "Indigenous Community Engagement Plan (ICEP) Review Committee" accompanies researchers in demonstrating evidence of formal community consent and intellectual property agreement (when community wishes) (Nipissing University).

HIRE COMMUNITY COLLABORATORS

Indigenous community members can help establish the research questions, methods, and methodologies. They can assume a leadership role in collecting and analysing the data and, deciding how and with whom the research will be shared. A higher level of community engagement calls for community expertise and ways of knowing (e.g., lived experience, Traditional Ecological Knowledge, Indigenous knowledges) contributing to knowledge generation and analysis.

Recommended practices for knowledge dissemination and authorship should be discussed with Indigenous partners. "The vast majority of publications done in partnership with Indigenous groups do not have any Indigenous authors on them, and when they do, they are rarely (never?) first author" (Liboiron and Cotter, 2023 as cited in Civic Laboratory for Environmental Action Research, 2026).

Another suggestion is to co-write a "community-involvement statement" outlining how Indigenous community members were involved throughout the research process. This includes the benefits of the research to the community, how consent was provided (for both the community body and individuals), and how the results will be returned to the community.

COMMON CHALLENGES AND POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

LIMITED COMMUNITY CAPACITY

Assuming that communities possess the necessary resources, capacity, and time to effectively engage with and respond to researchers is a common challenge. Many communities and groups are underfunded and under-resourced, often to the point where they struggle to meet the basic needs and priorities of their members. In this context, expecting communities to dedicate significant time and capacity to supporting research can create a substantial power imbalance between researchers and communities. This imbalance may increase the risk of extractive research practices, where communities bear the burden of participation without receiving meaningful benefits, and can ultimately contribute to harmful or inequitable research relationships.

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

Universities can also establish institution-specific frameworks and policies to guide how community engagement is done with Indigenous Peoples. For example, Memorial University created a policy on Research Involving Indigenous groups which builds upon the Tri-Council's Chapter 9 and the policy on Ethics of Research Involving Human Participants. The purpose is to ensure that researchers maintain an appropriate level of engagement with Indigenous Peoples starting at the research development phase and throughout the life cycle of a project (Memorial University, 2025). Memorial researchers are required to demonstrate evidence of Indigenous community engagement. Institutions can also establish an Indigenous Research Advisory Council to oversee policy implementation and provide guidance on research matters.

STRUCTURAL CONSTRAINTS

The development of reciprocal and mutually beneficial partnerships between universities and communities is often constrained by structures and processes that exist in Western institutions. For example, funding structures are predominantly managed by universities (Shragge et al., 2006; Sylvestre et al., 2018 as cited in Université de Montréal, 2025, p. 8), not by Indigenous entities. In addition, only a few funding opportunities allow non-academics to apply for funding as principal investigators. Currently in Canada, there are 25 Indigenous non-profit organizations who are eligible to administer SSHRC funds such as Partnership Development Grant, Partnership Grant and/or Connection Grant (Government of Canada, 2026).

Therefore, the inclusion of an Indigenous community as an equal research partner with shared power is dependent on the researcher's leadership and willingness to challenge the institution's research policies and rules (Lachapelle et Puana, 2012 as cited in Université de Montréal, 2025, p. 9) including the "overbearing position taken by science when it claims to validate Indigenous traditional knowledge or speaks on behalf of the people concerned, thereby dispossessing them of their voice and agency" (Asselin and Basile, 2012 as cited in Université de Montréal, 2025, p. 9).

RESEARCH FACILITATORS AND SEED FUNDING

Dalhousie University offers an inspiring example of seed funding to researchers and Indigenous organizations or communities to develop research collaborations. An Indigenous research facilitator can also help with developing research partnerships. Indigenous research facilitator supports researchers, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, who want to work with Indigenous communities, providing direction at the early stages of a research project.

DECISION AUTHORITY

The interpretation and specific application of community engagement and knowledge co-construction remain complex (Bull et al, 2019, p. 25). One challenge is establishing who makes up "community" and who has authority to decide.

DECISION AUTHORITY GUIDELINES

Memorial University established guidelines to navigate the complex question: "Unless the applicable Indigenous group had indicated a different protocol of engagement, the authority to decide on research matters will be as follows in descending order:

- a. An Indigenous Research Review process or REB designated by the Indigenous Group(s).
- b. Smaller groups/communities within the nation/governed area, can provide evidence of community engagement, but the final authority rests with the formal governing body.
- c. An Elder within the nation/governed area who can give evidence of community engagement
- d. A formal or informal body made up of or representing Indigenous Group(s) (example, a Native Friendship Centre) if the research only involves employees from or/and users of that Centre." (Memorial University, 2025).



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ETHICAL GUIDELINES

“The ethics process is flawed when it comes to the institution. It doesn’t always understand that we are working and doing the research in community, with community members – and we as Indigenous researchers are community members. We’re not studying people – we are being in relation with people, with each other.

With Institutional ethics, you are required to answer questions that don’t necessarily make sense in the context of Indigenous lifeways, in our languages, or how we relate to each other and the universe because they are based on individualistic ways of doing and being. We’re essentially doing “double ethics” [Indigenous ethics and institutional ethics]. It’s a colonial context versus an Indigenous context – and the ethics process doesn’t always reflect or allow for that.”

– Dr. Mel Lefebvre

ETHICAL GUIDELINES

Ethical guidelines are created to keep Indigenous communities safe – to ensure there is no exploitation, malpractice or harm for both the community members and the researchers involved.

Ethics can be defined as “the capacity to know what harms or enhances the well-being of sentient creatures” (Ermine, 2007, p. 195). Ethics also “reflects, express, and reinforce the social and cultural values of a community” and are intimately tied to worldview (Castellano, 2004, p. 99 in John and Castleden, 2025, p. 562). In Indigenous communities, ethical codes of conduct are established by Elders, or provided by oral traditions (Ermine, 2007, p. 195). These ethical boundaries are established by collective principles, such as Indigenous knowledge systems, the autonomy of Indigenous communities, or Indigenous treaties (Ermine, 2007, p. 196). All researchers collaborating with Indigenous communities must follow a set of ethical guidelines.

In contrast, ethical guidelines at academic institutions are procedural, finite, and legalistic (Bull et al., 2019, p. 23): Institutional ethics merely require researchers to submit their proposals for an ethics review before initiating their research (Bull et al., 2019). This is concerning, as there is no way of knowing if consultation occurred with the community, if consent was given, if the research remains “ethical” as it is carried out, and what kind of ethical obligations researchers have after the completion of the project.

“There are rarely checks and balances in place to ensure that the ongoing process of enacting ethical research is followed, and often there are no or insufficient means to ensure that the relational elements of research are incorporated into ethical protocols” (Bull et al., 2019, p. 23).

This gap between the ethical practices of Indigenous communities and institutions must be addressed to ensure respect and wellbeing for all research participants. A key issue arises when Indigenous researchers have

the additional responsibility and labour of meeting both institutional and Indigenous ethical requirements:

“The ethics process is flawed when it comes to the institution. It doesn’t always understand that we are working and doing the research in community, with community members – and we as Indigenous researchers are community members. We’re not studying people – we are being in relation with people, with each other.

INSTITUTIONAL ETHICAL REQUIREMENTS

At Concordia University, all student and faculty researchers conducting research involving human participants or human-derived data must complete the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS) 2 CORE certification (Concordia University, 2026a). This is an online course designed by Canadian federal research agencies, which guides researchers through nine chapters of ethical guidelines and research frameworks (Government of Canada, 2022b). After learning each module, researchers must pass a multiple-choice quiz at the end, with a score of at least 80 per cent (Government of Canada, 2022b). Chapter 9 focuses on research involving First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples of Canada. The chapter was designed to facilitate ethical engagement between researchers and Indigenous communities and is not intended to override ethical guidelines developed by Indigenous Peoples themselves (Government of Canada, 2022b).

This policy fulfils Concordia’s ethical requirements for researchers working directly with Indigenous participants in Canada. However, researchers not working with human participants or human-derived data are exempt from taking the TCPS 2 CORE, and therefore, Chapter 9.

RESEARCH ETHICS BOARDS

Canadian universities ensure adherence to the TCPS2 through the establishment of institutionally constructed research ethics boards (REBs) that provide ethical oversight of academic research involving humans conducted by faculty and students ([John and Castleden, 2025, p. 561](#)). At Concordia, the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) (Concordia University, 2016, p. 2) manages the ethics review process of research (funded or not) involving human participants. Currently,

researchers at Concordia submit an ethics proposal to this body, before they commence their research.

The HREC will deliver a Certificate of Ethical Acceptability to the researcher. This document confirms that a research study has met the ethical standards set out by an authorized body, such as an Ethics Review Board (Concordia University, 2016, p. 6). One member of the HREC is appointed as the “Chapter 9 reviewer” (Concordia University, 2016). This individual has significant research expertise with Indigenous Peoples and provides expertise for research projects that involve Indigenous participants or human-derived data. At Concordia, all ethics proposals sent by researchers to HREC are either accepted or sent back to the researcher for amendments.

KEY ISSUES

PATERNALISTIC STRUCTURE

Some argue that institutional structures are paternalistic in nature since they take on “the role of both police and protector in response to chapter 9 of the TCPS2” (Sylvestre, et al., 2018, p. 763 as cited in [John & Castleden, 2025, p.562](#)). They also position Indigenous communities as inherently vulnerable, subsequently failing to recognize Indigenous autonomy and self-determination in research (John and Castleden, 2025, p. 562). Additionally, institutional REBs do not account for Indigenous researchers conducting research with their own communities which comes with different worldviews, values, relationships, responsibilities, as well as repercussions (Brayboy and Deyhle, 2000; Grenz, 2023 in [John and Castleden, 2025, p. 565](#)).

RESEARCH THAT DOES NOT INVOLVE HUMANS OR HUMAN-DERIVED DATA

A grey area exists with research that does not involve humans or human-derived data yet has the capacity to impact Indigenous Peoples. For example, imagine an engineering project that measures the impact of climate change on building structures in Nunavik. This type of research does not require approval from the institution’s research ethics board, nor to complete the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS) 2 CORE certification since it consists of scientific analysis of building structure materials. It is not considered a “human or human-derived” research by the requirements of the TCPS (2022).



However, because the project takes place on Inuit land, it requires community consent and participation as per the TCPS (2022). Even though there is no requirement for researchers conducting non-human derived research to obtain a TCPS (2022) certification, a Chapter 9 reviewer would look for evidence of community engagement practices in the research outline within the ethics submission.

The ambiguity lies within the institutional process: If a researcher is not required to submit their work for review, how can the institution ensure compliance with community engagement requirements?

Similarly, research ethics committees do not require ethical review for projects that use publicly available data that is protected by law or not subject to confidentiality requirements. This is problematic because projects can impact communities without even having a relationship with the participants (Wisniewski, 2024, p. 44).

INDIGENOUS RIGHT TO SELF-DETERMINATION

As recognised by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), Indigenous Nations have authority over “both individual and collective rights; cultural rights and identity; rights to education, health, employment, language, and others. It outlaws discrimination against indigenous peoples

and promotes their full and effective participation in all matters that concern them” (OHCHR, 2007).

Research institutions have the responsibility to engage with Indigenous Peoples ethically and recognize that Indigenous Peoples have sovereignty over data gathered on their territories, involving their Peoples, cultures, environment, and other-than-human beings that exist therein (Morisano et al., 2024). Researchers need to keep in mind the distinction between Indigenous Nations and communities, avoid making assumptions based on pan-Indigenous stereotypes, and develop an awareness of the intersectional nature of Indigenous realities that span millennia, are affected by colonialism, and include age, gender, sexuality, and sociological and economic access (Morisano et al., 2024).

In urban centres where universities and other research institutions tend to be situated yet Indigenous governing bodies are absent, researchers can seek guidance from Indigenous organizations, community groups, and collectives such as Native Friendship Centres or Indigenous health authorities (Morisano et al., 2024).

NON-HUMAN KNOWLEDGES

Collaborating with Indigenous communities in any research capacity (from interviews with community members to animal studies on Indigenous land),

involves benefitting from Indigenous stories, experiences, and histories, even if the data collected is 'non-human derived.'

"...Some scholars postulate expanding the sphere of ethical considerations pertaining to Indigenous research beyond human participants to include the place-based, relational processes with respect to land, animals, plants and other beings within Indigenous territories" (Bergier, 2022, p. 9).

Non-Indigenous researchers who plan to research animals, land, art, and ceremonies that hold importance to Indigenous Peoples must learn to centre and engage with Indigenous community members, before, during and after the research has taken place. By going beyond the requirements of the TCPS and Concordia's institutional ethics, non-Indigenous researchers can start the process of building genuinely reciprocal relationships with Indigenous partners and put the practice of respecting Indigenous cultures into action.

BEST PRACTICES FOR INSTITUTIONAL ETHICS

Some universities have established a separate Indigenous ethics review process. Research involving Indigenous Peoples has been a distinct category of university research since the 1996 Final Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples ([Trent University, 2026](#)).

These Indigenous REBs bring together expertise through Indigenous academics, community members, Elders, and Knowledge Keepers who have a holistic review of research projects so that research is "guided by the responsibility of ensuring researchers respect the safety, welfare, dignity, rights and diversity of human experience and participants in their research and treat them equally and fairly – never as a means to an end" ([York University, 2026](#)).

For example, the University of British Columbia is piloting the integration of actions from its [Indigenous Strategic Plan](#) (ISP) into its Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB) to create the Indigenous Ethics Application Pilot to "support initiatives that are reciprocal, community-led, that legitimize Indigenous ways of knowing, and promote Indigenous Peoples' self-determination" ([UBC, 2026](#)). This is done by including research that originates outside of a specific Indigenous population, but whose findings may directly impact Indigenous populations ([UBC, 2026](#)).

Institutional REBs should include Indigenous membership in the ethical oversight of Indigenous research. Oftentimes "Indigenous research is vetted by those who may not have the necessary worldview, values, research expertise, or lived experience to do so appropriately ([John and Castleden, 2025, p. 562](#))".

Other ways for institutions to expand the scope of their ethical requirements regarding Indigenous research would be to go beyond human participants to consider and include the place-based, relational processes that Indigenous communities have with the land, animals, plants, and other beings within Indigenous territories (Bull, 2019, p. 9).

Institutions should also encourage collaboration between researchers and the ethics committee during an ethics review. This can be employed through conversational ethics, which is a mechanism that allows a researcher to participate in ethics review meetings alongside an ethics committee (Bull, 2019, p.4). This enables the researcher to address problematic issues in the research and provide proposed solutions (Bull, 2019, p. 4).

"Ideally, we like to be on the Land when we're doing our ceremonies, when we're building on relationships or coming into relation. We are who we are because of the Land – our language comes from the Land and so do we."

– Dr Mel Lefebvre

This makes way for greater accountability on the part of the researcher, as they have the responsibility of giving a detailed justification in following Indigenous community protocols and complying with ethical guidance provided by Indigenous People themselves (Bull, 2019, p. 5).

COMMUNITY-DRIVEN RESEARCH ETHICS

Research ethics driven by Indigenous Peoples will be grounded in the specific community's worldview and experience and often include themes and actions of collective rights, cultural principles, and self-determination (Hayward, A., et al., 2021).

"Just like researchers, the Aboriginal communities also needed to be informed of their rights and their ability to impose limits on the many research projects that concern them. – Suzy Basile, Atikamekw Nation" ([FNQLHSSC, 2018, p. 3](#)).

Non-Indigenous researchers need to keep in mind that whilst a research project might be considered "ethical" from the standards of the TCPS 2, there could be a discrepancy between a researcher's agenda and the

practical needs of the community (Brunger & Wall, 2016, p. 1868). Indigenous-driven research ethics allows communities and organizations to "provide guidelines for research taking place on their territory or with their people and even to "evaluate the feasibility and acceptability of a research project" (AFNQL, 2014, p. vi as cited in Wiscutie-Crépeau & Grégoire, 2024, p. 284). It also raises awareness about the importance of ethically responsible research.

Some Indigenous organizations, both on and off reserve, have well-established research ethics and project approval processes, while others may not (McMaster University, 2023, p. 10). Instead, they might provide an indication of support from their leadership (such as the elected Chief or Council), which can be provided to university research ethics boards as a measure of community consent and review (Hayward et al., 2021, p. 408).

Researchers at Concordia University must follow Concordia's research ethics policies and procedures ([Concordia University, 2026a](#)) and are responsible for knowing the local requirements to conduct research as outlined in article 9.8 of the TCPS

"I remember being incredibly nervous at this meeting - obviously, the relationship that Indigenous Peoples have with the media is often a tenuous one. This also applies to their relationship with research. I am Indigenous, but I'm also representing the institution [Concordia] here. Obviously, [the partner] had some very clear guidelines and things that they expected from any sort of a research relationship. So we went through different points.

My biggest thing was that we would fully respect the agency of the participants, that we would fully respect consent of the organization, the school, and everyone in it, that there would be absolutely no sharing of anything without consent".

– Kristy Snell, Associate Professor



INDIGENOUS RESEARCH ETHICS PROTOCOLS

In Quebec, one of the first Indigenous ethical protocols written is the Kahnawà:ke Schools Diabetes Prevention Program (KSDPP)'s Code of Research Ethics ([KSDPP, 2023](#)). The document establishes a set of principles and procedures that guide research partners to achieve the goals of the KSDPP (KSDPP, 2023, p. 5), including the incorporation and protection of Indigenous methodologies and Haudenosaunee philosophy, as well as the obligations of community and academic researchers.

For example, the KSDPP's *Review and Approval Process for Ethically Responsible Research* outlines concrete steps and expectations researchers' need to take and understand before any research is approved, reflecting the before, during, and after of the research project lifespan:

1. Submission of a letter of interest from the researcher to the KSDPP Scientific Director or their KSDPP supervisor
2. Introduction and consultation meeting(s) with the KSDPP Research Team
3. Submission of a detailed research proposal after consultation meeting(s) with the KSDPP Research Team
4. KSDPP Research Team's review and approval in principle of the research proposal
5. The researcher's presentation of the research proposal to, and consultation with, the Community Advisory Board
6. Issuance of a KSDPP Certificate of Approval from the Community Advisory Board
7. Submission of application to the appropriate university Institutional Review Board
8. Parallel Review and Approval Process
9. Continuous Consultation, Collaboration and Reporting"

([KSDPP, 2023](#))

([Government of Canada, 2022b](#)). Ethical approval from community should be acquired first and institutional committees should not grant approval to researchers without it (Basile et al., 2014, p. 34).

"I remember being incredibly nervous at this meeting - obviously, the relationship that Indigenous Peoples have with the media is often a tenuous one. This also applies to their relationship with research. I am Indigenous, but I'm also representing the institution [Concordia] here. Obviously, [the partner] had some very clear guidelines and things that they expected from any sort of a research relationship. So we went through different points.

My biggest thing was that we would fully respect the agency of the participants, that we would fully respect consent of the organization, the school, and everyone in it, that there would be absolutely no sharing of anything without consent". - Kristy Snell, Associate Professor

“The process of protocol, consent and accountability doesn’t start and stop with a document you sign and get someone else to approve. It’s an ongoing relational approach, and even when the research is finished, the relationship is ongoing... It would help if there were Indigenous People on the ethics review committee.”

– Dr. Mel Lefebvre

Similarly, the Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay (CBHSSJB) produced the “Researcher’s Guide” for health and social-services-oriented research for the population of Eeyou Istchee (CBHSSJB, 2024). Guided by community Elders, this was created to ensure that any and all research benefits the Eeyouch in the spirit of “Miyupimâtisiûn” (the act of living well) and reflects “Nishiyû” (respecting the growth of a Nation whilst remembering ancestors) (CBHSSJB, 2024, p. 3).

Readers gain an understanding of what research falls under the jurisdiction of the CBHSSJB and what researchers should know about the community and land prior to conducting research, as well as an overview of how research should be designed and funded. Like KSDPP’s research ethics code, potential researchers can access appendices with relevant forms and templates from the Eeyou Istchee to ensure that research is ethical and respectful (CBHSSJB, 2024, p. 2).

Urban Indigenous community research protocols are also important. The *Regroupement des Centres d’amitié autochones du Québec* (RCAAQ, 2021) outlines the need for a research protocol for urban Indigenous populations, focusing on the diversity of Indigenous Knowledges, the active involvement and collective rights of urban Indigenous populations, and how this needs to be supported throughout the different phases of research. Guiding principles of the RCAAQ research protocols are recognition, reciprocity, agency, and pertinence, reflecting the rich cultural reality of urban Indigenous lifeways.

INDIGENOUS RESEARCH ETHICS BOARDS

Some Indigenous communities have established Research Ethics Boards (REBs) and Research Advisory Committees (RACs). RACs assesses compatibility with the priorities and over all current research load of the community (Brunger & Wall, 2026, p. 1870). The REBs guide, oversee, and approve research projects (Hayward et al., 2021, p.408). Both are often made up by community members and Elders (Hayward et al., 2021, p.408). In some cases, “Indigenous organizations and communities may create their own research advisory boards to ensure protocols are followed” (Morisano and al., 2024, p. 6).

Collaborating with a group who has an REB consists of submitting an ethics application to both your university and the Indigenous group’s community’s ethics board (McMaster University, 2023, p. 10). If an Indigenous community does not have their own research ethics board or advisory committee, the researcher must still meet with community leaders and explain the purpose of the study, to fulfill the ethical requirement of collective community consent (McMaster University, 2023, p. 10).

Indigenous ethical protocols and boards serve as a form of protection for Indigenous communities against unethical research, helping to set out a negotiated research relationship where all parties can discuss and agree on one another’s duties and responsibilities (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 1998, p. 23).

You can consult a list of Indigenous ethical protocols and initiatives per province [here](#) (FNQLHSSC, 2024, p. 12).

COMMON CHALLENGES & POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

DIVERGENCES BETWEEN INSTITUTIONAL AND COMMUNITY ETHICS

It is possible for divergences between Indigenous and institutional ethical policies to exist. All divergences should be addressed and resolved prior to any research taking place ([Government of Canada, 2022a](#)). Challenges can also arise when plans for research change over time. When this happens, consult the Indigenous community

involved, and work together to forge a path forward that honours Indigenous self-determination and the needs of the community.

Whilst the TCPS states that divergences should be “resolved”, it’s important to remember that this is not a simple matter. This process requires time, patience, and building a relationship with the community a researcher intends to work with. This is the only way to ensure clear communication between all parties involved in the sphere of research.

SUPPORTING COMMUNITY-LED RESEARCH

One promising approach is the development of Indigenous community-based research hubs (Bull, 2019, p. 14). As Bergier (2022) notes, “This model stems from the need to provide a structure that supports enhanced engagement and relationship building with funding flowing directly to communities, instead of fixing the existing university processes” (p. 14). Whether established through formal agreements between institutions and communities or through individual partnerships, these approaches enable researchers to contribute their expertise in ways that support community-identified research needs and priorities.

LACK OF INSTITUTIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Bergier (2022) argues that the responsibility for ensuring adherence to Indigenous community protocols and ethical standards is currently placed on individual researchers rather than on the institutions that support and oversee research. As a result, researchers must justify why Indigenous protocols and ethical guidance should be followed (Bergier, 2022, p. 5). This approach allows institutions to avoid taking collective responsibility for ensuring respectful and accountable research relationships with Indigenous communities.

INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH AGREEMENTS WITH NATIONS

Universities can make formal agreements with Indigenous Nations to bolster community ethics. These long-term research agreements with specific First Nations, Métis, Inuit and urban Indigenous communities extend beyond the duration of a research grant or individual research collaboration and they help advance Indigenous communities’ priorities (Bergier, 2022, p. 18).





7

DATA SOVEREIGNTY



DATA SOVEREIGNTY

INDIGENOUS “DATA” AND KNOWLEDGES

Indigenous data can be defined as First Nations, Métis and Inuit “intellectual property” which includes historical and contemporary data, survey data, administrative data, data from alternative sources, and data generated through research activities ([FNIGC, 2020, pp. 2 & 9](#)).

This can be broken down in several ways:

- Data about Indigenous lands, resources, the environment, land management and history, geological data including information about wildlife and water source ([University of Calgary, 2026](#));
- Data “about” Indigenous Peoples, communities or Nations. This includes demographic data, socio-economic data and health, housing, infrastructure and other service data and,
- Data “from” Indigenous Peoples. This includes languages, cultures, Knowledges, stories, songs, images, literature, archives, ancestral knowledge. Essentially, any and all information that originates from First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples ([FNIGC, 2020, p. 2](#)).

However, “Characterizing Indigenous knowledges as simply “data” removes the relational context and action-oriented nature of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (i.e., as a way of knowing)” ([Council of Canadian Academies, 2026, p. 13](#)). Indigenous knowledges emphasize reciprocity, relational responsibility, and accountability to the natural world and are thus personal, place-based, and dynamic, whereas Western knowledge is described as an independent and systematic collection of facts” ([Council of Canadian Academies, 2026, pp. 13-14](#)).

Data is a global currency, a powerful force in making decisions and wielding power (IEAG 2014, The Economist 2017 as cited in Carroll, 2019, p. 1). Re-claiming and protecting Indigenous knowledges is an act of self-determination to advance collective well-being.

“The colonial approach is to use data gathered from research without a second thought. My teachings from my community [Red River Métis] are that a relationship is an action. So, we have to be mindful of a relationship before, during, and after the research process. This includes pre-emptive planning about what we will do with the data, how we allow for transparency and consent. We need to be in conversation with folks so that we can all make informed decisions. And if you don’t have permission to use the data, then you don’t use it.”

– Dr. Mel Lefebvre

Some of the challenges Indigenous communities face in terms of knowledge sovereignty and protection have been identified by the [Indigenous Innovation Initiative](#) (2021) and include:

- **Appropriation:** Using Indigenous Knowledges in non-Indigenous contexts without permission from the Indigenous community or individual.
- **Misrepresentation:** Western concepts and indicators of health and wellbeing (i.e. public health) are not necessarily the same for Indigenous communities, and as such, Indigenous health data often neglects to include a broader scope: Spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental health are equally important aspects of an individual. Indigenous wellbeing can include access to ceremonies, traditional medicine, and languages.
- **Patriarchy:** Colonial patriarchal systems that reinforce a male/female binary have replaced traditional Indigenous governance systems that recognize Two Spirit, Trans, and gender diverse people as valued members of community who are often leaders and decision makers.
- **Lack of transparency and reciprocity:** Indigenous Knowledges and data have been used without consent, with communities not knowing what the data is being used for and where it is being published. Indigenous communities and groups have also been critical of a lack of reciprocity in terms of accessing and owning data once research projects have concluded.
- **Aggregated data:** First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples are made up of numerous communities, Nations, tribes, and clans. There is a danger of representing Indigenous Peoples as homogenous when Indigenous Knowledges or data are grouped together. Pan-Indigenizing creates barriers to accessing, utilizing, and caring for community information and it prevents communities from accessing specific information pertaining to them.
- **Legislation and Imposition:** When Indigenous Knowledges are gathered through publicly funded research projects, it may be treated as government or institutional property and can be made public through privacy, access-to-information, and archival legislation without the consent of or control by community. In addition, these Knowledges are stored in databases that communities and Knowledge Keepers have no control over – and nor do they have access to them. In all cases, taking Indigenous data out of an Indigenous context infringes on the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

DATA SOVEREIGNTY

“Indigenous Data Sovereignty is how Indigenous Peoples’ exercise authority over their own data, over how their data is framed, and how their data is managed.” (University of Calgary, 2026). It is the right of Indigenous Peoples to own, control, and access data that derives from their communities ([IWGIA, 2026](#)).

There is a long history of state control of Indigenous lifeways and information, recording traditional knowledges and categorizing Indigenous Peoples to serve state interests and reinforce European assimilation tactics ([Kukutai et al., 2020, p. 654](#)). This shift of Indigenous Peoples pushing for control of intellectual and cultural property is reinforced by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the enshrinement of their inherent rights of self-determination and governance ([Kukutai et al., 2020, p. 654](#)).

While the “concept of Indigenous data sovereignty is a relatively recent one, with the first major publication on the topic only appearing in 2016” (IWGIA, 2026), Indigenous Peoples have always been “data warriors” ([Kukutai et al., 2020, p. 654](#)). Information and

Knowledges have been recorded and protected through ancient cultural practices like storytelling, songs, and other practices ([Kukutai et al., 2020, p. 654](#)).

Indigenous data sovereignty requires researchers to ask “(...) “to whom am I obliged with this data? What does this data and its data holder owe to community and Land, and how do I best meet those obligations in how this data is stored, shared (or not) and interpreted?” (Wemigwans, 2018 as cited in Burrell, Singh and Davison, 2024, p. 209).

DATA GOVERNANCE

“Indigenous data sovereignty is an aspiration to be achieved through data governance” (Carroll et al., 2019). Data sovereignty occurs at the intersection of governance and decolonizing data with the entirety of the process (conception, gathering, analysis, synthesis, storage, and use of data) being cared for through a sovereign Indigenous process and practice (Carroll et al., 2019, p. 5). As Indigenous Nations continue to (re)claim and govern their Knowledges, new capacities to define and inform data are identified (Carroll et al., 2019, p. 5).

Figure 4.

Reclaiming Indigenous Data Sovereignty Through Indigenous Data Governance and Decolonizing Data



Relationship between data rebuilding and nation rebuilding.
Note. Carroll et al., 2019.

“When the research process is done and we come up against the practice of data storage and the life of data, there are lots of questions to answer. How do you manage the data? Is there continuous consent around that data? How do you archive it and how do you remain accountable to the data and the people that gifted it?”

– Dr. Mel Lefebvre

DATA STEWARDSHIP

As outlined by the First Nations Information Governance Centre, data stewardship refers to how data is collected, accessed, held and managed. It also describes how data is subsequently analysed, visualized, protected, disseminated, and consumed ([2020, p. 2](#)). An Indigenous data stewardship ensures that Indigenous Peoples always lead and oversee these processes as they take shape. One way for researchers to put Indigenous data stewardship into practice is through the CARE principles for data management ([Carroll et al., 2020, p. 1](#)).

“CARE” ([Kukutai et al, 2020, pp. 656-657](#)) stands for:

- **Collective benefit:** where data ecosystems are designed and function in ways that enable Indigenous Peoples to benefit from data.
- **Authority to Control:** where Indigenous Peoples’ rights and interests in Indigenous data must be recognized, and their authority to control such data is empowered.
- **Responsibility:** Individuals working with Indigenous data have a responsibility to share how those data are used to support Indigenous People’s self-determination and collective benefit. Here, accountability requires meaningful and openly available evidence of these efforts.
- **Ethics:** the rights and wellbeing of Indigenous Peoples’ should be the primary concern at all stages of the data life cycle, and throughout the data ecosystem.

A key issue that Indigenous data sovereignty networks face is the lack of protection for Indigenous Peoples within the open data and open science movement. The well-established FAIR Guiding Principles for scientific data management and stewardship represent a push towards improving data Findability, Accessibility, Interoperability, and Reuse of digital assets (GIDA, 2026). However, it ignores “power differentials and historical contexts” (Global Indigenous Data Alliance, 2026) to focus primarily on data accessibility. The CARE principles “complement the existing FAIR principles encouraging open and other data movements to consider both people and purpose in their advocacy and pursuits” (Global Indigenous Data Alliance, 2026).

In 1998, the Ownership Control Access and Possession (OCAP®) principles were established to set ethical guidelines for how data gathering should take place in First Nations communities ([FNIGC, 2026, p. 1](#)).

“Although OCAP® focuses specifically on research in First Nations communities, it certainly had widespread impact in Metis, Inuit, and urban Indigenous communities in terms of how research is conducted in ways that resituate power structures” (Anderson & Cidro, 2019, p. 223).

These principles recognized and bolstered the importance of Indigenous self-determination, which became prevalent as academic spaces shifted towards community-based research practices ([Anderson & Cidro, 2019, p. 222](#)). This led to higher capacity building ([Anderson & Cidro, 2019, p. 222](#)) in the research space,

moving away from extractive research methods towards consulting community members to ensure that research is in line with community needs and is conducted respectfully ([NWAC, 2022, p. 11](#)).

The organization Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami has also identified access, ownership and control of data as a priority. One challenge in this area is the “aggregation of Inuit-specific data with that of other Indigenous Peoples, making relevant information impossible to discern or utilize”([Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2018, p. 32](#)). Guidelines for addressing this, as well as recording, engaging with, and disseminating Inuit data can be found in the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami’s [National Inuit Strategy on Research](#) (2018).

Métis-centred research is upheld by the Ownership, Control, Access and Stewardship (OCAS) principles ([NCIME, 2024, p. 12](#)). These principles assert that Métis peoples “govern the collection and use of their data in line with their nationhood... that data must be disaggregated to reflect Métis-specific identities... supporting Métis Nations to collect, manage, and interpret their own data... and align with Métis cultural, legal, and political traditions” ([BORN, 2026](#)).

It is of the utmost importance for researchers engaging in data collection, analysis, dissemination or repatriation

to ensure that all actions are led by or guided in collaboration with First Nations, Inuit and Métis community members.

RECOMMENDED PRACTICE

DATA MANAGEMENT PLAN

“A Data Management Plan (DMP) is a document that helps researchers and funding agencies understand the type of data that will be produced, how data will be managed and preserved, and how data will be shared” (Concordia University, 2026). In Canada, only a few funding agencies require data management plans.

The Canadian Tri-Agency recognizes the importance of managing First Nations, Métis, and Inuit data in accordance with principles developed and approved by these communities, such as OCAP® and suggests that the data management plans should be co-developed with the Indigenous partners ([Government of Canada, 2025](#)). In 2026, Université Laval developed a specific data management plan for research with and for Indigenous Peoples “Modèle pour recherche par pour et avec les Premiers Peuples” (Université Laval, 2026). In addition to guiding researchers through the process and offering useful resources on Indigenous-centred research, this initiative is a concrete step towards respecting Indigenous data sovereignty.



In light of expected Tri-Agency implementation of a requirement that authors of agency-supported research “deposit into a digital repository all digital research data, metadata and code that directly support the research conclusions in journal publications and preprints” (Government of Canada, 2025), co-developed DMPs will be especially important to ensure that all relevant Indigenous rights holders and implicated communities are the ones determining what will be deposited and what must be exempted ([Government of Canada, 2025](#)).

Concordia researchers seeking support on data management plans should consult the [Library](#).

DATA COLLECTION AND PRESERVATION

Increasingly, groups are developing their own data sovereignty protocols to guide how information is gathered, managed, and protected. The Indigenous Innovation Initiative “[Nindokiikayencikewin: to seek learning or Knowledges](#)” was co-created with community members and Elders to guide how they collect, use, and cite Indigenous Knowledges and data.

Indigenous groups and communities engaged in research are also developing Indigenous-owned data management platforms, such as [Niiwin \(2026\)](#). This platform hosts secure databases and tables that are supported by community knowledge protocols, which are OCAP®, CARE, and FAIR compliant ([Niiwin, 2026](#)). This enables Indigenous communities, organizations, and governments to exercise sovereignty over their digital information.

Another notable development is an international engineering standard for documenting the “provenance”, or trajectory of ownership of Indigenous data (Herrera Carbajal, 2025). Developed by the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers in collaboration with a group of Indigenous data sovereignty experts, the standard details not only the origins of a “particular set of data” but also “how it’s moved over time and how it’s potentially changed over time.” Herrera Carbajal, 2025). The standard should be relevant beyond engineering fields, providing “a scaffolding on which to build such policies at all levels in the future” (Carroll as cited in Baker, 2025).

Figure 5.

Three categories of Notices



Engagement notice, disclosure notices and collections care notices.
Note. Local Contexts, 2026..



TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE LABELS AND NOTICES

Started in 2010, the organization *Local Contexts* developed digital labels to protect Indigenous cultural heritage materials. Institutions and researchers can identify Indigenous data and recognize Indigenous rights and interests by applying notices to websites, publications, datasets, museum exhibitions, and more ([Local Contexts, 2026](#)). There are 3 types of notices for institutions and researchers:

INDIGENOUS CITATIONS

Indigenous Knowledges and knowledge systems are vast and expansive, evolving across millennia, generations and ever-shifting global contexts ([Aker, 2026](#)). Because of this, academic citation practices are simply unable to convey the multitude of information sources that Indigenous worldviews would deem as “citable references” ([Aker, 2026](#)). Indigenous citations extend beyond these traditional citation forms to encompass the who, what, when, where, and how of the concept being cited ([Aker, 2026](#)).

In his book, “Elements of Indigenous Style”, Gregory Younging provides guidelines to counteract the “cultural appropriation, misrepresentation, and lack of respect for Indigenous cultural Protocols as significant problems in Canadian publishing” (Younging, 2018, p.2). Similarly, Amy Shawanda’s guide “Nda-nwendaaganag (All My Relations): A Relational Approach to Citation Practices” (2023) explores how citation methods should be anchored in relationality, providing examples of how to cite both animate and inanimate beings ([p. 13](#)), such as Elders, Ancestral Knowledge and Trees.

For example:

Ancestral Knowledge

Item. (Year). Theme/message/idea. Person who created the item. Location. Town/City, Province.

Example:

Unknown Drum Group. (2022). Intertribal Song. Curve Lake Powwow, ON

Example for citing ancestral knowledge.

[Shawanda, 2023, p. 21.](#)

“While standard citation style guides such as APA and MLA do not provide guidelines for fully citing oral communications with Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers, many university libraries now advise following templates created by Cree Librarian Lorisia MacLeod (2021) for appropriately acknowledging these experts in Reference List or Bibliography” (S. Breier, personal communication, August 13, 2026).

MacLeod explains “To put it simply, to use the template for personal communication is to place an Indigenous oral teaching on the same footing as a quick phone call, giving it only a short in-text citation (...) Some oral teachings have survived since time immemorial and deserve the same respect that we afford the great stories and minds of the Western world: a proper citation.” (2021, p. 2).

These Indigenous scholars are advocating for greater recognition of Indigenous Knowledges in academia by redefining writing styles and citation practices.



8

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

This guide has highlighted both the ongoing challenges and the transformative possibilities of conducting ethical and mutually beneficial research with Indigenous Peoples and communities. While many of the recommendations presented here seek to improve research practices within academic institutions, it is important to recognize that, for many Indigenous Peoples, the path forward is outside these institutions (Hayward et al., 2021, p. 404) and within community-led systems of knowledge generation, governance, and decision-making. Whether research is conducted within institutional settings or is driven entirely by communities, it must uphold the principles of Indigenous self-determination, respect Indigenous laws and protocols, and ensure that communities retain meaningful authority over research that concerns them.

Across Canada, institutions are beginning to take steps toward greater accountability. Initiatives such as community consultation on forming Concordia University's first Indigenous Research Advisory Circle (CIRAC) demonstrate the growing recognition that Indigenous leadership must play a central role in guiding research governance, ethics, and knowledge mobilization. Similarly, l'Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue's (UQAT) inclusion of non-academic Indigenous representatives on its Research Ethics Committee and its attention to issues such as OCAP®, community benefit, active participation, linguistic accessibility of research and impact on consent, protections for marginalized populations, and decolonizing methodologies offer important examples of how institutional processes can better reflect Indigenous priorities and values (First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission, 2018, p. 299).

However, meaningful change requires more than advisory structures or procedural reforms. Universities have a responsibility to address the gap between institutional research frameworks and the distinct governance systems, priorities, and protocols of Indigenous communities. Universities should provide free and ongoing training for researchers, students, and research support staff to strengthen their understanding of Indigenous research methodologies, ethical frameworks, community protocols, and evolving priorities identified by Indigenous Peoples and communities.

Institutions must also strengthen accountability by developing mechanisms that support community-defined standards of ethical conduct, including meaningful community engagement plans. Rather than focusing solely on regulatory compliance, universities that intend to meet Indigenous research principles should support learning, capacity-building, and accountability to Indigenous communities.

As Sioui reminds us, research ethics committees have an important educational mission. Their role is not simply to evaluate compliance, but to support researchers in developing respectful, collaborative, and culturally informed approaches to research. Building this capacity across institutions is essential if research is to contribute positively to Indigenous communities rather than reproduce historical harms. (Sioui, 2011, p. 25 as cited in First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Health and Social Services Commission, 2018, p. 298).

Ultimately, meaningful transformation requires a shift away from researcher-driven agendas toward needs-based research defined and led by Indigenous communities themselves. When communities have authority over research questions, methods, interpretation, and use of findings, research becomes not only more ethical but also more relevant, impactful, and accountable. The goal is not simply to improve Indigenous participation within existing research systems, but to support Indigenous leadership in transforming those systems. By centering Indigenous voices, respecting community governance, and advancing self-determination, researchers and institutions can contribute to a future in which research serves the priorities, aspirations, and well-being of Indigenous Peoples and communities.

COLLABORATORS

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