



# **INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO INTERCULTURAL CLIMATE ENGAGEMENT USING INDIGENOUS AND DIVERSE LENSES**

Prepared for: kQwa'st'not ~ Charlene George  
and Hannah Askew  
Sierra Club BC

by Elizabeth Jackson  
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## Disclaimer

This report was produced as part of the UBC Sustainability Scholars Program, a partnership between the University of British Columbia and various local governments and organizations in support of providing graduate students with opportunities to do applied research on projects that advance sustainability across the region. This project was conducted under the mentorship of Sierra Club BC. The opinions and recommendations in this report and any errors are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of Sierra Club BC, or the University of British Columbia.



## Acknowledgements

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In addition, I would like to give special thanks Karen Taylor, the Program Manager at the UBC Sustainability Scholars Initiative for providing the training and guidance that helped to make this project a reality.

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\*\* nutsa mut iy sqwaliwen ~ 1 heart 1 mind of good teaching

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## A Brief Introduction

I would like to take a moment to introduce myself as the lead writer of this document and the literature review that accompanies it. My name is Elizabeth Jackson and I am an Indigenous PhD student in Sociology at the University of British Columbia (UBC). On my father's side, I am Modoc and Tsungwe Hupa from far Northern California and Southern Oregon (south of the colonial border that separates what are now called Canada and the United States), and settler English and German on my mother's side. Through my Modoc ancestry, I am a citizen of the Klamath Tribes of South Central Oregon. I grew up in far Northern California in redwood forests, near the Pacific Ocean and the Mad, Trinity, and Klamath rivers and the creeks that flow into and around them. I feel incredibly fortunate and lucky to be a part of this exciting project and work that the Sierra Club BC (SCBC) and UBC are doing to forward and center sustainability and decolonization in their practices. While my tribes have different protocols and customs than the Coast Salish protocols which I have been blessed to have become immersed in while working on this project, we are also very similar. Our protocols honor all life, land, and water and I was taught to always be a humble and respectful guest and listen and learn from our teachers who are the people and the more than humans around us. I am very thankful to have been called to be a part of this project and given the opportunity to meet and work with kQwa'st'not ~ Charlene George and the entire SCBC team on this project.

## Background

The problem of climate change has had one important positive effect and that is the momentum it has created for a stronger, more dedicated and actively engaged environmental movement. Recently, Indigenous and diverse groups have begun unique organizations to make strides in reducing emissions and finding effective adaptation and mitigation efforts in their own communities and beyond (Indigenous Climate Action 2020, Climate Justice Alliance 2021). An important difference in the drive behind Indigenous environmental organizations from that of mainstream ones is the knowledge that for many Indigenous Peoples, climate change is not a new phenomenon, but simply a symptom and culmination of the incredibly damaging effects of settler colonialism (Whyte 2016). This knowledge however, is not brought forth to downplay the severity of the problem of climate change, but to shed light on the origin of the issue. In order to make a difference in the daunting problem of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, we will need many dedicated hands. Taking a unified approach is likely the most impactful way to stop corporate and other polluters that are creating the most damaging impacts.

Mainstream environmentally focused organizations have a long history of ignoring the presence of Indigenous and diverse Peoples in the areas that they are attempting to protect. Recently, environmental organizations like the Sierra Club have acknowledged that some early members and leaders were vocal advocates of white supremacy and the removal of Indigenous Peoples from their homelands. These practices have resulted in a lack of diversity and inclusion in many environmentally focused non-governmental organizations (ENGOS). For several years Sierra Club BC has been working to decolonize their organization's efforts and this project and

others like it are the direct result of this initiative. However, for more than a century, the mainstream environmental movement and most ENGOs have remained very white (Green 2.0 2021).

Now that the environmental movement and ENGOs are beginning to reckon with their past mistakes and striving for equity and inclusivity, it is crucial for them to have the tools they need to create meaningful and lasting organizational change. This project named “A Pathway Together” (APT) is a joint endeavor between the Sierra Club BC, who have been successfully transforming to include Indigenous and other diverse Peoples in their leadership and programming (Sierra Club BC 2020), and the University of British Columbia who are also actively working toward institutional decolonization (University of British Columbia 2020).

A Pathway Together seeks to identify and create innovative approaches to intercultural climate engagement using Indigenous and diverse lenses. The following report and accompanying materials are coming to life to help ENGOs in their decolonization process and climate change work. It is important to note that inclusion of the local community is an objective of this project. It is vital to invite the voices and expertise of local Indigenous and diverse communities to be an integral part of any environmental movement action. ENGOs that are able to communicate and practice in ways that uphold local customs and protocols are likely to be more successful in realizing their goals and these steps can only be taken through genuine invitation and understanding of the local community. Conversely, using a generalized approach or simply incorporating local knowledge (without true inclusion) can result in harmful appropriation or minimize the importance of local involvement. It is also important to note that the process of incorporating local knowledge without direct involvement by knowledge holders, can be seen as an extension of settler colonialism and only serve to further distance the People’s

authentic voices that ENGOs most need at this critical time. This type of appropriation should be avoided, as well as using a pan-indigenous lens and/or terminology which can also harm and minimize local community protocol (Tuck and Yang 2012).

The project A Pathway Together has been created in a way that follows Coast Salish protocol and strives to be respectful to all Indigenous and diverse communities, as well as the non-Indigenous allies who are reading and utilizing this work in their practices. The APT toolkit, electronic Prezi guide, and print resources, have been brought to life to help ENGOs on their paths to becoming more socially conscious and environmentally just. The tools created and shared from this project can help to bridge the chasms that have divided the mainstream environmental movement from Indigenous and diverse populations for far too long.

## History of the Project

“A Pathway Together” (APT) can be seen as a continuation and expansion of a project started by Sustainable Scholars mentor kQwa’ste’not ~ Charlene George who is a cultural knowledge holder from the T’Sou-ke Nation on what is now called Vancouver Island, British Columbia. As part of her advanced graduate degree at Royal Roads University and in dual roles for Sierra Club BC (SCBC), both as the Cultural Voice and on the Executive Team; Charlene facilitated the creation of an art and environmental based interactive learning tool using Prezi technology. This technological guide was created to accompany Through Watcher’s Eyes ~ Between the Worlds (TWE), a mural which lives at Spencer Middle School on Vancouver Island. The mural was brought to life by Char, and many collaborators, to represent and share a complex



and deep story within Coast Salish teachings. TWE depicts a story shared by many Coast Salish Nations about Wild Man and Wild Woman (George 2019).

The prezi, Seeing Through Watcher's Eyes (STWE) is an electronic bridging tool that guides participants through Coast Salish knowledges, while bridging gaps between "the Western" and "the Indigenous," and enhancing and interacting with existing K-12 curriculum standards. STWE and the accompanying curriculum was a collaborative creation of the local community, school districts, SCBC, Char, and the many *beings*<sup>1</sup> who also provided their voice. The project was a success and is now integrated into the teaching materials of several Vancouver Islands school districts (George 2018, Sierra Club BC 2021). As mentioned, the collaborative work that breathed life into TWE and STWE follows Coast Salish protocol, a concept and practice that is shared and emphasized throughout this report. This important practice of following protocol has been carried through the life of this project, as well.

The prezi technology used to bring STWE and APT to life are defined by points of teaching and learning that are deeply embedded with protocol. These protocols are woven throughout the framework of STWE and APT beginning with the form of the honoured house (the thee lelum). Each point embedded within these online tools have been placed intentionally and are links that will take the viewer who visits with a good heart on a sacred journey of shared learning. These points are represented through the living artistic representations of a thee lelum, canoe paddles, smoke, the moon, wild woman, and salmon. They are all sacred and gifts of knowledge to take the viewer through Coast Salish protocol and the many teachings they hold. APT and all the reference points within are an expansion and continuation of the TWE mural and STWE. These important Coast Salish lessons have been modeled and shared by mentor

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<sup>1</sup> Beings in this sense means all living and non-living beings that are present in and between the worlds in Coast Salish and other Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies.



kQwa'st'not ~ Charlene George and I have done my best to follow them in my practice while working on this project. We would like to request that co-learners who are interacting with this work also follow the important protocol practice of coming and working in “a good way,” which means opening up your heart and mind with good thoughts and intentions to see, hear, and learn in a new and respectful way.

## Research Approach, Protocol to Guide us, and Guides from the Tumilth<sup>2</sup>

A Pathway Together (APT) was created by proceeding in our way, following protocol while combining Indigenous and western perspectives and styles of teaching and learning. As mentioned briefly above, this project began with an in depth and nuanced review of the online tool Seeing Through Watcher's Eyes (STWE) with T'Sou-ke artist and intercultural educator kQwa'st'not ~ Charlene George. A review of existing literature on best practices for intercultural approaches to environmental advocacy and education followed and the project culminated with the creation of a new Prezi bridging tool A Pathway Together (APT) and additional print resources to help guide ENGOs on their transformational paths to becoming more diverse, inclusive, and community accountable organizations. The collaborative work that breathed life into TWE, STWE, and APT follows Coast Salish protocol. Indigenous protocols emphasize community accountability and relationality with all life. These important concepts combined with the practice and protocols of the student author have been carried through the life of this

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<sup>2</sup> Tumilth means “sacred land” (George 2019)

project and the author and mentor would like to gift it to all those who are open to its lessons, just as a blanket, traditional foods, or a treasured bentwood box may be gifted at a potlatch.

The bentwood box is an important part of Coast Salish cultural life. These treasure boxes have been made, utilized in a variety of ways, and gifted since time immemorial. A bentwood box has been recovered and brought back to life to be filled with the tools and gifts of transformation that have been created throughout this project. The box will be ceremonially gifted to the University of British Columbia at the completion of the project. The online Prezi tool A Pathway Together can be viewed as a bentwood box in the electronic form. It is filled with an invitation to experience learning and growing in a new way. There are links to the academic papers created, and links to movies, and resources to help bridge the gaps between the Western and the Indigenous and diverse ways of learning and teaching.

## Celebrating our Good Work

Completion of this project was a long and complex journey and we are proud to present the final work to UBC, SCBC, and the future ENGOs who we hope to assist. A Pathway Together, and the accompanying literature and tools will help bridge gaps in understanding between mainstream organizations and the Indigenous and diverse communities around them. A synthesis of the authentic voice and gifts of Indigenous and diverse communities and the contributions of western science is a pathway forward that can help in making a difference in daunting environmental problems, such as climate change.

An example of the ways that the tools and knowledges laid out in this project can be a catalyst for change is the success of Seeing Through Watchers Eyes (STWE). Once STWE and

the curriculum was complete, brought to life, and incorporated into the Vancouver Islands school districts, the project was immediately nudged and a clear pathway forward was revealed. Those next steps included the creation of a physical Treasure Box for three local school districts and an invitation into Royal Roads University to incorporate STWE there. Along the pathway of creating STWE, it became apparent that a further bridging tool was required for inviting deeper understanding for post-secondary institutions and ENGOS. Similarly, while researching and working on APT, conversations about the processes and next steps that are needed for universities and other post-secondary thinkers were revealed. A next step will start with specific critical thinking and guiding of academic thought to include deeper connections, personal responsibility, and awareness.

## Tying Off the End of Our Weaving and Moving Forward on a Pathway Together



Artwork and photo credit - kQwa'ste'not ~ Charlene George & Mya Van Woudenberg, Sierra Club BC

The artwork above can be viewed as a visual representation of what we are encouraging in A Pathway Together (APT). Heron (SNEKE) who is represented here twice, speaks to lifelong balance and graceful commitment to transformational movements. APT is an invitation to move forward with grace and using a lens that can see beauty and hope while on our transformational journey.

The flowers represent the future. Every child is a beautiful flower (SPAKEN)! Seven generations past provided so well for us, and we must do the same for future generations. Flowers can be placed in rows and patterns with seeds from far away, or they can be left to naturally bloom in a symbiotic relationship with the environment around them. These flowers are a reminder that for future generations, we have to transform our way of being to allow the relationships to exist without the heavy handed placement that we humans often use.

Wild Woman can be seen peeking from behind the thee leelum (honoured house) and allowing us to borrow her ability to see uniquely. All these beings demand and invite us to enter an intercultural relationship with all and respectfully plan future pathways with all our relations, including the “more than humans” around us.

The footprints are walking toward the fences someone has placed to keep separate the “wild” and the “domesticated.” Fences and barriers are a part of colonial thinking. By removing fences and barriers, including those invisible ones within our minds, we will be better prepared to walk this pathway together. The tree of life continues to give eagle a perch, bark to weave, holds the soil together, and provides in a multitude of other ways. To appreciate these gifts we will need to push for a change and stop the current logging practice of clearcutting old growth mother trees.

Salmon are a representation of wealth and prosperity for all. What could be when we re-remember this and the gifts they give when we restore the waterways and help them to return year after year. The salmon in this image ask us to re-imagine what our relationship with salmon and water is and should be.

To sum up this narrative description of this artwork, and the lessons we are sharing with ENGOs through this A Pathway Together project, we would like to share Eagle’s (QELENSEN) lesson as an example of an ENGO’s successful transformation to see in a new way.

Sierra Club BC in their development approach remembers eagle’s shared wisdom:

“Eagle (QELENSEN) demands we fly with a strong heart and long-sightedness in all that we see and do, and see the real hidden costs (Growing Into Balance, pg 13, SCBC 2020/23 [link](#)).”

We invite you to begin to walk with us on A Pathway Together by clicking on the link below:

<https://prezi.com/view/HwO7tPJC1Cs7Be4nWjdq/>

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## Appendix A

### why everything is connected

As shared by Edith Pelkey~ Why everything in creation is connected and considered our brothers and sister: When creation first started there was only human beings. One day the humans decided that they wanted more in creation. A couple of the humans told the creator that they wanted to be the great cedar that would provide, wood for the houses, a soft inner bark that would make clothing, baskets and many other things that their brothers and sisters could use to help them, as well as medicine that could be made from their beautiful branches. Then others came forward and said they wanted to be Kwetholomechen, they would carry the spirits of the ancestors and they would help the people when they are travelling on the water. More and more came forward, some wanted to be the many different kinds of salmon, the animals, the sea creatures, trees, shrubs, flowers, and many different things. Everyone of them volunteered to become these things so that they would provide food, medicine and clothing for their human brothers and sister. That is why our people are connected to the land, the ocean and the sky. That's why all of creation is connected and they are all of our brothers and sisters. That's why our people, First Nations, were left to take care of all of creation.

Marily Olsen-Page ~ MUNULTHAAT

Why Everything Is Connected ~ by Marilyn Olsen-Page : As shared by Edith Pelkey:

“Why everything in creation is connected and considered our brothers and sister:

When creation first started there was only human beings. One day the humans decided that they wanted more in creation. A couple of the humans told the creator that they wanted to be the great cedar that would provide, wood for the houses, a soft inner bark that would make clothing, baskets and many other things that their brothers and sisters could use to help them, as well as medicine that could be made from their beautiful branches. Then others came forward and said they wanted to be Kwetholomechen, they would carry the spirits of the ancestors and they would help the people when they are travelling on the water. More and more came forward, some wanted to be the many different kinds of salmon, the animals, the sea creatures, trees, shrubs, flowers, and many different things.

Everyone of them volunteered to become these things so that they would provide food, medicine and clothing for their human brothers and sister. That is why our people are connected to the land, the ocean and the sky. That's why all of creation is connected and they are all of our brothers and sisters. That's why our people, First Nations, were left to take care of all of creation.”