



IAESC

Indigenous Advanced
Education & Skills Council

HANDBOOK FOR INDIGENOUS INSTITUTES PROGRAM REVIEW

MASTER'S DEGREE

Approved on August 25, 2026



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I. MASTER'S DEGREE

This Handbook is a guide for Indigenous Institutes in Ontario seeking a program review at the Master's Degree level. The Handbook is intended to support and outline the following:

- The responsibilities¹ (standards) and benchmarks used by the Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council (IAESC) to assess program review applications submitted by Indigenous Institutes in Ontario; and provides guidelines to assist Indigenous Institutes in preparing their applications.
- The responsibilities and benchmarks in this Handbook guide program development and review through an Indigenous quality assurance approach grounded in relational accountability, Indigenous governance, and responsibilities to learners, communities, Nations, and future generations.

Based on assessment of the submissions, the Indigenous Institutes Quality Assessment Board (IIQAB) provides approvals of applications for program quality assurance. Throughout the process, the IAESC assists the Indigenous Institute with any questions or concerns and facilitates communication between all parties involved in the quality assurance process.

Indigenous Institutes should note that the IAESC may revise this Handbook periodically, and it is the responsibility of the applicant to consult the most current version. Applicants should refer to the website of the IAESC (www.iaesc.ca) for the most current version of the Handbook. In instances where there are differences in the information presented between the print and electronic versions of this Handbook, the electronic version at www.iaesc.ca/applications takes precedence.

Inquiries about the responsibilities (standards), benchmarks, guidelines, or procedures presented in this document may be directed to: qa@iaesc.ca.

¹ The use of the term “**responsibilities**” is intentional. It reflects an Indigenous quality assurance orientation in which program review criteria are understood not only as external standards or minimum requirements, but as relational, ethical, and governance-based obligations carried by Indigenous Institutes to learners, communities, Nations, Indigenous knowledges, languages, lands, ancestors, and future generations. This usage is informed by the [National Indigenous Accreditation Board's Wisdom-Based Practices and Responsibilities for Social Work Education Programs](#), which explains the shift “from standards to responsibilities” as a movement away from externally imposed comparison points toward wisdom-based practices, sacred responsibility, collective accountability, and responsibilities that extend beyond accreditation.

II. ABOUT THE DEVELOPMENT

IAESC's approach to quality assurance is directed by Indigenous worldviews. Indigenous education focuses on the whole learner, including the intellectual, emotional, physical, and identity dimensions of the learner. It recognizes that learners are embedded in relationships with family, community, Nation, and the natural world.

IAESC's quality assurance framework is rooted in the principle of Indigenous control of Indigenous education and recognizes and respects the autonomy of Indigenous Institutes in formulating their own programming.

The development of the responsibilities and benchmarks is rooted in a process of consensus-building and observes the principles of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent. Beginning in the summer of 2020, the IAESC began inviting Indigenous Institutes and their respective communities to participate in dialogue. To date, dialogues have focused on the vision of education of Indigenous Institutes and their communities; Indigenous ways of knowing, learning, and doing; approaches to and experiences with Indigenous education; and understandings of quality assurance. Dialogues help direct the development of the quality assurance framework and inform the IAESC. As part of the process of development of the responsibilities and benchmarks, the IAESC also held a dialogue with experts in Indigenous education. IAESC thanks Dr. Lorna Williams, Dr. Don McCaskill, and Elder Rick Hill for their wisdom, guidance, and assistance.

From the spring of 2025 to the summer of 2026, a Steering Committee for the graduate credential's standards development was created. In total, seven representatives who were comprised of representatives of the Indigenous Institutes guided the development of the master's degree responsibilities and benchmarks. The representatives provided valuable insight, discussion, feedback, and input into the responsibilities (standards), making them culturally focused and unique for our territories throughout Ontario.

IAESC gratefully acknowledges the members of the Master's Degree Steering Committee for their guidance, time, and thoughtful contributions to the development of the responsibilities and benchmarks. The Steering Committee brought together representatives from Indigenous Institutes and sector contributors:

- **Seven Generations Education Institute** – Dr. Juan Marsiaj, Director of Research and Innovation
- **Oshki-Pimache-O-Win: The Wenjack Education Institute** - Kim Falcigno, Sr. Vice President, Academic;
- **Shingwauk Kinoomaage Gamig**, Dr. Melanie Goodchild, Vice President
- **Six Nations Polytechnic** – Amber Sky; Dean, Language, Culture, and Lifelong Learning
- **First Nations Technical Institute** – Dr. Joyce Helmer; Programs Advisor
- **Anishinabek Kinoomaagegamik (Anishinabek Educational Institute)** - Melanie Miller, Interim Quality Assurance Manager;
- **Kenjgewin Teg** - Nicole Nicolas-Bayer, Director of Quality Assurance;

- **Minowewe Consulting** - Dr. Lana Ray, Special Project Consultant;
- **IAESC** – Dr. Stephanie Roy, Director of Research and Summer Bayer, Research & Education Policy Intern;
- **Dr. Dan Longboat** - Knowledge Keeper; and
- **Dr. Rhonda Hopkins** - Knowledge Keeper.

IAESC acknowledges the important guidance of knowledge keepers Dan Longboat and Rhonda Hopkins, whose knowledge and perspectives helped support the cultural grounding of this work. The Steering Committee members helped shape the responsibilities and benchmarks to be culturally grounded, relational, and responsive to the distinct priorities of Indigenous Institutes, learners, communities, Nations, and territories across Ontario.

Equally important in the process of development of the Master's Handbook were the focus groups held with Indigenous Institute representatives, students, elders, partners, and subject-matter contributors. All played a key role in informing the development of the Indigenous Master's Degree Responsibilities and Benchmarks from October 2025 to February 2026. These focus group discussions provided space for participants to share perspectives on graduate-level learning, Indigenous governance, community accountability, learner supports, research expectations, and program quality from Indigenous Institute contexts. The feedback gathered through these sessions helped ensure that the responsibilities and benchmarks are grounded in Indigenous knowledges, institutional realities, and community-informed priorities while also aligning with external quality assurance expectations. Miigwech for everyone's valuable support, feedback, and guidance.

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1.0 INDIGENOUS ADVANCED EDUCATION AND SKILLS COUNCIL

The Indigenous Institutes Act, 2017 (“the Act”) was developed through consensus-building in a co-creation process between the province of Ontario, as represented by the Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development (now called the Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security), and Indigenous communities, as represented by Indigenous Institutes and community members. The Act was supported in many forms, most notably through the establishment of a Policy Co-Creation Table comprised of representatives from both the Province and Indigenous communities. The Policy Co-Creation table identified, developed, and addressed policy discussions between both parties and took its roots in many initiatives on Indigenous education as well as decades of advocacy by First Nations and education leaders. The resulting Act was developed in the spirit of good faith and cooperation.

On December 14, 2017, the Indigenous Institutes Act received Royal Assent in Ontario. The Act was introduced to Creation, to the land, and to the Indigenous Peoples' past and present through ceremony on March 28, 2018, at Rainy River First Nations. The ceremony was led by Anishinaabe Elder Fred Kelly and welcomed the Treaty #3 drum and singers, the Treaty #3 pipe, and other sacred items, as well as representatives from Indigenous Institutes, the provincial government, and the Keewatin-Patricia and Northwest Catholic District School Boards.

The Indigenous Institutes Act, 2017, acknowledges the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), 2007. UNDRIP recognizes the right of Indigenous peoples to establish and control their educational systems and Institutes and to provide education in their own languages in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning. Indigenous Institutes are recognized in the Act as Indigenous-governed and operated community-based education institutes that are mandated by and accountable to Indigenous communities. The Act further recognizes Indigenous Institutes as a pillar in Ontario's postsecondary education and training landscape.

Through regulation under the Act, the Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council (IAESC) was recognized as the Indigenous-controlled and governed Council which must:

- Establish a quality assurance board and the standards and benchmarks IAESC must apply in assessing Indigenous Institutes and;
- Establish, and undertake to maintain, standards regarding the interests of learners at Indigenous Institutes.

The Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council may:

- Provide approval to Indigenous Institutes to grant diplomas, certificates, and degrees;
- Provide approval to Indigenous Institutes to use the term “university” and any derivation of it; and,
- Provide recommendations to the Ministry regarding which Indigenous Institutes should be prescribed for the purposes of receiving funding.

2.0 THE INDIGENOUS INSTITUTES QUALITY ASSESSMENT BOARD

The Indigenous Institutes Quality Assessment Board (IIQAB) is recognized as a committee as mandated by the *Indigenous Institutes Act, 2017*. The committee provides objective and independent approvals on quality assurance applications from Indigenous Institutes, as well as on the quality assurance process and accompanying standards and benchmarks.

The Indigenous Institutes Quality Assessment Board is an impartial committee composed of three (3) to seven (7) community and sector experts and Knowledge Keepers, whose expertise and independence preserve the credibility of the IAESC’s quality assurance process. The work of the Indigenous Institutes Quality Assessment Board upholds and protects the interests of learners and is consistent with ethical and procedural standards that respect, promote, and privilege the diverse worldviews, knowledge, cultures, languages, and traditions of Indigenous communities.

Among other functions, IIQAB will:

- Review quality assurance standards and benchmarks for assessing the organizational capacity and program quality of Indigenous Institutes;
- Make recommendations to IAESC on quality assurance standards and benchmarks;
- Review and approval quality assurance applications submitted by the Indigenous Institutes;
- Oversee the quality assurance process; and,
- Report to and advise IAESC on all other related matters.

3.0 PROCEDURE FOR REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATION

3.1 Integrity

APPLICANT OBLIGATIONS

The Indigenous Institute, the applicant, may conduct internal consultations regarding the Program Review Panel report while continuing to maintain confidentiality. It may also share the report with all staff, learners, and administrators involved in the Program Review to assist in developing its response to the Program Review Panel Report.

Indigenous Institutes Quality Assessment Board members will follow a code of ethical conduct and ensure that reviews and approvals on applications are fair and based on objective criteria. The standards (in this context, responsibilities) used to assess applications respect, promote, and privilege the diverse worldviews, knowledges, cultures, languages, and traditions of Indigenous communities.

IIQAB COMMITMENTS

The Indigenous Institutes Quality Assessment Board's commitments and approach are consistent with Articles 11-15 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007. The Indigenous Institutes Quality Assessment Board is also committed to the ideas and aspirations embodied in foundational policy papers and reports, such as Indian Control of Indian Education, 1972; the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; and the Final Report and Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015.

3.2 Fees and Charges

For recognized Indigenous Institutes in Ontario, there are no fees for program applications.

3.3 Transparency of the Process

After the Indigenous Institutes Quality Assessment Board reviews each program application, the Board of Directors receives quarterly updates on application statuses and approvals. Once a final decision is issued, the decision and the public redacted version of the approved application are posted on the IAESC website.

3.4 Renewal of an Application

The quality assurance of programs will require periodic renewal with the IAESC. Program renewals are carried out every eight (8) years. Applicants are responsible for checking the IAESC's website for up-to-date instructions regarding timelines and procedures associated with the renewal process.

3.5 Mid-Term Report

IAESC will request a mid-term report outlining the progress and standing for the approved program. IAESC will contact the Indigenous Institute with further details when requesting the midterm report.

3.6 Withdrawal of an Application

The applicant will provide written notice to the IAESC if the decision to withdraw an application is made. Once the withdrawal notice has been received and processed, the IAESC will cease reviewing the application.

3.7 Major Modifications to Programs

If a program approved by IAESC undergoes substantial modifications (significant changes to course content, delivery, learning outcomes, or degree requirements, etc.), prior to its renewal date, the Indigenous Institute is responsible for notifying IAESC. IAESC will advise the Indigenous Institutes of the required steps to be taken.

4.0 PROCESS FOR PROGRAM REVIEW

4.1 Process

Eligibility

All Indigenous Institutes that have successfully undertaken an Organization Review approved by IAESC are eligible to submit a program review application. Applications for a Master's Degree program are assessed using the responsibilities (standards) and benchmarks outlined in this Handbook. Please refer to the guidelines in Appendix A: Submission Guidelines (page 34) and those appended to each standard for more specific instructions.

Step One (1): A letter of intent for new programs at Indigenous Institutes is submitted when the program is starting development (see Appendix A, Submission Guidelines).

Step Two (2): The Indigenous Institute completes and submits an electronic application in both PDF and word files to qa@iaesc.ca.

Step Three (3): The IAESC:

- 1) provides the applicant with a preliminary assessment

Step Four (4): The IAESC assembles a Program Review Panel responsible for evaluating the application and conducting a site visit at the Indigenous Institute.

Note: IAESC may consider the Indigenous Institute's suggestions for Program Review Panel members.

Step Five (5): The Program Review Panel conducts a site visit accompanied by IAESC staff as an observer.

- 1) Online site visits will be conducted using a video conference platform.

Step Six (6): The Program Review Panel prepares a report and, following review by IAESC, the report is sent to the applicant.

Step Seven (7): The applicant reviews the report and submits a formal written response to IAESC.

Step Eight (8): The Indigenous Institute provides an overview presentation of the program to IIQAB. The Indigenous Institutes Quality Assessment Board (IIQAB) considers all documents and records associated with the application. IIQAB renders a final decision.

Step Nine (9): The IAESC's Board of Directors and the Ministry of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence, and Security (MCURES) are provided with a formal letter advising them of the respective program approval.

Step Ten (10): Once approved, the decision is posted on the IAESC website.

4.2 Program Review Panel

The Program Review Panel will review the program application using the responsibilities and benchmarks approved by IIQAB. The responsibilities and benchmarks are listed and described in this Handbook.

IAESC appoints a Program Review Panel made up of experts. A Chair is appointed and is responsible for coordinating the review of the program application and for developing a written report.

The report includes the following information:

- An assessment of the application against each of the responsibilities and benchmarks as described in Section 5;
- An assessment of the sufficiency of the evidence provided by the applicant;
- An assessment of evidence found during site visit(s); and
- An evaluation of whether the program meets the established criteria.

The Program Review Panel members are held to a high standard and possess a broad outlook, open mind, and sound judgment. The Program Review Panel members agree to abide by the IAESC code of ethical conduct and confidentiality agreement, as well as a declaration that confirms no conflict of interest exists. At least one (1) of the panel members must have expertise in the field of study most closely related to the proposed program. Ideally, the candidate(s) will also have demonstrated knowledge of and applied experience in Indigenous education, Indigenous community(ies), administration, admission & enrolment processes, learning resources, budgets, and finances.

4.3 Outcomes of Review

IIQAB will issue a decision for:

- Approval or,
- Provisional approval (i.e., approval with conditions), or
- Recommendation for re-submission.

5.0 PROGRAM REVIEW RESPONSIBILITIES

The purpose of the program review is to assess an Indigenous Institute's proposed program using the responsibilities and benchmarks listed below. For each responsibility, the Indigenous Institute prepares a narrative, using the benchmark questions as a guide. In addition to the narrative, the Indigenous Institute is encouraged to provide supporting materials for each responsibility (standard).

Guiding benchmark questions and examples of supporting materials have been included for each responsibility. Supporting materials can be presented in various formats:

- Textual (e.g., original documents, write-ups, website links);
- Visual (e.g., photographs, videos, infographics); or
- Auditory (e.g. recorded material, testimonials, and commentary).

Complete applications include the following:

- Master's program application,
- Program abstract that briefly describes the program to be reviewed,
- Executive summary for the application, and
- Narrative and supporting materials for each standard.

For more information, see Appendix – Submissions Guidelines.

Program Review Responsibilities

List of responsibilities (standards):

- R1 – Indigenous Worldview
- R2 – Relational Ways of Knowing and Learning
- R3 – Community Legacy
- R4 – Program Design and Capacity
- R5 – Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Research Integrity
- R6 – Assessment
- R7 – Navigating External Relations

Indigenous Institutes should also state whether the program will be supported by a dedicated graduate studies structure, such as a Graduate School, graduate studies office, graduate council, or equivalent Indigenous Institute structure. Where applicable, the application should describe the mandate, authority, reporting relationships, decision pathways, administrative supports, and learner-facing functions of this structure, including its role in admissions, supervision, progression, graduation, appeals, policy oversight, and continuous quality assurance.

R1 – Indigenous Worldviews

Graduate programs are rooted in Indigenous worldviews as the organizing foundation. The program's purpose, curriculum, teaching, and assessment are built upon Indigenous knowledge systems and languages.

Benchmarks

1.0 Indigenous worldview is explicitly named as the organizing foundation of the program, and this is visible in program purpose, outcomes, teaching, curriculum, and assessment.

- What Indigenous worldview(s) grounds this program, and where is it explicitly named (program overview, calendar copy, course outlines)? How is this worldview visibly reflected in program purpose, program-level outcomes, curriculum design, teaching/learning approach, and assessment—so it is clearly the organizing foundation rather than an add-on?

2.0 Indigenous jurisdiction is documented for the program (governance, knowledge validation, and safeguards for local Indigenous knowledge when required).

- What is the program's Indigenous governance/jurisdiction—who has decision rights over program purpose, curriculum, teaching, assessment, and partnerships—and how are decisions made (process and cadence)? Who validates curriculum and knowledge claims (“says who?”)? Who delivers cultural content and language? What safeguards ensure local/community-authorized knowledge is protected and used appropriately when required?

2.1 Baseline knowledge/curriculum commitments appropriate to purpose and level are stated and carried across the program (not confined to one course), and exposure to increasingly complex theory is part of the program.

- What baseline Indigenous knowledge/teachings and practice commitments are non-negotiable for this master's program (given its purpose and level)? How are these commitments carried across multiple courses and milestones (where do they appear, deepen, and get applied), rather than being contained in a single "Indigenous content" course?

3.0 If applicable, where external frameworks are referenced, their relationship to the program is documented as secondary and strategic, with clear care taken to ensure they do not override Indigenous definitions of learning, readiness, or evidence.

- If you reference an external framework, what purpose does it serve, how is it positioned as secondary, and what guardrails make clear that Indigenous definitions of learning, readiness, and evidence remain governing?

Supporting Documents

SD1.1 Program philosophy/vision statement explicitly describing worldview grounding and principles;

SD1.2 Program/Curriculum map showing worldview as organizing principle (not a single course), including how teachings connect across the program;

SD1.3 Assessment policy/examples demonstrating Indigenous validation of learning (e.g., oral demonstration, land-based demonstration, storytelling, applied practice) and clear statements that participation in ceremony is not mandatory for grading or assessment; accessible alternatives are documented;

SD1.4 Mapping note/appendix showing how (and why) external frameworks are related to—rather than defining—the program (e.g., a "relationship mapping" approach);

SD1.5 Materials on the promotion, enhancement, and use of the community's and/or region's Indigenous languages within the program;

SD1.6 Any other materials to support the responsibility (standard).

R2 – Relational Ways of Knowing and Learning

Programs enact relational ways of knowing and learning through an intentional learner journey: adult teaching and learning are organized through Indigenous protocols, relationships, and land- and place-based orientations, using culturally driven learning modalities that foster safety, belonging, and cohesion.

The learner journey is intentionally designed to develop able helpers—graduates who can carry Indigenous Knowledges into practice with humility, relational accountability, and community relevance. Relational ways of knowing and learning are evidenced through what is consistently practiced (how people gather, open, teach, learn, and support one another).

Benchmarks

1.0 The program's core ways of knowing and learning approach are defined and demonstrated consistently across courses and learning activities.

- What are the program's core ways of knowing and learning approaches (in plain language), and what are the non-negotiable teaching/learning practices that show consistently across every course? Where (in which courses/learning activities) is this approach explicitly described, and what concrete evidence demonstrates it is enacted consistently (e.g., openings/closings, circle/dialogue methods, land-/place-based learning, mentorship, reflective practice, assessment modalities)?

2.0 Culturally driven protocols for how learners gather, open/close, and participate are clearly communicated and practiced (including online/hybrid/block adaptations where needed).

- What are the specific protocols learners will follow for gathering, opening/closing, participation, and communication—and where are these protocols clearly explained to learners (orientation materials, syllabus language, course shells)? How will these protocols be practiced consistently across the curriculum, and what adaptations will you use to uphold them in online/hybrid delivery?

3.0 Learner safety, accessibility, accommodations, conflict resolution, and respectful engagement practices are explicit and aligned to Indigenous values.

- How does the program define and uphold the following:
 - Learner safety and respectful engagement in ways that align with Indigenous values (e.g., relational accountability, collaboration and sharing, non-shaming practice, strength-based, and trauma-aware approaches)?
 - What accessibility and accommodation practices are in place (and how learners are told about them, including physical accessibility policies); and
 - What are the clear steps (or policies) for conflict resolution, harm, or breaches of protocol?

4.0 At least one required learning/assessment modality is not text-only and is aligned with Indigenous learning (e.g., oral dialogue, storytelling, demonstration, land-based learning).

- Which required learning and/or assessment modality in this program is intentionally not text-only, and why is it culturally congruent and appropriate to master's-level expectations? Where does it occur (which course(s)/milestone(s), what does "success" look like, and what criteria will be used to assess it fairly and consistently)?

5.0 Opportunities for spiritual, emotional, and personal growth are intentionally built into the curriculum and the broader learner journey that respects the learner's privacy and autonomy. Ceremony or cultural practice is included with the intention that students will intentionally become cultural helpers who are competent in cultural ways of knowing upon graduation.

- If ceremony or cultural practice is part of learning in this program, what—specifically—might learners be invited to participate in (with the intention that students will become cultural helpers who are competent in cultural ways of knowing), and how will you ensure participation is never required for grades or assessment? What accessible alternatives will be offered, how will equivalency be ensured (without forcing learners to disclose private reasons), and where is this safeguard clearly documented in learner-facing materials?

Supporting Documents

SD2.1 Course outlines/syllabi showing consistent relational ways of knowing and learning in practice (e.g., circle process, openings/closings, learning-by-doing, oral/dialogic learning);

SD2.2 An illustration or document to indicate the Institute's concept of well-being with regards to learning while in the program;

SD2.3 Program descriptions, course calendars, syllabi, learner handbooks, website links, or other materials that outline:

- Learner and/or cultural supports;
- Learner responsibilities;
- Academic integrity;
- Learner privacy and confidentiality; and
- Learner code of conduct and policies.

SD2.4 Learner orientation materials that explain learning protocols, expectations, and supports (including online/hybrid adaptations);

SD2.5 Assessment examples showing culturally driven modalities (e.g., oral presentation, demonstration, storytelling, land-based demonstration) and documented alternatives where needed;

SD2.6 Cohort agreements or relational accountability guidelines (including how conflicts/harms are addressed);

SD2.7 Evidence of land-based and/or cultural learning infrastructure planning (e.g., schedules, risk/safety planning, roles for Knowledge Keepers, accommodations);

SD2.8 Policy for respectful learning with the land;

SD2.9 Learner feedback demonstrates safety/belonging/cohort cohesion and how that supported learning outcomes; examples can include end-of-term learner feedback summaries; midpoint and end of program pulse survey results; continuous improvement log; you said/we did-what learners identified about the

learning environment and the program changes made in response. (A sample survey of learner feedback);

SD2.10 Announcements for events, particularly relating to ways of knowing, doing, and being;

SD2.11 Instructor handbooks;

SD2.12 Examples of learner assignments;

- Learner accommodations;
- Physical accessibility;
- Modifications; and
- Conflict resolution and other relevant areas.

SD2.15 Course development principles or guidelines.

R3 – Community Legacy

Indigenous Institutes enact Indigenous sovereignties and legacy orientations in the development, delivery, and governance of master's programs. Programs establish and sustain a community-anchored relational infrastructure that clearly defines roles, responsibilities, decision rights, and accountability for Indigenous knowledges, teaching, learner supports, and evaluation.

This includes appropriate involvement of Elders/Knowledge Keepers and other community-authorized roles, transparent processes for role validation, reciprocal practices (e.g., honoraria, supports, and protocols), and explicit knowledge/curriculum commitments (what must be taught, carried, and practiced).

Benchmarks

1.0 Legacy orientation (responsibility to community and future generations) is clearly articulated and reflected in program intent and expectations.

- Describe the program's legacy orientation—who the program is accountable to, what responsibilities it carries to community, ancestors, and future generations, and what graduates are expected to carry forward. Show how this legacy orientation is operationalized (not just stated) in program intent, learning outcomes, curriculum priorities, learner expectations, and assessment criteria. Name any non-negotiable commitments, reciprocity practices, or community benefit expectations that guide program decisions.
- 1.0 Processes for selecting/recognizing Elders, knowledge keepers, and Traditional Knowledge Keepers, or equivalent community-recognized roles and recognizing authentic cultural knowledge and lived experiences are documented.

- How will the program select and/or recognize Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Traditional Knowledge Keepers, or equivalent community-recognized roles (who are involved, what criteria are used, and what documentation is kept)? How will the program confirm community recognition, and what is the process for raising and addressing concerns about misrepresentation or “pretendianism”?

3.0 Reciprocity practices (e.g., honoraria, travel support, gift protocols) are defined and implemented in a way that is fair and honorable for time, effort, and service.

- What reciprocity practices will the program implement for Elders/Knowledge Keepers, community partners, and learners (honoraria, travel, gifts, hosting, and supports), and what is the rationale for what is considered fair and honorable in your context? How will these practices be budgeted, approved, and carried out consistently, so engagement is clear, upfront, and communicated with consistency and predictability?

Supporting Documents

SD3.2 Summary or other supporting documents of community engagement during program development;

SD3.3 Governance documents showing Indigenous decision rights and accountability (e.g., charter/terms of reference, roles for Elders/Knowledge Keepers, community accountability structures);

SD3.4 Terms of reference for advisory circles/councils, knowledge governance groups, or community accountability structures (including meeting cadence and decisions);

SD3.5 Terms of reference for hiring committees and other materials related to the hiring process;

SD3.6 Program review cycle documentation (meeting notes, revision logs) showing iterative evolution with Elders, learners, faculty, and community input;

SD3.7 Metrics to report program impact to community;

SD3.8 Validation processes for recognized authentic cultural knowledge and lived experiences (e.g., community-recognized selection, rosters, invitation protocols, documentation of how concerns are handled);

SD3.9 Honoraria and reciprocity policies/practices (e.g., honoraria schedules, travel supports, gift protocols) and records of engagement;

SD3.10 Curriculum governance documents (e.g., curriculum approval process, Indigenous-led content review notes, curriculum map showing commitments carried across courses);

SD3.11 Learner orientation materials describing “who does what,” supports, complaint/concern process, and protocol expectations;

SD3.12 Cohort agreements and evidence of cohort/alumni relationship supports (e.g., scheduled gatherings, mentorship structures, alumni engagement records);

SD3.13 Materials showing that these principles and values reflect the community's and/or region's knowledge, cultural practices and expertise, and local definitions of education, such as, but not limited to:

- Materials demonstrating that the goals and objectives of the program are in line with the Indigenous Institute's principles and values;
- Materials indicating that expertise of community members is included in program delivery (i.e., Program Advisory Committee);
- References to teaching elements items and the way in which they are incorporated into the program's educational experience;
- Reference to policy or description of protocols for handling and use of sacred items.

SD3.14 Policies and protocols for respectful engagement with community, and the land;

SD3.15 Policies and protocols for the respectful use of Indigenous knowledges in program delivery and course materials;

SD3.16 Policies and protocols for respectful engagement of Elders (e.g., OCAP™ for course materials, Elder honorariums, etc.);

SD3.17 Records of decision-making that involved community engagement;

SD3.18 Code of conduct (to which also considers the protection of data sovereignty; cultural protocols; and/or accountability structures in the master's program);

SD3.19 Any other materials to support the responsibility (standard).

R4 – Program Design and Capacity

The achievement of the program's credential-level learning outcomes is clearly supported by the program structure and delivery methods, along with strong administrative, operational, and financial capacity. The Master's Degree learning outcomes build and expand upon the requirements of the Ontario Qualifications

Framework (OQF) stated competencies, skills, and knowledge that the learner is expected to have upon graduation. Programs build a clear end-to-end learner journey (admission to graduation), teaching methods, and continuous quality assurance mechanisms that connect outcomes, supports, roles, policies, delivery formats, assessment, and continuous improvement. The program sets clear, consistent expectations while honouring diverse learner responsibilities, gifts, and Indigenous learning pathways.

Benchmarks

1.0 The program helps the learner meet the credential-level learning outcomes and degree competencies. Program-level outcomes and degree standards are defined and aligned to curriculum components and assessment approaches.

- What are the program-level outcomes/competencies/Ontario degree standards for this master's program, and how do they map to courses, learning activities, and assessments across the full sequence? How will you show that outcomes are coherently developed (introduced, deepened, applied) and that assessments measure what the program says it values?

Ontario master's degree competencies (OQF)

1. Depth and breadth of knowledge

A systematic understanding of knowledge, including, where appropriate, relevant knowledge outside the field or discipline, and a critical awareness of current problems and new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of the academic discipline, field of study, or area of professional practice.

2. Research and scholarship

A conceptual understanding and methodological competence that:

- Enables a working comprehension of how established techniques of research and inquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline.
- Enables a critical evaluation of current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline or area of professional competence.
- Enables a treatment of complex issues and judgments based on established principles and techniques.

On the basis of that competence, the learner has shown at least one of the following:

- Development and support of a sustained argument in written form.
- Originality in the application of knowledge.

3. Level of application of knowledge

Competence in the research process by applying an existing body of knowledge in the critical analysis of a new question or of a specific problem or issue in a new setting.

4. Professional capacity and autonomy

- The qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring the exercise of initiative, personal responsibility, accountability, and decision-making in complex situations.
- Intellectual independence required for continuing professional development.
- Ethical behavior consistent with academic integrity and the use of appropriate guidelines and procedures for responsible conduct of research.
- The ability to appreciate the broader implications of applying knowledge to particular contexts.

5. Level of communication skills

The ability to communicate ideas, issues, and conclusions clearly.

- Cognizance of the complexity of knowledge and of the potential contributions of other interpretations, methods, and disciplines.

6. Awareness of limits of knowledge

Cognizance of the complexity of knowledge and of the potential contributions of other interpretations, methods, and disciplines.

2.0 An end-to-end learner journey map is defined from admissions to graduation, including supports, roles, assessment touchpoints, and regular opportunities for learner evaluation of course content and delivery.

- What is the step-by-step learner journey for this master's program from first inquiry to graduation, and where are the key supports, roles, and assessment touch points at each stage? What is the highest risk "friction points" for learners, and what design choices will enable and empower learners to make decisions that are right for them? Also, share how learners will provide feedback on course content and delivery in the program.

3.0 Learning is intentionally sequenced to support master's-level deepening, integration, and application, including clearly defined work-integrated learning or applied practice components that connect coursework to a field of practice.

- How is learning sequenced so it becomes master's level through deepening, integration, and application—not simply more readings and more writing? What required work-integrated learning, practicum, placement, community-based applied project, mentorship, or other applied practice component is included, and how is it oriented to the program's field of practice? What are the key milestones where learners demonstrate increased responsibility, leadership, and ability to apply learning, and how does each course prepare learners for the next stage?

4.0 Essential roles across the program and learner journey are identified with clear responsibilities and escalation/support pathways. Learners receive clear guidance on protocols, expectations, and supports (who to go to for what, from day one).

- Which roles are essential across both the program and learner journey (admissions, onboarding, teaching, cultural support, wellness, supervision/mentorship, and conflict resolution)? And what does each role do? What is the clear escalation/support pathways (who to contact, in what order, and for what kinds of issues), and where are these pathways communicated to learners and staff? What do learners need to know from day one about protocols, expectations, supports, and "who to go to for what"? Where will this guidance be found (orientation, learner handbook, course shells), and how will you ensure it is consistent, accessible, and reinforced across the program – not dependent on a single instructor?

5.0 Teaching/learning, research (where applicable), and wellness supports are documented and resourced

- What support will learners need to succeed across teaching/learning, research/inquiry (if applicable), and wellness—and what resources/staffing/processes will provide those supports consistently? Where are these supports documented for learners?

6.0 The Indigenous Institute has the capacity to deliver the program consistent with its administrative and governance structures.

1. Describe the program structures, policies, processes, and personnel requirements, including how the program will demonstrate that faculty and other personnel have the qualifications, experience, and subject matter expertise required to deliver and support the program.

2. Describe the admissions criteria and process. How will admissions assess readiness beyond solely GPA (e.g., experience, relational accountability, community connection, purpose, capacity to carry teachings), and what are the transparent criteria and processes (screening, interviews, references)? What applicant support (information sessions, coaching, and bridging options) will you provide to make the process fair and accessible?

3. How does the program recognize previous credit and experience? The Indigenous Institute may consider the following:

- (a) Transition programming requirements (prerequisites and equivalencies);
- (b) Advanced standing;
- (c) Credit transfer;
- (d) Micro-credentials;
- (e) Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR).

4. Describe the graduation requirements.

Indigenous Institutes should provide a clear statement of culminating requirements for each program pathway, including thesis, major research paper/project, dissertation, capstone, applied project, portfolio, oral defence, or other terminal requirements, where applicable. The statement should identify expected scope, credit weight or milestone status, supervision and examination requirements, assessment criteria, timelines, and how the requirement demonstrates master's-level achievement and supports recognition for further study or advanced professional pathways.

5. Describe the grading system and/or methods of advancement.

6. How will the program identify a clear supervision model for learners that aligns with the program stream and may include a circle of research supervision, with clear roles, responsibilities, and support?

Indigenous Institutes should include Graduate Supervision Guidelines that clearly define the roles and responsibilities of the faculty advisor or supervisor, supervisory committee members, Knowledge Keepers or community-recognized mentors where applicable, the learner/candidate, and any graduate studies administrative body. The guidelines should address supervisor eligibility and workload, committee composition and appointment, frequency of meetings and feedback, progress monitoring, conflict resolution, changes in supervision, candidate responsibilities, and requirements for progression, completion, oral defence, or final approval.

7. Where research or inquiry is required, how will the program's supervision and assessment approach align with the program's stream?

8. Please describe the resources required to support the program. Considerations may include a. physical resources on-site; b. physical resources off-site; c. natural environment.

9. Describe the policies and procedures the Indigenous Institute has established for the periodic review of the proposed program. How does the Indigenous Institute respond to the following?

- Community; human resources (e.g., academic, professional, administrative, specialist, and support); learner feedback.

10. How does the Indigenous Institute share key information about the program with the learner and the broader community? The Indigenous Institute may consider the following:

- a. The Indigenous Institute's mission and goals statement, and/or strategic plans, with reference to its Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and being;
- b. A general description of the program (e.g., purpose, outcomes, length, personnel); and,
- c. Course descriptions and credit values.

11. Describe the policies and procedures related to the program and organization and the method of delivery to the learner (e.g., handbook, website, learner information system). Consider the following areas:

- a. Admissions, grading, dismissal, and graduation;
- b. Security of academic student records
- c. Criteria for international learners to complete the program requirements;
- d. Method of course delivery;
- e. Assessments and evaluations;
- f. Accessibility and accommodations;
- g. Learner support and services;
- h. Tuition fees (payment, late charges, default, refunds);
- i. . Learner achievements, recognition, and awards;
- j. Bursaries, scholarships, and financial aid;
- k. Withdrawals (program, course[s], dismissals);
- l. Academic integrity (e.g., plagiarism, cheating, dishonesty, fraud, etc.);
- m. Learner privacy and confidentiality;
- n. Learner code of conduct and policies addressing harassment, bullying, theft, e-learning;
- o. Protection of intellectual property and Indigenous knowledges;
- p. Learner complaints and conflict resolution (issue identification, resolution, and appeals); and
- q. Contingency plans for interruptions.

12. Please describe the mode of delivery (in-person, online, hybrid, blended, etc.). If more than one mode is offered, please also describe it. The Indigenous Institute may consider the following:

a. Forms of technology required; b. Competency required for learner participation; and c. Costs for participation.

13. Please share program related costs, which may include:

- a. Start-up costs;
- b. Developmental costs;
- c. Quality assurance costs;
- d. Tuition and othe associated fees;
 - i. Human resources (e.g. academic, professional, administrative, specialist, support)
 - ii. Capital requirements
 - iii. Operations and maintenance;
 - iv. Library, learning resources, and other program level costs; and,
 - v. Learner support services.

14. Please describe all anticipated revenue and enrolment for the program.

15. Please describe the financial support/aid available to the learner from the program.

16. Please provide copies of audited financial statements pursuant to O. Reg. 239/18 and Section 7 (2) of the Indigenous Institutes Act, 2017, S.O. 2017, c. 34, Sched. 20.

17. Please provide financial plans for:

- o Contingencies such as addressing funding disruptions and instability (e.g., unstable and/or unpredictable sources of funding, unanticipated expenses, program interruptions); and growth to enhance and expand the program.

18. Please provide a business plan for three (3) complete programming cycles.

Supporting Documents

SD4.1 Learner journey map or walkthrough documentation from admissions to transition, showing supports, roles, and assessment touchpoints;

SD4.2 Role descriptions and organizational charts for the program showing Elders/Knowledge Keepers, faculty, learner supports, community partners, and decision pathways;

SD4.3 Program map/curriculum sequence showing master's-level progression from baseline knowledge to deepening, integration, and application, including where work-integrated learning or applied practice components occur and how they align with program-level outcomes, assessments, and Ontario master's degree competencies;

SD4.4 Faculty CVs, résumés, biographies, or equivalent documentation showing subject matter expertise, including MA- and PhD-level faculty, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Traditional Knowledge Keepers, or equivalent community-recognized roles;

SD4.5 Academic Freedom Policy;

SD4.6 Faculty/Instructor Orientation Handbook with professional development and instructional supports stated;

SD4.7 All Student Protection policies and procedures related to the program and the method of delivery to the learner (e.g., handbook, website, learner information system) such as:

- a. Admissions, grading, dismissal, and graduation;
- b. Security of academic student records
- c. Criteria for international learners to complete the program requirements;
- d. Method of course delivery;
- e. Assessments and evaluations;
- f. Accessibility and accommodations;
- g. Learner support and services;
- h. Tuition fees (payment, late charges, default, refunds);
- i. . Learner achievements, recognition, and awards;
- j. Bursaries, scholarships, and financial aid;
- k. Withdrawals (program, course[s], dismissals);
- l. Academic integrity (e.g., plagiarism, cheating, dishonesty, fraud, etc.);
- m. Learner privacy and confidentiality;
- n. Learner code of conduct and policies addressing harassment, bullying, theft, e-learning;
- o. Protection of intellectual property and Indigenous knowledges;
- p. Learner complaints and conflict resolution (issue identification, resolution, and appeals); and
- q. Contingency plans for interruptions.

SD4.8 Learner handbooks or website links with information for prospective and currently enrolled learners;

SD4.9 Program descriptions, course calendars, and syllabi;

SD4.10 Proposals for new courses;

SD4.11 Examples of grading systems and/or methods of advancement;

SD4.12 Examples of learner assignments;

SD4.13 Informational brochures or website links on learner opportunities, which may include:

- a. Field placements;
- b. Work-integrated learning;
- c. Practicum placements;
- d. Internships;
- e. Mentorship programs;
- f. Professional development;

- g. Preparatory or transitional courses;
- h. Workshops;
- i. Summer programs; and
- j. Learner exchanges.

SD4.14 Learner admission requirements, procedures, and practices;

SD4.15 Sample admission package;

SD4.16 Materials discussing possible pathways for graduates following their studies;

SD4.17 Testimonials and alumni interviews or surveys;

SD4.18 Evaluations or appraisals of learners' independent work;

SD4.19 Descriptions of learner community initiatives developed and undertaken under the supervision of Institute or community personnel;

SD4.20 Employee handbooks, guidelines, and orientation process;

SD4.21 Handbooks, brochures, website links, learner information system, or other materials outlining learner life, tuition and fees, program requirements, course schedules, support services, and program administration;

SD4.22 Program information, including the program title, abstract, and description;

SD4.23 Materials indicating that the Institute has considered questions and potential challenges regarding learners' pursuit of pathways subject to regulation or accreditation, including correspondence or other records of consultation with regulatory and/or accrediting bodies;

SD4.24 Correspondence or other materials demonstrating input from other post-secondary education institutions, including information indicating that the credential will be recognized for purposes of further study;

SD4.25 Correspondence or other materials demonstrating input from employers, occupational agencies, or professional associations, including demand for or interest in the program and recognition of the credential for employment purposes;

SD4.26 Policies and procedures on learner complaints and conflict resolution;

SD4.27 Statements or protocols that outline the protection of intellectual property and Indigenous knowledges;

SD4.28 Contingency plan for course or program interruptions approved by senior administration;

SD4.29 Business plans and strategic plans;

SD4.30 Policy documents concerning learner fees, tuition, withdrawals, refunds, and, where applicable, credit transfer policies or agreements;

SD4.31 Link to staff directory;

SD4.32 Plan for recruitment or policy on recruitment process;

SD4.33 Policies on faculty credentials, performance, and professional development;

SD4.34 Job descriptions or sample job postings;

SD4.35 Sample interview questions or description of hiring process;

SD4.36 Minutes from governance and administrative bodies at the Institute;

SD4.37 Annual staff report or program report describing staff activities, such as community projects, research collaborations, publications, conference participation, or conference organization;

SD4.38 Campus map;

SD4.39 Materials or records that outline policy for periodic program evaluation or a plan for periodic program evaluation;

SD4.40 Supportive finance documents, including the program's ongoing operational funding and financial plan, anticipated revenues and enrolment, financial support or aid available to learners, audited financial statements, financial plans for contingencies and growth, a business plan for three complete program cycles, budgetary projections, fundraising strategies, projected learner financial aid, demographic data, and relevant sections of Transfer Payment Agreements for the program;

SD4.41 Program operational funding and financial plan, such as:

- a. Start-up costs;
- b. Developmental costs;
- c. Quality assurance costs;
- d. Tuition and other associated fees;
- e. Human resources requirements (e.g., academic, professional, administrative, specialist, support);
- f. Capital requirements;
- g. Operations and maintenance;
- h. Library, learning resources, and other program-level costs; and
- i. Learner support services.

SD4.42 Anticipated revenues and enrolment for the program;

SD4.43 Financial support and aid available to learners in the program;

SD4.44 Audited financial statements pursuant to O. Reg. 239/18 and section 7(2) of the Indigenous Institutes Act, 2017, S.O. 2017, c. 34, Sched. 20;

SD4.45 Financial plans for contingencies and program growth;

- a. Contingencies such as addressing funding disruptions and instability (e.g., unstable and/or unpredictable sources of funding, unanticipated expenses, program interruptions); b. Growth to enhance and expand the program.

SD4.46 Business plan for three complete program cycles;

SD4.47 Budgetary projections for best-case and worst-case scenarios;

SD4.48 Materials outlining fundraising strategies;

SD4.49 Materials outlining available and projected learner financial aid;

SD4.50 Demographic data, which may include admission and enrolment rates and Indigenous communities served by the program;

SD4.51 Relevant sections of Transfer Payment Agreements for the program.

R5 – Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Research Integrity

Programs establish Indigenous-led data sovereignty, knowledge governance, and research integrity practices that protect Indigenous knowledges, data, and relationships across the learner journey and across institutional partnerships. Where research, inquiry, or knowledge production occurs, programs uphold Indigenous epistemic accountabilities (e.g., “says who?” source scrutiny, positionality, and community authorization), apply Indigenous data sovereignty expectations (e.g. OCAP or local equivalents), and ensure that ethics, supervision, and dissemination practices benefit the progress and advancement of Indigenous peoples.

Benchmarks

1.0 The program defines what research/inquiry means in context, clarifies the formal ethics and Indigenous/community authorization (REB) process, and demonstrates that appropriate research ethics review infrastructure is in place, either within the Indigenous Institute or through a documented partnership.

- In this master’s program, what counts as “research” or “inquiry” (e.g., practice-based inquiry, community inquiry, needs assessment, land-based inquiry), and what does not? When do formal ethics, Indigenous/community authorization, and/or REB processes apply? What ethics review infrastructure is available to learners—within the Indigenous Institute, through a documented partnership, or through another approved pathway—and how are roles, timelines, decision points, learner supports, and communication responsibilities clearly defined?

2.0 Indigenous-led knowledge/data governance is established with documented decision rights for approval, storage, access, use, and dissemination.

- Who holds Indigenous decision rights for knowledge and data in this program (approval, storage, access, use, sharing/dissemination), and what is the governance process learners must follow?
- Where are these rules documented, and what happens if a learner or partner wants to use data/teaching outside the original purpose?

3.0 Indigenous data sovereignty expectations (e.g., OCAP™ or local equivalents) are required for learner research and inquiry, including consent, community benefit, stewardship, and limits on secondary use, in ways that are appropriate and realistic/doable in the master's degree program.

- Which Indigenous data sovereignty framework(s) or local expectations will govern learner inquiry at this degree level that is appropriate, realistic, and doable (e.g., OCAP™ or local equivalents), and what are the required practices for consent, community benefit, stewardship, access, and limits on secondary use? How will learners demonstrate compliance in their proposals, methods, storage plans, and dissemination/return-of-results?

4.0 Supervision, methods, and ethics navigation support are defined and resourced and include escalation pathways for concerns.

What supervision and assessment approach will learners experience in this program stream, and may it include a circle of research supervision with clear roles, responsibilities, ethical guidance, and community relevance? What methods and ethics navigation supports are available (e.g., templates, coaching, REB interface, and community authorization guidance), what are the feedback expectations, and what are the escalation steps if concerns arise (e.g., harm risk, data governance breaches, supervision conflict, and community concerns)?

5.0 Integrity requirements for sources/claims are explicit, including how oral teachings and Knowledge Keepers are credited with permission and reciprocity.

- What are the program's integrity expectations for making claims ("says who?"), citing sources, and distinguishing learner interpretation from authorized teachings? How will learners credit oral teachings and Knowledge Keepers (permissions, naming/attribution rules, and reciprocity expectations), and what are the consequences/supports if these expectations are not met?

Supporting Documents

SD4.52 Documentation describing the Indigenous Institute's graduate studies structure, such as a Graduate School, graduate studies office, graduate council, or equivalent structure, including mandate, authority, governance, decision pathways, staffing, learner-facing supports, and responsibility for graduate policies and quality assurance;

SD4.53 Thesis, major research paper/project, dissertation, capstone, applied project, portfolio, oral defence, or other culminating requirement guidelines, including scope, milestones, assessment criteria, examination procedures, timelines, and evidence of alignment with master's-level expectations and further-study recognition;

SD4.54 Graduate Supervision Guidelines, including Faculty Advisor or supervisor roles, supervisory committee membership and responsibilities, candidate requirements, progress monitoring, meeting and feedback expectations, escalation pathways, and procedures for changes in supervision or committee membership;

SD5.1 Knowledge governance and data governance policies (including OCAP, CARE or local equivalents), data stewardship roles, access controls, and retention/disposal guidance;

SD5.2 Research/inquiry guidelines for learners (definitions of inquiry types, templates, proposal expectations, consent guidance, and dissemination/return-of-results expectations);

SD5.3 Ethics navigation evidence/artifacts/documents (e.g., internal review steps, partner REB interface notes, sample ethics submissions, confidentiality protocols) where applicable;

SD5.4 Supervision standards (e.g., supervisor qualifications, load expectations, escalation paths, and learner support documentation);

SD5.5 Course materials/assignments demonstrating epistemic accountability (“says who?” analysis, positionality statements, source critique) and how oral teachings/Knowledge Keepers are credited with permission;

SD5.6 Community authorization and reciprocity documentation (e.g., letters of support, approvals, benefit agreements, honoraria records, and dissemination/return-of-results documents);

SD5.7 Research Policy;

SD5.8 Intellectual Property (Use of AI in research policy);

SD5.9 Position statement on the FAIR principles;

SD5.10 Research Data Management Policy.

R6 – Assessment

Programs uphold assessment sovereignty by defining readiness and competence in ways that are Indigenous-led, culturally congruent, and appropriate to graduate-level expectations. Across the learner journey, programs use multiple valid ways for learners to demonstrate competence (e.g., oral demonstration, storytelling, applied practice, land-based demonstration, portfolios), with transparent criteria, ethical safeguards, and integrity practices while also considering compliance-driven assessment.

Benchmarks

1.0 Graduate-level competencies/outcomes and readiness expectations (entry and completion) are defined holistically.

- What does readiness look like at entry and at completion for this master's program (beyond GPA)—in terms of knowledge, skills, conduct, relational accountability, and ability to apply teachings? Who has authority to define/confirm readiness, and how will readiness be assessed or recognized at key points (admissions, milestones, completion)?

2.0 Assessment of individual learner work in the terminal stage of the program demonstrates achievement of the Degree Level Standard, including clear evidence of exemplary, average, and minimally acceptable performance.

- How does the program use assessment of individual learner work in the terminal stage to demonstrate achievement of the Degree Level Standard? What terminal-stage examples, rubrics, descriptors, or other evidence show exemplary, average, and minimally acceptable performance, and how do these examples confirm that learners meet master's-level outcomes

3.0 Transparent criteria (rubrics, descriptors, exemplars, and oral criteria) are published and applied consistently.

- What criteria will be published for each major assessment (rubrics, descriptors, oral criteria, exemplars), and where will learners access them? How will the program ensure criteria are applied consistently across faculty, instructors, and Knowledge Keepers while still honoring relational, contextual evaluation?

4.0 Assessment policies, course materials, and assessment instructions clearly state that ceremony or cultural practice participation is never mandatory for grading or assessment, and that accessible alternatives, accommodations, and equivalent assessment pathways are available.

- Where ceremony or cultural practice is connected to learning or assessment, how do assessment policies, course materials, and assessment instructions ensure participation is never required for grades or assessment? What accessible alternatives, accommodations, or equivalent assessment pathways are available, how is equivalency determined without requiring learners to disclose private reasons, and where is this safeguard clearly communicated to learners?

5.0 Learner supports aligned to assessment demands (coaching, feedback cycles, accessibility) are available and consistently applied.

- What support will help learners meet assessment demands (coaching, writing/oral support, feedback cycles, practice opportunities, accessibility accommodations), and when do learners access them across the journey? How will the program ensure that these supports are consistent across courses/cohorts and not dependent on individual instructors?

Supporting Documents

SD6.1 Assessment framework showing assessment modalities (i.e., concrete ways learners learn and show learning) and criteria (rubrics, descriptors, oral assessment criteria, portfolio requirements) mapped to program outcomes. For example, assessment modalities can include:

- Oral dialogue / talking circle (facilitated discussion where learners demonstrate understanding through speaking and listening)
- Story work / storytelling (sharing a teaching story and interpreting/applying it to practice)
- Land-based learning (on-the-land learning activity with reflection and/or demonstration of learning)
- Demonstration / practicum-style skill demonstration (showing a process, practice, or protocol in action)
- Portfolio (curated collection of artifacts across the program: reflections, projects, community work, demonstrations)
- Community presentation / sharing back (presenting learning to a community audience, with appropriate protocol and consent)
- Applied project / community-informed project (creating something usable: plan, toolkit, curriculum, policy, program prototype)
- Mentorship-based assessment (feedback from a mentor/Knowledge Keeper tied to clear criteria)
- Arts-based or making-based demonstration (where appropriate and approved—paired with an oral explanation of meaning and learning)
- Independent research using an Indigenous research methodology

SD6.2 Examples of culturally supportive assessment (e.g., oral demonstrations, storytelling, land-based demonstrations, applied projects, community presentations) with documented criteria;

SD6.3 Oral exam/oral defense formats and guidance (including authenticity checks and documentation expectations);

SD6.4 Terminal-stage assessment evidence demonstrating achievement of the Degree Level Standard, including examples of individual learner work at exemplary, average, and minimally acceptable levels, with related rubrics, descriptors, evaluator feedback, and rationale showing how each level meets master's-level outcomes;

SD6.5 Policies, course materials, and assessment instructions on ceremony and cultural practice participation safeguards, including clear statements that participation is not mandatory for grading or assessment, accessible alternatives, accommodations, equivalent assessment pathways, and processes for determining equivalency without requiring learners to disclose private reasons;

SD6.6 Mentorship/tasking documentation (e.g., role expectations, supervision notes, observation forms, readiness descriptors) where used;

SD6.7 Evidence of learner supports (e.g., guides, templates, workshop materials, and support processes for writing/oral supports, feedback cycles, and accessibility) and evidence of consistent application.

R7 – Navigating External Relations

Programs have external relationships (regulators, qualifications frameworks, partner institutions, professional bodies, funders, and employers) in ways that maintain Indigenous worldviews, sovereignties, and the Indigenous core as governing.

Benchmarks

1.0 Key external interfaces are identified (regulators, frameworks, partners, professional bodies, employers, funders) with an explicit assessment of where risks to the Indigenous core exist.

- What external systems must this master's program interface with (regulators, frameworks, partner institutions, professional bodies, employers, funders), and what does each interface require? Where are the

highest risks of “surrendering the core,” and what mitigation strategies/guardrails will the program use to protect Indigenous purposes, governance, knowledges, and assessment?

2.0 Relationship mapping and translation are documented (not forced equivalence) and position external frameworks as secondary and strategic.

- What relationship mapping/translation will you provide to show credibility to external audiences (e.g., qualifications frameworks), and how will you avoid forced equivalence? How will you clearly position external frameworks as secondary/strategic, and where will you document tensions/differences honestly rather than flattening them?

3.0 Core commitments and clear boundaries are explicitly stated and embedded in governance/partnership processes (e.g., Indigenous governance authority over curriculum and assessment; community authorization/validation of knowledges; protection of Indigenous languages and local protocols; knowledge and data governance, including consent and limits on sharing; reciprocity and community benefit expectations; non-mandatory ceremony participation for grading/assessment with accessible alternatives; integrity expectations for “says who?” and proper crediting of oral teachings; culturally congruent assessment pathways beyond written work).

- What are this program's core commitments and boundary conditions—the elements that must be protected to keep the Indigenous core governing? How will these commitments and boundaries be built into governance, curriculum decisions, assessment rules, and partnership agreements so they guide decisions consistently and can be upheld in practice?

4.0 Partnerships (where applicable) assign clear roles, decision rights, quality assurance responsibilities, and learner support responsibilities without subordinating Indigenous institutes.

- If there are partners, what agreements/MOUs are needed, and how will they assign roles, decision rights, quality assurance responsibilities, and learner supports clearly? What clauses ensure the Indigenous institute is not subordinated (e.g., Indigenous governance authority,

curriculum and assessment control, dispute resolution, data and knowledge governance, and financial reciprocity)?

5.0 Graduate outcomes are communicated in ways external audiences can understand while maintaining Indigenous definitions of competence and success.

- How will you describe graduate outcomes/competence to external audiences (employers, regulators, partners) in language they can understand without compromising Indigenous definitions of success? What examples, narratives, or evidence will you use to communicate credibility and transferability while keeping Indigenous frames primary?

Supporting Documents

SD7.1 Relationship mapping documents (e.g., OQF/qualification framework mapping notes) showing how external requirements are mapped/translated strategically, explicitly positioning external frameworks as secondary/strategic and documenting tensions/differences;

SD7.2 Partnership agreements/MOUs that define decision rights, roles, quality assurance responsibilities, and learner support responsibilities across partners;

SD7.3 Regulatory/ministry interface documentation (e.g., reporting plans, criteria correspondence, summaries of constraints);

SD7.4 Learner-facing translation resources (terminology guides—e.g., competency, learning outcome, rubric, evidence, practicum, ethics/REB, professional standards), professional language supports, career navigation supports—e.g., “how to talk about your learning to employers/regulators” section such as sample resume bullets, interview language, and how to describe oral/land-based assessments—aligned to the learner journey;

SD7.5 External communication documents/artifacts (e.g., program descriptions, graduate outcome narratives, employer/community partner feedback, support) showing credibility without compromising Indigenous core commitments;

SD7.6 If applicable, please describe plans or steps taken to consult with post-secondary institutions, transferability councils (e.g., Ontario Council for Articulation and Transfer), and advisory bodies to support transferability and recognition of the program;

SD7.7 If applicable, please describe plans or steps taken to consult with relevant regulatory and/or accrediting bodies, regarding the preparation of the learner for employment in occupations that are subject to regulatory and legal requirements;

SD7.8 Evidence of collaboration with partnering post-secondary institutions, such as:

- a. Meeting minutes between members of the Indigenous Institute and members of partnering post-secondary institutions regarding transferability arrangements;

- 
- b. Drafts of Articulation Agreements and/or Memorandums of Understanding with other post-secondary institutions; and
 - c. Completed Articulation Agreements or Memorandums of Understanding with other post-secondary institutions, where appropriate.

SD7.9 Metrics and mechanisms to understand and track level of transferability and compatibility.

PLEASE INCLUDE ANY OTHER INFORMATION THAT YOU CONSIDER NECESSARY FOR YOUR APPLICATION.

APPENDIX A: SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Please follow these guidelines when completing the online Program Review application.

*If the application is for renewal, please consult IAESC's website for details.

- A. Send a letter of intent by email to qa@iaesc.ca to inform the Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council (IAESC) of the intent to apply. The letter of intent will include the following elements:
 - a. Description of the Applicant Indigenous Institute and the communities served.
 - b. Name of Master's program to be assessed in the application for approval
 - c. Indicate Anticipated start date.
 - d. Describe the need for the program (at the Individual level need, the community need, the Nation need or a professional need) and opportunities for the graduates.
 - e. Indicate anticipated cohort size and if there will be multiple cohorts over the duration of the program (particularly if more than one year).
 - f. Describe the Method of Delivery - Face to Face Delivery - Blended Delivery - Distance Delivery – On site Campus and program duration (full-time, part time).
 - g. Anticipated funding sources (grant programs, etc.).
 - h. Required faculty and staff to run the program.
- B. IAESC will acknowledge by email your letter of intent to submit a master's program review.
- C. Complete a full MASTER'S PROGRAM INTRODUCTORY PAGE APPLICATION, including:
 - o Prepared by
 - o Submission date
 - o Nomenclature
 - o Course Titles (including credit value)
 - o Total Credits for master's degree
 - o Total Program Hours:
- D. Complete a Program Abstract: For the program abstract, briefly describe the program to be reviewed (maximum 500 words), outlining the credential level, the main field(s)/subject(s) of study, the expected learning outcomes, and alignment with the Indigenous Institute's principles and values.
- E. Complete an Executive Summary: The executive summary of the Program Review application should include the following information:
 - a. A brief overview of the program foundations for the proposed program, highlighting the guiding Indigenous principles and values, as well as its rootedness in community;
 - b. The proposed credential to be awarded;
 - c. The location(s) of the program delivery and the delivery format (s);
 - d. Anticipated program start date;
 - e. Anticipated completion time for the proposed credential; and
 - f. An overview of the proposed program, including its relevance to learners and community.

- g. For each responsibility, include the narrative in one document (word and pdf). Each narrative should explain how the program meets the specific responsibility using the benchmark questions as a guide.
- F. There are no word limits for any responsibility (standard) sections.
- G. Include examples of supporting materials that help describe the narrative.
- H. Indicate clearly where information requested for a particular section is not applicable to the Institute or not available; specify the reasons for the reviewers, which will be taken into consideration.
- I. organization contact information with the full name of the Indigenous Institute, the mailing and email addresses, and identify the primary contact and email address for the application. Please note that it will be possible to add additional individuals (collaborators) to assist with completing the application. However, IAESC will communicate with the identified primary contact only.

Supporting Materials

- Applicants may include additional files, including textual, audiovisual, and image files. There is no limit to the number of files that can be uploaded; however, if a file exceeds 1GB in size or if it is a direct link to an online file, please provide an active link in the “Supporting Documents” section of the application.
- Attach each supporting document as a separate file. If necessary, scan copies of documents and hard copies to include them in the electronic file. Label and number attachments and note that the same document/appendix may be referred to in more than one responsibility (standard) narrative.
- Ensure that all formal policies submitted are those approved by the Institute’s governing body and identify the date on which each policy was approved.

Processing Applications

- Complete applications only will be processed and assessed.
- Once an application has been completed and submitted, the applicant will receive electronic confirmation that the process for reviewing the submission has begun.
- Following a final decision on the approval, provisional approval, or recommendation for resubmission of the application rendered by IIQAB, the Indigenous Institute will be notified.

APPENDIX B – GLOSSARY

ACCOMODATIONS

"Accommodations" refers to supports or adjustments for students to ensure accessibility and equity, especially for those with disabilities.

ASSESSMENT (PROGRAM REVIEW APPLICATION)

In the Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council's quality assurance process, assessment is rooted in reflection on the Indigenous education provided by Indigenous Institutes. Assessment involves careful review and feedback for the Indigenous Institute as part of the quality assurance process.

COMMUNITY

First Nation, region or territory where original Peoples have historically and continuously occupied and used the land.

ELDERS/TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE HOLDERS

Indigenous individuals recognized by their communities for their cultural knowledge and expertise.

INDIGENOUS WAYS OF KNOWING, DOING, AND BEING

A learner is provided with experiences that transmit Indigenous knowledge traditions and Western education. These experiences and transmission of knowledge are holistic and reflect the interconnectedness of the Indigenous ways of knowing, doing, and being that form pathways to lifelong learning for an individual.

MATURE LEARNER

Usually defined as a learner who is at least 18 years old; however, definitions of mature learners may vary across Institutes' admissions policies and may include applicants that do not have the Ontario Secondary School Diploma or whose formal education may have been interrupted.

MICRO-CREDENTIALS

Micro-credentials, also known as micro-certifications, are typically short-term and skills-oriented courses designed to address labour market gaps. Some micro-credentials are designed to count for credits and "stack" towards more conventional degree programs.

MODIFICATIONS

A program modification is a change to an approved program that affects one or more aspects of its design, delivery, curriculum, admission requirements, learning outcomes, structure, location, or credential requirements. Program modifications may be minor, such as routine updates to course content, or

significant, such as adding a specialization, changing program requirements, introducing a new delivery site, or substantially revising curriculum. Significant modifications may require formal review or approval to ensure the program continues to meet applicable quality assurance standards.

PATHWAYS

Pathways refer to the different activities learners pursue following their completion of a program. These activities can involve participation in the community, employment, or further study. Pathways rest upon the structures, services, policies, and regulations that support the learner in transitioning after the completion of the credential.

PRETENDIANISM

Pretendianism is the practice of falsely claiming Indigenous identity, ancestry, or affiliation without legitimate community connection or evidence. A “pretendian” is someone who misrepresents themselves as Indigenous, often to gain social, professional, cultural, or financial benefits. This behavior is widely regarded as a form of cultural appropriation because it can undermine the rights, identities, and self-determination of Indigenous Peoples while diverting resources and opportunities intended for Indigenous Peoples and First Nation Communities.

PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT AND RECOGNITION (PLAR)

PLAR is a formal process for assessing and recognizing learning gained outside of traditional classroom settings, including work, community service, volunteering, independent study, cultural practice, land-based learning, and apprenticeships or mentorship with Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Traditional Knowledge Keepers, or other community-recognized experts. PLAR may be used to determine admission, advanced standing, credit, or other recognition where prior learning is comparable to program expectations and learning outcomes.

WORLDVIEW

“Worldview” refers to the foundational ways our people understand and see reality based on language, relationships (both human and natural world), knowledge, responsibilities, and our place within Creation. In this handbook, “Indigenous worldview” refers to the Indigenous values, teachings, languages, laws, protocols, relationships, and knowledge systems that shape how a program is designed, governed, delivered, assessed, and renewed. A worldview is not an added perspective or theme; it is the organizing foundation that informs purpose, curriculum, pedagogy, learner supports, assessment, evidence, and accountability to learners, communities, Nations, lands, ancestors, and future generations.

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