



# Perspectives on Decolonizing Work Readiness Programs for Urban Indigenous Youth Research Report (SEPTEMBER 30, 2024)



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# 1. Executive Summary

## *Indigenous youth contribute significantly to the labour market*

*“The economic loss currently suffered by all of Canada resulting from the gaps in economic outcomes between Indigenous Canadians and the non-Indigenous population is significant. This analysis has shown that closing these gaps would result in an estimated increase in Canadian GDP by about \$27.7 billion annually. That is, the immediate closure of the gaps in economic outcomes could be expected to result in a 1.5% boost in Canada’s GDP.” (NIEDB, 2016)*

*“If this cohort could get the support they need to build essential skills through access to quality, targeted, and culturally appropriate education, skills and training, they would boost the country’s economy by \$27.7 billion annually” (Skudra, Avgerinos, & McCallum, 2020).*

Indigenous individuals deserve equitable access to education, employment and economic opportunity. The resulting benefits would be substantial for Indigenous communities because their standards of living would dramatically improve. All of Canada would also gain from an Indigenous economy that is more empowered to realize its full potential. Several recent trends speak to the enormous potential of the Indigenous economy.

According to the NIEDB (2016), investing in Indigenous education, skills and training would boost Canada’s economy by 1.5% (NIEDB, 2016). The Indigenous population grew by 9.5% from 2016 to 2021, which is nearly twice the growth rate (5.3%) of the non-Indigenous population over the same time period (Statistics Canada, 2021). The Indigenous population in Canada is also currently much younger— in 2021, 41.2% of the Indigenous population was under age 25 in comparison with 27.3% of the non-Indigenous population (Statistics Canada, 2021). Investing in Indigenous youth is critical for growing the Canadian economy. We all share the responsibility to help restore this prosperity by advancing the objectives of economic reconciliation as recommended by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Melvin, 2023, Anderson, 2021).

The overarching purpose of this study is to explore how educational institutions and workplace readiness programs have decolonized their learning spaces for the delivery of education, training, and programs aimed at increasing the number of Indigenous youths preparing for the workplace or entrepreneurial pursuits. The study involves collaboration with the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre (MNFC), Halifax, Nova Scotia, and the First Light Native Friendship Centre (FLNFC), St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador & Labrador.

Eliminating the educational and employment gaps that Indigenous Canadians face was one of the 94 calls to action outlined in the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation final report (NCTR, 2015). According to 2021 Census data, there are over 1.5 Indigenous people aged 15 - 25 (entering the workforce age) for every Indigenous person aged 55 - 64 (exiting the workforce age) (Statistics

Canada, 2021). Indigenous youth in urban areas, there is a growing opportunity to understand the specific needs of this new generation of workers focused on climate change and sustainability. Decolonizing educational systems and skills training programs can help limit the disparities Indigenous youth experience regarding employment and education. To decolonize, material, psychological, epistemological and spiritual forms of Indigenous sovereignty must be appreciated and respected.

This study involves three phases each with specific objectives.

1. Gather insights from Canadian university research ethics boards to understand methods and practices employed to decolonize the ethics application process based on First Nations protocols regarding ownership, control, acceptance, and possession (OCAP®).
2. Explore barriers and enablers for urban Indigenous youth to prepare and engage in the workforce.
3. Explore how organizations offering workplace readiness programs are engaging in decolonization efforts to help engage and prepare Urban Indigenous Youths for the workplace.

Our schools and public and private sector organizations are actively involved in helping Indigenous youth overcome the unique barriers and obstacles that they face. However, there are still concerns that decolonization practices in Atlantic Canadian workplace programs are somewhat limited in their growth and potential due to a lack of understanding of what it means to decolonize an organization to support Indigenous youth. Ensuring that Indigenous individuals and organizations are involved in the decolonizing process from the outset and are following Indigenous-led practices is a critical factor. There is a need to start working collaboratively and in a more focused way towards shifting the colonial approach to more culturally focused and supportive practices. This shift should include existing Friendship Centres because they are likely to engage youth early in their education years and build a relationship and bond with the youth. These opportunities for partnering are the focus of our recommendations to support the needs of urban Indigenous youth to engage in the workforce in a meaningful and supportive approach.

### **APRI Disclaimer**

This report is funded by the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency (ACOA) under the Atlantic Policy Research Initiative, which provides a vehicle for the analysis of key socioeconomic policy issues in Atlantic Canada. The views expressed in this study do not reflect the views of ACOA or of the Government of Canada. The authors are responsible for the accuracy, reliability and currency of the information.

### **Avertissement MRSRA**

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## **2. Introduction**

### **2.1 Background Information**

Eliminating the educational and employment gaps that Indigenous Canadians face was one of the 94 calls to action outlined in the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation final report (NCTR, 2015). The population of Indigenous peoples in urban areas is rising (OECD, 2020). According to 2021 Census data, there are over 1.5 Indigenous people aged 15 - 25 (entering the workforce age) for every Indigenous person aged 55 - 64 (exiting the workforce age) (Statistics Canada, 2021). With the growth of Generation Z (born 1997-2011) Indigenous youth in urban areas, there is a growing opportunity to understand the specific needs of this new generation of workers focused on climate change and sustainability. Decolonizing educational systems and skills training programs can help limit the disparities Indigenous youth experience in regard to employment and education.

The concept of decolonization dates to the 1930s and was described as “former colonies that achieved self-dependence” (Wainwright, 2020). The concept of Decolonization has been subject to distortion in the media, academic spaces and social justice (Hartman & Brandauer, 2022). Decolonization has been described as an “ongoing process offering multiple approaches for reconnecting Indigenous nations with their traditional lands, resources, and cultural practices” (Williams & Gill, 2017, p. 76). Indigenous knowledge has been identified as a starting point for decolonization; however, the definition of decolonization, up to a certain degree, is unknown due to the diverse Indigenous knowledge that comes from unique Indigenous communities across the world (Sium et al., 2012). In order to decolonize, material, psychological, epistemological and spiritual forms of Indigenous sovereignty must be appreciated and respected (Sium et al., 2012).

### **2.2 Purpose**

The overarching purpose of this study is to explore how educational institutions and workplace readiness programs have decolonized their learning spaces for the delivery of education, training, and programs aimed at increasing the number of Indigenous youths preparing for the workplace or entrepreneurial pursuits. The study involves collaboration with the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre (MNFC), Halifax, Nova Scotia, and the First Light Native Friendship Centre (FLNFC), St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador & Labrador. This study involves three phases each with specific objectives. The first phase aims to understand how academic Research Ethics Boards (REBs) are engaging in decolonization efforts. We have selected this as a pilot study to understand a small section of academia that has emphasized following First Nations protocol regarding ownership, control, acceptance, and possession (OCAP®). The results provided insights for the development of the community survey in phase two of the research. Phase two explores barriers and enablers for urban Indigenous youth to prepare and engage in the workforce. The last phase explored how academic institutions and workplace readiness programs are engaging in decolonization efforts to help engage and prepare Urban Indigenous Youths for the workplace. Our overarching goal was to be able to provide insights into Urban Indigenous Youth needs to help organizations leverage the knowledge to create appropriate and relevant programming to address the youths' needs. For this research, Urban Indigenous youth apply to Indigenous youth who live in Halifax or St John's. They may have grown up in either city or moved from an Indigenous community in rural Nova Scotia, Newfoundland & Labrador, or other

provinces, territories or countries. While the focus of our research is on urban contexts, the rural factors that influence the well-being of Indigenous youth are contributors to issues faced by urban youth.

### **2.3 Objectives of the Study**

The objectives for the three phases of this study are described below:

#### **Phase 1: Exploring decolonization in academia**

- To better understand the definition of decolonization and the various types of decolonization efforts to determine whether academic institutions are engaging in decolonization efforts ultimately. Specifically what progress are they making, and how are they including considerations for urban Indigenous youth?
- To gather insights as to how Research Ethics Boards are applying decolonization practices in their guidelines and practices to create appropriate questions for the urban Indigenous youth survey.

#### **Phase 2: Urban Indigenous youth career goals and workplace preparedness needs**

- To have comprehensive up-to-date information on urban Indigenous youth workforce preparation and participation in Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador and to be able to determine the highest career path participation rates, and education choices.
- To include the workforce impacts from COVID-19 and obtain more robust information by using both quantitative and qualitative methods to gain an understanding of the “story” (e.g. the “why” and “how” of working urban Indigenous youth) instead of simply gathering descriptive data; and
- To gather a list of the programs and services serving urban Indigenous youth workforce readiness and preparation (e.g., peer mentoring, coaching, education, high-school counselling).
- To use the information to inform government, the Mi’kmaw Native Friendship Centre, First Light Native Friendship Centre and other business agencies to guide the future development of policy and programs for working urban Indigenous youth in Atlantic Canada

#### **Phase 3: Expansion of the exploration of decolonization to education and workplace readiness programs**

- Determine how organizations perceive the term decolonization
- To understand how public and private sector organizations have engaged in decolonization practices to help urban Indigenous youth prepare for the workforce.
- To use the information to inform government, the MNFC, FLNFC, other business agencies and private industry on the importance of the decolonization of programming as well as to guide the future development of policy and programs for helping urban Indigenous youth prepare to join the workforce in Atlantic Canada

### **3. Literature Review**

Since the focus of this project is to explore how workplaces and educational institutions have decolonized their organizations, our literature review concentrates on the topic of decolonization, workplace readiness programs and barriers that Indigenous youth face in preparing to enter the workforce. We contend that for Indigenous youth to take advantage of work opportunities and gain meaningful employment, educational institutions, and workplaces will need to be decolonized.

#### **3.1 Understanding Decolonization**

Decolonization is listed as a common goal among many colonized countries; however, the processes required to ‘decolonize’ are not consistently understood (Sium et al., 2012, as cited in Kennedy et al., 2020). Some suggest that decolonization requires resisting and dismantling colonization and revaluing Indigenous knowledge (Nakagawa, 2021; Ritenburg et al., 2014); self-critique, humility and courage (Sium et al., 2012, as cited in Kennedy et al., 2020); identifying stakeholders, information sharing and inclusion of elders (Kennedy et al., 2020); reflecting on whether or not there has been a powershift (Nakagawa, 2021); self-determination and sovereignty from colonial ideologies (education, lineage, language, etc., as commodities) and symbolisms of ‘wealth’ (Nakagawa, 2021); a process of knowledge integration or ‘two-eyed seeing’ (Kennedy et al., 2020; Nakagawa, 2021; Ritenburg et al., 2014) or a combination of one or more of these. However, frameworks for implementing decolonization are limited – especially in the contexts of Indigenous organizations and those working closely with government organizations.

Nakagawa (2021) contends that the process of decolonization must include delegitimizing and dismantling all colonial legacies, structures and ideologies that place Western, Eurocentric ideologies over Indigenous knowledge. However, it is precisely these systems that many Indigenous communities and Indigenous communities heavily rely on.

Beyond achieving political sovereignty, decolonization entails efforts to reclaim cultural identity, economic autonomy, and social structures from the remnants of colonial influence. Newly independent nations faced the challenge of building stable governments, fostering economic development, and addressing the cultural legacy of colonialism. This often involved rediscovering and revitalizing indigenous cultures, languages, and traditions suppressed under colonial rule. Economically, decolonization meant striving to develop self-sufficient economies free from the exploitative trade patterns established by colonial powers. Socially, it required addressing inequalities and divisions entrenched by colonial rule. Decolonization, therefore, represents not just a political shift but a profound and ongoing effort to rebuild nations on their own terms. As we explore urban Indigenous youth entry into the workforce the profound and multifaceted impacts related to economic, social, and cultural dimensions in addition to political influences must be unwoven and reconstructed in a manner that supports Indigenous ways of knowing and doing.

#### **3.2 Preparing Indigenous Youth for the Workforce**

Preparing Indigenous youth for the workforce involves addressing a unique set of challenges and opportunities, encompassing educational, economic, cultural, and health-related issues. These



challenges can hinder their ability to successfully enter and thrive in the job market, but targeted strategies and supportive programs can help overcome these barriers.

### Key Issues

**Educational Barriers:** Indigenous communities often face significant educational hurdles. Limited access to quality education due to geographic isolation, lack of resources, and underfunded schools is a major issue (OECD, 2020). Moreover, curricula often lack cultural relevance, leading to disengagement among Indigenous students who do not see their histories and cultures reflected in their studies (Indspire, 2023).

**Economic Disparities:** Indigenous communities typically experience higher unemployment rates compared to the national average. Job opportunities in remote areas can be scarce, and when jobs are available, they often do not match the skill sets of Indigenous youth, exacerbating the employment gap (NCTR, 2015).

**Cultural Challenges:** Indigenous youth frequently face racism and discrimination in both educational and professional settings (OECD, 2020; Ritenburg et al., 2014). Additionally, balancing traditional practices and values with the demands of the modern workforce can be challenging, leading to a potential loss of cultural identity (Deer & Heringer, 2023).

**Health and Well-being:** Indigenous youth often experience higher rates of mental health issues, including depression and substance abuse, which can hinder their educational and career prospects (Indspire, 2023). Poor health outcomes and limited access to healthcare further affect their ability to work and learn effectively (NCTR, 2015).

### Strategies for Workforce Preparation

**Education and Training Programs:** Integrating Indigenous culture, languages, and histories into the educational curriculum can increase engagement and relevance (Deer & Heringer, 2023). Providing vocational training and apprenticeships that align with local job markets and economic opportunities can also be beneficial (OECD, 2020).

**Mentorship and Support Networks:** Establishing mentorship programs that connect Indigenous youth with role models and professionals in their desired fields can provide valuable guidance and support (NIYEC, n.d.). Offering academic and career counseling, mental health services, and substance abuse support tailored to Indigenous youth can further enhance their readiness for the workforce (CCDF, n.d.).

**Community and Economic Development:** Investing in local economies through initiatives that create job opportunities within Indigenous communities, such as community-owned businesses and sustainable economic development projects, can provide long-term benefits. Developing partnerships between educational institutions, Indigenous communities, and industries can create pathways for Indigenous youth into the workforce (NCTR, 2015; Australian Unity, n.d.).

**Policy and Advocacy:** Advocating for policies that increase funding for Indigenous education and workforce programs is crucial. Implementing and enforcing anti-discrimination policies in educational and workplace settings can help create more inclusive environments for Indigenous youth (OECD, 2020).

**Health and Wellness Programs:** Incorporating traditional healing practices and holistic approaches to health and wellness in programs targeting Indigenous youth can address mental health and well-being. Improving access to healthcare services, particularly in remote Indigenous communities, is also essential.

## Successful Programs and Initiatives

**Indspire** (Canada) provides scholarships, bursaries, and educational resources to Indigenous students across Canada, focusing on bridging the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous educational outcomes (Indspire, n.d.).

**National Indigenous Youth Education Coalition** (Australia), focuses on improving educational outcomes for Indigenous youth through mentorship, leadership programs, and culturally relevant educational initiatives (NIYEC, n.d.).

**Tindale Foundation** (Australia), offers scholarships, mentoring, and educational support to Indigenous students to help them succeed in higher education and beyond (Tindall Foundation, n.d.).

**American Indian Science and Engineering Society** (AISES) (USA), provides support, mentorship, and networking opportunities for Indigenous students in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) fields (AISES, n.d.).

**Employment and Social Development Canada** (ESDC) through its Indigenous Skills and Employment Training (ISET) Program is designed to help Indigenous people improve their skills and find employment.

**The Ulnooweg Education Centre** (Nova Scotia), facilitates collaborative research, development, and delivery of educational programs and initiatives in science and innovation, agriculture, and financial literacy throughout the four Atlantic Provinces.

**Joint Economic Development Initiative** (JEDI) (New Brunswick), works with partners to foster Indigenous economic development in New Brunswick. JEDI provides a variety of programs and services focused on supporting Indigenous entrepreneurship; community economic development; workforce development; and partnerships with the public and private sector.

By addressing these issues through targeted strategies and supportive programs, Indigenous youth can be better prepared for successful careers, enabling them to contribute positively to their communities and the broader workforce. Enhanced educational support, workplace inclusion initiatives, and strong mentorship networks are key to improving employment outcomes for Indigenous youth.

### 3.3 Educational Attainment and Workforce Participation

Based on the 2021 census data, the post-secondary completion rate among the Indigenous population was 40.3%, while the rate among the non-Indigenous population was 17.6 percentage points higher at 57.9% (Statistics Canada, 2021). In the United States, data from the 2018 National Center for Education Statistics showed that American Indian/Alaska Native students had a lower high school graduation rate (72%) compared to the national average (85%) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). In Australia, the 2016 Census showed that the employment rate for Indigenous Australians aged 20-24 living in major cities was 52.8%, compared to 69.9% for non-Indigenous Australians in the same age group (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016).

## Barriers and Challenges

**Discrimination:** A 2020 report from the Australian Human Rights Commission found that 38% of Indigenous Australians had experienced discrimination in the workplace in the past year, which can be a significant barrier to employment (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2020).

**Skill Mismatches:** Many Indigenous youth face challenges in finding jobs that match their skills and qualifications, particularly in urban areas where competition can be higher and certain sectors may be more predominant (FSC, 2022).

### Programs and Initiatives

#### **Government and Community Programs:**

In Canada, the Urban Aboriginal Strategy aims to improve socio-economic opportunities for Indigenous people living in urban centers through programs focusing on education, employment, and economic development (CIRNAC, n.d.). In Australia, the Indigenous Employment Program provides funding for training, employment, and mentoring programs specifically targeting urban Indigenous Australians (NIAA, n.d.).

#### **Industry Partnerships**

Programs such as the Career Trackers Indigenous Internship Program in Australia and the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Employment Strategy by companies like TD Bank in Canada are examples of successful partnerships providing pathways for Indigenous youth into the workforce (Australian Unity, n.d.).

### Recommendations for Improvement

The extant literature highlights four main areas for improvement to support Indigenous youth workforce preparation activities.

**Enhanced Educational Support:** Increase funding for education programs that are culturally relevant and provide targeted support for Indigenous students in urban areas.

**Workplace Inclusion Initiatives:** Develop and implement workplace inclusion policies to reduce discrimination and create supportive environments for Indigenous employees.

**Mentorship and Career Development:** Expand mentorship programs and career development initiatives that connect Indigenous youth with industry professionals and role models.

**Policy and Advocacy:** Advocate for policies that address systemic barriers to employment for Indigenous youth and promote equitable access to job opportunities.

## 3.4 The Path Forward

Urban Indigenous youth face unique challenges in entering the workforce, but with targeted support and initiatives, these barriers can be reduced. Enhancing educational opportunities, fostering inclusive workplaces, and developing strong mentorship networks are key strategies to improve employment outcomes for this population. Indigenous youth face a variety of struggles when entering the workforce. These challenges can stem from educational, economic, cultural, and social factors. Here are some key struggles:

### Educational Barriers

**Lower Educational Attainment:** Indigenous youth often have lower high school and post-secondary graduation rates compared to non-Indigenous peers, limiting their qualifications for many jobs (Statistics Canada, 2016).

**Access to Quality Education:** Schools in Indigenous communities, especially in rural and remote areas, may lack resources and experienced teachers, resulting in lower educational outcomes (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016).

**Cultural Relevance:** Education systems that do not incorporate Indigenous cultures, languages, and perspectives can lead to disengagement and lower academic performance among Indigenous students (Deer & Heringer, 2023).

### **Economic Disparities**

**High Unemployment Rates:** Indigenous communities generally experience higher unemployment rates, which can persist into urban settings and across generations (NCTR, 2015).

**Limited Job Opportunities:** Economic opportunities can be limited in both urban and rural Indigenous communities, with fewer employers and industries actively recruiting Indigenous workers (OECD, 2020; NCTR, 2015).

### **Cultural Challenges**

**Racism and Discrimination:** Indigenous youth often face systemic racism and discrimination in hiring processes, workplaces, and within career progression, which can discourage them from pursuing certain career paths (OECD, 2020; Ritenburg et al., 2014).

**Balancing Cultural Identity:** Navigating the balance between maintaining cultural identity and assimilating into mainstream work environments can be challenging (Deer & Heringer, 2023). This can include issues like cultural dress, traditional practices, and communication styles.

### **Social and Psychological Barriers**

**Mental Health Issues:** Indigenous youth experience higher rates of mental health issues, including depression, anxiety, and substance abuse, which can impact their ability to obtain and retain employment (NCTR, 2015).

**Lack of Role Models:** A shortage of Indigenous role models and mentors in many industries can make it difficult for Indigenous youth to envision and pursue successful career paths (Indspire, 2023).

### **Geographic Isolation**

**Urban-Rural Divide:** Indigenous youth from remote or rural areas who move to urban centers for work face additional challenges such as adapting to new environments, finding affordable housing, and overcoming social isolation (Statistics Canada, 2017).

**Transportation Issues:** Limited access to reliable transportation can hinder job search efforts and attendance at work or training programs (Perkins, 2021).

### **Skills Mismatch**

**Inadequate Training:** There may be a gap between the skills Indigenous youth possess and the skills required by employers (Perkins, 2017). This can be due to differences in educational focus, lack of access to vocational training, and fewer opportunities for hands-on experience.

**Digital Divide:** Limited access to technology and the internet in some Indigenous communities can result in lower digital literacy, which is increasingly important in many job markets (Perkins, 2021).

## Addressing These Challenges

**Improving Education:** Develop and fund programs that provide culturally relevant education and support for Indigenous students. Increase access to scholarships and bursaries for post-secondary education.

**Economic Development:** Support economic development initiatives within Indigenous communities to create more local job opportunities. Encourage partnerships between industries and Indigenous communities to facilitate job training and placement.

**Workplace Inclusivity:** Implement anti-discrimination policies and promote diversity and inclusion training in workplaces. Create mentorship programs that connect Indigenous youth with successful professionals in their fields of interest.

**Mental Health Support:** Provide mental health resources and support tailored to the needs of Indigenous youth. Encourage holistic approaches that incorporate traditional healing practices.

**Role Models and Mentors:** Promote visibility of Indigenous professionals and leaders in various industries to inspire and guide youth. Establish mentorship programs that provide guidance and support.

**Technology and Training:** Increase access to technology and digital literacy programs in Indigenous communities. Provide vocational training and apprenticeships aligned with market needs.

By addressing these struggles with targeted strategies and support systems, the transition of Indigenous youth into the workforce can be made more successful and equitable (NCTR, 2015; Perkins, 2021). Programs that help youth prepare for the workforce are structured initiatives designed to equip young people with the skills, knowledge, and experiences necessary to succeed in the job market. These programs often include a combination of education, practical training, mentorship, and real-world work experience to ensure that participants are ready to meet the demands of various careers.

## Examples of Workforce Preparation Programs

**Internships:** Short-term, often unpaid positions within a company that provide hands-on experience in a particular field.

**Apprenticeships:** Paid positions that combine on-the-job training with classroom instruction, typically lasting several years and leading to certification in a skilled trade.

**Career and Technical Education (CTE):** Programs offered by high schools and vocational schools that provide students with practical skills in fields like healthcare, information technology, and manufacturing.

**Job Corps:** A federally funded program in the United States that offers free education and vocational training to young people ages 16 to 24.

**Youth Employment Programs:** Community-based programs that provide job placement, work readiness training, and career counselling to young people. Examples include the YMCA Youth Employment Services and local government-sponsored summer job programs.

**Mentorship Programs:** Initiatives that connect young people with experienced professionals who provide guidance, advice, and support

The focus of this study is to explore the current needs and opportunities for urban Indigenous youth to engage in the workforce. In section four, we explain the methodology taken to engage urban Indigenous youth and organizations to determine the gaps and recommendations to create

a decolonized workforce readiness approach for urban Indigenous youth in Halifax, Nova Scotia and St John’s, Newfoundland and Labrador.

## 4. Methodology

This research project used a mixed methods approach to obtain more robust information using both quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data was derived from an online/telephone survey. To supplement the data from the survey, we conducted semi-structured interviews with various community organizations that provide work readiness services. This mixed methodology approach enabled us to identify the perspectives of Indigenous youth regarding their work readiness along with the perspectives of the organizations that facilitate work readiness.

Throughout this project, we have included a wide array of individuals and organizations in Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador to provide a comprehensive picture of decolonization and work readiness for Indigenous youth. As depicted in Table 1, we have engaged a total of 684 individuals and institutions.

Table 1: Project Participants

Participant Description	Indigenous	General Population	Institution	Total
Survey General Population, Newfoundland and Labrador		400		400
Survey General Population, Nova Scotia		244		244
Survey Indigenous Newfoundland and Labrador (subset of 400)	141			
Survey Indigenous Nova Scotia (subset of 244)	106			
Organization Interviews – Newfoundland and Labrador		6		6
Organization Interviews – Nova Scotia		16		16
Academic Institutions re IREB			10	10
Post-Secondary Institutions re Indigenous Youth Work Readiness			8	8
Total	247	666	18	684

Note: the 141 and 106 Indigenous respondents for Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia are a subset of the general population of 400 and 244 respectively for Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia

The methodology for each of the three phases of the study is described in more detail in the following sections.

### 4.1 Phase 1: Exploring decolonization in academic research ethics boards (pilot).

The methodology for Phase 1 (exploring decolonization in academic research ethics boards) was comprised of a documentary review of the websites of 10 academic institutions: five in Nova Scotia, two in Newfoundland and Labrador and three in Western Canada for comparison purposes.

## **4.2 Phase 2: Urban Indigenous youth career goals and workplace preparedness needs**

The methodology for Phase 2 is comprised of online and telephone surveys. The two organizations Mi'kmaq Native Friendship Centre, Halifax and the First Light Native Friendship Centre, St. John's took a slightly different approach to data collection to meet their specific needs. These differing methodologies did not have a negative impact on the validity of the findings for each province. However, it creates challenges in terms of conducting a comparative analysis. The methodologies for each province are described in the sections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2.

### **4.2.1 First Light Native Friendship Centre (St. John's, NL)**

The methodology for phase 2 for St. John's was comprised of an online/telephone survey. The Newfoundland and Labrador partner for this study, First Light Native Friendship Centre (FLNFC) requested that a survey be conducted with Indigenous youth rather than the open forum that was initially planned. FLNFC was keen to gather information from the population at large as well as from the Indigenous sector. This information enabled them to compare the needs of both youth populations to address the research questions. The survey for St. John's was completed by the MQO Research firm that was selected by the FLNFC.

The MQO survey was comprised of online and telephone surveys. The survey was collected in English. The general population sample size was 400 of which 141 were from the Indigenous population. The telephone survey was conducted between April 22 and May 21, 2023, using listed landline and random digital dial (RDD) cell samples as well as a list of likely Indigenous-identifying people provided by First Light. The online survey was distributed to a list of Indigenous people between June 20-29, 2023. The survey took approximately 5 minutes to complete.

The Indigenous component of the sample was largely provided by First Light and was comprised of 65 names of Indigenous youth, that were known through their programs and services. MQO added this list of phone numbers to their regular sample, to help boost the number of Indigenous youths in the sample.

### **4.2.2 Mi'kmaq Native Friendship Centre, (Halifax, NS)**

The survey was conducted by the MNFC through its social media accounts and distributed through the researchers' contact networks. The survey was comprised of online and telephone surveys. The survey was collected in English. The general population sample size was 244 of which 106 were from the Indigenous population. The Qualtrics online survey was conducted between August 2023 and March 2024 and distributed as a link and a QR code for easy access. The survey took approximately 5 minutes to complete.

## **4.3 Education and Workplace Readiness Programs**

The methodologies for Phase 3 also differed slightly in both jurisdictions to reflect the specific needs of each organization as described in Sections 4.3.1 and 4.3.2.

### **4.3.1 Interview Methodology (St. John's, NL)**

The First Light Native Friendship Centre sent out emails to various community organizations that assisted individuals in preparing for the workforce to introduce project leads Dr. Heidi Weigand and Dr. Daphne Rixon. While the six organizations that interact with First Light clients appears to be small, this reflects the reality in St. John's that a small number of organizations



provide services and/or employment to Indigenous youth. First Light was interested in gaining information from only those organizations that interacted with Indigenous youth. After First Light confirmed the willingness of the organizations to participate, Dr. Rixon then followed up to schedule interviews. The interviews ranged from 30 – 60 minutes via Zoom and were recorded. The recordings were transcribed using Otter AI software. The transcripts were organized by question and coded according to key themes. Interviews were conducted with the organizations depicted in Table 3.

Table 3: Organizations Interviewed – Newfoundland and Labrador and Labrador

Organizations Interviewed	Abbreviation
Marine Atlantic	MA
Community Employment Collaboration	CEC
Newfoundland and Labrador & Labrador Workforce Innovation Centre	NLWIC
Murphy Centre	MC
Stella’s Circle	SC
Community Foundation of Newfoundland and Labrador & Labrador	CFNL

#### 4.3.2 Interview Methodology (Halifax, NS)

In Nova Scotia, the Mi’kmaw Native Friendship Centre (MNFC) provided contact names and emails to Dr. Heidi Weigand for various community organizations that attend a Career Job Fair held at the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre (MNFC). The project team then followed up to schedule an interview. The interviews ranged from 30 – 60 minutes via Zoom and were recorded. The recordings were transcribed using Otter AI software. The transcripts were organized by question and coded according to key topics. Interviews were conducted with the organizations listed in Table 4.

Table 4: Organizations Interviewed – Nova Scotia

Organizations Interviewed	Abbreviation
Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre	MNFC
Museum of Natural History	MNH
Environment and Climate Change Canada	ECCC
Healing our Nations	HON
Parks Canada	PC
Laborers’ International Union of North America	LIUNA
Public Service Commission of Canada	PSCC
Bird Construction	BC
Clean Foundation	CF
Royal Canadian Mounted Police	RCMP
Clearwater Seafoods	CS
Halifax Fire Department	HFD
Ulnooweg Education Centre	UEC
Department of Fisheries and Oceans	DFO



Canadian College of Massage & Hydrotherapy	CCMH
Izaak Walton Killam Hospital for Children	IWK

Having outlined the various methodologies for each phase of the study, the next sections provide the findings from Phase 1 – Exploring Decolonization in Academia.

## 5. Phase 1: Exploring Decolonization in Academia.

### 5.1 Ethics Boards Overview

**Purpose:** We have chosen to review university ethics boards in phase one of our research to determine what decolonization practices are being explored and implemented.

**University Ethics Boards:** Universities are committed to promoting the responsible conduct of research involving humans and communities that values human dignity through the application of the ethical principles of respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice. Each university that is a signatory to the Agreement on the Administration of Agency Grants and Awards by Research Institutions must comply with the agreement. With respect to research involving humans, the primary policy document is the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans. As an example, Dalhousie University<sup>1</sup> has a policy to support the conduct of ethical and respectful research, by:

1. Ensuring that all individuals conducting research involving humans under the University’s auspices or jurisdiction are doing so with appropriate ethical oversight by a research ethics board and consistent with the principles and guidance of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans;
2. Establishing an independent ethics review structure;
3. Describing the mandate, authority and responsibilities of researchers, the research ethics boards, and the University in ensuring that research involving humans is ethically acceptable.

### Truth and Reconciliation Call to Action 65<sup>2</sup>

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada released its report *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future*, which identified 94 Calls to Action, and highlighted the important role of research to advance the understanding of reconciliation. Call to Action 65 specifically called for the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) to establish a national research program to advance the understanding of reconciliation. SSHRC further engaged with Indigenous organizations to help guide its approach in responding to the call. In 2018, the SSHRC, on behalf of the Canada Research Coordinating Committee, led the co-development of a strategic plan to identify new ways of doing research by and with Indigenous communities, as part of the *Strengthening Indigenous Research Capacity Initiative*.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dal.ca/dept/research-services/responsible-conduct-/research-ethics-.html>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/society-societe/community-communitite/indigenous\\_research-recherche\\_autochtone/index-eng.aspx](https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/society-societe/community-communitite/indigenous_research-recherche_autochtone/index-eng.aspx)

The strategic plan, *Setting New Directions to Support Indigenous Research and Research Training in Canada*, was launched in 2020 and identifies four strategic directions, objectives and mechanisms to support Indigenous research and training:

1. Building relationships with First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples
2. Supporting research priorities of Indigenous Peoples
3. Creating greater funding accessibility to granting agency programs
4. Championing Indigenous leadership, self-determination and capacity-building in research

A new chapter was called the Tri-council Policy Statement (TCPS) 2 (2022) – *Chapter 9: Research involving the First Nations, Inuit, and Metis Peoples of Canada*. This chapter on research involving Indigenous peoples in Canada marks a step toward establishing an ethical space for dialogue on common interests and points of difference between researchers and Indigenous communities engaged in research. This Policy provides guidance for research involving humans. Researchers and research ethics boards (REBs) are advised to consult reference documents that apply to their research undertakings.

We have three phases in our research. The initial phase, *Exploring decolonization in academia* provides an opportunity to explore how ten universities across Canada have chosen to move towards decolonizing the research ethics process. The findings from phase one have helped to tailor the questions for phase two (urban Indigenous youth career goals and workplace preparedness needs), and phase three (expansion of the exploration of decolonization to education and workplace readiness programs.) We present our findings from phase one.

Canadian universities have been implementing a variety of programs and initiatives aimed at supporting Indigenous youth. These include mentorship programs, academic support services, cultural programming, and financial assistance. For example, some universities offer Indigenous student centres and lounges, which provide a safe and supportive space for Indigenous youth to connect with their culture and community. Others offer tutoring and academic support services that are specifically tailored to the needs of Indigenous students. Financial assistance, such as scholarships and bursaries, are also available to help Indigenous youth pursue their education. In terms of ethics processes, universities are working to decolonize their research practices by ensuring that Indigenous individuals are involved in the research process from the outset. This includes engaging in community-based research that is guided by Indigenous knowledge and perspectives and ensuring that research is conducted in a culturally sensitive and respectful manner. Universities are also implementing protocols for the use of Indigenous knowledge in research, including guidelines for obtaining informed consent and protocols for data ownership and dissemination.

We are specifically looking at each university's commitment to Indigenous research protocols as a demonstration of accountability to the decolonization process. For example, in Mi'kma'ki, the Mi'kmaq Ethics Watch<sup>3</sup> (MEW) has oversight for research conducted with Mi'kmaq Peoples. However, the composition of Indigenous identities in urban contexts, for example, Halifax have many different Indigenous nations, cultures, and languages represented. With the emphasis on

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cbu.ca/indigenous-initiatives/mikmaw-ethics-watch/>

change through the TCPS-2, we explore how university research ethics boards are establishing Indigenous Research Ethics Protocols to guide their researchers that move beyond the boundaries of one nation's ethics protocols.

## **5.2 Decolonization Definition**

In the context of universities, decolonization involves recognizing and addressing the ways in which the university system has historically perpetuated colonial power dynamics, and working to create a more inclusive, equitable, and respectful learning environment that reflects Indigenous knowledge and perspectives. This can involve changes to curriculum and research practices, as well as addressing issues related to access and inclusion for Indigenous students, faculty, and staff.

Some specific examples of how Canadian universities are defining decolonization include:

- The University of British Columbia defines decolonization as "a process of restoring relationships, making things right, and creating conditions for Indigenous peoples to thrive."<sup>4</sup>
- The University of Victoria defines decolonization as " Decolonization is about practices and/or thinking that supports individual and collective determination as a starting point for this work. To decolonize is to recognize that current Western paradigms should not automatically hold privilege; Indigenous ways of thought are equal in value. Decolonization work includes determining how these alternate forms of scholarship are evaluated."<sup>5</sup>

## **5.3 Post-Secondary Institutions with Indigenous Research Ethics Boards**

Currently, the post-secondary institutions in Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador have practices in place to address Indigenous research projects. However, we would like to profile three Canadian Universities that have established an Indigenous REB or similar implementation: York University, the University of British Columbia, and the University of Victoria.

### **5.3.1 York University**

York University established the first fully autonomous Indigenous Research Ethics Board (IREB) in Canada in 2024 (York University, 2023a). It was created in response to Indigenous leaders' identified need for Indigenous-specific knowledge and leadership within research and support to ensure appropriate sensitivity to cultural and community rights. IREB goals are to Indigenize research, provide Indigenous peoples with greater input to research projects and reflect the relationships that Indigenous communities want with universities (York University, n.d.). IREB guidelines were developed by a group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers, including graduate students (York University, n.d.). The IREB Structure/Governance includes five University faculty members, one undergraduate and graduate student, three external elders/knowledge keepers, and three non-University affiliated Indigenous community representatives (York University, n.d.).

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<sup>4</sup> [https://guides.library.ubc.ca/antiracism/decolonization\\_anti-racism](https://guides.library.ubc.ca/antiracism/decolonization_anti-racism)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.uvic.ca/humanities/about/indigenization-and-decolonization/index.php>

### **5.3.2 University of British Columbia (UBC)**

UBC has developed a Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB). Work is ongoing on the UBC Indigenous Strategic Plan and the BC Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (UBC, n.d.). BREB uses frameworks and guidance from OCAP®, the BC Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA), the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, trauma-informed research guidelines, and TCPS2\* Chapter 9 to guide their reviews (UBC, n.d.). It is based on a lens of cultural safety, humility, and learning; acknowledges colonialism and oppression of Indigenous cultures by post-secondary research institutes; and is committed to facilitating Indigenous-led and partnered research (UBC, n.d.). The BREB process requires meaningful collaboration and engagement before finalizing research design and protocols. Researchers must explain the research context, costs and benefits for the community including appropriate collaboration or engagement and evidence of support from an appropriate Indigenous partner representative (UBC, n.d.).

### **5.3.3 University of Victoria (UVIC)**

Work is ongoing to create a BC Indigenous Community Research Ethics Board (BCICREB). They encourage Research Ethics Boards to involve local Indigenous peoples in reviewing research applications. The BCICREB governance model upholds Indigenous values of egalitarian decision-making and each council member has taken a pledge to be accountable to the Indigenous peoples of BC (UVic, n.d.).

The findings from the exploration of university research ethics boards provide the foundation for the survey to engage organizations in phase 3 of our study to understand how they have decolonized workforce readiness programs to address the needs of urban Indigenous youth.

#### **Summary of findings.**

In the context of universities, decolonization involves recognizing and addressing how the university system has historically perpetuated colonial power dynamics, and working to create a more inclusive, equitable, and respectful learning environment that reflects Indigenous knowledge and perspectives.

- York IREB has a fully established Indigenous Research Ethics Board inside its university. The key differentiator is that York has invested in internal change and not placed the burden on Indigenous organizations to review the research applications. This is built collaboratively with Indigenous advocates.
- UBC BREB requires the specification of the research costs for the Indigenous community or organization which addresses the burden and the need for compensation in the form of grants or other resources to conduct research collaboratively.
- UVIC IREB encourages Research Ethics Boards to involve local Indigenous peoples in reviewing research applications, and the model upholds Indigenous values of egalitarian decision-making

The next sections provide the results from Phase 2 which is comprised of surveys conducted in Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia to understand the urban Indigenous youth needs when preparing to join the workforce.

## 6. Phase 2: Survey Results

### 6.1 Newfoundland and Labrador & Labrador

#### 6.1.1 Demographic Information

There was a total of 400 survey respondents (including telephone and online). Of the 400 respondents, 141 identified as Indigenous. The following tables (5 – 10) provide a demographic overview of the 400 respondents in comparison to the subset of 141 Indigenous respondents. As noted in the methodology section, the survey for St. John’s was conducted by the MQO Research firm. The results provided in this section rely solely on the work of MQO and have not been independently verified by the research team for this project.

Table 5: Respondent Demographic Details: General Population Compared to Indigenous Population

	General Population	Indigenous
Female	52%	59%
Male	48%	40%
Indigenous	16%	N/A
Visible Minority	10%	39%
2SLGTBQ	5%	15%

Note: Prefer not to answer/unsure responses have been excluded

As depicted in Table 5, 39% of Indigenous respondents identified as a visible minority compared to 10% for the general population. It is also interesting to note that only 5% of the general population identified as 2SLGTBQ compared to 15% for the Indigenous population.

Table 6: Respondent Age Details: General Population compared to Indigenous Population

Age Range	General Population	Indigenous
18 - 24	7%	15%
25 – 34	15%	24%
35 – 44	15%	9%
45 – 54	19%	18%
55 – 64	20%	19%
65 and older	23%	14%

Note: Prefer not to answer/unsure responses have been excluded

Table 6 shows that 22% of the general population respondents are in the 18 – 34 age range, compared to 39% for the Indigenous respondents.

Table 7: Respondent Region Details: General Population compared to Indigenous Population

Region	General Population	Indigenous
St. John's	42%	34%
Other Eastern NL	22%	7%
Central NL	14%	6%
Corner Brook	0%	5%
Other Western/Northern NL	12%	13%
Labrador	5%	35%

Note: Prefer not to answer/unsure responses have been excluded

As illustrated in Table 7, only 5% of the general population was from Labrador versus 35% for the Indigenous population.

Table 8: Respondent Education Details: General Population compared to Indigenous Population

Education	General Population	Indigenous
High school or less	27%	37%
College diploma/certificate	39%	36%
Undergraduate degree	19%	16%
Masters or graduate degree	13%	10%
Doctoral degree	1%	0%

Note: Prefer not to answer/unsure responses have been excluded

According to Table 8, 37% of Indigenous respondents had an educational level of high school or less compared to 27% for the general population. This is attributed to fewer Indigenous respondents having attained higher levels of education.

Table 9: Respondent Employment Details: General Population compared to Indigenous Population

Employment Status	General Population	Indigenous
Full-time	52%	54%
Part-time	10%	6%
Part-time, seeking full-time	5%	7%
Unemployed, seeking job	5%	9%
Unemployed, not seeking job	28%	24%

Note: Prefer not to answer/unsure responses have been excluded

As depicted in Table 9, the employment status of Indigenous respondents was relatively similar to the general population.

Table 10: Respondent Industry Sector Details: General Population compared to Indigenous Population (for those employed or seeking work)

Industrial Sector	General Population	Indigenous
Retail Trade	10%	7%
Health care and Social Assistance	9%	11%
Educational Services	7%	6%
Public Administration	6%	9%
Construction	6%	9%
Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	6%	5%
Nursing and residential care services	6%	2%
Finance and Insurance	5%	3%
Accommodation and Food Services	4%	9%
Other Services (except Public Administration)	4%	5%
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	3%	6%
Home health care services	3%	2%
Information	3%	0%
Utilities	2%	0%
Transportation and warehousing	2%	0%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	0%	4%
Fishing	0%	2%
Other	25%	22%

Note: Prefer not to answer/unsure responses have been excluded; sectors with 1% or fewer respondents are reported as other

The industrial sector analyses in Table 10 show that Indigenous respondents were not employed in the information, utilities or transportation sectors, while the general population respondents were not employed in the arts, entertainment, recreation and fishing sectors.

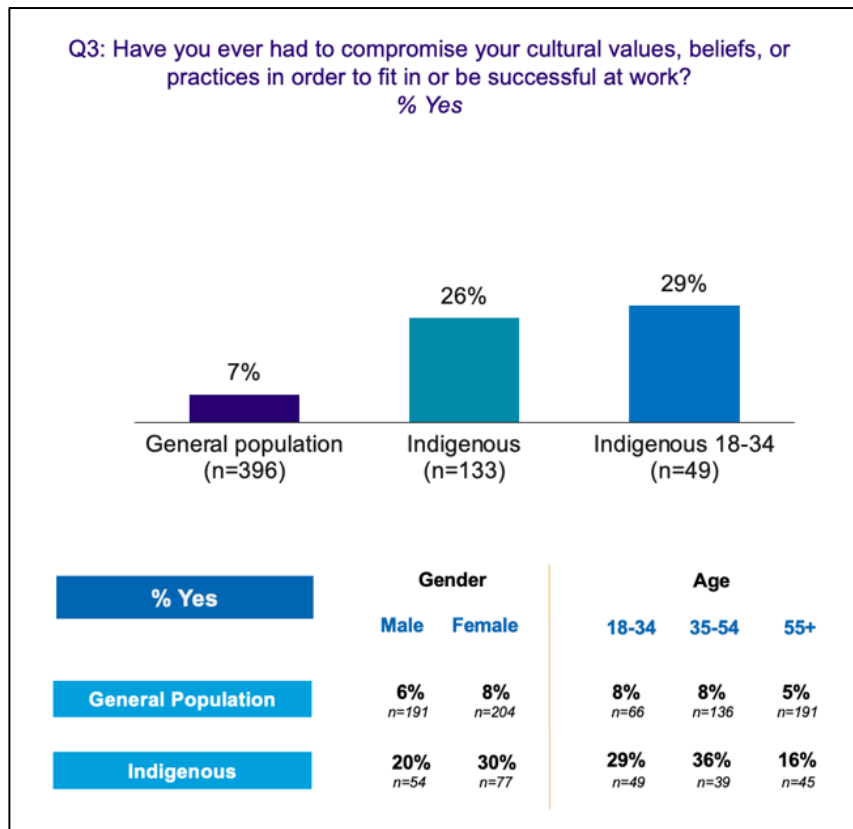
The remaining sections provide an overview of the responses to the interview questions on cultural compromise, employment program support, workplace knowledge about Indigenous culture, recognition of qualifications, professional development opportunities, and employer engagement with truth and reconciliation.

### 6.1.2 Cultural Compromise

*Survey question:* Have you ever had to compromise your cultural values, beliefs, or practices in order to fit in or be successful at work?

Indigenous respondents exhibited a significantly higher incidence of compromising their cultural values, beliefs, or practices at work compared to the general population. In fact, 26% of respondents who identified as Indigenous have experienced cultural compromise for work success which was significantly higher compared to the general population. Cultural compromise varied across different age groups within the

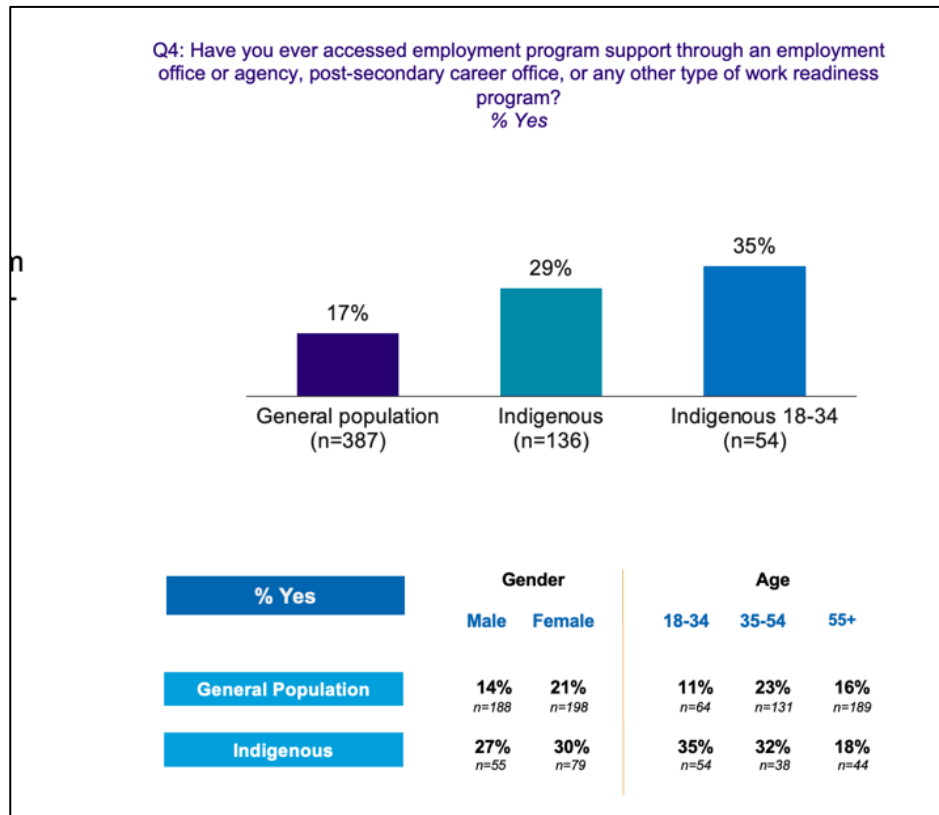
Indigenous community, with adults aged 18-34 (29%) and 35-54 (36%) being more likely to report cultural compromise than the oldest age group (55+: 16%).





### 6.1.3 Employment Program Support

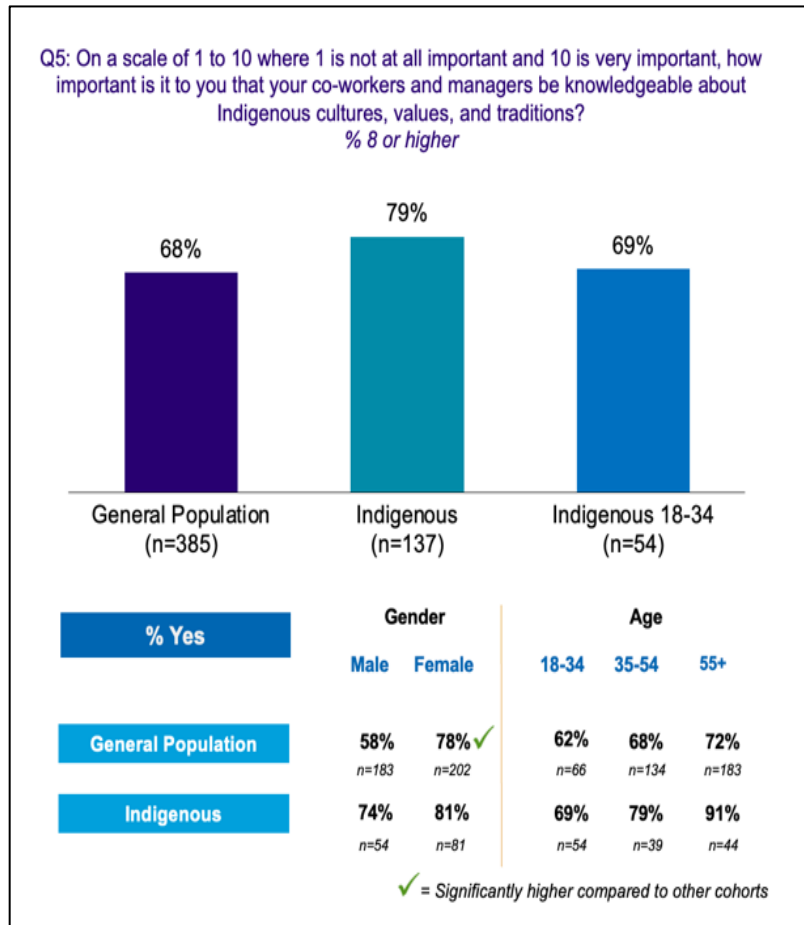
*Survey question:* Have you ever accessed employment program support through an employment office or agency, post-secondary career office, or any other type of work readiness program? Access to employment program supports was slightly higher among Indigenous respondents compared to the general population. For example, just under 29% of Indigenous respondents have accessed employment program support (35% among Indigenous respondents 18-34), which is significantly higher than the general population (17%). The survey found that females (21%) were more likely than males (14%) to access employment program support. In comparison, a higher level of both male and female Indigenous respondents (27% and 30% respectively) reported accessing employment support.



### 6.1.4 Importance of Workplace Knowledge About Indigenous Cultures

*Survey question:* On a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 is not all important and 10 is very important, how important is it to you that your co-workers and managers be knowledgeable about Indigenous cultures, values and traditions?

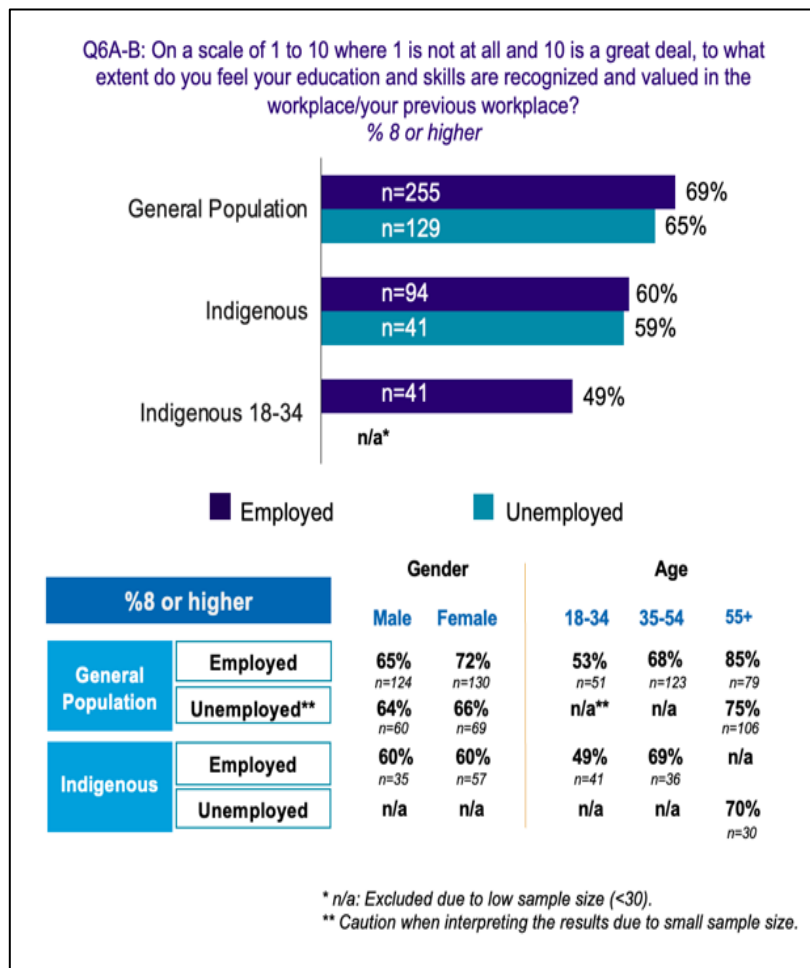
A majority of respondents from across demographic groups feel it's important that co-workers and managers are knowledgeable about Indigenous cultures, values, and traditions. While the importance of workplace knowledge about Indigenous cultures, values, and traditions was highest among Indigenous respondents (79% rating 8 or higher), two-thirds (68%) of the general population also indicated it was important to them personally. Overall, younger Indigenous adults aged 18-34 were marginally less likely to value workplace knowledge about Indigenous cultures compared to other age groups.



### 6.1.5 Recognition of Qualifications at Work

*Survey question:* On a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 is not at all and 10 is a great deal, to what extent do you feel your education and skills are recognized and valued in the workplace/your previous workplace?

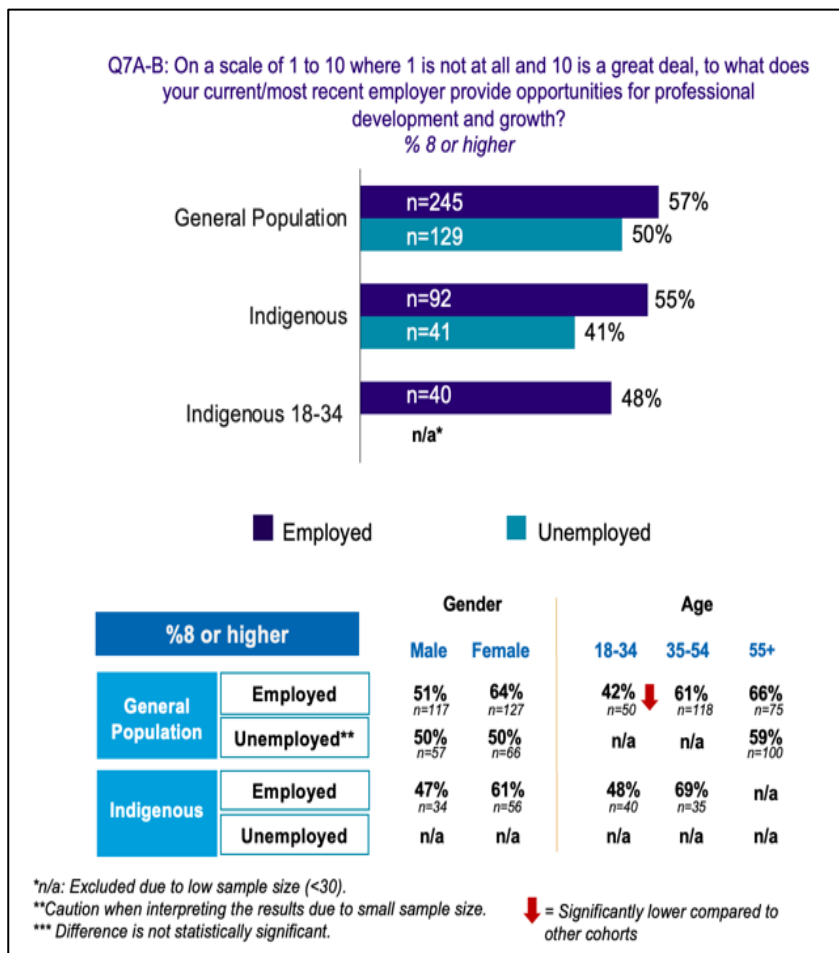
Around two-thirds of all respondents felt that their education and skills are highly recognized and valued in the workplace. This was marginally lower among Indigenous respondents, particularly those in the 18-34 age range. In general, two-thirds of the general population rated the extent to which their education and skills were recognized or valued at their current or previous workplace as an 8 or higher. However, this number dropped to six-in-ten among both employed and unemployed Indigenous respondents and just 49% for Indigenous adults aged 18-34.



### 6.1.6 Professional Development Opportunities

*Survey question:* On a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 is not at all and 10 is a great deal, to what extent does our current/most recent employer provide opportunities for professional development and growth?

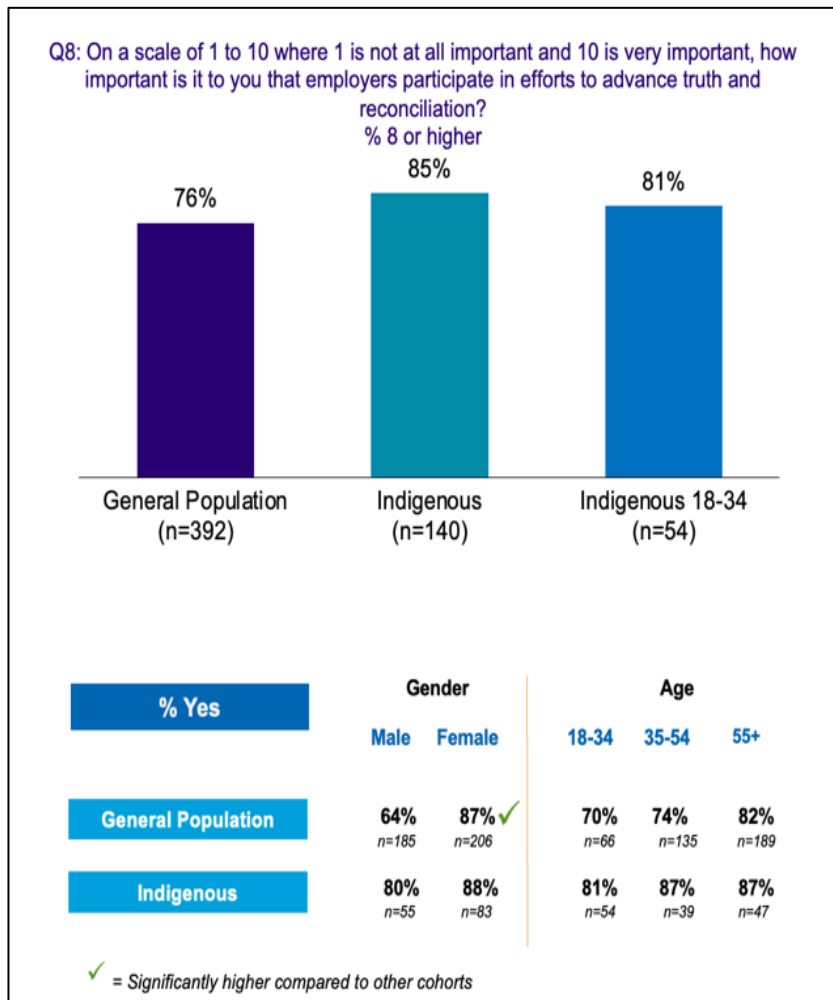
Approximately one-half of all respondents felt that their current or most recent employer provided significant opportunities for professional development and growth. In general, one-half of the general population rated the extent to which their current or previous workplace provided opportunities for professional development and growth as an 8 or higher (slightly lower among those who were unemployed). Meanwhile, this number was relatively consistent for Indigenous respondents who were currently employed but dropped to 41% among those that were unemployed (referencing their most recent employer). This number fell to 48% among Indigenous adults 18-34 (currently employed). It should be noted that the difference is not statistically significant.



### 6.1.7 Employer Engagement: Truth and Reconciliation

*Survey question:* On a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 is not at all important and 10 is very important, how important is it to you that employers participate in efforts to advance truth and reconciliation?

Employers’ participation in truth and reconciliation is highly important to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Indeed, the vast majority of Indigenous individuals (85%) placed a very high level of importance (rating 8 or higher) on employers’ participation in truth and reconciliation. Moreover, 76% of the general population also rated the important of employers’ participation in truth and reconciliation as an 8 or higher. It is interesting to note that females in the general population also rated the importance higher than males (87% vs. 64%). In comparison 88% of Indigenous females compared to 80% of Indigenous males believed it was important for employers to participate in truth and reconciliation.



## 6.2 Phase 2: Survey Results – Nova Scotia

### 6.2.1 Demographic Information

There was a total of 244 survey respondents (including telephone and online). Of the 244 respondents, 106 identified as Indigenous. The following tables (11 – 16) provide a demographic overview of the 244 respondents in comparison to the subset of 141 Indigenous respondents.

Table 11: Respondent Demographic Details: General Population compared to Indigenous Population

	General Population	Indigenous
Female	42%	63%
Male	57%	37%
Indigenous	46%	N/A
Non-binary	1%	Data not available
Visible Minority	33%	Data not available
2SLGBTBQ	20%	Data not available

Note: Prefer not to answer/unsure responses have been excluded

As depicted in Table 11, 63% of Indigenous respondents were female compared to 42% for the general population. In contrast, 37% of the Indigenous respondents were male compared to 57% for the general population.

Table 12: Respondent Age Details: General Population compared to Indigenous Population

Age Range	General Population	Indigenous
18 - 24	22%	32%
25 – 34	33%	37%
35 – 44	19%	17%
45 – 54	9%	2%
55 – 64	9%	8%
65 and older	8%	4%

Note: Prefer not to answer/unsure responses have been excluded

Table 12 shows that 55% of the general population respondents are in the 18 – 34 age range, compared to 69% for the Indigenous respondents.

Table 13: Respondent Education Details: General Population compared to Indigenous Population

Education	General Population	Indigenous
High school or less	15%	20%
College diploma/certificate	32%	43%
Undergraduate degree	29%	27%
Masters or graduate degree	24%	10%
Doctoral degree	15%	20%

Note: Prefer not to answer/unsure responses have been excluded

According to Table 13, 20% of Indigenous respondents had an educational level of high school or less compared to 15% for the general population. In contrast, 43% of Indigenous respondents had a college diploma/certificate compared to 32% of the general population. However, the picture changed substantially when comparing attainment of a graduate degree with only 10% of Indigenous respondents holding this degree compared to 24% of the general population.

Table 14: Respondent Employment Details: General Population compared to Indigenous Population

Employment Status	General Population	Indigenous
Full-time	39%	36%
Part-time	12%	9%
Part-time, seeking full-time	24%	33%
Unemployed, seeking job	15%	11%
Unemployed, not seeking job	10%	8%

Note: Prefer not to answer/unsure responses have been excluded

As depicted in Table 14, the employment status of Indigenous respondents was relatively similar to the general population for the full-time and part-time categories. In contrast, responses for the category part-time, seeking full-time indicates that 33% of Indigenous respondents were in this category compared to 24% of the general population.

Table 15: Respondent Industry Sector Details: General Population compared to Indigenous Population (for those employed or seeking work)

Industrial Sector	General Population	Indigenous
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	7%	3%
Fishing	4%	0%
Construction	9%	9%
Wholesale Trade	6%	5%
Retail Trade	7%	6%
Finance and Insurance	7%	4%
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	5%	5%

Industrial Sector	General Population	Indigenous
Educational Services	8%	10%
Health Care and Social Assistance (excluding home care and long-term care)	5%	5%
Home health care services	9%	10%
Nursing and residential care services	5%	2%
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	7%	11%
Accommodation and Food Services	11%	16%
Other Services (except Public Administration)	4%	4%
Public Administration	4%	3%
Non-Profit	7%	0%
Other	4%	1%

Note: Prefer not to answer/unsure responses have been excluded; sectors with 1% or fewer respondents are reported as other

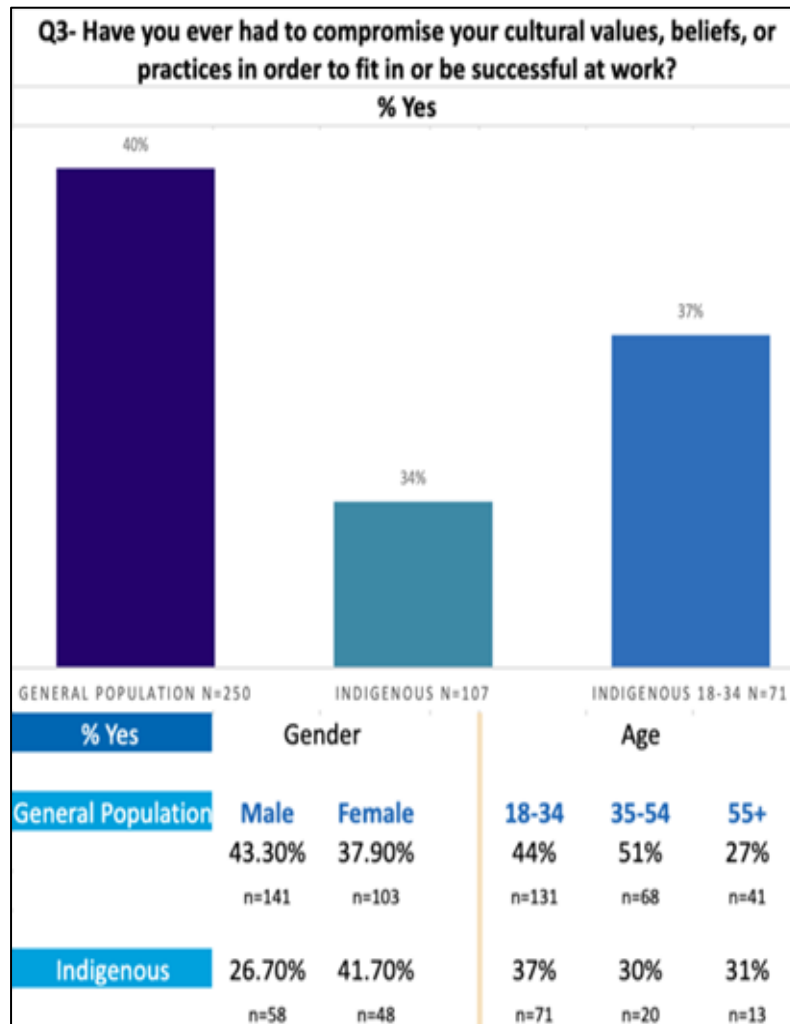
The industrial sector analyses in Table 15 show that Indigenous respondents were not employed in the fishery or non-profit sectors. Furthermore, the results for both the general and Indigenous populations were similar across the remaining sectors except the arts, entertainment and recreation sector which reported 16% employment for Indigenous respondents compared to 11% for the general population.



## 6.2.2 Cultural Compromise

*Survey question:* Have you ever had to compromise your cultural values, beliefs, or practices in order to fit in or be successful at work?

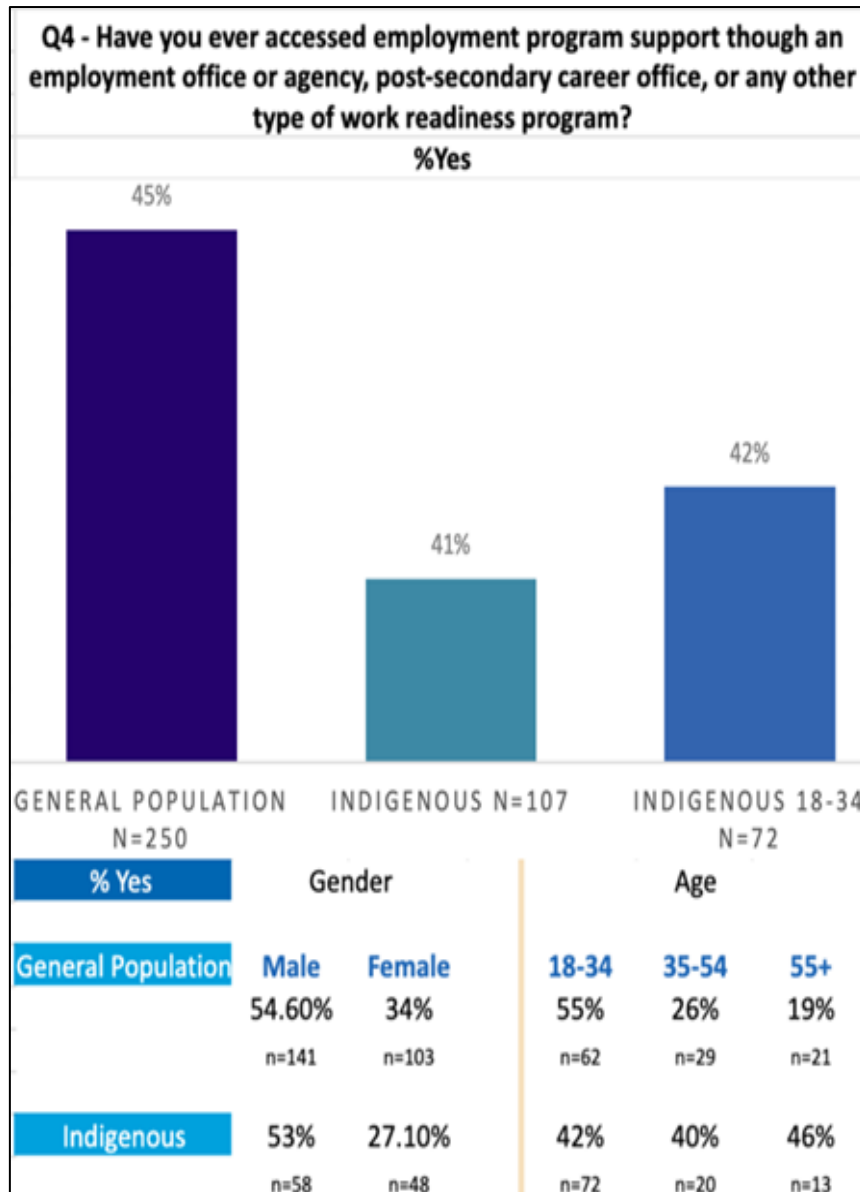
It is somewhat surprising that males in the general population experienced a greater degree of cultural compromise (43.3%) than Indigenous males (26.7%). However, a possible explanation could be that the general population included several African Nova Scotians. Meanwhile, a slightly higher proportion of Indigenous females (41.7%) reported cultural compromise than females in the general population (37.9%).



### 6.2.3 Employment Program Support

*Survey question:* Have you ever accessed employment program support through an employment office or agency, post-secondary career office, or any other type of work readiness program?

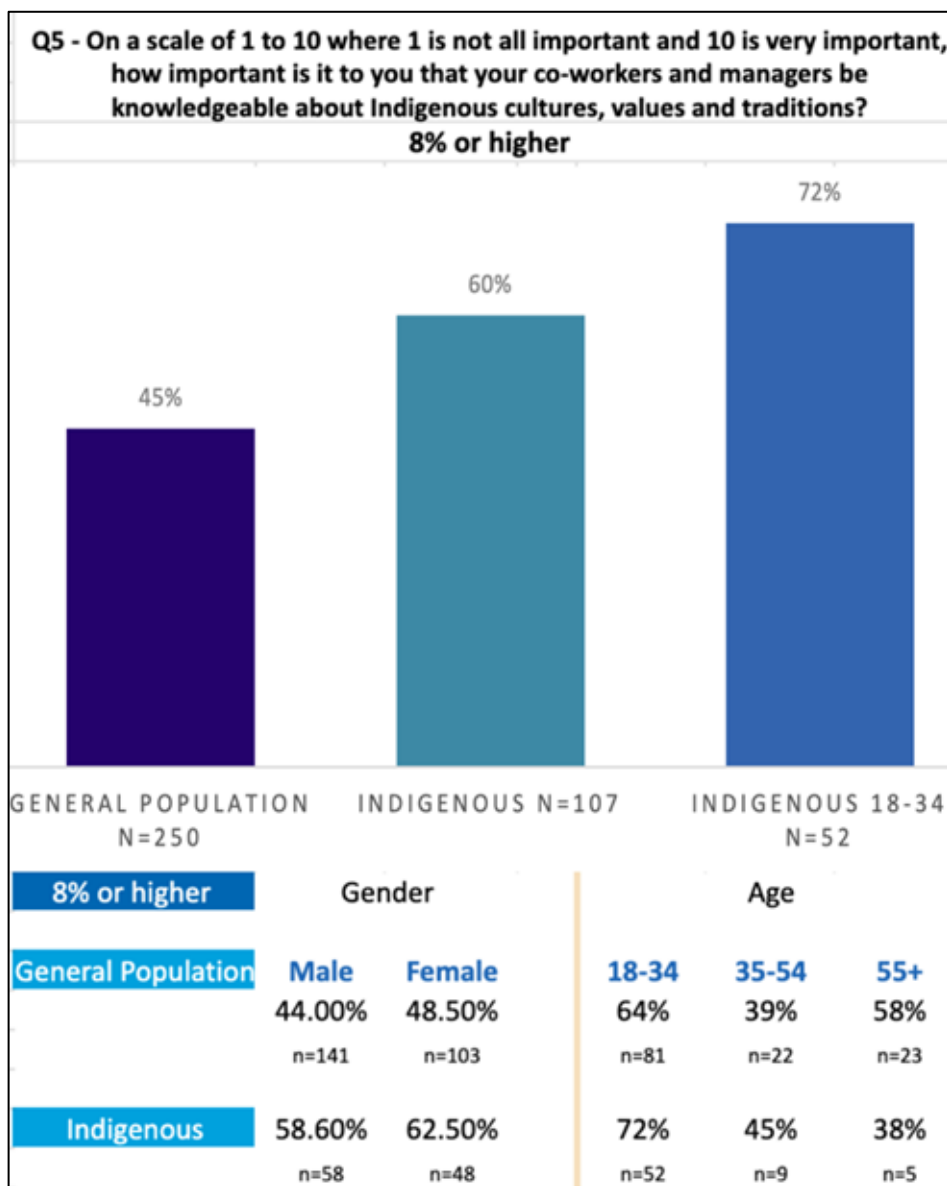
Access to employment support was very similar for males in the general and Indigenous populations. However, 34% of females in the general population accessed employment support compared to 27.1% for Indigenous females. It is noteworthy that within the Indigenous population those in the 35 – 54 and 55+ age groups were more likely to access employment support than in the same age ranges within the general population.



## 6.2.4 Importance of Workplace Knowledge About Indigenous Cultures

*Survey question:* On a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 is not all important and 10 is very important, how important is it to you that your co-workers and managers be knowledgeable about Indigenous cultures, values and traditions?

A higher proportion of both male and female Indigenous respondents (58.6% and 62.5%) believed it was important for the workplace to have knowledge of Indigenous culture, whereas 44% of males and 48.5% of females in the general population believed this was important. Younger Indigenous adults placed more importance on workplace recognition of Indigenous cultures. However, a higher percentage of older people (58%) in the general population viewed this as important compared to only 38% of Indigenous respondents.



## 6.2.5 Recognition of Qualifications at Work

*Survey question:* On a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 is not at all and 10 is a great deal, to what extent do you feel your education and skills are recognized and valued in the workplace/your previous workplace?

The number of respondents is too low to be statistically significant.

## 6.2.6 Professional Development Opportunities

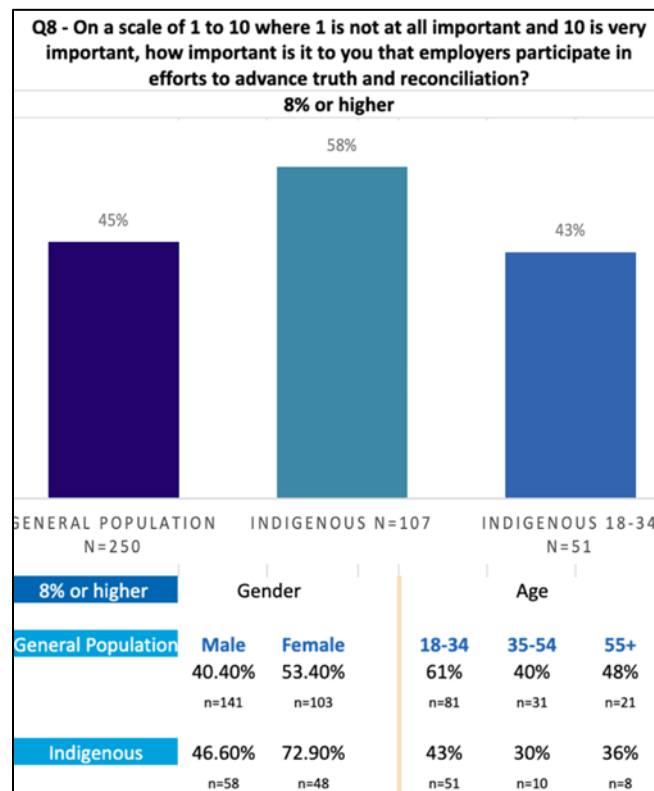
*Survey question:* On a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 is not at all and 10 is a great deal, to what extent does our current/most recent employer provide opportunities for professional development and growth?

The number of respondents in this sample is too low to be statistically significant.

## 6.2.7 Employer Engagement: Truth and Reconciliation

Survey question: On a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 is not at all important and 10 is very important, how important is it to you that employers participate in efforts to advance truth and reconciliation?

Employers' participation in truth and reconciliation is important to both Indigenous and the general population. However, it was significantly more important to female Indigenous respondents (72.9%) than female respondents in the general population (53.4%) and to male Indigenous respondents (46.6%).



The results of the interviews conducted in Newfoundland and Labrador are provided in the following sections.

## 7. Phase 3: Organization Interview Results

In our final phase of data collection, the research team interviewed small, medium, and large organizations in St John’s, Newfoundland and Labrador & Labrador, and Halifax, Nova Scotia to understand what decolonization practices were in place to help Indigenous youth prepare for the workforce. We explored recruitment and retention practices, cultural programming, and metrics being applied to assess the increase of Indigenous youth in the workforce and what decolonization means in an organizational context. Finally, to address the higher education pathway for skills development, we explored the programming offered by academic institutions in the Atlantic to understand their decolonization efforts. In total, we engaged 30 organizations from a wide cross-section of industries and sizes. Respondents were selected based on the recommendations of the respective Friendship Centres in Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia. They were selected based on their interactions with Indigenous youth and the friendship centres. The small number of Newfoundland and Labrador respondents (five) reflects the limited number of organizations that interact with Indigenous youth in Newfoundland and Labrador compared to Nova Scotia.

Table 16: Number of organizations engaged in phase three of the project

# of organizations Engaged from St John’s, NL	5
# of organizations engaged from Halifax, NS	17
# of academic institutions engaged in Atlantic Canada	8

### 7.1 Newfoundland and Labrador & Labrador Organizational Survey Results

The following sections provide a summary of interview responses, organized by questions posed to the respondents.

#### 7.1.1 Background of the respondent and the organization concerning Indigenous contexts

Overall, most respondents (with one exception) did not have an Indigenous background. One respondent voluntarily identified as Indigenous while another respondent noted that her husband and son were Indigenous. Similarly, the organizations represented did not have a specific focus on Indigenous issues or on Indigenous youth. Rather they focus on all marginalized communities which includes Indigenous people. One respondent reported that while only 9% - 13% of their clients identify as Indigenous, she believed there were “tons of folks” with Indigenous heritage that do not identify as Indigenous.

#### 7.1.2 Programs in place to support Indigenous Youth

Most organizations interviewed did not have programs in place to support Indigenous youth. However, several respondents provided information on future plans and potential services that are available from other organizations:

- Planned survey in Labrador to identify the skills needed by employers. The survey will identify the programs or initiatives that would potentially help match Indigenous people to employers.

- Grants available, while not specifically for Indigenous youth research but could be used for that purpose
- The YMCA works with Indigenous women (which could potentially include youth)
- Various employment and entrepreneurship programs, while not specifically designed for Indigenous youth, could be applicable
- A women's incarceration program could be helpful since indigenous representation would be included by virtue of the over representation of Indigenous people in incarceration.

### **7.1.3 Certification programs/partnerships**

While none of the respondents had specific programs/partnerships, a few respondents provided information about other programs and initiatives:

- Federal Government, programming for career development practitioners has been delivered to Indigenous communities and this training has been indigenized for the iSET partners across Canada. <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/Indigenous-skills-employment-training.html>
- Connected with the Nova Scotia Native Council to make them aware of all the various frontline and higher-level jobs that they have available in Newfoundland and Labrador. They provided the Council with information on how to connect applicants with the recruitment team so that they can be contacted when job opportunities are available.
- Literacy program and training for the construction and the food service industries.

### **7.1.4 Metrics to determine effectiveness of youth work readiness programs**

Overall, there were no specific metrics regarding effectiveness of youth work readiness programs. However, four respondents described other metrics and data that they maintained:

- PRIME performance measurement for meaningful evaluation. It is a metric to measure full lifelong and life wide development for Career and Employment (CCDF, n.d.). It is essentially a holistic tool developed across Canada with a blending of partners including Indigenous practitioners and organizations (CCDF, n.d.).
- One respondent noted that employment equity statistics were maintained because they are a Crown Corporation. They have an employment equity questionnaire, which captures approximately how much of their workforce is Indigenous. The number of Indigenous youths can be obtained by cross referencing with how many people fall under the definition of youth based on age, this would provide number of Indigenous youths in their workforce.

### **7.1.5 Gaps to be addressed to improve programs to meet the needs of Indigenous Youth**

- *Cultural sensitivity*: program dropout rates could be attributed to cultural differences and feeling overwhelmed, lost and not having support.

- *Arbitrary assignment to employment programs*: for Indigenous youth, it is very easy to get pigeon-holed into certain areas where they demonstrate capabilities. This links to PRIME (an employability assessment tool) which alleviates filtering people into pre-employability or employment programs (CCDF, n.d.). Instead, PRIME is considered a best practice since it includes a thorough client assessment and a determination of the interventions and support that should be provided in order to meet their goals for a preferred future (CCDF, n.d.). The PRIME approach is viewed as superior to the current model, which assigns people by default into a program hoping that the design of the program somehow fits the gaps and meets their needs (CCDF, n.d.).
- *Gender*: certain industries such as marine and construction are primarily male, white, cisgender and heterosexual dominated. Consequently, this creates challenges for Indigenous people, particularly for Indigenous women. Indigenous people do not see themselves represented in marine and construction industry.
- *Substance abuse*: substance abuse issues around Indigenous youth in urban areas and on reserves, creates a challenge to pass a drug and alcohol tests. It is difficult for those with addictions or in recovery to work, for example, on a dry ship.
- *Indigenous representation in workforce*: it is important to have supports in place for Indigenous people to feel safe and welcomed. The messaging should be inclusive and to work with Indigenous communities to acknowledge what is needed, which areas could be targeted and how to best advertise positions.
- *Unconscious bias in recruitment*: this is an issue in many industrial sectors
- *Indigenous identification*: it is difficult to identify Indigenous populations in St. John's because people are scattered and integrated into the community. Consequently, some Indigenous youth may not be aware of services provided by various organizations. There are also youth who are Indigenous but do not identify as Indigenous because they did not live on a reserve.
- *Digital divide*: Since many Indigenous youth do not have access to technology, it is challenging for them to enter the workforce due to a lack of awareness of employment opportunities.
- *Training and follow-up*: another gap is employers' perceptions and how to educate employers about working with the needs of diverse groups. It is not beneficial to offer a program for eight months without adequate follow-up. There needs to be long-term commitment to include diverse groups in the workforce.
- *Awareness of careers*: there is a significant gap with respect to youth awareness of the industries and the careers and education required to work in those industries. One respondent stressed the importance of determining what is missing at the K to 12 system for students to understand the careers and occupations that are available.

- *Skills gap*: there is a gap between the skills individuals have and the skills needed by employers.
- *Mental health issues*: Many individuals are presenting with complex mental health issues, and this creates a barrier to successful employment.

#### 7.1.6 Impact of Covid-19 on programs and services

- *Mental health issues*: the mental health issues that arose during COVID-19 are also still presenting challenges for employment and education.
- *Blended service delivery/work environment*: COVID brought about blended service delivery. Instead of relying on face-to-face for program supports and services, many have moved towards blended delivery, which is comprised of video conferencing, telephone, texting and emailing. This blended delivery has broadened the participation opportunities for many people, particularly those on the autism spectrum because they can control the variables of volume and time. Conversely, another respondent noted they are still working through the balance of being virtual, being a combination of in person and virtual, and doing that in a way that still allows people to feel like they're having that sense of community and doing the work together.
- *Recruitment*: COVID had a major impact since many employers had only minimal recruiting during that period. Consequently, when businesses went back to full operations, they were significantly short-staffed.
- *Differing industrial sector impact*: a respondent explained that while COVID hurt its café, the cleaning business is doing well.

#### 7.1.7 Colonization

During our organizational conversations, we asked participants for their understanding of the words colonization and decolonization to help create a better understanding of how these ideologies are being understood and mobilized. Their responses help the researchers provide insights and recommendations to help organizations continue to support urban Indigenous youth from a decolonized lens.

Respondents provided the following descriptions of colonization:

“I think colonization for me ultimately comes down to an Indigenous perspective and worldview, Indigenous ways of life of knowing, of being, of learning, of working of observing seasons and patterns and, and replacing them with capitalism, heterosexuality, binary genders, and traditional marriage. All of these different things are meant to advance society, in an economic way that doesn't necessarily work with our natural environment and the patterns in which we work with the environment. I think colonization has deep roots in patriarchy, heterosexism, and misogyny. I'm sure for some people who look at colonization, as the conquering of the free world. I just don't see it like that. I think that it has destroyed our patterns of existing in our natural environment.”



“...how do we make sure that there are no barriers for Indigenous people to live in centers that are non-Indigenous, and not lose any of their culture and their beliefs? If we're expecting Indigenous people to change and adapt, that is not acceptable for their rights, their culture and their experiences.”

“...historically all of the mostly European settlers who came to this place, took control of it away from the Indigenous people who were here.”

“...like so many structural influences, often operating unconsciously, so those biases impact many of us, especially [those] with privilege. It's also very illustrative of trauma, its impacts and how that can be collective, and it becomes part of identity.”

One respondent was very offended by this question as reflected in their response:

“you're testing me to define colonization for you. I'm just giving you the feedback. It's a pretty rude question. I have a master's degree, I understand colonization. I'm certainly committed to reconciliation. And I live that every day in my work life. But I just think the question is very closed, and not indicative of systemic oppression. Do I teach people about it? Yes. But asking me to define colonization is really, actually quite hard, hierarchical and colonizing itself”.

The term colonization is initially easily understood, but when trying to express it out loud it became challenging to frame it. This is helpful as it provides insights into the importance of definitions to help ground mutual understanding of the term between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people working together.

### **7.1.8 Decolonization**

The respondents provided the following descriptions of decolonization:

“Effort to move away from systems impacting individuals. Everything that we do with the collaboration in terms of how we host, and how we provide supports and services to career practitioners is about honouring the wisdom of the individuals and their lived experience in the world, which is inherently a decolonizing act. And the work we do around supporting individuals to be networked across the community so that they can rely on and support one another is a decolonizing act.”

“What decolonization means to me is also very challenging. Decolonization is not so much a destination as it is a journey. And I think that everyone's journey is different. For me, decolonization looks like incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing and being into my everyday work. That can look like fighting against that internalized capitalism and taking breaks when you need them and taking that second to walk outside and touch grass or actively working to fight back against those capitalist ideas within the workplace. I do a lot of traditional crafts, and I am a language learner. So those are other parts of my personal life of reclamation and reconnecting with culture that is important to decolonization.”

“I describe it as a journey. As something that in my lifetime, I'm never going to be done. It took us a really long time to get into this, and it's going to take us quite a while to move out of it.”

“A set of intentional approaches that are designed across many levels of society and government, such that there are immediate facets to decolonization”.

Some of the similarities noted in the comments are the long-term conscious actions that take the form of a journey.

### **7.1.9 Programs or practices in place to help move towards decolonization**

Respondents did not have specific programs or practices to move towards decolonization. However, they went on to describe other helpful initiatives:

- Professional development around working with Indigenous populations.
- Plans to include Indigenous representatives on their board within the next 3 – 5 years.
- To be more intentional through collaboration with First Light (Friendship Centre) in terms of training programs for Indigenous individuals.

In Section 7.2, we provide a summary of the interview results for Nova Scotia.

## **7.2 Nova Scotia Organization Survey Results**

The following sections provide a summary of interview responses and are organized according to the question topic.

### **7.2.1 Background of the respondent and the organization concerning Indigenous contexts**

Of the 16 organizations interviewed, three respondents voluntarily disclosed they were Indigenous. From an organizational perspective, six organizations had a specific focus on Indigenous issues:

- Established an official Indigenous Affairs Department,
- Established an Indigenous Centre of Expertise within the national recruitment directorate,
- Another organization (which is 50% Indigenous owned) has an Indigenous Employment Officer
- Develop and deliver STEM curriculum to Indigenous communities
- Created a Manager of Indigenous Relations position
- Although another respondent's organization does not have a specific position dealing with Indigenous issues, they explained:

“We have been laying the groundwork through engagement, and collaborative working with communities for years, and trying to establish the mechanisms and the relationships that will allow us to make that transition into a co-management world for which we have to work out how to do it together. There is no guidebook”.

## 7.2.2 Programs in place to support Indigenous Youth

The MNFC described the various programs they have in place to help Indigenous youth:

- High schools with Aboriginal outreach workers identify students who may be falling between the cracks at the school and might benefit from smaller classes at the MNFC. The MNFC will take those under 18 and help them get their high school diplomas through their adult education program.
- Victim Support Services mainly works with women coming out of violent situations. They help connect them with support services, and a number of those clients would be considered youth.
- Programs where groups of 25 Indigenous students (usually under the age of 30), are trained in trades such as welding and pipe fitting. After completion of training, they are provided with work placements.
- Essential and Life Skills program to teach people coming into the city basic survival skills such as budgeting, meal planning, setting healthy boundaries, and online banking digital literacy.
- E3 program (employment, education, empowerment) involves working with people of all ages who want to upgrade their skills for specific jobs.
- A program focused on Indigenous advanced access to postsecondary in partnership with Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU). Students complete their first year of classes at the MNFC with professors from MSVU. Those new to Halifax are getting the wraparound services that the MNFC can provide at the same time that they are completing their education.

In addition to the MNFC, Nova Scotia private and public employees have a number of programs to support Indigenous youth:

- Program to support Indigenous youth from the north. This is comprised of a training program for individuals at a very junior level without a lot of office skills.
- North American Indigenous Games (NAIG) where there is a mobile construction trailer, which is staffed for the entire 14 days with Indigenous employees so Indigenous people can get an accurate picture of what life as a labourer looks like (note: Halifax was the host of the 2023 NAIG)
- Training programs
  - Introduction to construction (Red Seal program)
  - Safety, fall protection, hoisting, rigging and foundational knowledge in the classroom
  - Energy advisor
  - Marine industry training; Career Set Sal in collaboration with the First Nations Coalition and Service Canada. This program targets Indigenous people who would like to have a career in the marine industry. There is no age limit. The majority of the programs will be offered at Nova Scotia Community College.
- Bridge Community and Industry program includes a cultural competency component
- Internships
- Bursaries, scholarships and wage subsidies; funding for digital skills
- Summer camps, learn about STEM
- Job fairs to promote construction as a career

- Public sector has an Indigenous student employment program that supports Indigenous students after they have been hired in the public service. They offer culturally adapted services; supplement regular onboarding with additional information about healing lunches, culturally adapted learning activities, and host events with mentors, representing many different backgrounds and intersecting identities to provide mentorship to the students.
- Federal Government partnership with Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq Maritimes Indigenous internship initiative for students at University or College who would like to potentially explore if the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) is a place they would like to work. The objective is to get the expertise, knowledge and skills back in the community
- Outreach committee that works in the community, either in Indigenous communities or in schools with targeted Indigenous youth
- Camp Courage holds an Indigenous-only youth and gender-diverse camp.

### **7.2.3 Certification programs/partnerships**

Of the 16 respondents, seven indicated they did not have programs/partnerships to increase their knowledge of youth workforce needs. The remaining respondents described various programs they offer to Indigenous people.

- Funding and partnerships to provide Indigenous people with training to build capacity skills and education.
- Indigenous Opportunities Network meets regularly with the MNFC and various communities in Nova Scotia to identify the gaps and determine how they can be addressed. They are certified with the Canadian Council of Aboriginal Business, but that organization does not really focus on youth specifically, rather, it is focused on Indigenous business. They engage with communities and Indigenous businesses about what they're doing and how they try to address getting youth into their systems.
- Indigenous cultural awareness training for all staff and management. A component of the training highlights the challenges that youth and Indigenous individuals face in entering the job market.
- Indigenous Canada course (offered by the Federal Government) and has Indigenous people on staff to consult to make sure that their criteria suited the community and that they were not asking for anything inappropriate
- Barrier-free recruitment process whereby anybody regardless of their socio-economic background or how they identify can apply.

### **7.2.4 Metrics to determine the effectiveness of youth work readiness programs**

Of the 16 respondents, four indicated they did not have any metrics regarding youth work readiness programming. The remaining respondents captured statistics on various aspects of their interactions with Indigenous youth but did not necessarily track the effectiveness of work readiness programs.

- Two organizations tracked statistics on the percentage of staff that are Indigenous, but do not track the effectiveness of work reading programs. This includes all Indigenous, not just youth.
- Membership tracking system that will record if employees wish to self-identify as Indigenous or if they belong to an underrepresented group in construction.

Seven organizations indicated that they maintained statistics on employment outcomes:

- Client management database to record interactions with clients. It identifies age ranges, number of interactions and successes.
- Metrics regarding: Does the trainee remain with us? Are we able to hire them back? Are we able to retain them after the training program is complete?
- Surveys were conducted after every session to get feedback regarding how the presentation went and if they learned anything and to ascertain if they enjoyed the session and to identify their area of interest: science, technology, engineering, arts or math. Information is used to determine what can be improved.
- Percentage of Indigenous students who have obtained full-time employment in the public service.
- Documented how often people are employed after they leave the program
- Statistics for the individual internship program and the new youth program. They also solicit feedback from students at the end of their internship.

### 7.2.5 Gaps to be addressed to improve programs to meet the needs of Indigenous Youth

Ten gaps were identified from the research:

- **Transportation:** is a barrier due to the hours of work from 7:00 – 3:30 Monday to Friday.
- **Food and housing:** There is also a housing shortage. However, a respondent from a federal crown corporation pointed out that their trainees as federal employees, during the time that they are in training, are provided with federal housing. Our research did not find any other examples of non-federal employers and private sector providing housing during training. Food is an issue, so they provide lunches for everyone in their programs. They secure temporary solutions for anyone experiencing homelessness.
- **Criminal records:** are not a barrier for one respondent who noted this might be an issue for other sectors.
- **Awareness of careers:** Getting information out is a barrier due to low attendance at information sessions. The challenge of where to advertise since marginalized groups are not on websites. There are also challenges related to getting into high schools and even Junior High Schools to talk about careers in the trades. More community involvement from outside organizations is needed so that the youth are more familiar with the people who are possibly teaching them to get ready for work. It is important to introduce students to STEM fields. For students who have no interest in the fisheries or oceans, it's difficult to find them a good placement in the Federal Government. There is an overall lack of a clear understanding of the specific needs of Indigenous youth, both those that come from reserves, and those that live in urban settings.
- **Funding:** Lack of multi-year funding as well as the reporting requirements for funding are challenging. One respondent noted the reporting requirements are exponential compared to non-Indigenous groups. It was also suggested that students be provided with study kits, laptops, and all of the equipment they need, rather than assuming they have funds for school supplies.
- **Indigenous representation in the workforce:** The need for more Indigenous staff members.

- **Digital divide:** Help applicants to prepare a CV and assist with the initial steps of how to apply. Lack of consultation with Indigenous people in the development of the actual application process. Since some people do not have access to the internet and computers, they are unable to complete the application forms.
- **Training and follow-up for Federal Govt jobs:** More support for both the trainee as well as the manager. Most Indigenous youth have never worked for the federal government, and they do not know how large an organization it is, so it can be lonely for them. Some preparation, before they start work would be helpful to making them feel comfortable to open up or just to talk about some of the challenges that they may be having. In those situations, it is important to create trust. It was noted that an audit of employment equity representation in selection processes revealed that representation of Indigenous individuals, as they move through the various stages has dropped. Peer mentoring could be helpful. From the student perspective, it's very different, because the federal government is an organization where there are cubicles, and since it's probably their first or second job, they are not used to being in an office environment. Consequently, it is important to be flexible and try to meet students where they are.
- **Cultural sensitivity:** Indigenous youth in remote communities experience further challenges, because to obtain training and join the workforce outside of their community, they had to move away. At this point, they lose their supports. Education along with early experiences and exposure will make the transition later in life a bit easier. Because of the historical relationships between Indigenous people and the Crown, they are already starting from a place of mistrust. Another challenge identified related to taking people from their small community and from other people that are similar to them and sending them for six months of training (for example, the RCMP) where they have nobody that looks like them, talks like them or has the same cultural beliefs. There is significant work to establish true relationships with the Indigenous community and ensure that it's not superficial relationships since the community wants to establish positive relationships with organizations.
- **High School Diploma:** One of the gaps that is a lot of the programs targeting people require a high school diploma for admission. It is important to recognize that the lack of a high school diploma doesn't necessarily mean that they wouldn't be a great worker or that they wouldn't do well in a more hands-on type of environment. Therefore, it is beneficial to explore a different model, not necessarily a curriculum-based model, but more a hands-on apprentice-type learning.

### 7.2.6 Impact of Covid-19 on programs and services

The impact of COVID-19 presented additional barriers and opportunities for Indigenous youth in urban contexts.

- **Cost of Living:** During the pandemic, the rise in the cost of living deeply impacted all their programs, particularly the housing team due to the increased rental rates. This was compounded by the lack of increases in social assistance payments, which caused the homeless population to drastically increase.
- **Blended delivery/virtual work environment:** Not set up for online virtual life and during COVID were not able to offer in-person programming. This was challenging, especially for Indigenous youth with limited resources to connect online. Meeting in person enables observation of general body language, attitude, and their environment. The professional

satisfaction of the work was lacking due to reduced personal interactions. Student employees felt left by themselves without a whole lot of support because it's easy to just walk to somebody's cubicle and ask a question, but more challenging in a virtual environment. This didn't happen as organically as it would normally in a workplace. However, on a positive note, other respondents cited the advantages with a virtual work environment. With virtual meetings, everybody is usually participating whereas before, there was a lot to organize, locations and travel. It opens the door for many people who couldn't benefit before with programming or events or even doing interviews because everything is done online. People can stay in their home communities and learn. This avoids issues such as daycare when travelling. One organization reported they had an Elder in residence and that during COVID, he was a great support to the students.

- **Innovation:** COVID also helped to brainstorm ideas. It helped with online programming such as the youth mentor training. Covid 19 had benefits since it forced the federal government, in general, to do things differently.
- **Recruitment:** Difficult to do recruiting when wearing a mask. Employers relied on the technology, assuming that everybody has a cellphone or a laptop and that they can fill out online forms. But that's not the case in a lot of these communities, so that caused some employers to fall behind further in recruitment. It was difficult to let communities know about job opportunities because organizations were unable to go into the community and do face-to-face meetings during Covid.
- **Relationships:** It affected all their external relationships, particularly the outreach committee that focuses on relationships and stakeholder investment in the Indigenous community. They could interact with the community only through emails.

### 7.2.7 Colonization

The respondents provided a wide array of descriptions of colonization.

- Very Eurocentric systems
- Canada's infrastructure is systemically racist on every level. Because the original colonizers did not see Indigenous people as human beings
- A group of people imposing their belief system or structures of governance onto another set of people
- It's a system where the government took advantage of the trust to the detriment of Indigenous people to dispossess them from their lands, and their culture to the benefit of Canada. And they built a system that very much excluded Indigenous people from full participation.
- Imposing non-Indigenous ways on the way things were done. It is imposing processes, and procedures that are non-Indigenous on Indigenous people.
- Removal of or prevention of Indigenous communities to live their traditional lifestyles.
- Colonization is an ongoing process and the traditional definition is colonizers coming here and doing what they did historically.
- Diminishing something that's not yours
- People came here and took things that weren't theirs

Other respondents provided more in-depth descriptions:

“There is a lot of anxiety, and people are scared to talk about Indigenous culture because they don't want to say something wrong, which I think defeats the whole purpose of reconciliation. In school, we talked about World War II or I all the time, but they only talked about residential schools, maybe for five minutes”.

“I grew up in the 70s and 80s with the prevailing views of Indigenous people at that time. And it was a racist view. It was a pejorative view. As an adult, I've been seeking to unpack a lot of that and relearn or learn for the first time a lot of the history of Canada that I wasn't taught in school. I'm shocked on an ongoing bias, from a bunch of reading that I've done, and sort of those friendships, on trying to unpack all that colonization stuff”.

“We were the first here and then other people came. Our freedoms were taken away and we're still fighting to get those freedoms back. We need our independence to take the colonialization away. We don't have the ability to self-govern and self-determine and until that happens, it's still going to be colonialistic.” (An Indigenous participant's perspective)

“When I think of colonization, I think of stripping away our identities and our rights and our language and our cultures. You know we're resilient and we're still here and we're rebuilding. We're trying to rebuild connections with our culture and with our values.” (An Indigenous participant's perspective)

“Colonization is our history in North America. Every aspect of our life here is impacted by the fact that folks from other cultures, and specifically here, we're really talking about French and British as being the main influence, but it touches every bit of our lives here.”

“For Indigenous communities, meetings are organized in a very different way. For example, they may not have an agenda, but they'll use, a talking stick for everybody to say something and make sure that it's more inclusive. It's trying to use mindfulness. It really is a barrier to Truth and Reconciliation. Because we're so set in the way that we do things that we don't even realize it, it's just ingrained.”

### **7.2.8 Decolonization**

In responding to the question on decolonization, the respondents provided a number of different perspectives and examples:

- It's about making space and being open to hearing from others and in some cases relinquishing control
- Decolonization is a process by which Indigenous peoples are recognized for the rights they have; recognition of the harms that they've suffered; and an invitation to Indigenous people to reclaim the powers that they've lost
- Awareness, more education and learning, just bringing normalization. Let us learn. Don't hide things because they're shameful for Canada
- Self-determination and self-government for First Nations so they're not dependent on the Indian Act and our government services. Full integration, as they see fit into the



economy, better integration into the management and protection of those natural resources, as they were the custodians before Europeans arrived

- Building equality and equity between groups
- Put the power back to the people; help them obtain more land, build partnerships with government agencies to build the infrastructure they need for self-support
- Relearning and unlearning and re-examining the way things have been done up to this point; creating a vision for how they're going to be fair and equitable for First Nations people
- Thinking about or seeing the efforts to recognize the impact of an external group of people coming into somebody else's land; we just have to start to deconstruct and accept that we've done it.
- Empowering something that's not yours
- It's inviting other ways of doing things, other knowledge systems, other processes; it's about exploring together; being inclusive

In addition, other respondents provided more in-depth perceptions of decolonization:

“When someone passes away in the community, maybe your traditional two days of bereavement is not sufficient for our Indigenous population, they grieve quite differently, and communally. So, we need to have allowances for that.”

“It is not what the government is doing by giving us back our rights. Rather, decolonization is what we, as Indigenous people do. We are learning who we were prior to colonization, we are going back to those traditional teachings. We are figuring out our identities, culturally and traditionally, and integrating those into our contemporary lives, Unfortunately, we are part of the colonizing society, but we are going back to our roots to figure out who we were as individuals because we were never completely assimilated. We never completely lost the language. We never completely lost the stories. And it's been shown that the closer Indigenous communities are to residential schools, the bigger the losses those communities suffered, especially in terms of language. And language is culture, our entire culture is intertwined within our language. And the loss of that means that we have to go really, really far back and we have to revisit some of the other communities that thankfully, we thought ahead enough to hold knowledge interest for us. We want you to hold our knowledge and trust for us, please keep our songs, keep our language and keep our stories.”

“It's personal relationships with people. I wanted to get to know you better, learn about your life experience, and try and help that inform me to be a better person. Getting through the legacy of residential schools, and intergenerational trauma, it will take generations of incorporating Indigenous rights, and autonomy, and help work together to build that self-government.

“Very different than indigenizing things because a lot of people will use that term, it kind of is two different ways. Decolonization is taking all those colonization ways out of the way Indigenous people do things and allowing them to self-govern, just be themselves. If a university or an organization is trying to decolonize something, and trying to find out

what part of our process procedure or policy feels colonized, it's important to have input from the community from Indigenous people. Change will happen again, not overnight, but it will, because there's such an openness.”

### **7.2.9 Programs or practices in place to help move towards decolonization.**

Respondents provided examples of how they are moving towards decolonization:

- Smaller training sessions to better interact with members and be sensitive and aware of some of the issues. Provide space to host meetings for Indigenous organizations. Set aside three or four days for cultural training. Having a designated outreach person helps Indigenous people feel comfortable knowing that they can reach out with issues and that it stays confidential.
- Work with non-Indigenous organizations on Indigenous awareness and create culturally safe spaces. Discuss the impacts of residential schools on individuals, families and communities. Work with non-Indigenous organizations, government, police, fire departments, and the military. Conduct workshops and courses for different organizations on different aspects of cultural awareness.
- The continuous offering of educational opportunities to learn about Nova Scotia Indigenous communities; providing spaces for community groups to use the building; includes temporary museum exhibits; and art-based exhibits focused on reconciliation. Work in partnership with the friendship center and the Urban Indigenous community members, to use their creations on tiles, and then display it in the museum and tell the story of the native people and colonization. Education is an important step when it comes to decolonization.
- The systems are still built on the assumption that Indigenous people have to prove their rights. Inviting Indigenous people to speak about their loss and giving them a voice, at least in terms of the environment in terms of issues that impact them. Any process where you invite Indigenous people to talk about issues that affect them is going in the right direction towards decolonization.
- Programs that help with understanding the impact of residential schools.
- With every new program, new policy tool, and new guidance, it is important to have consultations with Indigenous groups.
- Have an Indigenous employee resource group. Start programs that are youth-oriented through outreach to the school systems. Focus on being present and talking to people and building that trust and relationship back from years of distrust and mistreatment.
- Started land acknowledgement and smudging.
- Educating staff members. Provide materials that help educate staff members who are not only policing communities but are working with Indigenous people. A lot of people still see our uniform (RCMP) as colonialistic so they try to be involved with the community in uniform and out of uniform.
- It's knowing how to empower youth to move forward and be positive thinkers. Provide historical teaching to connect youth with Elders, creating links and knowledge circles.
- Everything has to do with community but cannot impose the way that we think. Have to be authentic in the needs of the community.
- Importance of personal awareness and education such as attending powwows and learning about the culture. For example, a respondent noted they had gone to a

community, learned about the Sundance and had an opportunity to interview a Sundancer.

**7.2.10 Other Comments**

A union respondent works with 225 contractors on mainland Nova Scotia. They have a woman in the building trades group, which sees women from all different construction trades have more of a social support network. They are hoping to replicate that with Indigenous members.

It was noted that a lot of the jobs in the federal government require certain educational diplomas and degrees. At the same time, there is a history of exclusion of Indigenous families from the education system and universities. There are a lot of survivors and children of those survivors, family members, all of whom have that very fresh in their minds. It doesn't promote an interest in trusting academic institutions. And that creates a huge disadvantage to Indigenous candidates for jobs. Until we can come to a place of recognizing Indigenous knowledge as almost equal to the knowledge that is taught in non-Indigenous schools and universities. There's always going to be that disadvantage.

It appears that Indigenous youth are very interested in the green economy, and they could be leaders in decarbonization and reduction of greenhouse gases, and green energy, whether it's solar, or wind. Does that segment of the population become the CEOs of the big green energy companies in Canada, maybe? Who knows?

One organization offers a five-day workshop/training for RCMP Employees. The training includes cultural content such as sweat teachings and a field trip to the Millbrook Cultural Heritage Center (NS) where Elders come in and talk about colonialism. They included two dancers who explained the dances, the Regalia, and smudging. However, they have funding for two years and each training has 25 people. We have over 1000 employees in the division and that's only 50 per year.

One respondent noted they have questions from youth on what life looks like outside of high school, leaving their community. A really good basis to get them prepared for work and what life is like after school is to prepare them properly. For University, what does life look like away from their family, away from community, where to find support, and how to write a resume? Post-secondary education is a really good bridge to get them into the workforce. But we also need to prepare them for university first, but I think preparing them before they have to start work is a really good place to start and offer support before knowing that they need them.

**7.3 Educational Institutional Support – Indigenous Youth Work Readiness**

The websites for the following eight post-secondary educational institutions in urban regions of Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia were reviewed to identify support systems in place for Indigenous students:

Table 17: List of post-secondary institutions

Nova Scotia	Newfoundland and Labrador
Dalhousie University	Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador

Saint Mary’s University	College of the North Atlantic
Mount St. Vincent University	Marine Institute
Nova Scotia Community College	
Nova Scotia College of Art and Design	

We conducted a documentary review of the websites to identify information related to the following key categories:

### 7.3.1 Onboarding process for Indigenous Students

Of the eight institutions examined, four provided some level of support for Indigenous youth. Saint Mary’s University has an Indigenous student advisor who is responsible for supporting and engaging Indigenous students. Dalhousie University has an Indigenous student access pathway. This is a one-year program that offers First Nations, Métis and Inuit students an opportunity to complete university courses in a culturally supportive and friendly campus community in Truro, Nova Scotia. Mount Saint Vincent University has an Indigenous Student Center that offers referrals, cultural and traditional activities and social support. Nova Scotia Community College states that study and career support is available but does not provide any detailed information. The websites of the remaining four institutions did not provide any detailed information regarding supports for Indigenous students.

### 7.3.2 Support systems for Indigenous Students (Indigenous Student Liaisons)

#### Newfoundland and Labrador’s Educational Institutions

Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador has an Indigenous Student Resource Centres at its campuses in St. John’s, Corner Brook (Grenfell Campus), the Marine Institute and the Labrador Campus. The St. John’s Campus has the most services available. Its Indigenous Student Resource Centre offers support for tutoring, study and workspaces, and scholarship information. It also provides visiting Elders, tent G\gatherings, Bannock and board games, wisdom Wednesdays, drumming and singing. The Indigenous Student House (ISH) aims to be students’ home away from home and a space of community, connection, and support. The ISH offers students a computer room, lounge, and kitchen, and is the site for the services and programming.

The Corner Brook Grenfell Campus programs and services for Indigenous students include the Student Union Indigenous Caucus, an Indigenous Student Lounge, the Indigenous Resource Centre, a variety of events such as an annual powwow and the annual Indigenous Peoples Week, housing agreements for Nunatsiavut beneficiaries, and culturally safe spaces for students to practice smudging and Kullik/Qulliq lighting.

The Marine Institute’s programs and supports for Indigenous students is difficult to locate and is provided through Memorial University’s Indigenous Student Resource Centre. It does not appear that the Marine Institute has Indigenous supports available on its campus. Furthermore, the link to Indigenous support services is not prominently displayed as illustrated through the following steps:

- Marine Institute Website, select Student Affairs:  
<https://www.mi.mun.ca/departments/academicandstudentaffairs/>
- Select Student Code of Conduct – this will bring you to the Memorial University’s website
- Here you will select Indigenous Student Resource Centre

The Labrador Campus was created in January 2022 building on the 42-year presence of the Labrador Institute. The Labrador campus offers two main educational streams: (1) the School for Arctic and Subarctic Studies and (2) the Pye Centre for Northern Boreal Food systems. Its curriculum, research and governance were developed through relationships and partnerships with the Nunatsiavut Government, the NunatuKavut Community Council, and the Innu Nation. Its programming is based on decolonization, anti-colonialism, Indigenization, equity, diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism.

The College of the North Atlantic provides space to support the following Indigenous activities: comfortable space to gather, space for group or individual study, two computer stations, community events bulletin board, group sessions, film and documentary screenings, special presentations, elder visits, crafting events and Indigenous events, activities and social gatherings. In its 2023-2026 strategic plan, the College states: “CNA acknowledges that reconciliation requires active learning, unlearning, commitment, and action. CNA is committed to engaging with Indigenous communities to intentionally support Indigenous students and employees in their learning and development.”

### **Nova Scotia’s Educational Institutions**

**Saint Mary’s University** has an Indigenous student liaison, provides an online Indigenous Studies research guide and has specific awards available for Indigenous students.

**Dalhousie University** has an Indigenous student Centre that offers a supportive environment for students to gather, meet other students, and have access to supports and services. Its Indigenous Student Advisor provides support and advocacy as well as tutoring, scholarships, cultural activities, educational and information sessions, networking opportunities and referrals to supports on and off campus. Its Indigenous Student Access Pathway offers First Nations, Métis and Inuit students an opportunity to complete university courses in a culturally supportive and friendly campus community.

**Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU)** has the Kina’masuti aqq Apognamasuti (Learning and Help) Indigenous Student Centre (ISC) which supports students in an educational and culturally engaging space on the MSVU campus. As part of a larger strategy dedicated to creating a welcoming environment for Indigenous students attending the University, the ISC is a non-judgmental space where Indigenous and non-Indigenous students can gather, collaborate, and engage in dialogue around contemporary Indigenous issues. The ISC provides computer stations; access to Wi-Fi; a group study area with a large table to seat up to 12 people; a lounge with comfortable seating; a large-screen TV; printing and faxing services; and a growing collection of Indigenous-based resource materials. The ISC also hosts a number of events. Finally, MSVU indicates that a number of financial supports for Indigenous students are available but do not provide specific information.

**Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC)** offers Indigenous supports and resources for students of First Nation, Metis and Inuit descent. They help students find the information, culturally specific supports and academic supports needed to succeed. Its services include career exploration, NSCC application process, connection with funding opportunities (e.g., emergency financial supports and tutoring), guidance around applying for NSCC awards available for Indigenous students, learning supports (e.g., tutoring), connection with other Indigenous learners, Indigenous student gatherings and organized cultural events.

**Nova Scotia College of Art and Design** provides unlearning and re-centering lectures. Otherwise, does not appear to offer any other supports.

### **7.3.3 Indigenous strategies for success**

#### **Newfoundland and Labrador**

Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador has a strategic plan for Indigenization. The plan includes four strategic priorities: Leadership and Partnership; Teaching and Learning; Research; and Student Success. As noted in section 7.3.2, the College of the North Atlantic does strategic plan indicates a commitment to reconciliation and support for Indigenous communities. This is further reflected in its mission statement: “The Aboriginal Resource Centre is committed to providing a welcoming, supportive, and comfortable environment by incorporating the culture and values of Indigenous peoples to increase accessibility and retention.”

#### **Nova Scotia**

SMU’s strategic plan includes enhancing learning opportunities for Indigenous students in strategic plan progress indicators. Dalhousie’s Indigenous Strategy is included in its annual report. MSVU’s strategic plan includes Indigenous education enhancement and protection. NSCC and the Assembly of Nova Scotia Mi’kmaw Chiefs indicate they are committed to a partnership that leverages their respective strengths while centering first-voice experience and expertise. The NSCC has established the Joint Steering Committee (JSC) with the Mi’kmaw Chiefs. It provides strategic guidance to the Joint Working Committee (JWC), in its efforts to advance collaborative and systemic improvements to Mi’kmaw student experience and success. The theme of NSCAD’s strategic plan is opportunity and belonging with mention of Indigenous objectives.

### **7.3.4 Department for Indigenous Affairs**

#### **Newfoundland and Labrador**

Memorial University has a separate department for Indigenous support. MUN has a VP - Indigenous, Director and various support staff positions: Manager, Coordinator for Indigenous Student Success, and Indigenous Wellness Navigator.

The Marine Institute and College of the North Atlantic do not appear to have separate departments for Indigenous Affairs.

#### **Nova Scotia**

Dalhousie University has an Indigenous Student Centre & Indigenous Advisory Council. The Indigenous Advisory Council is a strategic body that provides advice to the senior administration of the university and others. It also advocates for initiatives to be undertaken by the university.

MSVU has an Indigenous student Centre. In addition, the L'nu Advisory Circle at MVSU is made up of Indigenous community leaders and university representatives. The Circle provides important guidance on initiatives in support of Indigenous learners and communities, including Truth and Reconciliation efforts. It was formed in 2020 through the merger of the Internal and External Aboriginal Advisory Committees (established in 2014).

## **8. Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **8.1 Newfoundland and Labrador & Labrador**

As discussed in the previous sections, the survey and interviews conducted with Newfoundland and Labrador respondents revealed a wide array of barriers that have a negative impact on employment readiness for Indigenous youth. In the following sections, we provide conclusions which are followed by recommendations.

#### **8.1.1 Key Conclusions**

##### **Cultural Compromise**

Indigenous individuals exhibited a higher incidence of compromising their cultural values, beliefs and practices at work compared to the general population. Meanwhile, workplace knowledge about Indigenous cultures was highly valued, especially among females and Indigenous individuals.

##### **Employment Program Support**

Overall, usage of employment program support programs is relatively low. However, Indigenous individuals tend to access the programs at a higher rate compared to the general population.

##### **Recognition of Qualifications**

Around two-thirds of respondents felt that their qualifications are recognized and valued in the workplace. Meanwhile, a moderate level of employees received professional development opportunities from their employers. These measures were marginally lower among Indigenous respondents and young adults.

##### **Employer Participation in Truth and Reconciliation**

Employers' participation in Truth and Reconciliation was highly important among all respondents, particularly females and Indigenous individuals.

##### **Student Awareness of Career and Educational Opportunities**

The research found that students are generally unaware of the career opportunities available to them along with knowledge of the education and training required to attain successful employment.

### **Awareness of Educational Funding**

The study found that many Indigenous youth were unaware of the funding available to them to support their post-secondary education. Consequently, many Indigenous youth may decide not to pursue post-secondary education due to perceived financial constraints. The lack of awareness of educational funding may be attributed to the fact that many Indigenous youth do not identify as Indigenous because they do not have the experience of living in a First Nations community.

### **Workplace Knowledge About Indigenous Culture**

This study found that all demographic groups believed it is important that co-workers and managers are knowledgeable about Indigenous culture and engage in Truth and Reconciliation. Our research also revealed that Indigenous individuals do not see themselves represented in the workforce. There is also a degree of unconscious bias in the hiring process which likely harms Indigenous employability.

### **Digital Divide and Communication**

After Indigenous students graduate from high school, many lose access to technology and the internet. Consequently, they are unaware of the employment opportunities available to them. The study found that as a result of COVID-19, some organizations had increased their level of virtual services. They are now in the process of trying to find the right balance of virtual vs in-person services. It must be recognized by the various work readiness organizations, that a move to virtual has the potential to exclude some Indigenous youth who do not have access to technology.

### **Mental Health and Addiction Issues**

The study found that mental health issues were a barrier to Indigenous youth fully participating in work readiness programs and obtaining employment. Furthermore, employer perceptions of addiction issues were having a negative impact on employability. One employer in particular noted that its workplace could not accommodate addiction issues due to the overall safety of the general public.

### **New Wind/Hydrogen Employment Opportunities**

Looking to the future, there are opportunities for Indigenous youth to take advantage of training and employment opportunities in the new wind/hydrogen developments that are proposed for Newfoundland and Labrador. Indeed, most have MOUs in place with one or more Indigenous organizations in Newfoundland and Labrador. For example, specific to training opportunities have been identified in a MOU between World Energy GH2 and Qalipu First Nation. However, it must be recognized that these projects are just in the planning stages and it will be several years before they are developed to a point to train and hire Indigenous people.



### **8.1.2 Key Recommendations - Newfoundland and Labrador**

The findings of this study have provided key insights into the various barriers to Indigenous youth employment. To address these barriers, it is recommended that the following initiatives be undertaken:

#### **Cultural Compromise**

Implementing initiatives that promote Indigenous cultural sensitivity and inclusion in the workplace could increase workplace knowledge about Indigenous cultures. This, in turn, can encourage Indigenous individuals to share more about their cultural backgrounds, ultimately reducing the need for cultural compromise.

#### **Employment Program Support**

There appears to be a greater need for employment support programs among Indigenous individuals. Collaborative initiatives between various stakeholders, including employers, government agencies, and educational institutions, could help to ensure these programs are available to those who seeking the support.

#### **Workplace Knowledge about Indigenous Culture**

It is recommended that FLNFC initiate training for employers and employer associations to enhance their understanding of the supports needed to make Indigenous workers feel welcome and safe. Employers also need to understand the impact of colonization and decolonization.

#### **Recognition of Qualifications**

This suggests a need for organizations to focus on addressing the specific needs and aspirations of this age group. By providing more targeted employment program support, and professional development programs and fostering a culture that also values and recognizes the qualifications of Indigenous youth, organizations can create a more inclusive and supportive work environment for this demographic. Valuation of skills learned in the community through Indigenous knowledge systems is recommended.

#### **Employer Participation in Truth and Reconciliation**

The research highlights the importance of acknowledging historical injustices and promoting a workplace that values diversity and inclusivity. By demonstrating a commitment to Truth and Reconciliation, employers can contribute to healing, understanding, and promoting equity and cultural diversity within their organizations. We recommend looking at the language used in the calls to action and exploring opportunities to put specific actions in place by working in collaboration with Indigenous organizations, such as the FLNFC.

#### **Start Early**

FLNFC should work with the communities and the provincial department of education to develop career and post-secondary education information specifically targeted towards Indigenous students. Ideally, students need to have this information before they graduate from high school. For youth who travel from their communities to urban areas, the local community-based rural schools also need the programming. The communications initiative should be offered

in grades 11 and 12. The high school communications plan should also encourage students to stay in touch with the FLNFC when they leave high school in order to have access to supports and various resources. The communications plan has to be developed in a way that engages and excites students about their future education and employment. The inclusion of videos with success stories of other Indigenous youth would be beneficial.

A combined effort between employers and career development practitioners should be undertaken to target high school students with career information. While many schools hold ‘career days’ to increase student awareness of potential careers, a specific outreach targeted towards Indigenous youth is critical. Indigenous students need to be encouraged to consider their career options and educational requirements before they finish high school and for those who leave their community before moving to urban areas.

### **Educational Funding**

It is recommended that Indigenous students in high school be made aware of the educational funding available to them, irrespective of whether they have lived in a rural community or an urban area.

### **Employer Education**

FLNFC should work with various industry associations and large employers to increase awareness of the largely untapped source of Indigenous employees. It is recommended that webinars and seminars be developed by FLNFC and delivered jointly through industry associations. These webinars/seminars should address unconscious bias in hiring, the importance of understanding Indigenous culture, making Indigenous employees feel welcome and embracing the tenants of Truth and Reconciliation.

### **Work Readiness Programs**

FLNFC should establish formal relationships with the various community work readiness organizations. These community organizations are providing excellent services to the population at large, but they do not have a specific focus on the needs of Indigenous youth. There needs to be considerable dialogue between FLNFC and the work readiness organizations to increase awareness of the needs of Indigenous youth and to ensure they are placed in programs that meet their needs. While one organization currently uses the PRIME framework, it is recommended that FLNFC work with the other organizations to adopt this approach. In addition, it is suggested that FLNFC identify key metrics they would consider beneficial in evaluating outcomes and work with the organizations to provide this data annually.

### **Evaluation Metrics**

It is recommended that FLNFC meet with employers and work-readiness organizations to establish a reporting relationship whereby key statistics such as number of Indigenous youths served, age, program(s) completed, and outcomes would be provided annually to FLNFC. One of the most critical pieces of information that should be captured is the employment outcomes over the first 1 – 3 years after the Indigenous youth complete their work readiness programs.

### Capacity-Building and Partnerships

FLNFC should develop capacity through training and partnerships. There is a need for communications specialists to develop educational material for high schools, to develop professional development programs for employers and work readiness organizations as well as to maintain ongoing dialogue. The gathering and analyzing of metrics will also require a resource to develop a dashboard and maintain the data. The communications and IT work are not ‘one-offs’ but will be required on an ongoing basis. In addition, the FLNFC will need infrastructure and operating support to develop and deliver these programming services and develop the infrastructure to support the continuity of these services.

### Lessons from Nova Scotia

Newfoundland and Labrador and Labrador would benefit from adopting some of the following practices from Nova Scotia:

- Identify more private sector employers in the trades area that would be willing to hire Indigenous youth. These companies should be encouraged to appoint an Indigenous Affairs Liaison to co-ordinate recruitment and retention. For example, more work is needed to secure Impact Benefits Agreements such as those in place with as Vale (Voisey’s Bay mining operation) in Labrador that have employment commitments for Innu and Inuit residents. Similarly, Indigenous groups, employers, trades educational institutions need to work together to ensure that all major components of the economy are considering the importance and benefits from including Indigenous youth in training and employment. It would be beneficial for more companies to follow the approach of Marathon Gold which has socio-economic agreements in place with Miawpukek First Nation related to training, employment, etc.
- While there is an initiative underway through Trades NL: [Indigenous Office - Trades NL](#), more attention is needed to ensure that there is a process in place to work with unions in the construction trades to provide training in meeting the needs of employers.
- Hire both trained Indigenous youth and trainees to work in their communities to build and repair housing. The youth could work under the guidance of private construction companies. This initiative would also go a long way toward addressing the shortage of construction workers in remote communities in Labrador.
- Government and Indigenous organizations should collaborate to provide training for employers and trade unions to ensure they have a better understanding of the needs of Indigenous youth and how to make them feel comfortable in the workplace.

## **8.2 Nova Scotia**

In the following sections, we provide key conclusions followed by recommendations based on the interviews and surveys for Nova Scotia.

### **8.2.1 Key Conclusions – Nova Scotia**

There were two dominant themes in the survey findings in Nova Scotia.

#### **Cultural Compromise**

The survey revealed more Indigenous females experience cultural compromise than females in the general population. In addition, it was important to both male and female Indigenous people, particularly in the 18 – 34 age group for their workplace to have more general knowledge of the Indigenous culture.

#### **Employment Program Support**

Overall, there was a fairly high use of employment support by both Indigenous males and females. In addition, the research found that Indigenous people in all age categories require employment support.

In addition, respondents noted the importance of addressing transportation, food, increasing the number of Indigenous employees, increased awareness of careers and job opportunities, assistance in completing applications, cultural awareness training for employees, elder support, and expanded employer participation in training and hiring Indigenous youth.

### **8.2.2 Key Recommendations – Nova Scotia**

#### **Cultural Compromise**

It is recommended that employers implement initiatives that promote Indigenous cultural sensitivity and inclusion in the workplace. This could increase workplace knowledge about Indigenous cultures which can encourage Indigenous people to share more about their cultural backgrounds, ultimately reducing the need for cultural compromise. It is also important to ensure females are welcomed in the workplace. Specific knowledge of workplace cultures that support Indigenous female needs and safety practices would help to create a supportive and decolonized culture.

#### **Employment Program Support**

While considerable emphasis needs to be placed on employment support for Indigenous youth, these support mechanisms should continue throughout the Indigenous workers' life cycle. The need for ongoing support does not end with the attainment of their first job. Collaborative initiatives between various stakeholders, including employers, government agencies, and educational institutions, could help to ensure these programs are available to those who need it for as long as they need it.

### **Transportation**

Many Indigenous youth do not have access to transportation and are therefore often not able to work on jobsites that operate from 7:00 am to 3:00 pm. When hiring Indigenous youth, employers need to consider providing transportation or encouraging carpooling with other employees.

### **Food**

Food is a cultural practice in Indigenous communities. Providing food for Indigenous youth while they are in training programs will create a feeling of social belonging and support.

### **Increased Number of Indigenous Employees**

When hiring Indigenous youth, consideration should be given to hiring more than one recruit at a time. By hiring several Indigenous youths, they will benefit from the mutual support and not feel so alone in the workplace.

### **Increased Awareness of Career Options and Job Opportunities**

The current approach of high school career fairs is not effective in making Indigenous students aware of their career options, educational requirements and job opportunities. It is recommended that schools in Indigenous communities take a more proactive approach by including career options as part of the curriculum, inviting past Indigenous graduates to share their stories and paths to engaging in the workforce. Career fairs were recognized as one opportunity to learn about the workforce, however, the impacts of COVID-19 have created an online focus on recruitment. Engaging organizations and recruitment agencies in employment workshops will help to build relationships. This could be in the form of webinars, in-person, and videos.

### **Assistance In Completing Applications**

Many Indigenous youth do not have access to computers to complete their application forms. When they visit communities, employers could help potential employees complete their application forms.

### **Training for Non-Indigenous Employees**

Training should be provided to employees to make them aware of the needs of Indigenous youth and to learn how to make them feel welcome in the workplace. These could be in the form of cultural recruitment workshops tailored to creating supportive onboarding programs for new Indigenous recruits.

### **Provide Elder Support**

Contract with Elders to provide support for employees and students in training.

### **Expanded Employer Participation**

While several employers in Nova Scotia make a significant effort to hire Indigenous youth, there is a role for provincial and federal governments to play in encouraging more employers to provide meaningful training and employment for Indigenous youth.

### **8.3 Educational Institutional Indigenous Support**

The research found that four of Nova Scotia's eight educational institutions provided varying levels of support for Indigenous students while all three of Newfoundland and Labrador's educational institutions provided some degree of support. It is recommended that all post-secondary educational institutions in Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador develop more comprehensive support for Indigenous students. In particular, it would be beneficial to consider the approaches taken by Dalhousie and MSVU.

Best practices shared in the research include:

- Indigenous Student Centre which supports students in an educational and culturally engaging space on campus.
- Non-judgmental spaces where Indigenous and non-Indigenous students can gather, collaborate, and engage in dialogue around contemporary Indigenous issues.
- Provide computer stations; access to Wi-Fi; a group study area
- Indigenous-based resource materials.
- Financial support for Indigenous students.

## **9. Summary**

Many of the findings and comparisons between the Newfoundland and Labrador and Nova Scotia studies provide insights into the current programming, practices, and attitudes to support urban Indigenous youth joining the workforce. Our schools and public and private sector organizations are actively involved in helping Indigenous youth overcome the unique barriers and obstacles that they face. Additionally, the role of Urban Indigenous Friendship Centres presents an opportunity to play a critical role in educating decolonization practices. There are, however, still concerns that decolonization practices in Atlantic Canadian workplace programs are somewhat limited in their growth and potential due to a lack of understanding of what it means to decolonize an organization to support Indigenous youth. In our research, we noted the importance of the rigour involved in the research ethics boards to decolonize their research practices by ensuring that Indigenous individuals are involved in the research process from the outset and are following Indigenous-led practices such as OCAP® to ensure the ownership, control, accessibility and protection of data resides with the Indigenous communities and organizations.

While the decolonization knowledge is critical to the success of urban Indigenous youth there is strong potential to work collaboratively towards developing a shared understanding of what a decolonized workplace would look like by engaging Indigenous individuals and organizations in the process. There is a need to start working in a more focused way towards shifting the colonial approach to more culturally focused and supportive practices. This shift should include existing Friendship Centres because they are likely to engage youth early in their education years and build a relationship and trust bond with the youth. These opportunities for partnering are the focus of our recommendations to support the needs of urban Indigenous youth to engage in the workforce in a meaningful and supportive approach.

## 10. Appendices

### 10.1 Survey Questions

1. Demographic information
  - Age
  - Gender
  - Self-identify as: Indigenous, Visible Minority, 2SLGBTQ
  - Region of Newfoundland and Labrador and Labrador
  - Education
2. Employment status
  - Full-time
  - Part-time
  - Part-time, seeking full-time
  - Unemployed, seeking job
  - Unemployed, not seeking job
  - Employment sector
3. Have you ever had to compromise your cultural values, beliefs, or practices in order to fit in or be successful at work?
4. Have you ever accessed employment program support through an employment office or agency, post-secondary career office, or any other type of work readiness program?
5. On a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 is not all important and 10 is very important, how important is it to you that your co-workers and managers be knowledgeable about Indigenous cultures, values and traditions?
6. On a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 is not at all and 10 is a great deal, to what extent do you feel your education and skills are recognized and valued in the workplace/your previous workplace?
7. On a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 is not at all and 10 is a great deal, to what extent does our current/most recent employer provide opportunities for professional development and growth?
8. On a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 is not at all important and 10 is very important, how important is it to you that employers participate in efforts to advance truth and reconciliation?

## 10.2 Interview Questions

1. How would you describe your background and the organization concerning Indigenous contexts?
2. What programs do you have in place to support Indigenous Youth? (cue: Urban vs On-reserve differentiation)
3. Do you have any certification programs or partnerships to help increase your knowledge of what Indigenous youth need to prepare for the workforce? (cue: Urban vs On-reserve differentiation)
4. What metrics do you have in place to determine the effectiveness of the youth work readiness programming? For Indigenous youth? For urban Indigenous youth.
5. What gaps do you hope to address, or feel are needed to improve the effectiveness of the programs for Indigenous Youth?
6. How has COVID-19 impacted your programming and results?
7. How would you describe colonization?
8. How would you describe decolonization?
9. What programs or practices are in place with the Indigenous communities, organizations, or members to help move towards decolonization?
10. Is there anything else you would like to comment on?



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