

# THE TRUST GAP – IDEA STARTERS

## RECONCILI-ACTION

### MEANINGFUL APPROACHES TO DECOLONIZING ORGANIZATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS

#### THE CONTEXT

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada released its final report in 2015, along with 10 Principles of Reconciliation.<sup>i</sup> These principles act as guideposts for undertaking the work of decolonization and reconciliation in Canada and uphold the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as “the framework for reconciliation at all levels and across all sectors of Canadian society.”<sup>ii</sup>

As we work to address the dark actions and genocide perpetrated upon the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples through colonization, a new relationship between settlers and Indigenous Peoples must be established that is mutually beneficial for all parties, based on respect, and acknowledges past actions, transparency, and trust.

**How can institutions and organizations build trust and demonstrate meaningful leadership as they undertake decolonization and Indigenization initiatives?**

#### WHY IT MATTERS

While there has been some progress towards reconciliation and decolonization across sectors, there have also been stumbling blocks and many of the Calls to Action remain stalled or have not started.<sup>iii</sup> Existing commitments to reconciliation are also increasingly at risk as institutions and organizations reduce diversity, equity, and inclusion in times of financial hardship.<sup>iv</sup> However, a strong institutional focus on the complexities of reconciliation can also create space for knowledge sharing, allow for emergent innovation, and further build institutional confidence and trust.

It is also becoming increasingly evident that reconciliation will not only lead to more equitable economic outcomes for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples, but for the broader Canadian economy as well. According to the National Indigenous Economic Development Board, there is a potential \$27.7 billion annual contribution that fully mobilized Indigenous labour contribution to Canada’s GDP.<sup>v</sup> This work is integral to building a prosperous and inclusive future for everyone who calls Canada home.

#### WHAT WE KNOW

**The pace of progress has been slow and limited.**

- Since the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s final report, many institutions and organizations have developed policies and documents outlining their commitments to reconciliation. However, as of 2022, only 13 of the 94 Calls to Action have been completed.<sup>vi</sup>
- While the need to redress concerns in truth-telling and reconciliation has existed since the beginning of colonialism, it is only recently that these issues have entered Canadian consciousness broadly, with the first National Day of Truth and Reconciliation recognized as a federal holiday in 2021.<sup>vii</sup>
- Reconciliation is taking many forms across Canada and is often loosely defined. Decolonization and reconciliation include economic empowerment, Indigenous sovereignty, learning and un-learning, and, at its centre, establishing an equitable framework for sharing prosperity in Canada. As many institutions and organizations begin or continue, this work, sharing knowledge and building trust will allow this work to move more quickly and at a broader scale.

#### SPOTLIGHTING ACTIONS & SUCCESSES

##### Indigenous Watchdog

The Indigenous Watchdog acts as a repository, providing updates from news stories and reports on issues beyond Reconciliation, including drinking water advisories, food insecurity, housing, suicide prevention, treaties and land claims, and the environment.

##### Yellowhead Institute

The Yellowhead Institute is a research and education centre based at Toronto Metropolitan University and produces research reports, papers, lectures, and courses relevant to reclamation of Indigenous land and life. These organizations are focused on accountability and progress, and great places to build an understanding of why the Calls to Action are important, how to interpret them, and how to action them.

**Post-Secondary Progress**

One sector where Reconciliation work has been transformative is in post-secondary education. In addition to TMU establishing the Yellowhead Institute—itsself, an innovation in the sector—other institutions have also been making progress in this space for some time:

- OCAD University has had an Indigenous Education Council in place since 2008 and has developed an Indigenous Student Centre aimed at supporting the academic, cultural, social, and environmental needs and well-being of Indigenous OCAD U students. Additionally, OCAD U continues to conduct Indigenous Faculty Cluster Hires, developed an Indigenous Visual Cultures Bachelor of Fine Arts program, and includes Indigenous specific services in their Admissions and Recruitment office. Reconciliation is embedded into OCAD U's latest Academic Strategic Plan.
- Centennial College has established an Indigenous Reconciliation and Healing (The Eighth Fire) department aimed at implementing the college's Indigenous Strategic Framework. The work this department does at Centennial has been recognized with a Gold Medal of Indigenous Education Excellence in 2016 and is guided by the college's Aboriginal Education Council and Aboriginal Education Steering Committee. The college has also conducted Indigenous Faculty Cluster Hires as a part of their equitable hiring practices.

**KEY TERMS**

**Reconciliation:**

The process of establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada, with an awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes and action to change behavior.<sup>viii</sup>

**Decolonization:**

The process of deconstructing colonial ideologies of the superiority and privilege of Western thought and approaches. Decolonization involves valuing and revitalizing Indigenous knowledge and approaches and rethinking Western biases or assumptions that have impacted Indigenous ways of being.<sup>ix</sup>

**Indigenization:**

A process of naturalizing Indigenous knowledge systems and making them evident to transform spaces, places, and hearts. This involves bringing Indigenous knowledge and approaches together with Western systems.<sup>x</sup>

**RECONCILIATION ACTION PILLARS**

The following pillars have been identified as Reconciliation Action Pillars for CivicAction and have been adapted from Ontario Power Generation's Indigenous Reconciliation Action Plan.<sup>xi</sup> The content of these pillars is informed by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Principles of Truth and Reconciliation. These pillars can become a framework to explore accountabilities within organizations, and can act as a roadmap for reconciliation work:

- **Leadership:** Commit to reconciliation as a journey and track progress on accountability with metrics and targets around commitments.
- **Relationships:** Build positive and mutually beneficial relationships with Indigenous communities and peoples based on respect and understanding.
- **People:** Create an engaged and inclusive workforce that reflects the broad diversity of Indigenous communities and peoples across our organization.
- **Economic Empowerment:** Advance economic reconciliation with Indigenous communities and businesses through meaningful engagement, collaboration, and partnership with an aim to provide avenues for economic opportunity for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area.
- **Urbanization and Environment:** Be a trusted partner and ally in advancing reconciliation in the urban environment, including allyship in addressing challenges facing our region's urban Indigenous population.

**NOTE:** This document is intended to provide general background and spotlight actions and innovations in the space. It is not intended to be a complete or definitive set of facts about the topic. Wherever possible, sources have been cited. We apologize for any errors or omissions.

**REFERENCES**

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