
ESTABLISHING A NETWORKED RELATIONSHIP STRUCTURE

FINDINGS FROM IFA TOWNHALL



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ABOUT US

ILLUMINATING INDIGENOUS ARTISTIC & CULTURAL INNOVATION THROUGH FASHION, CRAFT AND TEXTILES

Indigenous Fashion Arts (IFA) is an Indigenous-led non-profit organization that sustains Indigenous practices in fashion, craft and textiles through designer-focused initiatives, public engagement and sector innovation.

Formerly known as Indigenous Fashion Week Toronto, IFA was established in 2017 and has since presented three highly successful festivals, launched entrepreneurship and international exchange programs, contributed to establishing fashion within the Canadian artistic landscape through partnerships with Nuit Blanche Toronto and the Art Gallery of Ontario, and partnered with Canadian retailer La Maison Simons to bring Indigenous-made works to market.

The IFA Festival, the organization's largest initiative, is a multi-platform biennial festival of distinct, innovative, and progressive Indigenous-made fashion, craft, and textiles. IFA celebrates Indigenous cultural expression that is grounded in traditional knowledge, ways of life and storytelling. The Festival offers extensive artistic, professional marketing and promotional opportunities for artists and designers. There are performances, a marketplace, a visual arts exhibition, industry networking opportunities and public-facing panel presentations. The event receives overwhelmingly positive responses from audiences, participants, and partners. As organizers we are continually humbled by the outpouring of joy, pride and love that is generated around the Festival.

IFA is an Indigenous-led organization that strives to remain community-based and grassroots, guided by our values and roots. We use a long-term and relational approach by working with a roster of trusted collaborators and artists, while expanding our reach every year to include new artists, designers and talent. Through our efforts we hope to create a new lens for understanding fashion, textiles and craft as legitimate artistic practices and viable economic engines grounded in our culture, knowledge, kinships, and worldviews.

GIVING THANKS

The IFA would like to give thanks for the support from the Mastercard Foundation and the Ontario Arts Council to bring together artisans and support this important and groundbreaking work.

And of course, we want to thank all the participants at the Town Hall for the great discussions. A list of contributors can be found at the end of the document.

PROJECT BACKGROUND



“These beads are living stories.”

IFA Townhall Participant 2022

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“Beadworking is “a connective process that fosters social, spatial, cultural, spiritual, and temporal connections through a series of other interwoven connective activities”...

“The bead is recaptured and used to not only create economic value but also in the value creation that binds families together and helps build the community, both spiritually and culturally.”¹

Malinda Gray, Ojibway

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“...the 2020 IFWTO beading circle discussed how beading helps to build connections with Indigenous lands and communities in a multiplicity of ways, including in the process of purchasing materials that have been sourced, hunted, and gathered from the land by Indigenous community members...

through this type of mindful, ethical, and sustainable process, beading is a practice specifically of decolonial care and responsibility — one which provides nourishment not only for the self and for one’s community, but for Indigenous lands.”²

Beading Native Twitter

¹ Malinda Gray, *Beads: Symbols of Indigenous Cultural Resilience and Value*; Master of Arts Department of Anthropology University of Toronto, 2017.

² Jeffrey Ansloos, Ashley Caranto Morford, Nicole Santos Dunn, DuPreLindsay DuPré and Riley Kucheran, *Beading Native Twitter: Indigenous Arts-based Approaches to Healing and Resurgence*, *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, (2021) doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2022.101914>

INTRODUCTION BY IFA BOARD MEMBER RILEY KUCHERAN (BIIGTIGONG NISHNAABEG)

Beadworking has been referred to as an act of resilience, an act of resistance, an act of knowledge – of cultural renewal and traditional knowledge sharing, and an act of honouring.

“Across history, the practice of beading has been widely recognized by Indigenous peoples as a means of recording and translating cultural knowledge, and of promoting wellness across various contexts...While colonialism has led to cultural dislocation for Indigenous peoples, including from creative practices like beading, Indigenous communities across Canada are working towards the protection, stewardship, and resurgence of this healing tradition, including addressing beading resurgence within digital spaces.”³

Indigenous artists, artisans and creatives produce a vast diversity of goods that continue an ancestral practice or artform rooted in their Indigenous Nation(s) and culture(s). Today there’s growing mainstream awareness of beadwork: artisans will sell out in minutes on social media to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous consumers across Canada and internationally; beading is entering school curriculums, and there are conferences, beading circles, and several collectives popping up.

Yet despite these advancements, beadwork practices are still recovering from legacies of colonization: beadworkers are passionate about their work and reclaiming their culture but find themselves in a precarious and unsupported sector. Beadwork is undervalued and undermined by consumer perception and cultural appropriation. Most beadworkers do not have access to benefits, wage guarantees, or training opportunities to strengthen their beadwork and business skills. Furthermore, the beadwork market is unpredictable with little pricing consistency across beadworkers. In response to high levels of precarity and poverty within Indigenous communities, many beadworkers sell their goods well below true value to sell quickly, which in the long run negatively impacts *other* beadworkers ability to sell their goods at true value.

Indigenous bead working is a well-established artform with a growing number of creators continuing the culturally significant practice of beadwork and selling their works nationally and internally. Acknowledging the resurgence in practice, Indigenous Fashion Arts wanted to build on the 2020 Indigenous Fashion Week (IFWTO) discussion with artisans, understanding that, Indigenous artistic practices like beadwork are viable creative industries, with incredible economic potential and opportunities for cultural resurgence.

The concept of establishing a more formal organization of artisans - such as an association - is an opportunity to strengthen the network of beadworkers across the country and has the potential to improve the living and working conditions of beadworkers themselves.

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³ Beading Native Twitter: Indigenous Arts-based Approaches to Healing and Resurgence, 2021.



PROJECT PURPOSE

The focus of this project is on nurturing a more formal artisan network within Indigenous Fashion Arts (IFA).

As IFA grows as an organization, it is particularly interested in weaving a network grounded in Indigenous approaches that meets the contemporary needs of Indigenous artists and designers and ensuring the ability to revitalize important cultural practices. IFA holds a unique position with the fashion sector and is offering to support artists and designers to work together to find a common ground to work together in a more formal way moving forward.

Building on the 2020 IFWTO discussions, in June 2022 the IFA held a “townhall” with over 40 artisans (primarily beaders) to discuss a proposed approach at collaboration moving forward. The purpose of the session was to:

Identify	Challenges and barriers faced by beadworkers
Determine	Priorities areas for collaboration
Discuss	What a networked governance model for collaboration looks like
Commit	Onboard members willing to participate on an ongoing basis

Participants contemplated a networked relationship structure, and how that governance model may work or be adapted for their use. Consensus emerged from participants that some form of an organization would be an asset for beadworkers, by providing wage and pricing guidelines, health and employment benefits, opportunities for collaboration along the supply chain (i.e., bulk material purchases and marketing), capacity building and pooling of resources, training opportunities and advocacy. A national stream of information – or an ideas hub - was also deemed helpful, especially for those just starting out.

What follows is a summary of the input and discussion by participants, along with a description of the proposed governance / relationship structure and research into similar organizations.

This document will serve not only as a summary, but as the basis for continued discussion. As one participant noted – it will take time to build consensus and get to know each other along the way. A few participants voiced the necessity of relationship building and transparency moving forward, citing former attempts at similar undertakings that have failed may negatively impact engagement. It was suggested that there are lessons to be learned from those experiences.

It is important to remember that the intention is that this work is led by you, the participants, possible members, and artisans that the organization can assist or impact. As it evolves, the IFA is asking for your continued voice, involvement, and participation.

DISCUSSION FINDINGS

IDENTIFYING CHALLENGES & BARRIERS

Both the literature and participant discussions identified several challenges and barriers for beadworkers, artists and designers, the most prevalent being:



UNDervalUED
AND
UNSUPPORTED
SECTOR



PRICE
INCONSISTENCY



BENEFITS &
WAGES






LACK OF
TRAINING
OPPORTUNITIES
& BUSINESS
SKILLS






CULTURAL
APPROPRIATION
& INTELLECTUAL
PROPERTY



CROSSING
BORDERS

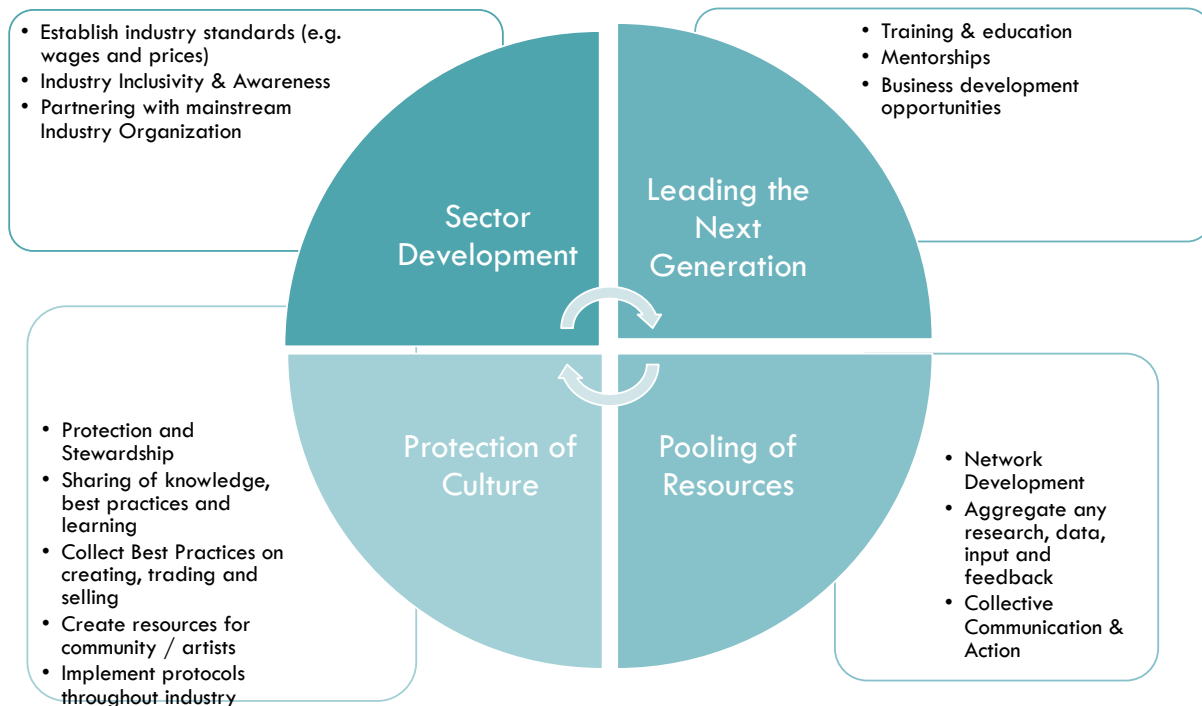
 <p>UNDervalUED AND UNSUPPORTED SECTOR</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exposure as artists - Knowing your value as an artist - Having the proper finances, people in place to support the work - Finding Indigenous suppliers - Access to cultural funds
 <p>PRICE INCONSISTENCY</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Pricing formulas that account for urban, rural, and remote considerations (shipping and receiving materials); access to supplies; rising costs; and the waning quality of the supplies. - Pricing inconsistencies (e.g., cost of various hides per square inch, setting an hourly rate for your work, antique beads vs. new beads) - Establishing price points for curators and buyers
 <p>BENEFITS & WAGES</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of access to mental health care - Universal wages / living wages - Lack of childcare and work / life balance - Support for participation in events <p>Balancing day jobs with artwork and the practice of keeping culture alive</p>

 <p>TRAINING & SKILLS DEVELOPMENT</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Access to training and internet are challenges, as are transportation to market, or paying market fees - Lack of guidance, support, and education for beginners - Need to develop business acumen - Protection from exploitative galleries - Money going to non-Indigenous organizations to “teach us” - Lack of capacity of those that have the skills to share (mentors and family)
 <p>CULTURAL APPROPRIATION & INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Artists replicating work as their own - Knowledge of how and when can designs be claimed by Indigenous designers: “I beaded a blueberry now nobody else can bead blueberries. We all love berries and the moon - those are not unique designs to anyone practitioner.” - Cultural appropriation among Nations of Nation symbols - Educating the public on sacred items, Indigenous fashion and who can wear or use this and in what settings - Decolonization businesses, such as holding gift shops accountable for their made in China products claimed as Indigenous - Anti-counterfeit legislation (truth to advertising act) affects people who enter the marketplace - Learning from the international sector around issues of intellectual property and international borders systems - Another consideration is developing “certificates of origin”
 <p>CROSSING BORDERS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ability to cross borders with materials (e.g., confiscation or not being able to travel into the US with seal skin products) - Navigating inherent biases of materials and lack of education at Airport security and border checks - What are we allowed to take across borders? Knowing our rights - Government advocacy, a statement or pass that says “We’re Indigenous artists, these are materials we need to travel with” - a statement that gives legitimacy to ease travel

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AREAS FOR POTENTIAL COLLABORATION

At the same time, areas for potential collaboration through a form of weaved network were discussed by participants, the most prevalent being:



Sector Development

- Establish industry standards (e.g. wages and prices)
- Industry Inclusivity & Awareness
- Partnering with mainstream Industry Organization



Leading the Next Generation

- Training & education
- Mentorships
- Business development opportunities



Pooling of Resources

- Network Development
- Aggregate any research, data, input and feedback
- Collective Communication & Action



Protection of Culture

- Protection and Stewardship
- Sharing of knowledge, best practices and learning
- Collect Best Practices on creating, trading and selling
- Create resources for community / artists
- Implement protocols throughout industry

Research focused on mainstream organizations providing similar services to artists in Canada include:

Canadian Artists' Representation/Le Front des artistes canadiens ([CARFAC](#)), which is federally incorporated as a non-profit and serves as the national voice of Canada's professional visual artists. The mandate is to promote the visual arts in Canada, to promote a socio-economic climate that is conducive to the production of visual arts in Canada, and to conduct research and engage in public education for these purposes. Services and activities include fee schedules, guidelines and protocols, learning sessions and templates as well as certificates of origin.

[ACTRA](#) (Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists) is a national union of over 27,000 professional performers. Their mandate is to negotiate, administer and enforce collective agreements to provide performers with equitable compensation as well as safe and reasonable working conditions. Services include developing policies and guidelines, offering deals and discounts to members, providing education opportunities, counselling and support services as well as distributing royalties.

Craft Ontario (formally the [Ontario Craft Council](#)) has a membership program that includes exhibition opportunities, business mentorship, discounted tickets to workshops or events, and discounted health, liability, and exhibitor insurance rates for members. Member benefits include exhibiting, insurance, savings, opportunities for sales and education and connecting to the broader industry network.

SECTOR DEVELOPMENT

The IFA believes that beading is a highly skilled, valuable artform that needs general, Canada-wide support. The vision of a network began with a desire to ensure that Indigenous beadworkers have access to a meaningful livelihood and career support: they would be supported to strengthen their skills and capacities while having access to critical benefits, decent wages, and a strong support network.

The IFA is suggesting the need for a more formal relationship that has the potential to support a network of 1000s of Indigenous beadworkers from across the country. At the ecosystem level, IFA envisions a strengthened network with the capacity to advocate for the needs of beadworkers over the long term, while ensuring the skills are brought back to our communities so that others can continue the knowledge and traditions.

Participants questioned: How do we generate economy and maintain our legacy to access weaving or beading? How do we describe Indigenous economy in a way that allows people in? This includes exploring the concept of reciprocity, including identifying resources that aren't financial, and the lending of skills in trade (trade grant writing, for example) outside the exchange of money.

Another aspect of developing an Indigenous economy is to pay fair value for our products and knowledge (in comparison to our non-Indigenous counterparts); establish artist wages for creation (broken down by practice such as beading or tufting), and categorizing prices by regions, type of materials, and hours.

Through the engagement activities, research, and report development phases the network of Indigenous beadworkers across the country will be strengthened, and deeper insights into the day-to-day realities of beadworkers will be documented and shared.

LEADING THE NEXT GENERATION

Weaving a network will help ensure Indigenous beadworkers, artists and designers have access to critical training and skills development opportunities to strengthen their art and businesses. These training and skill building opportunities, combined with adequate wages, benefits, ongoing support network and advocacy will result in work environments that are more likely to be “decent” and “meaningful” for Indigenous beadworkers. Participants wanted to ensure:

- Skills and training development focused on Indigenous facilitator with cultural competency
- Tiered business skills training based on what career or education level you identify yourself in, and where you need to
- Indigenous – led training and mentorships drawing on the amazing, intelligent professionals in our communities
- Putting money into Indigenous Curriculum
- Matchmaking the seasoned folks with emerging (big sibling to a younger, cousin structures)
- Mentorship workshops to ensure mainstream organizations are practicing cultural safety

Through Indigenous-led training and education opportunities we strive to create meaningful job opportunities in the places we call home.

PROTECTION OF CULTURE

In the absence of Indigenous Intellectual property laws that protect family and nation designs, Townhall participants noted that there is a need:

- to define cultural appropriation,
- to define sovereignty,
- to define how we want to work together (e.g. a constitution of sorts - “We the Beaders agree that”)
- to engage and develop “What to expect, tips and guidance” or a protocols type document that includes guidance from Elders and traditional protocols, building on CARFAC, Métis Nation of BC, and organizations that already have resources or copyright guidelines
- to decolonize Indigenous Business - addressing business models that do not correspond to our worldview, and describing this is how we do business, this is our value system of doing business, so if you want to do business with us, this is how we do it (within our model, led by us).
- for public education around what are sacred items, and what is fashion - who can wear or use this and in what settings.

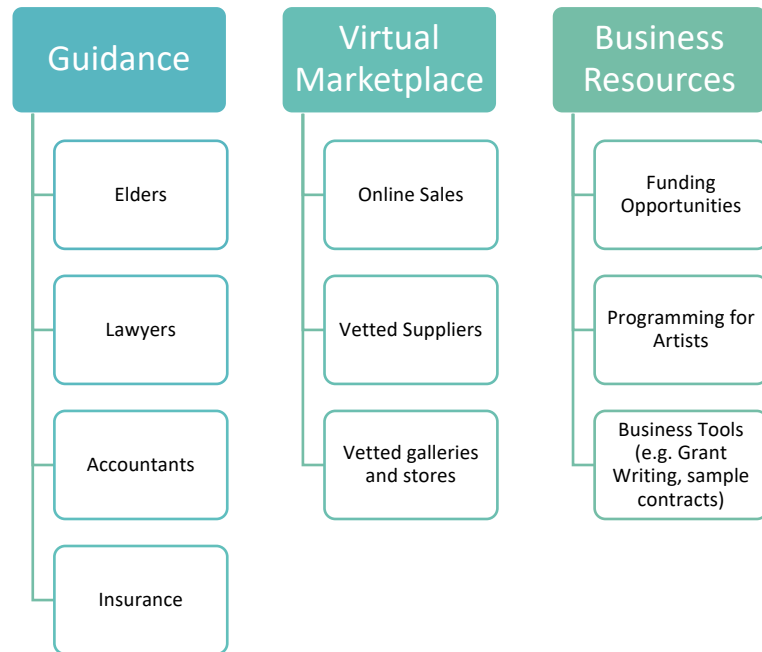
POOLING RESOURCES / CENTRALIZING SERVICES

Participants noted that a more formal network would allow for lateral knowledge sharing to ensure that entrepreneurship is a viable pathway for young artists. There was a lot of vibrant discussion – including some trepidation from past experiences - around the development of an Indigenous business platform that could include:

- both online sales and workshops

- easy to read, readily accessible, AODA compliant tools and resources
- a one stop, directory, vetted suppliers, respectful, quality suppliers
- Legal, financial and business advice either local to the region, or in the medium of work, and
- Consolidation of grants and funding resources available (travel, materials)

This diagram is a rough outline of the beginning of the discussion:



POTENTIAL OUTCOMES OF COLLABORATION

The IFA envisions several outcomes for artists and the sector that can be accomplished together.



Meaningful
livelihood



Career
Opportunities



Indigenous
Economy



Network
Development



Product Value



DEVELOPING A RELATIONSHIP MODEL

In contemplating the appropriate relationship model, the consultant explored different structures to meet the needs of beadworkers which included cooperatives, member-based organizations, and unions, etc. Research included:

- Research on the historical significance, practice, and resurgence of beading
- Canadian Associations (member-based) and Labour Unions
- Indigenous arts not-for-profit organizations including the Indigenous Screen Office, Indigenous Music Office and imagineNATIVE
- Indigenous Cooperatives (formal corporate structure for business purposes; not community owned but member owned) and National Indigenous Organizations in Canada (primarily not for profits /charities)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance / networked governance

While there are pros and cons to each model, there are additional factors to consider, including:

- The capacity of the IFA and use of the existing IFA governance structure
- The capacity of Indigenous artisans to participate in a member-based organization
- Existing community networks
- Leading for the next generation (one collective but difference within it).

ESTABLISHING VALUES TO COLLABORATE

Guiding values are the underpinning for any governance structure or relationship – they determine how decisions are made, how organizations operate and the basis for building relationships.

Importantly, the community-led process of forming an artist-led arm of IFA will ensure that important Indigenous values such as respect and reciprocity, and Indigenous priorities like intergenerational knowledge exchange and increasing land-based competencies are weaved into the mandate of the organization, which will ultimately lead to more sustainable economic development. Some of the values presented and discussed at the Townhall included:



**CULTURALLY
GROUNDED**



COMMUNITY-LED



REPRESENTATIVE



RECIPROCITY



**CONSENSUS
DECISION
MAKING**

Townhall participants stressed the importance of additional values such as:

- Addressing / preventing lateral violence
- Developing trust and respect and putting those values into action – likely through transparency and accountability to the advocacy group
- Cultural safety, particularly in navigating non-Indigenous spaces, people, and institutions
- Approaching in a community-up way
- Compensation and resources
- Not Toronto based



DEFINING NETWORKED RELATIONSHIPS

Tasoulla Hadjiyanni and Kristin Helle interviewed thirteen Ojibwe community members and discovered that craft making was not solely a monetary endeavor. Instead, it became “a connective process that fosters social, spatial, cultural, spiritual, and temporal connections through a series of other interwoven connective activities” (2010, 60)⁴.

⁴ Malinda Gray MA Thesis 2017 p.34

The focus of the Townhall presentation and discussion with participants was around a networked governance model, or networked relationships. While the literature spoke to some examples of networked governance from Turtle Island, the best definition emerged from The Australian Indigenous Governance Institute, a unique Indigenous led national centre of governance knowledge and excellence:

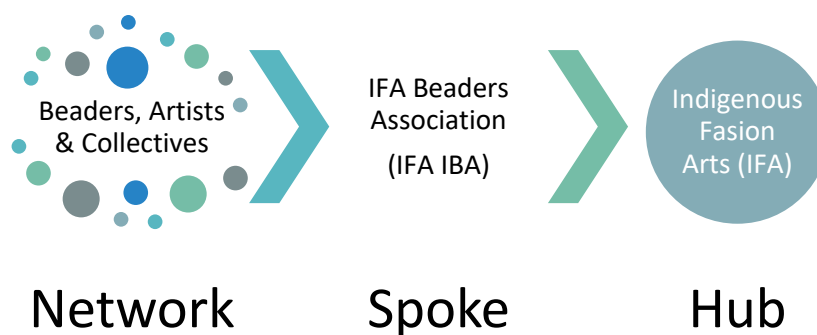
“A net is an open fabric of string or rope or wire woven together at regular intervals. Like the string that is woven together to form a basket, a network weaves together different people, relationships, things and organisations. A network is a connected group of people with similar interests or concerns who get together to work and support each other. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance is networked governance. It is dynamic and sophisticated, having:

- interdependent connections between people, places, and things (past, present and future)
- layered systems of representation and leadership
- overlapping memberships and mandates
- dense networks of relationships and mutual responsibility
- corresponding dispersed layers of decision making, accountability, and authority.

Indigenous governance is a networked form of governance. It is based on thick pathways and layers of relationships and connections between people, places, and things, past, present and future.”⁵

Some of the characteristics of networked governance that benefit the type of relationship Townhall participants discussed include. Networks:

- are relational in nature, very much in keeping with an Indigenous approach to relationship structures
- highly flexible and can change and evolve, which is an important consideration for an emerging organization
- allow for flexibility in membership – individuals, families, beading circles, regional groups, other organizational participants
- driven by sharing skills and resources
- intentionally diverse in leadership and representation, yet can provide a unified voice



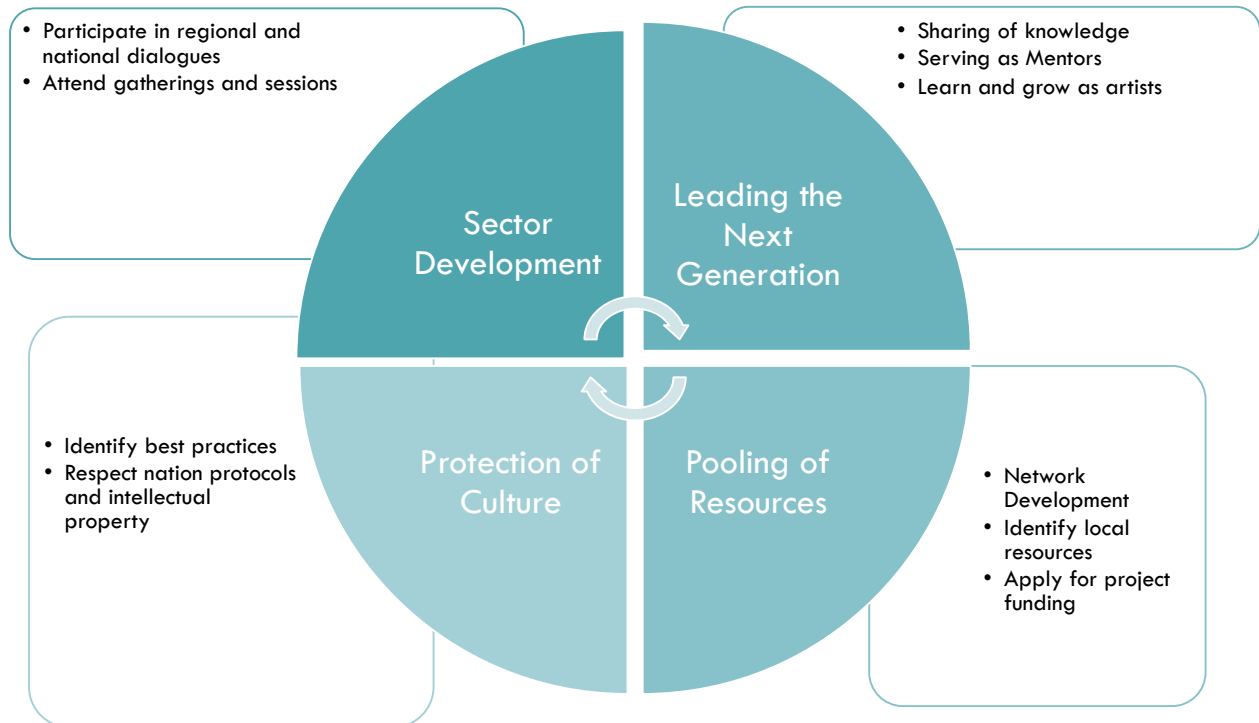
⁵ <https://toolkit.aigi.com.au/toolkit/9-4-networked-governance>

DEFINING ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

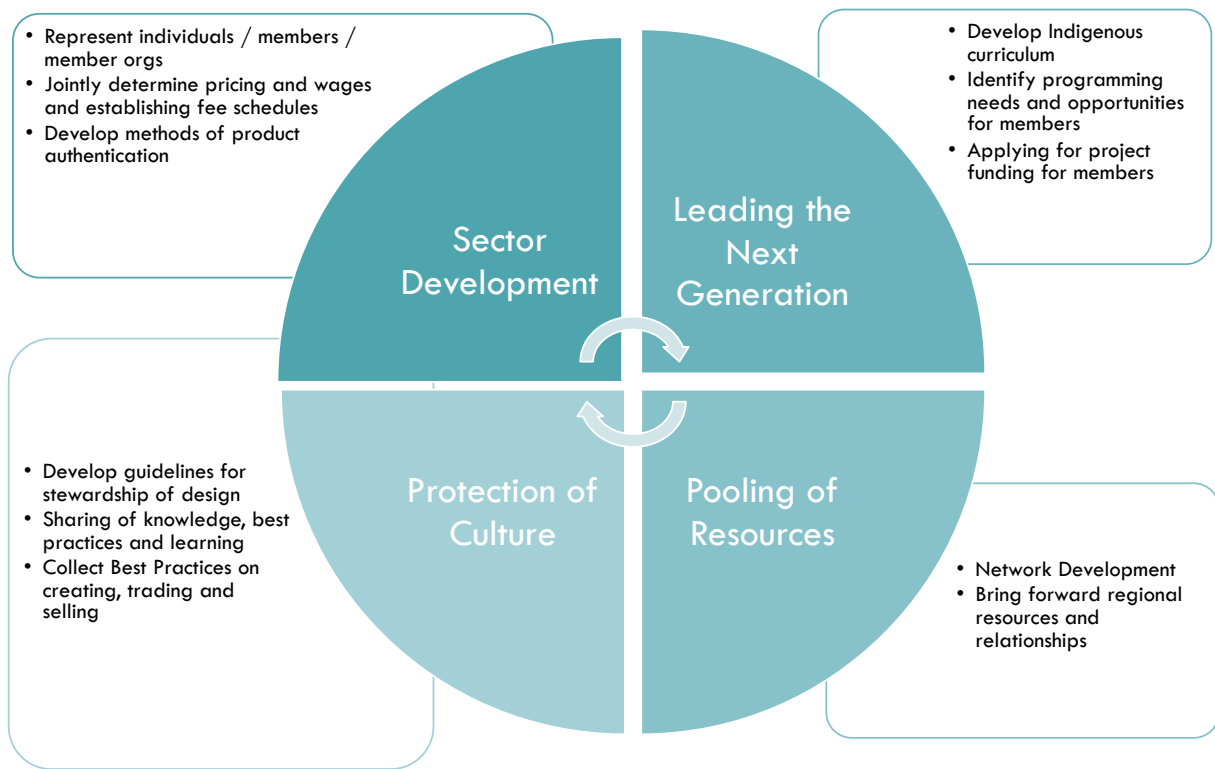
How are we responsible to each other? Townhall participants want to clearly define our responsibilities to one another, and our responsibilities to the collective. What follows is a first attempt at defining roles and responsibilities and serves as a starting point for additional discussion.

ROLE OF INDIVIDUALS

It is important that community members are committed to participating in the organization, particularly as it begins to take shape. As a demonstration of that commitment, members may be expected to pay a nominal fee on an annual basis to ensure that they receive “member” benefits. Individuals have unique skills and knowledge to share with the group, as well community and supply chain connections that they can contribute as they feel appropriate and comfortable. Individual members are also expected to act, through participation in events, exhibits and training opportunities, whether it is as a student, teacher, or mentor.



ROLE OF A NETWORK

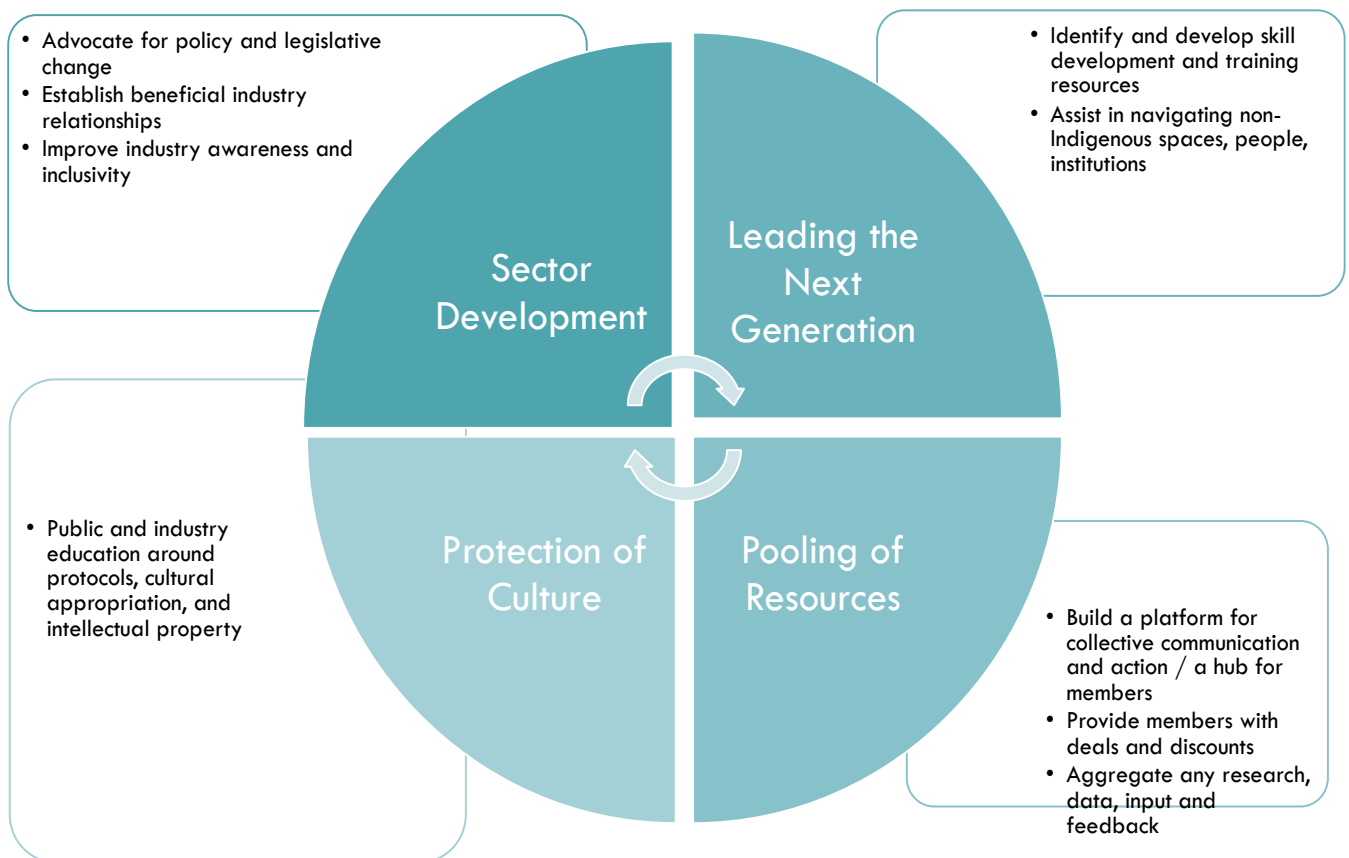


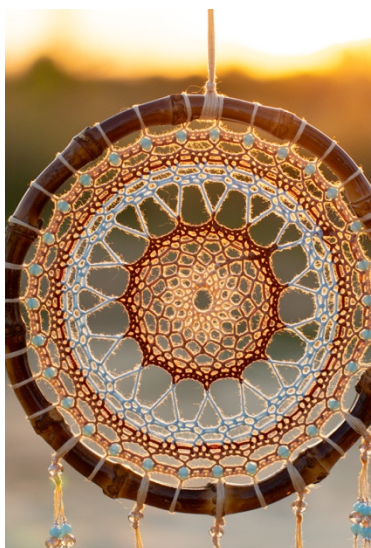
An artist-driven arm of the IFA could serve as the coordinator for collaboration and action. The IFA provides an existing legal framework, and as a not-for-profit can serve as an umbrella organization for a subsidiary for the purpose of sharing resources. As a “trade” member organization or an “industry alliance” of the IFA, the network would share a similar goal but would have its own form of governance.

This can be in the form of a “Steering Committee” or another form of agreed upon oversight body that coordinates with the IFA (the IFA would require a resource such as a Network weaver), or the network can be “self-steering” and self-organized. Either way, it needs to be clear how are decisions made and who has the authority to make decisions.

ROLE OF INDIGENOUS FASHION ARTS

Networks often have an organization that plays a facilitator or broker role – in this instance that would be the IFA. Network weavers begin to SERVE AS A HUB, connecting individuals and clusters which can collaborate or help expand the network. As a potential “arm” of the IFA, a networked “association” provides efficiency and effectiveness as members will be using an established legal structure and organization with existing capacity and reputation to build from. There is no need to create a whole new business or funding model, rather simply build an arm of the IFA that could apply for funding and grants, possibly generate revenue, and provide a shared platform for artists to plug into. Once the network has determined its priorities and preferred relationship structure, the IFA can help establish the necessary supports (e.g., network weaver).





NEXT STEPS: MOVING FORWARD

As a grassroots community-based and Indigenous-led organization, IFA takes a long-term relational approach. IFA would like to continue working with a roster of trusted collaborators and artists while also welcoming new talent as we grow. We are taking a careful approach to ensure that we build our capacity in a sustainable way, in line with our values of care and respect.

This session summary is the starting point for further discussion and engagement. We would like to:



Receive participant feedback on report



Reconvene for discussion of roles and responsibilities and next steps



Expand and open the network (regional discussions)



Finalize and commit to a relationship structure

Below is the beginning of a timeline for completing the work over the next year.



PARTICIPANTS LIST

Bobby	Brower
Cheryl	Suggashie
Cory	Hunlin
Evan	Ducharme
Inuk	Trennert
Janelle	Wawia
Justin	Louis
Korina	Emmerich
Livia	Manywounds
Mandee	McDonald
Margaret	Jacobs
Meghan	Weeks
Melrene	Saloy-EagleSpeaker
Rey Rose	Hope
Rykelle	Kemp
Te Ataraiti	Waretini
Bethann	McIvor
Brianna	Olson
Brit	Ellis
Jayde	Naponse
Jaymie	Campbell
Lynette	La Fontaine
Patricia	Cajas
Theresa	Burning
Trip	Phoenix
Niio	Perkins