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Data that Makes a Difference Conference

REIMAGINING DATA: INDIGENOUS LED DATA COLLECTION

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HOW DO WE CONNECT DATA BACK TO HUMANITY?

Current Reality:

- Data systems prioritize quantitative outcomes over relational outcomes
- Based on positivist paradigms within a forced hierarchy of pluralistic realities
- Data reflects capitalistic systems (Data = Currency)

Pressures/Tensions:

- Spreadsheet accountability vs. community accountability
- Eurocentric quantitative reporting systems with little input
- Community work is relational
- Financial competition



GROUNDING PRINCIPLES

- UNDRIP: Article 3
- CARE principles (Global Indigenous Alliance)
- OCAP® (First Nations Information Governance Centre)
- Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit: Guiding principles. (Government of Nunavut)
- National Métis Data Governance Strategy (Métis National Council)

AGENCY & FUNDER LEVEL

- Community engagement over data decisions
- Data has a sacred responsibility; it is a gift shared
- Defining indicators, interpreting meaning, and naming system harms
- It is not just data sovereignty, it is **narrative sovereignty**, the ability to tell our stories about our lived realities

CORE TENSION FOR INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY ENTITIES

IH-CE responsibility: Two-Eyed
Seeing (Etuaptmumk):

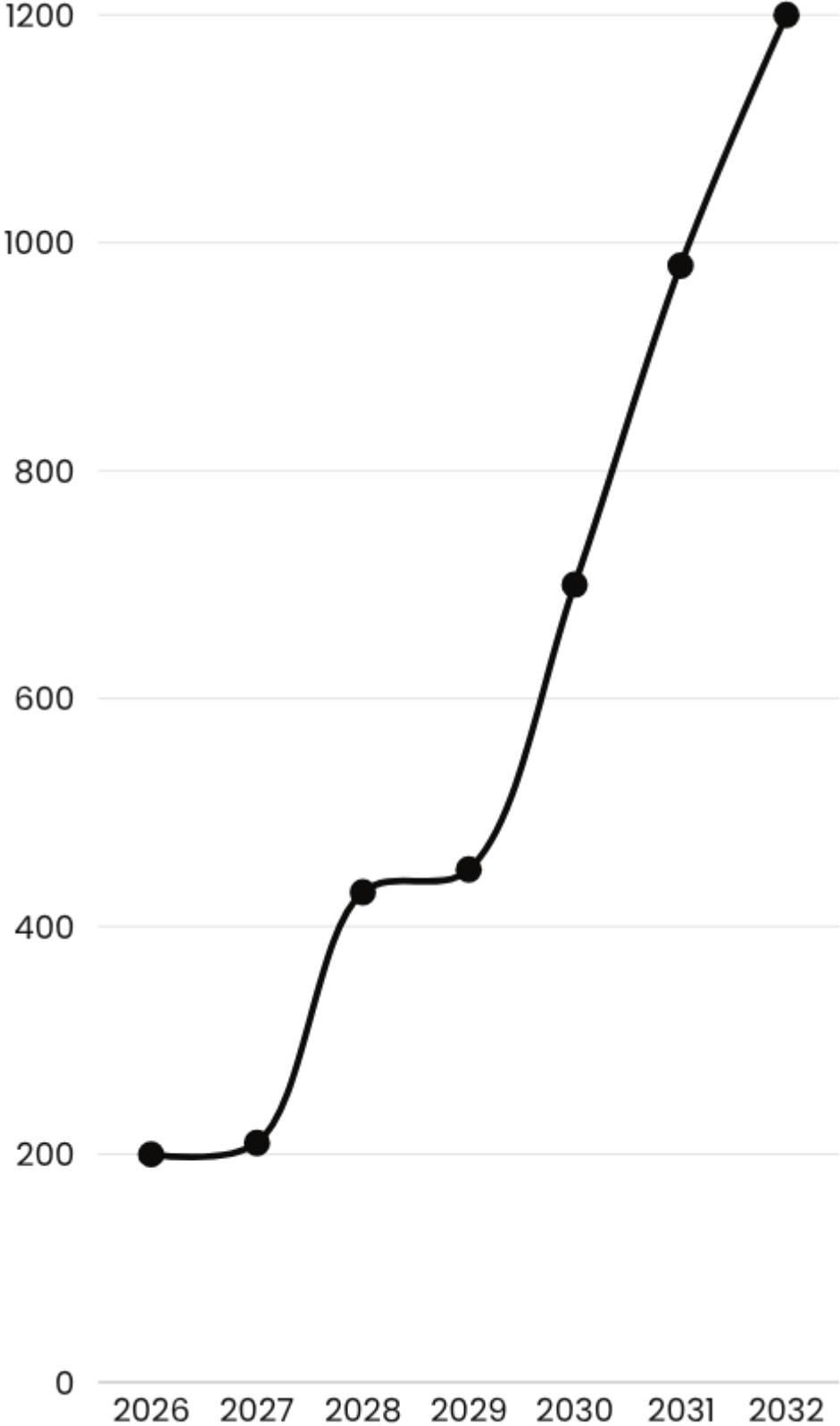
- One eye: data systems
- One eye: community accountability
- Balancing and bridging between two paradigms

Two Systems, Two ways of Knowing

Spreadsheet Accountability	Community Accountability
Outputs	Relationships
Timelines	Non-linear Journeys
Standardization	Cultural specificity

WHERE DOES THE DATA GO?

Data Pathways & Accountability Gaps



Current Reality:

- Upstream Data Flow:
 - Frontline → Database → Community Entity → Federal reporting → Public dashboards

Key issues:

- Participants and agencies rarely see how their data
- Data is taken and shared with various partners without context
- Community is too often used as a catch-all for the area

Reframing Accountability:

- Questions to Consider
- Circular accountability:
 - Community → Agency → Funder → Community



INDIGENOUS DATA SHARING AGREEMENTS

- Data review committees
- Indigenous-led DSA developing in community
- Indigenous ways of knowing and doing

WHAT DATA CAPTURES VS. WHAT IT MISSES

Captures transactional metrics:

- Housed
- Service Outputs

Misses relational and systemic metrics:

- Relationships as medicine
- Non-linear healing journeys
- System harm

What gets reduced:

- Stories → Outputs
- Relationships → Numbers
- Progress → Timelines

What creates stability becomes invisible and underfunded.



STORY 1: SYSTEM ACCESS

Narrative:

- Access Housing
- Access Income Supports

Data Will Show:

- Application submitted
- Delay in housing
- Time to housed

What Data Hides:

- No access to phones/internet
- Hours on hold require time to navigate bureaucracy
- Missed deadlines require literacy in forms/processes
- Mental & emotional harm to fit in systems not built for us

Consequences:

- Lost context becomes a misrepresentation of reality
- Participants are framed as “non-compliant” or “unsuccessful”
- This reality is a system access failure, not a “delay” data point.



STORY 2: WHEN DATA CAUSES HARM

Narrative:

- Mother in hotel
- Report made = payment nearly withheld
- Multiple systems acting without coordination

Data Will Show:

- Report
- Resolved

What Data Hides:

- Hours of advocacy
- Risk of losing housing
- Stress and instability for the family
- System surveillance

Consequences:

- Decision made based only on data
- Systems interact with each other without the participant at the center; participant's voice is absent
- The system trusted the data more than it trusted the person.



WHEN REPORTING SHAPES THE WORK



Standardized Reporting

- Designed for comparability (demographics, geographic, etc.), not community or cultural considerations



Impacts

- Program drift toward “what is measurable.”
 - Focus is on the “destination”, not the journey
- Administrative overload:
 - Time spent reporting vs. time spent serving



Consequence

- Overloading limited capacity
- Programs designed for spreadsheets
- Moral distress
- Relationships are no longer medicine

ROLE FOR INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY ENTITIES

Bridge between:

- Funder requirements (Canadian methodologies)
- Community realities (Cultural & contextual considerations)

Translators, Protectors, Navigators:

- Translate metrics from meaningful context
- Protecting against harmful data use
- Advocating for flexibility and context

Invisible labour:

- Ethical decision-making
- Lack of resources and mental overload
- Emotional load of advocacy against the walls of power

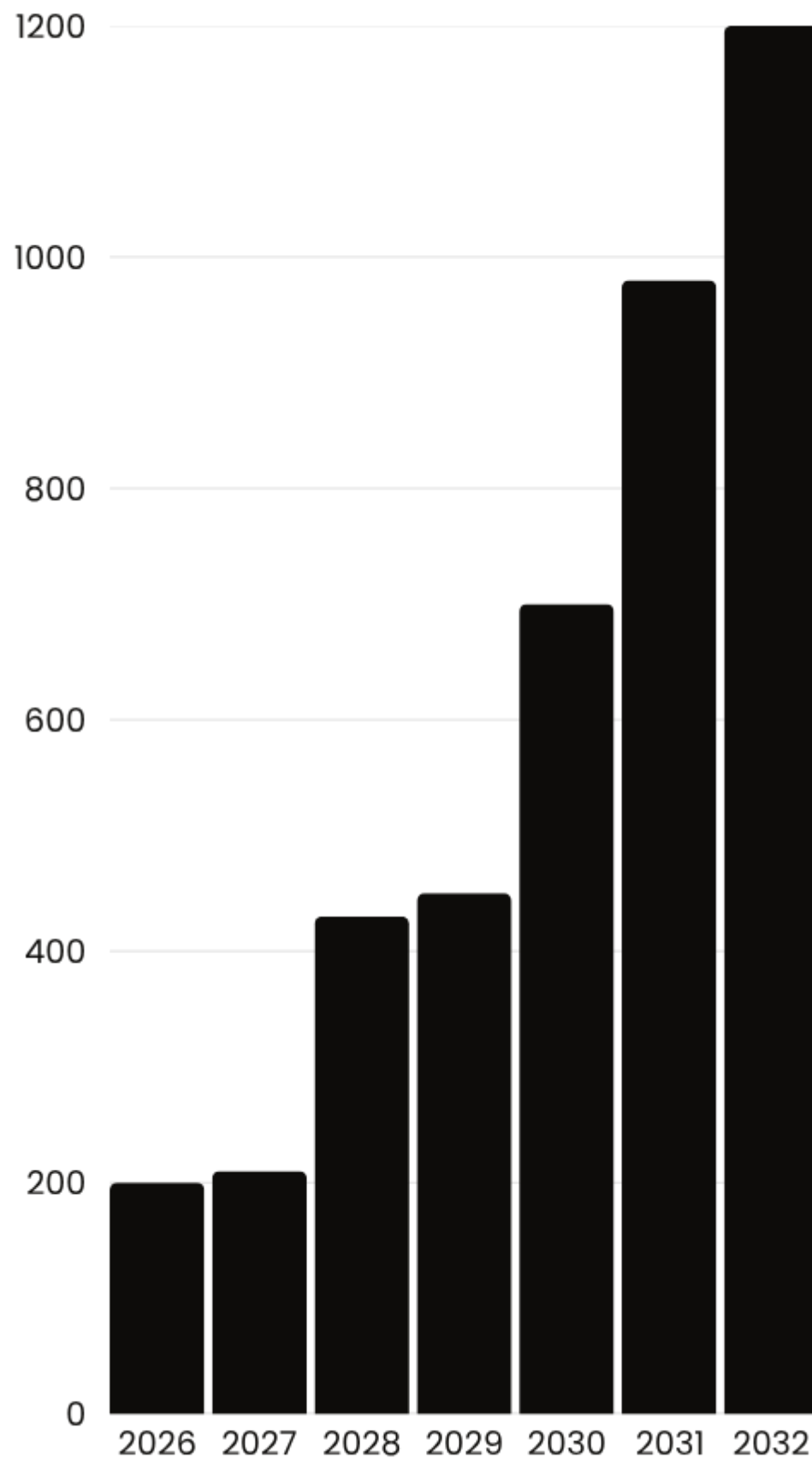


WHAT GOOD PARTNERSHIP LOOKS LIKE

- Co-development of indicators
- Narrative reporting processes
- Open dialogue on challenges and realities
- Flexibility in program model/budget changes
- Shared accountability with each other
- Multi-year agreements
- Hands-on support for capacity building

EXPANDING WHAT COUNTS AS OUTCOME

Community Define Indictors



Co-design reporting templates:

- Reconnection to culture and land
- Strengthened kinship relationships
- Movement toward stability (not just “housed”)

Shift from:

- Deficit-based → desire-based indicators
- Funder defined → agencies defined
- Data neutrality → cultural definition and interpretation

MEASURING WHAT MATTERS

Dual Track Reporting



Quantitative metrics (required)

- # of individuals housed
- Time to housed



Narrative & relational data (essentials)

- Success defined by participants and agencies
- Systemic factors



TOOLS:

- Case narratives
- Participant voice (quotes, letters)
- Digital stories/videos/audio recordings





MOVING FORWARD

- Data is not neutral—it reflects values and power
- Indigenous Data Sovereignty is a practice, not just principles
 - Indigenous-led reporting, data platforms, and data sharing agreements
- Systems change requires:
 - Acknowledgement and space for Indigenous self-determination
 - Development of meaningful relationships

HOW DO WE CONNECT DATA TO HUMANITY?

- Shift from extracting data to honouring stories
- Treating Data as a gift, not an entitlement
- Honouring the house the data comes from
- Data carries a story; carries responsibility for future generations





THANK YOU TO OUR COMMUNITY

Indigenous Housing Collaborative

- Alexander FN
- Bent Arrow Traditional Healing Society
- Big Stone Cree Nation
- Confederacy of Treaty 6 First Nations
- Creating Hope Society
- Edmonton 2 Spirit Society
- Edmonton Aboriginal Seniors Center
- Enoch First Nations
- End Poverty Edmonton
- Helen Hazel House
- Metis Housing
- Native Counselling Services of Alberta
- NiGiNan Housing Ventures
- O'Chiese First Nations
- Otipemisiwak Metis Government
- Paul Band First Nations
- Pisim Cancer Care
- Poundmakers Lodge
- Red Road Healing Society
- Stonebear
- Tall Cree First Nations
- Treaty 8 Yellowhead Tribal Council
- Tribal Chief Ventures
- Wahkohtowin Society
- White Eagle Lodge

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