



**DALHOUSIE**  
UNIVERSITY

Poqjituék Wi'kuominen  
Building our Wikuom



*Interim Report on Outreach Initiatives for the Lnuwey Tplutaqan Wikuom*  
April 2023

## **Introduction and Context**

In November 2021, the Faculties of Law and Management at Dalhousie University created an Outreach Coordinator position to assist in the establishment of an Indigenous Law, Governance and Indigenomics Wikuom - the L'nuwey Tplutaqan Wikuom. The Terms of Reference for the Outreach Coordinator stated:

The faculties of Law and Management at Dalhousie University wish to undertake outreach in order to seed the creation and maintenance of an Indigenous Law, Governance and Indigenomics Wikuom at Dalhousie. The purpose of the Wikuom would be to support and assist Indigenous communities in Atlantic Canada in the revitalization of their laws and governance, and other institutions that are vital to community flourishing and well-being. Through shared contributions from Law and Management, and with support of the Office of the Provost, we have resourced seed funding over a two-year period to develop a plan for securing long term funding and maintaining an Indigenous Law, Governance and Indigenomics Wikuom at Dalhousie; as well as to start implementing this plan.<sup>1</sup>

Mi'kmaq professors at both schools, Naiomi Metallic (Listuguj First Nation), Cheryl Simon (Abegweit First Nation), and Sherry Pictou (Bear River / Lsitkuk First Nation) have been leading this work. Millbrook First Nation member and Dalhousie law graduate (2018), Tanisha Blackmore, was hired as the Outreach Coordinator, and Glooscap First Nation member and Dalhousie law graduate (2022), Kristan Belanger, was hired as the Research Assistant to the Initiative. Our work has also been supported by Indigenous students and alumni who come from all over Atlantic Canada, as well as non-Indigenous academic allies.

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<sup>1</sup> Terms of Reference for an Outreach Coordinator, attached as Appendix 1 ("Terms of Reference")



## Approach

The team working to establish the Wikuom consists entirely of Indigenous women. Our outreach approach is therefore informed by an Indigenous worldview, particularly the Mi'kmaq principle *msit no'kmaq* ("all my relations"). *Msit no'kmaq* emphasizes the fundamental truth that all beings exist in relationship with, and connected to, all other beings in existence. It follows from this fundamental truth that we have a responsibility to establish the Wikuom *with* the community that we intend to serve, not for them.

We also recognize past failures of academic institutions in Canada to nurture their relationships with Indigenous Peoples, and through this work we strive to indigenize the academic institution where the Wikuom resides.

Our outreach approach therefore emphasizes meaningful engagement and reciprocity as we weave together - and continue to nurture - a network of mutually supportive relationships aligned in the revitalization of Indigenous laws across Atlantic Canada.

## Objectives

The Terms of Reference sets out the following objectives:

1. Identify interested faculty
2. Engage with stakeholders to identify functions and activities of the Wikuom
3. Identify resources to support the functions and activities of the Wikuom, and resource gaps
4. Identify sources of financial support
5. Coordinate a fundraising campaign
6. Generate excitement about the Wikuom

This Interim Report focuses on the primary outreach initiatives undertaken in Year 1 in order to meet objectives 1, 2, 3 and 6. Objectives 4 and 5 will be the focus of the Final Report on Outreach Initiatives for the L'nuwey Tplutaqn Wikuom, due in November 2023.



## FACULTY VISION SESSIONS

### *Objectives 1, 3 and 6*

Interested faculty from academic institutions across the Atlantic region were brought together in a series of four facilitated conversations we called Vision Sessions, in order to provide input on the development of a shared vision for the Wikuom. Three of the faculty conversations focused on groups from Dalhousie's Schulich School of Law, Faculty of Management and Indigenous Advisory Council. One session focused on academics external to Dalhousie with units and faculty working to service Indigenous groups from across Atlantic Canada (e.g., CBU Mi'kmaq Studies, Mi'gmaq Maliseet Program at STU, etc).



All four faculty sessions began with an introduction to Indigenous law, governance, and indigenomics revitalization initiatives already in place across the country, and the plan to create a similar initiative at Dalhousie. Participants were then invited to share their perspectives on how we could best carry out the work. We wanted to hear everything they had to offer with respect to all aspects of the work but specifically the people, activities, organizational structure and values that would constitute the Wikuom.

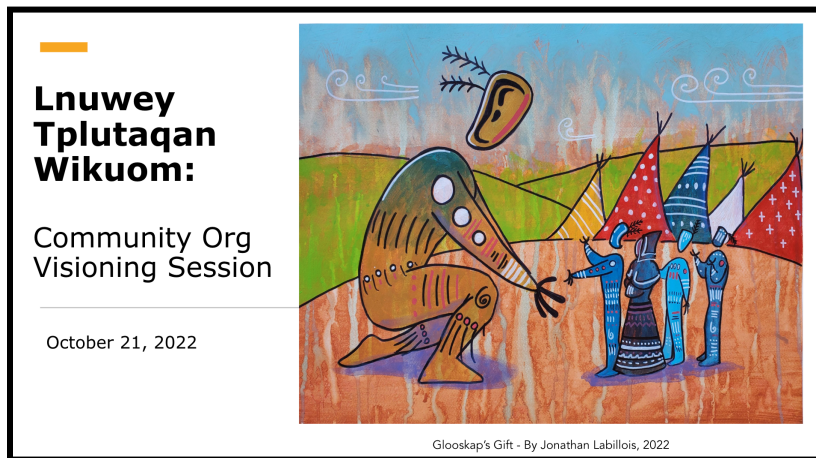
Participants at the faculty sessions were unanimously interested in being involved with the Wikuom on an ongoing basis and agreed that there was need for a focused effort to develop the area of Indigenous law revitalization with a unique and more inclusive focus at Dalhousie that would pair law revitalization with revitalization of other core Indigenous institutions, including governance, Indigenomics, information and data management, and organizational design features. Faculty shared their relevant research areas, explored opportunities to collaborate and identified potential research topics.

A number of common themes arose during the faculty discussions:

- Relationship building - between academics and organizations, but especially between the Wikuom and Indigenous communities across the region
- Centering Indigenous approaches - including research practices, protocols for interacting with Indigenous communities and organizations, respect for Indigenous ways of knowing, accountability frameworks
- Preserving and maintaining resources - centralizing our knowledge and facilitating broad access to the invaluable work produced by Indigenous governments, political and community organizations, academics, communities, and knowledge holders.
- Accessibility and cultural safety - dismantling structural barriers, being present in communities, involving elders, youth and traditional knowledge keepers



- Institutional challenges - operating inside of a traditional post-secondary institution, navigating the bureaucracy, securing funding, securing physical space



## COMMUNITY VISION SESSIONS

### *Objectives 2, 3, and 6*

Indigenous lawyers, law students and a variety of professionals representing Indigenous community organizations were brought together for more in-depth, full-day vision sessions.

Recognizing that our relationship with these stakeholders would be most crucial to the Wikuom's success, we sought to ensure that they would receive value in return for the guidance that they generously provided to us.

We began the sessions by providing introductory training on an Indigenous law revitalization methodology called the story brief method before moving into the facilitated conversation to gather input on the design of the Wikuom. The story brief method, introduced by Val Napoleon and Hadley Friedland in 2016, provides a practical framework for researchers to engage with Indigenous stories as sources of substantive law. Although the approach draws from the case briefing method taught in Western legal education to aid in the analysis of narratives, it is an intuitive and open ended framework that is easily grasped by those without legal training, and does not unduly distort the messages conveyed in the Indigenous source material being explored.

Participants expressed excitement about this brief but powerful experiential learning opportunity and the conversations that followed. We chose to apply the methodology to a collection of stories about Klu'skap in order to identify Mi'kmaq legal concepts relating to leadership and governance. These concepts may provide a fundamental starting point for Mi'kmaq communities across Atlantic Canada who are looking to establish culturally appropriate governance practices, laws, and policies within their governments and community organizations.

With minimal guidance, the participants were empowered to identify within the stories clear normative principles governing how a leader should wield authority. Many participants, most of whom were Mi'kmaq, recognized these principles as closely related to the values that continue to be transmitted within modern Mi'kmaq communities and understood them as legitimate sources of Mi'kmaq law. They also remarked on how the approach could be used to engage with a wide variety of subject areas in order to extract principles and values that could inform more culturally relevant policy and programming initiatives for their communities.



During the facilitated conversation that followed, participants discussed their personal experiences in post-secondary education, the work they've seen and been a part of to advance self-determination for their communities, and the many challenges that Indigenous communities in the region still face in this regard. They shared important examples of work already being done to revitalize Indigenous laws and governance traditions but agreed that progress would remain slow without a more centralized and streamlined approach to facilitate the work, minimize duplication of effort and share resources.

Participants at the community sessions shared our excitement, encouraged us and each other and provided a number of important insights. Key themes included:

- Resource sharing - we are all working toward one shared goal of self-determination, so it is critical to share our knowledge and resources as much as possible, for instance through a shared resource repository
- Community engagement - we are responsible to foster interest in this work in order to keep community members involved in setting priorities and to empower them to build solutions
- Indigenization efforts - we are operating in spaces (academia, law, government) that are hostile to our communities and we have to boldly implement L'nu approaches wherever possible in order to advance the goal of self-determination

## SESSION WITH SIBLING UNITS

### *Objectives 1, 3, and 6*

We wrapped up our first year of outreach with a session that brought together representatives from the other research units housed in Universities across Canada focusing on the revitalization of Indigenous laws. We have drawn heavily on the work done through these units and this session was our opportunity to reciprocate by creating an opportunity for colleagues to exchange experiences, wise practices and resources in support of our shared aims.



The units represented at the session are at various stages of development and have slightly different mandates, however, all are working toward a shared vision of Indigenous self-determination and all are building on the work of the Indigenous scholars, knowledge keepers and storytellers who worked to preserve and revitalize Indigenous laws and institutions before us. It was clear that the participants felt a profound connection to one another through



this work and consensus was easily reached that a collaborative arrangement should be formalized to ensure that this connection is nurtured moving forward. The group was eager to support one another and plans to share resources, develop standardized practices and gather on a regular basis developed quickly.

A number of key themes were raised:

- Importance of core funding - several colleagues emphasized the advantage of securing long-term, core funding, otherwise too much effort is spent fundraising
- Centralizing resources - colleagues recognize the benefits that a shared resource collection would provide
- Fundamental principles - colleagues articulated that feminism, human rights and global perspectives need to be incorporated and colonial perspectives need to be challenged

