



**ENGAGEMENT WITH
INDIGENOUS GOVERNMENTS,
COMMUNITIES AND ORGANIZATIONS**

JUNE 2021

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A sincere thanks to all SFU staff and faculty members who contributed to the successful completion of this report. Special thanks to the following individuals who provided input/support for the development of the survey and the finalization of this report:

- Ginger Gosnell-Myers
- Jessie Williams
- Mark Roman
- Navinder Chima
- Nicole Manson
- Ronald Johnston

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Please note:

For the purposes of the survey project, “Indigenous” is defined as including First Nations, Inuit and Métis.

OVERVIEW

In spring 2021, as part of ongoing reconciliation work, SFU External Relations launched the first survey of its kind for faculty and staff on SFU's Engagement with Indigenous Governments, Communities and Organizations to gain further understanding of current external Indigenous engagement and work being done to deepen relationships and engagement with Indigenous partners in 2019 and 2020.

This project was sponsored by Joanne Curry, vice president of external relations, and supervised by Sobhana Jaya-Madhavan, associate vice president of external relations. The project lead was Darya Berezhnova, SFU political science MA and co-op student.

As Canada's engaged university, SFU has many ongoing Indigenous initiatives, small and large, short and long-term, in a wide variety of departments and program areas. As a university whose three campuses are located on unceded traditional territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, Tsleil-Waututh, Katzie, Kwikwetlem, Qayqayt, Kwantlen, Semiahmoo, Tsawwassen and Stó:lō peoples, the university has engaged with Indigenous governments, communities and organizations over the years.

The purpose of the survey was to document the good work underway and address the knowledge-sharing gaps by collecting information for a baseline inventory. Access to this inventory will allow members of the SFU community to learn from, and be inspired by, the diverse and creative engagement initiatives currently happening. A growing inventory of engagement initiatives will also allow faculties and departments to support current and future projects in a more meaningful way.

Fifteen SFU units were represented in the survey responses, which reported more than 50 examples of engagement initiatives with 55 Indigenous governments and communities and 16 other Indigenous organizations. These engagements take place not only in B.C., but also across the country, in 11 out of 13 provinces and territories, and even internationally in Guatemala and New Zealand.

SFU UNITS REPRESENTED IN SURVEY

- Beedie School of Business
- Centre for Educational Excellence
- Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
- Faculty of Education
- Faculty of Environment
- Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
- Indigenous Student Centre
- Lifelong Learning
- Morris J. Wosk Centre for Dialogue
- Office for Aboriginal Peoples
- Student Recruitment
- VP Academic and Provost
- VP External Relations
- VP Finance & Administration
- Work Integrated Learning

SURVEY RESULTS

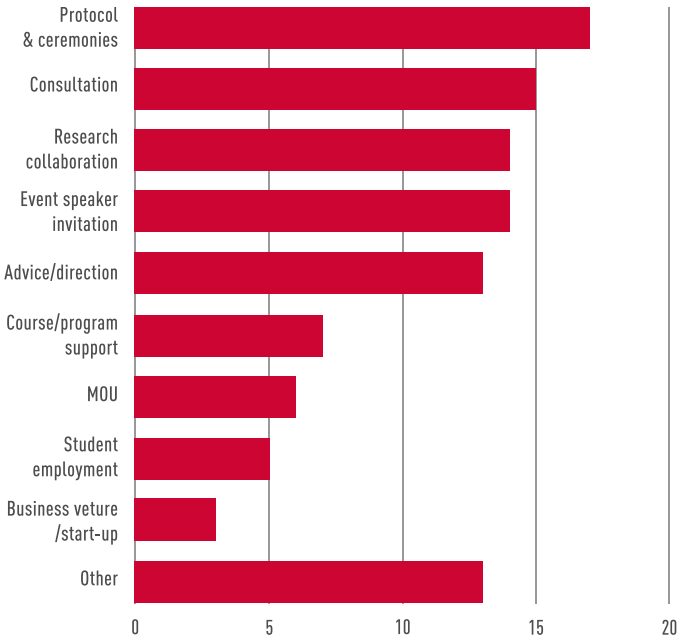
TYPES OF ENGAGEMENT

The survey asked about the nature and purpose of respondents' current or recent engagements with Indigenous governments, communities and organizations to better understand approaches and challenges to engagement and to create a baseline inventory of engagement initiatives between the SFU community and Indigenous partners.

The SFU community represented in the survey engage with Indigenous partners for many purposes, including for protocol and ceremonies, consultation, advice or direction on issues, event speaker invitations, student employment, research collaboration, course and program support, business ventures or startups, memoranda of understanding (MOU), student recruitment, exploratory partnership-building purposes and many more. The most commonly cited types of engagement, chosen by half or nearly half of respondents, include: protocol and ceremonies, consultation, research collaboration, event speaker invitations and advice or direction on issues.

The vast majority of participants responded that their relationships with Indigenous governments, communities and organizations are long-term and reciprocal, with some respondents acknowledging that although their initiatives are currently one-off or non-reciprocal, they aim to build on and improve these relationships so that they can be more collaborative and long-term.

BREAKDOWN OF ENGAGEMENT INITIATIVE TYPES



RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

It is evident from the survey results that relationship building with band councils, Elders and Indigenous knowledge holders is an important, ongoing process with new connections being established and existing ones continually strengthened. While the survey may not represent a complete picture of the current Indigenous engagement at SFU, it is evident that the university community has built relationships and co-created initiatives with many Indigenous governments, communities and organizations. Respondents were also clear that they are building relationships with urban Indigenous organizations and populations in Metro Vancouver, which are not associated with First Nations governments.

A significant number of respondents also reach out to Indigenous education coordinators, Indigenous community members, Indigenous language and culture educators and staff and other members of Indigenous organizations.

NATURE OF RELATIONSHIPS

Part of the survey assesses the nature of the relationships being established and nurtured between SFU and Indigenous partners. The length and reciprocity of relationships was particularly important to find out, as meaningful and strong relationships must be continuous and ongoing. The vast majority of participants responded that their relationships with Indigenous governments, communities and organizations are long-term, continuing for over a year – and in many cases, participants specified that these relationships have been cultivated over many years. Several participants who mentioned relationships of less than a year also highlighted a desire for growing and building on these relationships. A small number of participants responded that their projects were “one-off.”

The majority of participants categorized their relationships with Indigenous partners as reciprocal. Significantly, several respondents also highlighted relationships that are not reciprocal and noted that Indigenous communities’ involvement in these projects is a generous donation of their time and energy. Some participants expressed a desire for relationships to become reciprocal in the future, if they currently are not.

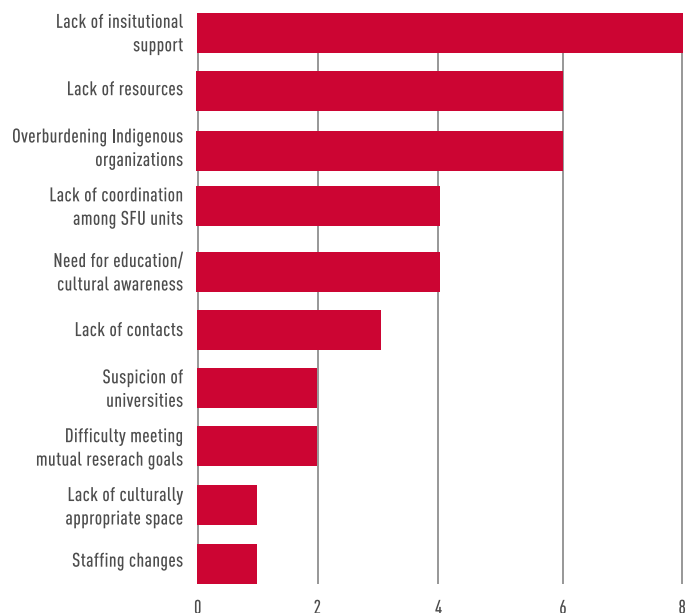
CHALLENGES

The three most common challenges faced by respondents during engagement with Indigenous governments, communities and organizations include a lack of resources, a lack of institutional support and the overburdening of Indigenous individuals and organizations. While three-quarters of respondents indicated they do have funds available in their department or workplan for Indigenous engagement work, nearly one-quarter responded they do not have dedicated funds. Several respondents described funding challenges, having limited or unreliable access to funds, not being included in financial planning, or having no funds at all to carry out their engagement work. Other respondents specified that funding for their projects comes from other sources, such as SFU's Aboriginal Strategic Initiative (ASI) fund, the broader funding envelope within SFU and/or limited external sources.

Survey respondents also discussed institutional challenges with several expressing that SFU's organizational structure is not set up for supporting and maintaining the long-term relationships that lead to meaningful engagement work. Not having a point of contact and not knowing how to take the first step in engaging with Indigenous organizations were also mentioned as challenges. Many respondents acknowledged that even when there is capacity at SFU, the high demand placed on Indigenous individuals and organizations by other partners means that they can only devote a limited amount of time and resources to engaging with universities. Respondents also mentioned that faculty and staff need to be aware of the history and cultures of the nations and communities with whom they are engaging. Lack of experience and understanding was noted as a barrier to establishing and maintaining meaningful relationships.

Two other notable challenges include a lack of coordination among SFU units and the need for more education and cultural awareness among SFU staff. Some respondents were unaware of ongoing engagement initiatives at the university or efforts to coordinate such initiatives. This survey and the resulting baseline inventory aim to address this challenge by making a list of ongoing initiatives available across departments.

CHALLENGES FACED BY RESPONDENTS DURING ENGAGEMENT



RECONCILIATION

Reconciliation is a priority at SFU. The Aboriginal Reconciliation Council (ARC) report [*Walk This Path With Us*](#) (2017) and its 34 calls to action have supported many reconciliation initiatives at SFU. The large majority of respondents stated that their Indigenous engagement initiatives were strongly related to the ARC report.

Some noted that the principles of the message, “nothing about us without us,” have resonated in their engagement initiatives, whether by establishing dedicated Indigenous engagement positions in their units, or by motivating collaborative and reciprocal engagement relationships. Survey respondents who self-identified as Indigenous highlighted that their engagement initiatives stem from their personal teachings rather than the ARC report, while still being linked to the overall goal of reconciliation.

CONCLUSION

The survey on SFU’s Engagement with Indigenous Governments, Communities and Organizations would be beneficial to SFU if done on an annual basis, to maintain and grow an accurate inventory of Indigenous engagement initiatives across all departments and program areas.

The data gathered will support ongoing engagement initiatives, and sharing of ideas and best practices among the SFU community, and potentially direct resource allocation decisions and reflection on how SFU can further develop and co-create meaningful, diverse and lasting relationships with Indigenous partners in B.C. and beyond.