



# Addendum to *Relational accountability in climate change research: A repository of research partnerships between UBC & Indigenous partners in B.C.* Report

Summer 2024

The UBC Indigenous Research Support Initiative (IRSI) is committed to fostering collaborative, transparent, and meaningful engagement with Indigenous Communities, Collectives, and Organizations (ICCOs). In the spirit of these values, this addendum contains the feedback and insights from the three gatherings that IRSI hosted to shareback the analysis of our climate research partnerships database. This database was developed as part of the Sustainability Scholars Program and documented climate research partnerships between UBC researchers and Indigenous partners based in B.C. Individual share-back sessions were held with UBC staff and researchers, the BC Assembly of First Nations, and the ICCOs named in the database. We recognize the need for this work to be nourished by many people and prioritize the views of Indigenous partners.

Here, we summarize the discussions, clarify language, and present our lessons learned about climate research partnerships.

**Reiterating the Database Purpose:** Guided by a request from the First Nations Leadership Council, as well as Indigenous priorities and action plans established by key UBC governing bodies; the Sustainability Hub and IRSI created an exploratory database to catalog climate change research partnerships between UBC and Indigenous partners in British Columbia. Non-exhaustive and continually evolving, the database serves several key purposes:

- Respond to the priorities of Indigenous partners and UBC's strategic plans.
- Act as a starting point to facilitate important discussions about research partnership practices at UBC.
- Address the specific needs of Indigenous community-based research by establishing a mechanism to:
  - Increase transparency and institutional accountability to UBC's Indigenous partners.
  - Provide valuable insights for Indigenous partners seeking information about past research projects.
  - Streamline research efforts by centralizing information to avoid duplication of research requests.

**Share-back Sessions Overview:** At the first share-back session, we gathered UBC staff and researchers who originally contributed to the database to discuss the project's key finding. This gathering centered a meaningful dialogue on building and sustaining respectful relationships with Indigenous partners, using the results of the project as a starting point.

We then met with a representative from the BC Assembly of First Nations (BC AFN) to report-back and build on the foundational conversations that helped to shape the project, as well as to discuss the ways that UBC might support the BC AFN's Climate Action Strategy moving forward.

Lastly, we disseminated our findings to the ICCOs identified as project partners in our database, and invited them to engage in a shareback session to dialogue about UBC's climate research partnership practices. We also took this opportunity to facilitate a research exchange, allowing for community priorities to be shared with UBC researchers and seed new connections. We humbly recognize the missed opportunity for earlier input from Indigenous partners, so this work has aimed to incorporate their feedback into the climate research database.

**Expanding our Definitions:** Uncertainty around language used during our gatherings highlighted the need to clarify and expand several key concepts.

**Research:** Previously undefined, but assumed through Western academic parameters, a re-conceptualization of research is necessary to encompass the broader perspectives identified during our community dialogues. Perspectives from Indigenous partners underscore the need for a collaborative definition, and drawing from Critical Indigenous Studies, one that integrates community context and accountability. This evolving definition acknowledges that "there is a motive" behind research efforts, emphasizing respect, reciprocity, responsibility, and relevancy to anchor research within a community context.[1,2] IRSI, under the university's VP Research and Innovation, is active in de-centering the Western definition of research within academia, and we must uphold ICCO priorities and promote "good" research practices that are rooted in trust, empowerment and the strengths of Indigenous communities.

**Climate Justice:** Acknowledging the expansive scope of climate change, we introduced the term "climate justice" to underscore that climate change has unequal impact, particularly for Indigenous communities marginalized by colonialism.[3,4] Recognizing valid concerns about its use as academic jargon and unfamiliarity in many Indigenous contexts, where terms like "land," "wildfire" and "floods" hold deeper resonance, we nonetheless advocate for climate justice as a concept with practical implications beyond academia. This perspective aligns climate justice with Indigenous justice, addressing the historical harms/wrongs inflicted by on Indigenous peoples since first contact.[5] This working definition serves as a framework that addresses the intersecting challenges of climate change research, ethical engagement, and the experiences of Indigenous communities.

**Partners:** In our discussions, concerns were raised about the terms "partner" and "partnerships" within this database. It was noted that these terms may not accurately capture the depth of relationships formed. While "partner" was described as too formal and unable to encompass the spectrum of relationships, it is intentionally used to balance power and ensure accountability between UBC researchers and Indigenous collaborators. Employing "partner" underscores a commitment to fostering relationships grounded in mutual respect, reciprocity, and responsibility, essential for equitable and meaningful engagements in research and collaboration. This approach acknowledges the value of enduring, non-transactional collaborations beyond individual projects or funding cycles.

**Lessons Learned:** These insights, reflecting community priorities discussed in our shareback sessions, provide food for thought and guide potential next steps.

**Transparency and trust require a delicate balance.** Our first shareback session highlighted the delicate balance that researchers face in safeguarding their relationships with Indigenous partners while also striving for transparency with the public, other researchers and ICCOs. Concerns were raised about how to publicly share about these relationships in a manner that respects their time-intensive nature, relationality and trust. Attendees emphasized the importance of handling public communications carefully to preserve the integrity of these relationships. Despite these challenges, sharing information was recognized as an opportunity for ICCOs to learn about available services and explore potential collaborations with UBC.

**IRSI's work depends on collaborative input, and this database requires ongoing nurturing.** During our session with researchers, it became evident that our database doesn't include a significant number of research partnerships, and it requires further nurturing and development across faculties to fully encompass the work being done. This database is understood to be exploratory in nature and will continue to evolve.

**Siloing research impedes collaborative solutions.** Research silos are rooted in colonial traditions and persist throughout the university. However, breaking down these disciplinary barriers respects Indigenous perspectives and creates new opportunities for meaningful collaborations. Prioritizing community-led priorities over researcher-driven agendas ensures alignment with Indigenous plans and values.

**Capacity-building must be prioritized.** Convening spaces for Nation-to-Nation dialogue allows research to address shared challenges and opportunities, as many Indigenous partners are at risk of having their priorities overshadowed by well-funded researchers and Nations with more resources and capacity. Institutions can further support capacity-building by offering toolkits and databases to Indigenous partners, providing them with the resources required to lead their own projects.

**Researchers should be leveraged as a valuable resource.** Researchers can serve as catalysts for projects that respond directly to the needs of Indigenous partners, leveraging their funding, resources, and expertise. Facilitating interdisciplinary collaboration bridges gaps between different fields of study, enabling comprehensive solutions to complex challenges identified by Indigenous partners. By sharing research findings, researchers contribute to collaborative partnerships that enrich both academic and Indigenous knowledge systems.

#### References

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4. Guerin M, Climate Emergency Task Force. *CETF Report on Progress 2021-22*. 2022 Oct.
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