

Wading in Cultural Waters

Indigenous Engagement & Reconciliation Program



Wading in Cultural Waters is Ajijaak Mu-He-Kan's comprehensive Indigenous Engagement and Reconciliation program for organizations seeking to move from good intentions toward meaningful, measurable and sustainable action.

The program is built around a simple principle: **reconciliation is not a single initiative, training session, policy or public statement. It is reflected in how an organization operates, builds relationships, makes decisions, creates opportunities and demonstrates accountability over time.**

Rather than providing organizations with a predetermined reconciliation checklist, Wading in Cultural Waters begins by understanding where an organization is today. Through Ajijaak Mu-He-Kan's **Indigenous Engagement & Reconciliation Scorecard**, the organization's existing practices are assessed across key areas of operation. The findings are then used to develop a practical, organization-specific **Engagement & Reconciliation Action Plan** that identifies priorities, establishes measurable objectives and provides a pathway for continued improvement.

Ajijaak Mu-He-Kan can remain involved throughout that journey—supporting planning, implementation, relationship development, training, policy development, organizational change and periodic reassessment.

From Intention to Measurable Action

Many organizations want to strengthen their relationships with Indigenous Peoples and communities but are uncertain where to begin, what meaningful action looks like, or how to determine whether their efforts are producing genuine progress.

The Wading in Cultural Waters methodology creates a structured starting point.

The **Indigenous Engagement & Reconciliation Scorecard** examines the organization through five interconnected areas:

- **Physical Environment & Client Experience** — how physical spaces, locations, visual cues and client-facing environments contribute to an Indigenous-welcoming and culturally respectful experience.
- **Indigenous Procurement & Economic Participation** — the extent to which Indigenous businesses, suppliers, contractors and service providers participate in the organization's supply chain and economic activity.
- **Indigenous Engagement & Community Relationships** — how the organization builds, maintains and contributes to relationships with Indigenous communities, organizations and people.
- **Indigenous Marketing, Communications & Public Representation** — how Indigenous Peoples, communities, cultures and relationships are represented in communications, branding, marketing and public-facing activities.
- **Human Resources & Organizational Culture** — how recruitment, employment practices, retention, advancement, workplace policies, cultural awareness and organizational culture support Indigenous employees and meaningful reconciliation.

The purpose of the Scorecard is not simply to award a grade.

It is intended to create an **evidence-based organizational snapshot** that helps identify existing strengths, gaps, inconsistencies and opportunities. Organizations may discover that considerable reconciliation activity is already occurring but has never been coordinated, measured or incorporated into a broader strategy. Others may identify areas where public commitments have progressed more quickly than internal systems, procurement practices, employment strategies or community relationships.

The Scorecard helps make those differences visible.

The Engagement & Reconciliation Action Plan

Assessment is only the beginning.

Following the Scorecard process, Ajijaak Mu-He-Kan works with the organization to translate the findings into a customized **Engagement & Reconciliation Action Plan**.

Rather than attempting to address every opportunity simultaneously, the Action Plan helps establish practical priorities based on the organization's circumstances, capacity, geography, industry, workforce, clientele and existing Indigenous relationships.

Actions can be organized into immediate, short-, medium- and longer-term objectives and may include initiatives related to:

Indigenous procurement and supplier development; recruitment and retention; workplace policies; cultural awareness and competency; physical spaces; community engagement; Indigenous partnerships; communications practices; sponsorship and

community participation; leadership accountability; measurement and reporting; and relationship development.

Where appropriate, responsibilities, timelines, measurable indicators and review points can be established so that reconciliation becomes part of normal organizational planning rather than remaining an isolated initiative.

The objective is to create a plan that is **ambitious enough to produce meaningful change while practical enough to be implemented.**

Supported Implementation

A distinguishing feature of Wading in Cultural Waters is that Ajijaak Mu-He-Kan's involvement does not have to end when the assessment and Action Plan are completed.

Organizations can retain Ajijaak Mu-He-Kan as an ongoing advisor and implementation partner.

Depending on organizational needs, that support may include:

Facilitating relationships with Indigenous communities and organizations; reviewing or developing policies; supporting Indigenous procurement strategies; assisting with Indigenous recruitment and retention initiatives; reviewing communications and public representation; identifying community participation opportunities; advising leadership teams; facilitating internal discussions; supporting implementation teams; and helping evaluate progress against the Action Plan.

This approach recognizes that meaningful Indigenous Engagement cannot always be developed entirely from inside an organization. Relationships require time, context, trust and an understanding of how to engage appropriately.

Ajijaak Mu-He-Kan helps organizations build that capacity while supporting the development of relationships that can increasingly stand on their own.

A Philosophy of Relationship, Reciprocity and Continuous Improvement

Wading in Cultural Waters does not approach reconciliation as an exercise in organizational perfection.

Organizations begin from different places. Their histories, industries, locations, resources, Indigenous relationships and opportunities are different. Meaningful progress therefore

cannot always be measured by whether every organization performs exactly the same activities.

The program instead emphasizes **intentional progress, reciprocity, relationships and accountability**.

Meaningful Engagement and Reconciliation should create value for Indigenous Peoples and communities, but it can also strengthen the organization itself. Stronger relationships can contribute to improved recruitment and retention, broader supplier networks, new partnerships, stronger community relationships, better decision-making, increased cultural understanding and greater organizational resilience.

For this reason, reconciliation should not be viewed solely as something an organization does *for* Indigenous Peoples.

At its strongest, it becomes part of a **reciprocal relationship in which organizations and Indigenous Peoples, businesses and communities can create opportunity and value together**.

The Scorecard therefore serves as both a measurement tool and a conversation starter. Periodic reassessment can demonstrate progress, identify emerging priorities and help ensure that the Action Plan evolves alongside the organization and its relationships.

The goal is not simply to increase a score.

The goal is for improvements in the score to reflect improvements in organizational behaviour, relationships and outcomes.

Learning That Supports Organizational Change

Education and facilitated learning form an important supporting component of the program.

Ajijaak Mu-He-Kan's **Wading in Cultural Waters workshop series** helps employees, leadership teams and implementation groups develop the knowledge and perspective necessary to understand both the reasons for reconciliation and the practical considerations involved in meaningful Indigenous Engagement.

Supporting workshops include:

Wading in Cultural Waters Part One: Why Engagement and Reconciliation Matter

Explores the historical and contemporary context that has created the need for reconciliation and examines why meaningful Indigenous Engagement can matter to organizations, employees, communities and long-term organizational success.

Wading in Cultural Waters Part Two: What Engagement Looks Like

Moves from understanding to relationship-building, examining intention, introductions, presence in community, reciprocity, cultural considerations and practical approaches to developing respectful Indigenous relationships.

Wading in Cultural Waters Part Three: Built for Engagement

Focuses on how organizations can embed Engagement and Reconciliation into their operational structures, policies, procurement practices, workplaces, communications and decision-making.

Reconciliation Through Employment

Provides a more focused examination of Indigenous employment, including community relationships, career exposure, competency-based recruitment, transferable skills, onboarding, cultural safety, retention, advancement and organizational accountability.

Workshops can be delivered independently, but within the broader Wading in Cultural Waters program they serve an additional purpose: **they help build the internal understanding and organizational capacity required to successfully implement the Action Plan.**

A Pathway, Not a Destination

Wading in Cultural Waters is ultimately designed to provide organizations with a pathway.

Assess where you are.

Understand why it matters.

Determine where you want to go.

Build a practical plan.

Take meaningful action.

Develop reciprocal relationships.

Measure progress.

Continue improving.

Ajijaak Mu-He-Kan works alongside organizations throughout that process, providing the assessment tools, Indigenous perspective, facilitation, advisory support and practical implementation assistance necessary to turn reconciliation commitments into organizational practice.

The result is not simply a reconciliation document.

It is a framework for building an organization that is increasingly **prepared for Indigenous Engagement, capable of sustaining meaningful relationships, accountable for its commitments and positioned to participate in reconciliation through practical action.**