



Indigenous Relations Initiative

Strategic Plan

2020-2025



McGill

School of
Continuing Studies

School of Continuing Studies'

Indigenous Relations Initiative

Strategic Plan

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Land Acknowledgement

McGill University is located on land which has long served as a site of meeting and exchange amongst Indigenous Peoples, including the Haudenosaunee and Anishinabeg Nations. We acknowledge and thank the diverse Indigenous Peoples whose footsteps have marked this territory on which peoples of the world now gather.

Consultation

The School's Indigenous Relations Initiative Strategic Plan has been guided by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC 2015) and the Final Report of the Provost's Task Force on Indigenous Studies and Indigenous Education (2017), which was developed through extensive consultation with Indigenous stakeholders on campus and with Indigenous communities and organizations off campus (p. 27).

Informed by these reports, we engaged in a process of consultation with internal and external stakeholders. Internal stakeholders included McGill University students, staff, faculty, and course lecturers; external stakeholders included Indigenous organizations and partners.

First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples who participated in the process of consultation taught us that Indigenous Peoples view the world through the lenses of interconnectedness and interrelationship with community members. We incorporated these Indigenous worldviews into the development of this Plan.





Terminology

In this document, we use the adjectives “**Aboriginal**” and “**Indigenous**” interchangeably when referring collectively to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples. Both terms are broadly considered to be appropriate, but the use of “**Indigenous**” has increasingly become the preferred term since the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP 2007). The term “**Aboriginal**” is used more frequently in Canadian policy and legislation (Younging, 2018, p. 55). It is important to note that both terms are potentially homogenizing, as neither captures the diversity of languages and cultures encompassed by the people these words describe.





Reconciliation

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada produced an extensive seven-volume report that examined the history and legacy of colonization in Canada. Reconciliation is the process of establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples (TRC, 2015). This process requires us to come to terms with the historical and continuing realities of colonization in Canada. As the TRC (2015a) emphasizes, a mutually respectful relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples can be established and maintained only when there is “awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour” (pp. 6-7).

Education is a cornerstone of the TRC’s Calls to Action. Education and employment gaps still exist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has called upon Canadian institutions to take steps to close these gaps (TRC, 2015b) and educate all Canadians on the historical relationship between Indigenous Peoples and the federal government, and to develop policies and programs that reduce education and employment gaps for Indigenous Peoples.





SCS Commitment to Reconciliation

As part of the University's commitment to reconciliation, a Task Force on Indigenous Studies and Indigenous Education was convened by the Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic) to respond to the TRC. The Final Report of the Provost's Task Force (2017) echoes the TRC in issuing 52 Calls to Action, which "must be taken up in earnest, robustly, by all actors within our University community" (McGill Provost, 2017, p. 5).

As an important actor within the University community, SCS has taken a first step toward reconciliation by creating a unit called the Indigenous Relations Initiative (IRI). One of the core missions of SCS is to build bridges, whether between the University and communities, between the University and its students, or between classroom teaching and learning and the world of work. It is our School's social responsibility to serve communities and underrepresented individuals who have had, and may still have, difficulties in accessing and advancing through higher education.

The School recognizes that it has a responsibility to provide opportunities for Indigenous Peoples to access higher education. For the last ten years, we have been working on building capacity in Indigenous communities, building strong relationships with partners, and forging connections with Indigenous alumni. The focus of the IRI is to extend our efforts and to work together collectively with internal and external stakeholders towards common goals of human advancement and betterment by leveraging our resources. We are at a critical point in time in our long-standing work with Indigenous communities, and the time is right for a focused Indigenous Relations Initiative Strategic Plan at the School.

The SCS Indigenous Relations Initiative Strategic Plan is part of the University's broader commitment to reconciliation and has been developed in response to the Calls to Action of the TRC and the Final Report of the Task Force on Indigenous Studies and Indigenous Education (2017).





SCS Indigenous Relations Initiative Strategic Plan

This Plan responds to the Calls to Action laid out in the Final Report of the Provost's Task Force on Indigenous Studies and Indigenous Education (2017). In response to the Calls to Action, we asked ourselves, "What meaningful outcomes do we want to bring about for SCS Indigenous learners and their communities?," and "What actions do we need to carry out to reach these outcomes?"

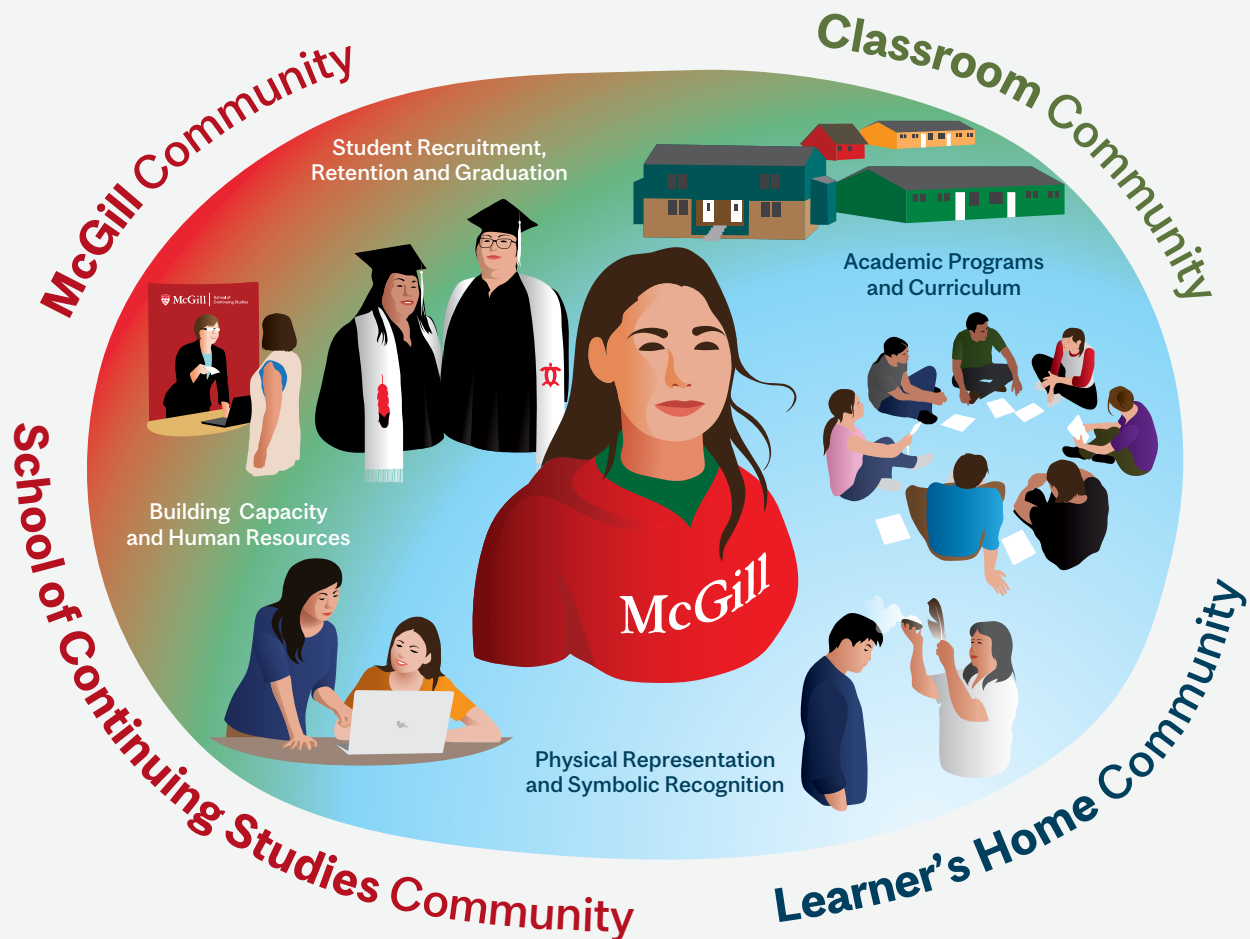
Our approach to identifying the actions and outcomes has been holistic. The actions of our Indigenous Relations Initiative Strategic Plan are grouped into four areas:

- Area 1: Academic Programs and Curriculum
- Area 2: Student Recruitment and Retention
- Area 3: Building Capacity and Human Resources
- Area 4: Physical Representation and Symbolic Recognition

We acknowledge that Indigenous knowledge emphasizes community and personal relationships, personal experience, and interconnectedness, and that Indigenous learning requires a holistic approach. As depicted in the illustration below, the Indigenous learner is interconnected with the 4 areas of focus.



Integrated Approach Centered Around the Student



With the learner at the centre, this plan is not envisaged as a linear process, but rather one in which the desired outcomes and actions are interconnected. Included within these areas of focus are the kinds of support that students may need from the moment they think of coming to SCS to the moment they become graduates and ambassadors in their communities. Furthermore, we do not see the Indigenous learner as an isolated identity but rather as part of larger and various communities. The learner is part of their home community, the classroom community, the SCS community, and the McGill University community. SCS therefore takes a «whole-community» approach to Indigenous learning.



Area 1.0

Academic Programs and Curriculum



In this area, we will focus on playing a significant role in creating transitional access to diverse programming, obtaining university credentials, and developing and fostering strong relationships with various partners to build capacity within Indigenous communities.

The School of Continuing Studies is primarily a teaching faculty but also an incubator for innovative approaches to professional and lifelong learning grounded in applied research and practice. It was through a research grant that SCS launched the University's first online program for Indigenous learners living in remote communities. To date, we have developed six programs specifically for Indigenous learners.

In this area, SCS demonstrates its commitment to innovation and leadership in the integration and understanding of Indigenous culture and knowledge into our program curricula and pedagogy. We aim to design academic content that is holistic, welcoming, and reflective of the realities of Indigenous students. For example, most textbooks and case studies are likely to be written by non-Indigenous authors, and the content of book chapters or articles often reflects big business or urban settings with Western ideologies and perspectives. We believe that incorporating the ideas, experiences, and perspectives of Indigenous learners and researchers into our academic content will make our courses and programming richer and more inclusive.

Beyond improving the inclusion of Indigenous learners, SCS recognizes that it is critical to offer opportunities for all students, SCS faculty members, and course lecturers to gain awareness of Indigenous epistemologies, values, and worldviews. We will ensure that SCS faculty members and course lecturers are able to participate successfully in this area of the initiative, and we will reach out to community leaders, Indigenous faculty, and Indigenous organizations to work with us in offering cultural awareness training.

Indigenous Peoples face barriers intersecting geographic, economic, and technological barriers to higher education. In this area, we will take key steps to address some of these barriers. For instance, Indigenous learners who live in rural or remote communities generally do not have local access to higher education. In order to pursue postsecondary education, they must leave their communities to live and study in larger population centres where they are disconnected from their support networks and may feel isolated and out of place. We will make SCS courses and programs more accessible to Indigenous learners in part through diverse modes of delivery. This means developing programs that are community based, online, on- or off-campus, cohort-based, intensive, and/or summer programs. Many of these programs will also allow Indigenous learners to engage with the University community while maintaining strong relationships with their support networks at home.

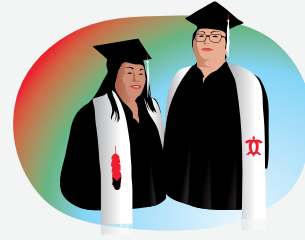


Provost's Call to Actions	Meaningful Outcome	Actions	Timeline
Introduce Indigenous content and engage with Indigenous pedagogies, epistemologies, values, and worldviews in academic curricula and programs.	Indigenous students have meaningful and relevant learning experiences	Organize on- and off-site workshops for teaching staff on designing courses using an Indigenous-centered approach/perspective (e.g., storytelling, narratives, experiential learning, and land-based learning).	Spring 2021
		Hire an Indigenous Instructional Designer, or one with deep familiarity with Indigenous learning, especially for online course development.	Spring 2022
		Build a repertoire of case studies related to Indigenous organizations, government, and businesses.	Fall 2024
Develop a diversity of academic programs, such as community-based, online, on- or off-campus, cohort based, intensive (e.g. two weeks) certificates, and summer programs.	Building capacity to narrow gaps between education and employment rates for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people	The School has been leading in this effort by delivering onsite, online, and tailored programs both remotely in communities and on campus. SCS will continue to nurture ongoing partnerships and cultivate new ones to learn about developing needs of Indigenous communities and create delivery approaches that meet their needs.	Ongoing
Create opportunities for students and faculty to learn about the TRC and Indigenous cultures and worldviews.	Non-Indigenous people become familiar with the history and legacy of residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal Rights	Hold cultural and historical awareness workshops/webinars for SCS faculty and administrative and teaching staff.	Spring 2021
		In collaboration with relevant stakeholders at SCS and the University, identify areas within programs/courses where Indigenous content can be included, and/or offer an Indigenous studies elective course.	Fall 2021
Establish explicit transition pathways between specific high schools, specific CEGEPs, and McGill University.	Pathways into Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) professional programs.	In collaboration with McGill's Enrollment Services and various faculties, design and develop a blended online land-based Science, Technology, Engineering and Medicine (STEM) Program for off-site delivery.	Winter 2022
Award transfer credit or advanced standing for Indigenous languages taught within communities.	Supporting communities in the Revitalization of Indigenous languages	Partner with school boards and Indigenous organizations who teach Indigenous languages within their communities to access the language courses and have them accepted for advanced university credit	Fall 2023



Area 2.0:

Student Recruitment and Retention



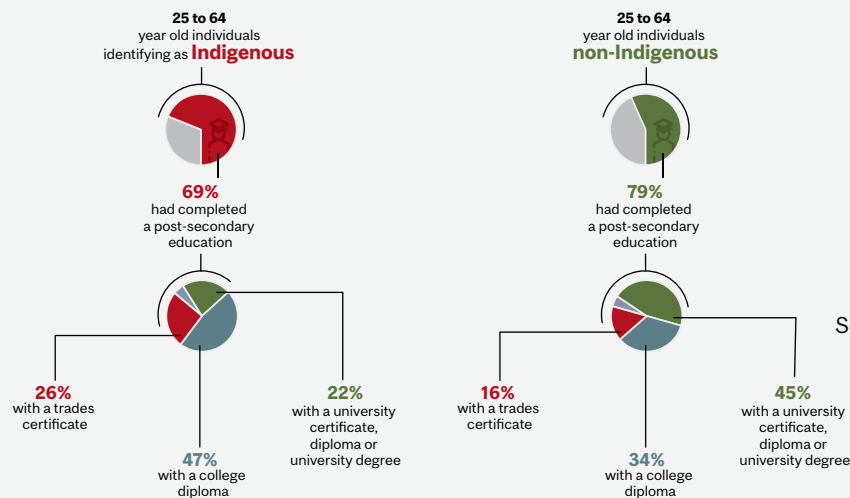
The education and employment gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations is wide. In this area, we focus on our recruitment and retention efforts, including developing support services and financial support that will help students to attend and graduate from their programs.

Through its initiatives in the area of student recruitment and retention, McGill's School of Continuing Studies (SCS) aims to respond to the TRC's call to develop strategies to reduce education and employment gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations (2015b). Today, one in three Indigenous learners at McGill University is enrolled at SCS. In 2019, over 114 Indigenous learners enrolled in an SCS program, and more than 150 registered in an independent course. We are committed to increasing the number of Indigenous learners at SCS and to ensuring their academic success.

Indigenous Peoples are the fastest-growing population in Canada. Nearly 1.7 million people identified as Indigenous in the 2016 census. It is estimated that the population of Indigenous Peoples will grow to more than 2.5 million, or 6.5% of the overall population, by 2036. Indigenous Millennials (born between 1980 and 1997) and members of Generation Z (born after 1997) together account for a significant percentage of the Indigenous population. This shift has implications for higher education, and we can expect to see a significant increase in the number of Indigenous learners enrolled at SCS in the coming decade.

Although an increasing number of young Indigenous learners have some form of post-secondary education, Indigenous Peoples in Canada are proportionately less likely to be university graduates than are non-Indigenous people.

Education

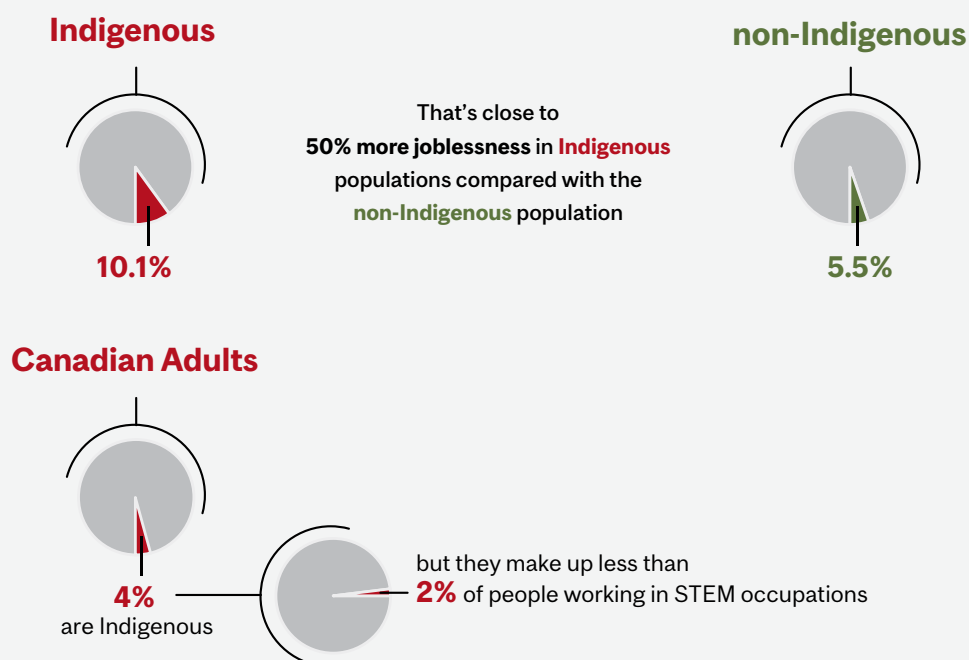


Source: Statistics Canada, 2016



There is also a wide employment gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

The unemployment gap in 2019



Source: The Conference Board of Canada, 2020

Indigenous Peoples are more likely to have lower wages due to the vast gap in education. In 2016, the median total income of the Indigenous population aged 25 to 54 was just over \$33,500 compared to over \$48,000 for the non-Aboriginal population (Statistics Canada, 2016).

Indigenous learners also often face significant financial barriers in paying for their education. Although some Indigenous learners are eligible for funding allocated by the federal government, these funds are limited and are distributed at the community level to an ever-increasing number of candidates. In some cases, this funding is distributed preferentially to younger students attending full-time studies rather than mature students. Indigenous learners may also have difficulty saving sufficient funds for education due to limited employment opportunities in their communities and higher cost of living in the North. In this area, we focus on our recruitment and retention efforts, including developing support services and financial support that will help students to attend and graduate from their programs.



Provost's Call to Actions	Meaningful Outcome	Actions	Timeline
Establish undergraduate and graduate enrolment targets; by 2022 an aspirational target of 1,000 Indigenous students enrolled at McGill.	Increase the number of Indigenous students earning a certificate or diploma.	Increase our enrollment goal by 10% for following undergraduate and graduate programs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Administration and Governance • Indigenous Business Management • Computers and Information Technology • Health and Social Services Management 	Ongoing
Create marketing and mentoring communication tools such as videos and radio advertisements, including those that target Cree and Inuit audiences living in remote Northern Quebec communities in their own languages.		Three Program Awareness Videos have been produced; Develop a recruitment awareness and communication campaign plan using the videos to reach out to remote Indigenous communities.	Ongoing
		Indigenous graduates are the ambassadors for the next generation of McGill University graduates. We will profile and celebrate Indigenous learners and alumni through SCS/McGill website, newsletters, national and local community papers, radio, and homecoming events, etc.	Ongoing
Outreach to Indigenous communities		Coordinate recruitment efforts with Central's Enrollment Services' Indigenous Outreach Associates.	Ongoing
		Hire an Indigenous Community Liaison and Engagement Coordinator to work in Northern Quebec, to liaise between the remote communities and SCS.	Fall 2022
Facilitate and expand access to McGill.		We have a qualifying program to facilitate access into graduate-level programs. The next step is to expand access for working Indigenous learners living in Canada's Eastern and Western time zones so that they can enroll in evening online courses/programs.	Fall 2022
Establish a Proactive Accompaniment program: provide academic, social, financial, and cultural support to students who are recruited to McGill, retain them and support them through to graduation.	Increase student retention and success across SCS programs.	Develop and implement workshops and /or support services through SCS's Career Advising and Transition Services (CATS).	Winter 2021
		Collaborate with McGill Association of Continuing Education Students (MACES) to establish financial support for tutorial services.	Fall 2022
Improve financial support for Indigenous students.	Financial barriers are a major factor in Indigenous learners not attending or completing their education. Remove financial barriers.	Increase the number of scholarships and bursaries for Indigenous students.	Fall 2022
		In collaboration with Central and SCS' University Advancement, create an awareness campaign to raise scholarships, bursaries, and awards for Indigenous learners.	Spring 2021



Area 3.0:

Building Capacity and Human Resources



In this area, we will focus on faculty and staff recruitment, engagement, and retention to create an equitable workplace.

Indigenous Peoples are vastly underrepresented in the higher education system as academic faculty, part-time course lecturers, and administrative staff. We are committed to creating an equitable workplace that incorporates and respects a diversity of cultures. In this area, we focus on recruiting Indigenous faculty to teach and embark on Indigenous initiatives that are important to them and SCS Indigenous learners, and on hiring Indigenous staff for various roles at all levels. We also recognize that it is critical to engage and retain Indigenous faculty and staff and will therefore embrace a holistic approach to the creation of relevant support services.

Provost's Call to Actions	Meaningful Outcome	Actions	Timeline
Articulate local targets for Indigenous hires in the next five years, and establish and support active, innovative, and equitable recruitment strategies that respect and support Indigenous Peoples.	McGill SCS advances diversity and equity and demonstrates efforts to amend and improve relationships with Indigenous Peoples	In collaboration with the Provost's Office and SCS Human Resources, develop a recruitment strategy to attract and recruit two Indigenous academic faculty for non-tenure track positions.	Fall 2021
		Over the next three years, attract and recruit three Indigenous course lecturers to teach at SCS.	Fall 2023
Support the retention of Indigenous faculty	A comprehensive support system for SCS Indigenous employees	In collaboration with the Provost's Office, appoint a McGill Indigenous faculty or staff as a mentor for newly hired Indigenous faculty and administrative staff.	Fall 2021
		In collaboration with the Office of the Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic), create opportunities for Indigenous staff to engage socially in culturally relevant activities (e.g., gathering for smudging ceremonies, storytelling, and sharing personal learning experiences).	Ongoing



Area 4.0:

Physical Representation and Symbolic Recognition



In this area, we are committed to creating an inclusive educational environment that respects and promotes Indigenous culture, protocols, and art on and in SCS's physical and virtual space

SCS is committed to creating an inclusive environment in which Indigenous learners can connect and feel a sense of belonging. Many of the spaces, structures, and surroundings of Canadian universities typically emphasize Western forms and perspectives over Indigenous ones, and are potentially alienating to Indigenous learners. Therefore, we will focus on integration of Indigenous protocols in SCS ceremonies and functions, and of Indigenous symbols and representation (artistic and written) in our physical and virtual spaces.

Embracing and emphasizing Indigenous protocols, symbols, and creative works is part of the larger project of integrating and embedding Indigenous culture, values, and perspectives in the life of the University. Our initiatives in this area are intended to enrich the experiences of all members of the campus community and to transform the University into a more welcoming environment for Indigenous learners. These initiatives are therefore critical to the success of the recruitment and retention initiatives described in Area 2.0.

Provost's Call to Actions	Meaningful Outcome	Actions	Timeline
Establish mechanisms that increase Indigenous community representation on campus, at ceremonies, and at convocation.	Acknowledgement of the traditional stewards of the land on which McGill University resides.	Include land acknowledgement on SCS website, documents, and opening remarks of internal and external events. Highlight the strategic plan and relevant information as part of SCS' EDI landing page on the website.	Fall 2020
	Recognition of diverse Indigenous art, photos, and iconography.	At SCS, incorporate physical representation such as signs and symbols, art installations, and photos of Indigenous learners and graduates.	Winter 2021
	Integrate Indigenous worldview during convocation celebrations.	Upon successful completion of a credit program, Indigenous learners attend a special convocation dinner hosted by McGill University's First Peoples' House. Graduating students receive a designed scarf as recognition of their achievements. The special ceremony is shared with family, friends, McGill staff, and others who have been involved in the learners' educational careers.	Ongoing





Closing Remarks and Acknowledgments

While the development of this Plan is a crucial first step in the SCS reconciliation journey, we are aware that the real work begins once we take action to turn the words on the page into tangible outcomes. At SCS, we are no strangers to challenge, and we embrace this new task with enthusiasm and commitment.

We sincerely thank all those who participated in interviews and discussions, and in the process of preparing this document. Special thanks to our Indigenous learners, alumni, and partners. We look forward to working with you in the coming years on the implementation of this Strategic Plan.



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