



# LEARNING EVENT

## Aligning ENGO Financial Practices with Commitments to Indigenous-led Conservation

10-11:00 am PDT | 1:00 - 2:00 EDT  
December 2, 2025

# Agenda

| TIME (EDT)  | Aligning ENGO Financial Practices with Commitments to Indigenous-led Conservation |
|-------------|---|
| 1:00-1:08   | <b>Opening (8 min)</b><br>Opening Song: <a href="#">Dirt Roads</a> by Tia Wood    |
| 1:08-1:13   | <b>Background &amp; Context Setting (5 min)</b>                                   |
| 1:13 - 1:45 | <b>Findings &amp; So What (33 min)</b>  |
| 1:45-1:52   | <b>Review of the tool (7 minutes)</b>   |
| 1:52 - 2:00 | <b>Wrap Up &amp; Close (8 min)</b>  |

# Introduction and Context

## Today's objectives:

- Share our research findings on ENGO Financial Practices
- Introduce a Self-Assessment and Reflective tool for ENGOs to advance financial conversations in your organizational context
- Share comments questions or reflections on your organizational journey
- Identify what supports could be helpful as next steps

# Building on Prior work

**CONSOLIDATED  
QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSES  
FROM INDIGENOUS PEOPLES  
FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF  
RIGHTS-BASED PRINCIPLES  
FOR THE ETHICAL  
ENGAGEMENT OF  
“CONSERVATION FUNDERS”  
AND INTERMEDIARIES**

2024  
AUGUST

**Core Human Rights Principles  
for Private Conservation  
Organizations and Funders**

**Giving in a Good Way: Transforming Colonial Funding Practices for Conservation**

A surge of interest in Indigenous-led conservation has led to increases in charitable funding. But is the philanthropy sector ‘giving in a good way’ or are funders exerting direction and control?

Interviews with 22 representatives from Indigenous, environmental, and philanthropic organizations (1) explored how colonial philanthropic approaches perpetuate challenges (thorns) for Indigenous-led organizations, and (2) produced key considerations (fruit) for philanthropic organizations to create meaningful, respectful, sustainable, and trust-based funding models.

The ‘Giving in a Good Way’ report serves as a starting point for a broader conversation on decolonizing philanthropy for Indigenous conservation organizations.

**Thorns**

- Inequity and Power**  
Donor support for Indigenous-led organizations can be misguided, even if well-intentioned, due to biases and a one-size-fits-all approach that hinders genuine collaboration and co-creation.
- Insufficient, Short-Term Funding**  
Constrained funding amounts and short timelines hinder the cultivation of meaningful relationships, perpetuate dependency, and prevent long-term financial and project sustainability.
- Onerous Applications and Reporting**  
The demanding level of detail and rigid deadlines of funding applications and reporting perpetuate colonial standards. This undermines the efforts of Indigenous organizations to achieve deeper, lasting impact within their communities.
- Accountability**  
Formal funding agencies can often prioritize corporate interests over community interests. There are concerns that philanthropic organizations fund Indigenous-led conservation initiatives to serve their own agendas and reputations.
- Competition**  
While financial support for Indigenous-led conservation grows, limited funding opportunities creates competition between Indigenous organizations that diverts energy and focus from reconciliation and conservation efforts.

See the ‘Giving in a Good Way’ report in the IPCA Knowledge Basket at [www.ipcaknowledgebasket.ca/giving-in-a-good-way](http://www.ipcaknowledgebasket.ca/giving-in-a-good-way)

Report author: Sara Wilbur-Collins

**RIGHT RELATIONS COLLABORATIVE**

2024 | **RECIPROCITY  
REPORT**

**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**

# Themes from Literature Review

**1. Direct Funding Practices:** Redirecting funds, long-term commitments, flexible models, Indigenous-led funds (e.g., IPRF, Coast Funds, Right Relations Collaborative).

**2 Transparency & Accountability:** Full disclosure, independent evaluation, human rights due diligence, grievance systems, transparency of fundraising practices.

## Sources in literature review

- International Indian Treaty Council (IITC, 2024)
  - Survey results & consolidated report of Indigenous guidance/feedback
- A Challenge to Conservationists (Chapin, 2004)
- Windigo Faces (Lee, 2011)
- Indigenous Circle of Experts (ICE, 2018)
- Confronting Colonialism in Conservation (2023)
- UNEP (2024) – Core Human Rights Principles
- Fox (2024) – MSc Thesis
- Giving in a Good Way (Wilbur-Collins, 2024) + Infographic
- The Upwelling Learning Agenda (The Circle & EFC, 2024)
- Justice Funders Resonance Framework

# Themes from Literature Review

**3. Partnership Principles:** Centering Indigenous governance, UNDRIP/FPIC, long-term relationships, protecting knowledge systems, accountability in partnerships.

**4. Systemic Change in Economy and Finance:** Shifting decision-making power, recognition of transformative change needed in economy, refusing harmful funding and corporate/government funding, decolonizing climate/biodiversity finance, need for non-market and holistic approaches.

## Sources in literature review

- International Indian Treaty Council (IITC, 2024) – Survey results & consolidated report of Indigenous guidance/feedback
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# Defining ENGO Financial Practices:

## Financial Practices

- Activities and policies that help your organization decide how funding is obtained and allocated
- Includes financial and administrative relationships with Indigenous peoples, and communities
- Examples of financial planning, partnerships/contracts, strategic budgeting processes, record keeping, fund management, pro bono or in-kind services, internal controls, and financial reporting

# Research Methods Used

- 1. Literature review of guidance & reports**
- 2. Reflexive survey with 10 ENGOs**
- 3. Focus group with 7 ENGOs**
- 4. Learning session with ~100 attendees**

# Key Findings: Indigenous partnerships increasingly important

- **ENGOs are committed to supporting Indigenous-led conservation**
  - Respectful and appropriate language used
  - Level of centrality to core mission varies
  - Decades of support, collaboration, and long-standing partnerships
- **Level of alignment with financial practices varies greatly across organizations**
  - Most ENGOs relatively early in systemizing practices
  - Promising initiatives in action but not always formalized
  - Often difficult to find/quantify the percentage of budget dedicated to Indigenous-led efforts

# Key Findings: Leadership integration needs more focus

The ways ENGOs incorporate Indigenous engagement and leadership falls on a spectrum:

| Arrangement | Ad-Hoc Indigenous Advisors   | Indigenous Advisory Councils or Board participation   | Full-time Indigenous Staff  | Integrated Indigenous Unit   |
|-------------|--|---|---|--|
| Description | Contracting external Indigenous advisors or consultants on an as-needed basis for specific projects or initiatives | Part of the governance structure, meet regularly or as needed to provide input on specific initiatives or strategic direction | Dedicated internal roles meant for Indigenous People, goals and objectives of the role can revolve around influencing strategic direction | Integrated unit comprised of staff that advise the board and largely influences strategic direction of the organization. |
| Usage       | All organizations mentioned using this method  | Many do this but level of formality and frequency of meetings vary  | A few do this but note challenges with retention  | Very few use this arrangement  |

## Key Findings: In-kind support is core but evolving

- **In-kind/direct support is the most common way ENGOs support Indigenous partners**
- **Examples include:**
  - Proposal/Grant Writing Support
  - Pro Bono Legal Services
  - Technical Support
  - Education Delivery & Capacity Building Programs
  - Participation in and promotion of Indigenous-led initiatives
  - Land stewardship activities
- **Emerging practices on increasing capacity among Indigenous partners vs providing services**

# Key Findings: Decolonizing Agreements is a challenge

ENGOs use a variety of different agreements with Indigenous partners, nations, and governments:

## Informal Agreements

Handshake or verbal agreements used for:

- In-kind activities
- Honoraria
- Collaboration

## Formal Agreements

Short or long term contracts used for:

- In-kind services
- Direct funding
- Transfer of funds
- Shared goals, co-learning opportunities, communications protocols

## Common Challenges

- Rewriting formal agreements to shift away from colonial lens
- Burden of administrative requirements (i.e. lack of MOUs or contracts)

# Contracts, Agreements, and Intellectual Property

## What we heard from ENGOs- Working to Decolonize Agreements and Contracts

Co-creating agreements with Indigenous partners is commonly used to create agreements that work well for both parties, however; partners may not always have the capacity to co-create. Inclusion of OCAP Principles are a way to decolonize written language.

"In formal agreements, we have started including our values and the ways we want to work together. This might seem intrinsic but we do it because we want to work in a more relational way with our First Nations partners, so we co-create both formal and informal agreements together. That is a huge shift away from our legal team just drafting it up. We often use a template then ask our partners what to keep, change, or what should be added. It usually takes a couple sessions co-creating the agreements together."

"One of the Indigenous partners' lawyers worked on a few nuances and strengthened some of our own language with better 'legalese' so we asked if we can adopt that in our own stuff and now we've started using that. Its also mandatory in all agreements that OCAP principles are written in anything formal or informal across the board.

# Contracts, Agreements, and Intellectual Property

## What we heard from ENGOs- Intellectual Property and Data Collection

Protecting Indigenous knowledge and IP is important. A few participants shared how this is approached at their organizations. Creating intentional safeguards such as requiring written consent and using firewall protections help ENGOs relate with Indigenous IP respectfully.

### REQUIRING WRITTEN CONSENT FOR USING INDIGENOUS IP:

We created a few key clauses used within and outside the [the organisation] saying that Indigenous nations, persons or community members are experts. Anything that we classify as Indigenous Knowledge whether its written, oral, or any other form, non-Indigenous folks cannot use it unless they have written consent

### FIREWALL PROTECTION OF INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE:

One thing I love about [the organisation] is that they actually firewall the data as well. They're doing lots of plant restoration and working with cultural information and with the firewall, even other people who work in the organization actually can't access that information

### INCLUDING INDIGENOUS DATA SOVEREIGNTY IN POLICIES AND PROCESSES:

There is a group of us that are explicitly focused on that area. We support direction setting and implementation through our processes, policies and systems, including considerations around Indigenous data sovereignty

# Key Findings: Transparency

## From the literature:

- Transparency is a crucial practice for building trust and ensuring financial practices include Indigenous leadership
- Globally, 62% of Indigenous people report not being informed of the sources of funding for projects or activities being brought onto their land.

**Some organizations proactively share information about funding and financial practices but we do not have enough findings that show this is a common practice.**

# Key Findings: Summary

- ENGOs committed to supporting Indigenous-led conservation but practices vary
- Leadership integration needs more focus
- In-kind support is core but evolving
- Agreements & Intellectual Property (IP) require decolonization
- Transparency in funding sources, flows and overall allocations is still a major gap

# Self assessment Tool

- Made for both Indigenous and non Indigenous audiences in mind.
  - A tool about accountability and transformation. By examining financial practices honestly and collaboratively, we can shift systems to better support Indigenous-led conservation and build relationships rooted in respect, transparency, and shared purpose & understanding.

# Self assessment Tool

**Section 1:** *Overview of Current Funding and Financial Practices*

**Section 2:** *Understanding the role of Indigenous-led conservation in your organization*

**Section 3:** *Funding Agreements and Partnerships with Indigenous Nations*

**Section 4:** *Barriers and challenges*

**Section 5:** *Increasing Support for Indigenous-led Conservation and Supporting Reflexive Policies*

**Section 6:** *Financial Transformation Evaluation Chart*

# Financial Transformation Evaluation Chart Sneak Peak

|  | <b>Paths of Practice</b>   |  |
|--|--|--|
| <b>Practice</b>                            | <b>Transactional</b>   | <b>Transformative</b>  |
| Reporting                                  | Reporting mechanisms are strictly determined by organization/funder.                                 | Indigenous methodologies and chosen platforms of storytelling/ceremony are the main method of reporting.                                     |
| Annual funding distribution                | Minimal funds are distributed to Indigenous-led initiatives/projects and majority stays within ENGO. | Significant and intentional allocations are made to Indigenous-led initiatives.  |
| Commitments to Indigenous-led conservation | ENGO has no internal or external commitments to Indigenous-led conservation.                         | ENGO has public facing commitments (with progress reports) that align with Treaty Rights, UNDRIP, TRC, OCAP and community partner protocols. |
| Land Back action                           | Minimal to no efforts are being made to ensure land is returned to Indigenous partners.              | Actively supporting return or transfer of land back to Indigenous partners.  |
| Funding agreements and contracts           | ENGO imposes funding cycles with fixed-term end dates.   | Trust-based funding agreement models are designed in collaboration with Indigenous partners, with predictable and sustainable funding.       |

# Lets Hear From You!

- Please share any questions or comments you have about the research &/or tool
  - Raise your hand or feel free to use the chat function
- Share comments questions or reflections on your organizational journey
- Identify what supports could be helpful as next steps!

# Stay Connected!

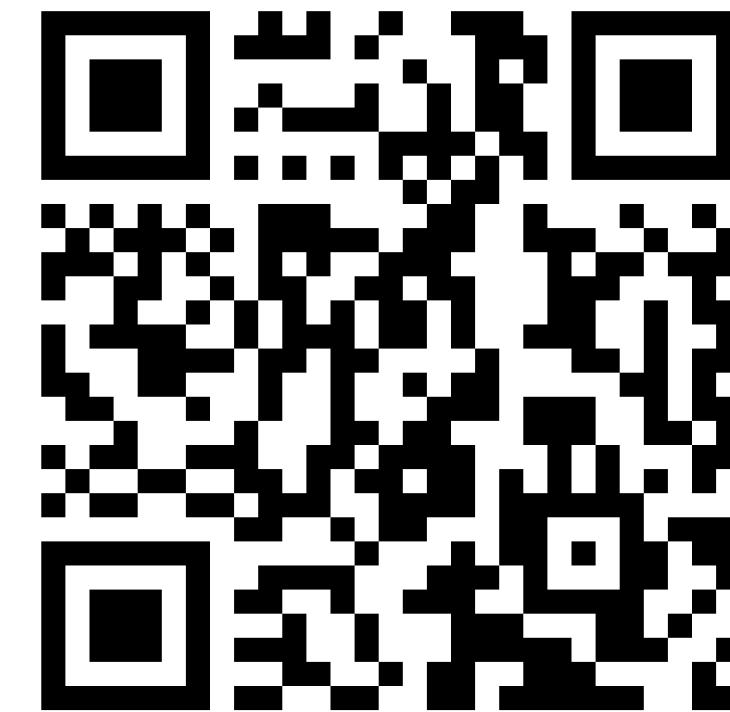


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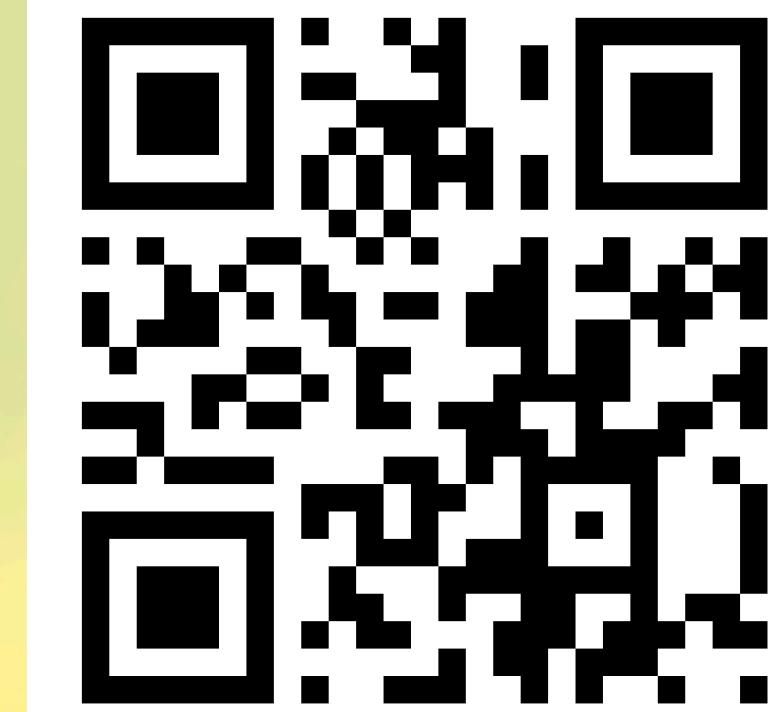
**RAD  
Website**



**Eco Analytics  
Website**



**Environics  
Website**



**We encourage you to reach out with questions, ideas and collaborative opportunities!**



***Thank you, anushiik, ekosani, miigwetch, masih,  
niá:wen, nitsiniiyi'taki, woliwon, wela'lin, hai hai,  
ɬeeko, marsi, ḡɬəɬə, gjaxsixa, merci.***

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