



Best Practices on Organizations doing Reconciliation And Retaining Indigenous Employees

Truth and Reconciliation Commission Call to Action #92

We call upon the corporate sector in Canada to adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a reconciliation framework and to apply its principles, norms, and standards to corporate policy and core operational activities involving Indigenous peoples and their lands and resources. This would include, but not be limited to, the following:

- i. Commit to meaningful consultation, building respectful relationships, and obtaining the free, prior, and informed consent of Indigenous peoples before proceeding with economic development projects.
- ii. Ensure that Indigenous peoples have equitable access to jobs, training, and education opportunities in the corporate sector, and that Indigenous communities gain long-term sustainable benefits from economic development projects.
- iii. Provide education for management and staff on the history of Indigenous peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Indigenous rights, Indigenous law, and Indigenous–Crown relations. This will require skills-based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism.

Basic Assumptions

- 1** The internal actions and changes in an organization to reduce barriers and increase retention for Indigenous employees, are a subset of the actions taken to do organizational reconciliation. It all starts with building a culturally safe organization with credibility.
- 2** When Indigenous peoples are supported and have access to all the social determinants of well-being as much any other Canadian, the outcomes and well-being of Indigenous peoples will be similar to any other Canadian. Gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous success are statistics on reconciliation.
- 3** Reconciliation is best led by leaders in the sector in order to change that sector. Reconciliation is local action, led by senior leaders and their organizations, and employees will take it home and spread it through their networks.

Why should an organization do anything about reconciliation?

Does your organization serve Indigenous clients? If not, why not? Are you sure Indigenous clients receive the best possible service and achieve similar outcomes as any other client? If not, then there's room for improvement. This isn't about judgement - it is about learning more to do better.

Does your organization have Indigenous employees? Are Indigenous employees succeeding in your organization similar to any other employee group? If not, then there's room for improvement.

Do you want to contribute to Indigenous wellbeing and success? There is no lack of opportunity for leaders in every sector to contribute to change, to advocate for change, and to be a change leader.

What is required?

UNDERSTANDING	LEADERSHIP and COMMUNICATION
Retaining Indigenous employees might require many changes to the organization.	Leading reconciliation is like leading an organizational change – visible leaders and champions are required.
Leading your organization to do its reconciliation journey may be transformational. It may change a lot of things. And it may be great.	Communicate, communicate, communicate. There is no such thing as too much communication when doing organizational change or reconciliation.

What is possible?

It depends on the existing strengths and commitment of the organization, and the gaps that may benefit from attention. What one organization commits to ensure Indigenous employee retention may be different than what is required in another organization. The best practice is to start with the internal focus, (aspects to review and potentially adapt within the organization to both start the organizational reconciliation journey as well as strengthen Indigenous employee retention), and at some point once the Internal Focus aspects are well under way, to then start looking at the external focus aspects.

INTERNAL FOCUS

Human Resource Policies and Procedures

- Do the difficult process of reviewing human resources policies for unintended barriers to Indigenous employees, which may benefit from external Indigenous advisors. Consider if policies on leave, vacation, continuing education, formal education supports all explicitly include Indigenous cultures and employees.
- Ask Indigenous employees what they need to succeed, and then provide it as much as possible. Even if the organization has never done it before.
- Target management, leadership and partner positions as Indigenous-only, and support people to succeed.
- Add racism as an explicit disciplinary offense similar to harassment in policies, and discipline infractions.
- Be ready to ask the difficult questions and hear difficult answers on why Indigenous employees leave the organization. Be ready to do the work to find out why Indigenous employees are not selected for higher level positions, or on the organization's board, then start to make the changes to reduce barriers and increase the number of Indigenous peoples in the organization.

Culturally competent workforce:

- Provide your employees with effective training in Indigenous cultural competence, and the result will be increased safety for all employees of diverse cultures.
- Provide opportunities in continuous learning about local Indigenous communities in your catchment area Indigenous organizations in your sector, Indigenous approaches to the work in your sector, history of the land your organization sits on and how to do land acknowledgements effectively, and how employees can take part in Indigenous events as an ally.
- Include mandatory questions on cultural competence in every HR selection process, with increasing expectations at higher levels.
- Model how to do land acknowledgements effectively to your staff at large events and show your public commitment to reconciliation.
- Be prepared for difficult discussions as employees work through how to do things differently, and be prepared for a renewed and energized workforce who want to contribute.

Leadership:

- Model your own learning, and encourage others to learn more to do better. Making change happens when leaders lead.
- Build relationships and learn with leaders in other organizations doing reconciliation such as LegalAid BC, Canadian Institute for Health Information, United Way Winnipeg, and Northern Health BC.
- Consider making a plaque of the organization's commitment to reconciliation along with a land acknowledgement and install it at the entrance as a daily reminder.
- Support the development of a reconciliation strategic plan or include reconciliation front and centre (not as a less-important add-on) to the strategic plan, and do it. Ensure any actions taken are cemented into your organizational policies, and not simply superficial pilots which fade away in a year or two. Doing change is not cheap, plan to do it once and do it well.

Program/Service provision:

- What do Indigenous clients say about their experience? Do they feel culturally safe? Learn how to ask this question with humility. If Indigenous clients don't feel safe or don't access your services, what can your organization do to eliminate barriers and increase safety (i.e. language barriers)?
- If there are local complimentary Indigenous support services to what your organization provides, sign partnership agreements with the Indigenous provider, and ask the Indigenous client if and how they would like to be supported in accessing both your services and an Indigenous service provider's services (i.e. mental health and Elder support).
- If there are spaces for other cultural groups (i.e. prayer room in a hospital), then build cultural space for Indigenous clients which is more than simply Indigenous art on the walls.
- If there are evaluations in place, do the evaluations on success include Indigenous knowledges?

Communication:

- Prepare employees and the organization for a period of learning and change and the possibility of making mistakes. Contributing to change usually includes some mistakes and some learning from mistakes.
- Ensure employees understand why the changes are being made, the expectations on them to support the changes, and the consequences of racism both intentional and unintentional.
- Communicate about progress made and next steps, and keep employees engaged in the process of change.

Relationship:

- Build partnerships with Indigenous sector partners and leaders as your coach/advisor on the process of reconciliation, and for the organization's credibility. It is not possible to do reconciliation without Indigenous partners.
- Consider signing a declaration of partnership and fund the Indigenous partner's costs to contribute.

EXTERNAL FOCUS

Organizational ally-ship:

- Consider how to make space for Indigenous voices at every table and network, because why shouldn't Indigenous peoples contribute and benefit from those tables? Be careful to avoid speaking for Indigenous peoples.
- Mentor Indigenous young leaders to use their voice and share your expertise and experience with them.
- Bring other organizations along with you, and support their organizational reconciliation journey
- Sponsor Indigenous-led events in your sector and give the stage to Indigenous leaders

What is your opportunity in the medium to long-term? This isn't a prescriptive exercise. It may take some time to find the niche that your organization can leverage to contribute to Indigenous success. Organizational ally-ship is about the art of influence for the betterment of Indigenous peoples, and your thoughtful contributions are needed.

