

CENTERING INDIGENOUS VOICES

Guide Towards Allyship
in Indigenous Research

Western Research

JULY 2025



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TERRITORY ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This Guide has been created at and for Western University which is located on the traditional lands and ancestral territories of the Anishinaabek (Ah-nish-in-a-bek), Haudenosaunee (Ho-den-no-show-nee), and Lūnaapéewak (Len-ahpay- wuk) Nations, who have longstanding relationships to this land, water, plant and animal life as the original caretakers. Western and the City of London are located on lands connected with the London Township and Sombra Treaties of 1796 and the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum. The local First Nation communities of this area include Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Oneida Nation of the Thames, and Munsee Delaware Nation. In the region, there are eleven First Nation communities and a growing Indigenous urban population.

We recognize that research carried out by [settlers](#), involving and on Indigenous Peoples of [Turtle Island](#), has inflicted intra and intergenerational trauma through physical injury, psychological distress, cultural harm, and a denial of Indigenous ways of knowing as contributing to research. This has led to a distrust of research as an activity and a fear/distrust of organizations performing it. This Guide is one way in which the Western research community can work towards accepting and actioning “responsibility as a public institution to contribute toward revealing and correcting miseducation as well as renewing respectful relationships with Indigenous communities through our teaching, research and community service” (Office of Indigenous Initiatives, n.d.).

Western acknowledges in our strategic plan, [Towards Western at 150 \(2020\)](#), that Reconciliation is a priority and is integral to the university's mission. Western Research's strategic plan, [Mobilize for Impact! \(2022\)](#), commits to “ensure ethical research engagement with Indigenous communities, recognize colonial practices in, and adopt anti-colonial approach to, research” (page 6). By acknowledging that we are located on Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, and Lunaape lands connected to Indigenous-Crown Treaties made with the Deshkan Zibing Anishinaabek (Chippewas of the Thames First Nation), and Indigenous Treaties such as the Dish with One Spoon, Western makes explicit our responsibilities to equity and justice for all Indigenous Peoples, Reconciliation, and our ongoing commitment to strengthen and build meaningful relationships including for research ([Guide Towards Indigenous Allyship at Western University, 2025](#)).



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As researchers, scholars and artists, we have a responsibility to ensure our work respects, uplifts and meaningfully engages Indigenous Peoples in ways that are equitable, reciprocal and grounded in trust.

Allyship is not a label. It is a lifelong commitment to learning, **unlearning** and standing in solidarity. It is a powerful force for change that can help dismantle systemic barriers and renew relationships to drive research that is *rigorous and just*.

As researchers, scholars and artists, we have a responsibility to ensure our work respects, uplifts and meaningfully engages Indigenous Peoples in ways that are equitable, reciprocal and grounded in trust. These principles are core to our mission in Western Research.

This guide provides a practical framework for allyship with Indigenous communities within the research context. It has been co-created with the Office of Indigenous Initiatives in the spirit of reconciliation, ethical research practice and meaningful relationship-building.

By providing actionable steps, reflective questions and community-informed principles that can be integrated into our work, the guide supports our commitments to become better allies. I invite you to engage with it as a living resource – one that grows with your experience and deepens your relationships.

I encourage you to reach out to our team – with questions, for support and to share successes.

Penny Pexman, PhD

Vice-President (Research)
Western University



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Research informed by Indigenous knowledge grounds understanding morally and ethically to safeguard the world for the benefit of all future generations.

Indigenous ways of knowing and being is comprised of distinct knowledge systems that provide tremendous value and innovation to research through long-term, time-tested, place-based, holistic understanding and perspectives that enrich and reorient Western scientific approaches. Research informed by Indigenous knowledge grounds understanding morally and ethically to safeguard the world for the benefit of all future generations, while prioritizing Indigenous concepts such as sustainability and integrity. Indigenous researchers often lead this transformative work which involves significant heavy lifting with the academy. Further, they are often expected to lead and action the work of Truth and Reconciliation within the academy as well.

With a goal to provide guidance in relation to respectful engagement with Indigenous research and Indigenous researchers, the Offices of Indigenous Initiatives, together with allied colleagues in Western Research, is pleased to launch this new responsive resource which builds upon on the principles articulated within the [Guide to Indigenous Allyship at Western](#). This resource is informed by the insight of many Indigenous and allied practitioners, partners, and collaborators to provide practical guidance and share promising practices that will help safeguard the Earth within an equitable and balanced approach.

Christy Bressette, PhD

*Vice-Provost & Associate Vice-President, Indigenous Initiatives
Western University*





CHI MIIGWECH, YAW^KO, ANUSHIIK, MERCI, THANK YOU!

This Guide was created through the collaborative efforts of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous contributors, including faculty, staff, undergraduate and graduate students and trainees, and community members. Our heartfelt gratitude to everyone who has contributed their time, perspectives, and commitment to help inform the creation of this Guide.

Development of this Guide was led in partnership by [Western Research](#) and [The Office of Indigenous Initiatives](#) at Western University. We would like to extend a special thank you, chi miigwech, to Dr. Christy R. Bressette, Vice-Provost & Associate Vice-President (Indigenous Initiatives) and the Office of Indigenous Initiatives team for leading the path towards allyship.

The recommendations offered herein have been made in good faith with a genuine interest in supporting Western University's stated desire and commitment to enhancing Indigenous research allyship at Western. The content herein is non-exhaustive and is intended as a starting point in an ongoing learning journey that should be extended to include independent learning, engagement, and action.

ABOUT THE GUIDE

The content in this Guide is non-exhaustive and is intended to complement existing resources including *The Office of Indigenous Initiatives [Guide Towards Indigenous Allyship at Western University](#)*. The information in this Guide is relevant to those interested in and/or conducting Indigenous research, including faculty, staff, students, trainees, and external partners, and is a starting point in an ongoing learning journey that should be extended to include independent learning, engagement, and action. This Guide is organized as follows:

01 Part One: Introduction provides the purpose (how to use the Guide and how to prepare when undertaking Indigenous research), methods (where the knowledge in the Guide came from), and background (Western's research landscape and principles).

02 Part Two: Recommendations provides recommended actions that the research community (researchers, faculty, staff, undergraduate and graduate students, and trainees) can take to conduct research in allyship **with** Indigenous Peoples, organizations, and/or communities, especially those local to Western University.

Throughout this Guide, the term Indigenous is used to respectfully refer to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples—three distinct and diverse groups recognized as the Indigenous Peoples living in Canada on Turtle Island. While many of the principles outlined may also be relevant and applicable in research with international Indigenous communities, this Guide specifically relates to research involving Indigenous Peoples of Turtle Island and honouring the unique relationship and associated responsibilities they carry.

Contacts and Additional Supports

While [The Office of Indigenous Initiatives](#) champions and leads Indigenous strategic decisions, builds collaborative and community-engaged partnerships, and supports campus partners in implementing Western's Indigenous Strategic Plan, [Western Research](#) leads Indigenous research support, administration, and guidance. Both teams work in close collaboration.

Support for Indigenous research is provided through Western Research. If you are planning to undertake or are currently engaged in Indigenous research, it is strongly recommended that you connect with Western Research for guidance, resources, and support.

For support, visit the [Western Research Indigenous research webpage](#).

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PART ONE: INTRODUCTION





PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

Part One provides an overview on the purpose (how to use the Guide and how to prepare when undertaking Indigenous research), methods (where the knowledge in the Guide came from), and background (Western's research landscape and principles).

Who is this Guide for?

This Guide is intended for Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers, staff, faculty, undergraduate and graduate students (henceforth referred to as students), and trainees who are interested in conducting Indigenous research *in a good way* and in allyship **with** Indigenous Peoples, organizations, and/or

communities, especially those local to Western University.

Indigenous research extends beyond community-based approaches to encompass all forms and disciplines that have potential implications for Indigenous Peoples, their data, Lands (water, air, plants, animals), and/or knowledges.

WHERE DOES THIS KNOWLEDGE COME FROM?

This Guide is based on an environmental scan and engagements with forty-one (41) participants, including Indigenous and non-Indigenous allied faculty, staff, and students at Western, and community members between July and October 2024.

This Guide foregrounds the voices of Western University's Indigenous community because of their localized living experiences and understanding that recognition is what matters most.

How can I use this Guide?

All resources and references mentioned in this Guide can be accessed by clicking on their respective titles.

THIS GUIDE:

- ***Is only one resource***
that can be used as a starting point alongside your personal research, engagement, and work (it is not exhaustive).
- ***Is a living document***
that should be updated as we all learn and grow from new experiences and research.
- ***Does not make you an allied researcher,***
allyship is a way of living and not a status that can be obtained or self-declared.
- ***Is localized and specific to Western University's research community;***
it reflects the voices of Indigenous and allied faculty, staff, students and trainees, and community members who supported this work.

Principles for Ind

- 
- Accepting Truth before jumping into Reconciliation
 - Committing to unsettling; and creating new pathways forward together
 - Honouring Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination in decision-making and relationship-building processes
 - Nurturing culturally inclusive and trauma-informed learning environments
 - Supporting the reclamation of Indigenous knowledge systems & lands through Indigenous-led cultural resurgence & language revitalization

Medallion created by: Karsyn Summers (Oneida Nation of the Thames). Principles for Ind

Indigenous Allyship



Indigenous Allyship drawn from [A Guide Towards Indigenous Allyship at Western University](#).

Background

As calls for decolonization and reconciliation in research continue to grow, there is an urgent need to equip researchers, staff, students, and trainees with guidance on how to engage in ways that respect Indigenous sovereignty, support community-led knowledge creation, and follow culturally appropriate [protocols](#). A common question from those new to Indigenous research is, “Where do I begin?”. While there is no checklist that one can complete to become an ally in research, this Guide offers a starting point—fostering accountability, building trust, and helping ensure that research contributes meaningfully to Indigenous well-being and self-determination. It is also intended to strengthen institutional awareness and capacity to “advance reconciliation with Indigenous Communities,” as mandated in [Towards Western at 150](#) and emphasized in Western Research’s strategic plan, [Mobilize for Impact!](#) and the collective responsibility to uphold treaties and Indigenous data sovereignty.





PART TWO: RECOMMENDATIONS







PART TWO: RECOMMENDATIONS

Part Two provides recommended actions that researchers, faculty, staff, students, and trainees can take to conduct research in allyship with Indigenous Peoples, organizations, and/or communities. Guidance on the practical application of recommendations is also provided and includes context, rationale, and potential misstep(s) that a person might make, and identification of internal/external resources directly related to each recommendation.

Part Two is organized by four broad recommendations that emerged from the engagements and research that informed this Guide, which include:

- 01 Learn and unlearn by educating ourselves.

- 02 **Unsettle** ourselves through continual self-reflection.

- 03 Listen to and support **community-led research** (& respect the right to refuse).

- 04 Advocate to drive structural change in support of Indigenous Research.



01

Learn and unlearn by educating ourselves

What to do (Recommended Action): Before asking an Indigenous faculty, staff, community member, trainee, or student to help you or others learn, do your own research to educate yourself. We have included a few resources here, but there are others included throughout this Guide.

Why do it (Rationale): Indigenous faculty, staff, trainees, and students are frequently being approached by non-Indigenous researchers to assist with topics that do not relate to their identities or research interests. For example, it is not appropriate to approach a First Nation person with a question about Inuit culture, as it does not match their identity, and one cannot assume it is their area of expertise. As a result of this over-engagement in work that is unpaid, emotionally exhausting, and outside of their regular job duties, Indigenous faculty and staff are frustrated, experience challenges completing their regular work, and are at risk of **burnout**.

How to do it (Reflection Questions & Resources): It is important to seek out community-specific and community-vetted resources. Sometimes this information is available on community websites or through a quick internet search. Noting community endorsement of the resource (either by posting it on their website or authorship by a community member or organization) is important to validating the information. Conducting independent research prior to engaging an Indigenous faculty member, staff, trainee, student, or community member, should include a focus on local histories, cultures, languages, priorities, and concerns. Researchers should also learn about any community research and / or consultation protocols. Further, it is important to avoid assumptions about lack of Indigenous research or authors, as Indigenous scholarship can be found in a wide range of disciplines. In Euro-Western scientific fields, it is often assumed that Indigenous scholars are not present, but this is usually due to limited visibility rather than absence. Taking the time to search more broadly can reveal valuable contributions and support more inclusive research practices.



WHAT TO AVOID:

Tokenism: Engaging an Indigenous person only because they are Indigenous and not for the knowledge they bring is tokenistic. (See [glossary](#) of terms for fulsome definition)

Homogenizing and Pan-Indigenizing: Expecting that Indigenous faculty, staff, trainees, and students know all things Indigenous erases the diversity among Indigenous Peoples, groups, and communities.

Over-engaging: Engaging Indigenous people too frequently or engaging them in unpaid, emotionally challenging work outside of their regular duties.

Tokenism: can be difficult to recognize because it creates an optic of inclusion and fairness by virtue of bringing members of an equity-denied group into a space without transforming the power dynamics through meaningful structural or systemic changes. **Indigenous tokenism** can look like:

- hiring an Indigenous person for a position without giving them decision-making power, influence, or a budget to make meaningful changes.
- onboarding an Indigenous member to a committee without listening to their ideas or validating their living experiences with institutional racism.
- inviting an Indigenous scholar to give a lecture/key note on a topic that does not relate to their research expertise.
- inviting an Indigenous scholar/trainee/Elder or community member to participate on your grant just because they are Indigenous.

Below are a few recommended resources to get you started. While a few are intended for instructors, researchers can use these resources to learn and unlearn in ways that will support research in allyship with Indigenous Peoples, organizations, and/or communities:



A Guide to Indigenous Allyship at Western University contains important information about the local Indigenous and settler colonial history and context of the land on which Western University is located. This includes information about local First Nations, treaties, and the local residential school history.



Indigenous Teaching and Learning Series is an online education series for university instructors designed to enhance their understanding of the colonial history and context of the academy, as well as decolonizing, Indigenizing, and other transformational movements taking place (Centre for Teaching and Learning, 2023).



Indigenous Learning Bundles: Maatookiiyng gaa-miinigoowiziying (Sharing Our Gifts) is a digital resource created to help Western and Affiliate instructors integrate Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into their courses ethically and culturally. This project provides Indigenous-led learning bundles, each equivalent to a lesson, which focus on Indigenous themes and emphasize Indigenous concepts, theories, and ways of knowing (Indigenous Initiatives, n.d.).



Biindigen: Indigenous Learning Circle offers Western staff and faculty a space to explore Indigenization and reconciliation through discussions, books, documentaries, and podcasts. Co-organized by Western Libraries, Western Research, Student Experience, the Human Rights Office, and the Office of Indigenous Initiatives, the group meets at least four times a year to socialize, listen, and engage in critical conversations on Indigenization, decolonization,

and reconciliation at Western (Indigenous Initiatives, n.d.).



Mbwaachidiwag: Podcast explores the complexities of embedding Indigenization and decolonization in institutional practices through conversations with Indigenous Peoples and allies hosted by Sara Mai Chitty, Curriculum & Pedagogy Advisor with Western's Office of Indigenous Initiatives (Office of Indigenous Initiatives, n.d.). Use this Podcast to gain insights into how Indigenous Peoples and allies can bridge divides through research and curriculum development (Indigenous Initiatives, n.d.).



Online Learning Modules: '4 Seasons of Reconciliation' and 'The Path' are two online courses offering foundational knowledge on Indigenous Peoples and Reconciliation in Canada and are both available on OWL Sakai for all staff, faculty, trainees, and students at Western. '4 Seasons of Reconciliation' provides a 3.5-hour module

that addresses Truth and Reconciliation, Indigenous contributions, and dismantling stereotypes. 'The Path' created by NVision, is a five-part series that offers cultural awareness and background on First Nations, Métis, and Inuit in Canada (Indigenous Initiatives, n.d.). Use these resources to learn and unlearn about Indigenous and colonial history and context.



Indigenous Community Research Partnerships (ICRP) is an online open education training resource at Queen's University. It is designed to assist researchers who are new to research in partnerships with Inuit, Métis, and First Nations ("Indigenous") communities, or who are researchers-in-training, to:

- Operationalize regulatory policy requirements and research directives;
- Ensure equitable inclusion of Indigenous and Western-oriented knowledge in research systems; and,
- In the case of Indigenous-specific enquiry, to privilege or give primacy to Indigenous ways of knowing and doing" (Queen's University Office of Indigenous Initiatives, 2024).



Unpacking and Addressing Anti-Indigenous Racism is an online module that explores the manifestations of **racism** and **discrimination** against Indigenous Peoples in Canada while outlining strategies to advance meaningful action in personal, professional, and community settings.



Western's Smudging Resource was created to answer frequently asked questions about smudging. Smudging is an Indigenous spiritual and cultural practice that involves burning sacred medicines (e.g., tobacco, sweetgrass, sage, cedar) to cleanse a room, person, or group (Indigenous Initiatives, n.d.). Use this resource to answer any frequently asked questions about smudging protocol, including how to do it in a respectful way. Please note that not all Indigenous Peoples and/or communities' smudge. Smudging is a practice rooted in many First Nations traditions, but it may not be part of Métis, Inuit, or specific Nation-based practices or protocols. It is important to seek guidance from the community you are working with to understand which ceremonial practices are appropriate and meaningful in their context.



ASK YOURSELF:

Before engaging an Indigenous person with a request for knowledge, ask yourself:

1. Can I find this knowledge myself through existing resources?
2. Is this knowledge the person holds?
3. Is it relevant to their Indigenous identity and/or Nation/community?
4. Does it reflect their area of expertise/study/research?
5. Am I providing this person with enough time to reflect and engage?
6. Is this ask going to involve **emotional labour**, and if so, how can I support this person?
7. Is this a safe space and time to ask?
8. How will I provide appropriate compensation to acknowledge this work?

These questions are adapted from the [Guide Towards Indigenous Allyship at Western University](#).

CASE STUDY

Tokenism over True Partnership

Scenario: An Indigenous scholar receives a message from an unfamiliar research lab stating:

"Dear [Indigenous Scholar],

X Lab is applying to X Grant.

*We see a great fit because of your expertise in X. Additionally, this grant requires knowledge users, would there be any organization within your network that deals with **Indigenous data sovereignty** that we could reach out to work with?*

At this stage you are only required to confirm your participation. Please let me know if you have any questions."

What Went Wrong: This outreach, while seemingly inclusive, reflects a transactional approach rather than a relational one. The scholar is approached by an unfamiliar individual last-minute, primarily to fulfill a grant requirement rather than to co-develop research priorities. It places the burden on the scholar to provide further contacts, without compensation or clarity on their role.

Why It Matters: True allyship in Indigenous research requires relationship-building, co-creation, and respect for Indigenous protocols and data governance. There are some important considerations when inviting Indigenous scholars to participate as team members in a grant: two important ones being whether you have an existing relationship with that scholar and reciprocity. When outreach is done with a preconceived agenda in mind (e.g., a grant) and no prior relationship, it is considered tokenism. Token involvement can harm trust and perpetuate **extractive research** practices.

Better Practice: Before deciding to apply for the grant, X Lab could have engaged the Indigenous scholar in meaningful dialogue about shared interests and research priorities. They could have asked, "Would you be interested in co-developing a proposal with us?" or "I am interested in your research, would my skillset be useful to your research team?" and ensured any organizational outreach came from relationships built with consent, reciprocity, and adequate time.



02

Unsettle ourselves through continual self-reflection

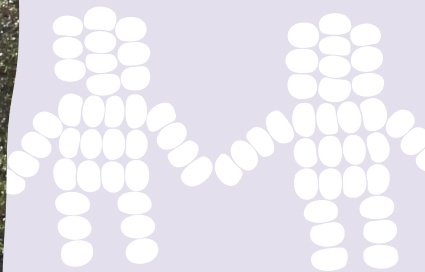
What to do (Recommended Action): Unsettle yourself by self-reflecting on your **positionality** and responsibilities before you begin working with Indigenous Peoples or communities.

Why do it (Rationales): Decolonization starts internally, and reflecting and unsettling is necessary in order to work with Indigenous Peoples and communities in a good way. Learning about who you are, where you come from, whose Land you are on, and why you are doing your research, can help you to understand your responsibilities and build relationships with Indigenous research partners. Further, critical self-reflection allows you to confront preconceived notions or biases you may hold about Indigenous Peoples or Knowledge, or yourself. While the process may be intellectually and emotionally uncomfortable, challenging beliefs rooted in colonial systems is essential to unsettling.

For many Indigenous people, it is protocol to introduce themselves in a way that makes visible their relationships to the Land they are on, as well as the community, Nation, and Clan to which they belong. Unlike many non-Indigenous people, these introductions reflect a deep awareness of **relational accountability**. Ultimately, reflecting on one's positionality is a meaningful way for non-Indigenous researchers to prepare themselves—by considering their own lived realities, relationships, and responsibilities before engaging with Indigenous communities. It is also important to reflect on the relationships and associated responsibilities you have to the land, water, air, as well as animal and plant life, including being mindful of the impacts of your research.

How to do it (Reflection Questions & Resources): Unsettling requires continual critical self-reflection / **reflexivity**, including on your positionality and responsibilities to the space and place you are taking up and what that means in terms of how you conduct research. The reflection questions and resources below can support you in understanding your positionality in relation to the research and unsettling on an ongoing basis.





WHAT TO AVOID:

Performative Allyship:

Undertaking actions that do not create meaningful positive change for Indigenous Peoples to make oneself appear to others as an Ally, often for personal or professional benefit. Examples include:

- scripted land acknowledgements that do not clearly link to one's positionality and action.
- positionality statements that centre one's family history without acknowledging one's relationship to settler colonialism (where you live, what traditional lands you are on, your treaty responsibilities, how you got to this land and how you benefited from the colonial project of Canada).

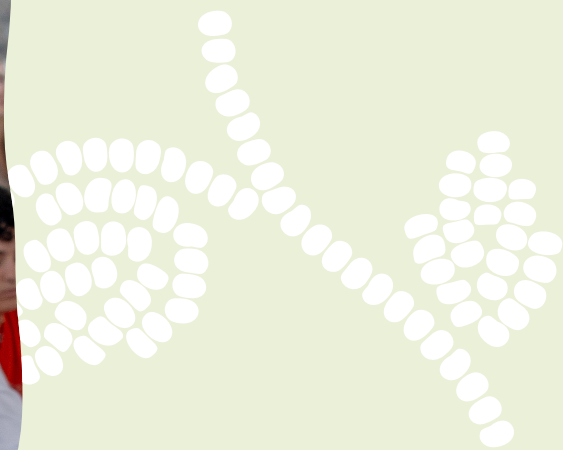
HOW DO I PREPARE A POSITIONALITY STATEMENT?

A positionality statement explains your personal context in relation to the social structures, people, and land you work within, with, and on. This helps others understand the place from which you are speaking. To prepare a positionality statement, you can draw on reflection questions provided in the [Guide Towards Indigenous Allyship at Western University](#) and [More than Words: A Guide to Land Acknowledgments at Western University](#), which are designed to foster a deeper understanding of one's relationship to Indigenous lands and communities. These questions can guide you in exploring your identity, privileges, and historical context in relation to the communities involved in your research.

“

Decolonization starts internally, and reflecting and unsettling is necessary in order to work with Indigenous Peoples and communities in a good way.





ASK YOURSELF:

Before engaging in research with and for Indigenous people or communities, ask yourself:

1. What benefits and privileges have I enjoyed from settling in Canada? How does this impact my experience as a researcher in this space?
2. On whose Traditional Territory am I situated (either in person or virtually)? On whose Traditional Territory am I intending to conduct research?
 - How have I and might I benefit from living on and performing research on this land?
3. What are the Treaties of the Land I am on?
 - What do they say?
 - What are my Treaty responsibilities?
4. What is my motivation and intention in taking on this research?
 - How will I stay accountable to myself?
5. What are my values and beliefs about research?
 - How are these similar or different from Indigenous values and beliefs about research?
6. Where do my values and beliefs come from?
 - How have they benefitted me by allowing me to maintain my power and privilege?
 - How are they harmful to Indigenous Peoples?
 - What can I do to learn, unlearn, and grow?

03

Listen to and support community-led research (& respect the right to refuse)

What to do (Recommended Action): Conduct community-based and community-led research; this is research conducted with communities and not on and about communities and includes respecting Indigenous data sovereignty and research protocols.

In practice, refusal can take various forms: a direct “no,” a “not now” indicating timing concerns, or even a lack of response, which may signify disinterest or other priorities. Researchers should interpret all such responses as valid expressions of the community’s wishes and be prepared to respectfully accept them, remaining open to future engagement only if and when the community is ready.

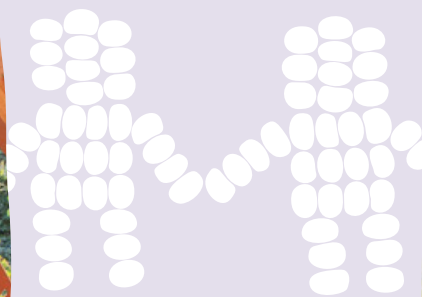
Why do it (Rationale): Indigenous communities continue to experience harm from non-Indigenous researchers who engage in extractive practices; often taking knowledge from communities for personal or academic gain, without offering clear or meaningful pathways to reciprocity or even sharing research findings back in return. This has led Indigenous communities to be wary of researchers in general, but especially non-Indigenous researchers.

While this lack of trust can be a contributing factor to refusals, Indigenous communities may decline to engage in research for many reasons. For example, the research may not be relevant, they may not have enough staff to provide dedicated support, or other matters may take priority in the community at that time.

The right to refusal is a core principle in research with Indigenous communities and means that communities have the authority to decline participation at any stage, request changes, or withdraw from a project entirely, without facing pressure or consequences. Silence or non-response should be respected as a valid form of refusal, rather than interpreted as indecision or consent. More information is presented below in the “What do I do if a community isn’t responding?” section on [page 36](#).

How to do it (Reflection Questions & Resources): Community-based and community-led research responds to priorities and requests the community has shared publicly, with you directly, or to your partners and that will clearly benefit the community. This is different from extractive research practices that centre on advancing a body of knowledge but largely benefit the researcher’s career, while the community may see little benefit or even experience harm.





WHAT TO AVOID:

Extractive Research: Conducting research on, about, and for communities, based on our own professional interests and/or perspectives of benefits and needs.

Entitlement: Approaching Indigenous community engagement in your research with a sense of **entitlement** or expectation that they will support and approve. This extends to failing to respect their right to refusal or otherwise responding poorly to refusals. It also extends to demonstrating entitlement to an explanation in the event of a refusal.

Settler Fragility: Becoming defensive when a refusal, feedback, or request for change to your research is brought forward by an Indigenous person or community, instead of reflecting on and learning from the experience about how to make your research more community-led. Fragility often manifests in decentering Indigenous community priorities or historic harms caused by research.

CASE STUDY

Recognizing Red Flags That Can Lead to Silence or Refusal

Scenario: An Indigenous organization received an unsolicited email from an international student seeking to conduct Indigenous research. The email included the following:

"To whom it may concern,

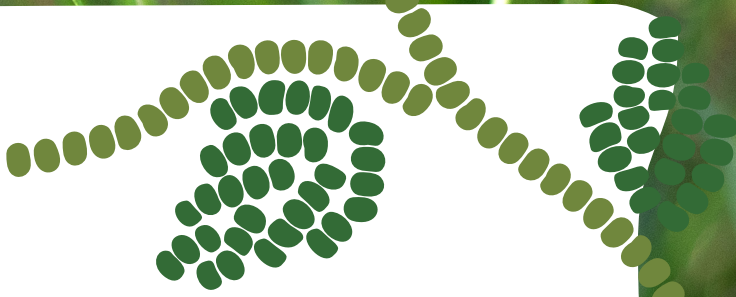
I am writing to inquire about the possibility of conducting X research with Indigenous Peoples, regarding X in the community. I am currently a graduate student at [X international university].

I am aiming to hold focus group interviews with approximately 10 participants. These sessions would last about an hour each. The interviews would be recorded (audio only) for transcription and discourse analysis; no audio will be published in the paper participants will be anonymized. Requests for certain responses to be omitted will be honoured.

I will submit an ethics application before any research is carried out and will involve the community throughout the process. More information will be available once my proposal is approved. I aim to travel to Canada to carry out this research in June, allowing time for analysis and dissertation submission by early September.

I look forward to your reply and am happy to answer any questions about myself or the project."

What went wrong – Key red flags: While the email was polite and detailed, it raised several concerns from the perspective of the Indigenous organization: 1) It demonstrates a one-sided request and that the student researcher is uninformed of the local context and diversity of Indigenous Peoples in Canada. They are interested in *studying* Indigenous Peoples, not doing research *with* Indigenous Peoples; 2) The request is very prescriptive with no room for Indigenous Peoples to be involved in the co-creation of the research – this approach reflects "helicopter research" where data is extracted/collected without



long-term engagement or benefit to the community; 3) Beyond their name and institutional affiliation, there is no positionality to demonstrate how they come to this work or indication of prior experience or relationships with Indigenous Peoples/communities – this raises questions about accountability and ethical orientation; 4) There is no mention of how Indigenous data sovereignty will be upheld; 5) There is no mention of compensation/reciprocity for the organization or participant's time and knowledge – the interaction is framed as extractive rather than reciprocal; and, 6) Indigenous People are expected to work within the researcher's imposed timeline with little regard for community and organizational timelines, capacities or protocols. This undermines the principle of respectful, community-paced research.

Why it matters: Indigenous Peoples are not a monolith; each Nation, community, or group has its own governance structures, research priorities, and protocols. It is important to understand who you are engaging with and how you are engaging. Effective and ethical research begins with meaningful relationships. An initial email may be the only opportunity to make a positive impression – red flags, even if unintended, can quickly close doors. Poorly framed outreach can reinforce colonial research practices and erode trust. Indigenous organizations frequently share information and experiences with one another, and reputations – good or bad – can circulate widely and influence future research opportunities.

Better Practice: Begin with humility and respect. Do not center your needs and assume a community wants or needs your research. Instead, invest in building a relationship – introduce yourself as a person, not just a researcher and extend an invitation to meet over food to learn about the community needs and priorities. Go in with an open mind and without the expectation that a research partnership will result from your relationship building. How you engage may determine if an Indigenous community is willing to recommend you to another community whose research needs may be better aligned with your research expertise. Be prepared to listen, learn and willing to reshape your expectations in response to community input and priorities.



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It is important to be transparent about your intentions, ensure mutual benefits, and respect the community's right to give consent and to withdraw consent at any time.

HOW DO I RESPECT INDIGENOUS DATA SOVEREIGNTY?

There are four commonly used distinction-based Indigenous ethics and data sovereignty protocols. It is important to note that not all Indigenous Peoples or communities will recognize these protocols. Many communities have other community-specific protocols in place, which take priority. It is important to ask. You can access each of these frameworks below.

- [The First Nations Principles of OCAP®](#)
- [The National Inuit Strategy on Research \(NISR\)](#)
- [Principles of Ethical Métis Research](#)
- [The USAI \(Utility, Self-voicing, Access, and Inter-relativity\) Research Framework](#)

For more information about Indigenous Data Sovereignty see the Glossary of Key Terms in this report as well as the following resources:

- [Western University's Institutional Strategy on Research Data Management](#)
- [Indigenous Data Sovereignty – University of Toronto Libraries](#)
- [“Indigenous data, Indigenous methodologies and Indigenous data sovereignty” in *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* by Maggie Walter and Michele Suina](#)

HOW DO I DETERMINE WHICH CONTACT OR COMMUNITY TO ENGAGE?

Identify which communities are directly connected to or impacted by the focus of the research. If there is a geographical location to the research, consider using [Whose Land](#), an interactive map of Indigenous territories.

Engagement should be meaningful and relevant, respecting the connection between the community's experiences and the research goals. Additionally, if you or your department or research team have established relationships with specific communities, consider building on those connections—while ensuring the community's interest and consent for involvement in your current research.

HOW DO I GO ABOUT ENGAGING AND WHAT ARE MY RESPONSIBILITIES WHEN ENGAGING INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND COMMUNITIES?

To engage respectfully with Indigenous communities, approach with humility and an understanding of their cultures and protocols. Prioritize listening, build genuine relationships, and follow community guidance on proper engagement practices. Additionally, it is important to be transparent about your intentions, ensure mutual benefits, and respect the community's right to give consent and to withdraw consent at any time. Researchers have a responsibility to foster trust, remain accountable, and honour the community's priorities throughout the research.

There are many resources that can support you in engaging with Indigenous Peoples and communities respectfully. Here are a few excellent ones to get you started:

- [J. Tobias, C. Richmond, I. Luginaah \(2013\) Community-Based Participatory Research \(CBPR\) with Indigenous Communities: Producing Respectful and Reciprocal Research.](#)
- The **'Six R's of Indigenous Research'**—respect, relevance, responsibility, reciprocity, relationships, and refusal—are guiding principles developed through Indigenous scholarship. Originating from Kirkness & Barnhardt's (1991) 4Rs and expanded by Johnston, McGregor & Restoule (2018), these principles emphasize respecting and preserving the integrity and knowledge of Indigenous Peoples (Johnston, McGregor, & Restoule, 2018; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Western University, 2022, p. 11).
- Castleden, H., Morgan, V. S., & Lamb, C. (2012). "[I spent the first year drinking tea": Exploring Canadian University Researchers' Perspectives on community based participatory research involving Indigenous Peoples.](#) Canadian Geographies / Géographies Canadiennes, 56(2), 160–179. Provides a strong foundational explanation of the importance of relationship building in Indigenous research.

- ♦ **Note:** this article typically requires access to online academic databases."
- [Tri-Council Policy Statement 2 \(2022\) – Chapter 9: Research Involving the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples of Canada](#) provides a framework for ethical research involving Indigenous Peoples in Canada, aiming to foster respectful relationships and encourage meaningful collaboration (Government of Canada, 2022). It acknowledges the unique cultures and values of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities, emphasizing reciprocity as a foundation for beneficial relationships (Government of Canada, 2022). Chapter 9 outlines the minimum standards and expectations that researchers are required to meet when engaging in research with Indigenous Peoples, serving as a baseline for ethical practice.
- [UManitoba Framework for Research Engagement](#) offers guidance for establishing meaningful, respectful partnerships that support shared excellence in collaborative, community-driven research. Use the framework to ensure that partnerships with Indigenous communities are characterized by ethical accountability and responsibility to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples as well as to the academic community (University of Manitoba, 2024).



Ultimately, researchers are encouraged to consult community-specific protocols, Elders, and local Knowledge Keepers, to fully honour the unique contexts and needs of each Indigenous community.

WHAT DO I DO IF A COMMUNITY ISN'T RESPONDING?

If a community isn't responding, approach the situation with patience and respect. Indigenous communities often have other priorities or limited capacity, so allow time for a response without following up too frequently. Additionally, reflect on your initial outreach to ensure it was respectful, clearly aligned with the community's values and priorities, and was rooted in the spirit of reciprocity. Ask yourself: how does your request support their needs and/or priorities? Was honorarium offered in recognition of their time? Were cultural protocols followed? Review the case study located on [page 32](#). You can also ask a colleague to review initial communication for a second opinion. However, if more extensive expertise is required, contact a [Western Research Indigenous Research Specialist](#).

A lack of response might also signal that your request could be adjusted to better meet the community's interests and needs. A respectful and constructive approach is to pause and reflect on how the request aligns with the community's priorities and values. Feedback can be sought, if possible, through trusted intermediaries or community liaisons, showing genuine willingness to listen and adapt.

Finally, recognize that silence may be a form of response; if the community chooses not to engage, respect their decision and remain open to collaboration only if and when they express interest.

WHO CAN PROVIDE CONSENT ON BEHALF OF A COMMUNITY?

Consent protocols vary widely across Indigenous communities. Some communities have designated representatives, councils, or Elders who hold the authority to provide consent on behalf of the collective. However, a great way to start is by asking the community how they approach collective representation and consent. In some cases, consent may need to come from a governing body, while in others, specific individuals such as Elders, Knowledge Keepers, or community leaders may be appropriate contacts. Nonetheless, projects require both individual consent from research participants and collective consent from the community. Ensure you are honouring both personal and community-level permissions as needed.

HOW DO I IDENTIFY APPROPRIATE REPRESENTATION?

To identify appropriate representation, begin by consulting with community leaders, Elders, or Indigenous research offices and/or band offices who can provide guidance on individuals authorized to represent the community in your research area. Each Indigenous community has unique protocols

for designating representatives, so it is important to ask about these practices to ensure that you are engaging with people who hold the appropriate roles. Knowledge Keepers and Elders can often offer insights into who has the authority to speak on behalf of the community, helping to align your research with cultural and contextual considerations. Avoid assuming that any individual from the community can serve as a representative; instead, respect the community's governance and decision-making processes to foster authentic engagement.

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Recognize that silence may be a form of response; if the community chooses not to engage, respect their decision and remain open to collaboration only if and when they express interest.



HOW DO I DETERMINE HOW MUCH ENGAGEMENT IS THE RIGHT AMOUNT? HOW CAN I BUILD MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS?

Incorporating relationship-building into the research timeline is essential when working with Indigenous communities. Building meaningful, reciprocal relationships will take as long or as little time as needed to foster trust and mutual respect. This involves actively engaging with the community by attending events and activities, when invited, and dedicating time to listen and understand the community's perspectives. Following the community's lead on ways to reciprocate is key, ensuring that the relationship is mutually beneficial. This may include leveraging your influence to create space for

Indigenous voices, offering financial compensation, and respecting practices of gifting and reciprocity, which are integral to honouring Indigenous relationships and engagement.

- **Community-Driven Approach:** Begin by asking the Indigenous community how they envision their role in the research and what level of engagement feels appropriate to them. Each community has its own protocols and preferences, so understanding these expectations will help you align your engagement to their standards.
- **Respect Relationship-Building:** Allocate time for relationship-building in the research timeline and understand that engagement goes beyond

formal meetings—it involves listening, showing up when invited, and being present. Engage as much as needed to build trust and ensure that community members feel valued and respected throughout the research process. This means beginning engagement well before any grant submission or ethics application is due. Often Indigenous scholars receive “urgent” last-minute requests to join research teams or review documents with little turnaround time. Indigenous Peoples, organizations, and communities often operate on different timelines than academic institutions, and researchers must plan ahead accordingly to engage meaningfully and respectfully.

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Projects require both individual consent from research participants and collective consent from the community.



- **Ongoing Communication:** Engagement is often continuous rather than a single action. Regularly check in with the community to make sure your level of involvement remains appropriate and responsive to their needs, adjusting as required.
- **Acknowledge Power Dynamics:** Reflect on the power dynamics in the research relationship and ensure that the community has an active, equal role. Balance your contributions with active listening, ensuring that the community's voices guide the research.

Ultimately, “the right amount” of engagement is determined collaboratively with the community, emphasizing respect, adaptability,

and a commitment to meet their needs and priorities in the research partnership. You can consult [Community Research Partnerships Training](#) for more information (Queen's University, n.d.).

HOW DO I RESPECTFULLY WORK WITH INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY MEMBERS?

[Working in Good Ways: A Framework and Resources for Indigenous Community Engagement](#) provides ethical practices, cultural humility, and provides tools for fostering meaningful relationships and aligning efforts with community priorities. Use this framework to work with Indigenous communities in ways that emphasize collaboration, shared benefits, and the integration of Indigenous knowledge and protocols (Ferland, Chen, & Villagrán Becerra, 2021).

[Guidelines for Working with Indigenous Community Members](#) is a critical resource if your research involves working with Indigenous community members. Use these Guidelines to understand how to work with Indigenous community members in reciprocal and respectful ways (Indigenous Initiatives, n.d.). They provide cultural protocols for respectfully engaging, hosting, and compensating Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and other community members for sharing their knowledge and time (Indigenous Initiatives, n.d.).





HOW DO I RESPECTFULLY WORK WITH ELDERS?

[Considerations for Meaningful Collaboration: Highlights from a Conversation with Indigenous Elders](#) and [Guidelines for Working with Indigenous Community Members](#) are critical resources if your research involves working with Indigenous Elders. Use this Guide to access guidance for meaningful collaboration with Indigenous Elders, focusing on respect, relationship-building, and cultural significance (Indigenous Initiatives, n.d.). It details steps for engaging with **Elders** before, during, and after events, emphasizing the importance of honouring their knowledge, offering honoraria, and maintaining culturally appropriate protocols (Indigenous Initiatives, n.d.).

HOW DO I RESPECTFULLY WORK WITH INDIGENOUS STUDENTS?

[Guide for Working with Indigenous Students](#) is a critical resource if your research involves working with Indigenous students. Use this Guide to better understand and respond to the needs, realities, and barriers of Indigenous students in university settings (Western University, n.d.). It also highlights their role in fostering equitable changes at organizational, professional, and personal levels (Western University, n.d.).



ASK YOURSELF:

When engaging in community-based and/or community-led research, ask yourself:

1. Do I have a strong positive relationship with this community?
 - Did I spend enough time building a relationship with this community?
 - Has the community participated in research with me in the past?
2. How can I ensure that my research is relevant to (a priority for) the community?
3. How am I following the community's research ethics, consent, and data sovereignty protocols?
 - Who decides on behalf of the community whether the community will participate in research? (e.g., Chief and Council, a Community Research Ethics Board, or another mechanism)
 - How am I including community members in decision-making processes throughout the research?
 - What steps am I taking to advocate for Western to uphold the community's rights throughout the research process?
4. How am I treating the community as an equal partner throughout the research process?
 - Am I prepared to let the community lead discussions around the timing, use, and dissemination of research results?
 - Have I created space for the community to share their expertise and insights in shaping the research methodologies? How am I attributing this expertise?
 - Am I open to adjusting my research approach based on community input and feedback?
 - How will I ensure that the research findings are shared in a way that is accessible and beneficial to the community?
5. How am I fostering long-term, respectful relationships with the community beyond the scope of this research project?

04

Advocate to drive structural change in support of Indigenous Research

What to do (Recommended Action): Once you commit to and begin the work to understand your positionality, you can begin to honour your responsibilities by taking action to create meaningful change.

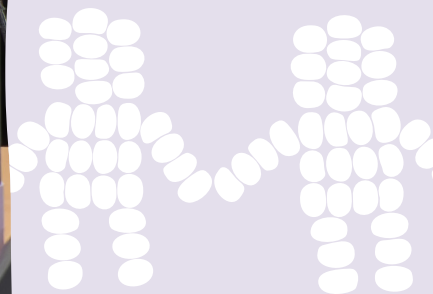
Why do it (Rationale): While critical self-reflection is key, committing to allyship in Indigenous research requires using your influence and privilege to enact purposeful actions that challenge and transform colonial structures. Indigenous Peoples frequently share stories about their voices being silenced or disregarded, and non-Indigenous colleagues becoming defensive when being called out for a misstep. It is evident that complacency among many non-Indigenous colleagues exists in terms of institutional practices that are discriminatory or that otherwise create barriers for Indigenous Peoples and communities because they are seen as “just the way things are” or viewed as “this is not my problem”. However, reconciliation and equity are collective responsibilities, and all individuals have a role to play in challenging systemic inequities. Some non-Indigenous people may hesitate to speak up, unsure whether it’s their place or fearing they’ll say the wrong thing. But silence can reinforce harmful structures. It is essential to recognize that advocating for structural change does not require lived experience of oppression—it requires a commitment to justice. As Western University has committed to Reconciliation there must be concrete action taken to fulfill the associated responsibilities and remain accountable. For more detail, please see Western University’s [Indigenous Strategic Plan \(2016\)](#).

How to do it (Reflection Questions & Resources): This will include listening to and learning from Indigenous Peoples to understand how you can be supportive. Effective allyship may involve advocating for Indigenous leadership, challenging harmful policies, creating safe spaces, amplifying Indigenous voices, or speaking up when you see systemic racism in action. It also requires action to ensure Indigenous research receives adequate support and resources, such as dedicated staff, funding, and infrastructure. Often when you encounter an institutional barrier, you are not the only one who experiences it, or who will encounter it. You might figure out a loophole, or an exception might be made for your project. However, it is important to consider how you can use your power and privilege to change processes, procedures, and policies so that they are more inclusive of Indigenous research processes going forward. Generally, you can leverage your power and privilege to make a difference.

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Committing to allyship in Indigenous research requires using your influence and privilege to enact purposeful actions that challenge and transform colonial structures.





WHAT TO AVOID:

Complacency: Failure to challenge systemic and structural barriers for community-led Indigenous research because this is “just the way things are”. Policies, committee composition, and budgets are examples of structures that often drive research and can be challenged and changed.

Inaction: Doing nothing to question or confront colonial systems and structures while they continue to cause harm equates to complicity.



What is an appropriate budget for Indigenous engagement in research?

When creating a budget for research with Indigenous communities, it is essential to include costs for relationship-building and ensure fair compensation. Begin by addressing honoraria upfront, openly discussing the maximum available budget and confirming with the community if it meets their expectations. Respect their requests without negotiating, ensuring that compensation reflects the value of their time, knowledge, emotional labour, and cultural contributions. Additionally, plan for gifting, travel, catering (food and beverage) as appropriate and long-term engagement costs to support respectful and sustained collaboration. An appropriate budget demonstrates a commitment to ethical and meaningful engagement with Indigenous communities.

EXAMPLE BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS FOR INDIGENOUS RESEARCH: CENTERING RELATIONALITY AND RECIPROCITY

When designing a research budget in partnership with Indigenous communities, it is essential to prioritize values of relationality, reciprocity, and respect. This involves going beyond conventional academic expense categories to ensure that community members are appropriately supported, honored, and resourced throughout the research process. The following budget lines are examples of items that can be considered:

1. Food

- **Purpose:** To support relationship-building through shared meals, which are central to many Indigenous ways of gathering.
- **Examples:** Catering for community meetings, research team meetings, or small-group gatherings; grocery store gift cards for hosting meetings in home settings.

2. Gifts

- **Purpose:** To acknowledge and respect community members' time, knowledge, and contributions.
- **Examples:** Culturally appropriate gifts (e.g., local crafts, traditional medicines), thank-you items for participants, Knowledge Keepers or Elders. Store suggestions for some Indigenous owned businesses:

[Iroqrafts](#)

[Kebaonish](#)

[Thunderbird Crafts & Trading Post](#)

[Whetung Ojibway Centre](#)

3. Tobacco and Protocol Materials

- **Purpose:** To follow local protocols, especially when requesting knowledge or guidance from Elders.
- **Examples:** Tobacco, cloth, or other items specific to regional or Nation-based practices.

4. Honoraria

- **Purpose:** To compensate individuals for their expertise, lived experience, and time.
- **Examples:** Set rates for Elders, youth advisors, cultural advisors, and other contributors based on local protocols or institutional guidelines developed in partnership with communities. See box on page 45.

5. Travel and Accommodations

- **Purpose:** To enable meaningful face-to-face engagement, including site visits, meetings or gatherings.
- **Examples:** Community members traveling to academic institutions, or researchers visiting the community; accommodations, meals, and mileage or flight costs included.

6. Trainees (In Community and Institution)

- **Purpose:** To build capacity and support learning for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous trainees.
- **Examples:** Wages or stipends for **community-based research** assistants; training support for students at institutions engaged in reciprocal learning.

7. Community Staff Salaries

- **Purpose:** To fairly compensate community members whose work contributes to or supports the research.
- **Examples:** Salaries for community research coordinators, translators, or administrative staff involved in the project.

8. Supplies and Equipment for Community Use

- **Purpose:** To ensure communities have the tools and infrastructure to fully participate in and benefit from research.
- **Examples:** Computers, tablets, internet access, recording equipment, or software licenses provided directly to the community.

9. Community Engagement and Dissemination

- **Purpose:** To share findings in ways that are accessible and useful to the community.
- **Examples:** Hosting community feedback sessions, creating visual summaries or videos, printing reports or booklets in local languages, or holding a knowledge-sharing gathering.

As mentioned in The Office of Indigenous Initiatives':

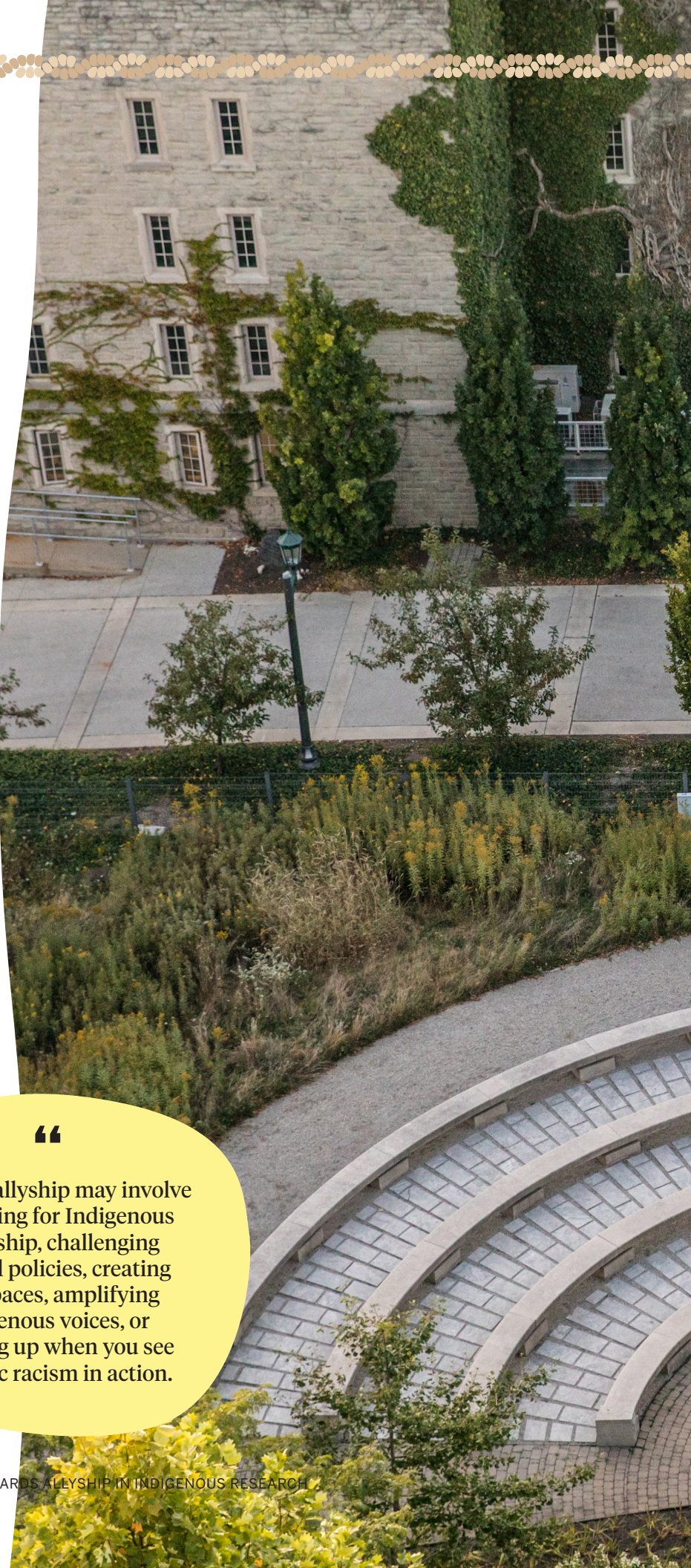

"Honoraria are provided on a non-routine basis to express gratitude and to recognize people for their time and expertise. Ideally, honoraria can be paid by direct deposit or a cheque. Processing honorarium requests early provides time for them to be fulfilled on the day of the event; organizers can do so by completing the [Indigenous honorarium payment form](#) (provided by their department managers and/or administrative officers) and following the weekly pay deadline. At a minimum, submit the payment form at least 4 weeks in advance of the event. Cheques will need to be picked up from Human Resources by the organizers to deliver directly on the day of the event. If direct deposit is preferred by the community member, please ensure they are aware that payments usually follow a schedule as set out by Human Resources. Your department's administrative officers should confirm that date with Human Resources.

It is important to engage with the invited guest/Elder to determine the appropriate honorarium. The guide below is a starting point.

Recommended honorarium amounts (as of January 2025; [please review the guidelines](#) for most recent information) should be a minimum of:

- \$100 per hour
- \$350 half-day
- \$700 full-day (Indigenous Initiatives, n.d.).

In addition, the rate should reflect time spent travelling to Western or other location, any time needed to prepare a presentation or talk, preparation meetings, and time to review and/or comment on documents or materials.



HOW CAN I SUPPORT EXCELLENCE IN INDIGENOUS RESEARCH AND SCHOLARSHIP AT WESTERN?

[Strengthening our Relations](#)

[- Indigenous Research Final Report and Proposed Strategy](#)

builds on and promotes ongoing Indigenization efforts at Western, aligning with foundational initiatives such as [Western's Institutional Strategic Plan \(2021\)](#) and [Indigenous Strategic Plan \(2016\)](#). It also responds to the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission's \(TRC\) Calls to Action](#) within higher education and affirms Western's relationship and commitment to Indigenous students, staff, and faculty. Within these foundational documents, *Excellence in Indigenous Research and Scholarship* is identified as a key direction for Western. Use this report to understand and advocate for Western's responsibilities for meeting this goal (Richmond, 2021).

HOW CAN I PROMOTE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION AT WESTERN?

[12 Ways to Engage in Truth and Reconciliation at Western](#)

contains a small list of resources and actions one can engage in and use to promote Truth and Reconciliation work at Western (Indigenous Learning Space, n.d.). Use this list to continue allyship work beyond your research.

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Effective allyship may involve advocating for Indigenous leadership, challenging harmful policies, creating safe spaces, amplifying Indigenous voices, or speaking up when you see systemic racism in action.



ASK YOURSELF:

When using your influence to drive structural change in support of Indigenous research, ask yourself

1. Do I understand how Western structures and systems may favor settler perspectives and perpetuate systemic racism against Indigenous Peoples (e.g., research funding priorities, ethical review processes, staff capacity, budget allocation, governance, policies, etc.)?
2. What am I doing to actively dismantle these structures and systems?
 - Am I complicit in supporting these structures and systems because they are “just the way things are”?
 - Am I complicit in supporting these structures and systems because they benefit my research or career advancement?
 - Am I prepared for addressing institutional barriers that emerge during my project, and can I commit to ensuring I dismantle those barriers for collaborations in the future?
3. Am I willing to give up some of my power and privilege to support anti-racist, unsettling and decolonizing research practices that involve Indigenous Peoples?
4. How am I ensuring that Indigenous voices and perspectives are prioritized, included, and respected in the research environment?
 - How am I using my influence to create space for Indigenous voices and perspectives within the research process?
 - How am I addressing tokenism and promoting genuine engagement with Indigenous communities in research?
 - How am I ensuring that Indigenous methodologies and knowledge systems are respected and valued within the research process?
5. Have I advocated for adequate resources, such as funding or time, to support Indigenous-led components of this research?
6. Am I open to continuous learning and humility in accepting feedback from Indigenous partners, even if it means adjusting my research approach or personal beliefs?



CONCLUSION





CONCLUSION: WALKING TOGETHER IN THE RESEARCH JOURNEY

Engaging in Indigenous research is a deeply meaningful and ongoing journey; one that requires humility, reflection, and a commitment to continuous learning. At Western Research, we want to remind you that you are not walking this path alone. Support is available to help you navigate the complexities of this work with care and respect.

Mistakes are an expected part of this process. They are not signs of failure, but rather important opportunities to reflect, learn, and grow. Do not let fear of making mistakes become a reason to step away. Instead, let it deepen your understanding and strengthen your commitment to ethical, respectful, and community-centered research.

Successful Indigenous research calls for thoughtful preparation, honest self-reflection about where you are in your learning journey, the building of meaningful and reciprocal relationships, and long-term engagement. Western Research is committed to guiding you through this process, providing resources and expertise necessary to ensure your work contributes positively – without placing undue burden on Indigenous faculty, staff, or communities.

Together, we can support research that is not only rigorous but also responsible, relational, and rooted in respect.



GLOSSARY OF TERMS

To return to the original page or section where a glossary term was first used, simply click the arrow icon located beside the glossary term. This will take you back to the source or initial page where the term appeared.

- ➡ **Allyship:** an ongoing process of learning, unlearning, and action. It involves recognizing and challenging systems of power and privilege that marginalize Indigenous Peoples and other equity-deserving groups. For non-Indigenous people, allyship means understanding the impacts of settler-colonialism and reflecting on one's role in upholding or dismantling systemic inequality. It also includes "calling in" others with compassion to promote awareness and respectful behavior (Native Women's Association of Canada, n.d.).
- ➡ **Burnout:** is a work-related condition that results in feeling low energy and cynical about one's occupation and can sometimes negatively impact one's professional performance (WHO, 2019).
- ➡ **Community-based Research:** Community-based research (CBR) is a collaborative and participatory approach in which the community helps shape the research focus and is actively involved throughout the entire process—from developing the proposal and collecting data to analyzing results and applying the findings. This approach centers community knowledge, addresses local priorities, and aims to create meaningful, action-oriented outcomes that benefit the community directly (Arctic Institute of Community-Based Research, n.d.).
- ➡ **Community-led Research:** a research approach driven by the priorities, knowledge, and leadership of community members. In this model, communities identify research needs, shape the research process, conduct the research, and retain ownership of the data, with researchers supporting rather than directing the work (University of Saskatchewan, Social Innovation Lab, 2024).
- ➡ **Discrimination:** refers to "the unjust or prejudicial treatment of individuals or groups based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, age, sex, or ability" (American Psychological Association, 2024, para. 1). In the context of Indigenous Peoples, discrimination includes both individual acts and systemic policies or practices that disadvantage Indigenous individuals or communities without valid justification—contributing to ongoing social, economic, and health inequities (Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2025).
- ➡ **Elders:** highly respected individuals who are often, but not always, senior citizens of a community who have and continue to demonstrate an admirable balance of their wisdom, harmony, and actions within their daily lives. Elders are recognized and designated by the community. They are frequently considered to be Knowledge Keepers of Indigenous history, traditional teachings, Ceremonies, and healing practices.
- ➡ **Emotional Labour:** refers to the process of "controlling one's emotions to meet the expectations of a role or job" (Psychology Today, 2025, para. 1), often by suppressing genuine feelings and displaying emotions deemed appropriate in professional or social settings (Psychology Today, 2025).
- ➡ **Entitlement:** A mindset or behavior in research where Indigenous communities are approached with the assumption that they will, or should, support, participate in, or approve of a project. This includes disregarding or minimizing their right to decline involvement, reacting negatively to refusals, or expecting justification for their decisions. Entitlement reflects a lack of respect for Indigenous sovereignty, autonomy, and self-determination, and undermines ethical, reciprocal engagement in research.

➡ Click to return to word source

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- ⑤ **Extractive Research:** A research approach where investigations are conducted on, about, or for communities, but are primarily driven by the researchers' own professional interests, goals, or perceptions of community needs and benefits—rather than in collaboration with or under the direction of those communities themselves. This model often overlooks the voices, priorities, and agency of the people being studied, and may result in outcomes that serve external stakeholders more than the communities involved.
- ⑤ **In A Good Way (Good Heart / Way or Mino-Bimaadiziwin):** striving to live in accordance with mino-bimaadiziwin, an Anishinabemowin (Anishinaabe language) expression that means living in accordance with the [Teachings](#) to enjoy a good life, with good intentions and actions (Rheault, 1999).
- ⑤ **Indigenous Data Sovereignty:** the right of “Indigenous Peoples, communities, and Nations to manage, oversee, and control data created by or concerning them. The concept of sovereignty highlights that Indigenous Nations are self-governing, which includes authority over their data and knowledge. This principle acknowledges Indigenous Peoples as the ultimate decision-makers regarding their data and knowledge, shifting their role in research from being mere subjects or participants to becoming meaningful partners and co-researchers” (University of Toronto Libraries, 2024, para. 1).
- ⑤ **Indigenous Research:** “research in any field or discipline that is conducted by, grounded in, or engaged with First Nations, Inuit, Métis, or other Indigenous Nations, communities, societies, or individuals; as well as their wisdom, cultures, experiences, or knowledge systems, in both historical and contemporary forms, past and present. Indigenous research can embrace the intellectual, physical, emotional, and/or spiritual dimensions of knowledge in creative and interconnected relationships with people, places, and the natural environment” (SSHRC, 2025).
- ⑤ **Positionality:** refers to the social and political context that shapes a person's identity, values, and perspectives, including aspects such as race, gender, class, ability, and Indigeneity (Queen's University, 2025). It recognizes that these intersecting factors influence how individuals experience the world and engage in research or teaching. A positionality statement is a reflective tool that acknowledges how one's identity and lived experiences inform their approach to knowledge, power, and relationships in academic and community settings (Queen's University, 2025).
- ⑤ **Protocols:** the “guidelines, manners, etiquettes, and rules that are in place to keep Indigenous ways of being, belonging, doing and knowing at the forefront” (Calgary Board of Education, 2022, p. 4). Protocols vary by community; however, some examples include offering tobacco when making a request, providing an honorarium or a gift as a thank you, and offering smudging at meetings, events, or engagements (Calgary Board of Education, 2022).
- ⑤ **Racism:** is “an ideology that either explicitly or implicitly asserts that one racialized group is inherently superior to others. Racist ideology can be openly manifested in racial slurs, jokes or hate crimes. However, it can be more deeply rooted in attitudes, values, and stereotypical beliefs” (OHRC, 2009, p. 12). Anti-Indigenous racism is racism against Indigenous Peoples specifically.
- ⑤ **Reflexivity:** is the practice of critically examining how a researcher's own social positioning, assumptions, and biases shape the research process. It involves ongoing self-awareness and reflection to ensure that personal perspectives are acknowledged and addressed in the design, interpretation, and communication of research (Jamieson, Govaart, & Pownall, 2023).
- ⑤ **Relational Accountability:** is a “situationally and contextually determined [...] form of paying attention to respect, reciprocity, and responsibility in our relationships” (Fraser, 2022, pp 2-3), which extend to all of Creation.

⑤ **Settler:** individuals whose ancestors came to this land willingly to access resources, regardless of how long their family has lived in Canada. Settlers benefit from the colonial structures and systems that dispossess Indigenous peoples of their lands, rights, and cultures. Importantly, being a settler is not inherently a condemnation, but a starting point for reflection, responsibility, and transformation.

⑤ **Settler Fragility:** A defensive reaction exhibited by non-Indigenous researchers—often settlers—when Indigenous communities refuse participation, request changes to a project, or raise concerns about the research approach. Rather than engaging in self-reflection or adapting to better align with community priorities, settler fragility manifests in behaviors such as centering the researcher's feelings, minimizing community input, or deflecting from the broader context of colonial harms and extractive research histories. This response can hinder meaningful, respectful, and community-led research relationships.

⑤ **Speed of Trust:** refers to the principle of building relationships, partnerships, or communities at a pace that respects the time required to establish genuine trust. Rather than rushing processes or outcomes, this approach emphasizes patience and mutual understanding. It emphasizes moving forward only as fast as relationships allow (Pfortmüller, 2022).

⑤ **Tokenism:** refers to the superficial or symbolic effort to include individuals from underrepresented or marginalized groups, without addressing systemic issues or ensuring meaningful participation. It often involves selecting one or a few individuals to represent an entire group, which can reinforce stereotypes and further marginalize those individuals (CultureAlly, 2023).

⑤ **Turtle Island:** is a term used by many Indigenous Peoples across North America to refer to North America, based on origin stories and the shape of the continent. Using this term is one way to recognize Indigenous sovereignty and challenge colonial borders.

⑤ **Unlearn/ing:** a process described as “stripping away the beliefs and ways to act/behave/live that have been imposed by our upbringing, by our education, by the society we live in. It means challenging everything we’ve come to know as the ‘way things are supposed to be’ and ‘embracing the way things are’” (Plata, 2020, para. 3).

⑤ **Unsettle/ing:** in an Indigenous context, unsettling refers to the process of disrupting dominant colonial narratives, assumptions, and power structures. It challenges settler comfort and compels critical reflection on one's positionality, complicity, and responsibility in systems of ongoing settler colonialism (Regan, 2010). Unsettling is not about creating guilt, but about fostering awareness, accountability, and a shift toward decolonial thinking and action.



“

Allyship involves recognizing and challenging systems of power and privilege that marginalize Indigenous Peoples and other equity-deserving groups.



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APPENDIX: SELF-REFLECTION TOOL

This self-reflection tool provides a series of reflection questions to support researchers, faculty, staff, trainees, and students in orienting themselves to conduct Indigenous research as allies.

These questions are adapted from the [Guide Towards Indigenous Allyship at Western University](#).

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

01 **Learn and unlearn by educating ourselves**

Before engaging an Indigenous person with a request for knowledge, ask yourself:

1. Can I find this knowledge myself through existing resources?
2. Is this knowledge the person holds?
 - Is it relevant to their Indigenous identity and/or Nation/community?
 - Does it reflect their area of expertise/study/research?
3. Am I providing this person with enough time to reflect and engage?
 - Consider asking what timelines would be reasonable from their perspective, or whether there are upcoming commitments that may impact their capacity. When unsure, it's respectful to build in extra time and remain flexible to accommodate their schedule and process.
4. Is this request going to involve emotional labour, and if so, how can I support this person?
5. Is this a safe space and time to ask?
 - Consider whether trust has been established, whether the setting allows for open and respectful dialogue, and whether the person has the time, capacity, and support to engage meaningfully. If in doubt, you can ask if they feel comfortable having the conversation now or would prefer to revisit it later.
6. How will I provide appropriate compensation to acknowledge this work?



02 Unsettle ourselves through continual self-reflection

Before engaging in research with and for Indigenous people or communities, ask yourself:

1. What benefits and privileges do I have and/or my ancestors have received while residing in Canada? How does this impact my experience as an individual in this space?
2. On whose Traditional Territory am I living, working, and/or learning on? On whose Traditional Territory am I intending to conduct research?
 - How have I and might I benefit from living on and performing research on this land?
3. What are the [Treaties](#) of the land I am on?
 - What do they say?
 - What are my Treaty responsibilities? Not only to Indigenous Peoples, but to the land, water, animal, and plant life?
4. What is my motivation and intention in taking on this research?
 - What drives my interest in this topic, and how does it align with the needs or priorities of the community?
 - How will I stay accountable to myself throughout the process?
 - How will I benefit from this research—and more importantly, does this research offer meaningful and tangible benefits to the community involved?
5. What are my values and beliefs about research, including community-led research?
 - How are these similar or different from Indigenous values and beliefs about research?
6. Where do my values and beliefs come from?
 - How have they benefitted me by allowing me to maintain my power and privilege as a non-Indigenous person?
 - How are they harmful to Indigenous Peoples?
 - What can I do to learn, unlearn, and grow?



03 **Engage in community-led research (& respect the right to refuse)**

When engaging in community-based and/or community-led research, ask yourself:

1. Have I completed the most relevant training (e.g., cultural safety, Indigenous data sovereignty, data management, OCAP® training, etc.)?
2. Do I have a strong positive relationship with this community?
 - Have I spent sufficient time building a relationship with this community, ensuring trust has been developed through multiple visits and meaningful cultural exchanges?
 - Have the community(ies) participated in research with me in the past?
3. How can I ensure that my research is relevant to (a priority for) and will benefit the community?
4. How am I following the community's research ethics, consent, and data sovereignty protocols?
 - Who decides on behalf of the community whether the community will participate in research? (e.g., Chief and Council, a community Research Ethics Board, or another mechanism)
 - How am I including community members in decision-making processes throughout the research?
 - What steps am I taking to advocate for my institution to uphold the community's rights throughout the research process?
 - If formal protocols are not in place, how am I working with the community to support the development of processes that facilitate, track, and document consent, data use, and access to community knowledge and resources?



5. How am I treating the community as an equal partner throughout the research process?
 - Do I understand the community's research priorities and needs? Does my research respond to them appropriately?
 - Have I created space for the community to share their expertise and insights in shaping the research questions and methodologies? How am I acknowledging this expertise?
 - Am I open to adjusting my research approach based on community input and feedback?
 - Am I prepared to let the community lead discussions around the timing, use, and dissemination of research results?
 - How will I ensure that the research findings are shared in a way that is accessible and beneficial to the community?
 - ♦ What provisions or resources have I secured to support community co-authorship or co-presentation of results at academic conferences, workshops, or other forums?
 - ♦ Have I discussed and respected the community's media communication protocols, including how findings may be shared publicly?
 - ♦ How will the community be involved in decisions about thesis or publication processes related to work conducted on their lands, waters, resources, and/or with their people? What agreements are in place to support this?
6. How am I fostering long-term, respectful relationships with the community beyond the scope of this research project?
 - Am I ready to commit to these relationships for decades (beyond the life of this research project?)
 - Have I approached this work with patience and humility, prepared to proceed at the speed of trust as determined by the community?



04

Advocate to drive structural change in support of Indigenous Research

When advocating to drive structural change in support of Indigenous research, ask yourself:

1. Do I understand how Western structures and systems may favour settler perspectives and perpetuate systemic racism against Indigenous Peoples (e.g., research funding priorities, ethical review processes, staff capacity, budget allocation, governance, policies, etc.)?
2. What am I doing to actively dismantle these structures and systems?
 - Am I complicit in supporting these structures and systems because they are “just the way things are”?
 - Am I complicit in supporting these structures and systems because they benefit my research or career advancement?
 - Am I prepared to address institutional barriers that emerge during my project, and am I making every effort to dismantle those barriers for collaborations in the future?
3. Am I willing to give up some of my power and privilege to support anti-racist, unsettling, and decolonizing research practices that support Indigenous Peoples?
4. How am I ensuring that Indigenous voices and perspectives are prioritized, included, and respected in the research environment?
 - How am I using my influence to create space for Indigenous voices and perspectives within the research process?
 - How am I addressing tokenism and promoting genuine engagement with Indigenous communities in research?
 - How am I ensuring that Indigenous methodologies and knowledge systems are respected and valued within the research process?
5. Have I advocated for adequate resources, such as funding or time, to support Indigenous-led components of this research?
 - Am I collaborating with the community to provide research training for community members if they wish?
6. Am I open to continuous learning and humility in accepting feedback from Indigenous partners, even if it means adjusting my research approach or personal beliefs?



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Reconciliation and equity are collective responsibilities, and all individuals have a role to play in challenging systemic inequities.



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