Indigenous Learning Place Consultation Report

**Introduction:**

This report is a summary of the consultation process undertaken for the Indigenous Learning Place that spanned January to November 2017. This report provides the foundation for the design of the site. This next phase of the project will also continue consultations with communities, organizations, students, and staff/faculty. This report begins with a list of all those consulted, a general description of the process, a summary of the prominent points of feedback related to physical characteristics, underlying principles, desired use and events, and concludes with a brief set of general recommendations.

**Parties Consulted:**

**Students (Individuals):** Elisabeth Wallace, Pitseolak Pfeifer, Jess Martin, Dustin Cote, John Carlson

**Faculty (Individuals):**

Susan Ross, Zoe Todd, Manuel Baez

**Staff (Individuals):**

Benny Michaud, Irvin Hill, Naomi Sarazin

**Community Consultations:**

Pikwakanagan 2017/03/13

Tungasuvvingat Inuit 2017/06/26

Kitigan Zibi 2017/07/18

**On-campus Forums:**

Aboriginal Education Council (AEC) 2017/02/15

Ojigkwannon Visioning Session 2017/02/16

Rodney Nelson’s Aboriginal Enrichment Support Program class 2017/04/04
Consultation Process:

The consultation process encompasses diverse knowledge and without it, the Indigenous Learning Place project would be without clear direction nor reflect the needs of the Indigenous students, faculty, staff, and community members it is being designed for. In the current climate of the drive towards implementing reconciliation initiatives at Carleton University, this extensive consultation ensures that the Indigenous Learning Place will be supported.

While successful, there were a number of planned consultations that did not take place. This includes return sessions to Pikwakanagan and Kitigan Zibi paired with on-campus consultations and Tungasuvvingat Inuit (TI) that would have been paired with a tour of the site. Despite this, both communities and TI’s participants expressed a desire to continue later on with providing feedback on the design portion of the project. They felt that they had provided foundational ideas and would best be suited to provide more feedback later. Their contributions have been integral to the development of the project and any further contributions will provide useful and relevant feedback on the design. Key to the project are the continued relationships with the communities and organizations that must be nurtured and dealt with respectfully.

Physical characteristics:

This section provides an overview of suggestions given by consultation participants for both physical characteristics and key considerations they felt were important for the site. There are eleven points that will be briefly explained in the context of their application. They have been highlighted due to their considerable overlap across different consultations and/or (near) consensus amongst the participants in individual sessions or forums.
1. Medicine Garden

The inclusion of a medicine garden as a central component of the ILP came up in nearly every consultation. The garden would grow traditional medicines such as sage, tobacco, and sweet grass and be tended to by students, while offering learning opportunities for Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff, faculty, and students. Classes could be centred around learning and growing the medicines, and they would be available for use in ceremony. Overall, having a medicine garden would assist in education, cultural knowledge, and foster understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

2. Acknowledgement Plaque

The vast majority of consultation sessions included the idea that there should be some form of plaque acknowledging that the ILP is on unceded Algonquin territory. A number of sessions asserted that it should be written in both English and Algonquin, undeniably signaling through the language and visuals that the land is Algonquin. One session built on this concept through the idea of incorporating critical cartography in the form of additional plaques describing the history of the land and its continuing significance to Algonquin culture. Preliminary ideas for these plaques include a description of traditional and continuing Indigenous activity in the Ottawa area, with emphasis placed on the land surrounding Carleton. The plaques would serve as educational tools on the significance of the land to Indigenous peoples and its ongoing history.

3. Water Feature

There were also many suggestions for ways the ILP could incorporate physical traits that increase a connection to the land. Eight different consultations produced the suggestion to have some sort of water feature to represent the site’s close proximity to the Rideau River. Two ideas
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were to have a large stone canoe with running water and a pond. A more direct connection to the River was suggested twice in the form of a pathway or stairway leading to the water. Having an access point would recognize the significance of water while also offering students a more direct pathway to one of the most beautiful and historically significant locations on campus.

4. Trees

It was suggested that additional trees such as cedar be planted to ensure the space has more than coniferous trees and shrubs and recognizing the cultural significance that cedar has in Algonquin and other First Nations cultures. The presence of cedar trees would represent traditional and continuing uses of cedar by Indigenous peoples and potentially serve as a point of education on their significance.

5. Recognition of The Four Directions/Connection to The Land

A physical installation that signifies the Indigenous connection to land was a consistent factor in 4 consultations. Additionally, it was described as a recognition of the four directions or natural elements of earth, wind, fire and water. There were participants who suggested that a medicine wheel be represented through an installation such as a performance area/speaking platform, however this concept was critiqued by others who stated that such symbolism is too First Nations centric or pan-Indian. In one consultation, it was suggested that in order to avoid being too First Nations centric include a Medicine Wheel and add Algonquin representation in the centre of the wheel to recognize the territory, with other First Nations, Inuit, and Métis cultures and nations recognized through the directions pointing to their territories. An additional concept on direction came up in two consultations where it was suggested that the main entrance to the ILP be from the East.
6. Inuit and Métis Representation

The inclusion of meaningful Inuit and Métis representation in the site came up in a few consultation sessions. It was suggested that this could be done by hanging banners, physical displays of cultural symbols, and signage on the site. This would immediately signal that while it is on Algonquin land it is meant to be inclusive of all Indigenous peoples including Inuit and Métis. This kind of inclusion is important as nearly every on-campus consultation stated that many Inuit and Métis students feel left out of current Indigenous programs and spaces.

7. Mural

The suggestion of a mural to be painted on the exterior wall of Southam Hall facing the ILP appeared in 6 different consultations, but without specific imagery. However, general suggested concepts for design and process included contemporary Indigenous cultures and Peoples, equal representation between First Nations, Inuit, and Metis, and having students assist with both the design and painting.

8. Inclusive and Accessible Spaces for Ceremonial and Educational Practices

The vast majority of consultations included ideas for physical factors that would better enable ceremony and events to take place in the ILP. First of all, every student consultation and nearly all staff/faculty sessions stated that the Teepee should be moved from Robertson Hall to the ILP. Criticisms of the current location included the noise of the O-train passing by, the lack of visibility in relation to the centre of campus, and the distance from Ojigkwanong, making it difficult for Elders to participate in events at both sites. About 90% of the students consulted emphasized that they would prefer to have the teepee moved to the Quad, but that having it in the ILP would still be a considerable improvement. As part of this move, the majority of those consulted want the new location to be permanent so the Teepee is visible as a key fixture on
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campus. A couple of participants suggested water-proofing/winterizing the canvas of the teepee to allow year-round use, which would add to the permanence and allow for outdoor ceremony and teachings in the winter months.

9. Alternative Ceremonial and Educational Structures

In addition to the Teepee, five different sessions brought up having another structure that is more representative of Algonquin and/or Anishinaabeg culture, or even an Inuit structure. Students in particular emphasized that they don’t necessarily dislike the Teepee or want it removed, but would appreciate also having a structure that does not epitomize the stereotype that all First Nations lived in Teepees, and instead reflects the territory that Carleton University is on. Examples included an Algonquin pikogan, Anishinaabeg wigwam, an Inuit Qumma (similar to a wigwam), and an Inuit style canvas tent. The idea of an arbour also came up in five consultations, with participants asserting that it could serve as protection from the elements without being a fully enclosed structure. For the most part it was suggested that the arbour follow the standard format seen at many pow-wow grounds, whereby it has a full roof and is accompanied by seating. This would create another gathering space while offering a covered area for workshops, barbecues, feasts, and outdoor classes. A major component of ceremony for many Indigenous cultures is fire, and as such the majority of sessions mentioned having a space for a sacred fire. To avoid posing a “fire hazard” it was suggested to use a raised pit, similar to what was done when Walking With Our Sisters was at Carleton in 2015.

10. Accessibility

As a means to maximize the above ideas, there were a few important suggestions on how to make the ILP more accessible. This includes dedicated, nearby parking spots for Elders, to prevent them from having to walk large distances, paved pathways and/or ramps for those with
mobility issues, updated seating that is more comfortable and also accessible for those with mobility issues, and gender neutral bathrooms to help everyone feel welcome around the ILP.

11. New Building Structure

Lastly, six consultations suggested that a new building be built using part of the area being allotted for the Indigenous Learning Place. It was stated that it should be able to hold classes and workshops, and therefore must be a suitable size, with seating and multi-media functionality. To ensure that it is integrated with the rest of the ILP, many participants suggested that the building be made of glass and have the ability to open its walls to the outdoors. In addition, there was the idea to attach the new building to Ojigkwanong. This was proposed due to the relatively small size of Ojigkwanong and the rapidly growing number of Indigenous students at Carleton. Combining the new building with Ojigkwanong would not only relieve congestion, but also be showing of support to Indigenous students in recognizing their need for more study and relaxation space.

**Underlying Principles for the Design and Implementation of the ILP:**

While the physical traits of the future Indigenous Learning Place are going to be visible to those using it, the entirety of the project would best be served by being guided by a set of principles. In order to decide upon preliminary, underlying principles the topic was opened to participants in each consultation. This section summarizes the points of feedback received through the consultation process regarding principles that should form the foundation of the construction and use of the ILP.

a. Protocols For Use
A set of protocols should be established in the spirit of celebrating Indigenous cultures on the Carleton University campus that should be followed by everyone who uses the space, especially those who are non-Indigenous as they have less knowledge of Indigenous culture.

b. Limiting Types of Events

An extension of these to-be-determined protocols is a limit on the types of events that can be held that might include alcohol and/or events that may be seen as culturally insensitive or racist in character. There was an expressed desire to avoid having conference services operate booking of the space as their employees would likely lack the cultural awareness to fully accommodate organizer’s needs. It was suggested that instead the Centre for Indigenous Initiatives could take on this role. This way, students as well as external community groups and organizers booking the space would be more comfortable knowing that they are communicating with someone who understands what their event is about.

c. Ensuring The Space Is Welcoming

In consultation, it was felt that to prevent tokenistic representation, it was emphasized that the planning and operating of Inuit and Métis events should be done by Inuit and Métis Peoples as much as possible. Beyond scheduled events, it was also mentioned that the ILP should be developed as a place that is welcoming to children and other family members of Indigenous students, staff, and faculty. The logic is that if the ILP is to be a welcoming space for Indigenous students on campus, it should include those closest to them as well.

d. Acknowledging Guests in Algonquin Territory

While the ILP is designed to be welcoming, many participants in the consultations asserted that with a pathway going through the space, that those entering it must be aware of the
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significance. This goes beyond non-Indigenous people as anyone who is not Algonquin should be thinking about what it means to be a guest on Algonquin territory.

e. Centrality of Algonquin Peoples

There should be full inclusion and representation of all First Nations, Inuit, and Métis cultures, but Algonquin culture and land must be central to a large extent. Overall, all activity in the ILP must be done in the spirit of reciprocity and stewardship. It must be noted that in the consultations, a contradiction emerged with regards to balancing the representation of Algonquin culture with other First Nations, Inuit, and Métis cultures. During the consultation in Kitigan Zibi it was stressed that they would like the ILP to be physically and visually representative of Algonquin culture with all others—especially Inuit and Métis—being included only through events. The vast majority of consultations emphasized including other First Nations, Inuit and Métis cultures, while centering Algonquin culture. Despite the overwhelming support for representation of all Indigenous peoples, it must be acknowledged that Kitigan Zibi has a great deal of prominence and ties Carleton University which must be respected.

f. Carleton University Statement of Commitment

Looking forward to the design process and eventual opening of the Indigenous Learning Place, there were a number of points stressed by consultation participants. The most prominent seemed to be wanting firm statement of commitment from Carleton’s administration that the project will be going forward and that following its opening that the University will maintain and support it.

g. Indigenous-Led Design

The considerable preference for an Indigenous architect and/or designer was also expressed.
h. Final Name in Algonquin Language

As for the name of the name of the site, it was nearly universally agreed that it should be done in the Algonquin language in collaboration between Kitigan Zibi and Pikwakanagan. However, in many student sessions they expressed a desire to directly collaborate with the community members to choose a suitable name, offering the explanation that they know better than anyone how to reflect Indigenous learning on campus.

Use and Events:

Overall, it was suggested that the ILP should be used as a place for teaching and learning. The incorporation of spirituality or ceremony would be done through the use of the site. In addition it was also emphasized that it should be used as a gathering place where students can learn from one another. This applies to different Indigenous cultures or communities learning from one another as well as non-Indigenous students learning from Indigenous students. By offering such a gathering place, respectful dialogue and exchange of ideas can take place. As for events there were a variety of suggestions with many fitting the template set out by the ideas for physical characteristics. This is includes the following: film screenings on the wall of Southam Hall or “snow screenings” on a makeshift snow-screen like that put on by Howard Adler’s Asinabka Festival; hosting feasts and barbecues; concerts and performances by Indigenous artists; hosting rotating art installations; hosting a pow-wow; and having regalia building and pow-wow dancing workshops.

Personal Recommendations:

In the spirit of consensus building, I respectfully contribute my own recommendations for the ILP’s design process and final product. While I am non-Indigenous (and self-identify as a
I believe that with the knowledge I have gained through the consultation process and in pursuit of an M.A. in Indigenous and Canadian Studies I can offer some salient feedback.

Most importantly I believe there must be a design-consultation process that is at least as in-depth as the initial round that I was involved in. I personally feel that I could have done more with the consultation process in terms of depth and quantity and would like to see this improved on. While I feel that I have helped set a solid foundation for the design process, I believe that it can and should increase in quantity and quality moving forward. In addition, while I feel that I was suitable for my role in the consultations, I strongly recommend hiring an Indigenous research assistant should an R.A. be required. While I was helping to communicate (mostly) Indigenous voices, the design process will be about turning their feedback into something tangible. I would not feel comfortable doing this as a settler and I don’t think that another non-Indigenous graduate student should take on the role either. Lastly, I agree with many of those consulted who said they would like the project to be headed by and Indigenous architect and/or designers. Non-Indigenous professionals should be involved, but it is important that the key directives for design come from an Indigenous perspective.