

THE USAGE OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES AS A TOOL FOR MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT WITH NORTHERN INDIGENOUS GOVERNMENTS AND COMMUNITIES

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KEY MESSAGES

- The usage of Indigenous languages should be incorporated at all stages of community engagement process with Indigenous governments and communities.
- Government and industry should incorporate the usage of Indigenous languages into consultants' data-gathering process through Indigenous decision-making practices; for example, instituting a Sharing Circle can be an effective practice for ensuring meaningful engagement between co-researchers, industry and the communities. As mentioned in Section 2 of this paper, Sharing Circles are communication tools used by Indigenous communities (and other cultural groups that have strong traditions of oral history) to discuss issues in an equal, supportive, and diplomatic ways; they reflect values of sharing, supporting, and respecting life experiences through personal interaction and group consensus to recognize issues and find solutions (Rothe et al. 2019). The use of a Two-Eyed Seeing (Reid et al. 2020) or a Two-Roads Approach (L'Hommecourt 2022) or other local Indigenous methodologies should also be incorporated into consultation processes. These ethical spaces help address a phenomenon from multiple perspectives, thus contributing to pluralist realism approaches (Fellows 2017).
- Federal and provincial/territorial legislations and industry regulations on Indigenous engagement should explicitly recognize the connection between Indigenous languages and the land, and should reflect this connection in their policies, Indigenous engagement recommendations in particular. The federal government should create a Task Force on Incorporation of Indigenous Languages and Knowledges into Engagement Practices. This task force would consist primarily of Indigenous experts on language and knowledge who can advise on how best to incorporate Indigenous language terms into Indigenous engagement policies and strategize further on how language usage could contribute to meaningful engagement with Indigenous communities and governments, consulting firms, and other institutional bodies.
- Consulting companies and agencies should hire both fluent speakers of Indigenous languages and fluent speakers of English and French, as well as language learners from a community, to work in translation-related tasks on consultation projects. Fluent speakers

can help translate between languages if necessary, and those who are still learning the language can be provided with an environment to develop their skills, thus supporting language revitalization and transmission in the community. Scobie and Rodgers (2019) suggest making Indigenous language skills a requirement for jobs that are connected to the stewardship of land, culture and knowledge systems; helping learners achieve fluency thus creates more possibilities of filling these jobs with speakers in the future.

- The government and industry should organize formal cultural (and linguistic) training programs for consultants and researchers working on projects like the CNC. Cultural competency necessarily must include language competency, due to the interrelation of language and culture that we elaborate on here. Joly and Westman (2017) emphasize the importance of training and education for regulators, industry proponents and consultants, which could promote an understanding of cultures and ways of life of Indigenous Peoples in northern Alberta (Joly and Westman 2017) — such a training program could employ local Indigenous knowledge keepers as instructors and focus heavily on the local Indigenous language(s) and their links to land (and thus worldview); this is elaborated upon in Section 4.2. Federal funding agencies should encourage researchers to conduct community-based studies with Indigenous governments and communities in Indigenous languages.