Backgrounder:
Memorial University's Indigenous Verification Policy

The following provides information and context in support of understanding Memorial's Indigenous Verification Policy and the path that led to this policy.

Overview

- **Memorial University is introducing an Indigenous Verification Policy that establishes a clear, community-directed process** for when Indigenous citizenship or membership needs to be confirmed by recognized Indigenous collectives to administer specific opportunities responsibly and with integrity.
- **The policy is not retroactive** and will be applied to opportunities within the university for Indigenous people moving forward. Unit-level planning is underway to develop implementation timelines.
- Memorial University's Indigenous Verification Policy was **developed by and with Indigenous communities**, in response to their direction, to ensure opportunities intended for Indigenous people are held by Indigenous people – placing decision-making authority where it belongs: with recognized Indigenous collectives. We are deferring to recognized Indigenous collectives in Canada, as per section 35 of the Canadian constitution (First Nations, Métis, Inuit).
- **Indigenous collectives – not Memorial University – determine their own citizenship and membership**; our role is to respect Indigenous self-determination when verification is required, and to administer processes, not to make determinations of Indigeneity.
- Indigenous-specific opportunities exist because **Indigenous Peoples hold constitutional, treaty, and inherent rights that universities have a responsibility to respect**. Indigenous verification helps protect these opportunities by ensuring decision making authority remains where it rightfully belongs: with Indigenous communities.
- The Indigenous Verification Policy is **reflective of intentional Indigenous community engagement, spanning years, across multiple touchpoints**. It was well researched, aligns with the national emerging best practice model, and is consistent with, by way of one example, a recent and relevant policy statement put out by the Ontario Human Rights Commission in May 2025.
- These opportunities for Indigenous students, faculty and staff **include scholarships, bursaries, and designated seats across undergraduate and graduate programs, research funding and targeted hiring**.

Context

Memorial University's Board of Regents has affirmed the work of Memorial's Indigenous leaders who created an Indigenous Verification Policy that is rooted in self-determination and respect for recognized Indigenous governing bodies. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) recognizes Indigenous peoples' right to self-determination, with respect to determining their political status and self-government which includes membership, and freely pursuing their economic, social and cultural development.

Self-determination is different from self-identification, which is individual rather than relational and does not rely on or require a verification process. Verification will be required when applying to an Indigenous-specific opportunity. Identity is complex and personal, and Memorial is committed to supporting all students, faculty and staff, including those who identify as Indigenous.

The Indigenous Verification Policy was developed in direct response to concerns raised by Indigenous leaders about the misappropriation of Indigeneity and the need to responsibly steward Indigenous-specific opportunities. This policy demonstrates respect for Indigenous self-determination at a time when institutions across Canada are being called upon to address false claims with clarity and integrity.

As Indigenous-specific opportunities have expanded over the years, often in response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and steadfast Indigenous advocacy, a gap has emerged: there were more Indigenous-specific opportunities, but a lack of rigorous, community-led processes for clarifying for whom those opportunities should be safeguarded.

In engagements across Newfoundland and Labrador, Indigenous leaders expressed clear concern that without rigorous, community-aligned verification processes, Indigenous-specific scholarships, hiring streams, research funding, and designated seats could be misdirected. This would risk diluting their purpose, causing harm to Indigenous students, faculty, and communities. Memorial's Indigenous Verification Policy is a direct response to that guidance and aims to mitigate harm to as many students as possible.

Engagement and Policy Development

Memorial's 2021-2026 Strategic Framework for Indigenization is our roadmap for a shared pathway to Truth and Reconciliation. The Framework was developed over a full year of engagement, including 26 Indigenous community engagement sessions across

Newfoundland and Labrador. Through these sessions, Indigenous verification was identified as a need for the university, and Memorial responded by initiating the development of the Indigenous Verification Policy.

The Indigenous Verification Policy was developed by a working group of Indigenous faculty and staff at Memorial. It builds on the engagement from the Framework and was further informed by its own phase of close engagement with over 15 Indigenous governments, communities and organizations in the province, as well as students, faculty, staff and alumni who identify as Indigenous.

This engagement emphasized that reconciliation is not a fixed destination or a single policy decision; it is an ongoing institutional responsibility. Operationalizing reconciliation means translating commitments into policy and practice, even in complex and evolving spaces.

In addition to extensive consultation, the policy was also developed alongside a comprehensive review of Indigenous verification policies at academic institutions across Canada, to reflect the diverse ways Indigenous citizenship and membership are held across communities.

Please see a list of institutions across Canada with policies or protocols in place or in progress at the end of this document.

Policy Scope and Design

There is no single way that Indigenous citizenship or membership is documented. The policy has one of the most comprehensive sets of verification pathways available among post-secondary institutions in Canada.

To verify Indigenous members and citizens for the purpose of Indigenous-specific opportunities, the community or group the person is a member of must also be a recognized Indigenous collective. Recognition within the policy framework is based on Indigenous governance, legal recognition, and relationships with other Indigenous Nations.

Opportunities for Indigenous students, faculty and staff that would require verification include scholarships, bursaries, and designated seats across undergraduate and graduate programs, research funding and targeted hiring.

The university's role in administering this policy is procedural. Decisions about citizenship or membership rest with Indigenous communities and their governance structures through one of the several verification pathways that are available.

It is important to note that verification is only required when an Indigenous-specific opportunity is at stake. The verification process is confidential and will be handled by a Verification Committee with cultural expertise. Support will be available to applicants throughout the process.

The policy is not retroactive and will be applied to opportunities within the university for Indigenous people moving forward. Unit-level planning is underway to develop implementation timelines.

Pathways to Verification

The pathways for verification are an important part of ensuring the policy is fair, respectful, and grounded in Indigenous realities.

There are three pathways for Indigenous Peoples in Canada, which include First Nations, Inuit and Métis:

- **Verification through Pathway A** is for Indigenous people in Canada who have primary documentation from a recognized Indigenous collective. This is the most straightforward route. In Pathway A, individuals provide current, official documentation of membership or citizenship from their recognized Indigenous collective; this aligns with how Indigenous governments themselves confirm membership or citizenship.
- **Verification through Pathway B** is for Indigenous people in Canada who can provide secondary documentation from a recognized Indigenous collective. This pathway allows individuals to demonstrate that they are being claimed by a recognized Indigenous collective by providing a statement of relationality explaining who they belong to, and a letter from an official representative of their community. This keeps community authority at the centre.
- **Verification through Pathway C** is for those individuals who have been displaced or disconnected from their community. This pathway is essential. It recognizes the impacts of colonial policies including residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, child welfare systems, and others, that have severed many Indigenous people from their communities. Pathway C supports individuals who are reconnecting, even when formal documentation is not available. It is trauma-informed and culturally grounded.

There are two more pathways for Indigenous Peoples outside of Canda – one pathway for Indigenous people in the United States and one pathway for Indigenous people globally. These pathways rely on documentation or confirmation from the relevant Indigenous collective, consistent with local governance systems.

These pathways honour Indigenous diversity and recognize the impacts of colonialism. They were purposefully designed to reflect the diverse ways Indigenous citizenship and membership are held across communities.

Memorial's Reconciliation Journey

Our engagement with Indigenous communities emphasized that reconciliation is not a fixed destination or a single policy decision; it is an ongoing institutional responsibility. Operationalizing reconciliation means translating commitments into policy and practice, even in complex and evolving spaces.

Memorial is committed to progress over perfection. Attempting to reach universal agreement risks halting progress altogether. Instead, we are taking informed, responsible steps forward – grounded in rigorous Indigenous community engagement – while remaining open to learning through implementation.

Policies and procedures undergo constant evolution. They are developed through deep community input, and then tested and iterated. The Indigenous Verification Policy is an operational and procedural step being taken in good faith – informed by deep engagement and direction from Indigenous communities – that remains open to refinement through responsible implementation. This is in alignment with Memorial's Policy Framework Process.

This policy is part of an ongoing commitment to listen, learn and adjust. Feedback will continue to inform how the policy is applied, ensuring it remains fair, respectful and aligned with its purpose.

The Indigenous Verification Policy reflects Memorial's reconciliation journey in action. It responds to Indigenous community concerns about stewardship and misuse, aligns institutional processes with Indigenous governance, and represents a responsible step forward grounded in engagement.

20 Canadian universities have policies and procedures in place or underway

Universities with policies and procedures in place: Carleton University, McGill University, McMaster University, Queen's University, Université Laval, University of Alberta, University of Calgary, University of Guelph, University of Montreal, University of Ottawa, University of Saskatchewan, University of Waterloo, University of Victoria, Western University and Wilfrid Laurier University.

Universities with policies and procedures in development: Concordia University, Dalhousie University, University of Toronto, University of Manitoba and University of Winnipeg