




CRE Workplace Investigation Summative Report

December 15, 2021



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CRE

Preamble: A letter from the CRE Board of Directors

Aaniin Boozhoo

During this process, an Elder shared with us, “if you stay out of the shadows and stay within the light, Creator will sort out the rest.” This report is a reflection of that wisdom, in that, we wanted to be as transparent as we possibly can, within the scope of confidentiality and reason.

In July 2020, the Canadian Roots Exchange received reports of inappropriate behaviour by senior leadership and on September 1, 2020 Miyo Pimatsiwin Legal Services was contracted by the Board of Directors (BoD) to commission a formal workplace investigation into the allegations.

Out of respect for those who shared their experiences and in accordance with the confidentiality set out in the investigation’s terms of reference, this report will not include any identifying information including names, places, dates and times. What will be presented are a number of summative themes with corresponding action oriented plans for how CRE will move forward. This report will examine how, as an organization, we are ensuring that those recommendations are cemented into the fabric of CRE, so that we can continue being responsive and address these issues head-on. For CRE to continue its journey in a good way, our approach must remain intentional, long-lasting, and transparent.

First, we want to extend our sincerest gratitude to those who had the courage to come forward and speak to our investigator, and to those that continue to hold CRE accountable. For anyone who feels unheard, that is a weight you are not alone in carrying. Our door will always remain open for those who wish to speak about their experiences with our organization. While these conversations have been difficult, they are incredibly necessary to our growth as an organization to do better. We are committed to creating brave spaces for those who wish to come forward.

Since the launch of the investigation, we have been actively listening, unlearning and examining how we can reform our policies, procedures and intentions in order to prevent additional and future harm from occurring within our organization. CRE remains committed to continuing the work of ensuring a safe workplace free from bullying, discrimination, harassment, lateral violence and other harmful behaviors. This work will remain ongoing, integrative and transformative. This report is a reflection of that journey.

Zhawenjigewin (in kindness),
CRE Board of Directors



Introduction


Founded in 2008, Canadian Roots Exchange (CRE) is an Indigenous youth-led non-profit with a mission to provide pathways for Indigenous youth on their journey of self-determination and resiliency, in an effort to advance reconciliation in their lifetime. This is achieved through programs and granting opportunities that support capacity building, networking and solidarity.

In the 2019 federal budget, the Government of Canada named CRE as a leading Indigenous Youth organization to take up TRC Call to Action 66 for reconciliation and committed federal funding for a pilot project of \$15.2 million over three years (2019/2020 - 2022/2023). This set the goal of the pilot project as ensuring that “the voices of First Nations, Inuit and Métis are heard and to support Indigenous youth reconciliation initiatives.” This funding supported the establishment of a distinctions-based national network of Indigenous youth, helped ensure that Government of Canada policies and programs are informed by the diverse voices of Indigenous youth, and provided support for reconciliation-focused, community-based Indigenous youth activities.

Since that time CRE has grown exponentially with over 50 staff members (80% self-identify as Indigenous) and offices in Toronto and Ottawa. Due to the recent global pandemic, CRE Staff are working remotely across Turtle Island.

Background

On September 1, 2020, CRE contracted Miyo Pimatisiwin Legal Services to launch a workplace investigation looking into the conduct of CRE’s former Executive Director. See <https://canadianroots.ca/statement-by-board/>. The investigation looked into a balance of probabilities of whether the former Executive Director’s conduct violated CRE workplace policies and values and any applicable human rights legislation and occupational health and safety regulations. Individuals were invited to come forward to share anonymous or confidential experiences of their time with CRE through the email account accountability@canadianroots.ca. This email continues to be monitored exclusively by CRE’s (BoD) and external legal counsel: Olthuis Kler Townshend LLP (OKT).



The investigation report concluded that there was a need for organization-wide systemic changes to both policy and procedures, and resulted in recommendations in the following areas. The report calls for:

CRE Accountability Measures

Calls for leadership to build greater accountability in the organization, while ensuring that Indigenous youth and community partnerships will continue to be the focus of the organization and its work.

- 1. Repairing and Re-Building Relationships**

Calls to repair past relationships and ensure alignment between CRE's mission, and values of fostering reconciliation, justice and solidarity.

- 2. Action Plan for Leadership and Implementation**

Calls for organizational alignment and strategic planning.

- 3. CRE Organization, Operation and Oversight**

Calls to further expand CRE internal support structures, as it relates to efforts to build team cohesion, and capacity building with policies and procedures.

Many of these recommendations, in addition to complementary action items, have significant overlap. Therefore in an effort to reduce repetition, we have combined Sections 3 & 4.

The following is a summary of those four themes, including actions on how CRE continues to grow and remain committed to creating an environment that is safe, supportive, and transparent. It is only through honouring these principles that CRE is able to carry out the important and necessary work of reconciliation.



CRE Accountability Measures

The Investigation Report spoke to many ways in which CRE could expand on the organization's accountability measures. The recommendations called for leadership to build greater accountability in the organization, through policies, procedures, and examining CRE governance while ensuring that Indigenous youth and community partnerships will continue to be the focus of the organization and its work. In addition, there were calls for CRE to further enhance safety and support for program participants and staff.


CRE Commitment: Policies & Procedures

Between the time of the launch of the investigation and when the report was submitted by Miyo Pimatisiwin Legal Services, the CRE leadership team began to put priorities in motion to address some of the gaps in policy & procedure. Since that time, CRE leadership and staff have assembled clear and comprehensive policies and procedures that include guidance on confidentiality and privacy law restrictions, clear conflict of interest guidelines and complaint processes, grievance procedures, trauma-informed practices, provincial occupational health and provincial human rights legislation. CRE remains committed to ensuring that the human rights of all persons associated with CRE (employees, volunteers, participants) are protected, and to ensure that every person is treated with dignity and respect, and provided with equal rights and opportunities without discrimination.

For more information on our Anti-Harassment & Anti-Discrimination policy please visit:
<https://canadianroots.ca/about/anti-harassment-and-anti-discrimination-policy/>.

Trauma Informed Care & Risk Management Training

It was recommended that CRE as a whole could benefit from exploring trauma-informed practices to support program participants and CRE staff. CRE has committed to provide mandatory all-staff training in how to safely and effectively deliver programs for youth of all backgrounds and life experiences. The nature of the work of CRE places team members in a direct professional relationship with participants. Trauma-informed practice is an approach to providing support for individuals which takes into consideration the ways in which trauma can impact how individuals might view the support. It will further equip CRE staff to respond to difficult participant situations while ensuring appropriate ethical behaviour and healthy boundaries. The training will include education for staff and volunteers on proper handling of misconduct, consent, sexual assault myths, victimization specific to Indigenous experiences and survivor centered approaches to disclosures. Staff will participate in this mandatory training throughout the 2021/22 fiscal year.



In addition to this work, CRE employees will also undertake mandatory Risk Management Training. While many of our teams are equipped with the skills and training to handle situations as they relate to youth, this training will help elevate CRE staff with a basic understanding of preparing for workplace risks, both in and outside of participant programs, and what they should know about their employer's emergency response plan. This training will take place in Winter 2022 before CRE begins in-person programming.

Anti-Oppression & Anti-Black Racism Training

In an effort to better equip staff with tools to combat Anti-Black Racism & systemic barriers throughout CRE programming, CRE staff began mandatory Anti-Oppression & Anti-Black Racism Training in November 2020. This type of training will be ongoing and iterative to ensure that the teachings are cemented into the fabric of the organization for next seven generations. CRE stands in solidarity with Black, Indigenous, people of colour and other racialized communities. We are committed to continuing to work toward dismantling colonial and violent systems of oppression and advocating for long-lasting sustainable and equitable change in the communities we serve. All staff (who joined the organization prior to December 2020) have received this training. This training will be offered annually and will be made available in Winter 2022.

CRE Commitment: Governance

CRE has experienced exponential growth since 2019, following the federal budget announcement. For scale, CRE has seen an 895% increase in its operating revenue since 2018, which is rare in the not-for-profit sector. For CRE, scaling up also required the expedition of policies, processes, and organizational structure. In the first 14-months, 70 new full-time, part-time, and seasonal staff were hired. Three new offices were opened, by-laws were amended, and 26 new policies were developed. Through the investigation report, recommendations were made in re-examining the alignment of roles in CRE current governance structure to provide greater oversight into operations, systems and leadership. Thereby achieving greater efficiencies and collaborations with the network of central and decentralized players advancing CRE.



BoD Recruitment

In an effort to broaden CRE's governance and oversight into the direction of the organization, CRE launched a Board Recruitment campaign in January, 2021. CRE's BoD are volunteers who lead the organization and ensure our work is impactful and accountable to our external stakeholders. Based on the skills and competencies of current board members and staff, CRE had recruited board members with backgrounds in the following areas:


- Communications
- Business Development
- Finance
- Human Resources
- Government Relations
- Indigenous Governance
- Leading Indigenous Organizations

As of May 1st, 2021, 11 new Board Members were appointed. As of July 2021, all new and current Board Members have undergone a comprehensive Board Governance Training. Please visit <https://canadianroots.ca/about/board/> to see the Board.

CRE Commitment: Community Accountability Advisory Circle

In fall 2020, CRE staff formed an internal committee, the Staff Community Accountability Committee (SCAC), to better inform the process for adopting an advisory circle. The SCAC had developed both an environmental scan & launched a community survey in December 2020. The purpose of the Community Advisory Circle (CAC) is to strengthen CRE's programs and services through the implementation of a sound governance system based on Indigenous governance teachings and rooted in community accountability.

Having a committee made up of key stakeholders, alumni, youth, Elders, and Knowledge Keepers will better inform CRE practices and ensure that our values are aligned with community priorities. The CAC will make recommendations on matters that impact the experiences of communities and youth. This advice is crucial for CRE's Board of Directors (BoD) as they set the goals and direction of the organization.



The purpose of the environmental scan¹ was to identify promising practices of various organizations and youth groups across Canada, examining publicly made documents outlining different governing structures, policies and bylaws that support community accountability. To support this process even further, the community survey² was developed to understand how CRE can better implement community accountability practices and what kind of systems/processes our stakeholders would like to see.

In sum, 97% of respondents had indicated that, 'Yes,' CRE should create a community council in an effort to continue to hold the organization accountable to the communities it serves.

Hiring of Executive Director

The investigation report also made recommendations around the process for hiring a permanent Executive Director (ED) for the organization. These recommendations included ensuring that the recruitment and hiring for senior leadership roles should adhere to a strict conflict of interest policy.³ Presently, CRE has appointed an interim Executive Director, Hillory Tenute.

In order to permanently fill the ED role, the CRE BoD has engaged in a fair, transparent and public hiring process. The Board anticipates that the permanent position will be announced in February 2022.

¹ The scope of the environmental scan was national, with a focus on regional organizations (5 regions). Organizations chosen were youth focused, Indigenous lead, and/or youth lead that focus on serving either First Nation, Metis and/or Inuit communities. The initial scope was to focus on grassroots organizations/groups, and larger organizations. The definition of larger organizations: places that employ more than 15 people; that have been in operation for 5 plus years; have a recognized name (are known in community and/or nationally); have a larger operation budget (100,000 plus annually). The definition of grassroots organization: have a small staff (5-10 ppl or less); rely heavily on volunteers to operate and design their programs; rely on donations/ fundraising; smaller scale in scope (ie their projects/program focus on a specific region and/or singular focus). The intention was to identify if these differences in scale would have any significant differences in practices.

² Brief Summary: Of the 35 responses, 57% identified as being 18-29 years old, 40% were past/current participants, 77% identified as Indigenous, 49% identified as being from Central Canada. 71% identified that they were able to provide CRE with feedback through programs, events and surveys. When asked, how can CRE be more accountable the top 3 responses were Communication (30%), Community Involvement (26%) and Internal Structures (12%).

³ CRE Conflict of Interest and Loyalty Policy was updated in 2020



Repairing and Re-Building Relationships

The Investigation Report spoke of areas where CRE could improve relationships more broadly through a number of actions. Specific recommendations were made in mending relationships where harm has been caused, in addition to conducting an alignment exercise as it relates to CRE's mission, values and philosophy, and articulating CRE's contribution to participants and volunteers.

CRE Commitment: Repairing Relationships

CRE is committed to (re)building relationships amongst various Indigenous and solidarity communities, and organizations both nationally and globally to foster collaborative actions toward the empowerment and self-determination of Indigenous youth everywhere. As mentioned in the outset of this report, CRE will always be committed to rebuilding relationships that have been harmed in the past, and we will continue to create brave spaces for those to come forward.

Since the release of the report, CRE leadership has made many efforts to repair those relationships of those who have come forward and prevent the past from repeating itself. This will be a continuous journey, but one that is necessary.

It is imperative that CRE support the efforts made by other organizations committed to creating equitable changes for youth. As a community, we must lift one another up and to continue to foster and deepen cohesive relationships between organizations, participants, communities and key stakeholders.


CRE Commitment: Aligning our Impact

Mission, Vision & Philosophy

CRE was founded in 2008 and as an organization, much has changed since then. Since 2019, CRE's identity as an organization and, by extent, its mission and vision were shifting, and "reconciliation in our lifetime" was selected as the new tagline and direction for this journey. This coming year, CRE will be exploring many components of its identity and evaluating what are the organization's contributions towards truth, reconciliation, and solidarity within this country. This transition of growth as an organization will examine:

- New organizational values, mission, philosophy
- New theory of change
- Creation of a 3-year "Reconciliation in Our Lifetime" Strategic Plan to ensure these changes are integrated into the fabric of the organization.

The purpose of this is to ensure that as an organization there is a clear direction for the future and an organizational identity that matches our intended impact. As an organization, we want to



ensure that each direction is reconciliation driven, Indigenous-led and reflective of the youth for which its programs are created for. To further support this work, CRE will undergo a National Engagement Strategy (NES) commencing the late fall of 2021. In 2019, CRE received 3 years of funding from CIRNAC, which concludes in March 2022. The purpose of the NES will be to engage with Indigenous youth to identify their needs and wants from CRE, in advance of the CTA 66 Pilot extension.

Capacity Building

The investigation report recommended that CRE adopt a rewards program for participants. Where applicable, participants are compensated for their time, the space they occupy and their expertise. Beyond monetary reimbursement, CRE has strengthened its focus to ensure that as an organization, we are giving back to the communities we serve by creating pathways to enhance capacity among participants, communities, partnerships and key stakeholders. From a programmatic lens, capacity building is interwoven into the overall design programs or is integrated as an ultimate outcome throughout all of CRE programs. It is our intention to incorporate capacity building within our program in an effort to advance social capital equity as a contribution towards reconciliation. Whether this is done through education in policy advocacy, research, self-determination within granting, skills development and or job readiness, CRE strongly believes programming that involves Indigenous participants has to be done through a strength-based approach to support.



CRE Organization, Operation and Oversight

The investigation report called for the implementation of a strategic plan to help the organization achieve its long-term vision in addition to updating the current organizational structure. It also called for CRE to further expand internal support structures for team cohesion and capacity building with policies and procedures. These recommendations did overlap in other sections, as such many areas have been covered throughout.

CRE Commitment: (re) Organization of CRE

3-Year “Reconciliation in our Lifetime” Strategic Plan

As mentioned in previous sections, CRE will be undergoing a 3-year Strategic Plan that will ensure we are moving forward in a good way. A third-party consultant has been hired to facilitate this work. The approach will be comprehensive and ensure feedback and insights are built in from the ground up. Building on this plan will be engagement with CRE staff, Leadership and stakeholders.

The strategic plan will offer goal planning, objective setting and clear timelines to guide the course of CRE over the next several years. Once this is complete, the organization will be better equipped to identify specific expertise required to ensure successful implementation of new policies and procedures. During this time, CRE staff and their teams will undertake efforts to build team cohesion and capacity through intentional team visioning, team-building and in-house team learning. Such activities will reinforce a sense of shared commitment to common goals of the organizations and support continuous improvement.

Management and All-Staff Review

In the Fall of 2020, CRE hired a consultant to conduct a Management and All-Staff Review. The purpose of this review was two-fold; firstly, to identify professional development objectives for each staff member and secondly, to learn about operational issues and provide recommendations to senior leadership based on analysis. To date, with support from CRE leadership, this internal document is being implemented by the Director of Human Resources & Operations.



CRE Commitment: Increasing Knowledge of (Internal) Operations

Human Resources Capacity Building

The investigation report called for CRE to examine the need for internal or external human resources, and to explore models to provide proactive consultation and advice that meet CRE needs. These should acknowledge the need for ease of access, clear communication and plain language human resources-related information. The major overhaul of CRE's policies and by-laws commenced in 2020 and continues into this fiscal year. The purpose is to create clearer policies and by-laws that align with a national charity of our size, scope, and mission, and an education plan for our team to ensure everyone is aware of the changes. The Director of Human Resources & Operations, with support from CRE Leadership is well-equipped to carry out this work.



Our Journey Forward

The cornerstone throughout many Indigenous teachings are based on relationships and the interconnectedness of those relationships in time and space. Whether these relationships are to the land, to the four-legged ones, to the plant world, or to one another, they are all reciprocal systems flowing to and from one another. CRE would like to thank all the contributions made from other organizations, both grassroots, local, and national throughout the year. Without your commitment of time, energy and emotional labour to foster relationships with CRE, we would not be in the position we are today. We are committed to maintaining and honouring these relationships to ensure they are met with integrity and reciprocity.

It is in the spirit of those teachings that CRE would like to acknowledge all the voices, resiliency and dedication that has gone into supporting a vision of reconciliation, and in particular, as it relates to the TRC's Call to Action 66 to support Indigenous Youth. Most notably, *Indigenous Youth Voices - Roadmap to TRC 66 (2018)*, led by the Indigenous Youth Advisors. While CRE's approach to CTA 66 differs in some respects from the *Roadmap to TRC 66 (2018)*, it is important to acknowledge the pathway that the Indigenous Youth Advisors and all the youth across Turtle Island have contributed towards its advancement.

The past is what shapes us and CRE remains committed to ensuring that our journey is a reflection of the lessons we have humbly met along the way. We also recognize this path may be bumpy at times, as growth and humility are critical to transformation. Where we go from here, will be to ensure we remain accountable to the communities we serve and courageous enough to continue to be open to the truth, and wisdom to do better. We have to do better. Miigwetch for believing in us and continuing to support our journey. Giizaagin.