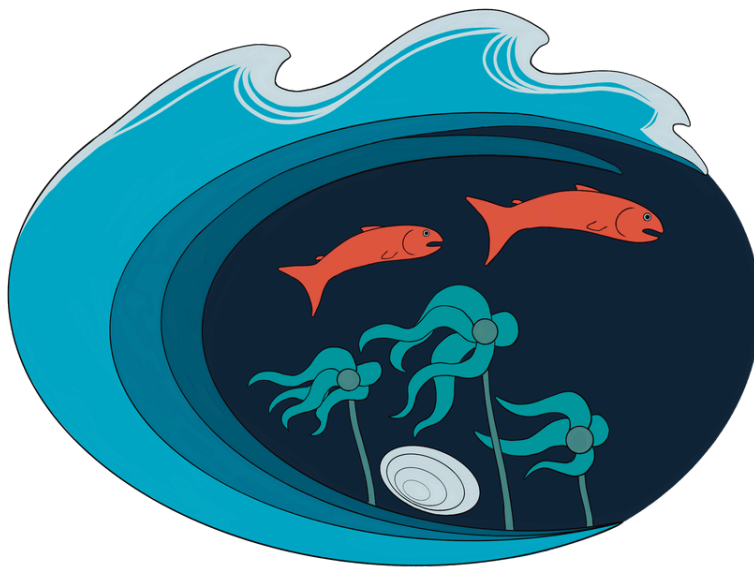


# The Upwelling

# LEARNING

# AGENDA



## An Invitation to Action

This shared learning agenda is the outcome of a research and knowledge mobilization initiative entitled UPWELLING + TRUTH TELLING: An Initiative in support of Indigenous solidarity, led by The Circle on Philanthropy (The Circle) and in partnership with Environment Funders Canada (EFC).



THE CIRCLE



ENVIRONMENT  
FUNDERS CANADA  
Advancing a sustainable future

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The term upwelling refers to the process in which nutrient-rich deep water rises to the surface of the ocean.<sup>1</sup> Nutrients are the stuff of life - with them come the opportunity for nourishment and vitality. When upwelling takes place in the ocean, the whole ecosystem benefits: nutrients rising to the surface contribute to the growth of seaweed and plankton, which in turn provides food for fish, birds and mammals.<sup>2</sup> Likewise, this learning agenda offers a framework for Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations (ENGOS) and funders to work with Indigenous nations and Indigenous-led organizations in ways that promote Indigenous self-determination, Indigenous sovereignty, and decolonization within the Canadian environmental sector.

Now that Indigenous leaders have done the labour of bringing key insights to the surface, we call on ENGOS and funders to put this learning agenda into action by way of enabling these shared learning conversations with funding, by heeding the leadership of Indigenous-led organizations and or communities and nations. We expect ENGOS and funders to take on the heavy lifting from here, and to do so in good relation with Indigenous peoples.

We offer the following guiding principles to operationalize the learning agenda in a good way:

1. We expect ENGOS and funders to pay Indigenous peoples fairly for any future labour put into operationalizing this learning agenda.
2. We expect ENGOS and funders to acknowledge the diversity of Indigenous nations in Canada. ENGOS and funders should avoid taking a pan-Indigenous approach to matters noted.

## WHAT IS A LEARNING AGENDA?

Learning agendas typically indicate a set of questions, activities, and outcomes intended to promote learning and decision-making within a team or organization. Learning agendas may address challenges at the strategic level, or project/activity level. They can be useful for identifying existing knowledge and data, as well as gaps in data collection. The Upwelling Learning Agenda outlined here contemplates the Canadian environmental justice movement as a whole.

<sup>1</sup> National Geographic Education. "Upwelling." National Geographic Society. Accessed January 23, 2024. <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/upwelling/>.

<sup>2</sup> National Geographic. "Upwelling."

<sup>3</sup> USAID, "Tips for Creating a Learning Agenda", 1, accessed November 3, 2023, [https://usaidlearninglab.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/learning\\_agenda\\_tip\\_sheet\\_final.pdf](https://usaidlearninglab.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/learning_agenda_tip_sheet_final.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Demetra Nightingale, Keith Fudge and Will Schupmann, "Evidence Toolkit: Learning Agendas," Urban Institute, March 2018, 2-3, [https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/97406/evidence\\_toolkit\\_learning\\_agendas\\_2.pdf](https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/97406/evidence_toolkit_learning_agendas_2.pdf).

## THE UPWELLING LEARNING AGENDA

### 1. What would the environmental sector look like if ENGO- and funder-Indigenous partnerships were established by invitation only?

- **Why this is important:** ENGOs and funders often ask Indigenous communities to sign on to projects that are already developed with the expectation that Indigenous folks want to work with them. In other instances, ENGOs or funders parachute into Indigenous communities without contemplating that Indigenous nations already have their own priorities. These approaches to partnership development are problematic; they can result in coercing Indigenous communities into work that they are not interested in and/or for which they do not have capacity. The concept of invitation flips this on its head: rather than presupposing that ENGOs and funders hold power, we want to know what shifts might occur if ENGOs/funders conduct work in Indigenous territories only after Indigenous nations have accepted them through invitation. We suspect that if partnerships were established by invitation only, projects would be based on community timelines, including the timing of cultural events and ceremonial activities.
- **How we will learn:** ENGOs, funders and Indigenous communities/leaders can develop an application process for instances where relationships with communities have not been pre-established. Such a process will include a screening or vetting process predicated on developing trust, and will be focused on assessing values-alignment. Through this process, ENGOs and funders can apply to Indigenous communities to be invited into a working relationship. Indigenous folks can use the application process to assess the quality of potential ENGO/funder partnership through asking questions. Whether approached by an Indigenous community, or proactively reaching out to partner, ENGOs must be willing to share information, answer questions and respond as requested by Indigenous peoples, and nations. Individuals responsible for reviewing such applications must be adequately resourced. Once this application process has been in place for a year, ENGOs, funders and Indigenous leaders can convene a reflective process of shared learning, challenges and opportunities to determine the effectiveness of this process and areas for improvement.

*Representative quote:*<sup>5</sup>

*ENGOs often assume that we want to work with them, and often do not consider waiting for us to invite them into partnership. - November 9, 2023 Meeting Participant*

### 2. What would happen if ENGOs and funders develop meaningful relationships with Indigenous communities without expectation?

- **Why this is important:** ENGOs and funders might engage an Indigenous community with a pre-established notion that the community will partner with them in some way. It is important to create an atmosphere without expectations for potential future partnership, as doing so respects Indigenous self-determination. Meaningful relationships are non-transactional and take into consideration a community's capacity, priorities, and goals.

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<sup>5</sup>Please note that the representative quotes in this document are not verbatim quotes from meeting participants, but instead are paraphrased based on statements made by Indigenous experts during our engagement meetings.

- **How we will learn:** In collaboration with Indigenous thinkers, ENGOs and funders can identify individuals willing to participate in a pilot project that focuses on creating ethical Indigenous-ENGO relationships in the environmental sector. It is important that ENGOs take on the labour of this work while deferring to Indigenous agency throughout the process. ENGOs/funders must respect the boundaries that Indigenous communities set regarding what these relationships look like. Indigenous folks may prefer to meet ENGO/funder staff in person to determine whether they want to enter into relationships with them. Individuals that participate in the pilot project should be invited to share their experiences in a knowledge sharing event. Based on this pilot, participants will share insights with the broader environmental sector. <sup>2</sup>

*Representative quote:*

*Rather than asking Indigenous folks to come to you, come to our communities to meet people and participate in cultural events. - November 29, 2023 Meeting Participant*

### **3. While ENGOs often challenge extraction-based resource development, paradoxically some also extract value from Indigenous communities, such as legitimacy and social capital. How might ENGOs put an end to such extraction where it exists?**

- **Why this is important:** ENGOs do not exist outside of settler colonialism, and thus are capable of perpetuating harm. Examples of extractive behaviour by ENGOs include seeking Indigenous communities' buy-in on initiatives for the purpose of gaining legitimacy and securing funding, and expecting Indigenous leaders to connect ENGOs with their networks without engaging in prior relationship building. ENGOs must take responsibility for harms caused – specifically through sector-specific forms of extraction – in order to restore trust with Indigenous folks and to avoid such harms in the future.
- **How we will learn:** ENGOs to implement training for their staff focused on building reciprocal relationships with Indigenous communities. ENGOs must enter relationships with communities having done their homework. First, ENGOs should commit to implementing ongoing anti-racism training that specifically names, decenters and dismantles white supremacy culture. Part of this relationship-building training may involve visiting communities (when invited) to engage in non-extractive relationship-building, such as participating in events and getting to know community members. ENGOs can evaluate the impacts of this training by inviting Indigenous leaders to discuss progress and areas for improvement. ENGOs to publish a summary based on the training and insights developed therein.

*Representative quote:*

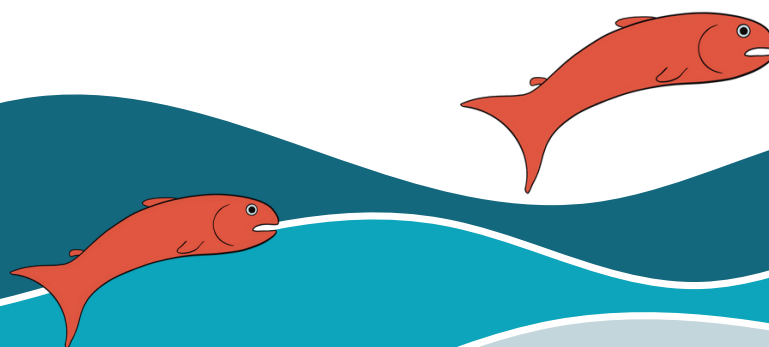
*ENGOs extract from Indigenous individuals by using our names and experiences to gain credibility amongst funders and the public. - November 9, 2023 Meeting Participant*

#### 4. What implications would arise if ENGOs and funders were to defer to inherent Indigenous leaders in setting the agenda for environmental justice work?

- **Why this is important:** Inherent political and legal authority does not flow from the Indian Act or any other settler state law. Indigenous leaders have expressed concern that some ENGOs and funders only seek partnerships with First Nation leadership elected under the Indian Act, thereby at times sidelining leaders whose authority flows from their own, pre-colonial governance systems and collective rights. For decolonization to occur, deference must be paid to inherent leaders / governance systems. Governance is layered and it takes strong commitment to see through the complexities caused by centuries of colonial violence.
- **How we will learn:** ENGOs and funders must do the labour to inform themselves about the Indigenous governance landscape. In fact, some already know about these issues but shy away from navigating them due to the complexity involved. ENGOs/funders must invest in and develop inherent governance training to educate staff about best practices for working with inherent Indigenous leaders. ENGOs and funders should not attempt to identify inherent leaders on their own, but should instead partner with leading Indigenous thinkers to navigate this terrain. ENGOs and funders should be aware that a) different nations have their own governance systems and b) that Canada will exploit this diversity against Indigenous nations. Additionally, ENGOs and funders should develop accountability tools to ensure that staff are applying the training in practice; they may invite inherent Indigenous leaders to participate in a gathering to evaluate their progress. ENGOs/funders can publish a summary document based on what they learned about themselves as a result of this training and work. Importantly, ENGOs and funders should approach this training as a process, rather than as a box to check off. In the end, while recognizing inherent Indigenous governance systems might be difficult and confusing, this does not exempt ENGOs and funders from doing the work.

*Representative quote:*

*ENGOs and funders must learn how to share decision-making power, or completely hand decision-making<sup>5</sup> power over to Indigenous leaders. - November 29, 2023 Meeting Participant*



## 5. How might ENGOs and funders ensure that they are respecting Indigenous sovereignties and territorial stewardship at all costs?

- **Why this is important:** Indigenous peoples can do whatever they need to do in their respective areas, so long as they do not cause harm or interfere with neighbouring nations' sovereignties. At times, some nations have been forced into resource extraction projects without much of a choice. But in all cases, Indigenous nations seek to ensure a good life for their future generations. Some Indigenous leaders have expressed that ENGOs and funders are unwilling to engage in decolonial work that is messy and/or that puts their "brand" at risk. While some Indigenous communities are invested in work that aligns with ENGO/funder goals, others are invested in work that contradicts their mandates, such as resource development. Indigenous nations have systems in place for using their lands in ways that do not disrupt relationships with other nations. Respecting Indigenous sovereignty includes acknowledging that some communities are interested in resource development, and finding ways to support their sovereignty without causing harm or remaking it into a corporate type of sovereignty.
- **How we will learn:** In partnership with Indigenous communities, ENGOs/funders can identify up to 5 Indigenous leaders working on initiatives related to resource development and who are willing to partner with an ENGO. The purpose of this partnership is for ENGOs to learn how they can support Indigenous sovereignty in practice, including when the work contradicts their mandates. ENGOs and funders should offer Indigenous leaders the opportunity (and resources) to evaluate them and their work. Based on the evaluations, ENGOs/funders can publish an anonymized report about the outcomes and insights from these partnerships. ENGOs and funders should stay present and in-relation with Indigenous communities throughout this process regardless of mandate alignment.

### *Representative quote:*

*To develop trust-based relationships with ENGOs, we are looking for them to show up for us, even if the work presents risk to them. - November 9, 2023 Meeting Participant*

## 6. What would it look like for ENGOs to decentre themselves as middlemen between Indigenous groups and funders, and instead focus on supporting Indigenous people in their fundraising efforts?

- **Why this is important:** A great deal of philanthropic wealth in Canada flows from colonial extraction in Indigenous territories. Furthermore, Indigenous peoples are more than capable of managing relationships with funders, but can benefit from ENGO support in terms of addressing tedious tasks. As middlemen, ENGOs can act as gatekeepers, which requires Indigenous communities to maintain relationships with ENGOs rather than a funder directly. By decentering themselves, ENGOs can remove one more barrier between Indigenous nations and the wealth stolen from their territories. This decentering should also not be defined as merely hiring more Indigenous people as grant writers inside ENGOs; Indigenous leaders are calling for a dismantling of current systems/approaches that marginalize Indigenous nationhood. That said, Indigenous experts have also called for ENGOs to stay in relation, if in different ways, specifically to assist with the labour involved in accessing and reporting on funding, and to otherwise act as a buffer in funding and charitable legislative contexts.

- **How we will learn:** Environmental and funder groups can host a gathering of up to 10 ENGO representatives and 10 Indigenous leaders to discuss how ENGOs can decentre themselves as middlemen. Emphasis should be placed on relationship building between funders and Indigenous attendees, and a long-term goal of ENGOs working themselves out of a job. Such an event should also include discussion about the fact that, often, Indigenous communities/groups are forced to continuously prove themselves; then identify ways to challenge this practice where it exists. Outcomes of this gathering should be summarized and shared publicly. Hosts to reconvene this group within 18 months to determine whether Indigenous communities' needs are being met.

*Representative quote:*

*We don't want ENGOs around forever. ENGOs stepping down from their role as middlemen is an important first step. - November 9, 2023 Meeting Participant*

## **7. In what ways might the Canadian ENGO and philanthropic sectors be upholding Pretendianism?**

- **Why this is important:** Pretendianism refers to the practice of non-Indigenous people claiming an Indigenous identity through deceit. It is a form of identity fraud that takes valuable resources and power away from Indigenous peoples, and ultimately plays into a larger process of replacing Indigenous nations with a settler society. There has been an increase in non-Indigenous people - and even white rights groups - claiming Indigeneity in Canada as a way to control access to land, sometimes using environmental conservation as a foil to subvert Indigenous territorial sovereignty. To the extent that ENGOs and funders knowingly or unknowingly uphold Pretendianism, they perpetuate settler colonialism.
- **How we will learn:** ENGOs/funders must familiarize themselves with the Pretendianism phenomenon, but must do so in collaboration with leading Indigenous thinkers. It is not for ENGOs or funders to tell someone whether or not they are Indigenous; Indigenous folks already have vetting processes for this kind of thing. Instead, ENGOs/funders can learn about this issue, and identify how their organization might be upholding it, if at all. Supporting Pretendianism might take shape through partnerships, turning a blind eye to a person's questionable identity claims because they otherwise serve project or funding interests, platforming Pretendian groups' claims to land, centering people that otherwise do not challenge white supremacy, among others. Partnership with Indigenous thinkers is critical here because Indigenous identity is very complex: people reconnecting with their nations after suffering histories of colonial exclusion should not be lumped in with Pretendians. In consultation with leading Indigenous thinkers, ENGOs and funders can develop specific policies on how to avoid supporting Pretendian movements, and how to end relationships where it becomes clear that a partnership is based on identity fraud.

*Representative quote:*

<sup>5</sup>*There has been an increase of white people claiming to be Indigenous in my territory, and they are not Indigenous. We do not recognize them or their claims to our land. - March 5, 2024 Meeting Participant*



Decolonization: “Decolonization is the process of deconstructing colonial ideologies of the superiority and privilege of Western thought and approaches. On the one hand, decolonization involves dismantling structures that perpetuate the status quo and addressing unbalanced power dynamics. On the other hand, decolonization involves valuing and revitalizing Indigenous knowledge and approaches and weeding out settler biases or assumptions that have impacted Indigenous ways of being. For non-Indigenous people, decolonization is the process of examining your beliefs about Indigenous Peoples and culture by learning about yourself in relationship to the communities where you live and the people with whom you interact.”

Deference, or to defer to: “To allow (someone else) to decide or choose something.”

Inherent leadership: “Hereditary chiefs, traditional leaders, and clan leaders are the traditional knowledge keepers and are recognized as having greater authority and rights relative to things like traditional territory or cultural knowledge and tradition.”

Pan-Indigenous: This term refers to the practice of assuming all Indigenous peoples are the same, or that they can otherwise be lumped into a singular identity. This is not true, and doing so can lead to distorting unique perspectives, realities, and goals. According to the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls: “First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples each have their own distinct cultures, languages, and ways of life. Their communities have their own distinct political, legal, social, cultural, and economic systems. There can be no one-size-fits-all, pan-Indigenous approach.”

Sovereignty: “As distinct Nations, sovereignty refers to the inherent and constitutional rights of First nations, Inuit and Métis to self-determination, self-government, cultural and spiritual practices, language, social and legal systems, political structures, and inherent relationships with lands, waters and all upon them. Sovereignty is also contingent on the fulfilment of certain fundamental obligations of each Nation’s governance structure to its own citizens.”

Transaction: “An exchange or transfer of goods, services, or funds.”

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<sup>6</sup> Biin, Dianne, Janice Simcoe, Marlene Erickson, Asma-na-hi Antoine, Ian Cull, Robert L. A. Hancock, Stephanie McKeown, Michelle Pidgeon, and Adrienne Vedan. “Decolonization and Indigenization.” Pulling Together A Guide for Front-Line Staff Student Services and Advisors, September 5, 2018.

<https://opentextbc.ca/indigenizationfrontlineworkers/chapter/decolonization-and-indigenization/>.

<sup>7</sup> Merriam-Webster Dictionary, “Defer,” accessed March 12, 2024, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/defer%20to>.

<sup>8</sup> Sorensen, Annette, and Scott van Dyk. “First Nations Governance.” Indigenous Perspectives on Business Ethics and Business Law in British Columbia, September 21, 2022.

<https://opentextbc.ca/indigenousperspectivesbusiness/chapter/first-nations-governance/>.

<sup>9</sup> National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, “Our Mandate, Our Vision, Our Mission,” accessed March 12, 2024, <https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/mandate/>.

<sup>10</sup> Future Cities Canada, “Understanding Indigenous Sovereignty and Rights,” *Civic Indigenous Placekeeping and Partnership Building Toolkit*, 90, February 2022, <https://futurecitiescanada.ca/portal/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/02/fcc-civic-indigenous-toolkit-final-2022.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Merriam-Webster Dictionary, “Transaction,” accessed March 12, 2024, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/transaction>.





## EXPRESSING GRATITUDE

The leadership, expertise and experience of the advisors is weaved throughout this learning agenda and we also acknowledge and honour the real concerns with visibility to funders, partners and collaborators which can have real relational or financial negative impact.

The following Indigenous advisors consented to being attributed to this piece: Jesse Cardinal, Siila Watt Cloutier, David Flood, kQwa'st'not (charlene george), Jess Housty, Paul Okalik.

The Circle and EFC would like to express our gratitude to all the Indigenous leaders who generously shared their experiences and wisdom with us. We acknowledge that the wisdom and experiences shared come from a long and deep commitment to the stewardship of the land and your communities, the joy, the pain, the struggle and the collective dreaming and resistance that comes with this work. It also comes from navigating the settler non-profit and philanthropic complex and all the harm, challenges and labour that this journey entails. We thank Indigenous leaders for their willingness to engage in these conversations and we are committed to uplifting and amplifying the knowledge that has been co-created in this process. Your willingness to contribute to this process has made this learning agenda what it is.



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