



Kickoff Workshop Harvest

Ecological Forestry Research Initiative



September 5, 2024 | Dalhousie Agricultural Campus



What was it?

This session marked the kickoff of the Ecological Forestry Research Initiative (EFRI), a five year collaborative research project led by the Westwood Lab at Dalhousie University. The session brought convened researchers and forestry professionals across institutions and sectors to develop a set of shared values to guide the research team's work and to discuss a decolonized approach to the research. For many, it was the first time meeting one another, and for the collective, the session was its first in-person gathering. In total, 17 participants attended.

Intended outcomes

- We have a shared understanding of the values and approaches to decolonizing research and have strategized ways to integrate this into the work.
- We have built relationships and shared understandings around values and beliefs for relational, supportive, and collaborative work that can be carried forward into the year.
- We have co-created a set shared values and agreements for the team's ways of working.

What happened?

Introductions

The day began with a land acknowledgement by Tyler and introductory remarks from Dr. Alana Westwood. Dr. Westwood invited participants to introduce themselves and share about the land and forest they come from. In her presentation, she spoke to the 'why' behind the project and the unique co-production approach it is taking.



Folks then participated in a mingle activity to introduce themselves and get to know one other better, and shared their reflections to the following prompts in small groups:

- How are you arriving?
- What do you hope to get out of this workshop?
- Who are the people before you / behind you / with you here today?
- Share a part of the story of your name, e.g. where it came from, how it was chosen, any memories or stories about having your name.
- Why is this research project and initiative personally important to you?
- Favourite place in nature and why?

Shared Values

To develop a set of shared values, we first held a pre-mortem and individually brainstormed all the conditions that would lead to failure through quick sketches.



Using these images, participants discussed themes in small groups and co-created representations of group failure. These included an acrostic poem, a skit, and several drawings.

It became clear that there was strong convergence around the conditions failure, such as lack of collaboration and communication, big egos, apathy, and having different goals or expectations.

Based on the pre-mortem, participants then brainstormed a set of values to represent group success and created a visual representation of these values in a living system. The images included a panda habitat, a river, a fire circle, and beaver dam.

The shared values identified by each group were synthesized into a draft set of values found [here](#).



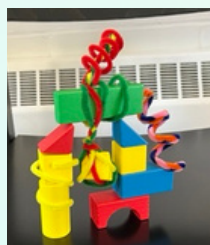
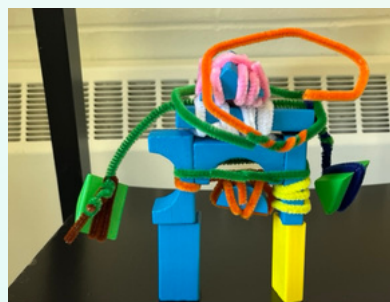
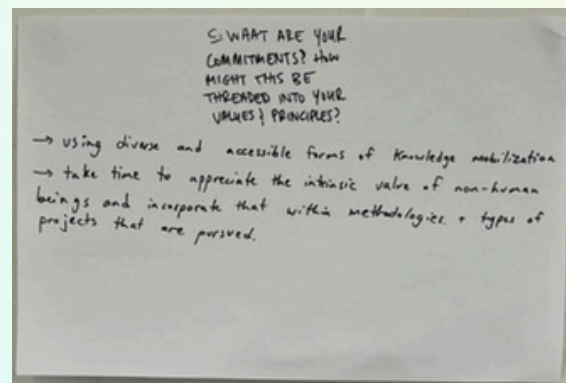
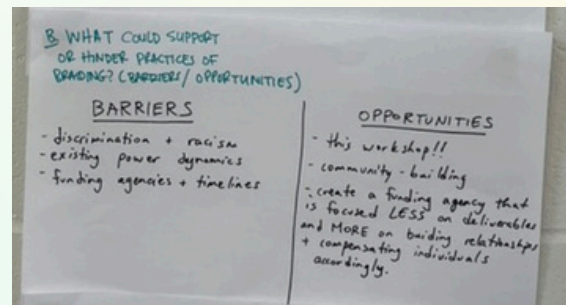
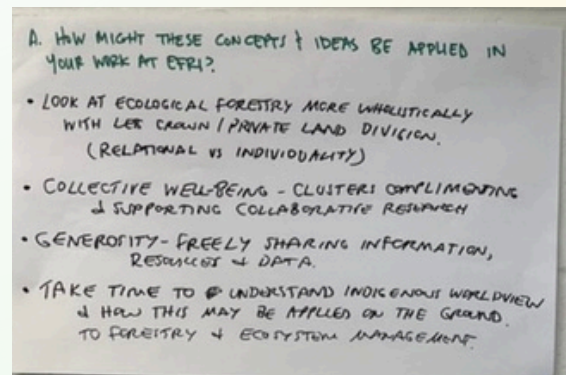
Decolonizing Research

Following lunch and a rowdy game of rock paper scissors tournament, we explored the topic of decolonizing research. Tyler presented on some foundational concepts such as the dominant mode of research, norms of white supremacy culture, insurgent and Indigenous research, and the brick and thread sensibilities metaphor from *Towards Braiding* (Jimmy & Andreotti, 2019).

Using wooden blocks to represent 'bricks' and pipe cleaners to represent 'threads', participants reflected and discussed in small groups on how brick and thread sensibilities show up in their own approach to work and research. They used the blocks and pipe cleaners to create a structure that represented braiding and collectively responded to the following prompts:

- How might these concepts and ideas be applied into your work at EFRI?
- What could support or hinder practices of braiding? (barriers, opportunities)
- What are your commitments? How might this be threaded into your values and principles?

Participants shared that they found the framework helpful in supporting their self-reflection about decolonization. They articulated the challenges of and identified strategies for weaving thread sensibilities while working within dominant systems and institutions. They found it challenging to identify commitments but expressed a desire and interest in continued learning about decolonizing research.

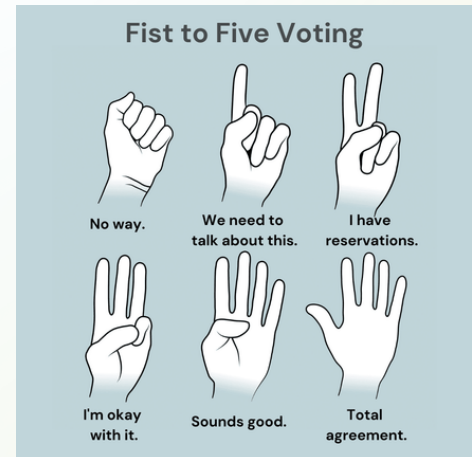


Closing

The day wrapped up with a fun scavenger hunt game and a synthesis discussion about how to bring the day's learnings into EFRI's work in a sustained way. The group reviewed the draft values and used a consensus based voting approach called 'First to Five Voting' to consent to the values. To check out for the day, participants discussed in pairs:

- What is your individual commitment to everyday decolonization in work and relationships with EFRI?
- What are you carrying forward from today's conversation?
- What still needs to be explored, uncovered, and understood?

Finally, we held a closing circle outside and each person shared a song that reflected our shared values, hopes, and excitement for working together. The Spotify playlist can be found [here](#)!



Next steps

To keep the good vibes from the day alive as the research work unfolds, we encourage the EFRI team to:

- Share the insights from the day with those who were not able to participate
- Identify someone (or a small group) to refine and finalize the draft values
- Incorporate the shared values into regular cluster team meetings
- Continue connecting and collaborating with one another!