



Canadian Restorative Justice Research & Knowledge Network: Engagement and Listening

What We Heard Report

August 2025

**This report was prepared by members of the Canadian Restorative Justice
Research and Knowledge Network Co-design Team.**

Acknowledgement

We want to extend our sincere gratitude to all the participants for sharing their views and experiences through the engagement process. Without such openness, this work would not have been possible. We would like to thank the Canadian Restorative Justice Research and Knowledge Network Advisory Group for their guidance throughout the process.

We would also like to recognize and thank Design De Plume Creative for their expertise and ability to translate our vision into a beautiful logo and branding for the Network.

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Introduction

The Canadian Restorative Justice Research and Knowledge Network (the Network) is being developed to build a research and knowledge community focused on restorative justice. This initiative comes out of the recognition of the important role that raising awareness through data, research and sharing knowledge can play in increasing the understanding and use of restorative justice in Canada.

The Network seeks to:

- bridge connections between sectors (e.g., justice, education, health, and social services) to share a diversity of knowledge to address gaps;
- build on promising practises;
- learn about culturally responsive practices;
- promote and support community-based approaches to prevent and respond to conflict and harm;
- tell “the restorative justice story” in Canada through different approaches and perspectives using data, research, and knowledge sharing; and
- strengthen existing research networks, while helping to create and grow new ones for generations to come.

This report provides a summary of the engagement activities that took place between January 2024 and February 2025.

Background

In 2022, the Dalhousie Restorative Lab organized a National Restorative Collaborative Learning Conference in Halifax, Nova Scotia, funded by Justice Canada, which included provincial, territorial and federal delegations¹. One of the main objectives of this conference was to discuss what would be needed to transform the approach to justice in Canada through an increased use of restorative justice. Throughout the conference there was recognition that increasing knowledge and awareness of restorative justice is crucial if there is to be an increase in its use, for which knowledge dissemination, research and data play a key role. At the end of the three-day conference, there was a commitment to collaboratively develop a national research and knowledge network.

¹ The delegations included government, non-government, and academic representatives including from Indigenous organizations. See the final report for more information: <https://restorativelab.ca/nrclc-2022-final-report/>.

Engagement Approach

The multi-phased engagement process to develop the Network included pre-engagement discussions, followed by an online engagement, and ended with two listening sessions. Information shared at each phase was reviewed and incorporated into the next engagement activity.

Pre-engagement

Between January and March 2024 restorative justice researchers and practitioners across Canada were contacted to determine their interest in the development of a research network and how they would like to be involved. A snowball sampling approach was used to identify people that may be interested in the development of a network. Virtual discussions were held with over 60 people² during this period, which resulted in a volunteer multi-sectoral/multi-disciplinary Co-design Team (CDT) being established to lead the engagement process with the support of an Advisory Group (AG) (see Annex A for the list of members).

Guiding Principles

The following are the principles identified during the pre-engagement phase that were used to guide the engagement process and development of the Network:

- The Network will be developed in a collaborative, relational and respectful way.
- The vision for the Network is to not duplicate work already being done across the country, but rather create mechanisms to connect, amplify the work being done, fill in any research or data gaps, and create a space for collaboration to support the growth of restorative justice research communities across the country.
- Collaboration between Indigenous, non-Indigenous, federal government, provincial-territorial government, academic and community-based or non-government researchers is key to the success and longevity of the Network.
- Multi-sector (e.g., justice, health, education, mental health, addictions, housing) involvement is key to telling “the restorative justice story”, so researchers from these different sectors need to be engaged.
- Knowledge sharing and dissemination are fundamental.

² Justice Canada led the pre-engagement discussions. Most of the meetings were one on one, however, some involved small group meetings.

Online Engagement

An on-line engagement, using Simple Survey, was undertaken between July and September 2024 with 114 completed responses were received from every province and territory, except Nunavut. Approximately half of the responses received were from Ontario and British Columbia. Most of the respondents were employed by not-for-profit organizations, educational institutions or government, while there were also respondents from the private sector, students, retired persons, and volunteers. Three quarters of the respondents had experience with restorative justice (41% moderate and 35% a lot of experience), while 21% indicated they had a little experience and 3% no experience.

More than half of respondents identified³ as a restorative justice practitioner (57%), over a third as a restorative justice researcher (35%) and 9% identified as a restorative justice policy officer. Many respondents (30%) indicated “other”, which included practitioners and facilitators of programs that may include restorative justice practices, researchers in other areas, members of restorative justice associations, and consultants.

Listening Sessions

Two listening sessions were held to provide an opportunity to share what was learned from the on-line engagement and further share ideas around the development of the Network in a collaborative way. Facilitated by members of the Network CDT, each session began with a presentation to provide background and context regarding why a Network is being developed followed by sharing results of the online engagement. After the presentation, discussion circles were used to consider questions posed under three themes:

- Resonance and Engagement: “What resonates with you from the presentation? What are we missing? What will engage people moving forward?”
- Diversity and Inclusion: “How do we ensure diversity and inclusion moving forward?”
- Leadership Invitation: “How do we invite leaders to either take up a role in the research network steering group or develop a community of research practice?”

Following the small group discussions, the facilitators then reported back during a plenary⁴ on the discussions to the full group before closing the session.

³ Respondents were able to identify in more than one way.

⁴ The in-person listening session was limited to 75 mins while the virtual session was 3 hours. The additional time in the virtual session permitted more time for a full plenary discussion after the small group discussions.

The initial listening session, which had 15 participants, was also held in-person on November 19, 2024, during the [National Restorative Justice Week Symposium](#) in Ottawa. The second listening session was held virtually on February 17, 2025, with 22 participants⁵.

Network Name & Branding

Throughout the engagement process, the name of the Network changed. Initially there was a call to develop a National Restorative Justice Research Network. This was to acknowledge that the focus of the Network is to be open and accessible to everyone across the country to ensure that communities of research practice build connections across jurisdictions to raise awareness and understanding. However, once established, it will also be important to have it recognized as a Canadian network as connections with other researchers and practitioners grow into international spaces.

The Network CDT also heard during the listening sessions that narrowly defining the Network as a research network could create a barrier for some to participate, including Indigenous and marginalized communities that have experienced harmful extractive research practices. While for others, the term research may be perceived as favouring empirical research over other ways of knowing, such as through sharing of stories, art, experiential. It is for this reason that the term knowledge was added to the name for the Network, to reflect that the purpose of the Network is to increase awareness and understanding of restorative justice through many different ways of knowing.

Since the Network is not an initiative of any one organization or association, the Network CDT recognized the importance of creating a unique identity and building recognition for the Network as a separate entity.

Between January and March 2025, the Network CDT worked, in consultation with the AG, with an Indigenous design team at Design de Plume Inc. to create a logo and branding for the Network, as illustrated in this report and the logo below.



The C in the logo represents Canada and cultural diversity, while the top of the C is a pie-chart to represent the importance of evidence-based research and knowledge. The colour blue is used for the C to represent water, as is reflected in the white lines

⁵ The participants included representatives from academia, federal and provincial governments, non-government organizations and independent consultants.

symbolizing ripples. Water is a strong metaphor for change and transformation, which are tied to the goal of the Network.

The R in the logo represents restorative justice and research. The top of the R is yellow to represent the sun, while the green on the bottom forms the shape of a leaf, symbolizing nature, a metaphor for interconnectedness, growth and renewal.

When placed in the banner, the logo is in an unclosed circle which symbolizes the continuous cycle of growth and change, with the opening symbolizing a path forward. Together, the logo captures the spirit of unity/collaboration, growth and sustainability, change and a path forward, which are key goals for the Network.

What we heard

There is extensive support for the development of the Network. Almost all respondents (72% strongly agreed and 18% agreed) to the online engagement agreed that having a network in Canada would be beneficial to enable research collaboration across sectors. The Network was seen as a way to help facilitate a connection between researchers and practitioners to support translating research into practice, create opportunities to learn and grow as a research community, raise awareness through disseminating and sharing research, including finding creative solutions to address harm and support well-being, enable people to meet others to collaborate on research and data projects, and foster communities of research practice.

The following are key themes that emerged during the multiphase engagement process.

Communication and Collaboration

Although most participants in the engagement process indicated that they are currently accessing restorative justice research and information through websites, open-source publications, journals and webinars, they indicated they would like more interactive approaches to foster ongoing communication and collaboration through the Network. These include in-person and virtual symposiums, conferences, knowledge exchanges and building communities of research practice where information and research projects underway, including challenges and lessons learned can be shared. To facilitate this approach, creating communities of research practice and an online presence with a website were discussed.

Communities of Research Practice

The intention of the communities of research practice is to ensure that the Network is inclusive so that everyone is able to find a space to interact with other researchers and practitioners. This model enables a decentralized approach that reflects the collaborative design of the Network.

The communities of research practice can be based on different topics (e.g., victim-centered restorative justice), geographical areas (e.g., restorative justice in rural/remote areas), or sectors (e.g., restorative justice in the justice or health sector). As long as there is someone to create, lead and organize the community, it can be added.

The communities of research practice that were of most interest through the online engagement include: identifying ways to measure restorative justice in Canada (e.g., identifying indicators, telling restorative justice stories) (62%); building restorative communities, including preventing harm (62%); and restorative justice in the justice sector (61%). Additional topics of interest that were selected by at least half of the respondents include: restorative justice for social justice (59%); restorative justice to address gender-based violence (58%); decolonization in restorative justice (57%); Indigenous restorative justice (54%); translating research to practice (54%); victim-centered restorative justice practices (53%); restorative justice to address identity-based harm (e.g., hate-based or hate-motivated crimes) (53%); anti-racism in restorative justice (51%); and restorative justice in the education sector (50%).

Website

A virtual presence through a website is key for the Network as this would be an on-line platform to enable people to connect and facilitate collaboration across the country. It would also provide a national and international presence. Participants suggested that the website includes: a catalogue of research products and publications; a space to promote new publications, webinars, podcasts, conferences and other awareness-raising events; and interactive collaboration spaces for the communities of research practice. These collaboration spaces would be developed as nodes (emergent hubs of engagement) that are virtually accessible from a main page of the website. Below is a visual representation that was used during the listening sessions to discuss the website and the communities of research practice.



In the middle is the main website that everyone would visit as a first step. This section would provide information on a national level for the full Network (e.g., events, Network announcements), and identify the different communities of research practice. This structure would enable additional communities of research practice to be added as the Network grows, and interests shift to new emerging topics.

Each community of research practice would have its own webpages, which would be accessed off the main section, that can be designed and maintained based on what the community feels is needed.

Implementation Strategies

Part of the engagement focused on how the Network should be implemented. What was heard is that the Network needs to be inclusive and diverse, accessible, and use an adaptable structure to ensure growth and sustainability.

Inclusive and Diverse

A key consideration in creating an inclusive Network is ensuring that a broad definition of restorative justice is used so that the Network is not solely focused in one sector (e.g., criminal justice) or one type of restorative justice (e.g., mediation). Rather, diverse perspectives of restorative justice are needed to enable an interdisciplinary approach, which brings together government, non-government organizations, academia and Indigenous communities to collaborate and share knowledge.

Restorative justice is relational, which is key to how the Network is to be implemented. A collaborative and relational structure, rather than hierarchical, that is independent but supported by government, non-government, academia, and the private sector is important.

Using a decolonizing, anti-racist, collaborative decentralized approach to implementing the Network will ensure that it is inclusive and welcoming of diverse experiences, expertise, and ways of knowing. In addition to ensuring that people from different backgrounds are invited to participate in the Network, it is crucial to engage with Indigenous leaders to ensure authentic collaboration and decolonized and Indigenous approaches are used.

Accessible

The purpose of the Network is to build relationships and person-to-person connections, which can only be done if it is accessible within different communities (e.g., not just for academia and government) through different mechanisms including opportunities to interact virtually and in-person. Access to the internet in northern and remote areas

needs to be considered. The website and knowledge products shared also need to be accessible (e.g., open source, plain language).

There is value in continuously engaging with and reaching out to individuals and groups at different times. Depending on interest, timing, scheduling and other influences, individuals and groups may be able to participate or get involved in different areas at different times.

Adaptable Structure

An important guiding principle for the development of the Network is that it be adaptable to address the changing needs of the community. By using a ground-up rather than top-down approach to development, the Network can have the autonomy and liberty to change and adapt more easily, including addressing the unique needs of different communities/regions, including remote/isolated communities, while still making connections across the country.

Sustainable

Considering approaches to ensure that the Network is sustainable is essential in its development. Dedicated, sustainable funding from multiple sources (e.g., federal and provincial/territorial governments, private sector, academia, non-government, private) is needed to maintain the website and ensure there are resources for a paid steering committee to oversee the Network.

A steering committee, that changes over time, is needed to coordinate the Network, while volunteers can lead the communities of research practice and provide cross-country representation.

Consistent communication, regular sharing of information, and opportunities to connect regularly through annual conferences and events are needed.

Each community of research practice needs to have a leader or an organizing group to create and maintain their own webpages, with the assistance of the steering committee web administrator.

Growth

To ensure that the Network continues to grow, evolve over time and promote diversity it will be important to find those who are passionate and can make connections with others who have the same interest and passion. It will also be important to bring in new people and create new partnerships. The Network can collaborate with educational institutions (e.g., ensure a steady stream of new ideas and students) and foster ongoing connection between researchers, government, policy makers and practitioners to align research priorities (e.g., can open funding opportunities) and collaboratively work on new approaches, projects, and organize forums.

A strong communication plan is needed to keep people informed and involved using innovative strategies, and to help promote the Network to others. The communities of research practice should be encouraged to be in constant dialogue with practitioners to identify practical projects and to help translate research into practice.

Dedicated funding is also essential to enable growth and development. Only so much can be achieved through volunteer resources.

Considerations for Implementation

The following are some key considerations for implementation that were shared during the engagement process.

- Start small to get the Network off the ground.
- Make it accessible by using a holistic definition of restorative justice and decolonized and anti-racism approaches.
- Dedicated funding is needed.
- Ensure Indigenous voices and ways of knowing are heard and respected.
- Connect with existing restorative justice organizations and provincial associations to not “recreate the wheel”.
- Create a brand for the network to increase awareness.
- Start simple (e.g., website and virtual collaborative library) and add other services one by one (e.g., events, collaborative sharing forums).

Next Steps

This report marks the end of the engagement phase of the process to develop the Network as well as the roles of the Network Co-Design Team and Advisory Group.

The next phase is to identify an Implementation Team that will focus on developing an implementation strategy that can be used to identify resources and support to launch the Network by Spring 2026.

Annex A

Network Co-Design Team

Name	Organization/Affiliation	Sector
Allison Kooijman	British Columbia Ministry of Health	Health
Brenda Morrison	Simon Fraser University Research and Engagement Centre for Restorative Justice	Multi-sectoral
Carsten Erbe	Manitoba Justice	Justice
Jane Evans	Department of Justice Canada	Justice
Lara Rooney	Department of Justice Canada	Justice
Muhammad Asadullah (Asad)	University of Regina	Justice
Nadine Okalik	Tungasuvvingat Inuit (Ottawa)	Justice
Norm Desjardins	Canadian Restorative Justice Consortium	Multi-sectoral
Sheri Halladay	Canadian Restorative Justice Consortium ⁶	Multi-sectoral

⁶ Norm Desjardins, affiliated with the Canadian Restorative Justice Consortium, was also a key member of the Network CDT between April 2024 and January 2025.

Network Advisory Group

Name	Organization/Affiliation	Sector
Alana Abramson	Kwantlen Polytechnic University & Restorative Justice Association of British Columbia	Education and Justice
Andrew Barton	Métis Nation of Ontario	Justice
Amanda Nelund	MacEwan University	Education and Justice
Aurra Startup	Community Justice Initiatives - Kitchener	Justice
Crystena Parker-Shandal	Renison University College, University of Waterloo	Education
Catherine Rossi	Université LAVAL	Justice
Daniel Del Gobbo	University of Windsor Faculty of Law	Justice
Diane Crocker	St. Mary's University	Education and Justice
David Milward	University of Victoria	Academia
Dorothy Vaandering	Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador	Education, Justice and Community
Jacob Glover	The Restorative Lab at the Schulich School of Law, Dalhousie University	Sport maltreatment and sport culture
Jeff Johnson	Waterloo Region District School Board	Education
Jennifer Llewellyn	Restorative Research, Innovation and Education Lab at the Schulich School of Law, Dalhousie University	Academic and practitioner across multiple sectors
Jo-Anne Wemmers	École de Criminologie, Université de Montréal, Centre de Justice Victimes d'actes Criminels	Justice (Victimology and Criminology)

Name	Organization/Affiliation	Sector
Jude Oudshoorn	Conestaga College	Higher education and corrections
Kamil Ahmed	Community Justice Initiatives - Kitchener	Justice
Melanie Randall	Western University	Justice and Education
Paul Robinson	Statistics Canada	Justice
Sandeep Manku	Waterloo Region District School Board	Education
Tim Stuempel	Tungasuvvingat Inuit (Ottawa)	Justice