

Connecting the Four Directions



Nîsôhkamâtôtân



At NAIT, we honour and acknowledge that the land on which we learn, work and live is Treaty Six territory. We seek to learn from history and the lessons that have come before us, and to draw on the wisdom of the First Peoples in Canada. Only through learning can we move forward in truth and reconciliation, and to a better future together.

Nisôhkamâtôtân
is a Cree word meaning
“let’s help each other.”





PREAMBLE

CONNECTING THE FOUR DIRECTIONS, NAIT's Aboriginal Strategy offers direction rather than a prescription of how to proceed. We have aligned it, as much as possible, to the 2021 Strategy.

The Aboriginal Strategy is not a function of the Nisôhkamâtôtân Centre, though it has been our pleasure to take the lead in its creation. Any meaningful encirclement will need the strong direction of our combined leaders: the wisdom of the people to manage participation, deployment, value, and metrics.

There were questions about whether to include the methods of development, deployment and enhancement within the Strategy. This seemed to us a vital part of the Strategy's success: however, we decided these elements represented the "how" to make the strategy work and that would be an important part of stage two.

It is our strong belief there is much work to be done once the Strategy is approved and the body of the Strategy will guide us through it. We have kept the many ideas from all the participants to inform the future and make it live.



A LIVING DOCUMENT

IN THIS STRATEGIC PLAN we use the term “Aboriginal” in the spirit of its use in section 35 [2] of the Canadian Constitution, to refer inclusively to members of First Nations (status and non-status, treaty and non-treaty), Métis, and Inuit Peoples in Canada. We recognize many people prefer the terms that are specific and traditional to their communities. Since the term “Aboriginal” is not used in many other countries, we use the term “Indigenous” to refer to similar peoples in international contexts.

Aboriginal People are storytellers. Their stories are alive and they change with the passage of time and with the people affected by them. Life continues to change. While we have attempted to describe a “path” within this document, it is not our intent to make conclusions and prescriptions that cannot move when movement is called for. This is a living document. Our hope is to enrich and support the NAIT values of respect, collaboration, celebration, support and accountability for all.

– Derek Thunder

A NOTE ABOUT THE GRANDFATHER TEACHINGS

NAIT’s Aboriginal Strategy seeks to create a bridge between the traditional teachings of the aboriginal communities and the current ways we teach in post-secondary education. The Grandfather Teachings are at the heart of the Aboriginal Strategy and acknowledge world views that have been passed down through generations. They are not meant to signal the work we have to do but rather they signal how we do the work.

SEVEN GRANDFATHER TEACHINGS

THE FIRST ELDER was given these gifts of knowledge by the Seven Grandfathers. These gifts were to help the people live a good life and to respect the Creator, the earth and each other. We have learned how to take care of Mother Earth. In our care for Mother Earth, we have learned to apply these gifts to families, communities, ourselves, and to all things. The Seven Grandfathers told the First Elder that “Each of these teachings must be used with the rest; you cannot have wisdom without love, respect, bravery, honesty, humility, and truth...to leave one out is to embrace the opposite of what that teaching is.” If one of these gifts is not used with the others, we will not be in balance. We must remember these teachings, practice them, and teach them to our children.

▲ **WISDOM: to cherish knowledge is to know wisdom.**

To have wisdom is to know the difference between positive and negative and know the result of your actions. Sound judgment, ability to see inner qualities and relationships. Listen and use the wisdom of elders, spiritual leaders and healers. Wisdom is sound judgment and the ability to use good sense, to have a good attitude and reason of action, that runs through and binds the seven teachings together. Wisdom is given by the Creator to be used for the good of the people.

▲ **LOVE: to know love is to know peace.**

Feel and give absolute kindness for all things around you. To love yourself is to live at peace with the creator and in harmony with all creation. Love is to feel and give complete kindness for all things around you. Love is based upon affection, respect, kindness, unselfish loyalty, devotion and concern. Love your brother and sister and share with them. Love cannot be demanded...it must be earned and given freely from the goodness of your heart.

▲ **RESPECT: to honour all of creation is to have respect.**

Showing respect is showing honour for the value of persons or things by polite regard, consideration and appreciation. Honour our teachings. Honour our families, others, and ourselves. Don't hurt anything or anyone on the outside or the inside. Respect, also is not to be demanded. You must give respect freely from the goodness of your heart if you wish to be respected.

▲ **BRAVERY: to face life with courage is to know bravery.**

The personal strength to face difficulties, obstacles and challenges. Have courage, make positive choices. Stand up for your convictions — show courage in communicating and decision-making. Do things even in the most difficult times. Be ready to defend what you believe and what is right. Never give in. Never give up.

▲ **HONESTY: is to be honest in action and character, be faithful to fact and reality — to walk through life with integrity is to know honesty.**

Being truthful and trustworthy. Tell the truth. Be honest with yourself, recognize who and what you are. Accept and act on truths with straightforward and appropriate communication. Be honest in every action and provide good feelings in the heart. Do not be deceitful or use self-deception. Honesty keeps life simple.

▲ **HUMILITY: to accept yourself as a sacred part of creation is to know humility.**

Reflecting, expressing or offering in a spirit of deference or submission. Balance of equality with all of life. Recognize the human need for balance in life. Know that you are equal to everyone else. Take pride in what you do, but the pride that you take is in the sharing of the accomplishment with others.

▲ **TRUTH: to know of these things is to know the truth.**

Faithfully apply the teachings of our seven grandfathers and trust in the creator. To show honour is to be truthful and trustworthy, to tell the truth. Sincerity in action, character, and utterance. Be faithful to fact and reality. Be true in everything that you do. Be true to yourself and true to your fellow man. Understand it — Speak it — Live by it.

NAIT'S VISION

To be the most relevant and responsive post-secondary institution in Canada and a world leading polytechnic by 2021.

OUR PROMISES

PROMISE TO ALBERTA

NAIT meets the current and emerging needs for polytechnic education and applied research in Alberta. NAIT is relevant and responsive and provides outstanding technical education. While serving the needs of Alberta, NAIT is globally competitive and recognized.

PROMISE TO STUDENTS

NAIT provides a positive student experience that encompasses students' mental, emotional and physical well-being and defines success broadly. We prepare students to succeed in meaningful careers, find employment in their chosen field and have the skills necessary to have an immediate impact.

PROMISE TO INDUSTRY

NAIT produces an exceptional skilled workforce, aligned directly to industry needs. Our programs are developed with industry's input and our research is industry-driven to create enterprises that compete worldwide.

PROMISE TO STAFF

NAIT will continue to be one of Canada's outstanding places to work, which follows from a culture of how we work together. This culture reflects the values of respect, collaboration, celebration, support and accountability.

CONNECTING NAIT'S VISION WITH THE ABORIGINAL STRATEGY

This strategy endeavours to bring Aboriginal ways of living and knowing to NAIT's promises by attending to the circle of the medicine wheel that includes mental, physical, emotional and spiritual well-being.

We believe in the essential contributions that Aboriginal people and communities give to the world.

We acknowledge our responsibility to develop opportunities with Aboriginal people and to accurately represent and include Aboriginal cultures, histories and systems of knowledge relevant to Aboriginal communities and their concerns.





BACKGROUND

THE CONCEPT AND DESIGN of this Aboriginal Strategy is based on the teepee. The teepee is constructed using 15 poles but there are three poles at the heart, which are the foundation. These foundation poles are the heart of this plan and represent Community Strength, Academic Success and Staff Support.

Aboriginal initiatives have existed at NAIT, but they have existed in isolated pockets around the organization. The Aboriginal Strategy intends to meet the goals entrusted within the document and bring them together with the hopes of our communities and the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

We have also used, at the heart of this plan, the support of the Seven Grandfather Teachings. These teachings represent how people are to live and be within the world.

The Grandfather Teachings were given as gifts to help the people live a good life and to respect the Creator, the earth and each other. We have learned to apply these gifts to families, communities, ourselves, and to all things. Each of these teachings must be used with the others; you can not have wisdom without love, respect, bravery, honesty, humility, and truth. To leave one out is to embrace the opposite of that teaching. We must remember these teachings, practice them, and teach them to our children.

The engagement of the Grandfather Teachings in any environment will improve the area in all ways. While the strategy aims to improve the mechanisms wherein Aboriginal people work and study, it intends to do so by the strengthening of the whole people – all of NAIT and its constituents.

These teachings are at the heart of the Aboriginal Strategy. This foundation is the basis for the four strategies presented.

One of the primary responsibilities of the strategy is to provide guidance to recognize the incredible strength and wisdom within Aboriginal communities and know when Aboriginal people are truly included, everyone benefits.

This leads us to our purpose. ▲



OUTCOMES AND STRATEGIES

OUR PURPOSE IS TO:

- ▲ Strengthen the whole of NAIT by creating an inclusive community.
- ▲ Make tools available to the NAIT community to empower everyone.
- ▲ Honour traditional ways of knowing and teaching.
- ▲ Add strength to our institution through Aboriginal knowledge and ways of knowing.
- ▲ Draw strength from Aboriginal communities.

WE ARE ESSENTIAL TO ALBERTA

Culture

NAIT honours and applies Aboriginal knowledge and culture

- Strengthen community through holistic activities that honour Aboriginal knowledge and culture.
- Consider Aboriginal culture in the design, naming and/or use of space.
- Consider Aboriginal knowledge and culture in programming for students and staff as applicable.
- Develop opportunities for Aboriginal people to meaningfully participate in NAIT decisions.



Staff

NAIT community members respect and value Aboriginal people and culture

- Create awareness of holistic teachings of well-being.
- Support NAIT's staff recruitment and retention strategy with Aboriginal ways of knowing.
- Link Aboriginal learning and mentorship to the diversity and inclusion strategy.
- Build familiarity and community through engagement.

Students

NAIT collaborates with the Aboriginal community to address barriers to Aboriginal student success

- Identify and remove barriers to Aboriginal student success.
- Support Aboriginal students to make informed choices.
- Create opportunities for Aboriginal students to develop supportive relationships and communities.
- Advocate for changes to government policy to better support Aboriginal students.

Others

NAIT develops trust with Aboriginal people and communities.

- Build relationships with Aboriginal communities.
- Develop ways to authentically connect students, staff and industry with the strength and wisdom found in Aboriginal ways of knowing and being.
- Work in partnership with Aboriginal communities and industry to develop community-based learning opportunities.
- Position the Nisôhkamâtôtân Centre as a centre of Aboriginal knowledge.

APPENDIX

Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action

These reflect the Calls to Action developed for education

6. We call upon the Government of Canada to repeal Section 43 of the Criminal Code of Canada.
7. We call upon the federal government to develop with Aboriginal groups a joint strategy to eliminate educational and employment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.
8. We call upon the federal government to eliminate the discrepancy in federal education funding on reserves and those First Nations children being educated off reserves.
9. We call upon the federal government to prepare and publish annual reports comparing funding for the education of First Nations children on and off reserves, as well as educational and income attainments of Aboriginal peoples in Canada compared with non-Aboriginal people.
10. We call on the federal government to draft new Aboriginal education legislation with the full participation and informed consent of Aboriginal peoples. The new legislation would include a commitment to sufficient funding and would incorporate the following principles:
 - I. Providing sufficient funding to close identified educational achievement gaps within one generation.
 - II. Improving education attainment levels and success rates.
 - III. Developing culturally appropriate curricula.
 - IV. Protecting the right to Aboriginal languages, including the teaching of Aboriginal languages as credit courses.
 - V. Enabling parental and community responsibility, control, and accountability, similar to what parents enjoy in public school systems.
 - VI. Enabling parents to fully participate in the education of their children.
 - VII. Respecting and honouring Treaty relationships.
11. We call upon the federal government to provide adequate funding to end the backlog of First Nations students seeking post-secondary education.
12. We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal families.

TRC Document: https://nctr.ca/assets/reports/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf



THANKS!

Special thanks to the contributors to NAIT's Aboriginal Strategy

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TO CHERISH KNOWLEDGE IS TO KNOW **WISDOM**

TO KNOW **LOVE** IS TO KNOW PEACE

TO HONOUR ALL OF CREATION IS TO HAVE **RESPECT**

TO FACE LIFE WITH COURAGE IS TO KNOW **BRAVERY**

TO WALK THROUGH LIFE WITH INTEGRITY IS TO KNOW **HONESTY**

HUMILITY IS TO KNOW YOURSELF AS A SACRED PART OF CREATION

TRUTH IS TO KNOW ALL OF THESE THINGS

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