

Indigenous Engagement Committee (IEC) 2024 Report

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1. Description of the committee

The IEC came in direct response to the Canadian Astronomical Society (CASCA) 2020 Long Range Plan(LRP) recommendation #46:

“We recommend that CASCA establish a new committee dedicated to facilitating engagement and relationships with Indigenous communities, and that can partner with existing groups working to promote STEM programs that embrace both Western and Indigenous approaches. The goals should be to listen to Indigenous communities, to discover mutual interests, and to identify opportunities to learn from and support each other. Potentially in partnership with the CASCA Education and Public Outreach committee (EPO), this committee can forge partnerships with Indigenous organizations, support Indigenous education in astronomy and STEM, and can develop astronomical learning material in Indigenous languages in collaboration with relevant teachers and programs.”

Terms of reference

1. To actively seek out and engage in dialogues with Indigenous communities, to discover mutual interests, and to identify opportunities to learn from and support each other.
2. To partner with existing groups working to promote STEM programs that embrace both non-Indigenous and Indigenous approaches.
3. To forge partnerships with Indigenous organizations to support Indigenous education in astronomy and STEM.
4. To facilitate connections to funding and support for community educational projects related to Indigeneity.
5. To foster the development of culturally appropriate astronomical learning material in Indigenous languages in collaboration with teachers and programs.
6. To build and regularly advertise a public database of resources related to reconciliation and Indigenous engagement that can be accessed by all CASCA members. These resources include but are not restricted to Truth and Reconciliation training, and best practices for publicly and privately funded projects.
7. To organize regular public consultations (webinars, conference sessions) of all CASCA members on specific Indigenous topics to encourage their engagement.
8. To guide the creation of IEC committees for Canadian facilities and projects that require such an advisory council.

2. Meetings frequency

The committee meets every two weeks on zoom.

3. Workshop

On February 13, the CASCA Indigenous Engagement Committee held its first workshop. The topic was “How to invite a local Indigenous knowledge-keeper to your astronomy class”. We discussed what documents were available for helping employees to fruitfully engage with local Indigenous groups, and compiled a list of these. A couple of institutions did not have a document at all, and several have really fantastic, comprehensive documents. The workshop attracted around 30 participants and an article was published in the Casseopeia newsletter to share the outcome.

Many resources were highlighted during the workshop, but the committee wanted to specifically share a very complete document provided by the Calgary Board of Education that can be found here:

<https://www.cbe.ab.ca/about-us/advisory-councils/FineArtsAdvisoryCouncilDocuments/elders-protocol.pdf>

This document is a complete elder protocol developed in partnership with many community members, the Native Counseling Services of Alberta and the Human Rights Education and Multiculturalism Fund.

The main take-aways from the workshop are summarized in the bullet points below:

- Seek the help of a Cultural Mediator provided (or not) by your institution
- Be aware of the burden of requests Indigenous people sometimes receive
- Clearly communicate the “shared purpose” of a meeting with the elder/knowledge-keeper
- Build a relationship before your event/activity
- Story telling takes time, it has a purpose to help you, and it is up to you to extract the tools you need from that story. Structured agendas may not be useful in some settings and Elders especially tend to not like time constraints.
- Elders have to be accompanied with respect over their whole visit to your institution.
- Gifts and honoraria must be given with care and respect.
- Ask what is the best way to reach out, it might not be emails.
- Prepare your participants in advance. Develop and use a code of conduct.

A list of Indigenous engagement documents from individual institutions was collected and will be available from the IEC website for future reference and updates.

4. EPO/Westar coordinations with IEC


As described in the description of the committee, the CASCA board had foreseen a strong interaction between the EPO committee, especially the Westar subcommittee, and IEC committee regarding connection with indigenous communities. The Westar sub-committee and IEC committee started a conversation to coordinate activities and had one joint meeting so far. We plan to organize a joint workshop in the upcoming

months, share resources and initiatives, and will have a joint booth table at CASCA to foster the development of our future plans.

5. Website

The IEC developed a new website that is central to its activities and impact on the communities : <https://indigenous-engagement.org/>

The structure of the website was developed in response to the terms of reference 1 to 7. It is still under construction with the goal to have a version ready for the CASCA To 2024 meeting in early June. The website will serve as a hub to share information for CASCA members and indigenous members/communities, to promote initiatives, and offer support for learning material creation, indigenous language translation, connection to STEM initiatives, finding resources, funding opportunities and more.

 Indigenous Engagement Committee

HOME ABOUT THE IEC TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES RESOURCES
SUCCESSFUL PROJECTS FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES CONTACT THE IEC

Canadian Astronomical Society CASCA committee to promote engagement with Indigenous Communities

Learn Engage Transform

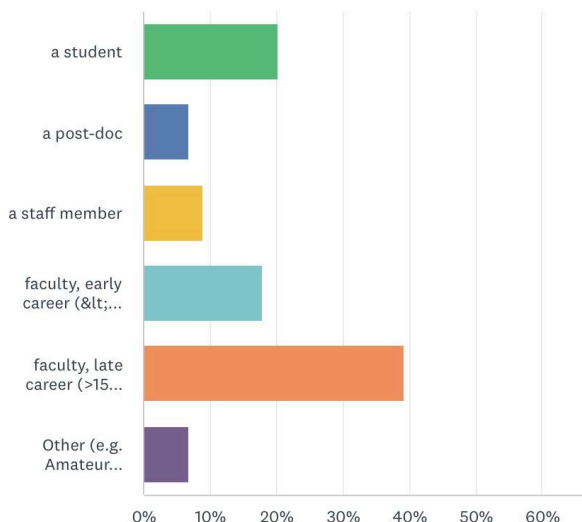
You are interested in transforming astronomy and make it more inclusive. You are a member of an Indigenous Community and/or an Astronomer. You are at the right place! This website was built with the goal to create bridges. CASCA would like to learn from the many indigenous communities on Turtle Island, hear their perspectives and learn about the night sky. Through this effort, we would like to support indigenous ways and help highlighting and preserving knowledge for the next generations to come. We also would like the field of Astronomy to be more welcoming to member of communities across Canada, so that every youth can pursue a career of their choice, including astronomy.



6. Census

A community census was distributed in April and May 2024 and gathered 93 responses. See the members distribution within the survey on the right image.

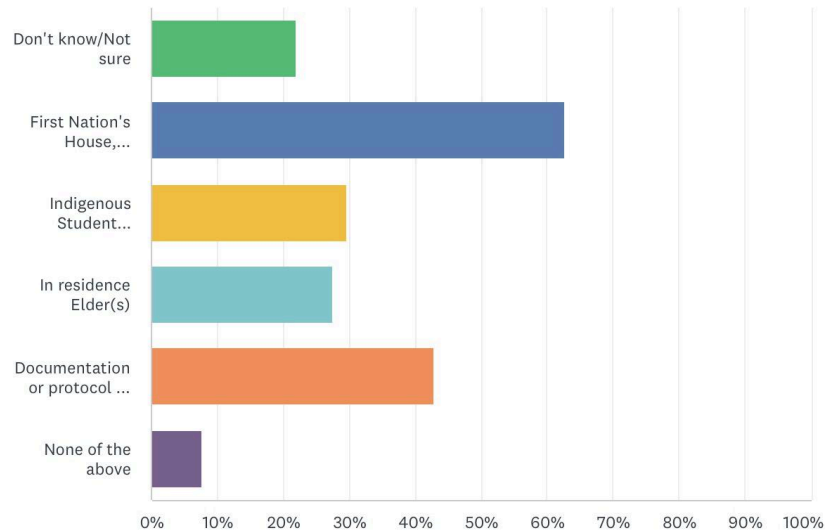
The census aims at measuring the current status of Indigenous engagement within the CASCA member in order to target specific areas for improvement. The results of the survey will be compiled shortly and shared during the CASCA IEC presentation.



Here are some examples:

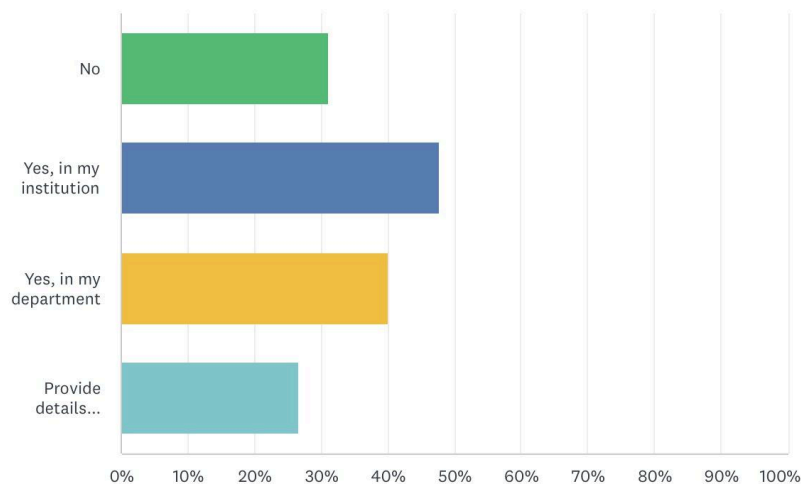
To your knowledge, is there support offered by your institution to facilitate Indigenous communities engagement? Please select multiple options if appropriate.

Answered: 91 Skipped: 0



Have you participated in an activity that included members of Indigenous communities and that was inclusive of Indigenous ways and knowledge?

Answered: 90 Skipped: 1



7. IEC goals for the upcoming year

During the upcoming year, the IEC will be planning additional activities (including EPO/Westar joint activities) using feedback for the community and the results from the census.

We will continue to build on the content offered on the website with respect to our terms of reference.

We plan on developing a newsletter that will include new resources available, activity plan, highlight initiatives from the members regarding engagement with communities and the creation of culturally sensitive content for teaching astronomy. The frequency of the newsletter is TBD.

We will also initiate contact with project leaders in order to fulfill the term of reference 8, and offer our support for the creation of IEC committees for Canadian facilities and projects that require such an advisory council.

Julie Bolduc Duval and Laurie Rousseau-Nepton have received a NSERC promoscience grant over three years that is highly linked to our mandate (engaging with communities, creating content, supporting teaching with two eyed seeing, etc). We will support this program that could have a large impact nationwide.