

# Respectful Terminology Platform Project: Connecting Indigenous Peoples' Knowledge Systems Through Innovative Metadata Technologies

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## Abstract

The Respectful Terminology Platform Project (RTPP) is a multi-year collaborative project focused on creating community-focused infrastructure for Indigenous controlled vocabulary with the National Indigenous Knowledge and Language Alliance (NIKLA). This article outlines the goals and reports on the current activities of the RTPP.+

### Keywords

Indigenous knowledge organization, Indigenous data sovereignty, controlled vocabulary

## 1. Introduction

Within the domain of cultural heritage, community-focused controlled vocabulary projects have begun to provide viable alternatives to problematic mainstream controlled vocabularies. There is growth in initiatives to support Indigenous-focused metadata practices, such as the return of original geographic names, Indigenous-centered naming conventions, Indigenous languages, Indigenous data sovereignty, and decolonization. In Canada, there have been several controlled vocabulary projects intended to reform controlled headings to remove antiquated and racist language, and to ensure the terminology aligns with locally recognized names.[1][2] The development of community-focused controlled vocabularies is a positive step, but a lack of support for the practitioner's workflow, accessible technologies and software, training, and application at scale reduces the overall impacts of this important work.

## 2. Project description and goals

The Respectful Terminology Platform Project (RTPP) is an Indigenous-led multi-year collaborative project with the National Indigenous Knowledge and Language Alliance (NIKLA) begun in spring 2022.[2] The RTPP is creating community-driven and responsive infrastructure to support structured vocabulary for Indigenous peoples, places, and cultures, intended for wide

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+ For the purposes of the RTPP project, Indigenous refers to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people in Canada.

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application, through the development of an open software and tool stack, governance system, and learning materials, such as a webinar series.[3]

### 3. Activities and methodology

The RTPP has completed an initial planning phase, and the next phase of the project involves community prototyping as the project is following the participatory design and prototyping process. Creating an Indigenous Advisory Circle (IAC) made up of Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and Indigenous practitioners was the mechanism used to involve Indigenous community members from the beginning of the project has ensured the project is designed and remains centered on community needs.

#### 3.1. Project governance

The RTPP is guided and supported by Indigenous protocols and governance ensuring that at all time relationship building is centred around respect, reverence, responsibility, and reciprocity. A Technical Working Group (TWG) was established made up of expert practitioners drawn from the library, archival, and cultural heritage sector who are both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, modelling the spirit of reconciliation by working together to move forward in a good way to undertake this reparative work.

#### 3.2. Prototyping and case studies

Working with community partners, the RTPP is working on developing controlled vocabulary workflows using representative First Nation, Métis, and Inuit case studies with existing controlled vocabulary projects. The case studies will also support the development and testing of governance and protocol systems and needs.

### 4. Conclusion

The RTPP intends to transform knowledge organization practices through the creation of a community-centered platform for controlled vocabulary, leading to more just metadata practices. While, the RTPP is focused on Indigenous vocabularies, the “lessons learned” could be applied more widely to other diverse communities. The way we undertake our work will aid the use of multiple controlled vocabularies that more accurately reflect contemporary naming practices in metadata applications, create greater societal understandings, and support an imprint of reverence for all peoples.

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