

Transforming Climate Action

Indigenous Engagement Strategy



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Introduction

Conversations around Indigenous inclusion and reconciliation in the Canadian research and innovation sector have become increasingly prominent over the last decade. From coast to coast, researchers have been working with Indigenous groups to develop best practices for engaging with Indigenous groups that are both respectful and meaningful. The institutions that make up our research leadership team have collectively worked to understand and develop Indigenous engagement in research best practices. Collectively, our partner institutions and research leaders have supported the development of an Advisory Committee on Indigenous Engagement in Ocean Research and worked to develop an Indigenous Engagement Guide (the Guide) and deliver Indigenous cultural awareness training for their partner researchers, HQP, and students. These efforts were informed by engagement and discussions with Indigenous groups on the development of the Guide for researchers from September 2019 through to March 2021. The Guide is now nested in the UNESCO International Ocean Best Practices Inventory which has allowed it to be globally accessed.

These efforts have provided our research leaders with an understanding about how meaningful and respectful engagement with Indigenous groups can and should be achieved. Key lessons learned through the development of the Guide include:

- The importance of early and prolonged engagement with Indigenous communities and organizations;
- The timelines for research proposals and funding are significantly limiting factors for Indigenous groups to respond to; and
- The current structure of research calls favors western or institutional researchers and are not always aligned with Indigenous perspectives, approaches, research goals, or ethical or other research protocols.

Meaningful Indigenous engagement is instrumental to achieving our goal to identify and demonstrate ocean-based climate change solutions and the development of meaningful partnerships and knowledge-sharing opportunities with Indigenous groups is vital to achieving this goal in an equitable and holistic way. To help ensure this engagement is conducted appropriately and in a way that is meaningful and respectful, we have developed an Indigenous Engagement Strategy to guide these efforts. This strategy will guide our approach to the co-development of research initiatives that are designed to promote and build research relationships and partnerships with Indigenous groups, where they are wanted.

Guiding Principles

The guiding principles for this strategy were established in the Guide. As with the rest of the Guide, these principles were distilled from direct conversations with Indigenous communities, organizations, governments, and researchers between 2018-2021.

- 1. Recognizing and Respecting Indigenous Territory and Rights:** Recognize the connections your research has to Indigenous communities and their territories and how the history of colonization and past relationships frame those connections. Expand your understanding of the Aboriginal title, Aboriginal Rights, and treaty rights of the Indigenous communities you are engaging with.
- 2. Indigenous Engagement is a Spectrum:** Engagement with Indigenous communities can take many forms, and it is important to engage early and continuously to create opportunities to build meaningful research relationships and partnerships.
- 3. Ethical Principles for Research:** Respect and abide by the principle of “free prior and informed” consent as outlined in the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP) and other best practices and ethical standards and guidelines in your engagement or research with Indigenous groups.
- 4. Indigenous Protocols for Research:** Seek out, review, and respect Indigenous protocols for conducting research, managing data, and engaging communities and organizations in research programs.
- 5. Relationships and Collaboration:** Collaborate with Indigenous groups to build meaningful research relationships that integrate Indigenous groups and active research partners, whenever possible.
- 6. Communication and Feedback:** Communicate with Indigenous communities and organizations early and often and maintain flexibility with your engagement plans in response to their guidance, feedback, and concerns.
- 7. Training Opportunities and Resources:** Expand your individual and research team’s knowledge of Indigenous world views, perspectives, and knowledge through self-directed learning, professional development, and training.

Vision

The Transforming Climate Action Indigenous Engagement Strategy seeks to foster respectful engagement and the creation of meaningful research collaborations and partnerships between our research team and Indigenous groups.

Mission

- Creating partnerships with Indigenous groups to co-develop the Transforming Climate Action initiative which respects the territory, rights, and knowledge of Indigenous peoples;
- Engaging in early and continuous outreach with Indigenous groups to keep them informed about the research initiative and to seek opportunities to be actively involved to various degrees (i.e., from providing feedback to co-developing or co-delivering the research initiative);
- Respecting the right of Indigenous groups not to participate in our engagement or research activities;
- Monitoring and evaluating engagement efforts to help improve the Indigenous Engagement Strategy on an ongoing basis;
- Providing enhanced learning, training, and professional development opportunities for researchers about Indigenous cultures, communities, and language;
- Following and promoting Indigenous and academic ethical guidelines developed by Indigenous communities and partner institutions to support Indigenous engagement in research programs.

Objectives

- 1. Engagement :** If desired, co-develop general and community-specific (if requested) engagement plans reflecting best practices for Indigenous engagement, and that can be tailored to suit the unique needs, desires, and processes of each Indigenous group we plan to engage with.
 - Continuously inform interested Indigenous groups about the progress of the research initiative, as well as opportunities to be involved;

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- Update our Indigenous Engagement Strategy based on feedback from the Advisory Committee on Indigenous Engagement in Ocean Research in order to provide a high-level framework to guide Indigenous engagement throughout the initiative;
- If requested, work with individual Indigenous groups to create and implement community-specific engagement plans, which can be tailored to meet specific processes, needs, and desires.

2. Respect for Indigenous Knowledge, Culture, and Data: Create and apply transparent and meaningful data collection, management, and ownership systems that are reflective of Indigenous protocols and ethical standards by providing training opportunities to our research team and developing knowledge-sharing agreements with Indigenous groups, as and where requested.

- Provide Indigenous cultural awareness training and other learning opportunities to research staff to ensure that those working on the Transforming Climate Action initiative understand cultural differences, Indigenous customs and protocols, and the long-standing impacts of Canada's history of colonialism;
- Ensure that data collection, management, and ownership reflect Indigenous protocols for research, as well as best practices and ethical standards for research with Indigenous groups.

If requested, establish and abide by knowledge-sharing agreements with Indigenous communities and organizations which set the terms and conditions for how data from Indigenous groups will be collected, accessed, used, and protected.

3. Partnership: Engage with the Advisory Committee on Indigenous Engagement in Ocean Research early and continuously throughout the duration of the initiative, share information, build capacity and collaboration that can help guide our engagement and the development of meaningful engagement and potential partnerships.

- Initiate engagement (phone calls, emails, letters, and meetings) with Indigenous groups in the beginning stages of the initiative and continue throughout its entire duration;
- Work with the Advisory Committee on Indigenous Engagement in Ocean Research to identify and build relationships with other potential Indigenous partners;
- Communicate different levels of involvement with potential Indigenous partners, and determine how they may want to be involved, if at all;

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- If required, complete any community-specific protocols needed to establish a research relationship, such as ethics approval processes or knowledge-sharing agreements;
- Establish formal partnerships with 1-2 Indigenous groups who are interested in co-developing the research initiative.

4. Monitoring and Evaluation: Implement a monitoring and evaluation framework which will help ensure that all aspects of the Transforming Climate Action research initiative are continuously evolving based on lessons learned, and conversations with Indigenous groups.

- Create and implement a monitoring and evaluation framework with the Advisory Committee on Indigenous Engagement in Ocean Research to ensure that engagement efforts and concerns/ feedback are recorded and responded to;
- Create opportunities for meaningful conversations with Indigenous groups about how the research initiative could be improved;
- Determine and implement opportunities to gather feedback with Indigenous communities, such as releasing annual surveys to gauge how Indigenous groups feel about different aspects of the project along the way;
- Evaluate all aspects of the research initiative, including the Engagement Strategy, with the advisory group on an annual basis and adapt it based on feedback received and lessons learned.

Our approach

Our Indigenous Engagement Strategy will be implemented in four phases over the next three years, followed by regular check-ins to ensure ongoing satisfaction. Because the research leadership team is committed to communicating and collaborating with Indigenous groups throughout the entire process, our team has already begun building relationships with Indigenous groups in relation to this proposed initiative and will continue to do so during the CFREF review process and before our research begins. The timeline for our Indigenous Engagement Strategy is:

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Phase 1 – Engagement Strategy Planning and Preliminary Conversations with Indigenous Groups

Phase 1 was completed in July through August 31, 2022, and involved preliminary and exploratory conversations with the Advisory Committee on Indigenous Engagement in Ocean Research and other Indigenous organizations. These conversations will be focused on determining which Indigenous groups we will be engaging with, and how to collect the information about their interest in participating in the development of the CFREF proposal. Some Indigenous groups expressed interest and provided letters of support for the proposal. However, all Indigenous groups we spoke to noted, strongly, their concern that the proposal timelines were too short for any meaningful engagement and participation in the proposal development but that the plan to build this engagement into the research program was favorable.

Actions:

- Determine which Indigenous groups we will be engaging with and collect/update contact information for key contacts;
- Engage in conversations with Indigenous groups via phone and email to understand their interests in the CFREF proposal and their perspectives on meaningful engagement going forward;
- Request letters of interest from Indigenous groups who may be interested in participating in the Transforming Climate Action initiative, with the knowledge that they are not fully committing to engaging with the project.

Phase 2 – Building Relationships and Co-developing Engagement Plans

Phase 2 is anticipated to occur between September 2022 and March 2023, during the CFREF proposal review period. During this time, we will communicate with Indigenous groups to build awareness of the initiative and create potential opportunities for future engagement and partnerships in proposed research activities. At this time, the mandate of the Advisory Committee on Indigenous Engagement in Ocean Research will be expanded to help ensure the group is representative of all eastern Canada Indigenous groups. Under the guidance of this Committee, our research leadership team will: update our Indigenous Engagement Strategy based on feedback received; develop community-specific engagement plans which can be tailored to suit the needs and protocols of Indigenous groups, if requested; prepare a monitoring and evaluation framework to help guide and monitor our research engagement efforts to help ensure that concerns/feedback are recorded and appropriately responded to;

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and develop knowledge/data-sharing agreements with interested Indigenous groups which set the terms and conditions for how data from Indigenous communities and organizations will be collected, accessed, used, and protected when partnering with proposed research programs. This phase aims to take advantage of the time during the CFREF review period to ensure that all necessary agreements and plans are ready to be finalized once the funding is awarded to ensure that Indigenous engagement is undertaken in a way which is meaningful and respectful.

Actions:

- Continue communicating with Indigenous groups to build relationships and share opportunities for engagement and partnerships;
- Transition the existing Advisory Committee on Indigenous Engagement in Ocean Research to the Transforming Climate Action initiative by updating the mandate and adding new members to be representative of all eastern Canada Indigenous groups;
- Begin reviewing the Indigenous Engagement Strategy with the Advisory Committee on Indigenous Engagement in Ocean Research;
- Begin developing community-specific engagement plans which suit the needs, desires, and processes of each community/organization (if requested);
- Begin co-developing a monitoring and evaluation plan with the Advisory Committee on Indigenous Engagement in Ocean Research to ensure that engagement efforts and concerns/feedback are recorded and responded to;
- If requested, begin co-developing agreements with Indigenous groups which set the terms and conditions for how data from Indigenous communities and organizations will be collected, accessed, used, and protected.

Phase 3 – Indigenous Participation and Planning

Phase 3 is anticipated to occur once the CFREF proposal has been awarded, between March and August 2023, but before the research programs have begun. During this time, the research leadership team will work with the Advisory Committee on Indigenous Engagement in Ocean Research and other Indigenous groups to finalize engagement plans, the monitoring and evaluation plan, and complete any knowledge-sharing agreements that are required. We will also use this time to maintain ongoing communication and relationship-building with Indigenous groups. Additionally, we will use this time to hire an Indigenous Research Advisor, who will lead all Indigenous engagement efforts, and to provide training and competency development to our research leadership team and staff. This training will include Indigenous Awareness Training, and training which pertains to data management and ownership.

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Actions:

- Hire an Indigenous Research Advisor to implement this strategy and lead engagement efforts;
- Work with the Advisory Committee on Indigenous Engagement in Ocean Research to update and finalize the Indigenous Engagement Strategy, as well as any community-specific engagement plans, based on funding received from CFREF;
- Work with the Advisory Committee on Indigenous Engagement in Ocean Research to finalize the monitoring and evaluation plan, based on funding received from CFREF;
- Finalize and sign knowledge-sharing agreements with Indigenous groups which set the terms and conditions for how data will be collected, accessed, used, and protected;
- Maintain ongoing communication and relationship-building with Indigenous communities and organizations;
- Provide training and competency development to our research leadership team and staff, including Indigenous Cultural Awareness Training, and training which pertains to data management and ownership.

Phase 4 - Implementation and Ongoing Evaluation

Phase 4 is anticipated to occur between September 2023 and August 2025, during the early years of implementation of the Transforming Climate Action initiative, along with our Indigenous Engagement Strategy. The exact engagement efforts will depend on input from the Advisory Committee on Indigenous Engagement in Ocean Research and the development of community-specific engagement plans, but could include instruments such as interviews, surveys, and community workshops. We will also meet with the Advisory Committee on Indigenous Engagement in Ocean Research, quarterly, and as needed, to help guide research and engagement in appropriate ways. Continuous monitoring and evaluation will be completed, and results and challenges will be communicated to the Advisory Committee on Indigenous Engagement in Ocean Research. In addition, we will maintain regular contact with research programs to help ensure that identified issues, concerns, or questions from Indigenous groups are addressed and best practices are adhered to.

Actions:

- Begin official engagement and data collection efforts
 - *These engagement efforts could include interviews, surveys, and community workshops, depending on what Indigenous groups decide are appropriate for their communities/organizations;*
- Update Advisory Committee on Indigenous Engagement in Ocean Research membership to include new partners, including at least one Elder;
 - *Meet with the Advisory Committee on Indigenous Engagement in Ocean Research on a quarterly basis to guide research and engagement;*
- Keep track of engagement efforts and any issues, concerns, or questions Indigenous groups may have. Review and evaluate engagement efforts with the Advisory Committee on Indigenous Engagement in Ocean Research on an annual basis and revise the Engagement Strategy based on lessons learned;
- Continuously ensure the data is collected, managed, and shared in appropriate ways, based on the agreements developed with Indigenous groups;
- Release annual surveys to all Indigenous groups who have been engaged to gauge how they feel different aspects of the project have gone so far.

Phase 4 - Proposed Engagement Efforts

Because we hope to co-develop our engagement plans with the Indigenous groups we engage with, our proposed engagement efforts are not finalized. The activities that are outlined in this section will be proposed to the Advisory Committee on Indigenous Engagement in Ocean Research and potentially adapted, based on their feedback. It may also differ from community to community, depending on whether a customized engagement plan is requested. These efforts would begin in September 2023, after the funding has been awarded, and continue until August 2025. The Indigenous Research Advisor will be primarily responsible for implementing this strategy and all Indigenous engagement efforts, and may be expected to travel to communities, depending on whether communities prefer in-person or virtual engagement.

Ongoing Communication with Indigenous Group Leadership

To keep all participating Indigenous groups informed and engaged with the initiative, the research leadership team will conduct regular outreach, at least once a month throughout the duration of the project. Outreach will involve phone calls, emails, and possibly in person or virtual meetings, if requested. At minimum, this outreach will involve sharing monthly updates about the project and informing the community about opportunities to engage further. For more highly engaged Indigenous groups, this ongoing outreach could provide opportunities to regularly share knowledge, plan engagement efforts, or share feedback about how the project is going so far. The research leadership team will keep track of all incoming and outgoing correspondence with Indigenous groups.

Community Open Houses

We propose that the research leadership team should host an average of one community open house per month (in total, across all communities). These meetings may be planned for specific communities, or they may be planned for larger regions which encompass more than one community. These meetings would be used to inform community members about the project, collect data aligned with the initiative's research, and collect feedback about how the project is going so far. Ideally, these meetings should take place in person and should include elements to encourage attendance, such as food/refreshments and door prizes. In-person meetings could include activities such as interactive poster boards, focus group activities, and informal conversations. The research leadership team should also offer to host virtual or hybrid meetings, depending on the preferences of the Indigenous groups we are working with. Virtual and hybrid community open house activities would involve online software such as Mentimeter, Mural, and Jamboard, which provide tools to collect qualitative and quantitative data from attendees who attend both online and in person.

Interviews & Meetings

To gather more in-depth information about ocean-based climate change solutions, we recommend that the research leadership team conducts 20-30 interviews with Indigenous experts in the field. These interviews should include 10-15 questions, and can be conducted either over the phone, in person, or in a virtual meeting on Google Meets or Zoom. Interview participants will be found by reaching out to individuals and attaining their informed consent before being interviewed, and the research leadership team will also ensure that community-specific research protocols are followed, if applicable.

Surveys

We propose that the research leadership team release three surveys between September 2023 and August 2025, which would be circulated to community members of the Indigenous groups who have chosen to participate in this initiative. These surveys would be used to collect data for the research initiative, and feedback on the project so far. Ideally, these surveys would be distributed both online and in-person/over the phone.

Conclusion

The Indigenous Engagement Strategy for the Transforming Climate Action initiative puts OFI's Indigenous Engagement Guide into action. By using and building on the principles established in the Guide, the Transforming Climate Action research leadership team will create an initiative which engages with Indigenous groups in a meaningful and respectful way, optimizes opportunities for knowledge sharing and co-development, and addresses the colonial nature of research calls throughout history in a way which breaks down the barriers for Indigenous involvement. We have developed a phased approach to Indigenous engagement which ensures that there are opportunities to be involved throughout the entire process of Transforming Climate Action, including throughout the proposal-writing process. We have also ensured that we take a flexible and adaptable approach, which will allow the Indigenous Engagement Strategy, and other elements of the initiative, to be adapted based on Indigenous feedback, and on lessons learned through monitoring and evaluation. Our strategy also prioritizes Indigenous protocols and ethical standards for research and data collection, which will ensure that all research staff has been trained to collect, work with, and protect Indigenous data. Furthermore, we have provided opportunities to develop community-specific engagement plans and knowledge-sharing agreements, which will ensure that the unique needs of each Indigenous group are met. These elements of the Transforming Climate Action initiative will allow our research to unfold in a way which is respectful, meaningful, and mutually beneficial for our Indigenous partners.

The background of the image is a close-up, high-angle shot of dark blue water. The water's surface is covered in intricate, concentric ripples and small waves, creating a textured, almost abstract pattern. The lighting is soft, highlighting the crests of the ripples and casting gentle shadows in the troughs, which adds depth and movement to the scene. The overall color palette is a range of blues, from deep navy to a slightly lighter, shimmering blue where the light catches the water's surface.

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