



# *Step into the River:*

## A Framework for Economic Reconciliation

for Municipalities, Institutions  
and Industry Partners

## Executive Summary

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# Acknowledgments

This work has been done for our children, grand-children and future descendants, as they are our legacy. Therefore it is our responsibility to work towards a future in which they can flourish. This work is also for our ancestors, who have suffered, endured, been extremely resilient, and who continue to find ways to heal, forgive and thrive. This is also for the generations of today, so that they can continue to move through this reconciliation journey with hope, capacity and more knowledge.

SFU Community Economic Development (SFU CED) acknowledges the unceded and treaty territories of the 204 First Nations on whose territories British Columbia is located, and whose communities represent 32 nation languages and close to 60 dialects. We acknowledge and recognize the diversity of Indigenous teachings, governance and lived experiences and that Indigenous peoples will have different interpretations and unique perspectives of this topic.

There are also many individuals who shared stories and experiences, connected us to others with knowledge, offered support and advice, reviewed documents, refined ideas, supplied information, provided resources, and

brought heart to this work. Our deep gratitude goes out to all the participants in our engagement sessions, for your contributions to our process and for your dedication and commitment to the development of this Framework. We would like to thank the participants who devoted time to engage in this process.

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# A story of economic transformation

What if economic reconciliation were a means of transforming our collective economy from the current state to a desired future state?

Guided by this fundamental question, in 2019 SFU CED embarked on a year of deep engagement to better understand and represent Indigenous views on economic reconciliation. This process consisted of a series of convenings and generative dialogues with Indigenous thought leaders and practitioners, as well as non-Indigenous individuals representing Indigenous-led organizations, across B.C. Stemming from the commitment to righting the historical wrongs of colonialism, and centering Indigenous ways of being and Indigenous economies, this work has been based on engagement with Indigenous leadership in the economic development sector.

Economic reconciliation is more than just normalizing relations with First Nations, it's about transforming the economy for all of our collective wellbeing. This document

describes the current state of economic reconciliation, both in BC and more broadly in Canada. Based on our conversations with Indigenous leadership in the economic development sector, we envision a future economy centred in well-being and rooted in Indigenous values and knowledge. A BC Economic Reconciliation Framework offers a set of values, mindshifts and practices to support how practitioners, local governments, organizations, institutions and industry partners can engage in reconciliation to meet that desired outcome.



# Beginning the Journey in Ceremony

An invitation by Sxwpilemaát Siyám

Our Ancestors and Elders have always shared and taught us the following wisdom: It is important to begin valuable work in ceremony. Ceremony is a practice in Indigenous communities that is paramount for the people. It is the lifeblood of their identity, purpose, responsibilities, knowledge-sharing and spirituality. In ceremony, there is space for sharing knowledge in many forms, listening, learning, protocols, singing, dancing, waking up your spirit and the spirit of the ground (land and the area in which you are hosting ceremony, being in gratitude, acknowledging kinship ties and relations, and reaffirming purpose, identity, and connections. The complexity of ceremony is also a good metaphor for the work of Reconciliation. To be 'in ceremony' requires a lot of work, time, energy, commitment, action of many and this is what it is going to take to transform our failing economic system through Economic Reconciliation.

Ceremony requires intention. I share the idea of ceremony to deepen your understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing and being and ground this document through those teachings. This document is inviting you, the reader, to open your heart and mind around an Indigenous worldview, epistemology, or lens used in structuring this written framework, as the voices that informed it were of Indigenous peoples throughout British Columbia.

# The Current State: The Truth of Economic Reconciliation

## Learnings from our Convenings

*“Reconciliation is a journey from the current state to a desired state. It is impossible to build a singular conceptual framework. It’s about building wellness in an ecosystem.”*

- Convening participant

*“Reconciliation has become the sprinkles on the cupcake. The foundational components of the cupcake are not changing.”*

Convening participant

*“Our own healing is also intensely integral in this journey, from the personal level, growing exponentially to ripple throughout our communities from family to family.”*

Convening participant

This section provides a deep look into the current state of Economic Reconciliation as experienced by Indigenous participants in our convenings. Returning to the question of whether Economic Reconciliation can be transformative, below are some main insights and needs that we have identified based on our learnings:

- **The need to see economic reconciliation as a practice, not a final product.** The journey of economic reconciliation is bumpy, sometimes windy and will always be highly complex. Meaningful relationships do not occur without hesitations, learning, setbacks and roadblocks. There is no one right or correct place to be on this economic reconciliation journey and it is important to remember that it is a process that requires all of us.
- **The journey of economic reconciliation does not look the same for any two individuals, businesses or communities.** While there is much to learn from the experience of others, there cannot be a “cookie-cutter” approach to reconciliation. The hard work of building

and sustaining relationships, building capacity and skills and identifying how economic reconciliation can support Indigenous self-determination needs to be given consideration in each unique context.

- **The need for moving beyond token acts of reconciliation** A common sentiment among our participants was that reconciliation has become a checklist item on the road to turning a profit. Non-Indigenous communities and partnerships will not get very far in terms of relationship-building if their purpose for engaging in reconciliation is only meant to validate the actions of settlers while doing little to honour and support Indigenous sovereignty, Title and Rights, and self-determination.

What makes for “meaningful” economic reconciliation is contextual and determined by Indigenous partners. Actions taken without engaging in deeper relationship-building to understand this result in token, superficial and incremental outcomes.

- **The need for healing and truth-telling** Reconciliation continues to require truth telling and healing as Canada still struggles to reckon with not only its history but also its current state of Crown-Indigenous relations. This is being supported by the work of many entities today and the growing demands to respond to Call to Action #92, but on-going action is required. The economic sector cannot be exempt from truth-telling and healing. There are deep historic

and ongoing harms inflicted on Indigenous peoples, including women, LGBTQ2S+, youth and Elders owing to economic development projects that reinforce power imbalances and undermine efforts to form more positive and trusting relationships.

Indigenous peoples are not the only ones in need of healing. Settler individuals and settler-led organizations need to engage in deeper inner reflective work and healing in order to unravel implicit bias, colonial mindsets, and the conditions of systemic racism that they operate in and benefit from.

The extent to which economic reconciliation can be transformative in nature depends on whether or not we are willing to transform. In the following sections, we will look at the ways in which **our relationship to wealth needs changing**, and illuminate a working framework for economic reconciliation.



# Re-imagining Wealth

Today's dominant, colonial economic model is linear and built on the myth of perpetual material growth. It creates waste, degrades nature, disregards justice and fails to ensure equity. This traditional economic model treats fundamental elements of life, like people, nature, and all living creatures as mere "externalities" with no real value. It's easy to see why we find ourselves stuck in patterns of overconsumption and waste.

In order for our economy to shift, we need to shift. What we value, the way we think, how we relate to one another, and our decision-making processes all need to transform. In this section, we begin by critically examining the understanding of wealth in the dominant settler society, and how Indigenous understandings of wealth in BC and more broadly in Canada have been delegitimized in order to advance the settler colonial project. We then share some overarching ways of thinking about wealth from Indigenous worldviews. Indigenous lifeways are sources of wisdom for the well-being economy that is being sought globally as our current economic system continues to fail all living things, including humans.

## **Moving away from dependency as the basis of economic structures**

Our current economy is structured around dependency rather than wealth or well-being, and the impacts are plainly visible and felt across different scales and places. Younger colonized countries are dependent on more colonizer and wealthier countries for investment and aid. Rural Areas are dependent on urban and foreign demand for goods and services. In Canada, the exclusion of Indigenous peoples from participating in the economy through the Indian Act has also created a system of dependency. The dispossession of their lands, culture, language, and way of life gave way for the government to suppress and control them. Ultimately, a state of dependency was intentionally created, in which First Peoples of this land now called Canada, were coerced into relying on colonizers for survival.

Despite the challenges brought on by this system of dependency, the lifeways of First Nations in BC are sources of creativity, sustainable alternatives, visionary thinking, and values and beliefs that enable humans to live in a good way. Their traditional economies continue in the various

trade conducted with one another, in their potlatches and ceremonies, in their ongoing traditional harvesting and sharing of that harvest. First Nations stories hold teachings of how to live and their responsibilities to care for those beyond themselves.

## **Indigenous lifeways and worldviews on wealth: A source of wisdom for economic transformation**

*“Indigenous peoples in BC already have a sophisticated concept of what constitutes a ‘good life’, a conception and way of living that has been refined over millennia and that varies within each culture, place and language.”*

- Centering First Nations Concepts of Wellbeing: Toward a GDP-Alternative Index in British Columbia

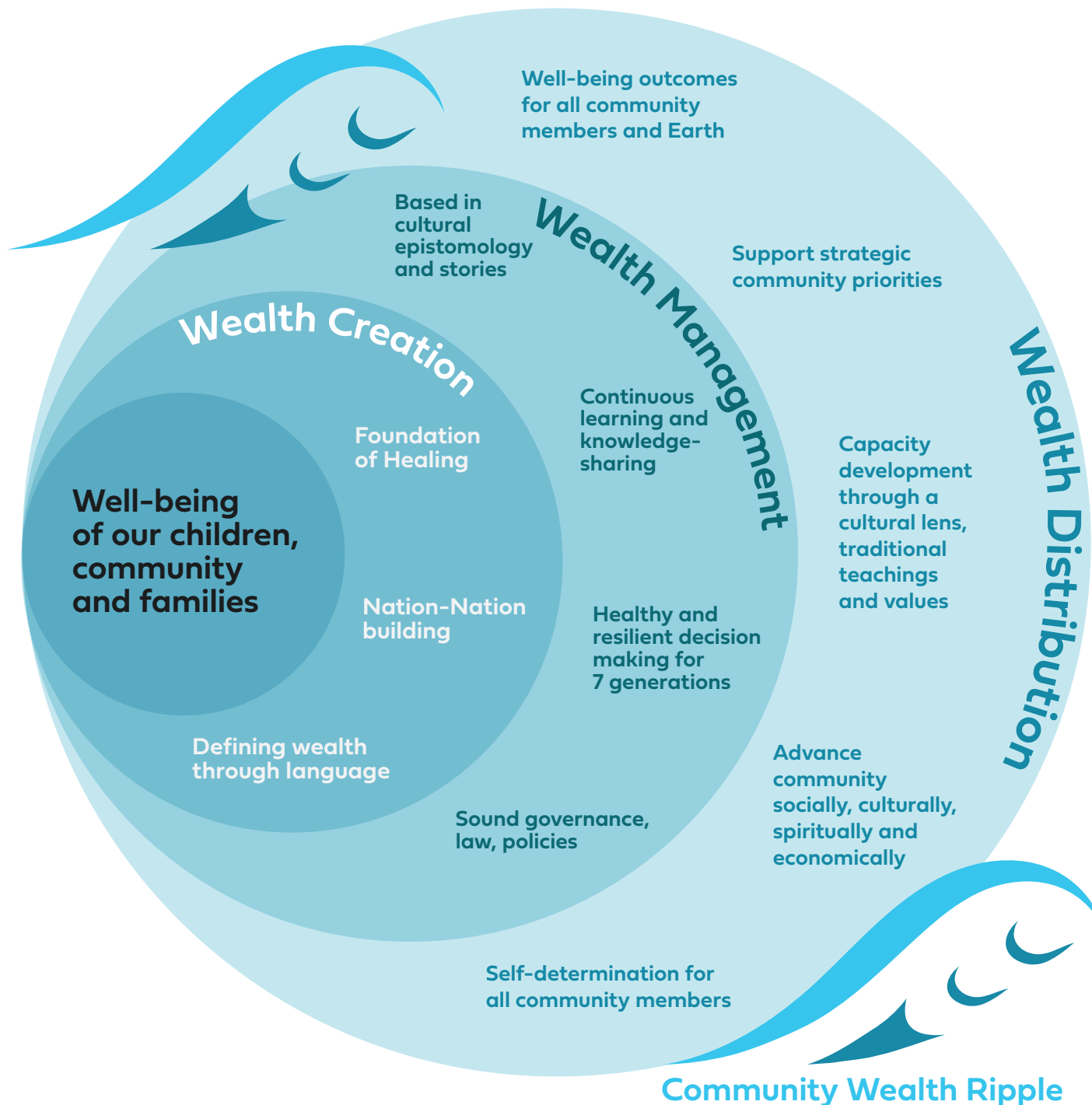
For Indigenous peoples wealth is well-being. Generally speaking the basis of wealth for many Indigenous peoples and Nations is that wealth is to be shared, which makes us all richer. Wealth creation, wealth management, and wealth distribution co-exist in a cyclical way, and distribution of wealth to community development initiatives such as housing, health, cultural preservation, entrepreneurship, and so on serves to generate community-wide impact. Values and beliefs around wealth are holistic in nature, tied to land, and prosperity is for the entire community and Nation. Many Indigenous people view wealth not only in terms of what they possess or as money but more in non-

monetary terms such as their ability to support and care for others, have ceremony, sharing, giving, and knowing who they are, where they come and why they are here.

## **Community Wealth Ripple: Intentionally Centring Children and Families**

What happens when our approach to creating, managing and distributing wealth intentionally centers children and families? The Community Wealth Ripple envisioned by Sxwpilemaát Siyám describes how wealth spreads through the community when that is the intention. It depicts dimensions of wealth creation, wealth distribution and wealth management that lead to well-being outcomes for Indigenous communities. Wealth creation is grounded in cultural knowing and has healing at its foundations. Wealth management practices are built on sound laws, governance and policies with a responsibility to health and resilient futures for the next seven generations. Rippling out from grounded wealth management practices, wealth distribution activities emerge that radiate through the entire community, rather than only benefiting a small few.





**Community Wealth Ripple**

**Community Wealth Ripple** shows how wealth moves through communities when the well-being of children, community and families is deliberately centered.

*Envisioned by  
Sxwpilemaát Siyám*

## Indigenous Matriarchs and Well-being

Knowledge and understanding of matriarchy is not lost. Indigenous women are taking back their original roles as leaders, politicians, entrepreneurs, academics, artists, voices of the people, land, water and all the resources and gifts mother earth offers us. They are owning their rightful place as equals in Indigenous Nations, on the land, in ceremony, and beyond.

Matriarchs have always held this space of leadership, it's just now becoming more prevalent and supported despite ongoing patriarchal dominance of men. Initiatives are forming to support Indigenous women in this effort. Rematriation in the economic sector includes the following dimensions:

- Providing wrap-around services and resources to support matriarchs in their roles as leaders;
- Establishing spaces of co-creation and relationship building amongst Indigenous women;
- Stepping aside for women to lead as CEOs, heads of boards, business owners, elected chiefs and council members, senior managers, Elders, land protectors, investors, knowledge-keepers, teachers, storytellers, and so forth.

Rematriation is a core principle in our framework for Economic Reconciliation.

## A Framework for Economic Reconciliation

The discussion in the previous section lays the foundation for a Framework for Economic Reconciliation offered in this segment, which shows how economic reconciliation can be a driving factor in transforming our economy. Considering the bigger picture, economic reconciliation is not only about changing relationships to Indigenous people alone, but completely reforming the economy by recognizing and adopting Indigenous knowledge. Truly enacting these values involves shifting our mindsets.

### Step into the River: The Economic Reconciliation Framework

Rivers have existed much longer than humans have, and will be around long after we are gone. They are also in a state of constant change. To step into the river is to become a part of something much greater than yourself. Rather than standing still or fighting against the current, to go in the direction of the river is to be in a positive relationship with change.

As we have said elsewhere, economic reconciliation is a journey, not an endpoint. Reconciliation is not about having more seats at the current table, but rather transforming the ways in which we are in relation to one another and

make decisions about our collective future. Therefore, a framework for economic reconciliation is not a checklist of actions to be achieved, but rather a journey in transformation.

We see economic reconciliation as a commitment to being in the river. It requires shifting our mindsets, deepening relationships and embedding values of transformation into our systems. To communicate what committing to reconciliation looks like, we've illustrated the following pieces: **The Riverbed** (Values of Economic Reconciliation); **Stepping Stones** (Fundamental Practices of Economic Reconciliation); and **Creating Ripples** (ideas for action in different sectors related to economic reconciliation).

## **The Riverbed: The Values of Economic Reconciliation**

The riverbed is the channel in which a river flows. It helps guide the river's course. As seen through an Indigenous worldview, these values are interconnected and reinforce one another - none of them can be adopted on its own or ranked higher than the others. While Indigenous Peoples already largely live by and embody these values, all people and organizations need to adopt and enact these values as it is only through our collective efforts that we can protect and care for what matters most for current and future generations.

### **Accountability and truth-telling**

Taking responsibility includes our accountability to our children, the land and all its creatures, and future generations. It also includes taking responsibility for past

and ongoing impacts of settler colonialism on Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing in Canada. It is a commitment to truth-telling and taking actions that are accountable to the truth.

Broadly speaking, for Indigenous Peoples storytelling is the foundation of articulating lived values that form the basis for Indigenous governance and regeneration. Indigenous scholars have noted that the use of storytelling to share Indigenous experiential knowledge and living histories is part of the core teachings that families pass on to future generations. Canada's version of history is very different from Canada's Indigenous Peoples' lived experience. Meaningful reconciliation efforts, commitments and actions must confront colonialism not only from a historical perspective but as part of an ongoing process that continues to impact present generations of Indigenous youth and families.

***“Settler violence against Indigenous peoples is woven into the fabric of Canadian history in an unbroken thread from past to present that we must now unravel, unsettling our comfortable assumptions about the past. At the same time, we must work as Indigenous allies to “restory” the dominant culture version of history; that is, we must make decolonizing space for Indigenous history—counter-narratives of diplomacy, law, and peacemaking practices—as told by Indigenous peoples themselves.”***

-Paulette Reagan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*

## Recognition and respect

Practicing openness to different perspectives and experiences, including Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing. It looks like honouring that Indigenous peoples are Title and Rights holders to their traditional territories and have the right to self-determination and self-government. This includes committing to actions and principles of Land Back and Cash Back (Yellowhead Institute), and upholding the rights of individuals whether they live on or off-reserve. Government, industries and institutions have emphasized building respectful relationships with Indigenous peoples and First Nations, which is absolutely necessary for meaningful economic reconciliation. However, how committed are they about uplifting and supporting Indigenous sovereignty?

## Regenerative Economy

As Dr. Jeanette Armstrong has emphasized, to live regeneratively requires that our whole society does things in such a way that we do not destroy the land's and all beings' ability for constant renewal. A circular and regenerative economy is one that is iterative and gets better over time as we learn. Rather than extract from the land and each other, how do we do things that are consistent with the rights of nature, valuing the health and well-being of Mother Earth by producing, consuming, and redistributing resources in harmony with the planet and all its creatures? Embracing a culture of spiritual, mental, emotional and physical well-being, our desired economic system encourages and generates collective healing.

## Connected to land and place

For Indigenous Peoples, the land does not belong to them, but rather they belong to the land. This inherent connection to place since time immemorial is the foundation of their societal laws and ways of being. The knowledge and spiritual connection that comes from being tied to the land creates respect, recognition and the ability to be in reciprocity with it.

An economic system that is connected to land and place is locally designed to redistribute goods so that all organisms can thrive and provide for future generations. It requires re-localization and democratization of how we produce and consume goods, ensuring all have full access to healthy food, renewable energy, clean air and water, purposeful employment, and healthy living environments.

This value asks us to move away from treating the land solely as something to be used, manipulated, and extracted from to treating the land as a part of ourselves, where we are rooted and understand the relationship to family, community and land through our responsibility and accountability to it and all those connected to it.

## Reciprocal relationships

Relationships are built on respect and in the spirit of exchange. For Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals, communities, organizations and institutions, this means that knowledge, capacity and wisdom is not one-sided or hierarchical. Collaboration and partnership with Indigenous Peoples and communities can generate transformative spaces and can shift us away from dominant western

ways of being. This is about working side by side as equal partners in the economy, in partnership with Indigenous communities in every aspect of economic development. This is particularly important in BC because most of the land is unceded territory. Interlinked with the value of Connected to Land and Place, each place has its own system of reciprocity to be respected.

### **Justice, liberation, anti-racism and solidarity**

A just world means that all children, families and communities are thriving, not just surviving. Injustices experienced by Indigenous people are not separate from other injustices. We honour the resilience of Indigenous, Women identifying, Black and all People of Colour, as well as LGBTQIA2S+ community members who have endured this system of oppression and continue to be leaders in dismantling it. We are committed to social and ecological liberation and learning to move away from performative or token allyship towards true solidarity with one another as we move forward together.

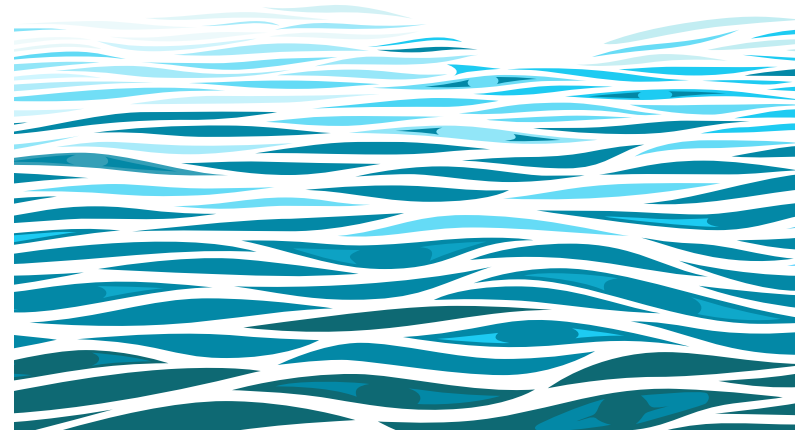
### **Self-determination, cultural sovereignty, Indigenization**

Indigenous worldviews, culture, values, protocols, practices, are embedded in decisions, processes and outcomes across various contexts of community economic development. By learning from Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing, communities across BC can make decisions that reflect the original peoples of this land and honour their inseparable relationship to the land, committing to transformation through decolonization and Indigenization.

### **Rematriation**

Rematriation involves acknowledging, respecting and supporting matriarchy in our everyday roles and responsibilities personally and professionally. Moving away from power and control, this is about centering and restoring relationships of care and rebalancing responsibility in our communities. This work is required internally within our Indigenous communities as well as externally throughout non-Indigenous communities.

It is through the process of Rematriation that Indigenous peoples and Nations reclaim their identity, culture and ways of being. Indigenous women's spiritual connection to matrilineal ancestors and relations that extend beyond this world, and their role as life givers means that they are in a unique position to lead in a way that consistently places children and families at the center. Honouring and supporting women to lead in their fullest potential is required not only to enable the full sovereign expression of all Indigenous relatives, but also for the benefit of all communities by helping people overcome fear and move towards love.



# Step into the River:

## The Economic Reconciliation Framework

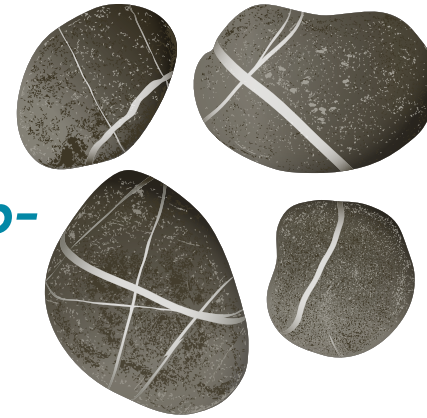
The riverbed holds the transformative values of economic reconciliation. The stepping stones are different spaces you might be walking in, held up by the practices that support you to stay on course within the flow of the river.

**Self-reflection & Awareness**

**Questioning & (un)learning**

**Relationship-building**

**Deep Listening**



*Accountability and Truth-telling*

*Recognition and Respect for Title & Rights*

*Regenerative Living*

*Connected to Land and Place*

*Reciprocal Relationships*

*Anti-racism, Equity and Solidarity*

*Rematriation*

*Self-determination, Cultural Sovereignty and Indigenization*

*Embraces and Celebrates Diverse Knowings and Ways of Being*

## Stepping Stones: Fundamental Practices for Being in the Flow

As we have mentioned, being in a river means allowing oneself to transform. Water is constant; no matter where you might stand in a river, it will flow around you. Committing to transformative reconciliation is a practice, meaning that you live out the following actions daily in order to become whole.

### Self-reflection and awareness

As you learn more, you are constantly in the space of reflecting on your sense of self, in what ways you have benefited from the current system, and in what ways you can work to change it. Self awareness includes learning more about your ancestry, your relationship to the land you grew up on or currently live on. Practicing self-awareness helps to instill what you value into your everyday life, so that you are aware of what you are accountable to and responsible for beyond yourself.

### Deep listening

Deep listening is needed urgently at this time including in the economic sector where there is often an imbalance of power in extractive or transactional relationships. To listen deeply is to listen from a receptive and compassionate place in oneself. It involves being generous with your time, empathic to the person speaking, and trusting and acknowledging what that person has experienced to be true. Deep listening is a practice of de-centering oneself, quieting the urge to react, and allowing oneself to be open to the unknown.



## Questioning & (un)learning

The purpose of questioning is to become aware of the aspects of the current economic system and what you have learnt to be true. It involves recognizing what narratives you have been taught in school, work and the news that reinforce complacency and complicity in the colonial system. It begins with each Canadian taking the initiative to question what they know or have been taught about the history of Canada and ongoing settler colonialism. It also involves questioning and reflecting on your own role, in what ways you may be complicit and complacent with upholding the current system. This process of learning and unlearning helps to cultivate curiosity about what else could be possible if we center the perspectives and knowledge of Indigenous Peoples to transform our systems.

### Relationship-building

No matter where you are in the river, you will be in relationship with Indigenous Peoples and communities as it is their traditional territory in which your work is being done. If you do not have a relationship established with your neighbouring First Nation communities and urban Indigenous population, it is imperative to reach out and begin the relationship building. Aligning to the values we have shared to a foundation of trust, safe space for healing and reconciliation. Then honouring the relationship through transparency, patience and a genuine commitment to the relationship.

## Creating Ripples

How do you begin to enact the values of economic reconciliation? From whichever context you are walking in, your actions can create ripples of impact through your community or region—ripples spanning outward from each point in the ecosystem. There are no prescriptive actions that we can provide for working in these spaces, as actions will be unique to each relationship with neighbouring First Nation(s) and Indigenous peoples. Just as ripples are not straight lines, this is not a linear pathway to an end point of reconciliation, but rather ideas for how you can stay in the river and contribute to transformation.

To aid in this, we have provided a Creating Ripples Guidebook. The guidebook poses a series of questions that are meant to support you in building your economic reconciliation practice and locating where in the ecosystem you have footing and influence. It is presented in two parts. Part 1: Fundamental Practices for Staying in the Flow of Economic Reconciliation contains some guiding prompts related to self-reflection, positionality and questioning what you've been taught to be true about Indigenous peoples in Canada and the state of reconciliation. Part 2: Sector-specific Actions provides some guiding questions and case examples related to different sub-sectors of Economic Development, including:

- Procurement, Finance & Management
- Management Capacity Building
- Education, Skills Building & Training
- Land Use and Planning
- Placemaking and Design

## Where to, next?

Because this is a living document, and because Economic Reconciliation is an ongoing journey, this is more of a jumping off point than a conclusion.

We hope that the stories, truths and insights shared here provoke you, in many senses of the word. The origin of the word provoke comes from pro- 'forth' + vocare- 'to call'. In this sense, we hope that you feel called forward.

We invite you to take a look at the global social economic reality and ask yourselves what has happened under the current economic regime? The way that we see it, on a global scale, we have widespread economic exclusion and negative impacts on society and our planet. We have a meteoric rise in wealth accumulation for the wealthiest parts of society and its result is a growing gap between rich and poor, which has only gotten worse with the increasing catastrophic effects of climate change, some of which is irreversible at this stage. Ignoring this reality only perpetuates the decline of our lives and that of mother earth.

Turning to Indigenous wisdom and epistemologies can lead to myriad possibilities for transforming our economic system and how we want to live. Placing the children and Mother Earth back at the center of the equation is integral to engaging in economic practices and building a resilient society rooted in care.



# Closing Remarks

on this Journey *by Sxwpilemaát Siyám*

*At the beginning of this document I began in ceremony, inviting you the reader to be a witness of sorts through this journey. And as a witness, you are responsible to take this new knowledge and do something with it.*

*The journey of this work has been fun, hopeful, painful at times, arduous and stressful, but hopefully worth it as my desire is to create a space of curiosity within settler communities to engage in intentional and purposeful work of economic reconciliation. The journey ahead of us all can be what we make it and I'm asking you the reader to choose a path of learning, listening, heart-opening, healing, and embracing discomfort, so that we can move towards a future state of our collective economy that is reciprocal, equitable, and most importantly gifted with the richness of each First Nation's knowledge of a good life.*

## Connect with us

We're open to ongoing dialogue, curiosity and collaboration around economic reconciliation and transforming our economic system.

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[www.sfu.ca/ced.html](http://www.sfu.ca/ced.html)