
A “Community First” Approach to Indigenous Research: The National Centre for Collaboration in Indigenous Education

FINAL DRAFT

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for



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Executive Summary

This report shares findings from the four-year project, the National Centre for Collaboration in Indigenous Education (NCCIE), related to its approach, process, strengths, and challenges so that others may learn from NCCIE's experiences. NCCIE has been an opportunity to “learn through sharing” on many levels, using an Indigenous approach grounded in principles that place “communities first” in how decisions are made and how the work of the project is undertaken. The project has applied Indigenous research principles and has framed “research” as “gathering stories” and “information gathering” rather than conventional, academic research per se.

The purpose of this report is to unpack the “Community First” principle that has guided NCCIE's work and to share with others who may wish to pursue similar projects how the project unfolded. Specifically, this paper examines what “Indigenous research” that places “communities first” looks like. How has NCCIE manifested Indigenous principles of *respect, relationship, and reciprocity* in its daily practice?

The information shared in this report is the result of learning-through-doing and offered in the spirit of openness to learn from one other. While some of the report's contents may point to challenges experienced in specific parts of Canada, the intent is not to point fingers but to learn from NCCIE's experiences. While NCCIE has realized great success in building relationships and in producing a website replete with Indigenous education stories and teaching resources, its process has not been without challenges and missteps. Those involved in the project humbly acknowledge this as well as how much we have learned during the project's four-year journey. In the spirit of respect and reciprocity, we wish to share what we have learned so that others who follow can approach their work with open eyes, ears, and hearts, avoiding some of NCCIE's challenges and building upon its successes.

What is the “Community First” approach?

To understand the “Community First” approach taken by NCCIE, it is important to acknowledge that “community” in this sense refers to the “Indigenous community” in all its various facets. To be clear, there is no one, singular Indigenous community. First, the use of the word “Indigenous” is in no way intended to make generalizations about the distinctness and diversity of the original Peoples of Canada or the world. It is meant to be inclusive of First Nations, Métis, Inuit, non-status Indians, and other rights holder classifications. Second, use of the term “community” refers to Indigenous individuals and groups wherever they are – on- or off-reserve, urban, rural, or remote. NCCIE has partnered with hundreds of “Indigenous communities” – whoever they may be – individuals, schools, First Nations, organizations, or community groups – putting them first to guide the particular endeavour on which they are collaborating. Hence, “Community First” means:

- A project is Indigenous-led and guided by Elders
- It is strengths-based and relationship-based
- The will of the community is respected above all else
- Rather than pursuing a researcher's interests, be guided by the community's interests and needs
- More time, than less, is needed to build and strengthen relationships and to conduct the work of the project
- Community ethics processes are respected and approvals are obtained before proceeding.
 - If approval is not given, the decision is respected without question

- Community protocols are respected, such as presenting tobacco or a gift, depending in whose territory one is working
- The principles of ownership, control, access, and possession (OCAP) are honoured
- An honorarium or gift is given to compensate the person or organization for their participation, time, and knowledge
 - It is often recommended to ask the person or organization how they prefer to be compensated or where they would like a gift or honorarium directed
- The principle of reciprocity can take many forms
 - Reciprocity is shown when accepting direction from the community as to what they need and what they would like to research
- Capacity-building opportunities are provided for members of the community during the course of the project
- Being humble and being accountable to the community
- “Research from an Indigenous perspective mirrors how we are meant to be and relate to and with others in this world.”¹

Strengths of the NCCIE experience

- NCCIE has given regional teams the **flexibility** and **autonomy** over decisions about the process each could follow to fulfill project objectives
- NCCIE has been **strengths-based** and **holistic** in its view of Indigenous education
- The Indigenous approach taken, respecting “**research as ceremony**” (an adaptation of the title of the book (2008), *Research is Ceremony*, by Shawn Wilson), has allowed regional teams the time necessary to develop relationships, build trust, honour culturally-appropriate protocols, and respect the knowledge being shared
- The **capacity-building** aspect of the project has given students, youth, and community members on regional teams an opportunity to develop skills in interviewing, working with technology, cultural protocols, and more
- **Face-to-face meetings** – in the form of regional workshops and national gatherings – have brought people together to explore their common interests in strengthening Indigenous education
- The “**Community First**” approach has contributed to the overall success of NCCIE, grounding the project in respect and humility
- Regional Teams have been given **ample financial and administrative support** and have appreciated processing invoices and expense reimbursements through a third-party organization rather than a university Finance Department
- An **effective communication strategy** has been implemented to share information with Regional Teams and to communicate back and forth on issues
- The **website** has become an excellent resource, showcasing the work of the project

Challenges regarding time, trust, and respect

- It is important to respect the diversity in Indigenous education organizations and hierarchies in the territory(ies) in which one is working and to **avoid a pan-Indigenous approach**. Each People and culture are unique and require individualized approaches
- Even with four years, NCCIE experienced **time constraints**, given the federal year-end of March 31 as well as academic demands on students’ and Regional Leads’ time

¹ Tyler Armstrong, NCCIE Research Associate, Personal Communication. November 26, 2019.

- Obtaining ethics approvals from the academic institution as well as communities took significant **time**
- Community members' **time** was often limited due to their responsibilities at work and at home
- Community emergencies or weather sometimes **delayed scheduled meetings**
- Because of the scale of the project, regional teams had to **limit the reach of the project**. They would have liked to have connected with every corner of their province/territory/region, but were unable to do so due to time and logistical constraints
- Research Associates (RAs) who had **no prior research experience** had a steeper learning curve than those with prior research experience
- Non-Indigenous RAs who had **no pre-existing relationships** with Indigenous organizations had to rely on their Regional Leads for introductions
- An Indigenous RA who was a victim of the 60's scoop was **"triggered"** when attempts to connect with an Indigenous educator or organization went unanswered. This individual eventually gave up and left the project.
- **COVID** significantly impacted the fourth year's efforts in knowledge mobilization

Challenges regarding administration, capacity-building, and technology

- Additional training for RAs and Regional Leads on the **Data Entry Portal and Quality Assurance requirements** would have been beneficial
- **Technical issues** (for example, those related to "required fields" and "saving" work in the "Portal") caused regional teams stress
- The **lesson plan template** used in Year Three were first seen as daunting and complicated. Upon completion of the work, however, the value in approaching lesson plan development from an Indigenous perspective was seen, justifying the length of the template
- **Safety** was identified as an issue when RAs had to travel long distances for interviews
- Some regions were extremely large and **travel to remote areas** difficult
- **Communication** with regions about administrative expectations and project details were streamlined after the first-year of operations to reduce the number of meetings and emails

Learnings for Indigenous Research

- Each People and culture are unique and require individualized approaches
- Flexibility and autonomy within regional teams are beneficial in a decentralized, national project
- More time, than less, is required for Indigenous research
- It is important to have sufficient and on-going training and technical support throughout the project for all aspects of the work involved
- Mental health support is essential for researchers to have access to if difficulties or "triggering events" arise
- Streamlined and effective communication is essential between project management and project teams
- If travel is required, safety issues need to be addressed (e.g., travel in pairs, emergency contacts, etc.)
- Ample financial and administrative support is key
- A "Community First" approach leads to strengthened relationships and mutually beneficial Indigenous research

Many more learnings are explored in the ensuing pages. Please read the full report for details.

A “Community First” Approach to Indigenous Research: The National Centre for Collaboration in Indigenous Education

“Research from an Indigenous perspective mirrors how we are meant to be and relate to and with others in this world.”

Tyler Armstrong, NCCIE Research Associate, Northwest Ontario Regional Team

The National Centre for Collaboration in Indigenous Education (NCCIE) has been an opportunity to “learn through sharing” on many levels, using an Indigenous approach grounded in principles that place “communities first” in how decisions are made and how the work of the project is undertaken. NCCIE has applied Indigenous research principles and has framed the “research” of the project as “gathering stories” and “information gathering” rather than academic research per se. The purpose of this paper is to unpack the “Community First” principle that has guided NCCIE’s work and to share with others who may wish to pursue similar projects how the project unfolded. Specifically, this paper examines what “Indigenous research” that places “communities first” looks like. How has NCCIE manifested Indigenous principles of *respect, relationship, and reciprocity* in its daily practice? First, the origins and organization of NCCIE are presented, outlining the set-up, structure, and process of the four-year project. Next, based on comments from regional teams, the national team, and community members, the strengths of the project’s approach and procedural challenges are discussed.

Introduction

In 2017, First Nations University of Canada (FNU) founded the National Centre for Collaboration in Indigenous Education (NCCIE), a four-year project aimed at amplifying community voices and strengthening Indigenous education across Canada. The Chanie Wenjack School for Indigenous Studies at Trent University partnered with FNU to advance the ‘action research’ of the project, the result of which is the widely accessible website, www.nccie.ca, where anyone interested in Indigenous education can discover stories about Indigenous education initiatives as well as freely available teaching resources that have been created with an Indigenous lens.

Approximately 275 individuals participated on regional and national teams, contributing their time and energy to the work of NCCIE during the project’s four years. This does not include the scores of First Nations, Inuit, Métis, and Indigenous persons who agreed to participate in the project and collaborate with regional teams from coast to coast to coast. With their consent and involvement, over 650 ‘stories’ about Indigenous education initiatives have been gathered; over 100 lesson plans have been created with an Indigenous lens; more than 60 videos and films have been produced; and a ‘library’ with approximately 300 resources has been generated. All of these resources and more are available on the [NCCIE website](http://www.nccie.ca), which is available in English and French.

How was the project funded? And, with such a large-scale, nation-wide project, how was all the work carried out? This paper details the “Community First” Indigenous approach taken by NCCIE, providing a roadmap of sorts for others who are interested in undertaking this or similar work. Also discussed are highlights from conversations with regional teams, community partners, and Elders who shared their insights and reflections on the strengths of the project, the challenges they faced, what they would have liked to have done differently.

Before embarking on this learning journey, a moment is needed to reflect on the words “Indigenous” and “communities.” The use of the word “Indigenous” is in no way intended to generalize about the distinctness and diversity of the original Peoples of Canada or the world. “Indigenous” is meant to be inclusive of First Nations, Métis, Inuit, non-status Indians and other rights holders’ classifications. In addition, throughout this paper and depending on the context, “Peoples” is capitalized to respect the distinctness and nationhood of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples. The word “communities” refers to Inuit, Métis, and First Nation groups – on- or off-reserve, urban, rural, or remote. Community partners collaborating with NCCIE may be individuals, schools, First Nations, or organizations.

Founding and Grounding the NCCIE in Indigenous Principles

The vision for NCCIE originated with FNUUniv, the Indigenous-led and Indigenous-controlled post-secondary learning institute in Saskatchewan, Canada. The founder of NCCIE, past President Dr. Mark S. Dockstator, saw the wealth of knowledge and learning opportunities in First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities and other “non-status Indian” groups across Canada, urban, rural, on- and off-reserve. He envisioned, and then secured funding for, a project to create a digital platform to amplify communities’ voices, letting them tell their own ‘stories’ about Indigenous education. Four questions were asked: 1. How do they describe Indigenous education? 2. What are examples of Indigenous education in action that they would like to share with others? 3. What is their vision for Indigenous education? 4. Besides funding, what resources do they need to achieve their vision?

NCCIE was originally framed as a “research” project because that is the terminology of both academe and funding agencies. As such, research ethics processes were respected and followed, from university Research Ethics Boards to First Nations communities and Indigenous organizations. From an Indigenous way of seeing, however, NCCIE was framed not as conventional “research” per se, but as an initiative to gather stories, amplify voices, and “learn through sharing.”

Figure 1 illustrates the Indigenous framework that guided the work of NCCIE. “Learning through Sharing” is the overarching goal that has taken many forms over the course of the project. Initially, the intent was to create the on-line platform so people could learn directly from each other. “Privileging Image” and “Amplifying Voice” are the video and audio recordings of people sharing their ‘stories’ about Indigenous education programs and initiatives situated in their communities, on-the-land, and in schools. Anyone interested in Indigenous education can access these recordings, listen and learn, and then connect directly with either the person or organization in a ‘story’ if they have questions and would like to learn more.

“Feeding” communities, giving back to them in the spirit of reciprocity and in gratitude for sharing with NCCIE, is evident in all the resources available on the NCCIE website. The website is free and accessible to all with the intention of supporting efforts to strengthen Indigenous education across Canada. To explore the many resources on the website, visit www.nccie.ca and wander through each tab and box. Videos and documentation to help guide visitors are available in [Website Tips](#) as well as the teachers’ resource guide, [Weaving Indigenous Education into Your Practice](#).

Figure 1: Indigenous Framework Guiding the NCCIE Project



Source: <https://www.nccie.ca/about-us/indigenous-education/>

Vision, Mission, and Project Mandate

Here are the vision and mission statements for NCCIE, which can be found on the NCCIE website, in the “[About Us](#)” section:

The vision of the project is to highlight innovative and exciting examples of Indigenous education from across the country, celebrating the dedicated work by communities to strengthen Indigenous education for all generations. NCCIE connects people at the grassroots level where education is delivered and knowledge is passed on.

The mission is to facilitate collaborative networking among communities, leaders, parents, educators, Elders, Knowledge Holders, practitioners, policy makers and researchers to advance the success of Indigenous education across Canada and to support efforts in reconciliation for all Canadians.²

Dr. Dockstator envisioned a collaborative undertaking to gather ‘stories’ about Indigenous education from as many places across Canada as possible, with FNUniv teaming up with other educational institutions around the country. The primary means of gathering these ‘stories’ was through regional teams that were set up coast-to-coast-to-coast. In all, 17 regional teams were established. The process to recruit Regional Leads, who then hired Research Associates (RAs) to carry out this work, is described in ensuing sections of this paper.

NCCIE Regional teams gathered ‘stories’ by interviewing educators and producing video and audio recordings to showcase the diversity and strength in Indigenous education across Canada.

² Retrieved from: <https://www.nccie.ca/about-us/vision-mission/>.

A [website](#) was created to be a digital platform for sharing these recordings and other resources about Indigenous education. Dr. Dockstator wanted the website to remain freely accessible to the public, for Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators and learners alike, and he made FNUUniv the home of [NCCIE.CA](#).

The collaborative work of the NCCIE regional teams provided an opportunity for youth and students to develop their skills and build confidence using technology, honouring protocols, arranging for and conducting interviews, and fulfilling post-interview responsibilities. Part of the mandate of Regional Leads was to train and mentor RAs in these skills, providing a capacity-building, hands-on learning experience for their team members. Regional Leads were also mandated to host workshops, bringing educators together (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) to discuss Indigenous education issues in their region and to present the work the RAs had done. In this way, the RAs also gained experience in preparing presentations and public speaking.

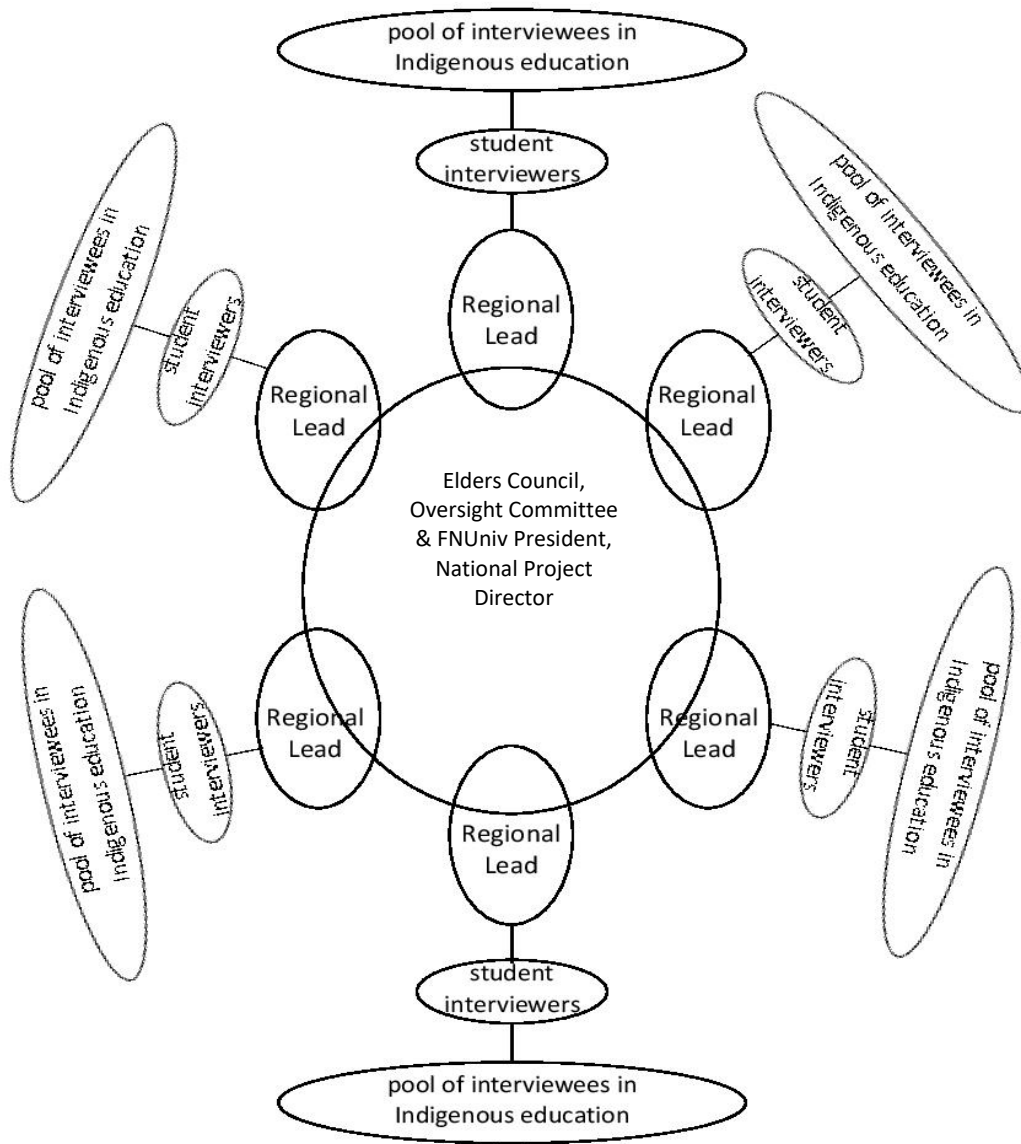
Another mandate of the project was to stage an annual national gathering. The national team planned and hosted the event each year,³ bringing Regional teams, community educators, and Elders together from across the country to showcase the progress of the project to date as well as discuss future directions for NCCIE to address key issues aimed at strengthening Indigenous education.

[Decentralized Structure of NCCIE](#)

Because the project is a national project, and Canada spans the entire continent, a decentralized approach to the project was taken. Giving regional teams the freedom to tailor their individual processes facilitated their ability to respect local and regional customs and protocols. Figure 2 illustrates NCCIE's decentralized nature.

³ In all, three national gatherings were held. Two were in-person, and the third was virtual due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 2: Decentralized Structure of NCCIE



The location of the regional hubs for each of the 17 teams is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Location of Regional Hubs



Strategic Decisions

ISC accepted the proposal in the summer of 2017, and the funds were transferred to FNUIn in August 2017. Already five months into the government fiscal year, the timing placed pressure on the project to produce the mandated deliverables by fiscal year end, March 31, 2018. Then-President Dr. Dockstator had to set up the project in such a way as to balance efficiency and expeditiousness with the time needed to respect Indigenous research principles, protocols, and ethics processes.

Because timing was tight from the outset, Dr. Dockstator made several strategic decisions in designing the organizational structure for the project. First, Dr. Dockstator acknowledged the importance of establishing a nation-wide organization for NCCIE, given the cross-country reach intended for the project. Even though FNUIn is centrally situated in Canada, geographically speaking, Dr. Dockstator recognized that a partnership with another Indigenous organization outside of Saskatchewan would reinforce NCCIE's collaborative and national approach as well

as increase NCCIE's standing across the country. He also recognized the significant workload inherent in such a large endeavour. Having a second organization to share the responsibilities and duties would be advantageous in this regard.

Second, Dr. Dockstator recognized the significant burden such a large project would place on the FNUUniv Finance Department, which is small in comparison to other post-secondary institutions. He anticipated several regional teams would be established, each with its own budget, set of contracts, and schedules. With so many moving parts, Dr. Dockstator decided to outsource to a third party the administration and budget tracking responsibilities for the numerous regional teams, rather than keeping it all in-house at FNUUniv, which would overwhelm the staff and impede movement of funds. FNUUniv's Finance Department would retain responsibility for budgetary obligations for the Saskatchewan region as well as the contractual obligations with FNUUniv's primary partners.

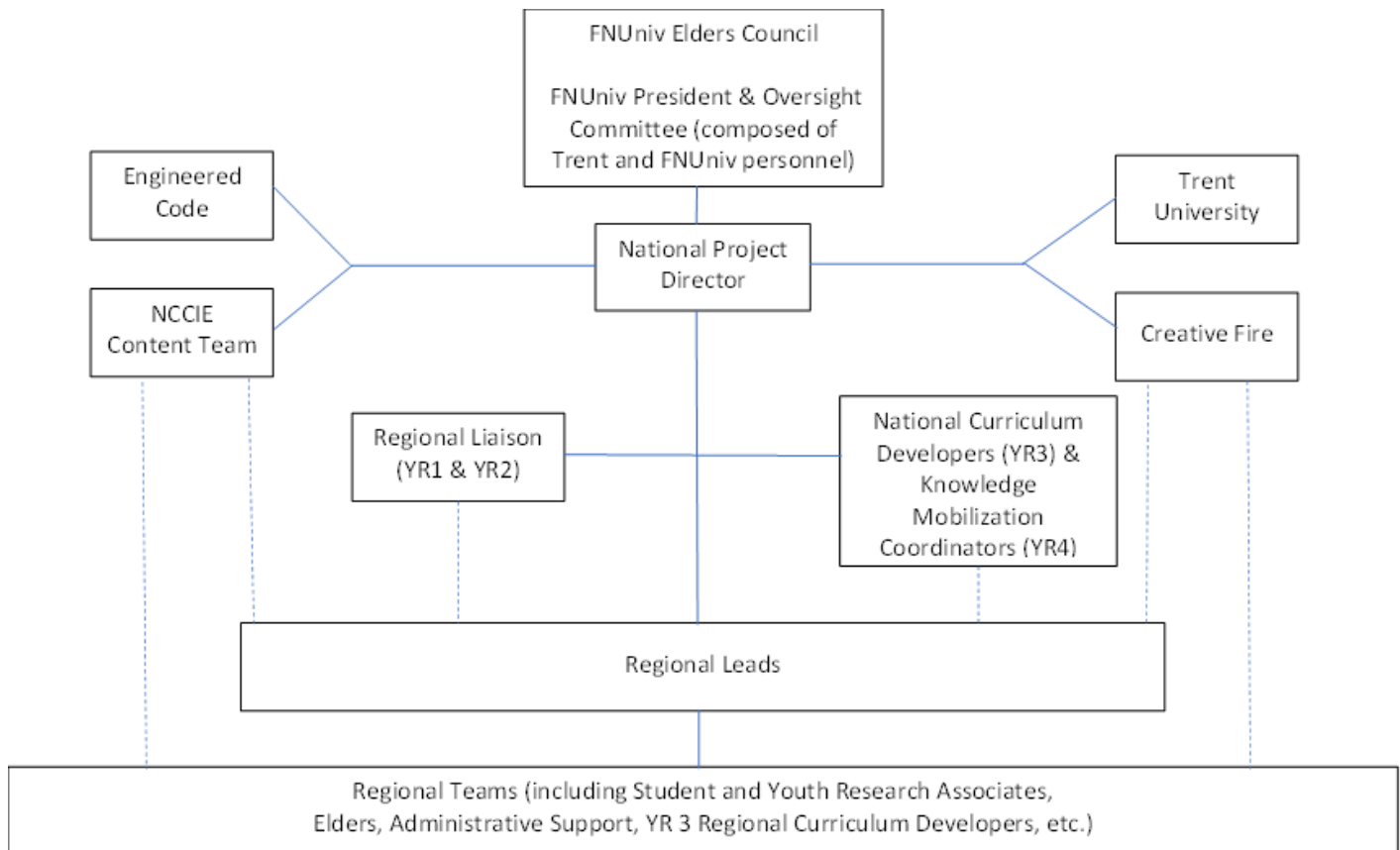
The Requests for Proposals (RFPs) issued from these decisions ensured a fair and equitable process to identify qualified partners that would be tasked with collaborating with FNUUniv to set up and implement the project mandate.

Organizational Structure, Roles, and Responsibilities

Three RFPs were issued. The three organizations selected to carry out different aspects of the project were Trent University Chanie Wenjack School for Indigenous Studies ("Trent University"), Creative Fire, and Engineered Code, as described below.

Once contracts were signed, the hard work of the project began in earnest. Each year had its own set of goals and objectives. The roles and responsibilities were divided among FNUUniv, Trent University, Creative Fire, and Engineered Code. In broad terms, Trent University was hired to direct the regional teams in their research and information gathering (other than Saskatchewan's team, which FNUUniv oversaw); Creative Fire was hired to produce all communications for the project as well as to support regions with contracts, budgeting, and expense reimbursement requirements, as well as to support FNUUniv in reporting requirements to ISC. Engineered Code was hired to develop and support the NCCIE website. FNUUniv provided overarching guidance for the project and directed the work of the Saskatchewan regional team. Roles and responsibilities of the partners and teams evolved accordingly and are detailed in Appendix A. Figure 4, below, illustrates NCCIE's organizational structures and support lines.

Figure 4: NCCIE Organizational Structure



Starting at the top of the diagram, the FNUiv Elders’ Council, *kêhtê-ayak*, guided the work of NCCIE at the national level. The FNUiv President and the Oversight Committee provided direction based on the Elders’ guidance. The National Project Director implemented the project according to this guidance and direction, communicating with the Regional Leads who, in turn, led their teams in conducting the work of the project and producing the deliverables. The National Director and Regional Leads were supported by the NCCIE Content Team, Regional Liaison, Creative Fire, and other resource people depending on the project’s objectives for the year. Also, with direction provided by the FNUiv President and the Oversight Committee, the National Director collaborated with Engineered Code, Trent University Chanie Wenjack School for Indigenous Studies (“Trent University”), and Creative Fire to fulfill the project mandate. Specific roles are described in more detail in Appendix A, which changed according to each year’s objectives.

Principles Grounding NCCIE

The concerted intent throughout NCCIE has been to conduct its “research” according to Indigenous research principles. If one had to label the approach from a western academic point of view, one could say the theoretical framework is Indigenous-led participatory action research. As many are aware, “research” was introduced to Indigenous Peoples in the 19th century and quickly gained a negative reputation among them for gross miscarriage of ethics through much of the 20th century (Thompson, 1859; Dalton, 2002). Much has been written about the appalling history of research that has been conducted *on* Indigenous Peoples and how to reframe research

according to Indigenous principles of *respect, relationship, and reciprocity* (Kovach, 2010; Smith, 2021; Steinhauer, 2002; Weber-Pillwax, 2001; Wilson, 2008). These principles have informed NCCIE’s “research” *by, for, and with* Indigenous Peoples. In fact, NCCIE has tried to downplay the “research” aspect of the project by presenting it in terms of “learning through sharing,” “amplifying voices,” “privileging imagery,” and “feeding communities” (as shown in Figure 1). Also, in discussing the project with prospective interviewees (and as articulated in consent forms), we emphasized that the information gathered (i.e., the recordings) would remain intact and unmanipulated.⁴

Several Indigenous principles have grounded the work of NCCIE. First, NCCIE is an **Indigenous-led** project in that First Nations University of Canada, NCCIE’s founding organization, is an Indigenous-owned and Indigenous-operated post-secondary learning institution. In addition, the Chanie Wenjack School for Indigenous Studies, the collaborating partner hired to lead the research process, has over 50 years of experience respecting an Indigenous lens in post-secondary education and research.

When FNUndiv founded NCCIE, the first step Past President Dr. Dockstator took was to discuss the project with kêtê-ayak, the **Elders’ Council** and seek their input. They approved of the concept and decided to begin the project with ceremony, with a pipe and a sweat, which are central cultural practices for many First Peoples in the prairies and elsewhere in Canada.⁵ The Elders and Knowledge Holders of kêtê-ayak have been kept informed of NCCIE’s progress and have provided important guidance and direction since the project’s inception. They also have produced original contributions to the project in the form of film documentaries and videos for the “[Knowledge Space](#).”

A foundational guiding principle for NCCIE has been the “**Community First**” principle. To understand the “Community First” approach taken by NCCIE, it is important to acknowledge that “community” in this sense refers to the “Indigenous community” in all its various facets. To be clear, there is no one, singular Indigenous community. First, the use of the word “Indigenous” is in no way intended to make generalizations about the distinctness and diversity of the original Peoples of Canada or the world. It is meant to be inclusive of First Nations, Métis, Inuit, non-status Indians, and other rights holder classifications. Second, use of the term “community” refers to Indigenous individuals and groups wherever they are – on- or off-reserve, urban, rural, or remote. NCCIE has partnered with hundreds of “Indigenous communities” – whoever they may be – individuals, schools, First Nations, organizations, or community groups – putting them first to guide the particular endeavour on which they are collaborating.

In essence, therefore, “Community First” means that the will of the community is respected above all else. This principle has informed many decisions made by NCCIE team members throughout the life of the project and its application will be illustrated throughout this paper.

⁴ Recordings were prepared for the website by: a) attaching title and name banners; b) inserting images with the interview questions at appropriate points; c) boosting sound and reducing background noise when necessary; and d) eliminating parts when interviewee was not speaking (e.g., when interviewer was speaking or when interviewee was thinking, etc.).

⁵ First Nations University of Canada has campuses in Treaty 4 and Treaty 6 territories, including Regina, Saskatoon, and Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, a prairie province of Canada. NCCIE recognizes that each First People has its own cultural practices, which may or may not include pipe and sweat ceremonies.

To begin, in addition to approval by Trent University's Indigenous Advisory Council and Research Ethics Board (REB), along with Regional Leads' REBs, ensuring compliance with Chapter 9 of the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS 2),⁶ other approvals may be needed at the community level. A First Nation or Tribal Council may have an ethics approval process that NCCIE would be asked to follow before approaching people and programs in their communities for interviews. Also, Nunavut, Northwest Territories (NWT), and Yukon had territorial-level approval processes with which NCCIE had to comply.⁷ Finally, some Indigenous organizations, such as the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres, have research ethics approval processes with which NCCIE had to comply.

Once the necessary **community ethics processes are respected and approvals obtained**, the work can proceed. If a community decided not to participate, the "Community First" principle dictates that NCCIE **listen** to the community, respect the decision, and move on.

"Community First" also means **respecting community protocols**. Protocols vary depending on the People. Regional teams, in general, were aware of the proper protocols to follow, depending on the territory in which they were working and/or the First Nation, Inuit, or Métis community, organization, or individual with whom they were meeting. Upon requesting an interview (via telephone or email), mention of the protocol was made. Upon meeting for the interview, the protocol was followed, whether it was presenting tobacco or giving a gift of some kind.

Adhering to OCAP, the principles of ownership, control, access, and possession first introduced by the National Aboriginal Health Organization in 2004 (First Nations Centre, 2004), is another way NCCIE put "communities first." Anyone or any organization granting an interview was given total control of the final recording. They own the knowledge they are sharing; they have access to the video or audio recording, and they are the stewards of it. If they want something changed in the recording, or if they would like it removed from the NCCIE website, they have that prerogative. All these points are articulated in the consent forms, a copy of which the interviewee keeps for future reference.

"Community First" also means **acknowledging the person's or organization's time and knowledge** that they are sharing with a cash honorarium, a gift card, or some other form of compensation.

Another approach to NCCIE's work that can be categorized as "Community First" is the **strengths-based approach** the project took. As shown in Figure 1, a top priority of NCCIE was to amplify community voices, letting them tell their own stories to respect their oral traditions. News coverage about Indigenous Peoples in the media tend to focus on the negative, such as housing shortages, boil water advisories, youth suicide, and Missing and Murdered Indigenous

⁶ TCPS 2 (2018) Chapter 9: *Research Involving the First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples of Canada*, Tri-Council Policy Statement for Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans. Retrieved from: https://ethics.gc.ca/eng/tcps2-eptc2_2018_chapter9-chapitre9.html.

⁷ NCCIE had to complete forms and obtain certificates from Nunavut and NWT. After inquiring with the Yukon Government and speaking with appropriate personnel, NCCIE was given verbal approval without having to complete any forms because the nature of the project was "story gathering" and "information gathering" with no manipulation of any data. Territorial requirements may have changed since 2017-18, so future projects will need to make their own inquiries.

Women and Girls (MMIWG). FNUUniv made the conscious decision that NCCIE would shine a light on the positive – on the strength and diversity in Indigenous education across the country.

All these practices, and more, are active measures of showing *respect* for the people, communities, and organizations with whom NCCIE sought to interview. As an Indigenous initiative, NCCIE places in high regard its *relationships* with the people and organizations with whom NCCIE sought to collaborate. Because it was a multi-year project, NCCIE could take the time that was necessary to build relationships and strengthen them.

Finally, acknowledging the people's and organizations' time and expertise with an honorarium or gift of some kind was just one of the ways in which NCCIE honoured the principle of **reciprocity, giving back or 'feeding' communities**. Another way NCCIE gave back to communities was during Year Three, which was dedicated to practicing reciprocity. That is, NCCIE regional teams embarked on a multitude of collaborations with communities, schools, and organizations around the country to create lesson plans and videos. "Community First" during this phase of the project meant listening to the communities, identifying lesson plans or videos that they would like to create, and following the communities' lead on the generation of resources.

Another form of "giving back" or "feeding communities" has been the capacity-building aspect of the project. In addition to students (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) being hired to work on the project, community youth and young adults were also hired as "Research Associates" (RAs) by many Regional Leads for their teams. Training was given to begin building their skills in setting up and conducting interviews, following cultural protocols, and using the digital recording equipment. Hands-on experience in "gathering stories" provided opportunities for RAs to develop these skills further, learning through doing. Students, youth, and community members alike have gained confidence with practice, and the skills they have developed are transferable to other employment.

In truth, the project has been a learning experience for everyone involved, from the National Director and the entire organizational support structure to Regional Leads, RAs, and participating community partners. To summarize some of what we have learned to be "good practice" in Indigenous research, RAs and Regional Leads have shared a few reflections and insights into the Indigenous approach that NCCIE has taken in its work:

It comes down to being a good person. We know innately what being a good person is and how to show it. But in Indigenous research, it has to be explicitly demonstrated over and over again.⁸

It boils down to being a good person – being humble, being grounded, being accountable, checking ego. Some try to say the words without following through with their meaning.⁹

People do not know what [being humble in research] means in an Indigenous context. They might say they are good when they are not. A good person can admit that they screwed up, acknowledging that they aren't perfect. "Good" is aspirational. Sometimes

⁸ Tyler Armstrong, NCCIE Research Associate, Personal Communication. November 26, 2019.

⁹ Ibid.

we achieve it; other times we make mistakes, fall short of the aspiration. When that happens, we need to be accountable; own it.¹⁰

Humility and accountability – both are important when doing Indigenous research.¹¹

Building meaningful relationships and working in Indigenous contexts takes time. It requires those who embark on this type of project to be patient, respectful, and accountable to participants and their communities, but it also demands a lot of time on behalf of the project organizers. In the Northwestern Ontario region, our team put in approximately 70 hours of work per week to ensure that we were doing work in a good way. What many researchers would see as being 'extra work', I see as being important work where everyone's wants and needs are accommodated.¹²

The opening quote of this paper sums up NCCIE's guiding principles and how we have all approached the work with communities. It is worth repeating: "Research from an Indigenous perspective mirrors how we are meant to be and relate to and with others in this world."¹³

Flow of Work

Figure 1, in addition to illustrating the Indigenous framework NCCIE has applied during the project, describes the arc of work from one year to the next. From "amplifying voices" and "privileging imagery" to "feeding communities," NCCIE has pursued its overarching goal of "learning through sharing." The following sections outline the nature of work and project objectives for each year.

Year One – Laying the Foundation

The overarching objective for Year One was to establish a strong foundation and good relationships for NCCIE for the work going forward. This involved:

- Engaging with kēhtē-ayak and beginning the project with protocols and ceremony, which included presenting tobacco, holding a pipe ceremony and sweat lodge ceremony and talking about the project
- Building a national team and regional teams
- Setting up the systems and communication networks to facilitate administration of the project
- Building relationships and strengthening existing ones between the NCCIE regional teams (e.g., post-secondary, academic institutions, or Indigenous organizations) and local Indigenous education initiatives found in First Nation communities, urban centres, and rural areas
- Obtaining necessary ethics approvals at national and regional levels. This involved compliance with post-secondary Research Ethics Boards (REB) and Indigenous Ethics Committees (IEC) as well as territorial and organizational ethics processes, depending on the regional team's location.
- Respecting protocols at the local level to obtain necessary approvals to proceed.

¹⁰ Leisa Desmoulins, NCCIE Research Associate, Personal Communication. November 26, 2019.

¹¹ Tyler Armstrong, NCCIE Research Associate, Personal Communication. November 26, 2019.

¹² Kelsey Jaggard, NCCIE Research Associate, Personal Communication. November 26, 2019.

¹³ Tyler Armstrong, NCCIE Research Associate, Personal Communication. November 26, 2019.

- Developing promotional materials (e.g., brochures, introductory information, PowerPoint slides) to inform people about the project when being invited for an interview
- Translating documents (e.g., promotional materials, interview questions, consent forms, etc.) into French for the Quebec regional team and Inuktitut for the Nunavut regional team.

The deliverables for Year One included:

- Identifying and gathering Indigenous education ‘stories’ to be gathered via video- or audio-recorded interviews
- Identifying resources on Indigenous education specific to each region (e.g., articles, videos, books, websites, and other media) to contribute to a [Resource Library](#) on the website.
- Creating a [website](#) to present the ‘[stories](#)’ and other resources in a user-friendly and engaging website – one that is openly and freely accessible to all and respects Indigenous principles of ownership, control, access, and possession
- Hosting face-to-face regional workshops and a first annual national gathering

Year Two – Expanding NCCIE

The overarching objective for Year Two was to build on the success of Year One, adding more content to the NCCIE website and strengthening relationships initiated in Year One. This involved:

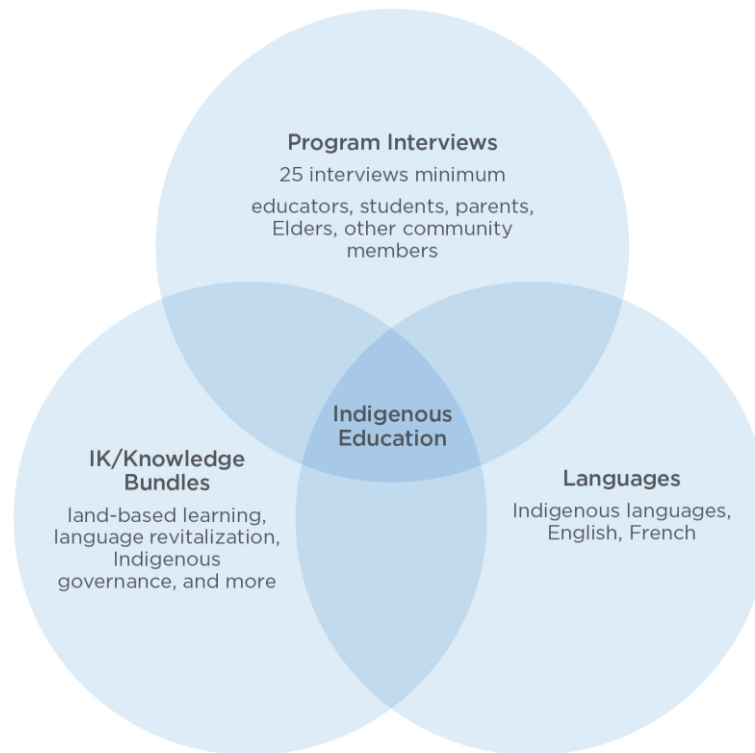
- Visiting with kêhtê-ayak, beginning the year with protocols and ceremony, and seeking Elders’ input for the Year Two mandate
- Spending more time building and strengthening relationships for the project
- Renewing ethics approvals, as needed
- Respecting protocols at the local level whenever necessary.

The deliverables for Year Two included:

- Identifying and gathering more Indigenous education ‘stories’ via video- or audio-recorded interviews
- Expanding interviews to include Elders and Knowledge Holders who wished to share some insights and wisdom
- Pursuing a number of special projects on: [Indigenous languages](#); [Indigenous governance](#); the NCCIE.CA [Knowledge Space](#); [introductory](#) and [documentary films](#) with kêhtê-ayak Elders and Knowledge Holders; the creation of [playlists](#) for languages, cultural knowledge, and land-based learning; and creation of the NCCIE.CA [French website](#)
- Adding content and refining the design of the NCCIE.CA [website](#) to make it more user-friendly, expanding the ‘[About Us](#)’ section and creating ‘[Website Tips](#)’
- Hosting face-to-face regional workshops and a second annual national gathering
- Updating and adding to promotional materials
- Updating and clarifying administrative and data entry processes

Figure 5 illustrates the work that the regions undertook during Year Two, gathering stories on Indigenous education programs, language programs, and Indigenous knowledges.

Figure 5: Focal Points for Year Two Interviews



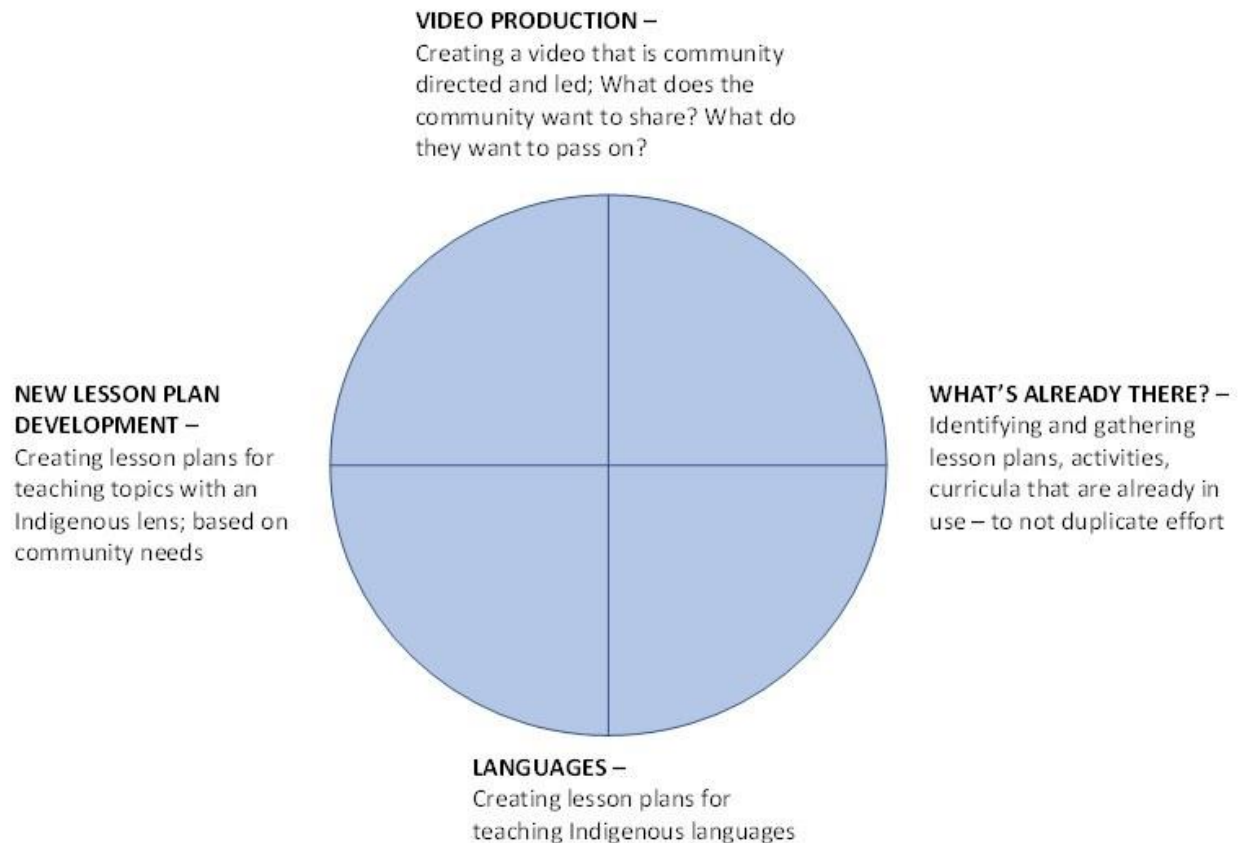
Year Three – Giving Back to Communities

In the spirit of reciprocity, Year Three’s focus was to give back to communities for collaborating with NCCIE in sharing their ‘stories’ about Indigenous education. NCCIE’s regional teams across the country asked their community partners, “What educational resources do you need for your children, for your youth, for your People, and how can NCCIE support you in developing these resources?” They expressed a desire to create lesson plans from their People’s perspective and with their cultural content. Some also expressed an interest in creating videos to share a ‘story’ or message of their choosing.

Two National Curriculum Developers were recruited to work on the design of an Indigenous lesson plan template, an Indigenous languages lesson plan template, and supporting documentation. These [templates](#) were shared with kēhtē-ayak, the Elders’ Council, to get their input and approval before distributing to regional teams. The Elders’ Council appreciated the holistic nature of the templates and how students were placed at the centre of learning, with attention given to spiritual and emotional as well as intellectual and physical ways of learning.

Regional teams invited community partners to participate on one or more of the initiatives illustrated in Figure 6:

Figure 6: NCCIE Year Three Initiatives



As in years past, time was spent:

- Visiting with kêhtê-ayak, beginning the year with protocols and ceremony, and seeking Elders' input for the Year Three mandate. As already noted, Elders provided input and gave feedback on the various lesson plan templates
- Renewing ethics approvals, as needed
- Respecting protocols at the local level, whenever necessary.

The deliverables for Year Three included:

- Collaborating with community partners to create lesson plans and produce videos of their choice and design
- Pursuing a number of special projects to: complete the [Indigenous governance](#) project; design the '[Teaching Resource Centre](#)' (for both English and French websites); create a second [documentary film](#) with kêhtê-ayak Elders and Knowledge Holders
- Continuing to add content and further refine the design of the NCCIE.CA [website](#), given the addition of new content (in both English and French)

Due to COVID-19, work on the various projects was impeded. For example, some collaborations at the regional level had to cease prematurely, because of lockdowns and school closures in

communities. The pandemic severely limited people’s availability to continue to work on NCCIE projects as their time and energy, understandably, had to focus on the emergency and family and community needs. Also, the third national gathering that had been planned for Year Three had to be postponed.

Year Four – Knowledge Mobilization

For the final year of the project, NCCIE turned to knowledge mobilization, raising awareness about the NCCIE website and how to access and use the numerous resources available for educators and learners of all ages. The website had grown to be multi-faceted in its opportunities for learning about Indigenous ways of knowing and being as well as educating with an Indigenous lens, as illustrated in Figure 7.

**Figure 7: NCCIE.CA
Our Stories – Our History – Our Future**



Due to the pandemic and the fact that this was the final year for the project, the objectives for Year Four were tailored to the unique circumstances of the situation in which everyone found themselves. No one could meet in-person, so kēhtē-ayak could not meet. Nor could any of the regional teams meet with community partners or hold in-person workshops. Everything became virtual. Alongside renewing ethics approvals (where necessary), the deliverables for Year Four reflected this new reality; these included:

- Hosting virtual regional workshops and participating in virtual conferences for knowledge mobilization
- Completing Year Three work where possible, given restrictions caused by the pandemic
- Pursuing three special projects: creation of “[Listen to the Knowledge of the Elders](#)” in the [Knowledge Space](#); creation of a digital ‘book’ entitled, “[Weaving Indigenous Education into Your Practice](#)”; and translation of several lesson plans into French for “[Le centre de ressources éducatives](#)”
- Further refining the design of the NCCIE.CA [website](#), given the addition of the new content, including new videos to aid in navigating the website in “[Website Tips](#)” and [Tip Sheets](#)
- Hosting a virtual national gathering and creating a webpage on NCCIE.CA to host videos and content from all [three national gatherings](#)

Methodology to Identify Strengths and Challenges

To gather insights and feedback on the project’s strengths and challenges, several discussions were held with NCCIE regional teams across the country. One meeting was held in person and thirteen meetings were held virtually via Zoom because of COVID-19. 17 Regional Leads, 17 Research Associates, one Knowledge Mobilization Coordinator, and 8 community members and Elders participated in these discussions, each lasting between one and 1.75 hours (see Appendix B for a list of participants). The meetings were recorded, and notes were taken, all of which were reviewed extensively to glean key points, insights, and quotations.

In addition to these virtual meetings, information for this paper was gleaned from notes, summary reports, and recordings of three NCCIE national gatherings and 13 regional workshops. The national gatherings were held in March 2018, August 2019, and March 2020. The national team, Regional Leads, student and youth researchers, community members, and Elders attended to share highlights of the project to date as well as to discuss issues pertinent to Indigenous education. Attendance at the first two in-person national gatherings numbered approximately 300 participants. Because the third national gathering was virtual due to the pandemic, attendance was greater at about 500 people. Similarly, 13 regional workshops were held over the first three years of the project at various locations around the country. Attendance ranged between 15 and 50 participants. The workshops were an opportunity for people involved in Indigenous education to gather, network, and discuss Indigenous education issues specifically relevant to their regions.

Videos that had been generated from some of these events as well as ‘stories’ available on NCCIE.CA were two additional sources of information for this paper. These videos are available on the NCCIE website at: <https://www.nccie.ca/national-gathering/> and <https://www.nccie.ca/teaching-resource-centre/videos/>.

Observations and remarks from all sources have contributed to an inductive analysis to coalesce findings and insights regarding strengths, challenges, and process decisions to address these challenges.

Overall, regional teams and community members were pleased to take part in NCCIE. They were extremely complimentary about the experiences they had but had some constructive insights to share about noteworthy challenges they had to address. For others who may be interested in pursuing community-led projects in the future, this information can be helpful in setting up and implementing similar pursuits that are grounded in Indigenous principles of respect, relational accountability, and reciprocity.

Strengths

The following is a list of strengths about NCCIE that people have identified and expounded upon:

- NCCIE has given regional teams the **flexibility** and **autonomy** over decisions about the process each could follow to fulfill project objectives
- NCCIE has been **strengths-based** and **holistic** in its view of Indigenous education
- The Indigenous approach taken, respecting “**research as ceremony**” (an adaptation of the title of the book (2008), *Research is Ceremony*, by Shawn Wilson), has allowed regional teams the time necessary to develop relationships, build trust, honour culturally-appropriate protocols, and respect the knowledge being shared
- The **capacity-building** aspect of the project has given students, youth, and community members on regional teams an opportunity to develop skills in interviewing, working with technology, cultural protocols, and more
- **Face-to-face meetings** – in the form of regional workshops and national gatherings – have brought people together to explore their common interests in strengthening Indigenous education
- The “**Community First**” approach has contributed to the overall success of NCCIE, grounding the project in respect and humility
- Regional Teams have been given **ample financial and administrative support**
- An **effective communication strategy** has been implemented to share information with Regional Teams and to communicate back and forth on issues
- The **website** has become an excellent resource, showcasing the work of the project

Each of these strengths are discussed in greater detail below. Please note that overlap exists in and between these strengths. Also, various aspects of strengths and challenges overlap and intertwine, as will become evident throughout the discussion.

Flexibility, Regional Autonomy, the Gift of Time and Relationship-Building

As discussed, specific expectations were set out annually for each regional team to fulfill. To gather ‘stories’ in Years One and Two, each Regional Lead could hire up to five (5) Research Associates to conduct at least five (5) interviews each for a total of 25 ‘stories’ per region per year (or as close to that number as possible), in which four main questions or topics were the focus of inquiry:

1. First, gather a description of the Indigenous education program (name, subject matter, age group, activities, why it is an exemplar of Indigenous education, what are the measures of success from an Indigenous perspective, etc.)

2. Seek their insights to the question, “What is their understanding of Indigenous education?”
3. Also, “What is their vision for Indigenous education over the next ten years?”
4. Finally, “What resources (other than funding) do they need to achieve this vision?”

In Year Two, regional teams requested and were given the option to gather perspectives from students and parents/guardians as well as instructors. Additionally, they were given the flexibility to interview Elders and Knowledge Holders who, in Year One, had indicated interest in sharing their perspectives about Indigenous education, stories, or some knowledge.

With Year Three’s objectives shifting to give back to communities, educators and community partners enjoyed the flexibility they were afforded to identify and co-create teaching resources based on *their* needs and desires. Lesson plans were developed with an Indigenous lens and could be either subject-based or language-based, depending on what community partners wished to do. Also, dozens of videos were created either as part of or independent of lesson plans and featured youth, culture, their schools, and more.

Throughout the project, regional teams were given the autonomy and flexibility to decide how best to approach the work for the year, depending upon the territory/ies in which they were working and the customs of the Peoples they were approaching for interviews or collaborations. At the beginning of NCCIE, the most common approach taken, once ethics approvals were received, was to identify prospective interviewees based on pre-existing relationships. Many Regional Leads already had relationships with First Nations, Inuit, and/or Métis communities and organizations because of previous work or research. As well, many Regional Leads recruited Research Associates (RAs) who also had pre-existing relationships with Indigenous communities and organizations.

When a regional team was established, they met to discuss their preferred approach (or combination of approaches) to identify prospective Indigenous education programs for interviews. If RAs were new to Indigenous research and working with Indigenous Peoples, the Regional Lead would assist with initial contacts and introductions. Training and mentoring were provided to everyone on the team.

Another approach to identify potential programs/initiatives for interviews was to gather recommendations and referrals in meetings with university’s or organization’s Indigenous Advisory Council or another group of Elders and Knowledge Holders in the community. All regional teams, depending on their circumstances and time, aimed for cross-representation of Peoples (e.g., from First Nations, Métis, and Inuit, depending who resides in the territory), from different organizations (such as Friendship Centres, Education Authorities, Tribal Councils, and school districts), with examples of seasonal, urban, rural, and remote programs, and community-based, on-the-land, early childhood, K-12, and post-secondary initiatives. This speaks to NCCIE’s holistic understanding of what Indigenous education is and where and when it occurs.¹⁴

In conversations for this report, regional teams expressed deep appreciation for the degree of flexibility they were given to fulfill NCCIE’s objectives. Given the shortage of time, especially

¹⁴ For more information on NCCIE’s understanding of Indigenous education, please see the report, “Listen to Our Voices: Policy Insights for Strengthening Education with Indigenous Education” (unpublished report, January 2022).

in Year One, they needed to expedite the process. So, many teams relied heavily upon pre-existing relationships to facilitate the community approval process to proceed. Approaching programs based upon pre-existing relationships increased the comfort level of many RAs, some of whom were new to research and conducting interviews.

For RAs who did not have pre-existing relationships with Indigenous communities or organizations, they were expected to make “cold calls,” which many said was uncomfortable for them, but a good learning experience. As a capacity-building project, NCCIE provided them with the opportunity to receive training to help them develop these skills, which are transferable to other projects and work environments. The capacity-building opportunities NCCIE provided was also identified as a project strength.

A final point before reviewing the many comments is that, when one considers the scope and scale of such a large national project as NCCIE, flexibility and regional autonomy are a necessity. Not only is Canada a huge country, but there are so many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities each with their unique cultures and customs that need to be respected. A pan-Indigenous approach is not feasible and not recommended. As will be seen by reading the following commentary, each region tailored their approach and process based on the diversity of Peoples and the politics in their territories.

Here are some highlights from the comments people shared about the flexible nature of the project:

- There was general consensus among the regions that, as one Regional Lead put it, they appreciated that the national leaders of NCCIE did not define for the teams how to do the work. Regions were free to design their own processes from the start.¹⁵
- In some regions, RAs expressed appreciation that they were involved in the design process. For those with some prior research experience and pre-existing relationships, RAs were allowed a degree of autonomy of their own, so that they could focus on interviews in areas of Indigenous education that were of special interest to them, as long as the general expectation for cross-representation of programs was met.
 - For example, the Manitoba team members pursued interviews with educational programs that were of special interest to them. One RA, who is Métis wanted to ensure Métis and Michif language programs were well-represented. Another RA had an interest in financial management and personal finance. In addition to ensuring a wide variety of programs were interviewed, he was able to interview programs with a focus on personal finance and money management for Indigenous Peoples and youth.
- With one year under their belts, regional teams appreciated the greater flexibility afforded in Year Two. For example, the Southeast Ontario team wanted to be able to record longer interviews and produce longer videos on different knowledges. They also wanted to hold roundtable discussions on Indigenous education in the academy and record and edit videos of these discussions for the website. Northeast Ontario’s team wanted to be able to interview Elders and Knowledge Holders. Southern British Columbia’s team also wanted to be able to interview Elders and Knowledge Holders. As well, they wanted to gather students’ and parents’ views in addition to educators’ perspectives about specific Indigenous education initiatives.

¹⁵ Vancouver Island Zoom Meeting, NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations, November 23, 2020.

- For Year Three’s objective to collaborate with communities on generating educational materials with an Indigenous lens, Regional Leads appreciated being given “the freedom to customize what [they] were doing [with] the various communities based on [the communities’] needs.”¹⁶
- A Research Associate (RA) commented how she appreciated the trust given to her as a student researcher. She liked being given the choice of who to approach for interviews and that she was able to approach individuals who do not necessarily self-identify as an educator, but from an Indigenous perspective they are.¹⁷ Also, she liked that, in Year Two, teams could focus on interviews with Elders and Knowledge Holders, not just Indigenous education initiatives.¹⁸
- NCCIE respected the fact that more time is needed when doing Indigenous research. Regional Leads and RAs alike remarked that they appreciated the acknowledgement of time needed to take care of relationships. For this project, more time was needed for any number of reasons:
 - Some communities or individuals preferred to wait and see what the project was all about before committing to participate
 - Some communities or organizations had their own protocols and approval processes, which required time to work through
 - Some communities or programs gave consent and set a date for an interview, only to experience an emergency at the time of the interview, requiring a postponement
 - By the time ethics approvals were obtained and interviews were scheduled (especially during Year One, but also Year Two), many interviews were set to take place in the wintertime. Sometimes weather played a factor, causing more delays or postponements due to snowstorms and poor travel conditions.
- Regional Teams could take the time to respect community delays (for whatever reason) and worked to reschedule interviews or meetings. Sometimes they could not be rescheduled, no matter how hard RAs or Regional Leads worked to contact someone to find a new date. In these instances, interviews were not completed, and teams had to move on, which was a disappointment for them.
- Teams realized in some instances that they had to slow down because relationships take time to develop. This presented a challenge, especially in Year One, due to the tight timelines. But they appreciated the fact that they were able to extend their efforts into Year Two, taking the time needed to develop relationships and build trust, especially when communities could see the website and how their ‘stories’ would be displayed.
- The Quebec region appreciated the flexibility of the project and the time they had to build relations. In Year One, the regional team began work in a similar fashion to other regions by identifying strong programs based on pre-existing relationships and approaching them for interviews. At the regional workshop, however (after several interviews had already been completed), the Indigenous education umbrella organizations in Quebec took issue

¹⁶ Atlantic Provinces and Labrador Zoom Meeting, NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations, November 19, 2020.

¹⁷ In communities, many people are involved in educational activities outside of the school environment. For example, groups of parents and grandparents may take their children and grandchildren out on the land seasonally and pass on their knowledge for hunting, gathering, food preparation and preservation, and survival skills. Some communities have obtained funding through various government grants to organize “summer camps” or “winter camps” for groups of families. Regardless of formal funding, these “learning-on-the-land” experiences are all forms of Indigenous education. Even though the parents and grandparents may not have a teaching certificate or degree, they are educators.

¹⁸ Northeast Ontario Zoom Meeting, NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations, November 23, 2020.

with this approach, asking why they were not involved. Even though they were initially contacted, because no response was received (as these organizations are very busy), the regional team moved forward without them as time was getting short. Interviews needed to be completed, and they had followed protocols and received approvals at the local Band Council or organizational level. The events at the regional workshop caused the team to pause and revise their approach going forward. This was a big learning for NCCIE and the Quebec regional team, realizing that the situation in Quebec differed from other provinces and required relationship-building with the Indigenous education organizations in the province. Their approval to proceed was paramount not only for NCCIE, but also for long-term, mutually beneficial relations beyond the life of the project. Because NCCIE was a multi-year initiative, the Regional Lead was then able to take the time needed in the Year Two to build relationships. One of the organizations, Institut Tshakapesh, had expressed an interest in holding further conversations with NCCIE. The Regional Lead traveled to Uashat Mani-utenam (near Sept-Iles) and met with leadership several times, spending time with them, answering their questions, and building trust. Ultimately, approval was given for the project to proceed there. The gift of time that NCCIE was able to provide worked to the advantage of the Quebec team so that they could slow down and do the important work of building relationships. In addition to establishing good relations with Institut Tshakapesh, the Quebec team worked to build relations with another organization, Conseil en Éducation des Premières Nations/First Nations Education Council (CEPN/FNEC). These relations have strong roots now that, going forward, provide a solid foundation for future opportunities.¹⁹

- The Labrador Regional Lead talked about how including Labrador as a part of NCCIE was really beneficial as never before had the people there felt they had been included in anything that was on a national scale. To be able to share their stories gave a boost to the community. Before NCCIE, they were in the throes of addressing multi-generational impacts of residential schools; people were depressed, and there was a lot of pain. NCCIE's focus on strengths in Inuit education and their participation in a youth video project lifted the community up and gave them something positive to celebrate. The Regional Lead talked about how taking more time when first reaching out to NunatuKavut and traveling there to meet with people face-to-face were important steps to developing the relationship and building trust to the point when they consented to participate. Her relationship with people there is very strong now, and she wishes NCCIE could continue as there are so many new projects they would like to do together.²⁰
- The Atlantic Provinces Regional Lead already had a strong network based on previous projects, including Aboriginal Head Start, Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network (UAKN), and Friendship Centres. NCCIE allowed these networks to continue to build and intertwine. Collaborating on several NCCIE projects with these organizations "strengthened and knitted together" the networks, which is "hugely positive" for the Atlantic Region. The Regional Lead notes, "As to contributing to the network building in Atlantic Canada, that has been something that [NCCIE] has done in spades because it has brought us physically together and [we have been] able to share with one another our various websites and projects."²¹

¹⁹ Quebec Zoom Meeting, NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations, December 9, 2020.

²⁰ Labrador and Atlantic Provinces Zoom Meeting, NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations, November 19, 2020.

²¹ Ibid.

- A community member shared that his biggest takeaway from being a part of NCCIE has been the network-building and “the knowledge knowing that at times we feel we are sitting there alone in the fight, but we learned that we are not alone in the fight. This project is a small sample of what we can accomplish when we put our minds to it. We were willing participants, and I appreciated the Regional Leads’ relationship and for being strong leaders for us. We appreciate their commitment to the project and keeping us involved and moving forward.”²²
- Another community member shared her perspective on the importance of relationships, saying that because of the working relationship she had with the Regional Lead, she could step back and trust the process: “Having someone in the community . . . who we trust allows us to have faith. If we had someone from away who we didn’t know or who hadn’t taken the time to invest in the community, I would have been very hesitant about letting young people give their stories to an organization not knowing that I could trust that they would be treated in a good way. Having that direct relationship was critical.”²³

In summary, the gift of time facilitated opportunities to exercise flexibility when it came to reaching out to communities, educators, and schools, building relationships, gaining trust, and taking care of relationships. NCCIE regions were able to follow the principle of “Community First” that the founder established at the outset of the project – that respect shown to communities is paramount and that each regional team takes its direction from what communities wanted and decided. Also, circumstances in each province, each territory, each community and organization must be considered when planning the approach to be taken in Indigenous research so that, in the end, NCCIE actions respect the distinctness of Indigenous Peoples and are not one-size-fits-all or pan-Indigenous.

Capacity-Building and Learning-through-Doing: Learning the Practice of “Research as Ceremony”²⁴

Regional teams have appreciated that NCCIE has been an opportunity for students to develop research skills and how the project has provided a variety of capacity-building opportunities through “learning through doing.”²⁵ More than one RA commented that, through NCCIE, they were learning how to work in a “culturally good way.”²⁶ They found the NCCIE experience particularly excellent and unique in that they were actually a part of a project that did what they had read about in the literature, practicing “research as ceremony” (e.g., in fact, one of their course textbooks is entitled *Research is Ceremony* (2008) by Shawn Wilson).²⁷ Regional Leads and RAs alike discussed their learnings and experiences, sharing the following observations and insights:

- The actual project has provided a sense of community amongst the team members as they worked together toward project goals.
- A Regional Lead talked about how NCCIE helped “not just to share knowledge but to create a network” in the area. “NCCIE now offers a whole network of people in your

²² Ibid.

²³ Atlantic Provinces and Labrador Team Discussion, NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations, November 19, 2020.

²⁴ Conducting research as ceremony is described in Shawn Wilson’s book (2008), *Research is Ceremony*.

²⁵ Southern British Columbia Zoom Meeting, NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations, December 7, 2020.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Northwest Ontario Team Discussion, NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations, November 6, 2020.

region. The information is there for you to call them and invite them in.” It is important to “build that awareness of all the incredible people who are there and who are wanting to share their knowledge.”²⁸ A Regional Lead noted that the project connected student RAs to networks and resources that they would not have otherwise had.²⁹

- A central tenet of NCCIE has been to provide relationship-building opportunities for strengthening Indigenous education across Canada, creating space for people to connect directly with each other so people can learn from each other, no matter where they are in the country. Indigenous Peoples across Canada have strong expertise in the education of their People, something they have been doing for millennia. NCCIE has built on that strength, amplifying community voices digitally and via in-person workshops and gatherings. For example, viewing ‘stories’ on the website, a visitor can find contact information to ask follow-up questions about specific Indigenous education initiatives. Regional workshops brought people within regions together to explore issues relevant to them where they live. National Gatherings presented an opportunity for people to network and discuss Indigenous education issues with others from around the country. Finally, the digital forums that NCCIE held brought people from across Canada together to explore and ask questions of educators, Knowledge Holders, and Elders on such topics as land-based learning and teaching math and science from an Indigenous perspective. Recordings of these events are still accessible on the website for people to watch and learn.³⁰
- Another Regional Lead talked about how the resources on the website can be used in professional development expectations of school districts across Canada. For example, in Alberta’s “personal growth plans,” NCCIE can be accessed for educators addressing Teacher Standard Quality #5, “Applying Foundational Knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit.”³¹

The RAs gained tangible skills in scheduling and conducting interviews, in being flexible, in listening, skills that are transferable to other jobs. RAs also commented about the intangible benefits of being part of NCCIE:

- Working on NCCIE enhanced their networks. They got to meet people in different areas that they were not involved in before. These relationships are ongoing. As one example, one RA and an interviewee applied for a grant together and are now collaborating together on sustainable farming and gardening.
- One RA who has since become an educator herself talked about how she has gained a better appreciation of Indigenous education in her region and what’s going on there. She says that now that she works more directly in education, there is a huge appetite for what NCCIE has to offer.
- One RA who is still learning about her identity said she learned a great deal just by listening.
- An RA talked about “how amazing it is to see how far they have come as a team; they are more comfortable interviewing.” For her, the term “interviewing” made her feel uncomfortable. So, she changed the frame to “hearing people’s stories,” and listening to

²⁸ Northeast Ontario Zoom Meeting, NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations, November 23, 2020.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ See: https://www.nccie.ca/teaching-resource-centre/videos/#panels_forums.

³¹ Alberta Zoom Meeting, NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations, November 25, 2020

their stories helped. “Interviewing” was intimidating for her; it is much more comfortable to think that they are simply conversing with an Elder or Knowledge Holder.³²

- Another RA expressed appreciation for the new relationships she has been able to develop through the project – not only with other researchers on her team, but also with people in communities. “They still keep in touch,” she says. She commented how, before NCCIE, she “almost had a fear of Elders.” NCCIE has helped her feel more comfortable with how approachable they are, that they really want to share and to feel that they are contributing. “Everyone has a story,” she says, and “They would not necessarily consider themselves or their programs as ‘examples of excellence’ in Indigenous education.”³³
- She was constantly reminded, through the interviews she was gathering for NCCIE, that “connection in Indigenous education is connection with the land;” that “these are the people in communities with this knowledge;” and “how it has been an opportunity to be reminded about our connection with the land.” She noted that these stories are a “reminder for other people who continue to ask the question, ‘What is Indigenous education?’ And to know that it is connected to the land and so much more.”³⁴
- An RA expressed her appreciation for being a part of the project as it gave her something for her resumé. It gave her a degree of credibility in the field of qualitative research and confidence in speaking about what she had done, how she had done it, and what she had learned.³⁵
- Several RAs spoke about how much they learned from those being interviewed. They still think about what was shared. “When the cameras stopped rolling,” one RA said, “that is when some rich information might have been shared.”³⁶
- Another RA commented that she appreciated the learning that she did as a researcher. For example, she learned that not everyone is accustomed to the tobacco offering; one woman had her own way. So, she learned that there is more than one way to approach an Elder or Knowledge Holder.³⁷
- This RA also told a story about one interview, that when the person was sharing, there was some healing that took place. The RA had to “remain neutral and strong within her own being” and not be emotionally connected. She had to stop the recording at one point while the person shed her tears and composed herself again. The RA appreciated working on this project, observing, “This was a great experience, and I gained a new appreciation for research and how to do it in a good way.”³⁸
- A Regional Lead shared a tip that teaming up with someone who was from the area and who already had relationships there helped a great deal. “People knew her and trusted her,” which helped their process immensely.³⁹

³² Northeast Ontario Zoom Meeting, NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations, November 23, 2020.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Alberta Zoom Meeting, NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations, November 25, 2020

³⁶ As shared by RAs during Alberta, British Columbia, Ontario in-person and Zoom meetings, Oct. 2019; Nov. 25 & Dec. 16, 2020.

³⁷ Northeast Ontario Zoom Meeting, NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations, November 23, 2020.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Alberta Zoom Meeting, NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations, November 25, 2020. This individual was part of the Alberta Team in Year Four but was the Regional Lead for southern BC in Year Three. This comment pertained to his work in Year Three.

- Another Regional Lead shared a tip about recruiting RAs who are “talkers,” youth, students, or community members who can hold a conversation with people and are able to ask probing, follow-up questions, especially if a conversation seems to be stalling.⁴⁰
- One Regional Lead expressed her appreciation that working on NCCIE gave her the opportunity to see things differently and begin teaching in a way that is aligned with what she was doing with NCCIE. “As an academic,” she says, “we see things as scholarly works. But Indigenous education is not in books, it lives in communities.” NCCIE gives her, as a professor, a way to show her students what and how Indigenous scholarship looks like.⁴¹
- Another Regional Lead talked about how she relied on her team to be self-motivated. She observed that “there was a lot of onus on the Regional Leads” to keep the people moving in the same direction and get the deliverables in on time, and keeping people focused on the project because of the long time horizon. “Working on the project,” she observed, “forced her to think about how to develop ‘political correctness,’ if you want to call it that, in a good way and a kind way – to keep people on track. This project makes you develop a lot of your own interpersonal skills because it was stretched out over four years.”⁴²
- Still yet another Regional Lead who was new to project management had to juggle his teaching role and his project management role. As he was new to project management and appreciated being able to call upon other Regional Leads (in particular, one who he knew from his time in graduate school) to get some pointers and suggestions.⁴³
 - At the beginning of the project, weekly teleconference calls were held with all the Regional Leads, at which time important updates and instructions were shared. It was also a time when Regional Leads could raise questions, discuss issues they were having, and share ideas across the country.
 - As the project went on, weekly calls were no longer needed. Depending on the point in time during the process, teleconference calls were held anywhere from once every two weeks to once a month.
- Another Regional Lead talked about how her student researchers, after finishing some interviews, “came back so excited about some of these projects.” She observes how NCCIE is a positive thing for students. “They get caught up in their own world. But for them to go out to communities, they’d be all charged up.” She shared a story about one of her RAs who interviewed one of her home community’s summer programs that she did not know about beforehand. She ended up sending her five children to that program the next summer.⁴⁴
- Overall, the project was a “very good experience” for her students, she says. Some of her students were from outside the territory. For them, because they did not have pre-existing relationships, they had to make cold calls, which was very uncomfortable for them. She comments how nervous they were in their first interviews, but how it got easier for them with practice.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ Southwestern Ontario Zoom Meeting, NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations, November 25, 2020.

⁴¹ Northwest Ontario Zoom Meeting, NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations, November 17, 2020.

⁴² Alberta Zoom Meeting, NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations, November 25, 2020.

⁴³ Ibid. This individual was speaking about Year Three of the project, when he was Regional Lead of southern BC.

⁴⁴ Vancouver Island Zoom Meeting, NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations, November 23, 2020.

⁴⁵ Vancouver Island Zoom Meeting, NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations, November 23, 2020.

- In Quebec, the regional team learned a lot about the importance of relationship-building with the First Nations communities and umbrella education organizations. The Regional Lead learned first-hand the importance of showing up, being there in person to meet with leadership and community members, spending time, and gaining trust and a level of comfort on the part of the community.

With respect to putting into practice the concept of “research is ceremony,” each Regional Team was asked to review the cultural protocols of the Peoples in their territories and to honour them. For some but not all Peoples, protocols include presenting tobacco when asking something of someone in the community. For others, protocols may involve the presentation of a gift of some sort, other than tobacco. Still, for others, introductory cultural protocols may not involve a gift at all. It is important to ask if unsure. Regional teams were able to invite an Elder or Knowledge Holder to share teachings about their protocols. They were also able to include an Elder or Knowledge Holder as a member of their team to provide regular guidance and support. An honorarium in the form of cash or a gift card was provided (and sometimes this was the expected protocol to follow); the amount varied depending on their level of involvement. Other ways in which “research as ceremony” is apparent through the work and experiences of NCCIE are shared in the following comments:

- RAs appreciated the opportunity to listen to Elders and Knowledge Holders – both as members of their team and as Indigenous education practitioners being interviewed about a program in which they were involved. One RA who is Haudenosaunee and was working with Anishinaabe Peoples spoke of the importance of considering positionality, asking the questions: How can I do this work in a way that is respectful of the People whose knowledge is being shared? Who am I and where do I come from with my perspective? He expressed the importance of doing respectful work, understanding where you, as the researcher, come from.⁴⁶
- On a similar note, the Manitoba Métis Nation has expressed gratitude for the work that was done and the way in which it was done. NCCIE and the RA who worked with them have developed a good relationship. The RA remarked, “It is a service to the nation, providing them with a good example of what research can be.”⁴⁷
- Some regions were able to hold a ceremony toward the end of the project. One team had a sweat lodge ceremony; others were able to bring spirituality into the project through smudging themselves regularly, making tobacco ties, etc.
- One RA wrote her thoughts and reflections down about working on the NCCIE project:
As a novice researcher, I learned many things regarding Indigenous research through this project. First, the way the NCCIE provided participants with the opportunity to remove their stories from the internet at any time provided me with examples of how research can promote Indigenous ownership, control, access, and possession over their data to reduce Eurocentric ideas of gathering and owning knowledge. Second, my NCCIE Regional Lead showed me the importance of mobilizing the knowledge gathered in interviews and giving back to communities to promote reciprocity. To do this in a good way requires listening to community needs and prioritizing those needs over the needs of the academy. There are many more (relationality, the opportunity to learn cultural protocols, etc.), but above are my key takeaways! . . . This project taught me to view

⁴⁶ Southeast Ontario Zoom Discussion, NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations, December 16, 2020.

⁴⁷ Manitoba Zoom Meeting, NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations, December 14, 2020.

knowledge as alive. Knowledge belongs to the sharer and it is imperative to reach out to that individual when you plan to use their knowledge in a different way than originally intended. This keeps relationships alive, the knowledge up to date, and is respectful.⁴⁸

- A community member, who is a Faculty of Education professor who collaborated with NCCIE on lesson plan development, talked about the learning that she was able to do as a non-Indigenous educator. She talked about that, with reconciliation, “The timing was fortuitous. It was an opportunity to take an anti-colonial approach to the teaching of math with elementary students. We had to think how to contextualize the learning on the land where we are to how you use the examples relevant to students *here* as opposed to always taking a western colonial approach to teaching math. What classroom approaches do we use? What examples do we use? This project was a perfect fit as this development was happening. Students, Teacher Candidates were so responsive to the project. I was so happy to be involved with this. We’ve formed a long-lasting relationship to continue the work, and it is a jumping off point for more things to happen as well.”⁴⁹

In summary, for both Regional Leads and RAs, NCCIE has been an opportunity for learning and for growth as human beings. “Research as ceremony” is an important perspective to bring to Indigenous research and enduring relationships. The capacity-building aspects of the project extend beyond the development of interviewing skills or learning how to set up a camera for good lighting and sound quality. These are important skills transferable to all sorts of work opportunities, to be sure. Fostering and maintaining good relations, however, is foundational to Indigenous research and work of all kinds, learning that trust and respect are key to life-long associations and collaborations for the benefit of everyone involved.

Ample Financial, Technical, and Administrative Support

A major strategic decision at the beginning of the project was to outsource the financial and administrative duties of the project to a third party. Post-secondary finance offices and administrations are rightly focused on the work of their institutions and do not have the capacity to take on the additional responsibilities of such a large project the size of NCCIE. Creative Fire was hired through an RFP process to carry out and expedite financial, administrative, and communication duties for regions and the project as a whole. This strategy had several advantages: 1) Direct Deposits were possible between Creative Fire and regional teams, facilitating a quick turnaround of expense claims for students (and other RAs and regional team members); 2) Creative Fire had the capacity to process and track the hundreds of NCCIE contracts for NCCIE regional and national team members; 3) Creative Fire developed and managed an administrative website that served as a one-stop-shop for regions to access everything from contract templates, job descriptions, and expense claim forms to ethics approvals, interview questions and templates, guidance for Regional Leads and RAs, technology support videos and more; 4) Creative Fire served as an administrative support team for regions when planning regional workshops, tracking RSVPs, arranging travel for workshop attendees, and more (Creative Fire provided similar supports for the national gatherings); 5) FNUUniv provided Creative Fire with flow-through funds not only to reimburse regional teams’ expense claims, but also pre-pay travel and accommodations for NCCIE team members, community

⁴⁸ K. Jaggard, personal communication, November 2019.

⁴⁹ Southeast Ontario Zoom Discussion, NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations, December 16, 2020.

participants, Elders (and their helpers), and other workshop and national gathering attendees so that no one had to front these expenses out of their own pockets; 6) NCCIE did not have to adhere to university policies that may restrict paying for such things as child care, teacher coverage, and honoraria limits (for the latter, and for the most part, we were able to abide by the "Community First" principle, rather than university policies, and respect community expectations, trusting the recommendations made by Regional Leads); 7) Creative Fire set up budget tracking systems to assist with regular oversight of the budget with expense variance reports and to facilitate preparation of annual reports to ISC; 8) other personnel were put in place by FNUUniv to provide additional supports to the regions. For example, a Regional Liaison was hired to assist the National Director in communicating with Regional Leads, providing assistance to them when they were setting budgets, planning workshops, or addressing questions and problem-solving. Additionally, an NCCIE Content Team was established to prepare regions' recordings for the website and assist regions with training and problem-solving related to technology, including use of the iPod kits and Data Entry Portal. In a few instances, members of the NCCIE Content Team were able to travel to regions to provide in-person training, which regional teams found helpful.

With respect to the annual budget, FNUUniv and the National Director divided each year's budget based upon the year's objectives. Regional Leads allocated their budget accordingly. Regional contracts were signed with Creative Fire, and with the flow-through funds received from FNUUniv, Creative Fire distributed each region's annual budget based upon contract terms. Upon signing, for example, all RAs received a \$1,000 advance to cover any initial expenses related to the project, such as gas money or transportation and childcare (during NCCIE-related activities). Once a trip was finished, they would submit their expense claims with original receipts, and Creative Fire would process them for reimbursement. As much as possible, Creative Fire would arrange to pay for car rentals, airfares, and hotel bills so RAs would not be required to cover such large expenses out-of-pocket. This was another advantage to outsourcing financial duties as post-secondary Finance Offices are unable to provide these services in a timely manner.

Whether a student, youth, or community member, the RAs all appreciated the advance at the beginning of the project so that they would not be strapped for cash. It was important to ensure, however, that everyone was clearly informed that the advance was to be used in connection with NCCIE, rather than for personal reasons, such as rent, food, etc.

Comments about the administrative and financial set up of NCCIE include:

- Regional Leads appreciated the ample budgets and the autonomy with which they were able to hire their RAs, an administrative assistant, as well as technology support. Some regions wanted to hire an Elder to be a part of their team and appreciated being able to use the budget to do so. In Year Three, if regions partnered with communities or organizations that wanted to create videos, they had the budget to hire local filmmakers or videographers. As well, for the development of lesson plans, they were able to hire a local curriculum developer.⁵⁰
- One Regional Lead expressed her appreciation that she was able to hire a local videographer who was connected to one of the area's First Nations. This helped with building trust and moving forward with the work at the start of the project. She also

⁵⁰ Northwest Ontario, Atlantic Provinces and Labrador Zoom Meetings, NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations, November 17 and November 19, 2020.

appreciated being able to pay an honorarium to the youth who participated in a video project in Year Three, saying, “That was a big deal – to be able to say to the youth, ‘We honour your time and energy and your sharing.’”⁵¹

- Regional Leads appreciated having the budget to travel to communities at the beginning of the project to meet with leadership, develop relationships, and seek community approvals to proceed with interviews.⁵²
- A Regional Lead was also appreciative of having the budget to travel to communities during Year Three to be able to work with people where they live. “It was inspiring, really special” to work with the youth, she said. Also, she was able to travel back when the video was complete for a “community launch” to share the results of all their efforts. The community really appreciated being able to come together and celebrate.⁵³ NCCIE funds paid for the Regional Lead’s travel as well as hall rental, food, etc.⁵⁴
- In another region in Year Three, NCCIE funds paid for teacher candidates to test draft lesson plans in their classroom placements and then to bring them together in a workshop setting to discuss how to refine the lesson plans based on their experiences with their students. A community member involved in this project said that the funding helped to bring teachers and teacher candidates together so that they could “develop the lesson plans more in full” based on the lesson plan testing.⁵⁵
- With respect to regional workshops and national gatherings, NCCIE covered all costs, including travel and accommodations for everyone in attendance from across their region and, in the case of the national gatherings, from across the country. Regional Leads expressed how much it meant for community members to be able to attend these events.
 - If teachers were attending, NCCIE covered the cost of supply teachers so they could attend (i.e., “teacher coverage”)
 - NCCIE paid for Elders and their aides or helpers to attend
 - NCCIE also paid for childcare for these events. In some cases, NCCIE paid for travel of a grandparent or spouse to accompany the community member and the child. In other cases, invoices were paid for caregivers staying at home with the attendee’s child/children
 - During the national gatherings, NCCIE also paid for simultaneous translation in French. During one of the national gatherings, NCCIE also paid for simultaneous translation in Nehiyawak (Plains Cree) and Anishinaabemowin (Eastern Ojibwe).

All in all, the financial and administrative systems that were set up worked very well. They were intended to be nimble and responsive in a very fluid environment, as NCCIE was a dynamic project with many ‘unknowns’ arising during the year (e.g., weather events and flight cancellations, special requests from community members that Regional Leads had to navigate, etc.). Several Regional Leads wished that funding could continue as more work is possible with communities, many of whom expressed interest in continuing NCCIE collaborations.

⁵¹ Atlantic Provinces and Labrador Zoom Meeting. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations, November 19, 2020.

⁵² Regional Lead Retreat Report, June 2018.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Southeast Ontario Zoom Meeting. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations, December 16, 2020.

Workshops and National Gatherings as Networking and Learning Opportunities

Regions were tasked with hosting at least one regional workshop during NCCIE, bringing community representatives together to discuss Indigenous education issues that were relevant in the area and to showcase the work of the region and introduce people to the NCCIE website. Most Regions scheduled their workshops for February and March when most of the year's work was completed. RAs gained experience in putting together presentations and in public speaking. Regional workshops were most often half-day or one day in length. The Atlantic Provinces and Labrador region received permission to hold a two-and-a-half-day workshop because of the significant travel times across several provinces for people to meet in one location. In addition to the presentations, a website tour, and discussions, the two Regional Leads arranged a group activity (such as dogsledding or snowshoeing). Two videos have been created from their workshops and can be accessed on NCCIE.CA at https://www.nccie.ca/teaching-resource-centre/videos/#panels_forums.

Nationally, NCCIE hosted three gatherings, bringing together the national and regional teams, Indigenous educators, community members, Elders and Knowledge Holders to celebrate the work of the year, hold discussions, and network. The first two were held in Ottawa, Ontario; because of COVID-19, the third national gathering was virtual. Recordings of all three are available at: <https://www.nccie.ca/national-gathering/>. Another national gathering was being planned for Regina, Saskatchewan at the FNUniv campus. Unfortunately, COVID-19 shut everything down. Youth at the second national gathering expressed desire for a more experiential agenda, rather than listening to speakers and participating in group discussions. So, the FNUniv-hosted gathering was going to be more interactive with hands-on learning and cultural teachings.

Comments include:

- The Alberta Regional Lead and her team arranged a set of workshops in different northern communities in addition to the ones she held in southern Alberta. People in the northern communities were so grateful to be heard.⁵⁶
- A community member from the Atlantic Provinces found the regional workshops incredibly inspiring. Also, meeting everyone at the national gathering was “really nice.” It was very meaningful to see the results of the work done during the year and to be able to share stories and network.⁵⁷
- A community member collaborating with NCCIE on lesson plan development felt the workshops they had were “really important.” Their process to develop the lesson plans included bringing together in-service teachers and teacher candidates in a workshop setting after testing the draft lesson plans with students.
 - During discussions they encouraged participants to critique the lesson plans as much as possible, considering their experiences and in light of the cultural knowledge and learnings, so that the final product is “doing right” by the knowledge that was shared by the Elders and Knowledge Holders.
 - The workshops were an opportunity for professional development for in-service teachers.⁵⁸
- A community member in the Atlantic Provinces talked about her association with NCCIE. In the beginning, she was interviewed about the land-based learning program

⁵⁶ Alberta Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. November 25, 2020.

⁵⁷ Atlantic Provinces and Labrador Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. November 19, 2020.

⁵⁸ Southeast Ontario Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. December 16, 2020

that she runs. As a result of the ‘story’ on the NCCIE website and from participating in the regional workshop, a lot of interest from other programs was generated. People contacted her to give training on how to set up a land-based learning program (e.g., how to deal with insurance and liability issues, etc.). It has been really inspiring, and she has been reached by people as far away as Yellowknife.⁵⁹

- A Regional Lead commented that “there is no substitute for bringing people together.” It was a huge takeaway for her how magical it is when you sit in a circle with people from across Atlantic Canada. “It’s a huge learning experience and a reaffirming one” for people to talk to one another and explore issues that they have in common.⁶⁰

All in all, the regional workshops and national gatherings were well-received. People expressed deep appreciation for the opportunities to meet face-to-face and to celebrate the strength in Indigenous education found across Canada.

Holistic and “Community First” Principles and “Research as Ceremony” in Practice

The holistic and “Community First” principles that NCCIE has adopted are manifested in a variety of ways. Comments by regional team members and community members best relay the value of these approaches as exemplars of “research as ceremony” in practice:

- One Regional Lead commented that once communities understood what NCCIE is about, “People were keenly interested. We were very careful to make sure there is no appropriation; we left their voices authentic” and communities appreciated that.⁶¹
- Community members in Atlantic Provinces and Labrador expressed their appreciation being involved with NCCIE, that their voices are heard on the website. They remarked that this project was “really good for the youth . . . for them to be involved in a project like this; it was a huge benefit for them.”⁶²
- Involving the youth was “critical for us,” one community member said. NCCIE “allowed the youth to frame their stories the way they wanted to.”⁶³
- They appreciated the flexibility so the community could determine what they wanted to do. They “really enjoyed and appreciated being able to tell *our* stories, with little restriction on how we could deliver it.”⁶⁴
- “We are storytellers. Capturing the stories and sharing them, this is something that we have not been good at doing; it has been a downfall for us. We don’t have the written or documented versions; but this was a positive first step for us to start documenting our stories.”⁶⁵
- The Regional Lead for this project appreciated the ability to customize what they did with communities and have them say what works best for them. She says, “We’re just getting started,” and based on her experience with the youth video project in one community, another community has expressed interest in a similar youth video project. She would really like to go and create youth videos there, too, she says.⁶⁶

⁵⁹ Atlantic Provinces and Labrador Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. November 19, 2020.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Alberta Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. November 25, 2020.

⁶² Atlantic Provinces and Labrador Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. November 19, 2020.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

- They enjoyed sharing and listening to other People’s stories, too, and expressed gratitude for being able to share.⁶⁷
- One community member talked about NCCIE being a “good experience” for her. She feels that the resources they have created will be treated with respect, that they will be treated almost as “ceremony” and is in essence “digital ceremony.” She has trust in the Regional Lead with whom she has been working and knows that respect will be there.⁶⁸
- Community members in one conversation expressed appreciation for being able to own the videos they created.⁶⁹
- A community member commented on the supportive nature of her Regional Lead and how she appreciated the support given by the project as a whole.⁷⁰
- During Year Three when developing lesson plans, one community member talked about, even though COVID affected some of the activities they had planned, the lesson plans turned out “really well.” The project affirmed for her the expertise she and her own People have – “that they can turn inward and learn from each other.”⁷¹
- A curriculum developer talked about how developing lesson plans and thinking about curriculum from an Indigenous perspective was difficult at the time and really challenged her. But in hindsight, she realizes how this holistic perspective is often neglected in lesson plan development and that it is very important to consider the emotional, physical, mental/intellectual and spiritual facets to students’ ways of learning. Thinking about lesson plans in this way “as a whole,” she reflects, “strengthens curriculum and lesson plans. We often don’t think about relationality,” she says, reflecting on the process of developing lesson plans from a holistic education perspective.⁷²
- A Faculty of Education professor who collaborated with NCCIE on creating math lesson plans with an Indigenous perspective also found the process challenging but rewarding. She is “always trying to find ways to make curriculum culturally respectful and responsive pedagogically,” she says. During her collaboration with NCCIE, the team was regularly checking in with a cultural Knowledge Holder to review the process and progress. She appreciated being able to acknowledge the Knowledge Holder’s participation with an honorarium.⁷³
- Also, she observes that, because of the Indigenous perspective to lesson plan development that NCCIE pursued, and because of her experiential learning journey with NCCIE, she trusts that the content on NCCIE is culturally respectful in terms of the process that went into creating lesson plans as well as the content.⁷⁴

In summary, regional teams and community members alike appreciated and learned from honouring Indigenous, holistic principles as well as the maxim “Community First” from the beginning of NCCIE to the end. The whole project has shown the praxis of “research is ceremony.”

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Southeast Ontario Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. December 16, 2020.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

Communication Strategy

Communication was critical to the success of the project. At the beginning, weekly teleconference calls were held to disseminate key information to launch the project and get regional teams moving. After a time, they moved to bi-weekly, then monthly meetings. When COVID hit, Zoom meetings were scheduled. The scheduling app Doodle Poll was used to identify dates and times of meetings for 17 Regional Leads plus several members of the national team. We learned to offer two different times so that 1) most everyone could attend at least one of the meetings; and 2) calls were with smaller groups so that everyone had a chance to ask questions, provide input, and discuss issues together.

Outside of the teleconference calls during Year One, information was distributed to Regional Leads via group emails. Whenever important decisions had been made and key documents generated, a group email was sent. When pressing information needed to be disseminated about new developments (such as clarifications about the use of templates or the Data Entry Portal, or requests for information to contribute to a national gathering agenda, etc.), more frequent emails were distributed. Eventually, the multitude of emails was consolidated into regularly disseminated e-newsletters.

In addition to being emailed, all e-newsletters were made available to regional teams on the ‘nccieadministration.ca’ website. This administrative site was created to serve as a one-stop-shop for regional team members to access all documents (such as ethics approval letters, consent forms, data entry instructions, expense claim forms, promotional materials, and more), e-newsletters, and recordings of teleconference/Zoom meetings. Appendix C lists all the materials provided on the internal website, ‘nccieadministration.ca.’

National team members (i.e., the National Project Director, Regional Liaison, NCCIE Content Team, and support personnel at Creative Fire and Engineered Code) were available via phone, email, and text. Because the project was fast-moving and time was of the essence throughout the project, efforts were made to return calls in a timely fashion so that issues and questions could be addressed quickly.

As with any project, we learned in real-time when something was not working. As an example, the request to streamline emails through e-newsletters came from a Regional Lead who provided the feedback that too many emails were cluttering inboxes, and it was becoming difficult for Regional Leads to find information. The NCCIE e-Newsletter was created to formalize the dissemination of information into monthly (and sometimes more frequent) issues. People were also reminded to use the ‘nccieadministration.ca’ website to access any documents they were seeking.

In the Year Two, Creative Fire identified for everyone single points of contact for budgets/expenses/contracts; information technology issues; workshop planning; and national gathering planning. With this information Regional Leads were clear who to call for assistance with what question or issue. Flow charts were also generated to illustrate key processes, such as for contract approvals and signatures, expense claim reimbursement, regional workshop planning, and the process to move interview from the planning stage all the way to the recorded story’s publication on the NCCIE website. These flow charts are included in Appendix C.

For the most part, with the suite of information dissemination and communication tools that were established by NCCIE and Creative Fire, regions were satisfied with the communication pathways, access to information, and responsiveness of the national team.

Challenges

NCCIE has been a very successful project, but it has not been without its challenges. After the first-year deliverables were completed, Regional Leads and the national team convened to review processes and discuss issues that arose. The Regional Leads appreciated the time together meeting face-to-face and for the opportunity to provide feedback. While more Regional Lead retreats would have been welcomed, timing did not allow for additional face-to-face meetings outside of luncheons during national gatherings. Sources of information for the following discussion include the retreat's report, Zoom discussions, and reflections from the National Director.

The information shared in this report is the result of learning-through-doing and offered in the spirit of openness to learn from one other. While some of this report's contents may point to challenges experienced in specific parts of Canada, the intent is not to point fingers but to learn from NCCIE's experiences. While NCCIE has realized great success in building relationships and in producing a website replete with Indigenous education stories and teaching resources, its process has not been without challenges and missteps. Those involved in the project humbly acknowledge this as well as how much we have learned during the project's four-year journey. In the spirit of respect and reciprocity, we wish to share what we have learned so that others who follow can approach their work with open eyes, ears, and hearts, avoiding some of NCCIE's challenges and building upon its successes.

Regarding NCCIE Work with Communities

Before elaborating on internal, process-oriented challenges, a few challenges that arose while conducting the work of the project with communities are important to note. The foundational principle that guided us in how we responded to these issues is the "Community First" principle, which allowed us to keep communities' expectations and priorities at the heart of our thinking and decision-making processes.

A few issues that arose dealt with community approval processes. For example, in one community, the Regional Lead thought she had obtained all the necessary approvals to proceed. It became evident that in addition to the Chief's and Council's approval, there were two other organizations in the community that needed to be approached for written approval before the team could proceed with interviews. The gift of time allowed us to pause the project until all necessary approvals had been received in writing.

Also related to community approvals, in northwestern Ontario as in other regions, the NCCIE regional team sought ample cross-representation of Indigenous education programs from early childhood, K-12, post-secondary, and community programs. For the latter, in addition to other community programs, the northwestern Ontario team approached a few Friendship Centres in the region and got their approvals for interviews. Once the videos were finalized and published to the website, we then learned that the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres (OFIFC), the umbrella organization, has its own ethics approval process that we needed to follow. As per their request, we removed the Friendship Centre videos from the website and began completing the form they had provided. Again, the gift of time allowed NCCIE ample

time to work through OFIFC's process and obtain their ethics approval, which took several months. In the end, OFIFC and NCCIE agreed on a project that would meet both organizations' needs. OFIFC happened to be working on another project for which videos highlighting Friendship Centre programs were required. A subcontract was signed whereby OFIFC took the lead creating the videos that, upon completion, were shared with the NCCIE website and met OFIFC's purposes as well. OFIFC had full control over the project and editing process. Due to various issues, including COVID, the deliverables were delayed a number of times and OFIFC requested project extensions. Thankfully, NCCIE had enough time in its project window to accommodate OFIFC's requests. Both OFIFC and NCCIE were pleased with the working relationship and the quality of the final videos.

Another challenge that arose, especially for the Sahtu Team, was the distance between the five communities in the region. The regional team all lived in Fort Good Hope in the Northwest Territories (NWT). Traveling to the other Sahtu communities, building relationships there and obtaining the necessary approvals in each proved difficult because of distance, winter weather, and job and family responsibilities. NCCIE was grateful that, being so remote, they were keen to participate in the project. So, we were happy to receive however many 'stories' they were able to deliver (17 instead of 25). In the Year Two, the local Regional Lead and National Director jointly decided to focus on a special project of which the Regional Lead was already a part. She had been hired to be the videographer for a global project related to climate change impacts called "Tracking Change: the Role of Local and Traditional Knowledge in Watershed Governance."⁷⁵ After conference call discussions, it was agreed that NCCIE and the "Tracking Change" team based out of the University of Alberta would collaborate to produce three videos about life along the Dehcho (Mackenzie River) and climate change impacts people are experiencing there. In addition to creating these important videos, the local Regional Lead was still able to gather a collection of 'stories' from some neighbouring Sahtu communities.

NCCIE endeavoured to have representation from as many parts of Canada as possible, each with its own team gathering 'stories' in the region. At the beginning of the project, the National Director met with the Oversight Committee members to identify people who they knew would be excellent Regional Leads. Most everyone contacted was interested in joining the project immediately. If they declined the opportunity, for whatever reason, they referred the National Director to other candidates and provided an e-introduction. Where the Oversight Committee had no initial referrals, the National Director made cold calls to an Indigenous organization. For example, Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning in Yellowknife, NWT was able to find a local person interested in taking on the project. Once they saw the results of NCCIE's first year, two people at Dechinta co-led the project going forward.

For Yukon and Nunavut, because of their remoteness and lack of contacts, it took until the Year Two to recruit Regional Leads. A Trent University graduate student was moving to Whitehorse and became interested in NCCIE when an Oversight Committee member at Trent told her about it. She became the Yukon Regional Lead beginning in Year Two. For Nunavut, the Regional Lead learned that FNU and University of Regina had partnered with Nunavut Arctic College (NAC) to offer a Nunavut Teacher Education Program (NTEP). When university representatives were planning a trip to Nunavut to meet with NTEP colleagues, the National Director

⁷⁵ <https://trackingchange.ca/>.

accompanied them and was able to meet with the Manager of the Nunavut Research Institute (NRI) to initiate the ethics approval process. Also, the FNUniv and University of Regina representatives introduced the National Director to two NTEP teacher candidates who were interested in learning about NCCIE and agreed to be NCCIE Co-Leads for the territory. The NRI ethics approval process was completed, and the National Director oriented the two Co-Leads so that they could build their team and begin the work of the project.

For other parts of Canada such as northern Quebec, as much as she tried, the National Director could find no one with the time or availability to devote to the project. For example, the National Director traveled to Montreal to meet with staff at the Cree School Board who then referred her to a prospective candidate in Chisasibi. Upon speaking with her, however, as it turned out, she was too busy, and no other referrals were provided.

Other regions were equally as large. In Alberta, for example, the Regional Lead resided in the south, but she was able to recruit RAs further north to gather ‘stories’ there. The Alberta Regional Lead wished she could have reached even further north. In Manitoba, interviews were conducted as far north as Fox Lake Cree Nation, even though the team was based in Winnipeg. If the project were able to access more funding to continue its work, one of the Regional Leads’ recommendations is to spend time gathering more Indigenous education ‘stories’ from further reaches of the country.

Mention has already been made of challenges that arose in Quebec with respect to the Indigenous education organizations and their questions about NCCIE. The Quebec regional team had reached out to some of these organizations at the outset to inform them about the project and invite them for interviews. When the team did not hear back after a number of attempts, RAs and the Regional Lead moved onto other prospective Indigenous education programs for interviews as time was running short to finish the work. With Band Councils’ consent from communities that had been involved in other education projects and showcased previously in conferences or research reports, the RAs were able to arrange several (mostly French) interviews that were finalized and published to the NCCIE website. At the first regional workshop in 2018 when these ‘stories’ were shared, some Indigenous education organizations took issue with NCCIE and raised questions about: 1) the lack of communication, why they were not approached at the outset to have some say in the direction of the project, its goals and objectives, and what benefit the project would have for Indigenous education in Quebec; 2) the collaborative nature of NCCIE when the umbrella organizations in Quebec were not included in the project’s initial design; 3) the purpose of the website when *Indspire* has been in existence for several years; 4) the region’s process in identifying who to interview (again, why were the umbrella organizations not approached?); and 5) why First Nations University of Canada received this funding when Indigenous education initiatives at local levels are struggling to access sufficient funds to run their programs. The message that NCCIE heard was that these organizations perceived the project to be top-down and that this sort of project should be bottom-up with grassroots organizations and communities receiving the funds so they could run their programs.

After the Quebec regional workshop, efforts to address these concerns, clear up some misunderstandings, and seek opportunities for potential collaboration were met with mixed results. One organization did not respond to NCCIE phone calls and emails from either the National Director or the Quebec Regional Lead. We made the determination that they were extremely busy taking care of their mandate and had no extra time for NCCIE, so we respected

their message of silence. Another organization's Executive Director spoke with both the National Director and the President of FNUniv, and efforts were made to identify a potential project that would be of benefit to the organization and its member First Nations' schools and communities. Unfortunately, efforts to move the relationship forward toward a mutually beneficial collaboration came to no avail.

Only so much time could be dedicated to this outreach effort because the needs of the working regions and the demands of the project meant that, at some point, these efforts needed to be suspended. In the end, the Quebec regional team met with success with the Innu cultural organization, Institut Tshakapesh, and the Regional Lead developed a successful working relationship to collaborate on a number of NCCIE projects. Also, the southern Quebec regional team was able to reach as far north to collaborate with Naskapi in Kawawachikamach (near Schefferville), among other Peoples in Quebec. The results of the ensuing collaborations were well-received, and the relationships built remain strong. In addition, the Quebec regional team continued its efforts to develop relationships with the other Indigenous education organizations in Quebec. For example, the subsequent regional workshop held on Université Laval's campus in 2019 was well-attended, with over 50 participants from a variety of organizations. The workshop's objective was to gather people's thoughts and priorities concerning Teacher Education Programs and how they can better meet the needs of Indigenous students and communities. These efforts amounted to a new beginning for Indigenous relations with members of the regional team. Toward the end of NCCIE, the Regional Lead noted that stronger relationships had been built and a new foundation established, potentially leading to future collaborations for the benefit of Indigenous education in Quebec.

A message received loud and clear from the Quebec regional team and the communities and organizations with whom the team collaborated is the critical importance of translating the NCCIE website and its many resources into French. For many First Nations in Quebec, French is either their second or first language, depending on where they live. English is not in their lexicon. So, it is important that resources on the website be made available for Indigenous and non-Indigenous schools and communities who speak their Indigenous language and French, but no English. In addition, outside Quebec, NCCIE learned that French immersion schools and language programs lack sufficient teaching resources in French that are about Indigenous topics. Beginning in the Year Two, NCCIE set aside funds to translate as much as possible and create the French website. This resource and time intensive process was a priority for NCCIE to satisfy both the need for Indigenous education resources in French and the concerns expressed by Indigenous organizations in Quebec that NCCIE respect Francophone needs.

It is important to note that the initiative to create the French NCCIE website had to be balanced with the need for teaching resources to strengthen and reclaim Indigenous languages. To ensure that Indigenous languages received the attention they are due, NCCIE initiated a number of special projects, including creating a playlist about Indigenous language teaching initiatives, translating several 'stories' into a number of Indigenous languages, and highlighting Indigenous languages in the main banner of the website. As well, a number of lesson plans for teaching Indigenous languages were created in Year Three, using a lesson plan template that was created with an Indigenous lens.

Some of the challenges experienced by NCCIE in Quebec were experienced to varying degrees elsewhere in Canada. In British Columbia (BC), for example, efforts by the southern BC regional

team were made initially to connect with the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) to inform them of the project and invite them for interviews. When the team did not get a response, they had to move on to seek interviews with other prospective Indigenous education programs and initiatives. Again, FNESC is extremely busy with its mandate and had little time to participate in a new project such as NCCIE, one that at the outset at least, was an unknown entity. During NCCIE's Year Three, FNESC leadership learned about the project in a presentation the National Director made to the Assembly of First Nations National Indian Education Council (NIEC). The FNESC representative raised concerns about the project at that time, inquiring why they were not approached or consulted at the outset. There is little more that the southern BC regional team could do than to extend invitations and make follow-up phone calls, which they did. At some point, upon receiving no response, the team had to respect the message of silence and move on.

A learning from all of this is that Indigenous education structures across Canada are distinct and, with 20-20 hindsight and NCCIE's current awareness of these structures, perhaps more concerted efforts could have been made to engage with each region's particular Indigenous education organizational structures and hierarchies. To be clear, a concerted focus on political voices was not part of NCCIE's mandate. Rather, NCCIE's vision and the "Community First" approach had been set by the President of FNUiv (with guidance from the Elders' Council) to amplify community voices at the grassroots level. Interviews to gather 'stories' from Indigenous education umbrella organizations would have been a welcomed contribution to the project. But regional teams, being unable to connect with them after initial attempts, had to move on. The old adage "you can't make everyone happy all of the time" is perhaps the main takeaway. It is difficult to address everyone's concerns, let alone to anticipate them from the beginning of such a large-scale, nation-wide project that has a multitude of diverse, fast-moving pieces needing constant attention. NCCIE has a deep respect for the distinctness and heterogeneity among Indigenous Peoples and has endeavoured to be an exemplar respecting their diverse approaches to education across Canada. But NCCIE was not created to navigate the political arena. Its primary goal was to create a grassroots network so Indigenous education programs and initiatives can connect and learn directly from each other to strengthen Indigenous education.

Time Issues

The multi-year nature of the project was a definite advantage for NCCIE, as the benefits realized from the flexibility this afforded are proof, as discussed. Other timing aspects of the project, however, presented the national team and regions with a number of challenges. For example, NCCIE operated according to the federal fiscal year calendar, which begins April 1 and ends March 31. Each year's deliverables were due by March 31. This presented the first year of the project with its own set of challenges because work could not begin until the funds were received in FNUiv's bank account, and this did not occur until late in the summer. Then the RFP process had to be completed. By the time the RFP selection process was finished it was October, leaving just six months before the deliverables were due. All the administrative, contractual, and budget tracking systems had to be set up, ethics approvals were needed, and regional teams established before any work gathering 'stories' could begin. Simultaneously, the data entry templates and the internet "Portal" to enter the data and upload recordings had to be created; the iPod kits had to be researched, purchased, and distributed; training sessions had to be conducted; and work building the website had to get underway. Everything was new. As one can imagine, with all these moving parts, time was in short supply to gather 'stories' and complete the deliverables.

At the national gathering in March 2018, the website was launched with a limited number of ‘stories’ to provide participants with an idea of the website’s potential as more ‘stories’ became available. The NCCIE Content Team was overwhelmed with the hundreds of ‘stories’ received in one large ‘dump’ toward the end of March. They worked diligently over the summer to process them, but as discussed below, many RAs and Regional Leads were unavailable during the summer months. The NCCIE Content Team did its best to work through the preview process with whomever they could reach. From the very beginning of the Fall Term in September 2018, Regional Leads and RAs were doubly busy, finishing up the Year One preview process to publish ‘stories’ onto the website and initiating work on Year Two objectives.

As the project developed over time, other challenges with the fiscal year calendar became evident as there was a constant tension between the academic year and the federal fiscal year. For example, with deliverables due at the end of March, conflicts arose with the end-of-term academic deadlines at universities. Student RAs and those professors who were Regional Leads were extremely busy with final assignments, exams, and grading. These responsibilities impacted the final weeks of the project and submission of materials, data entry into the Portal system, and quality assurance processes, all issues that are discussed in more detail in the ensuing sections.

Unless extensions were arranged, contracts ended March 31st. Student RAs were busy finishing up their semesters, and then many left for summer jobs. Youth and community RAs were busy with their summer activities, often going on-the-land where they were away from their homes and access to the internet weeks at a time. As a result, unless Regional Leads arranged for summer contracts for themselves and their RAs, little work was done over the summer break. Having said this, some regional teams planned for summer work and made necessary arrangements to conduct more interviews or finish work from the previous year.

Over the summer, the national team was busy finishing work from the previous year and planning for the subsequent year’s work, which formally began each September. With the beginning of Fall Term classes, again, professors and students alike had to balance coursework with NCCIE. Ethics approvals had to be renewed, the new mandates relayed, updated templates and other documentation reviewed, and new regional contracts prepared and signed. While regional work typically got underway earlier than in Year One, timing issues inevitably seemed to arise. With this context in place, regional teams and community members participating in the project have shared their perspectives on various challenges they experienced related to time:

- A community member acknowledged how time was “a bit of a challenge” – that she had to juggle her NCCIE commitments with the programs she is responsible for. When NCCIE was in Year Three, the community had decided to create a series of youth videos with the support of NCCIE. She observed that she “didn’t realize how much time making a film takes.” She noted that where she works there is always, it seems, “limited resources and personnel” and this impacted the time she was able to devote to the project. But she emphasized that she appreciated “being able to align the project based on what they [were] doing internally.”⁷⁶
- Still, another community member noted how COVID impacted work on NCCIE projects.⁷⁷ When COVID struck, the President at FNUUniv discussed timing issues with

⁷⁶ Atlantic Provinces and Labrador Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations, November 19, 2020.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

the funding agency (Indigenous Services Canada). Extensions for deliverables were authorized as a result.

- Another community member expressed disappointment that the work she had planned to do on a lesson plan had to be set aside. COVID disrupted everyone's schedules, and due to circumstances impacting people's lives (e.g., schools closing, children being homeschooled, lack of childcare, etc.), some RAs could not follow-through on their projects with community members. Money and time ran out, and some potential work was left undone.⁷⁸
- Regional Leads, as discussed, were under tight timeframes to get the work of the project done. Some talked about how it was a challenge for them to juggle their job responsibilities with those of NCCIE. Different strategies to accomplish the work included: selecting strong students to be RAs; selecting students with strong community ties; and more.⁷⁹
- One Regional Lead observed that everyone was on "a steep learning curve." Year One was "incredibly short," he said. "Everything got started late. We were behind the eight-ball, so to speak. So much was being done concurrently. . . People stayed positive and understood the challenge the timeline presented."⁸⁰
- Another Regional Lead discussed the iterative and collaborative process at the beginning – how they had to think through logistical pieces, identify and think through gaps, send questions to the National Director and Creative Fire, give feedback to refine the documents and templates. He commented that it was beneficial that the National Director had experience working with communities and with academics. Being able to navigate both was an asset.⁸¹
- Still another Regional Lead commented on the tight timeframe to get her team set up. She relied on "well-connected people who already had a trust relationship. They could reach deep into community and get the 'stories' that NCCIE was looking for."⁸²
- A Regional Lead observed that it was hard to "have enough time to account for how busy people are." He said that "people are stretched and involved in so much" that it was difficult sometimes to find an interview time that worked well for both the RA and interviewee.⁸³
- An RA talked about how he had interviews set up and then something came up in the community so they would have to reschedule. He said, "That's how the feather blows in the wind," acknowledging that this happens in this line of work, and we have to adjust accordingly. It adds to costs and the time needed to complete a project, but this is the nature of Indigenous research that is grounded in "Community First" principles.⁸⁴
- Another RA talked about how she had to be flexible to meet people for interviews "where they were at." For example, she even met someone in a Tim Horton's parking lot because he was so busy, and that was the only time he could meet. Another time, she met someone at a public library because that was their preferred location.⁸⁵

⁷⁸ Southeastern Ontario Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. December 16, 2020.

⁷⁹ Northeast Ontario Zoom Discussion. Saskatchewan Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations, November 25, 2020; May 15, 2021.

⁸⁰ Northeast Ontario Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations, November 25, 2020.

⁸¹ Southeast Ontario Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations, December 16, 2020.

⁸² Alberta Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations, November 25, 2020.

⁸³ Southwest Ontario Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations, November 25, 2020.

⁸⁴ Northeast Ontario Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations, November 25, 2020.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

- Still, another RA discussed how “Relationships aren’t easy; it takes a long time to build relationships. We couldn’t work based on our time frame; we had to work according to their time frame. We had to be accountable and show we were accountable.”⁸⁶
 - He shares a story from Year Three: “The team reached out a couple times to some language instructors to collaborate on developing and sharing resources and heard nothing back. They were ‘getting crickets from the community’” (i.e., hearing nothing). As a team, they reflected on what they could do differently and someone recalled that in the first workshop, they heard the language instructors note that they were looking to share resources . . . So, the team decided to pull together a list of resources for communities to use and shared that with them. This act of giving back to communities by giving them something they could really use (and had asked for) went a long way in strengthening relationships. It “re-booted communications and their interest in working together some more.”⁸⁷
 - “Building relationship is not a one-time thing. It is on-going work – recursive, iterative, showing sincerity, and following through on your word.”⁸⁸
- An RA in northern Alberta brought to light issues dealing with weather and road access. Poor winter conditions affected interviews because she could not travel the roads and had to cancel meetings. It forced her to reorient her interviews to more urban areas in northern Alberta. As a result, a large part of Treaty 8 had to be excluded because there were no roads and travel times were too great.⁸⁹
 - She talked about needing more time to develop relationships and get ethics approvals in remote areas that were harder to access. “Even with four years,” she said, she “did not have enough time” and wished that Indigenous education initiatives further north could have been included. Alberta was not alone in this desire to seek good cross-representation geographically.⁹⁰
 - A Regional Lead in Atlantic Canada mentioned that, with 20-20 hindsight, she would have distributed interviews differently to reach more corners and more Indigenous Peoples in the Maritimes. She said that now that they know people and have those relationships, it would be easier to access those interviews. She also confirmed that a challenge for her team was the timing of the academic year that affected RAs’ availability to do the work.⁹¹
 - NCCIE leadership knew that it would be impossible to capture 100% of all the Indigenous education initiatives across the country. The decision was made to focus efforts on seeking examples of different types of educational initiatives for different learner age groups from across each region. Of course, with more time and more funds, larger regions could have been split into smaller ones and more ‘stories’ could have been gathered. At one point, however, the decision had to be made to end “story gathering” and move to “giving back.” The President of FNUUniv at that time decided that the 653 ‘stories’ on the website were a

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Alberta Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. November 25, 2020.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

sufficiently-sized sample, providing educators with a comprehensive range of exemplars to explore and from which to learn.⁹²

- One regional team shared that they experienced a higher turnover rate of students than they would have liked. They had hired mostly undergraduate students who, they quickly realized, needed more time for training as they were new to research and data entry. They had technical challenges with uploading their data and recordings, and they had never conducted interviews before. The Regional Leads admitted that they, themselves, were stretched and did not have enough time in their day to oversee the work and mentor the students. Another challenge they experienced was that their university required that the Research Associate positions be advertised and applicants interviewed, a process that took up considerable time before the team was fully staffed and work could get underway.⁹³
 - All in all, this region's Regional Leads agreed that, for them, the project's timing was a challenge. By the time students were hired and received training, it was often late in the Fall Term, and the winter break was around the corner. In hindsight, they acknowledge that the project "did not jibe well" with undergraduate programs, saying: "They got off to a late start. Then students disappeared over the summer when more work could have been done." They recommend recruiting graduate students for a project like NCCIE.⁹⁴
- A number of regions recruited non-Indigenous RAs who noted challenges of their own. One RA reflected on his experience that, if he did not have a prior relationship with prospective interviewees or their organizations, he had difficulty "getting in the front door." The people he was approaching for interviews took a "wait and see approach." Being invited and attending the national gathering helped, because "they could see the outcome and the goodwill." Another RA in a different region had a similar experience with being new to the area and not having any prior relationships. He had to take time to meet people and develop relationships before interviews could be scheduled.⁹⁵
- Some graduate RAs also commented on challenges juggling schoolwork with NCCIE responsibilities. But they did learn time management skills and, overall, they learned a lot and appreciated the opportunity to contribute to the project.⁹⁶
- Regional Leads and the National Director acknowledge that the ethics approval process took considerable time at the beginning of the project. First, we had to wait for umbrella ethics approval from Trent University, which included approval from the Indigenous Advisory Council. Then, Regional Leads had to work through their university's or organization's ethics processes (which were expedited once the umbrella ethics approval was obtained). Also, if necessary, community ethics approval was needed. Then, "time was really tight," one Regional Lead observed.⁹⁷ The benefit was that NCCIE was a multi-year project. Once the first ethics approval was received, subsequent years' ethics renewals were granted readily, and work could get underway sooner.

⁹² Alberta, Atlantic Provinces and Labrador, and Quebec Zoom Discussions. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. November 19, 2020; November 25, 2020; December 9, 2020.

⁹³ Saskatchewan Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations, May 14, 2021.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Manitoba, Alberta, and BC Zoom Discussions. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. November 25, 2020; December 14, 2020.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Northeast Ontario Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. November 25, 2020.

- During “lesson plan development” in Year Three, for one region in Ontario, timing of workshops coincided with rotating strikes and job action by teachers. The regional team was holding workshops with teachers from two school districts to gather feedback on their experiences and their students’ experiences with the draft lesson plans. One of the school districts was on strike the day of the workshop, so the regional team was only able to draw on the expertise and experiences of teachers in the other school district. This challenge is an example of how regional teams had to adapt in the moment, given circumstances beyond their control. Even though the timing of the rotating strikes conflicted with the regional workshop, the feedback provided valuable direction to make the lesson plans stronger and more user-friendly.⁹⁸
- In another region, a non-Indigenous educator had been recruited to assist with lesson plan development. She said that she was nervous, not being an Indigenous person. But she could relate to other non-Indigenous educators because she could understand what they would be nervous about and “the fear that is out there of saying something wrong.” She brought this sensitivity to the work at hand.⁹⁹
- One Regional Lead reflected on his approach to the project and thought that perhaps he may have sought to control the workflow too much. He wished he had given the RAs more leeway to schedule interviews on their own. He found the project challenging in that “whenever you involve Indigenous people who are of like mind and who are as involved as he is, it’s hard to carve out time for the project.” There were a lot of rescheduling of interviews and cancellations, he said, because people were so busy. He observes,

Indigenous people are tasked with many things; they don’t just work a 9-to-5 job; they have to do all sorts of things on top of their day jobs. It’s problematic because they are so busy. There is no solution; it’s just a reality. You kind of take it on as an Indigenous person – taking on three or four jobs, projects; sitting on numerous boards; on top of family responsibilities . . . People’s time is scarce and getting around that while being respectful is challenging. It was a reality check how busy people are and how difficult it was to schedule a time for an interview.¹⁰⁰

- All the Regional Leads agreed that more time was needed in Year Four for knowledge mobilization to raise awareness about the website as well as to hold workshops with policy makers and Indigenous education leaders across Canada. COVID severely impacted everyone’s ability to set up in-person workshops and presentations. On the other hand, online Zoom events had the potential to reach many educators who otherwise would not have been able to take time off work or away from family to attend an in-person event. Regional Leads and members of the national team expressed the need to keep the NCCIE relevant going forward. Spending more time raising awareness about the resources on NCCIE’s website and how to use them was a key recommendation.

⁹⁸ Southeast Ontario Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. December 16, 2020.

⁹⁹ Alberta Zoom Discussion #2. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. December 18, 2020.

¹⁰⁰ Southwest Ontario Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. November 25, 2020.

Research and Trust Issues

As many have realized over the years, research has earned a negative reputation with Indigenous Peoples around the world (Smith, 1999). It is no surprise that ethics protocols and expectations when working with Indigenous Peoples have had to evolve. As emphasized throughout this report, the approach NCCIE has taken has been a “Community First,” Indigenous-directed approach, and this has been received well given the time afforded the project. As discussed at various points in this paper, however, some regional teams have been met with a degree of hesitation when introducing NCCIE to communities. One decision that was made early on was to frame the project not as “research” but as “story-gathering” to amplify community voices. Consent forms explained that the digital recordings of stories shared would not be altered in any way, so that people’s voices and messages would remain authentic. Still, the comments below reveal perspectives and concerns raised by community members and team members alike about the importance of taking the time necessary to build relationships and trust:

- A Regional Lead mentioned that “when they haven’t had a chance to sit with you face-to-face, they struggle to agree to participate.” She explained that they were unsure what the information was going to be used for, that NCCIE was “so new” and “seemed hypothetical.”
 - It helped to be able to show communities parts of the project that were complete, or that at least had some content to share so they could see how the ‘stories’ gathered would be presented.
 - She recommends “face-to-face time” at the beginning, where needed, to build a relationship and trust.¹⁰¹
- Because of issues related to autonomy and control, sometimes politics within regions contributed to an organization’s reluctance to participate. This was the experience in Quebec where some Indigenous education umbrella organizations presented their concerns and objections at the regional workshop. Trust was built with one of the Indigenous education umbrella organizations given time, face-to-face meetings, and abiding by their ethics approval process.¹⁰²
- Nunavut’s experience was unique in that the territorial government is Inuit-controlled. Once the research registry certificate was approved by the Nunavut Research Institute (NRI), one of the Regional Leads observed that “the challenge then became how to work with schools without going through the bureaucracy [the government] first, as in Nunavut, the bureaucracy has great control over schools.”¹⁰³
 - On top of NRI approval, the Regional Leads had to submit a request for an interview with the Department of Education where senior management had to review the proposal and approve the request. Teachers would not agree to be interviewed unless “it was something the government initiated.” As a result, the Nunavut NCCIE team focused on community-based Inuit education programs that were separate from schools. The ‘stories’ from the territory that appear on NCCIE are about exemplary Inuit education programs and initiatives that are non-profit but not accredited.¹⁰⁴
- The experience in Ontario with the Friendship Centres has already been discussed. OFIFC, initially, was concerned that NCCIE had circumvented their ethics approval process. Face-to-face meetings were held between OFIFC research staff, the Principal

¹⁰¹ Nunavut Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. December 1, 2020.

¹⁰² Quebec Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. December 9, 2020.

¹⁰³ Nunavut Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. December 1, 2020.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

Investigator at Trent University, the Southeast Ontario Regional Lead, and the National Project Director to address their concerns and apologize for the oversight. First, at OFIFC's request, the relevant 'stories' were removed from the website. Then, the National Project Director worked closely with OFIFC staff to find a way forward that would be mutually beneficial, and then to complete the ethics application and submit it for review and approval. The "Community First" principle guided NCCIE in this process and helped the National Director assure OFIFC that they would retain control over the project and the quality and messaging of the videos to shine a light on the 'stories' they wanted to tell.¹⁰⁵

- For RAs who were not Indigenous and had no prior relationships with Indigenous organizations, more time was needed to build relationships and trust. Regional Leads fostered relationship-building by making initial introductions and, in some cases, facilitating initial discussions, paving the way for a non-Indigenous RA to schedule a meeting for an interview. In some instances, the Regional Lead provided the non-Indigenous RA with background reading material to provide important foundational information and insights. As well, at team meetings, information was shared about customs and protocols of the First Peoples in their region.
- One Regional Lead emphasized the need for researchers to be informed about residential schools, 60's scoop, and differences between living in the city and on-reserve. He talked about how Indigenous Peoples, depending on where they grew up and the experiences they had, "each have had their own experiences that have shaped their worldviews." While his life has not been without its challenges, having grown up in a city, he admits to having had "more opportunities and more access" than many people on-reserve. He stresses the importance of "checking his privilege" and that others engaging in work with communities need to be cognizant of the challenges people face whether on-reserve or in urban centres.¹⁰⁶

Regarding Administration, Capacity-Building, & Technology

Behind the scenes, many administrative, capacity-building, and technology supports were put in place to facilitate the work of the regional teams. Everything was set up with the best of intentions; however, implementation was not without its challenges. Regional and national teams alike understood the complexity of the project and the many moving parts that had to work in concert. Everyone's understanding, patience, and collaborative spirit were instrumental to the success of the project. Regional teams were extremely supportive of the NCCIE mission and vision, and the communities with whom they were working were grateful for the opportunity to have their voices heard. The positive experiences far outweigh the challenges. Still, these hurdles are worth reviewing as they provide important learning opportunities.

Challenges related to Capacity-Building and Training

NCCIE's capacity-building aims provided students, youth, and community members who were hired as Research Associates (RAs) with opportunities to learn-through-doing and gain experience conducting and recording interviews, data entry, and public speaking, among other skills. In addition to hands-on experiential learning, RAs attended training sessions and were mentored by Regional Leads. More training than less is always beneficial. From the outset,

¹⁰⁵ In-person and teleconference meetings with OFIFC, August 2018-May 2019.

¹⁰⁶ Southwest Ontario Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. November 25, 2020.

however, the pace of the project was so fast that some regions lacked sufficient time to follow-up initial training with additional sessions.

As part of their job description, Regional Leads were asked to train their RAs and mentor them on how to conduct interviews and how to operate the digital equipment for recording interviews. This equipment consisted of an “iPod kit” purchased by FNUniv and shipped to Regional Leads for distribution to RAs (see Appendix D for “iPod kit” components). For training with the iPod kits, Regional Leads could recruit a local technology support person, or they could hold a teleconference (via Skype or Zoom) with a member of the NCCIE Content Team at FNUniv. While RAs gained confidence conducting interviews as the project progressed, some regional teams commented on a desire for more flexibility with the interview questions. Also, some RAs did not realize that they could ask follow-up questions not appearing on the original list or that they could make the interviews more of a conversation than a “question and answer” interview.

With respect to the use of the technology, sometimes the quality of the lighting or sound (or both) was an issue. To address this challenge, in preparation for the Year Two of interviews, the NCCIE Content Team created a set of training videos for RAs (that were posted to the ‘nccieadministration.ca’ website) on setting up and operating the iPod camera kits as well as lighting and sound tips. The national team also encouraged regions to hire a local technology support person, if they had not already done so, to assist RAs on an as needed basis. In some cases, a member of the NCCIE Content Team traveled to regions to provide hands-on technical training. In other cases, a few regions contacted interviewees and sought to re-record those interviews whose lighting was poor or sound quality too soft or muddled with background noise.

Another area of work that required additional training was navigation and use of the “Data Entry Portal.” The Data Entry Portal was a password-protected website especially created for RAs (and Regional Leads) for uploading the digital recording and entering information connected to each interview. RAs were asked to enter a title for the Indigenous education initiative, description, contact information, and keywords describing the education level, education topics, region (i.e., province or territory), language, and more. This “data” plus the recorded interview were processed by the NCCIE Content Team to create the ‘stories’ that now appear on the NCCIE.CA website. Once in draft form, ‘stories’ were to be reviewed by the RAs and their Regional Leads for grammar, completeness, and spelling errors. Once any requested changes were made, the final draft was shared with the person or organization interviewed to receive their approval before the ‘story’ was published to the website for public access.

While this process was sound in theory, in practice a number of issues surfaced. RAs and Regional Leads were asked to review the draft ‘stories’ in a timely manner. Unfortunately, timing became an issue because this review phase just happened to coincide with the end of academic terms when all their assignments were due or over the summer (as already discussed). As a result, the “quality assurance reviews” (QA) did not always take place according to plan. Also, when the ‘stories’ were forwarded to the interviewee for final review, after a certain point when no feedback was received (usually seven days unless a longer timeframe was requested), the NCCIE Content Team had to assume that no further changes were needed, and the ‘stories’ were published to the website. In some instances, no QA was completed.

These QA issues became evident during the summer after Year One and included such issues as spelling errors (both in the text of ‘story pages’ and in the videos), incomplete descriptions, too

many descriptive tags selected, and incomplete contact information, among others. As a result, Year Two job descriptions included QA responsibilities to review Year One ‘stories’ and to ensure the quality of Year Two ‘stories.’ More training sessions were held. The NCCIE Content Team provided a “Quality Assurance Checklist” for RAs and Regional Leads to follow. As well, more people were hired for the NCCIE Content Team to work with regional teams and assure the necessary edits were made.

The Data Entry Portal proved to be a challenge unto itself for RAs and Regional Leads to navigate. With 20-20 hindsight, specific training on the “Portal” would have been ideal. Again, the lack of time in people’s schedules hindered these efforts. The NCCIE Content Team did its best to work one-on-one with RAs or Regional Leads when additional assistance was requested. The biggest issue, it seems, that people had with the Portal occurred when they entered the data. When they went back later to continue entering data, they found the information had not been saved. One of the reasons for this was that certain data fields were asterisked as mandatory fields. If data was not entered in those fields, then nothing was saved. Once we figured out that this was a primary reason for loss of work, the national team worked with Engineered Code¹⁰⁷ to remove some asterisks and explained the need for certain mandatory fields in newsletters and on teleconference calls with Regional Leads. While this challenge persisted throughout the project, reminding RAs and Regional Leads (and curriculum developers in Year Three) to constantly save their work helped to alleviate the issue. Also, upon clicking the “save” button, automated notations with reminders that certain fields were empty were programmed to appear.

Technology and Data Entry Issues

There were definite growing pains managing all the data that were being generated across the country. The NCCIE Content Supervisor had to sort out how best to store the original video and audio recordings in a secure manner, ensuring that the accompanying text was connected to the corresponding digital file. When communities were being invited to participate, they questioned the security of the data and how it will be stored, used, and kept secure. Consent forms provided some information. However, operationalizing the guarantees took time to iron out. It required research and clarification of instructions to regional teams, some of whom were uploading video files to Google Drive, which was not secure. In the end, once everything was figured out, the NCCIE Content Supervisor and Engineered Code provided the following assurances:

- The data were stored primarily in a WordPress database, using MySQL, hosted with WPEngine. Industry standard practices were followed to ensure the security of these data.
- Once published to the website, the data were also stored within Microsoft's Azure cloud as this was used for NCCIE’s search index.
- Files uploaded via the “Portal” are only ever held in Microsoft's Azure cloud. They go directly to the cloud, not through the WordPress server. Before they are published, the files are hosted in a private area where a special token (like a password) is required to view them.
- FNUUniv is maintaining the security of the data indefinitely in Microsoft’s Azure cloud with a NAS Drive as back-up.

¹⁰⁷ Engineered Code was the firm hired to create and manage the website as well as the Data Entry Portal.

While these and other technical details were being troubleshooted simultaneously, this initial period grew a bit chaotic at times, giving way to an element of confusion among regional teams. Some Regional Leads and RAs acknowledged the confusion and how uploading files had its glitches. One RA commented, “Things changed mid-stream in the first year as kinks were being ironed out.”¹⁰⁸ For example, video file sizes were extremely large, and upload speeds were slow in parts of the country that had low bandwidth. Even where internet speeds were fast, sometimes uploading failed, and RAs had to start all over, sometimes waiting hours for uploads to finish. The NCCIE Content Team had to provide clear instructions so that RAs’ computers would not “go to sleep,” which disrupted the process. If uploading files to the Portal remained unsuccessful, the NCCIE Content Team recommended that individuals purchase USB sticks and mail the recordings with a tracking number. The files had to be clearly marked so that, upon receipt of a package through the mail, the NCCIE Content Team knew which file on which USB stick needed to be uploaded to which file in the Portal to match it to the text that had been entered previously. To this end, each ‘story’ was assigned its own numeric identifier so that all its corresponding files could be collated and synced.

Comments regarding the Data Entry Portal and Technology Issues are as follows:

- A Regional Lead shared that some of his RAs liked coding and data entry, while others did not. The younger RAs were more tech-savvy than the older RAs. For community members, using different terminology such as “filling in the blanks” instead of “coding” or “data entry” could have helped make the task less daunting for them.¹⁰⁹
- He also pointed out that internet access and bandwidth speeds were a definite issue for community members on-reserve who were researching information for third-year community projects and/or lesson plans. For community members living on-reserve, even those in southern Ontario, internet speeds in homes are often slow. The teacher working on a third-year project with NCCIE had to stay late at school to work on the computer because internet speeds were much faster there. This limited her time for the project as she had a family with young children and needed to be home after school and evenings. When she tried to work from home, she became frustrated with the poor bandwidth speed and, at one point, told the Regional Lead that it was triggering for her and caused her stress. When COVID struck and schools were closed, the project, unfortunately, was forced to a standstill. It was both frustrating and disappointing for the Regional Lead and the teacher because the project would have been an important contribution to the school and its curriculum documents.¹¹⁰
- A Regional Lead noted the challenges she had with the timing of the project once her student RAs uploaded the videos and data to the Portal. She said that the process was “somewhat challenging and problematic.”¹¹¹ After uploading their material, most of her RAs left campus when spring term ended. She could not reach them when ‘story pages’ were received for previewing.¹¹² This conflict with summer plans remained an issue for the duration of the project, and the national team and Regional Leads had to adapt their processes and expectations accordingly.
- That first spring when the initial tranche of ‘stories’ from across the country was received (approximately 300-plus), the four members of the NCCIE Content Team quickly

¹⁰⁸ Northeast Ontario Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. November 25, 2020.

¹⁰⁹ Southwest Ontario Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. November 25, 2020.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Southern British Columbia Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. December 7, 2020.

¹¹² Ibid.

became overwhelmed by the quantity of ‘stories’ they had to process. Like the regional teams, they were new to the project, and the learning curve was steep while all the systems were being built and de-bugged. For example, some RAs failed to enter timestamps at the points during interviews when a new question was being asked. Without the timestamps, NCCIE Content Team had to watch entire videos (some were close to an hour long) to identify the appropriate places to insert the ‘question board,’ significantly increasing the amount of preparation time per ‘story.’ Because it was summertime, many RAs could not be reached to do this work themselves. As a result, during that first year, the processing time to prepare several ‘story pages’ for preview grew quite long. This and other QA issues were detected, which needed to be resolved during Year Two. More resources were allocated to the NCCIE Content Team in the Year Two to increase staff and shorten turnaround times.

- RAs expressed frustration with the Data Entry Portal. One RA explained that the Portal was difficult to navigate, and that RAs could have benefited from more training on how to enter data, save data, what the required fields are, and quality assurance expectations. She said, however, that the NCCIE Content Team helped her (and other RAs) during the national gathering. They had set up an “office” at the event where RAs could meet with Content Team members one-on-one to address the challenges they were having. This proved very helpful and beneficial.¹¹³
- A community member who collaborated with an RA on lesson plan development also expressed her frustration with the Data Entry Portal. She called it “daunting” and “finicky.” She could see the benefits of the Portal and how important it was to make the presentation of lesson plans on the website consistent, but one needed to be “tech-savvy” and know that certain fields were ‘required’ fields. Otherwise, all the information that she had entered would not save properly. She appreciated the assistance of the team at Engineered Code who found her work so that she did not have to re-enter everything. In the end, she said, “The joy of the work outweighed the challenges with the Portal.”¹¹⁴
- She also explained that it would have been beneficial if specific, additional information had been requested. For example, it would have been helpful to have dedicated fields to discuss “cross-curricular connections.” It was not apparent in the Portal, when looking at curriculum documents from the province, how to articulate connections between math, science, literature, etc. A recommendation going forward would be to add space for this information as teachers look to make cross-curricular connections.¹¹⁵
- Other technological challenges related to the use of the iPod kits for interviews. One RA commented that she admits she is not “super tech-savvy.” She did not have the technical expertise to ensure good lighting, for example. As a result, a few of her interviewees opted for audio instead of video interviews. She would have appreciated more in-person, hands-on training on the equipment so she could have gained confidence in ensuring the sound and light quality of video interviews.¹¹⁶ With 20-20 hindsight, two actions would have been beneficial: 1) offering more training sessions and promoting the training videos; and 2) reminders to Regional Leads that they could allocate some of their budget for local technical support to provide individual or group assistance on an as-needed basis.

¹¹³ Southeast Ontario Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. December 16, 2020.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Northeast Ontario Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. November 25, 2020.

- Another RA expressed similar concerns regarding the use of the iPod kits and the quality of the sound and lighting in her recordings. Her preference was to have had a camera person present at interviews to ensure the quality of the recorded interview would be acceptable.¹¹⁷

Quality Assurance Issues

As already noted, by the end of the first summer when many of Year One's 'stories' had been published to the website, the need for quality assurance became evident. The internal process that had been set up (from data upload in the Portal to publication on the NCCIE.CA website) was as follows: 1) The NCCIE Content Team prepares the 'story' and places it in 'preview' for the region to examine and verify the presentation of information. 2) The region has up to 14 days to 'preview' the draft. If there are any changes to be made, the NCCIE Content Team makes them, and the region confirms the new version. 3) The region then shares the 'draft story' with the interviewee who is given seven days to review it. Upon request, the seven days may be increased to 14 or more days. 4) After the seven days, unless the region comes back with a request for change from the interviewee, the 'story' is automatically published to the website.

In many cases, the 14-day "preview" period with the regions and the seven-day review period with the interviewee went by without any comment. Later, the timing issues discussed earlier became evident when the national team noticed that several 'stories' appearing on the website had spelling or grammatical errors, incomplete descriptions or contact information, and other issues. Work on quality assurance (QA) became an added priority for the Year Two of the project.

QA was discussed at length during the Regional Lead retreat in June 2018. The following abridged excerpt from the retreat report summarizes the previous discussion on technology and ensuring the quality of the final deliverables:

One of the most discussed topics at the retreat was the process for capturing stories, editing the content, assigning code/tags/titles, uploading to the portal and being notified when content goes live on the website. Consensus from all the roundtables was the need for training support and clarification around the process of getting content onto the NCCIE.ca website.

Each regional team was supplied a 'kit' of tools to support video content gathering . . . [when they are] out in the communities. These kits consist of an iPod, stand, and accessories. The student researchers [RAs] were responsible for the set-up, capture, upload, and follow-through to each "story's" appearance on the website, with the support of Regional Leads.

In the first year, each region approached the oversight of the process differently. Some regions employed a dedicated IT support person to attend workshops and interviews, allowing for consistency in the visual and audio (look and feel) of each video. In other regions, the Regional Lead vetted the content before submission to the [Portal]. Others left the responsibility completely in the hands of the student researchers.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

The results were primarily positive, however some of the issues that arose were timeline, visual set up, audio set up, quality (size) of video, tags/codes/titles for searching and the time it takes uploading the videos to the portal. Poor bandwidth, and size of video files made uploading a highly time-consuming process.

Coding and assigning tags to the videos need guidelines and training. It is important that each video is searchable based on the topic(s) it covers. In some cases, videos were being assigned numerous tags that made it tough for the IT team to discern when preparing [them for the website].

A strong need for detailed training was the general consensus from the group. Options were to have upfront “boot camp” style training upon contract engagement with the student researchers, training videos that can be accessed multiple times (via the nccieadministration.ca site), and in-person/on call support from the NCCIE Content Team.

Portal tweaks to add notifications to the researchers/Regional Leads when stories go “live” were also requested by the retreat participants.¹¹⁸

In summary, a key recommendation to address these challenges is to schedule ample time at the beginning and throughout the project so that extensive training is provided for:

- Video equipment usage (iPod kits)
- Sound and lighting set up
- Practicing interviews as “conversations”
- Learning about and following community protocols
- Writing ‘story’ descriptions, titling a “story,” selecting proper descriptive “tags” (for search functionality), proofreading, etc.
- Use of the Data Entry Portal (e.g., mandatory fields, saving work, etc.)
- Quality Assurance

Other suggestions include clear instructions; communications (e.g., with training videos); newsletter notifications and reminders; tip sheets and checklists; offering follow-up training sessions at the beginning of each year and on an as-needed basis; and encouraging regions to recruit an IT person on an as-needed basis to deliver training, troubleshoot, etc. For the NCCIE Content Team, having knowledgeable IT staff with good “people skills” who can work effectively with regional team members one-on-one, as needed, is essential.

[Interview Questions and Data Entry Templates](#)

Two sets of templates were developed for NCCIE. The first template was the set of questions to be asked during interviews (or conversations) about Indigenous education programs and initiatives. To enter the data into the Portal, a digital template was created for RAs to type in the requisite information (i.e., title, description, contact information, etc.). A Word template was also available, but this basically doubled the workload for RAs. If they completed the Word template, they still had to type the information into the Portal (but they could copy and paste).

¹¹⁸ NCCIE Regional Lead Retreat Report, June 2018. Prepared by Creative Fire.

The second set of templates was created for lesson plan development during Year Three. One template existed for language lesson plans (e.g., Cree, Blackfoot, Ojibwe, etc.); another for subject lesson plans (e.g., math, science, literature, art, etc.). These two templates were created from an Indigenous perspective with input from Indigenous educators, curriculum developers, and Elders. Anyone can access them (along with supplementary information) on NCCIE.CA in the [Teaching Resource Centre](#).

Comments regarding the interview questions and the lesson plan templates include:

- Regarding interviews during Year One, a Regional Lead commented that her RAs did not have a lot of experience conducting interviews and felt they needed to follow the question template closely so that interviews were consistent with one another. They felt they could not go off-script or follow-up with additional questions. Because the template had been approved by the Research Ethics Board, they were uncomfortable straying from the set questions provided.¹¹⁹
 - This depended on the training sessions and prior experience of the RAs in conducting interviews. The flexibility with word choice and how interviews were conducted varied across regions. As one Regional Lead put it, it helped RAs to know they could approach interviews as conversations.
 - To clarify this issue for Year Two interviews, additional wording was provided on the template to clarify that the questions were to be interpreted as ‘prompts,’ and the interviewer could frame questions based on the intention, not the verbatim wording.
- Regarding lesson plan templates, a community member who teaches pre-service teachers in a Faculty of Education discussed the process she used when developing lesson plans with NCCIE. She said that at first, she and the RA used the Faculty of Education lesson plan template as that was what they were used to working with. When they saw the NCCIE template, they realized that more detail was needed. They brought teacher candidates together for a group conversation about the additional topics to be covered, namely the Indigenous components of the template (e.g., holistic and relational features). Then, they used the comments gathered to complete the template. At first glance, she felt the template was a bit onerous. In hindsight, she sees the value in approaching lesson plan development from an Indigenous perspective, keeping the student and the varied ways in which one learns (e.g., emotional, spiritual, intellectual, physical ways of learning) at the centre of the lesson plan’s development.¹²⁰
- Another community member concurred, saying that she was intimidated when she first saw the lesson plan template. She remarked that the template is very structured and the lesson plans grew to be very long after all the information was entered (some were upwards of 14 pages in length).
 - Coming out the other end of that process (with eight lesson plans in total), she realized that the challenge was not in the template but in the way she had been trained as a teacher. She had been trained in a Eurocentric mindset, she said. She “was not trained in rounding out a lesson plan in holism and to consider community engagement and the importance and impact of that in authentic teaching.” She talked about the inherent value of “reaching out to Elders and Knowledge Holders to bring their knowledge into the lesson plan” – that this

¹¹⁹ Southern BC Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. December 7, 2020.

¹²⁰ Southeast Ontario Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. December 16, 2020.

is not found in western-style lesson plans, but it is “innate to Indigenous ways of knowing and learning.” She said that through this process, she grew so much as an individual and as a teacher. She concluded that “what came out of this process was how education is done from an Indigenous perspective. The [template] package is an intense package, and in the future, I don’t have to use it all the time. But it is good to know that this is what belongs there.” She emphasizes that “what belongs there” is the “need to consider connection with community, with knowledge holders, with language. And how to grow our teaching into something more holistic rather than just fulfilling curricular outcomes.”¹²¹

- Another community member echoed similar sentiments about the challenging nature of the lesson plan template. She gathered input for lesson plans from Elders and school boards. Their contributions provided valuable insights that were incorporated into the lesson plans. A suggestion she had going forward in future lesson plan development with the NCCIE template is for curriculum developers to seek input from not only Elders but also school boards or Education Authorities.¹²²

Administrative Issues

In addition to setting up regional teams and technology platforms at the outset of the project, all the administrative policies, procedures, and forms had to be developed. Creative Fire was key to the success of this part of the project. At the Regional Lead retreat after Year One, Regional Leads requested more clarification on a number of issues. For example, in some cases, Regional Leads were encountering a disparity between actual work done and contract compensation. Student researchers were being paid the same amount whether they completed a one-day interview in one community or if they had to travel to conduct interviews over multiple communities and days. Going forward, Regional Leads appreciated being given the flexibility to structure payment options in collaboration with the Finance Officer at Creative Fire to take into consideration such factors as RAs’ time, effort, and deliverables.

With respect to expense reimbursement, regional teams sought clarification for which expenses were eligible for reimbursement and which were ineligible. Creative Fire provided explanations in accordance with federal policies, seeing as the project was funded by Indigenous Services Canada. Getting RAs to save their original receipts was an expectation that proved challenging at times, as some RAs were not in the habit of requesting or saving these documents. Creative Fire also provided training videos and flow charts to assist Regional Leads and RAs in filling out various documents, including contract templates and expense reimbursement forms. Also, checklists were developed so team members could see all the items that needed to be included with each contract and expense claim.

Also at the Regional Lead retreat, Regional Leads discussed challenges their RAs had covering costs associated with the project. For example, many of the researchers have young families and often struggled to have enough out-of-pocket cash flow to cover childcare, transportation, food for meetings, etc. While initial contract payments were provided at the beginning of each year to support the advance cash flow needs for these variable expenses related to the project, in some circumstances this purpose for the advance was not made clear. In these instances, RAs used the

¹²¹ Atlantic Provinces and Labrador Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. November 19, 2020.

¹²² Ibid.

advance to cover such items as rent or groceries and then did not have enough cash on-hand when they were ready to begin interviews. At the beginning of the Year Two, the purpose for the advance was clearly communicated by both the Regional Lead and Creative Fire Finance Officer.

Another point made during the Regional Lead retreat was that emergency funds ought to be set aside to support any unforeseen circumstances while travelling. For example, if winter weather prohibited return travel home, funds were needed for another night's stay in communities. A contingency budget was set aside in subsequent years for such emergencies.

While most of the regional teams contracted directly with Creative Fire, some Regional Leads, because of their university policies, had to set up a contract agreement between their university and Creative Fire. In these cases, the budget was transferred to the post-secondary institution whose Finance Office administered the contract instead of Creative Fire. These regional teams had to adhere to university policies with respect to honoraria, which may be restrictive. For example, some communities requested that the honoraria be in the form of donations to the program that was being featured in an interview. Regional teams administering the project through their universities were not allowed to do this as university policies restricted the payment of honoraria to individuals rather than programs. On the other hand, Creative Fire was not limited in this way and had greater freedom to respect communities' wishes. Fortunately, only two regional teams were obligated to set up contract agreements through their universities so this challenge was minimized.

Issues related to Scope, Scale, Safety and Mental Health

Comments relating to the scope and scale of the project focused on the challenges regions experienced trying to reach everywhere in their province or territory. Distances were great, and some communities are only accessible by air. This made it difficult, if not impossible, to fully represent one's region geographically and culturally. Other comments in this section relate to RAs' mental health and safety.

- In Nunavut, for example, flying is the only way to reach everywhere in the territory. The team had to arrange interviews by phone and email to save on costs. Then, the RA or Regional Lead flew to the community to conduct the interviews.¹²³
- In Alberta, the regional team felt they “only scratched the surface” in the ‘stories’ they gathered. They wished that they could have had more time and resources so that they could go to further reaches of the province.¹²⁴ In fact, many regional teams felt the same and wished more funding was available to gather additional ‘stories’ for the website.¹²⁵
- In Labrador, in addition to local ‘stories’ close to Happy Valley-Goose Bay, the Regional Lead invited a few distant communities to participate, and the communities then identified the youth there to be hired by NCCIE to conduct the interviews. Most of the youth were away from home at school when they were hired and trained how to use the technology and conduct interviews. When school ended and the youth returned home during the summer to gather the ‘stories’ for the project, the Regional Lead could not follow-up with them easily as they were “geographically distant in isolated

¹²³ Nunavut Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. December 1, 2020.

¹²⁴ Alberta Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. November 25, 2020.

¹²⁵ Atlantic Provinces and Labrador, Quebec, Ontario Zoom Discussions. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. November 17, November 19, November 25, December 9, December 16, 2020.

communities.” She felt she could not oversee the work properly. Upon the students’ return to school in the fall, when the Regional Lead reviewed the recordings, she found that their quality was unsatisfactory. Unfortunately, there was no time to return to the communities and re-do the interviews.¹²⁶

- A Regional Lead recommended that, in addition to being able to recruit administrative and technical support, it would have been helpful to be able to hire a mental health support person. She shared that one of her RAs, at one point, disappeared and dropped out of the project for no apparent reason. It came to light that she was a 60’s scoop child and had recently reconnected with her cultural roots. At first, she was excited to be a part of the project. When her calls to an Indigenous organization went unreturned, however, this became triggering for her somehow. In hindsight, the Regional Lead would have liked to have had emotional support for her team so they could talk through any negative or triggering experiences they may have had.¹²⁷
- A discussion was held during the Regional Lead retreat about the distances the RAs had to travel in some regions. Some Regional Leads mentioned that some of the communities engaged in Year One were remote and northern, and the majority of interviews took place over the winter season. Many of the RAs traveling for these interviews just happened to be female graduate students. Traveling long distances in various conditions makes the need for a focus on safety critically important. In Year Two, it was decided that when RAs had to travel long distances, they should always travel in teams of no less than two. Regional teams could also purchase emergency kits for these trips. Route planning and safety training would also be valuable for the researchers.¹²⁸

In summary, Regional Leads, RAs, and community members alike shared important feedback about technological challenges, training needs, mental wellness, and safety concerns, among other issues that arose during the project. 20-20 hindsight provides NCCIE with key lessons and insights for similar work in the future.

Conclusion

This paper details the “Community First” approach taken by NCCIE over the course of the four-year project. For the most part, people who have participated in NCCIE, either as a team member or a community member, describe their experiences as positive ones. But NCCIE has not been without its challenges. The purpose of this paper has been to shed light on how NCCIE began, how the work was carried out according to Indigenous research principles, and how the “Community First” principle has guided the way. In addition, the strengths of NCCIE’s process as well as its challenges are reflected upon by Regional Leads, RAs, community members, and the National Project Director. The aim has been to provide a roadmap for others to follow who are interested in undertaking this or similar work.

The “Community First” principle has proven to be an effective guiding light for NCCIE’s work, illuminating a path for respectful and mutually beneficial research. Key learnings about listening, taking time to build relationships, respect, and reciprocity, among others, were manifested and reinforced throughout the course of the project.

¹²⁶ Atlantic Provinces and Labrador Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. November 19, 2020.

¹²⁷ Vancouver Island Zoom Discussion. NCCIE Learnings and Recommendations. November 23, 2020.

¹²⁸ Regional Lead Retreat Report, June 2018. Prepared by Creative Fire.

The quote at the beginning of this paper reflects the spirit and intent with which NCCIE team members – both national and regional - have carried ourselves in the processes we have followed. In our everyday lives and in our research practice, the example we have aimed to set is “how we are meant to be and relate to others in this world.”¹²⁹

¹²⁹ Tyler Armstrong, NCCIE Research Associate, Personal Communication. November 26, 2019.

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Appendix A

Roles and Responsibilities for Years One and Two

Year One – Laying Foundations

FNUniv

- identify qualified partners through an RFP process
- clarify with each contractor roles, responsibilities, expectations, and deliverables
- meet with kēhtē-ayak Elders and Knowledge Holders for ceremony and guidance
- recruit additional team members to be contracted with FNUniv for technology support (i.e., the “NCCIE Content Team”), for administrative support (e.g., Regional Liaison), and Saskatchewan’s regional projects for NCCIE (e.g., SK Regional Lead and Research Associates, etc.)
- provide direction to Trent University on regional project responsibilities
- provide direction to Creative Fire on communications and reporting responsibilities as well as contract and budgeting responsibilities with the regions
- provide direction to Engineered Code on website development
- the NCCIE Content Team is responsible for:
 - Recommending and ordering the digital equipment for the iPod kits to be used by regions
 - setting up and creating identifiers for digital equipment (for tracking purposes)
 - shipping equipment to regions
 - training regional teams on using the iPod kits
 - collaborating with Engineered Code to create data entry ‘portal’
 - training regional teams on entering data into the data entry ‘portal’
 - providing technical support to the regions
 - preparing the audio and video ‘stories’ for the website
 - working with regional teams to finalize ‘stories’
- track the budget and expenses related to the three partners (Trent, Creative Fire, and Engineered Code) and other NCCIE contractors hired directly by FNUniv, including the Saskatchewan regional team, the NCCIE Content Team, and the Regional Liaison
- coordinate with Creative Fire the transfer of funds to ‘flow-through’ to regional teams
- communicate with ISC to provide updates as necessary
- seek ISC approval to expend any surplus beyond fiscal year-end
- with Creative Fire and National Project Director, finalize year-end reports and submit them to ISC
- with guidance from Elders’ Council, and input from Oversight Committee and Trent University, prepare Year Two plans and proposals.

Trent University Chanie Wenjack School for Indigenous Studies

- set up Oversight Committee
- hire and oversee the work of the National Project Director
- seek ethics approvals to provide “umbrella ethics approval” for the project through Trent Research Ethics Board (REB) and Trent Indigenous Ethics Committee

National Project Director

- with guidance from the Oversight Committee, recruit Regional Leads who, in turn, recruited students, youth, and community members to join the project
- with Trent University and FNUniv, develop interview guides and consent forms for interviews
- develop a Year One Guide for Regional Leads, detailing their roles and responsibilities
- establish regional budgets for Year One
- hold regular calls and issue newsletters for all Regional Leads (i.e., “national calls”) to communicate direction and answer questions
- collaborate with Creative Fire on communications (i.e., brochures, pamphlets, press releases, etc.)
- collaborate with Creative Fire on budget and expense tracking, report preparation, etc.
- with NCCIE Content Team and Engineered Code, create template for regions to use when entering data into the data entry ‘portal’ (e.g., name of Indigenous education initiative, person interviewed, description, etc.)
- collaborate with Engineered Code on the design of the website, development of a data entry ‘portal,’ and other digital needs
- meet with kēhtē-ayak, report to Elders, and seek guidance for the project as required
- collaborate with the NCCIE Content Team on digital technology for regions, providing training sessions to regional teams on the use of the technology, supporting the regional teams on data entry, etc.
- with FNUniv and Trent, and with technical and logistical support from Creative Fire, plan and host the annual national gathering
- oversee production of final reports by Creative Fire, as necessary; contribute to content of final reports
- contribute to Year Two planning process with FNUniv, Trent, Elders’ Council, and Oversight Committee
- Oversee the expenditure of the Year One surplus and the regional work associated with the surplus.

Regional Liaison

- support National Project Director in coordinating the work of the regions
- support Regional Leads with administrative and logistical questions; with contract and budget issues
- support Regional Leads with designing, planning, and hosting regional workshops
- support FNUniv and National Project Director in designing, planning and hosting national gathering
- support FNUniv, Creative Fire, and National Project Director in preparation of final reports.

Regional Leads and Teams

- recruit students, youth, and/or community members for ‘Research Associate’ positions
- obtain research ethics approvals from their research governing body (e.g., university REB, institutional or territorial ethics), based on the umbrella ethics approval provided by Trent University
- mentor and provide training/arrange training for Research Associates for working with technology (e.g., iPod kits, data entry ‘portal’), conducting interviews, following community protocols, etc.
- pursue region-appropriate process for identifying Indigenous education ‘stories’ for interviews

- based on pre-existing relationships or to build new ones, reach out to and communicate with local communities, schools, or organizations to introduce NCCIE and the project
- pursue local protocols to obtain approvals from communities, schools, or organizations for interviews
- oversee the work of Research Associates and mentor them during the interview phase of the project, including follow-up responsibilities to enter information and upload interviews to the 'portal'
- oversee the finalization of audio and video interviews, including the information to appear on 'story pages'
- oversee the work of Research Associates in creating an "Environmental Scan" – to list Indigenous education resources that are specific to each region (e.g., journal and newspaper articles, videos, government and other reports on Indigenous education from each region)
- organize and host a regional workshop to build and strengthen relationships in the region in support of Indigenous education
- together with Research Associates, attend the national gathering that bring together national and regional teams, community members, Elders and Knowledge Holders, and policy-makers
- track budget with Creative Fire; ensure Regional Lead and Research Associate contracts are completed; ensure Regional Lead and Research Associate expense claims are complete (in addition to those of any other regional team members)

Creative Fire

- prepare and produce communications materials for NCCIE
- host an internal communication and administrative website for national and regional teams to share information, documents, and communication materials
- support regions when planning and hosting regional workshops (with administrative, logistical, and travel support)
- support national team when planning and hosting national gathering (with administrative, logistical, and travel support, including French and Indigenous language translation services)
- administer contracts with regional teams
- administer and track regional budgets and expenses
- using flow-through funds from FNUniv, pay regional invoices and reimburse regional expenses
- with FNUniv and National Project Director, prepare year-end budget report and final report
- determine surplus, if any

Engineered Code

- with FNUniv and National Project Director, design and support the NCCIE website
- with National Project Director and NCCIE Content Team, design and create the data entry 'portal' system
- when audio and video interviews receive final approvals, upload them to their individual 'story pages'
- when the regions' Environmental Scans are finalized, upload contents to the NCCIE on-line Resource Library
- troubleshoot any issues and provide support for the website, nccie.ca, and the data entry 'portal' system.

Year Two – Expanding NCCIE

FNUniv

- meet with kēhtē-ayak Elders and Knowledge Holders for ceremony and guidance
- renew contracts with Trent, Creative Fire, Engineered Code, Regional Liaison, and NCCIE Content Team
- clarify with each contractor and partner their roles, responsibilities, expectations, and deliverables for Year Two
- recruit Regional Leads for Saskatchewan and set up regional activities as per Year Two mandate
- the NCCIE Content Team is responsible for:
 - fulfilling additional technology requests by ordering new iPod kits for use by regions, setting up and creating identifiers for tracking purposes
 - with equipment returned from Year One, cleaning storage, preparing them for use in Year Two
 - shipping equipment to regions
 - training new regional recruits on using the iPod kits
 - training regional teams on quality control and entering data into the data entry ‘portal’
 - providing technical support to the regions
 - preparing the audio and video ‘stories’ for the website
 - working with regional teams to finalize ‘stories’
 - working with National Project Director on Year Two special projects (e.g., Indigenous Languages project, Indigenous Governance project, etc.)
- track the budget and expenses related to the three partners (Trent, Creative Fire, and Engineered Code) and other NCCIE contractors hired directly by FNUniv, including the Saskatchewan regional team, the NCCIE Content Team, and the Regional Liaison
- coordinate with Creative Fire the transfer of funds to ‘flow-through’ to regional teams
- communicate with ISC to provide updates as necessary
- seek ISC approval to carryover any Year Two surplus for use in Year Three
- with Creative Fire and National Project Director, finalize year-end reports and submit them to ISC
- with guidance from Elders’ Council, and input from Oversight Committee and Trent University, prepare Year Two Unexpended Funding Plan and Year Three proposal.

Trent University Chanie Wenjack School for Indigenous Studies

- rehire and oversee the work of the National Project Director
- renew ethics approvals with Trent REB to provide “umbrella ethics approval” for the regions and their projects

National Project Director

- seek continued involvement of Year One Regional Leads and recruit new ones where necessary
- with Trent University and FNUniv, develop new interview guides and consent forms for interviews
- establish regional budgets for Year Two
- hold regular calls and issue newsletters for all Regional Leads (i.e., “national calls”) to communicate direction and answer questions
- collaborate with Creative Fire on communications (i.e., brochures, pamphlets, press releases, etc.)

- collaborate with Creative Fire on budget and expense tracking, report preparation, etc.
- with NCCIE Content Team and Engineered Code, create template for regions to use when entering data into the data entry 'portal' (e.g., name of Indigenous education initiative, person interviewed, description, etc.)
- oversee Year Two special projects (Indigenous Languages, Indigenous Governance, Knowledge Space, etc.)
- write content and collaborate with Engineered Code on the expansion of the website to display information from new projects, creation of the French website, etc.
- meet with kēhtë-ayak, report to Elders, and seek guidance for the project as required
- oversee work of the NCCIE Content Team to finalize and publish Year One deliverables, establish quality control protocols, provide training to regional teams on the use of the technology, support the regional teams on data entry, etc.
- with FNUniv and Trent, and with technical and logistical support from Creative Fire, plan and host the second annual national gathering
- oversee production of final reports by Creative Fire, as necessary; contribute to content of final reports
- contribute to Year Three planning process with FNUniv, Trent, and Elders' Council

Regional Liaison

- support National Project Director in coordinating the work of the regions
- support Regional Leads with administrative and logistical questions, with contract and budget issues
- support Regional Leads with designing, planning, and hosting regional workshops
- support FNUniv and National Project Director in designing, planning, and hosting national gathering
- support FNUniv, Creative Fire, and National Project Director in preparation of final reports.

Regional Leads and Teams

- recruit students, youth, and/or community members for 'Research Associate' positions
- renew research ethics approvals from their research governing body (e.g., university REB, institutional or territorial ethics), based on the umbrella ethics approval provided by Trent University
- mentor and provide training/arrange training for Research Associates for working with technology (e.g., iPod kits, data entry 'portal'), conducting interviews, following community protocols, etc.
- pursue region-appropriate process for identifying Indigenous education 'stories' for interviews
- based on pre-existing relationships or to build new ones, reach out to and communicate with local communities, schools, or organizations to introduce NCCIE and the project
- pursue local protocols to obtain approvals from communities, schools, or organizations for interviews
- oversee the work of Research Associates and mentor them during the interview phase of the project, including follow-up responsibilities to enter information and upload interviews to the 'portal'
- oversee the finalization of audio and video interviews, including the information to appear on 'story pages'
- conduct quality control reviews to ensure quality and completeness of information on 'story pages'
- add to the region's "Environmental Scan," if necessary

- organize and host a regional workshop to build and strengthen relationships in the region in support of Indigenous education
- together with Research Associates, attend the national gathering that bring together national and regional teams, community members, Elders and Knowledge Holders, and policy-makers
- track budget with Creative Fire; ensure Regional Lead and Research Associate contracts are completed; ensure Regional Lead and Research Associate expense claims are complete (in addition to those of any other regional team members)

Creative Fire

- prepare and produce communications materials for NCCIE
- host the internal communication and administrative website for national and regional teams to share information, documents, and communication materials
- support regions when planning and hosting regional workshops (with administrative, logistical, and travel support)
- support national team when planning and hosting national gathering (with administrative, logistical, and travel support, including French and Indigenous language translation services)
- administer contracts with regional teams
- administer and track regional budgets and expenses
- using flow-through funds from FNUniv, pay regional invoices and reimburse regional expenses
- with FNUniv and National Project Director, prepare year-end budget report and final report
- calculate Year Three surplus

Engineered Code

- with FNUniv and National Project Director, implement re-design of the NCCIE website, given special projects and new features
- manage and troubleshoot the data entry 'portal' system
- add new content to the website
- create French website
- troubleshoot any issues with the website, nccie.ca.

Appendix B

List of Participants in Zoom Discussions and In-Person Meetings

Alberta

Linda Many Guns, Regional Lead
Leah Bortolin, Research Associate
Fowzia Lopa, Research Associate
Fran Rogers, Research Associate

Atlantic Provinces and Labrador

Verlé Harrop, Regional Lead
Sylvia Moore, Regional Lead
Denise Cole, Community member
Neil Forbes, Community member
Amy Hudson, Community member
Sara Leah Hindy, Knowledge Mobilization
Coordinator
Jennifer Martin, Community member
Patsy McKinney, Community member

Northeast Ontario

Kevin Fitzmaurice, Regional Lead
Ashley Nadiwon, Research Associate
Crystal Osawamick, Research Associate
Echo Shay, Research Associate
John Vallely, Research Associate

Northwest Ontario

Leisa Desmoulins, Regional Lead
Tyler Armstrong, Research Associate
Kelsey Jaggard, Research Associate
Melissa Oskineegish, Research Associate

Manitoba

Laura Forsythe, Regional Lead
Richard Stecenko, Regional Lead

Nunavut

Kaviq Kaluraq, Regional Lead

Quebec

Annie Pilote, Regional Lead
Jean-Luc Ratel, Research Associate

Southern Ontario

Josh Dockstator, Regional Lead
Don McCaskill, Regional Lead
Phil Abbott, Research Associate
Jane Gray, Research Associate
Bobby Henry, Research Associate
Hanah McFarlane, Research Associate
Claire Mooney, Community member
Shirley Williams, Elder

Saskatchewan

Bettina Schneider, Principal Investigator and
Regional Lead
Dustin Brass, Regional Lead
Bonnie Rockthunder, Regional Lead

Southern British Columbia/Vancouver Island

Jan Hare, Regional Lead
Sharon Hobenshield, Regional Lead
Jason Bruce, Research Associate and Regional Lead

***kêhtê-ayak* Elders Council, FNUNiv**

Florence Allen
Audrey Cochrane
Rose Bird
Willie Ermine
Kim Fraser-Saddleback, Coordinator
Preston Gardypie, *oskâpêwis*
Roland Kaye, *oskâpêwis*
Gilbert Kewistep
Mary Lee
Grace McLeod, Coordinator
Sylvia Obey
William Ratfoot
Judy Pelly
Margaret Reynolds

National Calls

Belinda Daniels, Knowledge Mobilization
Coordinator
Leisa Desmoulins, Regional Lead
Joshua Dockstator, Regional Lead
Kevin Fitzmaurice, Regional Lead
Laura Forsythe, Regional Lead
Jan Hare, Regional Lead
Verlé Harrop, Regional Lead
Bob Kayseas, Vice President Academic, First Nations
University of Canada
Sara Leah Hindy, Knowledge Mobilization
Coordinator
Linda Many Guns, Regional Lead
Don McCaskill, Regional Lead
Herman Michell, Knowledge Mobilization
Coordinator
Sylvia Moore, Regional Lead
David Newhouse, Principal Investigator
Annie Pilote, Regional Lead
Bettina Schneider, Principal Investigator and
Regional Lea

Appendix C

Information Provided on NCCIEAdministration.ca

NCCIEADMINISTRATION.CA is the internal website for all regional and national team members to access important information related to the project, including:

Contracts

- Contract templates
- Job Descriptions and Deliverables (to be appended to contract)
- Confidentiality agreement
- Checklist for completing contracts

Ethics Renewal

- Research ethics application
- Clarifications and Modifications for application
- Letter of Support from FNUUniv President
- Ethics Approval Letter (Year 1)
- Ethics Renewal Letters (Years 2, 3, 4)

Consent Forms

- Consent Form (Year 1)
- Consent Form - Main (Year 2, 3, 4)
- Consent Form – Participants over 18 (Year 2, 3)
- Consent Form – Children-Youth under 18 (Year 2, 3)
- Script for RAs to read for under 18 interviews (suggested wording to explain consent form to under 18-year olds)
- Consent Form – Guardian/Parent (Year 2, 3)
- Consent Form – Photography/Videography (Year 3)
- Consent Form (Year 3)

Documents for Interviews

- Draft script for introductions and interview invitations
- Flowchart for interview process
- Questions for interviews
- Interview coding sheet (fillable Word and to print)
- Interview checklist (for before, during, and after interviews)
- Draft thank you letter
- Cash receipt (for interviewee to sign upon receipt of gift card or honorarium)

Promotional Materials

- Introduction to NCCIE (one paragraph summary)
- NCCIE backgrounder
- NCCIE brochure
- Save the Date templates (for workshops and national gatherings)
- Event banner template
- Workshop agenda templates
- NCCIE promotional posters

Documents en français

Documents in Inuktitut

Quality Review and Assurance

- Checklist for Quality Review
- Tips for Quality Review

Lesson Plan Materials (for Year 3)

- Language Lesson Plan Template
- Subject Lesson Plan Template
- Strategic Guide (interpretive guide to templates)

For Year Three Videos

- Specifications for video footage
- Guidance for “community-led” video projects (consents; creating a story board; length; etc.)
- Tips for uploading videos to the Portal

Regional Lead Information and Contacts

- Guidebook for Regional Leads (Year 1 process, deliverables)
- Information for ‘Asset Map’ and ‘Environmental Scan’ (Year 1)
- Contact information (emails and phone numbers for regional and national teams)
- Scope of Work for Year 2
- Scope of Work for Year 3

Newsletters and Teleconferences

Appendix D

Flow Charts

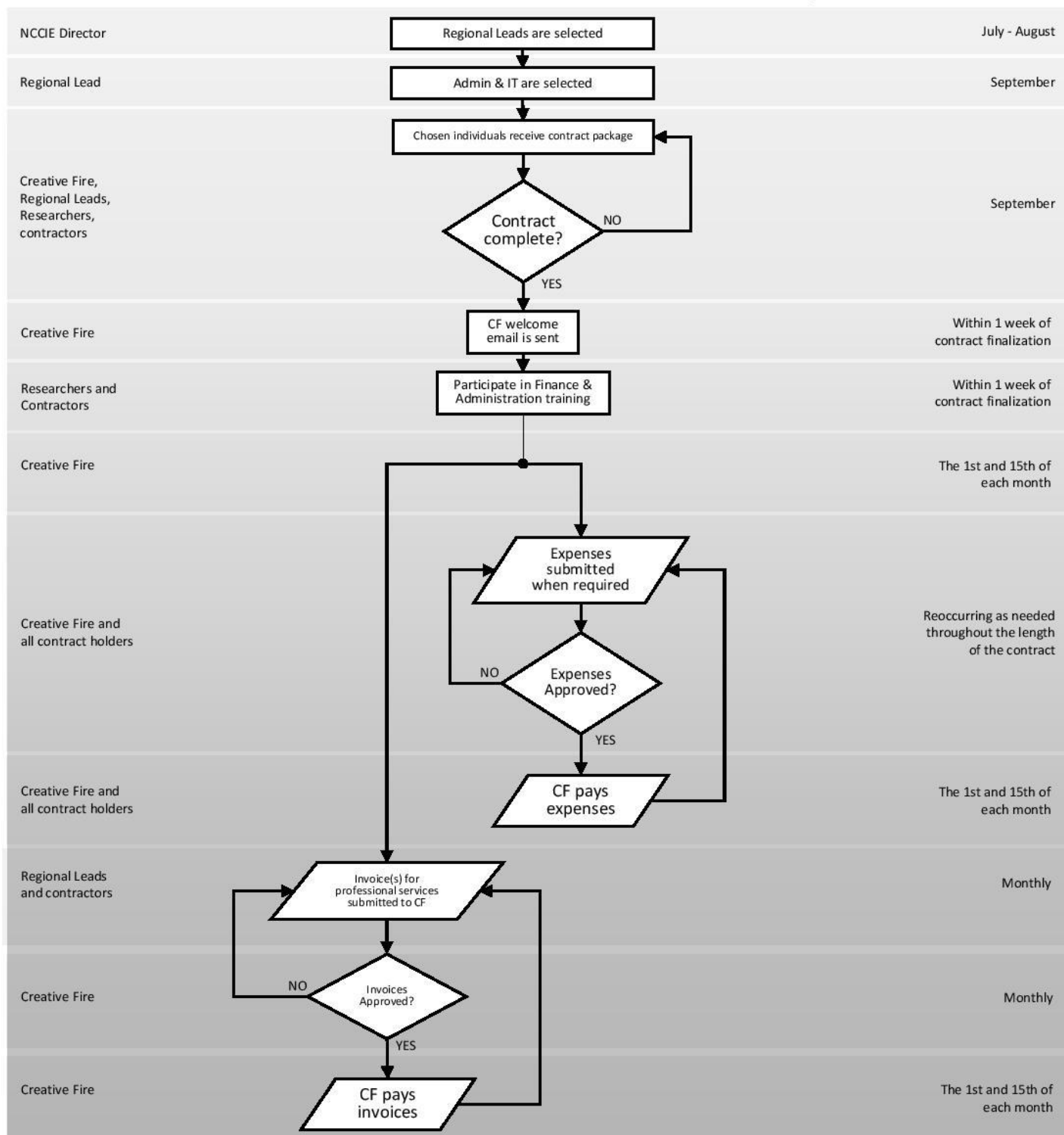
- Processes for Regional Leads and Contractors – Finance and Administration
 - For contract completion process
 - For expense reimbursement process
- Processes for Research Associates – Finance and Administration
 - For contract completion process
 - For expense reimbursement process
- Process for Teams to Follow for Interviews
 - Interview Preparation Phase
 - Interview Phase
 - Web Portal Phase

NCCIE Process – Finance & Administration

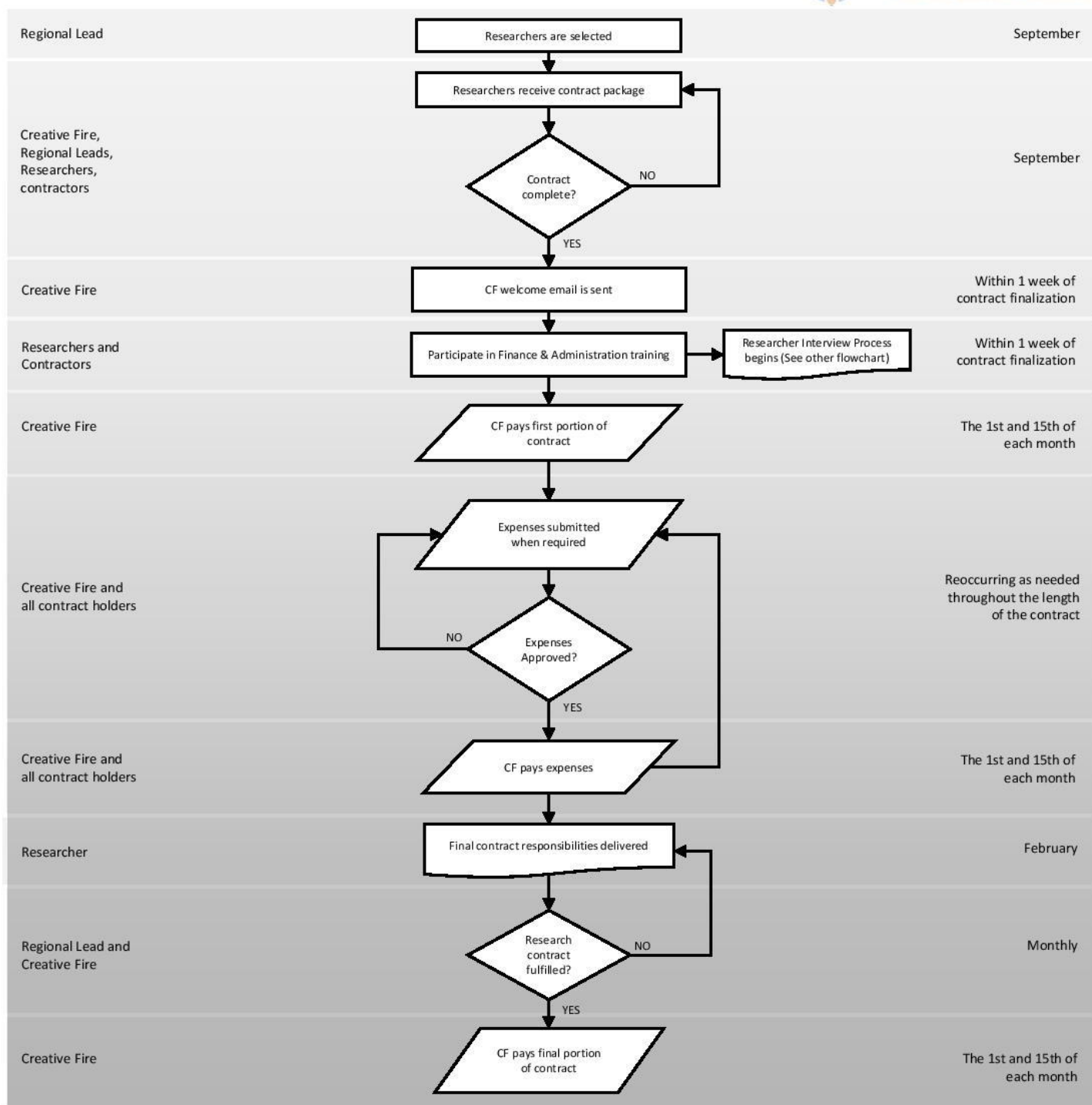
For Regional Leads and Contractors



**INDIGENOUS
EDUCATION**
The National Centre for Collaboration

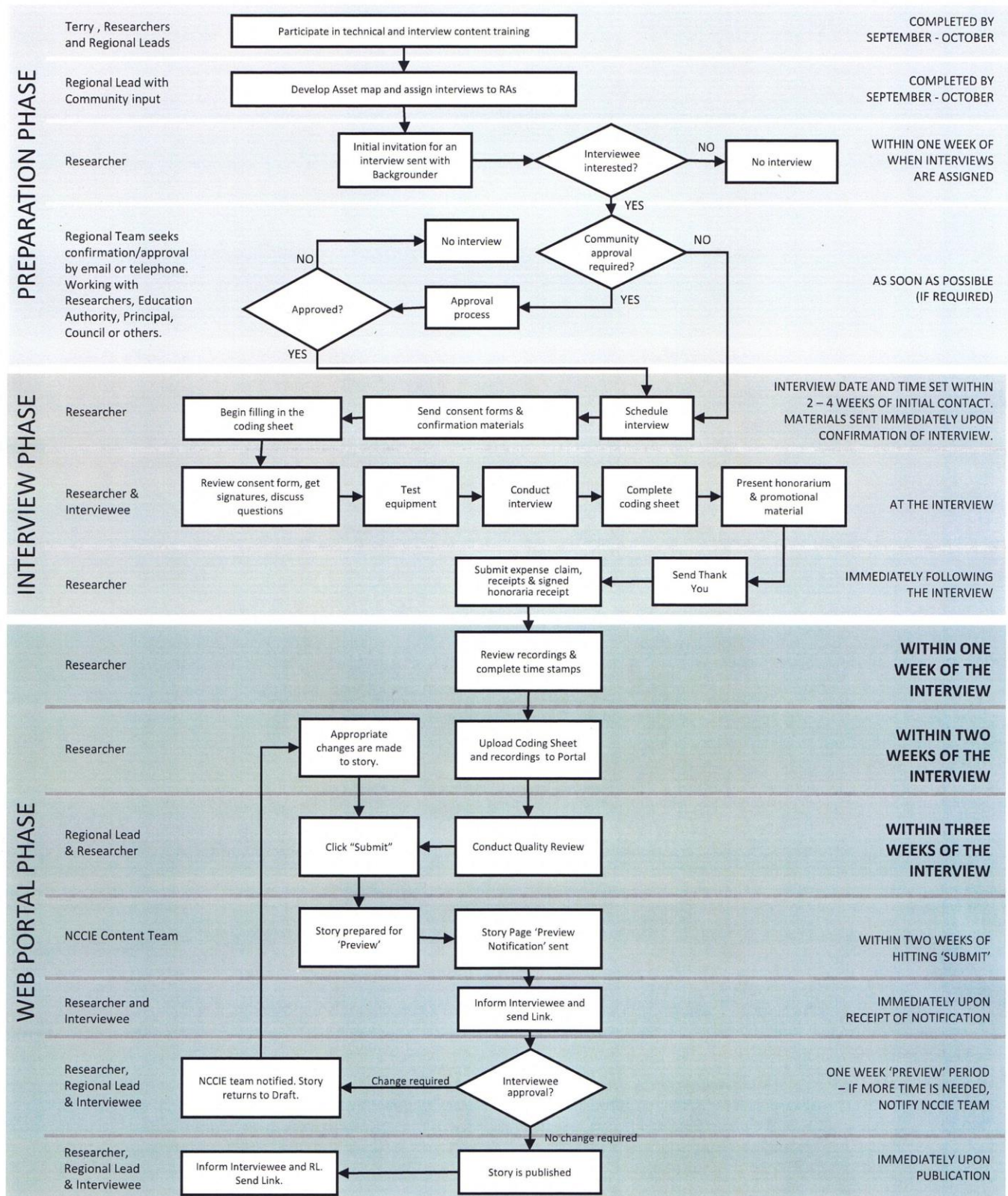


NCCIE Process – Finance & Administration For Researchers



NCCIE Process - Interviews

From asset map development to publication of stories



Appendix E iPod Kit Contents



www.fnuniv.ca
toll free 1.800.267.6303
info@fnuniv.ca

Content Gathering Device

TECHNICAL SPECS

<https://www.apple.com/ca/shop/buy-ipod/ipod-touch/32gb-red>



Tripod

TECHNICAL SPECS

<https://joby.com/griptight-one>



Microphone

TECHNICAL SPECS

<http://www.rote.com/microphones/videomicme>



iPod Case



Content Gathering Kit Case



Lapel Microphone



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