

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)

The United Nations [*Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*](#) (UNDRIP) is a global attempt to raise the profile and even codify the rights of Indigenous people. It was introduced in 2007; Canada endorsed UNDRIP in 2010 as a non-legally binding document, and in 2016 Canada officially removed its objector status and adopted UNDRIP as a full supporter. Although Bill C262, which would have required all Canadian laws to be consistent with UNDRIP, died on paper, [Bill 41, the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act \(the Act\)](#), came into force in British Columbia on November 28, 2019.

UNDRIP and our work at Kerr Wood Leidal

We at Kerr Wood Leidal understand UNDRIP as a crucial element of the context in which we operate as Canadians and a business. Our collective obligation is to listen to Indigenous people and pay attention to emerging and evolving ways of advancing our relationship towards reconciliation. We have worked with more than 120 First Nation communities and completed over 600 projects. As a result, we understand the unique issues and challenges often faced by First Nations and offer several services explicitly tailored to the needs of our First Nations' clients.

Kerr Wood Leidal grew from a team of 4 to 180+ over 45 years, delivering engineering excellence to our clients. We are industry leaders in providing water, community, and energy-related engineering services to the municipal infrastructure and resource development sectors. Our team, about half of whom are owners, deliver practical, sustainable, and innovative results in providing creative solutions that push the boundaries of conventional practice.

For decades we have served Indigenous clients, acting as the link between First Nations and the government. Through funding programs, such as those provided by Indigenous Services Canada, we have worked with First Nations to improve living standards for Indigenous people in B.C. We developed and planned civil infrastructure and managed the design and construction of recreation centres, schools, and administration buildings. Our direction is evident: for reconciliation to occur, Indigenous people must be involved in decisions impacting them, particularly on the land. Within our industry, six themes emerge that guide our actions:

- Motivation for Engineers to work towards better consultation and engagement

- Patience to allow learning to inform the consultation process

- Community-focus with community involvement

Respect for community protocols and processes
Striving for a balance between different priorities.
Practical guidelines and transparent development processes.

These themes are formulated to allow our industry to serve Indigenous clients better and support reconciliation, thus providing a platform within which we apply UNDRIP. The stand Canadian businesses take now will resonate with and support the reconciliation efforts. Our position in the market, close collaboration and relationships with Indigenous communities, stakeholders, and governments place responsibility and expectations that we cannot ignore.

Accountability and Collaboration are key

We consider UNDRIP through the lens of our values: **Accountability, Collaboration, Excellence** and **Innovation**. Taking action towards reconciliation associated with these values helps us work effectively within a framework influenced by UNDRIP. We determined these were our central values through an internal collaborative process that involved all our staff, and they now guide our daily actions.

Two values, in particular, help us understand how to view UNDRIP. **Accountability** means we take pride in our work and build trust by following through on our commitments to our clients, partners and colleagues. KWL staff at all levels take responsibility for their work and strive to meet professional expectations and timelines. For us, lasting relationships are essential, guiding us to act with integrity towards our Indigenous clients, stakeholders, and governments. **Collaboration** with our internal and external clients, partners and colleagues produces the most robust outcomes.

We care about each other and strive to create a fun, open and engaging environment that leverages our individual strengths and encourages vibrant discussion. We aim to learn from each other: provide constructive feedback, and share knowledge, skills and experience.

For example, as a company focused on water infrastructure, although we rely on engineering principles, we have also learned that engineering and scientific knowledge must work effectively alongside the rich Indigenous traditional knowledge that exists. This consideration is consistent with our value of **Collaboration**.

Actions

As our relationships develop and strengthen, understanding Indigenous issues continues to be essential to us. Our values lead us organically in our actions. Several initiatives and activities

demonstrate how KWL lives our attitude towards reconciliation. We have a co-op program that enables Indigenous students a professional experience with KWL and propels them further in their careers through our existing relationships. We foster an internal climate of diversity and inclusivity. This extends to Indigenous Peoples and is a standard by which we treat all our employees and clients. In addition, we support many charities and non-profit organizations. We establish where the need is most urgent and how important the cause is to us. These charitable activities are determined organically through our relationships and are driven by our people, not policies.

Some of the initiatives we have supported in the past are:

Chief Joe Matthias BC Aboriginal Scholarship Fund
Squamish Nation Youth Lacrosse Camp
Tsain-Ko Development Corporation
Indian Residential School Survivors Society
the Brian Nadjiwon Memorial Scholarship, and many others.

We continue to give and support as the need arises, informed by our relationships.

But, we also support and respect Indigenous issues through corporate initiatives by observing celebratory days such as the National Indigenous Day and the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. We keep the latter by closing our doors in support of [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Call to Action #80](#). Although the private sector in Canada does not require this action, it supports our Indigenous employees, respects our Indigenous clients, and demonstrates our stand.

Furthermore, we answer [the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Call to Action #92](#) to the private sector in Canada in this way: we continue to build and maintain respectful relationships and work towards better consultation and engagement. Through these relationships, we create opportunities for employment, training and education for Indigenous Peoples within KWL and through charitable organizations and partnerships with academic institutions. We also educate our staff on Indigenous history, culture, treaties, and rights by offering time and reimbursement for personally chosen educational activities, bringing in educators and giving our employees the time to attend relevant events.

Commitment to listening and learning

We will continue to work together, using innovative and sustainable models.

We are committed to being a leader and protecting Indigenous Peoples' access to the engineering

field – as students, professional engineers, and beyond. But most importantly, we are committed to learning and listening and working true to our values, and in that way, we learn how to be best guided by UNDRIP.

One might say that in British Columbia — due to the modern treaty process, complex jurisprudence and the rich diversity of First Nations — we have been alive to the need for, and many ways of, achieving reconciliation for several decades. As a result, our approach evolves not only as we learn more but also as we listen and respond to the varied needs of each community. Continuous improvement is the goal in this dynamic environment and a challenge we rise to.