



# FROM TRUTH TO RECONCILIATION

Redefining Archaeology in Ontario

## Recommendations



**From Truth to Reconciliation:**  
Redefining Archaeology in Ontario  
Recommendations

Prepared for the Ontario Archaeological Society  
by  
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# *Executive Summary*

The theme of the 2017 symposium of the Ontario Archaeological Society—From Truth to Reconciliation: Redefining Archaeology in Ontario—is an acknowledgment that Supreme Court decisions, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) Calls to Action, and United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) have direct and immediate consequences for how archaeology is practiced in Ontario. We recognize that the relationship between archaeology and First Nations peoples must change; however, the specific nature and direction that these changes must take is unclear—particularly given the complex and intertwined web of legislation that governs archaeological practice in Ontario. At the conference, we grappled with the problem of how to practice an archaeology that respects Indigenous rights, while operating within a regulatory system that does not yet fully recognize those rights.

Our goal was to explore what redefining the relationship between First Peoples and archaeologists could mean, both in “grounded” archaeological practice and in our conceptual frameworks. To that end, we invited representatives from Indigenous communities across the province to share their perspectives on the current state of the relationship and how it can be improved. The Nations United session that took place at the beginning of the conference was audio recorded. The following text outlines some of the main themes, perspectives, and messages shared during this open round-table discussion.



# *Overarching Themes*

**Gratitude/  
The Creator**

**Ancestors**

**Relationships**

**The Land/  
Mother Earth**

**The Sacred**

**Responsibility**

**Colonialism/  
TRC**

**Healing**

**Knowledge**

# Key Themes & Subthemes

## **Responsibility**

- Community
- Ancestral responsibility
- Keepers of the land and knowledge
- Repatriation

## **Legislation/Policy**

- Duty to consult and other, similar protocols

## **Knowledge**

- Spiritual knowledge
- Education and resources

## **Cultural Barriers**

- Cultural appropriateness
- Colonialism
- Mistrust

## **Rights**

- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC)

## **Respect**

- Lack of respect
- Walking together

## **Visualizing the Future**

- Self-governance/determination
- Canadian government support

## **Resiliency/Loss/Reconciliation**



# *Initial Recommendations for Next Steps*

- Centre **relationship-based practice**. Archaeologists must remember that, in Indigenous communities, relationships are not just with people, but with land, water, all of creation, and ancestors.
- Walk together, while **shifting power to Indigenous communities/First Nations**.
- **Honour Indigenous connection to land and responsibility**. This understanding is conceptually different than the Western worldview that informs archaeological practice. Archaeologists need to learn from First Nations and work within Indigenous worldviews/the worldview of the community that they are working with.
- **Listen**, and listen with our hearts. This means deep listening and empathetic listening with the intention to learn and act.
- **Engage respectfully when an outsider in a community during a project**. That means participating when invited to, and being mindful of your positionality at all times. In addition, as allies, we must work to create spaces where Indigenous communities and archaeologists can come together to discuss the future of archaeology and to establish best practices.





# Part A: Symposium Key Themes

This section elaborates on key themes found within the conference proceedings, as outlined above. These themes were generated based on the conference participants' thoughts, which were presented during a sharing circle. Each of the participants is a member of one of 20 Indigenous communities and Indigenous Nations. Participants included community members, band employees, and members of the archaeological/historical society.

## *Responsibility*

Many participants indicated that responsibility was an essential ingredient to reconciliation in archaeology. Responsibility was expressed as being responsible to community and ancestors, being responsible as keepers of land and knowledge, and, as a settler/archaeological community, being responsible for repatriation. This responsibility and connection to the land and community was expressed by a participant who stated, "...I wanted to make this known today [...] our connection to the land is real. It's not just a physical connection, it's a spiritual connection. And those remains—I don't even like calling them remains—our ancestors are in the ground, and when they're unearthed, they're disturbed. They're woken up."<sup>1</sup>

## *Legislation and Policy*

The theme of legislation and policy was a recurring topic throughout the sharing circle and conference proceedings. One main aspect of legislation and policy that was discussed in depth was the duty to consult, and how duty to consult is understood and implemented in regards to archaeology. According to one participant, "with regards to the duty to consult, this has been a longstanding issue that we've been faced with, not just in the Heritage and Burials file, but also on our Environment files."<sup>2</sup> Participants also discussed numerous challenges that Indigenous communities face during the duty to consult process. According to another participant, "the duty to consult in archaeology is non-existent. [...] The duty to consult does not exist in archaeology. Archaeologists are currently required to 'engage' with First Nations at Stage 3 of an archaeological assessment under the terms and conditions of their licenses. This is not part of the duty to consult—although many people think that it is."<sup>3</sup> Another participant agrees that with respect to the duty to consult "the fundamental approach of the government is wrong."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Regina Mandamin

<sup>2</sup> Regina Mandamin

<sup>3</sup> Julie Kapyrka

<sup>4</sup> Ron Bernard



## *Rights*

Another important theme identified by participants was that of Indigenous rights, especially pertaining to UNDRIP and the TRC. It is important to understand how these rights are intertwined and relevant to legislation and policy, such as the duty to consult. This connection was made clear when a participant stated, “and this<sup>1</sup> comes right back to Aboriginal rights to cultural heritage and the duty to consult in this province. Even despite Sections 11 and 12 of UNDRIP, that state Indigenous peoples have the right to archaeological sites and ancestral remains...”<sup>5</sup> In addition, consent was also identified as a key component to Indigenous human rights, as was the notion that communities must have consent on everything that happens within their territories.

## *Respect*

In regards to respect, participants discussed two main points. 1) the lack of respect that Indigenous communities receive, and 2) the idea of walking together as Indigenous and non-Indigenous/settler communities in the future.

First, many participants addressed the lack of respect that Indigenous communities receive from the government and Canadian society as a whole. For example, participants expressed that Canadian law does not truly recognize Indigenous peoples and communities. In addition, participants indicated that the best way for archaeologists to work respectfully with Indigenous communities is to listen deeply and understand who Indigenous peoples are.

Second, the idea of walking together in the future was discussed by many participants. Walking together requires a respectful relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. One participant explained it as follows: “...this reconciliation is us moving together, walking side by side, instead of continuing to adhere to these antiquated principles and culturally inappropriate principles of doctrine and discovery, terra nullius, feudal legal concepts.”<sup>6</sup> Another participant stated that they believe walking together can work in the future based on “...some pretty decent people that respect...,” and that they’d be “...looking forward to that respect that we have for each other to be able to do what’s proper.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Julie Kapyrka

<sup>6</sup> Regina Mandamin

<sup>7</sup> Darren Henry



### *Visualizing the Future*

The theme of visualizing the future as a way forward was also discussed at length by participants. Specifically, participants identified the future of archaeology in their communities as being dependent on self-governance and self-determination, as well as Canadian government support (namely, through legislation).

In regards to self-governance and self-determination, one participant addressed the importance of Indigenous peoples being the primary workforce in regards to archaeology in Indigenous communities. They stated, “you have an archaeologist, you have a First Nations person. And to me at some point, I would like to see that become one. That our monitors, eventually our workforce, become the archaeologists that are moving this issue into the future.”<sup>8</sup> Another participant added that their community needs to be able to build capacity. It was also noted that an Indigenous workforce includes “...not only do[ing] the digging and the dirty work, but the analysis component, and coming back to the communities...”<sup>9</sup> In addition, participants discussed the need for Canadian government support, specifically in terms of legislation and honouring Indigenous legal traditions. One participant noted that “...the laws and the policies need to go further and be more reflective of the Indigenous realities and incorporate our legal principles...”<sup>10</sup>

### *Knowledge*

Indigenous knowledge and the power of Indigenous knowledge was a major theme of the sharing circle. Participants discussed the power of Indigenous spiritual knowledge, and the need for supporting Indigenous education and ensuring that archaeological resources are easily and readily available to Indigenous communities. The importance of respecting Indigenous spiritual knowledge and connection was made clear by a participant who explained, “I think that is important for government and the archaeological community to be aware of. [...] we need to always keep that spiritual connection and respect those protocols and respect the wishes of those spirits of our ancestors when we’re doing this work.”<sup>11</sup>

In regards to education and resources, one participant, from Rainy River First Nations, described the importance of supporting Indigenous education endeavours when they explained, “the commitment of Rainy River First Nations has not only been to preserve their past, but also to protect the future of the culture by presenting about it and educating our visitors about Ojibwe traditions, which serves as one of the ways that the community is

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<sup>8</sup> Tom Deer

<sup>9</sup> Tara Montague

<sup>10</sup> Regina Mandamin

<sup>11</sup> Regina Mandamin



protecting the mounds”<sup>12</sup> —referring to the site known as the Manitou Mounds. However, participants also indicated that supporting education was not in itself adequate, and that in order to fully support Indigenous education, all archaeological and historical resources must be easily and readily available to Indigenous communities. This was explained by one participant who said that there is a problem with access to archaeological information. They provided an example: “There is something called the Ontario Archaeological Sites Database. It holds all registered archaeological sites in Ontario. The MTCS [Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport, Ontario] controls and maintains this database. If a First Nation would like to find out where archaeological sites are located within their traditional territories, they can only do so if they sign a contract with the MTCS.”<sup>13</sup> This example was provided to demonstrate the red tape that Indigenous communities often face when trying to access archaeological information.

### *Cultural Barriers*

The theme of cultural barriers was discussed at length by participants, and included discussions on cultural appropriateness of archaeological methods and activities in Indigenous communities, colonialism, and mistrust.

First, cultural appropriateness was discussed in terms of where archaeology must strive to be more culturally appropriate, and in terms of what makes a relationship appropriate and respectful when conducting archaeological work with an Indigenous community.

Participants made the case that for archaeology to be culturally appropriate, it must encourage the use of Indigenous methodologies and approaches to archaeology, as well as understand how Westernized ontologies have negatively impacted Indigenous peoples. In addition, one participant recalled what made a relationship with non-Indigenous researchers a positive experience for their community when they stated, “we were able to share those ceremonies with them, so that when they encountered our relatives, that they would start that ceremony for us. They would put that tobacco down. They would make the contacts, and we would attend and do the ceremonies that we did with them.”<sup>14</sup> This participant made it clear that archaeologists must respectfully participate in ceremony and culture when invited to.

Second, participants described how colonialism and colonial policy today have resulted in mistrust between Indigenous communities and the archaeological community. It is important to acknowledge here archaeology’s, and also anthropology’s, roots in colonialism around the globe. One example of Indigenous communities’ mistrust towards the

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<sup>12</sup> Tara Montague

<sup>13</sup> Julie Kapyrka

<sup>14</sup> Darren Henry



government and archaeologists is in regards to ancestral remains and repatriation. One participant stated that current legislation that governs archaeology in Ontario does not encourage Indigenous people's rights to their material culture: "First Nations do not own, control, or have easy access to any of the material culture created by their ancestors... And this comes right back to Aboriginal rights to cultural heritage and the duty to consult in this province. Even despite Sections 11 and 12 of UNDRIP, that state Indigenous peoples have the right to archaeological sites and ancestral remains, and the TRC's 94 recommendations and calls to action, and the Ipperwash recommendations, not to mention the recommendations in the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) under the current framework in Ontario, it appears that cultural heritage is not considered an Aboriginal right."<sup>15</sup>

### *Resiliency/ Loss/ Reconciliation*

Lastly, participants discussed the themes of resiliency, loss, and reconciliation throughout the sharing circle. In regards to these themes, participants addressed environmental change, land, and the importance of education and maintaining culture. To close, I note that the following statements were made regarding these themes:

"Interestingly, a lot of the youth of Rainy River First Nations [...] do not know their own history. One of biggest undertakings of the community, and of Kay-Nah-Chi-Wah-Nung [historical centre] specifically, is about educating the youth, especially the ones from the community, about their history."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Julie Kapyrka

<sup>16</sup> Tara Montague



# Part B: Recommendations for Next Steps

The conference *From Truth to Reconciliation: Redefining Archaeology in Ontario* identified many key themes that demonstrate the importance of forging new relationships between the archaeological community and Indigenous peoples and communities. In order to properly forge new relationships, the archaeological community must be prepared and willing to relinquish power and authority over material culture, and to work with Indigenous communities in order to better understand Indigenous worldviews/ methodologies pertaining to archaeology, when invited to do so. In order to make these next steps achievable, the Ontario archaeological community must work towards the following:

Centre **relationship-based practice**. Archaeologists must remember that, in Indigenous communities, relationships are not just with people, but with land, water, all of creation, and ancestors.

- The Ontario Archaeological Society should aim to nurture meaningful relationships within the archaeological society and with Indigenous communities.
- This can include going beyond “excavation,” and honouring archaeological sites with the communities.

Walk together, while **shifting power to Indigenous communities**/First Nations.

- The Ontario Archaeological Society should advocate for transparency regarding the location of archaeological sites for Indigenous communities.
- The Ontario Archaeological Society should advocate for transparency regarding all archaeological data, including data on collections, in order to support Indigenous education programs in Indigenous communities.

**Honour Indigenous connection to land and responsibility**. This understanding is conceptually different than the Western worldview that informs archaeological practice. Archaeologists need to learn from First Nations and work within Indigenous worldviews/ the worldview of the community that they are working with.

- The Ontario Archaeological Society should advocate for continued learning and engagement with Indigenous communities during similar conferences.
- The Ontario Archaeological Society should advocate for the training of archaeologists in Indigenous communities and support the hiring of Indigenous archaeologists within their communities and beyond.



**Listen to Indigenous communities**, and listen with their hearts. This means deep listening and empathetic listening with the intention to learn and act.

- The Ontario Archaeological Society should continue to engage in relationships with Indigenous communities and peoples, and facilitate open discussions in regards to their mandate and individual archaeological projects.

**Engage respectfully when an outsider in a community during a project.** That means participating when invited to, and being mindful of your positionality at all times. In addition, as allies, we must work to create spaces where Indigenous communities and archaeologists can come together to discuss the future of archaeology and to establish best practices.

As stated by one participant, “...the things that have been said in talking about protection, preserving, are really important”<sup>17</sup> to Indigenous communities. This worldview is consistent with the Ontario Archaeological Society’s mission statement. However, for the archaeological community to move forward in a respectful relationship with Indigenous communities and peoples, it must be recognized that “protection” and “preserving” is dependent on Indigenous communities having authority in regards to their own material culture, relationships, and practice.

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<sup>17</sup> Tom Deer



