



Efforts towards Reconciliation?

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Introduction

Indigenous peoples have a long history of service in the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), notwithstanding the power dynamics of settler colonialism.¹ Historically, Indigenous individuals joined the Canadian military despite at times facing discrimination related to their identity.²

partnership with Indigenous communities called Bold Eagle. The program had a positive impact on the socio-economic conditions of Indigenous participants and created a meaningful connection between communities and the CAF.³ Since the establishment of Bold Eagle, the CAF has developed additional programs for Indigenous peoples and initiatives that incorporate cultural components. These programs and initiatives have created opportunities for employment and leadership for Indigenous individuals that contribute to the

Canada has a fast-growing Indigenous population of about two million, comprising three main groups recognized under the Canadian Constitution: First Nations, Inuit, and Métis. These groups are diverse and constitute more than 600 Indigenous communities speaking over 70 Indigenous languages. Indigenous peoples represent about 5% of Canada's multicultural population of over 41 million⁴

Indigenous. For Indigenous peoples, serving in the military means facing many challenges including cultural adaptation, language barriers, and travelling from remote communities. While Indigenous representation in the military remains below the target set by the CAF Employment Equity Plan,⁵ it has been growing steadily thanks to the CAF programs for Indigenous peoples and other initiatives.

This policy brief outlines the present approach of the CAF towards Indigenous military participation drawing from a pilot research project involving 32 informal and background consultations with Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders held in April and May 2024. The consultations covered a wide range of topics related to Indigenous participation and engagement in the CAF, which are not fully explored here, such as the Canadian Rangers, a subcomponent of the Canadian Army Reserve operating in Canada's northern and

In this policy brief, the focus will be on CAF programs for Indigenous peoples along with related CAF Indigenous initiatives.

The analysis suggests that Indigenous programs and initiatives have a dual purpose of increasing Indigenous participation in the military and promoting national reconciliation, although challenges remain. The authors acknowledge being Caucasian female scholars of immigrant background with an interest in diversity in military organisations including the experience of Indigenous peoples in Defence. Recognizing there are limitations to doing research in this space as non-Indigenous scholars, the goal of the project is to contribute perspectives and recommendations on the participation of Indigenous peoples in the CAF in a way that is culturally sensitive and appropriate towards Indigenous peoples and cultures.

CAF programs for Indigenous peoples

The CAF has implemented three distinct sets of programs for Indigenous peoples aimed at attracting and recruiting Indigenous individuals: the summer training programs, the CAF Indigenous Entry Program (CAFIEP), and the Indigenous Leadership Opportunity Year (ILOY).⁷

languages, and advertised through the CAF recruiting website as “unique educational programs and entry plans for Indigenous Peoples” aiming to provide Indigenous applicants with opportunities to learn about military life, have challenging and rewarding educational and leadership experiences, with all expenses covered and no long term commitments.⁸ While

elders and counsellors.

bases across Canada. Bold Eagle is the longest running (since 1960) and largest (over 1000) Indigenous military band in the CAF. It is based in Edmonton, Alberta and performs at various military and public events across Canada.

Established in 1997, this program provides a concise, intensive introduction to the military environment, facilitating informed career decisions. In three weeks, participants become familiar with military life, including exercises similar to Basic Training and realistic military experiences. The CAFIEP does not include scheduled Indigenous cultural activities and teachings; however, civilian Indigenous counsellors, who may also be recognized as elders by their communities, are available to provide culturally appropriate support to participants during and after the program such as smudging or sharing circles, as needed. Participants can either train at the Canadian Forces Leadership and Recruit School in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu, in Quebec, or at Canadian Forces Base Halifax, in Nova Scotia. Participants are not enlisted in the CAF, rather, they are enrolled as civilians as this is considered a “try before you buy” program. Costs associated with travelling to and from the program

¹⁷ the CAF data on Indigenous programs since 2008 show that they have consistently attracted Indigenous peoples to the military.¹⁸ Nevertheless, it remains unclear how many Indigenous individuals join the military without participating in these programs.

During the consultations, some expressed concerns that recruiters may be funnelling their billets and meet the reporting requirements of the CAF EE Plan, without considering with the entry experience in the military and retention after the programs. For example, if an Indigenous individual meets the academic requirements and wishes to apply to join the

our consultations, we found that although there are Indigenous recruiters, some of whom are Indigenous, they receive little training on Indigenous attraction.

The CAF EE Plan 2021-2026 acknowledges that the CAF has made little progress since

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As mentioned, the CAF programs for Indigenous peoples have contributed to the rising

fostering leadership and healing, promoting a cohesive society that can repair relations

In Canada, the journey towards reconciliation and building renewed relationships with Indigenous peoples began in 1998 sparked by a report by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples including a chapter on the Indian residential schools. In 2008, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established to investigate the history and document the personal stories of survivors of the residential schools and, in 2015, it

relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country.”²⁴ To advance reconciliation and redress the legacy of residential schools, the TRC issued 94 calls to action addressing the federal, provincial, and territorial governments of Canada and the wider Canadian society.²⁵ The calls to action include improved education, health, and

of the four EE designated groups, as well as 2SLGBTQI+ members. The Defence Team Champion for Indigenous Peoples is traditionally the Commander of the Canadian Army. Although there is no requirement for the Champion to be Indigenous, from June 2022 to July 2024, the Defence Team Champion for Indigenous Peoples was Lieutenant-General Jocelyn Paul, a First Nations and member of the Huron-Wendat.²⁹ Lieutenant-General Paul is also

Our consultations also revealed that many Indigenous members of the Defence Team use their positions and roles to promote Indigenous awareness, community engagement, and positive relations between the military and Indigenous communities that align with the scope of reconciliation. Indigenous CAF members often promote a positive image of the military to their families and communities during visits or after their service. However, during our consultations, some said that they sometimes choose not to wear their CAF uniforms when visiting Indigenous communities to avoid sparking tensions with community members who hold anti-military views. We found that the memory of the 1990 Kanesatake Resistance (Oka Crisis) which involved the confrontation between a group of Mohawk protesters, on the one hand, and the Quebec police, the RCMP, and the Canadian Army, on the other hand, is unhealed and a source of mistrust.³⁰

DIAG co-chairs and base elders gather and consult with Indigenous CAF members to help them navigate a career in the military openly as an Indigenous person. They provide advice on matters such as racial discrimination and culturally appropriate protocols including

communities surrounding military bases. Community members are increasingly consulted on matters relevant to them. They are also invited to military bases to speak on Truth and Reconciliation Day and other events, and the military is invited to local powwows and to

Since the institution of the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation in 2021, Defence has embraced the language of reconciliation to promote initiatives that support Indigenous Defence members and engagement with non-military Indigenous communities. For example, early in 2024, the Assembly of Defence Team Indigenous Advisors (ADTIA) was created to

³¹ The idea of ADTIA was proposed at the Defence Working Group on Indigenous Reconciliation in October 2023 and approved by the Defence Director

Indigenous Advisors across Defence, share best practices, and ensure lines of communication that serve the Indigenous military community. In 2023, DND issued a grant scheme, the DND Indigenous Reconciliation Program, to fund initiatives that help build and maintain relationships between Indigenous communities and DND/CAF.³²

\$1.5 million to Indigenous peoples, governments, organisations, and entities to support costs associated with targeted or occasional events that encourage dialogue between Indigenous

Recommendations

Our research points to the following recommendations that will position the CAF to further promote reconciliation, as well as improve Indigenous attraction, recruitment, and representation in the CAF.

While the various programs have many strengths, the consultations also revealed some challenges including the

it was uncovered that they are not all as well run as Bold Eagle, which should represent the standard for other programs to follow. For example, a graduate of the Grey Wolf

who did not appear to have completed any meaningful Indigenous cultures and awareness training. The program was subsequently paused for a few years until it was revamped. Additionally, the RCAF should also consider developing its own summer program to create a path for Indigenous peoples to join the Air Force, considering that it has the lowest Indigenous representation among the three services namely 2.6%, compared to 3.2% in the Army and 3.0% in the Navy.³³ In our consultations, we found that the objectives of the ILOY program are unclear and contested between

academic faculty who are more concerned about academic standards. In an attempt to bring some clarity, in May 2024, the Canadian Defence Academy (CDA) the Training Authority responsible for ILOY, issued the ILOY mission statement emphasizing the program's goals of fostering leadership and personal growth in a challenging and

opportunity to serve Canada in a leadership role, potentially through employment in the CAF.³⁴ To date, the new ILOY mission statement is not published on the CAF

approved. Furthermore, it was mentioned that ILOY students would prefer to be better more freedom to select courses based on their interests and academic background.

individual learning plans. We were informed that in the future, ILOY students will be

and incorporating scheduled cultural events by Indigenous elders or counsellors rather than on an “as needed” basis.

Our research found that recruiters’ training in Indigenous programs are mentioned in their training, familiarising with them is left to recruiters’ discretion. Due to the short duration of their postings (2-3 years), many recruiters do not invest the necessary time in this area. This gap may be partially addressed in future by a recently launched in-person course called “Indigenous Cultural Orientation” which will be compulsory for recruiters involved with Indigenous applicants and communities. The objectives of the course include interacting with Indigenous peoples, describing DND/CAF initiatives concerning Indigenous people, and incorporating Indigenous considerations in

have to be assessed in due timeh(4i W 3489.36463 Tw 12 spokeTJETEMous peoples)19.8nclu

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in 2020 representing 2SLGBTQI+ members (Two Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Questioning, Intersex and more).

28 <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/conduct-and-culture/diversity-inclusion/defence-advisory-groups.html>
