

**UNSETTLING COLLABORATIVE CONSERVATION THROUGH A DECOLONIZING LENS:
ENGAGEMENT AND COLLABORATION WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND COMMUNITIES**

Organized by the Center for Collaborative Conservation (CCC), Colorado State University (CSU)

September 10-12, 2019, Fort Collins, CO

Summary of Key Learnings and Recommendations

Purpose and Goal: This 2.5 day workshop brought together Indigenous scholars, community members and leaders, and collaborative conservation researchers and practitioners, to share experiences and lessons learned about research partnerships that simultaneously address critical conservation and community needs. The overarching goal was to develop a network and platform to create an integrated research, education and practice program, building on CSU's existing programs, including programs at the Center for Collaborative Conservation.

Process: Workshop goals and design were guided by a seven-person organizing team and two facilitators, encompassing diverse experiences and perspectives. Team members recommended focusing the workshop towards young Indigenous scholars, students and community members, and inviting as keynotes both Indigenous scholars and tribal leaders. To develop a common vocabulary and conceptual grounding for discussions, all participants were asked to read several articles in advance of the workshop. Twenty-six people participated in the workshop, including two facilitators. Sixty-five percent of participants identified as Indigenous, and 23% from settler/colonist backgrounds.

Major Themes: *Relationality* emerged as a major theme that ran throughout the workshop, expressed as rupture and restoration of Indigenous relationships to the land, relationships within Indigenous Nations and communities, and relationships between Indigenous people/communities and other governments, academic institutions and allies. Resource extraction, resulting pollution/degradation, and climate change arose as **key environmental/conservation challenges** facing Indigenous communities. **Colonial education systems** that devalue traditional knowledge and perpetuate false histories and Indigenous erasure continue to harm Indigenous students. **Colonial and authoritarian governments** challenge Indigenous land, food, health and stewardship sovereignty. Participants shared **solutions** grounded in healing within Indigenous communities, restoring relationships to land, and developing equitable collaborative partnerships with external allies, governments and research institutions. Supporting Indigenous women and two-spirit/non-binary people within Indigenous and mainstream communities as they (re)claim their roles, empowers future change-agents and counteracts the patriarchal legacy of Christianity. Commitment to self-reflection and continual learning enables individuals of settler/colonist heritage to become more effective allies in decolonizing conservation, education, and research.

Key Outcomes and Learnings: Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants found the workshop powerful and unlike any other they had attended. Participants credited the composition of the group, the use of Indigenous facilitators and protocols, the thought-provoking keynote speakers, and an atmosphere of trust, care and shared learning. Participants valued listening to each others' stories, networking, and the feeling of being seen, heard and supported as their authentic selves. The experience of being seen, heard and accepted resonated deeply for some participants who identify as non-binary/trans or of mixed ethnic heritage (i.e. Chicana).

Implications: The workshop outcomes point to the need for more such gatherings to support Indigenous students, researchers and community members, and build equitable and authentic relationships with allies in the University. More profoundly, the workshop discussions point to the need for a transformative paradigm shift within academic institutions like CSU that touches all aspects of the Land Grant mission. The university must recognize its continuing role in perpetuating harm through its academic, research and outreach/engagement activities. Further, it must commit to repair the damage and re-imagine education, research and outreach that meaningfully and equitably include Indigenous students, staff and faculty; that foster equitable relationships with Indigenous people, communities and Nations; and that invest in long-term, reciprocal relationships that build community and support researchers and Indigenous communities in finding solutions together.

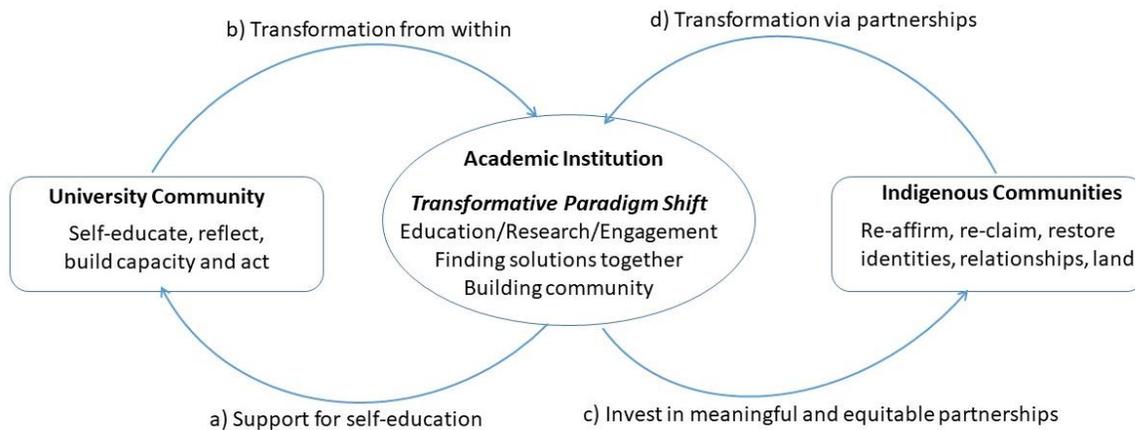


Figure 1. Relationships and practices among the University Community and Indigenous Communities that foster a transformative paradigm shift within Academic institutions.

This discussion suggests that the University can play a key role (Figure 1, above) in fostering this paradigm shift. The University can support its settler/colonist faculty and staff in their necessary processes of self-education, reflection and action (a), which, in turn, contribute to transformation within the university (b). At the same time, the University can support its Indigenous students, faculty, staff and community partners, in their work of healing, re-affirming, reclaiming and restoring relationships within their communities and with the land. When meaningful, trustful, reciprocal, and equitable relationships are established between Indigenous communities and the University (c), opportunities for collective solution-finding open, and Indigenous people and communities can participate in accelerating the transformation to a re-imagined University (d).