

ohpahotân Report 2026 Office of the Vice President Research

Introduction

The Office of the Vice Present Research (OVPR) Executive received the *Gift* of ohpahotân on January 12, 2022. Since then, the OVPR has responded to the *Gift* through its advocacy, strategic leadership, and direct support of Research, Scholarship, and Artistic Works (RSAW). This document reflects upon these efforts, focusing on the opportunities, successes and challenges that have arisen as the OVPR works towards uplifting the Commitments to Safety, Wellness, Stewardship, Representation, Right Relations, Creation, and Renewal. Our reflections are linked to both individual and institutional learning, strategy, activities, and supports.

The OVPR provides key services and supports to researchers, fostering connections between USask's RSAW endeavours and communities worldwide. Together, the units of OVPR facilitate the development of local, national, and international partnerships, manage grant and contract submissions, support knowledge mobilization, ensure compliance, and highlight the university's impact and achievements. Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing are integral to the RSAW milieu at USask, particularly given the negative history of research that has been extractive, exploitative, or unresponsive to the needs and leadership of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. This necessitates that the OVPR provides leadership and institutional RSAW strategy that provokes reconciliative action to change this narrative. This report reflects on the opportunities and tensions that arise in this work, realizing that “nothing about us, without us” must drive our RSAW endeavours through the creation of partnerships based on relational accountability and Indigenous-led research activities.

A brief description of the units and key functions within the OVPR is provided below to create the context within which RSAW services and strategy are offered:

- **International Office (IO):** supports the USask community to engage in international research and partnerships, by identifying funding opportunities, and bringing teams and global partners together to work on international projects.
- **Innovation Mobilization and Partnerships (IMP):** conducts technology transfer, research contracting, intellectual property management, venture creation, and innovation ecosystem engagement activities. IMP is the organizational home of Opus, USask's pre-accelerator program for founders with research-backed innovations for which they want to build new companies.
- **Research Acceleration and Strategic Initiatives (RASI):** supports the university research community in the incubation and development of research grants, infrastructure projects and initiatives, and management of the federal research chairs programs.
- **Research, Profile and Impact (RPI):** RPI tells the university's research story to the world – through strategic communications involving print, video, newsletters, media releases, web, social media, advertisements and events.
- **Research Ethics and Infrastructure:** upholds the approved ethical standards and guidelines for research conducted on campus.

- **The College of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (CGPS):** works closely with the VPR, deans, centre directors and department heads on the alignment of graduate student programming.
- **Community Engagement:** focuses on building trusting relationships with community partners to facilitate mutual understanding, leading to RSAW opportunities that connect USask expertise with community lived experience and knowledge to address local needs.

This report is structured around the teachings, ceremony, learnings and reflections of OVPR units/individuals as they have worked to respond to the *Gift*. It speaks to our relationships with *kehteyak* who are guiding our journey through teaching and ceremony; strategic initiatives; partnerships that help enable our work; OVPR programming intended to uplift Indigenous researchers or Indigenous research; formal and informal events and activities; policy, procedural and/or practice changes, and; gaps, challenges and tensions that remain as we learn together to work towards meeting our commitments to ohpahotân.

Note: *The OVPR does not claim direct responsibility for the work that is rightfully attributed to Indigenous or non-Indigenous scholars, units on campus, or partners. As RSAW leaders on campus, it is the responsibility of the OVPR to advocate for, invite, and support local, national and international opportunities and partnerships that strengthen RSAW at USask. To that end, some of the examples in this report are directly organized by the OVPR, but others are provided in recognition of the support OVPR provides to scholars and units that is part of our collective efforts to uplift the Commitments to ohpahotân through our RSAW endeavours. We invite readers to consider the information in this report in this collective spirit of shared responsibility and reciprocal relations.*

Teachings and Ceremony

Since receiving the *Gift*, the OVPR has grown in its understanding of ohpahotân through the guidance, teachings and **relationship with Elder Roland Duquette** who is from Mistawasis First Nation, and a member of the Wise Ones Circle. This relationship is founded in protocol, ceremony, and deep respect. To signify the personal and formal relationship between Elder Roland and the OVPR, Elder and the VPR, Baljit Singh, held a **turban ceremony** that invited members of the research community to witness the importance of, and respect for, the exchange of culture and knowledge that exists in our relational accountability to RSAW on campus. At this ceremony, both Elder and the VPR spoke about the effects of colonialism in their lives and in our institutions and signaled their commitment to learning from one another.

Elder Roland guides the OVPR Executive and individuals in the units in their learning journeys through his teachings and through leading ceremony. His wisdom and ways of working have deeply affected members of the OVPR, as evidenced in the following comment:

Since 2022, my learning about Indigenous peoples and ways of being has deepened through listening, relationship building, and Elder teachings that emphasize respect, reciprocity, and taking the time to do work in a good way...I consistently value [Elder Roland's] thoughtful, grounded way of teaching, which reinforces the importance of humility, listening, and intention in our work.

Many team members across OVPR units have established good working and personal relationships with Elder Roland who has participated in dozens of OVPR events. For example, he is regularly involved with the Innovation, Mobilization and Partnerships team as part of the **Opus Innovation Expos** and the first-

ever **mâmwihisicikewin: Community Innovation Challenge**—a partnership between Opus USask and Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies (SIIT) called the Innovation Collective programs. Most recently, Elder Roland facilitated a **Building with Purpose** session for the i2Build 2026 cohort where Elder shared his knowledge, history and insights to help founders understand their responsibility and the connections between Indigenous peoples, communities, and new technologies. Founders expressed their gratefulness for the opportunity to hear directly from and ask questions of Elder Roland—an opportunity they have not regularly received.

Elder Roland's guidance and influence is found across the units of OVPR, but some of his most dedicated and concentrated teachings have focused on USask's relationship with the **bison herd at the Livestock Forage Centre of Excellence**. In 2022, USask was awarded a CFI research project (Integrated Genomics for Sustainable Animal Agriculture and Environmental Stewardship – IntegrOmes) that includes bison as a fundamental aspect of the research. A project of this scale offers significant opportunity for genomic research that has the potential to increase bison health, but it also brings forth concerns related to the cultural and spiritual significance of bison and our responsibilities as stewards in that relationship, and brings in Indigenous perspectives into the interconnectedness of land with animals and humans. To that end, the OVPR has partnered with Director Scott Wright from the Livestock Forage Centre of Excellence (LFCE), the College of Agriculture and Bioresources as well as the Western College of Veterinary Medicine to foster understanding in this ethical space. Elder Roland's counsel has been fundamental for facilitating critical conversations between researchers, USask leaders, industry and community partners, and Knowledge Keepers. He has been instrumental in provoking conversation and actions that foster reconciliation in our relations with bison. Elder Roland led a **ground blessing** for the land at LFCE (2021) to acknowledge that bison were brought to the land and research was conducted on the herd without prior protocol and understanding. He also led a **bison rubbing stone ceremony** for the introduction of four rubbing stones for the herd in 2023 that were acquired in partnership between the LFCE and OVPR. The stones offer a practical source for the bison to rub the winter hair and a place to gather around to learn bison teachings. In future, the hair will be gathered with protocol to facilitate learning for faculty, students, and staff. Elder Roland and Baljit Singh have been together in these gatherings and they have also spent 1:1 time at LFCE as well. We gather with the herd seasonally and continue to grow our understanding, reflecting on our relationship with bison that hold relational, cultural, spiritual, economic and research significance.

Other events that have taken place through Elder Roland's leadership have included **gatherings at the Gordon Oakes Redbear Centre** around the buffalo robe, and a partnered event between the LFCE, the Indian Teacher Education Program (ITEP), Search and Rescue Saskatchewan, Saskatoon Public Schools and Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools during which **Grade 3 students** had opportunities to visit with and learn from the bison. See the attached [link](#) to an article written by Connor Jay from the College of Education related to this event. Most recently, this circle of relationships has grown to include conversations and events held in collaboration with the kihci-okāwīmāw askiy Knowledge Centre under the leadership of Dr. Melissa Arcand, Candice Pete-Cordoso and Donna van de Velde. For example, together with **Wise Ones** Julia Pitzel, Joseph Naytowhow and Roland Duquette, members of the OVPR, the LFCE, the kihci-okāwīmāw askiy Knowledge Centre and ITEP travelled to Kainai Nation in 2024 to witness the 10th Anniversary of the **Buffalo Treaty** and sign on as supporters of the spirit and intent of this important treaty. We have continued to meet regularly to learn from each other and participate in events, including the **Wild Buffalo Summit** (May, 2026), annual events held at the LFCE and the kihci-okāwīmāw askiy Knowledge Centre, and upcoming **Buffalo Treaty Gathering** (Oct, 2026).

Reflections on Commitments. The relationship that many of the members within the OVPR have with Elder Roland as well as other members of the Wise Ones has taught us how important it is to create safer and welcoming spaces for Indigenous peoples, particularly in areas of research where Indigenous peoples historically have been excluded or harmed. We have learned much about the intentional slaughter of the bison on the prairies as well as our responsibility as relatives and stewards to care for our relationship with them as we consider carefully what it means to conduct research with the herd at USask. We have been taught much about the need to amplify culture, language and protocols in the gatherings we hold, and the ceremonies Elder Roland has led. Elder Roland is also helping us to create right relations with other Indigenous peoples as the circle of our bison gatherings grow, and he builds pathways for us to visit, learn from each other, and work together on complex issues related to bison research and rematriation. Many of his ideas have provoked critical conversations as his experience and teachings require us to think differently about our work, and he asks us to invest in wise practices such as the incorporation of the bison rubbing stones that reflect the creative yet practical spirit of Indigenous ways of thinking and doing. Finally, Elder has been insistent that part of our work with bison must include a focus on connecting Indigenous youth to our work. The bison gathering in partnership with ITEP and the two school divisions is one example of this, but we continue also to talk about ways that undergraduate and graduate students can more fully participate in this relationship and learn about the cultural and spiritual significance of bison. While we have been intentional in moving thoughtfully in this space to build relationships of reciprocity and trust with those who have been walking alongside us, focusing attention on relationships with bison as a priority, we have been less engaged in commitments related to wellness, representation and renewal that need to be considered as we carry on this work. Taken together, Elder Roland's teachings have made a positive impact on the understanding and the work of OVPR in building relationships among themselves and across campus.

Strategic Leadership

The OVPR has provided strategic direction and opportunities in areas that support the Commitments of the *Gift*. For example, USask's **Signature Areas of Research** (SAs) are strategically constituted as thinking platforms that encourage transdisciplinary RSAW and collaborations. The OVPR provides resources to bring together scholars for the SAs and facilitate their activities that are intended to lead to strategic collaborations for research. Indigenous researchers and RSAW are represented in SAs, and the OVPR is looking for guidance from Indigenous scholars and Elders in relation to the Indigenous Peoples Signature Area. Recently, the OVPR responded to requests to bring together scholars and leads from **centres** that focus on Indigenous research. Members from kihci-okāwīmāw askiy Knowledge Centre, the Indigenous Law Centre, the Aboriginal Research Centre and Network Environments for Indigenous Health Research came together to discuss how they might create opportunities for collaboration and transdisciplinary research by working more strategically together.

The OVPR works in collaboration with the Office of the Provost and University Relations to provide strategic direction for a variety of **research chairs**, including the new Canada Impact+ Chairs Program, the Canada Excellence Research Chair (CERC) Program, the Canada Research Chair (CRC) Program, the Centennial Enhancement Chair (CEC) Program, and sponsored research chairs. USask has a number of current and upcoming research chairs who are Indigenous, and/or who conduct research focused on Indigenous research areas, and/or who work with Indigenous peoples and communities as part of their research programs. For example, Dr. Wendie Marks is a CRC who focuses on Development Origins of Health and Disease in Indigenous People. Dr. Robert Henry leads national network of centres of

excellence focused on Indigenous health and is a CRC. Dr. Kristina Bidwell is a CRC in Indigenous story telling. Dr. Kerry McPhedran is a CEC who works in the area of Water Stewardship for Indigenous Communities. Dr. Allyson Stevenson, recognized as a College Member of the Royal Society of Canada, holds the sponsored Gabriel Dumont Chair in Métis Studies. These colleagues, and others found at this [link](#), are reshaping the nature of RSAW, ethical engagement, and community-led research on campus.

Strategically, the CRC program attempts to address the historic underrepresentation of individuals from four designated groups (racialized individuals, Indigenous Peoples, persons with disabilities, women and gender equity-seeking groups). All individuals who participate in the search process have to demonstrate participation in anti-bias training. The 2023-2027 USask Faculty Association (USFA) Collective Agreement requires that faculty intending to participate on collegial processes attend an **anti-racism and unconscious bias** training session. This reflects a shared action between the USFA and USask to address the commitments associated with the *Gift* and the university's *EDI Framework for Action*. Additionally, in July 2022, USask implemented the **deybwewin | taapwaywin | tapwewin policy**, which provides a framework for the implementation of Indigenous membership/citizenship verification with documentation at USask. The Tri-Agency Institutional Programs Secretariat (TIPS) recently noted that the CRC Program will fall under the expectations of the federal **Tri-Agency Policy on Indigenous Citizenship and Membership Affirmation** beginning in Fall, 2026.

In addition to research chairs, the RSAW mission of USask is facilitated by the work of many **research centres**, some of which report to the OVPR. A number of these centres work closely with Indigenous communities to respond to local needs. For example, the Community-University Institute for Social Research engages with community partners to conduct research in areas such as housing security, renter equity, and MMIWG2S+family experience of policy intervention that differentially effect populations in Saskatoon's core neighbourhoods. The Canadian Centre for Rural and Agricultural Health initiated the Bridges Research Collective that is a "community-led, relationship-centred research team working alongside Métis and First Nations partners across northern Saskatchewan and beyond...who share a commitment to culturally grounded wellness, intergenerational knowledge, and equitable health systems." Researchers from the Canadian Light Source (CLS) collaborate with an Elders Advisory and a Project Protocols and Indigenous Ethics Advisory to ensure the CLS receives guidance on programming and projects that incorporate proper protocol and ceremonial knowledge. The CLS has initiated a number of engagements focused on students, resource development, professional growth, conferences and public engagement that respond to the *Gift*. These efforts are changing how research is conducted at USask, led by faculty, staff, students and partners who are committed to shifting the colonial narrative.

In 2024, the OVPR initiated **RSAW planning** for colleges and centres across the campus. The template created for units emphasized responsibility to the *Gift*, and the need to uplift Indigenization in planning for RSAW on campus. To that end, the planning template asks respondents to include considerations of peoples from equity-deserving groups, including Indigenous peoples, with a specific question on how RSAW strategies uplift Indigenization in research programs, personnel, etc. The planning template also opens opportunities for units to report on RSAW impact, as well as community and public engagement in the form of narratives. The appendix references diverse outcomes, indicators and data reporting strategies that are inclusive and recognize multiple forms of knowledge and knowledge mobilization.

The Research Profile and Impact (RPI) team has strategically elevated Indigenous scholars and researchers to national platforms through **award nominations and events** which in turn increases the reputational impact of Indigenous research on our campus. Examples include Indigenous scholars Dr.

Malcolm King (Royal Society of Canada Fellowship), Dr. Allyson Stevenson (Royal Society of Canada College Membership) and Dr. Alexandra King (Canadian Academy of Health Science Fellowship). Examples also include awards for individuals or projects that focus on or partner with Indigenous communities, including awards offered to Dr. Dwight Newman (Royal Society of Canada Fellowship), John Pomeroy (International Hydrology Prize), Kelly Mckelvey (SSHRC Impact Award finalist) and the Global Water Futures Program (Stockholm Water Prize shortlist), Zoe Slusar (NSERC Science Promotion Award).

Reflections on Commitments. The commitments that are most strongly represented in areas of strategic leadership include attempts at creating safer and welcoming spaces for Indigenous researchers and RSAW with the Indigenous Signature Area, as well as protocols and programs for anti-bias and anti-racism training for research chair searches. Many of the strategic initiatives include efforts to increase representation and right relations through research chair programs, the work of research centres, RSAW planning and awards and nominations. Research chairs and Indigenous-led centres in particular often focus their RSAW efforts in areas of wellness, stewardship, and creation, but this tends to be dependent on the scholars involved and is not led directly by the OVPR. What is most absent in the area of strategic leadership is a focus on renewal that sustains pathways of access and success for Indigenous youth.

Partnerships

As noted above, the OVPR engages with many partners across campus that help the OVPR respond positively to the *Gift*. Additionally, the OVPR has established a number of partnerships with external agencies and partners that help us respond to the needs of Indigenous peoples, governments, organizations and communities. A primary example is the development of a research institute that flows out of the Memorandum of Understanding and a Research Agreement created in partnership with **Métis Nation Saskatchewan** that will be led by Dr. Kurt Boyer, Chair in Métis Governance and Policy.

Another important partner is that of **Station 20 West**, in which the OVPR is a co-locator in Saskatoon's core neighbourhoods. In 2025, OVPR helped to sponsor events at Station 20 West in partnership with Dr. Loleen Berdahl who received a SSHRC Exchange Grant to support voter engagement of residents in core neighbourhoods in civic, provincial and national elections. Until 2026, the Networks Environments for Indigenous Health Research (NEIHR) has been formally located in this space with a focus on Indigenous health and wellness. Given NEIHR's need to have a more prominent presence on campus, and the desire of the OVPR to create opportunities to more groups and individuals whose work is community-centric, the Canadian Centre for the Study of Cooperatives (CCSC), as well as Community-University Institute for Social Research (CUISR) are now sharing this office space.

For the past two years, precipitated by collaboration with Dr. Jordan Woodsworth from WCVM whose work improves veterinary services in the north, the OVPR has been developing a relationship with community members in the **La Ronge area**. One of the events that OVPR helped to sponsor was the [Dog Medicine Gallery](#) travelling exhibit at Wanuskewin Heritage Park that showcased the relationship between people and dogs in the north that was part of Dr. Woodsworth's PhD research. Subsequently, OVPR has partnered with Dr. Woodsworth, Dr. Jay Wilson from the Prince Albert Campus, Dr. Sandy Bonnie from the Indigenous Student Achievement Pathways program, and Dr. Andrew Denton from the School for the Arts to meet with organizations and individuals in the area to discuss how USask can contribute to local needs, combining attendance at community gatherings with presentations to schools, and contributing to events such as Art in the Park. At this year's Art in the Park event, OVPR will bring prints of our *Images of Research* competition to open conversations regarding the ways in which

research can be beautiful in an attempt to reconcile some of the negative research histories and narratives that exist in these communities.

USask has a *Memorandum of Understanding* with **Wanuskewin Heritage Park**, and the OVPR has a *Research Agreement* that establishes the Wanuskewin Institute as a mechanism for research partnerships, programming and intercultural exchange. In an attempt to support the work of the Institute, a SSHRC Insight Development Grant was written that focuses on research governance and Indigenous knowledge sovereignty to consider how best to create agreements that facilitate Indigenous-led research. In addition to the research partnership, AVPR Dawn Wallin serves as USask's representative on the Board of Directors for the Wanuskewin Heritage Park.

As a final example, in early 2025, Opus partnered with the **Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technology (SIIT)**—The Innovation Collective to host the first-ever *mâdawihisicikewin: Community Innovation Challenge* that brought together Indigenous knowledge and research-backed technology to create solutions for communities in a 2-day hackathon. Student teams were evenly made up of USask and SIIT students who tackled community priorities like water protection, housing security, family wellbeing and food security. Thirty-one students attended Day 1, and four teams participated on Day 2. Collaboration and outcomes were deemed a success by partners and several sponsors and mentors who were involved—many of whom were represented well by Indigenous individuals and Indigenous-led and/or owned organizations. Planning for the 2nd *mâdawihisicikewin: Community Innovation Challenge* will begin in mid-2026 for an early 2027 date. The goal is that planning and stronger relationship-building with USask Indigenous students, programs and groups will result in a bigger hackathon event with more engagement across campus.

Reflections on Commitments. In our partnership work, the OVPR has intended to foster safety, right relations and creation by establishing inviting opportunities where partnerships can flourish and people can work respectfully in reciprocal relationships to creatively innovate through RSAW. Many of the outcomes of these partnerships are focused on stewardship (MN-S, La Ronge, Wanuskewin), representation (civic engagement at S20W, SIIT), right relations (MN-S, S20W, La Ronge, SIIT) and creation (MN-S, La Ronge, SIIT). Renewal efforts that focus on strengthening and sustaining pathways for access and success by connecting Indigenous youth was evident in the partnership between Opus and SIIT. Wellness has not been well represented in our partnership space.

Programming

The OVPR offers a number of programs that support professional growth and/or funding opportunities for individuals interested in Indigenous research.

TEDxUniversityofSaskatchewan TEDx is a program of local, self-organized events that bring people together to learn about ideas worth sharing. Organized by OVPR's RPI, the TEDxUniversityofSaskatchewan event brings together members of the community with experts on campus to spark deep discussion and connection. The RPI team mindfully and intentionally include Indigenous voices in the speaker lineup each year. Elder Roland opens the event. Speakers have included:

- Shaina Lynden – Reconciliation in policing through Indigenous-led education
- Leah Ferguson – Self-compassion in sport
- Andrew Hartman – Queer joy, healing, and community wellness

- Joseph Neapetung –Indigenous neuroscience
- Indiana Best – The “Journey of a Seed” grounded in Métis culture
- Kevin Lewis – kâniyâsihk Culture Camp for Cree land-based education and language learning

The event is typically sold out in short order, and the talks are made available [online](#).

USask was the first university to sponsor an ***Images of Research*** competition which is now common across universities. This competition organized by RPI routinely receives photos showcasing Indigenous research and work on the land. In 2026, the community engagement category was opened to members of the community who were working with USask researchers, with the intent to be more inclusive of the people and communities who partner with USask researchers. In 2024, RPI added a note to the event portion of the competition that includes the treaty territory in which the winning photographs were photographed which in a small but important way ensures appropriate representation and acknowledges the need for right relations in how we acknowledge research artifacts. The winning research images and their descriptions from 2026 are linked [here](#).

USask’s ***International Blueprint internal grant programs*** actively support Indigenous-led and community-engaged research, fostering partnerships that respect Indigenous knowledge, priorities, and autonomy. Specifically, two streams of the Global Community Service Fund – New Partnerships Stream and Existing Partnerships Stream – are designed to support collaborations and engagement with communities worldwide, including Indigenous research grounded in reciprocity, respect, and community priorities. These grants facilitate both the creation of new partnerships and the deepening of long-standing collaborations, ensuring that knowledge, data, and outcomes generated through funded projects are retained by and directly benefit local communities. As part of its adjudication process, the International Office ensures there is integration of Indigenous perspectives by aligning with ethical and governance frameworks such as the First Nations Principles of OCAP (Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession), supporting Indigenous data sovereignty and respectful research practices. The office supports respectful, reciprocal research partnerships and monitors and shares Indigenous-focused and international funding opportunities that advance Indigenous-led and Indigenous-inclusive research.

The ***People Around the World (PAW) Congress*** led by the International Office has intentionally created space for Indigenous voices, knowledge systems, and community-led approaches. PAW 2021 and 2022 underscored the importance of Indigenous perspectives in addressing complex challenges through a local-global, cross-learning lens, highlighting Indigenous knowledge as foundational to sustainable development and collaborative research. Across subsequent congresses, PAW continued to promote respectful relationship building, knowledge sharing, and community-driven solutions—values grounded in Indigenous research methodologies that emphasize reciprocity, relational accountability, and ethical engagement. For example, in 2025, the theme of “[Healthy People, Healthy Planet: Driving Innovation with Data](#)” incorporated health topics with Indigenous and relational worldviews to ensure health and data sovereignty, cultural safety and provide accessible solutions for a healthier planet. By sharing best practices and fostering cross-cultural dialogue, PAW equips participants to advance reconciliation through informed action, capacity-building, and strengthened partnerships.

One of the important aspects of the *Gift* that the Research Acceleration and Strategic Initiatives team has implemented in its support of ***large-scale institutional funding*** opportunities is the distinction between EDI and Indigenization. This includes NFRF-T, CFREFs, CERCs, Impact+ Chairs, SSHRC PGs and others as appropriate. Over time, the OVPR has ***supported scholars*** in their efforts to apply for grants targeted for Indigenous scholars and/or Indigenous research. Examples include Tri-Council special calls, Mitacs Indigenous Pathways grants, NSERC Undergraduate Student Research Assistants for Black and

Indigenous students, and Indigenous Scholars Awards and Supplements Pilot Initiative. In addition, USask scholars have served or consulted on Tri-Agency committees and/or policies such as the Indigenous Leadership Circle, Chapter 9 of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS2), *Setting new directors to support Indigenous research and research training in Canada 2019-2022* (extended to 2026), and the *Tri-Agency Policy on Indigenous Citizenship and Membership Affirmation*. Many others have served on Tri-Agency committees at the national and local level, providing valuable service and leadership in peer review.

RASI has created an Undergraduate RSAW Initiative that is actively involved in supporting opportunities for Indigenous students to engage in research, including amplifying the **Indigenous NSERC Undergraduate Student Research Assistant (USRA) stream** and supporting students in their application processes by strengthening reviews of the applications to ensure high quality experiences for students. The team works closely with Indigenous Student Achievement Pathways (ISAP) to ensure Indigenous USRA students are connected into their summer scholars circle in addition to the RASI Student Undergraduate Research Experience (SURE) summer program. RASI staff work with the OVPIE to support students with the *deybwewin | taapwaywin | tapwewin* policy to ensure that process runs parallel to their USRA award process. RASI is considering opportunities for offering the Indigenous NSERC USRA award during other terms to provide more flexibility, as well as being more intentional about incorporating the *Gift* into its new uRSAW Strategic Plan.

In terms of research ethics and animal care, **Research Ethics Office staff (REO) and Research Ethics Board (REB)** members participated in Building Research Relationships with Indigenous Communities (BRRIC) Training offered through the Saskatchewan Centre for Patient-Oriented Research to better understand community engagement and relationships in research to help with ethics reviews and application of TCPS2 Chapter 9. In addition, USask is finalizing legal requirements with the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technology to become its Research Board of Record. In this collaborative relationship, USask will support SIIT in its longer-term goal of having its own TCPS2 compliant REB. In return, SIIT will nominate an Indigenous SIIT faculty member to support USask's REB on research ethics reviews for studies involving Indigenous people and communities. Finally, the Behavioural REB recently made substantial revisions to the Community Engagement and Indigenous Peoples section of our REB application to allow for more principled review by the REB.

The **Animal Ethics, Research Ethics and Animal Care Unit** must ensure that USask researchers follow provincial and federal regulations, standards, and guidelines to maintain Canadian Council on Animal Care (CCAC) Good Animal Practice (GAP) certificate. Researchers who perform work on reservations or other designated Indigenous lands must ensure they have the appropriate permissions to perform their wildlife work on those lands. Recently, for research involving wildlife, the CCAC updated its terms to include a section on engagement with Indigenous communities and organizations that recognizes its own lack of consultation in the past and acknowledges the importance of Indigenous perspectives and protocols. The USask University Animal Care Committee (UACC) added the recommended CCAC guidelines along with a checkbox for principal investigators to acknowledge reading them to the wildlife Animal Use Protocol form.

In alignment with its startup support goals, the Innovation, Mobilization and Partnerships team identified the Saskatoon Regional Economic Development Authority (SREDA) **SOAR Indigenous entrepreneurship program** as a key partner program to which IMP can contribute mentorship and support. This relationship is strong and the program has received two more years of funding. IMP will

continue to support SREDA, holding a Board seat and volunteering additional expertise and resources to support Indigenous entrepreneurship.

Recently, the OVPR has worked with Dr. Jay Wilson from the Prince Albert Campus to partner with the **City of Prince Albert** on a funding program similar to that of **Research Junction** with the **City of Saskatoon**. These programs support the development of joint research projects that address contemporary urban issues for the benefit of residents, enhance research connections and support the development of large-scale, multi-year opportunities. Though not specifically targeted to Indigenous communities, projects have, and will, focus on the concerns of urban Indigenous residents and neighbourhoods.

SSHRC Matters is a research series designed to highlight the importance of social science, humanities and artistic research, scholarship, and expression, as well as its impact on our campus, in our communities, and for our world. Thirteen events have been organized since 2022, many of which have highlighted the work of Indigenous scholars and/or topics that have focused on, and partnered with, Indigenous communities. Descriptions of these events can be found at:

<https://vpresearch.usask.ca/research-support/tri-agency.php#SSHRCMatters>

Reflections on Commitments. The commitments that are most evident in our reflections of our programming efforts include fostering representation in University spaces and places, right relations through the creation of partnerships built on ethical engagement, and the stewardship of Indigenous cultures, languages and protocols as Indigenous researchers and their work are highlighted in OVPR programs or inform RSAW policy and programs on campus or at the federal level. Wellness was represented in the efforts of the recent PAW conference that focused on health and data sovereignty, and renewal is evident in the work related to the Indigenous NSERC USRA.

Events and Activities

To support individual learning and professional growth, members from the OVPR have attended, presented at, or organized a number of events since 2022 focused on Indigenous research, knowledge, and research ethics. A selected list of examples are found below:

- Wanuskewin Institute Leadership Meeting with Associate Deans Research and Signature Area Leads
- World Indigenous Peoples Conference in Education (WIPCE)
- Think Indigenous
- University of Alberta Indigenous Research Symposium
- Wild Buffalo Summit
- Buffalo Treaty
- Bison Convention
- Cowessess First Nation Residential Survivor Event
- USask Truth and Reconciliation Fora
- OVPIE's national Indigenous Membership and Citizenship Conference (2025)
- OCAP Training
- Employee training related to anti-racism and EDI
- RPI communications workshop on Indigenous symbols, voices and icons in communications

RPI created the **Visiting video series** which includes four documentary-style videos focused on Indigenous scholars who talked about the nature of their work and their experiences of being researchers at USask. One of the goals of the project was to make Indigenous research more visible and accessible to external audiences. Featured researchers included Dr. Heather Foulds, Dr. Holly Graham, Dr. Chris Phenix, and Dr. Deneh'Cho Thompson. The series can be found at the following link:

<https://research.usask.ca/research-stories/video-and-podcasts/visiting.php>

RSAW Intersections is an annual event sponsored by the OVPR that brings scholars together around a particular RSAW focus. RSAW Intersections has focused on celebrating and demonstrating how research is not an isolative event—but that one starting point met with courageous curiosity and boundless collaboration can lead to inspired communities. Previous topics included: Inspired Communities, Connections the World Needs, Intersections between Arts and Health Care. The most recent RSAW Intersections highlighted the power of story for social and cultural transformation, co-organized with Dr. Kokum Linda Young and Elder Roland Duquette.

The International Office works to include Indigenous engagement and focus when working with **international delegations**. For example, the Magic 7 consortium, a network of seven universities from the Philippines and USask, was established to promote international cooperation and incorporate Indigenous perspectives found in Philippines and Canadian Indigenous cultures, into higher education of both countries. A second example included a collaboration with the College of Education to support an inbound visit from the University of Agder in Norway. The visit program included meetings with Indigenous faculty, staff and teachers to discuss how Indigenous knowledge could be incorporated into teacher training programs that are grounded in local knowledge, storytelling and land-based pedagogy to foster holistic wellness and student development.

As part of efforts to support faculty members with the new **narrative Tri-Agency CV**, the Tri-Agency team has launched workshops that have been widely attended by faculty. As one of the series of workshops, a session was held in April, 2026 led by NSERC Lead Dr. Julia Boughner in collaboration with colleagues Jade Hupe and Rachel Regier from the Gwenna Moss Centre for Teaching focused on the ways in which storytelling approaches that are rooted in Indigenous methodology and sustainability can improve how scholars communicate their research experience.

Although the primary emphasis of the OVPR is to work in the background to support the research of USask scholars, on occasion, members from the OVPR also help to facilitate community-led research on issues that affect Indigenous communities by **working with partners to leverage grant funding**. Examples include the *Story Collider*, a Canada Foundation for Innovation infrastructure grant that allows for stories to be told *where those stories live* – including rural and Indigenous communities; a SSHRC Insight Development Grant developed in partnership with the Wanuskewin Heritage Park Authority that strengthens commitment to shared research governance and Indigenous knowledge sovereignty, and; a Mitacs grant in partnership with the City of Saskatoon to conduct a community needs assessment related to digital equity in technology, programs and services to promote better access for City residents, particularly for those living in core neighbourhoods.

The administrative team in the OVPR that support the AVPRs, VPR and directors embrace the commitment of stewardship in how they care for Indigenous-related research priorities by ensuring respectful scheduling, preparation, and follow-up for meetings, committees, and engagements involving Indigenous partners, researchers, or communities. They recognize that administrative systems play a key role in sustaining the Indigenous Strategy as a living responsibility, not a one-time commitment. Right

relations guide communication and coordination. They approach this work with respect, reliability, and care for protocol, recognizing that research relationships particularly with Indigenous communities depend on trust, clarity, and consistency. Time pressures within the research portfolio can be a barrier, and they continue learning how to balance efficiency with relational accountability. They understand renewal as an ongoing process of learning and self-reflection and thus continue to build their understanding of Indigenous research contexts, reconciliation, and positionality as administrative professionals supporting senior research leadership.

Reflections on Commitments. The majority of events and activities in which members of the OVPR have either participated, organized, or led tend to uplift commitments to safety, stewardship, right relations and representation. Events and activities have intended to create safe spaces for ethical engagement around Indigenous research and/or knowledge sharing. Less evident in these efforts is a commitment to wellness, creation, and renewal.

Policy, Procedure and Practice Changes

As part of its development of an **Intellectual Property Management Framework**, IMP included respecting ownership of Indigenous knowledge as intellectual property that USask makes no claim upon. Currently this IP management principle has been included in a draft for a new IP amendment to the USFA CBA, which is the key place IP management policy exists at USask. Two challenges have been faced. The first is having the framework principle become embedded in the new IP policy as negotiations between the Legal Office and USFA take considerable time. The second is that IMP has not seen examples of where this principle needs to be applied; to that end, it is unclear whether IP issues are taken care of without intervention, or whether they are not being brought forward for resolution. Once the policy is ratified, IMP will work with campus members to understand where and when and how the principle should be applied (in consultation, education with/for researchers or through ethics channels or elsewhere).

Opus engaged with **Indigenous leaders and programming on campus** to start building relationships in Spring 2025. This included in-person meetings and email updates with individuals from Gordon Oakes Red Bear Student Centre, OVPIE, CGPS, IBAC in ESB, GSA, and ISAP. Opus also sponsored Soup and Bannock (March, 2025) at Gordon Oakes Red Bear Student Centre, marking one of the first event opportunities to help support Indigenous students. The event was very well attended and provided an opportunity to introduce many Indigenous students to Opus and entrepreneurship. It is important to go to the students in places where they feel physically and psychologically safe. Opus will continue to look for opportunities to support Indigenous students, staff and faculty on campus by focusing on partnerships with the various teams, supports and resources on campus.

The OVPR finance team is **working to improve financial policies, processes, and guidance** supporting research to respect Indigenous principles of reciprocity, relational accountability, and ethical space. This has included supporting funding structures that recognize Indigenous governance, relationship building, and community defined priorities as legitimate and essential components of scholarly research, rather than ancillary activities. As noted by one member of the financial team:

I engage in ongoing reflection and learning about my role as a non-Indigenous administrator working within ohpahotân | oohpaahotaan. These learnings inform how I approach future policy development, financial guidance, and collaboration—ensuring reconciliation is not a single initiative, but an evolving responsibility embedded in everyday practice.

RPI is embedding Indigenous voices at the heart of **research storytelling** and honouring the expression “Nothing about us, without us” by modeling appropriate research communications, being accountable for this work, and being seen as leaders in communicating Indigenous content across campus. RPI routinely publishes Indigenous research stories aligning with ohpahotân commitments to Creation, Right Relations, and Representation. Three examples are included below, with a more fulsome list presented at the end of this report.

- [USask Community Research Uses Virtual Reality for Indigenous Health Education \(2025\)](#)
- [USask Undergrad Student Puts Community First in Ecological Research \(2025\)](#)
- [USask Research: Building Pathways of Healing and Justice \(2023\)](#)

The Director of RPI has been on the working committee tasked with developing an **anti-racism and anti-oppression strategy** for USask’s Strategic Communications team – a group of roughly 100 employees that supports communications and marketing professionals across campus. The planning and development of the strategy and the document has spanned nearly two years. Extensive consultation with Indigenous groups and the campus community of communicators were undertaken as part of this work and is expected to roll out Summer 2026.

USask scholars, advocated by the OVPR, have also been successful for **lobbying for change at the Tri-Agency**. Beyond involvement on committees and consultation for policy, an example of changing practice occurred when researchers began advocating for grant funds to be used to reimburse a nongovernmental and/or not-for-profit organization for costs incurred in compensating an Indigenous individual for time spent on the grant activities. Though stipulations remain, this change in practice greatly increases the ability of researchers to offer fair recompense to Indigenous peoples and organizations who agreed to partner on grants. A second example occurred for the SSHRC Storytellers Challenge when USask faculty member Dr. Kristina Bidwell successfully argued for a collaborative submission that de-centred the individual as a source of knowledge and privileged the collective community. Not only was this advocacy successful, but Olivia Abram and Leah Alfred-Omedo were one of the five annual submission winners of the Challenge for their submission entitled, Indigenous-led Collaboration in the Indigenous Literary Arts.

Reflections on Commitments. In the area of policy, procedure and practice changes, the OVPR has uplifted commitments to safety and renewal, particularly through Opus’ work to create opportunities for Indigenous youth to participate in entrepreneurship programming. Many of the initiatives in this area focus on creation, right relations, and representation. In this area, there has been less emphasis on stewardship.

Work To Be Done/Gaps/Challenges

The examples above demonstrate that the OVPR has meaningfully and respectfully engaged in efforts of truth and reconciliation to provide improved RSAW support for the USask community and partners. The examples are more than a “laundry list of evidence” for the purposes of institutional accountability. They reflect a journey of truth and reconciliation that is gaining momentum, with acknowledgement that much more can, and should, be done. As one member of the OVPR suggested:

I see meaningful efforts within units in OVPR to engage with and uplift Indigenous peoples—often driven by committed individuals—but this work remains uneven and is too often carried by the same people. There is opportunity to more consistently embed the Seven Commitments into

everyday practice, move beyond performative actions, and share accountability more broadly so this responsibility does not rest on specific colleagues.

Our reflections acknowledge the following areas where continued growth and/or collaboration can be uplifted:

- Increased representation of Indigenous peoples in OVPR leadership and staff positions, as well as in college Research Facilitator positions. The OVPR could benefit from working with HR, but more importantly, Indigenous networks across and beyond campus to increase recruitment efforts of Indigenous peoples. This could include job shadowing opportunities and conversations with the Wise Ones to help de-mystify the work in these roles and increase interest. Recent discussions have explored the creation of a position for Director of Indigenous RSAW. These conversations are on-going.
- Recruitment and retention of Indigenous researchers remains a priority, but challenges continue to exist related to faculty complement planning, off-reserve work arrangements, spousal hiring, and the creation of inclusive, culturally affirming environments. OVPR would like to work more closely with Provost's Office to support recruitment and retention of Indigenous researchers.
- Increase professional growth opportunities focused on personal and organizational learning to create broad, shared responsibility for the *Gift*. Our reflections note that in order to understand, accept and be accountable to the *Gift*, individuals must have a sense of humility, an ability to be comfortable with the uncomfortable, and be open to challenge, unlearning and change. Becoming aware of power relationships through anti-racist, anti-oppressive training, culturally affirming practices, avoidance of pan-Indianism and distinctions between Indigenization and EDI are fundamental to this learning.
- Research knowledge of and commitment to Indigenization can be uneven across campus, which opens up challenges and opportunities for improved research support. Increased workshops, professional development sessions for faculty offered through the OVPR must focus on developing Indigenous-led research partnerships, proposal writing cognizant of Indigenous protocols, reciprocal relationality and knowledge sovereignty, as well as Indigenous research ethics. For example, as rural and Northern research initiatives unfolds, the OVPR anticipates a growing need for an Indigenous advisory circle to lead this work, in addition to increased faculty educational resources for developing partnerships with Indigenous communities.
- Through our reflections on the Gift, we have realized that we must work deliberately and collaboratively across our institution. The OVPR must collaborate with:
 - Indigenous scholars, Indigenous partners/communities, other ethics offices and the Tri-Council to support evolving understandings of Indigenous research ethics. Different levels of understanding and sophistication with distinctions-based knowledge of Indigenous, Métis and Inuit peoples, protocols and community-led engagement can lead to very different interpretations of Chapter 9 in the TCPS2 or what foundational concepts like Indigenous sovereignty really means in the academic research world.
 - The OVPIE to navigate the deybwewin | taapwaywin | tapwewin policy and its relationship to the *Tri-Agency Policy on Indigenous Citizenship and Membership Affirmation*. One of the concerns that arises is timely coordination of information related to the policy between units, particularly for research chair searches.
 - The Wise Ones as a whole to deepen our relationships and understandings of different teachings, knowledges and distinctions with which each Wise One is gifted. This recommendation was made to us by Elder Roland, and we embrace it.

- The OVPR will continue to work with Indigenous researchers on the presence and sustainability of the Indigenous Peoples Signature Area that has not gained momentum even though Indigenous research is occurring across campus, led by Indigenous researchers, focused on Indigenous-specific topics, and/or in partnership with Indigenous communities. Here, too, Elder Roland has recommended that the Wise Ones host a meeting with Indigenous scholars about the Signature Area to help determine where concerns and potential strategies lay.
- OVPR could be more intentional in its efforts to include Indigenous students in its programming and RSAW endeavours. The examples offered by Opus and RASI demonstrate that Indigenous student interest in RSAW can increase if groups attend to relationship building and leverage partner networks in ways that are directly responsive to, and held in places where, students congregate and feel safer.
- Many universities have developed an associate VP level positions in their research portfolios to provide leadership to Indigenous research. Continued efforts to provide leadership could include a role such as this.

In conclusion, our efforts demonstrate that the OVPR has accepted responsibility for the *Gift*, and has worked towards supporting Indigenous researchers, partners, and research. We have more learning and reflection to do about truth and reconciliation in our work in RSAW at USask. However, one key learning is that as the OVPR moves along in its efforts, **it is important that we move beyond ceremonial protocol and foster substantive engagement with Indigenous peoples in RSAW outcomes.** Our reflections demonstrate that deep and meaningful work is occurring across our campus and within the units of OVPR, but it is often uneven, isolated, unintegrated, and held in the hands of a few committed individuals. The development of more strategic and personal relationships with Indigenous faculty, the Wise Ones, Indigenous partners and other units on campus can strengthen our relational accountability for, and stewardship of, the Commitments of the *Gift* in ways that enable RSAW leadership to be grounded in Indigenous knowledge, teachings and values.

Appendix

OVPR News Stories Highlighting Indigenous Researchers, Communities and Research (2022 Onwards)

- <https://news.usask.ca/articles/research/2025/usask-community-research-uses-virtual-reality-for-indigenous-health-education.php>
- <https://news.usask.ca/media-release-pages/2025/usask-researching-sustainable-bison-grazing-management.php>
- <https://news.usask.ca/media-release-pages/2025/usask-researchers-receive-1.5-million-for-rapid-response-wildfire-research.php>
- <https://research.usask.ca/awards/recipient-articles/2025/news-usasks-dr-john-pomeroy-wins-international-water-research-prize.php>
- <https://news.usask.ca/articles/research/2025/usask-canada-research-chairs-focus-on-one-health-wholistic-health-energy-security.php>
- <https://news.usask.ca/articles/research/2025/four-usask-researchers-recognized-by-royal-society-of-canada.php>
- <https://news.usask.ca/articles/students/2025/usask-undergrad-student-puts-community-first-in-ecological-research.php>
- <https://news.usask.ca/media-release-pages/2025/usask-researchers-publish-first-canadian-guidelines-for-spinal-bulbar-muscular-atrophy.php>
- <https://news.usask.ca/articles/research/2025/usask-data-driven-anthropology-research-project-receives-international-acclaim.php>
- <https://news.usask.ca/articles/research/2024/usask-researcher-receives-funding-for-indigenous-led-substance-abuse-research-program.php>
- <https://research.usask.ca/awards/recipient-articles/2024/usask-historian-a-finalist-for-sshrctalent-award.php>
- <https://healthsciences.usask.ca/news-and-announcements/news-stories/2024/news-usask-and-mns-government-agreement-supports-high-impact-research-with-and-for-m%C3%A9tis-communities.php>
- <https://news.usask.ca/articles/research/2024/new-funding-announced-for-indigenous-health-research-network.php>
- <https://news.usask.ca/articles/research/2024/usask-researcher-empowers-communities-with-culturally-rooted-digital-heritage-project.php>
- <https://news.usask.ca/articles/research/2024/m%C3%A9tis-cancer-survivor-experiences-documented-in-digital-storytelling-project.php>
- <https://news.usask.ca/articles/research/2024/renowned-usask-researcher-named-canadian-academy-of-health-sciences-fellow.php>
- <https://news.usask.ca/articles/research/2023/usask-research-building-pathways-of-healing-and-justice.php>
- <https://news.usask.ca/articles/research/2023/usask-part-of-sshrct-funded-nationwide-theatre-school-research-project.php>
- <https://medicine.usask.ca/news/2023/news-combating-diabetes-using-community-strengths-aided-by-usask-research.php>
- <https://news.usask.ca/articles/research/2022/usask-canada-research-chairs-to-use-indigenous-knowledge,-stories-to-create-social-impact.php>
- <https://news.usask.ca/media-release-pages/2022/indigenous-gangs,-street-lifestyle-focus-of-new-canada-research-chair.php>