

ASSEMBLY OF SEVEN
GENERATIONS

Accountability in Our Lifetime:

A Call to Honour
the Rights of Indigenous
Children and Youth



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Edited by Brittany Mathews

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the gathering and for providing guidance on how to move forward with this work.

"The day that I can see Indigenous youth achieve the standard of living and the quality of life that is enjoyed by the rest of the Canadian society and its youth, is when I will believe reconciliation has been achieved."

*— SURVEY RESPONDENT,
The Roadmap on the
Implementation of TRC
Call to Action 66, page 43¹*

¹ <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599307a5f5e231b361442225/t/5c675b67e79c705013d3a8ae/1550277485617/FINAL+%282%29-+Indigenous+Youth+Voices+-+Roadmap+to+TRC+66+-+Compressed.pdf>

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ABOUT

A7G

Assembly of Seven Generations (A7G) is an Indigenous owned and youth-led, non-profit organization focused on cultural support and empowerment programs and policies for Indigenous youth while being led by traditional knowledge and Elder guidance. A7G also holds weekly, seasonally and annual programs and events on Algonquin territory such as a weekly drop-in, language drop-in and annual Round Dances. A7G has also worked on national reports and facilitated gatherings such as the *A Roadmap to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Call to Action #66* and *A Way Forward in Conducting Research With and by Indigenous Youth*.

Caring Society

The First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada is a national nonprofit organization ensuring that First Nations children and their families have culturally based, and equitable opportunities to grow up safely at home and in their communities, be healthy, get a good education and be proud of who they are and where they come from.

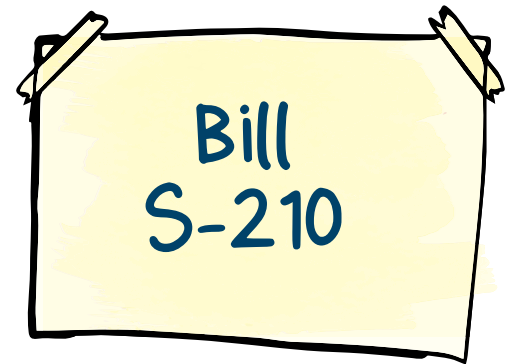


BACKGROUND

For decades, First Nations have called for Canada to respect the sacredness of their children and youth by upholding the best interests of the child, substantive equality and cultural continuity.

This call has been echoed in numerous reports including, but not limited to, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996), the Joint National Policy Review (2000), the Wen: De Reports (2005), the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2005), *A Roadmap to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Call to Action #66* (2018) and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2019).

In June 2020, Bill S-217 (now S-210) was introduced by Senator Rosemary Moodie for the creation of an Office of the Commissioner for Children and Youth in Canada. The Bill proposes the establishment of an appointed Commissioner for Children and Youth to promote, monitor and report on the implementation of Canada's obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.² The Bill also proposes the creation of an Assistant Commissioner, which the Commissioner must consider appointing for the purpose of ensuring focus on matters related to First Nations, Metis and Inuit children and youth.



Why and Intentions

It is unclear how and if Bill S-210 contemplates the unique experiences of First Nations, Metis and Inuit children and youth, and how a Bill of this nature would uniquely impact the lives of First Nations, Metis and Inuit children and youth. The Bill does not contemplate Canada's long-standing human rights violations against Indigenous children and youth, as substantiated by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (2016 CHRT 2), the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the National Inquiry into

² <https://www.parl.ca/LegisInfo/BillDetails.aspx?Language=E&billId=10873559>

Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. The Bill proposes the establishment of a Commissioner, and potentially an Assistant Commissioner, that would collaborate, advocate and promote the rights of First Nations, Metis and Inuit children and youth. However, it is unclear, given Canada's historical and ongoing Indigenous child rights violations, whether a Commissioner or Assistant Commissioner is sufficient in addressing Canada's human rights violations. The Bill also does not consider a mechanism for First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples to appoint or approve one or more Indigenous Assistant Commissioner(s).

Furthermore, the Bill fails to acknowledge how best interests of children are framed by western experiences and laws. It does not consider how



First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples consider and safeguard the best interests of their children according to their own laws and practices.

Indeed, First Nations, Metis and Inuit communities have actively worked to safeguard their children since time immemorial. The Bill assumes that First Nations, Metis and Inuit children could only “benefit” from Canadian human rights law, when in reality, First Nations, Metis and Inuit communities have actively worked to safeguard their children in the face of serious human rights violations perpetrated by Canada.³

In 2018, through researching the implementation of TRC Call to Action 66, Indigenous Youth Voices called on the federal government to begin working closely with Indigenous youth to create a Code of Ethics and Network Panel, as well as develop a Research and Translation team. Unfortunately, these recommendations were never acknowledged, which speaks to Canada's long-standing practice of shelving or ignoring calls for

³ Many of these insights and critiques were formulated and offered by the Caring Society. We acknowledge their work in offering a foundation for this report's intentions.

accountability on behalf of and from Indigenous young people. These are a few recommendations and examples of actions that could be taken to achieve justice for Indigenous youth and children. The functions of these teams would be as follows:⁴

Code of Ethics and Network Panel

A Code of Ethics will be developed as a framework for funding community-based youth organizations more equitably and effectively. This Code of Ethics will encompass the key learnings from our (IYV) research on the current priorities of Indigenous youth and the needs of community-based youth organizations. We will also develop a bank of Indigenous youth leaders across the Indigenous Youth Voices Network who are willing to act as selection committee panel members for funders. These youth would inform the disbursement of any Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada funds that implicate Indigenous youth, and the co-development of the Indigenous Youth Voices Government of Canada Fund. Provincial, territorial, and municipal governments, Indigenous governments and organizations, corporations, and foundations could also contact Indigenous Youth Voices to request selection committee members to be involved with their funding delivery processes.



Research and Knowledge Translation

The Indigenous Youth Voices Research Team will focus on collecting, organizing, and disseminating existing research and new research being done related to Indigenous youth needs and priorities. Far too often, Indigenous communities are being researched with little to no control over how that research is being done and what

4 <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599307a5f5e231b361442225/t/5c675b67e79c705013d3a8ae/1550277485617/FINAL+%282%29-+Indigenous+Youth+Voices-+Roadmap+to+TRC+66+-+Compressed.pdf>

it is being used for, and so we see this as being a positive step in having more control and understanding of research processes. This work could include developing a database of reports and literature in these areas to be shared with individuals, community-based organizations, funders, governments, and academia. It will also involve developing and facilitating knowledge translation strategies that can help to ensure that knowledge is making its way to the community level and not being trapped on shelves or only within academic spaces. Similar to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, the Research Team could also advise on the non-profit Capacity Building work (outlined next), offering insights to community groups on program evaluation techniques that are often a significant barrier to groups accessing sustainable funding.

As stated in the above excerpt from the Roadmap to TRC Call to Action #66, there has been an ongoing need for a code of ethics and a higher standard within the federal government when making decisions on behalf of Indigenous youth and children. The Code of Ethics and Network Panel offers insight into ways that Canada could be accountable for its decision making that has an impact on Indigenous young people. Additionally, there is a need for more appropriate research and transparency from governments when conducting research on Indigenous youth and children. In 2019, Indigenous Youth Voices

created a report that lists the requirements, as developed by Indigenous youth, on ethical research with and by Indigenous youth as mentioned in the 2018 Roadmap.⁵ The call for the federal government to be more accountable and ethical in their relationships with Indigenous youth and children is ongoing and has not been answered to date.



5 https://fncaringsociety.com/sites/default/files/indigenous_youth_voices-_a_way_forward_in_conducting_research_with_and_by_indigenous_youth.pdf

In keeping with the code of ethics and research requirements, a gathering was held in December 2020 with the intention of hearing from Indigenous youth and grassroots groups across Canada specifically about meaningful accountability for Indigenous children and youth within the Bill and beyond.

Environmental Scan

Children's commissioners have been established in close to 60 countries around the world with broad mandates to promote child rights, raise awareness and monitor progress in children's issues.⁶

An environmental scan was completed to review child and youth frameworks from other countries to support the discussions during the gathering and provide participants with examples of what a Commissioner for Children and Youth could look like within Canada.

National Child Participation Framework, South Africa

Within this framework child participation is a fundamental right of children. Child participation refers to the active involvement of children in the decisions, processes, programmes and policies that affect their lives. The framework is to guide all levels of government, civil society and sectors to promote meaningful participation. Additionally, it advocates that children are entitled to have a voice in decisions that affect their lives such as household and family, school, child protection, courses, health settings, community or local government and national policy. Child participation leads to better protection of children, raises public awareness on the needs of children and builds accountability across both society and governments as a whole.



6 <https://childrenfirstcanada.org/news/2020/6/16/children-first-canada-welcomes-introduction-of-bill-in-senate-of-canada-calling-for-federal-commissioner-for-children-and-youth>

Getting it Right for Every Child: A National Policy Framework to Promote Children's Well-Being in Scotland

This framework represents a shift from welfare to wellbeing, and aims to improve children's wellbeing via early intervention, universal service provision, and multiagency coordination across organizational boundaries. Focusing on promoting and improving the wellbeing of all children, this framework shifts away from top-down implementation toward the creation of broad policy frameworks administered at the local level and has a requirement for information sharing across organization boundaries enshrined in the statute. The framework acknowledges that there is a lack of consensus around the definition and measurement of child wellbeing, and that there should be a common interpretation practice framework based around it that is used across all agencies.⁷

Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy, New Zealand

The strategy has nine principles to guide its development and implementation, and to inform the overarching framework for the government and others to align with. Developed with input from 10,000 New Zealanders, including over 6,000 children and youth, the vision for the strategy is that New Zealand is the best place in the world for children and young people. Within the strategy are six high-level and interconnected wellbeing outcomes, that signpost the social, economic and environmental factors needed for child and youth wellbeing. Māori language and culture are woven throughout the strategy's essence, and grounds its principles, outcomes and the wellbeing indicators.⁸



⁷ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4911714/>

⁸ <https://childyouthwellbeing.govt.nz/resources/child-and-youth-wellbeing-strategy-html#child-9>

METHODOLOGY

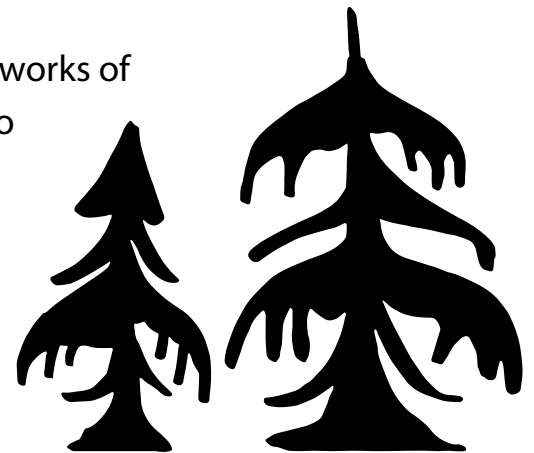
The method used to gather insight from Indigenous youth regarding Bill S-210 follows the requirements and standards created by Indigenous Youth Voices in 2019 entitled *A Way Forward in Conducting Research With and by Indigenous Youth*.

The seven requirements are:

- Accessibility
- Indigenous Youth Leading and Developing Research
- Holistic Approaches
- Indigenous Youth Defined Research Ethics
- Reciprocity
- Culturally-Led and Culturally Specific
- Support the Implementation of TRC Call to Action 66

These requirements were honoured by creating a diverse organizing committee, creating a safe and inclusive space for youth to share, inviting knowledge keepers and adults while centring discussions for youth leadership, creating a community agreement, having mental health supports, offering a respectable honorarium amount for participants and creating opportunities for youth to lead conversations, participate in research and writing of this report.

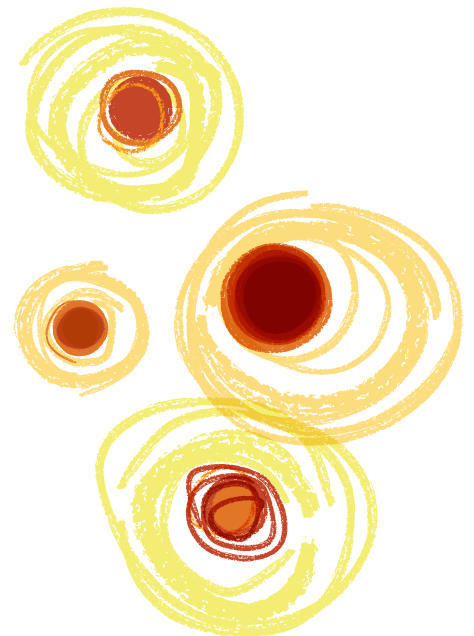
Relying on the expertise of grassroots youth networks of community leaders such as Alyssa Carpenter also ensured that there was a strong representation of Northern youth voices during the gathering. Northern youth indicated that there is a great need for Northern youth and their communities to be included in decision making that ultimately affects their communities.



The initial gathering was planned with the advice and expertise of Indigenous youth and community leaders. The gathering was led and developed by Indigenous youth. Also Indigenous youth led the research and writing of this report because Indigenous youth will be the ones that will either benefit or be disadvantaged from the creation of Bill S-210.

One of the most important parts of working together as a community is creating a standard and ethic for how we will work together. This helps set a tone of respect and understanding for the community that has come together to work on a project. It also creates a standard that the community is accountable to. Below is the Community Agreement that participants created together:

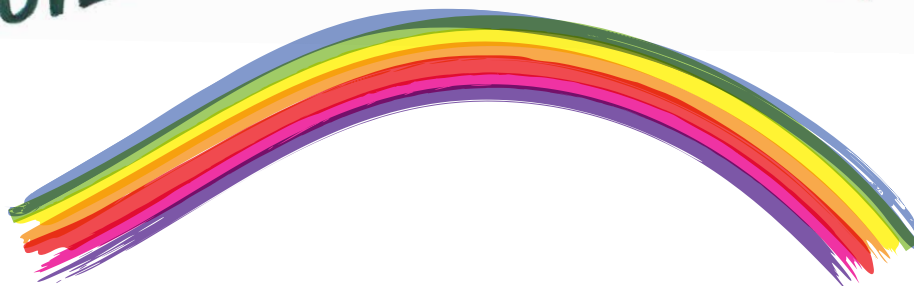
- Accessible Language (plain English, for example)
- Be Truthful
- One Speaker at a Time
- Reciprocity
- Honour Each Others Personal Experiences
- Respect
 - Respect Pronouns
 - Respect Each Other's Idea and Thoughts
 - Respect Confidentiality
- Take Frequent Breaks
- Lead With Kindness
- Acknowledge Each Other When Sharing
- Create Time and Space for Everyone to Share
- Sharing Trauma is not a Requirement
- Practise Consent
- Challenge When Needed
- Ask for Help
- Be Deadly!



Participants were presented with Bill S-210, the Briefing from the Caring Society, literature regarding Indigenous Child and Youth Advocacy as well as International Child and Youth friendly frameworks before continuing on to participate in facilitated breakout rooms.

Consent is a very important part of research and engagement with Indigenous youth. Indigenous youth were invited to participate in this gathering by their peers and from community members who have built relationships of trust. Prior to engaging and gathering any information from Indigenous youth, all participants were asked if they felt comfortable moving forward with the breakout sessions and if they felt that an Indigenous Youth Accountability Mechanism was needed, be that in a commissioner model or another model. All answered with an overwhelming yes, and we proceeded with the consent of all the participants. Mental health supports were also a part of the gathering because even though consent is given, there is a responsibility from the researchers and facilitators to ensure that there are supports especially if the discussions are triggering and/or very personal.

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

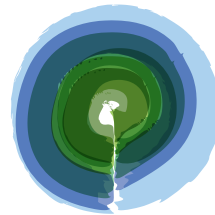


QUESTIONS ASKED


Indigenous youth were invited to participate in three breakout rooms to answer the following questions: Define Accountability, What Does Accountability Look Like? and Application of Accountability. Defining accountability from the perspective of Indigenous youth may look drastically different than defining accountability for non-Indigenous youth due to historical and contemporary injustices perpetrated by the Canadian government itself. After defining accountability, participants were asked to envision what their understandings of accountability could look like in action. Lastly, participants were then asked to think about existing models and best practises of accountability.



Define Accountability
What Does Accountability Look Like?
Application of Accountability



INITIAL SUMMARY



"This accountability mechanism has to love and care for Indigenous youth and children the same way that we do."

— Grassroots Indigenous youth

All of the participants in the gathering agreed that there is a strong need for an Indigenous Youth Accountability Mechanism. However, it became clear in the gathering that Indigenous youth do not see the values and principles of Indigenous communities reflected in Bill S-210, nor do they believe their needs and rights will be addressed through this Bill.

Some initial concerns regarding Bill S-210 that were raised are: Indigenous youth and children seemed to be an afterthought, a lack of understanding of Indigenous rights which have been held by our communities since time immemorial, a lack of authority to hold governments accountable and individuals holding a national child commissioner role which may not support the diversity requirements and needs of Indigenous communities. These concerns, as well as requirements to move forward, will be examined further in this report.

Participants had in-depth conversations about what accountability means to them, how it should look moving forward and types of mechanisms they might want to see. This is the start of many important conversations to be had on the topic of accountability. Youth indicated that they would like to see regional conversations and to establish an ongoing network to share best practises and critical discussions on the topic of accountability.

The following page is an illustrated report of the discussions that took place.

Rights of Indigenous Youth & Children...

Canada has and continues to abuse Indigenous children & youth

- inequitable funding
- non-compliance of Canada/provinces to fulfill human rights tribunal or Jordan's Principle

JORDAN'S PRINCIPLE

INUIT CHILDREN 1ST INITIATIVE

Legislations that are supposed to guarantee same access as non-Indigenous children...

No protection for Métis children...

BILL S-210

- No binding mechanism
- Indigenous Youth not consulted

Is this bill just an official way to continue violation of rights?...

Canada only reports approved Jordan's Principle's cases... **No TRANSPARENCY** on how many/who they deny...

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

instead of

- #s based reports
- 1 hour consultations
- Reports that sit on shelves
- Worker burnout...

Value qualitative methodologies!

address power dynamics

Remove barriers to grassroots leadership

Provide long term funding...

stop making us fight for survival!

government ask: What would REURCITY look like to grassroots? ... over-worked & under-resourced!!!

acknowledge how decision-makers have harmed us!!!

Why aren't you supporting 1000 youth!?

WE KNOW how to take care of OURSELVES

Colonial government does not!

IMPLEMENT MANY EXISTING REPORTS

take ACTION make mistakes, learn, & do better!!!

Believe youth! #LAND BACK

What does ACCOUNTABILITY to INDIGENOUS YOUTH look like?

National Child & Youth Frameworks

THEMES of other

- meaningful participation of children & youth
- Holistic: Welfare -> Well-being
- Integrate participation of youth across all levels of government, sectors, & civil society

Community Specific accountability

- INCLUDE MORE NORTHERN VOICE
- SHARE CROSS-REGIONALLY
- Within communities we listen to children & youth...
- implementing what we already know!
- existing reports!

Centre children & youth in all spaces!!!

ombudsperson is always a middle-aged white man saving the children

Reproducing ...

- modern Indian Agent
- White savior complex

We all have a role in community accountability & CARE...

as a mother how can I be accountable to future generations?

colonial patriarchal power dynamics... Defines accountability as...

When I flood your community how much \$ do I owe you

Language shapes our understanding

We all have RESPONSIBILITY to an Inherent ethical Standard!

ENGLISH language of acquisition & things

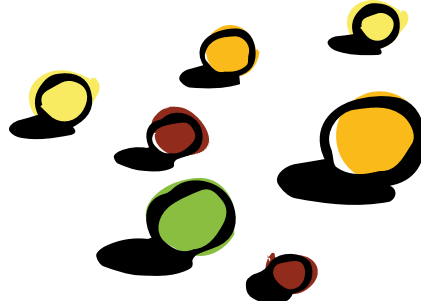
ANISHINAABEMOWIN language of relationships, recognition of life/spirit, & Verbs

THEMES

Define Accountability

Indigenous youth defined six determinants of what accountability should look and feel like for them and their communities. These six determinants of accountability are as follows and are further elaborated on in this section.

- Responsibility
- Safety
- Respect
- Reciprocity
- Relational
- Integrity



Indigenous youth have chosen to use accountability rather than “rights promoter,” which is listed as one of the mandates of the Child Commissioner. This is because Canada is long overdue in honouring inherent Indigenous rights, as demonstrated by generations and over 150 years of reports and recommendations that Indigenous peoples have provided to Canadians. Indigenous youth and children need action and it is urgent.

Despite Canadian Human Rights Tribunal rulings, Canada continues to discriminate against First Nations children and youth specifically.⁹ These human rights violations are founded and it is beyond the point of advocacy, rights promotion and the power to report. There must be accountability for those in positions of power that demonstrate prejudice and racism towards Indigenous peoples as well as accountability for the decades of broken promises on behalf of Canadian governments. The bleak reality is that government inaction and its ongoing violations of the rights of Indigenous youth and children, has resulted in harms and

⁹ https://fncaringsociety.com/sites/default/files/2020_chrt_36_information_sheet_jr_update.pdf

high mortality rates in Indigenous communities.¹⁰ In 2019, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal found that Canada continues its “willful and reckless” discrimination against First Nations children in ways that harms First Nations children and families, and contributes to the deaths of some First Nations children.¹¹

Responsibility

Being accountable cannot be a gesture or a good idea that will be implemented incrementally. Instead, governments and organizations need to look at accountability as a responsibility. If governments and organizations feel they are responsible for the safety and wellbeing of Indigenous children and youth then preventative measures would be put in place to create safety before harm is even a question.



Rights of Indigenous Youth & Children ...

Canada has and continues to abuse Indigenous Children & Youth

Safety

While safety and protection is recognized as a basic child right, Indigenous youth and children continue to experience discrimination at the hands of governments and are left without this very basic right to live.¹² During the gathering, safety was an important focus. Indigenous youth and children should feel safe in their everyday lives, this includes access to safe

10 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/82-003-x/2019012/article/00001-eng.htm>

11 <https://fncaringociety.com/publications/victory-first-nations-children-and-families-tribunal-orders-compensation-2019-chrt-39>

12 <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx>

drinking water, safe living conditions, safe food, safe health and mental health services and they should feel safe when speaking out about their concerns.

UN Declaration on the Rights of the Child, Article 6 states:

- 1 Parties recognize that every child has the inherent right to life.
- 2 Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child.¹³

Respect

Indigenous youth and children are the experts of their lives and they wanted to be treated as such. Exploiting and tokenizing Indigenous youth and children is disrespectful. Not allowing Indigenous peoples to speak their traditional languages on their homelands is disrespectful.



Reciprocity

Reciprocity is a foundational philosophical view of many Indigenous nations. This is a land-based philosophical perspective that has lived with many Indigenous nations for thousands of years and it continues to live in Indigenous communities today. Reciprocity means sharing in good faith and giving back when needed. The relationship between Indigenous communities and governments is often extractive.¹⁴ Research and consultations need to be reciprocal.

¹³ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

¹⁴ https://fnccaringociety.com/sites/default/files/indigenous_youth_voices_a_way_forward_in_conducting_research_with_and_by_indigenous_youth.pdf

"Relationship-building and a sense of reciprocity must be the cornerstone of research. Indigenous youth made it clear that researchers must have a sense of responsibility and accountability that extends beyond the limitations of a specific research project. This includes building trusting and meaningful relationships before research begins to ensure that relationships are maintained past the end of the research. Indigenous youth see this as an important mechanism in ensuring that researchers begin to value and define youth for their resilience and successes."

– Ethical Research Engagement with Indigenous Youth: Seven Requirements¹⁵

Relational

Relationships are vital. The fate and wellbeing of Indigenous children and youth are often subject to whomever is in power. Therefore, the federal government must commit to centring its relationships with Indigenous communities and the wellbeing of Indigenous children and youth over electoral terms and mandates. A part of transforming relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and nations must involve accountability, justice and equity. Indigenous youth and communities have been carrying the weight of reconciliation and repairing the damages done by colonization for decades. Indigenous youth today want to see those that have enabled harm toward their communities meet them at least half way towards their goals.

To build an accountability mechanism, it's important to build relationships. Relationships have to develop past memoranda and contracts, relationships are similar to how one builds a good reputation.

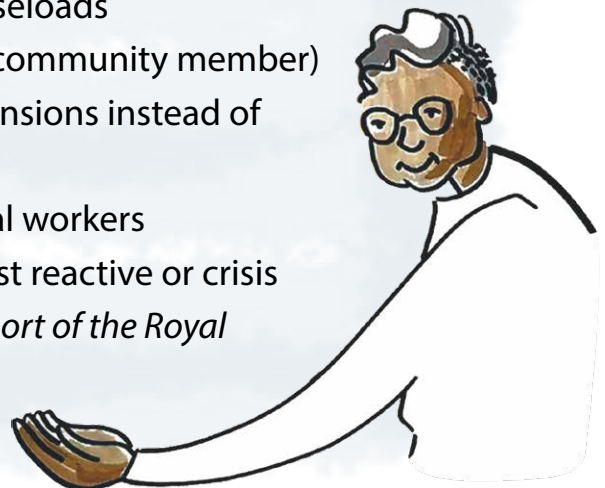
¹⁵ <https://yellowheadinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/iyv-factsheet-research-with-indigenous-youth-1.pdf>

Trust and consistency are very important to maintain good relationships and reputation but these are often disregarded due to the constantly changing government mandates and leadership.

A prime example of this is Indigenous youth who have been impacted by the child welfare system. While Canadians consider reconciliation for the Residential School era, ongoing oppression and violence is happening in the removal of Indigenous children and youth and being institutionalized in the child welfare system. Many of these young people experience a sense of deep loss and disconnection, racism and abuse due to the lack of accountability and justice within the child welfare system.

A few indicators of justice and accountability, defined by a group of First Nations Youth In Care in a 2019 report entitled Justice, Equity and Culture: The First-Ever YICC Gathering of First Nations Youth Advisors were:

- cultural competency of social services and follow-up audits of competency led by Indigenous youth in care
- accountability for foster families who are not treating youth well and liability for abuse experienced by youth in care
- more social workers with smaller caseloads
- a community notary (trusted Elder/community member) to help mediate family issues and tensions instead of restraining orders
- more engagement of youth by social workers
- more preventative measures (not just reactive or crisis management) as detailed in the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*¹⁶



¹⁶ https://www.a7g.ca/uploads/9/9/9/1/99918202/38228_chrt_compensation_report_v5_final.pdf

Integrity

Integrity speaks highly to prevention of harm and abuse. Individuals moving forward with a youth accountability mechanism must have a deep sense of integrity. Integrity is a hard value to gauge, however some suggestions were presented by Indigenous youth to gauge an individual's integrity:

- Centring children and youth
- Centring survivors (residential school survivors, Sixties Scoop survivors, sexual abuse survivors, survivors of child welfare, etc.)
- Indigenous-led
- Community appointed
- Honesty
- Highly recommended by children and youth
- Ability to receive feedback and improve from criticism

These values and attitudes are an ethical standard for a potential accountability mechanism and these ethics must be upheld in a very sensitive way so that Indigenous youth can trust the accountability process.



WHAT DOES ACCOUNTABILITY LOOK LIKE?

Many Indigenous youth and communities feel that they have never seen the federal, provincial or territorial governments being held accountable, despite the generations of reports, legal decisions and human rights findings.¹⁷ The Canadian government is seen doing business as usual despite findings of discrimination against First Nations children.¹⁸ All levels of government have failed to address in any substantive way the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's findings of cultural genocide and calls to transform its relationships with Indigenous peoples.¹⁹ Indigenous peoples have very little faith in existing colonial methods and models of accountability without mechanisms to hold governments responsible. There is a foundation of trust that is needed before a process of accountability can take place.

There have been countless reports, inquiries, recommendations, calls to action, agreements and treaties made between Indigenous peoples and all levels of governments that have been ignored or forgotten. Indigenous youth are concerned that the proposed National Child Commissioner will simply be building upon broken and discriminatory relationships, especially when the Bill does not consider ways that the Commissioner itself and any recommendations it makes would be binding and promote accountability. The way forward is not only focusing on the problems that exist today, but addressing how the problems were created due to a continued lack of accountability within government policies.



17 <https://fncaringsociety.com/history-inequity>

18 <https://fncaringsociety.com/i-am-witness>

19 <https://yellowheadinstitute.org/trc/>

A few reports that have full lists of reports, recommendations as well as treaties and agreements between the Crown and Indigenous Nations are:


*A Roadmap to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Call to Action #66, Section 3.3, Review of Select Literature, pages 44–47*²⁰

*Land Back: Indigenous Youth Leading the Way in Indigenous Sovereignty, A Timeline of Unhonoured Treaties and Broken Promises, pages 6–11*²¹

Accountability for Indigenous youth means a mechanism that accepts the truths of Indigenous youth and holds perpetrators of harmful behaviours accountable. Harm is often caused by a system or person that abuses the power they have over someone or a group of people with little to no recourse. Any accountability mechanism must consider the systemic ways that a person, institution or system holds power over the people it harms.

Furthermore, accountability cannot simply “react” after a harm is caused or experienced.

Accountability mechanisms must lay the groundwork for harm prevention, from domestic abuse to systemic violence, in order to address the structural interventions that are required to move towards the holistic wellbeing of Indigenous youth.



“An accountability process looks like a set of values a person adheres to which are created by the community and co-created with the person going through the accountability process.”
– Grassroots Indigenous youth

20 <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/599307a5f5e231b361442225/t/5c675b67e79c705013d3a8ae/1550277485617/FINAL+%282%29-+Indigenous+Youth+Voices+-+Roadmap+to+TRC+66+-+Compressed.pdf>

21 https://www.a7g.ca/uploads/9/9/9/1/99918202/reimagine_playbook_0.pdf

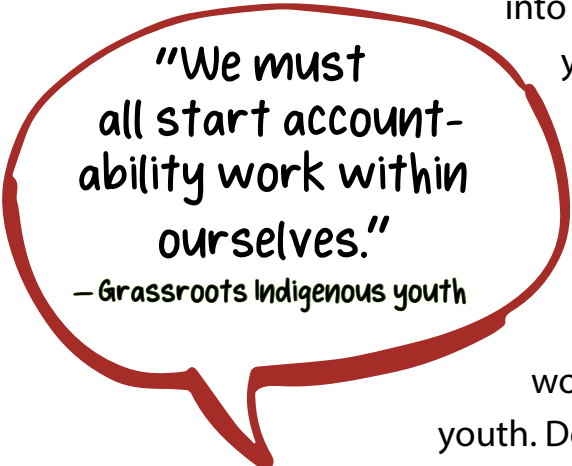
Best practices of accountability have to be led by Indigenous communities. Each community is unique, with specific needs, protocols and histories. Accountability must be designed specifically by each community; however, communities should come together to advocate for federal and provincial accountability.

Indigenous youth also spoke to the need to hold their own communities accountable. Many existing political structures are built from a colonial lens and therefore inherently carry many harmful aspects of colonization within themselves. The same standards of accountability have to also be applied to Indigenous communities and organizations.

Application of Accountability

Due to the traumatic histories and current realities of Indigenous youth, grassroots groups do not trust that the Canadian government will take

into consideration the barriers of Indigenous youth when developing projects, supports or services. Grassroots Indigenous groups continue to be overburdened and overwhelmed with the real world trauma they encounter in their work and are left understaffed to take on the



**"We must
all start account-
ability work within
ourselves."**

— Grassroots Indigenous youth

work of meaningfully supporting Indigenous youth. Despite the amount of reports that have been released that highlight the needs of Indigenous youth and what is required for engagement to be meaningful, the government continues to utilize numbers-based approaches over long-term impacts to define and measure success. Relying on the number of people reached (quantitative data) or how funding is spent to measure the success of a program continues to perpetuate colonial values as the standard for Indigenous peoples. Furthermore, government employees

lack cultural understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and enter communities for a short period of time for reporting purposes and do not follow up with the community.

So, how can government and organizations be held accountable for measuring success without replicating harmful powerful dynamics? It starts with:

1. Recognizing that Indigenous youth are more than a number or a price tag. Measuring success within federal

systems requires approaches that move beyond numbers and data towards qualitative methods that measure wellbeing of Indigenous youth in outcomes. This must be integrated into all frameworks, programs and policies. Space needs to be intentionally created for grassroots groups to have equal voices within the development and delivery of every government program, with

qualitative measures being community-driven. Representation of Indigenous youth within these systems needs to be not only funded but meaningfully supported. Policies and programs need to decolonize the idea that there is a monetary value for Indigenous youth and look at the quality of life and improvement for them, their families, and communities. In order for Indigenous communities to move beyond “reaction mode,” the government must shift from one-time funding opportunities towards funding that supports intergenerational approaches that fosters community wellness.



2. Grassroots Indigenous-led education and training. Despite ongoing efforts to educate and train government agencies, organizations and educational institutions, there continues to be

a lack of understanding and follow-up on education and training sessions. Indigenous youth would like to have more control over this training as well as evaluations for agencies, organizations and institutions that undergo cultural sensitivity training or anti-oppression training. Training and education should be led and delivered by Indigenous youth themselves and not rely on National Indigenous Organizations as this is a conflict of interest in many cases.



It is important to acknowledge that Indigenous people feel that we must move beyond education and training. While this is a good first step, action must follow. One example of this is the Youth Services Evaluations²² that A7G is currently conducting with youth-serving organizations. Evaluations are a way to see how well an agency or organization is doing after they have done training. This is a step towards accountability and evaluating how well an agency or organization is meeting the needs of Indigenous youth and children.

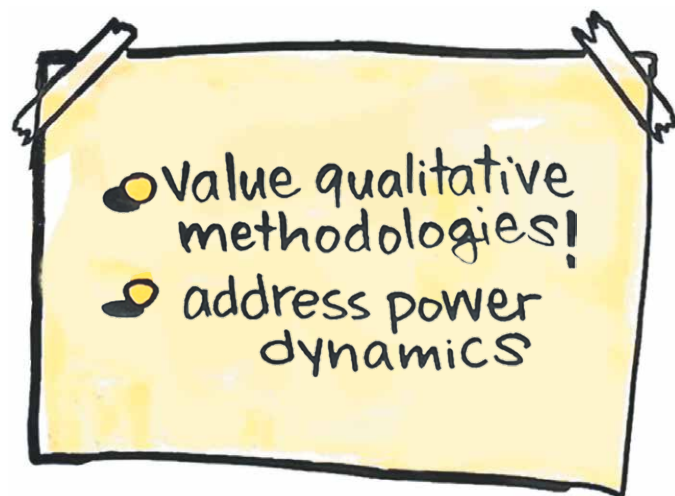
This also brings us back to the requirements from the Roadmap to the TRC Call to Action #66, in particular the Code of Ethics and Network Panel. The Panel is intended to recommend Indigenous youth experts on specific topics, these experts would then be recommended to agencies and organizations to improve their relationships with Indigenous youth and children. This Panel would also be recommended to advise on areas such as policy changes, funding

22 https://www.a7g.ca/uploads/9/9/9/1/99918202/79002_youth_services_eval_overview_v4.pdf

proposals and program development. This gives space and room for Indigenous youth to better guide the work that affects them. Having Indigenous youth work together as a network or collective group eliminates the burden of tokenization and offers better support to youth that might feel uncomfortable in colonial spaces.

If culture and language is valued then the principles and values of Indigenous communities must be the end result of this work.

3. Indigenizing approaches to community engagement and relationship building. Evaluations of the success of programs policies, and services must be developed by and for Indigenous communities. Government agencies must ask themselves “what are we doing wrong?” and listen to the feedback from Indigenous youth on changes needed for meaningful engagement that goes beyond checking off a box. Governments and organizations need to list short- and long-term actions items with how the community and youth will be involved in implementing them, and any next steps should be specific and identified with Indigenous youth, with reasonable time frames established. To ensure effective changes are made, active evaluation needs to take place on what is being implemented and if it is working as the needs of Indigenous youth and communities is fluid and ever changing.



4. Cross collaboration between organizations. Grassroots groups should lead the work and facilitate future discussions, holding space to bring people together as a living form of accountability that doesn't operate in silos, but spreads across different regions, organizations, and communities. Organizations need to shift from viewing one another as competition and work together more authentically, sharing wise practices on ways to accomplish each other's goals and meet the needs of Indigenous youth.

REQUIREMENTS TO MOVE FORWARD

The message and direction from Indigenous youth during the gathering was clear. A National Children's Commissioner in its current proposed state would not address the concerns or needs of Indigenous children and youth. However, despite the longstanding legacy of broken promises from the Canadian government, Indigenous youth are still hopeful. Indigenous youth are hesitant yet continue to be open to working on repairing relationships. The following are the requirements for moving forward to determine the best model of accountability for Indigenous youth.

- Establish a network of best practises, led by grassroots youth leaders and groups from different regions, in the spirit of TRC Call to Action 66.

This looks like:

- Indigenous communities defining and measuring what success means to them.
- Educating Indigenous youth on their rights as Indigenous young peoples.
- Ensuring there is space for Indigenous youth to participate in matters that affect them.
- Decentralizing power and moving towards non-hierarchical leadership.
- Creating a network that centralizes the safety and wellbeing of Indigenous youth and children.
- Grassroots youth leading education and training with the Code of Ethics Panel.
- Research led and developed by Indigenous youth and children in keeping with the Research and Knowledge Translation and the report, *A Way Forward in Conducting Research With and by Indigenous Youth*.
- Must include Northern and rural youth and children as well as gender-diverse and LGBTQ2S+ youth and children.

- A call to action to Canadian governments (including the Senate) to read, understand and implement existing reports, recommendations, treaties and literature by Indigenous communities and youth.

This looks like:

- Addressing existing reports, inquiries before making new ones.
- More action and movement on existing reports, recommendations, etc. especially those coming directly from community and Indigenous youth and children.
- Actions directly from recommendations and call to actions from reports listed in this report as well as and follow up from those recommendations and calls to action.
- Open communication with those implementing actions.



- Accountability and justice from harmful systems and structures.

This looks like:

- Legislative changes to address systemic racism and inequities.
- Halting known problematic systems.
- Youth wellbeing, best interests and improvement is centered. Limiting the wellbeing of youth based on government financial considerations and budgets is deprioritized.
- Federal government fully commits to making systemic and lifelong change, not placing a price tag on Indigenous childhoods.
- Move beyond election mandates (four-year mandates) to measure progress and commit to goals.

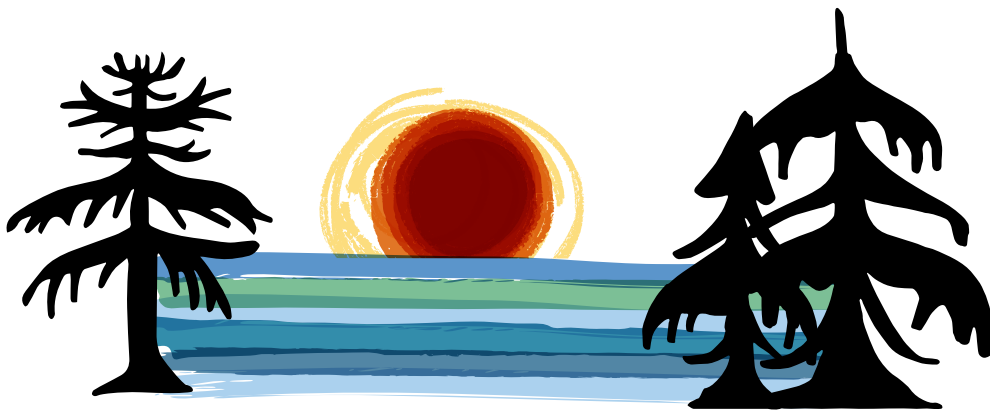
- Prior to establishing a National Children’s Commissioner, Indigenous youth must be ethically engaged in the decision making process.

This looks like:

- Holding regional gatherings with Indigenous youth.
- Research following the guidelines from A Way Forward: Ethical Engagement with and by Indigenous Youth.
- Discussions regarding a National Children’s Commissioner are not predetermined.
- Indigenous youth and children need space to determine what the best Youth Accountability Mechanism will look like.

CLOSING WORDS

This is just the beginning of important work that must continue. Indigenous youth and children deserve justice and reparations for the harm that continues to impact daily lives. Indigenous youth deserve accountability and responsibility from the federal government, as well as all levels of government. The federal government has a deep responsibility to meaningfully engage in this accountability work, however it must be led by Indigenous youth and children and their trusted allies. Therefore, it is the intentions of A7G, the Caring Society, and all youth involved in this initial report that we continue building relationships amongst ourselves and ensure that we continue fighting for the rights of Indigenous children and youth to be respected and honoured.



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