

Impact Assessment
Agency of Canada's

Reconciliation Framework



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Agency of Canada

Agence d'évaluation
d'impact du Canada

Canada 

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Introduction

The Reconciliation Framework (the Framework) is an umbrella guidance document for the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada (the Agency) to focus its efforts to advance reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. The Framework is an evergreen document that will evolve as we move forward in collaboration with Indigenous Peoples and other partners. While this version uses a variety of general terms, such as Indigenous groups, organizations, and partners, they are not intended to be exclusionary, and will, over time, be further clarified in consultation with Indigenous Peoples, as applicable.

Context

Recognizing the role colonization has played, and continues to play, in the cultural, political, social, and economic marginalization of Indigenous Peoples, the Government of Canada has embarked on a reconciliation process with First Nation, Inuit, and Métis Peoples. For the Agency, it means acknowledging the truth of Canada's colonial past and its lasting legacy, and working towards eliminating its remnants from our policies, processes, and ways of thinking. Beyond talking about reconciliation, we must practice it in our everyday work. This requires learning, commitment, cultural competency, and humility, starting with senior leadership and cascading down through all sectors of the organization.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, in its landmark 2015 report, [Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future](#), approached reconciliation as an ongoing process of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships. The Commission emphasized how the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) (UN Declaration) effectively provides the necessary principles, norms and standards for reconciliation to flourish in twenty-first century Canada. The Agency is committed to undertaking all our work in a way that aligns with the objectives and spirit of the UN Declaration, and to ensuring that the rights of Indigenous Peoples are respected throughout federal impact assessments.

The Agency's truth and reconciliation journey includes committing to specific actions that support the Government of Canada's pledge to renewed nation-to-nation, government-to-government, and Inuit-Crown relationships. The Agency continues to benefit greatly from its many years of work with Indigenous Peoples, in its operations, policy development, funding programs, modern treaty negotiations, and ongoing improvements to Crown consultation processes. The result is a better understanding of the impacts of major projects and how to address these impacts. While implementing the Reconciliation Framework poses a number of challenges, the increased confidence we hope it will engender among Indigenous Peoples to participate in legislative and regulatory systems for major projects in Canada is a meaningful and significant step towards achieving reconciliation goals.

Vision

The Agency's vision will be guided by four pathways which represent the Agency's priorities for advancing truth and reconciliation: cultivating meaningful relationships, respect for governance and knowledge systems, maximizing Indigenous leadership in impact assessments, and building education, awareness and inclusion.

Each pathway is accompanied by commitments to provide both clarity to our employees and make explicit the Agency's accountability to our Indigenous partners. Commitments may evolve over time as we learn lessons and receive feedback from Indigenous Peoples.

The Framework will support the Agency's work in a way that aligns with the objectives and spirit of the UN Declaration as well as the following guiding principles:

- ✦ Respect, in words and actions, the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as recognized and affirmed in Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982, and upholding the honour of the Crown
- ✦ Provide financial and other supports to Indigenous groups to facilitate meaningful participation
- ✦ Apply a distinctions-based approach to all relationships with Indigenous Peoples

Long-term objectives for the Framework's implementation include:

- ✦ impact assessment processes that create the conditions for free, prior, and informed consent, should communities wish to provide it
- ✦ reduced barriers to Indigenous Peoples' participation in impact assessments
- ✦ improved trust and transparency in how Indigenous Knowledge is considered, protected, and woven into impact assessments
- ✦ reduced barriers to Indigenous recruitment and retention at the Agency, including an increase in the number of Indigenous employees
- ✦ improved education, competency, and awareness of all Agency employees to ensure respectful and fruitful relationships with Indigenous Peoples

THE FOUR PATHWAYS

Cultivating Meaningful Relationships

The Agency's relationships with Indigenous Peoples must be based on the recognition that Indigenous Peoples inhabited and governed these lands prior to the Crown's assertion of sovereignty, and have continued to care for their traditional territories. For the Agency, given Indigenous Peoples' unique connection to, and constitutionally protected interest in, their lands, relationships must extend beyond the requirements of public participation.

Critical to carrying out the Agency's mandate as well as advancing reconciliation is establishing and deepening our relationships with Indigenous Peoples. This requires work both within and outside of the context of specific assessments, and includes the development of legislative, regulatory, and policy frameworks. It means that we, as representatives of the Crown, act in good faith, with honour, integrity, and fairness.

Commitments:

- ✦ Work to implement the advice of the [Indigenous Advisory Committee](#)
- ✦ Build and strengthen partnerships with Indigenous organizations to facilitate exchanges of knowledge and information about issues and priorities
- ✦ Build and strengthen relationships with Indigenous groups, taking advantage of opportunities to connect outside the assessment process
- ✦ Work towards staffing senior-level leads in each region to maintain longer-term relationships with Indigenous groups and support project-specific and non-project specific interactions
- ✦ Take steps to ensure that the voices of urban and off-reserve Indigenous Peoples are heard and considered in the Agency's work
- ✦ Take steps to identify and reduce barriers to participating in impact assessment processes for Indigenous Elders, youth, children, women, men, persons with disabilities, and gender-diverse and two-spirit persons
- ✦ Collaborate with other federal departments, provincial governments and lifecycle regulators to resolve issues raised by Indigenous groups in impact assessments that cannot otherwise be resolved with a program of conditions or by the proponent
- ✦ Develop approaches to engaging and collaborating with modern-treaty nations in a way that reflects each's unique relationship with the Crown and respects their rights and interests, which may include work aimed at "operationalizing" self-determination
- ✦ Develop plans to ensure meaningful engagement with, and the participation of, Indigenous Peoples on regulatory, policy, and guidance frameworks



Respect for Governance and Knowledge Systems

Indigenous Peoples have long had their own governance systems which were and continue to be complex, dynamic, and deeply rooted in their territories. These systems include confederacies and laws which can be thought of as constitutions as well as hereditary systems of government. Assimilationist policies such as the *Indian Act* sought to abolish these forms of governance and establish systems that reflected the culture of the newcomers. To support renewed nation-to-nation, government-to-government, and Inuit-Crown relationships, the Agency must recognize and respect Indigenous systems, including supporting efforts of Indigenous groups to apply these systems to impact assessment processes.

Indigenous Knowledge reflects the unique cultures, languages, values, histories, governance and legal systems of Indigenous Peoples. It is place-based, cumulative, and dynamic. The Agency recognizes the value of Indigenous Knowledge in impact assessment, and that steps must be taken to protect Indigenous Knowledge considered confidential from unauthorized disclosure. Building trustful and collaborative relationships with Indigenous Peoples will help the Agency create and maintain the conditions necessary for Indigenous Knowledge to be discreetly shared and meaningfully considered.

Commitments:

- ✦ Utilize all tools at the Agency's disposal to support and facilitate the participation of Indigenous groups in impact and regional assessments in accordance with their own laws, customs, and processes. Take steps to remove barriers the Agency's processes might cause
- ✦ Collaborate with Indigenous groups to ensure the thorough and meaningful consideration of Indigenous Knowledge in impact assessments and the post-decision phase
- ✦ Follow up with proponents to ensure they are working with Indigenous communities to include Indigenous Knowledge
- ✦ Collaborate with Indigenous groups to ensure the thorough and meaningful consideration of Indigenous Knowledge in strategic and regional assessments
- ✦ Be transparent in our processes and clear on how Indigenous Knowledge is considered in impact assessment and decision-making
- ✦ Ensure our processes are culturally safe and accessible, so Indigenous Peoples feel comfortable sharing their knowledge
- ✦ Expand consultation and engagement activities to include traditional governance systems whenever invited to do so

Maximizing Indigenous Leadership in Impact Assessments

The Agency will strive to shift from colonial ideas of governing “over” to governing “with” Indigenous Peoples. It continues to encourage Indigenous groups to collaborate with the Agency to conduct parts of assessments and undertake Indigenous-led assessments. These participation models support a shift away from colonial systems of administration in favour of respecting Indigenous Peoples’ right to self-determination, including self-government.

To apply this Framework in a manner that is consistent with reconciliation and the UN Declaration means going beyond the Duty to Consult and embracing collaboration and partnership with Indigenous Peoples in the stewardship of our shared home. This is an important step in establishing renewed nation-to-nation, government-to-government, and Inuit-Crown relationships.

Commitments:

- ✦ Seek consent early from Indigenous groups on impact and regional assessment processes
- ✦ Support collaborative and Indigenous-led approaches to conducting assessments
- ✦ Collaborate with Indigenous groups to include, in impact and regional assessments, the results of Indigenous-led assessments, ensuring they are factored into the federal government’s decision-making process
- ✦ Work to include Indigenous interests, preferences, and context considerations in the planning and delivery of Agency-led assessments and review panel processes
- ✦ Enable opportunities for Indigenous groups to input information into federal government decision-making processes and documents
- ✦ Enable greater involvement of Indigenous groups in the Post Decision phase of impact assessments



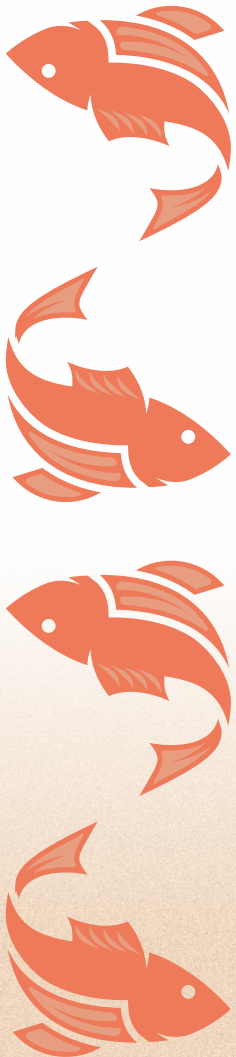
Building Education, Awareness and Inclusion

The Agency is committed to building and maintaining a workforce that reflects the mix of people of Canada. As part of this commitment, a greater and focused effort must be made to ensure Indigenous Peoples not only see themselves reflected in the Agency, but feel included and supported as employees. This means developing strategies that break down barriers faced by Indigenous Peoples to seek, obtain and keep employment at the Agency. It also means actively searching out opportunities for recruitment and career development—to bring to life the Agency’s commitment to have a diversified workplace that welcomes and supports all employees.

Another key to safeguarding a supportive, respectful and inclusive workplace is to improve cultural competence and address any racism, bias and/or discrimination within the Agency. This goes beyond simply providing training. It includes measures aimed at creating an environment where employees are exposed to diverse Indigenous cultural practices, languages, art and, where feasible, on-the-land experiences.

Commitments:

- ✦ Implement the Agency’s Employment Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan in collaboration with Indigenous employees
- ✦ Fully implement the strategy outlined in the [Many Voices One Mind: A Pathway to Reconciliation](#) report—which aims to address the challenges and barriers faced by Indigenous Peoples within the Public Service—and utilize the Agency’s Indigenous Career Navigator to support this work
- ✦ Consistent with the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Call to Action 57](#), educate all Agency staff, including senior management, to heighten their awareness of Indigenous Peoples, their relationship with Canada, and their knowledge systems and cultures. Training will include, to the extent possible, topics tailored to the duties of specific positions
- ✦ Promote Indigenous cultures and languages, and support Indigenous businesses at the Agency, including meeting, if not surpassing, the Government of Canada goals for procuring Indigenous business, as well as providing communications products that amplify Indigenous voices



Implementation

A working group of employees from across the Agency will be established to develop short-, medium-, and long-term action plans to guide employees and managers in implementation. The scope of action plans will consider regional realities and experiences, as well as the specific needs of Agency sectors and divisions.

Results

As part of our work in fulfilling our commitments, the Agency will develop qualitative and quantitative performance measures. Progress will be tracked and summarized in an annual progress report, starting in the 2024-25 fiscal year.

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Imagery

The Impact Assessment Agency of Canada (the Agency) worked with an Indigenous-owned company to develop the graphic design of the Reconciliation Framework. The animal-track motif captures species of significance to Indigenous Peoples across Canada while representing the elements of land, air, and water. They serve to remind us of the habitats we must protect as we carry out our work. The colour palette represents the diversity of peoples across Canada and includes shades of ember, representing the element fire. The cover art consists of a wolf in a circular design. As a pack animal with a wide-ranging habitat, the wolf reminds us of the collective effort it will take to implement the Reconciliation Framework everywhere we work across Canada, while the circular design symbolizes the interconnectedness and interdependence of all life.

