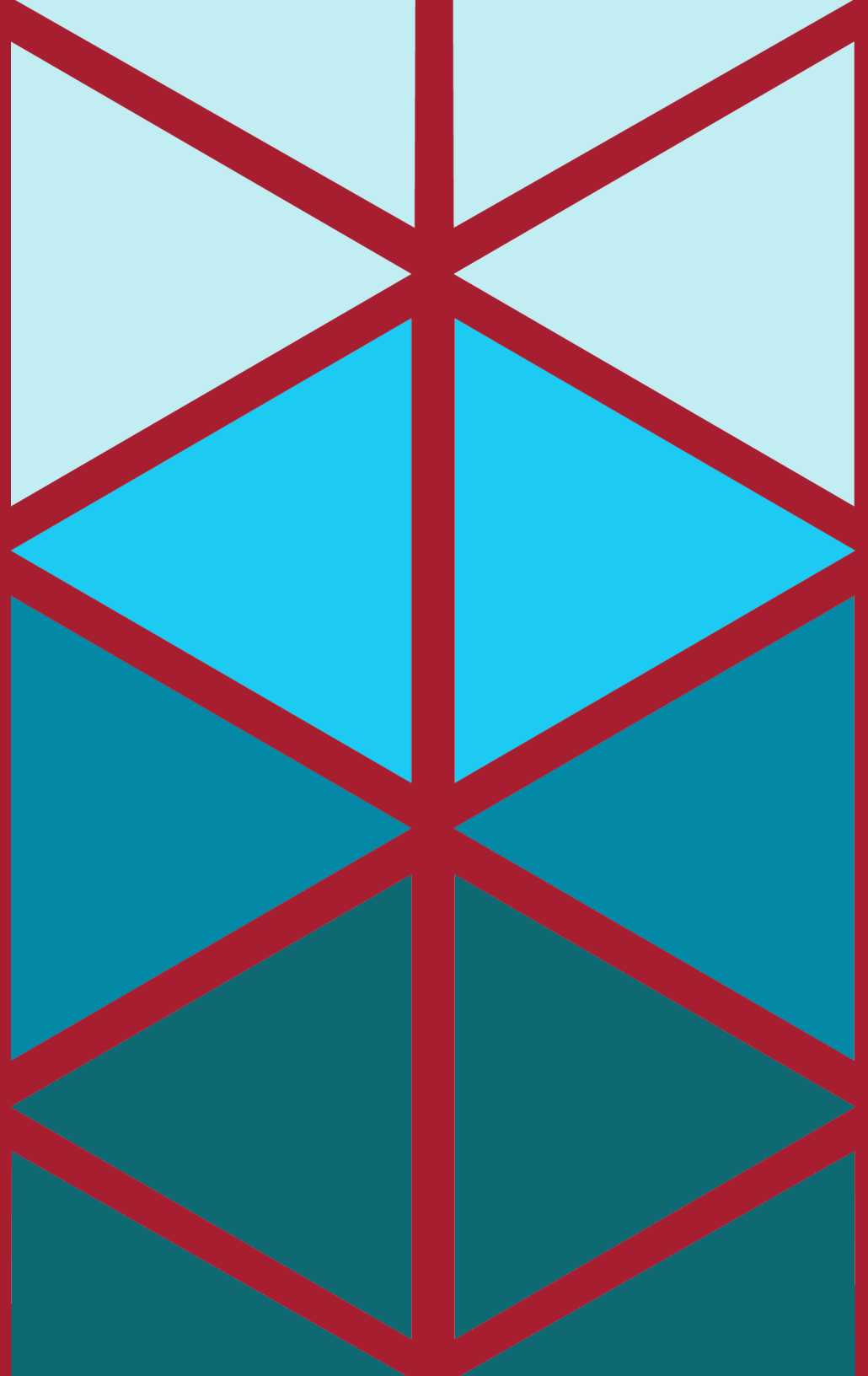
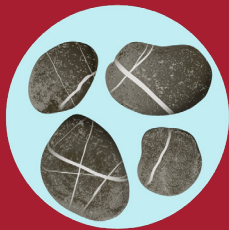




Step into the River:

Section Three

- ▶ **The Current State:
The Truth of Economic
Reconciliation**



The Current State: The Truth of Economic Reconciliation

Learnings from our Convenings

This section highlights major themes from our convening dialogues around the meaning and current state of economic reconciliation. The quotes from participants in our convenings and other Indigenous leaders throughout this section reveal the many different perspectives on reconciliation. It also captures the challenges that Indigenous economic development practitioners and community members face when interacting with non-Indigenous governments and organizations, along with where more positive relationships can or have the potential to occur.

There is no singular definition of (economic) reconciliation

An even larger question we need to ask is, what is reconciliation, really? In accounting, reconciliation is considered an act of balancing, ensuring that two records

are in agreement. More colloquially, reconciliation is seen in some ways as a restoration of friendly relationships, and also as an action of making one belief or viewpoint compatible with another. A tension brought up in our convening sessions was the reality that, owing to the course of settler colonialism, there isn't exactly a friendly relationship to restore in the first place.

Since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action were passed, reconciliation has taken on many different meanings across Canada and has been used to describe a broad range of activities. Despite a strong momentum nationwide at the outset, current commitments to reconciliation seem to be stagnating in Canada. There is an underlying concern that people, organizations and institutions nationwide have reduced reconciliation to tokenistic behaviours and actions that don't actually demonstrate commitments to the deeper shifts that both RCAP and the TRC have called for. This is especially true in

the economic sector, where actions taken in the name of reconciliation are often the bare minimum that's required, and ultimately still largely benefits the settler economy that has excluded Indigenous peoples.

Stemming from reconciliation, economic reconciliation focuses specifically on the economic sector. While it does not appear as its own unique concept in the TRC Calls to Action, there are various actions for local governments, educational institutions and the corporate sector that apply to this specific stream of reconciliation. Additionally, other pieces of legislation, policies and organizations have put forth their own commitments related to economic reconciliation to guide their work. It is in this context that we have interrogated what is meant by economic reconciliation, and what constitutes meaningful actions of it.

Economic reconciliation as defined by Indigenous economic organizations

A few Indigenous-led entities tackle the breadth and depth of what reconciliation means to their organizations and how that influences the work they do. We have shared some of these understandings here, with more outlined in Appendix B:

- Reconciliation Canada states that “Economic reconciliation aims to create meaningful partnerships and mutually beneficial opportunities based on a holistic, values-driven approach to attaining community economic prosperity”.³³

- The National Indigenous Economic Development Board states that “The commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples is not a partisan issue; it is a matter of The Honour of the Crown, based on the existing Aboriginal rights upheld and recognized in Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982. Yet, reconciliation is not solely the government’s responsibility; **all Canadians must be involved.**”³⁴
- For the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business, “Business reconciliation means actively promoting equal economic opportunity for all Canadians, as outlined in the TRC Call to Action 92. While all Canadians have a role to play in reconciliation, the term will have differing meanings across Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous communities and all Canadians. Recognizing that reconciliation is the duty of all Canadians gives all economic actors a role in supporting the participation and meaningful engagement of Indigenous Peoples in economic opportunities. A commitment to business reconciliation provides opportunities for new partnerships and business and investment opportunities.”³⁵

34 2019 Indigenous Economic Reconciliation Report. National Indigenous Economic Development Board. <http://www.naedb-cndea.com/en/launch-of-the-2019-indigenous-economic-reconciliation-report/>

35 Business Reconciliation in Canada. Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business. https://www.ccab.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/small-business-web_AA.pdf

As shown, economic reconciliation has different meanings to organizations and entities. Yet we can find commonalities in the definitions provided above.

Commonalities of reconciliation definitions as understood by Indigenous-led organizations:

- Respect (equity, equality, social justice),
- Recognition (history, title, rights, responsibility),
- Healing (truth-telling, sharing, listening, forgiveness),
- Relationships (creating, building and sustaining)
- Indigenization (transformation of thinking, being and doing)

These commonalities have informed guiding principles for the framework for economic reconciliation detailed further on.

A journey, not an endpoint

“Reconciliation is a journey from the current state to a desired state. It is impossible to build a singular conceptual framework. It’s about building wellness in an ecosystem.”

Convening participant

During our engagement sessions with Indigenous thought leaders and community practitioners, an understanding that was widely shared was that reconciliation is a journey, not an end point. Additionally, different Nations and Indigenous organizations have different priorities and meanings for

Quick reference: Definitions of economic reconciliation

For more discussions of definitions of economic reconciliation, try checking out the following:

[BCAFN Economic Reconciliation Definition Paper](#)
[Reconciliation Canada: Economic Reconciliation](#)

See more in Appendix B



economic reconciliation. Through our learnings it became clear that reconciliation is not monolithic. It is neither a static moment in time nor an achievable end point. It is not something that people become. Reconciliation should instead be seen as a process that is constantly moving and evolving based in place and on the relationships of those who are participating in it. It is defined by their own histories, their own interactions, and their own values for the lives they want to lead. To participate in economic reconciliation as a non-Indigenous individual or organization is itself a process of learning and coming to a shared understanding of what reconciliation means for and with Indigenous partners.

Rather than arriving at a conclusion about what the “right” or most universal components of a framework should be, ***we invite readers to see the work of reconciliation as constantly in motion.*** This is going to require non-Indigenous readers to shift your understanding and expectations; to expand your hearts and minds to see that the well-being of all living creatures stems from being part of something that is larger than just ourselves.

Reconciliation has become tokenistic (box-ticking)

Reconciliation in some cases seems to have become trivialized or tokenized in its broader application or understanding. It is too easy for initiatives to adopt commitments that give the appearance of reconciliation, but

in reality the systemic issues are not changing. To quote another convening participant, there is concern

“Reconciliation has become the sprinkles on the cupcake. The foundational components of the cupcake are not changing.”

Convening participant

about communities allowing the bar of economic reconciliation to be set “artificially low”. Participants brought to the forefront the tendency of reconciliation to be watered down to singular actions, such as installing a mural of Indigenous artwork and labeling it reconciliation. **Some other examples of, and underlying assumptions, around tokenistic economic reconciliation include:**

- **Failing to acknowledge that you are on unceded lands and not addressing the land question.** Approximately 95% of land in BC is unceded. These lands continue to be expropriated for the gain of non-Indigenous people, despite the duty to consult and the Indigenous right, as recognized by the United Nations, to free, prior and informed consent to all developments on lands that are subject to Indigenous claim.
- **Considering a land acknowledgment as sufficient, without deeper commitments.** Although land acknowledgments are an important step in addressing the colonial process of cultural erasure, many Indigenous leaders have noted that in their widespread

adoption they have lost their significance.³⁶ Non-Indigenous settlers need to understand that it is not enough to simply acknowledge that they are on unceded territory, and that they need to develop deeper commitments to reconciliation. Mere land acknowledgments give the impression to First Nations that the only reason for engagement is limited to seeking validation for the initiative as opposed to committing to a meaningful relationship or partnership. This is not to say that land acknowledgments are not needed. They absolutely are, and you should consult with your neighbouring Nations on their protocols for this acknowledgment. An acknowledgment is not only about identifying the First Peoples of that territory, but more deeply integrating one's own positionality and complicity in the broken relationships that exist. Land acknowledgments should push settlers to reflect and discuss the realities of ongoing colonialism.

- **Believing that Reconciliation is only the responsibility of Indigenous people, the Federal Government, or decision-makers.** A common assumption is that reconciliation is the work of Indigenous people or senior levels of government for past historical wrongs. While addressing historical wrong-doings is absolutely a part of reconciliation, injustice is very much still ongoing, and settlers continue to benefit from it and are complicit in it. As stated elsewhere in this document, reconciliation is the responsibility of all Canadians. There are actions to be taken in all aspects of life, both personally and

professionally.

- **Attempting to retroactively “Indigenize” a project or initiative after it is already under way.** There are countless examples of this across sectors. Training programs and toolkits may be labeled for the benefit of Indigenous people or communities without inviting Indigenous people and organizations to be included from the onset and without truly decolonizing the process. Furthermore, initiatives designed in this way do not consider the very different contexts and experiences of Indigenous people and communities, and fail at truly Indigenizing them or embedding unique cultural values.
- **Bringing on a First Nation(s) program or project only to get access to different funding streams and not as meaningful partners or participants.** Some entities may want to collaborate with an Indigenous entity or First Nation(s) to seek out ‘Indigenous Funding’, procurement opportunities or the like but not provide benefit to them through the relationship. In addition to serving only the non-Indigenous entity, it creates a space of mistrust, lack of transfer of capacity, or real change.
- **Inviting an Indigenous person to join a board to support an organization’s reconciliation effort without having taken deeper commitments to decolonization and**

36 Beyond territorial acknowledgments. âpihtawikosisân. <https://apihtawikosisan.com/2016/09/beyond-territorial-acknowledgments/>

reconciliation. Similar to the shallowness that diversity and inclusion initiatives can exhibit, this measure does little to get at deeper systemic changes, and often ends up placing a large responsibility solely on the one Indigenous person at the table. While having a seat at the table is significant, the table itself also needs reconstructing. Inviting Indigenous representation at the board or leadership level requires a change in behaviour by an organization, and a deference to the directions and changes that Indigenous directors may encourage the organization to take.

- **Treating an ‘Indigenous Relations’ coordinator or position as a catch-all in an organization.** A significant trend in the past few years is hiring an Indigenous Relations or Engagement person for all matters “Indigenous” in an organization. These positions are often valued at entry-level pay rates, filled by non-Indigenous people, and not accompanied by a larger commitment of resources, staffing and strategic direction. This reveals a lot about the extent to which commitments to reconciliation are valued, undercutting the depth and understanding needed to engage at an organizational level. As is repeated throughout this document, reconciliation isn’t an add-on, or simply reaching out to Indigenous people. It is an act of internal change. If anything, every position in an organization should be an “Indigenous Relations Coordinator”. This should be a meaningful part of every job description. Another issue that was raised in the



convenings was addressing turnover in non-Indigenous institutions and its effects on cultural awareness and the continuity in the relationship with the First Nation. In these relationships, there is a level of responsibility of these institutions to ensure that all employees have the knowledge around local First Nations protocols, practices, and needs, and that relationship ties continue even after individual employees may move on.

- **Continuing to think, believe and act like your “reconciliation” efforts are to ‘help, fix, support’ First Nations in some way.** As Audre Lorde has written, “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.” Indigenous peoples do not need fixing, especially from colonial institutions that created the conditions of inequality and injustice in the first place. Believing that First Nations individuals and communities are in need of fixing reinforces the myth of white supremacy that colonialism relies on. These actions are self-serving, fuels saviour culture and does not support Indigenous sovereignty or self-determination.
- **Treating the bare minimum of Free, Prior and Informed Consent as meaningful.** The notion of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) mandated in UNDRIP and the TRC deserves a more developed discussion here. With the enactment of the duty to consult and

“Any true reconciliation requires action, not tokenism. It is time for our People to sit at the table as true partners, with direct influence on decisions that impact our land and waters to build a brighter future for our children. ... As partners and rightful custodians of our lands and waters, we can set a higher bar for environmental standards and monitoring. Our traditional knowledge and wisdom are needed to protect our Mother Earth for future generations.”³⁷

Project Reconciliation

³⁷ Indigenous support strong regarding resource development. <https://troymedia.com/business/indigenous-support-strong-regarding-resource-development-amidst-reconciliation/>

accommodate, Indigenous peoples now have an important voice in resource development. However, First Nations communities widely share the experience of corporations and government agencies “ticking a box” on engaging or consulting with Indigenous communities. Tools like Impact Benefits Agreements, procurement commitments, or employment training agreements may be meaningful, but this heavily depends on how they are done. Our convening participants described many of these tools being used in a way that only meets the bare minimum. For example, First Nations communities may be approached by non-Indigenous entities leading these projects with one-dimensional commitments, such as claims or promises to “increase employment” for a particular community. However, these commitments may only guarantee very short-term employment, and furthermore often do not address the systemic barriers which then reinforces power imbalances between non-Indigenous and Indigenous partners.

Indigenous community development practitioners also noted the experience of only being awarded small contracts, limiting Indigenous-led businesses from taking on projects at more significant scales. Meanwhile, not much changes for the communities themselves. First nations individuals and businesses could be hired for other services beyond the minimum commitment

that they are legally obligated to do. Corporations and governments largely fail to consider other avenues of evening the playing field, such as joint-ventures and partnerships with First Nations as a wise practice for Economic Reconciliation.

These experiences lead to a key question about what makes for ‘meaningful consultation’. As the original rights holders to land in this region, First Nations determine what would be meaningful according to their community

Quick reference: Duty to consult

[Section 35 of the Constitution](#)

It is important to understand that Section 35 recognizes Aboriginal rights, but did not create them—Aboriginal rights have existed before Section 35³⁸

- UNDRIP - [Free, Prior and Informed Consent of Indigenous Peoples](#)
- [The Duty to Consult Just Keeps on Evolving](#)
- [A Primer on the Constitutional Duty to Consult](#)
- [Indigenous-led Assessment Processes as a Way Forward.](#)
- [Squamish Nation Process New Governance Tool to assert their rights and title and to protect their traditional lands and waters.](#)

38 See Indigenous Foundations. https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/constitution_act_1982_section_35/

needs. Applying the principle of FPIC in a way that respects Indigenous sovereignty can support an Indigenous Nation's values and beliefs by incorporating them throughout a project, from the early concept phase to terms of reference, project mapping, selecting experts, reviewing and approving studies, and so forth.

In an effort to understand and articulate economic reconciliation, this convening called for "changing the flour" in the cupcake recipe. There is a need to transform systems and Indigenize all sectors of the economy. While key legislation, such as the new UNDRIP adoption in BC, mark important milestones, there is more to be done.

Economic reconciliation is missing truth-telling

"Our own healing is also intensely integral in this journey, from the personal level, growing exponentially to ripple throughout our communities from family to family."

Convening participant

Reconciliation cannot be divorced from truth-telling. Indigenous communities are still working through the truth-telling within their own communities, let alone outwardly in relation to settler communities and institutions. The current generations of Indigenous people alive today

continue to face lateral violence, trauma, racism, addiction, and displacement. The need for healing from historic and ongoing injustices and imbalances of power cannot be separate from conversations of economic reconciliation. Our Indigenous convening participants spoke strongly to the requirement that healing cannot be seen as a process that happens outside of economic development. If economic development practices are to center well-being, they need to heal at multiple levels and in multiple contexts. From the personal to the community level this needs to be part of the equation.

A large part of any reconciliation work is truth-telling. This looks like sharing, educating, listening, acknowledging, accepting, forgiving, and healing throughout the process. It starts with knowing the truth about the past and present situation of Crown-Indigenous relations in Canada. This situation has been genocidal, racist, excessively oppressive, paternal and outwardly controlling. Any relationship that begins or continues between Indigenous and settler Canadians must reckon with that history and the ongoing impacts of subjugating Indigenous Peoples as wards of the Crown through the Indian Act.

Intergenerational and compound trauma from colonization, government-led domination and oppression throughout Canadian history, conquer and divide tactics of land grabs, the reservation system, and treaties and so on, have caused on-going settler colonialism to leach into our communities for several generations since contact.

The TRC Calls to Action states that it is going to take just as many generations to undo what has been forced upon Indigenous people and continues to be enforced through the mechanism of the Indian Act. The specific space of economic reconciliation is going to require just as much effort to unravel, forgive, heal and regenerate traditional ways of being. This work is already being done, but there is much more to do to shift this space, as communities embody their own self-determination on their own terms.

Some examples of where the truth is not being heard in relation to economic development include:

- **A disregard for Indigenous peoples' connection to place that predates settler history.** Land is either given back to a First Nation or purchased by a First Nation, and settler populations are concerned about preserving the 'history' of that land or their current activities on it, but truly do not think past their own occupation of the land. They do not look further to the original Indigenous history of that land, where there is a much longer and deeper significance of reciprocal relationship, connection (spiritual, resources, sacred sites, etc.), use and sustainability to the land.
- **Focusing only on creating employment opportunities for Indigenous people who have barriers to employment without hearing stories about why they are out of work.** Employers may provide job opportunities, but fail to address the systemic barriers facing many Indigenous peoples as it pertains to

education, child-care, rural or remote transportation, training, housing, poverty, and skills development, etc. Moreover, employers may hold Indigenous peoples to the standards laid out by the system that created the barriers in the first place, failing to consider whether an Indigenous employee feels comfortable, trusting of, or safe in that particular employment environment. Employment outcomes are not just about opening up positions to Indigenous Peoples.

- **Treating resource negotiation as purely a business transaction.** Non-Indigenous government agencies want to negotiate over land and resource uses, but don't want to learn about the significance of these lands and resources, and the impacts that losses of them have had on the First Nations and their community members.
- **Any entity assuming that sufficient Indigenous engagement or consultation means just getting more Indigenous people to participate, without understanding why they currently aren't involved and without demonstrating commitment to decolonizing their engagement process.** You have to respect and recognize that First Nation and Indigenous People have a unique worldview and lens on how things are done. Their perspectives on how to be is unique to their land and place. They have their own governance, sustainability practices, they use ceremony for many purposes, have deep rooted values and beliefs, all of which influences how they see the world, their place in

it, and how they want to be engaged about it.

Reconciliation within and between First Nations

“We need to not only think about how we reconcile with industry and municipalities, but also how do we reconcile within our own community groups or traditional territories?”

Convening Participant

While the dominant narrative of reconciliation in Canada tends to focus on reconciliation between First Nations and non-Indigenous governments, institutions and industrial actors, during our convening we discussed the need to dedicate resources and space for Nation- to - Nation relationship strengthening and Indigenous sovereignty as it relates to economic development. Prior to contact, Nations worked together through building relationships by intermarrying, potlatching, trading, etc. The Indian Act dismantled our territories and the Nations that represented them. Today, in B.C. we are broken up into 204 First Nations under the Indian Act even though we were larger Nations prior to this who worked collaboratively for the well-being of the territories, its wealth of resources and the families. For example, the Okanagan Nation is made up of 7 First Nation communities in B.C. and the Colville Confederated Tribes in the United States, whose territory extends over approximately 69,000 square kilometers in southern

Case studies:

Musqueam, Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh partnership [MST Development Corporation](#) is an historic partnership between the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations. Together, our three nations have regained ownership of significant lands within our shared territories. We are full or co-owners of six prime properties in Metro Vancouver, with more than 160 acres of developable land, currently valued at over \$1 billion.

[Inter-Governmental Relations: Squamish and Lil'wat First Nations](#)

In 2001, the nations signed an historic Protocol Agreement formalizing their commitment to continue inter-governmental cooperation in matters of cultural and economic development, and co-management of shared territory.

[Háɫcístut: Framework Agreement for Reconciliation](#)

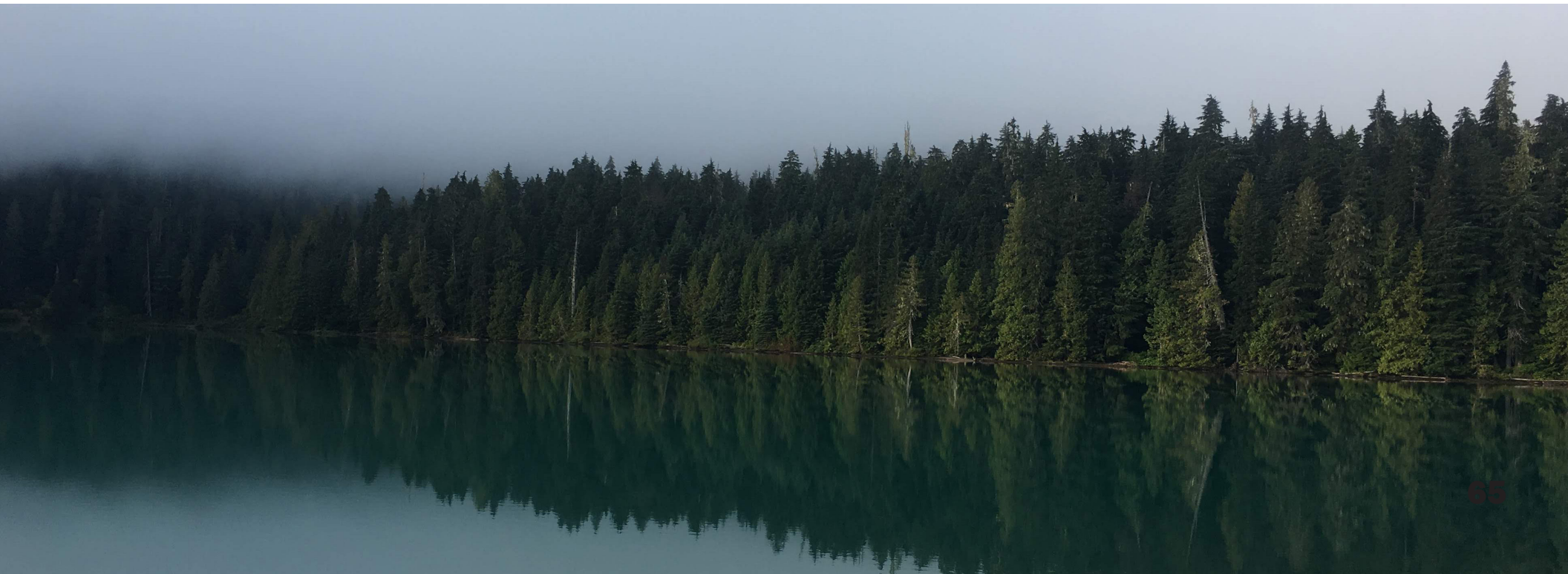
Háɫcístut is a Heiltsuk word that means “To turn things around, and make things right again.” Founded on the Heiltsuk Potlatch concept, Heiltsuk & the Federal and Provincial Governments have entered into the [Háɫcístut Reconciliation process](#), to negotiate a new Government to Government relationship.

B.C. These Nations all speak nsyilxcən language but are separated into each of the respective “Bands” under the Indian Act and are governed separately and receive federal funds according to the government funding regime based on membership. In order to achieve Nation-like governance, they had to create the Okanagan Nation Alliance.

The colonial governance structure followed under the Indian Act does not promote Nation-to-Nation building as funding is allocated to individual bands. While great strides have been made for certain Nations across the province, there exist strong inequities between Nations based on their capacity to access resources or exercise their rights. Without the ability to hire a good lawyer to leverage title and rights, for example, some First Nations may end up in

an economically compromising position compared to other Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

Alliances of First Nations would harness collective sovereignty and make it more challenging for the Federal, Provincial and local governments to deny title and rights. Rather than being entities that need to be consulted for large projects that affect natural resources, Nations would have decision-making power over what happens and how. The Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh (MST) Development partnership is an example of the positive impacts that occur when nations unite together on economic development efforts.



The experience on the ground: Barriers to reconciliation

Convening participants were asked to reflect on their experiences with non-Indigenous individuals, governments and businesses. Their reflections are captured according to themes of trust, cultural appropriation, implicit bias, systemic racism and lack of awareness, and a divisive or competitive mentality by non-Indigenous communities.

Trust

As has been commonly stated, humans move at the speed of trust. For Indigenous people, the level of trust in partnering with non-Indigenous stakeholders is often very low, as Indigenous individuals and communities navigate compound trauma whilst also engaging with settler-led organizations that are discriminatory, self-serving, narrow-minded, and unwilling to deviate from the current ways of doing business. The private sector is deeply fraught with interactions and conditions that create and perpetuate trauma and distrust. From the infliction of racism and violence on First Nations community members by major project site workers and law enforcement, to the lack of follow-through on co-governance agreements or honouring treaties, there are numerous examples of settler organizations and individuals compromising any possible relationship built on trust and safety.

Making amends in the form of benefits or amenities is insufficient if reconciliation is to be transformative, and doesn't mean much if trust has been broken.

Relationships for any Indigenous person, community or Nation cannot happen without trust, and building trust does not happen overnight. The imbalance of power and the poor showing on behalf of settler populations has broken the fundamentals of trust on which every relationship depends. Like any marriage, friendship, or community connection, trust doesn't manifest simply when one side acknowledges they were

“Paying for some healthcare services is not enough. The supports needed are social in nature. It goes hand-in-hand with economic development.”

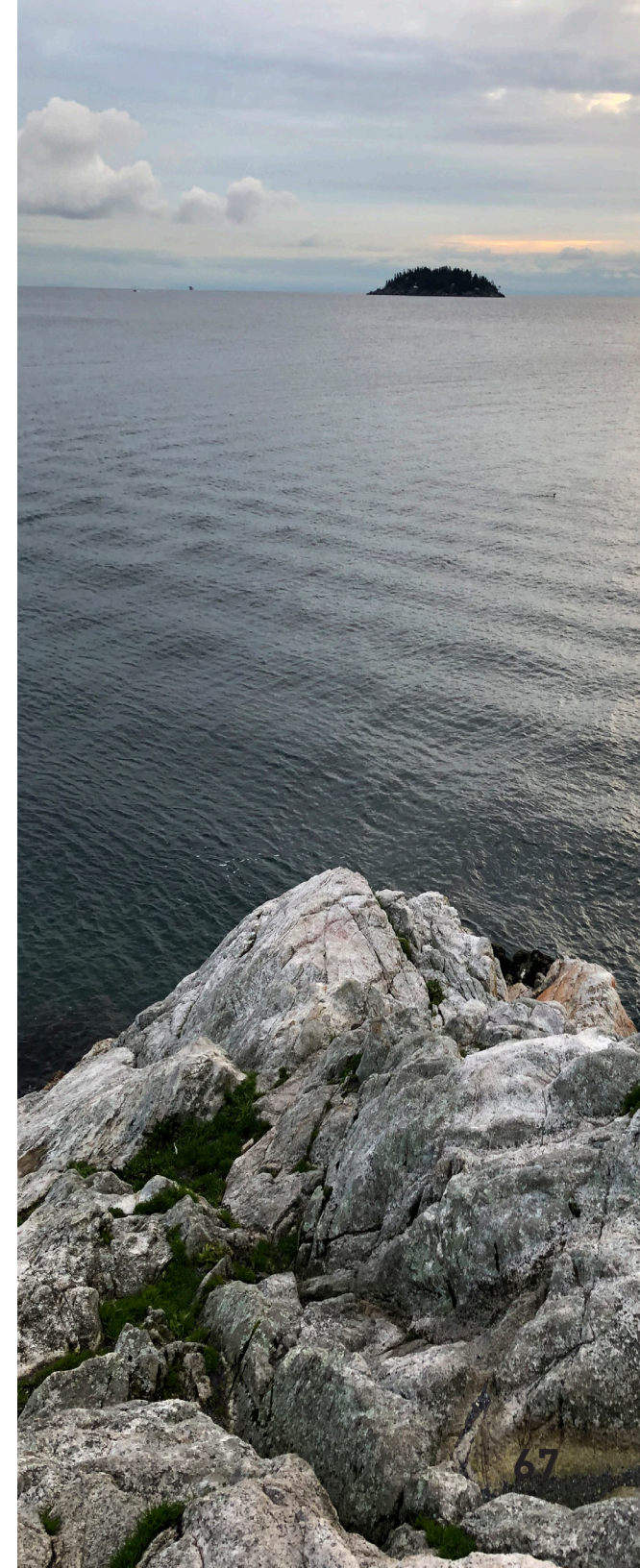
Convening participant

wrong. It requires a long process of proving oneself, making amends, and investing into healing. And even then, it may still be possible that trust will not be regained, or that it can be lost again in one single incident or interaction.

One builds trust in purposeful ways and there are no shortcuts. While trust-building is inherently based in the context of each unique relationship, in the economic sector some conditions that are needed in order to build trust include:

- **Trauma-informed relationship-building.** Research and wisdom on trauma acknowledge that trust and safety inhabit the body.³⁹ When bodies are experiencing trauma that has gone unresolved, they are stuck in a particular point in time. Therefore, individuals may not be able to feel like they can move on and trust new circumstances because their bodies have not moved on from the event, no matter how much time has passed. This means that for Indigenous people who have withstood compound trauma across multiple generations, there have been many moments of harm created by settlers that have led to mistrust that is going to take more than one-time apologies, organizational statements, and transactional reparations to heal from. Understanding how trauma works and applying this knowledge in relationship-building is pivotal for any transformative reconciliation initiative.
- **Practicing empathy and accountability.** Settlers' lack of empathy creates a barrier to building trusting relationships with First Nations. Empathy means understanding and sharing the perspectives of others beyond your own. Accountability means taking responsibility for the choices we make and examining whether these choices align with the values that we uphold individually and collectively. In the context of economic development, empathy and accountability are especially important for considering how one's actions will impact others, such as First Nations communities on whose territory a

³⁹ See Nkem Ndefo on The Body As a Compass, [For the Wild Podcast](#). March 24, 2021.



project or initiative is taking place. One builds empathy and accountability by actively practicing deep listening to others while decentering one's own agenda or motives and reflecting on whether the actions taken align to our deep internal values.

- **Transparency around intentions.** Going back to our introduction to this document, non-Indigenous organizations need to be clear and transparent on what their intentions are in building relationships with First Nations.
- **Creating spaces for honest healing.** Meetings and consultations are held to initiate projects or work with little to no regard for past harm. There needs to be an acknowledgment of the healing that is needed, along with support provided to those who can create space for healing within the economic development sector. There is a dominant colonial narrative that healing is solely the work of Indigenous peoples, yet settler individuals also need to reckon with what they have benefited from at the expense of Indigenous peoples, and in many cases what their ancestors have inflicted or been complicit in perpetuating since contact. Therefore, it is important for settler individuals to honestly and willingly be a part of the healing process.

When it comes to engaging in trust-building, take time to educate yourself, ask questions, and seek answers from the right people, whether it's Indigenous Peoples or other respected allies within the community.

Navigating complexity:

How can the economic development sector make space for trauma-informed trust-building?



Cultural appropriation

“There needs to be a focus on teaching non-Indigenous people that having Native branding without a Native voice is bad, and teaching those who don’t have the resources to engage with First Nations how to do so.”

Convening participant

The issue of cultural appropriation was brought up in relation to a few different sectors. There are countless examples of moments when non-Indigenous businesses or organizations extract aspects of Indigenous culture without properly understanding the depth of their significance, and also without involving and compensating Indigenous knowledge keepers and artists. As Andray Domise has written, “Cultural appropriation amounts to theft. It is the lifting of cultural aspects from underrepresented groups of people, and not only offering nothing in return, but expecting their gratitude for the promotion”.⁴⁰ To be clear, cultural appropriation is laying one’s own

Case examples of cultural appropriation and redress:



Cowichan Sweater - If you like the look of Cowichan sweaters, don’t buy a [“Cowichan-inspired”](#) sweater from a retail giant, buy an authentic wool Cowichan sweater, vest, mittens, hat, etc. from a Coast Salish knitter or an Indigenous-owned store that buys sweaters from these cowichan knitters. That is cultural respect.

[Fake Indigenous art](#) is literally sold almost everywhere in BC and Canada, especially to tourists. Purchase real Indigenous art at a real cost of production and sell it. Indigenous art can include fashion, painting and drawing, beading, dreamcatchers, jewelry, prints, carving, statuettes and everything in between.



understanding of another culture over that actual, real or true culture, packaging it as one's own, modeling it as your own, and often selling it for a profit with no participation and acknowledgment of that culture or royalty going to them. Economically speaking, culture is Indigenous intellectual property, so appropriation is the extraction of value from assets that Indigenous people own.

For example, in the tourism sector, guiding and tours about Indigenous lands, culture and history are led by non-Indigenous people, without involving Indigenous knowledge-keepers and communities. Cultural and land-based tourism activities should respect what aspects of local Indigenous culture and knowledge can be shared (and by whom), and what should be protected according to community protocol.

Rather than seeing it as a dangerous minefield, things like Indigenous branding or sharing Indigenous culture could be an opportunity for dialogue about how non-Indigenous businesses can appropriately and respectfully acknowledge Indigenous culture through intentional honouring and amplification of Indigenous voices, culture-keepers and artists. More detailed examples of cultural appropriation and redress are included in the following table.



[B.C. city gives Ogoopogo copyright to First Nation after cultural appropriation concerns.](#) Vernon had owned intellectual property of the mythical lake serpent since 1956. The City of Vernon, B.C., has given up the copyright to a mythical creature's name and transferred it to the Syilx Nation, following criticism of cultural appropriation from Indigenous communities.

[Canucks Goalie newly Indigenous art inspired designed](#)

There have been many troubling incidents lately of Indigenous arts, stories, & identities being appropriated. With respect to Holtby's mask my sense was that it was a case of good intentions carried out poorly. This [video](#) shows a responsive process whereby those involved sought to understand the mistakes made & to rectify them in the right way. This is a great example of accountability & should be learned from.



Implicit bias, systemic racism and lack of understanding

It needs to be recognized that racism and bias are a part of the stories and assumptions humans tell ourselves. As a species we categorize things and people and use stories or symbols to reaffirm those categories. In the case of Indigenous-settler relations, we continue to find that beliefs, symbols, tropes, and assumptions infuse settler opinions and actions, even for those who may be self-declared allies who claim to be committed to reconciliation and decolonization.

Lack of understanding and empathy also fuels racism. There are non-Indigenous Canadians who continue to lack the education and awareness of current issues, and ongoing lack of understanding of the connection between what happened historically and what is going on today in relation to Indigenous-Settler and Indigenous-Crown relations. Operating from a disconnected space is inexcusable as there are many ways to be informed, to learn and make those connections, and to build one's own self-awareness.

Several of our convening participants shared their experience of being on the receiving end of rhetoric and actions that are steeped in Western and white supremacy. Representatives from non-Indigenous organizations talk to them in a way that reveals their perception of First Nations as mere stakeholders who are a burden to project implementation, rather than as partners in building and sustaining a vibrant well-being economy. Additionally, participants also noted the experience of feeling like an afterthought in project development processes led by non-Indigenous entities.

Our convening sessions are certainly not the first place that these issues have been reported. Systemic racism is a painful truth in our society that many are not prepared to confront, even though it plays out on a daily basis. The Community Economic Development Initiative's (CEDI) Summary Report of the 2018 National Indigenous-

“There is a lack of realization of implicit bias amongst non-Indigenous people. They feel good about themselves for engaging but they don't go beyond that.”

Convening participant

“A major barrier is the ongoing paternalistic and incompetent approach in government to government conversations - lack of local training, context and knowledge of no-treaty dealings.”

Convening participant

Local Government Partnership Forum highlights gaps, barriers, supports required and actions needed to build strong, sustainable and equitable First Nation / Métis – Municipal partnerships. In this report, they found that the most prevalent barriers were “internal to the communities and organizations seeking to collaborate.” Non-Indigenous staff-persons lacked awareness of Indigenous history, cultures and contemporary issues, which gave way to racism, prejudice and stereotypes. In the case of communities that sought collaboration, the lack of a pre-existing relationship combined with uncertainty about how to begin communicating and collaborating, was also seen as a significant barrier to partnership.⁴¹

Looking at these issues in geographic context is also significant. Rural-Indigenous alliances have the potential to be tremendously transformative, and yet that is where divisions arguably run the deepest. Worker camps, healthcare facilities, educational institutions, highways, retail locations, fisheries, and so forth are all sites of anti-Indigenous racism, discrimination and violence, particularly against Indigenous women and LGBTQ2S individuals. In the article “Beyond Territorial Acknowledgments,” âpihtawikosisân describes the “two solitudes” of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous experience in rural Canada: whereas these common challenges could serve to unify these populations, the geographic and social vastness between communities, along with the underlying tensions placed upon the land itself, lead to navigating these problems in isolation.⁴²

An “Us vs. Them” mentality

There is a sense of protectionism from non-Indigenous organizations that projects a fear of Indigenous entities “stealing” growth opportunities. Moreover, First Nations

41 Summary Report of the 2018 National Indigenous-Local Government Partnership Forum <http://www.edo.ca/downloads/2018-partnership-forum-report.pdf>

42 Beyond territorial acknowledgments. âpihtawikosisân. <https://apihtawikosisan.com/2016/09/beyond-territorial-acknowledgments/>

Navigating complexity:

Given the access we have to information and our ability to seek out knowledge, there are plenty of ways to learn and listen and be educated in this age of technology. What is keeping you from confronting your own implicit bias and discomfort when it comes to this work?



are not always invited to important economic conversations happening in the region. This tension has been ongoing for decades, being raised as an issue within the 1986 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.⁴³ While the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples called for a recognition of these areas of friction and mechanisms to address them as the Indigenous economy grew, there is obviously continuous tension at the local level as seen in conflicts such as subsistence fishing.

This “Us vs. Them” mentality also plays out at the individual or consumer level in some communities. Convening participants from more remote First Nations communities commented on the hesitation of non-Indigenous consumers to go on reserve to purchase from local Indigenous business owners. There is stigma and fear related to going on reserve to shop. There are opportunities for these mindsets to shift to give way to a more collaborative approach to economic development between Indigenous and non-Indigenous neighbours.

Our whole system is segregated. Spatially our communities are divided by lines of reserve and off-reserve, governmentally we have different structures, organizationally we have settler economic organizations and Indigenous economic organizations, economically we have Indigenous businesses and non-Indigenous businesses, and so forth. This is the result of, and further reproduces, a mentality of us and them. On some level we have to desegregate our institutional and social structures, and to do so this requires us to desegregate our colonial mentalities of difference as well. That kind of segregation depends on the trust-building, relationship building, and harm-acknowledging behaviours that we have described thus far. But it also depends on each community seeing the connection between us and the need for us to join together rather than remain apart.

“Non-Indigenous organizations are protective over economic opportunity, they do not see our involvement as a growth opportunity, but rather as us stealing business.”

Convening participant

⁴³Volume 2: Restructuring the Relationship. Report on RCAP. <http://data2.archives.ca/e/e448/e011188230-02.pdf>

It's not all bad: Mutual benefit of economic reconciliation

Although this section has largely focused on the barriers and challenges related to economic reconciliation that hinder its ability to lead to transformative outcomes, there do exist hopeful examples of positive Indigenous and non-Indigenous partnerships. There are mutual benefits of economic reconciliation that speak to the strength in collaborative approaches to community economic development.

“Our goals are not that different.”

Convening participant

Contrary to the common ‘Us vs. Them’ mentality, there are many areas of overlap and alignment when it comes to Community Economic Development goals of Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities and industry partners. Partnering regionally can help First Nations and municipalities meet various needs and go after resources collectively.

Here is where the rubber can meet the road as it pertains to economic reconciliation in communities throughout BC. Rather than remaining dependent on senior levels of government in Canada to lead the way, when their ongoing commitment to Crown-Indigenous relations typically includes a lot of rhetoric and little meaningful action, there are many promising examples of positive relationship-building occurring at the regional and municipal level. Initiatives led by Comox Valley Regional District and the Sliammon First Nation, and the City of Powell River all offer lessons and tools for other communities to learn from. It may begin with one small project, but those can be the starting point of something transformative. More examples are provided as case studies later on page 76.

Case studies:

Westbank First Nation (WFN)
WFN signed its Self-Government Agreement in 2005. Rather than being governed under Canada's Indian Act, WFN is now governed under a modern and comprehensive set of community laws, with full jurisdictional control over its lands and resources. Providing for numerous partnerships, infrastructure development, Econ. Dev. Commission, etc.. Not being governed under Canada's Indian Act has had significant fiscal and economic contribution to the local, provincial and federal economies.

Rural-Indigenous alliances

Although rural regions are pivotal to the provincial and national economy for the resources that they provide to the urban regions of southern Canada, the impacts of these extractive industries on rural Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities are largely overlooked. Envisioned as sites for major projects as opposed to places where people live, rural communities face barriers to local, place-based development, and are exposed to a variety of social, environmental and health-related hazards brought on by these large-scale projects. Infrastructure may be outdated, scarce or completely absent, which hinders the ability for local and regional governments to create community economic development opportunities. Broadband and transportation services are unreliable and often do not meet the needs of local populations for health, education and general well-being. Without a strong infrastructure, rural regions experience major challenges in going after unique opportunities whether in the tourism, agriculture, technology, or energy sectors.

These challenges are of course parallel to First Nations reserves as well, where the severe lack of infrastructure and limitations imposed by the Indian Act produce significant barriers to economic development for Indigenous communities.⁴⁴ Convening participants recognized the importance of collaboration between municipal, regional and Indigenous governments in rural areas in order to lobby for more senior levels of government and industry leaders for development support. Tourism initiatives that center and celebrate Indigenous culture, alternative energy projects, and improved infrastructure were all seen as low-hanging opportunities that regions could leverage. There is strength in being able to carry a unified message for what is needed in rural and remote communities.

“I think rural/Indigenous alliances have the potential to be the most transformative relationships in this country, even as they remain the least likely to occur.”

âpihtawikosisân,
Beyond Territorial Acknowledgment

⁴⁴Emerging Trends Offer Promise to Aboriginal Peoples <https://www.td.com/document/PDF/economics/special/td-economics-special-db0609-aboriginal-pr.pdf>

Examples of positive economic partnerships and Indigenous-led businesses

Name of initiative	Between FN and non-Indigenous entity	Description	What makes it a positive relationship?
Speaking Earth and Indigenous Culture Awareness Training program	Ktunaxa First Nation	This Indigenous-owned resort has a cultural tourism program through which Elders can share their knowledge and culture with visitors. There is also an Indigenous Culture Awareness Training Program for corporate groups.	Once a residential school, Ktunaxa Elders reclaimed and restored the property to create the Resort, which is now a source of hope, strength, and pride.
Addition to Reserve Policy	Doig River First Nation and City of Fort St. John	Both signed an MOU in 2010 to build a mutually beneficial, working relationship. DRFN has and will continue to acquire lands within and near the City, some of which are part of Doig River's Treaty Land Entitlement claim. Planning for development of DRFN urban land holdings is underway, which requires the City and DRFN to work together on the development and servicing of the lands.	Recognition of title and rights, commitment to relationship building
Senákw	Squamish Nation's Nch'kay Development Corporation and Westbank Projects Inc.	10.5 acres 4,000,000 sf 6,000+ rental homes 950+ affordable homes	The largest partnership with any First Nation in Canadian history. Squamish Nation not just passive landlords

Senákw (cont.)

Largest net zero carbon residential project in Canada

Largest First Nations economic development project in Canadian history

Historic architectural, cultural, artistic, construction, and entrepreneurial opportunities for the Squamish Nation

but active investors and partners in developing the land. Historic economic development opportunity that will set the Squamish Nation on a path to complete economic independence.

Landmark Coast Salish architecture and design — a lasting cultural legacy for the Squamish Nation and for Canada. Hundreds of job and entrepreneurial opportunities for Squamish Nation membership in design, construction, and operations.

Indigenous Clean Energy

197 projects across the country and collaborators include: industry associations, electricity sector companies, clean energy bodies, financial institutions, corporations, public agencies, environment and other NGO's, academic entities, charitable and corporation foundations, and communications channels.

Ranging from Impact Benefit Agreements to direct ownership of projects. These opportunities are generating jobs and training opportunities for community members and providing a more consistent flow of revenue to meet community needs.

Depending on the partnership level of any given project, it can serve any of the following principles: respect (equity, equality, social justice), recognition (history, title, rights), reconciliation (healing), relationships (creating, building and sustaining)

Cedar LNG

Haisla Nation, Pacific Traverse Energy (PTE), a Vancouver based energy infrastructure development company and Delfin Midstream, an LNG export development company specializing in low-cost floating LNG technology, with offices in Houston, TX and Oslo, Norway.

The Cedar LNG Project is a proposed floating liquefied natural gas (FLNG) facility in Kitimat, British Columbia, Canada, within the traditional territory of the Haisla Nation. The Project is strategically positioned to leverage Canada's abundant natural gas supply and BC's growing liquefied natural gas (LNG) infrastructure to produce industry-leading low carbon, low-cost Canadian LNG for new overseas markets. By using an innovative design philosophy that fits the facility into the local environment, the Cedar LNG Project will minimize the impact to the local environment while creating value for customers, and prosperity for the Haisla Nation, and the region.

Cedar LNG will be a floating natural gas liquefaction facility and is aiming to be the first majority Indigenous-owned LNG export facility in Canada, with its majority stake owned by the Haisla Nation.

The Cedar LNG Project will be designed to be consistent with Haisla values, including minimizing effects to the environment. The liquefaction process will be electric-driven and use air cooling technology.

Nation to Nation relationship building.

Coastal First Nations - Great Bear Initiative

Protecting our Coast. Building our Economy. A unique alliance of nine BC First Nations, creating jobs for the

The Coastal First Nations Great Bear Initiative is a unique alliance of nine distinct First Nations working together: To protect our coast and improve the quality of life in our communities.

For millennia, coastal First Nations have carefully stewarded our territorial lands and waters. But by the late 1990s, destructive industrial logging and commercial overfishing were depleting our resources. Our

Supporting:

- planning for marine and land resources in the Great Bear region
- increased local control and management of forestry and fisheries
- sustainable development

future and protecting the Great Bear Rainforest.

Their member nations include Wuikinuxv, Heiltsuk, Kitasoo/Xaixais, Nuxalk, Gitga'at, Metlakatla, Old Massett, Skidegate, and Council of the Haida Nation.

communities were struggling. Two decades ago, coastal Nations came together in a first meeting to address these harmful practices and create a new vision for a sustainable coastal economy.

In June 2000, leaders from the Central and North Coast and Haida Gwaii signed the Declaration of First Nations of the North Pacific Coast. A coast-wide alliance was born.

Today we celebrate and uplift our Nations for their resiliency in overcoming adversity to protect our communities, cultures and coastal Territories.

through ecosystem-based management

- capacity building in coastal First Nations communities
- partnerships with government, industry, environmental groups and others
- Nation to Nation working relationships for business development, employment, skills development and training, entrepreneurship and procurement

Support needed for collaboration

During this discussion we also asked what kinds of supports are required for Indigenous communities and members to engage in partnerships and dialogues. The kind of support and reciprocity needed is not limited to technical or material support, but also social-emotional intelligence and empathy.

Summary

This section has provided a deep look into the current state of Economic Reconciliation as experienced by Indigenous participants in our convenings. Returning to the question of whether Economic Reconciliation can be transformative,

procurement
support

acknowledgment
and respect of the
healing journey First
Nations are on

equal
technological
access

mentorship
with respectful
understanding of
place

empathy for how
intimidating and
exhausting it can be in
meetings with non-
Indigenous people

capacity
development

Below are some main insights and needs that we have identified based on our learnings:

- **The need to see economic reconciliation as a practice, not a final product**

The journey of economic reconciliation is bumpy, sometimes windy and will always be highly complex. Meaningful relationships do not occur without hesitations, learning, setbacks and roadblocks. There is no one right or correct place to be on this economic reconciliation journey and it is important to remember that it is a process that requires all of us.

The journey of economic reconciliation does not look the same for any two individuals, businesses or communities. While there is much to learn from the experience of others, there cannot be a “cookie-cutter” approach to reconciliation. The hard work of building and sustaining relationships, building capacity and skills and identifying how economic reconciliation can support Indigenous self-determination needs to be given consideration in each unique context.

- **The need for moving beyond token acts of reconciliation**

A common sentiment among our participants was that reconciliation has become a checklist item on the road to turning a profit. Non-Indigenous communities and partnerships will not get very far in terms of relationship-building if their purpose for engaging



in reconciliation is only meant to validate the actions of settlers while doing little to honour and support Indigenous sovereignty, Title and Rights, and self-determination.

What makes for “meaningful” economic reconciliation is contextual and determined by Indigenous partners. Actions taken without engaging in deeper relationship-building to understand this result in token, superficial and incremental outcomes.

- **The need for healing and truth-telling**

Reconciliation continues to require truth telling and healing as Canada still struggles to reckon with not only its history but also its current state of Crown-Indigenous relations. This is being supported by the work of many entities today and the growing demands to respond to Call to Action #92, but more action is required. The economic sector cannot be exempt from truth-telling and healing. There are deep historic and ongoing harms

inflicted on Indigenous peoples, including women, LGBTQ2S+, youth and Elders owing to economic development projects that reinforce power imbalances and undermine efforts to form more positive and trusting relationships.

Indigenous peoples are not the only ones in need of healing. Settler individuals and settler-led organizations need to engage in deeper inner reflective work and healing in order to unravel implicit bias, colonial mindsets, and the conditions of systemic racism that they operate in and benefit from.

The extent to which economic reconciliation can be transformative in nature depends on whether or not we are willing to transform. In the following sections, we will look at the ways in which our relationship to wealth needs changing, and illuminate a working framework for economic reconciliation.





“True reconciliation with Native peoples requires Canada to stop its paternalistic, discriminatory policies and, most important, stop interfering with our sovereignty over our identities, communities and lands. These are by no means easy or comfortable actions for Canadians to undertake, but they must be undertaken regardless. Anything else is simply not ‘the real thing’.”

Alicia Elliot,
A Mind Spread out on the Ground