

# The Community Forum

**Welcome** to The Community Forum, a collection of stories, perspectives, and ideas for action from Forum Community Relations. This winter edition offers ideas and perspectives about what it might look and feel like to weave Indigenous ways of knowing and being with Western systems and approaches.

This edition includes stories and reflections from our community with a specific focus on weaving Indigenous and Western ways. We hope you enjoy the resources and take the time to reflect on the opportunities to more meaningfully weave Indigenous practices into your own personal and professional lives.

Wishing you a restful and rejuvenating holiday season filled with comfort, love, and joy!

~ Anne



## Weaving the Sash: Beyond Indigenous Inclusion

By Michelle Fournie

My vocational practice, research, and volunteerism is often centred between worlds. This is a natural calling as a young-ish Metis mother striving to reconnect to self, land, language, community, and being born, raised, and still living in an urban centre. Piikani Elder Dr. Reg Crowshoe and William Ermine of Sturgeon Lake First Nation might call this space between worlds an “ethical space.” I am drawn to reconciliatory work and my practice is informed by the Metis sash—interwoven in story to create something useful, strong, and new to survive.

*There’s tension in this space for me.*

We are collectively mourning as we lose those who should inform the future state of the world—Indigenous children to death by suicide, diseases of addictions, and discriminatory apprehension. I grieve the Elders who carry the stories that would have saved us. I listen for the last time to our languages, ever. I cry the tears of each side of my ancestors. I directly heal from the intergenerational trauma passed down to me through these hurt people who also had the highest hopes for their children.



**Video: Ethical Spaces  
with Elder Reg Crowshoe  
& Elder Willie Ermine**

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I relieve this tension by learning Wise Ways and applying them immediately to new scenarios. I navigate the Western system with the experience of generous allies while providing for my family and chasing education. One day I face lateral violence and the next day my face is painted with the same ochre that has protected the peoples for centuries.

Learning how to weave in new ways of working and being with each other is extremely complicated. But to be effective, this sash must make room for all threads, simultaneously distinctive and together. It must hold appropriate tension and be created with patience and attention.

***I'm scared, but I do it anyways.***

I grew up in the 80s in urban parks and my mom yelling, "don't be scared, just go down!" after seeing my petrified look on the top of the oversized metal slide. Thirty years later with my own children, I offer a different approach courtesy of the conscious parenting movement by saying, "I know you're scared, and go down anyways!" This is also how I view reconciliation.

***What happens when we choose to go down anyways?***

We choose accurate and powerful language to properly describe the unimaginable acts of violence, abuse, and harm inflicted on all Indigenous children and families in the name of economic and political gain.

We start identifying and caring for people experiencing trauma-based responses in the classroom and the workplace, while offering healing through culturally appropriate and holistic service offerings.

We quit boasting to each other about our well-intentioned pan-Indigenous approaches to advance diversity, and re-state each teaching connected to the person and place from which that dream/story/teaching came from.

We create supportive environments for Indigenous peers to engage in reconnection to land, language, culture, while the rest close the gap from awareness training to informed action and power sharing.

We stop antagonizing Indigenous peoples stating that the organization is committed to reconcile but then stifle these talented individuals because our systems aren't ready to withstand that much change that fast.

We honestly refer to murdered and missing Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit beings as targets of current systemic racism and oppression, rather than casualties and victims of an unfortunate history.

We transform well-meaning discussions to brave conversations that start with different and better questions.

We mentor and invest in Indigenous youth so they too can share in the prosper from their ancestors, including Mother Earth.

We seek and depend on the wisdom of every single Elder that walks in kindness, selflessness, and love, despite what we have put them through as a country.

We start sharing.

We keep listening.

We work together.

We go down anyways.



## More than one right way: A story of weaving Indigenous and Western approaches to strategy

By Carolyn Davis

One of the great gifts in my life is a small group of friends from my university days, which includes the inimitable Anne

Harding. Together we've uncovered our professional paths, forged loving families, navigated the early years of raising children, and held one another through joy, grief, and back again. And so, when after a lovely snowy walk on Nose Hill a few weeks ago, she asked me to share an experience I am having weaving western and Indigenous ways of thinking, I said yes.

I work with Momentum, a change-making organization that acts as a bridge between social and economic perspectives. We walk alongside people experiencing low income as they build assets and move closer to a sustainable livelihood. Momentum has been at this work in Calgary and beyond since 1991, guided primarily by Western-style 'strategic plans'.

In 2015, we were becoming more aware that our approaches - while intended to be broadly inclusive - may have been missing the mark with Indigenous learners, and so with the support of Indigenous advisors, we developed our first Indigenous Engagement strategy. This strategy, held within a bundle and 'made official' through ceremony, sits in a place of pride at our building entrance next to a large mural by artist Keegan Starlight that serves as a visual land acknowledgment for all who arrive in our space. Seven years later we have dedicated Indigenous programming, Indigenous staff members, and many meaningful relationships

from which to draw strength. But we aren't "only" an Indigenous-serving organization. We work with all who experience low income, from any background.

Against this backdrop, my colleagues and I are guiding an evolution of our organization's strategy. How might we guide our strategy process in a way that incorporates Indigenous perspectives, results in a final product that our varied stakeholders feel part of, and doesn't overreach into cultural practises that don't belong to us?

In the design phase, we considered our desire to engage Momentum's diverse community in meaningful ways, build connections, and be informed by the changing world around us. We wanted to balance creativity and rigour, and leave room for experimentation. A successful process would also grow our capacity to be adaptive and nimble—we have fared reasonably well through the pandemic and seek to maintain and grow our resilience.

If that's not enough, we were curious about lessons from a course about the Four Seasons of Reconciliation, introduced to us by Tim Fox with the Calgary Foundation. Moving through activities such as planting, celebration, harvest and rest felt intuitive, and aligns well with Momentum's long-standing value of sustainability. The course taught us that we could incorporate these concepts loosely—our timeline doesn't need to match Mother Earth's exactly.

After a summer of trying on ideas it became clear that there is indeed alignment between what matters to Momentum

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and to Indigenous people and communities within our network. The resulting process is a blend: We have adopted a structured design framework from IDEO, wrapped in relationship-rooted consultation with stakeholders and broader community—those who may not have a stake but certainly have insight to help advance our mission. Many of these conversations are happening in person, on Treaty 7 land, with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous folks. Many of our strategy gatherings start with simple mindfulness exercises such as looking out a window, taking

a deep breath, or giving thanks for the food we are eating.

By emphasizing shared values of rooted relationships, inclusion of many voices, and working with the land and her limits, we trust we will finish with a process that works for many and still has the rigour that an organization of our complexity requires to remain healthy and effective into the future.



**Visit Momentum here** →



← **Visit IDEO here**

## **From Inclusion by Exception to Inclusion as Culture: reflections on organizational change**

**By Anne Harding**

When my dear friend and mentor Art Cunningham and I deliver our Indigenous Relations and Resource Development workshop, Art often begins by talking about the “three eras of Indigenous relations” that he has observed throughout his decades of working in the field. These eras include:

- *The Indian Era*, marked by the time when Indigenous Peoples were ‘invisible’ and Canadians and our institutions didn’t really know or think about Indigenous peoples, except for negative stereotypes that we were fed through the media and Hollywood;
- *The Aboriginal Era*, marked by increased visibility through the many landmark court rulings in the mid-1990s and beyond that affirmed Indigenous Rights and the potential impact that the assertion of those rights could have on development; and
- *The Truth & Reconciliation Era*, marked by the release of the Truth & Reconciliation

Commission of Canada’s 94 Calls to Action, Canadians’ increased understanding of the history and experiences of Indigenous Peoples, and a desire to walk together on a new path for the relationship between Indigenous and all Canadians.

I like this framework for talking about the last 40+ years because it helps us to see where we’re at today within a broader story of our country. I also appreciate when inevitably a student asks for the specific dates when these eras start and end. Art gives a chuckle and a wry smile and talks about how there aren’t really specific definitions because the eras overlap and flow into each other. What matters aren’t the precise dates and milestones, but rather the intentions and approaches that are employed within each era.

I also think this is a helpful framework to apply when I think about how Western (non-Indigenous) organizations might evolve their Indigenous inclusion and reconciliation efforts

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over time. Having worked with and observed many small and large Western organizations over nearly two decades, I've noticed some common patterns for how the journey goes.

### **INCLUSION BY EXCEPTION**

Once organizations get past the 'invisibility' stage (which I believe a large portion of our non-Indigenous businesses and institutions are still at today), they tend to look for the 'easy wins' or 'low-hanging fruit' of Indigenous inclusion. Existing processes and structures remain in place, and they tend to look for places where Indigenous interests or engagement might be conveniently inserted.

The goal here seems to be to do "some good" by making space for Indigenous elements, however I've noticed that what often results instead is backlash and skepticism from those who benefit from the current structures and processes. People wonder "what's so special about Indigenous people?" and resentment can start to build for these 'exceptional' circumstances if they are not also wrapped in education, awareness, and meaningful relationships with Indigenous people and communities.

### **INCLUSION FROM WITHIN**

For those organizations that continue to move along the journey to greater inclusion, I've noticed a shift away from asking why Indigenous inclusion matters to them to asking how they might advance Indigenous inclusion. Rather than opportunities for Indigenous interests to be included by exception (and usually only identified by a few key individuals), organizations in this stage have created a broad awareness among their employees about the importance of and intention for greater Indigenous inclusion. It is no longer just the job of the Indigenous Relations team to identify and implement opportunities, but

rather everyone in the organization is empowered to ask "what might Indigenous inclusion look like" and encouraged to explore options and build relationships to advance the work together.

### **INCLUSION AS CULTURE**

I also think it's important to offer a fourth stage that I see, or maybe it's not even a stage on its own but a way of being that may run in parallel to all stages, even when Indigenous interests are 'invisible' and we don't even know we're doing it. This fourth stage is the adoption, incorporation, or weaving of Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and being, within our Western institutions and structures. It's when individuals within organizations carry out activities, thought processes, or work in Indigenous Ways alongside their more familiar Western Ways. Now in order to truly understand what might be meant by this for your organization, authentic relationships with Indigenous Elders, knowledge keepers, and leaders are essential.

Another reference for this concept is "two-eyed seeing", first coined by Mi'kmaq Elder Albert Marshall. The idea being that when we view an experience, challenge, or opportunity through multiple perspectives, we might see different and new insights or solutions that would not otherwise have occurred to us.



*"two-eyed seeing"*

I'm heartened by different individuals and organizations I'm seeing these days that are trying to weave Indigenous ways of knowing and being into their work. If this is something that you're interested in reflecting on and trying out in your own personal and professional lives, I offer a few resources below to consider. And of course, the best resource of all will be the relationships you build with Indigenous people and communities as you learn and walk a new path together.

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- This year for National Indigenous Peoples' Day, I created this reflection exercise based on my own daily practice of gratitude, that I've also done with my son and daughter over the last few years. Consider using it for yourself as a way to think and talk about acknowledgement and connection with the land.



**Reflection Exercise**

and sport activities that reflect the rich cultural heritage of Indigenous peoples across Canada. NOTE - while this resource is a great place to start, it would be best to connect with members of the Indigenous communities where the games originate to learn from them directly, ensuring proper protocol and gifting is provided for those teachings.

- My husband is a cub scout leader and recently found and used this resource, which is a collection of traditional Indigenous games and activities to do with children as a way of introducing or reconnecting to recreational



**Indigenous Games for Children**

- In 2019, Nutrien released its Aboriginal Content Playbook, which offers resources for suppliers to develop a plan and take action to increase Indigenous inclusion in their own organizations.



**Aboriginal Content Playbook**



**What's one thing that you can do to start weaving Indigenous ways with Western practices?**

*Check out this 2 minute video to find out.*



Previous 'Community Forum' newsletters have included a section with recommended books from Anne's children, Bobby & Allie. In this edition, we branch out into different kinds of media and also include recommendations from the older children of our friend and colleague, Michelle Deacon. Enjoy!

### Bobby's Pick

The song Northern Lights by Inuit band The Jerry Cans



*"It has a great beat and I love that I can sing the Inuktitut parts - it makes me feel connected to the singer."*

- Bobby Harding, 9 years old



### Allie's Pick

Spirit Rangers on Netflix Created by Karissa Valencia

*"I like that the kids rescue people and animals who have gotten into trouble."*

- Allie Harding, 4 years old

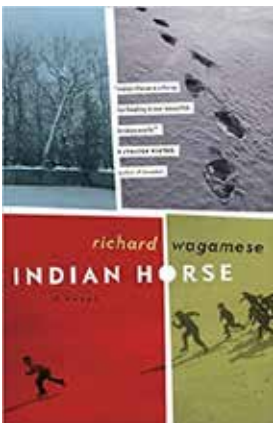


### Simon & Amelia's Pick

Indian Horse by Richard Wagamese

*Simon (he), 14 years old, liked "that it was written as fiction", and "the author informed you of residential schools...you hear about residential schools but it was different reading it as a story than just presented as facts (like at school)."*

*Amelia (she), 16 years old, thought "the hockey focus was interesting; the fusion of 'Canadian' and Indigenous cultures, but also the assimilation of Indigenous peoples into 'Canadian' (or European) culture. I learned more about residential schools from this book than I have ever learned in school. We learned about them in class, but they sugar-coat it; the book made it seem much more real."*



*Anne is privileged to live, work, and play in traditional Treaty 7 territory and home of Métis Nation of Alberta Region 3.*

*Anne is the Owner of Forum Community Relations, a Calgary based consulting company dedicated to catalyzing better communities through Indigenous relations, community engagement, and culturally appropriate facilitation.*

Connect with her work at [www.forumrelations.com](http://www.forumrelations.com)

