Administration Portfolio Report

ohpahotân | oohpaahotaan: The Gift — Past, Present, and Future

Our responsibility for the Gift

The Administration portfolio understands ohpahotân | oohpaahotaan as a Gift that carries responsibilities of reciprocity, reflection, and action. Because the portfolio shapes many of the systems through which people experience the university, including employment, finance, facilities, safety, procurement, technology, and shared services, its contribution is not limited to individual events or initiatives. The deeper responsibility shows how administrative structures can either reproduce barriers or help create safer, more respectful, and more relational ways of working.

Since the Gift was received by the university, the portfolio's journey has moved from awareness-building and participation toward the more difficult work of changing policies, processes, and everyday practices. Progress has not been uniform. This report therefore reflects both meaningful progress and the work still required.

The seven commitments of Safety, Wellness, Stewardship, Representation, Right Relations, Creation, and Renewal are treated here as interdependent. They are woven through the stories below rather than presented as separate objectives.

How the work has evolved

Early efforts across the portfolio often emphasized learning, visibility, and participation. These activities helped build awareness, but they also revealed a central lesson: awareness alone does not change the institutional experience of Indigenous students, employees, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, cultural service providers, or community partners. The portfolio has increasingly focused on the administrative conditions that determine whether commitments can be enacted in practice: how people are paid, how policies recognize ceremony and healing, how spaces support cultural practice, how leaders learn, and how Indigenous guidance enters decision-making.

Stories of systems change and learning

1. Recognizing Indigenous wellness within employee systems

A significant area of progress has been the movement from a conventional benefits model toward one that recognizes Indigenous approaches to healing and wellness. Employee benefit coverage was expanded to include services and supports associated with Elders, traditional healers, medicines, and ceremonies, while collective agreement provisions have also begun to recognize traditional healing practices.

The lesson is that policy intent must be matched by accessible processes, clear communication, and culturally safe implementation. Future work must assess whether employees understand and can use the benefit without unnecessary disclosure, burden, or delay.

2. Making financial processes more respectful and workable

The portfolio has also examined how standard payment and procurement processes can create barriers when they are applied to Elders, Knowledge Keepers, cultural service providers, drummers, artists, and community members without regard for cultural protocol or relationship. Work to redesign these processes has included more flexible payment options, simplified workflows, and responsive mechanisms intended to recognize that institutional administrative requirements must not displace reciprocity and respect.

ConnectionPoint led a major transformation of the Elder and Cultural Service Provider offering payment process, addressing long-standing barriers within standard university financial systems. In collaboration with the Office of the Vice-Provost Indigenous Engagement (OVPIE), this work resulted in:

- A dedicated Cultural Service Provider eForm
- Reinstatement of printed cheque options
- Flexibility for Cultural Service Providers to choose preferred payment methods (direct deposit or cheque)
- The ability to submit offerings and reimbursable expenses in a single request

ConnectionPoint's most recent Indigenous Engagement process exploration has been for the use of petty cash to support Cultural Service Provider payments. In response to a unique need expressed, we have collaborated with the Office of the Vice-Provost Engagement and the kihci-okāwīmāw askiy Knowledge Centre to develop a new pilot process.

These changes significantly improved access, reduced administrative burden, and ensured processes better reflect the cultural practices, preferences, and lived realities of Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

Inclusion of language and assessment in our RFPs on proponent's work and commitment in Indigenous engagement and the Truth and Reconciliation commission's Calls to Action was also improved. Language in our RFPs for the benefits consultant, benefit plan administrator, short term disability case management and pension administrator included language that asked proponents to describe their:

- efforts in Truth and Reconciliation with staff and their local community
- training and development for staff on Indigenous engagement; alternative ways of providing their service through traditional knowledge and practices; or other related/similar initiatives

This work has a longer history than a single process improvement. Repeated operational challenges exposed a mismatch between university systems and culturally appropriate ways of recognizing contribution. The change therefore represents more than efficiency: it is an effort to ensure that those who share knowledge or support ceremony are not asked to carry the administrative burden created by the institution.

The learning is that administrative systems are not neutral. Processes designed without Indigenous partners can unintentionally create exclusion, even when the underlying intent is respectful. The portfolio has the opportunity to review related procurement, contracting, reimbursement, tax, and technology requirements.

3. Supporting ceremony while confronting implementation barriers

The Smudging and Ceremonies Policy established an institutional basis for ceremony and contributed to the recognition of cultural practice as part of university life. The policy, however, has not removed every barrier. Inconsistent local understanding, and uncertainty about responsibilities can still make ceremony more difficult than the policy intends.

This experience has reinforced that issuing a policy is only the beginning of systems change. Implementation requires practical guidance, capable staff, appropriate spaces, clear escalation routes, and ongoing attention to the experience of those using the policy. Administration's role is to ensure that operational systems enable the commitment rather than placing the work of navigation on community members.

4. Moving from representation toward voice, authority, and belonging

Implementation of deybwewin | taapwaywin | tapwewin and related hiring guidance has helped establish clearer and more accountable practices concerning Indigenous citizenship and membership. Recruitment education, anti-racism learning, and efforts to bring Indigenous guidance into planning and governance are part of this work, but their reach and consistency must be assessed rather than assumed.

Progress should be assessed with Indigenous employees and partners, while avoiding reporting approaches that create additional burden or compromise privacy.

5. Learning to connect leadership development with operational accountability

Anti-racism and anti-oppression learning, leadership development, recruitment education, book studies lead by our Senior Consultant, Inclusion, Diversity, and Anti-Racism, and facilitated discussions in partnership with Teaching and Learning have created spaces for reflection across the portfolio. Their value is strongest when learning changes how leaders allocate resources, design processes, respond to concerns, and hold teams accountable.

The HR team enhanced learning opportunities that build understanding, accountability, and inclusion:

- The Greystone Advanced Program includes a dedicated anti-racism and leadership module focused on understanding racism in the workplace and the role leaders play in addressing systemic barriers.
- An introductory anti-racism learning program is available to all employees.
- A modular anti-racism program, developed by Senior Consultant, Inclusion, Diversity, and Anti-Racism, supports intact teams and units in building tailored anti-racism strategies.
- An unconscious bias in recruitment training module was developed and is delivered for all senior searches, with availability for broader recruitment processes.

The more meaningful question is what leaders do differently afterward. Future reporting should connect learning activities to observable changes in policy, practice, behaviour expectations, or decision-making.

6. Stewardship of land, place, knowledge, and resources

As the portfolio responsible for much of the physical and digital environment, Administration has a particular stewardship obligation. Emerging work has included consideration of Indigenous knowledge in campus planning, respectful use or return of natural materials, land-based activities, partnerships with Indigenous artists and vendors, and attention to Indigenous data governance and digital stewardship.

Safety Resources designed and implemented a new Plant Research Safety Program that includes controls to protect Indigenous flora. This work reflects stewardship responsibilities connected to land, biodiversity, and Indigenous knowledge systems, and supports researchers in conducting ethical, safe, and respectful research involving plant materials.

7. Creating safer and more culturally responsive environments

Safety within the Gift includes physical, cultural, psychological, and systemic dimensions. The portfolio has begun to apply this broader understanding through policy review, violence-prevention work, complaint and support processes, emergency response, and the design and operation of campus spaces.

One area of learning is that conventional processes can ask Indigenous people to fit institutional expectations at the moment they most need flexibility and care. Storytelling and relationship-based approaches may offer more culturally responsive ways to understand concerns, but these approaches must be developed with appropriate Indigenous guidance and cannot be treated as an informal substitute for fairness, confidentiality, or due process.

Relationships and reciprocity

The strongest work has been relational. Collaboration with the Office of the Vice-Provost Indigenous Engagement has helped units interpret the Gift and identify where administrative practice needs to change. Relationships with Indigenous employees, students, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, leaders, artists, vendors, service providers, and communities have also shaped individual initiatives.

The portfolio recognizes that consultation is not the same as shared authority, and participation is not the same as reciprocity. Future work must explain who shaped an initiative, when they became involved, how their contribution influenced the result, how protocol and compensation were respected, and how the relationship will be sustained after the immediate project ends.

What remains difficult and where more attention is needed

- Implementation is uneven across a large and diverse portfolio. Some practices are embedded; others depend on individual knowledge or advocacy.
- Policies intended to enable ceremony and cultural practice can still encounter operational barriers.
- Indigenous guidance is not yet consistently present early enough, or with sufficient authority, in some policy, planning, space, technology, procurement, and service-design decisions.

Commitments for the next phase

The portfolio also recognizes that the journey is incomplete. Future progress requires specificity, honest reflection, sustained Indigenous guidance, and clear commitments that can be revisited. In reciprocating the Gift, the portfolio must continue to move beyond listing what it has done toward demonstrating what has changed, for whom, what has been learned, and what responsibility remains.

Next steps are to move from foundational alignment to more visible, community-defined outcomes. In the coming period, ICT will (1) formalize an Indigenous-informed approach to technology governance and consultation with OVPIE and Indigenous colleagues; (2) co-develop clearer standards and training for privacy, identity, and data stewardship that reflect Indigenous priorities and protocols; and (3) identify a small number of practical service improvements, co-designed with Indigenous users, that reduce friction in everyday experiences (access, support pathways, and digital inclusion). We recognize this is ongoing work, and we will measure progress not only by deliverables, but by relationships, reciprocity, and whether Indigenous voices experience our systems as supportive of their success.

The Administration portfolio has made meaningful progress where it has used its operational responsibilities to remove barriers and change institutional systems. The clearest lesson is that reconciliation is enacted through everyday decisions as much as through formal strategy.