Aboriginal Self-Identification Project Final Report

Council of Ontario Universities

Aboriginal Self-Identification Project Final Report

COUNCIL OF
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50 years ans

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Executive
Summary

This report is designed to assist Ontario universities in the development of a common Aboriginal self-identification mechanism. It provides recommendations and a number of tools to be used by university administrators in building broader Aboriginal learner awareness of, and participation in, an Aboriginal self-identification mechanism.

Recommendations were developed through a literature review, a brief environmental scan, and an engagement strategy that included engagement with Aboriginal and university communities.

In total, 26 Aboriginal community engagements were completed across Ontario, involving 505 participants, including the following key groups:

- members of the Aboriginal university community;

- youth and learners;

- Elders, parents and guardians;

- Métis and Inuit organizations;

- Aboriginal Political Treaty Organizations;

- members of Tribal Councils and First Nations governments; and

- Aboriginal service organizations.

Engagement with the Ontario university community was also critical to the project. The university engagement strategy included: an institutional survey on current Aboriginal learner self-identification practices at all 20, publicly-funded universities in Ontario, institutional visits, and formal presentations and discussions with representatives from the following key groups:

- COU Reference Group on Aboriginal Education;

- Accountability Sub-Committee of the Council on University Planning & Analysis;

- Ontario University Registrars' Association;

- Council of Senior Administrative Office - Universities of Ontario

- Ontario Committee on Student Affairs; and

- Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents.

The engagement with Ontario universities demonstrated that universities employ a variety of approaches with respect to the current collection and use of Aboriginal self-identification data. In order to ensure the flexibility required to accommodate this diversity in the system, the following series of recommendations on core elements and other key considerations of a self-identification mechanism can be applied in a variety of contexts.

Core Elements of a Self-Identification Mechanism

1. Title

COU recommends that a title should:

- be clear and visible to learners;

- include the terms "voluntary" and "Aboriginal"; and

- exclude the term "Canadian".

2. Preamble

COU recommends that a preamble should:

- be short and concise, and appear under the title at the beginning of the self-identification process;

- use clear and simple language;

- explain briefly the purpose and potential use of self-identification data (e.g. for reporting and program planning purposes);

- include additional information (e.g. through hyperlinks, etc.) on:

    i. privacy assurances;

    ii. a more detailed overview of potential benefits to the learners (e.g. bursaries, scholarships, and improvement to service delivery); and

    iii. definitions on Aboriginal identity terms (i.e. First Nations – Status/Non-Status, Métis, and Inuit).

- include a statement that proof of Aboriginal ancestry is not required, but clarify that additional documentation could be required in other circumstances to maintain eligibility for certain academic initiatives, scholarships, or bursaries;

- provide information for learners on how to opt-out or opt-into the self-identification process, as well as on how to adjust or withdraw self-identification information; and

- inform learners that the collected data will be reported in aggregate only.

3. Question and Definition of Aboriginal Ancestry

COU recommends that a question and definition on Aboriginal ancestry should:

- appear under the preamble at the beginning of the self-identification process;

- be provided BEFORE a question related to Aboriginal identity is asked;

- use clear and simple language;

- provide the following definition of Aboriginal ancestry: "In the context of this voluntary self-identification question, an Aboriginal person in Canada, as recognized in the Constitution Act, 1982, is a person who identifies with First Nations (Status/Non-Status), Métis, or Inuit cultural and/or ancestral background";

- include additional information (e.g. through hyperlinks, etc.) that defines the Aboriginal identity terms (i.e. First Nations - Status/Non-Status, Métis, and Inuit);

- allow learners to choose "I prefer not to answer at this time" to defer their response on Aboriginal ancestry until another opportunity, if the practice at the institution is to offer the opportunity to self-identify multiple times. If this is not the practice, and the self-identification process is offered only once over the academic career of a student, the process for updating their response on Aboriginal ancestry should be made clear; and

- provide learners with an opportunity to opt-out of the process if they choose "No" to the question on Aboriginal ancestry. If learners choose the opt-out option, they should be removed from the process and not be asked again during their course of study.

4. Question and Definition of Aboriginal Identity

COU recommends that a question and definition of Aboriginal identity should:

- be provided under the question on Aboriginal ancestry as a second step of the self-identification process;

- be activated only after learners have chosen "yes" to the Aboriginal ancestry question (this applies to online processes only);

- provide the option for learners to identify using the terms of First Nations (Status/Non-Status), Métis, and Inuit, as well as an option to generate their own identity category (e.g. through the provision of an "Alternative identity term" category);

- include additional information (e.g. through hyperlinks, etc.) that defines the Aboriginal identity terms (i.e. First Nations - Status/Non-Status, Métis, and Inuit), as well as the "Alternative identity term" category;

- allow learners to choose "I prefer not to answer at this time" to defer their response on Aboriginal identity until another opportunity, if the practice at the institution is to offer the opportunity to self-identify multiple times. If this is not the practice, and the self-identification process is offered only once over the academic career of a student, the process for updating their response on Aboriginal identity should be made clear; and

- allow learners to choose multiple categories (e.g. First Nations and Métis).

5. Authorization of Disclosure to Other Parties within the Institution

COU recommends that an authorization of disclosure to other parties within the institution should:

- be provided as a third step of the self-identification process;

- allow learners the opportunity to provide consent for their information to be shared with other parties within the institution (e.g. Aboriginal student services, financial aid offices, Aboriginal student groups, etc.);

- include additional information (e.g. through hyperlinks, etc.) on the benefits of their name and contact information being shared with other parties within the institution (e.g. Aboriginal student services, financial aid office, Aboriginal student groups, etc.);

- include a list of other parties (e.g. Aboriginal student services, financial aid offices, Aboriginal student groups, etc.) from which the learner could choose to share their contact information;

- allow learners to choose multiple categories (e.g. Aboriginal student services and Aboriginal student groups); and

- inform learners of the process on how to change or withdraw their authorization at any time.

6. An Overview of Benefits

COU recommends that a more detailed overview of potential benefits should:

- be provided as text for a hyperlink (or other communication mediums) in the preamble;

- communicate to learners the potential benefits derived from the collection and use of self-identification data; and

- include a list of potential benefits that are tailored to the services and financial assistance offered by the university for Aboriginal learners.

7. Information on Privacy

COU recommends that information on privacy should:

- be provided as text for a hyperlink (or other communication mediums) in the preamble;

- provide clear reasons for the collection and use of self-identification information;

- provide learners with information on privacy laws established to protect their privacy and personal information; and

- communicate to learners that the self-identification data, once it is collected, will be stored securely as all other student information collected by postsecondary institutions.

Other Considerations of the Self-Identification Mechanism

Data Collection, Storage, and Reporting:

Data Collection

COU recommends that self-identification data be collected at least once over the academic career of a student. When possible, choosing to pursue additional opportunities and locations for response within the institution may increase participation in the process. The collection of data should also link Aboriginal self-identification with individualized student information to avoid double counting. In all cases, particularly if the process is only offered once, a mechanism that allows students to adjust or withdraw their response should be provided.

Data Storage

COU recommends that self-identification data should be integrated into one secure central data system, link Aboriginal self-identification with individualized student information to avoid double counting, and include protocols that outline access, use, retention, and storage of the information.

Data Reporting

COU recommends that self-identification data reporting should:

- be in aggregate only;

- take into account the sample size to avoid a breach of learner privacy;

- include Aboriginal community engagement at an appropriate part of the reporting process (e.g. as part of reporting to Aboriginal Educational Councils); and

- inform learners that, once aggregate self-identification data has been reported to the Ministry for a specific reporting period, will not be updated or amended for subsequent changes made to the underlying data.

Chapter 1
Introduction

This report is designed to assist Ontario universities in the development of a common Aboriginal self-identification mechanism. It provides recommendations and a number of tools to be used by university administrators in building broader Aboriginal learner awareness of, and participation in, an Aboriginal self-identification mechanism.

Context

Ontario's Aboriginal population is historically under-represented in postsecondary education. According to 2006 census data, only about seven per cent of Ontario's Aboriginal population, between the working ages of 25 and 64, had a university certificate or degree. Comparatively, 21 per cent of Ontario's non-Aboriginal population, between the working ages of 25 and 64, had a university certificate or degree.

Additionally, Canada's Aboriginal population is proportionately younger and is growing at a faster rate than the rest of the population. And, as the 2006 census demonstrated, the educational prospects of this young population are unlikely to be the same as those of their non-Aboriginal cohorts.

Improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal learners will help to address the socio-economic gap that exists between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, and to ensure that the growing numbers of Aboriginal youth have access to labour market opportunities that increasingly require postsecondary education. Ontario universities are committed to increasing the numbers and success of Aboriginal learners in postsecondary education. One of the challenges they face in meeting this goal is that identifying Aboriginal learners is not a simple task. This project was undertaken to work with the Aboriginal and university communities to better understand barriers to participation in self-identification processes, as well as to provide recommendations to help to encourage higher response rates.

Background

From the release of the Aboriginal Education and Training Strategy (known as AETS) in 1991, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU), universities, and members of the Aboriginal community have been working to increase:

- Aboriginal participation and completion rates in university and college programs;

- the sensitivity and awareness of postsecondary institutions to Aboriginal culture and issues; and

- the role of Aboriginal people in decision-making related to Aboriginal postsecondary education.

Closing this attainment gap and helping to improve Aboriginal learners' achievements in education continues to be a key priority for MTCU. In March 2013, MTCU demonstrated its ongoing commitment by announcing renewed sector funding to the Postsecondary Education Fund for Aboriginal Learners with new multi-year agreements for Ontario universities within the Student Success Fund.

In addition, Ontario's 20, publicly-funded universities have all demonstrated a strong commitment to addressing the educational attainment gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. And, it appears that these collective efforts to increase Aboriginal learner success are paying dividends, with an increase of Aboriginal staff and faculty at Ontario universities, and more Aboriginal students participating in higher education than ever before.

Giizhe Giizhigok Qweg, 2011
by Christi Belcourt »

Provincial Activity in the Area of Self-Identification

Ontario's commitment to forge a stronger, more positive relationship with Ontario's Aboriginal learners was underscored in 2011 when MTCU released its Aboriginal Postsecondary Education and Training Policy Framework, a document that builds on a 2007 Aboriginal Education Strategy for the primary and secondary education system. The development and implementation of the Framework signals the government's renewed commitment to partnership with Aboriginal communities, and to supporting positive outcomes for Aboriginal learners across the province. The Framework also outlines a long-term vision, as well as the principles and goals that will guide their investments in Aboriginal postsecondary education in the province.

In order to monitor the effectiveness of the Framework's strategic directions, MTCU signaled its intent to develop a targeted Aboriginal Postsecondary Education Performance Measures Strategy. In particular, MTCU indicated that student self-identification policies would be developed, analyzed and evaluated in partnership with Aboriginal communities and organizations in order to establish improved data collection on, and tracking and monitoring of, Ministry investments in Aboriginal postsecondary education and training.

While some institutions have established self-identification mechanisms, data about Aboriginal learners is not collected, analyzed and reported in a systematic manner across Ontario universities. This makes it difficult to consistently identify and track the academic progress of Aboriginal learners. In the spring of 2011, MTCU approached the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) to ask if there was interest in undertaking a project to work with the university and Aboriginal communities to better understand barriers to participation in self-identification processes, as well as to provide recommendations to help to encourage higher response rates.

MTCU also asked Colleges Ontario (CO) to undertake a similar project with its members.

Project Oversight

The COU Reference Group on Aboriginal Education was created in 2008, and is composed of one representative from each of Ontario's 20, publicly-funded universities. Institutional representatives on the Reference Group include senior Aboriginal staff or faculty members engaged in direct service delivery to Aboriginal students. The mandate of the Reference Group is to:

- work together to ensure Aboriginal students success in Ontario universities;

- promote and facilitate opportunities for Ontario universities to engage one another in creating meaningful change to meet the needs of Aboriginal learners and communities; and

- share information, promote professional development, implement best practice and develop expertise in Aboriginal education.

To oversee the self-identification project, COU established a Working Group on Aboriginal Self-Identification. This Working Group was composed of representatives from both the COU Reference Group on Aboriginal Education and members of the Council on University Planning & Analysis (CUPA). Membership was as follows:

- University of Windsor - Russell Nahdee (Chair - Working Group) (COU Reference Group on Aboriginal Education)

- Lakehead University - Sarah Browne (CUPA)

- Laurentian University - Sheila Cote-Meek (COU Reference Group on Aboriginal Education)

- Laurentian University - Shauna Lehtimaki (CUPA)

- McMaster University - John Dube (CUPA)

- Nipissing University - Jamie Graham (CUPA)

- Nipissing University - Laurie McLaren (COU Reference Group on Aboriginal Education)

- University of Toronto - Jonathan Hamilton-Diabo (COU Reference Group on Aboriginal Education)

The primary purpose of the project was to provide recommendations and approaches that could be used to guide Ontario's postsecondary practices towards a common Aboriginal self-identification mechanism. Some initial challenges facing the project included the:

- lack of a common, national, Aboriginal self-identification mechanism;

- the historical issues surrounding Aboriginal self-identification in education;"

- use of different terms that are applied to Aboriginal peoples in Canada that often carry unfavorable historical and political connotations (e.g. Aboriginal); and

- the diversity of approaches used to collect self-identification information at Ontario universities.

Methodology for the Development of a Common Aboriginal Self-Identification Mechanism

The COU Aboriginal Self-Identification Project was composed of three phases:

- Exploratory Phase: an environmental scan of current Ontario university practices and a brief review of experiences in other jurisdictions and sectors were undertaken;

- Engagement Phase: a broad engagement strategy with Aboriginal and university communities was developed and implemented; and

- Final Report Phase: a final report with recommendations on approaches and tools to support Aboriginal self-identification at our institutions was developed.

A critical element of the COU Aboriginal Self-Identification Project was engagement with the Aboriginal community. As a result, our Aboriginal engagement strategy was both broad and geographically diverse. In total, 26 Aboriginal community engagements were completed across Ontario, involving 505 participants, including the following key groups:

- members of the Aboriginal university community;

- youth and learners;

- Elders, parents and guardians;

- Métis and Inuit organizations;

- Aboriginal Political Treaty Organizations;

- members of Tribal Councils and First Nations governments; and

- Aboriginal service organizations.

Engagement with the Ontario university community was also critical to the project.

The university engagement strategy included formal presentations and discussions with representatives from the following key groups:

- COU Reference Group on Aboriginal Education;

- Accountability Sub-Committee of the Council on University Planning & Analysis;

- Ontario University Registrars' Association ;

- Council of Senior Administrative Office - Universities of Ontario

- Ontario Committee on Student Affairs; and

- Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents.

To help guide the engagement strategies, the Working Group established a number of engagement principles:

- inclusion and respect for diversity;

- respect for the autonomy of Ontario universities;

- respect for Indigenous knowledge, languages and cultures;

- accountability;

- project perspective of data stewardship; and

- transparency.

For further information on the engagement principles, please refer to Appendix F: Guiding Community Engagement Principles for the Aboriginal Self-Identification Project.

The goals of the engagement strategies were to:

- discuss and understand challenges and best practices in current self-identification practices;

- identify cultural perceptions affecting learner participation in a voluntary self-identification process; and

- identify effective practices and tools that could be used to promote self-identification.

Report Structure

Chapter 2 presents the findings from a literature review and a brief environmental scan. Chapters 3 and 4 outline the findings from engagements with Aboriginal and university communities. Chapter 5 provides recommendations on developing and implementing a self-identification mechanism at Ontario universities, as well as a number of external considerations. It also provides several tools and resources that have been developed to assist universities' administrators in the implementation of a self-identification mechanism. Chapter 6 offers a summary of the recommendations.

Chapter 2
Environmental Scan Findings

The COU Aboriginal Self-Identification Project was composed of three phases: an exploratory phase that included a literature review and a brief environmental scan of domestic and international practices; an engagement phase that included a broad engagement strategy with Aboriginal and university communities in Ontario; and a final report phase. This chapter summarizes findings from the exploratory phase.

It begins with the literature review and is followed by results of the environmental scan that included a brief review of the following:

- perspectives on self-identification from the United States, Australia, British Columbia, and Ontario;

- current work underway at Colleges Ontario; and

- perspectives from the Aboriginal College and Learning Institutes.

Literature Review

Introduction

COU consulted literature with a focus on Aboriginal self-identification mechanisms that had been produced over the past decade. For a full list of the literature reviewed, please see Appendix A: Literature Review Sources.

The literature review identified a number of social and historical factors affecting participation in Aboriginal self-identification processes. These items will be discussed first and will then be followed by findings related to specific elements of a self-identification mechanism.

Historical Factors

The following historical factors were discussed in the literature as having a potentially negative impact on participation in a self-identification process:

- identity legislation (e.g. the 1857 - 1985 Gradual Civilisation Act);

- the legacy of residential schools; and

- the historical misuse of data.

For more than a century, the laws governing Aboriginal peoples have often placed formal education in direct conflict with Aboriginal identity. For example, the 1857 *Gradual Civilisation Act* automatically removed Indian status and related rights from First Nations who earned a university degree. This 'involuntary disenfranchisement' remained in place until 1985 when Parliament amended the *Indian Act*.

The legacy of residential schools has been another major factor affecting the Aboriginal community's relationship to the Canadian education system. As Paulette Regan noted in *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada*, the intergenerational impact of residential schools has left a "legacy of distrust associated with education, especially when it involves attending a distant institution with little or no Aboriginal control over its governance."[1]

Many Aboriginal community members continue to view data collection with concern, fearful that data about Aboriginal peoples may portray them negatively, and that it will not be used in a respectful way. The Education Policy Institute's (EPI's) 2008 *Review of Current Approaches to Canadian Aboriginal Self-Identification* report noted that there is still a lot of work to be done to alleviate these concerns with Aboriginal peoples across Canada.[2]

Social Factors

A 2010 Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) report, *Aboriginal Self-Identification and Student Data in Ontario's Postsecondary System: Challenges and Opportunities*, examined Aboriginal student self-identification data collection in postsecondary institutions. It suggested that a number of social factors can affect participation in self-identification mechanisms. Some of the factors cited were:

- the fluid, subjective, and context-sensitive nature of cultural identity;

- reluctance among some groups to self-identify in certain situations because of mistrust;

- imprecise definitions and ethnic classifications; and

- a lack of clarity regarding the purposes for data collection.

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[1] Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010) 4.

[2] Education Policy Institute. *Review of Current Approaches to Canadian Aboriginal Self-Identification* (Winnipeg, 2008) 40.

HEQCO's 2010 report, EPI's 2008 report, and the Ontario Ministry of Education's 2007 policy framework, *Building Bridges to Success for First Nation, Métis and Inuit Students (Building Bridges)*, all noted that these social factors have created a suspicion of data collection within the Aboriginal community. This has, in turn, affected Aboriginal participation rates in self-identification mechanisms. However, the EPI report also stated that Aboriginal self-identification is now being supported and encouraged by the provincial and federal governments. This is part of the governments' continued efforts to increase Aboriginal Canadians' access to education and to support "the empowerment and potential of First Nations education."[3]

A similar shift in perspective has been voiced within the Aboriginal community. In March 2011, the Assembly of First Nations' (AFN) stated in its report, *A First Nations' Perspective of INAC'S Data Collection Instrument Final Report*, that: "First Nations are committed to taking steps to build partnerships, build trust, and engage in data collection in order to make good decisions for our children."[4]

The literature also revealed that if learners do not feel that their culture and identity are reflected within a postsecondary institution, their willingness to participate in a voluntarily self-identification mechanism is likely to be negatively affected. The 2012 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario highlighted the "need for a significant increase in teaching and non-teaching Aboriginal school staff. These individuals can act as mentors and role models, share their Aboriginal culture, and help foster an environment where Aboriginal students can reach a high level of achievement."[5] A postsecondary environment that reflects Aboriginal learners, academically within the administration and faculty, will not only improve Aboriginal success at postsecondary institutions, but will also encourage greater participation in a voluntary self-identification process.

The EPI report provided a list of other social factors that could discourage a learner from self-identifying, including:

- being a part of an institution with few Aboriginal learners;

- having parents who are opposed to data collection;

- a lack of clear definitions for Aboriginal identity groups; and

- students of mixed ancestry experiencing difficulty identifying with one ethnicity.[6]

A 2011 report, *First Canadians, Canadians First; National Strategy on Inuit Education,* by the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), the body representing more than 50,000 Inuit in the Northwest Territories, Northern Quebec, and Northern

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[3] Ibid. 5.

[4] Assembly of First Nations. *A First Nations' Perspective of INAC'S Data Collection Instrument* (DCI) Review (2011) 17.

[5] Office of the Auditor General of Ontario. *2012 Annual Report* (Ontario: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2012) 137.

[6] Education Policy Institute. *Review of Current Approaches to Canadian Aboriginal Self-Identification* (Winnipeg, 2008) 47.

Labrador, concluded that for Inuit learners, measurement tools need to include culturally relevant indicators that are responsive to the Inuit context. The ITK's *Strategy* also found that a greater representation of Inuit culture at postsecondary institutions would lead to an increase in participation in postsecondary education.[7]

The issue of cultural representation in postsecondary education was similarly identified by the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO). MNO's report, *Research on Effective Practices to Support Métis Learner's Achievement and Self-Identification Project*, stated that the quality of collected data at postsecondary institutions is negatively influenced because, "Aboriginal initiatives, including Student Associations, are, in theory, promoted as 'pan-Aboriginal,' and therefore inclusive. However, these initiatives are perceived as embodying First Nations' priorities, identity, and culture, while excluding the Métis."[8] The report goes on to say that "postsecondary institutions are simply not designed with Métis students in mind."[9]

General Considerations

The literature identified a number of general considerations in the development of a self-identification mechanism. Specifically, the HECQO report suggested that the following questions should be considered when developing an Aboriginal self-identification mechanism:

- Which dimensions of Aboriginality are being asked about (e.g. ancestry, identity, status)?

- What are the response options available (e.g. single response, open response, multiple responses)?

- Are examples provided, and if so, what are they?

- How is the question phrased (e.g. in terms of being a First Nations person, or belonging to a First Nation)?

- What is the appropriate terminology to use in the question (e.g. First Nations or North American Indian)?[10]

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[7] Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami. *First Canadians, Canadians First: National Strategy on Inuit Education.* (2011) 90.

[8] Stonecircle. *Research on Effective Practices to Support Métis Learner's Achievement and Self-Identification* (Ottawa, 2011) 28.

[9] Ibid. 13.

[10] Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario. *Aboriginal Self-Identification and Student Data in Ontario's Postsecondary System: Challenges and Opportunities* (Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2010) 37.

Specific Elements of a Self-Identification Mechanism

Findings from the literature suggested that these specific elements should be part of a self-identification mechanism:

- a preamble;

- Aboriginal ancestry and identity;

- terminology;

- promotion of benefits related to self-identification; and

- privacy.

The timing and frequency with which the mechanism is used, as well as the protocols for data storage and reporting were also raised as issues.

Preamble

The HEQCO report suggested that an effective self-identification mechanism must first "offer some guidance as to why the question is being posed, the potential uses of information, and examples or definitions of response categories."[11] The report noted that a preamble should include a transparent rationale for asking a question in clear, readable print close to the question. It should also explain how security, confidentiality, and privacy will be ensured. Specifically, the report said: "It must be clear that self-identification in a confidential survey or form will not lead to a person being individually identifiable anywhere outside of closed and secure institutional data systems."[12]

Aboriginal Ancestry and Identity

The HEQCO report argued that the decision to use a question around ancestry, identity, or both, depended on the purpose for which information was being collected.[13] In Ontario, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) has indicated that its use of the term 'Aboriginal learner' is intended to include a broad definition of Aboriginality, making an inclusive approach to self-identification important in the Ontario context. If the purpose of data collection is to be as inclusive as possible, the HEQCO report suggested combining Aboriginal ancestry and identity in the same process.[14]

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[11] Ibid. 47.

[12] Ibid. 72.

[13] Ibid. 45

[14] Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario. *Aboriginal Self-Identification and Student Data in Ontario's Postsecondary System: Challenges and Opportunities* (Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2010) 45.

The Métis Nation of Ontario's report, *Research on Effective Practices to Support Métis Learners Achievement and Self-Identification Project*, underscored the importance of an inclusive approach to self-identification. The report noted that having a mechanism that inquires solely about ancestry negatively affects the quality of Métis data collected at Ontario institutions.[15]

The 2011 *Toronto Aboriginal Research Paper* (TARP), commissioned by the Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council, spoke to the specific issues faced by Aboriginal people living in urban settings. In particular, it noted challenges related to Aboriginal identity. A survey undertaken in connection with the report stated:

> "In many cases, living in the urban centre leads to marriages of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. The children of these unions face their own unique set of circumstances in navigating their identity. Lawrence (2004) describes some of the anxiety facing mixed blood people: 'most urban mixed-bloods have therefore had to contend, at some point in their lives, with the fact that they do not fit the models of what has been held up to them – by whites – as authentic Nativeness'. The notion of 'belonging' can become even more difficult in an urban context like Toronto where there is a diverse population of many different ethnic groups. Restoule's (2004) research determined that acceptance by an Aboriginal community, regardless of physical location was more important than blood quantum in terms of identity development. The issue of belonging, connection and authenticity was raised by many respondents."[16]

However, the TARP report identified a growing willingness of the general population to identify with their Aboriginal ancestry as a result of legal changes in "the *Indian Act* and its recent amendments (Bill C-31 and C-3) that have broadened the criteria for defining Indian Status."[17] This becomes increasingly important as the urban Aboriginal population in Ontario grows.

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[15] Stonecircle. *Research on Effective Practices to Support Métis Learner's Achievement and Self-Identification* (Ottawa, 2011) 13.

[16] Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council. *TARP Toronto Aboriginal Research Project: Final Report*.279.

[17] Ibid. 79.

The EPI report discussed potential advantages and disadvantages of generating disaggregated self-identification data based on identity. It suggested that disaggregated data can be desirable because:

- it encourages identification by providing specific categories that individuals may more readily identify with;

- it is appropriate to use the specific terms that Aboriginal communities identify with;

- it provides insight on areas of particular community strengths, weaknesses and needs so that policy decisions, programming and curricular development can be tailored to suit; and

- funding and policies are determined based on specific identity groups so it is important to have knowledge specific to each group.[18]

The EPI report also identified a number of potential disadvantages to collecting disaggregated data based on identity, including that:

- the confidentiality of students could be compromised when data is collected in small numbers; disclosure avoidance is important to ensure privacy and safety of Aboriginal students who represent a marginal population;

- the financial costs of developing and implementing such a data system is prohibitive;

- learners with mixed backgrounds may have difficulty answering; and

- identity group categories may shift depending on predicted uses of data (e.g. language categories for curriculum and programming or band membership for funding).[19]

Terminology

The literature revealed a number of challenges associated with developing the terminology that would be most successful within a self-identification mechanism. The question of Aboriginal identity is complex, which makes the task of defining identity for the purposes of a self-identification mechanism difficult.

This challenge lies in part with the heterogeneity of the Aboriginal community. As the HEQCO report noted "...there are many dimensions of Aboriginality in Canada, and many terms and definitions are applied to the concept."[20] The report underscored that: "...the diversity of Aboriginal populations in Canada hinders the ability to create a group that is sufficiently representative to develop a definition on behalf of all of Aboriginal peoples in Canada."[21]

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[18] Education Policy Institute. *Review of Current Approaches to Canadian Aboriginal Self-Identification* (Winnipeg, 2008) 41-42.

[19] Ibid. 41.

[20] Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario. *Aboriginal Self-Identification and Student Data in Ontario's Postsecondary System: Challenges and Opportunities* (Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2010) 13.

[21] Ibid. 30

The EPI report argued that defining Aboriginal identity is further complicated by the fact that: "Historically, Aboriginal identity has been defined and redefined by the Canadian government through revisions to the *Indian Act* and through treaties which imparted official status to some Aboriginal peoples and not to others."[22]

Given this complexity, the HECQO report stressed strongly the importance of involving the Aboriginal community in any activity in this area. "It is inappropriate for non-Aboriginal entities to define who is and who is not Aboriginal."[23]

Promotion of Benefits

The literature review supported the notion that self-identification mechanisms should promote and communicate potential benefits to learners to encourage their participation. The HECQO report noted that if no collective or individual benefit can be derived from the provision of self-identification data, or if alternative outcomes are perceived, Aboriginal people may be reluctant to participate in a self-identification mechanism.[24]

While various examples of potential benefits were identified across the literature, some of the most common were improved access to financial aid and improved student services. A survey within the EPI report noted:

> "In addition to funding, respondents spoke of other benefits for which they were required to, and thus willing to, identify such as support in the application and registration process, access to Aboriginal advisors and housing awards at the post-secondary level."[25]

Addressing Privacy Concerns

All of the reports spoke to the importance of privacy assurances in a self-identification process. The HEQCO report underscored that: "Regardless of the type of instrument through which data is collected, one of the primary concerns should be the strength of the protocols through which security, confidentiality, and privacy are ensured."[26] In addition, the literature stressed the need to be compliant with provincial privacy laws. The Ontario Ministry of Education policy framework, *Building Bridges to Success for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Students (Building Bridges)*, was particularly forceful on this point. In addition, it mandated that school boards consider the implication of other related laws. Specifically it stated:

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[22] Education Policy Institute. *Review of Current Approaches to Canadian Aboriginal Self-Identification* (Winnipeg, 2008) 3.

[23] Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario. *Aboriginal Self-Identification and Student Data in Ontario's Postsecondary System: Challenges and Opportunities* (Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2010) 30.

[24] Ibid. 32.

[25] Education Policy Institute. *Review of Current Approaches to Canadian Aboriginal Self-Identification* (Winnipeg, 2008) 47.

[26] Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario. *Aboriginal Self-Identification and Student Data in Ontario's Postsecondary System: Challenges and Opportunities* (Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2010) 37.

"When developing and implementing policies for voluntary, confidential Aboriginal student self-identification, school boards must consider the application of the Ontario Human Rights Code, the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (MFIPPA), the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA), and the Education Act. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Constitution are also relevant in the development of Aboriginal student self-identification policies. School boards are encouraged to consult with legal counsel and freedom of information coordinators to ensure the legal accuracy of the policies they are developing."[27]

There was consensus within the reports that privacy assurances are absolutely essential to building the trust of Aboriginal learners. The HEQCO report refined this, stressing the importance of ensuring that students are not individually identifiable. It noted that four school boards that consulted with Aboriginal communities on how to improve response rates concluded that success depends on making it clear that "self-identification in a confidential survey or form will not lead to a person being individually identifiable anywhere outside of closed and secure institutional data systems."[28]

The EPI report also injected a note of caution, highlighting that it is not enough to simply state the applicable privacy laws. It emphasized that an inadequate explanation of the laws or how they are adhered to would have a negative impact on participation rates.

Data Collection

The literature review revealed multiple approaches to when and how a self-identification process might be used. The EPI report provided the following as examples of points at which self-identification processes might be used at the elementary, secondary, and postsecondary levels:

- at registration;

- before standardized testing;

- as a part of postsecondary education surveys (e.g. graduate surveys);

- during apprentice education;

- during adult basic education; and

- in order to complete financial aid forms.[29]

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[27] Aboriginal Education Office. *Building Bridges to Success for First Nation, Métis and Inuit Students* (Ontario: Ministry of Education, 2007) 10.

[28] Ibid. 72.

[29] Education Policy Institute. *Review of Current Approaches to Canadian Aboriginal Self-Identification* (Winnipeg, 2008) 51.

The EPI report surveyed 12 postsecondary jurisdictions regarding their self-identification practices. The survey revealed that universities and colleges most often ask a self-identification question using a combination of application, enrolment, and student surveys.[30] It also identified that: "The frequency of data collection varies by survey as does the data use."[31]

The literature reviewed did not identify an optimal number of times to ask learners to self-identify. However, the HEQCO report suggested some caution, noting that, due to a high frequency of requests, Aboriginal learners are at risk of serious survey fatigue. The report stated that because Aboriginal learners are a group in which "multiple stakeholders have a keen interest, it may be the case that they are surveyed more often than other students, both within and outside of the institutional setting, leading to higher levels of fatigue."[32]

The HEQCO report also promoted the importance of consistency in when and how a self-identification process is used. The report stated that: "…if the way in which a single institution collects data remains the same over time, this can allow the establishment of a baseline and the measurement of increases or decreases in the number of Aboriginal students over time."[33]

Data Reporting

The EPI report highlighted that the reporting of Aboriginal self-identification data is undertaken for a variety of reasons including to:

- provide support to program administration;

- identify Aboriginal students in order to disburse tuition reimbursements or to award Aboriginal-specific financial aid;

- improve program delivery; and

- enable policy research, such as benchmarking Aboriginal performance and monitoring longitudinal progress of Aboriginal students.[34]

The EPI report also drew attention to issues related to the comparability of Aboriginal self-identification data across Canada, noting that not all data is transferable across provincial borders because of the lack of a common standard in defining identity.[35]

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[30] Ibid. 14.

[31] Ibid. 34.

[32] Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario. *Aboriginal Self-Identification and Student Data in Ontario's Postsecondary System: Challenges and Opportunities* (Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2010) 26.

[33] Ibid. 48.

[34] Education Policy Institute. *Review of Current Approaches to Canadian Aboriginal Self-Identification* (Winnipeg, 2008) 51.

[35] Ibid. 52.

In addition, the literature noted that progress to improve Aboriginal data collection has been slow. In Ontario, the *Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario* highlighted a significant gap between data collection by the Ontario Ministry of Education and the expected use of the data. For example, five years after identifying the challenge of closing the achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, the Ministry had not determined the gap size nor established a baseline from which to measure this gap. The Auditor General report also noted that the Ministry had yet to determine the baseline number of self-identified students it would need before beginning to measure and report on Aboriginal student achievement.[36]

Implementation Considerations Related to a Self-Identification Mechanism

Training for Administrative Staff Members at Postsecondary Institutions

The literature did not provide detailed insight into self-identification mechanisms at Ontario universities. However, in the *Building Bridges to Success for First Nation, Métis and Inuit Students* (Building Bridges) Framework, the Ontario Ministry of Education did offer some general considerations for implementation. Specifically, the report highlighted the need to ensure that individuals interacting with a self-identification mechanism must be well versed on the issues and sensitive to concerns related to self-identification. This education of front-line administrative staff was identified as the key to success in the implementation of a self-identification mechanism.[37]

Engagement with Aboriginal Communities

The *Building Bridges Framework* also stressed the importance of establishing an ongoing dialogue with families aimed at developing a clear understanding of the self-identification initiative. It was noted that it was only through a broad engagement strategy with the Aboriginal community that school boards were able to learn about and address the concerns families had about such policies.

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[36] Office of the Auditor General of Ontario. *2012 Annual Report* (Ontario: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2012) 137.

[37] Aboriginal Education Office. *Building Bridges to Success for First Nation, Métis and Inuit Students* (Ontario: Ministry of Education, 2007) 18.

The Framework also recommended that implementation of a self-identification mechanism include engagement with:

- a broad range of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit families;

- First Nations communities; and

- Aboriginal organizations, including Native Friendship Centres and other local political and service delivery groups.[38]

The EPI report underscored this point:

> "The Saskatchewan Ministry's student tracking system works closely with First Nations and Métis education branches and each Superintendent is assigned Bands and areas to work with and be a liaison with those groups. According to key informants, this partnership has increased identification as well as quelled negative attitudes about data misuse."[39]

Brief International Perspectives on Self-Identification from the United States and Australia

Following recommendations from the Working Group members, a brief environmental scan on self-identification practices in the United States and Australia was undertaken. The U.S. information was deemed potentially relevant to the Canadian context because of similar and overlapping historical, cultural, and geographical contexts. The environmental scan also included a brief analysis of Aboriginal self-identification practices in Australia because of relevant parallels between the two countries.

United States

The environmental scan of American policies and practices for self-identification of Native Americans included a review of a number of government, non-government, and postsecondary institutional documents and websites.

Government and Tribal Standards for Identification in the U.S.

The terms 'Native American' and 'American Indian' were used interchangeably in the literature that COU reviewed. This section of the report uses the term Native American, unless it is a direct quote.

Like Canada and Australia, the Native American population in the U.S. spans a vast landscape, and is subdivided into many recognized and unrecognized tribes. As in Canada, Native Americans live on and off-reserves. Since 1960, the U.S. census has used self-identification to identify Native Americans. The question on the census asks respondents

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[38] Ibid. 12.

[39] Education Policy Institute. *Review of Current Approaches to Canadian Aboriginal Self-Identification* (Winnipeg, 2008) 44.

about ethnicity and race. If the respondent chooses American Indian or Alaska Native, they are also asked to provide the identity of their principle tribe, or the tribe with which they are enrolled.

All elementary and high school learners enrolled in on-reserve schools have their performance tracked through the Native American Student Information System (NASIS). The system records: enrolment, attendance, behavior, assessments, transcripts, grades, health, and class schedule for learners from Grade 2 to high school completion. While these data are valuable to government planners and administrators, they cover a very small sub-section of Native American learners. As the National Indian Education Association notes, about 93 per cent of American Indian and Alaska Native learners attend regular public schools. Moreover, once learners leave high school, their progress is no longer tracked by the NASIS.

Australia

The environmental scan of Australia's learner policies and practices focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (who are generally referred to collectively in the literature as Indigenous) and included a review of a number of government, non-government, and postsecondary institutional documents and websites.

Government Standard for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Self-Identification Data

In Australia, data is collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). Data collection by ABS on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders uses a self-identification process. The ABS defines an Indigenous person as "a person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which he or she lives." Below is the version of the self-identification question that appears on the ABS website and that ABS has used since 1971:

> **Is this person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Origin?**
> **For persons of mixed origin, mark both 'yes' boxes.**
>
> ☐ No
> ☐ Yes, Aboriginal
> ☐ Yes, Torres Strait Islander

In addition to ABS data, the government collects background information when learners enroll in primary and secondary school as a means to monitor progress in meeting national education goals. This enrollment asks for information on: gender, Indigenous status, parental background, socioeconomic background, language background, and geographic location. Information gleaned from the survey is reported in aggregate; identity is not attributed to individual learners, and parents can refuse to provide information.

Provincial Perspectives

The environmental scan of provincial Aboriginal self-identification policies and practices revealed that a diversity of approaches are used across Canada. Best practices were identified in British Colombia and Ontario.

British Columbia

The environmental scan of British Columbia's (B.C.) approach to self-identification included a review of a variety of government, non-government, and postsecondary institutional documents and websites.

The findings related to the B.C. scan are divided into four parts:

- a look at the B.C. government standard for Aboriginal learner self-identification data;

- an overview of personal education numbers and the implications for Aboriginal learners and postsecondary institutions;

- a review of the introduction of a province-wide postsecondary Aboriginal education action plan and desired outcomes; and

- an outline of positive outcomes at postsecondary institutions in B.C.

Government Standard for Aboriginal Data

In 2007, the B.C. Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation (MARR) produced a guideline on how the B.C. government should standardize the collection of self-identification data for Aboriginal peoples in the province. The rationale behind the initiative was to acquire good-quality, comparable data, that would allow for the measurement of effectiveness of programs and services delivered to Aboriginal clients across a range of sectors, including education, health and fitness, and employment. In the B.C. *Government Standard for Aboriginal Administrative Data* strategic document, Aboriginal persons are defined according to the *Constitution Act, 1982*, Part II, Section 35(2), as: "...the Indian, Inuit and Métis peoples of Canada." Under this standard, the MARR and the Ministry Chief Information Office are responsible for information collection.

A key component of the B.C. standard is that it allows respondents to identify with more than one Aboriginal identity group and gives individual ministries flexibility to "collect and structure data based on the services they offer." The standard also has established rules regarding the handling of discrepancies, which helps ensure that errors do not simply mean that an Aboriginal individual is not counted.

The B.C. approach offers a positive step in standardizing self-identification and collecting high quality usable data.

The Personal Education Number

Like Ontario, B.C. has an education identifier for all learners. Known as the Personal Education Number (PEN), it tracks a range of personal information (date and place of birth, date of registration, mother and father's names, parents' place of birth, sex, and registration number). It does not record Aboriginal status. PEN tracks students as they move through the B.C. education system and is used for multiple purposes, including: distribution of school funds; planning

and analysis; and administration for primary, secondary and postsecondary education. Although the PEN is not needed for students to apply to postsecondary institutions, it could help streamline the process. Any out-of-province learners applying to postsecondary institutions in B.C. are assigned a number by the ministry. While Ontario (where it is called the Ontario Education Number, or OEN) and B.C. collect unique and personal information, neither province uses their system to identify or specifically track the academic progress of Aboriginal learners.

Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Strategy and Action Plan

In 2007, the B.C. government created the Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education Strategy and Action Plan aimed at building a new "government-to-government relationship" with Aboriginal people. This plan was designed with a vision to ensure that postsecondary education outcomes for Aboriginal learners are comparable to non-Aboriginal learners. The vision also includes a role for public institutions and Aboriginal organizations, supported by resources from the federal and provincial governments. The plan also sets out the following goals:

- to close the educational gap for Aboriginal learners; and

- to provide effective and accountable programs and services implementation and delivery.

To help attain these goals the government established strategies and actions to:

1. increase access, retention, and success for Aboriginal learners through implementation of Aboriginal Service Plans;

2. reduce financial barriers through targeted scholarships for Aboriginal learners;

3. increase participation in strategic program areas;

4. support Aboriginal learner transition;

5. enhance opportunities for Aboriginal culture to be reflected within the infrastructure of institutions;

6. increase the number of culturally relevant programs and services;

7. encourage Aboriginal representation on institutional governing bodies;

8. strengthen agreements and partnerships; and

9. improve effective planning based on system-wide data tracking and performance measures based on learner success.

The strategy acknowledges that a major challenge in Aboriginal education research is the lack of data on Aboriginal ancestry and postsecondary education participation, which presents a challenge to addressing issue number nine, improving effective planning based on system-wide data tracking and performance measures based on learner success. Moreover, the strategy document concludes that reliable data regarding Aboriginal learners will have a positive impact on addressing the other eight issues.

The plan also sees value in system-wide data tracking standards and performance beyond participation rates and offers some insights on how to improve the system. It suggests data collection could include: participation rates; transition rates (number and rate of learners moving into postsecondary education from K-12 within one year of K-12 completion, and rate of transition from Adult Basic Education to further postsecondary education); completion rates; and the level of credential awarded. According to a 2011 evaluation of the action plan by Human Capital Strategies, the easier to use province-wide standard has led to some improvement in data tracking and performance measurement, but challenges still exist.

British Columbia Postsecondary Institutions Current Best Practices

As identified in various literature sources, B.C. has been cited as a leader in Aboriginal education in Canada. The reason for this becomes evident as one explores the plethora of information about what the province and individual institutions are doing to support Aboriginal learners.

According to EPI's 2008 Review of Current Approaches to Canadian Aboriginal Self-Identification report on practices across Canada, all B.C. postsecondary education learners have the option to self-identify and are encouraged to do so. For universities and colleges, an online joint application service (Post-Secondary Application Service of British Columbia) encourages individual applicants "to advise institutions of Aboriginal ancestry, to assist them in providing culturally-appropriate services."[40] Applicants are asked to check a box if they "would like to declare North American First Nation ancestry."[41]

Across B.C., postsecondary institutions demonstrate a commitment to the success of Aboriginal learners by offering support and dedicated resources to Aboriginal learners who self-identify. Some B.C. institutions have demonstrated notable success through the implementation of strategic plans and other projects designed to achieve success for Aboriginal learners and have produced detailed plans over the past five years, including the British Columbia Institute of Technology, Simon Fraser University, University of British Columbia (UBC), and the University of Victoria.

The development of institutional and provincial plans means that more programs and spaces are being introduced on campuses, which is a good foundation for Aboriginal learner success. These programs help attract learners to schools, and help institutions identify Aboriginal learners. Offering programs and spaces for Aboriginal learners contributes to self-identification and academic success. Implementation of these programs and spaces is deemed more important in identifying learners and markers for success than programs designed to identify Aboriginal learners.

The B.C. government framework has created the impetus for institutions to introduce programs that will help Aboriginal learners succeed. It has also meant that institutions have had to offer more than the minimum in order to differentiate themselves and attract Aboriginal learners. This has lead to 'raising of the bar' and competition between institutions. As a result, institutions are improving access and success for Aboriginal learners, and B.C. has emerged as a leader in postsecondary education for Aboriginal learners.

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[40] Education Policy Institute. *Review of Current Approaches to Canadian Aboriginal Self-Identification* (Winnipeg, 2008) 16.

[41] Ibid. 16.

Ontario

Much of the work on Aboriginal self-identification in Ontario has focused on elementary and secondary school systems, and the work undertaken within these systems provides useful insights into best practices and guiding principles for developing a university-based, common self-identification mechanism.

Self-Identification at Ontario's Elementary and Secondary Schools

In 2007, the Ontario Ministry of Education released a policy framework entitled: *Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework*. This Framework provides the strategic policy context within which the Ministry of Education, school boards, and schools work together to improve academic achievement for Aboriginal learners who attend provincially-funded elementary and secondary schools. It also outlines a performance measurement strategy to gauge the success of the implementation of the Framework. The Ministry of Education released a policy framework the same year entitled: *Building Bridges to Success for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Students (Building Bridges)*.

In addition to outlining a range of strategies, the *Building Bridges* Framework sets out performance measures to assess progress towards achieving the goals established within the Framework. The Framework noted that the absence of reliable, learner-specific data on Aboriginal learners across Ontario is a challenge in assessing progress.

The Framework described the importance of having accurate and reliable data in order to:

- assess progress towards the goal of improving Aboriginal student achievement;

- support improvement planning and accountability; and

- inform policy and funding decisions, measurement, and reporting.

This Framework also outlines important information that school boards need in order to implement Aboriginal self-identification, including:

- background information on the self-identification process and its relationship to Ontario's education policy framework for Aboriginal students;

- a recommended process for developing effective voluntary, confidential self-identification policies and practices;

- case studies illustrating successful practices in Ontario school boards;

- practical tools that can be used to develop, implement, and communicate policies and practices; and

- reference information on the collection and use of personal information, ministry contacts, and selected provincial and local Aboriginal organizations.

As part of the *Building Bridges* Framework, the Ministry encouraged school boards to work closely with local Aboriginal communities in the development of a self-identification mechanism. This created a diversity of self-identification mechanisms across Ontario.

The Aboriginal Postsecondary Education and Training Policy Framework

In 2011, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) released its *Aboriginal Postsecondary Education and Training Policy Framework*. The development and implementation of the Framework signals a renewed commitment to partnership with Aboriginal communities to supporting positive outcomes for Aboriginal learners in postsecondary education across the province. The Framework has the following key goals:

- Accountability and Transparency;

- Responsiveness and Respect;

- Aboriginal Learners' Success; and

- Labour Market Readiness.

In order to monitor the effectiveness of the Framework's strategic directions, MTCU signaled its intent to develop a targeted Aboriginal Postsecondary Education Performance Measures Strategy. This strategy is intended to include:

- the development of policies to better identify Aboriginal learners/clients;

- program evaluations;

- improved tracking of, and results-based reporting on, Aboriginal postsecondary education investments; and

- improved reporting back to Aboriginal communities and the postsecondary education and training sectors on their collective achievements.

In particular, MTCU indicated that student self-identification policies would be developed, analyzed, and evaluated in partnership with Aboriginal communities and organizations in order to establish improved data collection on, and tracking and monitoring of, Ministry investments in Aboriginal postsecondary education and training.

Current Work Underway at Ontario Colleges

Colleges Ontario (CO) is the advocacy organization for Ontario's 24 colleges of applied arts and technology, and is

committed to advancing policies and awareness campaigns that ensure Ontario's colleges contribute to producing a highly skilled workforce, and to help strengthen the future of Ontario and Canada.

In 2011, the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities also asked CO to undertake an Aboriginal Self-Identification Project on behalf of its membership. COU and CO were able to collaborate for a select number of Aboriginal community engagements during the COU-led self-identification project.

In September 2012, Colleges Ontario undertook a pilot self-identification process at a select number of colleges in Ontario.

Perspective of Aboriginal Colleges and Learning Institutes on Self-Identification in Ontario

Aboriginal Colleges and Learning Institutes (Aboriginal Institutes) partner with Ontario colleges and universities to offer a wide range of accredited degrees, certificate and diploma programs, and apprenticeship programs. Some Aboriginal Institutes also provide secondary school programming, continuing education, literacy and basic skills training and may offer Aboriginal language education programs. Aboriginal Institutes receive funding from two primary sources: the federal government's Indian and Northern Affairs Canada Indian Studies Support Program, and from the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Aboriginal Postsecondary Education and Training Bursary. Currently, Aboriginal Institutes deliver programs to approximately 4,000 learners each year.

Aboriginal institutes in Ontario include:

- Anishinabek Educational Institute;

- First Nations Technical Institute (FNTI);

- Kenjgewin Teg Educational Institute;

- Iohahi:io Akwesasne Adult Education Centre;

- Oshki-Pimache-O-Win Education and Training Institute;

- Ogwehoweh Skills and Trades Training Centre;

- Seven Generations Education Institute;

- Shingwauk Kinoomaage Gamig; and

- Six Nations Polytechnic.

Individuals at Aboriginal Colleges and Learning Institutes must self-declare identity upon registration so that funding allocations can be determined. This direct approach is unique to Aboriginal Colleges and Learning institutes for several

reasons, including:

- many of the institutions are located within First Nations communities;

- they have high levels of Aboriginal staff and faculty; and

- the institutions are managed by a First Nations government.

Aboriginal Institutes do not have access to funding available to provincially-accredited colleges and universities for operations and capital. Below is an example of an Admission Form used at First Nations Technical Institute:

Registered at which First Nation: _____

10 Digit Band Number: _____

Funding Agency (if different for FN): _____

Contact Name at Funding Agency: _____

Telephone Number of Funder: _____

Chapter 3
Aboriginal Engagement

A critical element of the COU Aboriginal Self-Identification Project was engagement with the Aboriginal community. As a result, COU's Aboriginal engagement strategy was both broad and geographically diverse.
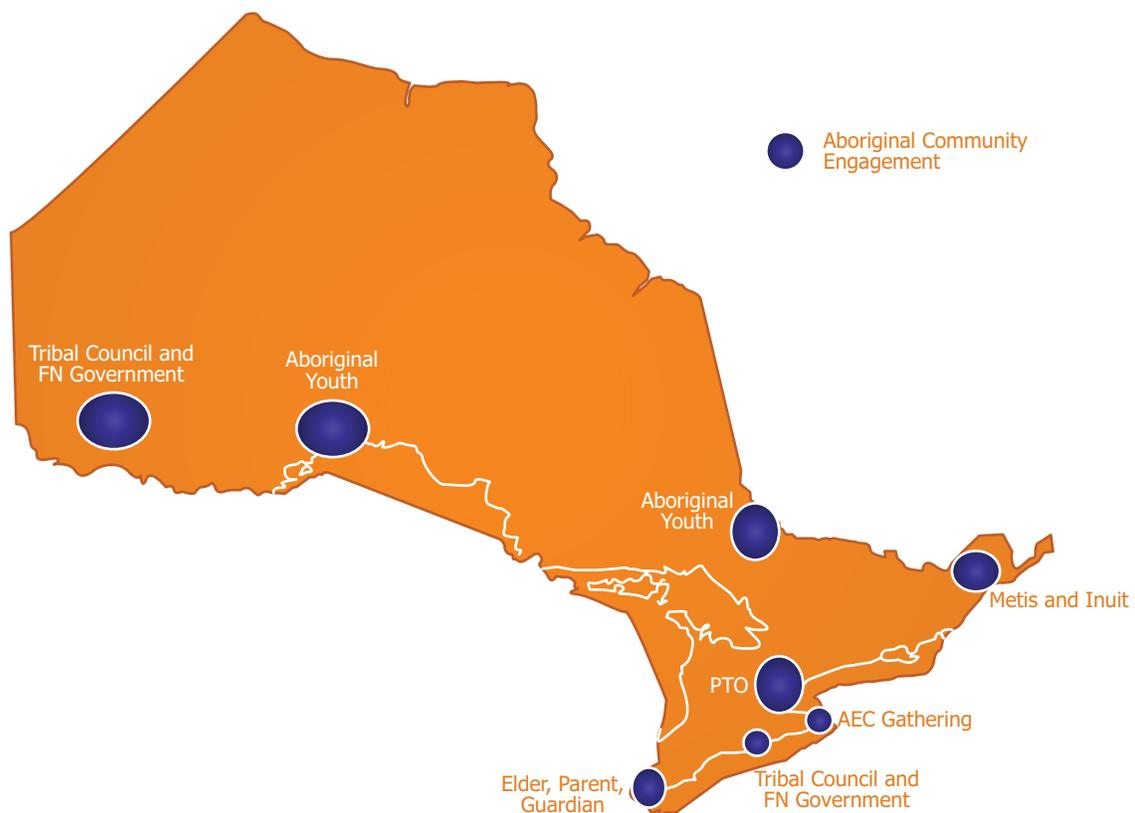
In total, 26 Aboriginal community engagements were completed across Ontario, involving 505 participants, including the following key groups:

- members of the Aboriginal university community;
- youth and learners;
- Elders, parents and guardians;
- Métis and Inuit organizations;
- Aboriginal Political Treaty Organizations;
- members of Tribal Councils and First Nations governments; and
- Aboriginal service organizations.

The chart below outlines the types of engagement undertaken, the number of completed engagements, and the number of participants.

Type of Engagement	Number of Planned Engagements	Number of Completed Engagements	Number of Participants Engaged
Youth/Learner	6	6	220
Parent/Guardian	3	3	110
Political Treaty Organizations	2	2	10
Tribal Council and First Nations Governments	3	3	20
Ontario Aboriginal Education Councils	1	1	40
Aboriginal Service Organizations	4	4	16
Métis Nation of Ontario	2	2	50
Tungasuvvingat Inuit Resource Centre	1	1	35
Aboriginal Elders	4	4	4
Total	26	26	505

This chapter provides a summary of the discussions from each of the Aboriginal engagement sessions, and finishes with an overview of the key findings.

Aboriginal Youth & Learners

> " The Government definition of who I am is different than who I say I am. "

Between September 2012 and November 2012, COU engaged with more than 200 Aboriginal learners from the primary, secondary, and postsecondary education sectors. Engagements were held at Ontario universities, including Lakehead University, Algoma University, Nipissing University, and the University of Guelph.

Methodology

The following topics were explored and discussed with Aboriginal learners through creative activities, moderated discussions, and peer-to-peer interviews:

- Aboriginal pride;

- identity and the self-identification process;

- benefits and barriers to self-identification; and

- preferences in the self-identification process.

DECODE, a Toronto-based research firm hired by COU, explored the question of a self-identification process through facilitated sessions. The objective of the DECODE sessions was to engage with Aboriginal learners to gain an understanding of their unique perspectives and experiences with self-identification policies and practices.

As part of the sessions, a copy of a draft Aboriginal learner self-identification mechanism was provided, and learners were asked to review it in small groups by answering a series of questions aimed at improving the self-identification process. This activity provided the opportunity to test draft questions directly with Aboriginal learners and to receive valuable feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of a self-identification process.

Summary of Key Findings

In these engagement sessions, COU, including members of the Working Group, heard about factors that would encourage learners' participation in a self-identification mechanism, including:

- a preamble to explain clearly the purpose and potential use of self-identification data;

- a question on Aboriginal identity to provide the option for learners to identify using the terms of First Nations (Status/Non-Status), Métis, and Inuit;

- an alternative identity option to respect the diversity of the Aboriginal community by allowing learners to generate their own identity category (e.g. through the provision of an "Alternative identity term" category);

- a more detailed overview of potential benefits derived from the collection and use of self-identification data; and

- an FAQ document with further information on definitions of Aboriginal ancestry and identity (e.g. First Nations – Status/Non-Status, Métis, and Inuit).

General Overview of Findings

General

Overall, learners were satisfied with the draft self-identification mechanism.

Core Elements of a Self-Identification Mechanism

Preamble

After reviewing the draft copy of a self-identification mechanism, learners indicated that they were satisfied with the preamble because it identified clearly the purpose of collecting self-identification information, as well as those who could potentially use the information.

Question on Aboriginal Ancestry

Learners suggested that a question on Aboriginal ancestry could define all Aboriginal people too broadly as one cultural and ancestral group, rather than recognizing that there are more than 600 distinct bands in Canada. Government

" uncomfortable "

definitions were singled out as being particularly poor in this regard. This frustration was well reflected in one learner's comment: "The Government definition of who I am is different than who I say I am."

When asked to describe their feelings about checking a box about their Aboriginal ancestry, learners suggested that the process was "objectifying" and left them feeling "uncomfortable". However, most Aboriginal learners were satisfied with the

" objectifying "

self-identification mechanism that was provided in the sessions because it also allowed them to identify using the identity terms of First Nations (Status/Non-Status), Inuit, or Métis. Most importantly, it provided an option for learners to identify within an "Other" category where they could indicate an alternative identity term such as Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe, Treaty #3, etc.

Question on Aboriginal Identity

Learners consistently characterized their Aboriginal identity using a combination of culture and ancestral heritage, identifying themselves with the name of their tribe, reservation, band, and language. Most of the learners also had complex and shifting perceptions of their own identities, constructed from unique combinations of cultural and ancestral experiences. For instance, the learners indicated that identity may be a combination of the culture in which one is raised, the ancestral history of one's family, and the community in which one currently lives.

The draft copy of a self-identification mechanism provided to the learners included the term "Other" as a category within the question on Aboriginal identity. While learners agreed with having the ability to generate an alternative identity, they asked that a term other than "Other" be used, indicating that the term "Other" would make them feel alienated.

Overview of Benefits

During the engagement sessions, the benefits of a self-identification mechanism were discussed and the following were identified:

- improved access to funding for both individuals and Aboriginal programs and services at postsecondary institutions;

- improved ability to connect personally to the Aboriginal community through the institution;

- improved staff training to support the implementation of student services on campus and to increase confidence amongst learners in the self-identification mechanism;

- stronger Aboriginal university communities that could help "change negative societal impressions" about Aboriginal people; and

- greater awareness of Aboriginal culture and issues on the part of the broader Canadian population and more "equal and fair treatment" of Aboriginal learners.

However, some learners were also worried that this might unintentionally reinforce negative stereotypes within the broader university community by giving the impression that Aboriginal learners receive unfair or special treatment. Learners were also concerned about "becoming a number" in the self-identification process, while other learners expressed a "fear of being singled out" by teachers or peers as a representative of, and expert on, all matters pertaining to Aboriginal people in Canada. As one learner commented: "It feels like you have to know about native issues and you'll be called upon to be the representative (for all Aboriginal learners)."

"Is it to include or exclude us?"

Other Elements to Consider

Data Collection

Learners were asked to indicate previous experiences with self-identification. Most mentioned major events, such as university or job applications as the first time they had to self-identify. Learners had also been asked to self-identify when applying for student financial assistance at postsecondary institutions, including the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP), as well as for bursaries and scholarships. They further indicated that their decision to self-identify at these moments can affect their willingness to self-identify at other points in their lives.

Data Reporting

Learners indicated concern about who uses the information once self-identification information is collected. Learners were also suspicious about the intentions of the institutions collecting their personal information. This suspicion was particularly well captured when one learner asked for clarification on why this was being done: "Is it to include or exclude us?"

Recommendations

The learners provided detailed suggestions to improve the clarity and effectiveness of the draft copy of a self-identification mechanism. This feedback is summarized below:

1. Use clear, simple, and inclusive language throughout the self-identification mechanism.

- Learners indicated that they were confused about the terminology used in the draft self-identification mechanism and preferred for more basic and understandable language, rather than government, legal, or technical language.

2. Ensure that learners have multiple means of accessing more information about the self-identification process.

- Learners raised a number of questions about the definitions related to identity and ancestry, and recommended an FAQ section to clarify any ambiguous or technical definitions.

- Learners suggested an in-person option to fill out a self-identification questionnaire with knowledgeable university staff members who can answer questions in real-time, accommodate different communication styles, and build confidence in the process.

- Learners suggested including videos with conversational style instructions provided by real people (not actors) to help learners better navigate the question process and explain the associated benefits and consequences.

3. Provide clarity on the purpose and benefits of self-identification to improve participation rates.

- Learners requested that the purpose and use of the data be stated clearly.

- Learners also requested that benefits be described BEFORE being asked to self-identify rather than after, and that the benefits described include those related to individuals, institutions, and the broader community.

4. Request permission to follow-up with the learner.

- Learners indicated that a request for permission to allow postsecondary institutions to follow-up with them should be provided in a self-identification mechanism. The purpose of the follow-up would be to provide postsecondary institutions with the opportunity to ensure their learners are well supported.

Aboriginal Elders, Parents, and Guardians

COU, including members from the Working Group, engaged with Aboriginal Elders, parents, and guardians to hear their diverse perspectives on self-identification through three separate engagement sessions that leveraged already existing forums for discussion. One engagement session was held with the Greater Essex County District School Board (GECDSB), and two were held with the Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board (WECDSB).

Summary of Key Findings

In these engagement sessions, COU, including members of the Working Group, heard about factors that would encourage learners' participation in a self-identification mechanism, including:

- a preamble to explain briefly the purpose and potential use of self-identification data;

- information on privacy protections;

- a more detailed overview of potential benefits derived from the collection and use of self-identification data;

- an alternative identity option to respect the diversity of the Aboriginal community by allowing learners to generate their own identity category (e.g. through the provision of an "Alternative identity term" category);

- an opportunity for learners to opt-out or opt-into the process, as well as the opportunity to adjust or withdraw self-identification information at any time to allow for the fluid and context-driven nature of Aboriginal identity; and

- opportunities for learners to self-identify at multiple times and at different locations.

Background Overview

In 2007, the Ministry of Education released the *Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework* that set out the reasons why the Ministry of Education, school boards, and schools need to work together to improve academic achievement for Aboriginal learners attending provincially-funded, primary and secondary schools. The same year, the Ministry released a policy framework, *Building Bridges to Success for First Nations, Métis and Inuit Students*, that encouraged school boards to develop voluntary, confidential Aboriginal learner self-identification processes so that the government would have access to data that could be used to support improvements in planning and accountability, and to inform policy and funding decisions, as well as measurements and reporting.

The engagements, with which COU, including members of the Working Group, were involved, were part of this broader exercise of developing self-identification processes within primary school boards.

General Overview of Findings

General

Overall, Elders, parents, and guardians were positive about Aboriginal learner self-identification. However, they indicated that a lack of trust in the Canadian education system, due to the legacy of the residential school experiences and other discriminatory historical education policies and practices, remains a significant hurdle to be overcome.

Questions on Aboriginal Voluntary Self-Identification

As part of the engagement sessions, five questions were presented on the topic of Aboriginal voluntary self-identification. The questions and key findings are provided below.

1. Would you feel comfortable self-declaring a learner to your district school board?

The engagement sessions revealed a reluctance to support the self-identification of Aboriginal learners for the following reasons: a lack of trust in the self-identification process, a lack of transparency in the allocations of funds, and survey fatigue with institutions.

Participants also identified factors negatively affecting self-identification participation rates, including:

- the effects of residential schools on loss of culture and language;

- historical privacy violations;

- family poverty; and

- family dynamics, including dealing with symptoms of post-traumatic stress.

However, participants stressed that a clear message about the reasons for data collection through a self-identification process would increase self-identification participation rates.

2. Would you encourage your learner to participate in a self-identification process?

The participants suggested that the following elements would increase participation rates of students and families in a self-identification process:

- working to build greater trust in the self-identification mechanism among the Aboriginal community;

- offering greater transparency and communication to the Aboriginal community about applicable privacy laws established to protect learners' privacy and personal information;

- communicating the potential benefits of self-identification for learners at postsecondary institutions, such as services and supports; and

- ensuring a stronger dialogue with postsecondary institutions on barriers affecting the success of Aboriginal learners.

3. What would make you feel most comfortable to identify your learner?

Participants indicated that, to increase the comfort level of the Aboriginal community in releasing self-identification information, postsecondary institutions should clearly outline the benefits of the self-identification process, as well as the privacy laws established to protect learners' personal information within postsecondary institutions.

Participants also suggested that having Elders visit classrooms would increase learner pride and self-confidence in their cultural ancestry, which, they explained, would help to increase the willingness of learners to participate in a self-identification process.

Lastly, participants stressed that any information being shared with Aboriginal Elders, parents and guardians needs to be user-friendly, including the use of words that are less technical, acronym-free, and incorporate Indigenous languages to promote higher levels of comprehension and comfort.

4. Do you have any suggestions on the draft self-identification question that has been provided?

Overall, participants were satisfied with the district school board's draft self-identification question process and marketing materials provided to them for comment.

In response to a section of the self-identification process where learners would be asked to identify their Aboriginal identity (i.e. First Nations – Status/Non-Status, Métis or Inuit), the participants stated that a self-identification mechanism would have a higher participation rate if an alternative identity option, such as an "Other" category, was provided. The group further suggested that it could be helpful to drill down on Aboriginal identity to incorporate other more specific cultural and ethnic identity categories (e.g. on and off-reserve, Cree, Kanien'kehá:ka, Anishinaabe, Treaty #3, etc.). Other recommendations on the question included:

- the need to investigate opportunities for Aboriginal languages to be incorporated into the self-identification process; and

- the need to ensure learners are given an opportunity to opt-out or opt-into the self-identification process, as well as the opportunity to adjust or withdraw self-identification information at any time to allow for the fluid and context-driven nature of Aboriginal identity.

In addition to the district school board's draft self-identification question process, participants raised a concern with the definition of the term "First Nations", which "Refers to Canada's original people whose history is interwoven with the creation of the 1876 *Indian Act*, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC), and the subsequent government registry system." Participants indicated that they would not self-identify or encourage their learners to self-identify as First Nations under this specific definition because they did not view their history as being "interwoven" with the *Indian Act* of 1876.

5. When and how many times do you feel the self-identification question should be asked?

The participants noted the importance of self-identification when transitioning into postsecondary education. It was suggested by some participants that learners be asked to self-identify at multiple times and at different locations for best results. Participants stated that they were aware of the self-identification question that is asked by the Ontario Universities' Application Centre (OUAC).

Other Considerations for the Self-Identification Mechanism

Importance of Transparency in the Self-Identification Mechanism to Build Trust

Participants indicated that the shadow of mistrust that currently exists between the Aboriginal community and the education sector is a significant issue, and that demonstrating transparency and accountability is critical to the success of an Aboriginal self-identification mechanism. It was also mentioned that there are issues in local communities between Status and Non-Status Aboriginal peoples in relation to education and resource allocation, and that this could affect self-identification participation rates as well.

General Concerns Related to a Self-Identification Mechanism

In general, Elders, parents and guardians expressed concerns about learner transitions into primary, secondary, and postsecondary education institutions. If the transition processes are not transparent and understandable, parents felt hesitant to encourage participation in a self-identification process.

Participants also stressed that if the self-identification question was too closely linked to questions related to others such as students requiring services for a disability or other marginalized groups, it would negatively impact their willingness to identify their learners in a self-identification process.

The fear that participation in an Aboriginal self-identification process could single out learners was expressed. One parent said that they were fearful of "isolating, ostracizing or marginalizing" their child in the institution or among their peers.

In addition, parents and guardians expressed concerns about potential technical mistakes with computer tracking, double counting, miscommunication, and secretarial error during the input of data.

Strategic Communication

Participants noted that strategic communication around the importance, purpose, and benefits of participating in an Aboriginal self-identification process would help to increase the number of parents who would feel comfortable identifying their learners. The most effective communication would provide a clear identification of the potential benefits and purpose at the beginning of the self-identification process.

Métis Nation of Ontario

Another key audience in the Aboriginal community engagement process was the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO). Engagement with MNO occurred on August 25, 2012, as a pre-conference session at the MNO Annual General Assembly held in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario.

Summary of Key Findings

In this engagement, COU, including members of the Working Group, heard about factors that would encourage learners' participation in a self-identification mechanism, including:

- a preamble that briefly outlines to learners the potential benefits derived from the collection and use of self-identification data;

- definitions of Aboriginal ancestry and identity terms; and

- opportunities for learners to self-identify at multiple times and at different locations.

General Overview of Findings

General

Overall, participants in the engagement session indicated general support for a common self-identification process in postsecondary institutions, and they provided comment on a number of core elements related to a self-identification mechanism.

Core Elements of a Self-Identification Mechanism

Preamble

There was consensus on the need for a preamble that briefly outlines to learners the potential benefits derived from the collection and use of self-identification data, including improved service delivery.

Definition of Aboriginal Ancestry and Identity

The following draft definitions of the terms 'Aboriginal' and 'Métis' were provided to participants during the engagement session:

Aboriginal: An Aboriginal person in Canada, as recognized in the *Constitution Act, 1982*, is a person who identifies with First Nations (Status/Non-Status), Métis, or Inuit cultural and/or ancestral background.

Métis: One of three groups of peoples recognized as Aboriginal by the *Constitution Act, 1982*. The Métis are a distinct Aboriginal people with a unique culture, language (Michif), and heritage.

No revisions were offered to the definition of "Aboriginal". However, participants suggested that the definition of Métis include a list of their ancestral homelands (e.g. Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, and the Northwest Territories) and that it exclude the term "Michif", as it is does not represent all languages spoken by Métis peoples in Canada.

Other Elements to Consider

Data Collection

Métis community members recommended that the self-identification question should be asked at registration and when accessing financial aid.

Other Considerations for the Self-Identification Mechanism

Benefits of Self-Identification

Participants expressed a belief that a self-identification mechanism could help to significantly improve and evolve benefits for Aboriginal learners.

Encouraging Aboriginal Self-Identification through Promotion

Participants also suggested that, to improve the likelihood of Métis participants choosing to self-identify, an information package that is specific to Métis learners should be available to accompany the self-identification mechanism.

Finally, participants suggested that advertisements and brochures should be produced to encourage learner participation in the self-identification process and that these materials should include information specific to Métis learners.

Tungasuvvingat Inuit Resource Centre

Engagement with the Inuit community was undertaken in partnership with the Tungasuvvingat Inuit Resource Centre (TIRC), in Ottawa on June 21, 2012, during the Inuit Spring Festival. COU and TIRC developed a survey on self-identification that was used to engage members of the Inuit community. COU, including members of the Working Group and TIRC, surveyed a total of 36 individuals. The survey results provided valuable insight and guidance in developing recommendations for this final report.

Summary of Key Findings

In this engagement, COU, including members of the Working Group, heard about factors that would encourage learners' participation in a self-identification mechanism, including:

- definitions of Aboriginal ancestry and identity terms;

- a more detailed overview of potential benefits derived from the collection and use of self-identification data; and

- an alternative identity option to respect the diversity of the Aboriginal community by allowing learners to generate their own identity category (e.g. through the provision of an "Alternative identity term" category).

General Overview of Findings

General

In general, participants were positive about Aboriginal self-identification; they indicated that they would self-identify as Inuk, and would also encourage their children to self-identify at postsecondary institutions.

Core Elements of a Self-Identification Mechanism

Definition of Aboriginal Ancestry and Identity

The following draft definitions of the terms 'Aboriginal' and 'Inuit' were provided to participants during the engagement session:

Aboriginal: An Aboriginal person in Canada, as recognized in the *Constitution Act, 1982*, is a person who identifies with First Nations (Status/Non-Status), Métis, or Inuit cultural and/or ancestral background.

Inuit: One of three peoples recognized as Aboriginal by the *Constitution Act, 1982*. The Inuit are "*Aboriginal*" or "*First Peoples*" representing four Inuit regions in Canada with a separate origin, culture and identity. The regions are: Nunatsiavut (Labrador), Nunavik (northern Quebec), Nunavut, and the Inuvialuit Settlement Region in the Northwest Territories.

No revisions to the text were offered.

Overview of Benefits

The Inuit community stressed the importance of promoting to Aboriginal learners the potential benefits derived from the collection and use of self-identification data. The survey asked individuals to cite factors or benefits, such as academic and cultural supports, that helped them to successfully complete their programs.

Participants noted that Aboriginal programming that is key to success includes:

- Aboriginal student resource centers

- institutional mentors;

- tutors;

- cultural events;

- financial support;

- hands-on experience;

- peers providing program support;

- on-campus Aboriginal specialists; and

- school tours.

In addition to identifying factors or benefits that contributed to the Inuit community members' postsecondary education success, individuals were asked to identify what would make them feel most comfortable self-identifying. Respondents indicated that a more detailed overview of the potential benefits to them as learners would increase their likelihood of participating. The potential benefits cited were:

- services at Aboriginal student centers;

- programs and courses tailored for Inuk learners;

- opportunities to learn more about their culture;

- financial support and scholarships; and

- opportunities to Indigenize postsecondary institutions.

Other Considerations for the Self-Identification Mechanism

The survey results also indicated that participants would feel most comfortable self-identifying if they were given an opportunity to specify language or heritage, as well as an opportunity to self-identify on a survey translated into their native language. They also indicated that they would be most likely to respond if the self-identification mechanism was presented through the Aboriginal student services office.

Political Treaty Organizations

Working in partnership with the Chiefs of Ontario Education Coordination Unit, COU engaged twice with five Aboriginal Political Treaty Organizations (PTOs): the Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians; the Chiefs of Ontario; Grand Council Treaty #3; Nishnawbe Aski Nation; and a representative of the Independent Nations. These engagements took place in Toronto on July 16, 2012, and in Thunder Bay on January 16, 2013. PTOs stressed the need for more engagement in northern Ontario, which led to an additional series of engagements with youth as far north as Sioux Lookout.

At the July session, the following questions were posed during the roundtable discussion:

1. How might a provincial self-identification mechanism (or process to develop one) assist Aboriginal education planning?

2. What factors might affect participation rates in a self-identification process? What solutions might exist to address those factors?

3. Would you be willing to promote a common, provincial self-identification process to your learners? If so, what tools would you use?

Summary of Key Findings

In these engagement sessions, COU, including members of the Working Group, heard about factors that would encourage learners' participation in a self-identification mechanism, including:

- a preamble to explain briefly the purpose and potential use of self-identification data;

- a more detailed overview of potential benefits derived from the collection and use of self-identification data;

- information on privacy protections; and

- an opportunity for an Aboriginal lens to be applied at an appropriate part of the reporting process for self-identification information [e.g. as part of reporting to Aboriginal Education Councils (AECs)].

General Overview of Findings

General

In general, PTOs supported the idea of implementing a common self-identification mechanism at postsecondary institutions; they viewed self-identification as an opportunity for a meaningful assessment of the population with positive outcomes for all involved.

Core Elements of a Self-Identification Mechanism

Preamble

The PTOs expressed the need for transparency from the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) on the intended purpose of self-identification data collection and reporting. It was suggested that a preamble that provides clarity on why an Aboriginal learner's self-identification question is being posed and on the use of self-identification data once it is collected, be provided as part of a self-identification mechanism.

Question on Aboriginal Ancestry

Participants expressed varying degrees of discomfort with the term "Aboriginal". However, it was generally agreed that there is no obvious or more appropriate alternative in the context of a common self-identification mechanism within Ontario institutions.

Overview of Benefits

Participants highlighted a number of potential benefits to learners related to participation in a self-identification process, including improved service delivery and financial support.

Information on Privacy

Participants raised a number of concerns regarding the security and privacy of data collected through a self-identification mechanism. They stressed that a self-identification mechanism should assure learners that their information will be protected and that they will not be individually identified.

Other Elements to Consider

Data Reporting

PTOs expressed a strong desire to continue engaging with COU and postsecondary institutions in Ontario. They also stressed the need for data to be shared with Aboriginal communities at an appropriate point in the reporting process for self-identification information [e.g. as part of reporting to Aboriginal Education Councils (AECs)].

Other Considerations for the Self-Identification Mechanism

Collaborative Relationships with Postsecondary Institutions and PTOs

PTOs welcomed the opportunity for sustained collaboration with COU and postsecondary institutions in Ontario. The group expressed a strong desire to continue to assist in identifying the needs of Aboriginal learners through this project and through each institution's Aboriginal Education Council. Some participants felt that relationships with postsecondary education institutions were rooted in unequal partnerships, but self-identification was identified as being a potential opportunity to improve outcomes for all involved.

Funding

The ways in which the self-identification mechanism would be used to guide funding decisions was another core area of concern raised by PTOs. Participants indicated that funding models have lacked accountability and have not properly identified the needs of those they were designed to serve. PTOs stressed the need for assurances that this new measurement tool would not have a negative impact on funding. In particular, there was concern that institutions with fewer students that were working to build their Aboriginal learner population might receive less support. In addition, concerns were raised that self-identification could adversely affect institutions that had been successful, as the government could decide they no longer required as much funding.

Tribal Councils and First Nations Governments

COU, including members of the Working Group, undertook three engagements with Tribal Councils and First Nations governments. Specifically, they met with the Southern First Nations Secretariat in Delaware - Moraviantown First Nation on July 26, 2012, the Bimose Tribal Council in Kenora on August 8, 2012, and the Northern Shore Tribal Council in Sault Ste. Marie on August 23, 2012.

The following questions were posed during all three engagements:

1. How might a provincial self-identification mechanism (or process to develop one) assist Aboriginal education planning?

2. What factors might affect participation rates in a self-identification process? What solutions might exist to address those factors?

3. Would you be willing to promote a common, provincial self-identification process to your learners? If so, what tools would you use?

In addition, the Northern Shore Tribal Council was provided with proposed definitions of Aboriginal and First Nations (Status/Non-Status).

Summary of Key Findings

In these engagement sessions, COU, including members of the Working Group, heard about factors that would encourage learners' participation in a self-identification mechanism, including:

- a title that includes the term "Voluntary" and excludes the term "Canadian";

- a preamble that is short and concise, and explains briefly the purpose and potential use of self-identification data;

- a question on Aboriginal identity to provide the option for learners to identify using the terms of First Nations (Status/Non-Status), Métis, and Inuit;

- definitions of Aboriginal ancestry and identity terms;

- a more detailed overview of potential benefits derived from the collection and use of self-identification data;

- information on privacy protections; and

- an alternative identity option to respect the diversity of the Aboriginal community by allowing learners to generate their own identity category (e.g. through the provision of an "Alternative identity term" category).

General Overview of Findings

General

Overall, Tribal Councils and First Nations governments were cautious to promote learner participation in a self-identification process in the postsecondary sector. Some noted a concern that an Aboriginal self-identification process within a provincial system could affect federally-guaranteed Aboriginal treaty rights or control over education. At the same time, they suggested that a common self-identification process could also have a positive impact on the learners' sense of pride in their Aboriginal culture and ancestry.

Core Elements of a Self-Identification Mechanism

Title

Participants indicated that the title of a self-identification process should be clear and visible to the learners and communicate that the process is *voluntary*, in order to engender trust. They also indicated that there are learners who do not identify themselves as Canadian citizens and stressed strongly that, in order to increase the participation rate of a self-identification mechanism, the title of the self-identification mechanism should exclude the term "Canadian".

Preamble

Transparency in the self-identification mechanism related to the purpose of collecting and using self-identification data was strongly encouraged to establish trust among Aboriginal learners and institutions. Participants suggested that a short and concise preamble addressing these factors would greatly increase self-identification participation rates.

Question on Aboriginal Ancestry and Identity

Participants expressed caution regarding a question on ancestry, which they suggested could limit the ability to verify First Nations' identities. They indicated that it is important to provide learners with the opportunity to identify using the following Aboriginal identity terms: First Nations (Status/Non-Status), Métis, and Inuit, as well as an opportunity to identity in an "Other" category.

Definition of Aboriginal Ancestry and Identity

The following draft definitions of the terms 'Aboriginal' and 'First Nations' were provided to participants during the engagement sessions:

Aboriginal: An Aboriginal person in Canada, as recognized in the *Constitution Act, 1982*, is a person who identifies with First Nations (Status/Non-Status), Métis, or Inuit cultural and/or ancestral background.

First Nations

(Status/Non-Status): This term refers to all Aboriginal people who are not of Inuit or Métis descent, regardless of their standing under the *Indian Act, 1985*.

Status: Refers to individuals who are eligible to have their names included on the Indian Register maintained by the federal government of Canada.

Non-Status: Refers to people who identify as First Nations but are not recognized on the Indian Register maintained by the federal government of Canada.

In response, participants indicated that the terms "Status" and "Non-Status" were generally not difficult terms to define as they are directly connected with the *Indian Act* of 1985.

No revisions were offered to the definition of "Aboriginal", however, participants emphasized that a definition of Aboriginal ancestry should always include a reference to the *Constitution Act, 1982*.

Overview of Benefits

Engagements with Tribal Councils and First Nations governments underscored again that a successful Aboriginal self-identification process should include a focus on the potential benefits associated with the process.

Information on Privacy

Participants indicated that a self-identification process should include information on privacy laws established to protect learners' privacy and personal information, in order to build confidence and trust in the mechanism amongst Aboriginal learners, as well as increase the likelihood of Aboriginal learners' participation in a self-identification process.

Other Considerations for the Self-Identification Mechanism

Encouraging Aboriginal Self-Identification through Promotion

Tribal Councils and First Nations governments regarded self-identification as a process that could engender a sense of empowerment in learners and institutions. They noted that the use of social media, peer support networks, and other tools to promote the potentially positive outcomes of a self-identification process would help to increase learner participation.

General Concerns Related to a Self-Identification Mechanism

Participants expressed a concern that an Aboriginal self-identification process could single out learners. One participant said that they were fearful of "isolating, ostracizing or marginalizing" learners in the institution or among their peers. Another participant mentioned that if an institution asked Aboriginal learners to disclose their ancestry or identity only, that this could be considered racial discrimination. However, this view was not a common perspective shared during the engagement sessions.

Aboriginal Community Service Organizations

As part of the Aboriginal engagement strategy, COU, including members of the Working Group, met with a number of Aboriginal service organizations, including the:

- Ontario Native Education Counselling Association (ONECA) on January 15, 2013;

- Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres (OFIFC) on September 13, 2012;

- Native Women's Resource Centre of Toronto (NWRCT) on July 12, 2012;

- Native Canadian Centre of Toronto (NCCT) on August 16, 2012; and

- Toronto Council Fire Native Cultural Centre on July 24, 2012.

Summary of Key Findings

In these engagement sessions, factors that would encourage learners' participation in a self-identification mechanism were explored, including:

- a preamble that briefly outlines to learners the potential benefits derived from the collection and use of self-identification data;

- a statement that proof of Aboriginal ancestry is not required;

- a question related to Aboriginal ancestry provided BEFORE a question related to Aboriginal identity;

- an alternative identity option to respect the diversity of the Aboriginal community by allowing learners to generate their own identity category (e.g. through the provision of an "Alternative identity term" category);

- definitions of Aboriginal ancestry and identity terms;

- a question on Aboriginal identity to provide the option for learners to identity using the terms of First Nations (Status/Non-Status), Métis, and Inuit, with the ability to choose multiple categories (e.g. First Nations and Métis);

- opportunities for learners to self-identify at multiple times; and

- an opportunity for learners to opt-out or opt-in of the process, as well as the opportunity to adjust or withdraw self-identification information at any time to allow for the fluid and context-driven nature of Aboriginal identity.

General Overview of Findings

General

The views expressed in engagements with community service organizations reflected the diverse cultural and social perspectives of the Aboriginal community as a whole. While there were some reservations, in general, they were supportive of the implementation of a common self-identification mechanism at postsecondary institutions.

Core Elements of a Self-Identification Mechanism

Preamble

There was consensus among participants on the need for a preamble that briefly outlines the potential benefits derived from the collection and use of self-identification data. They further indicated that, to increase the participation rate of a self-identification process, a preamble should inform learners that proof of their Aboriginal ancestry is not required.

Question on Aboriginal Ancestry

Aboriginal community service organizations stressed strongly the importance of presenting the self-identification question related to Aboriginal ancestry BEFORE a question related to Aboriginal identity. They stressed that this order of questions would increase the participation rate for urban Aboriginal learners and learners of mixed ancestry who face challenges in understanding their Aboriginal identity.

Definition of Aboriginal Ancestry and Identity

The following draft definitions of the terms 'Aboriginal' and 'First Nations' were provided to two service organizations during the engagement sessions:

Aboriginal: An Aboriginal person in Canada, as recognized in the *Constitution Act, 1982*, is a person who identifies with First Nations (Status/Non-Status), Métis, or Inuit cultural and/or ancestral background.

First Nations (Status/Non-Status): This term refers to all Aboriginal people who are not of Inuit or Métis descent, regardless of their standing under the *Indian Act, 1985*.

Status: Refers to individuals who are eligible to have their names included on the Indian Register maintained by the federal government of Canada.

Non-Status: Refers to people who identify as First Nations but are not recognized on the Indian Register maintained by the federal government of Canada.

In regards to the definition of the term "First Nations", participants were pleased that the term "First Nations", rather than "Indians" was used as the latter was considered offensive. They were also pleased that the term "First Nations" was defined as all Aboriginal people who are not Inuit or Métis, regardless of their legal status under the *Indian Act*, as there are many First Nations people in Canada who are not registered under the Act.

Furthermore, participants indicated that the terms "Status" and "Non-Status" were generally not difficult terms to define as they are directly connected with the Indian Act. They also indicated that an explicit mention of culture and ancestry in a definition of Aboriginal ancestry would capture a greater number of Aboriginal learners.

Question on Aboriginal Identity

Participants stressed that a self-identification mechanism providing learners with an option to further differentiate between "Status" or "Non-Status" could be exclusionary for some learners and negatively affect learner participation rates.

In addition, participants indicated that learners should be given the opportunity to choose multiple categories in a question on Aboriginal identity (e.g. First Nations and Métis).

Information on Privacy

Protection of privacy in the collection, use, and storage of self-identification data was identified as a critical element to learner participation. One community service organization cautioned that the level of mistrust of university

administrative processes in general should not be underestimated, as the lack of transparency in the collection of learner information has been problematic in the past. Institutions should clearly outline the intended use of the data and established privacy measures, as well as be able to explain how and when personal identifiers would be removed from the collected self-identification data. Two service organizations suggested that communication with the learner regarding self-identification should be focused on the purpose of data collection. They also stressed the importance of ensuring that Aboriginal learner data is handled (analyzed, safeguarded and/or reviewed) by an Aboriginal person employed at the institution.

Other Elements to Consider

Data Collection

Community service organizations recommended that the self-identification question be asked multiple times during a learner's postsecondary career, and that the self-identification mechanism have the flexibility to accommodate the fluid and context-driven nature of Aboriginal identity, particularly in urban environments. As long as the question process accommodates changes in a learners' identity, the self-identification was viewed as an opportunity for the learner to explore Aboriginal identity.

Other Considerations for the Self-Identification Mechanism

Benefits of Self-Identification

Some participants expressed a belief that the benefits to learners could evolve significantly and positively as a result of a self-identification process, which was identified as a desirable outcome.

Opting-Out or In, Adjusting, or Withdrawing Self-Identification Information

Community service organizations indicated that learners should be provided with an opportunity to opt-out or opt-in of the process, as well as the opportunity to adjust or withdraw self-identification information at any time to allow for the fluid and context-driven nature of Aboriginal identity.

Reflection of Social, Cultural, and Spiritual Factors

Community service organizations were concerned about how social, cultural, and spiritual factors would be considered and reflected in the development and implementation of the self-identification process.

Aboriginal Education Councils

COU, including members of the Working Group, engaged with approximately 40 representatives from Ontario universities' Aboriginal Education Councils (AECs) on November 8, 2012. This engagement was organized in conjunction with a provincial gathering of AECs in Niagara Falls, Ontario, that was organized with Brock University and Colleges Ontario.

The following questions were posed during this engagement session:

1. Who encourages self-identification?

2. What are the benefits of self-identification to the learner?

3. What are the barriers to self-identification?

4. What are the resulting programs and services for the learner?

Summary of Key Findings

In this engagement, factors that would encourage learners' participation in a self-identification mechanism were explored, including:

- a more detailed overview of potential benefits derived from the collection and use of self-identification data;

- a statement that proof of Aboriginal ancestry is not required; and

- opportunities for learners to self-identify at different locations.

General Overview of Findings

General

Aboriginal Education Councils (AEC) were supportive of implementing a common self-identification mechanism across postsecondary institutions in Ontario, and expressed interest in collecting Aboriginal learner self-identification data in order to improve Aboriginal learners' postsecondary education attainment rates.

Core Elements of a Self-Identification Mechanism

Preamble

Participants indicated that a preamble should inform learners that proof of their Aboriginal ancestry is not required to participate in self-identification process.

Overview of Benefits

During the engagement session, AEC members were asked to identify benefits to the learner as a result of self-identification. Participants identified the following potential benefits:

- increase in cultural pride and stronger connections with the Aboriginal community;

- increase in campus-wide awareness of Aboriginal issues;

- strengthened peer support;

- improved funding supports for learners and services;

- increased academic success;

- greater opportunities to build relationships between Aboriginal and university communities;

- improved professional development for faculty and staff; and

- improved transitions to graduate studies and the labour market.

Other Considerations for the Self-Identification Mechanism

Barriers to Effective Self-Identification

Participants were also asked to help generate a list of barriers to effective and meaningful self-identification for learners.

The following barriers were identified:

- lack of comfort and security in personal identity;

- lack of understanding of individual ancestry;

- lack of trust on how the self-identification data will be collected, stored, and used;

- fear of being targeted as 'spokespeople' to represent the entire Aboriginal community;

- lack of family support; and

- fear of being associated with negative stereotypes and racism.

Encouraging Aboriginal Self-Identification Through Individuals, Services, and Networks

AEC participants helped to compile a list of individuals, services, and networks that could have an impact on a learner's decision to self-identify, including:

- university administrators and recruitment officers;

- university admission processes;

- families and peers;

- Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal service centres;

- student councils and cultural events;

- bursary and scholarship programs; and

- the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU).

Summary of Aboriginal Engagement Findings

Core Elements of a Self-Identification Mechanism

The following is a summary of the factors that would help to encourage learners' participation in a self-identification mechanism:

1. A title that:

- communicates to Aboriginal learners that the self-identification process is voluntary, in order to engender trust; and

- excludes the term "Canadian", because Aboriginal community members stressed that there are learners who do not identify themselves as Canadian citizens.

2. A preamble that:

- is short and concise;

- explains briefly and clearly the purpose and use of the collected self-identification information;

- briefly outlines to learners the potential benefits derived from the collection and use of self-identification data; and

- includes a statement that proof of Aboriginal ancestry is not required.

3. A question and definition of Aboriginal ancestry that:

- is provided BEFORE a question related to Aboriginal identity; and

- includes a definition of Aboriginal ancestry.

4. A question and definition of Aboriginal identity that:

- allows learners to identify using the terms of First Nations (Status/Non-Status), Métis, and Inuit;

- includes definitions of Aboriginal identity terms;

- ensures learners are provided an alternative identity option to respect the diversity of the Aboriginal community by allowing learners to generate their own identity category (e.g. through the provision of an "Alternative identity term" category); and

- allows learners to choose multiple categories (e.g. First Nations and Métis).

5. A more detailed overview of benefits that communicates to learners the potential benefits derived from the collection and use of self-identification data.

6. Information on privacy that:

- provides clear reasons for the collection and use of self-identification information.

7. Other Elements to Consider

I. Data Collection

Opportunities for learners to self-identify at multiple times and at different locations (e.g. registration, financial aid, student services, etc.) would help to increase participation in a self-identification mechanism.

II. Data Reporting

It is important to ensure that an Aboriginal lens be applied at an appropriate part of the reporting process for self-identification information [e.g. as part of reporting to Aboriginal Education Councils (AECs)].

8. Other Considerations for the Self-Identification Mechanism

I. Opting-Out or In, Adjusting, or Withdrawing Self-Identification Information

Learners should be provided an opportunity to opt-out or opt-into the process, as well as the opportunity to adjust or withdraw self-identification information at any time to allow for the fluid and context-driven nature of Aboriginal identity.

II. FAQ Document

Learners should be provided an FAQ document with further information on definitions of Aboriginal ancestry and identity (e.g. First Nations – Status/Non-Status, Métis, and Inuit).

Chapter 4
Ontario Universities Findings

A critical element of the COU Aboriginal Self-Identification Project was engagement with the university community. This engagement included a survey on current universities' self-identification practices, formal presentations and discussions, and a number of institutional visits.

The goals of the university engagement strategy were to:

- discuss and understand challenges and best practices in current self-identification practices;

- identify cultural perceptions affecting learner participation in a voluntary self-identification process; and

- identify effective practices and tools that could be used to promote self-identification.

A key component of the university engagement was an institutional survey to collect information on current Aboriginal learner self-identification practices in Ontario universities. The survey was distributed to 20 Ontario universities, with a 100 percent response rate. For a copy of the survey, please refer to Appendix B: COU Survey of Current Self-Identification Practices.

During the collection and analysis stage of the COU surveys, additional areas of concern were identified in which more information was necessary to gain a better understanding of current practices. COU responded by developing

additional questions to gain clarification and more information. These questions were provided to nine specific universities based on an initial analysis of the current self-identification mechanism at the institution and responses were gathered through teleconferences, after which a second analysis was completed. For a copy of the additional questions, please refer to Appendix C: COU Teleconference Questions on Current Self-Identification Practices.

The university engagement strategy also included formal presentations and discussions with representatives from the following key groups:

- COU Reference Group on Aboriginal Education;

- Accountability Sub-Committee of the Council on University Planning & Analysis;

- Ontario University Registrars' Association;

- Council of Senior Administrative Office - Universities of Ontario

- Ontario Committee on Student Affairs; and

- Ontario Council of Academic Vice-Presidents.

In addition, COU visited eight postsecondary institutions to discuss challenges and best practices:

- Algoma University;

- Carleton University;

- University of Guelph;

- Lakehead University;

- University of Ottawa;

- Ryerson University;

- University of Waterloo; and

- Wilfrid Laurier University.

Summary of Key Findings

In the engagement sessions, COU, including members of the Working Group, heard about challenges and best practices in current self-identification practices that would help to encourage learners' participation in a self-identification mechanism. These factors that were identified include:

- the use of clear and simple language in the self-identification process;

- a title that includes the term "Aboriginal" to reduce the participation of non-Aboriginal learners;

- a preamble to explain briefly the purpose of self-identification and the potential use of self-identification data;

- a question related to Aboriginal ancestry provided BEFORE a question related to Aboriginal identity;

- a more detailed overview of benefits prior to posing questions in the self-identification process;

- opportunities for learners to self-identify at multiple times and at different locations;

- information on privacy protections; and

- an FAQ document with further information on definitions of Aboriginal ancestry and identity (e.g. First Nations – Status/Non-Status, Métis, and Inuit).

General Overview of Findings

General

Self-identification is generally understood to be a process in which learners are asked to identify their Aboriginal ancestry or identity, or both, often at the time of application or registration to a postsecondary education institution. The survey results indicated that there is a diversity of self-identification practices at Ontario institutions. Many universities currently ask Aboriginal learners to self-identify through an internal process. Other universities do not collect self-identification data at all.

The survey revealed that Aboriginal learner self-identification data is collected at Ontario universities for a number of reasons: to directly promote and organize Aboriginal student services, awards, workshops, and events; to determine population and retention data; and to provide enrolment data for funding reports. In the future, universities indicated plans to use the self-identification data to:

- analyze enrolment, retention, and graduation rates;

- plan learner activities; and

- assess learner needs.

Universities indicated concerns that current self-identification mechanisms may not accurately capture the Aboriginal population on campus because of:

- population data discrepancies between internal and external self-identification data sources; and

- residual effects of systematic discrimination against Aboriginal peoples in the education sector in Canada.

The survey identified that universities collect self-identification data at multiple collection points such as:

- Aboriginal resource centres (55%);

- online course registrations (22%); and

- Aboriginal-specific program applications (20%).

Other collection points include: the Office of the Registrar, financial aid offices, student and academic support centres, and student councils, as well as during scholarship applications, and through academic faculties.

Although, most universities indicated that they have multiple data collection points within their institution, they also noted that there is often no consistent method of consolidating the information into a single, secure database.

Core Elements of a Self-Identification Mechanism

Title

Universities indicated that in order to collect accurate self-identification data, the title of a self-identification process should include the term "Aboriginal" to reduce the participation of non-Aboriginal learners.

Preamble

The university community expressed the need for a preamble that briefly and clearly outlines to learners the purpose and use of the collected self-identification data (e.g. for reporting and program planning purposes) in any Aboriginal self-identification process. Universities also noted that it is important to communicate to learners that their information will be used for reporting purposes in an aggregate format only and that if it is used for other purposes, the learners' explicit consent will be required.

Engagement with the university community also identified that a preamble should:

- use clear and simple language;

- include additional information (e.g. through hyperlinks, etc.) on:
    i.   privacy assurances;

    ii. a more detailed overview of potential benefits to the learners (e.g. bursaries, scholarships, and improvement to service delivery); and

    iii. definitions on Aboriginal identity terms (i.e. First Nations – Status/Non-Status, Métis, and Inuit).

- include a statement that proof of Aboriginal ancestry is not required, but clarify that additional documentation could be required in other circumstances to maintain eligibility for certain academic initiatives, scholarships, or bursaries; and

- provide information for learners on how to opt-out or opt-into the self-identification process, as well as on how to adjust or withdraw self-identification information.

Question and Definition of Aboriginal Ancestry

Engagement with universities revealed that a clear and consistent definition for the term "Aboriginal" is necessary as a preface to the question itself. However, the COU survey found that there is no standardized definition of the term "Aboriginal" across the sector and that there is a large degree of variation among the definitions currently in use. Approximately 25 per cent of universities use a legal definition from the *Constitution Act, 1982*. Others use definitions developed by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, while others still use a definition derived from the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*.

The university community also indicated that a question and definition of Aboriginal ancestry should:

- use clear and simple language;

- allow learners to choose "I prefer not to answer at this time" to defer their response on Aboriginal ancestry until another opportunity, if the practice at the institution is to offer the opportunity to self-identify multiple times. If this is not the practice, and the self-identification process is offered only once over the academic career of a student, the process for updating their response on Aboriginal ancestry should be made clear; and

- provide learners with an opportunity to opt-out of the process by clicking "No" to the question on Aboriginal ancestry. If learners choose the opt-out option, they should be removed from the process and not be asked again during their course of study.

Furthermore, a number of participants from the university engagements noted that the term "Indigenous" is becoming a preferred and more commonly used term than "Aboriginal". However, a number of other participants noted that the term "Indigenous" has a much broader application in Canada and that it may result in international Indigenous students mistakenly self-identifying within the Canadian context.

Question and Definition of Aboriginal Identity

Based on COU survey results, approximately 70 per cent of Ontario universities ask learners to specify if they are First Nations (Status/Non-Status), Métis, or Inuit. There was no consensus of opinion on whether or not it is valuable to provide an opportunity for Aboriginal learners to indicate their specific Aboriginal identity.

No university offers an option to generate an "alternative identity term" (e.g. Haudenosaunee or Tsilhqot'in). However, one indicated that allowing for such an option might assist with service and program planning, and that it may help to increase participation rates.

The survey revealed that most universities do not allow learners to identify with multiple Aboriginal identities (e.g. First Nations and Métis), which can help to increase learner participation. However, university members indicated openness to the idea, noting that it might help to increase participation rates.

Finally, engagement with the university community identified that the question and definition of Aboriginal identity should:

- allow learners to identify using the terms of First Nations (Status/Non-Status), Métis, and Inuit to better streamline services for Aboriginal learners within postsecondary institutions and to better target student programming;

- include clear definitions to help learners determine which category is applicable to them and to ensure accurate reporting and collection of self-identification data at postsecondary institutions;

- include additional information (e.g. through hyperlinks, etc.) that defines the Aboriginal identity terms (i.e. First Nations - Status/Non-Status, Métis, and Inuit); and

- allow learners to choose "I prefer not to answer at this time" to defer their response on Aboriginal identity until another opportunity, if the practice at the institution is to offer the opportunity to self-identify multiple times. If this is not the practice, and the self-identification process is offered only once over the academic career of a student, the process for updating their response on Aboriginal identity should be made clear.

Authorization of Disclosure to Other Parties within the Institution

Universities identified the need to provide an authorization of disclosure to allow them to share learner contact information with other parties within the institution (e.g. Aboriginal student services, financial aid offices, etc.), so that additional services and benefits could be communicated to the learners. It was stressed that sharing Aboriginal learners' information without their authorization could negatively impact their decision to self-identify.

An authorization of disclosure to other parties within the institution should:

- include a list of other parties (e.g. Aboriginal student services, financial aid offices, Aboriginal student groups, etc.) from which the learner could choose to share their contact information;

- allow learners to choose multiple categories (e.g. Aboriginal student services and Aboriginal student groups);

- inform learners of the process on how to change or withdraw their authorization at any time; and

- include additional information (e.g. through hyperlinks, etc.) on the benefits of their name and contact information being shared with other parties within the institution (e.g. Aboriginal student services, financial aid office, Aboriginal student groups, etc.).

Overview of Benefits

Universities indicated that is important to communicate to Aboriginal learners the potential benefits derived from the collection and use of self-identification data (e.g. bursaries, scholarships, and improvement to service delivery). Some methods highlighted through the survey included: promoting the benefits of Aboriginal student services; advertisements for scholarships; and offering workshops, events, and access to student lounges.

Universities further indicated that an overview of potential benefits should be provided as part of the self-identification process, and should:

- communicate to learners the potential benefits derived from the collection and use of self-identification data;

- include a list of potential benefits that are tailored to the services and financial assistance offered by the university for Aboriginal learners; and

- be provided as text for a hyperlink (or other communication mediums) in the preamble.

Information on Privacy

The COU survey revealed that, in order to protect learners' personal information, most universities limit the use of, and access to, learner data. Approximately 44 per cent of universities provide access to the Office of Institutional Analysis, and 33 per cent to the Office of the Registrar and other university departments (e.g. Aboriginal resource centre).

Engagement with the university community revealed that information on privacy should:

- inform Aboriginal learners about privacy laws established to protect their privacy and personal information;

- communicate to learners that the self-identification data, once it is collected, will be stored securely at postsecondary institutions;

- appear within the preamble of the self-identification process; and

- be provided as additional information (e.g. through hyperlinks, etc.).

Other Elements to Consider

Data Collection, Storage, and Reporting

Data Collection

The COU survey revealed that data collection, storage, and reporting practices vary across Ontario universities. Most universities (67%) collect Aboriginal learner self-identification data using both an internal and external source(s). The survey further demonstrated that Ontario universities have a wide variety of approaches as to when and how learners are asked to self-identify, including:

- as part of a census at registration;

- as part of the Ontario Universities' Application Centre (OUAC) application process;

- through the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and Canadian Graduate and Professional Survey (CGPSS) questionnaires;

- at the point of initial contact at multiple student service locations (e.g. financial aid, registrar's office, Aboriginal resource centre, etc.); and

- as part of a centralized self-identification mechanism that collects data at multiple points within the institution.

Other collection points include: the Office of the Registrar, financial aid offices, student and academic support centres, and student councils, as well as during scholarship applications, and through academic faculties.

The survey and engagements with Aboriginal and university communities went on to reveal that having multiple opportunities to respond to the self-identification mechanism at multiple locations, greatly increased the chances of learner participation in the self-identification mechanism. It was also stressed that if multiple opportunities and locations were provided, that this activity should be coordinated within the institution to prevent double counting.

During the follow-up teleconference calls, some universities identified specific locations where it was felt that Aboriginal learners' participation would be greater due to high Aboriginal learner traffic. These included: the Office of the Registrar, online course registration; and Aboriginal resource centres.

Participants also stressed that if the self-identification question was too closely linked to questions related to others such as students requiring services for a disability or other marginalized groups, it would negatively impact a learner's willingness to identify in a self-identification process.

Finally, engagement with the university community identified that Aboriginal self-identification data collection should:

- be undertaken at least once over the academic career of a student;

- provide a mechanism that allows students to change their response if the process is only offered once;

- include, where possible, multiple opportunities and locations for response; and

- link Aboriginal self-identification with individualized student information to avoid double counting.

Data Storage

The survey revealed a diversity of practices in the storage of self-identification data including within: Aboriginal resource centers; student record systems; and in the Office of the Registrar, Institutional Planning Office, or Equity Offices.

A number of respondents further indicated that the storage of Aboriginal self-identification data occurred both electronically and in paper format at multiple locations within the institution.

Engagement with the university community identified that the storage of Aboriginal self-identification information

should:

- be integrated and stored in one secure student information data system;

- link Aboriginal self-identification with individualized student information to avoid double counting; and

- include the development of protocols that outline access, retention, and storage of self-identification data.

Data Reporting

Universities stressed the importance of reporting self-identification data in an aggregate format to protect learners' privacy and personal information. Concerns were also raised about how the government might use the reported self-identification information (e.g. to determine funding allocations and projections).

Engagement with the university community also revealed that the primary interest in reporting Aboriginal self-identification data was for the purposes of increasing accountability of public spending, and improving Aboriginal student services.

The survey identified that, in an effort to report on Aboriginal learners who have not self-identified but who are currently enrolled, more than half of Ontario universities extrapolate their self-identification numbers from external sources for reporting purposes.

Engagement with the university community identified that self-identification data reporting should:

- be in aggregate only;

- take into account the sample size to avoid a breach of learner privacy; and

- inform Aboriginal learners that, once aggregate self-identification data has been reported to the Ministry, it cannot be changed or withdrawn.

Other Considerations for the Self-Identification Mechanism

A Two-Step Process: A Question on Aboriginal Ancestry and Identity

Engagement with the university community identified that some learners will only self-identify as: First Nations (Status/Non-Status), Métis, or Inuit, but the percentage was deemed to be limited. Therefore, the universities suggested a two-step process for the self-identification mechanism; the first step would be a question related to Aboriginal ancestry, and the second step would be a question related to Aboriginal identity (i.e. First Nations - Status/Non-Status, Métis, and Inuit). If at the first step the learner chooses "No" in the question on Aboriginal ancestry, learners would be removed from the process and would not be asked again during their course of study.

Chapter 5
Self-Identification Mechanism Recommendations

As described in previous chapters, these recommendations were developed through a literature review, a brief environmental scan, and a broad engagement strategy that included 26 Aboriginal community engagements and engagements with 20 Ontario universities. The engagement with Ontario universities demonstrated that universities employ a variety of approaches with respect to the current collection and use of Aboriginal self-identification data. In order to ensure the flexibility required to accommodate this diversity in the system, this report will outline a series of recommendations on core elements and other key considerations that can be applied in a variety of contexts.

Based on an analysis of the data collected, the core elements of a self-identification mechanism are:

- title;

- preamble;

- question and definition of Aboriginal ancestry;

- question and definition of Aboriginal identity;

- authorization of disclosure to other parties within the institution;

- overview of benefits; and

- information on privacy.

Other key considerations of an Aboriginal self-identification mechanism include:

- data collection;

- storage of data; and

- reporting.

In this chapter, each core element is discussed using the following format: example, overview of findings, implementation considerations, terminology considerations (where applicable), and recommendations. The examples provided could be used online or in a paper format.

Core Elements of a Self-Identification Mechanism

1. Title

Example

Voluntary Aboriginal Self-Identification Question

Overview of Findings

A title should:

- communicate to Aboriginal learners that the self-identification process is voluntary, in order to engender trust;

- ensure that the term "Aboriginal" is used to reduce the participation of non-Aboriginal learners; and

- exclude the term "Canadian" because Aboriginal community members stressed that there are learners who do not identify themselves as Canadian citizens.

Implementation Considerations

A title should:

- be clear and visible to the learners.

Recommendation

COU recommends that a title should:

- be clear and visible to the learners;

- include the terms "voluntary" and "Aboriginal"; and

- exclude the term "Canadian".

2. Preamble

Example

Self-identification information is collected for reporting purposes and to help guide institutional planning of Aboriginal student support services. Proof of Aboriginal ancestry is not required. However, documentation could be required to maintain eligibility for certain academic initiatives, scholarships, or bursaries. The information provided here will be kept confidential and stored in a secure location.

Additional information on the following topics is provided: <u>privacy</u>, <u>benefits of self-identification</u>, <u>definitions of Aboriginal ancestry and identity terms</u>, and how to <u>opt-out</u> or <u>opt-into</u> the process, <u>adjust or withdraw</u> self-identification information.

For information that could be provided through hyperlinks (or other communication mediums), please see Appendix E: Tools and Resources.

Overview of Findings

A preamble should:

- use clear and simple language;

- explain briefly the purpose and potential use of self-identification data (e.g. for reporting and program planning purposes);

- provide a short and concise summary of: privacy assurances, benefits to the learner, and definitions on Aboriginal identity terms (i.e. First Nations – Status/Non-Status, Métis, and Inuit);

- provide information for learners on how to opt-out or opt-into the self-identification process, as well as on how to adjust or withdraw self-identification information;

- include a statement that proof of Aboriginal ancestry is not required, but clarify that additional documentation could be required in other circumstances to maintain eligibility for certain academic initiatives, scholarships, or bursaries; and

- inform learners that the collected data will be reported in aggregate only.

Implementation Considerations

A preamble should:

- appear under the title at the beginning of the self-identification process; and

- include additional information (e.g. through hyperlinks, etc.) on:

    i.   privacy assurances;

    ii.   a more detailed overview of potential benefits to the learners (e.g. bursaries, scholarships, and improvement to service delivery); and

    iii. definitions on Aboriginal identity terms (i.e. First Nations – Status/Non-Status, Métis, and Inuit).

Recommendation

COU recommends that a preamble should:

- be short and concise, and appear under the title at the beginning of the self-identification process;

- use clear and simple language;

- explain briefly the purpose and potential use of self-identification data (e.g. for reporting and program planning purposes);

- include additional information (e.g. through hyperlinks, etc.) on:

    i.   privacy assurances;

    ii.   a more detailed overview of potential benefits to the learners (e.g. bursaries, scholarships, and improvement to service delivery); and

    iii. definitions on Aboriginal identity terms (i.e. First Nations – Status/Non-Status, Métis, and Inuit).

- include a statement that proof of Aboriginal ancestry is not required, but clarify that additional documentation could be required in other circumstances to maintain eligibility for certain academic initiatives, scholarships, or bursaries;

- provide information for learners on how to opt-out or opt-into the self-identification process, as well as on how to adjust or withdraw self-identification information; and

- inform learners that the collected data will be reported in aggregate only.

3. Question and Definition of Aboriginal Ancestry

Example:

In the context of this voluntary self-identification question, an Aboriginal person in Canada, as recognized in the Constitution Act, 1982, is a person who identifies with First Nations (Status/Non-Status), Métis or Inuit cultural, and/or ancestry background.

Based on this definition, do you feel this matches your cultural and/ or ancestral background?

☐ Yes   ☐ No   ☐ I prefer not to answer at this time

For definitions, please see Appendix E: Tools and Resources.

Overview of Findings

A question and definition of Aboriginal ancestry should:

- use clear and simple language;

- be provided BEFORE a question related to Aboriginal identity is asked; and

- include a clear definition of the term "Aboriginal" to ensure accurate reporting and data collection.

Implementation Considerations

A question and definition of Aboriginal ancestry should:

- appear under the preamble at the beginning of the self-identification process;

- include additional information (e.g. through hyperlinks, etc.) that defines the Aboriginal identity terms (i.e. First Nations - Status/Non-Status, Métis, and Inuit);

- allow learners to choose "I prefer not to answer at this time" to defer their response on Aboriginal ancestry until another opportunity, if the practice at the institution is to offer the opportunity to self-identify multiple times. If this is not the practice, and the self-identification process is offered only once over the academic career of a student, the process for updating their response on Aboriginal ancestry should be made clear; and

- provide learners with an opportunity to opt-out of the process if they choose "No" to the question on Aboriginal ancestry. If learners choose the opt-out option, they should be removed from the process and not be asked again during their course of study.

Terminology Considerations

A number of definitions for the term "Aboriginal" were identified during the development of this report. COU opted to combine several approaches. The definition of the term "Aboriginal" is based on the *Constitution Act, 1982* but has been broadened to include those who identify with any combination of cultural, legal or ancestral conceptions of Aboriginality. Both the Aboriginal and university community engagements confirmed this approach to be relevant and inclusive. Please refer to Appendix D: Definitions and Terminology for more information.

Recommendation

COU recommends that a definition and question on Aboriginal ancestry should:

- appear under the preamble at the beginning of the self-identification process;

- be provided BEFORE a question related to Aboriginal identity is asked;

- use clear and simple language;

- provide the following definition of Aboriginal ancestry: "In the context of this voluntary self-identification question, an Aboriginal person in Canada, as recognized in the Constitution Act, 1982, is a person who identifies with First Nations (Status/Non-Status), Métis, or Inuit cultural and/or ancestral background";

- include additional information (e.g. through hyperlinks, etc.) that defines the Aboriginal identity terms (i.e. First Nations - Status/Non-Status, Métis, and Inuit);

- allow learners to choose "I prefer not to answer at this time" to defer their response on Aboriginal ancestry until another opportunity, if the practice at the institution is to offer the opportunity to self-identify multiple times. If this is not the practice, and the self-identification process is offered only once over the academic career of a student, the process for updating their response on Aboriginal ancestry should be made clear; and

- provide learners with an opportunity to opt-out of the process if they choose "No" to the question on Aboriginal ancestry. If learners choose the opt-out option, they should be removed from the process and not be asked again during their course of study.

4. Question and Definition of Aboriginal Identity

Example:

Do you identify with any of the specific identities provided below?
Please check all categories that apply to you:

☐ First Nations (Status/Non-Status) ☐ Inuit

☐ Métis   Alternative identity term:

☐ I prefer not to answer at this time   (e.g. Kanien'kehá:ka, Anishinaabe, Treaty #3, etc.):

_____

The following definitions may aid in your selection of a specific identity category that applies to you:

First Nations (Status/Non-Status), Métis, Inuit, and Alternative identity term.

For definitions, please see Appendix E: Tools and Resources.

Overview of Findings

A question and definition of Aboriginal identity should:

- allow learners to identify using the terms of First Nations (Status/Non-Status), Métis, and Inuit;

- respect the diversity of the Aboriginal community by also allowing learners to generate their own identity category (e.g. through the provision of an "Alternative identity term" category); and

- include clear definitions to help learners determine which category is applicable to them and to ensure accurate reporting and collection of self-identification data at postsecondary institutions.

Implementation Considerations

A question and definition of Aboriginal identity should:

- be provided under the question on Aboriginal ancestry as a second step of the self-identification process;

- be activated only after learners have chosen "yes" to the Aboriginal ancestry question (this obviously applies to online processes only);

- include additional information (e.g. through hyperlinks, etc.) that defines the Aboriginal identity terms (i.e. First Nations - Status/Non-Status, Métis, and Inuit), as well as the "Alternative identity term" category;

- allow learners to choose multiple categories (e.g. First Nations and Métis); and

- allow learners to choose "I prefer not to answer at this time" to defer their response on Aboriginal identity until another opportunity, if the practice at the institution is to offer the opportunity to self-identify multiple times. If this is not the practice, and the self-identification process is offered only once over the academic career of a student, the process for updating their response on Aboriginal identity should be made clear.

Terminology Considerations

As noted earlier, establishing a common definition of individual identity is complex. In order to define the Aboriginal identity terms (i.e. First Nations - Status/Non-Status, Métis, and Inuit), certain definitions were shared at key points in the engagement process. Specifically, as part of the project's engagement strategy, the definition for the term "Métis" was shared with the Métis Nation of Ontario, and the definition for the term "Inuit" was shared with the Tungasuvvingat Inuit Resource Centre. Collaboration with these organizations provided critical insight, guidance, and perspective in developing these definitions provided in this report.

In addition, the definitions of First Nations, Status, and Non-Status were developed from key findings identified in engagements with the Aboriginal community, as well as in the literature review. For more information, please refer to Appendix D: Definitions and Terminology.

Recommendation

COU recommends that a question and definition of Aboriginal identity should:

- be provided under the question on Aboriginal ancestry as a second step of the self-identification process;

- be activated only after learners have chosen "yes" to the Aboriginal ancestry question (this obviously applies to online processes only);

- provide the option for learners to identify using the terms of First Nations (Status/Non-Status), Métis, and Inuit, as well as an option to generate their own identity category (e.g. through the provision of an "Alternative identity term" category);

- include additional information (e.g. through hyperlinks, etc.) that defines the Aboriginal identity terms (i.e. First Nations - Status/Non-Status, Métis, and Inuit), as well as the "Alternative identity term" category;

- allow learners to choose "I prefer not to answer at this time" to defer their response on Aboriginal identity until another opportunity, if the practice at the institution is to offer the opportunity to self-identify multiple times. If this is not the practice, and the self-identification process is offered only once over the academic career of a student, the process for updating their response on Aboriginal identity should be made clear; and

- allow learners to choose multiple categories (e.g. First Nations and Métis).

5. Authorization of Disclosure to Other Parties within the Institution

Example:

Authorization of Disclosure to Other Parties within the Institution

In order to allow us to forward information regarding Aboriginal student services, supports, and events to you, do you give authorization to provide your name and email to the following?:

☐ Aboriginal Student Resource Centre   ☐ Financial Aid Office

☐ Student Services   ☐ Aboriginal Student Groups

*This information can be changed or withdrawn at any time. Please refer to:
change or withdraw for further instructions*

For information that could be provided through hyperlinks (or other communication mediums), please see Appendix E: Tools and Resources.

Overview of Findings

An authorization of disclosure to other parties within the institution should:

- allow learners the opportunity to provide consent for their information to be shared with other parties within the institution (e.g. Aboriginal student services, financial aid offices, Aboriginal student groups, etc.);

- include a list of other parties (e.g. Aboriginal student services, financial aid offices, Aboriginal student groups, etc.) from which the learner could choose to share their contact information; and

- inform learners of the process on how to change or withdraw their authorization at any time.

Implementation Considerations

An authorization of disclosure to other parties within the institution should:

- be provided as a third step of the self-identification process;

- include additional information (e.g. through hyperlinks, etc.) on the benefits of their name and contact information being shared with other parties within the institution (e.g. Aboriginal student services, financial aid office, Aboriginal student groups, etc.); and

- allow learners to choose multiple categories (e.g. Aboriginal student services and Aboriginal student groups).

Recommendations

COU recommends that an authorization of disclosure to other parties within the institution should:

- be provided as a third step of the self-identification process;

- allow learners the opportunity to provide consent for their information to be shared with other parties within the institution (e.g. Aboriginal student services, financial aid offices, Aboriginal student groups, etc.);

- include additional information (e.g. through hyperlinks, etc.) on the benefits of their name and contact information being shared with other parties within the institution (e.g. Aboriginal student services, financial aid office, Aboriginal student groups, etc.);

- include a list of other parties (e.g. Aboriginal student services, financial aid offices, Aboriginal student groups, etc.) from which the learner could choose to share their contact information;

- allow learners to choose multiple categories (e.g. Aboriginal student services and Aboriginal student groups); and

- inform learners of the process on how to change or withdraw their authorization at any time.

6. An Overview of Benefits

Example:

The following is an example of text for a hyperlink (or other communication mediums) that provides a more detailed overview of benefits. These benefits will vary depending on the services provided at the institution, but some potential examples are given below.

Benefits of Self-Identification

Self-identifying will help to:

- improve and enhance Aboriginal programming and services at our institution;
- connect learners with funding opportunities through bursaries and scholarships; and
- improve connections with Aboriginal communities.

Overview of Findings

An overview of benefits should:

- communicate to learners the potential benefits derived from the collection and use of self-identification data; and

- include a list of potential benefits that are tailored to the services and financial assistance offered by the university for Aboriginal learners.

Implementation Considerations

An overview of benefits should:

- be provided as text for a hyperlink (or other communication mediums) in the preamble.

Recommendation

COU recommends that an overview of potential benefits should:

- be provided as text for a hyperlink (or other communication mediums) in the preamble;

- communicate to learners the potential benefits derived from the collection and use of self-identification data; and

- include a list of potential benefits that are tailored to the services and financial assistance offered by the university for Aboriginal learners.

7. Information on Privacy

Example:

The following is an example of text for a hyperlink (or other communication medium) that provides additional information on privacy assurances:

The responses that you provide in the questionnaire will be kept confidential and stored in a secure location. Self-identification information will be used only for purposes related to provincial reporting and planning for institutional Aboriginal student support services.

Any information reported to the provincial government or other parties will be shared in aggregate. No individualized data will be provided.

The university is subject to the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA) as it applies to the university sector, which ensures that all personal information is kept confidential and safe.

Universities are also subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA).

Details of the Acts and the website of the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario can be found at the following links:

- Personal Information Protect and Electronic Documents Act
  http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/P-8.6/index.html

- Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act of Ontario
  http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statutes/english/elaws_statutes_90f31_e.htm

- Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario
  http://ipc.on.ca/english/Home-Page/

The Ontario Human Rights Commission's *Guidelines for Collecting Data on Enumerated Grounds Under the Code* (See also the commission's Guidelines for Developing Special Programs) explains when it is permissible to collect and analyze data based on "enumerated grounds", such as race, disability, or sex. This Ontario Human Rights Commission document can be found at the following link:

   http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/guidelines-collecting-data-enumerated-grounds-under-code

For applicable university policies, please click on the links below:

- Institutional Privacy Policy
- Policy on Student Records
- Information Contained in Student Records
- Storage and Conservation of Records
- Record Retention
- Access to Records and Disclosure of Information

Any questions or concerns that you have may be directed to _____ (insert institutional department responsible for Aboriginal self-identification data).

Overview of Findings

Information on privacy should:

- be provided in the preamble;

- provide clear reasons for the collection and use of self-identification information;

- inform Aboriginal learners about privacy laws established to protect their privacy and personal information; and

- communicate to learners that the self-identification data, once it is collected, will be stored securely as all other student information collected by postsecondary institutions.

Implementation Considerations

The information on privacy should:

- be provided as text for a hyperlink (or other communication medium) in the preamble.

Recommendation

COU recommends that information on privacy should:

- be provided as text for a hyperlink (or other communication mediums) in the preamble;

- provide clear reasons for the collection and use of self-identification information;

- provide learners with information on privacy laws established to protect their privacy and personal information; and

- communicate to learners that the self-identification data, once it is collected, will be stored securely as all other student information collected by postsecondary institutions.

Other Elements to Consider

Data Collection, Storage, and Reporting

Data Collection

Summary

The timing and frequency of data collection is an important issue affecting rates of participation in Aboriginal self-identification processes.

Key findings are listed below and include:

- general findings

- data collection points for Aboriginal self-identification information;

- implementation considerations;

- recommendations

- data storage; and

- data reporting.

General

- universities currently use a diversity of approaches to when and how Aboriginal self-identification questions are asked, including:

    - as part of a census at registration;

    - as part of the Ontario Universities' Application Centre (OUAC) application process;

    - through the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and Canadian Graduate and Professional Survey (CGPSS) questionnaire;

    - at the point of initial contact at multiple student service locations (e.g. financial aid, registrar's office, Aboriginal resource centre, etc.); and

    - as part of a centralized self-identification mechanism that collects data at multiple points within the institution.

- some Ontario universities ask learners to identify once on an annual basis, usually at the beginning of the year; others ask only once over the academic career of a student; and

- participants from the Aboriginal community engagements expressed strongly that there is a need to allow learners to opt-out or opt-in of the self-identification process, as well as to adjust or withdraw their self-identification information at any time. If learners choose the opt-out option, they should be removed from the process and not be asked again during their course of study. If the self-identification practice is offered only once over the academic career of a student, the process for updating their response should be made clear.

Data Collection Points for Aboriginal Self-Identification Information

- the Aboriginal community indicated strongly that Aboriginal learners should be asked to self-identify at locations where they feel most comfortable self-identifying to staff members;

- some universities identified specific locations where they believe more learners will participate because of high learner traffic or a higher level of comfort in self-identifying to staff members. These locations included: the Office of the Registrar, online course registrations, and Aboriginal resource centers; and

- the Aboriginal and university community engagements revealed that having multiple opportunities to respond to the self-identification mechanism at multiple locations, greatly increased the chances of learner participation in the self-identification mechanism. It was also stressed that if multiple opportunities and locations were provided, that this activity should be coordinated within the institution to prevent double counting.

Implementation Considerations

The collection of data should also:

- be collected at least once over the academic career of a student;

- provide a mechanism that allows students to change their response if the process is only offered once;

- include, where possible, multiple opportunities and locations for response; and

- link Aboriginal self-identification with individualized student information to avoid double counting.

Recommendations

COU recommends that self-identification data be collected at least once over the academic career of a student. When possible, choosing to pursue additional opportunities and locations for response within the institution may increase participation in the process. The collection of data should also link Aboriginal self-identification with individualized student information to avoid double counting. In all cases, particularly if the process is only offered once, a mechanism that allows students to adjust or withdraw their response should be provided.

Data Storage

Summary

The security and access of Aboriginal self-identification data is of great concern to Aboriginal peoples, and they are issues that can affect a learner's willingness to participate in a self-identification process.

Overview of Findings

Key findings from the environmental scan, and Aboriginal and university community engagements are:

- the Aboriginal community expressed concerns about how Aboriginal self-identification data would be stored and used, as well as those who would have access to the stored data;

- the Aboriginal community stressed that the effectiveness of an Aboriginal self-identification mechanism depends on participants believing that they can trust data security protocols once their information has been given; and

- they also stressed that, once collected, the self-identification data should be integrated into one secure student information data system.

Implementation Considerations

The storage of data should also:

- be integrated and stored in one secure student information data system;

- link Aboriginal self-identification with individualized student information to avoid double counting; and

- include the development of protocols that outline access, retention, and storage of self-identification data.

Recommendations

COU recommends that self-identification data should be integrated into one secure central data system, link Aboriginal self-identification with individualized student information to avoid double counting, and include protocols that outline access, use, retention, and storage of the information.

Data Reporting

Summary

Engagement with the Aboriginal and university communities revealed that the primary interest in reporting Aboriginal self-identification data was for the purposes of increasing accountability of public spending, and improving Aboriginal student services.

Overview of Findings

Key findings from the environmental scan, and Aboriginal and university community engagements are:

- Aboriginal self-identification data should always be reported at the aggregate level;

- sample size should be taken into account to avoid a breach of learner privacy;

- an Aboriginal lens should be applied at an appropriate part of the reporting process for self-identification information [e.g. as part of reporting to Aboriginal Education Councils (AECs)]; and

- Aboriginal learners should be informed that, once aggregate self-identification data has been reported to the Ministry, it cannot be changed or withdrawn.

Recommendations

COU recommends that self-identification data reporting should:

- be in aggregate only;

- take into account the sample size to avoid a breach of learner privacy;

- include Aboriginal community engagement at an appropriate part of the reporting process (e.g. as part of reporting to AECs); and

- inform learners that, once aggregate self-identification data has been reported to the Ministry for a specific reporting period, will not be updated or amended for subsequent changes made to the underlying data.

External Considerations

During the engagement sessions with the Aboriginal and university communities, participants raised a number of issues related to external considerations that could affect Aboriginal self-identification data collection and reporting at Ontario universities. These considerations included the opportunity to use external data sources to validate internal data, concerns regarding implication of the new Ontario Education Number (OEN) and potential challenges related to implementation timelines and funding allocations.

External Data Validation

There is an opportunity to compare and/or validate the data collected as part of each university's self-identification process through external sources such as National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), Canadian Graduate and Professional Student Survey (CGPSS), and Ontario Universities' Application Centre (OUAC). However, data comparison and validation will rely on the consistency of the self-identification mechanism.

As noted previously in this report, a number of Ontario universities are currently using external sources to generate data concerning their Aboriginal learner population and/or to validate the Aboriginal learner data generated through their own institutional mechanism. Specifically, about 60 per cent of Ontario universities rely on Aboriginal student population numbers from external sources to populate their annual Multi-Year Accountability Agreement (MYAA) report submissions to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Although using data from external sources can be beneficial in validating or comparing the accuracy of data collected from internal processes, there are limitations to this approach. For example, OUAC gathers application data only, which is not necessarily reflective of actual enrolment and requires an extrapolated calculation. In addition, the wording on the OUAC application sometimes leads to international, non-Aboriginal students mistakenly identifying themselves as Aboriginal. There are also limitations to using NSSE and CGPSS surveys, which do not survey the entire university population.

Considerations Related to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU)

Ontario Education Number (OEN)

MTCU has recently implemented a unique student identification process, the OEN, for the collection of longitudinal information on educational pathways and success. However, there have been inconsistent signals from MTCU on data collection associated with this new process, including the government's intentions on a potential requirement to collect individualized Aboriginal learner self-identification information. Given the strong concerns raised by Aboriginal community members about reporting individualized data, COU is recommending that, for this and other reasons, neither the Ontario Ministry of Education nor MTCU should collect such information.

Purpose and Implementation of a Common Self-Identification Mechanism Recommendations

Throughout the Aboriginal and university community engagements, multiple questions, comments and concerns were raised in regards to MTCU's goals, objectives and desired outcomes of a common Aboriginal self-identification mechanism. In particular, universities raised strong concerns about the Ministry's expectations in so far as timing related to the potential implementation of a common self-identification mechanism. Universities asked that COU underscore clearly to government the importance of:

- recognizing the autonomy of Ontario universities;

- providing adequate time for the implementation of a common provincial Aboriginal self-identification process;

- outlining a clear purpose and use of Aboriginal self-identification data to both Aboriginal and university communities; and

- engaging with Aboriginal and university community partners continually when moving forward with the development of goals and strategic directions of the Aboriginal Postsecondary Education and Training Policy Framework.

Impact of Self-Identification Data on Funding

Throughout the engagement sessions, concerns were raised about the potential impact that new self-identification data would have on funding allocations. Participants stressed the need for assurances that this new measurement tool would not have a negative impact on funding. In particular, a concern was raised that institutions with fewer students that were building their Aboriginal learner population could receive less support, which they indicated would be an unwelcome outcome. In addition, there was a concern that it could adversely affect those in institutions who had been successful, as the government could decide that these institutions now required less funding.

Aboriginal community members also expressed specific concerns about the ways in which the self-identification mechanism could be used to guide funding decisions. Participants noted that funding models have lacked accountability and have not properly identified the needs of the learners they were designed to serve.

Reporting of Learner Level Data

During the engagement sessions, a number of participants signaled strongly that the integrity of the self-identification process would be compromised if universities were required to share student record level data. Regardless of encryption and processes to depersonalize the data, there is considerable mistrust of the government and its use of data within the Aboriginal community. Recent privacy breaches in relation to the administration of student loans at Human Resources and Skills Development Canada only reinforce the impression that data held by the government is never completely secure.

Tools and Resources

As part of this project, several tools have been developed to assist university administrators in building broader Aboriginal learner awareness of, and participation in, an Aboriginal self-identification mechanism. These tools are:

1. a sample Aboriginal Self-Identification mechanism;

2. a sample Learner FAQ Document that could be included in a preamble and that covers the following:
   - the benefits of self-identification;
   - definitions of Aboriginal identity terms;
   - an explanation of the purpose of collecting self-identification information; and
   - responses to common questions.

3. an implementation Checklist for administrators.

These tools may be found in Appendix E: Tools and Resources.

Chapter 6
Summary of Recommendations

Below is a summary of the recommendations found in this report. Based on our work, the core elements of a self-identification mechanism should be:

1. Title

COU recommends that a title should:

- be clear and visible to the learners;

- include the terms "voluntary" and "Aboriginal"; and

- exclude the term "Canadian".

2. Preamble

COU recommends that a preamble should:

- be short and concise, and appear under the title at the beginning of the self-identification process;

- use clear and simple language;

- explain briefly the purpose and potential use of self-identification data (e.g. for reporting and program planning purposes);

- include additional information (e.g. through hyperlinks, etc.) on:
  i. privacy assurances;
  ii. a more detailed overview of potential benefits to the learners (e.g. bursaries, scholarships, and improvement to service delivery); and
  iii. definitions on Aboriginal identity terms (i.e. First Nations – Status/Non-Status, Métis, and Inuit).

- include a statement that proof of Aboriginal ancestry is not required, but clarify that additional documentation could be required in other circumstances to maintain eligibility for certain academic initiatives, scholarships, or bursaries;

- provide information for learners on how to opt-out or opt-into the self-identification process, as well as on how to adjust or withdraw self-identification information; and

- inform learners that the collected data will be reported in aggregate only.

3. Question and Definition of Aboriginal Ancestry

COU recommends that a definition and question on Aboriginal ancestry should:

- appear under the preamble at the beginning of the self-identification process;

- be provided BEFORE a question related to Aboriginal identity is asked;

- use clear and simple language;

- provide the following definition of Aboriginal ancestry: "In the context of this voluntary self-identification question, an Aboriginal person in Canada, as recognized in the Constitution Act, 1982, is a person who identifies with First Nations (Status/Non-Status), Métis, or Inuit cultural and/or ancestral background";

- include additional information (e.g. through hyperlinks, etc.) that defines the Aboriginal identity terms (i.e. First Nations - Status/Non-Status, Métis, and Inuit);

- allow learners to choose "I prefer not to answer at this time" to defer their response on Aboriginal ancestry until another opportunity, if the practice at the institution is to offer the opportunity to self-identify multiple times. If this is not the practice, and the self-identification process is offered only once over the academic career of a student, the process for updating their response on Aboriginal ancestry should be made clear; and

- provide learners with an opportunity to opt-out of the process if they choose "No" to the question on Aboriginal ancestry. If learners choose the opt-out option, they should be removed from the process and not be asked again during their course of study.

4. Question and Definition of Aboriginal Identity

COU recommends that a question and definition of Aboriginal identity should:

- be provided under the question on Aboriginal ancestry as a second step of the self-identification process;

- be activated only after learners have chosen "yes" to the Aboriginal ancestry question (this obviously applies to online processes only);

- provide the option for learners to identify using the terms of First Nations (Status/Non-Status), Métis, and Inuit, as well as an option to generate their own identity category (e.g. through the provision of an "Alternative identity term" category);

- include additional information (e.g. through hyperlinks, etc.) that defines the Aboriginal identity terms (i.e. First Nations - Status/Non-Status, Métis, and Inuit), as well as the "Alternative identity term" category;

- allow learners to choose "I prefer not to answer at this time" to defer their response on Aboriginal identity until another opportunity, if the practice at the institution is to offer the opportunity to self-identify multiple times. If this is not the practice, and the self-identification process is offered only once over the academic career of a student, the process for updating their response on Aboriginal identity should be made clear; and

- allow learners to choose multiple categories (e.g. First Nations and Métis).

5. Authorization of Disclosure to Other Parties within the Institution

COU recommends that an authorization of disclosure to other parties within the institution should:

- be provided as a third step of the self-identification process;

- allow learners the opportunity to provide consent for their information to be shared with other parties within the institution (e.g. Aboriginal student services, financial aid offices, Aboriginal student groups, etc.);

- include additional information (e.g. through hyperlinks, etc.) on the benefits of their name and contact information being shared with other parties within the institution (e.g. Aboriginal student services, financial aid office, Aboriginal student groups, etc.);

- include a list of other parties (e.g. Aboriginal student services, financial aid offices, Aboriginal student groups, etc.) from which the learner could choose to share their contact information;

- allow learners to choose multiple categories (e.g. Aboriginal student services and Aboriginal student groups); and

- inform learners of the process on how to change or withdraw their authorization at any time.

6. An Overview of Benefits

COU recommends that an overview of potential benefits should:

- be provided as text for a hyperlink (or other communication medium) in the preamble;

- communicate to learners the potential benefits derived from the collection and use of self-identification data; and

- include a list of potential benefits that are tailored to the services and financial assistance offered by the university for Aboriginal learners.

7. Information on Privacy

COU recommends that information on privacy should:

- be provided as text for a hyperlink (or other communication medium) in the preamble;

- provide clear reasons for the collection and use of self-identification information;

- provide learners with information on privacy laws established to protect their privacy and personal information; and

- communicate to learners that the self-identification data, once it is collected, will be stored securely as all other student information collected by postsecondary institutions.

Other Elements to Consider

Data Collection, Storage, and Reporting

Data Collection

COU recommends that self-identification data be collected at least once over the academic career of a student. When possible, choosing to pursue additional opportunities and locations for response within the institution may increase participation in the process. The collection of data should also link Aboriginal self-identification with individualized student information to avoid double counting. In all cases, particularly if the process is only offered once, a mechanism that allows students to adjust or withdraw their response should be provided.

Data Storage

COU recommends that self-identification data should be integrated into one secure central data system, link Aboriginal self-identification with individualized student information to avoid double counting, and include protocols that outline access, use, retention, and storage of the information.

Data Reporting

COU recommends that self-identification data reporting should:

- be in aggregate only;

- take into account the sample size to avoid a breach of learner privacy;

- include Aboriginal community engagement at an appropriate part of the reporting process (e.g. as part of reporting to AECs); and

- inform learners that, once aggregate self-identification data has been reported to the Ministry for a specific reporting period, will not be updated or amended for subsequent changes made to the underlying data.

Appendix A:
List of Literature Review Sources

Aboriginal Education Office. *Building Bridges to Success for First Nation, Métis and Inuit Students*. Ministry of Education, 2007.

Assembly of First Nations. *A First Nations' Perspective of INAC'S Data Collection Instrument (DCI) Review*. 2011.

Canadian Council on Learning. *Aboriginal Self-Identification and Student Data in Ontario's Postsecondary System: Challenges and Opportunities*. Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, 2010.

Cidro, Jamie, Kevin FitzMaurice, and Don McCaskill. *Toronto Aboriginal Research Project: Final Report*. Toronto Aboriginal Support Services Council, 2011.

Holmes, David. *Redressing the Balance: Canadian University Programs in Support of Aboriginal Students*. Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2006.

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami. *First Canadians, Canadians First: National Strategy on Inuit Education*. 2011.

Kachuck Rosenbluth, Ellen. *Indigenous Issues in Post-Secondary Education: Building on Best Practices*. Queen's University School of Policy Studies, 2011.

Office of the Auditor General of Ontario. *2012 Annual Report*. Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2012. Section: Education of Aboriginal Students.

Regan, Paulette. *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada*. 2010.

Review of Current Approaches to Canadian Aboriginal Self-Identification. Education Policy Institute, 2008.

Social and Aboriginal Statistics Division. *Report on Regional Discussions on Aboriginal Identification Questions*. Statistics Canada, 2008.

Stonecircle Consulting. *Research on Effective Practices to Support Métis Learners Achievement and Self-Identification Project*. Métis Nation of Ontario, 2011.

The State of Aboriginal Learning in Canada: A Holistic Approach to Measuring Success. Ottawa: Canadian Council on Learning, 2009.

Appendix B:
COU Survey of Current Self-Identification Practices

PROJECT

The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU) has funded the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) to work with Ontario universities to develop a proposed common self-identification mechanism; a report concerning universities' support for the approach; the development of tools to support on-campus communication strategies to ensure a broad understanding of the data collection initiative and encourage the highest possible participation rate; and the development of a training kit to help front-line university administrative staff to answer questions regarding Aboriginal self-identification.[42]

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Ontario's Aboriginal population is historically under-represented in postsecondary education. According to 2006 census data, only about seven per cent of the provinces' Aboriginal population, between the working ages of 25 and 64, had a university certificate or degree. Comparatively, 21 per cent of Ontario's non-Aboriginal population, between the ages of 25 and 64, had a university certificate or degree.

Additionally, the Aboriginal population is proportionately younger and is growing at a faster rate. Consequently, improving educational outcomes will not only help to address the socio-economic gap that exists between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, but it will also help ensure that the growing numbers of Aboriginal youth have access to labour market opportunities that increasingly require postsecondary education. Ontario universities are committed to increasing the numbers and the success of Aboriginal learners in postsecondary education. The challenge, however, is that identifying Aboriginal learners is not a simple task.

For Aboriginal learners, not only will the way a self-identification question is asked be important, but Aboriginal learners must feel comfortable in responding. This means that universities must gain the trust and support of Aboriginal learners and their communities.

An important element of this project will be working with Aboriginal students and other members of the Aboriginal community to identify barriers to participation in self identification processes, as well as strategies for encouraging higher response rates. Upon completion of the project, universities will receive a tool kit featuring a common approach to self-identification, strategies for communication, and training materials for front-line staff.

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[42] The term "Aboriginal learner" will be used to refer to First Nations, Métis and Inuit learners.

SURVEY OF CURRENT PRACTICES

To establish a baseline and determine current practices for the self-identification of Aboriginal students, a short survey has been developed. Institutions are asked to complete the questionnaire by June 20, 2011 and submit them to John Manning (jmanning@ cou.on.ca) or 416-979-2165, x207.

Should you have any questions or concerns regarding the survey, please contact John Manning at email address or the telephone number noted above.

COU is seeking one completed survey per institution. COU recognizes that staff from the Institutional Planning Office and Aboriginal Student Office already collaborate on many projects of mutual interest and further collaboration is encouraged to prepare the response to the survey.

Institution:	
Contact Person:	
Tel / Email	

Most universities receive information from OUAC regarding those Aboriginal learners who have self-identified through the OUAC self-identification process. The survey below is intended to inquire about institutional-specific approaches to Aboriginal learner self-identification (exclusive of any information that may be obtained from OUAC).

1. **Does your institution ask Aboriginal students to self-identify?** (If no proceed to question 10)

    a. If yes, please describe the process whereby students self-identify. Please be sure to describe how (e.g. survey to all students, register with Aboriginal services office) and when (e.g. beginning of the year, at registration etc.).

    b. If Aboriginal self-identification is done via a questionnaire, please provide a copy of the question.

2. **How often is the question asked?** (e.g. does your institution ask students to self-identify as Aboriginal annually?)

3. **Does your institution use a specific definition of 'Aboriginal'?**

    a. If yes, please provide the definition.

4. **Are students asked to declare 'type' of Aboriginal** (e.g. First Nation, Métis, Inuit) **and / or status?**

5. **What tools and resources does your institution use to encourage student participation in your institution's self-identification process?**

6. How and where is the self-identification data stored? (e.g. data is stored on the student record, data is anonymous to establish population numbers only).

   a. Does the way that the data is collected and stored allow for further demographic analysis of Aboriginal students? If yes, please explain / provide examples.

   b. For what other purposes, if any, does your institution use information obtained from the Aboriginal learner self- identification process?

   c. For what purposes (in the future) would you like to use data?

7. What processes did you use to develop your current Aboriginal self-identification question? What groups / people were consulted? (e.g. Aboriginal Council, Institutional Analysis, Registrar's Office, Student Union etc.).

8. Do you have any evidence to indicate that your self-identification process may not accurately capture the Aboriginal population on your campus? Can you explain?

9. Are there lessons your institution has learned with respect to Aboriginal self-identification that may be helpful to share with other universities?

   a. If yes please describe initiatives that were very successful or were less successful.

10. There are currently certain Aboriginal reporting requirements (e.g. MYAA, etc.). How does your institution currently fulfill this requirement? (e.g. estimates from NSSE survey, OUAC data etc.).

11. Does your institution ask students to self-identify as belonging to any other groups (e.g. students with disabilities, first generation, francophones, visible minorities, etc.)

12. Other comments?

Appendix C:
COU Teleconference Questions on Current Self-Identification Practices

During the collection and analysis stage of the COU surveys, additional areas of concern were identified in which more information was necessary to gain a better understanding of current practices. COU responded by developing additional questions to gain clarification and more information. These questions were provided to nine specific universities based on an initial analysis of the current self-identification mechanism established at the institution, and to reflect the diversity within the province. These questions were organized through teleconferences before October 2012, after which a second analysis was completed.

The following is a list of additional questions developed by COU for the second analysis:

1. How is the self-identification information currently collected? (NSSE, OUAC, stand-alone, multiple sources, etc.)?

    If your answer to Question 1 is a stand-alone questionnaire, please answer Questions 1a to 1c. If not, please proceed to Question 2.

    a. If you use a stand-alone questionnaire, when is the self-identification question asked? (e.g. beginning of the year, beginning of the term, etc.)

    b. Where is it asked? (e.g. student service centre, registrar's office, financial aid office, equity office, student information system login, etc.)

    c. From the answers you provided in Question 1b, what informed your decision to ask students to self-identify at these points?

2. If there is an "Other" option available for students who are asked to declare 'type' of Aboriginal (e.g. First Nation, Métis, or Inuit), what purpose is it being used for?

3. From the list of tools and resources your institution uses to encourage student participation in your institution's self-identification process, which tool or resource do you find most effective and why?

    a. What tools could COU provide you to encourage student participation to self-identify? (e.g. checklist, communication strategies, promotional planning document, etc.)

4. From the Aboriginal community engagements so far, it has become clear that participants, who self-identify require a process that respects learners' confidentiality and privacy. Could you please elaborate on the policies, regulations, and protocols within your institution that would be applicable to a self-identification process?

5. Do you share your self-identification data with your Aboriginal Education Council? Is there opportunity for your Aboriginal student services to provide input and interpretation to your data?

6. Are there any uses of the self-identification data that your current consent statement prohibits you from doing?

7. In the previous survey, you have stated that your institution asks students to self-identify as belonging to other groups (e.g. students with disabilities, first generation, francophones, visible minorities etc.). How is the question asked? Where and when is it asked?

8. Other Comments

Appendix D:
Definitions and Terminology

Establishing a common definition of individual identity is complex. In order to define the Aboriginal identity terms (i.e. First Nations - Status/Non-Status, Métis, and Inuit), certain definitions were shared at key points in the engagement process. Specifically, as part of the project's engagement strategy, the definition for the term "Métis" was shared with the Métis Nation of Ontario, and the definition for the term "Inuit" was shared with the Tungasuvvingat Inuit Resource Centre. Collaboration with these organizations provided critical insight, guidance, and perspective in developing these definitions provided in this report.

In addition, the definitions of First Nations, Status, and Non-Status were developed from key findings identified in engagements with the Aboriginal community, as well as in the literature review.

ABORIGINAL

The proposed definition of Aboriginal ancestry was developed from key findings identified in engagements with the Aboriginal community, as well as in the literature review. Two literature sources were used: the A*boriginal Postsecondary Education and Training Policy Framework*, and the *Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO)* report.

Methodology

Participants from the Aboriginal community engagements stressed that a definition of Aboriginal ancestry should:

- include a reference to the *Constitution Act, 1982*; and

- include an explicit mention of culture and ancestry in order to capture a greater number of Aboriginal learners.

As a result of these findings, elements from the following two definitions were combined to develop the proposed definition of Aboriginal ancestry:

- A collective name for the original people of North America and their descendants. *The Constitution Act, 1982* recognizes three distinct groups of Aboriginal peoples: Indians, Métis, and Inuit.[43]

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[43] Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. *Aboriginal Postsecondary Education and Training Policy Framework* (Toronto, 2011) 40.

- In the context of this application an Aboriginal person in Canada is a person of First Nation, Métis, or Inuit descent who self-identifies as an Aboriginal person.[44]

The definition provided by HEQCO was found to be the most concise and was generally well received during engagement sessions with the Aboriginal community.

Recommendation

The Council of Ontario Universities (COU) recommends the following definition for the term "Aboriginal":

In the context of this voluntary self-identification question, an Aboriginal person in Canada, as recognized in the *Constitution Act, 1982*, is a person who identifies with First Nations (Status/Non-Status), Métis, or Inuit cultural and/or ancestral background.

FIRST NATIONS (STATUS/NON-STATUS)

The proposed definitions of Aboriginal identity were developed from key findings identified in engagements with the Aboriginal community, as well as in the literature review. Three literature sources were used: the Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board, Policy ST: 25; the Educational Policy Institute report; and the HEQCO report.

Methodology

Participants from the Aboriginal community engagements stressed that a definition of the term "First Nations" should:

- not refer to the history of First Nations as "....interwoven with the creation of the 1876 *Indian Act*"[45];

- not refer First Nations people as "Indians"; and

- be defined as all Aboriginal people who are not Inuit or Métis, regardless of their legal status under the *Indian Act*, as there are many First Nations people in Canada who are not registered under the Act.

As a result of these findings, elements from the following two definitions were combined to develop the proposed definition of the term "First Nations":

- The term First Nations refers to the Indian peoples in Canada, both Status and non-Status.[46]

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[44] Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario. *Aboriginal Self-Identification and Student Data in Ontario's Postsecondary System: Challenges and Opportunities* (Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2010) 78.

[45] Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board. Policy ST: 25 *Voluntary First Nation, Métis and Inuit Self-Identification Policy* (Windsor: 2010).

[46] Education Policy Institute. *Review of Current Approaches to Canadian Aboriginal Self-Identification* (Winnipeg, 2008) 1.

- The term First Nations includes all Aboriginal people who are not Inuit or Métis, regardless of their legal status under the Indian Act.[47]

Recommendation

COU recommends the following definition of the term "First Nations":

This term refers to all Aboriginal people who are not of Inuit or Métis descent, regardless of their standing under the *Indian Act, 1985*

STATUS

The definition for the term "First Nations" includes a further definition for Status and Non-Status within the proposed question and definition of Aboriginal identity. The definition of the term "Status" was developed from key findings identified in the literature review, as well as in the engagements with the Aboriginal community. Two sources from the literature review were used, and included the *Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board, Policy ST: 25*, and the *Aboriginal Postsecondary Education and Training Policy Framework*.

Methodology

Elements from the following two definitions were combined to develop the proposed definition of the term "Status":

- Refers to people registered under the *Indian Act* who identify with a First Nations community/ancestral land.[48]

- Individuals who are entitled to have their names included on the Indian Register maintained by the federal government. Only status Indians are recognized as Indians under the *Indian Act*, which defines an Indian as "a person who, pursuant to this Act, is registered as an Indian or is entitled to be registered as an Indian". Status Indians are entitled to certain rights and benefits under the law that are not available to non-status Indians.[49]

The draft definition of the term "Status" was provided to the Aboriginal community for feedback. Participants indicated that the term "Status" was generally not a difficult term to define as it is directly connected with the *Indian Act* of 1876. Therefore, the selected definition was chosen for brevity.

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[47] Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario. *Aboriginal Self-Identification and Student Data in Ontario's Postsecondary System: Challenges and Opportunities* (Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2010) 13.

[48] Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board. *Policy ST: 25 Voluntary First Nation, Métis and Inuit Self-Identification Policy* (Windsor: 2010).

[49] Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. *Aboriginal Postsecondary Education and Training Policy Framework* (Toronto, 2011) 46.

Recommendation

COU recommends the following definition of Indian "Status":

Refers to individuals who are eligible to have their names included on the Indian Register maintained by the federal government of Canada

NON-STATUS

The definition of the term "Non-Status" was developed from key findings identified in the literature review, as well as in the engagements with the Aboriginal community. Two sources from the literature review were used, and included the *Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board, Policy ST: 25*, and the *Aboriginal Postsecondary Education and Training Policy Framework*.

Methodology

Elements from the following two definitions were combined to develop the proposed definition of the term "Non-Status":

- refers to people who identify with a First Nations community/ancestral land but are not registered under the AANDC registry system.[50]

- Individuals who are not entitled to have their names included on the Indian Register maintained by the federal government. Only status Indians are recognized as Indians under the Indian Act, which defines an Indian as "a person who, pursuant to this Act, is registered as an Indian or is entitled to be registered as an Indian". Status Indians are entitled to certain rights and benefits under the law that are not available to non-status Indians.[51]

The draft definition of the term "Non-Status" was provided to the Aboriginal community for feedback. Participants indicated that the term "Non-Status" was generally not a difficult term to define as it is directly connected with the *Indian Act* of 1876. Therefore, the selected definition was chosen for brevity.

Recommendation

COU recommends the following definition of Indian "Non-Status":

Refers to people who identify as First Nations but are not recognized on the Indian Register maintained by the federal government of Canada.

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[50] Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board. *Policy ST: 25 Voluntary First Nation, Métis and Inuit Self-Identification Policy* (Windsor: 2010).

[51] Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. *Aboriginal Postsecondary Education and Training Policy Framework* (Toronto, 2011) 46.

MÉTIS

Methodology

The following definition of Métis was developed in collaboration with the Métis Nation of Ontario and was vetted during engagement with the Métis community:

Métis: One of three groups of peoples recognized as Aboriginal by the *Constitution Act, 1982*. The Métis are a distinct Aboriginal people with a unique culture, language (Michif), and heritage.

Participants suggested that the definition of Métis include a list of their ancestral homelands (e.g. Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, and the Northwest Territories) and that it exclude the term "Michif", as it is does not represent all languages spoken by Métis peoples in Canada.

Recommendation

COU recommends the following definition of "Métis":

One of three peoples recognized as Aboriginal by the *Constitution Act, 1982*. The Métis are a distinct Aboriginal people with a unique culture, language, and heritage. Their ancestral homeland includes Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, and the Northwest Territories.

INUIT

Methodology

The following definition of Inuit was developed in collaboration with the Tungasuvvingat Inuit Community Centre in Ottawa and was vetted during engagement with the Inuit community:

Inuit: One of three peoples recognized as Aboriginal by the *Constitution Act, 1982*. The Inuit are "Aboriginal" or "First Peoples" representing four Inuit regions in Canada with a separate origin, culture and identity. The regions are: Nunatsiavut (Labrador), Nunavik (northern Quebec), Nunavut, and the Inuvialuit Settlement Region in the Northwest Territories.

No revisions were offered to the definition of "Inuit".

Recommendation

COU recommends the following definition of "Inuit":

One of three peoples recognized as Aboriginal by the *Constitution Act, 1982*. The Inuit are "Aboriginal" or "First Peoples" representing four Inuit regions in Canada with a separate origin, culture and identity. The regions are: Nunatsiavut (Labrador), Nunavik (northern Quebec), Nunavut, and the Inuvialuit Settlement Region in the Northwest Territories.

Appendix E:

Tools and Resources

Aboriginal Self-Identification Tools
Sample Aboriginal Self-Identification Question

Voluntary Aboriginal Self-Identification

Self-identification information is collected for <u>reporting purposes</u> and to help guide institutional planning of <u>Aboriginal student support services</u>. Proof of Aboriginal ancestry is not required. However, documentation could be required to maintain eligibility for certain academic initiatives, scholarships, or bursaries. The information provided here will be kept <u>confidential</u> and stored in a secure location.

Additional information on the following topics is provided: <u>privacy</u>, <u>benefits of self-identification</u>, <u>definitions of Aboriginal ancestry and identity terms</u>, and how to <u>opt-out</u> or <u>opt-into</u> the process, <u>adjust or withdraw</u> self-identification information.

In the context of this voluntary self-identification question, an Aboriginal person in Canada, as recognized in the Constitution Act, 1982, is a person who identifies with <u>First Nations (Status/Non-Status)</u>, <u>Métis</u> or <u>Inuit</u> cultural, and/or ancestry background.

Based on this definition, do you feel this matches your cultural and/ or ancestral background?

☐ Yes ☐ <u>No</u> ☐ I prefer not to answer at this time

Do you identify with any of the specific identities provided below?
Please check all categories that apply to you:

☐ First Nations (Status/Non-Status)   ☐ Inuit
                                          Alternative identity term:
☐ Métis   (e.g. Kanien'kehá:ka, Anishinaabe, Treaty #3, etc.):
☐ I prefer not to answer at this time   _____

The following definitions may aid in your selection of a specific identity category that applies to you:
<u>First Nations (Status/Non-Status)</u>, <u>Métis</u>, <u>Inuit</u>, and <u>Alternative identity term</u>.

Authorization of Disclosure to Other Parties within the Institution

In order to allow us to forward information regarding Aboriginal student services, supports, and events to you, do you give authorization to provide your name and email to the following?:

☐ <u>Aboriginal Student Resource Centre</u>   ☐ <u>Financial Aid Office</u>

☐ <u>Student Services</u>   ☐ <u>Aboriginal Student Groups</u>

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*This information can be changed or withdrawn at any time.
Please refer to: <u>change or withdraw</u> for further instructions*

The following provides further information for each highlighted item in the Voluntary Aboriginal Self-Identification process:

Reporting Purposes

The collected self-identification data is only reported or shared in aggregate (individual data combined to create one collective number. This protects privacy).

Aboriginal Student Support Services

Providing the context and role of these institutional departments would be beneficial to the learner. The following list of supports and services are intended to provide illustrative examples only, and is not intended to be exhaustive, nor imply that they apply to all institutions.

Aboriginal Resource Centre

A description and explanation of the purpose of this department in the institution, related to Aboriginal self-identification.

Student Services

A description and explanation of the purpose of this department in the institution, related to Aboriginal self-identification.

Financial Aid Office

A description and explanation of the purpose of this department in the institution, related to Aboriginal self-identification.

Aboriginal Student Groups

A description and explanation of the purpose of this department in the institution, related to Aboriginal self-identification.

Confidentiality

The collected self-identification data will be reported in aggregate. Individualized data will not be shared with professors, administrators, residences or financial services unless you provide explicit consent. [Insert institutional information on the security of self-identification data within postsecondary institutions designed to protect learners' personal information.]

Information on Privacy

The responses that you provide in the questionnaire will be kept confidential and stored in a secure location. Self-identification information will be used only for purposes related to provincial reporting and planning for institutional Aboriginal student support services.

Any information reported to the provincial government or other parties will be shared in aggregate. No individualized data will be provided.

The university is subject to the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA) as it applies to the university sector, which ensures that all personal information is kept confidential and safe.

Universities are also subject to the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA).

Details of the Acts and the website of the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario can be found at the following links:

- Personal Information Protect and Electronic Documents Act
  http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/P-8.6/index.html

- Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act of Ontario
  http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statutes/english/elaws_statutes_90f31_e.htm

- Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario
  http://ipc.on.ca/english/Home-Page/

The Ontario Human Rights Commission's Guidelines for Collecting Data on Enumerated Grounds Under the Code (See also the commission's Guidelines for Developing Special Programs) explains when it is permissible to collect and analyze data based on "enumerated grounds", such as race, disability, or sex. This Ontario Human Rights Commission document can be found at the following link:

- http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/guidelines-collecting-data-enumerated-grounds-under-code

For applicable university policies, please click on the links below:

- Institutional Privacy Policy

- Policy on Student Records

- Information Contained in Student Records

- Storage and Conservation of Records

- Record Retention

- Access to Records and Disclosure of Information

Any questions or concerns that you have may be directed to _____ (insert institutional department responsible for Aboriginal self-identification data).

Benefits of Self-Identification

These benefits will vary depending on the services provided at the institution, but some potential examples are:

Self-identifying will help to:

- improve and enhance Aboriginal programming and services at our institution;

- connect learners with funding opportunities through bursaries and scholarships; and

- improve connections with Aboriginal communities.

Definitions of Aboriginal Ancestry and Identity Terms

Aboriginal: In the context of this voluntary self-identification question, an Aboriginal person in Canada, as recognized in the *Constitution Act, 1982*, is a person who identifies with First Nations (Status/Non-Status), Métis, or Inuit cultural and/or ancestral background.

First Nations (Status/Non-Status): This term refers to all Aboriginal people who are not of Inuit or Métis descent, regardless of their legal standing under the *Indian Act, 1985*.

Status: Refers to individuals who are eligible to have their names included on the Indian Register maintained by the federal government of Canada.

Non-Status: Refers to people who identify as First Nations but are not recognized on the Indian Register maintained by the federal government of Canada.

Métis: One of three peoples recognized as Aboriginal by the *Constitution Act, 1982*. The Métis are a distinct Aboriginal people with a unique culture, language, and heritage. Their ancestral homeland includes: Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, and the Northwest Territories.

Inuit: One of three peoples recognized as Aboriginal by the *Constitution Act, 1982*. The Inuit are "Aboriginal" or "First Peoples" representing four Inuit regions in Canada with a separate origin, culture and identity. The regions are: Nunatsiavut (Labrador), Nunavik (northern Quebec), Nunavut, and the Inuvialuit Settlement Region in the Northwest Territories.

Alternative Identity Term: If there are any other terms with which you identify as an Aboriginal person, please indicate that in this section.

Opting Out of the Process

By selecting "No" in response to the question on Aboriginal ancestry, you will be removed from the Aboriginal self-identification process. You will not be asked about Aboriginal ancestry or identity again during your academic career.

However, you can voluntarily update or change your response at any time.

Opting Into to the Process

You may opt-into the self-identification process at any time during your course of study.

Information on how to opt-into the process is provided below:

[INSERT INFORMATION SPECIFIC TO THE INSTITUTION]

Information on how to opt-into will depend on the institution.

Adjust, Change or Withdraw Self-Identification Information

You may adjust, change or withdraw self-identification information at any time during your course of study. However, data that has already been reported cannot be changed or withdrawn.

Guidelines are provided below:

[INSERT INSTITUTIONAL GUIDELINES]

Guidelines on how to adjust or withdraw self-identification information will depend on the institution.

Sample Learner FAQ Document

PARTICIPATION IN SELF-IDENTIFICATION

Self-identification information is collected for reporting purposes and to help guide institutional planning of Aboriginal student support services.

The data will be reported in aggregate and individualized data will not be shared with professors, administrators, residences or financial services unless you provide explicit consent.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS TO SELF-IDENTIFICATION?

Your self-identification as an Aboriginal learner helps to:

- improve and enhance Aboriginal programming and services at our institution;

- connect learners with funding opportunities through bursaries and scholarships;

- improve connections with Aboriginal communities; and

- [INSERT OTHER INSTITUTIONAL SPECIFIC BENEFITS].

HOW ARE ABORIGINAL IDENTITIES DEFINED?

Aboriginal: In the context of this voluntary self-identification question, an Aboriginal person in Canada, as recognized in the *Constitution Act, 1982*, is a person who identifies with First Nations (Status/Non-Status), Métis, or Inuit cultural and/or ancestral background.

First Nations (Status/Non-Status): This term refers to all Aboriginal people who are not of Inuit or Métis descent, regardless of their legal standing under the *Indian Act, 1985*.

Status: Refers to people who are eligible to have their names included on the Indian Register maintained by the federal government.

Non-Status: Refers to people who identify as First Nations but are not recognized on the Indian Register maintained by the federal government of Canada.

Métis: One of three peoples recognized as Aboriginal by the *Constitution Act, 1982*. The Métis are a distinct Aboriginal people with a unique culture, language, and heritage. Their ancestral homeland includes: Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, and the Northwest Territories.

Inuit: One of three peoples recognized as Aboriginal by the *Constitution Act, 1982*. The Inuit are "Aboriginal" or "First Peoples" representing four Inuit regions in Canada with a separate origin, culture and identity. The regions are: Nunatsiavut (Labrador), Nunavik (northern Quebec), Nunavut, and the Inuvialuit Settlement Region in the Northwest Territories.

Alternative Identity Term: If there are any other terms with which you identify as an Aboriginal person, please indicate that in this section.

COMMON QUESTIONS

Some common questions on the purpose of self-identification data collection include:

- Why is self-identification data being collected, and how will it be used? Self-identification information is collected for reporting purposes and will be used to help guide institutional planning of Aboriginal student support services.

- What information is reported? The information will be reported in aggregate and no information will be made public in such a way as to identify any individual who has taken part in the self-identification process.

- Is the information confidential? Yes, your self-identification information is confidential. The collected self-identification data will be reported in aggregate. Individualized data will not be shared with professors, administrators, residences or financial services unless you provide explicit consent.

The university is subject to the Personal Information Protect and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA) as it applies to the university sector, which ensures that all personal information is kept confidential and safe.

Universities are also subject to the Freedom of Information Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA).

Details of the Acts and the website of the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario can be found at the following links:

- Personal Information Protect and Electronic Documents Act
  http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/P-8.6/index.html

- Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act of Ontario
  http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statutes/english/elaws_statutes_90f31_e.htm

- Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario
  http://ipc.on.ca/english/Home-Page/

The Ontario Human Rights Commission's *Guidelines for Collecting Data on Enumerated Grounds Under the Code* (See also the commission's Guidelines for Developing Special Programs) explains when it is permissible to collect and analyze data based on "enumerated grounds", such as race, disability, or sex. This Ontario Human Rights Commission document can be found at the following link:

- http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/guidelines-collecting-data-enumerated-grounds-under-code

For applicable university policies, please click on the links below:

- Institutional Privacy Policy
- Policy on Student Records
- Information Contained in Student Records
- Storage and Conservation of Records
- Record Retention
- Access to Records and Disclosure of Information

Any questions or concerns that you have may be directed to _____ (insert institutional department responsible for Aboriginal self-identification data).

- **Who has access to my responses?** Access to self-identification information is limited. Only specifically designated staff in the [insert institutional department responsible for Aboriginal self-identification data] will have access to self-identification information. Your name and email address will be provided to institutional departments if you authorize the disclosure of your contact information during the self-identification process.

- **Will proof of ancestry be required?** Proof of ancestry will not be required to complete the self-identification process. However, documentation may be required to maintain eligibility for certain academic initiatives, scholarships, or bursaries.

- **Can I identify in more than one group?** Yes. Definitions are provided to help you accurately identify which group(s) you belong to in the question inquiring about Aboriginal identity. Should you feel that none of these categories accurately reflect your identity as an Aboriginal person, the 'Alternative identity term' category can be selected for you to generate your own identity term (e.g. Anishinaabe, Haudenosaunee, Treaty #3, etc.).

- **What happens when I select "I prefer not to answer at this time"?** You will be asked to self-identify again at a later point. Selecting the 'No' option on the question asking about Aboriginal ancestry will opt you out of the process permanently, and will ensure that you are not asked these questions again.

- **What if my information changes later on?** If you wish to adjust or withdraw your self-identification information, please follow the process outlined [insert institutional process, specific to the university]. However, data previously reported cannot be changed or withdrawn.

IMPLEMENTATION CHECKLIST:

The following items should be considered in the implementation of an Aboriginal self-identification mechanism at your institution:

- ☐ **Community Engagement** – Implementation of an Aboriginal self-identification mechanism has been guided by the Aboriginal Education Council (AEC) or other Aboriginal communities and stakeholder groups that have been identified at your institution (e.g. Aboriginal student services).

- ☐ **Staff Training** - Faculty and staff who may interact with or encourage students to participate in self-identification have received culturally-relevant training.

- ☐ The mechanism includes or has considered the use of the following core elements:

  - title;
  - preamble;
  - question and definition of Aboriginal ancestry;
  - question and definition of Aboriginal identity;
  - authorization of disclosure to other parties within the institution;
  - overview of benefits; and
  - information on privacy.

- ☐ The self-identification mechanism includes other key considerations:

  - data collection;
  - storage of data; and
  - reporting of self-identification data.

- ☐ **Terminology** - The self-identification mechanism has clearly outlined any terminology that may be unclear to the learner (e.g. Aboriginal, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis, etc.).

- ☐ **Accessibility**

  - Clear and simple language is used to explain the process in promotional materials and within the mechanism itself.
  - Phone and in-person assistance are available to learners upon request.

- ☐ **Privacy** - Information on privacy is clearly communicated, and includes: reasons for the collection and uses of self-identification information, and information on privacy laws established to protect learners' privacy and personal information within postsecondary institutions.

- ☐ **Promotional Materials** - The following materials were developed for use, both on-campus and during recruitment initiatives:

  - brochures;
  - posters; and
  - online resources including: interactive tools (videos featuring peers, social media, and engagement); up-to-date web resources and information; and one-on-one support.

Appendix F:
Guiding Community Engagement Principles for the Aboriginal Self-Identification Project

Guiding Community Engagement Principles for the Aboriginal Self-Identification Project

1. **Inclusion and Respect for Diversity**

    Inclusiveness and respect are integral to the research and work being completed. This project is intended to benefit all Aboriginal learners who are entering or attending a university in Ontario, regardless of status, gender, age, or geography. Awareness of the diverse needs and perspectives of Aboriginal learners is a core element of this project.

2. **Respecting the Autonomy**

    COU member institutions and members within the Aboriginal community are autonomous stakeholders with authority to establish their own policies and procedures. Recommendations from this project will be non-binding.

3. **Respect for Indigenous Knowledge, Languages and Cultures**

    The Aboriginal world-view, the uniqueness of Aboriginal cultures and languages, as well as the diversity of Aboriginal knowledge systems, reflect valid ways of knowing and have a place in the development and delivery of this project outcome. The project recognizes the importance and respects the contributions of Aboriginal knowledge within postsecondary institutions.

4. **Accountability**

    This project strives to deliver recommendations on an Aboriginal self-identification mechanism that are effective, transparent, and responsive to the Aboriginal community.

5. **Project Perspective of Data Stewardship**

    The collection, use and disclosure of information collected from Aboriginal Peoples require a unique perspective on data stewardship, which will be reflected in the recommendations. These recommendations will also address principles of data integrity and confidentiality.

6. **Transparency**

    Engagement and consultation are key values and a significant aspect in the development of an Aboriginal Learner Self-Identification Framework. The COU Working Group on Aboriginal Self-Identification will engage the Aboriginal and university stakeholders throughout the project and provide clear indication of findings and potential recommendations.