

Principles of Engagement

for Indigenous
Community-based Research

What we heard
October 26, 2018



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References

Page 1 map taken directly from the Musqueam Declaration, June 10th, 1976

Marina Veronica Lommerse, Julia (Julie) Cathrina Lommerse, “Self-determined architecture : facilitating cultural futures and education with the First Nations Longhouse,” *The International Journal of the Humanities*, Melbourne: Australia, 2007.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Indigenous Research Support Initiative

VP Research & Innovation

The Indigenous Research Support Initiative at UBC is housed on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territory of the x^wməθk^wəyəm (Musqueam) people.

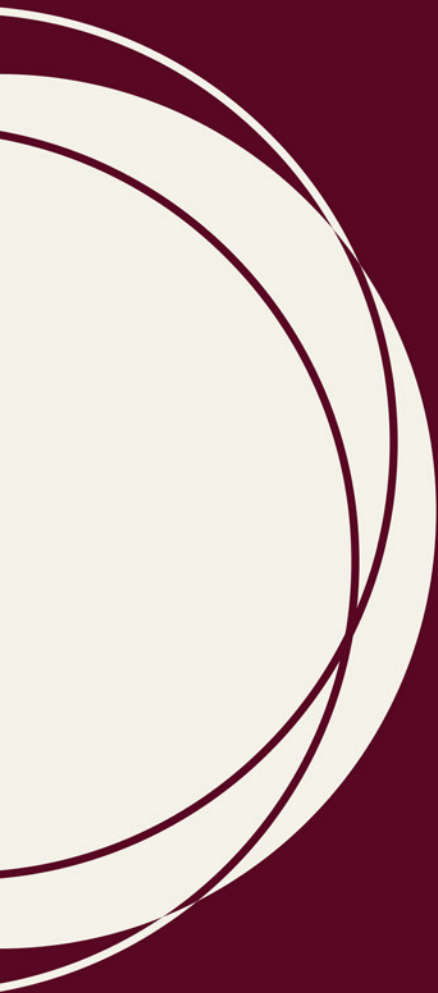
We acknowledge, with gratitude and respect, that we are guests on the lands and waters that the Musqueam people and their ancestors have called home since time immemorial.



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Letter from Dr. Helen Burt

In the short time since IRSI was launched, we have been extremely fortunate to have benefited tremendously from the knowledge and guidance of many Indigenous advisors, faculty, staff and students. In particular, it has been a great honor and privilege for me to participate in the Principles of Engagement Gatherings held in Vancouver, Kelowna and Prince George in which we heard that community-based research must be grounded in authentic and enduring relationships and that Indigenous community needs must in fact drive that research. We also heard that research outcomes are only meaningful if they benefit the communities involved and lead to better lives for the people therein.

For all who came to the Gatherings, I wish to express my heartfelt and sincere thanks. We could not create appropriate guidelines or principles for Indigenous research collaborations without the voices of many. After all, that's what collaboration is about.

I am excited to know that UBC is committed to making progress toward realizing its vision of being a leading academic institution, globally, in meeting the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as well as the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Calls for Justice. That said, transformation takes time. The 2018 Principles of Engagement Gathering was just one step in this iterative process of transformation in which UBC is involved.

As you read through this document, please consider and reflect upon the principles within. We hope that they resonate with those of you involved in Indigenous research and that they will be meaningful in terms of guiding how partners want to engage in this work. If you have any comments or feedback, please don't hesitate to reach out to the team at IRSI and UBC to let us know.

Respectfully,

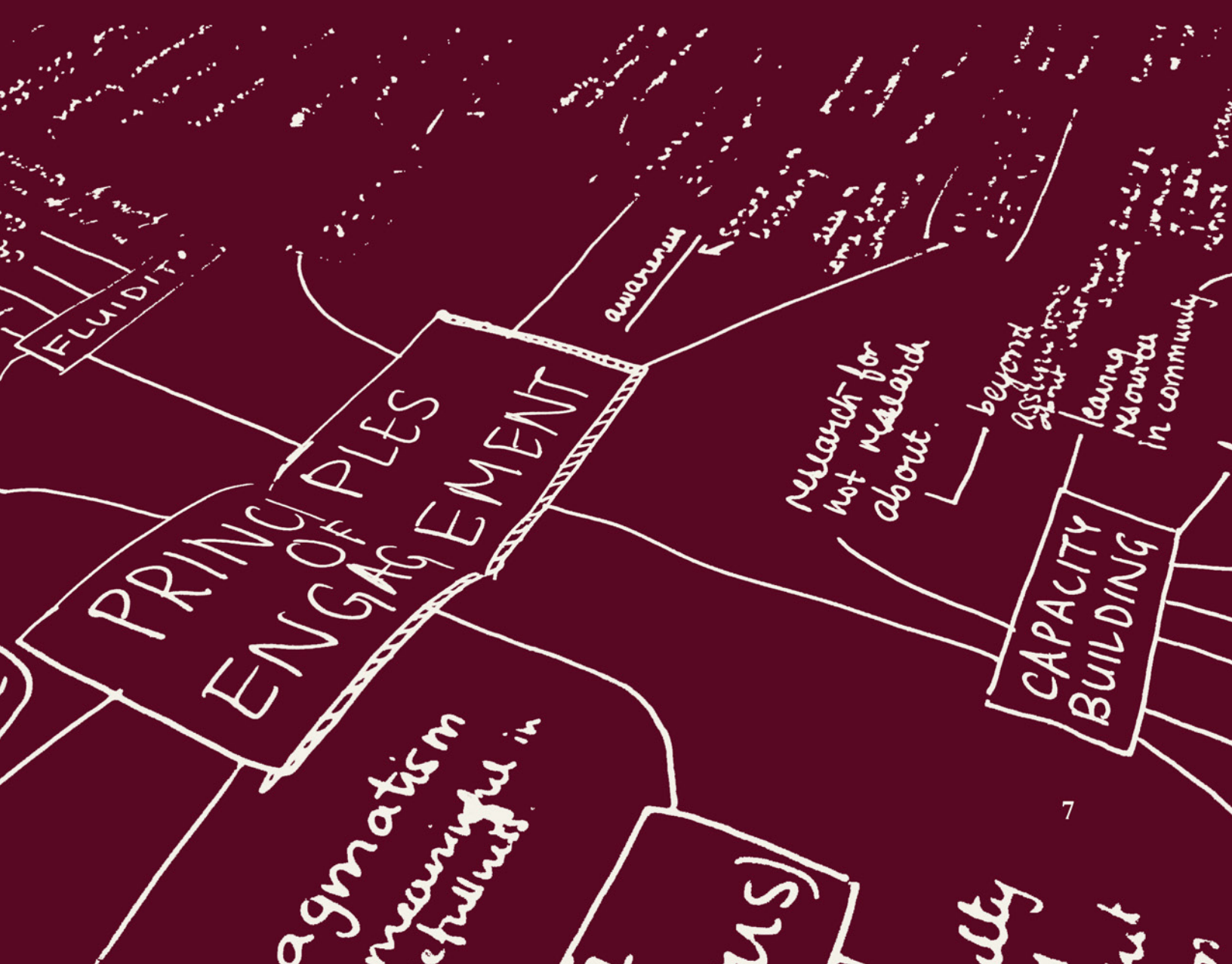
Dr. Helen Burt
Associate Vice-President
Research & Innovation

Introduction

On October 26th, 2018, the Indigenous Research Support Initiative hosted a gathering, bringing together approximately 90 Indigenous community leaders and members, finding partners, faculty, staff and students with interests and expertise in Indigenous research. Held at UBC's Vancouver campus on Musqueam traditional territory, the gathering was intended as a space for collaborators to co-develop principles of engagement that support Indigenous, community-based research collaborations grounded in respect, reciprocity and mutual understanding.

Using metaphors of dwelling spaces and nature, this document summarizes the core ideas and themes that emerged from the 2018 Principles of Engagement Gathering. Just as the floor, framing and roof of a dwelling provide foundation, support and shelter, so do co-developed principles for engagement embody the structural and supportive elements on which meaningful, respectful and mutually beneficial research collaborations are built.

The Principles

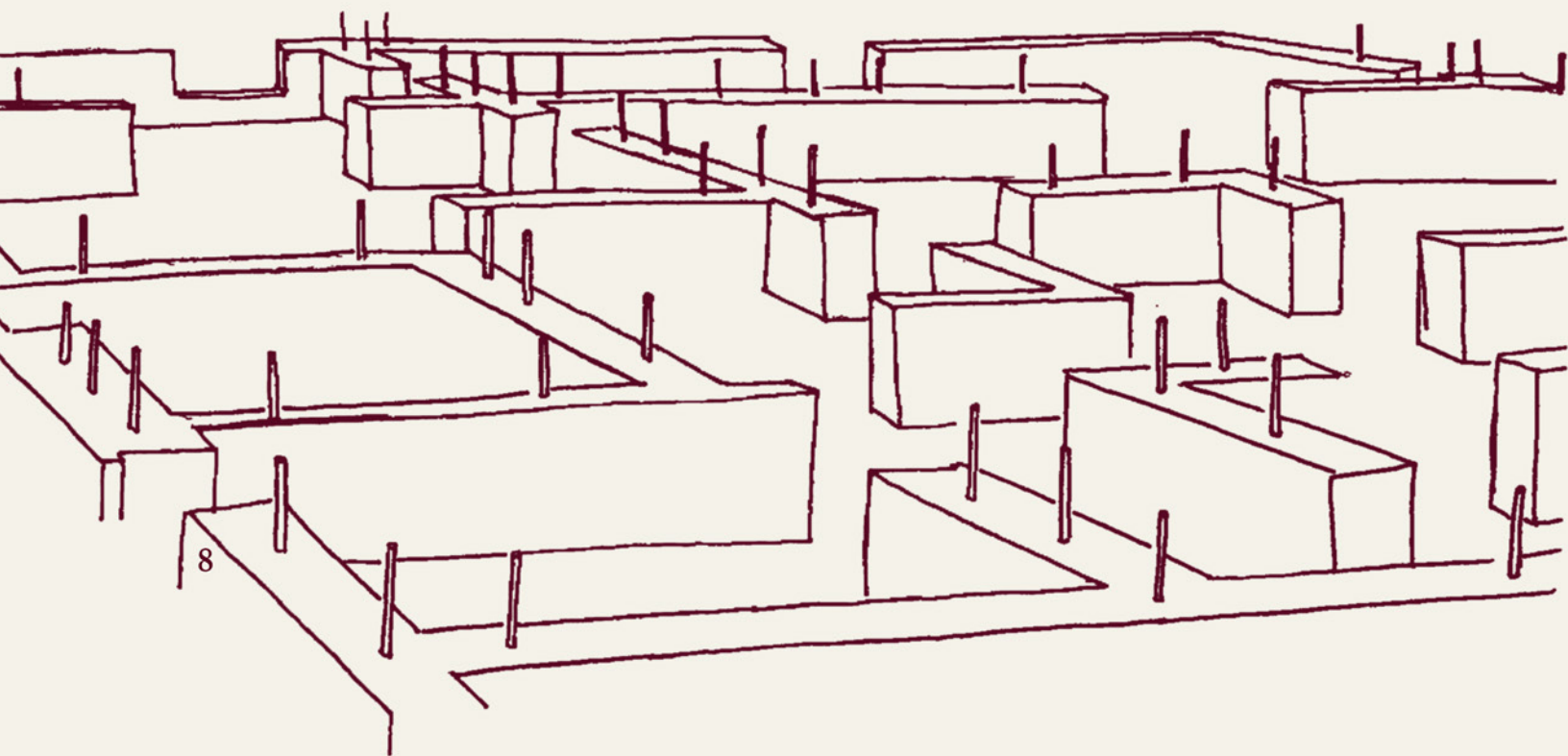


Early Engagement, Community Led

BUILDING FOUNDATIONS

The foundation of a building connects the structure to the land by creating a stable base for something to be built upon. A strong foundation helps a structure withstand unexpected changes and allows the load of what is built upon it to be equally distributed. If the structure we are building is a shared space for knowledge exchange, the foundations of that space are the relationships amongst all those living, and working, on the land.

Building a foundation takes time and trust, and this in turn highlights the need for early and meaningful engagement in order to build a relationship before setting a research agenda. To determine the kind of foundation one needs to understand the land, and by extension, to understand the values, ways of knowing, history and contemporary reality of the community. Beginning with listening, researchers need to meet communities where they are at and apply a strengths-based approach to their research work. Most importantly, the foundation of the relationships between researcher and community must acknowledge that the community priorities will lead the definition and implementation of the project.





Meaningful and Reciprocal Relationships

WESTERN RED CEDAR

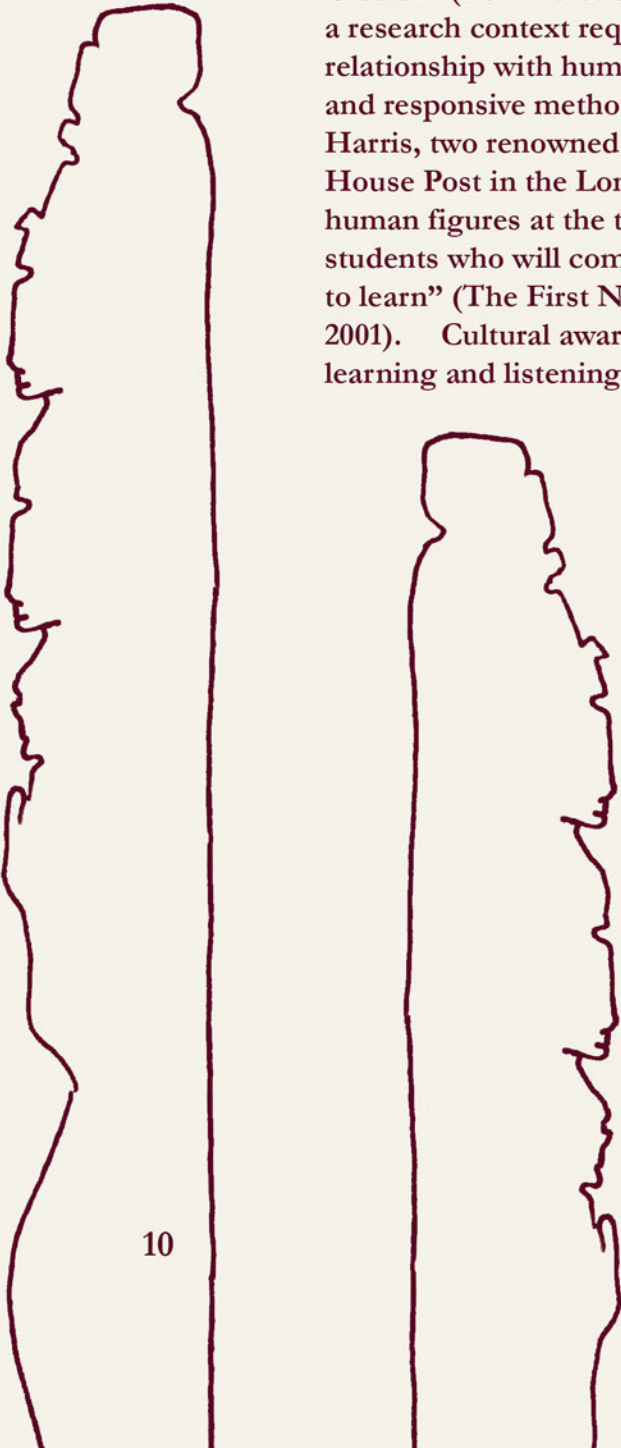
Once the foundation is laid, a structure is built upon it to enable the essential combination of support, comfort, and shelter. Many Indigenous structures use Western Red Cedar as building material. The tree not only provides wood to help communities build gathering spaces, lodges, canoes, and totem poles, but also has many medicinal and healing properties in its leaves and barks. Cedar trees thereby provide and allow for communal life to flourish, while the community in turn cares for the land. This mutuality is pivotal to the relationship that enables research. Co-designed with community, the research must build capacity for the community to flourish, and this involves developing clear protocols on culturally appropriate ways of returning research outcomes and sharing resources.

IRSI can act as an honest broker (facilitator) amongst partners, preparing and sharing with researchers about the value of co-created design of research and working with communities to articulate community priorities within a research context. The relationship must go both ways, prioritizing capacity building and knowledge sharing with an emphasis on meeting and supporting multi-generational needs, and thereby pragmatically co-determining the measures of success. Like cedar wood, which is soft, light, and decay-resistant -making it an excellent structural material for plank houses- the research must be adaptable enough to change course as the project progresses, yet strong enough to support the enduring relationship on which the partnership is built.

Cultural Awareness, Humility and Respect

HOUSE POSTS

The rich cultural and artistic heritage of the Pacific Northwest First Nations is represented in house posts which have “stories within their work provid[ing] links to First Nations history, family ties, and to the Creator” (Lommerse and Lommerse, 2007). Engaging with a culture in a research context requires learning those stories, and approaching the relationship with humility, emotional intelligence, and culturally safe and responsive methodologies. Chief Walter Harris and Rodney Harris, two renowned Gitxan artists, carved the Wolf and Wolf Pup House Post in the Longhouse at UBC. The design includes “three human figures at the top of the house post [that] represent the students who will come here [to the First Nations Longhouse] to learn” (The First Nations Longhouse, Kirkness and Archibald, 2001). Cultural awareness and mutual respect is built through learning and listening, and, with humility, opening oneself to new ways of knowing. This approach sets up a bridge of respect that makes research truly collaborative.





Adaptability and Fluidity

WATER

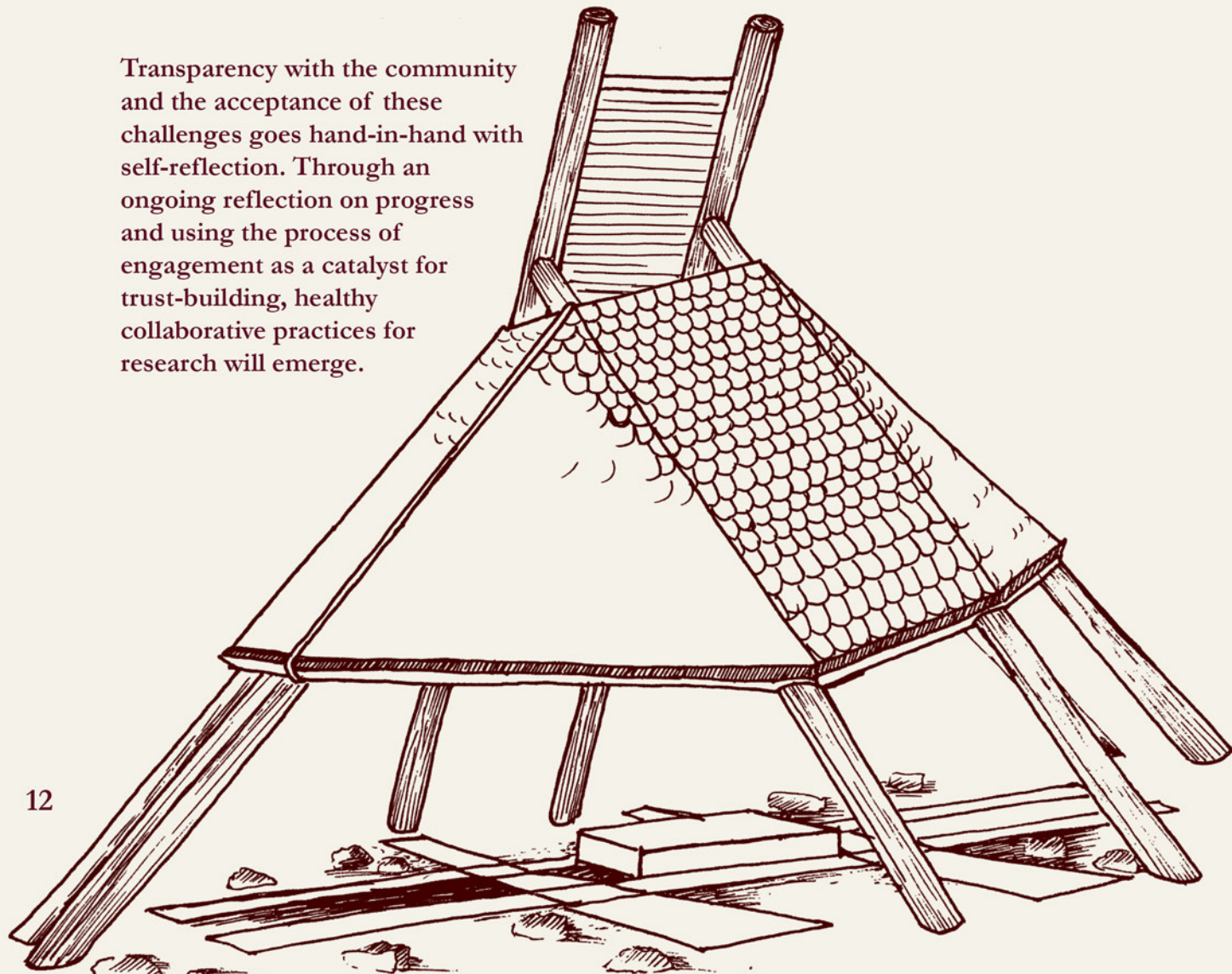
The term fluidity refers to the qualities of grace and ease, and the ability to easily adapt and change when the context requires it. The element of water is both essential to life and has much to teach us about adaptability and flow. Just as a stream changes direction when obstacles are in the way, or water shifts shape from liquid to solid to gas, so can water show us the importance of being open to change and allowing research projects to change their purpose and direction should barriers or issues arise. The fluid quality of water reflects flexibility in all aspects of a research project, and it is a flexible approach that catalyzes creativity. The principle of fluidity also empowers communities to choose their own metrics of success for the research by resisting the constraints of timetables and funding parameters.

Unlearning and Relearning

SACRED CIRCLE

“The Sacred Circle is available to all those who need spiritual sanctuary and can be used as a quiet retreat for rest and reflection” (The First Nations Longhouse, Kirkness and Archibald, 2001). This is a gathering space as well, demanding personal reflection when used alone and with others. At the inception of a research project, academic partners are called on to reflect on their assumptions and be prepared to unlearn formerly exploitative practices and learn new ways, as they acquire different and new knowledge based on the wisdom and expertise of community partners. To demonstrate accountability and integrity, there needs to be an acceptance on the part of researchers that their understanding might fall short at times and that challenges may arise.

Transparency with the community and the acceptance of these challenges goes hand-in-hand with self-reflection. Through an ongoing reflection on progress and using the process of engagement as a catalyst for trust-building, healthy collaborative practices for research will emerge.



Accountability

PIT HOUSE FRAME

A dwelling's frame creates the outline and vision of a built structure, forming the shell on which other materials will be placed to give the structure support, strength, and shape. Pit houses, a traditional dwelling of the communities in the central plateau region of British Columbia, are built starting with a frame of logs upon which the roof and other structural elements are added. Building the framing can be likened to creating the principles and protocols that will form the structure of the relationship that drives the research partnership. Appropriate research protocols place an emphasis on honouring relationships with Indigenous communities.

While co-created principles are essential starting points on which to build, there is a need to recognize the uniqueness of each community and to engage with their distinct principles as well. This involves accepting that the community's priorities and protocols will guide the project's overall direction and allowing for timelines, expected outcomes and other project parameters to reflect those needs and protocols. Other Indigenous frameworks, such as the principles of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, should be considered as well to support a solid and balanced collaboration.

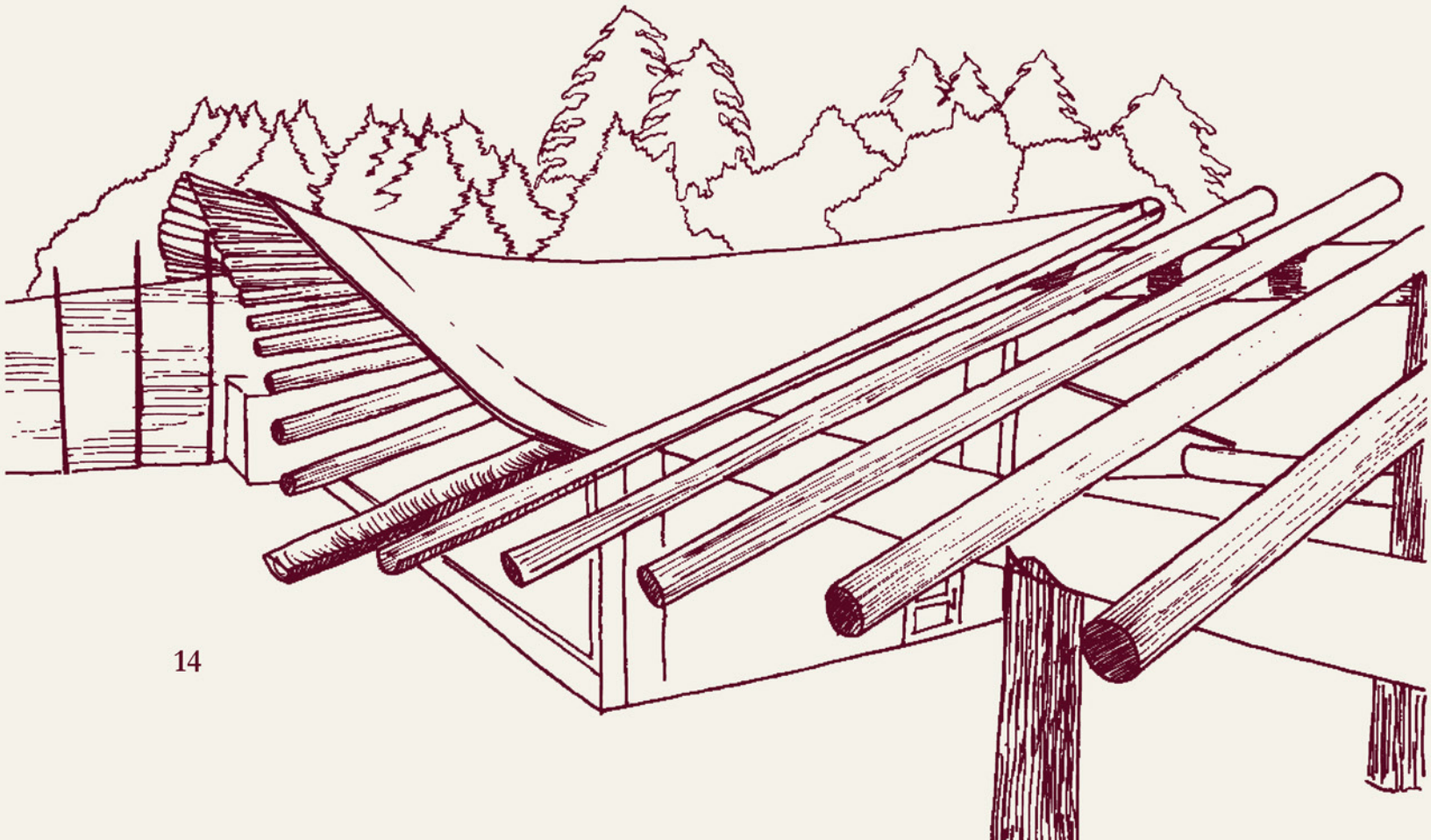


Reconciliation

ROOF OF THE UBC LONGHOUSE

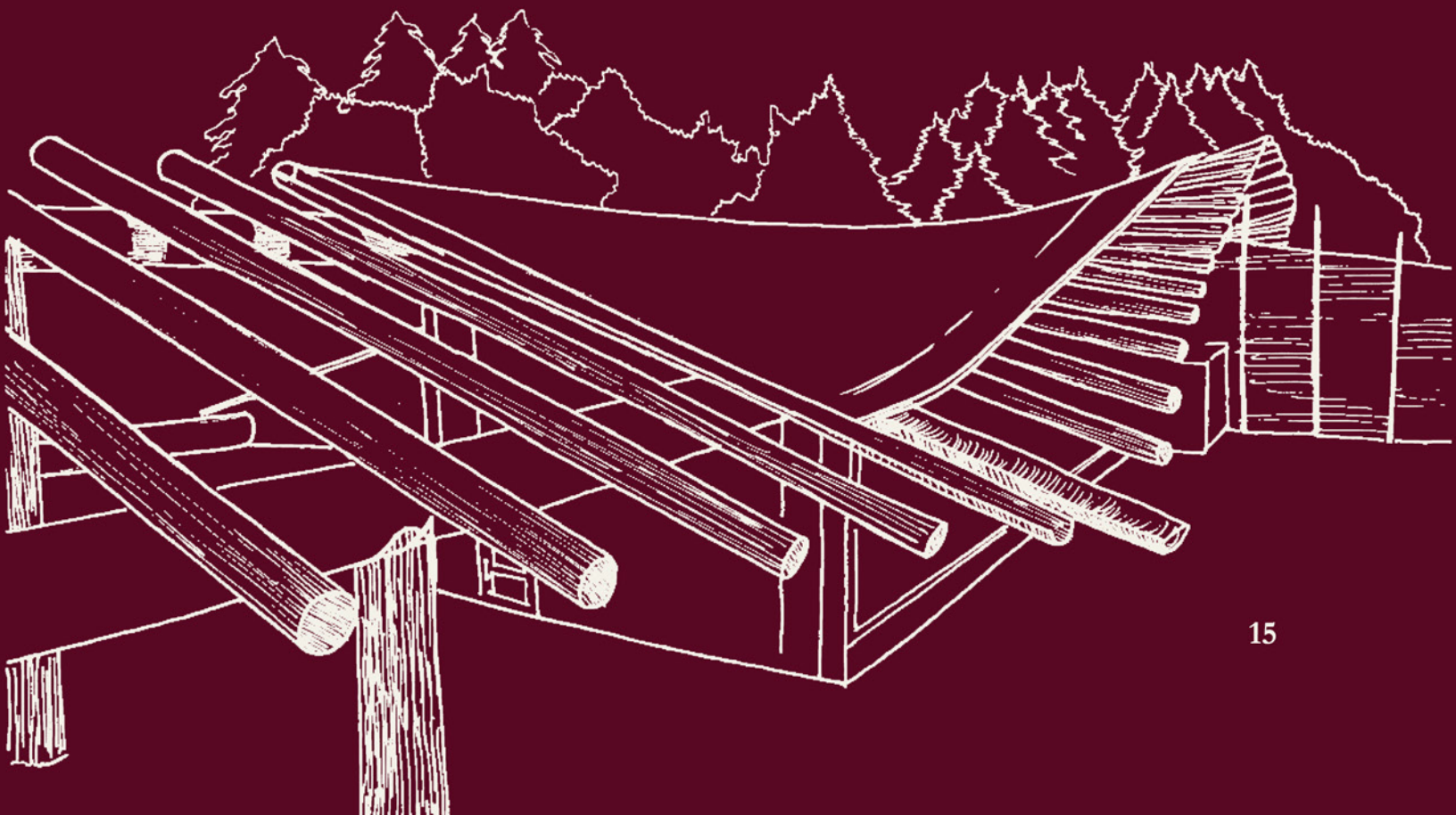
A roof provides shelter and protection from the weather and other external conditions. The protective significance of a roof lends itself to the relationship between communities and researchers in terms of reconciliation. A roof can thus be a metaphor for the deep-rooted value in the relationship; it must stand the test of time through all weather conditions that affect communities and protect communities against further damage. Roofs represent the need to provide safety whilst communities continue their healing process from the realities they have faced.

As written in the Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, “Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future”, “reconciliation must support Aboriginal peoples as they heal from the destructive legacies of colonization that have wreaked such havoc in their lives. But it must do even more. Reconciliation must inspire Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples to transform Canadian society so that our children and grandchildren can live together in dignity, peace, and prosperity on these lands we now share.” (2015)



“The longhouse roof resembles the wings of a bird in flight. One copper wing sweeps toward the past, to our cultures that have existed for many thousands of years, and the other wing sweeps toward the future, signifying the blend of knowledge to our cultures” (The First Nations Longhouse, Kirkness and Archibald, 2001). This design detail lends itself to the practice of understanding the historical, to revisit the now and knowing that reconciliation is based on new, authentic relationships.

Reconciliation is “about coming to terms with events of the past in a manner that overcomes conflict and establishes a respectful and healthy relationship among people, going forward (Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future, 2015)”. In terms of research, that entails paying heed to the history of extractive and exploitative practices of the past, and transforming those practices based on community-centered principles and adherence to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.



About the Indigenous Research Support Initiative

Part of the Vice-President, Research & Innovation office at UBC, the Indigenous Research Support Initiative (IRSI) provides professional support and services for academic and community partners engaged in Indigenous, community-driven research collaborations.

IRSI was established in 2017 in response to the need for better support and more informed resources for researchers engaged in Indigenous collaborations and is working collaboratively with UBC and Indigenous research partners to co-develop an Indigenous Research Framework. That Framework will be supported by three pillars:

- Principles of Engagement for Indigenous research collaborations;
- Guiding principles for the stewardship of Indigenous research data, information and records; and
- Indigenous research ethics specific to Indigenous community-based collaborations.

Ultimately, IRSI envisions that all relationships between UBC and Indigenous community partners are based on the principles of respect, reciprocity, trust, continuity, humility and acceptance, and that through its own internal transformation UBC inspires and supports a greater movement toward reconciliation and positive change.

For more information about IRSI, visit us online at irsi.ubc.ca.



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