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**The World Indigenous Research Alliance (WIRA):  
Mediating and Mobilizing Indigenous Peoples'  
Educational Knowledge and Aspirations**

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**Abstract:** There is an Indigenous resurgence in education occurring globally. For more than a century Euro-western approaches have controlled the provision and quality of education to, and for Indigenous peoples. The World Indigenous Research Alliance (WIRA) established in 2012, is a grass-roots movement of Indigenous scholars passionate about making a difference for Indigenous peoples and their education. WIRA is a service-oriented endeavor designed by Indigenous scholars working in mainstream institutions to support each other and to provide culturally safe spaces to share ideas. This paper highlights how WIRA came to be, and outlines the nature and scope of these shared endeavours. Strategically, WIRA operates under the mandate of the World Indigenous Nations Higher Educational Consortium (WINHEC) who regularly report to the General Assembly of the United Nations Indigenous Peoples Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) pertaining to Indigenous Peoples and their education (United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, 2007). Indeed, this collaboration provides the opportunity to share best practices across respective countries, and to co-design interdisciplinary, dynamic and innovative educational research. Since the inception of WIRA, a number of research priorities have emerged alongside potential funding models we believe can assist our shared work moving forward. The launching of WIRA is timely, and sure to accelerate the goals envisaged by WINHEC, and Indigenous peoples aspirations in education more generally.

**Keywords:** indigenous education; international; self-determination; collaborative research; aspirations; knowledge mobilization.

### **La Alianza Mundial de Investigaciones Indígenas (WIRA): Mediación y Movilización de los conocimientos y aspiraciones educativas de los Pueblos Indígenas**

**Resumen:** Hay un resurgimiento indígena en la educación que ocurre a nivel mundial. Durante más de un siglo enfoques euro-occidentales han controlado el suministro y la calidad de la educación de y para los pueblos indígenas. La Alianza Indígena Mundial de Investigación (WIRA por su sigla en inglés), establecida en 2012, es un movimiento de base de académicos indígenas apasionado por contribuir a los pueblos indígenas y su educación. WIRA se orienta para brindar servicios diseñados por estudiosos indígenas que trabajan en instituciones convencionales para apoyarse mutuamente y proporcionar espacios culturalmente seguros para compartir ideas. Este documento pone de relieve cómo WIRA llegó a ser, y describe la naturaleza y el alcance de estos esfuerzos compartidos. Estratégicamente, WIRA opera bajo el mandato del Consorcio para la Educación Superior de las Naciones Indígenas del Mundo (WINHEC por su sigla en inglés) que informa periódicamente a la Asamblea General de las Naciones Indígenas, Foro Permanente de las Naciones Unidas sobre

Cuestiones Indígenas (UNPFII) pertenecientes a los pueblos indígenas y su educación (Foro Permanente sobre Cuestiones Indígenas de las Naciones Unidas, 2007). De hecho, esta colaboración ofrece la oportunidad de compartir las mejores prácticas de los respectivos países, y para el co-diseño de una investigación educativa interdisciplinar, dinámica e innovadora. Desde el inicio de WIRA, una serie de prioridades de investigación han surgido junto a modelos potenciales de financiación que creemos que pueden ayudar a nuestro trabajo común de seguir adelante. El lanzamiento de WIRA es una oportunidad para acelerar las metas previstas por WINHEC y las aspiraciones de los pueblos indígenas sobre la educación en general.

**Palabras clave:** educación indígena; internacional; libre determinación; investigación colaborativa; aspiraciones; movilización de los conocimientos.

### **A Aliança Internacional de Pesquisa Indígena (WIRA): Mediação e Mobilização de conhecimentos e aspirações educacionais dos povos indígenas**

**Resumo:** Há um ressurgimento da educação indígena, que ocorre em todo o mundo. Por mais de um século abordagens euro-ocidentais tem controlado a oferta e a qualidade da educação de e para os povos indígenas. A Aliança Internacional de Pesquisa Indígena (WIRA por sua sigla em Inglês), criada em 2012, é um movimento popular de acadêmicos indígenas apaixonados por contribuir para os povos indígenas e sua educação. WIRA tem como objetivo prestar serviços projetados por estudiosos indígenas que trabalham em instituições regulares para apoiar uns aos outros e proporcionar espaços culturalmente seguros para compartilhar idéias. Este documento destaca como WIRA se formou, e descreve a natureza e a extensão desses esforços compartilhados.

Estrategicamente, WIRA opera sob o mandato do Consórcio Mundial para Educação Superior das Nações Indígenas (WINHEC por sua sigla em Inglês) que informe periodicamente a o Fórum Permanente da Assembleia Geral sobre Povos Indígenas das Nações Unidas sobre Questões Indígenas (UNPFII) pertencentes aos povos indígena e educação (Fórum Permanente sobre Questões Indígenas das Nações Unidas, 2007). De fato, esta colaboração oferece uma oportunidade para compartilhar as melhores práticas nos respectivos países, e para co-projetar uma pesquisa educacional interdisciplinar, dinâmica e inovadora. Desde o início do WIRA, uma série de prioridades de investigação surgiram com modelos de financiamento potenciales que achamos que poderiam ajudar o nosso trabalho comum. O lançamento da WIRA é uma oportunidade para acelerar as metas estabelecidas pela WINHEC e para as aspirações dos povos indígenas à educação em geral.

**Palavras-chave:** educação indígena; internacional; auto-determinação; investigação em colaboração; aspirações; mobilização do conhecimento.

## **Introduction**

Indigenous nations are collecting their energies and driving the resurgence of Indigenous people and their knowledge worldwide. The World Indigenous Research Alliance (WIRA) is a strategic and determined response to this growing movement. The objective being to improve upon the realities of our co-existence with settler societies and to assert ourselves as self-determining and resilient in the face of new forms of colonization. For Indigenous peoples worldwide, this struggle has often resulted in the denial of the scholarship of their knowledge and knowledge systems. Similarly, it has also hindered our ability to participate fully in education systems based on culturally-incongruent policies and practices intergenerationally (United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), 2007, 2009; World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium (WINHEC), 2014).

Whilst there is evidence of increased engagement of Indigenous peoples in the western education system for over the past number of decades, the on-going educational and academic disparities between the Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous people of Aotearoa-New Zealand, Australia, Canada, Hawai'i<sup>1</sup>, and the United States remains a major concern in regards to nurturing and fostering genuine educational partnerships for respectful and empowering decision-making.

In each of the partner countries, legacies of colonial oppression have had a significant impact upon the wellbeing and development of Indigenous people (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Grande, 2004; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008; Smith, 2012). Today, Indigenous peoples are tasked with addressing the myriad of results that colonization has had (and continues to have) on our communities and nations. Land theft, forcible relocation, suppression of Indigenous cultural practices, values and beliefs, loss of language, and disruption of family life are but a few of the consequences of colonial policies (Alfred, 2009; Jackson, 1998; Mutu, 1998). These factors, among others, have denied Indigenous people their right to self-determination, and their inherent sovereign rights to bicultural and cultural education at all levels (Battiste, 2005; Raunati Hook, 2007; Walker, 2005).

Despite the development of treaties and international instruments of law, culturally-incongruent policies imposed by successive governments have resulted in Indigenous peoples experiencing less equitable educational and academic opportunities than non-Indigenous peoples (UNPFII, 2007, 2009). Around the world, unacceptable levels of Indigenous student's achievement across all levels of the education system remain (Assembly of First Nations (AFN), 2012; Marriott & Sim, 2014; Ministry of Education, 2008). Although there are increasing signs of Indigenous people succeeding in the education system, the attrition and progression rates of Indigenous students remains unacceptably low (AFN, 2012; Marriott & Sim, 2014; Ministry of Education, 2008). Concerned for the wellbeing and development of their people, Indigenous scholars, knowledge holders, and Elders are mobilizing to address the educational discrepancies imposed upon their people. In so doing, Indigenous scholars and community educators are challenging governments to address the imposition of political practices that have kept their people culturally, socially, politically, and economically marginalized.

In their quest to address the conditions imposed upon their people, the voices of Indigenous scholars, knowledge holders and community educators are progressively mounting a stern challenge to the inappropriate nature and imposition of the western systems in a manner that is culturally unique and revolutionary. Of particular note, is the work being pursued by a global network of Indigenous scholars, knowledge holders, Elders and community educators committed to progressing the goals and objectives of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples through education (United Nations General Assembly, 2007). Established in 2002, the World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium (WINHEC) created a vehicle through which a series of ground-breaking initiatives could be developed. This grassroots organization offered Indigenous Nations the opportunity to advance the education of their people through evidenced-based, community-targeted research, and culturally-aligned education.

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<sup>1</sup> The Hawaiian Kingdom acquired recognition of its independence on December 19, 1842, by the United States of America and declared itself a neutral state in 1854. For information on the prolonged and illegal occupation of the Hawaiian Kingdom by the United States of America since 1898 and the enduring sovereignty of Hawai'i, see Sai, D. K. (2011). *Ua mau ke ea - sovereignty endures: An overview of the political and legal history of the Hawaiian islands*. Honolulu: Pu'a Foundation.

This paper highlights how a collective of Indigenous academics from Aotearoa-New Zealand, Australia, Canada and the United States (Hawai'i) are working collaboratively with WINHEC to advance the aims of the World Indigenous Research Alliance (WIRA).

## **A Global Alliance for Indigenous Educational Research**

The intent to establish a global Indigenous research entity followed an extensive global survey by the WINHEC Research and Journal Working Party (RJWP) to ascertain the thoughts of a wide spectrum of stakeholders as to the role of research on the wellbeing of Indigenous Nations. The findings of this global survey contributed to a proposal being brought forward for Executive Board consideration at the WINHEC AGM hosted by Dong Hwa University, Taiwan in 2012. It was found that Indigenous academics, community leaders and Elders are significantly under-represented within the mainstream university sector, in the development of educational policy and within research worldwide.

The proposal aligned with WINHEC-RJWP to address the current under-representation of Indigenous peoples in fields of research that engages with, and builds upon the capacity within Indigenous communities. The overall vision of the global Indigenous research entity WIRA was to build a forum through which the scholarship and contributions of Indigenous research and knowledge can be profiled and acknowledged at national and international levels.

The 2014 WINHEC AGM afforded many of the working parties the opportunity to reconnect and update one another on recent developments, as well as to discuss key initiatives, strategies, and activities for the coming year. The launching of the World Indigenous Nations University (WINU) at Crown Point, Navajo Technical University, New Mexico in August 2013 was a significant milestone bought about by Indigenous peoples themselves (WINHEC, 2013). WINHEC, WINU, and the World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education (WIPCE, 2015) provide the strategic and professional validity to legitimize what we do as part of the WIRA.

## **World Indigenous Research Alliance (WIRA)**

WIRA was officially launched at the 2012 WINHEC AGM and research conference held in Taiwan. The WIRA vision refers to "Indigenous peoples leading research action with, for and by Indigenous peoples through WINHEC collaborations." The key rationale of WIRA is to provide a network for educators, academics, tribal, and community groups collaboratively working to improve the educational futures of Indigenous peoples. The rationale is motivated by three key factors. First, the ongoing educational disparities between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous peoples remain glaringly unacceptable. Second, a legacy of loss underpins the on-going crisis of inequalities of Indigenous peoples in education. Third, the loss of land, language, culture, and identity are considered the most significant factors responsible for Indigenous peoples' underachievement in the current education system.

WIRA mission is to build Indigenous educational researcher capacity and Indigenous research leadership accessible to Indigenous communities and organizations. Through the use of technology, WIRA consists of geographically separated research sites or nodes. This mission is being achieved through initiatives that involve fostering respectful relationships between Indigenous peoples and academic institutions to achieve the educational aspirations our communities actively seek.

As such, WIRA has a number of key goals. First, we are establishing a critical mass of Indigenous scholars who engage in research at international, national and tribal levels in diverse

Indigenous contexts. Through this interconnected national and international consortium, Indigenous educational researchers will be empowered to protect and promote diverse Indigenous peoples' knowledge, stories and histories through evidentiary and culturally astute methods of consultation and engagement. We will continue to strive for a strong position for Indigenous research on issues of importance to Indigenous people at the forefront of excellence sought by entities such as the United Nations, UNESCO and other national and international research entities. Second, we are building on and strengthening the existing culturally and professionally skilled, qualified Indigenous research workforce who will lead in shaping and implementing a global Indigenous research agenda that influences national social policy around Indigenous issues. Through these initiatives, we will provide a unique and viable research alternative to communities, Indigenous and non-Indigenous stakeholders, governments, and service providers nationally and internationally. Finally, we will enable and engage in Indigenous-led research as a visible and central component contributing to the development and growth of nations that proactively embraces the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and other instruments of international note such as the Declaration of Human Rights for Indigenous Peoples.

The heart of WIRA seeks to collaboratively address several key issues. There has been a historical lack of engagement with Indigenous peoples and communities in research designed to influence the development of policies and services for Indigenous populations. This lack of tangible collaboration and engagement of Indigenous academics, Elders, knowledge holders and communities in the development of research projects, research designs and methodologies has created a serious rift between Indigenous peoples and communities and the academic community, in some cases. Limited and questionable cultural competencies among some non-Indigenous academic staff engaging in Indigenous-focused research have also served to widen this and the consequences experienced by Indigenous populations often dire. The under-representation of Indigenous academic staff and Elders as supervisors and role models for Indigenous postgraduate students has also made it difficult for many Indigenous people to attain careers as researchers.

WIRA's terms of reference guide and enables space to mediate and advocate for changes in education that will improve, benefit, and/or advance the educational aspirations of Indigenous peoples and communities. WIRA is now the forum responsible within WINHEC to support, enact, and conduct quality research and scholarship initiatives, developments, and activities that benefit the educational aspirations of Indigenous peoples, and communities. In taking up this responsibility, WIRA engages with Elders, local knowledge holders, WINHEC Executive Board members, and communities and is also the forum for the discussion of strategies and priority areas for action to support and enact.

As a result of this mandate, a number of priorities for WIRA have been identified. First, WIRA will engage in research and scholarly collaborations for, by, and with Indigenous peoples and their communities regarding their educational goals, aspirations, improvements and outcomes. Secondly, it will foster the development of national and international collaborative research between Indigenous researchers and, where applicable, non-Indigenous researchers, that highlights the expertise of Indigenous scholars, Elders, and representatives based in educational institutions, community organizations, and in government. Thirdly, it will provide well-informed advice and guidance to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Rights, Economic and Social Council, and other forums of note on issues of pertinence to Indigenous Peoples education through research. The following diagram provides a visual representation of the strategic priorities for action identified within WIRA, drawing on these strengths.

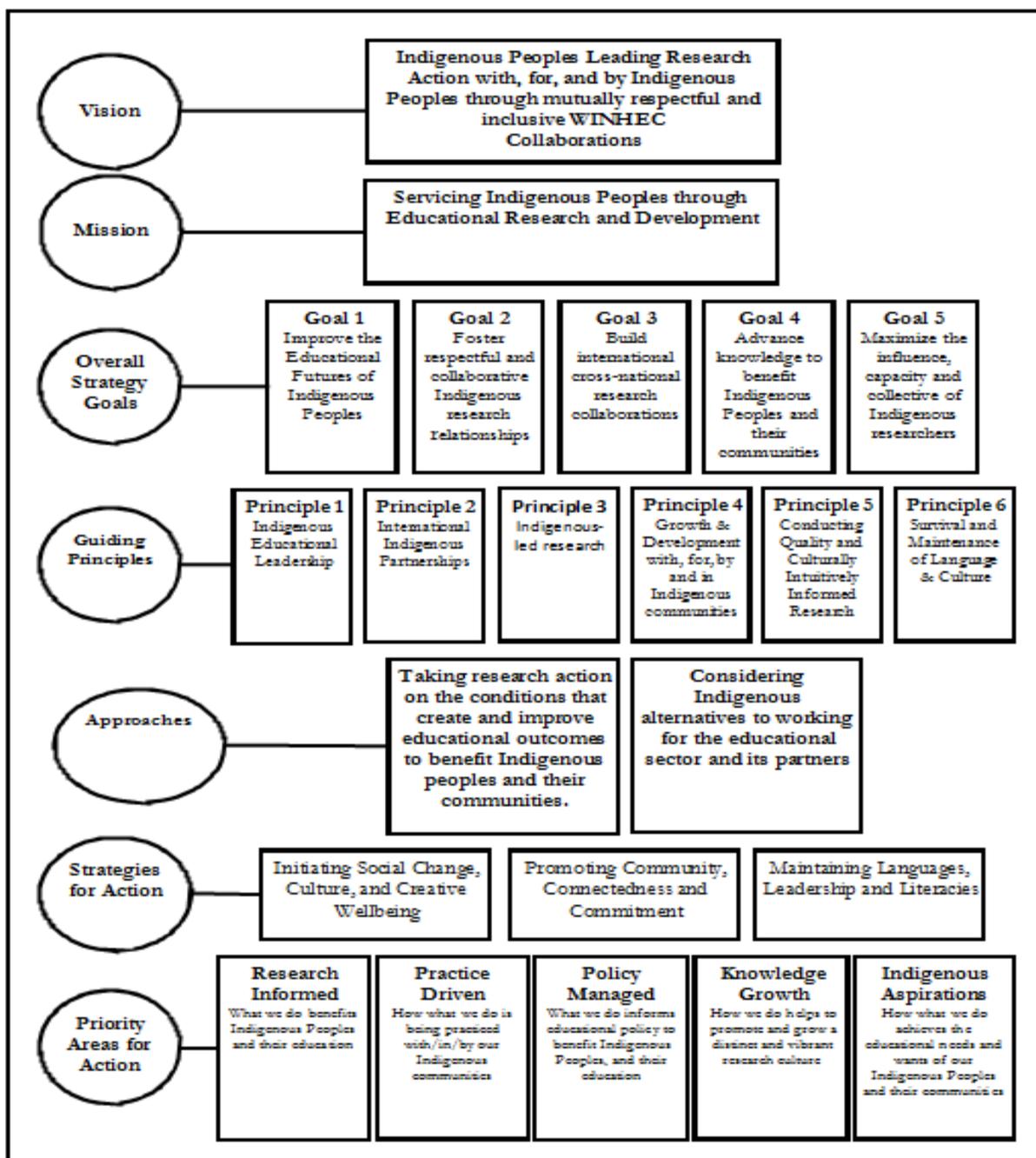


Figure 1. The World Indigenous Research Alliance (WIRA) Priorities for Action.

The following specific knowledge areas are based on the current experiences and expertise members bring to WIRA, and in which we believe, are broad enough to be inclusive of the key goals and aims underpinning the purpose underpinning WIRA, and of WINHEC more generally.



Figure 2. WIRA Conceptual Knowledge Framework.

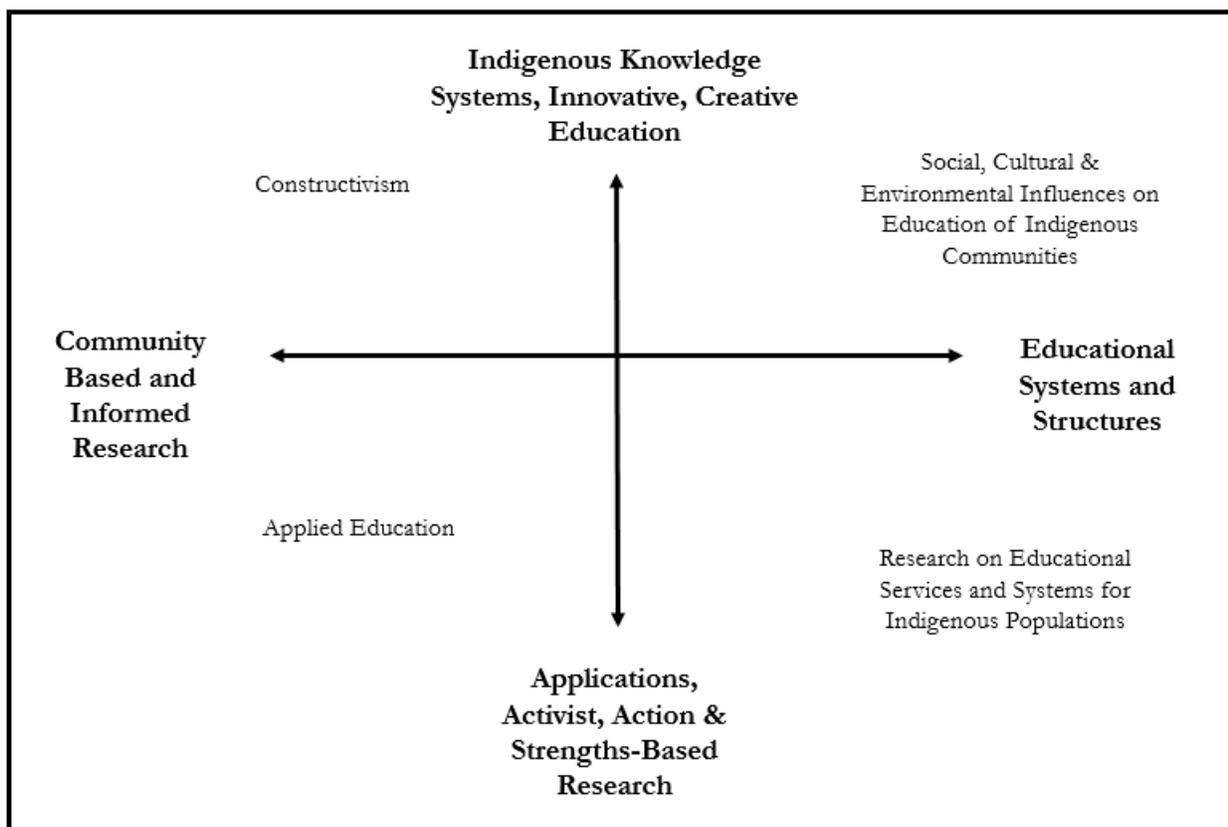
In effect, WIRA brokers the connection between research, policy and practice by reimagining, repositioning and asserting what we can control, and what we need to do to survive and thrive as Indigenous peoples in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. From this standpoint, we offer collective guidance on legitimate Indigenous educational research knowledge, who benefits, and who deserves to know while remaining accountable to our communities, and in particular, tribal leaders, elders and families.

### WIRA Priorities for Action

WIRA is based upon the development of collaborative research between Indigenous researchers and member colleges, institutions and sites of higher learning at the national and international levels. WINHEC has already developed an extensive research network, having worked collaboratively on a number of projects of significance during the past five years, gaining wide international interest and support from key Indigenous educators, Elders and researchers in Canada, Aotearoa-New Zealand, Samiland, Alaska, USA, Hawai'i, Taiwan and Australia. In each of these locations, WIRA has connections to Indigenous people from many clans, tribes, nations and organisations keen to develop national and international links that will promote and develop the need for research to address the health and wellbeing of Indigenous people and communities. This work is facilitated by support from member organizations in several countries, such as the Wanangas in Aotearoa-New Zealand, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium (NATSIHEC) in Australia, American Indian Higher Education Consortium (AIHEC)

in the USA, and First Nations Adult and Higher Education Consortium FNAHEC in Canada, as examples.

As a network, WIRA members have agreed to work collaboratively on research projects that are community, school, and family-based and interdisciplinary by their nature and design. Currently, there are a number of Indigenous scholars within WIRA who are focused on Indigenous achievement; curriculum, pedagogy, teaching and learning; teacher education; and Indigenous language revitalization. The combination of the skills, resources, approaches, and research members bring from these respective fields will assist in moving the collective research agenda forward. The following diagram provides the proposed dimensions of research related to improving the educational futures of Indigenous peoples, and their communities.



*Figure 3.* Dimensions of research related to the educational futures of Indigenous peoples

The diagram highlights four key dimensions for education including constructivism (i.e., constructing knowledge understanding and knowledge of the world, through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences from Indigenous perspectives); applied education (i.e., exacting applied work from settings where Indigenous peoples teach and/or learn); educational services and systems for Indigenous populations (i.e., to provide professional learning or development opportunities that fit the special character and educational aspirations of Indigenous peoples, and their communities); and social, cultural, and environmental influences in education of Indigenous communities (i.e., exploring innovative and creative pillars, pathways and prospects for achieving measureable educational success) . The main goal being to support the integration of researchers into collaborative interdisciplinary Indigenous focused research teams. These relationships are not

only important to achieving the goals of WIRA, but also hold significance for helping to create meaningful involvement and integration of Indigenous knowledge mobilization on a global scale.

### **World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium**

The World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium (WINHEC), under which WIRA is situated, was first established in August 2002 on the homelands of the Nakoda (Stoney) people at Kananaskis, Alberta, Canada. The founding aim of WINHEC is as follows:

We gather as Indigenous Peoples of our respective nations recognizing and reaffirming the educational rights of all Indigenous Peoples. We share the vision of all Indigenous Peoples of the world united in the collective synergy of self-determination through control of higher education. Committed to building partnerships that restore and retain indigenous spirituality, cultures and languages, homelands, social systems, economic systems and self-determination. (WINHEC, 2002, p. 2)

In congruence with Articles 13 through 16 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the goals and objectives of WINHEC are to provide an international forum to support Indigenous peoples to pursue common goals in all areas of education.

Furthermore, a number of working parties have been subsequently created to uphold the purpose and vision of WINHEC. The Accreditation Authority board, for example, works towards promoting and upholding the cultural competencies, standards, and practices educational institutions strive to emulate. Other working parties that support the wider goals of WINHEC include the Funding, Technology and Software Working Party; WINHEC Review Working Party; Academic Programmes Working Party; Research and Journal Working Party (RJWP); Youth/Elder councils Working Party; Graduate Working Party (i.e., mentoring for Masters and PhD students and post-graduate courses, programmes and qualifications); Languages and Culture Working Party; Early Childhood Education Working Party, and; Sustainable Development – Climate Change Working Party.

### **Current configuration of WIRA**

Representatives of WINHEC continue to host and convene annual opportunities for WIRA to meet as a collective in partnership with Indigenous communities, tribal colleges and universities. Sustained activity between WIRA meetings is required to achieve maximum benefit. The co-chairs of WIRA currently work together to provide continuity in operationalizing initiatives as discussed by WIRA members. The following diagram is the current configuration of WIRA structure:

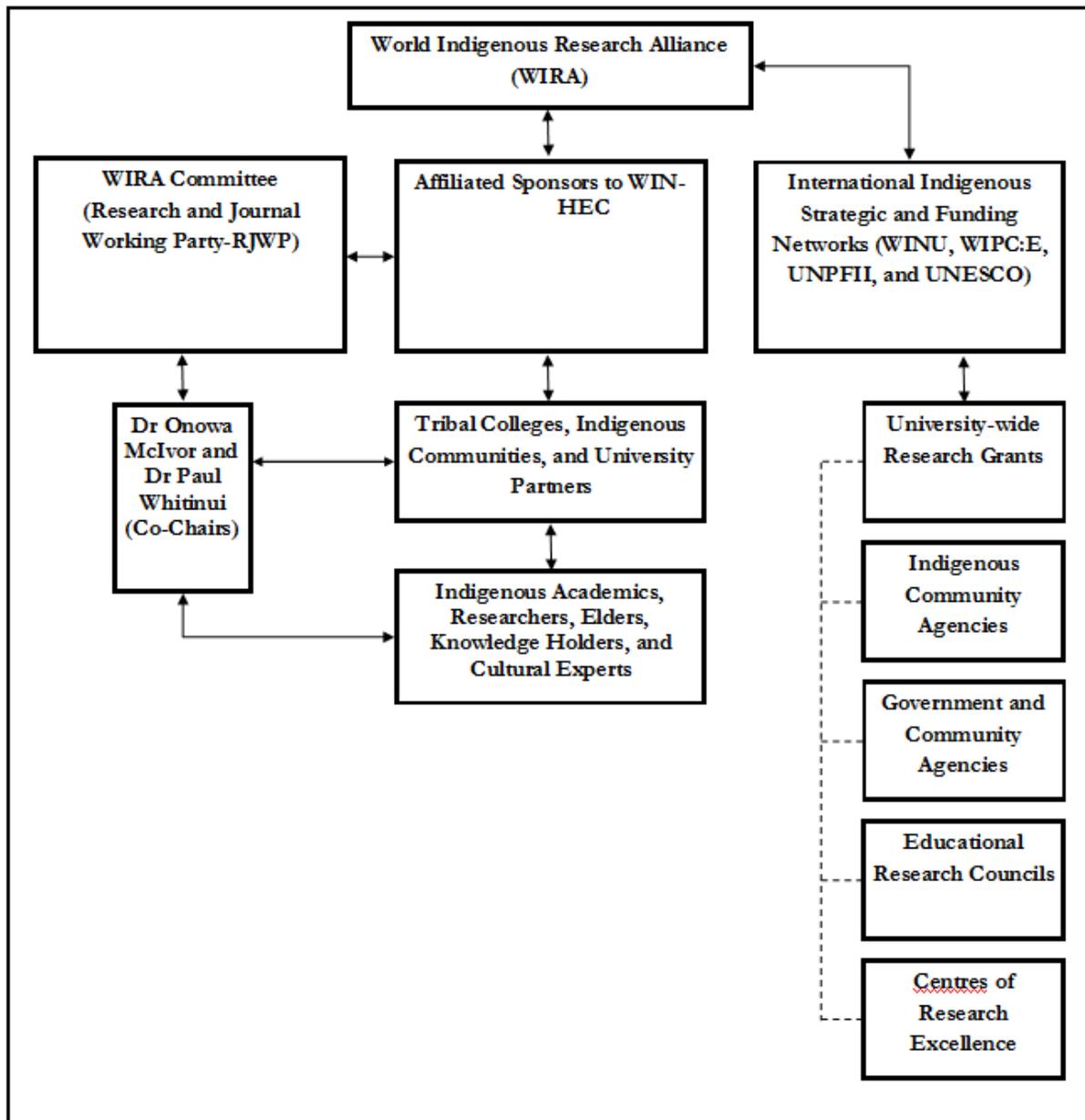


Figure 4. Current configuration of WIRA

The WIRA committee emerged out of the RJWP. The co-chairs of WIRA carry out the RJWP terms of reference affirmed by the WINHEC Executive Board in 2014. WIRA also reports to the WINHEC Executive Board on all matters concerning research and development. We acknowledge that we cannot do this work in isolation, and that our current places of work, Indigenous elders, leaders, knowledge holders, and cultural experts all provide the impetus to do what we do. Without their continued support, WIRA or indeed the mobilization of knowledge, would not be possible.

## Converging Energies

At an international conference on education held on the Hawaiian island of O'ahu in January 2013, Indigenous scholars from Aotearoa-New Zealand, Norway, Canada, Alaska, and Hawai'i were invited to discuss an important question: *What is Indigenous about Indigenous Education?* The gathering encompassed a range of interesting themes, topics, questions, and ideas surrounding Indigenous education that both presenters and participants believed warranted further discussion (Whitinui, Gaski, Brewin, Maaka, & Wilson, 2013).

A follow-up panel comprising of Indigenous scholars from Aotearoa-New Zealand, Canada, Australia, and Hawai'i to propose an International Indigenous Peoples' Educational Knowledge Network (hereafter, the 'Network') occurred at the same international conference on education one year later (Whitinui, McIvor, Robertson, Cashman, & Morcom, 2014). The panel focused on developing a collective plan of action for moving forward on international Indigenous education-focused research collaborations. The newly formed team continued their discussions in the coming days while gathered on the Hawaiian island of O'ahu. The intention of the joint venture was to stimulate progressive discussions about the kinds of research and scholarship ideas the group believed would improve and/or even accelerate educational outcomes for Indigenous peoples. These gatherings proved to be incredibly productive as spaces to talk about pursuing collaborative and meaningful Indigenous research ideas that can be challenging when also balancing the responsibilities held in mainstream institutions (Mathews, 2013).

Those gatherings helped to conceptualize the purpose of an international Indigenous education network, as well as, to identify the benefits of developing such an initiative. The purpose and benefits identified included: an Indigenous knowledge sharing as a network of committed Indigenous scholars; Indigenous challenges and solutions in education; Indigenous peoples succeeding as Indigenous peoples in education; Indigenous research, development and scholarship specific to meeting the educational needs of Indigenous peoples; and Indigenous language, leadership and literacy development in education.

These discussions led to explorations around the feasibility of aligning the proposed new network with WINHEC as many of the ideas, values and suggestions mirrored the intent of the WINHEC-WIRA. In May 2014, these collective and growing energies converged. During the WINHEC AGM (Annual General Meeting) held at the University of Hawai'i, West O'ahu, WIRA also held their AGM meeting. It was at this gathering that the initiators of the proposed international Network, agreed instead to align with WIRA (Robertson, Anning, Arbon & Royal, 2012) to collaborate on research and scholarship activities under the auspices of WINHEC. The merger of the proposed Network with WIRA enabled the group to explore ideas initially developed as part of the proposed new Network, but instead with a much larger, far-reaching and diverse cohort of Indigenous scholars.

### **The Indigenous Elder's Alliance (IEA) Support for WIRA**

WINHEC members recognized the need to profile that Indigenous Nations' Elders hold positions of prominence, recognition, and respect. They are the healers and the teachers responsible for the passage and protection of traditional knowledge. They are the keepers of the culture and custodians of secret and sacred stories, songs, and lore. The establishment of a global IEA was a unique and befitting step for WINHEC to secure its position as a global network and a voice of prominence within higher education. The IEA is also central to WINHEC's goal of developing a series of education based initiatives that contribute to the preservation, restoration, and revival of

Indigenous knowledge and knowledge systems with Indigenous peoples from nations of the world. The Indigenous Elder's Alliance (IEA) compliments and supports the work of WIRA, amongst other functions within WINHEC.

In establishing the IEA, a more specific and reasoned definition of what constitutes an Indigenous Elder was warranted. The definitive concept of what it means to be an "Elder" has been the source of increasing debate. It was determined that while the definition of an "Elder" in most cultures sits within a framework of accomplishment and respect, there is a significant cultural divide in the way Elders are positioned in terms of the value of their knowledge and their social and familial significance. Yet, the group was established to profile the scholarship of Indigenous Elders, knowledge holders, and knowledge to compliment the teaching and research undertaken by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers and academics.

WIRA has a responsibility to uphold and reach out to those Elders involved with the IEA. Since 2002 in Kananaskis, Canada, the Elders involved with WINHEC have provided many opportunities for Indigenous peoples working in higher education, and more recently K-12, to discuss a variety of initiatives, activities and programmes of mutual interest. There is increasing interest globally in the value of Indigenous education frameworks, principles of cultural and language preservation and restoration, epistemologies, pedagogies, ethical standards, knowledge transition and research and teaching methodologies. By being responsive and inclusive, WIRA and the IEA have enabled interested parties to work together in respectful collaborations and positive mediation.

## **Funding and Support for WIRA**

Many mainstream universities, although supportive in principle of the work we are aspiring to accomplish, struggle to find ways to support it. It is hoped that working collectively to mobilize Indigenous knowledge in the area of education will go some way to creating the space, visibility and long-term benefits of meeting the goals of mainstream institutions, in terms of teaching, research, leadership roles, and service. In addition, it is hoped to highlight the growth WIRA members experience by our interactions and our relationships each other, as well as the benefits back to Indigenous communities. WINHEC has provided Indigenous scholars with letters of support to mainstream institutions that acknowledge our contribution and commitment to Indigenous education. This has resulted, in some cases, in assisting some Indigenous scholars in mainstream institutions to gain support to attend meetings.

The invitation for mainstream academic institutions to actively support Indigenous scholar's involvement in WIRA is deeply critical to the interconnection between grassroots Indigenous community-based educational revolutions and academia. The key is to acknowledge that conducting research at an international level collaboratively with other Indigenous scholars benefits everyone, including mainstream and other higher education institutions. However, we acknowledge that some institutions are experiencing fiscally uncertain and challenging times; in particular, we understand that many education and teacher training programmes are not funded to the same level as the sciences, engineering or medical areas. Due to this reality, we believe it is most likely that support will come from positive collaborations between Indigenous community and government agencies, educational research councils, Centres of Research Excellence, as well as mainstream universities. The following table highlights potential sources of funding and support for the work of WIRA on a global scale.

INSTITUTION		COUNTRY			
		CANADA	AUSTRALIA	N.Z.	HAWAII (U.S.A)
FUNDING AND POLICY	Indigenous Community Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First Nations governments,</li> <li>• National and Provincial First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Organizations,</li> <li>• Local, provincial, and national Friendship Centres and associations, Indigenous Post-Secondary Institution</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium (NATSHEC)</li> <li>• National Indigenous Research and Knowledge Network (NIRAKN),</li> <li>• National Indigenous Medical Doctors Association</li> <li>• National Indigenous Elders Consortium (NIEC)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Iwi/Māori and Urban Authorities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hawaiian-focused trusts</li> </ul>
	Government and Community Education Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Federal Government (Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada)</li> <li>• Ministry of Training Colleges and Universities (Ontario)</li> <li>• Ministry of Advanced Education (BC), Ministries of Education</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Advisory Council (ATSHEAC)</li> <li>• National Advisory Group on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Information and Data (NAGATSIHID)</li> <li>• Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS)</li> <li>• Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Advisory Council (ATSHEAC)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whānau Ora</li> <li>• Te Wāhanga NZCER</li> <li>• Ministry of Education (MoE)</li> <li>• Education Review Office (ERO)</li> <li>• Te Kōhanga Reo National Trust</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• US Department of Education</li> <li>• Hawai'i Department of Education</li> <li>• Office of Hawaiian Affairs</li> </ul>
	Research Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Australian Research Council (ARC)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Te Puni Kōkiri (TPK)</li> <li>• Ako Aotearoa</li> <li>• Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga – Māori CoRE (University of Auckland and University of Otago)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Native Hawaiian and Indigenous Leadership Institute</li> </ul>
	Universities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The University of Victoria</li> <li>• Queen's University</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Griffith University</li> <li>• University of Adelaide Queensland University of Technology</li> <li>• World Indigenous Nations University</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The University of Otago</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The University of Hawai'i (Manoa)</li> </ul>
	Indigenous Academics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr. Onowa Melvor</li> <li>• Dr. Lindsay Morcom</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professor Boni Robertson</li> <li>• Associate Professor Veronica Arbon</li> <li>• Dr Berice Anning</li> <li>• Associate Professor Gary Thomas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assoc. Professor Paul Whitinui</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr. Kimo Cashman</li> </ul>

Figure 5. International-wide WIRA Support

The funding and support areas include Indigenous community agencies, government and community education agencies, research funding (externally), universities (internally) and via our own academic and scholarly networks and areas of expertise collaboratively. The WIRA group includes seven Indigenous scholars who currently all reside in mainstream universities across four different countries – Canada, Australia, Hawai'i (USA), and New Zealand. However, given the nature of the work we are progressing, as well as the make-up of WINHEC, tribally based institutions will inevitably also be part of the work we do. Knowledge mobilization in education for Indigenous peoples is about revisioning, reimagining and asserting ourselves in choosing what we hope education will look like for future generations, and to sharpen our focus on what we need to do now to make a difference.

### Envisaged Accomplishments

Indigenous researchers, Elders, post-graduate students and academic staff are at the centre of WIRA, as their aspirations for such an alliance have been central to the discussions for many years. Early feedback from these parties determined that an entity such as WIRA should strive to accomplish a number of key tasks. First, stakeholders saw as a priority the creation of an alliance of Indigenous researchers, as well as the development of a register of Indigenous research expertise, the development and awarding of more post-graduate scholarships, and the creation of a website for Indigenous researcher information. Stakeholders also identified priorities for enhancing Indigenous researcher development and a need for an improved research and post-graduate environment that

could be created through better training and development for academic supervisors for Indigenous students. They also saw a need to increase the number of Indigenous examiners available to these students, and a need for improved academic career path guidance and support. They emphasized the need for more Indigenous research appointments within universities at a high level of influence. WIRA envisaged establishing Centres of Research to serve as points of interaction among higher education institutions, government, industry and the private sector. Finally, stakeholders also emphasized that WIRA needs to support and enhance local activities and respond to local priorities, not usurp or replace these as any programs offered by WIRA need to be flexible, variable and responsive to local communities and their needs (Robertson et al., 2012).

WIRA's current aspirations have been refined to focus on the development and maintenance of an Indigenous research network; the development and implementation of educational research relevant to Indigenous peoples; collaboration on publications to enhance knowledge dissemination; and significant contributions to educational policies. These aspirations contribute to the overall goal of WIRA to position Indigenous research at the forefront of excellence within educational research, higher education, and policy development.

WIRA also presents a major platform for attracting funding from governments, industry, philanthropic sources, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous entities interested in working on educational research and community capacity-building projects. It also provides a critical vehicle for national and international collaboration, knowledge exchange and innovation with respect to Indigenous input into research and community engagement activities (Robertson et al., 2012).

### **Benefits to Key Stakeholders**

An international Indigenous research alliance like WIRA will make a significant contribution to engaging and building Indigenous researcher capacity and Indigenous research leadership. These benefits will affect all key stakeholders including Indigenous researchers, and their host universities and governments. WIRA has the potential to establish a system whereby Indigenous researchers can engage with postgraduate students, as well as established and early career researchers throughout member countries. There are a number of likely benefits that will emerge from this work. First, it will result in a platform for communication and exchange to maximize the influence, capacity and collaborative potential of Indigenous researchers nationally as well as internationally. Second, there is potential to assist the professional development of early career and post-graduate Indigenous researchers. A third benefit will be facilitation and structural support for the development of mentoring relationships between emerging and established Indigenous researchers. Fourth, it will provide a high-quality postgraduate and postdoctoral training environment for the next generation of Indigenous researchers in innovative and internationally competitive research. Finally, it will provide a cohort of Indigenous role models that are discipline and community-specific.

### **Current Collaborations**

Innovative, dynamic, and collaborative research is currently taking place locally, nationally and internationally as part of WIRA. Representatives from the current member countries are all actively engaging in a range of research projects that support the aforementioned key knowledge areas. A number of tangible successes have already resulted from our collaborations such that WIRA is organizing the research component for the 2015 WINHEC annual meeting hosted by the Seven Generations Education Institute, in Nanicost, Fort Frances, Ontario, Canada. It is also

anticipated that several of the papers presented at this conference will be submitted for the 2015 WINHEC journal.

Two WIRA members from different countries received an “Internationalizing the Curriculum” grant, held between Queen’s University, Canada and the University of Otago, NZ. It was used primarily to develop a shared on-line post-graduate course called *Living Indigenous Educational Leadership*. This course is currently being offered by the University of Otago, and will be a key component of Queen’s University’s new online Professional Master’s in Education. This collaboration has afforded the opportunity to create Indigenous spaces in our current teaching and learning programmes and in addition, provided a collaborative journal writing opportunity on the various themes included. In furthering our collaborative efforts, we have established a visiting scholars’ programme to enable attending each other’s universities that has emerged as a direct result of the Alliance. These kinds of scholarly activities provide the much needed time to share and collaborate on new research ideas, as well as to provide a wider Indigenous voice in a variety of regional settings. This work also builds on existing collaborations between Queen’s and Otago universities, as a part of the Matariki Network of Universities (Otago Bulletin Board, 2015).

In addition, research projects are currently taking place in each country and we are looking toward further international collaborative research projects in the future. One example is a research project entitled: *Te whakabanere nga wawata o te whanau: Honouring the educational aspirations of whanau to improve the participation of Maori children in English-medium primary schools in Aotearoa New Zealand*. Researchers are working with two local elementary schools in a project that could well be replicated in other countries, and as part of a larger collaborative research project under WIRA. Finally, WIRA are soon to begin a review of Indigenous-focused journals, and their international rankings with the goal of providing impact-factor criteria that will rank Indigenous journals fairly and equitably alongside non-Indigenous journals. Indeed, such opportunities only emerge if we, as Indigenous peoples, create the space, own the space, commit to the space, and do the work.

### Where To From Here?

The opportunity to progress WIRA through the sharing of our respective and collective insights, reflections, and experiences is timely, given the recent high plenary meeting of the General Assembly, known as the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, held in New York in 2014 (United Nations World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, 2014). The session brought together a wide range of Indigenous leaders from around the world to share perspectives and best practices on the rights of Indigenous peoples. The main goal being to continue to pursue the objectives underpinning the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations General Assembly, 2007), and to put forward the recommendations from the ALTA outcome document (United Nations World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, 2013) that emerged from a meeting in June 2013 on the Sami people’s homelands at Alta, Norway. One of the key recommendations, called on states to:

[E]nsure meaningful and effective participation and the free, prior and informed consent of Indigenous Peoples in accordance with their protocols in order to reform the dominant education system to reflect the histories, identities, values, beliefs, cultures, languages and knowledge of the Indigenous Peoples to whom it is being delivered. (United Nations World Conference on Indigenous Peoples, 2013, pp. 7–8)

Amidst a global climate where endemic disparities continue to underpin the cultural incompetence of many western education systems, WIRA provides an opportunity for international Indigenous

nations to design Indigenous-led education-focused research to address the educational aspirations of Indigenous peoples.

In conclusion, WIRA, though a young entity, holds tremendous potential for a variety of key stakeholders, including Indigenous researchers, students, Indigenous peoples and their communities, Indigenous and non-Indigenous schools and higher education institutions, as well as other government agencies and services. WIRA members are also developing a database of interested partners, sponsors and scholars willing to support the goals and aspirations of WIRA. The WIRA governance and operational processes continue to develop and this work has led to the prioritisation of goals for WIRA. Presenting these include collaborative research projects and co-publications as part of achieving the wider goals of WINHEC, as well as supporting the development and revitalization of the WINHEC journal.

The upcoming international gathering of WIPCE in 2017, to be hosted by Six Nations Polytechnic and TAP Resources in Toronto, Canada, will provide yet another opportunity to grow, and promote the benefits of WIRA. Until such time, we will continue our engagement on international Indigenous research and scholarly collaborations involving member countries.

Finally, we have identified and will continue to identify key organisations interested in either sponsoring, partnering, or otherwise supporting the educational aspirations and goals of WIRA. We look forward to expanding our network by supporting Sami University College, who are the host editors of the WINHEC journal for 2015-2017. In this way, by collaborating as community-minded Indigenous academics who understand the value of both Western and Indigenous ways of researching, learning, and relating, we aim to produce research of the highest quality that responds to any number of pressing issues impacting on Indigenous peoples and their educational futures. At the same time, we hope to act as a bridge to demonstrate the tremendous value of Indigenous knowledge, and the benefits it holds for all people. In this way, WIRA has the potential to benefit not only its members, but also a range of different institutions, communities, governments, and nations. We are proud and excited about this important initiative, and look forward to watching it grow as Indigenous people continue to take their rightful place in the world, and to take greater control of their own educational and knowledge destiny.

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