



A ROLE AT THE HEART OF RECONCILIATION:

Reference Framework for the Role of
Indigenous Relations Manager



Introduction

Corporate relations with Indigenous peoples are evolving. Increasingly, organizations are recognizing that authentic reconciliation cannot be limited to symbolic commitments; it must translate into concrete, sustained, and measurable actions.

It is with this perspective that the role of Indigenous Relations Manager emerges: a position that is strategic, relational, and deeply human. This role acts as a bridge between two realities: that of the enterprise and that of Indigenous communities, to foster mutual understanding, trust, and lasting partnerships.

This document aims to help companies better position and value this role within their structures. It proposes:

- A clear definition of key objectives and responsibilities;
- A performance evaluation framework adapted to the relational nature of the position;
- And pathways for integrating Indigenous perspectives into the organization's policies, strategies, and operations.

More than just a job description, this guide is intended as a tool for reflection and action for executives, HR teams, EDI or ESG committees, and anyone wishing to contribute to a more respectful and sustainable approach to relations between businesses and Indigenous peoples.

Because beyond obligations and projects, this role embodies a conviction: that reconciliation is first and foremost a relationship to be nurtured, day after day.

Brigitte Skeene
Founder
Talent IQ Inc.



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SECTION 1: THE 6 KEY OBJECTIVES OF THE ROLE

1. Relationship Building and Trust

- Serve as the primary liaison between the company and Indigenous partners.
- Foster ongoing dialogue and collaboration, rather than ad-hoc consultations.
- Build trust through transparency, consistency, and respect for Indigenous rights, values, and worldviews.

2. Reconciliation and Corporate Responsibility

- Support the company's role in advancing reconciliation, in alignment with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and UNDRIP (United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples).
- Ensure that company decisions reflect a commitment to social responsibility and inclusion.

3. Strategic and Policy Integration

- Integrate Indigenous perspectives into company strategies, policies, and operations (e.g., procurement, hiring, community investment).
- Help develop and implement an Indigenous relations strategy aligned with corporate goals while respecting the priorities of Indigenous communities.

4. Employment, Training, and Economic Opportunities

- Create and support pathways to employment, development, and retention for Indigenous peoples.
- Encourage partnerships with Indigenous businesses and suppliers.
- Promote capacity-building initiatives beneficial to both the company and Indigenous communities.

5. Cultural Awareness and Education

- Facilitate or coordinate cultural awareness training for employees.
- Help create an inclusive and culturally safe work culture for Indigenous employees.
- Ensure that company leaders understand and respect Indigenous histories, rights, and knowledge.

6. Community Engagement and Impact

- Collaborate with communities to identify mutual interests, potential impacts, and opportunities.
- Manage consultation and engagement processes respectfully and effectively, particularly for projects affecting Indigenous lands or resources.¹
- Track and report on the social and community impact of company activities.

¹ These practices align with respect for the duty to consult and, where appropriate, accommodate Indigenous peoples, as recognized by Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982 and detailed by Canadian jurisprudence, when projects or activities are likely to impact their ancestral or treaty rights.

SECTION 2: KEY SUCCESS FACTORS OF THE ROLE

The success of the Indigenous Relations Manager role does not rest solely on goodwill or a job description. It depends on organizational conditions and relational stances that allow the role to be exercised coherently, authentically, and with impact.

This role requires technical competence, cultural intelligence, influencing leadership, and a deep human commitment. When these elements come together, relationships evolve respectfully, sustainably, and reciprocally; and reconciliation takes shape in everyday actions, decisions, and practices.



Explicit Leadership Support

What it means: Leadership must carry the message, affirm the importance of the role, and give it the necessary legitimacy to act across the organization. Without this backing, the role remains peripheral.

What it involves in practice:

- Clear messages from leadership recognizing the value of the role.
- Leadership presence in key meetings.
- Allocation of adequate time, budget, and resources.
- Acceptance that relationships are built over time (not in “quick project” mode).

Expected effect: The role is perceived as strategic, not incidental, and progress can be made with coherence.



Active Listening and Relational Humility

What it means: It is not about “coming with solutions,” but first understanding the realities, histories, and priorities of the communities concerned. Humility is a posture, not a skill.

What it involves in practice:

- Taking time to listen before acting.
- Knowing how to acknowledge what one does not know.
- Letting the community define what matters to them.
- Accepting discomfort as part of the journey.

Expected effect: Relationships develop on trust, not performance.



Cross-Functional Influence Capacity

What it means: The role does not act alone. It must mobilize and guide multiple teams, notably human resources, communications, marketing, legal, diversity and inclusion, procurement, ESG (environmental, social, and governance), and operations. Impact stems from the ability to build internal alliances.

What it involves in practice:

- Working closely with internal teams.
- Clarifying responsibilities and collaboration points.
- Translating cultural realities into management levers.
- Knowing how to adapt the message to the audience.

Expected effect: Indigenous relations become a shared responsibility, not a silo.



Authentic Relationship with Communities

What it means: The relationship is not limited to signing agreements. It is built over time, through consistency and reciprocity.

What it involves in practice:

- In-person meetings, continuity in interactions.
- Respect for protocols and ways of doing things.
- Honest information sharing, even when answers are not yet clear.
- Long-term commitment beyond project cycles.

Expected effect: A living relationship, rather than a purely institutional one.



Alignment Between Values, Discourse, and Actions

What it means: This role cannot be a facade or a communications initiative. Actions must reflect what is said.

What it involves in practice:

- Transparency: what is not ready to be done must not be promised.
- Clarity in priorities, limits, and commitments.
- Consistency in operational decisions (not just words).

Expected effect: Creation of credibility: the foundation of trust.



Clear Framework for Accountability

What it means: Communities and the company must be able to see what has been achieved, what has been learned, and what remains to be done.

What it involves in practice:

- Qualitative and quantitative indicators (not just numbers).
- Regular review, adjustment, and improvement moments.
- Transparent internal and external communication.

Expected effect: A living, evolving process rooted in integrity.

SECTION 3: PITFALLS TO AVOID: LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE FIELD

Individuals occupying the role of Indigenous Relations Manager often share a common observation: this role is learned as much through experience as through training. The pitfalls presented below are drawn from real-life situations experienced, observed, or corrected over time. Naming them clearly helps avoid costly missteps and, above all, preserves trust.

1. Reducing Listening to a Performative Exercise

The Pitfall

Treating listening as a consultation to check off or a step to demonstrate, rather than as a relational posture. Arriving with implicit expectations of quick results or validations.

What it Generates

An impression on the communities' part that listening is guided or instrumentalized, even when the intention is sincere. The relationship may remain superficial.

The Lesson Learned

Authentic listening precedes action. It aims to understand before acting, without hidden agendas or imposed timelines. It accepts that what is heard can transform internal reflection and the organization's pace.

2. Arriving with Predefined Objectives

The Pitfall

Presenting oneself with a project, solution, or pre-defined direction, then seeking validation from communities.

What it Generates

A feeling of imposition, even unintentional. Participation can become minimal, out of politeness or caution, without real engagement.

The Lesson Learned

Authentic co-creation begins with questions, not answers. Objectives must emerge from dialogue, not survive it. The relationship must be able to influence strategy, and not the reverse.

3. Underestimating the Diversity of Indigenous Realities

The Pitfall

Assuming an experience with one community, Nation, or Indigenous organization can be transposed directly elsewhere.

What it Generates

Cultural missteps, inappropriate comparisons, or unrealistic expectations that weaken the relationship.

The Lesson Learned

Every community is distinct. Doing one's homework is a sign of respect. This does not mean knowing

everything, but demonstrating a genuine willingness to learn the history, governance, priorities, and protocols specific to each context.

4. Multiplying Interlocutors Without Internal Coordination

The Pitfall

Allowing different teams within the organization to maintain, often unknowingly, parallel relationships with the same communities.

What it Generates

An impression of disorganization, contradictory messages, and unnecessary duplication. This can damage the organization's credibility.

The Lesson Learned

Mapping existing relationships is essential. Identifying who internally already has ties with communities allows for a coherent, aligned, and respectful presentation.

5. Carrying the Role Alone

The Pitfall

Assuming the relationship with communities rests solely on one person or a dedicated function.

What it Generates

Isolation of the role, emotional overload, and organizational vulnerability if that person leaves or changes positions.

The Lesson Learned

This role is a catalyst, not a substitute. It must activate internal relays, build alliances, and develop shared responsibility across the organization.

6. Promising Before Being Ready

The Pitfall

Wanting to do well, respond quickly, or reassure by committing beyond what the organization is truly ready to deliver.

What it Generates

A loss of credibility that is difficult to repair. Trust frays when commitments cannot be kept.

The Lesson Learned

Transparency protects the relationship. Stating that certain things must be validated or that the organization is not yet ready is often more respectful than making uncertain promises.

7. Limiting the Relationship to Project Moments

The Pitfall

Entering into relationships only when a project, regulatory issue, or obligation arises.

What it Generates

A relationship perceived as utilitarian or opportunistic rather than a sincere commitment.

The Lesson Learned

Relationship precedes project. Maintaining regular points of contact, even in the absence of immediate issues, demonstrates genuine intent and a long-term vision.

In Summary

The most frequent pitfalls are not technical; they are relational.

They recall a fundamental truth: in this role, how things are done matters as much as the action itself.

Avoiding these pitfalls means accepting that the path toward lasting and respectful relationships requires time, humility, and a real capacity to be transformed by the relationship itself.

SECTION 4: PERFORMANCE EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

1. Relations and Trust

Objective: Develop and maintain strong, respectful relationships with Indigenous communities and organizations.

Indicators:

- Number and quality of partnerships established with Indigenous communities, organizations, or governments.
- Frequency of engagements (meetings, workshops, community events).
- Community feedback (surveys or interviews to assess trust, satisfaction, and perceived respect).

2. Strategic and Policy Integration

Objective: Integrate Indigenous perspectives into company decisions and projects.

Indicators:

- Number of initiatives, policies, or projects integrating Indigenous perspectives.
- Evidence that the recommendations of the Indigenous relations person influence decisions.
- Progress in implementing a formal Indigenous relations strategy.

3. Employment and Economic Impact

Objective: Foster employment, development, and economic opportunities for Indigenous peoples.

Indicators:

- Hiring results (increase in Indigenous recruitment, retention rates, and promotions).
- Partnerships with Indigenous businesses (contracts awarded and procurement spending).
- Number of training, mentoring, or capacity-building initiatives supported or delivered.

4. Cultural Awareness and Education

Objective: Promote cultural awareness and competency within the company.

Indicators:

- Number of employees trained on cultural issues and Indigenous awareness.
- Internal survey results (employees' understanding and confidence in interactions with Indigenous communities).
- Adoption of culturally informed practices across teams.

5. Community Engagement and Impact

Objective: Create a positive and tangible impact for Indigenous communities and the company.

Indicators:

- Projects completed in collaboration with Indigenous communities and observed benefits.
- Effective resolution of concerns or conflicts raised by communities.
- External recognition (media mentions, awards, or distinctions for social responsibility and community engagement).

6. Qualitative Measures

Objective: Evaluate the person's influence and credibility within the company and among communities.

Indicators:

- Testimonials or narratives illustrating the strengthening of relationships and trust.
- Internal recognition (leaders and teams seeking advice on decisions affecting Indigenous stakeholders).
- Feedback from Indigenous employees regarding support and inclusion within the company.

SECTION 5: EXAMPLE OF A DASHBOARD

Category	Indicator	Annual Target	Current Result	Evaluation / Comments
Relations & Trust	Number of partnerships established	5	4	Good progress, aim for 1 additional partnership by year-end
	Positive community feedback (%)	80%	75%	Organize follow-up to reinforce satisfaction
Strategy & Policy	Initiatives integrating Indigenous perspectives	3	2	Identify 1 additional project to integrate the Indigenous perspective
	Influence on strategic decisions (qualitative)	5 key decisions	4	Well tracked, encourage more visibility with leadership
Employment & Economy	Indigenous recruitment	10	8	Continue tracking candidates and foster retention
	Contracts with Indigenous businesses	2	1	Identify new procurement opportunities
Cultural Awareness	Employees trained	50	40	Plan additional sessions to reach target
	Internal understanding improvement (survey %)	70%	65%	Communication plan to reinforce buy-in
Community Engagement & Impact	Collaborative projects completed	4	3	Plan a final project to reach target
	Resolution of community concerns	100%	90%	Follow-up necessary to resolve remaining points
Qualitative Measures	Testimonials and positive feedback	5	3	Collect more feedback to document successes
	Inclusion of Indigenous employees (survey)	80%	75%	Plan actions to strengthen sense of inclusion

SECTION 6: THE EVOLUTION PHASES OF THE ROLE

The implementation of the Indigenous Relations Manager role is a process of progressive transformation. This role requires strategy, patience, and a deep human commitment.

Rather than a one-off project, it is a collective journey where each phase consolidates the foundations of the next. The model below presents a realistic trajectory across four major phases spanning 18 to 24 months, enabling concrete results while building long-term trust and sustainability.

PHASE 1: Listen and Understand (0 to 6 months)

Objective: Lay the foundations through listening, learning, and field awareness.

Key Actions:

- Map existing relationships, partners, and communities.
- Understand community expectations, needs, and priorities.
- Assess the organization's maturity regarding Indigenous relations.
- Raise awareness among management and managers about the scope of the role.

Expected Result: A shared understanding of the context, nascent relationships founded on trust, and clear leadership commitment.

PHASE 2: Structure and Plan (6 to 18 months)

Objective: Establish the organizational, strategic, and operational foundations of the role.

Key Actions:

- Develop an Indigenous relations strategy aligned with the company's vision and values.
- Define internal roles, responsibilities, and collaboration processes (HR, procurement, ESG, etc.).
- Launch initial cultural awareness and training initiatives.
- Determine primary performance indicators and monitoring mechanisms.

Expected Result: A clear structure, a legitimate framework for action, and early concrete gestures of rapprochement.

PHASE 3: Integrate and Mobilize (18 to 24 months)

Objective: Bring the role to life through business policies, projects, and organizational behaviors.

Key Actions:

- Integrate Indigenous perspectives into business decisions, policies, and projects.
- Strengthen community partnerships and support joint initiatives (employment, development, procurement).
- Train internal champions or ambassadors to amplify the message.
- Communicate results and lessons internally and externally.

Expected Result: Tangible impacts on relationships, corporate culture, and the external perception of the role.

PHASE 4: Consolidate and Sustain (24 months and beyond)

Objective: Durably anchor the role in the organization's governance, culture, and strategy.

Key Actions:

- Integrate Indigenous relations into strategic planning and ESG indicators.
- Evaluate results, adjust strategy, and ensure accountability to communities and executives.
- Formalize long-term partnerships and community feedback mechanisms.
Create conditions for continuity: succession planning, documentation, experience sharing.

Expected Result: The role becomes a recognized organizational pillar, driving reconciliation, consistency, and sustainable transformation.

ABOUT OUR FOUNDER

Brigitte Skeene – Innu from Mashteuiatsh



Talent IQ reflects the vision of Brigitte Skeene, an Indigenous leader deeply committed to creating rewarding opportunities for Indigenous talent. With nearly three decades of experience, Brigitte is convinced that the way we recruit and build our teams shapes the future of our workplaces and our communities.

A proud Innu woman from Mashteuiatsh, Brigitte has found deep inspiration for her work in her personal journey of reconciliation. Over the past decade, she has rediscovered her roots, learned her language, and reconnected with her culture. This journey has shaped her approach to talent strategy, where she prioritizes authenticity, deep connection, and lasting impact.

Brigitte's mission is to help companies integrate Indigenous perspectives into their recruitment strategy, fostering environments that are more inclusive, more human, and able to prosper. Her work goes beyond recruitment: she is determined to create spaces where Indigenous talent can flourish and contribute to organizational success.

- Harvard University – Certificate in Communications
- École des dirigeant·e·s des Premières Nations – Educational Lead and Trainer
- Cultural Intelligence Centre – Certified Cultural Intelligence (CQ) Facilitator
- CoachingOurselves – Facilitator, Leadership Coach
- AIHR – Certified Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Specialist
- Facteur H – Author and Speaker
- Working Effectively With Indigenous Peoples®
- Management and Strategy Institute – Certified in Project Management (PMEC)
- Acuity Institute – Certified Kaizen Leader



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