Dewemaagannag

Key principles and values to decolonize engagement with Indigenous 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 assist in the creation of academic and non-academic partnerships that are locally rooted, community-driven and beneficial to all involved. 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 based on the personal experience of the writers and their collaborators. It was created to support non-Indigenous staff, researchers, and faculty members at Concordia in building respectful, impactful and ethical collaborations with Indigenous communities. We intend to update the text to correct any errors and to include any new information, perspectives and practices as needed.

THE CREATORS OF THIS GUIDE

Geneviève Sioui

Kwe, I'm Geneviève Sioui, a member of the Wendat Nation and coordinator, Indigenous community engagement at the Office of Community Engagement at Concordia University. I grew up in Québec City, close to my dad and grandfather's community, Wendake.

I was first introduced to community-based research as an anthropology student, working alongside researchers who had long-standing relationships with Indigenous communities and organizations. These women, with years of experience in academia, made space for me to learn and contribute, but most importantly, laid out the foundational principles of collaborating with Indigenous communities.

These formative years assisting with research set off a desire to be directly involved with communities and to invest energy in organizing, mobilizing, supporting, celebrating, learning with and from, as well as advocating, multi-tasking, and working tirelessly with like-minded individuals.

My personal journey of navigating a mixed identity, and being an urban Indigenous woman, and my professional experiences in research, Indigenous education and community organizing animate the values and principles I hold. They inform my work at Concordia University where I support community-university collaborations, and offer advice to ensure that expectations, protocols and community-preferred practices are respected on the path towards addressing inequalities.

Amanda Shawayahamish

Boozhoo, I'm Amanda Shawayahamish. I am an Anishinaabe woman from Animbiigoo Zaagi'igan Anishinaabek, a small community located three hours northeast of Thunder Bay, Ontario. I moved to Tiohtià:ke (Montreal) about 9 years ago to further my education.

My journey in Indigenous research began in the First Peoples Studies Program at Concordia University. An Indigenous professor opened my eyes and mind in her Decolonizing Research Methodology course. After this course, I changed my major from Biology to First Peoples Studies.

My professional work began as a research assistant on a major Indigenous community-based research project led by a non-Indigenous researcher. Part of my work was partnering and collaborating with Indigenous communities throughout Quebec. The experience I gained from this project inspired me to continue in this type of work.

I am in the Individualized Program (MA) at Concordia University. This program allows me the flexibility to engage in Indigenous-based research and methodologies, and to connect with other Indigenous researchers in Montreal. My thesis will be a decolonized research-creation project based on Indigenous storytelling and beadwork.

I work with the Office of Community Engagement as a project assistant where I support the development of guidelines for Indigenous community engagement at Concordia University and I contribute to building relationships, and collaborations with Montreal Indigenous organizations, Indigenous professors, students and employees.

OUR COLLABORATORS

Allan Vicaire, Mi'kmaw from Listuguj
Senior Advisor, Indigenous Directions Office of the Provost
and Vice-President, Academic, Concordia University

Celeste Awashish, Cree from Mistissini, Bachelor of Education,
specializing in Kindergarten and Elementary Education

Iako'tsi:rareh Amanda Lickers, Seneca,
Six Nations of the Grand River

Katsistohkwi:io Jacco, Kanien'keha:ka from Kahnawa:ke and
part of the bear clan

Michelle Smith, Red River Métis filmmaker, educator and
PhD candidate at McGill University

Véronique Picard, Huron-Wendat & Québécoise, and
PhD candidate at Concordia University

Vicky Boldo, Cree/Metis, adoptee from the 1960's, mother,
daughter, sister, auntie, and kohkum

THE GUIDE

As Indigenous Peoples operating in a higher educational colonial institution, we are often solicited for our knowledge, experiences, and relationships with Indigenous communities. The requests are fueled by an increasing awareness of inequalities, a desire to make space for diverse perspectives, and by Indigenous advocacy. Whether universities are answering the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action, or leading an indigenization or decolonization process, they should be guided by Indigenous experts.

After years of consultation, advising, positive and negative experiences of collaborating, and many conversations with colleagues and peers, we created this document as a starting point to reflect on **how to best collaborate with Indigenous communities**. In this document, you will find our perspectives, and the points of view of **Indigenous collaborators** on what constitutes and feels like **good collaboration**.

To summarize, our goal is to:

- **Centre Indigenous perspectives** on community engagement
- Encourage a **reflection on the motivation** for soliciting Indigenous communities
- **Provide guidance** on ways to move from reflection to action.

WHO IS IT FOR?

This document is for **any individual or organization engaging with Indigenous individuals or communities.** As it provides tools to shift power dynamics between Indigenous communities and settlers. Institutions such as universities, where learning, teaching and research is increasingly interested in and concerned about including Indigenous perspectives and knowledge, will particularly benefit from this content. Most importantly, this is **an invitation to take action(s)** against the extraction of Indigenous knowledge and expertise by individuals.

This guide supports:

- individuals and groups who wish to learn how to best collaborate with Indigenous Peoples, organizations, and/ or communities.
- long-term collaborators who want to improve and deepen their relationships through a self-reflexive process.

WHAT DOES IT CONTAIN?

- Key principles and values that are central to building relationships
- Stories and advice from Indigenous individuals

OUR APPROACH

We recognize and understand **colonization as an ongoing process** that has affected the ability of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples to engage in respectful and equitable relationships. Indigenous Peoples have been and continue to be made invisible by and within institutions, including universities.

Throughout this document, we invite you to be critical and to challenge power imbalances in your personal and professional relationships.

"Understanding the power imbalances means understanding racism (…) and being prepared to be anti-racist" - Amanda L.

Policies and practices of colonial governments like the Doctrine of Discovery, the Indian Act, and the Indian Residential School system as well as erasures and omissions of Indigenous presence in history have contributed to dismissing Indigenous knowledge and dispossessing Indigenous Peoples. While some historical injustices have been documented and addressed, colonial structures and narratives still exist. The consequence is unequal access to education, resources, justice and knowledge for Indigenous Peoples.

In universities, colonization manifests as:

- the absence or marginalization of Indigenous content in curricula (outside of Indigenous-focused programs)
- the underrepresentation of Indigenous employees, professors and students
- the difficulty to accept Indigenous knowledges and methodologies as reliable and authoritative
- experiences of racism and microaggressions.
- absence of cultural safety
- tokenism
- performative diversity.

We believe collaborations between academics and Indigenous communities should:

- give power to Indigenous Peoples by centering their expertise and voices.
- contribute to greater social justice and dismantle oppressive systems

Relationships and collaborations with Indigenous Peoples should not be driven primarily:

- by moral imperative (i.e.,) because it feels good, for charity or good conscience)
- to be opportunistic (i.e., responding to a research funding opportunity rather than community-led and focused on community priorities)
- to be used to validate your work (i.e., working with Indigenous stakeholders to validate findings or a program implementation)
- to elevate your personal or professional status.[1]
- or to make your employer look good.

1   Carter, J., Pearce, T., and Jacobson, C. "Working the Academy : A Form of Giving Back?" Giving Back : Research and Reciprocity in Indigenous Settings by RDK Herman, Oregon State University Press, 2018, p.34.
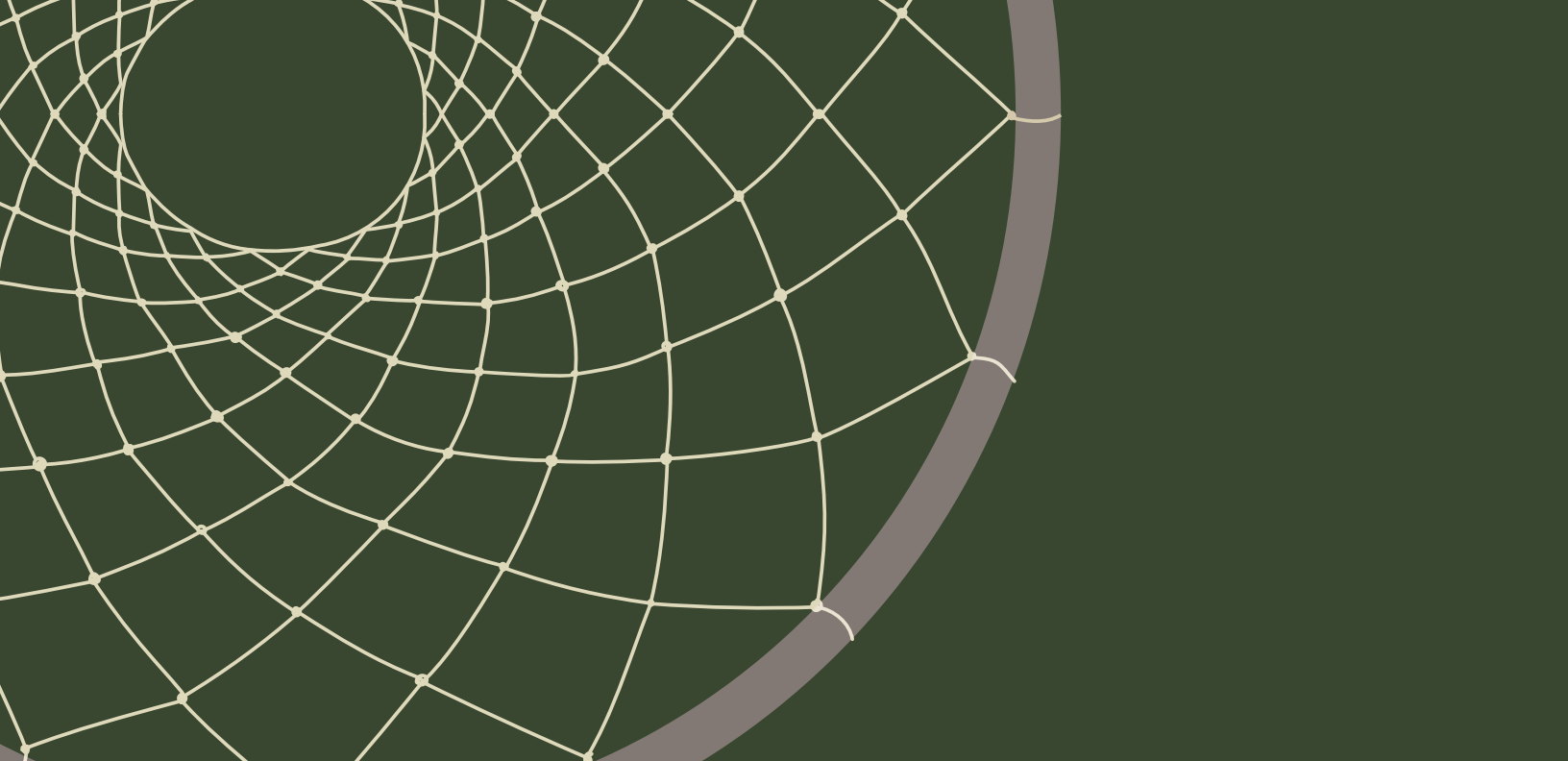
This guide represents primarily First Nations and Métis perspectives. To compensate for the lack of Inuit perspectives on collaboration, we invite you to consult the following resources:

- National Inuit Strategy on Research: https://www.itk.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/ITK-National-Inuit-Strategy-on-Research.pdf
- Inuit Societal Values drafted by the Government of Nunavut: https://www.gov.nu.ca/sites/default/files/publications/2022-01/iq_brochure_draft_1.pdf

EDUCATION IS YOUR FIRST STEP

Relationship building is the key to collaboration. It is only through long term, meaningful connections that you can understand and centre Indigenous needs, perspectives, and knowledge. One common question we received is "How do we build these connections?" While this is a valid question, we want to emphasize:

The absence of relationships with Indigenous Peoples is **an invitation to learn more about Indigenous realities.**

Before seeking collaborations:

1. **Learn** about the Indigenous territory you are on and what Nations and group expect from you as a guest.
2. **Listen** to the Indigenous Peoples and communities you may encounter to understand their needs.
3. **Self-reflect** on your own motivations for seeking a collaboration.
4. **Don't assume** that every Indigenous Nation and group has the same values and protocols.

We recommend using self-directed learning tools[2] as a first step and to avoid transferring the burden of education on Indigenous Peoples. Learning about historical and contemporary Indigenous realities will help bridge the knowledge gap and is a concrete step for anchoring ideas in real life and meeting Indigenous priorities and needs.

Another important step in your education is researching and learning about similar initiatives, programming, and research to inform your own project, validate its pertinence and avoid duplicating initiatives.

"[Non-Indigenous peoples] have to do their homework if they are interested in providing a service or some sort of a program in a community, they should look at what has been done across Canada to see if there are any similar types of programming that they want to deliver in the community."- Allan

The process of relationship building is not linear, nor a step-by-step process. It requires that you open your mind to a different way of learning and forming connections.

2   Concordia University, Mikana & The Montreal Indigenous Community NETWORK. The Decolonial Toolbox. 2022, www.concordia.ca/decolonialtoolbox

GUIDING PRINCIPLES & VALUES

This section focuses on principles and values that Indigenous Peoples hold when engaging with one another.. These should be central in your engagement toward our communities:

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

Whether you are doing a class project with a community, developing a research proposal, creating an advisory committee or hiring Indigenous employees, these principles and values can be applied to various collaborative contexts.

To help you put into practice the principles and values detailed in this guide, we included questions on which to reflect. After reading a section, take a moment to think and answer the prompting questions in relation to your project. This activity will help you integrate a self-reflective practice and strengthen the loops of your web by anchoring and centering Indigenous principles and values of collaboration. You are invited to revisit the questions and your answers once you have completed reading the guide or on a regular basis to notice the evolution of your collaborative practice.

OCAP PRINCIPLES FOR RESEARCH

For research projects specifically, many of these principles are reflected in and protected by the First Nations principles of Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP®). Recommended by the First Nations Information Governance Committee, the OCAP® principles assert that First Nations have "control over data collection processes in their communities, and that they own and control how this information can be stored, interpreted, used, or shared".[3] When applied, the principles protect Indigenous world views, traditional knowledge and protocols. Universities and researchers should honour these principles which contribute to building reciprocal and respectful collaborations with Indigenous communities, and most importantly, reinforces Indigenous governance and sovereignty.

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3   The First Nations Information Governance Centre. (2022). First Nations principles of Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP®). Retrieved September 9, 2022 from https://fnigc.ca

LISTENING

Oral storytelling as a mode of transferring knowledge is fundamental to Indigenous communities. As such, listening is a core Indigenous principle.

What does it mean to listen?

- Learn to be quiet, wait and be present. Society demands that we meet deadlines and multitask, but be aware that Indigenous communities have their own temporal ways of being.
- Take the time to listen to the community's stories because they are used to share experiences and knowledge.
- Expect metaphors, warnings and suggested practices.
- Be attentive to the unspoken as non-verbal communication is just as important.
- Assess the need: your project should fulfil a need, respond to a demand, address a concern, voiced by the community. Co-designing empowers communities and moves away from treating Indigenous Peoples as service beneficiaries to considering them as equal collaborators: Indigenous Peoples know best what is needed in their own communities.
- Continue to listen once collaboration is established, to maintain the relationships, collaborations, and partnerships you have worked hard to establish.
- Accept that some knowledge is considered sacred and will not be shared.

"Always listen more than you speak, humility will get you far." – Vicky

Our collaborators add:

"When there is a lack of communication, mistakes will happen, it is part of the process." – Véronique

"Take the time to listen and incorporate the feedback you get from community members into the work that you do even though it might not be what you had envisioned in the beginning." – Katsistohkwiio

Allan reminds us there is a delicate balance to find between being autonomous and collaborative:

"They [non-Indigenous peoples] can do their homework [educating themselves], but they can't complete a whole project without the input of the community."

RESPECTING INDIGENOUS EXPERTISE

Indigenous Peoples and communities are the experts on their own needs. Imagine collaborating with people who embody thousands of years of experience on this earth. The collaborations you initiate with Indigenous individuals, organizations and communities will only be stronger by pulling together different types of expertise towards the same goal.

"The starting point really is the needs of the community, or the organization or the people you are working with." – Véronique

"Let the people that you are working with lead and guide you, and you should do a lot of the groundwork to get your project to a finished product as the researcher." – Katsistohkwiio

Ways you can value Indigenous expertise

- Create a safe and open space for the community to voice their concerns, and opinions about your project. Do not assume that your project is necessary for the community nor that you know what is best for them.
- Realise that Indigenous experts possess knowledge of the local context and overall quality and feasibility of the project.
- Hire Indigenous collaborators from the community with lived experience to gather, analyze and interpret data.
- Decolonize your research: use Indigenous sources, collaborate with Indigenous researchers/scholars, include entire testimonials (in appendices if necessary) as opposed to parsing out what you think is valuable content - that is relational responsibility and respect.
- Respect and recognize Indigenous intellectual property and knowledge sovereignty.
- Engage with rather than consult.

"I was a part of this research project back in my home community, and what I had noticed was we worked a lot with outside consultants, who didn't know the social dynamics in the communities, and they were the ones who were supposed to interpret and analyze all the data that was collected. I would have liked to see more collaboration with actual community members at that level and not sending out all the data outside." – Celeste

"We did see themes that were common to the storytellers involved. This was helpful in identifying points of advocacy. But we recognized that it's important to maintain the integrity of each person's story and to respect that story as something whole. It's an extension of our relationship with that person, it's a responsibility to that person. For a researcher to come in and pull that story apart and derive meaning from it, outside of the lived context of that story can be problematic." – Michelle

"Indigenous Peoples cannot have sovereignty over their own stories if these are recorded, analyzed, fragmented and interpreted without their involvement. In addition to violating the principles of OCAP, fragmenting Indigenous stories interrupts the interconnectedness of things: knowledge is connected to people, people are part of the land, and connected to non-humans and spirits. What happens to the spirit of the story and its meaning when it is removed from its context and is no longer recognizable?" – Michelle

"Honour what people share in a research project profoundly and think carefully about how data is analyzed (…) I think a big part of decolonizing data analysis is not applying arbitrary categories to people's experiences and recognizing the integrity of those experiences." – Michelle

"It's time for Indigenous voices to be heard, instead of being reported, translated, analyzed in academic reports and taking away our space." – Amanda S.

SELF-REFLECTION QUESTIONS for listening and expertise

1. What are the motivations for this project ? (Reflect on your intentions and identify internal and external incentives for the project)
2. Which community priority or need are you responding to?
3. How are Indigenous collaborators involved in your project (what are their roles, responsibilities, expertise) ?

RELATING IN RECIPROCITY

We view reciprocity as a non-material exchange that extends beyond the beginning and end of this project. Reciprocity is ensuring that your collaborators benefit from the partnership, and in the case of Indigenous individuals and communities, they should benefit the most.

Reciprocity can be expressed in various ways:

- an exchange of expertise that offers mutual benefits
- a collaboration that is renewed in time, that is not disposable
- by offering and sharing resources and knowledge with your counterpart

"If you are thinking of doing research in/with a particular community, you can ask what projects the community has going on that you can contribute to while you are doing research. You could offer to help with funding proposals, you can offer training or provide learning opportunities for local youth for example."
— Michelle

"Nothing about us without us" is a contemporary principle that Indigenous communities share as historically most research has been initiated by researchers, not communities, and results are rarely used for the well-being of nonacademic participants.[4] As Indigenous communities question how knowledge is accessed and shared outside of academic circles, it is imperative that knowledge is returned to community members.

The role of researchers is to:

- ensure they involve Indigenous research partners in decision-making processes related to the project in support of knowledge co-production and sharing
- ensure the research aligns with community-defined needs and aspirations and contribute to increasing well-being
- ensure that the research process follows ethical guidelines and safeguards, adheres to cultural protocols, seeks permission before sharing or using Indigenous knowledge, and ensure that research methods align with cultural values
- prioritize knowledge transmission to younger generations
- make knowledge accessible in culturally appropriate and responsible ways.

4   Carter, J., Pearce, T., and Jacobson, C. "Working the Academy : A Form of Giving Back?" Giving Back : Research and Reciprocity in Indigenous Settings by RDK Herman, Oregon State University Press, 2018, p. 48.

BEING ACCOUNTABLE

Fostering relationships with Indigenous Peoples and communities creates accountability and responsibility for what actions are acceptable, and for sustained action over time. This is fundamental to a meaningful coexistence.[5] Relationship building is a shared process, and so is learning about the impacts of colonialism and the community's history.

"Before you begin a collaboration, you should have an understanding of who we are, what we do, the communities you are working with, and colonial history." — Véronique

The different ways that you can be accountable towards Indigenous communities are by "(…) doing everything you can to have respectful and good relations and to honour the goals and aspirations of the community you are working with, including advocacy at your university if necessary." — Michelle

What accountability looks like:

- Consider the participation of community members in your project.
- Ensure that community members and their stories are not exploited. Make sure you compensate guest speakers with an appropriate gift or monetarily, even when sharing personal or collective stories is spontaneous.
- Obtain consent before asking a student to speak about their knowledge of a cultural practice and ensure they are compensated.
- Avoid collecting testimonies or asking an Elder to speak about a sensitive topic if you are unable to provide adequate compensation and/or spiritual and emotional support.
- Have the humility to listen, to learn from mistakes and take ownership for your actions.
- Avoid soliciting community members to put you in touch with Elders to perform an opening address for an event that is not dedicated to Indigenous affairs.

Always have a clear and common understanding of what is being asked in terms of resources, work, or knowledge, and identify and compensate when more work has been put in. Be open and flexible about modifying your deadlines and the amount of work expected.

Allan explains
"For Indigenous communities, Indigenous Peoples are often bombarded with so many requests saying I want to do this, I want to do that. It's a capacity issue if communities can assist or not."

SELF-REFLECTION QUESTIONS for reciprocity and accountability

- How are Indigenous collaborators benefiting from participating in your project?
- How is your project meaningful and reciprocal for them?
- How are you accountable to the community or individuals involved in the project?
- How will the outcomes or results be returned to the community? How will the project impact future generations?
- How will Indigenous rights to control and own data generated through your project be respected and recognized?

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5   Office of Aboriginal Initiatives, Indigenous Allyship : An Overview. Wilfrid Laurier University, 2015, p.12.

COMPENSATING

Indigenous expertise is often rooted in lived experience, stories, and traditional knowledge. An Indigenous collaborator who shares individual experience should be compensated fairly for their time and expertise.

Be aware and take into consideration the emotional, and mental energy that your Indigenous collaborators are putting into the project. Consider that the acknowledgement and compensation should be proportionate to the investment of work, knowledge, emotional labour and resources mobilized by your collaborators. This could involve co-authorship or some other form of acknowledgment of their role and contributions.

"They, the organizers, were so respectful, they always made sure they had a budget, and they always paid the Indigenous Peoples who were the collaborators, anyone who was presenting or facilitating" – Vicky

> ### ABOUT INVISIBLE LABOUR :
>
> *"The term "invisible labour" was first used by sociologists in the '70s and '80s to bring attention to the unpaid, unrecognized, and undervalued labour of household work by women".*
>
> *Indigenous Peoples "often feel tokenized and are expected to take on additional service responsibilities that are neither acknowledged nor rewarded" such as explaining Indigenous cultures to colleagues, fighting microaggressions in a group setting, providing guidance to Indigenous students as unrecognized and unpaid work, or investing personal time to challenge structural issues that affect them.*
>
> *Invisible labour should be recognized, compensated and mitigated.[6]*

How to compensate collaborators appropriately:

- Think of your Indigenous collaborators first to ensure appropriate payment is factored into your budget and not an afterthought.
- Look up industry rates, Canadian Artists Representation (CARFAC) rates, etc. and when those do not apply, look for guidelines around compensating Indigenous collaborators as outlined by an Indigenous organization.
- Arrange and pay for travel and accommodations.
- Prioritize payment that is accessible, efficient, and low-barrier (gift cards, cash, vouchers).
- Advocate in your institution for faster payments for Indigenous collaborators.
- When possible, honorariums should be paid on-site at the event or shortly thereafter.
- Ensure payment is timely, preferably with an advance if engaging in longer-term collaboration (more than 1 month).
- Communicate to the collaborator exactly when they will receive their payment.

A good practice regarding compensation is to review it periodically. For instance, Véronique explains that "Every year we look at our honorariums" to see how much went to their Indigenous collaborators and decide if the amounts are representative of the labour that Indigenous experts are contributing to the research or if they need to be increased.

In addition to having the financial or material means to compensate, you should be attentive to the expertise that you are soliciting which includes sharing lived experience. This should be compensated for:

"Be aware of what your collaborators are sharing, and make sure this is reflected adequately in the honorarium." – Véronique

If you would like to learn more, please consult this document **Indigenous Elder and Community Protocols** for guidelines on compensation.

6   Azher, S. (2021, April 1). Uncompensated, Unrecognized, and Undervalued Invisible Labor by Faculty of Color in Educational Institutions. Medium. https://srazher.medium.com/uncompensated-unrecognized-and-undervalued-invisible-labor-by-faculty-of-color-in-educational-8af35a25b362

OBTAINING CONSENT

Unfortunately, Indigenous expertise is often sought without consent or compensation. Extraction from Indigenous communities has been going on since colonization and this includes resources, traditional knowledge, intellectual property, and time. When approaching Indigenous communities and individuals, be aware of the power dynamics at play and that those dynamics can influence how Indigenous communities and individuals respond.

Indigenous students, for example, report being asked to share about their communities and histories in class to palliate the teacher's limited knowledge about Indigenous realities. Students express how difficult it is to refuse to respond given the teacher's position of authority.

"You are not asking a student to teach a math class, you are extracting their personal and family histories, you are asking them to share about their communities, you are asking them to share these very personal stories, so how are you going to honour that?"
— Vicky

Continuous consent is another principle to respect when working with Indigenous communities. Michelle explains "Consent is about relationships. Let collaborators know that you are not going to put anything out into the world unless they know about it, and they are ok with it. Just because they signed a consent form, it doesn't mean that the researcher can do anything with the content. It also means staying in touch with people, checking in."

Consent forms required by the University's Research Ethics Board may not be adapted to a collaborator's reality. Celeste explains that consent forms should be accessible, "If you are sending out consent forms, are you sending it digitally and can people access it? Do they understand English or French, can they write in English or French? I know some people who have a hard time writing their signatures, they will put a little sign, and then will the university accept that?" In these cases, you should consider seeking additional forms of consent to make sure that your collaborators are knowingly engaging in your project.

What does consent look like?

Before asking for the input or expertise of Indigenous Peoples ask yourself:

- Have you spoken to the individual in advance of the situation?
- Is there a possibility that the individual might feel coerced, manipulated or intimidated?
- Is there a power dynamic at play, e.g. student/teacher, manager/employee, adult/minor, etc.?
- Are you putting the individual on the spot, without prior consent?
- Are your expectations reasonable? Are you asking about potentially ceremonial or sacred knowledge that may not be for you?
- Is there a risk to this individual? Emotionally, mentally, physically, spiritually?
- Is the topic you are asking input on relatively benign or could this individual be compromised or (re)traumatized?
- Does the individual's input warrant compensation?
- If you are wrong about a situation and if you cause harm, are you willing to take ownership of and accountability for your actions?
- Are you expecting the individual to facilitate access to their community?

If a student or faculty member is conducting research with an Indigenous community, they are required under the TCPS 2 (2022) to go through a formal process of ethical approval under the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS)

TCPS 2 (2022) Chapter 3 addresses the Consent Process.

If you are unsure about your answers to any of these questions, do not proceed without consent.

SELF-REFLECTION QUESTIONS for compensation and consent

1. How much of your project's budget is dedicated to compensating Indigenous collaborators versus non-Indigenous collaborators?
2. List the visible and invisible labour that Indigenous collaborators are contributing to your project (time, knowledge, experiences, networks, stories, emotional work, advocacy, etc.).
3. Based on your previous answer, what is fair compensation for your collaborators? Develop a plan to address invisible labour.
4. Which mechanisms are you putting in place to validate and renew consent over time?

POSITIONALITY

Finally, we recommend taking time to reflect on your position of **power and privilege**. "This is an important part of decolonization, as it forces [non-Indigenous] people to suppress their privileged voices and the notion of superiority that has been impressed upon them from birth, and to listen to the perspectives of [Indigenous Peoples]". [7]

Working with Indigenous communities means there should be shared **power in decision-making** to avoid tokenizing and as a concrete step towards equitable collaboration. The community has the right to advocate for themselves, especially when decisions impact them.

"Be aware of false inclusion and tokenism, it is easy to tokenize without knowing, always be mindful of that."— Véronique

"Who has the power of decision making? They are asking: "Can you come in and share your perspectives, help us Indigenize this or decolonize this?" but then you have no decision-making power." — Amanda L.

Often, Indigenous Peoples are consulted for projects, but they are rarely put in a position of power where they can influence and be a part of decisions. Non-Indigenous peoples should consciously and actively transfer this role back to Indigenous individuals and communities.

Community engaged work can replicate existing hierarchies and power dynamics, especially when performed in the context of an institution. A genuine engagement should recognize and challenge colonial structures, and a desire for social change should be the true motivation for this work.

"Researchers really must think carefully about what they are doing, what's the purpose of the research and how they can be of service to community members. It's a responsibility, researchers have incredible privilege to be in an institution, being able to access resources. It's essential to put them to good use." — Michelle

It goes beyond finding ways to incorporate Indigenous knowledge and practices into community engagement, it is understanding how power is negotiated in community engagement activities, "(...) a complex interplay between balancing organisational and community priorities, negotiating power relations and positioning oneself with respect to others."[8]

Ways to challenge structures of power:

- Understand your positionality and privilege as a non-Indigenous person.
- Advocate for the fair recognition and compensation of Indigenous collaborators, especially in research.
- Create or advocate for more funding opportunities reserved for Indigenous-led projects.
- Find out about community protocols so that you can engage in a good way according to that specific community.

SELF-REFLECTION QUESTIONS for positionality

1. What is the power you hold in the context of your race, class, gender, sexuality and ability?
2. What mechanisms are you putting in place for collective decision making?
3. How will the power inequities and dynamics between Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners be accounted for and mitigated?
4. Are you using resources or spaces that are meant for or could be offered to Indigenous communities?
5. Does your project have the potential to cause unintended harm? Do you have a risk management plan?"

7   Office of Aboriginal Initiatives, Indigenous Allyship : An Overview. Wilfrid Laurier University, 2015, p.13.
8   Frawley, J., Larkin, S., & Smith, J.A. (2017). Indigenous Pathways, Transitions and Participation in Higher Education From Policy to Practice. p.37.

CONTINUING THE JOURNEY

How do you move on from here? What should your next step be? We invite you to **imagine the web of a dreamcatcher** to illustrate the process of building relationships and collaborating with Indigenous communities. This visual analogy illustrates the complexity of community engagement and the ideal collaboration that we aspire to.

The dreamcatcher has often been used to represent Indigenous Nations and for many, it is considered stereotypical and a symbol of the homogenization of Indigenous cultures. Conversations with Dr. Bimadoshka Pucan helped us understand that the dreamcatcher has a cultural meaning for the Anishinaabeg, amongst other Nations. This **illustrates the misconceptions and stereotypes** that are conveyed about Indigenous cultures and how forging relationships often leads to learning new meanings and moving past stereotypes.

The web of the dreamcatcher is made from a single string attached to a circle that acts as a solid foundation. The first knot is crucial for connecting the loops, ensuring stability.
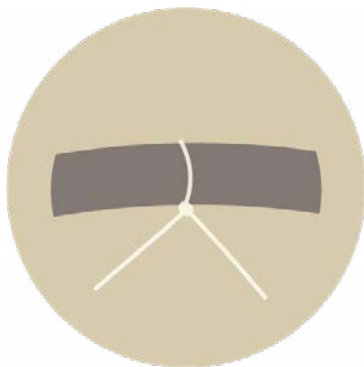
We identified **education** as the first knot: you should have a strong knowledge base of Indigenous realities and histories to be able to support relationship building and future collaborations. Each Indigenous perspective is different, so take the time to build connections and learn about each other.

Learning and connecting with others are represented by the thread making a loop and anchoring on the outer circle of the dreamcatcher.

Each of these foundational loops that attach to the circle represent **a commitment to learn and reflect**. As you learn about historical facts, be critical of contemporary injustices, colonial narrative, and most importantly, be self-reflective. Reflect on your own position of power and privilege and be honest about your intentions and expectations.

"To understand the structures, power and balance, and the interpersonal differences (…) not only cultural but also in terms of lived experiences within Indigenous communities." – Amanda L.

As a future ally to Indigenous Peoples, make sure those loops are tight and strong. This will require patience, trial and error, care, respect and acceptance of the mistakes you will inevitably make in this process.

Rehearsing and practicing what you have learned is crucial to integrating the knowledge. You might need to redo a loop before moving on to the next one. However, you should not be seeking perfection: this is a life-long journey, and you will make mistakes.

Put into practice the values and principles of listening, respecting Indigenous expertise, relating in reciprocity, being accountable, compensating fairly, renewing consent and reflecting on your positionality, power and privileges.

As you move towards the inside of the circle, you are attaching more anchors and strengthening the web. Each connection you make, you create one more anchor, one more loop, and one last knot. It becomes tighter and tighter. This represents the strength and trust of your relationship with the Indigenous community.

9   Office of Aboriginal Initiatives, Indigenous Allyship : An Overview. Wilfrid Laurier University, 2015, p.6.

In the end, the web may not be perfect, the middle might be off-centre or not as tight as you had hoped, but it is **the process of constructing the web, building those competencies, learning, relationships, trust, and connections that matter.** Each web you will make is different, it will represent the richness and diversity of Nations and groups that you collaborate with and will always require more learning from you.

Creating the web of a dreamcatcher requires resources (material, time and knowledge) and it engages its maker in movements, decisions, and trial and error, just like building connections and relationships. Most importantly, the result is representative of the level of proficiency and experience of the artisan, and it is never perfect.

 "It's continuous, you can never stop nurturing the relationship." – Véronique

Finally, you will most likely learn how to build a dreamcatcher from someone who has learned before you and is able to pass on this knowledge. Pay attention, listen, be respectful and accept to let go of some control. These attitudes apply to both dreamcatcher making and collaborating with Indigenous communities.

Remember this journey is a learning experience, it is not a linear or a step-by-step process. The skills that you are acquiring are meant to be revisited and will be strengthened over time. Accept and learn from mistakes and possible refusals from communities. ''It is impossible to 'become an ally' it is only possible to 'aspire to be an ally,' as allyship requires one to constantly cast a critical eye on themselves, to re-evaluate how they are choosing to live and carry themselves, and to think about how their lifestyle and choices (directly or indirectly) impact Indigenous Peoples.''[9]

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