

Pathways to Purpose: Indigenous Perspectives

Draft for Consultation and Feedback

Introduction

The [Social Purpose Assessment Tool](#) is a set of 50 practices designed to help organizations embed social purpose throughout their operations, governance, culture, and decision-making. To better reflect and support Indigenous entrepreneurs, Nation-owned businesses, development corporations, community enterprises, and Indigenous organizations, the Canadian Purpose Economy Project developed Pathways to Purpose: Indigenous Perspectives, a draft resource for consultation and feedback.

This resource explores how the Social Purpose Assessment Tool may be interpreted and applied through Indigenous perspectives, values, governance traditions, and ways of knowing. While maintaining the core assessment framework and rating system, it introduces culturally grounded language, examples, and reflective prompts that honour Indigenous worldviews, relational accountability, community well-being, economic sovereignty, and self-determination. It is intended to support meaningful conversations with Indigenous entrepreneurs, Nation-owned businesses, development corporations, community enterprises, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and other Indigenous organizations.

This companion resource recognizes the strength, innovation, and leadership of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples, communities, and organizations across these lands. While Indigenous Peoples share experiences of resilience, resurgence, and Nation rebuilding, there is no single Indigenous perspective or approach. The diversity of Nations, languages, cultures, legal traditions, governance systems, and relationships to land and community shape unique priorities, opportunities, and pathways forward.

Created with respect for the rights of Indigenous Peoples to define their own futures, this resource does not seek to prescribe what social purpose should look like for Indigenous businesses, organizations, communities, or Nations. Rather, it is offered as a starting point for dialogue, reflection, and learning, supporting organizations in exploring how social purpose can be understood and expressed in ways that honour Indigenous knowledge systems, community aspirations, collective well-being, economic sovereignty, and self-determined priorities.

This resource was developed by Michelle Reid, an Ojibwe woman from Serpent River First Nation, Co-founder of the Canadian Purpose Economy Project and member of its Leadership Group. It is offered in the spirit of curiosity, relationship-building, and continuous learning.

We welcome feedback on how this resource can be strengthened, adapted, and made more relevant to Indigenous businesses, organizations, communities, and Nations. Please share your comments, suggestions, and reflections with us at info@purposeeconomy.ca.



Purpose of Pathways to Purpose: Indigenous Perspectives

This resource supports Indigenous entrepreneurs, community enterprises, development corporations, and Nation-owned businesses to use the [Social Purpose Assessment Tool](#) in ways that respect culture, sovereignty, and right relations. It keeps the same seven sections and rating approach, so your results remain compatible with the original tool, while offering culturally grounded language, options, and examples.

How to use

- Start with your own teachings and community context.
- Where the toolkit says board, shareholders, executives, or corporation, feel free to read Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Clan or Family leadership, community advisors, or Nation representatives.
- Where it says strategy, KPIs, or metrics, consider stories, seasonal cycles, ceremonies, and relational accountabilities as equal forms of evidence.
- Keep the same rating scale for Current State and 5-Year Ambition:
 - 1 - No Progress
 - 2 - Limited Progress
 - 3 - Some Progress
 - 4 - Significant Progress
 - 5 - Complete
 - X - Not Applicable
 - Use X when a practice is not aligned with your cultural protocols or sovereignty.

Core principles to hold while assessing

- **Sovereignty:** Decisions rest with your governance and community.
- **Relational accountability:** Prioritize responsibilities to land, waters, ancestors, and future generations.
- **Consent and protocol:** Follow community protocols, honoraria practices, and processes for consent.
- **Data sovereignty:** Steward knowledge in line with community expectations; do not disclose what should remain with the Nation.
- **Cyclical time:** Consider seasons and life cycles rather than only linear, quarterly horizons.

1) Business Model

Intent in the toolkit: Clarify why you exist and how your business model advances purpose.

Indigenous reframing

- Purpose is inherited from teachings and community obligations.
- The business exists to serve people, place, and culture, not only markets.



Prompts

- Whose wellbeing does our business directly support (Nation, urban Indigenous community, youth, Elders, language learners, land caretakers)?
- How does revenue flow back to the community in ways that reflect reciprocity?
- Which cultural teachings shape pricing, hiring, sourcing, and surplus distribution?
- How do we balance enough revenue with enough giving, care for land, and cultural continuity?

Evidence options

- Stories from community members, Elders' teachings or letters, examples of reinvestment, seasonal plans, ceremony records if appropriate to share.

Keep the existing rating scale for each practice in this section.

2) Governance and Leadership

Intent in the toolkit: Leadership bodies champion and monitor purpose in decisions and plans.

Indigenous reframing

- Replace corporate entities with your governance forms: Elders Council, Knowledge Keepers, Clan or Family leaders, Nation councils, youth councils, community advisory circles.

Prompts

- Who must be involved for legitimate decisions in our community?
- Which protocols guide major choices (offerings, witness roles, circle process, consensus)?
- How do we pause or stop work that does not align with teachings, even if revenue is attractive?
- How do we invite and document guidance from Knowledge Keepers in ways they approve?

Evidence options

- Protocols followed, community meeting notes (as permitted), records of circles, letters of support, decisions witnessed.

Use the same ratings and apply X if a corporate practice is not culturally relevant.



3) People and Culture

Intent in the toolkit: Purpose is lived in hiring, development, recognition, and daily work.

Indigenous reframing

- Culture is not a program. It is how you live and work every day.

Prompts

- How do we center language, ceremony, and teachings in work life?
- How do we support staff to learn protocols, land stewardship, and trauma-informed practice?
- How do we hold space for wellness, caregiving, and community responsibilities?
- How do we nurture youth and apprentice roles?

Evidence options

- Orientation that includes history and local protocols, cultural leave policies, mentorship by Elders, staff stories, community feedback.

Keep the ratings and consider stories as valid evidence of progress.

4) Operations

Intent in the toolkit: Structure, premises, and practices embody purpose.

Indigenous reframing

- Operations should reflect care for land, water, and non-human relatives.
- The shop, office, or land base is a place of teaching and belonging.

Prompts

- Do our spaces follow protocol for territory acknowledgements that are action-based?
- Do our supply, energy, waste, travel, and food choices respect land and waters?
- Do we enable community use of our spaces for gatherings and learning?

Evidence options

- Local sourcing with Indigenous suppliers, waste and water stewardship practices, space sharing agreements, seasonal operational changes.

Use the same ratings and apply X if a practice is outside your context.



5) Customer Experience and Marketing

Intent in the toolkit: Purpose is visible at customer touchpoints and in product design.

Indigenous reframing

- Community comes before customer, and truth comes before brand.
- Marketing must avoid extractive storytelling or tokenization.

Prompts

- Do our stories belong to us to share? Do we have consent?
- Are products and services guided by teachings and made with good relations?
- Are we protecting sacred knowledge and not commercializing what should remain with the community?

Evidence options

- Consent records where appropriate, guidelines for cultural IP, or alternatively, guidelines for cultural history and tradition, protocols for photography and stories, product audits for cultural safety.

Keep the ratings and use X for items that would breach protocol.

6) Business Ecosystem

Intent in the toolkit: Work with suppliers, peers, and policy to advance purpose.

Indigenous reframing

- Ecosystem means kinship networks, Nation partners, Indigenous suppliers, and allies who accept Indigenous leadership.

Prompts

- Are we buying from Indigenous suppliers and paying fairly?
- How do we lift up other Indigenous businesses rather than compete unnecessarily?
- How do we engage municipalities, institutions, and corporate partners in ways that respect UNDRIP and community protocols?
- Are we careful about affiliations that conflict with our values?

Evidence options

- Supplier lists, reciprocity agreements, partnership MOUs with protocol clauses, examples of shared advocacy shaped by community.

Use the same ratings with attention to reciprocity over scale.



7) Monitoring and Reporting

Intent in the toolkit: Gather data, learn, report, and improve.

Indigenous reframing

- Knowledge is medicine and must be handled with care.
- Stories and witness testimony can sit alongside numbers and dashboards.

Prompts

- What information belongs to the community and should not be public?
- What can be shared to demonstrate impact without revealing what is sacred?
- How do we include seasonal cycles and ceremonies in our reflection and learning?
- How do we return findings to the community and ask for guidance on next steps?

Evidence options

- Community reports with consent, story bundles, seasonal reflections, Elder or youth witness stories and statements, safe summaries for public audiences.

Keep the ratings and use X where disclosure would breach protocol.

Optional translation guide (use locally and adapt)

- Board or shareholders → Elders Council, Knowledge Keepers, Nation committee, family leadership circle
- Executive team → Community advisory circle or operational leadership circle
- KPI or metric → Story, seasonal indicator, witnessed commitment, qualitative milestone
- Stakeholder engagement → Relationship building with consent and protocols
- Strategy and innovation → Teachings-guided paths and community-led experimentation
- Risk management → Cultural safety, protocol adherence, harm prevention

Relational indicators you can use in place of classic KPIs

- Number and quality of community relationships renewed each season
- Youth engagement and mentorship hours with Elders or Knowledge Keepers
- Language use supported through work (lessons, signage, paid learning time)
- Land and water care outcomes tied to operations (stewardship days, restoration projects)
- Community wellness benefits (access to services, cultural programming supported)
- Economic reciprocity (percentage of surplus reinvested, Indigenous supplier spend)

You can still summarize these in the toolkit's sections and ratings.



Protocol, consent, and integrity safeguards

- Use consent processes for stories, images, and names.
 - Offer appropriate honoraria or gifts for guidance and knowledge sharing.
 - Do not publish sacred teachings or locations.
 - Build in ceremony and reflection points before major decisions, not only after.
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Practical worksheet (copy into your assessment sessions)

1. Which teachings guide this decision?
 2. Who needs to be present or consulted for legitimacy?
 3. What protocols must we follow?
 4. What stories or indicators will tell us we are on the right path?
 5. What should remain with the community and not be reported publicly?
 6. What reciprocity will we practice as part of this work?
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Keeping compatibility with the original tool

- Continue to complete the 50 practices across the seven functions and score Current State and 5-Year Ambition using 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 or X.
- Where a practice uses corporate language, substitute the Indigenous terms that fit your governance and context.
- Document examples and stories as your evidence base. This is valid data for learning and prioritization in your integration plan.



Gratitude

Pathways to Purpose: Indigenous Perspectives was inspired and written by Michelle Reid, Co-founder of the Canadian Purpose Economy Project and member of its Leadership Group. She is the Manager of Indigenous Reconciliation at BDC and an Ojibwe woman from Serpent River First Nation. We are grateful for her leadership, insight, and generosity in helping bring Indigenous perspectives and ways of knowing into this work.

ABOUT THE CANADIAN PURPOSE ECONOMY PROJECT

The Canadian Purpose Economy Project exists to accelerate the transition to the purpose economy. It engages national ecosystem actors to create an enabling environment for social purpose businesses to start, transition, thrive and grow. It convenes, connects, curates and collaborates to drive the social purpose business movement in Canada toward an economy where social purpose business is the norm, attracting capital, talent and partners. In this economy, businesses unlock all their assets, influence, reach and scale in collaboration with others to help Canada address its societal challenges and realize a flourishing future. We appreciate the ongoing support of Coast Capital, our Founding Purpose Champion, and operate as a project of the Canadian Business for Social Responsibility Foundation. Visit our website at www.purposeeconomy.ca to register for updates, explore our purpose levers of change and join the social purpose business movement.

