



Open Research Awards 2025

HASS disciplines prize

Cassia Lynn Johnson (Camborne School of Mines)

Title of case study

Developing a Knowledge-Sharing Agreement with the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation Government

Introduction to the case study

In 2023, I signed a research agreement with the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation Government in Yukon, Canada. While my research does not directly focus on Indigenous knowledge, it takes place on the Nation's Traditional Territory, where the majority of Yukon's small-scale gold mining (SSM) occurs, making engagement with the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in essential. Yukon's SSM industry is one of the only mercury-free and formalized SSM sectors globally, and my research is among the first to address the literature gap on SSM in the Global North. Given the location and focus of my study, ensuring respectful collaboration with Indigenous governments is foundational.

Detail the practices you have used to support openness/reproducibility

Though I do not directly study Indigenous Knowledge, interviews include Indigenous citizens and government officials, and the research is based in their Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in Traditional Territory. As part of the agreement, I committed to sharing all interview transcripts of their Government Employees/Citizens and research findings with the Nation. I also agreed to gain additional permissions before using any direct quotations from their citizens and government representatives. Interviews with Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in participants will be housed in their cultural archives, ensuring ongoing access for the community. This effort aligns with principles of Indigenous Data Sovereignty and ensures that the research contributes back to the Nation.

Outline any barriers or challenges you encountered, and how they were handled

I learned many lessons about conducting research on Indigenous Traditional Territories. Initially, I did not know that Knowledge Sharing Agreements existed. I discovered that, although my interviews didn't seek Traditional Knowledge, the contributions from Indigenous participants reflected their unique worldviews and were deeply valuable.

The University's ethics protocol emphasizes autonomy, conflicting with the Nation's Protocol. To address this, I amended my ethics approval to align with the Nation's protocols, ensuring dual compliance. I learned the importance of relationship-building and in-person presence.

Engagement with the Nation's Heritage Department guided the process appropriately, even when the Nation had limited capacity for involvement.

What benefits have you identified from your case?

The benefits of this process were immense. I gained a deeper understanding of Indigenous Data Sovereignty, Traditional Knowledge, and the ethical dimensions of working across knowledge

systems. Although my research was imperfect, this experience laid the groundwork for more respectful and equitable research practices in the future. I also grew more aware of how Western and Indigenous approaches to knowledge differ, and how both can contribute to meaningful, place-based research.

How do you plan to continue this case moving forward?

In future projects, I hope to co-develop research questions with Indigenous Governments and citizens. Rather than conducting research about a community, I aim to conduct research with communities. This means beginning conversations early, collaborating on all stages of the research process, and ensuring that the outcomes are useful and accessible to the communities involved. I plan to continue refining my understanding of open and ethical research by building relationships and honouring local protocols.

Conclusions

This case study illustrates how a willingness to learn, and commitment to open research and ethical engagement, particularly with Indigenous governments, can enhance the relevance, impact, and inclusivity of academic work. While I still have much to learn, the process of working with the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in has reshaped how I understand openness in research. True openness, I now believe, includes sharing not only data, but also power, process, and purpose.

Links to any materials/resources relevant to the case

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0301420724003453>