



Building Right
Relations:

Insights from Indigenous Engagement

2023-2025 KEY LEARNINGS REPORT



Advocating for impactful policies

Carbon Removal Canada is an independent non-profit accelerating the responsible scale-up of carbon removal technologies by advocating for impactful policies grounded in rigorous research, shaping Canada's emerging carbon removal market, and connecting the right people to the right information.

Since launching in mid-2023, we have committed to building relationships with Indigenous businesses, governments, and community leaders, and centering the voices of Indigenous Rights Holders across our work.

This report captures Carbon Removal Canada's Indigenous engagement activities and insights to date, identifies ongoing programmatic gaps, and explores potential paths forward to deepen organizational reciprocity, investment, and accountability to Indigenous Peoples.

As we reflect on early progress, we recognize that Indigenous engagement requires sustained attention and long-term action. By taking stock of our commitments, we aim to transparently share lessons learned in our journey towards truth and reconciliation¹. These key learnings will inform our long-term planning and serve as a case study for others seeking to build a just and equitable carbon removal sector. Above all, we seek to hold ourselves accountable to the relationships and trust cultivated with Indigenous colleagues, without whom Carbon Removal Canada's work would not be possible.



01. Attendees at our Centering Indigenous Leadership & Community Voices workshop
02. From left to right: Na'im Merchant (Carbon Removal Canada) moderates a panel at Carbon Removal Day, featuring Francesca Hillery (Partnerships for Tribal Carbon Solutions), Chief Harvey McLeod (Upper Nicola Band), and Darrell Brown (Kisik Clean Energy).





Indigenous Engagement

2023-2025

Carbon Removal Canada recognizes the legacy of colonization and extractive development in Canada, and the past and ongoing harm that Indigenous Peoples, Lands, and Waterways have experienced as a result. To disrupt this cycle, clean energy and climate technologies including carbon dioxide removal must prioritize Indigenous knowledge, experiences, and self-determination throughout the entire project lifespan. We view this mandate as both a moral imperative and an opportunity to embed social, economic, and environmental co-benefits in carbon removal strategies.

As a young organization in an emergent industry, we spent our first 24 months (mid-2023 to mid-2025) interrogating how Carbon Removal Canada can advance Indigenous priorities and participation within the broader carbon removal landscape. Guided by the international right of Free, Prior, Informed Consent (FPIC)², we engaged past and present council members, Indigenous clean energy business owners, and subject matter experts to inform Carbon Removal Canada's programs and positions. Through engagement activities and ongoing conversations, we gathered insights directly from Indigenous Rights Holders on opportunities for leadership, barriers to participation, and preferred approaches to engagement with the carbon removal sector. Carbon Removal Canada staff also participated in reflection exercises to assess our internal progress on integrating Indigenous engagement across workstreams.

01. Carbon Removal Canada hosted a workshop, "Centering Indigenous Leadership & Community Voices" in 2024, bringing together policymakers, Indigenous businesses, and carbon removal companies.
02. Natasha Bernardi, Senior Manager of Partnerships & Impact makes opening remarks at our Centering Indigenous Leadership & Community Voices workshop in Vancouver.





Implementation in Action

Carbon Removal Canada is deeply grateful to learn from the knowledge and experience of Indigenous Rights Holders with whom we have developed relationships over the past two years. To align with Indigenous priorities around carbon removal, we identified three key learnings— Reciprocity, Investment, and Accountability— to guide program development and organizational practice.

Below, we reflect on our current efforts to implement each key learning and opportunities for future improvement.

Current Efforts — Reciprocity

The principle of reciprocity recognizes our relationships with Indigenous Peoples, Lands, and Waterways and our responsibility to provide equitable, tangible benefits in return. With guidance from our advisory partner, Rise Consulting, Carbon Removal Canada has begun incorporating Indigenous Protocols – long-practiced ways of respectfully engaging with and being a good host to Indigenous Peoples – into operations and ways of working. As a non-Indigenous organization, we follow protocol to express respect for long-practiced Natural Law, land kinship, and teachings rooted in reciprocal relationships (referred to by some as Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)³ within and beyond the carbon removal sector. Our aim is to build and maintain right relations⁴ with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities.

Carbon Removal Canada has also made efforts to share social capital, expertise, and resources with Indigenous peers in the carbon removal sector. As a convening organization working with communities, developers, and policymakers, Carbon Removal Canada helps identify shared goals, facilitate relationships, and foster



relationships between Indigenous Rights Holders and industry actors. This includes partnering with Rise Consulting to publish recommendations for carbon removal companies pursuing Indigenous engagement, with the goal of fostering industry alignment with [Action #92](#) for Business and Reconciliation in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action.

[Read the Executive Summary here](#)  By acting as a relational partner, Carbon Removal Canada works to support Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty in carbon removal.

- Incorporated Indigenous Protocols⁵ in 2023-2025 Indigenous engagement activities
- Published recommendations and organized virtual and in-person events to encourage sectoral collaboration with Indigenous Rights Holders
- Connected Rights Holders with government and industry contacts

01. An attendee at our Centering Indigenous Leadership & Community Voices workshop





Looking Forward – Reciprocity

Many of our Indigenous Protocols and reciprocity practices are newly introduced and thus remain informal, risking inconsistent application across staff and workstreams. To preserve institutional knowledge and ensure continuity, Carbon Removal Canada plans to formalize these de facto practices. As part of this effort, we began developing a series of organizational position statements in 2025 to clarify Carbon Removal Canada's stance on contentious issues within carbon removal discourse and provide a consistent voice across our organization. Additional steps will include:

- Standardized procedures for offering honoraria to Indigenous knowledge holders, including accessible outreach templates and payment options
- An outreach accountability tool to facilitate and monitor connections between stakeholders across the carbon removal sector

Current Efforts – Investment

Historic and ongoing disinvestment in Indigenous communities undermines self-determination, sovereignty, and economic growth. Informed by the [National Indigenous Economic Strategy Calls to Economic Prosperity](#)⁶, Carbon Removal Canada seeks to counter this legacy by actively supporting Indigenous-led businesses, communities, and organizations whenever possible. We view intentional procurement as a practical strategy to bolster Indigenous entrepreneurs and local economies, while sending a market signal on the value of partnering with Indigenous businesses. By hiring Indigenous vendors and advisors, Carbon Removal Canada aims to lower barriers to participation and ensure Indigenous communities benefit from the carbon removal industry. This is particularly important given the potential role of Indigenous businesses in deploying carbon removal projects, such as through supply chains, project construction, and the development of renewable energy projects to power deployment.

Investing in Indigenous Peoples also means using our platform to amplify Indigenous thought leadership. In September 2024, Carbon Removal Canada and [Rise Consulting](#) co-hosted an in-person workshop on Centering Indigenous Leadership & Community Voices, with community partners [Partnerships for Tribal Carbon Solutions](#) and the [Indigenous Greenhouse Gas Removal](#)

[Commission](#), and speakers from First Nations, Indigenous-led businesses, and organizations advancing Indigenous self-determination in the carbon removal and energy sectors. [Learn more about the workshop](#)

When Indigenous voices directly shape the conversation on carbon removal policy and market development, the entire industry benefits: Indigenous knowledge can complement and enhance the development of carbon removal technologies, while consultation with Rights Holders strengthens the credibility and social license of carbon removal technologies—both of which are critical to successful project deployment.

- Engaged Indigenous-led businesses across Carbon Removal Canada's internal supply chain, including consultants and event facilitators
- Collaborated with Indigenous-led organizations on high-profile events; platformed Indigenous thought leaders via panels, speaking engagements, and guest-authored blog posts [Read AJ Bird's blog post](#)
- Attended partner-hosted events focused on Indigenous engagement and participation in carbon removal

Looking Forward – Investment

Since launching in May 2023, Carbon Removal Canada has prioritized community engagement throughout our trajectory from a start-up non-profit to a recognized leader in responsible carbon removal. With a lean team and limited resources, we made intentional choices to embed community engagement across our organization from the outset. With the support of [Elemental Impact](#), we hired a Community Engagement Fellow to spearhead the research and development of our inaugural engagement activities. Using the insights captured in this report, we have begun exploring short- and long-term goals for the next phase of our Indigenous Engagement strategy. Looking forward, Carbon Removal Canada will explore funding mechanisms to support future Indigenous engagement efforts:

- **2025:** Develop an internal procurement protocol with guidance for identifying and hiring Indigenous-led businesses, including a directory of previously used vendors and suppliers recommended by Indigenous colleagues





- **2026:** Create an intentional, forward-looking strategy for Indigenous engagement, building on these key learnings and collaborating with Indigenous-led partner organizations
- **2027:** Secure funding to hire an Indigenous Relations Lead with direct ties to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities to serve as a consistent touchpoint for Indigenous stakeholders, support the integration of Indigenous perspectives into additional workstreams, and provide internal direction to Carbon Removal Canada's overall Indigenous engagement strategy

Current Efforts — Accountability

This report reflects the beginning of Carbon Removal Canada's ongoing Indigenous engagement work. We strive to uphold the right of FPIC by openly communicating our goals, progress, and challenges. To that end, we have begun to implement mechanisms to track the impact of our work over time. By gathering feedback from event participants, internal staff, and partner organizations, we aim to identify specific areas for improvement and develop solutions informed by stakeholder perspectives. Tracking and monitoring also clarifies our strengths and capacity, sharpening Carbon Removal Canada's value proposition in the broader ecosystem.

We recognize the legacy of broken treaties, land dispossession, and cultural erosion that continues to harm First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities today, and the resulting skepticism toward external institutions. Trust cannot be assumed or rushed; it must be earned through long-term effort. We prioritize relationship-building, seek guidance from Indigenous knowledge holders, and work to align organizational goals with community priorities. We have also begun to invest in staff education to deepen understanding of Indigenous culture, knowledge systems, and the impacts of settler colonialism in Canada. By approaching this work with humility and respect, we strive to create mutually beneficial, long-lasting relationships that contribute meaningfully to truth and reconciliation.

- Began collecting data and evaluating progress both formally (external reviews, feedback forms) and informally (conversations with Rights Holders, staff surveys)

- Started to incorporate Indigenous voices in organizational decision-making structures, such as the Board of Directors [See our Board here](#)
- Dedicated staff time to education and reflection activities, such as participation in a KAIROS Blanket Exercise and individual learning on National Indigenous Peoples Day

Looking Forward — Accountability

From 2023-2025, Carbon Removal Canada focused on building a foundation: developing relationships, learning, scoping opportunities, and producing early events and products. These efforts helped establish Carbon Removal Canada as a trusted partner and strengthen our network within the carbon removal ecosystem. We are now positioned to move beyond discrete initiatives toward long-term outcomes by shifting from a project-to-project approach to a strategic vision for Indigenous engagement. This will enable more coherent design and sequencing of activities. Priorities include:

- Establishing a formal organizational Theory of Change to embed Indigenous engagement across workstreams
- Expanding our outreach to Inuit and Métis communities
- Creating a recurring, formalized feedback loop with Indigenous colleagues to guide priorities and evaluate impact
- Developing internal learning infrastructure on Indigenous governance, land rights, and climate leadership



Acknowledgements

Carbon Removal Canada is deeply grateful for the trust, guidance, and collaboration of Indigenous colleagues between 2023-2025. We also recognize our many partners who have supported and contributed to this work. Your insights and generosity have been essential in building our understanding and shaping our approach to this work.

We would like to thank all of our collaborators, including:

AJ Bird

BIRD & MCCRIMMON

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Rise Consulting

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CARBON REMOVAL

Sean Lowrie

ARCA

We recognize that this is only the very beginning of a long-term process. We remain committed to deepening relationships with Indigenous Rights Holders and to engaging additional stakeholders in the year ahead. We welcome outreach from community members and organizations interested in helping shape Carbon Removal Canada's direction, informing future priorities, and advancing justice and equity within Canada's carbon removal sector.

As an early-stage non-profit, we are mindful of our current capacity and the importance of setting feasible goals. While we are committed to maximizing impact, we acknowledge that lasting progress depends on strong partnerships and shared accountability. As we move into our next phase of work, we welcome collaborators who share our vision for a just, equitable, and responsible carbon removal sector in Canada.



Appendix: 2023-2025 Indigenous Engagement Summary

ACTIVITY	ACTIVITY	OUTPUT	KEY LEARNINGS
Indigenous Engagement in Carbon Removal Report (June-December 2023)	Rise Consulting was engaged by Carbon Removal Canada to conduct both primary and secondary research regarding the priorities of Indigenous Peoples, communities, and organizations who are considering engaging in carbon dioxide removal and clean energy activities. Areas of focus also included stakeholders' experiences with and attitudes towards clean energy project developers and opportunities for multinational collaboration and knowledge-sharing. Following desk research, Rise identified major themes and conducted community interviews with key actors in clean technology verticals, subject matter experts, and Indigenous clean technology business owners.	• Indigenous Engagement in Carbon Removal Report: In collaboration with Carbon Removal Canada staff, Rise Consulting compiled a comprehensive summary of research and interview findings, with a focus on capturing wise practices and Indigenous thought leadership in interviewees' own words. • Gathering of Participants: Using the Indigenous practice of Talking Circles⁷, collaborators came together in a virtual gathering to discuss and reflect upon the report's findings, identify remaining knowledge gaps, and explore potential next steps. • Elemental Impact Presentation: To maximize our reach and share knowledge with sector funders, Carbon Removal Canada staff presented findings to Elemental Impact's Carbon Removal Working Group and all-staff meeting.	• Importance of direct dialogue and relationship building with Indigenous communities for every step of the processes. • Partnerships and projects should involve opportunities for equity and co-ownership. • Prioritization of long-term benefits that extend beyond the project lifecycle and leverage community assets. • Barriers should be addressed to facilitate the participation of Indigenous businesses within the carbon removal industry.
Responsible Removal Activity (September 2023)	During Carbon Removal Canada's first staff retreat, team members participated in a group reflection activity to establish internal alignment of our organizational understanding of responsible carbon removal. To prepare for this activity, staff reviewed pre-reading materials on Indigenous critiques of carbon removal technologies and projects; the current state of environmental justice considerations within the carbon removal sector; case studies of First Nations-led carbon removal projects; and best practices for effective community collaboration. Guided by a series of reflective questions, staff shared their individual visions for responsible removal, including core principles, tangible practices, and value propositions.	• Responsible Removal Framework: Using the ideas generated through this exercise, staff collectively brainstormed a preliminary framework for responsible carbon removal and reflected on the roles or actions Carbon Removal Canada could take to advance these goals. • Responsible Carbon Removal Plan: To capture the ideas generated through this exercise, staff compiled a list of corresponding potential activities to inform Carbon Removal Canada's strategic planning.	• Carbon Removal Canada is better positioned to facilitate conversations and partnerships across diverse stakeholder groups, including communities, project developers, industry groups, and policymakers. • Carbon Removal Canada would benefit from the development of a comprehensive, long-term strategy for engagement with Indigenous Rights Holders and additional stakeholder communities.



Appendix: 2023-2025 Indigenous Engagement Summary

	ACTIVITY	OUTPUT	KEY LEARNINGS
Blanket Exercise (September 2024)	Prior to the Workshop on Centering Indigenous Leadership in Carbon Removal, attendees were invited to participate in the KAIROS Blanket Exercise, an immersive approach to reconciliation led by First Nations facilitators and Elders from Moon Tide Reconciliation.	Steps Towards Reconciliation: Participants engaged in storytelling and personal reflection to learn about the history of the nation-to-nation relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada and gain a deeper understanding of colonization's lasting impacts on Indigenous communities.	- Survey responses and anecdotal comments from participants highlighted the blanket exercise as a powerful experience that set a meaningful tone for the workshop. - Future events should integrate immersive reconciliation practices led by Indigenous facilitators and Elders.
Workshop on Centering Indigenous Leadership in Carbon Removal (September 2024)	Carbon Removal Canada hosted an in-person workshop centering Indigenous leadership and community voices to define responsible and respectful engagement for the carbon removal sector. Featuring multiple speakers representing First Nations, clean technology businesses, and Indigenous-led carbon removal initiatives, the workshop explored topics including opportunities for Indigenous procurement; environmental justice and Indigenous leadership in carbon removal; potential for collaboration in ocean-based carbon removal; biochar and healthy soils; progress and learnings in community engaged projects; and building relationships with Indigenous communities.	Knowledge Sharing: The workshop featured 4 presentations, 3 panel discussions, an interactive case study analysis, and a closing Talking Circle reflecting on lessons learned and future commitments. Audience Reach: 103 attendees participated in the workshop, representing 72 carbon removal developers, industry associations, academic institutions, and Indigenous governments and organizations across North America. Participant Feedback: To assess workshop outcomes and inform future events, Carbon Removal Canada solicited participant feedback through a brief survey. In particular, attendees were asked to reflect on their experience and highlight their main takeaways from the workshop. Post-Workshop Report: Our event partner, Rise Consulting, compiled an internal report summarizing the discussions, activities, and impacts of the workshop, as well as an analysis of the participant survey results.	In both survey responses and individual communications, workshop participants: - Expressed a deep appreciation for relationships, shared wisdom, connection to nature, and learning from others—especially Indigenous voices. There was a strong focus on gratitude for those who shared experiences and the opportunity to gather with diverse communities. - Emphasized the importance of building foundations of trust, humble collaboration, and proactive engagement. Participants also acknowledged the role of co-development and partnership, particularly in fostering long-term, meaningful relationships that are grounded in shared values and understanding. - Highlighted the role of Indigenous voices in leading solutions and advancing reconciliation. A key takeaway was the importance of being open to what Indigenous communities can teach, ensuring that their leadership is central to decision-making from the start. - Celebrated the collective efforts toward climate action, reconciliation, and community-driven change. The reflections express hope in the progress being made, the commitment to listening and learning, and the recognition that relationship-based practices can drive systemic change on emerging projects.



↩ Appendix: 2023-2025 Indigenous Engagement Summary

ACTIVITY	OUTPUT	KEY LEARNINGS
Internal Staff Survey (March 2025)	Carbon Removal Canada staff completed an online survey rating the relevance, utility, efficacy, and accessibility of 2023-2024 Indigenous engagement activities and providing feedback on Carbon Removal Canada's internal training and reflection initiatives. Questionnaire results were supplemented with individual staff interviews to better understand team members' experiences and explore opportunities for improvement.	- Overall, staff members felt better prepared to collaborate with Indigenous colleagues compared to when they began working at Carbon Removal Canada. - Staff identified the Workshop Centering Indigenous Leadership in Carbon Removal and the Blanket Exercise as the most impactful engagement activities, and are eager to participate in similar Indigenous-led events and teachings. - Staff referenced the Workshop on Centering Indigenous Leadership in Carbon Removal and the <i>Indigenous Engagement in Carbon Removal</i> Report most in their work. - Staff would benefit from additional Indigenous engagement education and resources, such as cultural literacy training and reference guides on environmental justice, Indigenous governance, and best practices for free, prior, informed consent.



↓ Endnotes

- 1 **Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC):** Created as part of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, the TRC produced a series of recommendations to advance reconciliation between Canadians and Indigenous Peoples. The TRC's 94 Calls to Action include calls for reconciliation and Indigenous inclusion within the corporate sector (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).
- 2 **Free, Prior, Informed Consent (FPIC):** An international right enshrined within the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), safeguarding Indigenous Peoples' autonomy and self-determination in decision-making processes. In particular, FPIC stipulates that consent must be given freely and without coercion, intimidation, or manipulation; consent must be secured in advance of activities impacting Indigenous Peoples, lands, and resources; information must be provided in a clear, accessible, and culturally-informed manner throughout the full scope of the consultation process; and consent can be withdrawn or modified at any time (United Nations General Assembly, 2007).
- 3 **Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK):** Traditional Ecological Knowledge refers to land-based kinship and teachings accumulated across generations through the lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples. TEK encompasses long-practiced knowledge and practices rooted in reciprocal relationships (Whyte, 2013).
- 4 **Right Relations:** Being in right relations refers to the responsibility of non-Indigenous people to disrupt settler-colonial relationships based on extraction and exploitation, and to move toward embodying respectful, reciprocal relationships with Indigenous Peoples, lands, and lifeforms. This concept emerges from decolonial discourse and Indigenous worldviews, particularly the principle of 'all my relations,' which recognizes the interconnectedness of all human and non-human beings (Gram-Hanssen et al, 2022).
- 5 Carbon Removal Canada's 2023-2025 Indigenous Protocols included offering honorarium payments to event speakers and community interview participants; opening gatherings with land acknowledgements; and covering Indigenous colleagues' travel and lodging for Carbon Removal Canada events.
- 6 **National Indigenous Economic Strategy:** Developed by over 20 Indigenous organizations, the National Indigenous Economic Strategy develops a comprehensive framework for the participation and advancement of Indigenous Peoples in the Canadian economy. This strategy includes 107 specific recommendations for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians, referred to as Calls to Economic Prosperity (National Indigenous Economic Strategy for Canada, 2022).
- 7 **Talking Circles:** Rooted in Indigenous pedagogical practices of collective learning and relationality, Talking Circles are a long-practiced process for facilitating respectful, authentic dialogue within First Nations communities (First Nations Pedagogy Online, 2023).

Carbon Removal Canada. *Frequently Asked Questions*. (2025). carbonremoval.ca/faqs

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