

Strengthening Indigenous Hiring Initiatives – An Overview

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Position Statement

It is important to note that the author of this document is a settler employee of Memorial University. As such, this document represents a collection of literature and resources, and not the direct opinions or stances of any Indigenous group, community, organization, government, or individual.

INTRODUCTION

The effort for Indigenization, led by Indigenous peoples across the country, is one that must be supported from both within and outside the University. This document looks to provide guidance on how best to transition Memorial in its growth of Indigenous faculty and staff, as “[t]he best assets for recruiting and retaining Indigenous employees are existing Indigenous employees¹.” This is to say that in order to best facilitate Indigenous hiring and create an environment to that affect, Indigenous employees must exist within the institution. To take that a step further, Indigenous people must exist within the institution, and should be well resourced, respected, and have positive experiences with the institution such that it may be a place that is both safe and nurturing for Indigenous employees, resulting in more Indigenous applicants and a growing community within the institution. For that to be the case, practices must be established that create a hiring process that is respectful of Indigenous applicants and future employees, as well as an environment that falls in line with this respect.

This document will explore a number of practices and principles that can be implemented into the hiring of Indigenous employees in order to ensure they are well-respected and considered in an equitable manner, and will also discuss how to create a healthy and respectful institutional environment that encourages Indigenous hiring, retention, and success.

Some of the items mentioned here may already be in place at Memorial, either across the entire University or within specific units or areas. Others may be principles rather than specific actions – however, there is always room for expansion, refinement, and adaptation to specific circumstances at the University. Additionally, not all practices will be appropriate for all scenarios, and so until there is a form of supported standardization, this remains highly dependent on specific attention. This document will refer to all hiring processes, for both staff and faculty, but will pay special attention to the hiring processes for academic staff members and faculty. While the principles behind hiring for academic and non-academic members may be similar, the processes for actualization may be significantly different.

It should be noted that this document describes strategies and objectives that may be effective in strengthening Indigenous hiring processes. It is not a document that makes any changes to active policy or sets out mandates, but looks to inspire discussion about the most appropriate, effective, and respectful approach of hiring processes, as well as stimulate further discussion at the University as policies and mandates continue to grow and change.

The two final pages of this document are composed of “Intersections with Memorial’s Policies, Procedures and Plans” and “Further Reading”, which may help to tailor initiatives as needed.

¹ Morris, Marika. 2017. [Indigenous recruitment and retention: Ideas and best practices from a literature review of academic and organizational sources](#). Government of Canada.

POSITION DESIGN AND ALLOCATION

Practices to support, include, and recognize Indigenous employees and candidates must begin before a position is even advertised. This should include both targeted Indigenous hires as well as general hires, and should encompass considerations both of the individual position being created as well as the environment in which said position will exist. These recommendations come from Indigenous-led organizations, such as Indigenous Works ², as well prominent research on Indigenous recruitment and retention³. Some important questions to pose are:

- Has the department considered how its activities may intersect with the needs or wishes of Indigenous communities? Has the department considered establishing a relationship with Indigenous communities through which a joint approach to developing the position could be considered?
- Are there Indigenous employees in this department? If there are, have their experiences been positive? If there are not, why might that be and are there adjustments that are necessary for the department to be a respectful and non-violent place?
- Do the people in this department have a baseline understanding of the Indigenous Peoples in this province? Are there training or education opportunities available to them?
- Are there individuals in management in this unit that have shown consistent commitment to and understanding of Indigenous principles at the University?

In addition, organizations such as *Indigenous Works* provide training on [Navigating Indigenous Employment](#), which may be appropriate for some sections.

Some specific best practices for Indigenous hiring that can be considered prior to the advertisement of a position include:

- Ensuring there is Indigenous representation on the hiring committee
 - If Indigenous representation from within the University community is not possible, consider how involving Indigenous communities and/or organizations in the hiring process may be appropriate. This is best suited for positions that require an Indigenous candidate, rather than any job an Indigenous applicant may apply for.
- In cases where a position will interact directly with Indigenous communities, involve the relevant communities directly when designing positions and/or considering candidates

² Indigenous Works. n.d. [Tips for Hiring Aboriginal Employees](#). *Indigenous Works*.

³ For an overview of this literature, see: Morris, Marika. 2017. Indigenous recruitment and retention: Ideas and best practices from a literature review of academic and organizational sources. *Government of Canada*.

- Implement mandatory training on Indigenous knowledges and scholarship for hiring committees⁴
 - Where this is not possible ensure that there are frequent opportunities for education and training for position holders
- Develop or utilize existing cultural awareness programs for all existing staff and add this program to onboarding for future employees
- Further develop and expand existing cultural awareness programs to avoid education being a single instance of information and allow for consistent development of learning
- If using a search agency, consider those with experience with Indigenous candidates or approved by Indigenous communities or organizations
- Where appropriate, consider partnering with a First Nations, Inuit, Métis, and/or Indigenous Peoples' organizations to design the position and be involved in the hiring process
- Ensure that Indigenous-specific positions are well resourced and positioned to be efficacious
- Allow for a balance of positions to be held by Indigenous people
 - While it is important to have Indigenous people leading work that relates to Indigenous culture, the University should be sure not to expect all Indigenous people to undertake such work within the University; institutions must ensure opportunities for inclusion in diverse work environments for Indigenous persons
- Ensure that no single person or body is responsible for Indigenous initiatives – Indigenous inclusion cannot be relegated to the hiring of Indigenous Peoples in one designated area, or hiring without mechanisms for support or achievement of initiatives
- Ensure that there is a voluntary self-declaration and identification tool, made accessible to all employees. Allow for the differentiation of Indigenous group (i.e. First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and Indigenous Peoples) if participants choose
- Make sure that there is an accessible and effective method for addressing issues or workplace misconduct and that anti-Indigenous actions are expressly disavowed within this system

⁴ Caverley (2004) outlines education of non-Indigenous staff as a way to both advance equity and improve the environment of a workplace. Having basic knowledge of Indigenous organizations and culture can allow for cultural sharing and sensitivity, and a lack of it can result in unintentional violence or alienation. See: Caverley, Natasha. 2004. [What Works: Effective Policies and Programs for Aboriginal Peoples of Canada Final Report](#). Human Resources and Social Development Canada Strategic Policy Directorate.

- Set firm targets for the proportional representation of Indigenous Peoples in the University; proportional representation, consistent with identifiable goals, be they in the localized context, sector specific, or based on national figures. Where possible, work with communities and/or Indigenous Peoples to identify what targets are most appropriate, and ensure targets include both faculty and staff
- In all instances where Indigenous individuals and Organizations are involved in work towards positions, training, etc. ensure that there is fair and competitive compensation for their work

ADVERTISEMENT AND SEARCH

When a position is advertised, a number of important actions should be taken⁵:

- Have an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) professional with appropriate experience with Indigenous principles review the posting
 - One example of a system might be to have a joint effort for review of postings by a member of the Joint Equity Committee and the Indigenous Resource Officer
- Specifically recognize all Indigenous Peoples as well as the Indigenous Peoples of the Province in job postings⁶, whether through a land acknowledgment or other means
- Consider partnering with Indigenous organizations for designing the posting and circulating the advertisement
- Where appropriate, issue the application to Indigenous communities or agencies to circulate
- Circulate broadly rather than internally, use broad promotional methods, and promote via organizations focusing on Indigenous employees or scholarship, as well as at conferences or events focusing on Indigenous employment and/or scholarship

⁵ Many of these recommendations specific to academic institutions are outlined in Canada Research Chairs Program. 2019. [Equity, Diversity and Inclusion: A Best Practices Guide for Recruitment, Hiring, and Retention.](#) as well as Concordia University. 2019. [Indigenous Directions Action Plan.](#).. Concordia University.

⁶ This is especially important when considering the local context. See Morris (2009) pp.44-54 on working with the Nunavut Inuit, and how this may translate to Newfoundland and Labrador's contexts. Morris, Marika. 2017. [Indigenous recruitment and retention: Ideas and best practices from a literature review of academic and organizational sources.](#) Government of Canada.

- Some examples of partners in advertising may include the [Academica Indigenous Top Ten Newsletter](#); [Windspeaker National Newspaper and other Indigenous publications](#); and [NationTalk](#)

Additionally, when engaging in a search for an Indigenous candidate the University ought to:

- Where appropriate and available, ensure that the hiring committee includes Indigenous representation, with appropriate compensation allowing for the release from other duties and committees to prevent burnout, and where undue burden is not currently being placed on Indigenous individuals at the University. This should be an invitation, and not a requirement for staff and faculty.
 - Where Indigenous representation may not be possible internally, it should be investigated whether representation from other Equity Deserving Groups (EDGs) and/or external Indigenous involvement is possible
- Collaborate with communities during the search and consider community representation on the hiring committee, or mechanisms for input from communities, during search processes
- Give communities the opportunity to submit names that could be contacted to submit an application for the position

INTERVIEWING

The interview process should be adjusted to best meet the needs of applicants and their individual contexts. Such adjustments may be to the attitudes of those evaluating applicants, while others may be to the interview process itself. Some possible adjustments include:

- Recognize cultural differences in self-promotion – some Indigenous cultures may see self-promotion as bragging, or otherwise not teach it as a practice, or may consider many of their achievements to be community achievements rather than owing to one individual. This way of thinking may impact how they frame all of their achievements (i.e. if one is not inclined to self-promote, the way they describe their experiences may focus on the outcome or the process of cooperation rather than individual roles and achievements within a project). Indigenous applicants may also prioritize listening skills, and may be considered by some board members to be more quiet or soft-spoken than other applicants⁷
- Keep in mind how different authority structures may make some candidates uncomfortable – providing a range of methods and locations for interviewing may allow for a candidate to create an environment where they can best

⁷ To see a list of common cultural differences and methods for accommodation, see: Indigenous Works. n.d. [Tips for Hiring Aboriginal Employees](#). *Indigenous Works*.

illustrate their abilities. Consider providing information on the interview process beforehand to allow for preparation and comfort

- Where appropriate consider having a local Indigenous representation present that may be able to pose questions of identified importance to their community. This may include representatives from multiple communities, depending on a candidate's work and its anticipated scope
- Avoid judging criteria based on a specific idea of professionalism, such as how long someone speaks, how much eye contact they make, etc.
- Consider working with Indigenous individuals and/or organizations to develop criteria for evaluation, especially in cases where there may not be Indigenous representation among those interviewing candidates
- Educate hiring committee on how interview styles may differ, and note how the same desired aspects for a candidate may be apparent in different ways as a result of cultural differences
- Where a candidate may be expected to provide a presentation to the committee or lead a class, consider having this also be available to Indigenous communities or including a requirement to provide a presentation to Indigenous communities that express interest
- Where appropriate, consider using a model such as a Q&A for candidates with community representatives as part of the interview process (i.e. if a candidate is doing research that may have a direct impact on communities, or entering a role that has a community cooperation focus)

It is important to note that, while options to include Indigenous interviewers, etc., are vital to consider, they must be carefully considered and processes developed to strike a balance between offering accommodations and overburdening either a candidate or Indigenous Peoples working in and with the University. The ways that Indigenous People relate to their culture, and how they may or may not want their culture to be present in their workplaces and interview processes, vary. This is especially important if an applicant is applying for a broader position, rather than one expressly interacting with Indigenous culture(s).

These practices will not be appropriate for every position. In particular, many non-academic positions may have a duty to uphold to privacy of applicants and so cannot facilitate outside involvement during the interview process. In cases such as these ensure that there is as much involvement as possible both in the design of the position and setting of interview criteria, as well as opportunities for early engagement when an individual enters their position in cases where they will be working on projects involving communities

HIRING DECISIONS

The evaluation of applicants is a place where cultural differences can be overlooked, and may as such become a site of discrimination. The practices discussed here are primarily pulled from Indigenous Works' *Tips for Hiring Aboriginal Employees*, which focuses on common cultural differences that should be considered with Indigenous applicants, and the Canada Research Chairs Program's *Best Practices Guide for Recruitment, Hiring, and Retention*, which illustrates how to consider cultural relevance in an academic context specifically.

- Be sure to consider non-peer review publications and publications in which a candidate is not a first author, as well as a smaller number of publications and consider instead how these publications represent the work of the applicant
 - Indigenous researchers may be more likely to have career gaps, may be less likely to lobby for a first author position and/or if working with communities may see listing themselves as first author inappropriate, may put a focus on research with specific outcomes and prioritize accessibility over peer-reviewed publication, and may prioritize community-based research which can take significantly longer and result in false starts or stalls for research depending on community needs
- When considering references, consider cultural relevance. This may include not limiting eligibility to academic associates, and recognizing the expertise of community leaders and Elders if they wish to be references. Also recognize the unique contexts of these references and adapt ways to evaluate them without a required academic reference format
- Give options for references to be contacted over submitting detailed letters
- Consider the relevance of community-based initiatives and activities on CVs and resumes
- Do not average productive periods over unproductive periods, and do not make assumptions or judgements based on the stage of an applicant's career with their age, or regarding the length of their unproductive period
- Consider the context of the kind of research undertaken – community-based research, for example, often takes significantly longer to complete, which may result in fewer publications and fewer citations; thus, common metrics may not be an appropriate assessment of scholarly activity
- Assign value to collaborative efforts as well as ones in which a candidate was a leader or working on their own
- Consider giving Indigenous communities the ability to put forward a recommendation on candidates for the hiring committee to take into account

RETENTION AND PROGRESSION

The success of Indigenous applicants is based not only their acquisition of a position, but their continuing experience within the University. Memorial must strive not just to bring in Indigenous faculty and staff, but to reshape the environment of the University such that it is both welcoming and respectful in its interactions with Indigenous employees. Some initiatives to consider are to:

- Assist in the development of an Indigenous Employee Network, and consider how it may connect to other institutions or organizations if beneficial⁸
 - This ought to be led by Indigenous employees – the University may consider searching for a leader and providing resources for this initiative, but it should be Indigenous led
 - This group should have an individual in a position to affect change that they can report to, who can work to affect organizational change when necessary
- Develop programs for career counselling and mentoring, or ensure that other services are accessible to employees
 - While Indigenous leaders must be given opportunities to act as mentors in the institution, it is important not to create an environment that requires that Indigenous leaders prioritize mentoring above their own careers, or to put more of a focus on mentorship than non-Indigenous leaders; the institution must foster an environment in which Indigenous faculty and employees can seek mentorship from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous colleagues
 - Ensure that there are diverse Indigenous and non-Indigenous mentors that Indigenous Peoples have access to, and establish a degree of cultural literacy among non-Indigenous staff and faculty that may serve as mentors.
 - Establish an ongoing Elders-in-Residence program for Memorial University
- Encourage Indigenous employees, where appropriate, to undergo leadership training, gain career development training, and become part of the organization's leadership⁹

⁸ Bellegarde (2009), discusses how employee networks can provide necessary solidarity and companionship for Indigenous individuals. This may include a place to vent or discuss issues, as well as a forum for which to decide upon collective action to effect change. See: Bellegarde, Joan. 2009. [Establishing an Internal Aboriginal Employee Network for Saskatchewan Boards of Education](#). Research Report #09-08. Regina: Saskatchewan School Boards Association.

⁹Angus (1999) outlines the need for clear pathways to promotion and success for Indigenous employees. Without an environment that both encourages success and does not tolerate inequity, employees are likely

- Ensure that EAP programs are able to offer Indigenous-specific cultural options and are equipped to accommodate the needs of Indigenous employees¹⁰
- Ensure that there are Indigenous contacts in important touchstone areas, such as human resources, that can facilitate comfort and access to resources within the institution
- Recognize Indigenous-specific national events or traditions, and create space for them within the University

to suffer alienation, develop resentment, and leave. See: Angus, Joy. 1999. Strategies to Support the Recruitment, Retention and Professional Development of Indigenous Managers. *Aboriginal and Islander Health Worker Journal*, 23(6), pp.28-33.

¹⁰ See Morris (2017). Morris, Marika. 2017. [Indigenous recruitment and retention: Ideas and best practices from a literature review of academic and organizational sources](#). *Government of Canada*.

INTERSECTIONS WITH MEMORIAL POLICIES, PROCEDURES, AND PLANS

While many of the possible practices contained within this document are not formally in place Memorial, there are some policies and procedures that may either have designated room for the implementation of these and other initiatives, may have goals in line with the described principles, or may allow for parallel actions to those in this document that may achieve some or many of the same goals. When looking to fully understand the scope of Memorial's current state in terms of hiring for Indigenous Peoples, as well as other equity deserving groups, the following documents may provide vital information or make clear paths for action towards equity. Knowledge of these relating pieces may also be necessary when working towards change in the University system. The documents are constantly shifting, and so the context at the time of this document's use and its writing may vary significantly.

Policies:

[Employee Training and Development](#)

[Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in Employment](#)

[Recruitment and Selection of Non-Academic Employees](#)

[Workplace Accommodation](#)

[Collective Agreement:](#)

Article 7 Appointment of Faculty Members

Article 11 Tenure-Track Appointment and Tenure for Faculty Members

Article 23 Term Appointments

Article 24 Miscellaneous Appointments

Article 27 Miscellaneous Working Conditions

Article 30 Employment Equity

Additional Resources:

[Employment Equity and Diversity Plan: 2019 to 2021](#)

[Memorial University Planning](#)

[Strategic Framework for Indigenization 2021-2026](#)

FURTHER READING

- Angus, Joy. 1999. Strategies to Support the Recruitment, Retention and Professional Development of Indigenous Managers. *Aboriginal and Islander Health Worker Journal*, 23(6), pp.28-33.
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