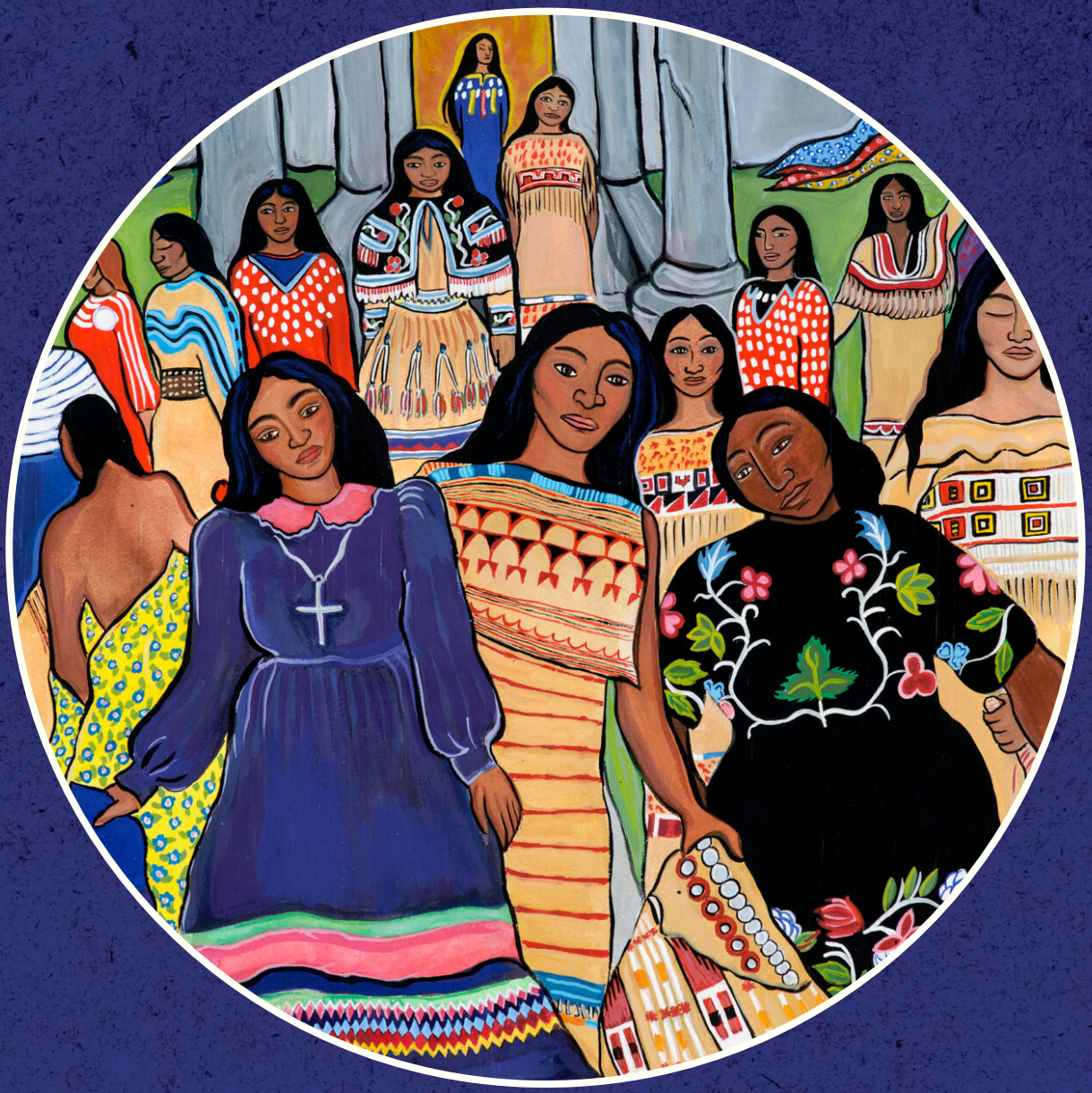
The Rematriation of Indigenous Women, Girls, Two-Spirit, and Gender-Diverse People's Human Rights and the Obligations of All Governments:



# WHAT WE HEARD AROUND THE KITCHEN TABLE

**About the Cover Art:**

## Ancestral Women Taking Back Their Dresses (1990)

*The first time I travelled to Europe to visit museum collections, I was overwhelmed by the sheer volume of cultural material from across the globe. I was looking for "our stuff" and I found it. When I got back, the first thing people would ask was, "Did you bring them back?" It was difficult to explain, to older people in particular, why I couldn't do that. I couldn't explain it to myself. One day when I was feeling very frustrated, I thought, "The only way we're ever going to get that stuff back is if those women, the artists, just go there and get it." So these are my superheroes, and my imaginary vindication. Our female ancestors fly across the ocean, invade the museums and take back our possessions. The women have blasted the doors of the museum open, thrown their cotton print dresses away, and reclaimed their traditional dresses. Every dress in the painting is a real dress in a museum collection. I felt much better after I finished. By painting this I took something back. I brought them home.*

**– Sherry Farrell Racette (Métis, Anishinaabe-Algonquin, and Irish)**

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Mamawipawin

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We express our gratitude to Sherry Farrell Racette,and Micaela Gilbert for use of their art, which has helped bring this report to life. We thank Angela Ciceron and Amber Vandenberg from the University of Manitoba for their contributions to this report.



# Executive Summary

*Calling for Justice and Re-imagining Governance: The Rematriation of Indigenous Women's Human Rights and the Obligations of All Governments* examines the interconnected historical and contemporary factors contributing to the systemic marginalization of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin. While working on this project, the rights of women, girls, and gender-diverse people in Canada and abroad have faced significant threats, including the reversal of hard-won rights. Growing neofascist sentiments and far-right movements continue to threaten these rights. Here in Manitoba, the province in which our research team is based, violence against Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit and gender-diverse kin, including against elected members of Manitoba's legislature were occurring as we wrote this report. These acts of violence reinforce findings that the intersectional impact of settler colonialism in Canada remains a gendered and racialized project.

## Objectives

Inspired by and responding directly to the Calls for Justice offered in the National Inquiry on Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls Final Report, in particular Call 1.4 which demands "urgent and special measures to ensure that Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people are represented in… governance and leadership," this project contributes to the ongoing work of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin who are actively working to stop a genocide through their leadership and governance. The aim of this project is to propose new systems of governance and expressions of self-determination which centre gendered realities.

## Methods

Guided by Indigenous feminist methodologies, this project used a relational and collaborative process that centred Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse people's knowledge, leadership, and lived experience. The project combined critical engagement with literature across Indigenous studies, law, politics, history, and human rights and included a literature review, collective reading practices, Kitchen Table Gatherings, and story-based learning led by Indigenous matriarchs. Together, these approaches supported knowledge-sharing, reflection, and accountability grounded in relationships, care, and responsibility to community.



# Key Findings

1. Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin play key roles in governance and leadership, working within and outside of settler colonial systems. The goals of leaders in Indigenous communities and Nations are the health and safety of their relatives in their community, whether urban or rural.

2. The leadership of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin is not recognized as governance because it exists, and persists, outside of dispossessory hierarchical state structures.

3. Matriarchy and leadership are taught to Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin through ceremony, visiting, and teachings.

4. Human rights mechanisms (e.g., United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights) must be acknowledged and implemented within municipal, provincial, territorial, and federal law and policy.

5. Violence against Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin is ongoing and can be traced back to colonial systems, stereotypes, and ongoing colonial structures.

6. Recommendations and proposed Indigenous-led reparation frameworks found in the Independent Special Interlocutor for Missing Children and Unmarked Graves and Burial Sites associated with Indian Residential School's Final Report (2024), the final report of the National Inquiry on MMIWG (2019b), Manitoba's Aboriginal Justice Inquiry (1991b), and the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) have not been respected or implemented. Municipal, provincial, territorial, and federal government inaction to implement these recommendations and policy changes demonstrates that the active genocide against Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin is thus permissible.

7. Intergenerational knowledge transmission and mentors are important for Indigenous girls and gender-diverse youth. These relationships foster leadership, provide opportunities for youth to imagine their futures and gain new skills, and create important support networks for leadersof all ages throughout their lives.

8. Indigenous men in leadership positions may experience racism, however they also benefit from patriarchal systems and structures that negatively impact Indigenous women and gender-diverse kin in similar positions.

9. More resources, including parenting supports, are necessary to address systemic inequities experienced by Indigenous communities, in urban and rural settings.

10. Indigenous organizations and programs need sustainable funding commitments and resources to effectively support Indigenous women, girls, gender-diverse kin, and families.

11. Indigenous Nations and Peoples are actively working together across Canada, including here in Winnipeg, to fundamentally change the realities of their kin creating healthy futures beyond the settler colonial state.

12. Settler colonial justice and accountability systems do not work for Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin.

13. Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin are actively stopping a state-sponsored genocide.

14. A failure to acknowledge the leadership and governance of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin contributes to the ongoing genocide.

15. All levels of government must acknowledge, respect, and adhere to their obligations to ensure Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin are fully and effectively participating in all aspects of decision-making processes.



# Introduction

The ***Calling for Justice and Re-Imagining Governance: The Rematriation of Indigenous Women's Human Rights and the Obligations of All Governments*** project combined a review of published literature with community engagement to bring together knowledge on the interconnected historical and contemporary factors contributing to the systemic marginalization of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, Indigiqueer, and gender-diverse people. The project's final report – ***Those Who Hold Everything*** – documents those factors and outlines actionable steps towards rematriation – to restoring Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse people's human rights and leadership roles.

Gathering, sharing, reflection, and accountability informed our responsibilities to ground this project in relationality and care. In this way, we worked to disrupt the violent dispossession and dismissal of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse voices. Aligning with our relational approach, we understand the importance of including Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kins' voices within this research. Guided by Indigenous feminist frameworks of community engagement – so much organizing still begins and/or continues to happen around a kitchen table in someone's home – we held a series of "Kitchen Table" gatherings, where we shared a meal and visited with community leaders and matriarchs. In these Kitchen Table Gatherings, we heard from Indigenous women leaders who conversed with each other and our team. The results were wide-ranging and powerful conversations. These Kitchen Table gatherings breathed life into our project's final report.

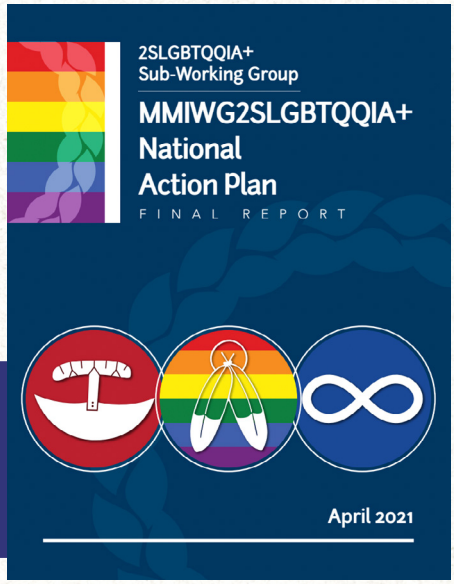
Four Kitchen Table Gatherings were held between September 2025 and April 2026. One Kitchen Table was held at the University of Manitoba's Fort Garry Campus, another in Winnipeg's inner city, and a third online. A final Kitchen Table, held at The Forks of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers in Winnipeg allowed participants to see and provide feedback on our project's final report. Over tea and coffee, and meals from local Indigenous caterers, we came together. Tobacco ties were offered to each leader in attendance, as well as an offer of an honourarium. Each Kitchen Table was opened in a good way with a prayer from Grandmother Denima Thelma Morrisseau, who alongside Sandra DeLaronde and our research team, guided the conversations. In total, twenty-four leaders generously shared their knowledge and expertise. Student researchers took notes of the conversations that occurred, and these anonymized, consolidated conversations are summarized below. Those in attendance shared with us that leadership is taking who we are with us wherever we go – this ethos has guided this work.



# Terminology

This report was conducted within Winipek [Muddy Waters in Ininimowin] or the City of Winnipeg, located in Treaty One Territory, Dakota Oyate homelands, and the National homelands of the Red River Métis (Craft 2013; Sinclair 2024; Iapi debwewin aansaamb 2025). Winipek was and is home to a historical and central meeting place called Nistawayak/Nestawe'ya, also known as The Forks. This report makes no Nation specificity to honour the network of Indigenous relations who have worked together in place for generations (Sinclair 2024, 48–49).

**Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, Indigiqueer, and gender-diverse people:** This project centers Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, Indigiqueer, and gender-diverse people. In this, we aim to move away from a binary, colonial understanding of gender, and examine the range of different gender identities, presentations, and histories. In practice, the report focuses particularly on Indigenous women, and the work to better include the range of gendered and embodied experiences and expressions is ongoing and necessary.




**For further information, please see MMIWG2SLGBTQQIA+ National Action Plan Final Report (2SLGBTQQIA+ Sub Working Group 2021).**

**Indigenous, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit:** Our team includes both Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers. When we refer to Indigenous kin, we are mindful of the different relationships and responsibilities. This report utilizes the language of both First Nations and Indigenous, an umbrella terms for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. Where necessary, we distinguish between First Nations and Indigenous. For example, when referencing the Indian Act, we speak of First Nations people in particular.

**For further information, we suggest reading: Métis scholar, Chelsea Vowel's *Indigenous Writes: A Guide to First Nations, Métis & Inuit Issues in Canada* with a particular emphasis on the first chapter, "Just Don't Call Us Late for Supper: Names for Indigenous Peoples" (2016).**

**Turtle Island:** This report has included literature beyond jurisdictional boundaries of Canadian provinces, as well as the settler-states of Canada and the United States. This project expands all over Turtle Island, but with a specific focus on our place-based relations in Winnipeg, Manitoba on Treaty One lands.

**Matriarchy:** We draw on Indigenous feminist framing of "matriarchy" and "matriarch" that, as Jennifer Brant explains, are "rooted in community knowledges, specifically matriarchal worldviews, that have existed since time immemorial and govern our relations to our human and non-human kin" (2023, 17). Matriarchy is embedded in heart knowledge. It embeds responsibilities that begin in the home, that care for youth and healthy Indigenous futures. It is felt, experienced, and shared. It is a relational organizational structure that has been practiced since time immemorial. This framing of matriarchy is connected to another guiding concept, rematriation.

**To learn more about Rematriation, see the University of Manitoba's work on Respectful Rematriation and Repatriation Ceremony *https://umanitoba.ca/indigenous/engagement/respectful-repatriation***

**Tokenism:** Tokenism refers to process when Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin are expected to show up, but their work is extracted without proper recognition, acknowledgement, compensation, or relationship.

**Genocide:** A central component of this project has been centering the work of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2019b). We adopt their findings and work from a recognition that this gendered and racialized violence of colonialism is indeed a genocide (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls 2019a). Their definition states:

> *The significant, persistent, and deliberate pattern of systemic racial and gendered human rights and Indigenous rights violations and abuses – perpetuated historically and maintained today by the Canadian state, designed to displace Indigenous Peoples from their land, social structures, and governance and to eradicate their existence as Nations, communities, families, and individuals – is the cause of the disappearances, murders, and violence experienced by Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people, and is genocide. This colonialism, discrimination, and genocide explain the high rates of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people.*
>
> *(National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls 2019c, Vol. 1b, 174).*

**"... this gendered and racialized violence of colonialism is indeed a genocide."**

***National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019***

# What We Heard Around the Kitchen Tables

Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin have historically been excluded from decision-making processes and where they are included, are seldom listened to. Leadership (and exclusion from leadership) is both gendered and racialized. Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse leaders also experience ageism. They are at once parentified while also discriminated against as they age; in both cases, they are dismissed. The lived experiences of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin cannot be removed from the context of colonialism which frames their everyday realities.

The **Indian Act** aimed to destroy First Nations and their modes of governance. This was operationalized through the dispossession of First Nations women who married non-First Nations men, which worked to re-structure First Nations and women's role and authorities within them. Women were removed from multiple levels of power in their Nations, destroying political systems. This violence did not just dispossess women, but the effects were experienced across the entire Nation. Grounded in part on colonial stereotypes, the Indian Act was used as a tool to fuel the genocide against First Nations. However, First Nations women mobilized and re-located off-reserve while remaining close to their communities to maintain their relations, and connections to place-based knowledges and ways of being.

The divide between urban and rural, attributed to the Indian Act, creates rifts within and between Nations. This divide separates Indigenous peoples from their Nation, relations, connection resources, and culture. This is both a historical and contemporary reality experienced by Indigenous Nations. Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin are adversely disadvantaged by this divide. Resources need to be put in place for both rural and urban areas, including programs to support the transition from on-reserve to urban settings. Everyone is entitled to access programming and resources regardless of location. Centring caring for relatives and relations must be the priority and the barrier between rural and urban, south and north should be removed to ensure equitable access to programs, supports, and resources. These supports must be made regionally, nationally, and internationally to support Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin.



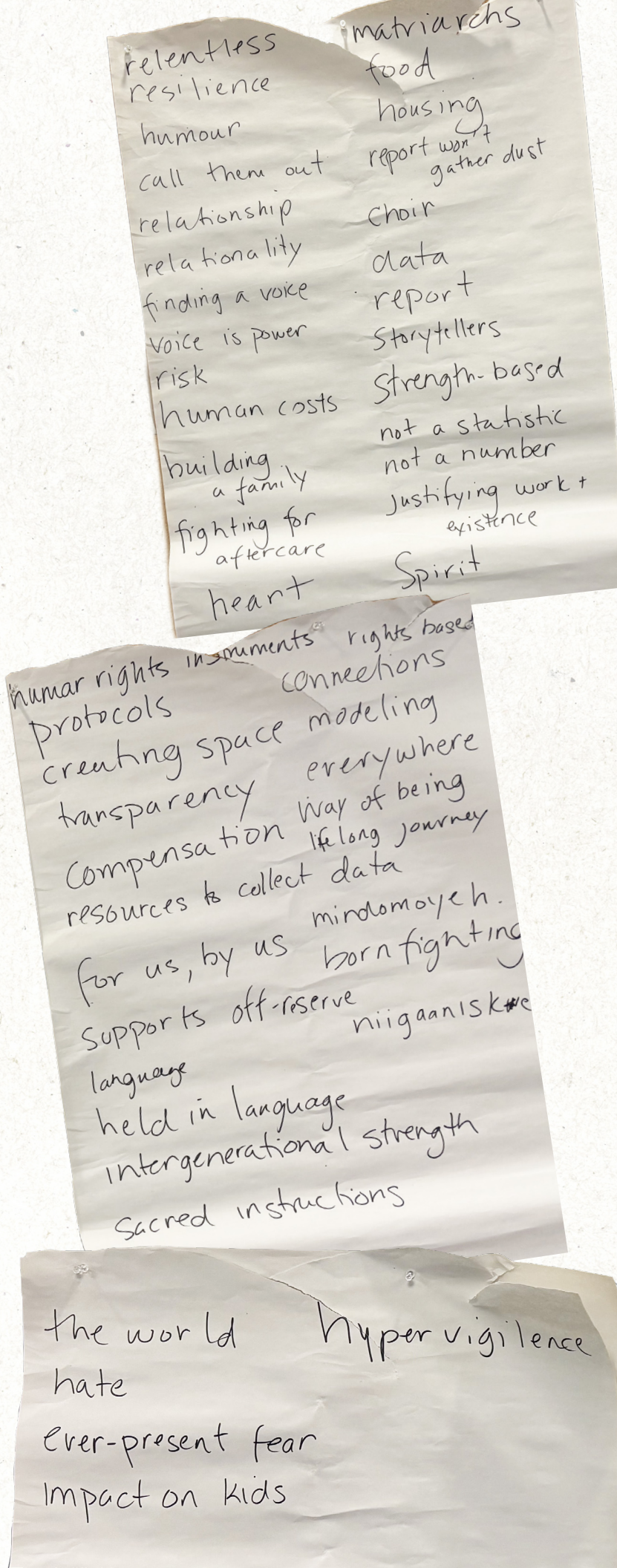
## Leadership in Settler Colonialism

Throughout the Kitchen Tables, we were gifted stories from leaders who were mentored by those that came before them, now they carry this work. This is not new work; their leadership is centered on continuing to advocate, fight, and advance the rights of their relations. Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse leaders take on this work and care for their community and relations, while also doing the work at home, and efforts towards their own healing. They are not deterred by the length of time it takes, as someone is always behind them ready to support the work, and so the cycle of mentorship continues.

Leadership remains highly gendered, and misogyny continues to infiltrate Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations. It is necessary to acknowledge that Indigenous Nations can reproduce patriarchy and further discriminate against Indigenous women. An overall shared experience at the Kitchen Table gatherings was that Indigenous men are held to a lower standard when in leadership positions compared to Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin whose leadership is constantly under scrutiny, with their mistakes forever remembered, whereas men are granted room for failure, with their mistakes forgiven and forgotten.

It became clear through listening to leaders that colonial structures and governing systems necessitate hierarchy and mirror patriarchal and colonial norms for their survival, at the cost of the safety, inclusion, and rights of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, gender-diverse kin.

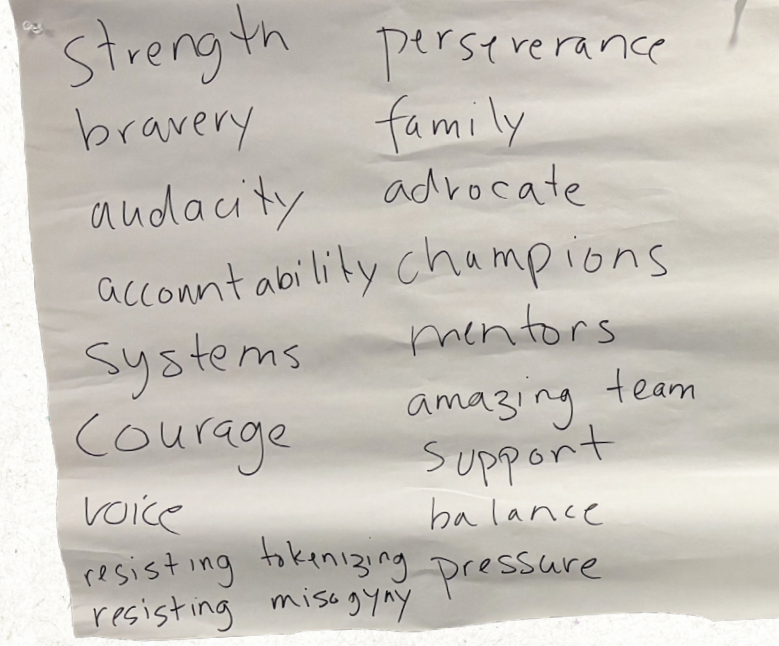
Historically and in contemporary frameworks, Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin have been responsible for organizing and enacting the work that takes care of their relations. This means these lead-



ers take on more responsibility than what is on their job description because they understand the work needs to be done, and if not them, no one else will do it. Moreover, it became clear through our visits that when Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin are included, be it in workplaces, in communities, or in more overtly political (i.e. elected or appointed) leadership positions, often the theory and solutions they generate to push change forward are mined and extracted, then used by those who hold power as their own, ignoring the contributions and leadership of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin.

Leaders at the Kitchen Tables shared the importance of taking up space and holding that space for future generations as they raise them up. Leadership is felt, witnessed, and experienced through the mentorship of other Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin. This is facilitated through a deep respect for the transmission and production of Indigenous knowledges. Leaders found it useful to know they had other trusted Indigenous women, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse folk to take up the work if they needed to step down, making an analogy to a "choir"; which is to say, they sing together and when one stops to take a breath, other choir members sing on.

Settler-state political systems are devoid of Indigenous knowledges and ways of being – a huge barrier in accomplishing collective goals. Through our project, it became clear to the research team that there are no protections for Indigenous politicians, especially Indigenous women, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse politicians within the settler-state governance system. In our gatherings, Indigenous women around the table shared that it is important to understand and be aware that the system




will "try to come" for Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin in leadership positions because their very presence upsets the supremacy and norm of settler-state structures.

Shared experiences and developing trust can move the pendulum of colonialism and create a holistic change to be inclusive and safe for Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin. This shift includes recognizing that leadership and governance exist outside of dominant political spheres and are driven by responsibility and care for all relations.

Notwithstanding Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kins' disappearance and erasure of their positions within Nations, their leadership has always persisted. It challenges dominant colonial structures. Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin's leadership is guided by heart knowledge. This leadership and governance builds and centers relational networks. These networks expand across generations. The embedded care interwoven between these relationships that exist between generations pushes their leadership forward.




During our Kitchen Table Gatherings, and with permission from all participants, detailed notes were taken by the research team on the project themes. These were the terms that were recorded during these gatherings. Design: Angela Ciceron.

## Data Sharing and Sovereignty

During our gatherings, data sharing and sovereignty became an important consideration for Indigenous leadership. Indigenous Peoples have the capacity and knowledge to collect and care for their own data. However, there are few resources available to facilitate data collection and build infrastructures for it. All levels of settler-state government must be accountable to share the data they collect on Indigenous Peoples, women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin with Indigenous Nations. Data sovereignty must be practiced and cared for in accordance with Indigenous pedagogies. Data collection must be inclusive of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin and utilize a gendered lens to ensure the data is accurately captured. Indigenous-led data can create pathways for funding. Too many matriarchal organizing practices have been lost because the stories and teachings have not been recorded. Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin's stories must be recorded in the ways that they want to tell their stories. This data may include oral stories to protect Indigenous histories, to recognize the work of reclaiming leadership, to maintain connections, and to contribute to the revitalization of culture, language, and identity. These are the stories that reflect who Indigenous Peoples are. When these stories are not recorded and safely protected, relationality is severed and individuals lack access to stories, teachings, and knowledge.



## Absences and Patterns of Erasure

Owing to the intersections of sexism and racism caused by settler colonialism, many records and policies fail to see or address the needs of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin. This undermines the leadership and systemic transformation that Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin have fought for: their leadership has been effectively disappeared. To circumvent this, it is necessary to critically read documents and records with care and develop strategies to determine what is missing or excluded.

During our time together, leaders shared that they experienced significant tokenism. Everyone present at the gathering had stories to share of occasions where they have been invited to sit on boards or to attend key meetings on issues, concerns, and policies that directly affect their communities, only to discover that they are there to "represent" inclusion and consultation, but that they have no real voice or means of meaningfully participating in the decision-making processes. Tokenism remains an extractive and exploitive colonial process and a process that is gendered. Leaders suggested that ensuring there are more opportunities for Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse leaders to share space meaningfully in these colonial systems in ways that increase the presence of Indigenous knowledges and leadership can counter tokenism and the resulting experiences of alienation and erasure.

In the workplace, Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse leaders are not always provided the information necessary for their position when they take up leadership positions. Most leaders described that they were not adequately informed and often had to "learn as they went" with little resources, support, or acknowledgement. They did this while often having to fight against colonial systems to

support their relations through their work. In so doing, they are blazing a trail for future leaders, though often at great personal and/or professional costs.

Colonialism explicitly conceals the violence it creates and sustains and covers up the realities it has constructed for Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin. Leaders at the Kitchen Tables expressed the need to circulate information on the history of colonialism to all levels of society, and to identify and explicitly work against colonial structures whenever they are enacted. Colonial institutions persistently misunderstand and/or ignore the needs of Indigenous Nations. If systems do not listen and meaningfully include Indigenous leadership, failure is bound to occur. This can harm future relationships, and hinders transformational change required to create healthy futures for Indigenous Nations. Indigenous leaders demonstrated that it is important for Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin to work together to continue to create space for Nations to gather, explore similarities and differences, to strategize, and to share information. This then, can be disseminated back to Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse leaders in their communities to build coalitions. This approach however must not be romanticized, nor should the distinctiveness and autonomy of each Indigenous woman, girl, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse person be negated. There is strength in working and learning together, and while it may not always be seamless, it can be transformative. This work cannot be done alone.



## Funding

The Kitchen Tables revealed that Indigenous resources and programs remain inadequately funded. At present, funding structures and mechanisms do not reflect the gendered realities and labour of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin. Funding applications and reporting requirements take substantial time and resources that Indigenous leaders do not have, while maintaining the operation of programs, fighting against colonial structures, and supporting those who are in the programs. Indigenous leaders at our Kitchen Tables shared that reporting requirements ask that they “calculate the cost” of the lived experiences of Indigenous, women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin in colonial ways. The requirements are untranslatable to their lived realities. Indigenous values, knowledges, and ways of being cannot be translated into numbers removed from their spirit. Funding mechanisms must transition away from solely

a cost-benefit evaluation of programming and focus instead on stable and consistent funding that can support positive outcomes as identified by the communities they intend to support.

State-based colonial funding structures do not account for the lived realities of those using the resources and programs. The provision of community programs cannot work unless those who need them have access to clothes, food, water, and hygiene products and a safe place to live. Indigenous programming, while underfunded, often goes above their intended goals to ensure Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin have what they need and are safe. This is particularly true for unhoused Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin. They deserve to know they are safe and valued and have access to the basic standards of life and live with dignity. When programs are cut, it can lead to isolation, loss of dignity, and loss of lives. The ramifications are extremely serious; programs and resources build families, networks of support and community through building connections and relationality.

Funding structures do not account for the extra measures and labours required of those who run the programs. Funding structures often have rigid timeframes, demanding bureaucratic requirements, and offer unstable funding over the long term, affecting program and resource development and their outcomes. They do not account for the time it takes to build trust and relationality between those who operate the programs and those who access the resources.

We must work toward ensuring that funding is more robust, sustainable, and appropriate to the needs of the work. At the same time, we should continue to work to remove stigma around accessing resources and support. Resources, programming, and support must be available to support the healing work of Indigenous Nations. All Indigenous peoples must be included in this process to ensure healthy futures; this includes creating and informing Indigenous people about opportunities for their future and support their paths along the way. Indigenous leaders know the work and programs that must be done through heart knowledge, and Indigenous teachings to ensure their relatives in the community are cared for and protected.



## The Protection and Human Rights of Indigenous Women, Girls, Two-Spirit, and Gender-Diverse Kin

The life, protection, dignity, and safety of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin are natural rights. Recognizing this, Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse leaders are often first to step in to help their relatives and often can be found in frontline outreach positions and organizations. They are the ones who advocate for those most marginalized by colonial structures, particularly given that most structured leadership does not understand or listen to the needs of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin. Their leadership exists in and outside of government and societal organizations but is often less effective than it could be on the "inside" for reasons discussed above. Nonetheless, leadership for Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin seeks to take care of relations and provide justice in as many ways and through as many means as possible.

Under the structure of colonialism, Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin have fought relentlessly for their rights, safety, and their relatives. However, there is no justice within settler systems. Violence against Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin is normalized in every sphere of settler-state life and is rarely taken seriously. During the Kitchen Tables, leaders shared that as they meet with and care for their relatives through their work and in their lives, it was regular practices to take mental note of what Indigenous women, girl, Two-Spirit and gender-diverse kin were wearing, what they were doing, and who they were with each time they saw them in case anything happened to them. This is what it means to work to prevent genocide as genocide unfolds around them in particularly gendered ways. Colonialism is raced and gendered, it does not differentiate based on "title." It seeks for its violence to endure. It is a constant state of fear and normalized violence.

Indigenous leaders advocated for a shift in dominant colonial narratives to demonstrate that violence against Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin is not to be expected; rather, it must be understood as wrong, to be prevented at all costs, and offenders must be held accountable. This is necessary to end the genocide against Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit and gender-diverse kin. Respecting, caring, and honouring Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin needs to be taught by an early age throughout the settler-state to stop this cyclical violence. These narrative shifts, combined with accountability measures must be implemented to protect and save lives. This should be accompanied by a systemic shift as colonial stereotypes have not changed or been eradicated within the settler-state, regardless of Indigenous people entering colonial structures. Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin are not statistics; they are loved, they belong, and they deserve to live free from this imposed violence. Indigenous leaders have been sent here to do this work and keep fighting for their relations by the Ancestors who continue to support them on their journey.



## Ceremonies

The discussions around our Kitchen Tables indicated the importance of re-activating traditional ceremonies including rites-of-passage, birthing ceremonies, and Indigenous women's teachings. At present, people have begun to take up this work and pass along these teachings to the youth.

Leaders shared that there should be an emphasis on individual healing, to renew our relationships and relational networks of care and support outside of settler-state structures. This is important to re-orient relationships within communities as a healing practice. Ceremonies can support the reclamation and revitalization of family networks, honouring and supporting youth, languages, and being in relation to the land. Finding out who one is through ceremony and culture is an important practice for individuals to ground themselves.

## Families

Leaders centered familial networks and expanded webs of relational networks of care for future generations to be welcomed and cradled in love, to help them to see their worth. Parenting can teach youth what healthy relationships are and set standards on how they should be treated by others. Unlearning colonial legacies to share love between family and relations is an important process of healing that honours respect and love. Youth need to know that they are supported and have futures. Adopting a strength-based approach to support youth to create healthy futures and capacity build to keep them out of these spaces is necessary because focusing on having shelter space diverts the systemic issue.

At the Kitchen Tables, leaders shared that matriarchy begins in the home, and that leadership is innate. Here, teachings share the importance of self-worth and loving yourself. Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin are brave and deserving of knowing they are loved. To protect leaders, they shared that setting and honouring boundaries is a way you can respect yourself and nurture your spirit. These protocols are components of everyday leadership that endure while a patriarchal society exists.

In addition to the emphasis on youth, women, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin, men also must be re-introduced to their roles and responsibilities and be invited to men's healing ceremonies.

## Where is Knowledge Nurtured

Community leaders identified that leadership knowledge is generated and shared through recorded stories, orally, and through visiting and building relationships. Knowledge is embodied and generated through experi-

ence including ceremony and fasting. It is a process of trusting and finding your voice while being encouraged and taught to lead. Leaders are trusted with the information and directives shared by the community. It is the responsibility of leaders to operationalize what needs to be done for the community. Knowledge is nurtured through observation, heart work, togetherness, and guidance from mentors and teachers. Leaders are encouraged to receive teachings, learn, and be a part of new experiences. At times, leaders may not think they are ready to take on new responsibilities, but you must trust that you are ready and remember that your mentors believe in you. Building this trust helps develop leaders' confidence and find their inner selves. It takes time to grow, which in turn makes leaders' voices louder as they learn to set and enforce personal and professional boundaries, learning not to tolerate violent realities and exploitative or intrusive experiences in settler-colonial spaces. It is important to build and sustain long-term relationships with your teachers, as it facilitates trust, openness, and respect for knowledge to be shared to foster intellectual intimacy.

As knowledge is generated, it is important for spaces to be conducive to learning. This may require transforming spaces and re-creating them so spirits can be safe to learn. A common discourse shared in the Kitchen Tables was the importance of "build[ing] lodges where we are." On the contrary, leaders also emphasized it is important to protect your spirits and energy when spaces are not healthy. Spaces should be healthy and safe for Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit and gender-diverse kin to be in.

Non-temporal knowledge is shared between generations, land, water, and the more-than human to facilitate Nation-specific land-based learning. Learning from the land teaches us openness to approach knowledge and knowledge generation differently as we encounter it.

It is important to understand how knowledge is both written and passed down through place-based relationality. Elders and Knowledge Keepers can always point you in the right direction to knowledge. However, do not expect immediate results; building relationships takes time. The leaders shared that, "[you] earn the right to tell a story and earning that right is different every time." Shifting perspectives from output-driven to relational-driven is necessary.

Academia has not been a conducive space for Indigenous knowledge sharing – a transformation in the academy is necessary. For those working in academia, it is important to stand behind your work and be proud of your achievements while also remaining accountable to them and your relations. Beyond transactional relations, it is important to honour the responsibilities given and to return the gift of that knowledge by sharing with others. The answers are lived and always in the room.



## Futures

Creating safe futures for Indigenous, women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin necessitates that we teach and inform Indigenous relatives about the legacy of colonialism so as to heal, understand, and respond to the “why” and “how” it is has impacted individuals, families, and communities. This work would support Indigenous peoples understanding of their circumstances and histories with the settler-state.

Capturing the contemporary experiences of colonialism and gendered violence to demonstrate these experiences are not historical recollections but a continuation of dispossession. Ignoring these stories continues to disappear the work of Indigenous women who have changed the outcome of history by continuing to fight for their relatives (e.g., Landfill Search, COVID). Systems do not know the work because they do not understand the context Indigenous peoples are living within.

Enduring within the systems of colonialism, Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin continue to create change so that they and their relatives can thrive. Cycles of dispossession, violence, and erasure are consistently being broken because of the strength of leaders. We can all make changes and take up our responsibilities. Indigenous peoples are making their own systems and doing what is necessary for their kin. The Kitchen Tables acknowledge however, the importance of receiving critique.

Previous reports and inquiries and their recommendations must be honoured; otherwise, inaction can be dehumanizing and feel like an exploitation of people’s existences. Throughout the operation of inquiries, there is often a disregard of needs and protocols. There have been so many reports where the recommendations remain unfulfilled and for many, this signifies that this violence is permissible, increasing the manufactured vulnerability of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin. Leaders shared that they continue to have the same conversations decade after decade demonstrating the requirement of systemic shifts of colonial structures. They shared “Why has nothing changed? Why do the answers to the questions they ask go unactioned?” Statistics no longer shock communities, instead remaining a reflection of the continuation of colonialism and failed change. Colonialism is still ongoing, and the constructed stereotypes continue. Protective measures and accountability mechanisms to protect Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse kin must be implemented. These protections must also account for the inclusion and respect of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse knowledges.



# Annex A: Agenda for Select Kitchen Table Gathering

**Calling for Justice: Kitchen Table Gathering**

**Agenda**

| | |
|---|---|
| 9:45-10:15 | Check-In and Welcome<br>Opening Prayer |
| 10:30 - 11:00 | Introduction to the Project & Roundtable Introductions |
| 11:00-12:30 | Discussion (see below) |
| 12:30-1:15 | Lunch |
| 1:15-1:30 | Closing Prayer |

**Discussion Questions**

1. What is one example of Indigenous women's leadership or governance in action? What have you done, or what have you seen done?

2. What is matriarchy? What is leadership? What is governance?

3. Where do you find the knowledge you need?

4. Is it written or passed down orally?

5. Should it be Nation specific?

6. If the knowledge you need isn't available, why isn't it there?

7. What opened doors for you to get into your leadership role?
   What is needed to create pathways to put more Indigenous women and the kitchen table back to their rightful leadership role?

8. What do you want this report/project to do for you and your work?

# Annex B: Past Reports

The purpose of this annex is to provide information to Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender-diverse leaders, as well as Indigenous and non-Indigenous governments.

There is an overwhelming amount of testimony, story, policy recommendations, and responsibilities for governments to hear, listen, and implement through previous reports and inquiries. This knowledge is often forgotten, ignored, and dismissed. This Annex provides a list of 4 critical reports and inquiries that can be used by leaders when they go to court, submit claims, and hold Indigenous and non-Indigenous governments accountable. The project team listed on the table of contents is in your corner, we support your leadership.

For a full list of resources utilized and found throughout the course of this project, please visit our public Zotero library. These sources can be used in grant writing, creating chronologies, and demonstrating expansive research gathered to support your arguments and claims.

***Calling For Justice Zotero Library:*** **https://chrr.info/resource/calling-for-justice-zotero-library/**

## Reports

The Aboriginal Justice Inquiry examines Indigenous People and the Justice System within the Province of Manitoba, with a dedicated chapter to Indigenous women's experiences along with recommendations to end systemic injustices:

> Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission. 1991. *Report of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba. Volume 1: The Justice System and Aboriginal People.* Province of Manitoba. **https://ajic.mb.ca/volumel/toc.html**

The Amnesty International Report articulates Canada role in ensuring the safety of Indigenous women, along with policy and government action recommendations to end discrimination in acts of violence against Indigenous women:

> Amnesty International. 2004. *Stolen Sisters: A Human Rights Response to Discrimination and Violence against Indigenous Women in Canada.* AMR 20/003/2004. Amnesty International. **https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/amr20/003/2004/en/**

The National Inquiry's Final Report documents the cause and impact of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit, with 231 specific Calls For Justice to guide the Canadians government, agencies, and institutions toward ending systemic violence:

> National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. 2019. *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.* National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. **https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/final-report/.**

Sister in Spirit Initiative's second edition report is dedicated to families' perspective, and stories of Missing and/or Murdered Indigenous Women along with policy recommendations to provide justice for Indigenous women, girls, and their families:

Native Women's Association of Canada. 2009. *Voices of Our Sisters in Spirit: A Report to Families and Communities.* Second Edition. Native Women's Association of Canada.
**https://nwac-afac.ca/assets-knowledge-centre/2009_Voices_of_Our_SIS_A_Report_to_Families_and_Communities.pdf**



# Annex C: Human Rights Mechanisms

The United Nations human rights agency describes human rights as inherent to all human beings, whatever our nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status. We are all equally entitled to human rights without discrimination and these rights are interrelated, interdependent, and indivisible (UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, n.d.)

International human rights law, despite its complex and at times controversial history, can serve as a tool for mobilization and social change (Neve 2025). The human rights framework can and has been used as a tool to advocate for human rights. The information below, which is not exhaustive, provides some of the important legal mechanisms that can be used to engage government as 'duty-bearers' of rights in relationship to 'rights holders.'

The **International Bill of Human Rights** includes the following human rights Covenants and Declaration:

United Nations. 1948. "Universal Declaration of Human Rights." General Assembly Resolution 217 A. United Nations, December 10. **https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights**

United Nations. 1966a. "International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights." General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI). United Nations, December 16. **https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights**

United Nations. 1966b. "International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights." General Assembly resolution 2200A (XXI). United Nations, December 16. **https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-economic-social-and-cultural-rights**

Canada has ratified these Covenants, making them legally binding Treaties, with specific obligations as a result, including regular compliance reports to the United Nations.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples is the most important Declaration defining Indigenous Rights at the international level. While Declarations do not have the same legally binding power of a Covenant, they remain significant as reflecting the collective views of member nations. Ratification by states signals that they will be bound by those provisions.

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, A/RES/61/295 (2007). **https://www.ohchr.org/en/indigenous-peoples/un-declaration-rights-indigenous-peoples**

In 2021, the Canadian Parliament passed the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*, confirming the legal force of the Declaration in Canadian law and committing the federal government to aligning its laws and policies with its provisions. It affirms that all rights apply equally to Indigenous people.

> United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act, sc 2021, c 14 (2021). **https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/declaration/about-apropos.html**

The United Nations Special Rapporteur provides information and guiding principles on internally displaced people (IDP), articulating the Government's role when IDP are displaced. Governments have a responsibility in the protection and investment in IDP's safety and rights. Framing the historical and ongoing displacement of Indigenous peoples in Canada through the lens of the UN's Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement may offer an opportunity to advocate for rights and protections.

> United Nations. 2024. *"Special Rapporteur on Internally Displaced Persons."* About Internally Displaced Persons. **https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-internally-displaced-persons/about-internally-displaced-persons**

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, as well as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, both ratified by the Canadian state, with relevance for advocacy work for Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, and gender diverse people.

> United Nations. 1979. "Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women." United Nations General Assembly Resolution 34/180. December 18. **https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women**

> United Nations. 1989. "Convention on the Rights of the Child." General Assembly Resolution 44/25. United Nations, November 20. **https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child**



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