ALIGNING ENGO FINANCIAL PRACTICES WITH COMMITMENTS TO INDIGENOUS-LED CONSERVATION

Qualitative Research and Recommendations on Emerging Practices Among Canadian ENGOs.

EcoAnalytics

RESTORE ASSERT DEFEND RAD NETWORK

ENVIRONICS RESEARCH

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WHY THIS PROJECT MATTERS

Indigenous Peoples have always been the original stewards of the land, upholding knowledge and governance systems essential for sustaining biodiversity and addressing the climate crisis. Yet, despite this leadership, they receive only a fraction of conservation funding. In the lands known as Canada, Indigenous Peoples (First Nations, Inuit and Métis) are 5% of the population but receive less than 1% of major charitable grants—a stark inequity that undermines efforts to protect lands and waters and advance reconciliation.

Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations (ENGOs) play a critical role in responding to the biodiversity and climate crises, and have made significant commitments to reconciliation. Many have embedded Indigenous-led conservation into their mission statements and strategic plans, and increasingly engage in providing technical support and collaborating on strategic partnerships with Indigenous Peoples and Nations. However, organizational financial practices often lag behind these commitments, creating gaps that hold inequities and colonial relations in place, and may not fully uphold Indigenous governance and self-determination. At a deeper level, there remain significant divergences between the worldview of mainstream environmentalism and those of Indigenous Peoples. This research is part of wider efforts to bring more awareness to these differing worldviews, which in turn can create the basis for respectful relationships, improved financial practices and even new economic understandings that could support systemic solutions to the biodiversity and climate crises.

INTENDED OUTCOMES

This research set out to inform and guide ENGOs and funders on how to better align financial practices with their commitments to reconciliation. To do this we wanted to get an understanding of the current state of financial practices in the sector, identify gaps between funding and commitments, engage in reflexive discussions on how to move forward, and share promising practices and practical guidance for embedding reconciliation into financial decision-making.

"Financial practices" refers to activities and policies that help your organization decide how its funding is obtained and allocated, and includes financial and administrative relationships with different Indigenous Peoples, partners or communities. Common activities include financial planning, budgeting, record-keeping, fund management, internal controls, and financial reporting.

HOW THIS PROJECT WAS CONDUCTED

EcoAnalytics (environmental research collective), RAD Network (Indigenous-led network focused on nature finance and conservation economy), and Environics Research (market research consultancy) teamed up to carry out a qualitative study that included:

- a literature review of sector reports, articles, and resources to understand best practices for better financial alignment;
- a qualitative survey of ten ENGOs to understand current practices and barriers to further alignment;
- a focus group discussion with seven ENGOs to understand opportunities and emerging practices;
- a learning session to share our findings and facilitate ideation on next steps with approximately 100 participants, including a mix of representatives from non-Indigenous organizations, Indigenous organizations, and funders.

All project phases were carried out using reflexive and collaborative processes, ensuring our methods emphasized co-learning and relationship-building–two values that are at the heart of this work.

WHAT WE LEARNED

Environmental Non Government Organizations (ENGOs) across Canada are committed to supporting Indigenous-led conservation. This commitment is reflected in a variety of ways including mission statements, partnerships, and strategic plans. However, the depth and consistency of inclusive and equitable financial practices aligned with Indigenous leadership vary widely across organizations.

Indigenous Leadership integration needs more focus and meaningful inclusion.
While many ENGOs engage Indigenous advisors or board members, few have formal structures like Indigenous specific units. Recruiting and retaining Indigenous staff remains a significant challenge, limiting the ability to uplift Indigenous leadership and ways of knowing across programs.

In-kind support is core but evolving.
In-kind support, such as providing legal services, technical assistance, and grant writing free of charge, is the most common way ENGOs support Indigenous partners. Organizations are increasingly reflecting on how to shift from direct service provision toward long-term capacity building, including co-learning and relationship-based funding strategies.

Agreements and Intellectual Property require more Indigenous frameworks and ways of knowing.
ENGOs use a mix of formal and informal agreements, with growing emphasis on co-creation and OCAP (Ownership, Control, Access, Possession) principles. Some organizations are developing innovative practices like firewalling Indigenous data and requiring written consent for knowledge use, but sector-wide models are still emerging.

Transparency remains a major gap.
Few ENGOs have formal policies for sharing financial information with Indigenous partners. While some transparency exists in relational contexts, there is a clear need for more consistent and proactive practices to ensure Indigenous partners are informed about funding sources and allocations.

PROMISING PRACTICES

Several innovative approaches are emerging across the sector:

- Indigenous specific and governed units, such as a fully Integrated Indigenous Unit that decides the strategic direction of the organization;
- Concrete and sustainable budget allocations (e.g., 30–50%) for Indigenous-led initiatives;
- Joint fundraising and co-application models with re-granting mechanisms;
- Compensation policies to ensure Indigenous Nations are paid when their land is used;
- Co-created agreements embedding OCAP principles and centering relational values;
- Internal data firewalls to protect Indigenous knowledge;
- Mandatory organization-wide Indigenous training.

This report highlights both the progress and the challenges in aligning ENGO financial practices with Indigenous leadership and community wisdom. Continued reflection, collaboration, and innovation will be essential to advancing relationship building opportunities with Indigenous communities, in pursuit of Reconciliation in the conservation sector. The learning event we hosted indicated a strong appetite to continue learning and sharing among ENGOs as practices evolve. To understand what your organization can do to better align its financial practices with reconciliation, we invite you to use this reflexive Self-Assessment tool.

1. ENGO FINANCIAL PRACTICES WITH INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES: CURRENT AND EVOLVING PRACTICES

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Indigenous Peoples are the original stewards of the land and waters, holding knowledge, values, and governance systems that are essential for effective and just land relationships. The conservation sector has increasingly acknowledged the importance of Indigenous leadership in conservation and stewardship. However, a persistent gap remains between the financial practices of the environmental sector, including Environmental Non-Governmental Organizations (ENGOs), and their commitments to supporting Indigenous priorities and self-determination.

This is the case with the funding gaps identified in Box 1, and in an array of reports and engagements that consistently find more is needed to create equitable, transparent funding relationships between funders, ENGOs, and Indigenous communities (see Literature Review, Appendix B).

These inequities persist in Canada, and also internationally, as shown by recent findings from a global survey conducted by the International Indian Treaty Council (IITC) (2024) that highlight significant concerns with conservation funding mechanisms. Ninety percent of Indigenous respondents reported being affected by externally introduced conservation projects, with 56% describing these projects as having a negative impact on their way of life. While only 34% of these initiatives were carried out by NGOs, it demonstrates the need for NGOs to reform current practices and take steps to mobilize their resources to better serve Indigenous Peoples, especially in conservation initiatives.

As colonial governments and institutions around the world begin to recognize the importance of Indigenous leadership for addressing the global climate and biodiversity crises, it has become clear that a fundamental shift is needed to centre Indigenous rights, sovereignty (including economic), and knowledge systems. In Canada, the 2018 landmark report by the Indigenous Circle of Experts (ICE), We Rise Together, marked a turning point, leading to an increase of interest and support across sectors for Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs) and new partnerships like the Conservation through Reconciliation Partnership (CRP) in 2019. Early on, Indigenous leaders in the CRP recognized the need to transform finance pathways and colonial funding practices, which became the focus of a work stream that led to the formation of RAD (Restore, Assert, Defend) Network in 2022, to advance decolonized conservation finance and funding pathways. Since then, RAD Network co-learning and convening activities have continued to reveal the theme that ENGO financial practices and funding relationships are of central concern, both to Indigenous Nations and to ENGOs themselves, seeking to shift their practices.

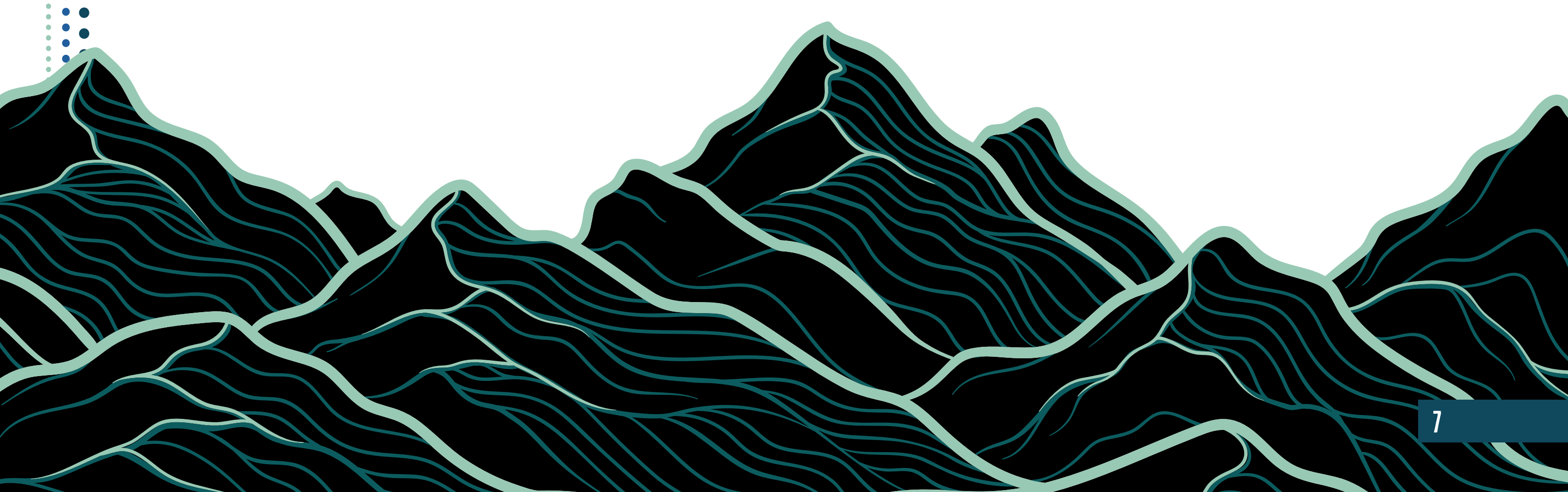
1.2 PROJECT ORIGINS

To better understand the need and opportunity to shift funding relationships, [Conservation through Reconciliation Partnership (CRP)]() initially partnered with EcoAnalytics, an environmental market research and communications project, to launch a collaborative research initiative aimed at understanding how ENGOs could better support Indigenous-led conservation through their financial practices. EcoAnalytics convenes a membership of fourteen ENGOs along with a wide network of allied climate and conservation-focused ENGOs.Many of these organizations wanted to understand how they could deepen their commitments to reconciliation, recognizing that financial practices is an area in which there is a lot of room to grow. Environics Research, a market research consultancy committed to research in the interest of Indigenous peoples and wide experience working with ENGOs, was engaged to conduct the research. The CRP then invited RAD Network to be the lead Indigenous partner organization. RAD Network (Restore, Assert, Defend) is a growing Indigenous-led network that works through collaboration and reciprocity to connect Indigenous Nations and Communities to resources and tools for decolonized conservation finance and nature-based solutions. The research and writing team for this report included Annika Jagmohan, Chelsea Martin, Darcy Riddell, Kate McMahon, Jasmine O'Reilly and James Boothroyd.

Ten ENGOs participated in this research. They ranged in size from 10 to 475 staff, with most in the 40 to 50 range. They also ranged in age since establishment, from 10 to 83 years, with an average of 43 years.

Participating organizations focus on a variety of aspects ranging from direct environmental action and conservation, to policy, advocacy, and legal services. Completing the survey took significant time and energy among different people working for these organizations. The research team is very appreciative of this time investment, and it was gratifying to hear at the learning events that the time was felt to be worthwhile–sparking discussion, unearthing new learning, and showing pathways for positive change.

> "Financial practices" refers to activities and policies that help your organization decide how its funding is obtained and allocated, and includes financial and administrative relationships with different Indigenous Peoples, partners or communities. Common activities include financial planning, budgeting, record-keeping, fund management, internal controls, and financial reporting.



Box 1

BACKGROUND ON FUNDING INEQUITIES

To mobilize the scope and scale of response to address the climate and biodiversity crises we are facing, there are widespread calls to substantially increase the amount of conservation finance available. In 2019, financial flows into global biodiversity conservation was between US$124 -143 billion. This represents a near-tripling in funding since 2012. Government budgets and tax policies account for approximately 57% of this spending (around US$75-78 billion). In addition, conservation philanthropy accounts for about US$2-3billion, which makes up about 2% of the conservation finance budget. To reverse the decline in biodiversity by 2030, we need to spend between US$722-$967 billion each year over the next seven years. This identified biodiversity financing gap is an average of US$711 billion or between US$598-$824 billion per year.

Alongside the biodiversity financing gap, there are notable inequities in the distribution of funds to Indigenous Peoples. A 2018 review of charitable gifts from Canadian Registered charities (Redsky, Brascoupe, Blumberg and Lang, 2012) found that, out of 28,164 grants that were over $30,000, just 284 were granted to Indigenous groups (Indigenous charities and First Nations governments or bands), which is just over 1% of grants. The total amount given by Canadian charities (including charitable organisations, public foundations and private foundations) to Indigenous groups was $46,887,535– which translates to about one-half of a percent of the funds granted.

Even though Indigenous people are about 4.9% of the Canadian population, Indigenous groups received just over one-half a percent of donated funds. This means that Indigenous groups are receiving about 1/10th of the funding that they would receive as a result of population size, even if one ignores issues of need. Indigenous groups are getting about $1 for every $178 given to non-Indigenous groups.

Currently, conservation finance and philanthropy is not fairly and transparently distributed in a way that honours Indigenous jurisdiction and knowledge systems, and advances self-determination of Indigenous Peoples. To achieve this, a significant portion of conservation funds need to be distributed and under the direction of Indigenous Nations, particularly for conservation initiatives that are being undertaken on their territories.

1.3 OBJECTIVES & INTENTIONS

About 100 participants attended the online learning session hosted by RAD Network, EcoAnalytics, and Environics Research on September 11, 2025. The intention of this project is to support ENGOs and the larger conservation movement in identifying ways to align their financial practices to restore inherent Indigenous authority or governance systems, advance equity, and foster learning and relationships. The intended outcomes are to:

- Help ENGOs develop reflexive questions that transform current financial practices and integrate changes into commitments related to Indigenous-led conservation.
- Identify gaps between ENGO financial practices and their commitments to Indigenous-led conservation, and enable practices that help strengthen Indigenous governance, abundance and self-determination.
- Identify constraining and enabling factors for advancing improved financial management.
- Identify opportunities to change financial practices to ensure Indigenous governments, communities, and organizations have less competition when seeking funds for their land stewardship initiatives, as well as discover pathways for ENGOs to better financially support Nations and Indigenous-led conservation efforts.
- Increase transparency and knowledge sharing within the sector. This report and the tool will be posted on the IPCA Knowledge Basket website and shared within the RAD Network, with the goal of modelling the kind of inquiry and commitment to change that will support broader systemic transformation and faster adoption of innovative practices in the conservation sector.
- We hope the research will positively impact organizations, including by:
    - Providing resources to advance internal conversations on current practice, and sharing ideas for innovation among leadership, financial and program staff;
    - Strengthening alignment between organization practices and strategic Indigenous relationship-building plans/mandates;
    - Increasing transparency and trustworthiness of ENGO partners in this space;
    - Strengthening the integrity of commitments to supporting Indigenous stewardship;
    - Highlighting and promoting sound and innovative practices; and
    - Sharing concrete actions that support change within organizations.

OUR ENGAGEMENT AND LEARNING METHODOLOGY

This project was rooted in qualitative methodologies involving multiple components, including a literature review, qualitative survey, focus group with survey participants, and a learning event with a larger group of ENGO participants.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To start the project with an understanding of existing work and to build on important conversations already underway on the topic, Environics Research conducted a literature review, primarily focused on grey literature, with some academic publications. It includes recent reports and Indigenous-led guidance from dialogues focused on how ENGOs and funders can shift their financial practices to better support Indigenous-led conservation.

We distilled the following four themes around **promising practices** from the literature review, aimed at dismantling colonial funding dynamics, strengthening Indigenous governance, and building more equitable approaches to conservation finance. These themes are further detailed in Appendix B, followed by a full list of materials referenced for this project.

1. **Direct Funding Practices**–changing how money flows to support direct access, Indigenous authority and long-term self-determination.
2. **Transparency & Accountability**–ensuring clear and transparent communication about fundraising, independent evaluation, and rights-based safeguards to protect Indigenous communities.
3. **Partnership Principles**–building relationships rooted in respect, reciprocity, and Indigenous governance systems.
4. **Systemic Financial Reform**–addressing corporate influence, centralized control, and market-based conservation models that mis-align with Indigenous worldviews and values.

QUALITATIVE SURVEY

Ten environmental organizations completed a qualitative survey conducted by Environics Research from February-May 2025. This form was shared with participating ENGOs and was designed primarily by RAD Network team members. Completion of this form was meant to be a reflexive practice. It included questions about organization history, Indigenous partnerships, support and learning, current funding sources and agreements, goals for increasing alignment with Indigenous-led initiatives, and barriers and challenges with aligning and distributing funding. Survey findings were assessed to identify common themes, practices, and challenges with funding Indigenous-led conservation that informed the next phases of the project. The self-assessment and reflection tool in Appendix A is a distillation of the survey questions, so that interested organizations can access the work going forward.

FOCUS GROUP

Representatives from seven organizations who filled out the survey attended a focus group in June 2025. The session was hosted by EcoAnalytics and moderated by both RAD Network and Environics Research. This discussion focused on emerging themes from the qualitative survey:

1. Levels of Indigenous engagement and leadership
2. In-kind support and capacity
3. Contracts, agreements, and intellectual property
4. Transparency & sharing with partners

For each theme, participants were presented with qualitative survey findings, provided their input, and engaged in conversations to dive deeper on their organizations' perspectives and experiences with different practices. They also provided their input on what they'd like to get out of participating in this project.

LEARNING SESSION

About 100 participants attended the online learning session hosted by RAD Network on September 11, 2025. This learning session was open to any organization interested in learning more about the topic (not limited to ENGOs who participated in the previous phases). Attendees included representatives from both non-Indigenous and Indigenous organizations. The session started with a presentation on the findings collected from the literature review, survey findings, and focus groups. After the presentation, reflection questions and breakout groups were used to get participants thinking about and discussing how they can apply the learnings to their own organizations.

2. ENGO FINANCIAL PRACTICES: OUR FINDINGS

Building on the information gathered through the literature review, the survey and following focus groups gathered a wide range of information from organizations. Data gathered ranged from their organizational history and governance, to their existing Indigenous programming and funding, as well as their staffing, decision-making and financial policies. Several key areas of interest emerged over the course of this project, with a range of examples of progress towards emerging best practices.

2.1. COMMITMENT TO INDIGENOUS-LED CONSERVATION

All participating ENGOs expressed a strong commitment to reconciliation and Indigenous-led conservation. This was evident in mission statements, values, and long-standing partnerships:

"Supporting Indigenous-led conservation is a significant priority... This understanding is foundational to our mandate, and is at the heart of our work."

— Survey Response

"We consider working with Indigenous people as one of our core guiding policies and strategic approach."

— Survey Response

However, the centrality of Indigenous leadership varied. Some organizations embedded it deeply into their strategic plans, while others treated it as a guiding principle.

One practice for describing commitments and partnerships with Indigenous Peoples is to avoid describing Indigenous People simply as one of many important stakeholders, instead acknowledging their unique responsibilities and rights as Indigenous governments involved in conservation and land stewardship. Most organizations are already using respectful and appropriate language when referring to Indigenous communities and Nations.

To align with human rights and Indigenous rights standards, both Internationally and in Canada, ENGOs pursuing funding and partnerships to advance Indigenous-led conservation can support staff and boards to actively implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Principles and Calls to Action in their strategies. This means reviewing the 46 Articles of UNDRIP and the 94 Calls to Action, and taking time to reflect and link these to ENGO goals and strategies.

2.2 LEADERSHIP INTEGRATION: SPECTRUM OF ENGAGEMENT

We found that ENGOs incorporate Indigenous leadership in varying degrees, ranging from ad-hoc advisors to fully integrated Indigenous units:

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

While the chart demonstrates a spectrum of involvement from least formal to most formal, organizations often employ a mix of multiple strategies. They typically start with the more informal models like ad-hoc advisors or consultants and aim to move towards more formalized processes. The most formal arrangement is the Integrated Indigenous Unit. This arrangement is most innovative and aspirational for ENGOs–particularly for smaller organizations who may not have the size or scope to be structured this way. Organizations using similar arrangements often have a goal of ensuring that every single project or program includes Indigenous leadership and upholds Indigenous projects and sovereignty.

INTEGRATED INDIGENOUS UNIT

An integrated unit allows for Indigenous staff to substantively lead and govern program work aligned with Indigenous worldviews, while benefiting from the administrative, financial and operational scaffolding of the host organization. This arrangement is also a potential pathway to incubate new Indigenous organizations over time.

INDIGENOUS STAFF

Retention of Indigenous staff has been a common challenge across all arrangements. Challenges with recruiting and retaining Indigenous talent makes it harder to maintain formal arrangements and increase Indigenous representation in ENGOs.

"Retention is sometimes really hard... if an Indigenous person's nation is asking them to come back home, who am I to deny them?"

— Focus Group Participant

"We don't believe it's an Indigenous person's responsibility to change a non-Indigenous organization, it's everyone's responsibility."

— Focus Group Participant

"Filling those roles with other Indigenous applicants has been a challenge. Attracting Indigenous applicants for those positions has been challenging sometimes."

— Focus Group Participant

"When we have tried to find those Indigenous people to fill those roles, it's been a challenge... there's lots of appealing reasons for folks to stay in the communities or Indigenous organizations with which they already work."

— Focus Group Participant

Current strategies for recruiting Indigenous applicants involve leaving job postings open longer and reposting to attract more applicants. However, these methods do not seem to have much success, suggesting room for improvement in terms of accessing Indigenous job boards or other more tailored ways of recruiting Indigenous staff.

"We are just in the midst of finishing hiring for [an Indigenous] position with our team... it's been reposted twice and there were only a small handful of Indigenous applicants compared to the other applicant pool."

To meaningfully respect and engage Indigenous leadership, ENGOs and the Indigenous communities they work with can benefit from having honest conversations about what kinds of capacity and governance roles are supportive to the goals of the community, both in the present, and what might be desired over time to increase the amount of resources and strategic decision-making over programs focused in their territories.

Each arrangement has benefits and drawbacks, and are highly context- and relationship-dependent. Indigenous leadership is also about nation-building, and therefore instead of adding Indigenous capacity into ENGOs, a nation's priorities might be focused on generating long-term investment in their own community capacity, increasing direct Indigenous access to funding and own-source revenues, and sovereignty over territories.

2.3 FINANCIAL PRACTICES: OVERVIEW AND EXAMPLES

To support readers in identifying actionable strategies, this section outlines specific financial practices used by ENGOs to align with Indigenous leadership. Practices are grouped by type, with examples and some discussion on how these strategies are employed in practice.

2.3.1 DIRECT FINANCIAL SUPPORT

To support readers in identifying actionable strategies, this section outlines specific financial practices used by ENGOs to align with Indigenous leadership. Practices are grouped by type, with examples and some discussion on how these strategies are employed in practice.

Providing funding directly to Indigenous Nations is recommended in the literature and does occur in practice, however, it is not the most common way ENGOs provide support to Indigenous partners. Many ENGOs prefer to offer services or raise funds collaboratively rather than transfer funds directly, citing CRA compliance issues and a desire to avoid creating dependency or misaligned accountability structures.

The most common ways of providing direct financial support are:

- **Grants to Indigenous partners** for conservation projects, and
- **Funding agreements** that transfer resources to Indigenous-led initiatives.

Some evolving practices for increasing funding to Indigenous Nations are budget allocations and joint fundraising or co-applications.

- **Budget allocations:** The amount of funding that ENGOs dedicate to Indigenous-led work can be a difficult number to track down and quantify. As a result, the amounts ranged from 0% to as much as 50%. Having concrete budget allocations is rare, few organizations are identifying specific amounts of their budget that they aim to dedicate to Indigenous-led initiatives. However, identifying targets during fiscal or strategic planning can help ensure that funding flows to Indigenous-led initiatives.

"We allocate 30 to 50% of our budget to Indigenous-led initiatives internally and through partnerships."

— Survey Response

"A key decision point in approving the budget is its alignment with our strategic plan which is grounded in our north stars, including centering Indigenous law."

— Survey Response

- **Joint fundraising and co-application models**: ENGOs apply for funding with Indigenous partners, sometimes including re-granting mechanisms.

"One way that I think really works is joint applications or creating a line item that says funds can be re-granted to Indigenous partners right from the start with your funders."

— Survey Response

2.3.2. IN-KIND SUPPORT

In-kind support is the most common way ENGOs support Indigenous Nations. This approach is widely practiced and generally well-developed, with many ENGOs viewing it as core to their mission and a practical way to support Indigenous-led conservation. Some typical examples are shown below:

- **Grant writing and fundraising support**
- **Legal services** provided pro bono
- **Technical assistance** (e.g., GIS, ecological surveys)
- **Education and stewardship programming**
- **Event coordination and promotion of Indigenous-led initiatives**

"We don't want to receive payment for our services so we'd rather raise those funds ourselves than offer our services in-kind."

— Focus Group Participant

"We provide graphic support, facilitation, and help with communications... when partners don't have the capacity or prefer not to take on certain roles."

— Focus Group Participant

Many ENGOs are increasingly aware of the tension between providing direct services and fostering long-term capacity within Indigenous communities. While in-kind support remains the most common form of engagement, some organizations are actively reflecting on how to shift toward more sustainable, self-determined models. Relationship building and making direct connections between resources and Indigenous partners is seen as key for building capacity in the long-term.

"We are also trying to be part of the grant writing process so we are lending our capacity and building up skills."

— Focus Group Participant

"It is great to write a grant and get some money, but it's even better to help that community build a relationship directly with the funder."

— Focus Group Participant

"We try not to exchange funds directly... instead, we help create relationships between Indigenous partners and funders themselves."

— *Focus Group Participant*

"We support and fund some guardian programs to help build that capacity within the Nations... so those Indigenous folks can also go out into this sector and utilize their skills."

— *Focus Group Participant*

ENGOs we surveyed and engaged have long-standing relationships and partnerships with Indigenous governments and Nations so they are able to provide services and help make connections as needed, but there was less mention of knowledge sharing and training, suggesting these initiatives might be less formalized.

One example of a knowledge sharing program focuses on providing co-learning opportunities on an annual basis.

"Through our program, we provide co-learning opportunities for a cohort of individuals nominated by their Nation each year."

— *Survey Respondent*

Other examples of knowledge sharing are less formalized and may involve exchange programs or honoraria.

"Instead of simply providing legal support, we share knowledge with our partners and our staff team builds capacity for those working in their own communities or organizations to carry out their own work."

— *Focus Group Participant*

"We also support exchange programs between First Nations and provide honorariums."

— *Survey Respondent*

"We've supported two Indigenous colleagues to attend COP16 in Colombia"

— *Survey Respondent*

Overall, given the important role that in-kind provision of technical capacity and support plays for ENGOs and Indigenous Nations, the practice would benefit from more collective focus. For example, is it envisioned by both partners to be desirable over the long term?

If not, what kinds of relationships and visioning are in place to ensure that in-kind support is not creating dependencies and maintaining a lack of transparency whereby ENGOs are raising significant funds to support Indigenous-led conservation, while largely employing and building the capacity of non-Indigenous people within their own organizations.

Projecting forward to desired future states can support clarity around capacity-building goals and prevent ongoing situations of ENGO-administered in-kind capacity without a longer-term plan for shifting technical and other capacity into Nations. This is one area for ENGOs to consider in developing policies and clear strategic commitments to align with Reconciliation goals.

2.3.3. AGREEMENTS AND CONTRACTING

There are many innovations occurring in the area of agreements, partnerships and contracts. ENGOs use a mix of formal and informal agreements, depending on the nature and purpose of their collaboration:

- **Formal contracts** for services, grants, land acquisition, and staff hiring.
- **Informal agreements** (e.g., verbal or handshake agreements) for honoraria and collaboration.
- **Co-created agreements** that reflect shared values and OCAP principles.
- **Supportive philanthropy policies** to guide ethical financial relationships.

Challenges include colonial legal structures and administrative burdens:

"One challenge we face when distributing funding... is ensuring all the necessary paperwork is in place, as required by our funders. This process can sometimes be time-consuming and complicated."

— Survey Response

Organizations are handling these challenges by adopting OCAP principles and co-creating agreements to better reflect relational values.

"We co-create both formal and informal agreements together... That is a huge shift away from our legal team just drafting it up."

— Focus Group Participant

"We are working with Indigenous partners to re-write our formal Agreements to support Indigenous leadership and shift from a colonial lens."

— Survey Response

Some ENGOs are beginning to explore **renewable agreements** with Indigenous partners, especially for multi-year initiatives. Since many conservation initiatives are longer-term in nature, these agreements can be better aligned with the timeline of the initiatives while still providing some flexibility. These agreements are often shaped by the nature of the collaboration, funding availability, and the evolving needs of Indigenous communities. One organization noted they had renewed a partnership for five years, and others mentioned that agreements typically run for 1–3 years with the possibility of extension.

There was significant discussion and interest at the learning event for ENGOs to share innovative approaches, templates and contract language with each other. This is an important area to develop new practices that begin with trust-building and transparency, while building on Indigenous protocols, recognizing the governance responsibilities of Nations, and protecting knowledge. The following sections have added relevance to contracts and agreements, and together can be taken as a place to reflect on how policies are enshrined in financial documentation. Organizations can undertake full reviews of their contracts and other financial templates to ensure that "standard" or default legal language does not remain within contract templates intended for Indigenous Nations and organizations, and that specific attention is paid to upholding sovereignty of knowledge, transparency, and respectful language and reporting requirements that are not onerous.

2.3.4. COMPENSATION AND HONORARIA POLICIES

Most ENGOs have ethical gift acceptance policies and are increasingly formalizing honoraria practices to ensure ethical and culturally appropriate compensation for Indigenous partners. The practices below are fairly common practice in the sector:

- **Ethical compensation guidelines**: Formal policies and gift screening processes to ensure that funding sources align with their values, especially regarding industries that conflict with environmental or Indigenous rights.

"We do not accept funding from companies or organizations that we view as contrary to our mission and values, for example industrial forestry, oil and gas, mining or nuclear."

— Survey Respondent

"We have guidance and screening related to all funding which screens out industries/organizations like oil and gas or others that are not aligned with our values."

— Survey Respondent

"We have a Corporate Screening process for Corporate Donors. We generally do not accept gifts from extractive industries."

— *Survey Respondent*

- **Honoraria guidance documents:** Policies developed in collaboration with Indigenous partners to guide when and how honoraria are offered.

"We developed the Honoraria Guidance as a way to meaningfully and culturally support the Indigenous people and communities we collaborate with."

— *Survey Respondent*

Sometimes ENGOs need to get creative to meet the needs of their Indigenous partners.

- **Pre-planning and Payment Flexibility:** Some organizations created new requisition forms and pre-event petty cash guidelines to streamline honoraria payments.

"The elder really wanted the honoraria in cash… I did the work instead of putting it on the elder to provide documentation."

— *Focus Group Participant*

One example of an innovative policy is the nominal compensation policy under development with one organization.

- **Nominal compensation policies:** Formal policy providing Indigenous Nations with payments as a gesture of thanks, not as a fee, but as a respectful acknowledgment for use of their land.

"We are currently examining instituting an Acknowledgements and Gratitude Policy which would provide nominal compensation to the Indigenous Nation(s) on whose lands we physically conduct our business. This compensation will be equivalent to the GST (5%) paid when staff are renting rooms for meetings or accommodation and other expenditures incurred while conducting campaigns, holding meetings and other appropriate work outside our office."

— *Survey Response*

2.3.5. TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Transparency was identified as a critical but underdeveloped area in ENGO financial practices related to Indigenous-led conservation. Transparency was inconsistently practiced. Some organizations share funding details in annual reports or directly with partners, while others lack clear policies.

"Yes, but we could be more proactive."

— Survey Respondent

"We do not have clear information."

— Survey Respondent

Current practices around transparency include:

- **Sharing funding sources and amounts** with Indigenous partners.
- **Including Indigenous partners in budget planning and reporting.**
- **Public-facing commitments** and annual reports.

"We almost always share because new partners almost always think we have way more money than we do."

— Focus Group Participant

"Our financials are transparent through our annual reports and CRA tax filings."

— Focus Group Participant

Participants acknowledged that while some transparency exists in relational contexts, few organizations have formal policies or systems in place. There was recognition that this is a "leading edge of practice" and that more work is needed to ensure Indigenous partners are informed when ENGOs raise money in their name and how those funds are allocated (e.g., staffing vs. direct support).

> This finding was again amplified in our learning event, with recognition that ENGOs and funders need better ways to be transparent about the amount of money that flows to ENGOs not just for work in specific Indigenous territories, but to advance "Indigenous-led conservation" overall.

This involves tracking and sharing fundraising activities, and what funds directly support Indigenous capacity, leadership and self-determined priorities. This finding aligns with the broader literature, which emphasizes priority for direct funding relationships with Indigenous Peoples and removing intermediaries. However, in addition to increasing direct access to funding, a significant opportunity remains for trust-building through developing policies and practices to be financially transparent with Indigenous partners.

2.4. INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

Another evolving area is the protection and honouring of Indigenous Knowledge. ENGOs are increasingly recognizing the importance of safeguarding Indigenous intellectual property and data sovereignty. This includes formalizing protections in contracts and agreements, and respecting Indigenous protocols around knowledge sharing. The standard for this includes upholding the Principles of OCAP (Ownership, Control, Access and Possession) or the Global CARE principles, to ensure that the rights of Indigenous Peoples are upheld in data governance policy and practice.

- **Written Consent Requirements:** Indigenous knowledge (oral, written, or otherwise) cannot be used by non-Indigenous staff or partners without explicit written consent.

"Anything that we classify as Indigenous knowledge... the non-Indigenous folks cannot use it unless they have written consent."

— Focus Group Participant

- **Firewalling Data**: Some organizations have internal structures that restrict access to cultural or ecological data collected by Indigenous teams.

"They actually firewall the data... the executive director and nobody else on the staff who's not in the Indigenous [unit] can access that information."

— Focus Group Participant

It is recommended that ENGO staff who work with Indigenous Peoples and anyone developing contract and partnership agreement language are familiar with and actively advancing the Principles of OCAP, and that some staff take the training through the First Nations Information Governance Centre and share with others.

3. BARRIERS TO ALIGNMENT

Although ENGOs have made strides in their efforts to align financial practices with their commitments to Indigenous-led conservation, there are some persistent barriers and challenges ENGOs face trying to better align their financial practices. These barriers fall into four main categories:

3.1 LEGAL AND REGULATORY CONSTRAINTS

Many ENGOs are limited by federal regulations, particularly those set by the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA). These include:

- Restrictions on transferring funds to organizations that are not qualified donees.
- Requirements for formal documentation (e.g., contracts, SINs, T4s) that conflict with the relational and cultural nature of Indigenous partnerships.

"Limitations to honoraria amounts to a given individual without invasive and CRA-required practices, such as collecting personal info (SIN#s) and issuing T4s."

— Survey Response

3.2. ADMINISTRATIVE AND OPERATIONAL CAPACITY

Some ENGOs face challenges with their internal capacity, making it even more challenging to focus on effectively aligning their financial practices. Common challenges include:

- Limited staffing and financial systems to track Indigenous-related funding.
- Inability to act as flow-through organizations for re-granting funds.
- Delays in developing policies and templates that reflect relational values.

"We have no core funding so our capacity is limited by grant availability... Only recently have we been able to hire a financial manager and get the software needed to embed systems change."

— Survey Response

3.3. RELATIONAL AND PROTOCOL CHALLENGES

Even when ENGOs are committed to co-creating agreements and supporting Indigenous leadership, they encounter challenges such as:

- Partners lacking capacity or interest in formalizing agreements.
- Uncertainty around appropriate protocols, especially when Indigenous partners prefer informal arrangements.
- Difficulty balancing organizational risk management with relational approaches.

"We require an agreement, and our partner does not... sometimes they prefer we just write something and send it to them."

— Focus Group Participant

Relationship-building takes time, and often how to proceed is not clear initially. These relational challenges can be responded to by following many of the principles and practices expressed within the Upwelling Learning Agenda, and other resources summarized and referenced in our literature review. Practices include approaching communities by invitation, listening to and centring Indigenous priorities and goals to avoid transactional relationships, and respecting sovereignty and governance complexities of Indigenous Nations when entering into agreements. This relational response involves program and relationship leads in an ENGO engaging with those making financial policies, including boards of directors, and can be supported through formal organizational training, learning and evaluation processes.

3.4. LACK OF ESTABLISHED MODELS AND SECTOR-WIDE GUIDANCE

There is a shortage of tested, decolonized financial models for ENGOs to follow. As a result:

- Organizations must co-create new approaches from scratch, which is time-intensive and relationship-dependent.
- Few sector-wide standards exist to guide ethical financial practices with Indigenous partners.

"As a colonial organization we have few models to guide us towards a Two-Eyed Seeing process... We co-create with partners — this is slow and built on trust and relationships, testing and learning."

— Survey Response

During the learning event, several participants expressed desire to learn from one another as new models and approaches are being developed. There was interest in a community of practice, template and model sharing, and more opportunities to learn from each other and Indigenous partners in ethical space (Crowshoe and Lertzman, 2020).

4. TRAINING AND LEARNING AS A CATALYST FOR CHANGE

Training can enable greater progress towards aligning financial practices with Indigenous-led conservation. Most ENGOs surveyed participate in Indigenous-focused training, with some making it mandatory for staff and board members. These programs help build cultural competency, support ethical collaboration, and inform financial decision-making.

> In particular, mandatory training is associated with tangible changes in financial practices. Organizations that require training for all staff reported clearer shifts in financial practices, such as updated honoraria policies and co-created agreements.

"All staff and board members undertake cultural safety training. We are currently exploring options on trauma-informed practices, and in the process of developing an Indigenous Right Relations learning plan for the organization."

— Survey Respondent

"Changes to our honoraria guidelines have been made… Finance helped with creating the payment guidelines."

— Survey Respondent

"We have updated our grants agreements, updated our payment terms for Indigenous contributors, and are continuing to explore ways to decolonize our practices."

— Survey Respondent

However, when training is voluntary or informal, its impact on financial practices is less clear. In these cases, not all staff may be equipped with the shared understanding or tools needed to drive organizational change. Since aligning financial practices often requires cross-functional collaboration, broader participation in training can help make it easier for staff to determine how to apply learnings to their financial practices.

"Though we have many success stories of partnerships, it is not clear how it has influenced our financial practices."

— Survey Respondent

"Participation in the training has helped us to be more intentional about including Reconciliation in all of our workplans, but I'm not sure it has impacted specifically our financial practices."

— Survey Respondent

CONCLUSION

This report highlights both the progress and the challenges in aligning ENGO financial practices with Indigenous leadership and community wisdom.

> While many organizations are on a meaningful journey, continued reflection, collaboration, and innovation will be essential to advancing relationship building opportunities with Indigenous communities, in pursuit of reconciliation in the conservation sector.

As original stewards of the land and waters, Indigenous Peoples have developed knowledge and governance systems essential for sustaining biodiversity and addressing the climate crisis.. Yet, despite this leadership, they receive only a fraction of conservation funding. Our findings on ENGO financial practices in relation to Indigenous Nations and communities underscore that change is happening—many ENGOs have embedded Indigenous-led conservation into their mission statements and strategic plans, and increasingly engage in providing technical support and collaborating on strategic partnerships with Indigenous Peoples and Nations. However, organizational financial practices often lag behind commitments to Reconciliation, creating gaps that hold inequities and colonial relations in place, and may not fully uphold Indigenous governance and self-determination. Transparency around funding flows for Indigenous-led conservation from funders and ENGOs is needed to build trust and respond to ongoing calls from Indigenous communities.

At a deeper level, there remain significant divergences between the worldview of mainstream environmentalism and those of Indigenous Peoples, which can be bridged through convening ethical space (Crowshoe and Lertzman, 2020) and practices of Two-Eyed Seeing "Etuaptmumk" (Marshall, 2004). ENGOs can be focused on incremental policy changes, short timeframes, organizational survival, and messaging within current windows of political salience. The priorities of Indigenous communities are based on different lived historical experiences and values, and may be focused very practically on capacity, economic self-sufficiency and land back. Spiritual and cultural teachings on healthy land relations, Natural Law, and governance protocols can also conflict with fundamental assumptions underlying the capitalist economy.

We intend that this research join the wider efforts to bring more awareness to these differing worldviews, which in turn can create the basis for respectful relationships and new and transformed economic approaches for advancing systemic solutions to the crises of climate change and biodiversity loss.

We invite organizations to use the reflexive self-assessment tool in Appendix A to examine their practices and understand more about how they can apply these learnings to their own financial practices, partnerships and relationships with Indigenous Peoples.

SELF-REFLECTION AND ASSESSMENT TOOL

Reflective questions to better align ENGO financial practices with commitments to Indigenous-led conservation and stewardship

INTRO AND BACKGROUND

On behalf of RAD Network and EcoAnalytics and Environics, we invite you to participate and utilize this tool which was created from a collaborative research project exploring how ENGOs are working to align their financial practices with their commitments to reconciliation and undoing colonial barriers.

This project builds on previous work on decolonizing environmental practices and philanthropy (eg., Upwelling + Truth Telling events, dialogue and reports from Conservation Through Reconciliation Partnership) and is intended as a way for organizations to continue learning and strengthening partnerships between settler-led ENGOs and Indigenous Peoples. The intention of this project was to help organizations learn from each other's challenges and best practices. We hope the findings from this report quicken the pace of innovation in financial practices, leading to more resources under Indigenous direction in the conservation field. For more information here is a link to our September 2025 webinar video. We encourage you to review the findings and reflect where your policies, engagements and protocols align (or diverge) with emerging practices before diving into this reflective exercise.

Non-Indigenous Participants

Are you a non-Indigenous organization that aims to support Indigenous land stewardship initiatives? Do you have financial relationships tied to these commitments and goals? If yes, this tool could be for you!

This questionnaire is designed to be completed in collaborative organizational settings, with program and financial staff. It should be rooted in dialogue, contemplative thought processes, empathy and understanding.

The call to action is for users to bring these questions to their respective teams (i.e. operational teams, financial teams, leadership members, etc.) and host a thoughtful discussion of where their organization is at with their financial practices/priorities, and where they intend to go. The overarching goal is to engage the financial teams of non-Indigenous organizations—who may not necessarily be on the front lines of relationships with Indigenous Peoples—in a conversation that helps alleviate pressures on those who are on the front lines of those relationships. In the context of Indigenous-led stewardship, this tool serves as a developmental pathway to identify organizational practices, including learnings and areas for change, as well as potential barriers, in relation to working with Indigenous communities.

Once that progress is clearly identified and named, we encourage conversations that articulate an improved pathway forward that aligns with emerging practices and Indigenous worldviews. Ideally, tool users would reconnect with this questionnaire during key financial planning cycles to reflect upon the journey thus far and make policy and practice decisions aligned with organizational goals for reconciliation and right relations with Indigenous Peoples.

The ultimate goal of this questionnaire is to help organizations illuminate the intersection of their financial practices in relation to Indigenous-led conservation, to examine where systemic roots of inequity, bias, extraction of culture and lands still persists within the hidden confines of financial policies/practices.

We aim to mobilize the practical findings from this research into developmental conversations that lead to transformative financial changes within organizations and in wider funding and financial systems. We are calling for action and accountability with the hope that transformational financial practices and policies can be catalyzed in support of and alignment with Indigenous-led land relationships.

INTENT & HOW TO USE THIS TOOL

Indigenous Participants

Are you an Indigenous government, organization, or community that is engaging with (or potentially engaging with) environmental organizations in support of Indigenous land stewardship? Do those established or emerging relationships include fiscal or financial responsibilities? If yes, then this tool could be for you!

This questionnaire was designed with ENGOs in mind and is to be completed in collaborative settings, rooted in dialogue, contemplative thought processes, empathy and understanding. The call to action is for ENGOs to bring these questions to their respective teams (i.e. operational teams, financial teams, leadership members etc) and host a thoughtful discussion of where ENGOs are at with their financial practices/priorities and where they intend to go. In the context of Indigenous-led stewardship, this tool serves as a developmental pathway to identify organizational practices, including learnings and areas for improvement when working with Indigenous communities.

Indigenous governments, organizations and communities can present this tool to their non-Indigenous partners as a way to host transparent, meaningful and proactive conversations around finances, fundraising practices, and funding Indigenous-led conservation. Through the use of this tool, one of the intended goals is to identify financial commonalities and 'sticking points' between Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners; where the hope is to have conversations to articulate an improved pathway forward that aligns with Indigenous worldviews and right relations.

HARNESSING THE ENERGY

We recognize that discussing financial practices and relationships can unwrap a variety of feelings and sentiments. If this happens during your dialogues, it is important to specifically name the emotions as they come forward; this is a critical step in your journey. To support this process, we encourage you to practice mindful observation (pausing to notice thoughts, feelings and physical body sensations such as tension or heartbeat) as it is connected to improved decision making, increased self-awareness and enhanced relationships.

Having these open and honest discussions is important, and as we continue to grow these conversations around these conversations, it's important to harness that spirit to move towards a transformed system that respects and uplifts Indigenous-led land stewardship.

SECTION 1: OVERVIEW OF CURRENT FUNDING AND FINANCIAL PRACTICES

1. How do you think Indigenous Peoples perceive your organization, do you have mechanisms to get this feedback, what are the gaps you are working on? Factors to consider include:
    a. How your organization was historically founded and funded, and how this influences your purpose, accountabilities and culture (e.g. membership-based, a few key donors, US-based, or global organization, etc.)
    b. Current funding reliances and how this influences your purpose, accountabilities and culture (e.g. private donors, public funds, corporate donations, etc)
    c. Evaluating ethical funding sources
    d. Funding distribution (administrative costs, fundraising, grants, research, other, etc).

SECTION 2: UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF INDIGENOUS-LED CONSERVATION IN YOUR ORGANIZATION

1. Does your organizations' mission relate to Indigenous values of stewardship for the land and formally acknowledge Indigenous sovereignty/self determination? How is your mission and other public commitments informed by UNDRIP, TRC Calls to Action and Principles of OCAP?
2. What role do Indigenous advisors or communities uphold and how do you ensure their perspectives are equitably braided into decisions that affect them?

SECTION 3: FUNDING AGREEMENTS AND PARTNERSHIPS WITH INDIGENOUS NATIONS

1. Consider the types of financial partnerships your organization hosts or are considering with Indigenous Peoples. Are you:
    a. Making efforts to ensure funding is more predictable/sustainable and transparent?
    b. Supporting Nations in non-financial ways?
    c. If offering in-kind supports, does this include training, youth engagement or long-term consideration of how this capacity might be shifted into the Nation?
    d. Considering how decisions are made when funding is allocated to Indigenous projects?
    e. Re-evaluating financial policies to ensure processes are supporting Indigenous worldviews?
    f. Transparently sharing the total amount of funding that you receive and how this relates to Indigenous-focused funds raised and distributed?
    g. Actively pursuing pathways to land back and upholding Indigenous governance?
    h. Advancing solutions that uphold Indigenous economic sovereignty and increase access to own-source revenue?

SECTION 4: BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES

1. Do you have formal or informal mutual learning opportunities or evaluations built into your organizational practices to uncover pathways to decolonize and advance reconciliation? Considerations include:
    a. What barriers or difficulties have you faced when upholding your organization's Indigenous commitments?
    b. Were you able to work with the Nations to better understand their experiences and inform paths forward or practice changes?
    c. Do you have mechanisms in your organization to share learning across program areas and that impact financial practices and broader organizational policies?

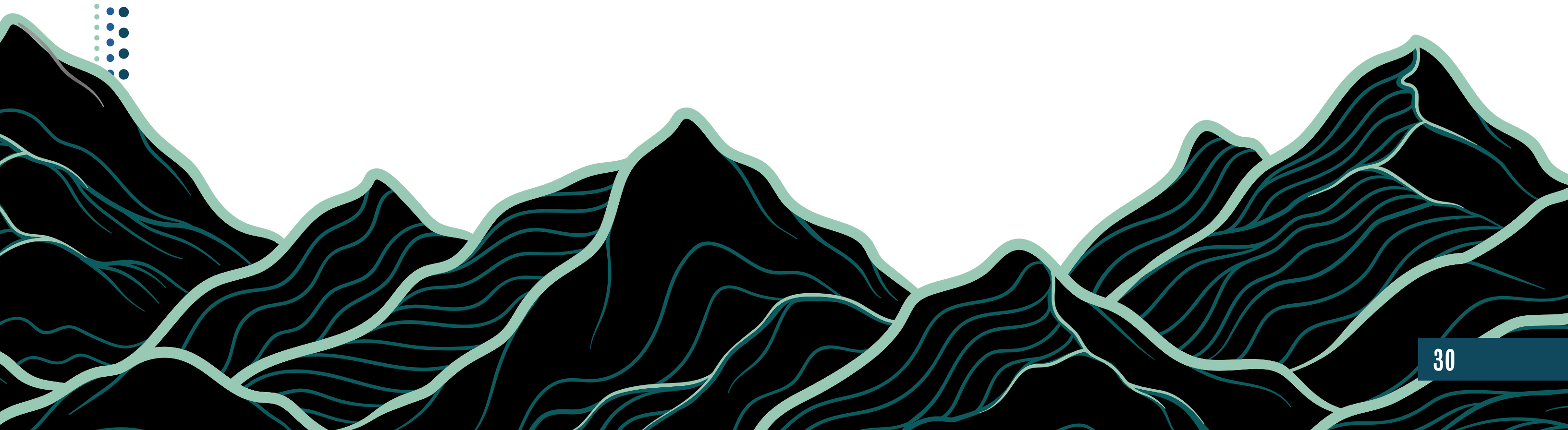
SECTION 5: INCREASING SUPPORT FOR INDIGENOUS-LED CONSERVATION AND SUPPORTING REFLECIVE POLICIES

1. Are there designated staff responsible for ensuring alignment between organizational practices and Indigenous commitments?
2. How do you plan to increase financial support and capacity for Indigenous-led conservation?
3. Does your organization maintain commitments to participating in Indigenous-focused learning networks? Have any financial staff participated in Indigenous-focused learning? Financial staff may include Chief Financial Officers (CFOs), finance leads, administrative staff, fundraising support staff, grant writing teams, etc.
4. How has participation in Indigenous-focused training impacted your financial practices?

SECTION 6: FINANCIAL TRANSFORMATION EVALUATION CHART

Inspired by Justice Funders Resonance Framework, this chart aims to help ENGOs self-assess how their financial practices align with Indigenous-led conservation practices and values. This chart is an incomplete list of the many transformative financial practice possibilities, and is meant to guide reflection and calls to action—not to rank or score organizations numerically or competitively. We intend to build on this resource as more wise practices emerge. The starting point may not be the same for all those who participate, but the goal is to highlight what could be possible on our paths toward reconciliation. While going through this chart, please keep the following in mind: where do you fall on the spectrum of transactional to transformative and what does it take to move towards transformation?

	Paths of Practice	
Practice	**Transactional**	**Transformative**
Decision-making power	Budget decisions are made internally by the organization.	Indigenous partners lead decisions affecting them.
Financial policies	Policies are rigid and heavily enforced (receipts, per diems, legalese in financial contracts and agreements, defaults to intellectual property for work undertaken).	Policies reflect Indigenous definitions of time, include reciprocity/trust-based approaches and maintain a flexible approach to allow for cultural contexts (e-transfer, elders paid in cash, etc).
Reporting	Reporting mechanisms are strictly determined by organization/funder.	Indigenous methodologies and chosen platforms of storytelling/ceremony are the main method of reporting.
Accepting funding	ENGOs accept money without aligning with Indigenous worldviews or funding ethics.	Indigenous partners co-lead funding acceptance strategies.
Annual funding distribution	Minimal funds are distributed to Indigenous-led initiatives/projects and majority stays within ENGO.	Significant and intentional allocations are made to Indigenous-led initiatives.
Commitments to Indigenous-led conservation	ENGO has no internal or external commitments to Indigenous-led conservation.	ENGO has public facing commitments (with progress reports) that align with Treaty Rights, UNDRIP, TRC, OCAP and community partner protocols.
Land Back action	Minimal to no efforts are being made to ensure land is returned to Indigenous partners.	Actively supporting return or transfer of land back to Indigenous partners.
Increasing capacity in communities	Supporting communities is short term and project-based, effectively maintaining reliance on external funding, tools or "expertise".	Organizations are removing themselves from the capacity-builder role and thinking about building capacity well in advance in self-determined ways (ie. in 5 years, capacity will be BUILT and organization is no longer needed).
Indigenous representation	Indigenous participation is tokenistic or symbolic.	Indigenous leadership is embedded throughout all levels of financial decision making—from strategy to implementation.
Overcoming financial allocation challenges and barriers	No feedback loops or mechanisms for overcoming barriers.	Proactive steps are being taken to work with Indigenous partners to identify challenges and co-create culturally inclusive solutions.
Funding agreements and contracts	ENGO imposes funding cycles with fixed-term end dates.	Trust-based funding agreement models are designed in collaboration with Indigenous partners, with predictable and sustainable funding.



APPENDIX B

Literature Review

This literature review brings together recent reports and Indigenous-led guidance on how ENGOs and funders can shift their financial practices to better support Indigenous-led conservation. The goal is to highlight promising practices that dismantle colonial funding dynamics, strengthen Indigenous governance, and build more equitable approaches to conservation finance.

1. DIRECT FUNDING PRACTICES

- **Fund Indigenous organizations directly, not through intermediaries.**
  Conservation finance should flow straight to Indigenous Nations and organizations rather than being routed through ENGOs or other intermediaries that act as gatekeepers. When money passes through non-Indigenous organizations, it adds layers of control, restricts self-determination, and shifts decision-making power away from communities. Direct funding affirms Indigenous authority over conservation. The Indigenous Peoples Resilience Fund (IPRF) demonstrates this approach by funding Indigenous organizations without requiring charitable status, reframing philanthropy as "supporting" rather than "granting" (IITC, 2024; Chapin, 2004; Confronting Colonialism, 2023; IITC Consolidated Report, 2024; UNEP, 2024; Fox, 2024; Wilbur-Collins, 2024).
- **Invest in long-term, trust-based funding models.**
  Short-term project grants perpetuate instability and dependency while undermining meaningful relationship-building. Indigenous Nations emphasize the need for long-term, flexible commitments that align with their own priorities and governance systems. Project Finance for Permanence (PFP) initiatives under the Enduring Earth Initiative, the Right Relations Collaborative (where pooled, multi-year funds are guided by Indigenous Aunties and funders "apply" to share funds), and the Coast Funds Endowment in British Columbia illustrate how conservation finance can be structured for durability and trust (Wilbur-Collins, 2024; IITC Consolidated Report, 2024).
- **Design funding mechanisms that align with Indigenous governance systems.**
  Colonial funding standards—onerous applications, rigid categories, and burdensome reporting—undermine Indigenous-led work by forcing communities into western bureaucratic molds. Instead, funding must adapt to Indigenous governance, collective decision-making processes, and community timelines. For example, the IPCA Development Fund is designed to reinvest endowment earnings into Indigenous Protected and Conserved Areas (IPCAs) according to community-led priorities, providing a model of flexible, decolonized funding design (Confronting Colonialism, 2023; IITC Consolidated Report, 2024; Fox, 2024; Wilbur-Collins, 2024).
- **Strengthen Indigenous self-governments and collective decision-making.**
  Beyond conservation projects, finance should resource the governance structures that sustain Indigenous authority. This includes funding Indigenous strategies that integrate governance, stewardship, and cultural revitalization, as well as supporting processes like family or tribal meetings that ground decisions in community protocols. Such investments strengthen Nations' long-term ability to lead conservation in their territories (IITC Consolidated Report, 2024; Fox, 2024).

- **Ensure inclusion and equity in funding flows.**
  Conservation finance must intentionally and meaningfully reach Indigenous women, youth, and other groups that face systemic exclusion, while supporting pathways for diverse leadership. Inclusive resourcing ensures that conservation finance not only supports land stewardship but also strengthens intergenerational and community-wide governance. UNEP (2024) and Wilbur-Collins (2024) emphasize that equity in finance is essential to decolonization.
- **Develop alternatives to market-based conservation finance.**
  Conventional models based on carbon offsets, biodiversity credits, or similar market mechanisms often reproduce extractive logics and commodify Indigenous territories. Funders should instead invest in non-market approaches that reflect Indigenous worldviews of reciprocity and stewardship. The Deshkan Ziibi Conservation Impact Bond provides an example, tying financial returns to ecological and cultural outcomes instead of market commodification (Fox, 2024; Wilbur-Collins, 2024).

2. TRANSPARENCY & ACCOUNTABILITY

This section digs into practices and systems that will ensure clarity, independent evaluation, and rights-based safeguards for funding and partnerships.

- **Disclose funding sources and ensure clarity of financial flows.**
  Many Indigenous communities report not being informed of who funds conservation projects on their territories, even when they want to be involved from the outset. Funders and ENGOs must fully disclose where money comes from, the conditions attached, and how funds are allocated, so that Indigenous Peoples can make informed decisions about whether and how to participate (IITC, 2024; IITC Consolidated Report, 2024; UNEP, 2024; Wilbur-Collins, 2024).
- **Create independent, transparent systems for evaluating conservation finance.**
  Large ENGOs often overstate successes and underreport harms in donor reports. Independent mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation—led or co-led by Indigenous Peoples—are needed to ensure accountability. For example, The Circle on Philanthropy's I4DM tool helps funders assess whether initiatives are Indigenous-benefiting, Indigenous-informed, or Indigenous-led, offering a model for transparent reporting and evaluation (Chapin, 2004; UNEP, 2024; Wilbur-Collins, 2024).
- **Adopt reflexive practices that confront inequitable power dynamics.**
  Funders should conduct "power audits" to evaluate their influence and control in relationships, redefine success according to community values, and continuously assess whether their funding structures reinforce colonial dynamics. This includes recognizing how onerous reporting requirements and one-size-fits-all approaches undermine Indigenous-led initiatives (Chapin, 2004; Lee, 2011; Confronting Colonialism, 2023; IITC Consolidated Report, 2024; UNEP, 2024; Fox, 2024; Wilbur-Collins, 2024).
- **Hold intermediaries accountable.**
  When funding passes through ENGOs, universities, or other intermediaries, Indigenous communities are often unaware of who these actors are or how they operate. Funders must require intermediaries to disclose their identities, roles, and decision-making processes,and ensure they are accountable to the communities affected (IITC Consolidated Report, 2024).
- **Embed human rights due diligence into funding relationships.**
  Funders should only partner with organizations that can demonstrate respect for Indigenous rights. This includes implementing robust due diligence systems to assess risks and impacts before committing funds, and ensuring Indigenous Peoples are part of these assessments (UNEP, 2024).

- **Establish grievance and remedy mechanisms.**
  Accessible complaint systems should be created to address situations where conservation finance causes or contributes to harm. These mechanisms must be rights-based, culturally appropriate, and responsive to Indigenous communities (UNEP, 2024).
- **Require regular public reporting on human rights and equity performance.**
  Funders and ENGOs must publish regular, transparent reports on how they are addressing human rights concerns, power imbalances, and equity outcomes in their conservation financing. These reports should be co-designed with Indigenous partners to reflect their priorities (UNEP, 2024).
- **End extractive ENGO practices that misuse Indigenous legitimacy.**
  ENGOs must stop leveraging Indigenous communities' names, stories, or networks to gain credibility with funders or the public without investing in genuine, reciprocal relationships. This includes ceasing practices where Indigenous participation is tokenized for fundraising or branding purposes (Upwelling, 2024).

3. PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLES

This section explores what relationships rooted in respect, reciprocity, and Indigenous governance systems can look like.

- **Ground partnerships in Indigenous governance and authority.**
  Partnerships must recognize that authority flows from inherent Indigenous governance systems, not just Indian Act–created leadership. ENGOs and funders should learn about and work with hereditary and traditional governance structures, deferring to their authority in decision-making. For example, the Upwelling Learning Agenda calls for funders to invest in training to understand inherent governance and to partner with Indigenous thinkers to navigate these complexities (Upwelling, 2024).
- **Base engagement on invitation and free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC).**
  Funders and ENGOs should not assume that Indigenous Nations want partnership; instead, they should only enter into relationships when explicitly invited. This approach respects community timelines, including cultural protocols and ceremonies. FPIC must be a non-negotiable standard for any initiative that affects Indigenous lands and communities (UNEP, 2024; Fox, 2024; Upwelling, 2024).
- **Foster respectful, reciprocal, and long-term relationships.**
  Meaningful partnerships are non-transactional and rooted in trust, reciprocity, and time. Funders should prioritize relationships over project deliverables, with success measured by being present, listening, and spending time on the land. Practices like requiring funders to do their own "homework" through cultural competency and anti-racism training shift the burden away from Indigenous partners (Wilbur-Collins, 2024; Upwelling, 2024).
- **Protect Indigenous institutions, decision-making, and knowledge systems.**
  Partnerships should uphold and resource Indigenous institutions rather than replace them with NGO-led structures. Indigenous knowledge systems must be treated as equal to Western science in shaping funding priorities and conservation strategies. For example, the Right Relations Collaborative and the Deshkan Ziibi Impact Bond embed Indigenous worldviews and cultural outcomes directly into funding models (Wilbur-Collins, 2024; Fox, 2024).

- **Stay in solidarity with Indigenous sovereignty, even when it conflicts with ENGO mandates.**
  ENGOs must commit to supporting Indigenous sovereignty consistently, even when Nations pursue priorities that challenge donor expectations or ENGO "brands," such as resource development. This requires showing up for communities in difficult contexts and resisting extractive practices where ENGOs leverage Indigenous legitimacy for fundraising or credibility (Upwelling, 2024).
- **Address harmful practices and uphold accountability.**
  Partnerships must avoid extractive behaviours such as using Indigenous leaders' names or networks for social capital, or platforming fraudulent "Pretendian" groups that undermine Indigenous sovereignty. ENGOs and funders should work with Indigenous-led vetting processes to ensure authenticity and integrity in all partnerships (Upwelling, 2024).

4. SYSTEMIC FINANCIAL REFORM

Finally, this section addresses corporate influence, centralized control, and market-based conservation models.

- **Challenge corporate and government dominance in conservation finance.**
  Many ENGOs and funders rely on money from corporations or governments whose interests directly conflict with Indigenous sovereignty, often tied to extractive industries. To uphold Indigenous rights, conservation finance must refuse funds that compromise accountability to Indigenous Peoples. This includes rejecting "partnerships" that entrench corporate influence or prioritize donor agendas over community well-being (Chapin, 2004; Lee, 2011; Confronting Colonialism, 2023; UNEP, 2024; Fox, 2024).
- **Shift financial decision-making power to Indigenous Peoples.**
  Systemic reform requires more than consultation—it means devolving actual control over funding priorities, governance boards, and endowment structures to Indigenous Nations. Practices like those used by the Right Relations Collaborative, where Indigenous Aunties vet funders and set terms for engagement, demonstrate how power can be transferred from NGOs to Indigenous leadership (Confronting Colonialism, 2023; IITC Consolidated Report, 2024; UNEP, 2024; Fox, 2024).
- **Route climate and biodiversity finance through Indigenous-led governance.**
  Global conservation and climate funds (e.g., "30x30" initiatives, climate mitigation finance) should not be centralized in governments or large ENGOs, which often bypass Indigenous authority. Instead, these resources must flow directly into Indigenous-led programs, where Nations exercise sovereignty and self-determination over how funds are used. Mechanisms like the IPCA Development Fund and Coast Funds demonstrate how Indigenous governments and organizations can manage conservation finance in ways that align with their governance systems, cultural priorities, and long-term visions (UNEP, 2024; Fox, 2024).
- **Support reciprocal and restorative funding models.**
  Funding should not only mitigate harm but actively "give back" to Indigenous lands, waters, and communities. This involves financing cultural revitalization, ecological restoration, and intergenerational stewardship projects, often framed by Indigenous concepts of reciprocity. The Deshkan Ziibi Conservation Impact Bond exemplifies how financing can be tied directly to ecological and cultural outcomes (IITC Consolidated Report, 2024; UNEP, 2024; Wilbur-Collins, 2024).

- **Challenge neoliberal, market-based conservation paradigms.**
  Financial instruments such as carbon credits and biodiversity offsets can reproduce extractive logics and commodify Indigenous territories. Funders should instead support models rooted in Indigenous values of relationality and stewardship. Fox (2024) argues for rejecting neoliberal paradigms in favour of Indigenous-led, non-market approaches that prioritize community-defined well-being over commodification (Fox, 2024).

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