Balancing the Narrative: Communications Guidelines for Indigenous-led Conservation

conservation through reconciliation partnership

"In my artwork (a mix of acrylic painting and digital illustration), I sought to capture the powerful connection and interconnectedness between nature and humanity, in the context of this land we call Canada—both our history and present day realities. Woven together are plants, insects, berries, water, sky, people and land—no one more important than the other—no hierarchies: symbolic of the delicate balance that sustains our ecosystems and how all life on earth should be valued as equal and worthy of protection. A reminder that our relationship with the land should be rooted in stewardship and harmony, as has been the case for Indigenous Peoples around the world for thousands of years."

Kisa MacIsaac, Métis artist

About the Conservation through Reconciliation Partnership

The Conservation through Reconciliation Partnership (CRP) is an Indigenous-led network that brings together a diverse range of partners to advance Indigenous-led conservation, including Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs), and transform the conservation sector in Canada. The CRP is a collective of Indigenous leaders, environmental conservation organizations, academic institutions, scholars and researchers, and communities acting on and building from the recommendations set out by the Indigenous Circle of Expert's report *We Rise Together*.

IPCAs are lands and waters where Indigenous governments have the primary role in protecting and conserving ecosystems through Indigenous laws, governance, and knowledge systems. Culture and language are the heart and soul of an IPCA. IPCAs vary in terms of their governance and management objectives. However, they generally share three essential elements:

- They are Indigenous-led[1].
- They represent a long-term commitment to conservation.
- They elevate Indigenous rights and responsibilities.

The CRP is co-hosted by the IISAAK OLAM Foundation, the Indigenous Leadership Initiative, and the University of Guelph. The IISAAK OLAM Foundation and the Indigenous Leadership Initiative provide strategic guidance and identify opportunities to support Indigenous-led conservation in Canada and beyond through representation on the Leadership Circle. The University of Guelph coordinates research, administration, and knowledge mobilization. The CRP's core activities are financially supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

Acknowledgements

These guidelines are the result of a collaborative effort rooted in the principles of relationships, respect, responsibility, and reciprocity and a commitment to support Indigenous-led conservation. They were developed through the collective vision and efforts of the Conservation through Reconciliation Partnership's Communications Learning Circle.

The Communications Learning Circle was a virtual peer-support and learning community. It was established to address the "Third Moose in the room" as identified by the Indigenous Circle of Experts (ICE). The 'Third Moose' refers to capacity development for Indigenous-led conservation initiatives, including IPCAs.

This document extends the communication guidelines developed by Nature United for engaging with Indigenous Partners, which have evolved over several years of collaborative experience. We are appreciative of Nature United for laying the groundwork that allowed us to build upon. Furthermore, we wish to acknowledge Pamela Vernaus, the Senior Communication Manager at Nature United, for co-chairing the learning circle and for her instrumental contributions in facilitating the design and layout of this document.

We would like to thank our partners for sharing internal and external resources to inform these guidelines in the spirit of reciprocity and reconciliation.

We extend our deepest gratitude to Emilee Gilpin, Senior Communications Advisor and Community Storyteller for Coastal First Nations, Great Bear Initiative, who has shared her expertise and knowledge in carefully reviewing this work.

1 Indigenous-led refers to "Indigenous government or Peoples having the primary role in determining the objectives, boundaries, management plans and governance structures for IPCAs as part of their exercise of self-determination. IPCAs are initiated by Indigenous governments as mandated by Indigenous Peoples in the exercise of self-determination. There may be a range of partnerships to support these acts of self-determination." Indigenous Circle of Experts (2018). We Rise Together. pg 103.

We are grateful to Kisa MacIsaac, Métis artist, educator, and facilitator, for crafting the beautiful illustrations that are carefully displayed throughout this work.

The development and production team included:

Kristy Tomkinson
(Chair of the CRP Communications Learning Circle)

Pamela Vernaus
(Co-chair of the CRP Communications Learning Circle)

Chantelle Abma
(Ducks Unlimited Canada)

Emily Cousin
(Indigenous Leadership Initiative)

Dawn Dietrich
(Conservation through Reconciliation Partnership)

Kristina Fickes
(Environment and Climate Change Canada)

Lynsey Grosfield
(Wildlife Conservation Society)

Megan Harvey
(Parks Canada)

Alison Henning
(MakeWay)

Soudeh Jamshidian
(IISAAK OLAM Foundation)

Rashida Jeeva
(World Wildlife Fund - Canada)

Nadine Lefort
(Unama'ki Institute of Natural Resources)

Scott Mullenix
(Nature Canada)

Lindsay Stewart
(Grizzly Bear Foundation)

Raechel Wastesicoot
(Nature Conservancy of Canada)

The review team included:

Monica Allaby
(MakeWay)

Benjamin Filliol
(Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, CPAWS)

Brendan Glauser
(David Suzuki Foundation)

Alison Henning
(MakeWay)

Scott Mullenix
(Nature Canada)

Jacqueline Nunes
(Nature United)

Stephanie O'Neill
(David Suzuki Foundation)

Pamela Vernaus
(Nature United)

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Introduction

For millennia, Indigenous Peoples governed and cared for the lands and waters in what has very briefly been known as Canada. First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities continue to cultivate diverse and abundant cultures, economies, and livelihoods that are in balance with natural law.

Indigenous-led conservation and stewardship is a new way of describing a range of practices, knowledge, skills, and laws Indigenous Peoples have developed, refined, and shared across generations to care for and govern their territories.

In the past decade, there has been a recent shift within Canadian environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS), Crown governments, and other partners in recognizing, supporting, and investing in Indigenous-led conservation, including Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs).

Indigenous-led conservation is gaining national attention. Many governmental and non-governmental environmental organizations and agencies are making reconciliation and relationship building with Indigenous leadership a central part of their mandates. And these mandates are directly supported through organizational communications strategies and practices.

These guidelines offer anti-oppressive practices, considerations, and approaches for communicating with and about Indigenous conservation leadership within the Canadian context. This document acts as a framework through which to co-develop communications strategies, approaches, and content with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis partners in respectful, reciprocal, and responsible ways.

These guidelines attempt to shed light on the enduring impacts of colonialism. They also aim to encourage relationship building based on reconciliation, trust, respect, equity, open dialogue, integrity, and mutual accountability.

The primary audiences for these guidelines are communications departments, teams, and professionals within environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOs); federal, provincial, and territorial conservation agencies and organizations; consultancies; and other partners supporting and communicating about Indigenous-led conservation.

This document can also offer value to Indigenous-led organizations and governments as they co-create communications strategies with partners. It can support Indigenous governments and organizations as they reinforce the principles of respect, responsibility, and reciprocity to ensure authentic, meaningful communications.

Why These Guidelines Matter

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to 'better' communications with and about Indigenous conservation leadership. The required approach will depend on the goals, visions, and protocols of each Indigenous partner. However, these guidelines provide a starting point for communications professionals and departments, wherever they are in their learning journey.

This document was developed with the aim of sparking conversation, learning, and transformation in the following ways:

To shift the dominant narrative

The dominant narrative within the conservation sector is that humans must be removed from nature to protect and conserve it as 'pristine' as the day it was 'discovered.' There are several fallacies that underpin this narrative, including the concept of 'terra nullius', which translates to "nobody's land," and the Doctrine of Discovery — a legal and moral mechanism used to justify the dispossession of sovereign Indigenous governments in what is now Canada. The Pope's recent repudiation of this doctrine could have major implications for Canadian case law.

These colonial underpinnings impacted the relationships Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples have with their ancestral territories and set the stage for current-day conservation laws, practices, and approaches.

It is crucial to shift this problematic narrative to one that better reflects the truth: that Indigenous Peoples have lived within, taken care of, governed, held, and shared knowledge of their homelands long before they were 'discovered' by colonizers — and continue to do so today.

Shifting the dominant conservation narrative requires a critical examination of the voices, language, messages, and perspectives the conservation sector is using, and for whose benefit.

To build understanding of Indigenous-led conservation among the Canadian public

ENGOs and Crown government agencies are trusted voices and sources of information regarding environmental conservation issues in Canada.

As advocates, researchers, fundraisers, and influencers, environmental organizations and agencies regularly engage with the Canadian public. ENGOs have a unique opportunity — and a responsibility — to build public understanding and support for Indigenous-led conservation efforts.

The dark history of conservation is still relatively unknown to the general public. While there is increased attention and recognition of Indigenous knowledge systems, innovations, and leadership within the conservation sector, there is so much more work to be done.

To authentically support Indigenous-led conservation through communications, it is imperative for environmental organizations and agencies to:

- Recognize, reflect upon, and publicly acknowledge colonial approaches to conservation and its harms (See resources on the past, present, and future of conservation in Canada on page 43);
- Critically examine organizational approaches to reconciliation and supporting Indigenous-led conservation;
- Centre and amplify Indigenous voices and leadership by hiring Indigenous Peoples to make decisions about what stories are being told, how, why, and for whom;
- Re-examine communications practices to avoid perpetuating stereotypes, using harmful language, reinforcing past or current traumas, erasing Indigenous presence/stewardship, taking credit for work done in partnership with Indigenous communities, etc.;
- Uplift Indigenous-led organizations in the conservation movement without crowding the 'space' and appropriating resources;

- Facilitate cross-cultural relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities through communications/marketing activities and educational programs[2]; and,
- Identify and offer resources (financial, human, informational, and otherwise) that can advance the communications goals and priorities of Indigenous partners, as well as their respective leaders and communities.

To build capacity within Indigenous conservation leadership

The Indigenous Circle of Experts (ICE), through their regional gatherings across several territories, identified capacity-development as the 'Third Moose in the room', or a key area that needs to be addressed.

Their report, *We Rise Together*, calls on environmental organizations and agencies to "build capacity of Indigenous governments, communities and associated organizations to plan, establish and manage IPCAs and engage in conservation efforts more broadly" (pg. 65).

As outlined by ICE, some examples of capacity building are:

- Promoting and restoring Indigenous languages and cultural awareness.
- Supporting reconnection to the land and water, especially for Elders, youth, and women.
- Fostering relationships through cross-cultural training, including Indigenous knowledge systems and western systems.
- Creating safe spaces to share capacity and leverage collective knowledge.
- Sharing resources across Indigenous communities.

Co-learning and capacity building can also occur through the respectful and reciprocal co-development of communication strategies and activities.

To advance reconciliation and ethical partnerships

Following the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action in 2015, reconciliation has become a priority for many Canadian entities and organizations.

Reconciliation is not a box to be checked off; it is a journey that is built upon truth, understanding, recognition, respect, trust, and humility. Further, Indigenous Peoples and communities approach and interpret reconciliation differently. For example, Indigenous governments have 'reconciliation framework agreements,' or 'reconciliation negotiation' tables with different levels of Crown governments to seek justice and restoration (see the Reconciliation Framework Agreement for Bioregional Oceans Management and Protection as an example).

As the Truth and Reconciliation Commission reminds us, "There is no reconciliation without truth." Communications professionals hold a specific responsibility to ensure storytelling and messaging is honest and authentic. This can be done by making space for truths to be voiced and heard. It also requires intentional language and messaging, so that communications do not perpetuate violence.

2 Deitrich, Dawn. (2023). Building Public Understanding of Indigenous-led Conservation: Insights from Communications Strategies in Five National Parks.

In addition, authentic and meaningful communications work cannot be done without first building and nurturing ethical and reciprocal relationships. These relationships extend beyond human and interpersonal ones, to relationships with the lands, waters, non-human relatives, and future generations.

To dispel harmful stereotypes of Indigenous Peoples

Harmful stereotypes and assumptions about Indigenous Peoples continue to pervade Canadian media, popular media, and education systems.

Canadian media, in particular, continues to narrate, support, and perpetuate a colonial worldview and agenda, which has had severe and harmful impacts on Indigenous Peoples (see Seeing Red: A History of Natives in Canadian Newspapers and Reckoning: Journalism's Limits and Possibilities).

To quote Gregory Younging in Elements of Indigenous Style, "[Stereotypes] are a disservice to the people they claim to describe and a disservice to readers" (pg. 94). Environmental organizations and agencies have a responsibility to mitigate these impacts and dispel harmful stereotypes.

These guidelines do not offer an exhaustive list of stereotypes to disrupt. Instead, they outline guidance on respectful, intentional, and responsible collaboration with Indigenous Peoples. This is one pathway to examine, break down, and question biases.

To reimagine communications in the environmental conservation sector

An intentional shift from colonial approaches, systems, language, and terminology can create space for collaborating and co-creating communications strategies.

There is a long history of non-Indigenous peoples taking an extractive, one-sided, and transactional approach to documenting, researching, and reporting on Indigenous Peoples. Duncan McCue, an Anishinaabe journalist, calls this "story-taking." This approach is exclusively for the benefit of the non-Indigenous individual, organization, institution, and has often resulted in racist, supremacist, and 'othering' narratives that perpetuate a superiority or 'white saviour' complex.

Environmental organizations can and must strive for storytelling that repairs relationships, increases understanding, and encourages action towards reconciliation. At a high level, this will require an approach that includes:

- Doing more listening, and less talking.
- Hiring more Indigenous staff at all levels.
- Taking a Two-Eyed Seeing approach to work beyond Western and written systems of communications. For example, co-creating communications strategies and materials with Indigenous leadership, voices, knowledge systems, and storytelling approaches.
    - Two-Eyed Seeing is the practice of learning to see using two knowledge systems, drawing on both to guide discovery and problem-solving. Resources on Two-Eyed Seeing are included in the Additional Resources Section of this guide.
- Working in Ethical Space: A space where Indigenous and Western knowledge systems are in conversation.
    - Ethical Space cannot be cultivated without Two-Eyed Seeing and is a space where collaboration, mutual support, and multi-directional knowledge sharing occurs. Resources on Ethical Space can be found in the Additional Resources Section.
- Shouldering some of the burden that Indigenous partners are facing. With the growing momentum of the Indigenous conservation leadership movement, Indigenous experts, scholars, leaders, organizations, and communities are often stretched thin and under-resourced.
- Holding and demonstrating respect and reciprocity for knowledge and expertise shared by Indigenous partners.

- Taking a trauma-informed approach. Learn about past and present-day colonialism and be responsive to and mindful of intergenerational and persistent trauma.
- Continually evaluating, learning, and sharing outcomes beyond silos. Environmental organizations should strive to be open to sharing their learning, challenges, and missteps in communications strategies and processes to inform and build capacity across the entire sector. This also helps to shoulder the burden of Indigenous partners in educating others.

As Candis Callison (Canada Research Chair in Indigenous journalism, media, and public discourse; author) states in an interview with Emilee Gilpin for the National Observer:

> *"As we move into a world in which we are all living with climate change, we need to stop thinking of Indigenous knowing as something in the past, but rather as a living evolving knowledge base with expert practitioners that can help us adapt to an unpredictable future. This is the kind of story I hope to hear more of."*

Environmental organizations have already started building momentum, but more effort is needed to decolonize communications approaches in conservation and shift towards sharing stories in a good way, rather than taking them.

Setting the Context

Colonial conservation approaches have not always benefited Indigenous communities

The priority, goal, and largely the outcome of colonization was land development and the eradication of Indigenous Peoples, along with their cultures and languages. Settlers brought their own ideas and models for conservation, which were largely aimed at resource extraction and economic development.

These models were imposed on Indigenous Peoples, severing their connections and relationships with their ancestral lands and knowledge systems. European settlers held the notion that lands were only protected in the absence of any human impact, an idea that conflicted with Indigenous kinship with the land.

This notion of 'fortress conservation' gave impetus to the burgeoning conservation sector and the environmental organizations and agencies that we know today. Indigenous Peoples were systematically and forcefully removed from their traditional homelands, foods, medicines, social structures, languages, and ways of life to create parks and protected areas for recreational purposes. Colonial policies around land have displaced Indigenous Peoples from some of the richest and healthiest parts of their territories.

These parks and protected areas allowed mainly white settlers to enter and admire the beauty and wonder of nature. However, they did not foster a true reciprocal relationship between settlers and the land. More resources on the dark history of conservation can be found in the Additional Resources Section.

The dynamics of conservation in Canada are changing. Today, the conservation sector is increasingly looking to Indigenous Peoples for leadership and guidance. This is due to the incredible work of Indigenous governments and communities from coast-to-coast-to-coast and is evident through the wealth of case law that has upheld Indigenous rights and title under the Canadian Constitution.

In addition, national and international initiatives are advancing reconciliation and the recognition of Indigenous rights and responsibilities. These include:

- The 94 Calls to Action from Truth and Reconciliation Commission;
- The adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP);
- The Pathway to Target 1 process;
- The Indigenous Circle of Experts' ground-breaking report, *We Rise Together*; and
- The signing of the Kunming - Montréal Global Biodiversity Framework.

In the past five years, there has been a significant increase in the recognition of and investment in the Indigenous conservation movement across the country. For example, the Canadian federal government has invested upwards of $1.3 million, and counting, to support the creation and management of IPCAs.[3] The Conservation through Reconciliation Partnership estimates there are currently more than 60 declared IPCAs. Of note is the recently announced Marine Protected Area Network for the Northern Shelf Bioregion in British Columbia. In addition, the Indigenous Leadership Initiative estimates that there are more than 110 Indigenous Guardians Programs across the country.

Supporting Indigenous-led conservation is key to healing communities, righting relationships, and advancing Indigenous rights, title, responsibilities, and sovereignty. Overall, supporting Indigenous-led conservation means committing more authentically to the protection and health of our environment.

3 See: August 2021 announcement of $340M in federal funding to support Indigenous-led conservation; September 2022 announcement $40M in federal funding for Indigenous-led, area-based conservation; December 2022 announcement of $800M in federal funding for Indigenous-led conservation initiatives in Ontario, B.C., NWT and Nunavut.

Guiding Principles

There is a legacy of ignoring or denying Indigenous voices, perspectives, rights, and responsibilities in conservation communications. Following a 'fortress conservation' narrative, environmental conservation communications and storytelling traditionally focused on the landscapes, waterscapes, plants, and wildlife, thus removing the people who have the generational knowledge of the ecosystems in which they live and govern.

Communications professionals must aspire to higher standards, engaging in meaningful relationships and enabling collaborative, respectful, and trauma-informed communications practices.

First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples hold different stories, responsibilities, and laws to care for, steward, and govern their traditional territories. These responsibilities reflect their distinct cultures, geographies, long-standing relationships, and sophisticated governance systems to the land and give rise to the unique rights of Indigenous Peoples.

As our understanding and interpretation of these rights continue to evolve, so does our recognition of how to best support and acknowledge Indigenous responsibilities and rights, as well as effectively develop communications materials.

This section outlines seven principles to guide the process of developing communications materials in partnership with Indigenous leadership. Many of these principles are further described in imagineNATIVE's On Screen Protocols and Pathways guide.

Consent

Free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) is a specific right pertaining to Indigenous Peoples and is recognized in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Adopted in 2017 by the United Nations General Assembly and endorsed in 2010 by the Government of Canada, UNDRIP "establishes a universal framework of minimum standards for the survival, dignity, wellbeing and rights of the world's indigenous peoples."

FPIC acknowledges and protects the rights of Indigenous Peoples and guarantees that they have a genuine and impactful role in making decisions that impact their communities, territories, and themselves.

FPIC is about working collaboratively in partnership and respect. Within the context of communications work, FPIC requires informed consent from Indigenous partners, or any individuals represented, whether quoted, referenced or visually represented, prior to publication. This includes a clear and transparent process for understanding the terms of consent and obtaining and implementing consent.

It is important to be transparent, communicative, and genuine throughout the entire consent process. At any point — including any time after the conclusion of a project — an individual or a community may withdraw their consent. Consent forms or agreements, along with materials, can always be revisited and discussed.

The Content Development section of these guidelines provides a more detailed process for consent and withdrawal of consent.

Respect

Communications materials must respect Indigenous protocols, laws, and governance structures. In some contexts, hereditary, traditional, or elected leadership representatives will want or need to be involved in decision-making and guidance, especially at the initial stages of communications projects. Respecting how, and with whom, Indigenous communities may want to engage helps maintain a positive relationship at all levels.

It is also important to respect the stories and knowledge individuals share. Avoid editing, over-editing, or oversimplifying information that individuals share for communications materials. Treat these stories and knowledge with care. Work with Indigenous partners throughout the editing and approval process to ensure their knowledge and voices are not lost in translation.

As Amanda Karst (Boreal Program Director, Nature United) reflects in this webinar on Organizational Change and Reconciliation within ENGOs:

> *"We have communications guidelines that were developed to really articulate how to do things better—and that's around getting informed consent from communities and being clear on that process, and if possible, ensuring stories are told by Indigenous partners. Ensuring that we don't claim credit for the work and acknowledging that Indigenous leadership and knowledge shared within our relationships is held by people within those communities ."*

Demonstrate respect by acknowledging the territories, treaties, governments, legal frameworks, and governance structures in which you are working.

Relationships

Relationships are at the heart of respectful and meaningful collaboration. By prioritizing long-lasting relationships, communications initiatives can better serve Indigenous communities and promote meaningful engagement with audiences.[4]

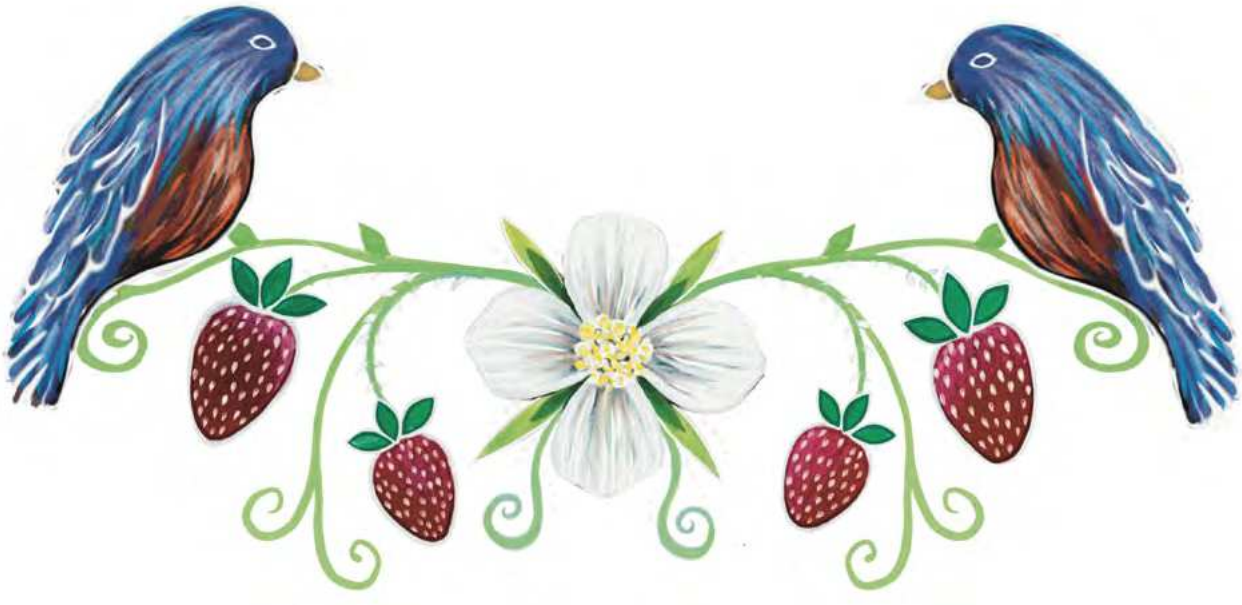
Relationship building does not follow a linear, time-bound path. It is important to approach relationship building with patience, humility, and a willingness to learn and re-learn.

As Hannah Askew (Executive Director, Sierra Club B.C.) reflects in this webinar on Organizational Change and Reconciliation within ENGOs:

> *"When you enter into a relationship, you don't know how that relationship will change you. You have to be comfortable with the open-endedness of just allowing yourself to be changed by the process of being in that relationship and that reciprocity. And so, for us it has been a messy process. It's not always clear exactly where the next step will take us. But we've been trying to grow our organizational capacity to be more porous, to be uncomfortable, to know that we won't always understand things."*

Indigenous Corporate Training offers these seven tips for building relationships with Indigenous partners.

More detail on relationship-management for communications strategies can be found in the Communications Process Section.



4 Deitrich, Dawn. (2023). Building Public Understanding of Indigenous-led Conservation: Insights from Communications Strategies in Five National Parks.

Reciprocity

Communications professionals must recognize, appreciate, and compensate the time, energy, resources, and increasing commitments of Indigenous leaders, scholars, experts, and creatives. Indigenous Peoples take on a significant amount of emotional, intellectual, and spiritual labour to fit into colonial systems and structures. Reciprocity is a critical principle for relationship building.

Reciprocity can be expressed in many ways, including:

- Self-location: Introducing yourself (who you are, who you come from, and where you come from), your organization, your intentions for the work, your values, your cultural worldview, and so on.
    - Self-location also requires content creators to consider whether a story is theirs to tell. It requires an examination of their relationship with the issue and their connection with the people they are collaborating with to share a story (more resources on self-location can be found in the Additional Resources Section).
- Defining ways that the initiative can benefit the environment, territory, and community. This should occur early in the collaboration process.
- Engaging in community events.
- Sharing gifts (ask what is most appropriate before offering gifts).
- Offering compensation or honoraria (see these guidelines from the Conservation through Reconciliation Partnership on honoraria).
- Expressing acknowledgements and sincere gratitude.
- Listening, learning, and making a genuine effort to understand.
- Where possible, using the highest quality equipment and techniques to collect and elevate individual and community stories. This can help to ensure stories are shared in the best way possible and reach a wider audience.
- Capacity building (sharing knowledge, tools, expertise, and offering support).

It is also important to respect and follow a community's specific protocols or laws around reciprocity. When working with Indigenous partners, ask about the appropriate protocols to follow regarding gifts, compensation, and reciprocity.

Authenticity and Transparency

Authenticity and transparency are central to building and nurturing trust. Communications must be centred around Indigenous partners telling their own story, in their own voice, and in their own way. This is referred to as 'narrative sovereignty,' as Labrador Inuk journalist Ossie Michelin reflects:

> *"Having the ability to tell your own stories, to define your own world view, is called narrative sovereignty. It means that you have the ability to share ideas that are important to you. When Indigenous people have narrative sovereignty, stereotypes and myths fall away and we are free to truly represent ourselves. Our stories are a chance to get to know us, to see our humanity, to see us as multifaceted beings instead of two-dimensional stereotypes."*

Authenticity strengthens communications and builds trust with audiences. It can help to bridge knowledge gaps, address harmful biases, and build shared understandings.

It is imperative that communications initiatives clearly and transparently credit Indigenous partners for their stories, knowledge, and work. In addition, Indigenous Peoples are the owners of any Indigenous knowledge that may be shared through communications processes. See the section on Indigenous Intellectual/Cultural Property for more information.

Two-Eyed Seeing

In Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall's words, Etuaptmumk, or Two-Eyed Seeing refers to "learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous Knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the strengths of western knowledges and ways of knowing – and learning to use both of these eyes together for the benefit of all."

Elder Albert reminds us that learning to see with both eyes comes with the responsibility to act on the knowledge we've gained. Every effort should be made to weave place-based, Indigenous knowledge systems into communications for Indigenous-led conservation.

While there are many more than just two worldviews, the concept of Two-Eyed Seeing is a helpful reminder that there are multiple ways of seeing, thinking, being and behaving that can coexist.

When collaborating with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis governments, leaders, organizations, and community members on communications work, Two-Eyed Seeing can be upheld through every step of the process, from strategy development to knowledge gathering, to storytelling.

More resources on Two-Eyed Seeing can be found in the Additional Resources Section.

Ethical Space

Ethical Space is a concept adapted by Cree scholar Willie Ermine of Sturgeon Lake First Nation and Blackfoot Elder Dr. Reg Crowshoe from Piikani Nation.

As described by Dr. Reg Crowshoe, Ethical Space is where different knowledge systems and worldviews can understand each other and interact with each other on a foundation of mutual trust and respect. It requires entering dialogue transparently, honestly, and authentically.

Ethical Space cannot be cultivated without Two-Eyed-Seeing. It is within Ethical Space that all collaboration, mutual support, and multi-directional knowledge sharing occurs, ensuring that the work is completed and shared in a respectful and authentic way.

More resources on Ethical Space can be found in the Additional Resources Section.

The First Nations Principles of OCAP®

The First Nations principles of Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession, or OCAP®, assert that First Nations have control over data collection processes and that they own and control how this information can be used. These principles can help guide ethical ways of working with First Nations who choose to share their data, information, and cultural knowledge.

OCAP® operates as a set of specifically First Nations principles. They reflect First Nations commitments to use and share information in a way that brings benefits to communities, while minimizing harm.

The principles of OCAP® go beyond federal and provincial government privacy legislation, which protect individual privacy rights only.

There are potential harms associated with the use or misuse of any information about a community, including:

- Physical harm;
- Psychological harm;
- Social harm;
- Economic harm;
- Legal harm; and
- Relational harm.

In many cases, communities have suffered more than one of these types of harm.

The interpretation of OCAP® principles will be unique to each region or community. Each individual Nation has the knowledge and authority to balance the benefits and harms associated with the collection and use of their information.

OCAP® principles were developed within a research context but are highly relevant for communications work. While the principles of OCAP® are an expression of First Nations authority, the following questions are important to discuss when co-creating communications materials with all Indigenous partners:

- How will the communications materials be collected? How will they be used?
- Who can have access to and use the final materials?
- Who will have ownership of the raw and final materials?
- Who can have access to and use the raw information gathered as part of the project (e.g., transcripts, video footage, etc.)?
- What restrictions exist for utilizing the information for other purposes?
- How will materials be shared?

FAIR and CARE Principles

The push for open data and science in recent years fails to fully consider Indigenous Peoples' rights and interests. Current processes and principles focus on data sharing but ignore historical context and power imbalances, causing challenges for Indigenous communities trying to protect and control their data for their own benefit. The FAIR and CARE Principles offer a different approach that promote fairness, well-being, and inclusivity in data advocacy.

The 'FAIR Guiding Principles for scientific data management and stewardship' were published in *Scientific Data* in 2016. FAIR stands for Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, and Reusable.

The CARE Principles for Indigenous Data Governance were drafted at the International Data Week and Research Data Alliance Plenary co-hosted event "Indigenous Data Sovereignty Principles for the Governance of Indigenous Data Workshop," on November 2018 in Gaborone, Botswana. CARE stands for Collective Benefit, Authority to Control, Responsibility, and Ethics.

Communications Process

This section outlines key considerations for respectful processes for communications initiatives in collaboration with Indigenous partners. Before any work begins, it is imperative that considerable time, space, and resources are invested in building and nurturing relationships.

Building and Nurturing Relationships

There is a harmful legacy of non-Indigenous organizations, academics, and corporations claiming to work with Indigenous leaders and communities as 'consultants' and 'stakeholders.' This has caused a lot of violence and trauma and has rightfully led to mistrust.

Building relationships can take time — anywhere from a few months to several years.

Consider the following processes for nurturing trusting, meaningful, and lasting relationships:

- **Honour the principle of reciprocity.** Consider what you are bringing to the table. Make sure that the relationship is not a one-way street.
- **Be transparent about your organization's approach to communications**. Clarify any external commitments your organization may have (i.e., to funders, organizational partners) regarding communications deliverables and deadlines.
- **Take time to undertake regular communication.** Work with colleagues in the community in a culturally appropriate way. Meet people where they are. Establish regular times to meet and check in, put resources toward showing up — whether its in an office, community centre, or on the land — even if you have nothing specific to meet about.
- **Maintain consistency.** Organizational turnover is inevitable. However, make efforts to maintain staff contacts and connections with Indigenous partners. Consistent and sustained connections help nurture trust.
- **Discuss funding.** The community may need funding to support ongoing engagement and associated work (e.g., a contribution agreement). Sufficient financial resources provide the ability for Indigenous communities to engage effectively and can provide mechanisms to support projects as they are developed.
- **Respect Indigenous protocols, laws, and governance structures.** Communities have different laws, governance systems, principles, and ways of relating. Ask who the appropriate voice on a matter is for the story in question, whether it is hereditary, matriarchal, elected, a speaker, or the community overall. Respecting how (and with whom) Indigenous communities may want to engage helps maintain a positive relationship at all levels.
- **Respect time.** Make efforts to shift out of the Western concept of time and deadlines. Meaningful, collaborative work takes time, open-mindedness, and humility. Recognize and appreciate the time, energy, resources, and increasing commitments of Indigenous leaders, knowledge-keepers, scholars, and creatives.
- **Be flexible.** Likely, many unexpected things will come up that are outside of your regular responsibilities or timelines. Seek opportunities to support or address these emergent issues, questions, or opportunities.
- **Follow through on your commitments.** Relationships and trust can easily be impacted by one commitment that is not honoured. Share communications materials with partners throughout and after the process in a respectful way and not once you have published materials.
- **Respect how Indigenous governments and communities choose to associate with each other.** Respect and honour how the community chooses to associate with other Nations or governments. When stories are placed into the public eye, they may affect communities' relationships with one another. Therefore, be respectful and conscious of the potential implications of sharing that story.

- **Take a trauma-informed approach.** Gain an understanding of the historical traumas that may exist prior to engaging in sensitive topics related to traditional territories. There will often be intergenerational trauma due to past and current impacts of colonization. See the trauma-informed communications section for more guidance.
- **Engage in community events.** Upon invitation, attending open houses, community feasts, sharing gifts, or providing cards or flowers for those who have passed can be important gestures to help build respect and trust with the community.

For additional resources on building and nurturing relationships, visit **Beyond Conservation: A Toolkit for Respectful Collaboration with Indigenous Peoples.** Developed by the Indigenous Knowledge Circle (IKC) of the National Boreal Caribou Knowledge Consortium (NBCKC), this toolkit offers a single place to find resources and guidance for non-Indigenous people to support Indigenous-led conservation and stewardship.

Communications Planning

Ideally, before any work begins to develop specific communications materials, there will have been conversations between your organization and Indigenous partners about communications goals, needs, and expectations. These dialogues should be documented, and copies shared with all parties involved.

At the onset of a communications project, it is important to establish clarity and understanding about:

- The purpose (the 'why') of the project and the intentions (the interests, approach, and attitudes) behind the project.
- The budget for the project and where all funding comes from (e.g., organizations, private companies, foundations, individuals).
- Individuals and/or organizations involved in the project.
- Established protocols, laws, or policies that need to be considered and/or honoured. This may include research policies, confidentiality agreements, or cultural protocols.
- How sacred sites, objects, knowledge, or stories will be treated in communications materials.
- Each party's communications goals and needs. Prioritize specific ideas and approaches that are mutually beneficial.
- The type of communications materials (e.g., brochure, article, video) that will be created and means of distribution.
- Who the target audiences are and why.
- How you will gather information.
- The approval and consent process.
- The sources of permissions in the community(ies) where the project(s) will take place.
- How you will safeguard Indigenous intellectual and/or cultural property.
- What messages or storylines you anticipate highlighting.
- The proposed timeline (start to finish) for the project.
    - Ensure there is ample time for meaningful engagement with all individuals involved in content gathering, creation, and sharing for their review, consent, feedback, and approval.
- An outline of the review process.
- How you will acknowledge and compensate Indigenous partners and collaborators.

- What success looks like and how it will be tracked and measured.
- Who will have access to and use information and materials related to the project(s).

Revisit and revise any agreements to ensure they reflect evolving communications needs and relationships as they develop. Some additional, but no less important, considerations for a communications process in collaboration with Indigenous partners are:

- **Intergenerational exchange opportunities.** For example, invite youth, knowledge keeper, and Elder voices to not only enrich the content but also to create opportunities for knowledge sharing, learning, and mentorship.
- **Capacity building opportunities**. Invite Indigenous partners to learn about communications processes and tactics so that they can utilize these tools for their own efforts.
- Ensure that any work within the community has **minimal impacts to the environment, including plants and wildlife, and to individuals.** Identify and integrate ways to minimize harm yet meet the criteria of the initiative or project to ensure it is successful.

Indigenous Intellectual/Cultural Property

Indigenous knowledge and systems of knowledge, also known as 'traditional knowledge,' is place-based and context-specific.

While many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis knowledge keepers, experts, and scholars are willing to share their knowledge, many others consider knowledge gathering activities as an extension of colonization and exploitation. Cultural appropriation came at the heels of colonialism and is still common today.

Content about Indigenous Peoples, including art, films, and books, is often created and sold by non-Indigenous peoples for profit or personal gain:

> "The number of works by non-Indigenous artists appropriating Indigenous culture (ceremony, regalia, story, etc.)—and this is important – for commercial benefit – are frankly too numerous to list."—imagineNATIVE

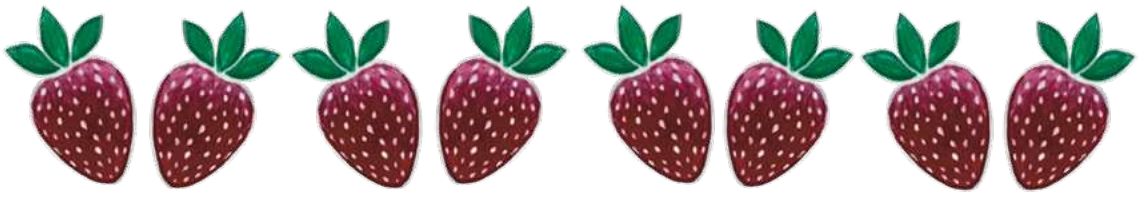
Indigenous intellectual property or Indigenous cultural property is a concept that Indigenous Peoples in Canada have developed to assert their rights. The idea of private property or ownership is a Western one. As Gregory Younging points out:

> "Indigenous Peoples think of Creation as something that includes and sustains all living things. People are part of it and responsible for caring for it. The question of 'who owns it' has no context" [pg 25].

This responsibility expands to cultural teachings, heritage, practices, and expressions.

Indigenous cultural property is recognized and upheld by UNDRIP under Article 31:

1. "Indigenous peoples have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as the manifestations of their sciences, technologies and cultures, including human and genetic resources, seeds, medicines, knowledge of the properties of fauna and flora, oral traditions, literatures, designs, sports and traditional games and visual and performing arts. They also have the right to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural expressions."



2. "In conjunction with Indigenous peoples, States shall take effective measures to recognize and protect the exercise of these rights."

While Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution protects Indigenous rights, Indigenous cultural property is not specifically mentioned, nor is it adequately protected under the Canadian *Copyright Act*.

According to the Intellectual Property Institute of Canada, the Canadian *Copyright Act* **fails to** recognize and protect:

- Collective ownership rights.
- Historical works and oral expression.
- The perpetual and timeless character of traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions.

Careful, thoughtful, and thorough consideration must be taken to understand community protocols for knowledge sharing, what is appropriate to share, and determine where knowledge ownership lies (i.e., Does it lie with an individual, a set of individuals, or the whole community?).

Obtaining Consent

Obtaining consent is mandatory prior to the co-creation and publication of communications materials.

Consent forms are an agreement for consent and release of information gathered via quotes, interviews, photographs, and audio/video recordings. Special consent forms are required for minors. Below is a checklist for safeguarding intellectual/cultural property and consent:

- Work with and respect the community leadership, liaison, and/or organizer of the event to understand and establish their protocols for sharing knowledge and obtaining consent.
- Ensure anyone to be photographed, interviewed, filmed, or recorded in any way has received, reviewed, and been given the option to sign a consent form (in addition to any other legal forms required). It is good practice to submit requests to the Indigenous organization or community representative at least one week before the event.
- Take the time to talk through the consent form with individuals to be sure they understand what they are consenting to and how information might be used. The consent form allows for individuals to indicate if they'd like to be involved in the review stage before materials are published and to request copies of published materials. Make sure to track these requests and provide signatories the opportunity to review.
- Ensure that all signatories have a copy of their signed consent form.
- Discuss, in advance, what is happening during content creation and to understand any specific concerns, sensitivities or practices your organization and the photographer should be aware of. Learn what is appropriate and not appropriate to record (e.g., ceremonies, including smudges, prayers, dancing, singing, etc.).
- When asking the community about photography, interviews, and other materials, be clear where and when and how you intend to use materials.
- Request consent from subjects prior to starting interviews, filming, photo shoots, etc., whenever possible. If consent is sought afterward due to unforeseen conditions, ensure that written consent is obtained for any materials already gathered.
- Ensure you have been given consent from parents or legal guardians for information gathered from children and youth.
- If you are planning to repurpose or re-use information materials previously gathered, be sure you have consent to do so. If you do not have explicit consent to use the materials in this way, you will need to go back and get renewed consent.

- Ensure that your consent form is succinct and uses plain language and accessible terms. Include phrasing stipulating that participants are free to withdraw their consent at any time without facing any adverse consequences.
- Ensure that appropriate acknowledgement and compensation is provided to all collaborators.

Withdrawal of Consent

At any time of the process, including after the project has been completed, consent can be withdrawn.

In instances where a large gathering was recorded, work with and respect the community leadership, liaison, and/or event organizers to determine how to proceed with withdrawn consent of one or a few individuals.

Consent may not solely lie with the specific individuals who are collaborating with you on content creation. According to imagineNATIVE:

> "In obtaining proper consent keep in mind too that there are nation stories and rights, community stories and rights, and individual family stories and rights. When you are contemplating the use of oral histories, understand that there may need to be some limitations of where copyright applies, and you may want to consider 'shared authorship' or 'co-creation' credits with community members."

Obtaining consent from one leader within the community, such as an Elder or knowledge keeper, may not mean you have consent from the entire community. Work with and respect the community leadership, liaison, or event organizer to determine protocols and agreements around consent.

Trauma-Informed Communications

Indigenous Peoples have experienced and continue to experience physical, psychological, cultural, socio-economical, and spiritual trauma due to centuries of colonialism.

While institutional trauma is often reported and discussed, it is important to be aware that violence and trauma is also rooted in the severance of Indigenous Peoples from their relationships with their territories. This violence and trauma continue today through the actions and impacts of extractive industries. This is often known as 'environmental violence', 'ecocide' and/or 'environmental genocide' and is inextricably linked to cultural genocide.

A trauma-informed approach should be considered and woven throughout the relationship building, relationship management, and all other collaborative processes with Indigenous partners.

Three key elements for a trauma-informed approach across any organization include:

- Realizing the prevalence of trauma;
- Recognizing how trauma affects people; and
- Responding by putting your knowledge into practice.

While the bulk of research in trauma-informed approaches draws from the healthcare sector, there are a growing number of resources for journalists. You can find these in the Additional Resources Section.

Below are some wise practices for trauma-informed communications:

- Self-locate. (Introduce who you are, who you come from, where you come from, your values, and your intentions).
    - Be humble about what you know and what you don't know. Consider whether its your story to tell and examine your relationship with the issue as well as with the individual and/or community.
- Discuss compensation and reciprocity.
- Ask the interviewee if they have a care plan (i.e., someone to talk to before, during and/or after the interview).

- Take breaks and regularly check in on everyone's well-being.
- Communicate respectfully. The tone of voice can significantly impact how people receive and react to messages.
- Be respectful of others' life experiences.
- Build healthy relationships. Treat people with dignity and respect.
- Be an active listener.
- Focus on behaviours and not the person.
- Use appropriate body language.

In addition, in his book Decolonizing Journalism (pgs.77-81), Duncan McCue offers these core tips for trauma-informed reporting, which are highly applicable to communications initiatives:

- Be human.
- Be humble.
- Be transparent.
- Get informed consent.
- Empower interviewees.
- Be patient.
- Interview respectfully.
- Remember resilience (think of the whole person, beyond their trauma).
- Recheck facts.
- Stay in touch.
- Consider a follow-up.
- Care for yourself. Consider creating a care plan for yourself as well. Reach out to a confidant or support person.

Overall, a trauma-informed communications approach is about care and humanity. kelsie kilawna (Sylix, former reporter for IndigiNews, current Senior Associate of Storytelling at MakeWay) approaches trauma-informed reporting through her Sylix cultural protocols and practices.

kelsie describes how she planned to approach trauma-informed reporting after the news of the Kamloops Residential School first broke:

> "Any reporting that follows this story, I situate myself as a mother...This means my writing practices will be centred around love, healing, integrity, and uplifting the good, while following the highest quality of journalistic standards."

Content Development

Developing communications materials will be proactive as well as reactive. It is important to be open, flexible, and nimble to opportunistic communications. However, it is also critical to maintain your commitment to the principles of consent, respect, authenticity, transparency, and reciprocity — and honour any additional agreements or protocols that have been discussed in advance.

Ideally, the content development process will align with the partnership agreement and the communications plan(s) that have been jointly developed and agreed upon.

Below are some key considerations that would apply to all contexts:

- **Clarify what information is needed** to develop the proposed communications materials.
- **Clarify the method or format** in which the information will be recorded.
- Spend time discussing and agreeing upon the **primary messaging and storylines.**
- **Identify existing information that could be re-utilized** to develop content. This helps to decrease time and resource commitments of Indigenous partners and communities.
- **Identify who might be approached** for interviews, quotes, audio clips, photographs, video, etc., and by whom, well in advance.
- **Identify who will be involved** in gathering information and producing content: who will conduct interviews, film, draft text, etc.
- **Clarify who from both partners must be present** when information is being gathered from community members, out on the land, etc.
- **Consider the demands that communications projects may place on community partners or specific individuals.** Be respectful and thoughtful about minimizing these demands. Provide sufficient and appropriate compensation for their time and any associated expenses.
- **Care for, empower, and respect interviewees** through a trauma-informed approach.
- **Allow ample time and space for review, consent, approvals, reflection, and feedback** on communications materials. Be mindful of the time, energy, and space it takes to offer careful, considerate feedback.
- **Bring in experts where required and/or appropriate[5].** Hiring external experts, such as Elders, knowledge keepers, thought leaders, scientists, and facilitators, can offer several benefits. These include creating local employment opportunities, building local capacity, bringing neutrality and credibility to messaging.
- **Strive for the highest quality content (written, audio, and visual).** There is a legacy of low-quality, harmful, and traumatic reporting and communications about Indigenous Peoples in Canada. Producing high quality materials is an act of harm reduction and reconciliation.
- **Take a Two-Eyed Seeing approach.** Discuss how multiple knowledge systems and languages can be braided together in audio, visuals, and text in the short-term and long-term.

5 Deitrich, Dawn. (2023). Building Public Understanding of Indigenous-led Conservation: Insights from Communications Strategies in Five National Parks

Visual Guidelines

Images, graphics, animation, and other representations are critical pieces to any communications project. As environmental organizations increasingly prioritize Indigenous-led conservation and reconciliation efforts in their communications, they're also striving for appropriate, respectful, and authentic visual content.

Visual guidance will vary and depend on the context, guidance, and preferences of the Indigenous partners and communities with whom you are working.

Some high-level and anti-oppressive practices include:

- **Early and ongoing engagement** on visual content is important. For example, content plans for visuals and imagery should be included in the co-developed and agreed upon communications plan. This may include discussions around what is and is not appropriate to portray visually (in illustrations, photography, or videography) including sacred sites, sacred objects, artistic works, ceremonies, community gatherings or events, etc. This may also include the intent of the visual content and overarching communications work.
- **Hire local, Indigenous creatives** (artists, animators, designers, photographers, videographers) to co-develop visual content.
- **Recognize, respect, and safeguard Indigenous intellectual and cultural property.** Appropriately credit work in publicly available materials. Follow the principles of OCAP®, FAIR, and CARE Guidelines.
- **Ensure proper referencing, descriptions, and naming** according to the preferences of Indigenous partners. Specify the territory, clan, family, and other significant details. Ensure the spelling is correct. Be respectful about the content you are gathering and sharing.
- **Consider and engage with neighbouring communities.** Where filming, photography, or illustrations of places and spaces that overlap with neighbouring Indigenous territories, it is essential to engage with their respective communities. Note that it may not be feasible or realistic to gain consent from all Indigenous governments.
- **Ensure proper documentation.** Ensure that documentation about consent and usage (including release forms, signed agreements, etc.) is systematically filed with the visual asset, so it is clear and accessible to everyone who will be using that visual asset.

Some key things **to avoid** when developing visual materials include:

- Taking photographs or videos without consent, even if the visual recordings are for 'personal' use and not shared.

- Pan-Indigenous representation and stereotypical imagery (e.g., dream catchers, headdresses, Hollywood portrayals of Indigenous Peoples, etc.).
    - For example, the documentary Reel Injun takes a look at the portrayal of Indigenous Peoples throughout the history of cinema.
- Use and/or over-use of Western imagery to depict concepts (e.g., scales of justice [laws], handshake [agreement], dollar signs [economy, currency], compass or cartesian map [direction, travel], book [knowledge], lightbulb, test tube, microscope [science]).
- Making assumptions about imagery (e.g., that Turtle Island is an image or a term that represents or is appropriate for all Indigenous communities).

- Using stock imagery. Where possible and if budgets allow, visual content should truly reflect the relationships of the space and place the communications work is referring to.
- Using old images, such as archived photography. Many older images portraying Indigenous Peoples were taken without consent. It is important to use high quality photography with consent. If using older images that were taken with previous consent, ask for consent again.

Mapping Guidelines

Mapmaking is a well-developed art among Indigenous Peoples. Traditionally, Indigenous Peoples used maps for navigation, sharing cultural knowledge, and communications. Eurocentric approaches to mapping, however, are a tool for asserting control over lands, waters, and their inhabitants. Colonizers used maps to justify the dispossession of Indigenous Peoples from their traditional homelands.

Today, mapping can be a helpful tool in communications, but it should be approached in a respectful and responsible way.

As stated on Native Land Digital:

> "The land itself is sacred, and it is not easy to draw lines that divide it up into chunks that delineate who 'owns' different parts of land. In reality, we know that the land is not something to be exploited and "owned," but something to be honoured and treasured."

When it comes to mapping Indigenous-led conservation initiatives, including IPCAs and Guardian Programs, not all Indigenous communities or partners will wish to portray their initiatives in colonial terms. Be mindful of territorial and boundary disputes between Indigenous governments.

Ducks Unlimited-Canada has co-created maps with Indigenous partners and shares the following guidance:

- Maps should be co-developed with Indigenous partners. Early and ongoing engagement is key[6].
- Maps should be as simple and minimalist as possible. Only show one or two key features at a time.
- Where appropriate, develop multiple maps with less information. For example, create separate maps showing species ranges, burns, etc.
- Where possible, include Indigenous government logos or other personalized graphics.
- Do not include any other cartographic features or symbols (e.g., North arrow, scale bar, etc.).
- Include key, identifiable place names with labels. Where possible, use Indigenous and/or traditional place names instead of or in addition to colonial place names. Translate place names into the traditional language of that place.
- Use traditional Indigenous territory boundaries where appropriate.
- Do not include a legend. Map features should be recognizable and intuitive and identify the features of focus within the title (e.g., Caribou ranges / protected areas / etc.).
- Do not use acronyms.
- Always use the same symbology for map features across all maps. Symbology will be dependent on discussions with Indigenous partners.
- If the study area is large, make a map book or map series to show portions of features of interest in the study area in more detail (i.e., zoomed in).
- The preferred colour palettes for maps will depend on discussions with Indigenous partners.

6 Deitrich, Dawn. (2023). Building Public Understanding of Indigenous-led Conservation: Insights from Communications Strategies in Five National Parks

Messaging Guidelines

This section outlines some anti-oppressive practices for co-creating messaging with Indigenous partners, including language and terminology and the use of Indigenous languages. All messaging should be co-created and reviewed with Indigenous partners.

Language and Terminology

Appropriate use of language and terms will be diverse and context-specific. Indigenous communities have diverse views about language and terminology. Work with partners to determine their preferred language and use of terms to ensure they are appropriate.

Several reliable style guides have been developed over the years, including Gregory Younging's Elements of Indigenous Style, and can be found in the Additional Resources Section.

Below are ***some*** examples of problematic and/or harmful terminology, along with short explanations for why they are problematic and suggested alternatives. This is not an exhaustive list.

Problematic and/or Harmful Term	Explanation	Suggested Alternatives
Ally, Allyship	The term 'ally' and/or 'allyship' can be problematic. It is often used by white settlers and non-Indigenous organizations to self-identify as supporters of Indigenous Peoples and their rights, without any critical self-reflection, humility, or deep understanding. In this way, 'allyship' has been used superficially as an identity without responsibility or concrete action. As stated in this piece by kelsie kilawna for IndigiNews, "How can allies cause harm? Well, allies are usually well-intentioned, but very quickly that can turn into taking up space in conversations and silencing those they claim to ally with."	Partner, Partnership, Supporter, Collaborator
Conservation	'Conservation' is a colonial, Eurocentric term, concept, and approach to environmentalism with roots in the 'Doctrine of Discovery.' This decree advanced a belief that European people, culture, and religions were more superior than others due to their perceived separation from nature. This led to the seizure of Indigenous territories and the displacement of Indigenous Peoples. This is not to say that the idea of 'conservation' cannot be decolonized and used for Indigenous-led efforts (e.g., Indigenous-led conservation and Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas).	Caretaking, Stewardship (under traditional governance, laws, and cultural values).

Cull, Culling	Culling — the process of selecting and removing a specified number of a species — has been used as a tool for wildlife management to help with population control, invasive species, or disease. The premise is that a cull would help bring the ecosystem back into balance. 'Culling' is not an appropriate term, nor is it accurate, when referring to Indigenous harvesting. Harvesting is not only a right and responsibility, but also a way of life for Indigenous Peoples.	Harvesting, Managing
Indigenous Groups	The term 'Indigenous groups' is often used to refer to Indigenous governments, communities, and or Indigenous-led organizations. It is yet another term that homogenizes Indigenous Peoples and undermines their place-based knowledge and distinct and sophisticated governance systems.	Be as specific as possible with the name(s) of the Indigenous government(s), Nation(s), Indigenous communities, and/ or Indigenous-led organization(s)/ association(s). Or specify whether they are Indigenous government(s), communities, organizations, or associations.
Land Claim	As Gregory Younging points out, the word 'claim' is problematic "because it implies that Indigenous Peoples must apply to obtain ownership over land, not that they have inherent ownership" (pg. 57). There are a diversity of legal realities among and between Indigenous communities. As like many of these terms, it is best to discuss its use and alternatives with Indigenous partners.	Indigenous Title, Inherent Rights and Title.
Land-Use, Land-Management	The concepts of 'land-use' and 'land-management' connote a Eurocentric approach to interacting with the land as a separate 'thing' to be fragmented, measured, and manipulated. This undermines the rights, responsibilities, and relationships that Indigenous Peoples hold with their traditional territories.	Land Relationship, Land Care, Stewardship, Governance
Legends, Mythology, Myths, Tales	These terms are often applied to Indigenous knowledge systems and Oral Traditions. As Gregory Younging states: "This is offensive to Indigenous Peoples because the terms imply that Oral Traditions are insignificant, not based in reality, or not relevant" (pg. 57).	Oral Traditions, Traditional Stories, Stories, Teachings, Laws

Pioneer, Pioneered	People often use the term 'pioneer' as a metaphor for being the 'first' to do something or be innovative. This term is linked to colonialism and its harms. Its use as a metaphor is problematic and can perpetuate harm.	Leader, Led, Guide, Guided, Innovator, Innovated
Pristine, Untouched	Terms like 'pristine' and 'untouched' are commonly used in conjunction with 'wilderness' and 'wild.' These terms are problematic for the same reasons and are an extension of the doctrine of 'Terra Nullius.' They sustain the colonial myth that the lands and waters of what is briefly known as North America were empty and available for the taking, instead of being nurtured, governed, and stewarded since time immemorial.	Healthy, Thriving, Cared for, Tended to. Untouched by industry. Not impacted by industrial development.
Protect	The idea of 'protecting' lands and waters from human interaction is a Eurocentric one that justified the removal and dispossession of Indigenous Peoples from their homelands. Indigenous Peoples hold rights, responsibilities, and relationships to govern and steward their traditional territories.	Steward, Care for, Tend to.
Self-Government	As Gregory Younging explains, this term was "originally conceptualized and used by Indigenous Peoples in the late 1970s to describe their right to govern their own affairs" (pg. 59). However, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development adopted and applied this term to its community-based self-government policy. This policy did not fully recognize Indigenous rights and governmental powers. Therefore, it fell out of use and became problematic. Self-determination is more appropriate and is also defined in UNDRIP.	Self-Determination, Sovereignty, Rights and Title.
Stakeholders	Firstly, Indigenous Peoples hold rights and responsibilities to care for their traditional homelands. They are not participants to be consulted with in discussions but are place-based leaders and experts. Secondly, there is a Canadian legacy of 'consulting' Indigenous Peoples as 'stakeholders' in disrespectful, untruthful, and even deceitful ways.	Rights holders, Partners, Collaborators, Co-managers, Place-based leaders, Place-based experts.
Wilderness, Wild	Using the terminology 'wilderness' and 'wild' is an extension of the idea that lands and waters in Canada were devoid of human activity and must be 'conserved' and 'protected.' In fact, Indigenous Peoples have cared for the lands and waters since time immemorial.	Lands and waters, Traditional territories or Homelands, Ancestral Lands, Ancestral Gardens, Gardens.

Other problematic, but quite common, editorial practices include:

- **Using the past tense when referring to Indigenous Peoples.**
    - As Gregory Younging outlines, "Referring to Indigenous Peoples in the past tense engages inappropriate and offensive assumptions that they no longer exist, no longer practice their cultural traditions, and have been assimilated into mainstream society" [pg 97].
- **Using possessives when referring to Indigenous Peoples** (e.g., "Canada's Indigenous Peoples," "Our Indigenous Peoples").
    - These possessives imply that the state, or Canada 'owns' Indigenous Peoples. Instead use "Indigenous Peoples in Canada" or "Indigenous Peoples in what is now Canada."
- **Listing Indigenous Peoples as a separate category** when referring to types of professionals, experts, or leaders (e.g., scientists, researchers, practitioners, consultants).
    - Indigenous scientists, researchers, practitioners, consultants exist in all sectors. An alternative suggestion might be to say: "Indigenous and non-Indigenous scientists, researchers, practitioners, consultants, etc."
- **Using singular forms** to describe Indigenous communities, knowledge systems, cultures, governance systems or laws, etc. This reinforces pan-Indigeneity and fails to acknowledge unique identities or distinct rights among Indigenous Peoples.

Using Indigenous Languages

The work of revitalizing and re-establishing Indigenous languages and appropriate spellings is ongoing. There is no comprehensive list or reference of correct names or spellings for all Indigenous Peoples in Canada. See the Additional Resources Section for various style guides.

Many environmental organizations are incorporating Indigenous terms and languages in their communications efforts. A common practice is to italicize these terms. However, this can be an act of 'othering' and undermining the legitimacy and strength of Indigenous languages.

We highly recommend using Indigenous languages with care in communications efforts where appropriate:

- Hire Indigenous language holders and experts to translate materials when requested and/or appropriate.
- Ask and work collaboratively with Indigenous partners to clarify the preferred names and spellings for phrases, places, people, teachings, and other significant names or terms.
- Recognize that many Indigenous languages have thrived and endure as orally-based, intricate systems of knowledge that have evolved over millennia. The 'correct' or appropriate spelling of names, terms, and phrases in English is context-specific and fluid.
- Respectfully acknowledge and compensate individuals who give time and energy for this work.

Content Review

This section outlines key considerations for the content review process. Ideally, the review process will be discussed and agreed upon during the planning stages of a project.

Establish who will be involved in reviewing communications material at draft and/or final stages. This will vary with the project and the partnership but will typically include communications staff, the community lead/liaison, staff in partner organizations, and people who have provided content and indicated that they want to review materials prior to final production and/or publication.

- Identify and list everyone who needs to be involved at each stage of review (both communications staff and external partners).
- Confirm consent from any individual interviewed, quoted, photographed, filmed, etc., in the communication materials.
- Clarify who is authorized to provide final sign-off on the project from all parties.
- Clarify the timing for review and the feedback process.
- Secure written approval and sign-off from all parties, as discussed and agreed upon with Indigenous partners, for publication.
- Appropriately compensate individuals for their time and expertise in a timely manner. Make the compensation process as smooth and simple as possible.

Use and Distribution of Materials

Find ways to share materials that would be mutually beneficial for all involved. Inform Indigenous partners how communication materials will be used and distributed. Ensure that Indigenous partners have access to and copies of any communication materials that are developed.

- Clarify how all partners can use or distribute final communication materials and any related restrictions.
- Clarify at the outset of the project how many copies of materials are to be produced or printed for use by both partners and how electronic files can best be shared to facilitate use and distribution (e.g., USB, Google Drive, Dropbox, Box, other file transfer protocols, etc.).
- Clarify at the outset if photos, video footage, interview transcripts, etc., gathered as part of a communications project can be used for other purposes by either or both partners. If this is the intention or preference, check that consent forms have allowed for this re-use, adaptation, or redistribution.

Measuring Success

How you will measure the success of your communications work in collaboration with Indigenous partners should be established during the planning process. What success looks like (including short-term, medium-term, and long-term outcomes and impacts) for each communications initiative will be specific to each context.

Think beyond standard key performance indicators (KPIs) and consider the following when evaluating communications work:

- How will it benefit Indigenous partners and communities?
- How will it strengthen relationships with Indigenous partners?
- How will it help to shift the dominant narrative of conservation in Canada?
- How will it build audience understanding of Indigenous conservation leadership?
- How will it support the broader Indigenous-led conservation movement (i.e., how could it inform or guide other Indigenous conservation initiatives and IPCAs?)?
- How will it inform the wider organization (i.e., how can key learning, missteps, and insights inform broader organizational change?)?

Working with Freelancers, Contractors, and Vendors

In general, content for communications should be co-developed by an organization's communications team and Indigenous partners.

In cases where freelancers, contractors, or vendors are developing content, there should always be a lead who will help manage the project, ensure that the project adheres to any formal agreements, and provide oversight and/or review.

Below are key considerations for hiring and working with freelancers, contractors, or vendors:

- Identify opportunities to hire local, Indigenous freelancers, contractors, and vendors to maximize opportunities for local benefits. Local experts:
    - Hold a lived experience and thus a better understanding of the community and region;
    - Hold trusting relationships with their communities;
    - Are better positioned to navigate sensitive matters and areas; and
    - Provide additional employment within the community.
- If local resources aren't an option, ensure external freelancers/contractors/vendors have completed cross-cultural competency training and agree to adhere and uphold the communications guidelines.
- Clearly define roles and responsibilities.
- Identify a lead (main point of contact and relationship-holder) who will work with the freelancer to avoid confusion and miscommunication. The main point of contact will manage the project, ensure that it adheres to all guidelines, and provide oversight/review.
- Discuss and agree upon the primary requirements of the project.
- Make existing information available to the freelancer/contractor/vendor that could be used to develop the content.
- Provide fair compensation.

Crisis Comunications

Due to the miseducation of Canadians regarding the nation's historic and continued relationships with Indigenous Peoples, communications efforts that aim to shift the dominant narrative can be met with scepticism, misinterpretation, and even hostility. This can present a reputational risk to environmental organizations and/or disrupt operations.

Early and ongoing engagement and cross-cultural relationship building with Indigenous partners and target audiences should prevent a lot of misunderstandings, however, missteps can still occur.

Here are some general guidelines that can be integrated into your organization's existing crisis communications plan (or consider revamping your crisis communications plan and co-develop one with Indigenous partners):

- Primarily, honour and uphold your relationships and responsibilities to Indigenous partners. Follow your partner's lead and expertise. Then you can think about protecting your organization's public image and brand.
- Dedicate human resources and time to monitoring and managing comments and feedback on all digital platforms. Delete the comments section if necessary and/or if requested by Indigenous partners.
- Create opportunities for two-way communications with target audiences. This will help to better understand their perspectives and needs.
- Bring in the experts[7]. A neutral voice can help bring credibility to the issue. Brand ambassadors and champions can also help bring credibility.
- Work with Indigenous partners to think through ways to strengthen or re-frame messaging, tactics, and approaches.
- Understand that shifting your audiences' understanding of colonialism, trauma, and the harms of the conservation movement will take time, investment and reflection. Commit resources to engaging audiences in dialogues that support their education.
- Involve your entire organization, including communications, fundraising, operations, and executive leadership, in shaping evolving narratives. Prepare Frequently Asked Questions and internal messaging to support various teams and to ensure consistent messaging across your organization.

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Final Thoughts: The Path Forward

This set of guidelines is meant to inform and guide communications departments and professionals working within and for environmental organizations. However, communications is a function of the wider organization.

Communications contributes to an organization's fundraising, marketing, public advocacy, brand awareness, government relations, policy change, and thought leadership. Therefore, the approaches, considerations, and principles within these guidelines need to be reflected within the entire organization. This will require change and discomfort.

The colonial institutions and systems currently in place were created to establish and preserve the comfort, privilege, control, and authority of white settlers in Canada. It is high time to sit in discomfort, dismantle, and rebuild, or create something new altogether.

Organizational change and reconciliation require learning and unlearning at the individual, team, and organizational levels. This is a continuous journey with no end-point.

Here are some concrete actions that environmental organizations and agencies can take now to get started:

- Invest in initial and ongoing cross-cultural competency training for staff at all levels. Make this a part of each employee's professional development and/or work plan. Some training resources and courses include:
    - Indigenous Corporate Training Inc.,
    - Sanyas Anti-Racism Indigenous Cultural Safety Training Program,
    - Indigenous Awareness Canada
    - University of Alberta's Indigenous Canada Course
    - Assembly of First Nations' It's Our Time Toolkit
- Hire Indigenous staff at all levels of the organization. Strategically eliminate barriers to hiring Indigenous Peoples in positions of authority and seniority.
- Workshop the principles, considerations, and anti-oppressive practices contained within these guidelines. Document your processes, learning, and missteps.
- Share lessons learned about working with Indigenous conservation leadership. Join or establish a community of practice, be transparent in your communications, develop and publish a report (see Organizational Frameworks for examples from other ENGOs), and so on. This will help shoulder the burden that Indigenous Peoples hold to educate and guide non-Indigenous peoples.
- Critically reflect upon and acknowledge the past, current, and ongoing harms of colonial approaches to conservation that have been perpetuated by your organization. The pathway of reconciliation cannot begin without truth.
- Invite other ways of knowing into your organization. Prioritize humility and open-mindedness. Invite Indigenous knowledge keepers and experts to organizational training opportunities or brown bag lunches.
- Spend time on the land. Visit community leaders, culture and knowledge keepers, and community members.
- Share the space — whether it's within traditional and/or digital media, fundraising, political advocacy, or research. Be aware of the space your organization is taking up within the conservation sector, then step aside and uplift Indigenous leadership.

- For example, in a joint announcement in 2023, the Indigenous Leadership Initiative (ILI) and International Boreal Conservation Campaign (IBCC) celebrated a milestone in making conservation more effective and equitable. ILI will be taking over IBCC's conservation efforts in Canada, absorbing its staff, structures, budget, and fundraising. This move represents a remarkable advancement of decolonization, where an established environmental coalition has relinquished control of its assets to support Indigenous leadership.

Non-governmental and governmental environmental agencies and organizations should be learning from each other and speaking with each other in addition to learning from Indigenous partners. If we can encourage a community of sharing and learning key lessons, wise practices, and missteps, we can truly uphold the spirit of "We rise together."

Additional Resources

Much of this work was guided by and built from Nature United's internal Communications Guidelines. We are grateful to Pamela Vernaus and Jacqueline Nunes for their generosity in sharing and discussing these guidelines with the CRP Communications Learning Circle.

The public version of these guidelines can be found here.

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www.conservation-reconciliation.ca