St Lawrence Kahnekarónnion (River) Strategy

River Community Peace & Healing Protocol

INTENTION:

The purpose of this document is to articulate the roles and responsibilities of the members of the Kahnekarónnion (River) Strategy and speak into existence the unity and shared values guiding their relationships, drawing on principles and knowledge from Haudenosaunee Teachings.

PREAMBLE:

Akwe:kon enska entitewahwehnon:ni ne onkwa'nikon:ra tanon teiethinonhwera:ton ne oneka'shon:ah, tsi kahnekaronnion, kanientara'ko:wa, kanientarahere, tsi iohonwa:taien tanon ne ohwentsiakonhshon iotnekahtenkionhakie. Tsi she:kon wa:tons ionkwaha'tanawenhsta... eh kati'niiohtonhak ne onkwa' nikon:ra.

We bring our minds together as one and give thanks for water; the rivers, the lakes, the oceans, and that clean water keeps running all over the earth. It keeps our thirst quenched... now our minds are one.

KAHNEKARÓNNION (RIVER) STRATEGY

The purpose of the Kahnekarónnion (River) Strategy Collective is to facilitate inclusive and equitable communication and collaboration along the St. Lawrence River and beyond.

To achieve increased communication and collaboration, the River Strategy Collective cultivates a community agreed-upon, value-informed space for people and organizations from across the region to gather, connect with each other, share knowledge and information, and identify opportunities to work together towards shared goals for the river.

SIGNATORIES

Anyone with an interest in the river can become a member of the Kahnekarónnion (River) Strategy Collective, for example, community groups, non-profit organizations, municipalities, academic institutions, industry, government agencies, researchers, and anyone that has love for the river. It is important to remember that everyone has a place here and their thoughts and insights are valuable to the mission. As non-Indigenous allies, you are agreeing to comply with the guiding principles as well as the roles and responsibilities articulated hereafter. For Indigenous signatories, your signature is to comply with the guiding principles and agree to the articulation of roles and responsibilities for allies.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Drawing from the Akwesasne Task Force on the Environment Research Advisory Committee, the Kahnekarónnion (River) Strategy is founded on the principles of *skennen, kanikonriio* and *kasastensera.*

Skennen (Peace): The community will embody a holistic (mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual) understanding to ensure a peaceful relationship amongst each other and creation. Conflict will arise, but we must hold our responsibilities to care for each other and all of creation through striving for unity and a path toward righteousness and reason. Where necessary, we enact peace through education, public opinion, and political action.

Kanikonriio (Good Mind): This is described as "the shared ideology of the people using their purest and most unselfish minds." We will cultivate a community that puts their minds and emotions in harmony with creation, which are all part of our family. There is equity here for everyone, where our contributions are valued, acknowledged, and celebrated. There is no place for oppressive systems here in any form.

Kasastensera (Power): There is power in this community. We are stronger together. The power flows from carrying Kanikonriio to use rational, relational, and reciprocal thinking and actions to channel the inherent goodwill of our community to work towards peace, justice, and unity, which will prevent the abuse of all of creation – human and non-human alike.

These are collectively the principles of righteousness that demand a rejection of prejudice, privilege, and superiority from our minds. We must recognize that we are part of creation and that we all carry roles and responsibilities to each other where we reason from a place that ensures the holistic health and rights of Akwe:kon (Everyone) are protected for future generations.

The **Kaswentha (Two Row Wampum)** already embodies these principles as a treaty without paper or signatures. The Kaswentha belt graphically represents the parties of the agreement with rows of purple wampum, separated by white wampum. One purple row represents Dutch ships, while the other row represents Haudenosaunee canoes. The separation symbolizes mutual respect for each party's autonomy in perpetuity. As we are composed of Haudenosaunee and non-Haudenosaunee, we must ensure that our worldviews are respected here, which is made possible through careful negotiation and intentions.

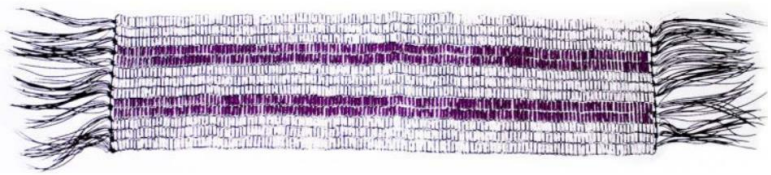

Image from Univeristy of Waterloo

ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES OF NON-INDIGENOUS ALLIES:

The roles and responsibilities of Kahnekarónnion (River) Strategy Collective non-Indigenous members, as allies, build on these foundational Teachings of the Haudenosaunee and include calls to action, for justice, and to affirm rights for everyone living on *Anowarah':ne [Turtle Island]*, such as those outlined in documents such as within the "Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future," "Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls," and the "United Nations Declaration of Indigenous Peoples." Part of fulfilling these roles and responsibilities is a reflection on what it means to be an ally with Indigenous Communities, which have been articulated into 9 principles below. It is important to remember that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to allyship and that the right approach will change over time, so flexibility is needed. Further, consent, like learning, is a continual process.

LEARN

Learn about the true history of *Anowarah':ne* as well as Indigenous history of and around Kaniatarowanenneh (St. Lawrence River). Learn about and celebrate Indigenous Peoples' history, cultures, pride, and diversity (MMIWG Final Report, 2019). Remember, it is not the responsibility of Indigenous Communities to educate non-Indigenous people, and learning is an ongoing process (Swiftwolfe et al., 2019). Commit to ongoing learning through participation through readings, events, and training when available that are told by Indigenous Peoples.

LISTEN

Listen to Indigenous peoples – they are the experts of their reality, which is diverse and context-specific (Jonas, 2021) – and build direct lines of communication with Indigenous Peoples (i.e. cultivate meaningful relationships and community). Listen to the truths shared by Indigenous Communities, and acknowledge the burden of human and Indigenous rights violations, and how they impact Indigenous Communities and Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people today (MMIWG Final Report, 2019).

REFLECT

Move forward with humility and the critical self-reflection of on-going learning. Remember that discomfort is part of the journey – the process of learning and reflection is not about being comfortable, you may need to learn biases or make mistakes in the process – accountability is an expression of care and opportunity for growth (Jonas, 2021). Similarly, be critical of motivations – engaging or supporting Indigenous Communities is not an opportunity to "further one's own self-interest, nor are they there as extra-curricular activities" (Swiftwolfe et al., 2019).

ACKNOWLEDGE & RESPECT

Acknowledge you are a guest on these land and waters due to the forced dispossession of Indigenous Peoples who have a long history of caring for them. Further, there are many nations that exist across Turtle Island (Swiftwolfe et al., 2019) that have diverse cultural protocols and traditions that emerged from thousands of years of relationship-building with the lands and waters.

Acknowledge and respect the value of every person and every community, as well as the right of Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people to generate their own, self-determined solutions (MMIWG Final Report, 2019).

It is also important to respect that many Indigenous Peoples have to act as advocates on a wide range of issues that affect them and their communities. Being involved is often not a choice with an option to opt out, and pressures on time and energy can lead to being spread thin in many directions (*10 Ways to Be an Ally to First Nations Communities*, 2022). Therefore, think before you ask for an Indigenous Person to contribute their time and energy and when possible compensate for expertise.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Being a strong ally involves more than just tolerance; it means actively working to break down barriers and supporting others in every relationship and encounter in which you participate (MMIWG Final Report, 2019). However, when working with Indigenous Peoples, ensure the community is centered in your mind and actions because harm can be done unintentionally, which you are accountable to. This requires a continuous process of consent and checking in, which is a way to be responsible for yourself and to identify when to take a step back. Saviors are not needed here; solidarity is (*10 Ways to Be an Ally to First Nations Communities*, 2022).

SPEAK OUT

Confront and speak out against racism, sexism, ignorance, homophobia, and transphobia, and teach or encourage others to do the same, wherever it occurs: in your home, in your workplace, or in social settings. Denounce and speak out against violence against Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people (MMIWG Final Report, 2019).

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

Create time and space for building relationships based on respect as human beings, supporting and embracing differences with kindness, love, and respect. Learn about Indigenous principles of being in good relationships specific to those Nations or Communities in your local area and work, and put them into practice in all of your relationships with Indigenous Peoples (MMIWG Final Report, 2019). For example, reflect on the guiding principles within this strategy when working with Haudenosaunee Communities.

GIVE BACK

Where appropriate, use your labor, resources, and skills to actively support Indigenous Peoples to achieve their goals and carry out their initiatives (*10 Ways to Be an Ally to First Nations Communities*, 2022). There are many different ways to give back to Indigenous communities and one of the current calls is in the name of “Land Back!” This concept is described by Riley Yesno (2024) as, “[A] slogan that originated online and has been proliferated by Indigenous Youth, especially. It emphasizes material restitution for Indigenous Peoples over symbolic gestures.” Expanding on this, Piertos et al. (2021) state, “Land Back is about reclaiming Indigenous spheres of influence and sovereignty and extending our values to result in better stewardship of ecological, political, and economic systems.” These beautiful and complex expressions of Land Back can be intimidating, but it is a concept that emerged from

community organizing and sought to address historical harms towards a transformed and hopeful future.

HOLD INSTITUTIONS ACCOUNTABLE

Help hold all powerful institutions accountable to act on existing calls to justice and uphold their obligations and commitments to Indigenous Peoples (MMIWG Final Report, 2019). A daunting ask from allies and yet a reminder to reject hyper-individualism and lean into community. To embody this principle, we must act from our various places and experiences in the world, hence positionality. Positionality simply being a reflection of how a person understands their place in the world and acts as an opportunity to deconstruct harmful ideas and reflect on why you are here to be an ally.

Bringing all of these principles together will take time and mistakes will be made. Yet, let us be kind and patient with each other while also being accountable - the greatest expression of love by a community. These principles of allyship are expressed towards Indigenous People and can be extended to the land because the land is part of us as a relative. Remember, damage on the land is damage on Indigenous People and their culture, so is **HEALING**.

DECISION MAKING

The decision-making process for the River Strategy will build on the values and principles described above and will follow a consensus-based approach. Consensus-based decision making is a collaborative process which entails the entire group contributing to a decision, while respecting the group and individual members. The goal is to consider the best interest of the collective, while also considering individual ideas (Horn-Miller, 2014).

WRITER POSITIONALITY

I am Abraham Francis – Kanienkehaka (Mohawk) from Akwesasne and Wakeneniothró:non (Deer Clan). I consider myself an Akwesasronon Ecologist and have had the wonderful opportunity to help in the creation of this MOU, which is inspired by so many different experiences across my life. In particular, I have thought of this process of creating a wampum belt, which is a living agreement that requires a shared understanding, renewal, and dynamic interpretation. In particular, I hope to express the roles and responsibilities of various dimensions of the River Strategy Community, which has been brought together through our shared love for the Kaniatarowenneh (St. Lawrence River) and all of creation. This document is firmly rooted in Haudenosaunee Teachings because it is part of respecting the culture that emerged from this landscape that can help us maintain healthy relationships with each other and creation.

Date document last revised: November 1, 2024

Signatory Print Name: _____

Organization (if applicable): _____

Signature: _____

Definitions:

Inclusive

Inclusion refers to the notion of belonging, feeling welcome and valued. It also speaks to a capacity to engage and succeed in a given institution, program, or setting. Inclusion calls for recognizing, reducing, and removing barriers to participation created by social disadvantage or oppression, and can result in the reimagination of an institution, program, or setting (Adapted from McGill University Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Strategic Plan 2020-2025).

Equitable

Unlike the notion of equality, equity is not about sameness of treatment. It speaks to fairness and justice in process and in results. Equitable outcomes often require differential treatment and resource redistribution to achieve a level playing field among all individuals and communities. This requires recognizing and addressing barriers to opportunities for all to thrive (Adapted from McGill University Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Strategic Plan 2020-2025).

2SLGBTQQIA+

This acronym represents individuals who are two-spirited, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, and all other sexual orientations and genders.

Haudenosaunee

Refers to the Haudenosaunee (alternatively known as the Iroquois) Confederacy, which is an alliance of six nations connected by the Kainaerekowa (Great Law). Each nation has its own identity and language. These nations are known as: Cayuga, Seneca, Onondaga, Oneida, Mohawk, and Tuscarora. The original homelands of these communities are primarily in the northeastern *Anowarah':ne* along the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River region.

Anowarah':ne (Turtle Island)

An English translation of a name used by many Indigenous Peoples for the continent commonly known as North America.

Indigenous Peoples

The term 'Indigenous' is an umbrella-term with diverse meanings and applications that vary across imposed settler- and post-colonial-state boundaries. The term on a global level for Indigenous People works to build community between different Indigenous Communities around the world (Francis, 2019).

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