



# Connaught Indigenous Funding Stream Adjudication Report

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT .....	1
VPRI INDIGENOUS RESEARCH CIRCLE .....	1
OVERVIEW OF THE CONNAUGHT INDIGENOUS STREAM .....	1
ROLE AND FUNCTION OF ADJUDICATION COMMITTEE.....	2
GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF ADJUDICATION.....	4
FINAL STAGE.....	5
NEXT STEPS .....	6
PROCESS SUMMARY.....	6
GOALS .....	7
APPENDIX A.....	9



## PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The purpose of this report is to outline the adjudication process for the Connaught Indigenous Funding Stream. This will be done by explaining the creation and function of the Division of the Vice-President, Research and Innovation (VPRI), the Indigenous Research Circle at the VPRI, what makes this funding stream different than others within the University of Toronto (U of T), and the adjudication process.

Transparency and communication with all involved in the process is of utmost importance, due to ethical sensitivities of Indigenous academic research. Using a decolonial framework, this report describes how the VPRI Indigenous Research Circle based a Western adjudication process in Indigenous knowledges yielding a process that emphasizes both Indigenous and Western scientific excellence.

## VPRI INDIGENOUS RESEARCH CIRCLE

The adjudication committee is made up of all seven members of the VPRI Indigenous Research Circle (IRC). The IRC is composed of Dr. Suzanne Stewart, Indigenous Advisor to the Vice Provost of Research and Innovation; Cathy Fournier, Special Projects Officer in Indigenous Research, Indigenous Elder Clayton Shirt, Traditional Knowledge Keeper at Waakebiness-Bryce Institute for Indigenous Health, and Research Coordinator Joshua Adams. Critical IRC members include student research assistants with a variety of professional research and community-based backgrounds, including Christine Skura, Claire Hiscock, and Krysta Barilko, whose Indigenous community and lived experience support the backbone of the spirit of this funding initiative.

## OVERVIEW OF THE CONNAUGHT INDIGENOUS STREAM

The Connaught Indigenous Stream is unique in that unlike many other forms of funding at U of T and across postsecondary institutions broadly, it is cooperative and grounded in the interests and needs of Indigenous communities. It is based in a revolutionary framework of placing Indigenous communities in control of academic research projects, to ensure the safety and accountability of research being conducted.

The first step in the Connaught Indigenous Stream process was reaching out to over 700 Indigenous communities, organizations and leaders across Canada to identify their research priorities. We held eleven consultations with communities interested in taking part. The next step was a scan throughout U of T's departments for researchers with areas of expertise and interest that aligned with the needs identified by consultations with communities. After contacting potential researchers, our team then held a preliminary meeting with each faculty member to outline the objectives of the funding stream and see if they were willing to collaborate. If the researcher agreed, we facilitated an introductory meeting between researcher and community for them to gauge one another and for community to present their research needs. If both agreed, subsequent meetings were held. A crucial component in community-based Indigenous research is relationship building. When the funding stream began in January 2020, face-to-face meetings were possible but as the year went on, the COVID-19 pandemic extinguished any possibility of in-person meetings. It took longer to establish trust both with communities and between researchers and community due to the nature of virtual meetings. Despite these hurdles, the process continued as scheduled with each community finding itself a suitable researcher for their individual project.

## ROLE AND FUNCTION OF ADJUDICATION COMMITTEE

The role of the adjudication committee was to ensure the principles of decolonial, cooperative, community- identified and driven research were honoured and upheld. First, the call was put out to over 700 Indigenous communities/organizations across Canada to see if they would be interested in participating in this funding initiative and to build a research partnership with a U of T researcher. As communities are the leaders in this, it was important to establish relations with them first and to ascertain their specific research needs. We then sent out a general research alert through the VPRI office to see if we could generate interest. Next a general email was sent out to researchers across the three campuses of U of T whose expertise may align with the identified research needs of the specific community based on our community consultations. The final stage in our matching researchers with the communities/organizations was to reach out to specific researchers individually to see if they would be interested in a collaborative research project.

Relationship building is an integral part of many Indigenous methodologies, especially given the historical and contemporary context of harm and subsequent distrust many Indigenous peoples experienced and continue to experience. The relational process between community and researcher, therefore, was not hurried. After our preliminary meetings, our committee virtually

introduced the community representatives with the researchers. In each instance several such meetings were held to discuss needs, interest, experience, and values, and to see if common ground could be found. Throughout the process, control was held by the community in terms of decision making regarding initiating and formalizing the partnership with the researcher. There were two instances where a community had concern about working with the researcher they had begun working with several weeks into the process. In another example, the IRC's adjudication committee found a different researcher who was a better fit with the community organization. In another example one community organization decided that they wanted to end their participation in this funding initiative due to immediate crisis needs of the COVID-19 pandemic and remain interested in future proposal development.

Once both parties on each proposal team agreed on the terms of the funding and expressed the desire to move forward collaboratively in the research process, it was then the IRC adjudication committee's role to facilitate discussion between the two parties and begin to develop the funding proposal. As these discussions continued over the course of many weeks, it was the IRC adjudication committee's function to act as a mediator between community organization and researcher to ensure that the teams were comfortable moving forward at all stages of this process, and to help ensure that the researcher was there as a guide to the research and not shifting into the role of a Principle Investigator. Inevitably, tensions or slight disagreements did arise in some instances within proposal teams, and in those cases our Traditional Knowledge Keeper, who was present at all proposal building team meetings, would remind the teams of the purpose of the Connaught Indigenous funding initiative, and that the research is to be community identified, lead, driven and owned. In other instances the community organization was not accustomed to being in a position of control within academic research, and the IRC had to remind them that this proposed project was to be community led. The IRC adjudication committee's role as mediator was to help uphold principles of self-determination of Indigenous community organizations throughout the proposal development process.

The final role of the IRC adjudication committee was to provide academic and cultural support and feedback on the proposal development process. Originally the proposals were to be written in a series of workshop in-person on the U of T campus, engaging in Indigenous cultural protocols, with community organization representatives and academic researchers present. However, due to COVID-19 restrictions, the proposal development shifted to online and telephone, and the process took longer than the originally planned six months. The IRC adjudication committee's role in supporting proposal development took a number of different forms, but mainly we provided guidance on what was involved and expected for the process of

proposal writing, in that it was to be written collaboratively. Once drafts were complete, feedback and suggestions were provided to strengthen the proposals before they were finalized.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF ADJUDICATION

The Seven Grandfather Teachings are a foundational aspect of Ojibwe worldview and tradition. The teachings operate as a moral compass and a way to navigate life for many Indigenous people across Turtle Island—including non-Ojibwe. Each teaching is embodied by an animal, all made equal in the eyes of the Creator. It is important to infuse spirit into every facet of the research process, especially given academia's history of perpetuating harm and inequities for Indigenous populations. For this reason, the Seven Grandfather Teachings were the foremost guiding principles for the overall adjudication process and for the internal team review (see Appendix A, Research Proposal Assessment Sheet).

### THE SEVEN GRANDFATHER TEACHINGS:

**TRUTH (DEBWEWIN)** – Among the oldest of all creations, the turtle knows intimately every teaching and carries them with itself everywhere on its back. The turtle's ultimate truth is that life must be taken slowly and meticulously. This teaching is built into the adjudication process by upholding relationship building as the pinnacle of all research collaboration. The relationship between community and researcher cannot be rushed or underestimated. Establishing a foundation takes time, and this is the turtle's truth.

**RESPECT (MNAADENDIMOWIN)** – The buffalo honors all creation, but especially Indigenous peoples, by giving all of itself. Its hide for warmth and shelter. Its meat for nourishment. Its bones for tools. This sacrifice is the ultimate respect. Like how the buffalo gives itself to achieve balance, the funding stream prioritizes itself on a needs basis and in a way that upholds Indigenous values of conservation and generosity.

**COURAGE (AAKWA'ODE'EWIN)** – Courage is embodied by the bear. Like a bear that will defend its family at any cost, this initiative incorporates the teaching of courage by doing what is necessary and just in order to defend your family and community. This Indigenous funding stream is one small way that the injustices can be rectified in relation to past harms caused due to research. Like the courageous bear, we strove to find communities, despite the adversity they may have faced in the past, to be leaders at the forefront of this important opportunity.



**WISDOM (NBWAAKAAWIN)** – The beaver embodies wisdom because it uses its natural gift for the survival of itself and its family. The beaver alters its environment sustainably, having a positive impact on its community. The adjudication process integrated the teaching of the beaver by seeking to better the position of Indigenous peoples in the world. Gifts inherent in Indigenous ways of being, such as fairness, patience and relationships, were used to contribute to healing the broader Indigenous community with culturally safe, beneficial research. Like the beaver contributes to its environment, the adjudication process and the broader initiative is helping to alter the colonial ecosystem of institutional research in a way that contributes further to self-determination.

**HUMILITY (DBAADENDIZIWIN)** – The wolf, despite its tenacity, chooses the collective over its own self-importance. The wolf travels closely with its pack with concern for all and disregard for hierarchy. Similarly, as the wolf recognizes through humility the strength that is fostered by community, the adjudication process seeks to honour strength of the collective Indigenous community, especially those most in need.

**HONESTY (GWEKWAADZIWIN)** – The *sabe* or sasquatch walks tall, embodying honesty through integrity. Its realm is between the physical and spiritual worlds, the closest to spirit among all the creations. The adjudication process values honesty and openness in its facilitation between community, researchers and the university. This requires time, patience and numerous meetings to ensure that the collaborations were done in a nurturing way. Spirit was purposefully woven into every fabric of the adjudication process to ensure integrity, on Indigenous terms.

**LOVE (ZAAGIDWIN)** – The eagle has strength to carry all the teachings throughout the open skies, of which the most encompassing teaching is love. It can soar the highest, closest to the Creator, and gaze watchfully down upon all other creations with this powerful teaching. It is through the spirit of love for all creation that this initiative operates. It is the Indigenous Research Circle’s prerogative to encourage culturally safe and spiritually grounded community-based research.

## FINAL STAGE

Once each proposal was internally reviewed by the IRC, feedback was provided to the applicants’ teams, who incorporated such feedback into a final version to be submitted to the Connaught Committee. After the proposals are reviewed and approved by the Connaught



Committee, the funds will be released. The funds will flow through the researcher and/or the community, and the funded projects are to remain community informed, driven and owned. Prior to submitting the proposal, the budget had to be agreed upon between each community and researcher. After that, the role of the adjudication committee is largely over, being available for consultations if needed or if problems arise throughout the research process.

## NEXT STEPS

As this was the first year the Connaught Indigenous Fund was rolled out, it is the IRC's task to assess the strengths and points of improvement for continuing this funding stream in years to come. The internal review will produce areas to work on and the process will be modified accordingly. Such an example could be having a more structured process for the proposal deadlines. While many researchers may be overworked and grappling with the shift to online teaching, prioritization of the proposal seems to have been an issue.

## PROCESS SUMMARY

**STEP 1:** Consultations with Indigenous communities and leaders from across Canada to identify their research priorities.

- We contacted over 700 Indigenous communities and organizations across Canada to invite them to a consultation to discuss possible research needs
- We met with eleven communities/organizations – preliminary meeting to establish needs/goals

**STEP 2:** Identify U of T researchers with experience in the research area identified by communities with understanding that the research is to be identified, lead and driven by the community

- Created VPRI research alert to entire U of T community asking for researchers interested in identified research projects
- IRC scanned each department for researcher's areas of expertise and interest
- Targeted call to specific researcher whose area of expertise matched with the community identified research topic





### STEP 3: VPRI Indigenous Research Circle preliminary meeting with potential researchers

- VPRI Indigenous Research Circle met with researchers to discuss the potential for collaboration and to outline the objectives of the Connaught Indigenous Funding Stream

### STEP 4: Introductory meeting with community/organization contact and potential researcher

- VPRI Indigenous Research Circle, researcher and community/organization contact meet to introduce each other and to see if the potential research collaboration is a good fit
- If both parties agree to move forward, subsequent meetings were held

### STEP 5: Relationship building

- Regular virtual meetings with researcher and community to establish foundational relationship (May 2020 to August 2020)
- If during this relationship building stage either party felt the collaboration was not a good fit, another researcher was identified and the introductory meeting and relationship building process was repeated

### STEP 6: Work with collaborative research teams (communities and academic researchers) to develop a research proposal that will be funded by the Connaught fund

- Provide guidance throughout writing stage as needed
- Provide feedback on proposal drafts before finalized

### STEP 7: Indigenous Research Circle and Connaught Committee reviews and approval of proposals

- Provide feedback on submitted proposal drafts
- Institute funding
- Ask proposal teams for feedback on the process
- IRC begin evaluation of the process and outcome

## GOALS

Ensuring that research being funded has positive impact on the future of Indigenous individuals, families and communities, as identified and defined by them, within an Indigenous and decolonizing framework, and is done in culturally safe and ethical spaces.



## Appendix A

### Research Proposal Assessment Sheet, Connaught Indigenous Funding Stream

Project Applicants: \_\_\_\_\_ Rating: /20

#### 1. Project Summary (5) \_\_\_\_\_

- Is the summary sufficiently understood without reading the Objective and Goals section?
- Is the information presented logically so that reading it is clear, straightforward and, coherent?

#### 2. Partnership Objectives & Goals (5) \_\_\_\_\_

- Is it apparent that the research is identified and lead by the community?
- Does the research question make sense based on the information in the summary?
- Are the specific aims clear and complete?
- Does the rationale and objectives make a good case for the purpose of the study?
- Are rationales provided for each experiment (that is, a few sentences describing what the experiment is designed to ask and what the general method used will be) before plunging into technical details of the experiment?
- For each set of procedures, is there appropriate discussion of the possible results, what they will mean and how they will affect further work?
- Is the level of description of the technical details appropriate?
- Have the necessary administrative requirements to do with human subjects, ethics, cultural safety, etc. been addressed?

#### 3. Description of Team and Partners (5) \_\_\_\_\_

- Does the study include and give a detailed description of all the key players (populations, partners, researchers, etc.)
- Are all team members best poised to respond to the needs of the study?
- Is community involvement and benefit for the community(ies) involved is clearly stated?

#### 4. Writing Style (5) \_\_\_\_\_

- Are the ideas clearly stated?
- Are acronyms and terms defined at their first use?



- Do paragraphs have topic sentences? Do sentences within paragraphs support an idea - that is, is there a logical flow in the writing?
  - Are there few errors in grammar, sentence structure, punctuation, and precise word choice?
5. **Is the budget appropriate for the study?**
  6. **What are the strengths of this application as per the Seven Grandfather Teachings?**
  7. **What are the weaknesses of this application as per the Seven Grandfather Teachings?**
  8. **What would you suggest the applicants do to improve the research?**

