



# **WHO ARE YOU RESPONSIBLE TO?**

## **What We Heard: Consultation on Indigenous Verification at Memorial University**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND  
FINAL REPORT**

**APRIL 2024**







MEMORIAL  
UNIVERSITY







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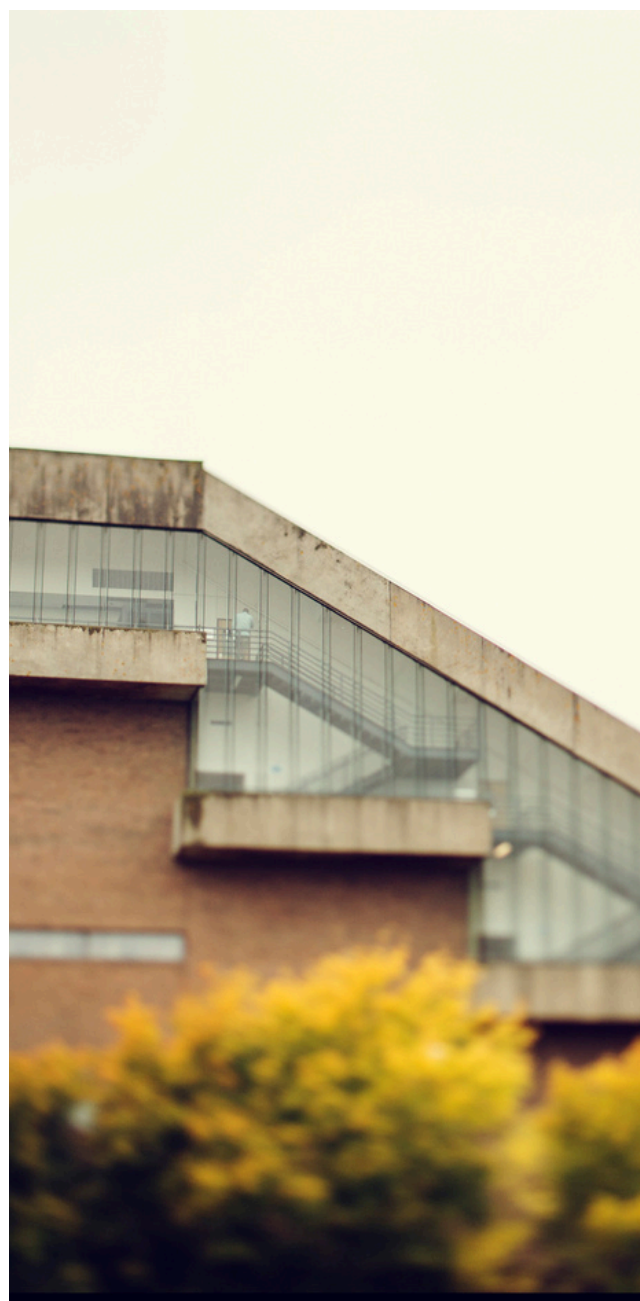
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# Executive Summary

Memorial University has made several commitments to reflect Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing in teaching and learning, research and administration at the University. Memorial agrees that it is incumbent on the institution to make space, both literally and figuratively, for Indigenous Peoples and their knowledges, pedagogies, perspectives, and more, within the academy. Ensuring that these spaces, and Indigenous-specific opportunities do indeed benefit Indigenous peoples, requires a system to verify one's claim to Indigenous citizenship or membership.

In Fall 2023, First Peoples Group was contracted to conduct a broad range of consultation sessions with Faculty, Staff, Students, and Alumni within Memorial University, as well as Indigenous Nations, communities and organizations. Over the past six months, First Peoples Group has reviewed current processes related to Indigenous verification within Memorial University, and at universities across Canada. In addition, we have hosted 42 consultation sessions, for a total of 179 engagements.







First Peoples Group examined current policies, practices, and protocols on Indigenous verification in addition to hosting a wide-range of consultation sessions to offer recommendations to support Memorial University in the development of an Indigenous verification protocol. Specifically, the goals and objectives of this work were to:

- Review current verification processes within Memorial University and at other post-secondary institutions across Canada.
- Plan for and host consultation sessions with Faculty, Staff, Students and Alumni at Memorial University as well as Indigenous Nations, communities and organizations.
- Prepare and deliver weekly consultation updates to the Vice President's Advisory Committee on Indigenous Affairs.
- Bring forward a written report at the end of the consultations that includes a summary of what was heard as well as recommendations for protocols aimed at requiring and ensuring an Indigenous declaration and verification practice(s) that respects Indigenous voices.

Through consultations, pathways forward have become clear on how Indigenous peoples in Newfoundland and Labrador see Memorial University addressing Indigenous verification.

Recommendations outline how Memorial University may identify "Recognized Indigenous Collectives". They also outline how verification of individuals from these collectives may look and, very importantly, how verification for individuals who do not hold citizenship/membership documentation for their collectives may look.

There is a fundamental difference between having an Indigenous ancestor and being a citizen or member of a Nation. This report aims to address this nuance. It also aims to address how colonial policies have displaced people from their communities and how Memorial University will need to take this into consideration in the development of a verification protocol to ensure Indigenous people are not excluded from this process and harm to Indigenous peoples is minimized.





# Recommendations

*Based on what was heard during consultations and responses to the online survey, First Peoples Group offers 15 recommendations for Memorial University to consider in developing an Indigenous verification protocol. Some recommendations appear underlined as they are hyperlinked to key discussions in the report.*

## **1. Reconciling with Collectives**

Many participants noted that the reason a number of universities are in such difficult situations in respect to false claims is they lack meaningful relationships with recognized Indigenous collectives. It is recommended that Memorial University begins to right relations with recognized Indigenous collectives by acknowledging the ways the University has failed them and, additionally, the harm that has been caused to them through being deprioritized over relationships with unrecognized collectives.

## **2. Recognized Indigenous Collectives**

It is recommended that the University utilizes a two-pronged approach with regard to outlining Recognized Indigenous Collectives within a verification protocol:

- federal recognition under Section 35 of the Constitution Act and/or
- recognition as a legitimate Indigenous collective by their federally-recognized neighbours,

Neighbours include those that a collective has historical relationships with, with particular attention being paid to relations within the three Indigenous groups:

- First Nations --> First Nations relations
- Inuit --> Inuit relations
- Métis --> Métis relations

## **3. Respect for Collectives' Membership/Citizenship Processes**

It is recommended that Memorial University establish Memoranda of Understanding with recognized Indigenous collectives within the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. At a minimum, these Memoranda of Understanding should outline how the University and the collective will work collaboratively with respect to Indigenous verification.

## **4. Coordinated Approach**

It is recommended that a verification protocol be coordinated through the Office of Indigenous Affairs as the key body responsible for its oversight and implementation. This will help ensure that applicants to Indigenous-specific opportunities receive consistent responses to their applications. A working group reflective of the Indigenous diversity within the province should be established to begin protocol development.





## **5. Assessment of Current Indigenous-Specific Opportunities**

It is recommended that the University review requirements and processes related to the selection and awarding of current Indigenous-specific opportunities. This will ensure consistency across these opportunities as the University works toward a centralized approach.

## **6. Oversight for the Creation of Indigenous-Specific Opportunities**

To ensure there is consistency in language being utilized across Indigenous-specific opportunities, and to facilitate greater oversight on the creation of these opportunities, the following is recommended:

-proposals for the creation of Indigenous-specific opportunities are submitted to either Human Resources, or the Office of the Registrar, depending on if it is a student or faculty/staff-facing opportunity.

-proposals be reviewed by the Vice President's Advisory Committee on Indigenous Affairs, which will determine which opportunities are approved.

## **7. Verification Pathways**

It is recommended that Memorial University have two verification pathways within its protocol.

### *Pathway A*

Documentation from a Recognized Indigenous Collective (Indian Status Card, Inuit Treaty Organization Card, Métis Government Membership Card, or a letter from a membership/registry authority within a recognized Indigenous collective). In the case of American Indians or Alaskan Natives, documentation from tribal nations that are state –or federally recognized should be provided.

### *Pathway B*

In the case of individuals who have no federal documentation, and obtaining documentation from a recognized Indigenous collective is not possible, it is recommended that Memorial University establish an alternative pathway, which could consist of candidate statements outlining a connection to an Indigenous collective.

Both pathways will require the University to confirm a claim with the Recognized Indigenous Collective.

## **8. Verifying Lived Experience & Community Connection**

It is recommended that Memorial University consider the potential impact of an Indigenous-specific opportunity to determine if a second level of verification is needed, which would include learning about an applicant's involvement and contributions to Indigenous communities.



## **9. Staff: Human Resources**

It is recommended that the University fulfill Response 1.6 (ii) from the Strategic Framework for Indigenization, and develop a full-time, permanent, Indigenous-specific position in Human Resources. This position will have a dual report to the Office of the Vice-President (Indigenous).

## **10. Staff: Office of the Registrar**

It is also recommended that the University fulfill Response 1.6 (iii) from the Strategic Framework for Indigenization, and develop a full-time, permanent, Indigenous-specific position in the Office of the Registrar. This position will have a dual report to the Office of the Vice-President (Indigenous).

## **11. Properly Resourced**

It is recommended that any funding required to resource the verification protocol at Memorial University be in excess of funding that is allocated for Indigenous initiatives.

## **12. Development of Guidelines for Inviting Indigenous Guests to Memorial University**

It is recommended that Memorial University consider developing a *Guidelines for Inviting Indigenous Guests* document in lieu of asking visitors and guests to verify their Indigenous citizenship/membership through the University protocol. This document

could include guidelines on how to learn more about a potential speaker, cultural educator, etc.

## **13. Application of Verification Protocol**

We recommend that the university determine how a verification protocol will be applied to existing Indigenous-specific opportunities and spaces.

## **14. Data Storage**

Establish a database, which houses information related to Indigenous verifications, to be held by the Office of Indigenous Affairs. Documentation pertaining to the verification process should be preserved following the document retention guidelines established for recruitment and employment files, as well as document retention procedures for comparable student records.

## **15. Education and Awareness**

An education/awareness campaign is recommended to educate the Memorial University community on why there are Indigenous-specific opportunities at the institution. This campaign should utilize various formats (print, multimedia, etc.) to explain the impacts of non-Indigenous people making false claims of Indigenous membership/citizenship to occupy Indigenous-specific opportunities, and the repercussions doing so. In addition, all University applications must clearly explain what an Indigenous-specific opportunity is.





# Context and Background

There's a subtle yet important distinction between having a responsibility *for* and a responsibility *to* someone or something. "Responsibility *For*" pertains to what you can respond to and be held accountable for; things that are within your domain. "Responsibility *To*" refers to the people you are accountable to, encompassing your relationships and the inherent obligations they require (Hall, 2022). As Indigenous Peoples, we have always named our relations. We have always named our relations to one another and to the lands and waters we are on. Indigenous verification is rooted in traditional protocols of naming who you are, what makes you who you are, the community or group that claims you, and your intentions for being in a certain space. We hold a responsibility to these relations.

The issue of false claims to Indigenous citizenship or membership is a concern that is being addressed in universities across Canada and one that Memorial University takes seriously. We are aware of the deep wounds it causes to Indigenous people and communities, as well as the threat it poses to the integrity of Indigenous ways of knowing and being in academic institutions. Preventing this from happening requires establishing and implementing systems that are based on broad consultation with Indigenous Peoples, communities, and nations.

Developing an Indigenous verification protocol is included in the set of actions within the Memorial University Strategic Framework for Indigenization, specifically, Response 1.1.8, which reads, "Develop protocols/guidelines to address issues of Indigenous identity as they pertain to internal processes such as targeted hires, reserved seats, and other Indigenous-specific opportunities". The actions set forward in this framework are grounded in consultations with various Indigenous groups across Newfoundland and Labrador. It is important to note the timing of the release of this framework; which was approved by the Board of Regents at its March 2021 meeting. Many individuals are of the belief that the impetus for the creation of a verification protocol comes from the exit of former Memorial University President, Dr. Vianne Timmons, which then shone a spotlight on the institution and its lack of verification processes. Dr. Timmons exited the University in April 2023, nearly two years after the release of the Strategic Framework for Indigenization. The commitment to developing a verification protocol comes from the consultations with Indigenous groups across the province, two years before Dr. Timmons' departure.

"At the core of this initiative is the potential for renewed relationships with Indigenous peoples and the advancement of reconciliation. Additionally, Memorial's capacity to expand upon and advance knowledge about cultures and worldviews will increase, helping to build trust and understanding as well as the capacity to inspire future students and generations."

*(Strategic Framework for Indigenization, Memorial University)*



No decisions have been made regarding what this verification protocol could look like. The voices of current faculty, staff, students and alumni of Memorial University in addition to Indigenous Nations, communities and organizations throughout Newfoundland and Labrador are integral in making recommendations to the University on Indigenous verification.

First Peoples Group does not hold any authority in terms of the development of a verification protocol at Memorial University. First Peoples Group is not making determinations on who is or who is not Indigenous. We are simply sharing with the University a summary of what we have heard throughout the consultation process.

## About First Peoples Group

First Peoples Group is a 100% Indigenous-owned and Indigenous-led consulting firm that offers community-based Indigenous knowledge and management consulting services across Canada. With our commitment to understanding cultural sensitivities and nuances, we work to foster safe and brave spaces required for meaningful dialogue with Indigenous Peoples. Our vision is to work collaboratively to build a better Canada for the next seven generations.

Four core values motivate how we conduct our business; *excellence* in service delivery, *integrity* and *honesty* in all dealings with our clients, and *respect* for the knowledge and wisdom that all stakeholders bring to the table.

At First Peoples Group, we approach every aspect of our work with Reconciliation at the forefront. In recent years, Reconciliation has taken its rightful place as a priority in many organizations, schools, and governments. Reconciliation may take on different meanings depending on the context. At First Peoples Group, Reconciliation is about a commitment to relationships: with ourselves, with others, and with the land.





# Acknowledgements

First Peoples Group expresses gratitude to every student, faculty member, staff member, and alumnus of Memorial University who took part in a consultation session, and/or offered their thoughts on Indigenous verification through the online survey. We also express our gratitude to every community leader and member who took time to meet with us in a consultation session, and/or to write and submit statements on their position. We acknowledge that the topic of Indigenous verification is difficult for many, and evokes feelings of anger for some, and feelings of sadness for others. We feel honoured to have been able to listen to you all share so openly and passionately.

In addition, we express gratitude to the Office of Indigenous Affairs at Memorial University, the Vice President's Advisory Committee on Indigenous Affairs (VPACIA), and the President's Executive Council (PEC) for your guidance in preparation for the consultation process.



# Terminology

## **Collective**

Utilized throughout this report interchangeably with “Indigenous group” and “Indigenous community”.

## **Indigenous-specific opportunities**

Includes, but is not limited to, targeted hiring practices, designated student seats, student scholarships reserved for Indigenous peoples.

## **Material Benefit**

Financial, personal or professional gain which stems from the experience of an Indigenous-specific opportunity.

## **Membership/citizenship**

Throughout this report, the terms “citizenship” and “membership” are used interchangeably. Many Indigenous situate their belonging within an Indigenous collective as nationhood, therefore, using the term ‘citizenship’ is emphasized. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples utilizes the term ‘membership’.

## **What do we mean by ‘verification’?**

Throughout this consultation process, the term verification has been used in the context of confirming that a claim to Indigenous citizenship or membership is true. To be clear, verification of Indigenous citizenship or membership does not equal definition of Indigenous citizenship or membership. An example that may serve well to illustrate this further: *Imagine you are pulled over while driving and a police officer asks to see your driver’s license. The process of you showing your driver’s license includes a verification that you, in fact, are a licensed driver. The police officer is not in the position of deciding whether or not you possess the skills to be a licensed driver, there is another authority who has already determined this.* In the case of Indigenous verification, a University would not be deciding whether or not an applicant is Indigenous. This is determined by the Indigenous collective itself.



# The Era We Find Ourselves In

We find ourselves in a time where Truth and Reconciliation are at the forefront of many discussions in academic institutions, in addition to discussions surrounding Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging. Academic institutions, governments, corporations, and organizations are working to develop Reconciliation Action Plans to spell out their commitments to honouring the 94 Calls to Action set forth by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. These same spaces are developing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging positions and departments to ensure all voices are seen, valued and heard.

There still remains a large amount of miseducation, erasure, and lack of knowledge regarding Indigenous histories, governance, and identity amongst Canadians. When you map this lack of knowledge onto a landscape that has made a commitment to be inclusive and rely on self-identification as the only process for naming Indigenous identity, there becomes a pathway for those who wish to misrepresent themselves as Indigenous to gain material benefit within the academy.

In one consultation, a participant shared, **“if the University is going to move forward with Indigenous verification, they should verify other groups right across the board - ask people to demonstrate they are disabled, demonstrate they are gay, demonstrate they are a woman”**. This reveals a lack of understanding of Indigenous rights. While Indigenous peoples and communities may face inequities, we are not equity-seeking groups. Indigenous Nations and communities are the original inhabitants of these lands and have unique status and rights recognized under Section 35 of the Constitution Act of 1982.





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“People are making false claims and taking Indigenous spaces and opportunities away from rights-holding Indigenous peoples - this is new age colonialism”.

— Community Participant



There have been participants who have shared that *having* an Indigenous verification process would be like “**residential schools all over again**”. There have been participants who have shared that *not* having a verification process is “**a new wave of colonialism**” and “**settler colonialism in action**”.

A participant framed Indigenous verification within the context of Truth and Reconciliation; that the process of verifying is honouring the Truth component, and the component of reconciliation is about accountability.

”

“If we don’t reconcile, we allow the lie to have power”.

— Alumni Participant



# Overview of Engagement

Throughout February and March of 2024, First Peoples Group engaged in 42 consultation sessions on the topic of Indigenous verification at Memorial University.

- 14 group consultation sessions were held with Memorial University Faculty, Staff, Students and Alumni, with a total of 66 participants
- 12 one-on-one consultation sessions were held for Memorial University Faculty, Staff and Alumni

In addition to the consultation sessions, a survey was offered to Memorial University Faculty, Staff, Students and Alumni. The survey garnered 45 respondents;

- 2 faculty
- 6 staff
- 14 students
- 23 alumni

There were also 3 individuals who could not attend a consultation session due to last minute scheduling challenges, and opted to submit a written response to the consultation questions through email.

In addition, 16 sessions were held with Indigenous Nations, communities and organizations\*, with a total of 53 participants from the following Nations, communities and organizations:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| -Benoit's Cove Indian Band                   | -Mekap'sk Mi'kmaq Band                    |
| -Burgeon Band of Indians                     | -Métis National Council                   |
| -Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (Staff)      | -Newfoundland Indigenous Peoples Alliance |
| -Congress of Aboriginal Peoples (Affiliates) | -Nunatsiavut Government                   |
| -Flat Bay Band-No'kmaq Village               | -NunatuKavut Community Council            |
| -First Light Friendship Centre               | -People of the Dawn Friendship Centre     |
| -Innu Nation                                 | -Port au Port Indian Band                 |
| -Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami                     | -Qalipu First Nation                      |

\*An additional 12 Nations, communities and organizations were invited to schedule a consultation session. These groups either declined, did not attend the scheduled session, or did not respond to any of the email communications. A full list of invitees can be found in Appendix C.

In total, there were 179 engagements throughout the consultation phase.



# Consultation Questions

*The following questions were asked in each consultation question, and are the same set of questions asked in the online survey.*

*These questions were reviewed by the Vice President's Advisory Committee on Indigenous Affairs (VPACIA) as well as the President's Executive Council (PEC) at Memorial University.*

1. Should there be explicit requirements for Indigenous verification for designated Indigenous staff, faculty and student opportunities at Memorial University? If so, what might these requirements include?
2. Should verification requirements apply to all roles and opportunities with the university? (i.e. Faculty, Staff, Students, Keynote Speakers, Visiting Cultural Educators, etc.)
3. What process should the University follow when verifying that these requirements have indeed been met by an individual?
4. If the university implements a verification process and an individual who occupies Indigenous space (e.g. Indigenous-specific positions, funding, scholarships, etc.) does not meet the requirements, how could this be addressed?
5. Should Indigenous ways of knowing, and of kinship and connection be honoured in a verification process? If so, how?
6. What do you feel is at risk if there is no verification process? What is at risk if there is a verification process?
7. Is there anything else you would like to share on the topic of Indigenous verification?
8. Are you aware of any other universities that have created policies and processes related to Indigenous verification that are seen to be effective?



A scenic view of a rocky coastline. The sky is a clear, vibrant blue with a few wispy white clouds. In the foreground, a body of water reflects the light. The middle ground features rugged, brownish-grey rock formations. In the background, several white buildings with red roofs are nestled on a hillside. The overall atmosphere is bright and serene.

# **What We Heard: Faculty, Staff, Student and Alumni Consultations**

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I can't handle losing my job. I can't handle my students losing everything I've given them if I'm misidentified, as not Indigenous in a way that lasts. So, I keep my head down in places where the 'Pretendian hunters' might pop up.

— Faculty Participant

## Faculty Sessions Summarized

*This summary includes discussion from (2) faculty group sessions held on February 12, 2024 and March 12, 2024, in addition to (5) faculty one-on-one sessions.*

In one faculty session, the consultation process itself was the subject of much discussion. First Peoples Group facilitators disclosed that questions were reviewed and revised by the Vice President's Advisory Committee on Indigenous Affairs (VPACIA) and the President's Executive Council (PEC).

- One participant strongly opposed universities engaging in Indigenous verification due to perceived incompetence and lack of trust.
- Another participant expressed frustration with Indigenous politicians making broad accusations of fraudulence against entire communities.
- Concerns were raised about the impact of University policies on Indigenous peoples, including the erasure of their experiences and harm caused by verification requirements. Resistance to verification processes was voiced, with emphasis on inherent human honesty and trust and concerns about liability protection for universities.
- Suggestions were made for verification requirements to apply to all University roles and opportunities, with case-by-case exceptions for lack of documentation.
- Questions were raised about the intent behind false claims of Indigenous identity and the potential for a special process to handle such cases with sensitivity.

“

**“Who is overseeing the creation of designated Indigenous opportunities within the University?”**

— Faculty Participant

- Personal experiences of struggling with Indigenous identity and the impact of fraudulent claims were shared.
- The importance of acknowledging and respecting the unique struggles of 'visibly Indigenous individuals' was emphasized.
- Participants also questioned their own involvement in research projects centered on specific collectives and the potential conflicts it might entail.

“

“Culture is a recipe for a good way of living a good life. If it's not perpetuated the way it's meant to be perpetuated, then we lose that recipe. That's a huge risk. Cultural appropriation is a very big deal on the East Coast, and if you have somebody who is speaking these teachings claiming an Indigenous perspective, when in fact they're not, they can do damage, a lot of damage”.

— Community Participant

## Staff Sessions Summarized

*This summary includes discussion from (4) staff group sessions held on February 14, 2024 and February 27, 2024, March 7, 2024 and March 14, 2024, in addition to (4) staff one-on-one sessions.*

- Emphasis was placed on the importance of community involvement in determining Indigenous identity requirements.
- Participants agreed that universities should not determine identity but rather confirm verification with communities based on their own processes.
- The effectiveness of verification protocols in deterring fraudulent applications was discussed, with examples from the University of Saskatchewan.
- Suggestions were made for clarifying "First Nations identity" for non-Indigenous students and advocating for an empathic approach to addressing verification issues.
- Alternative approaches focusing on Indigenous perspectives and experiences were proposed instead of strict criteria enforcement.
- Challenges in defining and verifying Indigenous citizenship/membership were discussed, along with concerns about University roles and added labour on communities.
- Concerns were raised about the verification process for Indigenous-based knowledge and kinship, as well as data storage and privacy of sensitive documents.
- The history and verification practices unique to the St. John's campus and Labrador were highlighted.
- Discussions included the abuse of identity within communities, the authority of faculty/staff in verification, and the value of markers such as language learning and connection to the land.

- Suggestions were made for establishing a committee for Indigenous verification with community input and adopting community verification processes to ensure equity.
- Concerns were raised about the risk of fraudulent individuals holding positions and perpetuating harm against Indigenous peoples if no verification process is in place.

”

“What we're finding out is people are told that they're Indigenous, and they go forward not in a fraudulent way, but actually believing that they are Indigenous. Then, they find out later that they're not, so there has to be some sort of consideration, or at least compassion in that regard”.

— Staff Participant

“

“Where are the Innu students?  
Where are the Innu faculty? Where  
are the Innu staff?”

– Student Participant

## Student Sessions Summarized

*This summary includes discussion from (3) student sessions held on February 15, 2024, March 6, 2024 and March 20, 2024.*

- Challenges Indigenous communities face in verifying kinship and connection, potentially leading to lateral violence, were emphasized.
- Concerns were raised about the verification processes for Indigenous identity, citing issues with federal recognition and personal experiences of marginalization.
- The need to consider future policy development in light of cultural mixing was emphasized.
- Worries about the tension between Indigenous groups in the province and its potential impact on questioning identity and authenticity were expressed.
- Suggestions were made to exempt Elders and keynote speakers from verification requirements to avoid insulting individuals.
- Ideas such as verifying Indigenous citizenship/membership through individual meetings and considering the level of harm before taking action were proposed.
- Instead of punishment, suggestions were made for making amends through volunteering or learning about Indigenous culture.
- Concerns were raised about the Indigenous roundtable and the lack of mental health support for Indigenous students during the process.
- The importance of community-led verification processes, with support from the University, was highlighted.
- The significance of allowing individuals to express their Indigeneity and its impact on their work or identity was emphasized.
- Suggestions were made for an exploratory and investigative process involving Indigenous groups with agency and dialogue.
- Criticisms were voiced about the University's handling of the process and concerns about the potential for more harm from verification processes than without.

- Questions were raised about how the University would communicate findings of non-Indigenous claims and the need for accountability and resources for community healing.
- Concerns were expressed about the timing of the University's initiative amidst a court battle.

”

“Where is the student voice? Could student seats be developed for Vice President’s Advisory Committee on Indigenous Affairs?”

– Student Participant



“

“The reason this issue has become so rampant is because the threshold has been so low, often it was just ticking a box”.

– Alumni Participant

## Alumni Sessions Summarized

*This summary includes discussion from (4) alumni sessions held on March 21, 2024 and March 25, 2024, in addition to (3) alumni one-on-one sessions.*

- Concerns were raised about the influence of non-Indigenous individuals on Indigenous strategies at MUN, leading to Indigenous voices being marginalized.
- The importance of applying a verification process equally to everyone, without exceptions, to avoid discrimination was emphasized.
- Suggestions were made for clear job application requirements for Indigenous positions and the involvement of an Indigenous advisory committee in verification decisions.
- Acknowledgment of the University's failure to establish strong community relations from the beginning and the need for Indigenous-specific HR policies and measures were highlighted.
- It was deemed inappropriate for MUN to adjudicate Indigenous identity and suggestions were made for a national system to verify Indigenous cases.
- Concerns were expressed about creating an environment of suspicion at the University and the potential harm of verification processes.
- Resistance against the weaponization of verification tactics and the potential negative implications for Indigenous youth at MUN were discussed.
- The historical context of identity, particularly regarding the 'Labrador Métis Association', and concerns about recognition under verification policies were raised.

- Questions were posed about who would be responsible for verification and concerns were expressed about the mental health effects of identity politics on NunatuKavut youth.
- There were strong statements indicating that if MUN does not recognize NunatuKavut Inuit in its verification process, it cannot claim to be 'Newfoundland and Labrador's University'.

“

“We are concerned that our people will not be recognized by this policy”.

- Alumni Participant

An aerial photograph of a coastline, showing a dark, forested landmass on the left and a vast, blue ocean on the right. The image is partially obscured by a dark maroon rectangular overlay in the lower half. The text is white and bold, positioned on the maroon background.

# Indigenous Identity, Ancestry and Collectives



## Verification as a part of Indigenous culture and governance

Some participants argued that verification is a colonial concept. However, it was shared in several sessions that for Indigenous peoples, verification has actually always been a part of Indigenous societies and cultures, and is not a colonial or novel concept. One participant discussed how verification was traditionally used by their community when travelling to places outside of their village. Each community had a unique vocable, and everyone who was a part of that community knew when it was time to go home when they heard this sound, so no one was left behind.

For First Nations, the Indian Act actively dismantled Indigenous systems of governance, and, as a replacement, imposed section 6 of the Indian Act and the concepts of “Status” and “Non-Status” Indians, which defines who is a rights holder. Today, many First Nations are taking active steps in reclaiming the right to determine citizenship and membership codes for their community members.

For example, one participant pointed to the Wula Na Kinu Mi'kmaq Enrollment Process, which was established by The Assembly of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq Chiefs to determine who the rights-holders, or beneficiaries, of Aboriginal and Treaty Rights are in Nova Scotia. This process is grounded in L'nu identity, concepts and culture and reflects L'nu understandings, definitions and ways of identifying who is L'nu and what it means to be L'nu. This pilot included eligibility requirements for the issuing of Harvester Identification Cards to Non-Status individuals as well as individuals who are registered Status Indians on the Atlantic General List (these are folks who do not have a status card to one of the 13 Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq Bands).

For Inuit, one can apply to their respective treaty organization to become a beneficiary of an Inuit Land Claim Agreement. For Métis, Métis governments determine the criteria for Métis citizenship.

## Self-Determination

Across a large number of consultations, a common topic surrounding Indigenous Nations and communities naming their own citizenship and membership processes was discussed. We heard participants state that Memorial University cannot be in the position of determining Indigenous identity, citizenship, or membership, but rather confirming with a Nation/community that a claim is, in fact, true. Many participants shared that this type of approach honours the self-determination of Nations and communities. Within the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Article 4 relays that “Indigenous peoples, in exercising their right to self-determination, have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs”, which extends to citizenship and membership processes.

Individuals also expressed that no one can determine their membership or citizenship, other than themselves and their community, and certainly not an academic institution.



## Individual vs. Collective Indigenous Identity

In popular discourse, the concept of identity doesn't always imply an ongoing connection. It can suggest biological ties within one's genetic lineage. Genetics may influence alliances, yet identity can also be seen as an individualistic notion, something perceived as permanently fixed within one's being. Rather than solely looking inward, including at our genetics, to define ourselves, we must also recognize our constant evolution in relation to not only genetic and cultural heritage but also to each other and the environments we inhabit, whether by choice or circumstance (Teillet, 2022).

Universities are encouraged to address claims of Indigenous identity fraud during tenure or research, as failure to do so perpetuates a serious offence. By understanding that our identities are shaped by ongoing processes and our interactions with various socio-political landscapes, we can move beyond rigid definitions based solely on genealogy.

As one participant in a community session aptly put it, **"When you claim Indigeneity, a community claims you, too"**. The terminology surrounding identity can be problematic, as it often implies an individualistic perspective, allowing individuals to mould themselves as they please. However, many emphasize that Indigenous identity is inherently collective—it cannot exist in isolation. Dr. Kim Tallbear (2022) warns against reducing identity to a static, personal possession, stressing its multifaceted nature. She urges us to recognize identity as a dynamic process, shaped by both personal connections and broader socio-political contexts.

## We Come From Nations

Many participants shared the sentiment that 'identity' does not fully capture the essence of being from a Nation. We often hear of Nation-to-Nation, government-to-government and Inuit-Crown relationships as they relate to the dynamic between Indigenous Nations and the Federal Government of Canada. Principles respecting the Government of Canada's Relationship with Indigenous peoples are rooted in section 35 of the Constitution, guided by the UN Declaration, and informed by the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)'s Calls to Action. Moreover, they signify a dedication to sincerity, adherence to legal principles, promotion of democracy, equality for all, prevention of discrimination, and upholding human rights.

This work is not about determining one's identity; it is about verifying one's place within a Nation.

**"We are citizens of Nations, not members".**  
*-Community Session Participant*





## What is considered a legitimate Indigenous collective?

A large majority of participants shared that the role of Memorial University would be to confirm an Indigenous citizenship/membership claim with the collective directly. This leads us to a question, what is considered a legitimate Indigenous collective?

Our identities are shaped by our relations within a collective, as well as the collectives we have shared land with or have been neighbours with. What do our neighbours know of us? Indigenous citizenship/membership is rooted in the land. Just because a family has lived in a place for generations, does not necessarily make them Indigenous to those lands. It was also shared that just because a group of people can live off the land, and live a lifestyle that is influenced by Indigenous ways of knowing, it does not mean they are Indigenous.

We have heard participants share that Federal recognition of a Nation or community needs to be considered when determining the legitimacy of an Indigenous collective. Throughout several conversations, Federal recognition was defined as recognition under the Indian Act, in the case of First Nations, recognition as an Inuit Treaty Organization (ITO), in the case of the Inuit, and recognition as a Métis government, in the case of the Métis.

### Federal recognition is not:

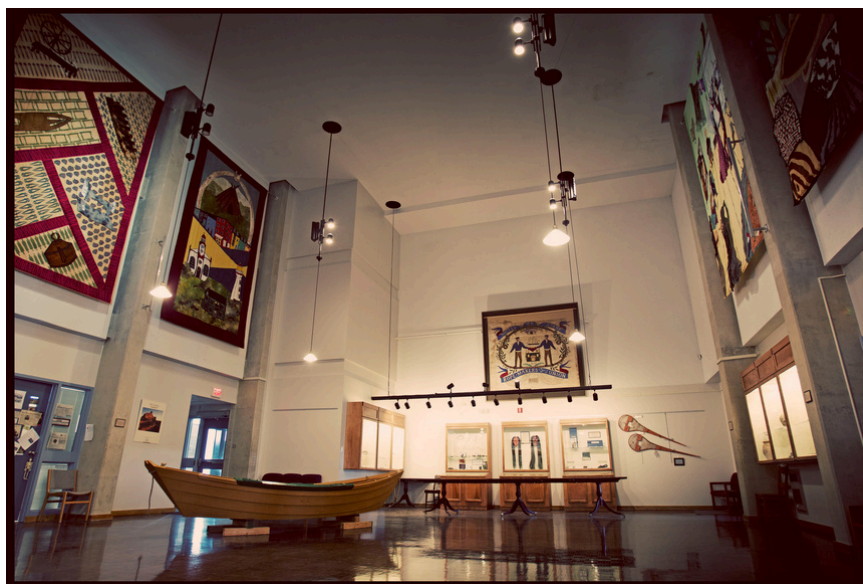
- A collective receiving funds through Canada's three federal research agencies, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.
- A collective receiving federal funds for community projects or research outside of finalized agreements.
- A collective serving as an intervener appearing before the Court. Any person interested in a proceeding before the Court may apply for intervener status.
- A collective attending the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII).

“It would be inappropriate to use any Recognition of Indigenous Rights and Self-Determination (RIRSD) discussions as a basis for treating a group legitimately Indigenous”. - *Community Session Participant*

Participants also shared that legitimate Indigenous collectives *do* exist beyond those who are federally recognized as well. It was shared that these collectives have longstanding relationships with collectives who do have federal recognition. There are also collectives not recognized by the government who are also not recognized by other Indigenous collectives.

Participants shared that Indigenous collectives who exist outside of the periphery of federal recognition often state that Federal recognition is simply colonial recognition. There has been much advocacy by Indigenous Nations and communities to obtain such recognition. Many participants felt that until a collective receives Federal recognition, or is recognized by collectives who already have Federal recognition, they should not be considered legitimate Indigenous collectives.

We also heard that while some collectives may be fraudulent, there are likely some legitimate individual Indigenous claims within those collectives. An application stream for folks without formal documentation (i.e. Indian Status card, Métis citizenship card, Inuit beneficiary status) may allow such individuals to apply to Indigenous-specific spaces and/or opportunities within Memorial University.





## **First Nations**

Many participants shared that a simple place to start when considering the legitimacy of a First Nations collective is to look at federal recognition. *Is this First Nation considered a band under the Indian Act?*

In the case of non-federally recognized First Nations, it was shared that a collective's legitimacy can also be tied to the relations they have with other Indigenous collectives. Does a non-federally recognized band have relations with a federally recognized band? It was also expressed that the nations within the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) could also be considered when determining the legitimacy of a First Nations collective, as there are Nations recognized by the AFN that are not recognized by the Federal Government of Canada.

We heard a number of participants express that there should be a limit to how far back one can claim ancestry to be able to access Indigenous-specific opportunities. Several participants expressed concerns about the Qalipu enrollment process with respect to how many individuals gained status with a very distant ancestral connection. In addition to individuals who gained status through this process based on strong claims, there were also many individuals who gained status through this process who have little to no connection to the community or lived experiences as Mi'kmaw people. While it would not be incumbent upon a University to involve itself in the citizenship and membership processes of a Nation, this does emphasize the need for a verification process to consider not only proof of Indigeneity but also whether an individual has Indigenous Knowledge or lived experience.

**"I would look at the dimensions of identity (heritage, ancestry, community involvement, status or non-status, etc). And then the applicant would be expected to provide information that is relevant to them. What could they provide from those dimensions, It should be something that is open to review and strengthening".**

**- Community Session Participant**



## First Nations

**“I find the non-status folks are the most vulnerable in this discussion”.**  
*- Community Session Participant*

In consultations where the topic of verification for non-status First Nations people was discussed, there was a general sense of opposition toward Indigenous verification. Bill C-31 from the federal government effectively disentangled Indian status from band membership, allowing individuals who may not qualify for registration under the Indian Act to be listed on a First Nation's band list.

**“I'm of the opinion that a person is born Indigenous. Your family and your community make you Indigenous. No federal government number can take that away from you. I think it's really important that people know that, and that we reinforce that, not at the expense of allowing non-Indigenous to take advantage of benefits but, at the same time, I do think that we have to really keep that in mind that non-status people are not a footnote. We're a very large number of the Indigenous community. People have varying degrees of connection with their communities, frankly, because of genocide, that's on purpose. We are living with a sense of that.”**

*- Alumni Participant*

One participant shared that non-status individuals should be considered on a case-by-case basis, where formal membership or citizenship documentation would not be a requirement, but rather an additional piece of one's story. Centering the oral histories of non-status individuals was emphasized.

**“The problem is that Indigeneity is not black and white, however convenient it might be politically to suppose so. For example, it is well known that the enrollment process for Qalipu was flawed -- there are numerous examples where siblings with the same genetic heritage, who grew up in the same culture were not equally recognized by the process (in some cases simply because of their postal code at the time of application)”.**

*- Alumni Participant*



## ***Inuit***

In discussions with Inuit participants, it was shared that individuals claiming Inuit citizenship/membership should be recognized within one of the four Inuit Treaty Organizations (ITOs):

- Inuvialuit Regional Corporation
- Nunavut Tunngavik Incorporated
- Makivvik
- Nunatsiavut Government

Each of these organizations has their own set of criteria for Inuit to be accepted as beneficiaries.

It was also shared that there are Inuit who may not currently be beneficiaries of a land claim agreement but may be eligible to be enrolled as a beneficiary. To determine whether or not an individual would be eligible, it was shared that the University would need to work in partnership with the ITO registries in the region an applicant is claiming connection to.

“

**“If there are positions at MUN specifically for Indigenous people, anyone applying to these positions should be able to provide proof that they are a beneficiary of a group that has been accepted into one of four of the land claims processes. Confirmation from their group must be required. This process could be that if an individual claims that they are Indigenous, they need to be specific about which Indigenous group they are a part of to prove their membership. MUN must follow up with this group.”**

- Community Participant

“

**“Memorial University verification requires an impetus on truth, accountability and transparency. To achieve this, there must be an open dialogue between MUN and Inuit of Canada, including Knowledge Keepers and Elders on how to verify who is Inuit and who is not.”**

- Community Participant





## Métis

In discussions with Métis participants, it was shared that individuals claiming Métis citizenship/membership should be represented within one of the following Métis governments:

- Métis Nation of British Columbia
- Métis Nation of Alberta
- Métis Nation-Saskatchewan
- Métis Nation of Ontario
- Manitoba Métis Federation
- Northwest Territory Métis Nation

In addition to the provincial Métis governments, there are eight recognized Métis settlements in northern Alberta that operate independently from the Métis Nation of Alberta. These communities issue their own letters or cards as confirmation of Métis citizenship or membership. The settlements that constitute the Métis Settlements General Council include:

- Buffalo Lake
- East Prairie
- Elizabeth Lake
- Fishing Lake
- Gift Lake
- Kikino
- Paddle Prairie
- Peavine

It was shared that each of these Métis governments has a system to verify Métis citizenship. There are a number of Métis groups that issue their own membership cards that *do not* have the processes and systems to verify citizenship. It was stressed that the University must understand the difference between these groups and the six Métis governments, and eight recognized settlements noted above.

In the case of someone who is not a registered citizen of one of the six Métis governments but identifies as Métis, it was shared that it could be determined whether or not this individual is eligible for citizenship by working with the Métis government within the territory the individual comes from.



## A Complicated History

The 1949 Terms of Union between Newfoundland and Canada notably omitted any mention of Aboriginal people within the newly formed province. This departure from the typical procedure during the integration of jurisdiction into the Canadian Federation meant that First Nations people were not registered, reserves were not established, and specialized programs and services were not provided. Since First Nations were not acknowledged, the Indian Act was not enforced in Newfoundland. Consequently, the Innu and Mi'kmaq communities in the province were excluded from accessing the wide range of programs and services available to their counterparts in mainland Canada. Legally unrecognized, they lacked the status as nations that other Indigenous communities elsewhere in Canada possessed.

This unique situation has led to slow and fragmented recognition for these First Nations and for the Inuit. The long-term consequences of this omission have adversely affected community health, infrastructure, land claims, and various other aspects in Newfoundland and Labrador.

## Beyond Ancestry

Many participants shared their hope that the University would be seeking to know more than just one's ancestry, membership or citizenship status within an Indigenous Nation or community. It was emphasized that connection to community, involvement within the community, and lived experience as a community member need to be considered in the full picture of an Indigenous applicant, especially in the case of targeted hires for positions involving the teaching of Indigenous content or supporting Indigenous initiatives.

It was shared that membership or citizenship within an Indigenous collective doesn't always denote lived experience or connection within the community and that the University should consider the potential impact and benefit of the opportunity an applicant may be applying for. Another participant shared that individuals can learn how to 'perform culture' and appear to possess Indigenous knowledge. Examples such as introducing themselves in an Indigenous language, wearing traditional regalia, singing and drumming were provided.

***How can the University verify community connection and lived experience?***





# Current Opportunities and Approaches at Memorial University







## Current Indigenous-specific opportunities at Memorial University

There is no set number for targeted Indigenous hires, as this occurs on an ad hoc basis, based on academic priorities and programming and shifts in employment.

Information shared with First Peoples Group from the Memorial Office of Indigenous Affairs indicates that there are over 30 scholarships and bursaries across undergraduate and graduate programs specific to Indigenous students, however, it was noted that it is unclear if Memorial is the administrator for 3 of the scholarships, which are included at the bottom of the list. Some of these opportunities are also open to other minority groups.

### *Examples of Scholarship Opportunities:*

- Duley Award
- Dr. Evan Simpson Indigenous Undergraduate Entrance Scholarship
- Every Child Matters Award
- Moving Forward Together Campaign Award
- SLB Canada Indigenous Student Award
- Anna Maly Memorial Bursary Award
- Public Service Credit Union Award for Indigenous Students
- Atlantic Credit Unions Promise Scholars Award in Business
- Allison Chaytors Loveys Promise Scholars Bursary
- Faculty of Business Administration Indigenous Scholarship
- White Rose Extension Project Diversity Scholarship
- Peter and Karin Tremaine Atlantic Promise Scholarship in Business
- Undergraduate Award in Professional Studies
- ElshCap Engineering Scholarship
- Eva and Herschel Gora Bursary
- Hebron Diversity Award
- Dr. W. Alexander (Sandy) MacDonald Bursary for Indigenous Learners
- Memorial Indigenous Music Award
- Katherine Daley Memorial Award Nursing
- Andrew Harvey Memorial Scholarship in Social Work
- Marine Atlantic Scholarship
- Cenovus Energy Future Leaders Award
- Duke Marine Scholarship



- Baskanderi Award in Anti-Racism
- EDI Entrance MASc Scholarship in Engineering
- Jane Doe Award in Anti-Violence Research
- O'Dea Graduate Awards in Rehabilitation Research
- General Motors Undergraduate Scholarship (unclear if award is granted by Memorial)
- Siem Offshore Canada Limited Partnership Scholarship (unclear if award is granted by Memorial)
- Pikalujak Fisheries Limited Partnership Scholarship (unclear if award is granted by Memorial)

Additionally, there is a \$5,000 top-up funding offer for Indigenous students who undertake graduate studies at Memorial University. Several students per term receive this funding, but exact numbers are unavailable.

There have been targeted selection processes for a single Indigenous scholar, but no ongoing program exists for scholarship selections.

The following list breaks down Indigenous-specific seats per undergraduate and graduate programs.

At the undergraduate level 9 units have designated seats. At the graduate level there are 7 programs with designated seats. Some programs list a percentage instead of a set number of seats.

### ***Undergraduate Designated Seats:***

- Faculty of Business Administration, Bachelor of Commerce – Up to 3 Seats
- Faculty of Business Administration, Bachelor of Commerce (Co-op) – Up to 3 Seats
- Faculty of Education – at least 3 positions per year
- Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science – up to 3 positions per year
- School of Human Kinetics and Recreation – up to 3 positions per year
- Faculty of Medicine, MD Program – 3 seats
- School of Music, Bachelor of Music – 1 seat
- Faculty of Nursing, B.Sc in Nursing – up to 3 seats per year
- School of Pharmacy, Doctor of Pharmacy – 1 seat per year



At the School of Social Work, there is an equity Initiative offering a minimum of 20% of the total number of seats to eligible applicants who have met the minimum requirements for admission and who identify as one or more of the following groups: First Nations, Inuit, or Métis (minimum of 5% of seats); members of a racialized group (minimum of 5% of seats); disabled people (minimum of 5%); and/or members of another equity group (minimum of 5% of seats).

### ***Graduate Studies Designated Seats:***

- Master of Applied Literary Arts – 1 seat, with a \$5000 bursary for full-time studies
- Master of Arts in Environmental Policy (MAEP) – 1 seat
- Master of Management – 10% of seats per year
- Master of Marine Studies (Aquaculture) – up to 2 seats per year
- Master of Science in Maritime Studies (Public Safety) – up to 2 seats per year
- Master of Social Work – 10% of seats per year
- Ph.D Maritime Studies – up to 2 seats

## **Memorial’s current approach to Indigenous verification**

### ***Self-identification***

At Memorial University, currently, and prior to this point, self-identification has been used as the primary process through which Indigenous people could apply for, or access, Indigenous designated spaces. There are at least 2 programs that have required documentation to be provided when an applicant has applied for an Indigenous-specific opportunity.

### ***Cluster Hire***

In 2020, a process was established by Memorial University referred to as “cluster hiring”, a targeted faculty hiring process for Indigenous tenure-track staff. Only one cluster hire has occurred thus far.

A few participants expressed in the consultation process that they were aware of the cluster hire process, and that they felt, while it was not a perfect process, it was inclusive and had low risk in creating situations where some legitimate Indigenous claims to citizenship/membership may otherwise have been excluded from the application process.



As part of Memorial's strategic priority in advancing Indigenous scholarship and supporting Indigenous worldviews in education and scholarship, the University sought to fill up to 5 new full-time, tenure-track Indigenous academic staff hires in any discipline, at the level of entry or intermediate rank. These positions were open to candidates who identified as Indigenous from around the world, but preference was given to First Nation, Métis, and Inuit candidates from Canada and, particularly, from the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. All qualified candidates were encouraged to apply; however, Canadian Citizens and permanent residents were given priority. This was a targeted search for Indigenous scholars. The competition was open to individuals who identified with an Indigenous community.

All applications were initially assessed by the University Joint Equity Committee (JEC) to ensure that all applicants had self-identified as Indigenous and identified themselves with an Indigenous community. The JEC consulted in this regard with a University advisory committee that included the Interim Associate Vice-President (Indigenous Research), the Special Advisor to the President on Aboriginal Affairs and representation from the Aboriginal Elders program.

*The following documents were required to be submitted by applicants:*

- A letter of application describing how the applicant meets the criteria for the position;
- An up-to-date curriculum vitae;
- The names and addresses of three referees;
- Copies of or links to three recent and influential research publications and/or project outputs;
- A statement of the candidate's Indigenous self-identification;
- Letter of support from an Indigenous community leader, government or organization to be sent under separate cover.





The background image shows a stone building with a crest on the right side. The crest is a shield with a red cross on a white background, set against a red background. The building is made of grey stone blocks. In the foreground, there are trees with yellow and orange autumn leaves. The sky is a pale, overcast grey.

**Why do some  
opportunities  
exist only for  
Indigenous  
peoples?**



Opportunities exist specifically for Indigenous peoples in academic institutions for two major reasons: (1) reconciliation through initiatives that foster equity and inclusion, and (2) to integrate and make space for Indigenous Knowledge expertise.

These two major reasons also align respectively with the main pillars of Indigenization that the Memorial University Strategic Framework has identified: Indigenous representation and Indigenization.

## **Reconciliation and representation, equity and inclusion**

The historical and ongoing impacts of colonization of Indigenous lands and subsequent impacts on Indigenous peoples have resulted in major barriers to education between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Language and cultural differences, social and mental health challenges, remoteness and isolation, intergenerational trauma, and financial barriers can all play a role as individual or compounding barriers. Additionally, systemic discrimination and racism put prospective Indigenous students at a disadvantage when it comes to accessing the same opportunities as their non-Indigenous peers.

The Memorial University Strategic Framework for Indigenization identifies Pillar 1 as: “the need to ensure that there is an embodied representation of Indigenous people within the University. This is achieved through intentional hiring, retention, and mentorship of Indigenous people into positions of leadership, Academic Staff Members (ASMs), and supporting staff across the University.”

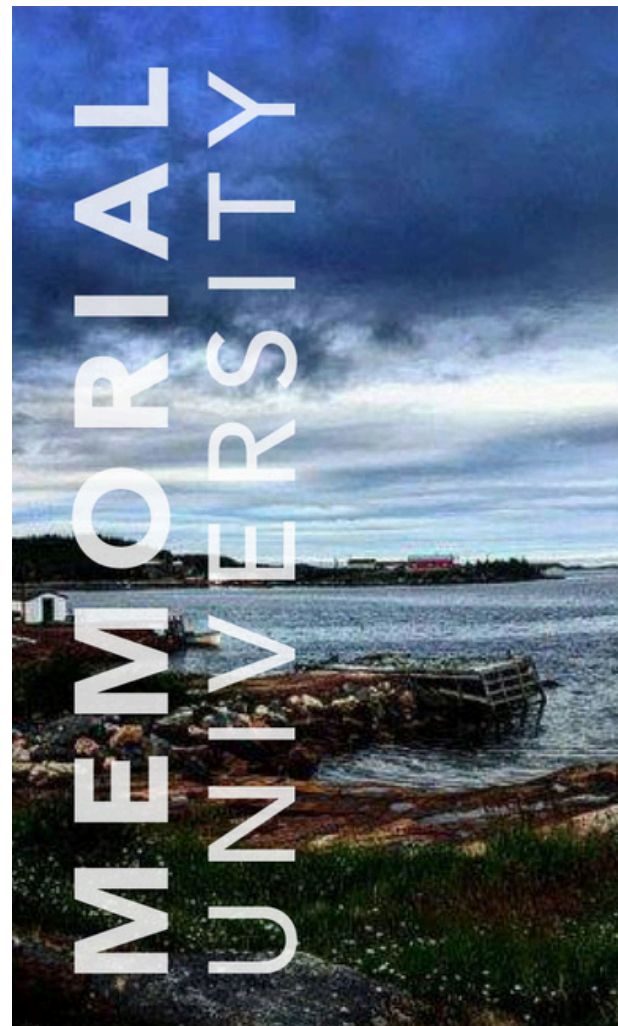
“It also requires increasing the admissions of Indigenous students into various programs in the university as well as offering academic supports to ensure their academic successes at the University.”

Reconciliation in Canada focuses on righting relations with First Nations, Métis and Inuit, and redressing the historic harms caused by colonization of these lands. While the Strategic Framework on Indigenization does not discriminate against Indigenous peoples from outside of Canada, it is important to keep in mind that its efforts focus on First Nations, Métis and Inuit. The importance of territoriality further invites Memorial University to focus reconciliation efforts with Indigenous peoples even closer to home, examining relationships with the Indigenous peoples whose land Memorial University is situated on.

Reconciliation through Indigenization, equity and inclusion in academic institutions can look like designating Indigenous-specific seats in various academic programs to ensure representation of Indigenous peoples. It can also look like the creation of scholarships, bursaries, or faculty or staff positions specifically for Indigenous peoples.

It is important to remember that the reason Indigenous-specific opportunities exist in academic institutions is to create equitable opportunities for Indigenous peoples, in hopes of achieving higher representation and better inclusion of First Nations, Métis and Inuit, in student, faculty and staff positions, as well as to redress historical harms caused to Indigenous peoples.

These opportunities are not “handouts”, nor are they intended to place more significance on Indigenous peoples than non-Indigenous peoples. Rather, they exist for reasons of equity. For example, one community participant iterated that it is already a fight for Inuit students to be able to excel in post-secondary, and to be understood and respected in academic spaces. False claims of Indigenous citizenship/membership further exacerbates this fight.



“We cannot forget why Indigenous peoples have funding. It is because we have been a minority within Canadian society for years until the Government of Canada decided to turn around and support us now. This is also about the long standing history and relationship we have with Canada in respect to the harm it has perpetuated against Inuit.” - *Community Session Participant*



## Indigenous Knowledge expertise as a requirement

The Memorial University Strategic Framework for Indigenization states the importance of the University to “make space, both literally and figuratively, to Indigenous Peoples and their knowledges, pedagogies, perspectives, and more, within the academy” and “acknowledges the action that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has called post-secondary institutions to engage in”.

Some opportunities only exist for Indigenous peoples when Indigenous Knowledge is required. Therefore, where Indigenous Knowledge is something that can only come from a place of lived experience, opportunities or spaces within academic institutions that require expertise of Indigenous Knowledge can only be occupied by Indigenous peoples. Academic institutions wishing to increase or integrate Indigenous Knowledges and pedagogies into academic programs will require targeted hiring of Indigenous staff and faculty.

Several participants suggested that a two-step verification process must occur for spaces requiring Indigenous Knowledge expertise. First, the applicant’s claim of Indigenous citizenship/membership must be verified. Second, the applicant must undergo a verification to determine whether their level of expertise on the area of Indigenous Knowledge required for the position is satisfactory.

It is important to remember that Indigenous membership/citizenship to the community the applicant is claiming does not always correlate to lived experience as an Indigenous person. In other words, just because someone holds membership or citizenship documentation does not mean they are necessarily qualified to hold an Indigenous-specific space if that opportunity requires expertise in an area of Indigenous Knowledge. Participants shared that lived experience holds more weight than a status card.

Pillar 2 of the Memorial University Strategic Framework for Indigenization states: “Indigenization involves including Indigenous knowledges, values, worldviews, histories, and cultures into specific educational practices such as pedagogy, instruction, curricula formulations, and research as we interrogate discursive practices at Memorial University”. Equally important to the sentiments expressed in Pillar 2 is the understanding that Indigenous people did not arrive at the current state alone.





Many Indigenous scholars including Mi'kmaw Professor Bonita Lawrence have argued that settlers need to acknowledge that there is “land theft and dispossession.” Therefore, the teaching curricula and pedagogical practices at Memorial University must include and reflect the violent history of colonization, the Indian Act, Residential schools, and racism in Newfoundland and Labrador and Canada that dispossessed Indigenous Peoples of their lands, resources, and humanity.

Indigenous Peoples have lived on these lands and waters since time immemorial. Therefore, it is critical that in this institution of higher education that we represent those Indigenous knowledge systems that have been built on these lands and waters. It is one way to honour the lands, waters and Indigenous ancestors of the territories in which we work and live. Indigenous Peoples, cultures, and knowledge systems have been marginalized by the colonial system, and indeed governments and their education systems have worked to eliminate Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. It is our responsibility to actively work to make reparations. This work will help to build respectful relationships between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous Peoples.





**Why is  
verification  
necessary?**

## **“Some people think misrepresentation is a victimless crime”**

Indigenous verification is necessary to prevent non-Indigenous peoples from taking opportunities that are meant exclusively for Indigenous peoples away from them. Not having a verification protocol poses a plethora of risks to Indigenous peoples, both internal and external to Memorial University.

The following quote shared in an alumni session demonstrates the lack of understanding that can exist not only in settler populations about the harms that can be caused by Indigenous citizenship/membership fraud, but also with folks who self-identify as Indigenous.

**“Has anyone actually looked at the harms caused by people who misrepresent themselves? Is this really that big of an issue?”**

This quote begs the question of whether some people with claims to Indigenous citizenship/membership see verification as a threat. Many participants expressed that they take no issue with being asked to share their family, community and nation connections by others, and welcome the opportunity to speak to their family and ancestral history.

**“I think the possibly more naive part of me thinks that you would have to be a real sociopath to you know, concoct an entire life story as an Indigenous person. There are people who are doing it when there's money on table”.**

— Alumni Participant

**“**

**“Not having a verification system that is very robust allows fairly sophisticated elites to sneak into opportunities within a school where they are already successful”.**

— Community Session Participant

Another participant wondered how a verification protocol could take precautionary or preventative measures instead of reactionary ones.



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**When might  
verification be  
necessary?**





There are a number of scenarios that may trigger an Indigenous verification within Memorial University.

For one, wherever opportunities are created or reserved for Indigenous peoples as an ameliorative measure, meaning it grants a material benefit to redress historical harms and address subsequent systemic barriers and inequities, which may impede Indigenous peoples' equal participation in the University. This may look like special opportunities reserved only for Indigenous peoples, like Indigenous-specific funding or grant opportunities, or opportunities which exist for everyone but are made more accessible for Indigenous people (e.g. the designation of a percentage of seats to Indigenous applicants in various academic programs).

Another example of when Indigenous verification may apply is when an Indigenous person may be relied upon as an authoritative source of Indigenous Knowledge, or for their life experience as an Indigenous person, for research, educational, or policy advice-giving purposes, whether or not they receive a material benefit in return.

The vast majority of participants engaged said that, yes, in either of these scenarios, wherever financial gain, professional gain or social gain is possible for any given Indigenous-specific space or opportunity, or where lived experience and/or Indigenous Knowledge is required (ie. teaching position of some aspect of Indigenous Knowledge), *verification must apply*.

Participants further expressed that the verification requirements should apply whether the position or opportunity is temporary or permanent.

Participants suggested that Memorial implement a process to identify and track Indigenous-specific opportunities as they arise to ensure the proper application of the policy.

Other participants felt that while a baseline verification must occur for any of these opportunities and spaces, the level of verification required should be proportional to the level of influence, impact or personal, professional/financial/social gain in question.

It was echoed by many participants that while verification is important, extreme caution is necessary to prevent the perpetuation of colonialism with respect to the University's role in Indigenous verification within the academy.



Some participants expressed that if students and faculty are expected to be verified for various opportunities and roles, the same standard should be applied to all. Other participants echoed the importance of treating everyone with equality.

Other participants felt that anyone who claims Indigenous citizenship/membership should be verified as everyone, Indigenous or not, has an influence on students in faculty or staff positions. Simply put, if someone is claiming Indigenous citizenship/membership, they should be able to prove that claim. Some participants felt that false claims to Indigenous citizenship/membership ultimately bring their character into question, whether or not the position they hold is an Indigenous-specific space.

It was suggested that it would be extremely important to verify cultural educators and speakers with the respective communities they claim to belong to.

A distinction was also made between how verification is used for individuals who are applying to the University for a specific role or opportunity versus an individual who is invited to the University as, say, a keynote speaker.

Where these individuals are considered guests, the University should conduct their own verification to ensure that they are confident in who they are inviting to the University. In other words, it may be counterintuitive or come across as disrespectful to invite someone to the University but then require them to undergo a verification.

**“The university should not pursue verification with visitors, or those they are inviting in as guests as it is an overstep”.**

*-Student Participant*



Some participants suggested that it could be insulting to ask an Elder to undergo a verification. Others argue that Elders and spiritual/ceremonial leaders should definitely be verified, as these individuals are not immune to making false claims of Indigenous citizenship/membership just because of their title. It may feel difficult to challenge Elders and spiritual/ceremonial leaders given their status as highly respected and regarded individuals in Indigenous communities and the protocols we are taught to follow when interacting with Elders, including respect and honour.

One participant explained the phenomenon of how ‘opportunities create opportunities’, and how someone who makes a false claim, such as a self-proclaimed Elder, spiritual/ceremonial leader, or Knowledge Keeper, or someone who has been trained and encouraged by a self-proclaimed Elder or Knowledge Keeper, can build their “resume” very easily. In this way, an individual can become the “go-to” person for event openings and ceremonies, despite their claim being false.

One participant pointed out that some people exploit opportunities, as there is often compensation or honoraria associated with asking Elders, spiritual/ceremonial leaders, and Knowledge Keepers for their time and wisdom. Eventually, this person may also acquire major awards and accolades which can create a toxic dynamic within Indigenous communities if they are indeed fraudulent. However, participants expressed that it can often be very difficult to call these kinds of people into question when they have been hired by Memorial University.

Another participant echoed this sentiment, explaining how a similar phenomenon happens to students and faculty on campus, where they can become a point person for Indigenous events. If a verification protocol doesn’t exist, these individuals can get away with taking up space that does not belong to them.

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**“Verification should apply to all roles as it increases the integrity of the University. What those requirements are might look different depending on what role you play, and what your impact might be, which is why I think having a multi-dimensional element is important”.**

– Community Session Participant



# The Risks of Having No Verification Protocol





Many participants shared the sentiment that if there is no protocol, false claims of Indigenous citizenship/membership and the associated negative impacts on Indigenous peoples within and outside of Memorial University will continue.

Across several consultation sessions, it was shared that ‘a new narrative’ has been developed by non-Indigenous people who are claiming to be Indigenous.

“These people know the right words to use to sound convincing. Growing up with a parent who was an alcoholic, a grandparent who went to residential school, they themselves overcame adversity. These are fictional tales pulling on the trauma of real Indigenous peoples”. - *Community Session Participant*

## Impacts on Indigenous peoples and communities

Indigenous-specific opportunities exist to ensure Indigenous peoples have the same opportunities, or chance to be considered, as their non-Indigenous counterparts. When people make false claims of Indigenous citizenship/membership, they take opportunities away from legitimate Indigenous peoples. Not only do these false claims deprive Indigenous people of educational and employment opportunities, but they also cause great psychological and spiritual harm to legitimate Indigenous collectives and their cultures.

Many participants spoke about how it was often unpopular and, many times throughout history, dangerous to be Indigenous. Many Indigenous communities today are still fighting for equal rights and access to better education and living conditions, amidst mental health disparities which, in some Indigenous communities, are extremely dire. When people make fraudulent claims of Indigenous citizenship/membership, they are deeply hurting and insulting those who are meant to benefit from these opportunities.

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“In terms of Indigenous verification. Back in the day, Inuit were discriminated against for being Inuit. It is not just about spaces and benefits, etc, it is about the history of who we are as a people. The things my Elders had faced for just looking like an Inuk - and to see the people claiming to be Inuk after saying racial slurs - it blows my mind that all of a sudden, there are these groups who want to be Inuit.”

– *Community Session Participant*

“

“Even when I was a child. I was ashamed to be Inuit, I wanted to be white. Like, you know, because of the things people would say to me. And tried everything in my upbringing, to be more white, to be more qallunaat, and now everybody wants to be Inuit”.

– *Community Session Participant*



## Prevention of misrepresentation and cultural appropriation

The issue of cultural appropriation and fraudulent claims of Indigenous citizenship/membership was specifically brought forth in a number of sessions.

One example of this shared was the incident when Memorial University hired a non-Inuk throat singer to perform at the University. This performer had learned throat singing from an Inuk and then exploited this teaching, which was shared in good faith to benefit professionally and financially. Furthermore, this person misrepresented themselves and Inuit whom they learned from. Participants felt that this incident could have been prevented by an Indigenous verification protocol.

Fraudulent claims of Indigenous citizenship/membership, especially when used for material gain, are a serious form of cultural appropriation.

## Impacts on students

This section discusses various impacts of fraudulent claims of Indigenous citizenship/membership on students, specifically.

### **Educators**

Verification is especially important in situations where Indigenous Knowledge is being disseminated or taught. In these situations, there is a real risk of mental, emotional, spiritual and academic harm if a learner places trust in an educator and is misled about who they are and the expertise they claim to possess.

If a professor is found to have made false claims to being Indigenous, they have potentially taught inaccurate or incorrect information to students who placed their trust in this educator.

*This participant invites us to imagine the impact not only on the student's credibility, but their investment of time, effort and finances.*



**“There's also a huge risk to Indigenous students - if we have someone hired as a faculty member who becomes their supervisor, and we've seen this and other institutions like what happens to their research, what happens to their publications, if this person is found to be not Indigenous? What does it mean for them?”**



### **Staff**

Staff can also have an impact on Indigenous students. For example, if an Indigenous support worker is found to have claimed Indigenous citizenship/membership falsely, they have misled students who sought their guidance, leadership, and cultural support. Students seeking support services may feel vulnerable and require assurance and direction, whether in their personal or academic lives. What part of what students garnered from this relationship was real, and how much was founded on deception?

### **Elder and Spiritual/Ceremonial Leaders**

Similarly to staff, students who seek out advice, guidance or counselling from an Elder or spiritual/ceremonial leader are often seeking this support from a place of trust and sometimes vulnerability. If an Elder or spiritual/ceremonial leader is found to be fraudulent, how has this breach of trust impacted the holistic health and well-being of a student who sought out their support? How will this affect these students and their trust in individuals traditionally meant to provide support and care, moving forward?





## Impacts on research

Research with Indigenous peoples requires care and ethical considerations for Indigenous communities and peoples. The framework for ethical conduct of research involving Indigenous peoples, set out in Chapter 9 of the Tri-Council Policy Statement, details Research Involving the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples of Canada.

The preamble states:

*“The approaches used have not generally reflected Indigenous world views, and the research has not necessarily benefited Indigenous peoples or communities. As a result, Indigenous peoples continue to regard research, particularly research originating outside their communities, with a certain apprehension or mistrust.”*

The harm that false claims of Indigenous citizenship/membership can cause to Indigenous peoples from the *researched* perspective is a relatively new consideration and adds an additional layer to ethics around research. A certain trust can be established when Indigenous peoples are approached by Indigenous researchers, especially when those researchers claim to be Indigenous, and claim to be approaching their work from a place of lived experience or cultural competency and awareness. Although the TCPS does not discuss this, it points to how research, if not conducted with the proper ethical protocols, has the potential to further harm Indigenous peoples, communities and nations who have had a long history of mistrust that comes from exploitative and extractive relationships.

Furthermore, the generation and research of Indigenous Knowledge by those making false claims to Indigenous citizenship/membership is a major issue. This kind of research fraud poses a great risk to the integrity of Indigenous Knowledge systems, as research not generated from a place of Indigenous worldview and lived experience lacks authenticity and may generate or endorse cultural or historical inaccuracies.

In one session, Inuit participants discussed an incident that exemplifies the harm caused by research involving an unrecognized collective. A settler-researcher at Memorial, working with an unrecognized collective, approached Nunatsiavut Inuit to participate in a video. The company that was hired to film the video later told participants that they would be portrayed as Beothuk. This video footage was later used in a way that instead portrayed them as members of the unrecognized collective, which none of them were made aware of.

Due to the impacts of colonization, Indigenous Knowledge systems are in a vulnerable state. Many Indigenous nations are in the process of restoring Indigenous Knowledge Systems that have been fractured by colonization, and this is a process that must be conducted with great care. False claims to Indigenous citizenship/membership pose a major risk to the integrity of these systems which are relied on in the reclamation of traditional teachings and culture and revitalization of Indigenous societies and nationhood.





## **Indigenous-specific opportunities advance political agendas of unrecognized Indigenous collectives**

The issue of Indigenous-specific opportunities intended for legitimate Indigenous collectives being taken by unrecognized Indigenous collectives was voiced in a number of consultation sessions. Not only did participants emphasize that this in itself was an issue, but they further discussed how these opportunities were being used to advance the facade of unrecognized collectives' legitimacy and their political agenda, especially in the eyes of the public.

It was in this context, in particular, that many participants brought forth concerns about NunatuKavut Community Council (NCC), a collective that self-identifies as Indigenous; specifically identifying as southern Inuit and formerly as the “Labrador Metis Nation”. Many participants argued that NCC has the right to self-determination as an Indigenous collective under the United Nations Declaration on Indigenous Peoples. As discussed on page 25, Indigenous collectives either have federal recognition or are recognized by neighbouring collectives who have federal recognition. What we have heard overwhelmingly from participants is that in addition to not having federal recognition, NCC is not recognized by their Innu or Inuit neighbours (Innu Nation and Nunatsiavut Government).

Furthermore, NCC is not recognized by Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) or the Inuit Circumpolar Council. In fact, a recent joint statement from Innu Nation, Nunatsiavut Government, and Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami called on the Government of Canada to “reject the false Indigenous claims from the NunatuKavut Community Council (NCC).” The Inuit Circumpolar Council Canada similarly announced that “The Inuit Circumpolar Council Canada denounces the NunatuKavut Community Council (NCC) and affirms that the NCC is not an Inuit collective”.

**“While some members of NCC may have distant Indigenous ancestry, there is no evidence of their group having any kind of collective identity until the late 20th century. Many individuals whom the Innu have known for decades who have spent their whole lives identifying as white settlers have now race-shifted into self-identifying as Inuit”. -**

*Community Session Participant*

We heard from participants about fears that, through the “Elders, Aunties and Uncles program” at the Labrador Campus, NCC community members will be installed to support students with advice on research ideas, programs of study, and ways of incorporating diverse forms of knowledge into research. Participants feel that NCC community members will shape and direct graduate research for NCC’s benefit and to the detriment of Innu, and will also make the Labrador Campus an even more hostile and uncomfortable place for Innu students.

Participants also voiced other concerns about NCC’s representation at the Labrador campus, where NCC members hold several faculty and staff positions and where NCC has a voting seat as well as a large general presence on the governing Academic Council, as well as on the Labrador Research Forum. Additionally, participants voiced concern over the establishment of a MUN community hub in Cartwright hosted by MUN and NCC, which is the only community hub in Labrador.

**“[MUN] knows they’ll get the answer they want, from talking to NCC”. - Community Participant**

Many participants voiced that Memorial University will lose credibility with legitimate Indigenous collectives from partnering with and granting opportunities to unrecognized collectives such as NCC. This may lead to legitimate Indigenous collectives deciding to stop supporting Memorial University moving forward.

Some participants suggested that Memorial University has more of a responsibility than ever to right relations with recognized Indigenous collectives. This includes acknowledging the ways in which the university has failed them and, additionally, the harm that has been caused to them through being deprioritized over relationships with unrecognized collectives.





## Memorial finds it easier to engage with unrecognized collectives and, in doing so, lends legitimacy to their cause

It was emphasized by several participants that Indigenous collectives with false claims often do not experience the same social barriers or challenges to education and research opportunities as Indigenous communities. Therefore, it is much easier for collectives with false claims to access Indigenous-specific opportunities. Furthermore, these collectives often share common worldviews and cultural affinities with Westernized academic institutions, making partnerships more palatable. The issue of tokenism in academic institutions was also named, and how, oftentimes, when academic institutions must satisfy certain quotas for hiring or engaging with Indigenous peoples, they select groups who are more cooperative or easier to work with. In other words, it is easier for them to work with fraudulent Indigenous groups than those that are legitimate.

One Innu participant said that Memorial University will “only hire Indigenous peoples for their own benefit. Token Indian[s] [are] there for show, not for their knowledge. University work is based on western credentials, which NCC members have, and there seems to be little appetite at MUN to make space for Innu experience – living in an Innu community, living on the land, Innu culture, and Innu language”.

A participant spoke about the complete lack of research partnerships with the Innu:

“In contrast to NCC, which has had a long and extensive relationship with MUN researchers and academics, there are only a very small number of faculty who have even been interested in working with Innu, and even then the university has created barriers to the expansion of those partnerships related to NCC, such as a completely misguided research policy pushed through by an advocate for NCC that would have required NCC’s approval of Innu research projects with MUN faculty in Innu territory”.

An example of this was when Innu Nation engaged with the world-renowned Students on Ice Foundation (SOI) to engage Innu youth in science through the Innu Nation Uinipeku Ocean Expedition. This engagement provides Innu youth with an opportunity to participate in a tailored SOI program—an adventure for Innu youth that is Innu-led. This expedition takes place primarily in Innu territory, with some limited time spent in Nunatsiavut marine areas. Innu Nation sought and received the support of the Nunatsiavut Government for this venture.



Participants explained the importance of this expedition as a highly positive experience for Innu youth that familiarizes them with the study of Innu coastal and marine environments and provides them with the opportunity to interact with technicians from the Department of Fisheries, the Canadian Hydrographic Service, and others conducting research in Innu territory. Moreover, it is an opportunity to forge deeper connections with other Innu youth and the land. Participants further described this experience as significant in exposing Innu youth to the possibilities that exist for careers in science and land/marine management, as well as to the future of the Innu nation and the mental well-being of Innu youth.

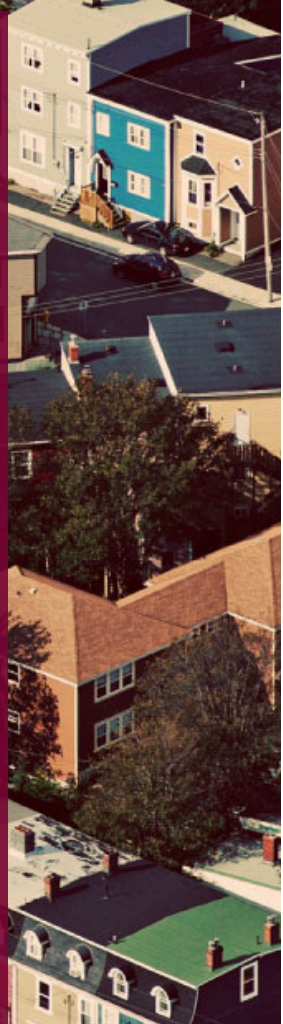
Participants explained that an unrecognized collective attempted to derail this project, demanding “research permits” from SOI, and demanding that Innu youth learn about this unrecognized collective’s “local Indigenous perspectives” in order for the trip to be allowed to go ahead. Participants voiced that this unrecognized collective and many of their ancestors have a long history of trying to displace Innu from their lands. This example illustrates the demands that the unrecognized collective feels entitled to make now, in large part due to the platform that MUN has given them. Participants voiced that the behaviour of this unrecognized collective continues to be extremely harmful to Innu and Innu youth.

“Universities are influential spaces, and can be seen as supporting false claims, for instance, NCC”. - *Community Session Participant*

## Impacts on Indigenous people reconnecting to communities

It is also worth mentioning how false claims to Indigenous citizenship/membership can impact Indigenous peoples who are in the process of reconnecting with their identity and community. For many Indigenous folks, this journey can be challenging, and when false claims are made, it adds insult to those who are navigating and sometimes questioning their own identity and deciding what spaces they feel comfortable in, or what spaces they feel they can ethically occupy, considering their level of privilege or what point in their journey they are on.





**What are possible risks of a verification protocol?**



Once again, it was clearly stated by several participants that any risks associated with a verification process must outweigh the risks that would exist from not having one. Otherwise, the policy could have the potential to cause more harm to Indigenous peoples than might be caused by those making false claims. In this section, we discuss a number of risks that may be present with a verification process.

## **Risks of excluding Indigenous peoples outside of Canada**

Some participants shared their concern that a verification protocol has the potential to exclude Indigenous peoples from outside of Canada, given the numerous Indigenous collectives worldwide and the lack of expertise regarding Indigenous citizenship/membership on a global scale. It was suggested that the University proceed with verifying Indigenous peoples outside of Canada by working to confirm their citizenship/membership within the collective they claim. As the University becomes more knowledgeable of these collectives, these relationships should be documented to support future verification efforts.

In the case of American Indians or Alaskan Natives, it was shared that documentation from tribal nations that are state or federally recognized should be provided.

## **Risks of excluding “grey area” Indigenous folks, Indigenous people who were adopted, or have complicated life histories**

Concerns were also brought forth by several participants in regard to what could happen to Indigenous folks who lost connection with their birth family through circumstances such as closed adoptions, resulting in limited records or documents that may be required to satisfy the criteria of an Indigenous verification process. Participants explained that, despite this complication, these individuals may still have a strong connection to the collective they claim, and that collective may claim them back. What happens to these individuals if a stream in the verification process does not exist for folks who do not have records about their family lineage, or formal documentation such as an Indian Status Card, Métis Nation citizenship card, or Inuit Land Claim beneficiary status?



## **Risk of excluding Non-Status Indians, Métis and Inuit who lack federal documentation**

We heard from a large number of participants that if the verification protocol is not written carefully, it has the potential to exclude Indigenous people who lack federal documentation that might be required to apply to an Indigenous-specific space or opportunity. The majority of these concerns were regarding non-status First Nations folks who are not eligible for Status.

It was suggested that a secondary or alternative stream in the verification process exists for Indigenous peoples who lack federal documentation, especially those who are non-Status Indians.

A number of participants mentioned the flawed Qalipu enrollment process, where, in many scenarios, Status was granted unfairly and based on unreasonable or illogical criteria. In many cases, some family members of the same family received Status whereas others did not. Another participant explained how their relative was denied Status simply because their application was missing a signature, and they were not given the opportunity to complete the form after being notified of this issue. The issue was also raised of how, through this process, many folks who were granted Status had strong community connections, whereas others have extremely distant and vague connections to their community, many of which date back several generations.

Where the Indian Act still regulates who is a rights-holder under section 6 of the Indian Act, there are an increasing number of legitimately Indigenous individuals who may be born and raised as Indigenous citizens/members and from an Indigenous worldview but who do not have Status. In sessions, it was argued that non-Status individuals should have the same access to Indigenous-specific spaces and opportunities at Memorial University as Status individuals.

This discussion also emphasized that some Non-Status individuals may, in fact, have a more substantial connection to their community than some Status folks do.

Again, this point further demonstrates the need for a verification process that verifies not only someone's citizenship/membership but also their connection to community and culture.





The same sentiment can apply to Indigenous folks who are reconnecting and may not have access to information about their family or community. Perhaps some of these individuals may be eligible to obtain formal documentation in the future, but some may not. Participants felt an option for these folks should exist to ensure they are not excluded from the verification process.

Participants suggested various methods of verification that could be used for folks who do not have formal documentation to prove their citizenship/membership to a collective. It was suggested that these individuals be considered on a case-by-case basis by a Committee mandated to process cases of verification. Some of these forms of verification include:

- Letters from an Indian Band, Métis government or Inuit Treaty Organization
- Letters or written statements of verification from references, family members
- A written statement from the applicant explaining their lived history as an Indigenous person
- family connection/history and/or
- community affiliation.

It was shared that for many Non-Status individuals, going to their Band to request a letter explaining their non-status would be difficult and, in some cases, impossible. Participants voiced that, for many Non-Status individuals, returning to the entity that ceased to recognize their place within the community could be re-traumatizing.

## **Backlash from applicants**

Some participants shared concerns that backlash may occur from people who have dubious claims and do not meet the verification protocol's requirements. These people may direct their frustration to the Office of Indigenous Affairs or other staff affiliated with the verification process. Also, the risk of litigation from groups who may be excluded from this process is a risk.

“

“Who can be put at risk, if a verification process is put in place, are students, largely young people, whose identities may be contested, etc, and I just don't want students who go to MUN to be hit with a request for a status card, number, that they can't provide, and then walk away from that thinking they aren't Indigenous anymore. I just don't want more violence to be done to young Indigenous people”.

– Alumni Participant



## When is verification *not* necessary?

Several participants emphasized that verification is not necessary if spaces are not specified for Indigenous peoples.

In fact, it was brought forth by a number of individuals that Indigenous students may wish to *not* self-identify, as they may choose to forego any opportunity to be considered for Indigenous-specific seats or streams within programs (e.g., medical school), for any number of reasons. These individuals suggested that in applications, there should exist one box to declare Indigenous citizenship/membership, and a subsequent box where the applicant can indicate whether they wish to be considered for Indigenous-specific opportunities. This opt-in process can be helpful because it allows students more agency around declaring their citizenship/membership without fearing they might be pointed out or feeling they will be automatically considered for an opportunity they do not wish to be considered for.

An individual who identifies as Indigenous but does not wish to occupy Indigenous-specific opportunities or spaces will not require verification. This same individual who applies to a new opportunity later on and wishes to then be considered for Indigenous-specific opportunities will at that time be required to verify their Indigenous citizenship/membership.





**Process  
Considerations  
for an Indigenous  
Verification  
Protocol at  
Memorial  
University**



## Education

There was a large amount of discussion surrounding education in order to dispel myths regarding Indigenous citizenship and the reasons why there are targeted hires, reserved seats, and other Indigenous-specific opportunities. Participants shared ideas about the development of an awareness campaign to accompany the verification protocol so applicants are better informed. It was suggested that written resources as well as multimedia resources be shared to ensure the content of the campaign is accessible to those who may be engaging with it.

## Application Processes

Many participants stated that being clearer on applications about what it means to claim Indigenous citizenship/membership could deter those who may be simply 'checking the box' to gain material benefit, while being non-Indigenous. Students shared that the term 'Indian' has been confusing, especially for their international student colleagues, and that more detailed information on what Indigenous citizenship/membership is should be considered on applications. It should be made clear that Indigenous verification will take place if an applicant is moving on to further stages of consideration for employment or entry for study. Other participants stated that the University should consider sharing potential repercussions for an individual if it is found their claim to Indigenous citizenship/membership is not true. Specific mention of policies for Academic Fraud and Academic Misconduct should be noted on applications as well.

## Support for Applicants

Some participants felt there is a need to consider that verification may be emotionally difficult and, in some cases, re-traumatizing when an individual is asked to verify themselves repeatedly. This consideration could be especially important in the scenario of verifying folks who have experienced severe trauma in respect to their culture and identity, such as Indian Residential School survivors. Some suggested that once an individual has been verified by the University, this would go on file and they would not need to undergo this process again. Applicants may require logistical support in the application process but may also require emotional support where this process could stir up intense emotions for some folks.

It was also mentioned that there should be supports in place for people who may be in the stage of reconnecting to their Indigeneity, other than just going to the Juniper House on campus, which is Memorial University's Indigenous Student Resource Centre. We also heard participants share that an ombudsperson should be considered to support people in navigating the verification protocol.





“We must be careful not to create undue burden on people who are already burdened”.  
- *Community Session Participant*

## Data Storage

Several participants raised concerns about the storage of data and identifying documents, especially highly sensitive documents. Documents may detail adoption, abuse, Sixties Scoop, foster care, etc., and individuals must trust the University to take care of this information—the keeping of stories. There are University processes in place for the retention of employment files and student records, which could be expanded on for the preservation of documentation pertaining to Indigenous verification.

## A Centralized Approach: Committee, Capacity, Costs

Several participants shared that they felt non-Indigenous peoples should not be involved in verifying Indigenous peoples within the academic institution, as they do not operate from an Indigenous worldview or have lived experience as an Indigenous person to understand Indigenous merits, perspectives, or worldviews that would qualify them for Indigenous-specific hiring positions, scholarships, bursaries, or research funding.

Participants shared a desire for a more centralized protocol, which would be University-wide, rather than each faculty/department having its own approach. It was suggested that a Verification Committee be established to act as an administrative body to handle the verification process. This committee should be diverse in its membership, representing the breadth of Indigeneity in the province and from different faculties within the University. Some participants shared that Indigenous peoples from local communities should have a seat in a verification committee. Many participants stressed the importance of establishing intentional criteria to determine the membership of the committee, emphasizing the skills required of a committee member and that the committee members need to understand the history and politics of Indigeneity operating in Newfoundland and Labrador.



One participant suggested that all academic institutions in Canada wishing to implement a Verification Protocol adopt a consistent methodology, to ensure any individual only has to undergo a Verification once, and this Verification can be used by any academic institution to confirm their Indigenous citizenship/membership.

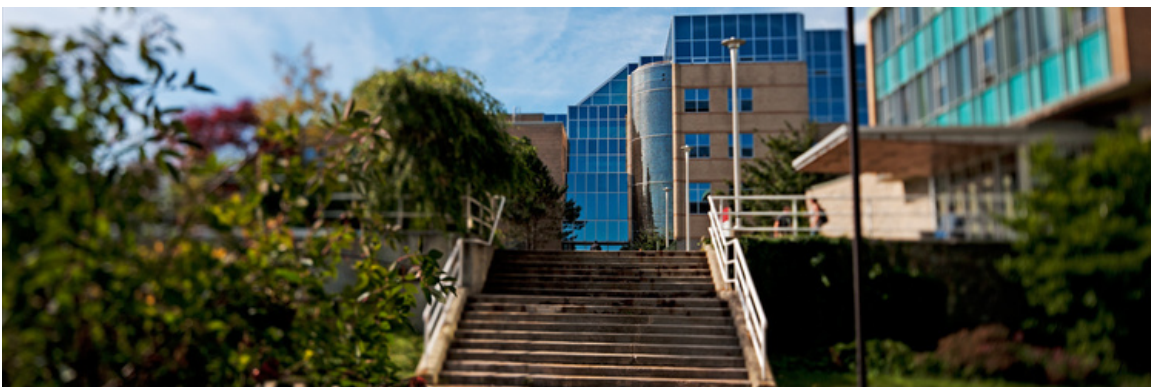
It was shared that the capacity of the University and of the individuals who may serve on a committee needs to be considered in the development of a verification protocol. How might these individuals be compensated for these additional responsibilities?


Participants shared that this verification protocol and the processes associated with it need to be properly resourced. It was suggested that an Indigenous-specific employee be hired in Human Resources and the Office of the Registrar to support these processes. One participant emphasized that the government needs to provide funding in excess of funds already allotted for Indigenous initiatives.

## Monitoring and Evaluation

Once established, a verification protocol must be continuously monitored and evaluated. Participants differed in their thoughts about the frequency of this evaluation, with some suggesting an annual review and others suggesting a less frequent review. Some participants suggested the University have quarterly reviews of the verification protocol throughout the first year of implementation.

It was also stated that the University will need to remain informed regarding any future court decisions and leave room for further policy development.





# **Current Memorial Faculty, Staff and Students and False Claims**



When asked how situations involving individuals who have made false claims and are currently in Indigenous-specific opportunities at Memorial University should be handled, some participants felt that the verification protocol should be applied retroactively, meaning anyone who is currently holding an Indigenous-specific space should have to undergo the verification process and face actions or consequences based on the outcome of the process.

It was suggested that if a retroactive approach is taken, it should be a blanket approach rather than a selective one.

Other participants felt that no action should be taken retroactively, and the verification protocol should only be used on a go-forward basis, with new hires and selections for Indigenous-specific spaces and opportunities.

It was emphasized by participants that with either approach, the review of individuals holding Indigenous-specific opportunities and spaces would need to be carried out with extreme care and caution.

For individuals who underwent the verification protocol and were found to have made false claims, many participants suggested that the course of action should be based on whether the fraudulent claim was made with ill intentions or whether the case involved a person who held an Indigenous-specific space in earnest.

Where actions to address false claims within the category of individuals who intentionally made false claims is much more straightforward, there was much discussion around various situations where individuals might make a false claim in earnest. Some participants suggested that a person who was raised in Indigenous culture and was told they were Indigenous family members but later found out that they were dishonest or had been mistaken, may qualify for this category.



It was felt by many that individuals who make false claims from a malicious place would require stronger actions, including immediate removal from their position along with a publication on this decision. Others suggested that this person take accountability for their actions by making a public statement that they were not in a position to take that opportunity.

Some participants felt that individuals who made false claims in earnest would still need to be removed immediately, but perhaps they could be offered another opportunity not specified for Indigenous peoples in the University.



For students, an example was given that perhaps the student remains in their program or committee but just in a general space, and the Indigenous-specific space is opened back up again to be filled by an Indigenous applicant.

The sentiment that, throughout this process, “justice does not become revenge”, was emphasized by one participant. This quote was shared with respect to the approach that should be taken with people who wrongfully occupy Indigenous spaces. We, as Indigenous peoples, must follow our own teachings and worldview when addressing these issues and handle them in a respectful way. Empathy, respect, kindness, courage, honesty and gentleness, were all virtues that participants expressed must be present when addressing issues of false claims of Indigenous citizenship/membership.

Additionally, any verification protocol must examine approaches to caring for all members of the University community and methods such as transformative justice and talking circles.





A participant suggested that supporting those who have made false claims to gracefully step out of spaces and take accountability for how their actions have caused harm and change might be the best policy or intervention because it has the least impact on Indigenous folks and the most impact on those making false claims. This policy could integrate incentives for people to come out and claim their right relations, and come into their full identities properly as non-Indigenous peoples or allies, in a good way.

A participant suggested that if the University gives people time to grandfather out of their positions, it mitigates the risk of violence towards Indigenous “grey paper” folks. One participant said that it could “let Pretendians off the hook” but explained that they felt it was more important to err on the side of not doing violence to Indigenous folks than to attempt to “manage Pretendians out of positions they are occupying”.

Other participants suggested that the verification protocol requires anyone found to be fraudulent to repay their scholarships or bursaries. One participant specified that this should not be the first course of action, necessarily, but must be part of the process. Perhaps it would be a secondary or tertiary course of action.

Several participants expressed the need to be wary of “cancel culture” and how the practice of “cancelling” those who do not meet the verification criteria could be further harmful. An individual must be made aware of a concern and then provided the opportunity to clarify, within a timely manner, their claim to Indigenous citizenship/membership. Actions taken to address false claims must maintain humanity and dignity for those being investigated. A person who makes false claims is still a member of the community. One participant wondered, “How do we care for this person as well?”

An exit approach should include a learning opportunity so the individual understands why there are specific opportunities for Indigenous people, and must understand the harm that their actions have caused, whether or not their claim was from a place of malintent or was made in earnest.

## Respect and care for all

Several participants brought forth concerns about the risk to Indigenous staff who may be affiliated with the verification process, who may receive backlash and violence as a result of adjudications and decisions made on matters of Indigenous Verification. On the other hand, it was also brought forth with a similar weight, the importance of handling verification with respect and following conduct that is grounded in Indigenous teachings of respect and dignity for everyone involved.

Another participant shared how, when creating any policy, it is integral to care for all your constituents equally. This includes people who may be causing harm, such as those making false claims, Indigenous peoples within Memorial who may be inflicting lateral violence onto others, and problematic administrators).



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**“If you are in a seat that belongs to someone else, you need to get out of the seat”.**

*- Community Participant*

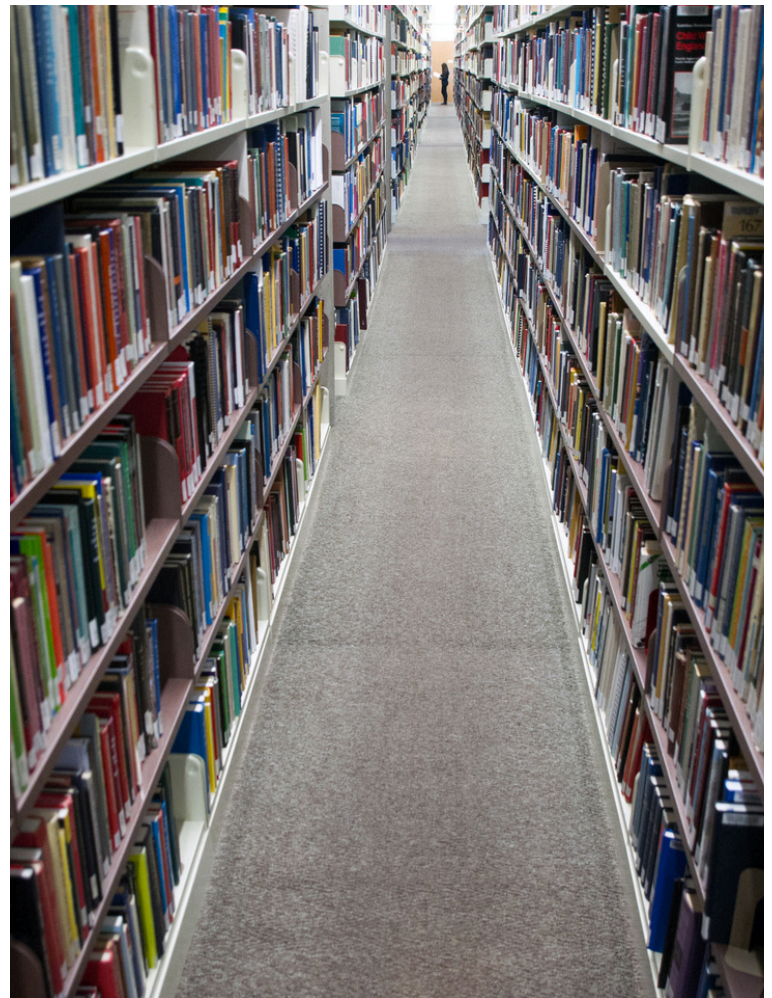
## Removal of Faculty and Staff: Support for Students

Many participants felt that a verification policy would be incomplete without a clear plan in place for those who may be impacted by individuals who may be removed through the process. For example, if a graduate student's thesis supervisor were to be removed for fraudulent claims, it would be imperative for the University to consider the impact on the student and co-develop a plan with the student so their studies and research would not be severely impacted.

“

**“Accountability is a major piece of Reconciliation”.**

*- Community Session Participant*







**What Are Other  
Institutions  
Doing?: What  
Was Shared**





## Verification Protocols in Other Canadian Universities

*Participants provided insights into verification procedures initiated and implemented at Wilfrid Laurier University, Dalhousie University, the University of Saskatchewan, and the University of Waterloo.*

At **Wilfrid Laurier University**, the verification process focuses not solely on a candidate's claim to Indigeneity but also on which Indigenous community the candidate is claimed by and their lived experiences of Indigeneity. Two options are available to confirm Indigenous identity for eligibility for Indigenous-specific opportunities: written documentation or candidate self-declaration.

The Office of Indigenous Initiatives has been verifying the Indigenous identity of new faculty hires since Spring 2022. The verification process has applied to Indigenous students as of the 2022-2023 student awards cycle. The verification process is not retroactive. If a claim to Indigenous identity were to come into question, the individual may be required to go through a verification process at that time.

At the University of Saskatchewan, The deybwewin | taapwaywin | tapwewin Policy, which was created by a task force of Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Language Teachers, and other Indigenous community and campus leaders, received approval from the Board of Regents in July 2022. The University has established a Memorandum of Understanding with Métis Nation-Saskatchewan in 2021 to ensure the University will “rely on the objectively verifiable MN-S Citizenship Registry to assess eligibility for Métis based opportunities at the university”. Applicants claiming Indigenous membership/citizenship must upload documentation to a portal to facilitate verification.

If no documentation is available due to any number of reasons related to colonial policies and displacement, a signed affidavit outlining the applicant’s lineage and connection to a community and an account of the historical and geographical location of membership and connection to the Indigenous community is required.



Meanwhile, in Fall 2023, the **University of Waterloo** launched a new process to verify Indigenous membership/citizenship to confirm eligibility for Indigenous-specific staff, faculty and student opportunities at Waterloo. The Indigenous Verification Advisory Committee (IVAC) oversees the verification process, which applies to all members of the University community including students, faculty, staff, as well as Elders, Cultural Advisors and other service providers. Similar to the University of Saskatchewan, students utilize a portal (Quest) to upload documentation.

At **Dalhousie University**, there is an Indigenous Admissions Pathway within the Medical School. Applicants must self-identify and provide the following supporting documents with their application:

1. A letter expressing the applicant's intent to be considered under the Indigenous Admissions Pathway, which describes their Indigenous identity and present-day connection to an Indigenous community.
2. A letter of support from either an official in a recognized Indigenous organization or a relative in an Indigenous community.
3. Specific information and documentation regarding their First Nation (Status and Non-Status), Métis, Inuit, Band Council, Tribal Council, Treaty, community, nation, or organizational affiliation.

These documents are reviewed on a case-by-case basis and may be subject to verification by members of the Indigenous Admissions Subcommittee.

In the Fall of 2023, Dalhousie University released a report entitled *Understanding Our Roots, Task Force on Settler Misappropriation of Indigenous Identity*. The report includes 11 recommendations ranging from policy development and an apology to the local Indigenous communities, as well as progress reports on recommendations made within the Dalhousie University Indigenous Strategy.

In December 2023, two professors at the Dalhousie University Schulich School of Law released a human rights and legal analysis outlining their concerns with the task force's findings and recommendations.



# Closing Comments



Throughout this consultation process, **we have heard** that our identities are shaped by our relations within a collective and the collectives we have shared lands with or have been neighbours to. What do our neighbours know of us?

**We have heard** that our Indigeneity is rooted in the lands we come from and are responsible to.

**We have heard** that while these conversations on verification seem to centre around benefits, as Indigenous peoples, we must centre responsibility. What is our responsibility to the nations we come from? What is the responsibility to those we are neighbours to? What is the responsibility to the lands and waters we call home? Being a citizen or member of an Indigenous Nation or collective is not about perks and opportunities.

**We have heard** that there is a considerable amount of misunderstanding regarding why certain opportunities are reserved for Indigenous peoples. These opportunities create access that otherwise may not exist. These opportunities centre on Indigenous knowledge rather than Western or colonial ways of knowing. These opportunities hold up ancestral ways of knowing in their rightful place as expertise.

**We have heard** that a verification process is not at all cumbersome if your claims within an Indigenous collective are, in fact, true.

**We have heard** that many people will be able to provide some sort of documentation, that this will be the norm, and that there must be flexibility for exceptions to the norm.

**We have heard** confusion about why some individuals and collectives would be against ensuring Indigenous-specific opportunities have safeguards to ensure they are filled with Indigenous people.

**We have heard** expressions of fear; of not being recognized, of losing jobs, of lateral violence as a result of a verification process.

**We have heard** a great deal of discussion around self-determination; that collectives are the only ones who can determine the Indigeneity of their citizens and members.

**We have heard** that a university has no role in determining Indigenous identity, and must recognize the sovereignty of Indigenous collectives.

**We have heard** that our ancestral ways of knowing as Indigenous peoples must be present throughout a verification process. We must create space for stories. We must ensure there is adequate support for those who may be impacted by a fraudulent person and support for the fraudulent person themselves.

**We have heard** that if we do nothing; if we continue to allow self-identification to be the only pathway for verifying one's Indigeneity, we risk further erosion of our livelihood as Indigenous peoples.





# Appendices



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- B. Consultation Participant Package
- C. Consultation Attendees and Invitees
- D. Online Survey Findings
- E. Resources Utilized in Preparation of this Report



# APPENDIX A: INVITATION TO CONSULTATION

Dear [community leader/representative],

As you may be aware, Memorial University has hired First Peoples Group to conduct a series of consultations to support the development of an Indigenous verification protocol.

The issue of falsely claiming Indigenous identity is a concern that is being addressed in universities across Canada. Memorial University takes this issue seriously and is aware of the deep wounds it causes to Indigenous people and communities, as well as the threat it poses to the integrity of Indigenous ways of knowing and being in academic institutions. Preventing this from happening requires establishing and implementing systems that are based on robust consultation with Indigenous Peoples, communities, and nations.

This protocol will be used throughout Memorial University and will be applied to situations in which individuals may stand to benefit from such claims, such as targeted hiring of Indigenous faculty and staff, designated seats for Indigenous students, Indigenous-specific scholarships and bursaries, and Indigenous-specific research funds.

First Peoples Group will begin community engagement sessions in February 2024. When these engagements are complete, First Peoples Group will compile what we heard, along with recommendations for Memorial University, into a publicly available final report, which will ultimately inform an Indigenous verification protocol for Memorial University.

Please email Hannah Martin ([hannah@firstpeoplesgroup.com](mailto:hannah@firstpeoplesgroup.com)) if you and your community are interested in participating in an engagement session in winter 2024. We will follow up with another email in January.

Sincerely,

Heather Watts, President, First Peoples Group





# APPENDIX B:

## CONSULTATION PARTICIPANT PACKAGE

# Consultation Participant Package

PREPARED BY:  
FIRST PEOPLES GROUP

### Background Information

Memorial University has engaged the services of First Peoples Group to advance the institution's work around Indigenous verification.

First Peoples Group will work with Memorial University to conduct a series of consultations with Indigenous leaders, Indigenous organizations, and Indigenous faculty, staff, students and alumni of Memorial University.

These consultations will take place in February and March 2024. First Peoples Group will provide a final report with recommendations for Memorial University based on what we heard in consultations, in April 2024.

### Session Agenda

- (10 Minutes) Session Opening & Norm Setting
- (20 Minutes) Introductions
- (75 Minutes) Questions & Dialogue
- (15 Minutes) Next Steps & Closing

### Session Norms

- Be Present
- Defer Judgement - the belief in the basic goodness of people
- Speak From Your Experience
- Confidentiality - What is said in the circle, stays in the circle
- Share the Air - Be mindful of creating space for all to participate and share
- Appreciation for Ourselves and Others - Listen with curiosity and compassion, an open mind and open heart





## Consultation Questions

1. Should there be explicit requirements for Indigenous verification for designated Indigenous staff, faculty and student opportunities at Memorial University? If so, what might these requirements include?
2. Should verification requirements apply to all roles and opportunities with the university? (i.e. Faculty, Staff, Students, Keynote Speakers, Visiting Cultural Educators, etc.)
3. What process should the University follow when verifying that these requirements have indeed been met by an individual?
4. If the university implements a verification process and an individual who occupies Indigenous space (e.g. Indigenous-specific positions, funding, scholarships, etc.) does not meet the requirements, how could this be addressed?
5. Should Indigenous ways of knowing, and of kinship and connection be honoured in a verification process? If so, how?
6. What do you feel is at risk if there is no verification process? What is at risk if there is a verification process?
7. Is there anything else you would like to share on the topic of Indigenous verification?
8. Are you aware of any other universities that have created policies and processes related to Indigenous verification that are seen to be effective?

## Confidentiality

We will be utilizing Otter.ai (a transcription software) to record consultation sessions to ensure comments are accurately represented. Please be assured that your name and/or contact information will not be linked to your comments or contributions to the consultation session. The transcripts captured from the consultation sessions will be used by First Peoples Group to identify recommendations on the development of an Indigenous verification protocol for Memorial University and will be disposed of once the final report is accepted by the University.

If you do not wish to have your comments audio-recorded, please inform Hannah Martin before your consultation session.



## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1) What is the forum (virtual or in-person)?

*These consultation sessions will take place virtually, through the Zoom platform.*

### 2) Who is your desired audience and preferred volume of participants?

*To ensure there is enough time for all voices to be heard, we want to limit the session to 20 participants. In terms of who the desired audience is, we encourage leaders, Knowledge Keepers, Elders, and those who may be involved in the post-secondary system (as students, parents/guardians of students, staff) to attend. We acknowledge that individuals in your community may be connected to Memorial University presently, or in the past. Please note that there will be consultation sessions for current Memorial University Faculty, Staff, Students, as well as Memorial University Alumni, and we ask individuals to attend (1) session only.*

### 3) Is there a cost to participation?

*There is no cost to participate.*

### 4) How will you ensure protection of data and identity of participants?

*We will be utilizing Otter.ai (a transcription software) to record consultation sessions to ensure comments are accurately represented. Please be assured that your name and/or contact information will not be linked to your comments or contributions to the consultation session. Names of session attendees will be noted for internal tracking purposes only.*

*The transcripts captured from the consultation sessions will be used by First Peoples Group to identify recommendations on the development of an Indigenous verification protocol for Memorial University and will be disposed of once the final report is accepted by the University.*

*If you do not wish to have your comments audio-recorded, please inform Hannah Martin before your consultation session.*

### 5) What is the anticipated time commitment?

*The consultation session will be 2 hours in length.*

### 6) How will the final report and assessment be delivered to participants?

*The final report will be available publicly through Memorial University, and will be sent to leaders of the participating nations, communities and groups.*

## Questions?

Please contact First Peoples Group Associate, Hannah Martin: [hannah@firstpeoplesgroup.com](mailto:hannah@firstpeoplesgroup.com)





# APPENDIX C:

## CONSULTATION ATTENDEES AND INVITEES

Attended a Consultation Session	Did Not Attend a Consultation Session
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Benoit’s Cove Indian Band</li> <li>-Burgeo Band of Indians</li> <li>-Congress of Aboriginal Peoples</li> <li>-Flat Bay Band-No'kmaq Village</li> <li>-First Light Friendship Centre</li> <li>-Innu Nation</li> <li>-Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami</li> <li>-Mekap’sk Mi’kmaq Band</li> <li>-Métis National Council</li> <li>-Newfoundland Indigenous Peoples Alliance</li> <li>-Nunatsiavut Government</li> <li>-NunatuKavut Community Council</li> <li>-People of the Dawn Friendship Centre</li> <li>-Port au Port Indian Band</li> <li>-Qalipu First Nation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Assembly of First Nations Newfoundland (AFNNL)</li> <li>-Assembly of First Nations Quebec Labrador (AFNQL)</li> <li>-Benoit First Nation</li> <li>-Gander Bay Band</li> <li>-Glenwood First Nation</li> <li>-Indian Head First Nation</li> <li>-Labrador Friendship Centre</li> <li>-Miawpukek First Nation</li> <li>-Mi’kmaq Sante Mawiomi / Mi’kmaq Grand Council</li> <li>-Sple’tk (Exploits) First Nation</li> <li>-St. George’s Band</li> <li>-Three Rivers Mi’kmaq Band</li> </ul>



# APPENDIX D: ONLINE SURVEY FINDINGS

APRIL 2024



# SURVEY FINDINGS







# ABOUT THE SURVEY

This survey was available from February 12 – March 15, 2024 for those who could not attend a consultation session, or for those who attended a session but would like to provide additional information. Survey responses were anonymous; and personalized links to the survey were provided.

If self-identified Indigenous faculty, staff, students and alumni wished to complete the survey, they were asked to email their request to [ypindigenous@mun.ca](mailto:ypindigenous@mun.ca) and include the following:

- Your name
- Affiliation with Memorial (i.e. faculty, staff, student and/or alumni)
- Indigenous community you have responsibility to



# THE QUESTIONS

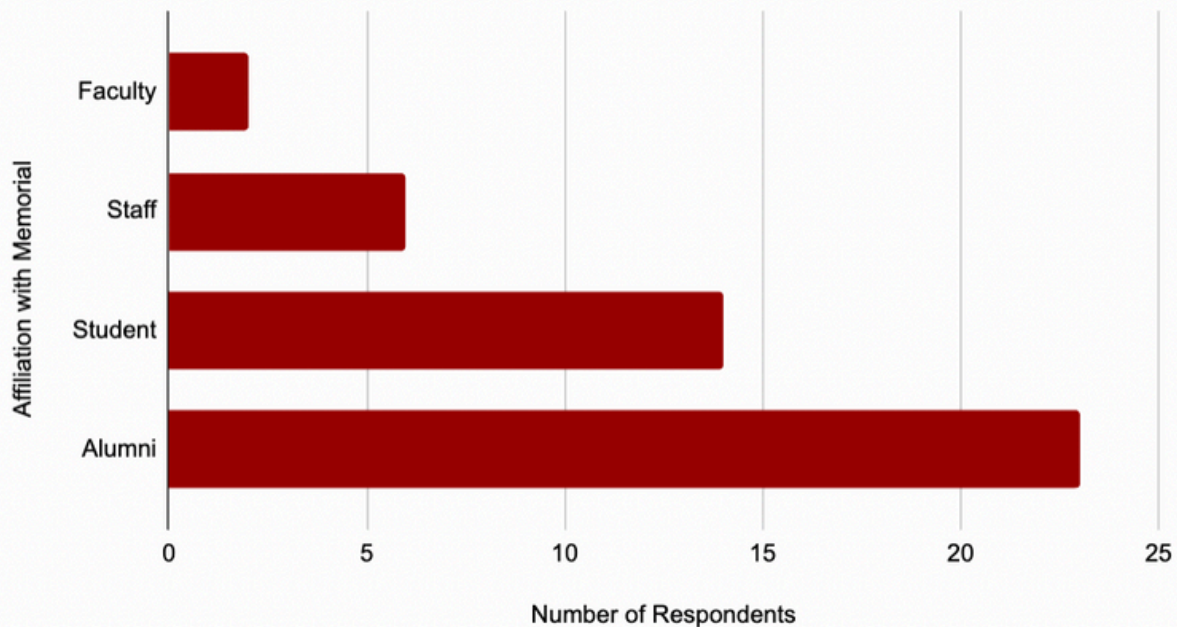
1. Should there be explicit requirements for Indigenous verification for designated Indigenous staff, faculty and student opportunities at Memorial University? If so, what might these requirements include?
2. Should verification requirements apply to all roles and opportunities with the university? (i.e. Faculty, Staff, Students, Keynote Speakers, Visiting Cultural Educators, etc.)
3. What process should the University follow when verifying that these requirements have indeed been met by an individual?
4. If the university implements a verification process and an individual who occupies Indigenous space (e.g. Indigenous-specific positions, funding, scholarships, etc.) does not meet the requirements, how could this be addressed?
5. Should Indigenous ways of knowing, and of kinship and connection be honoured in a verification process? If so, how?
6. What do you feel is at risk if there is no verification process? What is at risk if there is a verification process?
7. Is there anything else you would like to share on the topic of Indigenous verification?
8. Are you aware of any other universities that have created policies and processes related to Indigenous verification that are seen to be effective?

**NOTE: The survey questions are identical to the questions asked in consultation sessions.**



# THE RESPONDENTS

What is your affiliation with Memorial University?



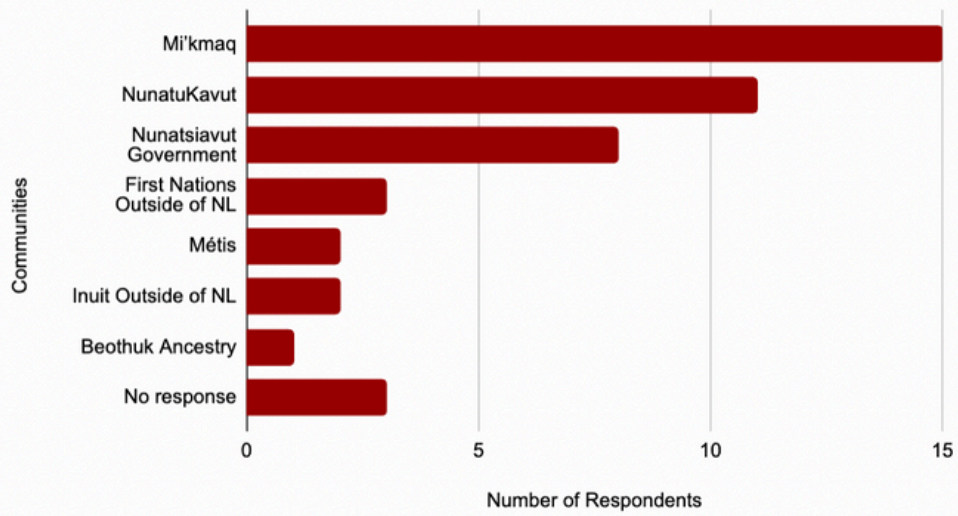
Affiliation with Memorial	Number of Respondents
Faculty	2
Staff	6
Student	14
Alumni	23
	<b>45 total respondents</b>



# THE RESPONDENTS



What Indigenous Community Do You Have a Responsibility To?

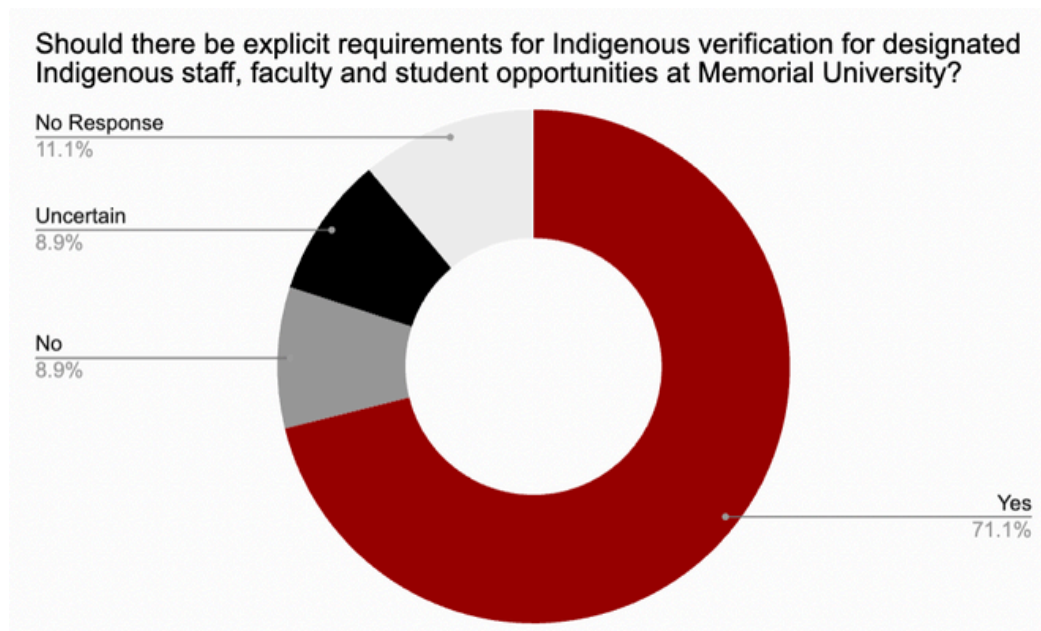


Communities	Number of Respondents
Mi'kmaq	15
NunatuKavut Community Council	11
Nunatsiavut Government	8
Métis	2
First Nations Outside of NL	3
Inuit Outside of NL	2
Beothuk Ancestry	1
No response	3



# QUESTION ONE

**Should there be explicit requirements for Indigenous verification for designated Indigenous staff, faculty and student opportunities at Memorial University?**



The responses regarding whether there should be explicit requirements for Indigenous verification for designated Indigenous staff, faculty, and student opportunities at Memorial University are diverse and nuanced. Below is a summary of the key points:

**Need for Verification:** Many individuals believe that some form of verification for Indigenous identity is necessary. This includes providing a copy of a status card, proof of membership in an Indigenous organization, or confirmation from an Indigenous community.

**Challenges with Existing Processes:** Several comments highlight challenges with existing verification processes, such as the flawed enrollment process for the Qalipu band. There's a recognition that the current systems may not accurately represent Indigenous identity and may exclude individuals with legitimate claims.



# QUESTION ONE, CONT'D.

**Should there be explicit requirements for Indigenous verification for designated Indigenous staff, faculty and student opportunities at Memorial University?**

**Diverse Perspectives on Requirements:** Opinions vary on what constitutes sufficient evidence of Indigenous identity. Some suggest relying solely on official documentation like status cards, while others advocate for a more flexible approach that considers family history, community recognition, or self-identification.

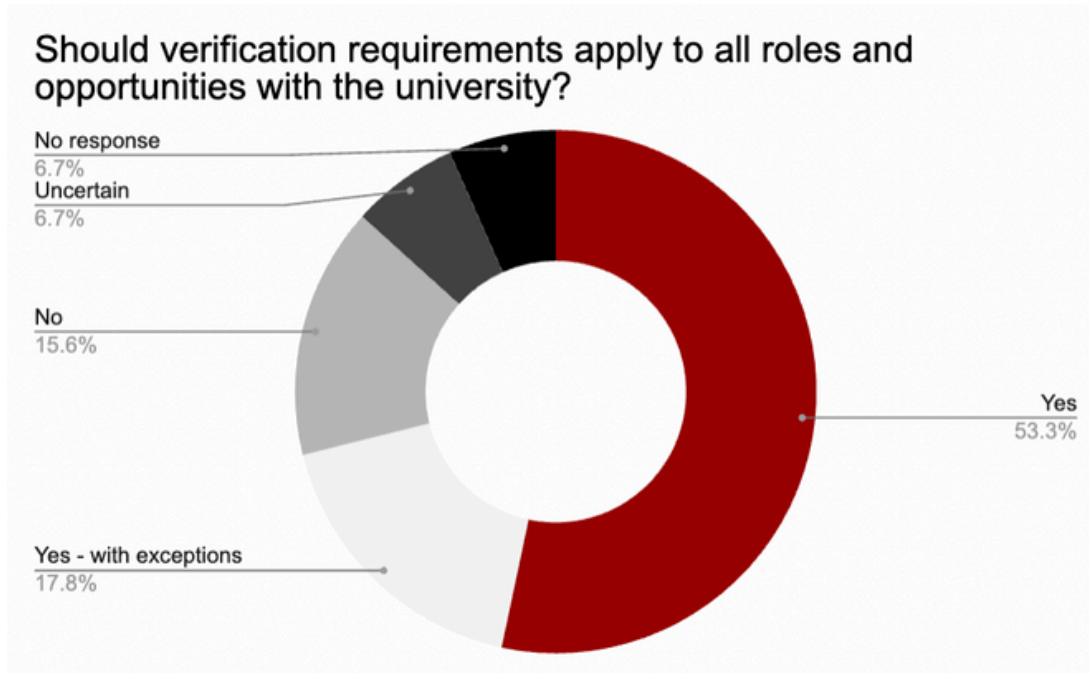
**Concerns about Discrimination and Fairness:** Some express concerns about the potential for discrimination or unfair treatment based on Indigenous identity. There's a call for sensitivity and caution in developing verification processes to avoid perpetuating harmful stereotypes or excluding legitimate Indigenous individuals.

**Role of Educational Institutions:** There are differing views on whether educational institutions like Memorial University should be involved in verifying Indigenous identity. While some argue that it's not their responsibility and could lead to further marginalization, others believe it's important for ensuring Indigenous representation and authenticity within academic spaces.

Overall, the issue of Indigenous verification is complex and multifaceted, with stakeholders offering diverse perspectives on how best to approach it within the context of educational institutions.

# QUESTION TWO

**Should verification requirements apply to all roles and opportunities with the university?**



The responses regarding whether verification requirements should apply to all roles and opportunities with the university, including faculty, staff, and students, are varied. Below is a summary of the key points:

**Consistency and Fairness:** Many respondents argue that if verification is required for some roles, it should apply to all roles to ensure consistency and fairness. They believe that anyone claiming Indigenous identity should provide verification.

**Relevance of Indigenous Identity:** Some respondents suggest that verification should only be required for roles or opportunities directly related to Indigenous culture, history, or funding specifically designated for Indigenous people. They argue that Indigenous identity may not be relevant in all contexts.



# QUESTION TWO, CONT'D.

**Should verification requirements apply to all roles and opportunities with the university?**

**Respect and Sensitivity:** There's a consensus among some respondents that verification should be handled with respect and sensitivity, especially when involving Elders or guest speakers. They express concern that asking for proof of Indigeneity may be insulting or unnecessary in certain situations.

**Ethical Considerations:** A few respondents raise ethical concerns about requiring verification for Indigenous identity, suggesting that it may perpetuate discrimination or undermine Indigenous autonomy. They argue that ethnicity should not be a factor in hiring decisions.

**Clarity in Requirements:** Some respondents emphasize the importance of making verification requirements explicit from the outset, especially for positions or opportunities where Indigenous identity is considered a criterion for selection.

Overall, there's a range of perspectives on whether verification requirements should apply universally to all roles and opportunities within the university, reflecting differing opinions on the relevance, fairness, and ethical implications of such requirements.





# QUESTION THREE

## What process should the University follow when verifying that these requirements have indeed been met by an individual?

The responses regarding the process the University should follow when verifying Indigenous requirements are varied. Below is a summary of the key points:

**Official Documentation:** Many respondents suggest requesting official documentation, such as status cards or membership cards, to verify Indigenous identity. This documentation would need to be submitted by the individual as part of their application or enrollment process.

**Community Confirmation:** Some respondents emphasize the importance of obtaining confirmation from Indigenous communities or organizations. This could involve contacting community leaders, elders, or membership coordinators to verify the individual's affiliation with the community.

**Committee Review:** A few respondents propose establishing a committee of Indigenous individuals from diverse backgrounds to review verification materials. This committee would assess the submitted documentation and may request additional information if needed.

**Sensitive Approach:** Several respondents highlight the need for sensitivity and understanding when dealing with Indigenous identity verification. They emphasize the potential trauma associated with proving Indigenous ancestry and suggest handling the process with care and respect.

**Flexibility and Self-Identification:** Some respondents advocate for flexibility in the verification process, allowing individuals to self-identify and submit proof as they see fit. They suggest that self-declaration should be respected, with verification required only for specific positions or benefits directly related to Indigenous identity.

**Educational Component:** A few respondents propose incorporating an educational component into the verification process, providing information about the historical and cultural context of Indigenous identity in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Overall, there's a recognition of the complexity and sensitivity surrounding Indigenous verification processes, with respondents emphasizing the need for careful consideration, community involvement, and respect for individual experiences and identities.



# QUESTION FOUR

**If the university implements a verification process and an individual who occupies Indigenous space (e.g. Indigenous specific positions, funding, scholarships, etc.) does not meet the requirements, how could this be addressed?**

The responses provide various perspectives on how to address situations where an individual who occupies Indigenous space does not meet the verification requirements. Below is a summary of the key points:

**Community Involvement:** Many respondents emphasize the importance of involving Indigenous communities or elders in the decision-making process. They suggest that the final decision should be made by the presiding elders or councils from the Indigenous group rather than the University.

**Direct Communication and Further Investigation:** Some respondents propose directly approaching the individual and giving them a chance to provide further information or verification within a specified timeframe. If the individual fails to provide satisfactory documentation, a second meeting or investigation could be conducted.

**Policy and Procedures:** Several respondents suggest that the university should have clear policies and procedures in place for addressing these situations, including termination from positions, reversal of funding and scholarships, and potential legal action for fraudulent misrepresentation.

**Educational Approach:** A few respondents advocate for an educational approach, where the individual is informed of the importance of Indigenous-specific spaces and scholarships and given an opportunity to understand the reasons behind the verification process.

**Case-by-Case Basis and Sensitivity:** Many respondents stress the importance of addressing each situation on a case-by-case basis, considering factors such as community support, personal history, and potential trauma associated with proving Indigenous identity.

**Community Recognition:** Some respondents highlight the importance of recognizing and respecting the diverse Indigenous groups in the region, including those that may not be officially recognized by government entities.

**Transparency and Accountability:** Several respondents emphasize the need for transparency and accountability in the verification process, ensuring that individuals are aware of the requirements and consequences of misrepresentation.

Overall, there's a recognition of the complexity and sensitivity surrounding these issues, with a focus on community involvement, clear policies, and individual circumstances.



# QUESTION FIVE

## Should Indigenous ways of knowing, and of kinship and connection be honoured in a verification process? If so, how?

The responses reflect a variety of opinions on whether Indigenous ways of knowing, kinship, and connection should be honored in a verification process, and if so, how they should be incorporated:

**Community Recognition:** Many respondents emphasize the importance of community recognition and validation of an individual's Indigenous identity. They suggest that letters of support from community members, elders, or leaders could be valuable in verifying kinship and connection.

**Respect for Indigenous Knowledge:** Some respondents advocate for honoring Indigenous ways of knowing, acknowledging that Indigenous identity is not solely determined by official documents but also by cultural practices, teachings, and connections to the community.

**Self-Identification and Personal Connection:** Others highlight the significance of self-identification and personal connection to Indigenous heritage. They suggest that individuals should be given the opportunity to explain their relationship to their culture and community, and this should be considered in the verification process.

**Avoiding Gatekeeping and Exclusion:** Several respondents express concerns about creating a verification process that may exclude individuals who do not fit a narrow definition of Indigenous identity or who have been disconnected from their culture due to colonialism. They caution against imposing Western standards of verification on Indigenous peoples.

**Consultation with Indigenous Leaders:** Some respondents suggest consulting with Indigenous leaders or organizations to develop a culturally sensitive verification process that respects Indigenous ways of knowing and kinship ties.

Overall, there is a consensus among respondents that any verification process should be respectful, inclusive, and reflective of the diverse ways in which Indigenous identity is understood and expressed.



# QUESTION SIX

**What do you feel is at risk if there is no verification process? What is at risk if there is a verification process?**

The responses highlight various risks associated with both having and not having a verification process for Indigenous identity:

## **Risks of Not Having a Verification Process:**

- Non-Indigenous individuals could falsely claim Indigenous identity, leading to the misrepresentation of Indigenous peoples and the misuse of resources intended for Indigenous communities.
- Indigenous spaces and opportunities could be occupied by non-Indigenous individuals, depriving Indigenous peoples of their rightful positions and representation.
- There is a risk of perpetuating colonialism and systemic discrimination by allowing non-Indigenous individuals to claim Indigenous identity without verification.
- Genuine Indigenous individuals may feel marginalized and invalidated if their identity is questioned or doubted due to the lack of verification; there may be an aura of suspicion around Indigenous identity if there is no verification.

## **Risks of Having a Verification Process:**

- Indigenous individuals may face scrutiny, trauma, and emotional distress if their Indigenous identity is questioned or denied during the verification process.
- The verification process may perpetuate division and exclusion within Indigenous communities, particularly for those who do not fit neatly into official categories or lack official documentation.
- There is a risk of adopting a colonial mindset by imposing Western standards of verification on Indigenous peoples, undermining Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty.
- The verification process may create barriers for Indigenous individuals who lack official documentation or who do not meet certain criteria, leading to feelings of exclusion and inadequacy.

Overall, both approaches carry risks, and careful consideration must be given to designing a verification process that respects Indigenous self-identification, community recognition, and diverse forms of Indigenous identity while also guarding against fraud and misrepresentation.





# QUESTION SEVEN

## Is there anything else you would like to share on the topic of Indigenous verification?

The topic of Indigenous verification is complex and multifaceted, encompassing various perspectives, experiences, and concerns. Below are key points and reflections based on the statements provided:

**Global Perspective:** While the discussion appears to focus primarily on Canadian Indigenous groups, the issues raised are relevant to Indigenous peoples worldwide. Indigenous identity verification processes vary among nations and communities, reflecting unique cultural, historical, and legal contexts.

**Colonial Legacies and Assimilation:** The statements highlight the enduring impact of colonialism on Indigenous identity. Historical erasure, forced assimilation, and systemic discrimination have contributed to a sense of disconnection and marginalization among Indigenous populations, including struggles with identity validation.

**Complexity of Identity:** Indigenous identity is not solely determined by genetic ancestry or official documentation but encompasses cultural connection, community recognition, and personal experience. The narratives illustrate the complexities of identity, including mixed heritage, historical trauma, and the challenge of proving Indigenous identity within colonial systems.

**Impact of Verification Processes:** While Indigenous verification processes aim to prevent fraudulent claims and protect Indigenous rights, they also risk retraumatizing individuals, reinforcing colonial hierarchies, and perpetuating divisions within Indigenous communities. Sensitivity, inclusivity, and community consultation are essential in designing and implementing verification mechanisms.

**Role of Institutions:** Educational institutions like Memorial University play a role in Indigenous identity verification, particularly in admissions, hiring, and resource allocation. However, there is a need for institutions to approach verification with cultural competence, humility, and respect for Indigenous self-determination.



# QUESTION SEVEN, CONT'D.

**Is there anything else you would like to share on the topic of Indigenous verification?**

**Community Empowerment:** Indigenous communities should lead discussions and decisions regarding identity verification, drawing on cultural protocols, traditional knowledge, and community consensus. Recognition by national Indigenous organizations can provide validation and legitimacy for Indigenous identities.

**Intersectionality and Equity:** Verification processes must recognize the diversity within Indigenous populations, including non-status individuals, mixed heritage, and those with complex family histories. Equity considerations should prioritize accessibility, fairness, and the mitigation of further harm to marginalized groups.

**Navigating Challenges:** Addressing concerns such as lateral violence, historical injustice, and intercommunity tensions requires careful navigation and collaboration. Solutions should prioritize reconciliation, healing, and the restoration of Indigenous autonomy and sovereignty.

In summary, Indigenous verification is a sensitive and nuanced issue that intersects with broader issues of colonialism, identity, and social justice. Meaningful dialogue, community engagement, and decolonial approaches are essential in navigating the complexities of Indigenous identity verification while upholding Indigenous rights, dignity, and self-determination.





# QUESTION EIGHT

## **Are you aware of any other universities that have created policies and processes related to Indigenous verification that are seen to be effective?**

While specific details about the effectiveness of policies at other universities are not provided, it seems that there is a broad awareness of such policies existing, albeit with varying levels of knowledge about their specifics and outcomes. Below are some key points to consider:

**University of Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University and University of Saskatchewan were all mentioned, with no additional details provided.**

**McMaster University:** The requirement of a letter of support from an Indigenous leader and proof of affiliation through a membership card for admission to the Indigenous stream of a master's program highlights one approach taken by McMaster University. However, the hardship imposed by this requirement, especially regarding obtaining multiple letters for each applicant, underscores potential challenges with such verification processes.

**Mount Royal University:** Mentioned as potentially leading in Indigenous relations and programming, Mount Royal University in Calgary could serve as an example for effective engagement with Indigenous communities and issues within academia.

**Dalhousie University:** Criticism of Dalhousie University's policies as being too restrictive suggests that there may be concerns within the Indigenous community about the fairness and inclusivity of verification processes at certain institutions.

**Unique Cultural Context:** Newfoundland's unique cultural position is acknowledged, suggesting that policies and processes related to Indigenous verification should be tailored to the local context, incorporating the vibrant culture, language, and heritage of the region.

In summary, while there is awareness of Indigenous verification policies at other universities, the effectiveness of these policies remains a subject of debate and scrutiny. The call for fairness, inclusivity, and cultural sensitivity resonates across responses, emphasizing the importance of engaging Indigenous communities in the development and implementation of verification processes.



# APPENDIX E:

## RESOURCES UTILIZED IN PREPARATION OF THIS REPORT

[A Human Rights and Legal Analysis of the Understanding Our Roots Report](#)

[Membership Information Guide, Qalipu First Nation](#)

[deybwewin | taapwaywin | tapwewin Policy, University of Saskatchewan](#)

[Métis Nation Saskatchewan MOU regarding Métis citizenship](#)

[Indigenous Admissions Pathway, Dalhousie University](#)

[Our Story, NunatuKavut Community Council](#)

[Indigenous Citizenship/Membership Verification Guidelines, University of Waterloo](#)

[Principles respecting the Government of Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples](#)

[Indigenous Identity Fraud, Jean Teillet](#)

[Post-Secondary Needs Assessment, Congress of Aboriginal Peoples](#)

[Indigenous Identity Verification Process, Wilfrid Laurier University](#)

[Statement on the NunatuKavut Community Council, Inuit Circumpolar Conference Canada](#)

[Indigenous Voices on Indigenous Identity, First Nations University of Canada](#)

[Strategic Framework for Indigenization 2021-2026, Memorial University](#)

[Inuit and Innu United Against False Claims of Indigenous Identity](#)

[The Importance of Moving Beyond Self-Identification: Indigenous Identity Verification in Canadian Educational Institutions](#)

[Inuit Nunangat Policy](#)

[Understanding our Roots - Nestimuk tan wtapeksikw](#)





**FIRST PEOPLES GROUP**  
[www.firstpeoplesgroup.com](http://www.firstpeoplesgroup.com)  
[info@firstpeoplesgroup.com](mailto:info@firstpeoplesgroup.com)