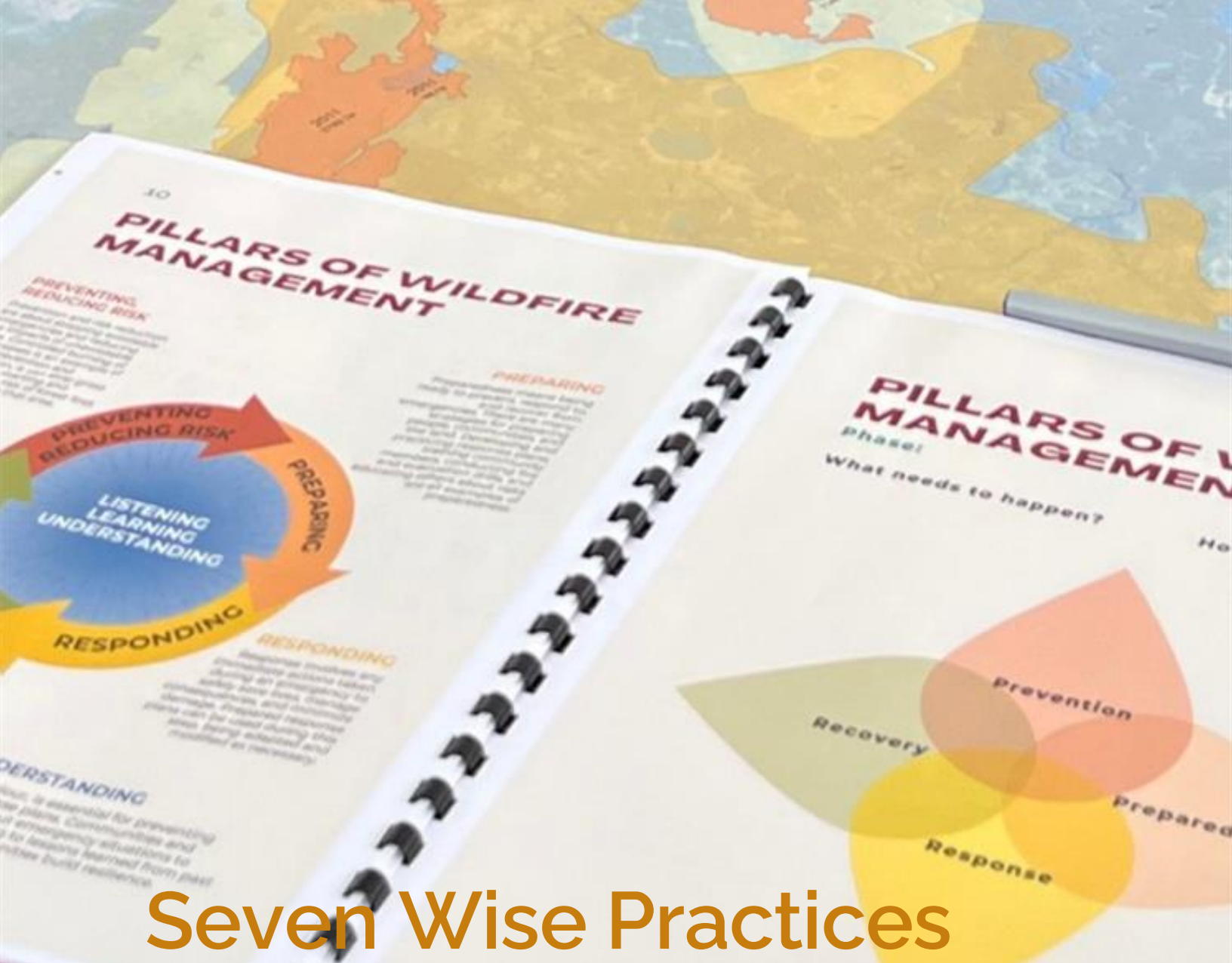




Seven Wise Practices

A tool for evaluating wildfire management experiences and activities

Version 1.0



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Introduction

This tool is intended to provide a structured and adaptable approach for members of First Nation communities and external organizations supporting First Nations to reflect on and evaluate wildfire management experiences and activities. To guide evaluation and learning, we suggest seven wise practices for doing wildfire management with remote First Nations communities.

These practices emerged from a multi-year research partnership involving Lakehead University, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, and the Keewaytinook Okimakanak Tribal Council. They draw on the perspectives of First Nations community members who have experience with one or more aspects of wildfire and wildfire management including evacuations, firefighting, and fire risk mitigation activities, and are informed by interviews, focus groups, and multi-community workshops that were held as part of this partnership. As experience is gained in using this tool and applying the seven wise practices framework, we expect and hope that the tool will evolve, and we welcome feedback on it¹.

Who should use this tool?

- Members of remote First Nations facilitating conversations about wildfire management or fire-related evacuations
- Members of external organizations involved in wildfire management with remote First Nation communities
- Tribal Council or other support organization staff looking to evaluate their wildfire management and evacuation approaches

Suggestions for using the tool

The tool is designed to support conversations by guiding reflection on past wildfire management and evacuation experiences, while also helping to plan more effectively for the future. For example, the scoring exercise described below can be used after a fire or evacuation incident to evaluate what went well and what needs improvement, looking back but also looking forward toward future possibilities in wildfire management. These conversations may be conducted through individual interviews, group discussions, or in a workshop.

¹ Feedback is welcome at lindsaygalway@kochiefs.ca.

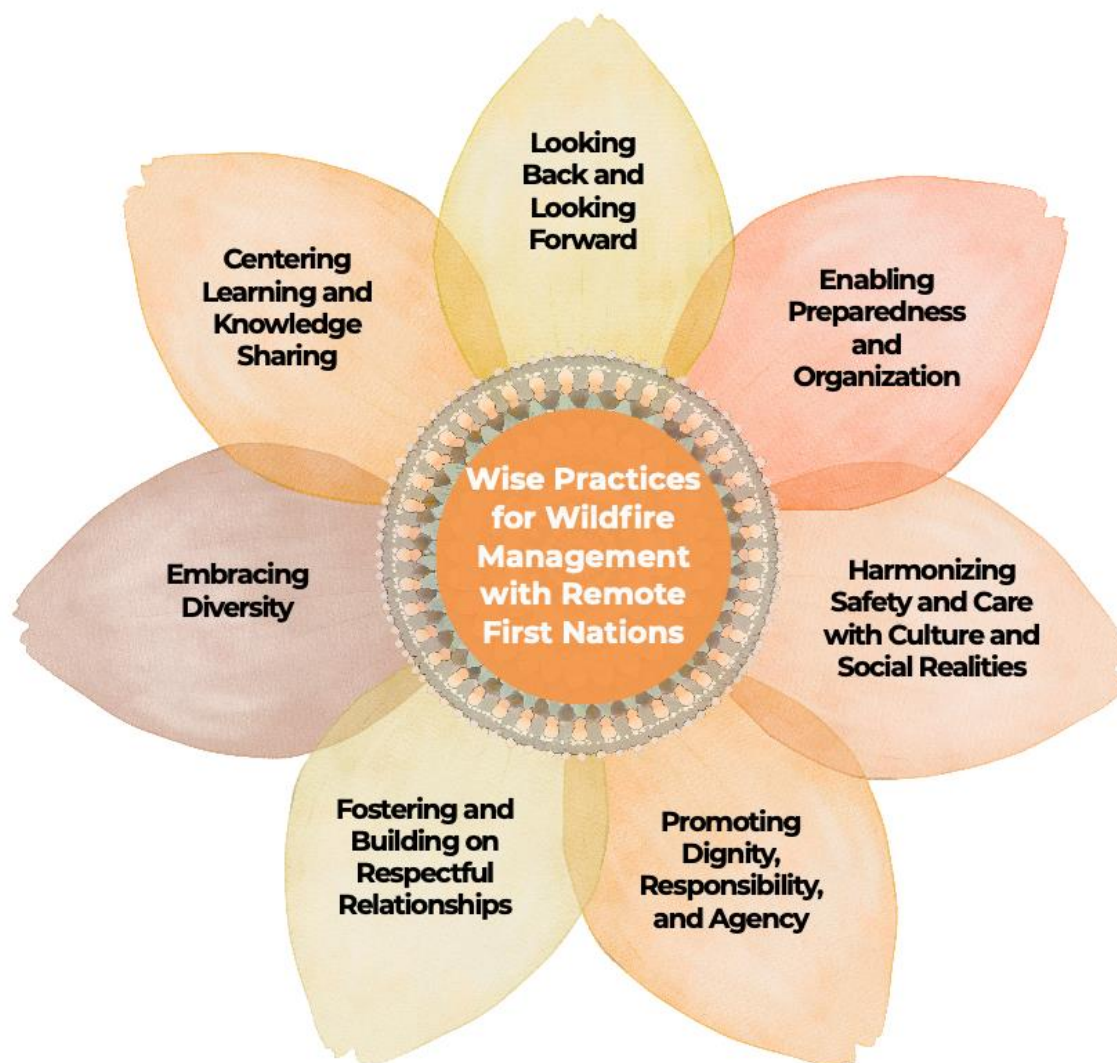
When and how to use this tool

- After a fire or evacuation
 - Evaluate what went well and what needs improvement
 - Looking back and looking forward
- To support conversations and plan more effectively for future fire-related situations
 - Individual interviews
 - Focus group discussions
 - Community meetings or workshops
- Typically, this tool will NOT be appropriate to use in the midst of a fire incident

Below, we describe a scorecard activity as an optional approach to guiding evaluative discussions around wildfire management. Alternatively, the seven wise practices can simply serve to guide discussions and provide helpful prompts for facilitators, with or without a scoring exercise. The seven practices suggest a comprehensive range of topics to explore when evaluating and planning wildfire management activities. Importantly, not all seven wise practices may be relevant to each unique situation; facilitators do not have to engage with all seven but can choose from the ones most important or relevant to the discussion at hand.

Seven wise practices for wildland fire management with remote First Nations

Broadly, wise practices are actions, tools, and principles that center the unique knowledges, experiences, stories, and strengths of Indigenous communities.ⁱ Unlike “best practices” that employ procedures and steps to guide participants toward what is often presented as a universally-desired outcome, wise practice approaches focus instead on context, adaptability, reflection, and knowledge-sharing, and are “particularly helpful in situations that are complex, uncertain, changing, and difficult.”ⁱⁱ The seven wise practices described here are informed by the lived experiences and stories shared by members of Keewaytinook Okimakanak communities, and serve as a flexible set of principles that can be adapted to help other remote First Nations and their partners reflect on their own pasts and look toward the future. This process “is merely a wise practice in itself, since traditionally Indigenous leaders learned from past stories before making a decision about future action.”ⁱⁱⁱ



These seven wise practices should be considered a work in progress. Particular First Nations may have their own teachings, values, and wise practices that look different from these. Anyone using this tool should therefore feel free to adapt it to suit the community they are working with, and the situation being discussed.

In discussions for planning, the seven practices can be treated as seven potential needs to address or things to think about. Open-ended questions—particularly those starting with “How” and “Why”—can spark lively discussions about past experiences and future planning.

Description and examples of wise practices

Practice	Description and examples
Looking Back and Looking Forward	<i>Looking back and looking forward</i> can involve honouring and remembering history and past experiences, and prioritizing opportunities for reflection and planning in relation to wildfire management. For communities experiencing an evacuation, as an example, this can involve community debriefs that encourage open dialogue about peoples' experiences, and applying lessons learned to improve future wildfire evacuations, helping communities to become more resilient overall. This practice also honours history. For example, firefighting and risk mitigation capacity-building activities can benefit from remembering and building on the capacity of Elders who worked as firefighters. It also involves sharing and reflecting on past experiences to inform wildfire preparedness and response. For instance, this could mean post-wildfire community feedback sessions.
Enabling Preparedness and Organization	Effective <i>preparedness and organization</i> can involve thoughtful and structured evacuation management and communication that improves community members' experiences and reduces distress. This can be as simple as taking care of the basics for community members. Evacuation examples might include organizing communication, mealtimes, gathering spaces, responsibilities, activities, holistic health supports, and accessible transportation throughout the different stages of the evacuation. In wildland firefighting and risk mitigation, this can mean efficiently coordinating preparation for and response to wildfires. Coordinating and promoting wildfire management training, ensuring equipment is available and well-maintained, and regularly updating community-specific evacuation plans are all key parts of <i>enabling preparedness and organization</i>.

Fostering and Building on Respectful Relationships

Attending to physical needs is only one part of a healthy evacuation experience. *Fostering and building on respectful relationships* entails creating opportunities for both strengthening existing bonds among community members and building new bonds, particularly at the host community. Keeping families, friends, and communities together wherever possible and holding social gatherings can increase resilience at both the individual and community levels. Similarly, helping community members feel welcome in the host community can contribute to more positive evacuation experiences.

Fostering and building on relationships in wildland firefighting and mitigation similarly involves strengthening bonds between community members, recognizing the importance of family and community, and creating opportunities for collaboration. Support for relationship building can include creating opportunities for communal work to reduce risk and hosting firefighter training in-community. It is also important for people from external agencies to nurture relationships and not treat their work simply as the delivery of technical services.

Promoting Dignity, Responsibility, and Agency

Promoting dignity, responsibility, and agency during an evacuation means making sure that people feel respected, informed, and confident in making decisions for themselves (when possible and safe to do so). Community members should be treated as capable decision-makers who deserve clear communication and the power to choose what's best for them. This can involve clear communication about the choice to leave or stay behind. At the host community, this could mean providing opportunities for community members to contribute, for example by distributing tasks and roles to community members: e.g., transportation, security, preparing some meals, etc.

In wildland firefighting and risk mitigation, *promoting dignity, responsibility, and agency* means treating community members with respect and fostering their confidence and sense of agency. This can be achieved through organizations partnering with the community in making decisions that shape how the community prepares for and responds to fires, and recognizing their achievements related to these activities. This also involves access to the knowledge, equipment, and support communities need to respond to fires in their territories.

Harmonizing Safety and Care with Culture and Social Realities

In the context of an evacuation, *harmonizing safety and care with culture and social realities* means that those entrusted to care for and protect community members should understand and respectfully engage with the community's cultural practices, ways of life, and values. Building trust through recognizing social realities, such as past traumas, addictions, and other social challenges, and providing holistic support is vital; so too is recognizing community values, like family. This could involve providing parental relief through activities for children, culturally appropriate supports for mental well-being, and culturally and socially familiar foods and activities.

In the context of wildland firefighting and risk mitigation, it is important for organizations working with First Nations communities to show a willingness to make decisions that honour their socio-cultural realities. This means building long-term relationships between organizations, such as provincial fire agencies, Tribal Councils, and communities; adapting training to local contexts, such as demonstrations that reflect firefighting in the community's local environment; and aiming to build community capacity to support a community-led approach to wildfire management.

Embracing Diversity

Embracing diversity involves acknowledging and engaging with the fact that community needs are diverse and that there is no single 'right' way to do work with communities. In an evacuation context, this also means ensuring that a diversity of community voices and perspectives inform and shape evacuation preparedness, response, and activities. Providing diverse emergency management training, a variety of foods and activities at the host community, and diverse opportunities to provide feedback are all ways of embracing diversity during an evacuation.

Embracing diversity in wildland firefighting and risk mitigation means avoiding one-size-fits-all solutions and tailoring training, educational activities, and fire risk mitigation work to specific communities and their unique local contexts, needs, knowledges, and values.

Centering Learning and Knowledge Sharing

In an evacuation, *centering learning and knowledge sharing* is about building community capacity to manage evacuations through both traditional knowledge-sharing activities and standardized training. Learning from one another, learning from the experiences of other communities, and learning from past experiences are all ways of knowledge sharing that benefit the community. Community reflections and debriefs, as well as offering training in fire-related evacuation preparedness and response, can also benefit the community and build resilience.

Centering learning and knowledge sharing in wildland firefighting and risk mitigation means weaving together both Indigenous and Western knowledge systems to guide wildfire management activities. Beyond simply integrating Indigenous knowledges into wildfire management, this means creating opportunities for equal knowledge transfer between wildfire management organizations and communities.

Scorecard Activity

This community scorecard activity is one option for using the seven wise practices. To create a scorecard that draws on the practices, facilitators should first familiarize themselves with each practice, then consider how they could connect to the wildfire management and evacuation experiences of the community. From there, they can create questions for participants that can be scored from “unacceptable” to “excellent” using the scoring scale below. Questions can also be created during the discussions by asking participants what they would like to see regarding each of the practices. While the scores themselves can be informative, it is most important to listen closely to the stories and insights shared during discussions. The explanations, perceptions, and experiences are more important than the numerical scores.

Scoring can be done by individuals, for example in interviews, or by small groups in focus group discussions or breakout groups in workshops.

Scoring scale example:

- 1: Unacceptable – failed to meet most of the community’s needs and values.
- 2: Poor – did not meet some of the community’s needs and values.
- 3: Okay – met the community’s needs and values.
- 4: Good – met or surpassed some of the community’s needs and values.
- 5: Excellent – met or surpassed all of the community’s needs and values.

Scorecard: Questions based on the community-centered practices that are relevant to participants can be crafted then scored to evaluate satisfaction with a wide range of experiences and activities; for example, scorecards can be designed for community members to assess their evacuation experiences, or for provincial fire agency personnel to evaluate collaborative firefighting and mitigation work and see how their experiences and expectations align with those of community members. Below is an example of a completed scorecard reflecting a community member's evaluation of their evacuation experience.

Evacuation scorecard for community example:

Questions based on wise practices	Responses, comments	Score
Looking Back, Looking Forward		
1. Did the evacuation team consciously try to remember strengths and weaknesses of previous evacuations?	Just a little. We started to do that but then the situation became urgent and we ran out of time.	2 (Poor)

2. Recovery: After returning home, were community members given the opportunity to share and reflect on their experiences and plan for the future, such as through community debriefs and discussions?	No, nothing like that was planned. It would have been good to be able to hear other people's stories and ideas.	1 (Unacceptable)
Average Score for Practice		1.5
Enabling Preparedness and Organization		
3. Before leaving: How clear and organized was the process of leaving home (e.g. evacuation lists made ahead of time, people having time to pack, evacuation announced multiple ways)?	It was good. They announced it on the radio and went door-to-door, we had lots of time to pack. I did hear they had to add some babies to the list, though!	4 (Good)
4. At the host community: Were supports for alcohol use, substance use, and emotional and mental wellness made available for and promoted to community members?	Well, there was some stuff. I think one organization reached out to offer help, but none of us really knew until later on. I think it was okay, but we could've done a better job at getting people help.	3 (Okay)
5. At the host community: How clear and organized were the updates about what was happening back home?	It was alright. The firefighters and people who stayed would update the leadership every now and then, they'd tell people, and news would eventually spread to everyone.	3 (Okay)
Average Score for the Practice		3.3
Fostering and Building on Respectful Relationships		
6. At the host community: How would you rate the efforts made to keep families, friends, and the community together?	Excellent. Our Chief worked hard to make sure that our community could stay together in one place.	5 (Excellent)

7. At the host community: Did you feel a sense of belonging or togetherness during the evacuation? Were there spaces and activities that helped people come together and support each other?	Yes, it was good for us all to be together. All our mealtimes were at the same place and the Elders really enjoyed being in those areas with the kids. And there were common rooms where people could sit around and chat.	4 (Good)
8. At the host community: Did it feel like your community was welcome at the host community? What did the people and organizations there do to welcome you?	Yes, actually. One of the nearby First Nations invited us to join them and do stuff on the land. And the mayor came by often to check in on us and even invited us to a community BBQ. We made good friends there.	5 (Excellent)
Average Score for the Practice		4.7
Promoting Dignity, Responsibility, and Agency		
9. Before leaving: How would you describe how emergency workers treated community members? Did they show care and respect?	They treated us very well. The Rangers were very understanding of our situation and showed us kindness.	5 (Excellent)
10. At the host community: How well did leadership and outside organizations listen and respond to the concerns of community members? Did people feel as if their voices were heard?	The leadership took what we were worried about seriously. When we said we were concerned about drinking at the hotel, they asked us what we wanted to happen, and then made it happen.	5 (Excellent)
11. Recovery: How involved were community members in planning recovery activities for the return home?	Everything went back to normal. Nothing was planned, maybe the Council met, but not with us.	2 (Poor)
Average Score for the Practice		4

Harmonizing Safety and Care with Culture and Social Realities

12. At the host community: How well did family supports—such as family-friendly activities and childcare relief—work for you and others?	It was good. Took a while but once we got settled in there was lots for the kids to do. KO started coming by and taking the kids out, they had fun, and it gave parents a break.	4 (Good)
13. At the host community: How would you rate the cultural food and cultural activities available to community members?	It was okay. They did bingo once and some people enjoyed it but not everyone cares for it. Some of the Elders did their own beadwork. I think they had bannock for us once, but it would have been nice to eat some moose or blueberries. Or go fishing and have a fish fry!	3 (Okay)
14. At the host community: Were there supports to help people feel mentally and emotionally well? If so, how well did those supports match the needs, culture, and values of your community?	Well, not really. I saw the KO mental health workers once or twice. Not too many people went to them, I think sometimes people are afraid of being seen as “weak” or sick if they do.	2 (Poor)
Average Score for the Practice		3

Embracing Diversity

15. At the host community: Was there a variety of food for people to eat and a variety of things for people to do? Were people with different needs listened to and accommodated?	Yeah, there were some things to choose from. I know the food upset the stomach of some of the Elders, and some people are more picky too – once those concerns were brought up, they took care of us and made sure the Elders got what they needed.	4 (Good)
Average Score for the Practice		4

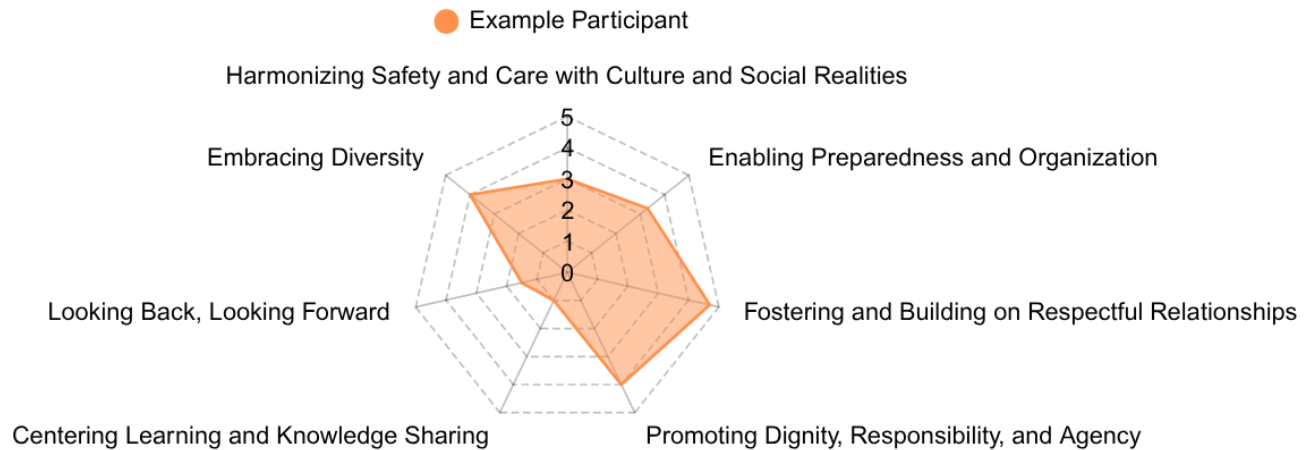
Centering Learning and Knowledge Sharing		
16. At host community: Were community members given the opportunity to share their thoughts, ideas, and reflections about their experiences throughout the evacuation?	No, nothing like that. I would have liked to talk all together about what was going on.	1 (Unacceptable)
17. Recovery: How well were evacuation-related learning activities (e.g. information sessions, group discussions, or workshops) organized after the return home?	We didn't have anything like that. It's too bad, I think that's a missed opportunity to share what we felt in the moment so everyone could learn to do better.	1 (Unacceptable)
Average Score for the Practice		1

Documenting and communicating key insights

There are many ways to share the stories that come from discussions on wise practices. Visual representation of a community's assessment can help highlight important themes and support future discussions about what has been learned and what actions to take next.

Data can be visualized in many forms. Spider diagrams, for example, are a simple yet effective way of representing data from the scorecard exercise, illustrating individual experiences in wildland firefighting, risk mitigation, or fire-related evacuation. The closer the point is to the outer edge, the higher the score and higher the participant's satisfaction for that practice. The diagram as a whole offers a clear visual representation of both the successes of the evacuation and the areas that need improvement. Spider diagrams can be used to represent the experiences of individual or multiple participants. The diagram below visually summarizes the scores for each of the wise practices from the example scorecard.

Spider Diagram: Seven Wise Practices



In the above example, the combined insights from the scorecard and spider diagram suggest that, while the evacuation largely met the community member's expectations, significant opportunities for improvement remain. In particular, future evacuations should prioritize reflection, future preparedness, and learning and knowledge sharing, both within the community and with external organizations.

By documenting insights in clear and engaging ways like this can help translate community voices into actionable improvements in wildfire management and evacuation strategies. Prioritizing data visualization and storytelling methods that honour Indigenous knowledges is crucial; doing so will help ensure that the insights gathered through discussions on wise practices lead to meaningful, community-driven change.

***Learning from Indigenous Perspectives for Wildland Fire
Management from Treaty 5 and 9 Remote First Nations***

The *Learning from Indigenous Perspectives* project was a multi-year research partnership involving Lakehead University, the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, and the Keewatinook Okimakanak Tribal Council. Keewatinook Okimakanak member First Nations that participated in the project included Deer Lake, Keewaywin, McDowell Lake, North Spirit Lake, and Poplar Hill First Nations.

Other publications from the project are available from:

<https://kogeo.ca/catalogue/#/documents?filter%7Bcategory.identifier.in%7D=Wildfire>.

Notes

ⁱ Calliou, B. and Wesley-Esquimaux, C. (2015). A Wise Practices Approach to Indigenous Community Development in Canada. In Voyageur, C. J., Calliou, B., & Brearley, L. (Eds.), *Restorying Indigenous Leadership: Wise practices in community development* (2nd ed). Banff Centre Press.

ⁱⁱ Muir, A.M., Duncan, A.T., Almack, K., Boucher, N., Dunlop, E.S., Febria, C., Ives, J.T., Lauzon, R., Lickers, H., Mattes, W.P., McGregor, D., McGregor, H., & Reid, A.J. (2023). Sharing across the space: Introduction to a special issue on bridging Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge systems. *Journal of Great Lakes Research*, p.55.

ⁱⁱⁱ Calliou, B. and Wesley-Esquimaux, C. (2015). A Wise Practices Approach to Indigenous Community Development in Canada. In Voyageur, C. J., Calliou, B., & Brearley, L. (Eds.), *Restorying Indigenous Leadership: Wise practices in community development* (2nd ed). Banff Centre Press, p.45.