# Terms of Reference:
# IDAEL Knowledge Holder Advisory Council

## 1. Background

The Indigenous Disability-Affirming Early Learning (IDAEL) and Care Partnership is a SSHRC-funded project led by Dr. Kathryn Underwood (Primary Investigator) and Dr. Nicole Ineese-Nash (Co-Director). The project aims to address structural and systemic inequities in early childhood systems by co-developing disability-affirming, culturally grounded training and governance models. It brings together Indigenous, Black, and other racialized partners and communities to braid diverse knowledge systems and support children and families at the margins of service delivery.

The Knowledge Holder Advisory Council plays a vital role in shaping the research. It brings together those with lived experience of disability across various identities, including—but not limited to—Indigenous, Black, and other racialized communities, as well as youth, caregivers and kind, Elders, and culturally diverse individuals.

## 2. Purpose of the Advisory Council

The Advisory Council exists to:
- Center lived experience as critical expertise in research and system change;
- Offer guidance on cultural, ethical, and disability-affirming practices in all project phases;
- Support the development of inclusive, relational training and governance models;
- Ensure that the project is shaped by those who live at the intersections of disability, race, culture, and systemic exclusion;
- Inform the Research Team, which holds the central governance role for the project.

## 3. Composition

The Council will include 10–15 Knowledge Holders, with broad representation across:
- People with diverse experiences of disability (including neurodivergence, Deafness, madness, chronic illness, and mobility differences)
- Indigenous, Black, and other racialized individuals
- Youth, caregivers and kin, Elders, educators, and community leaders
- Regional representation from both Northern and Southern Ontario

The focus is not on specific diagnoses but on how disability is constructed and experienced, especially in early childhood systems.
Membership will be drawn from partner organizations and relational networks, ensuring community alignment and trust-based engagement. Ad hoc sub-groups may be formed to support specific priorities (e.g., youth-specific input, training feedback, cultural protocols).

## 4. Membership Principles

Membership will be grounded in:
- Relational accountability: honoring knowledge shared through relationships and responsibilities
- Inclusive participation: accommodating access, communication, and cultural needs
- Broad disability perspectives: centering how systems respond to difference rather than defining categories
- Equity and ethics: prioritizing consent, flexibility, and mutual respect throughout engagement

## 5. Roles and Responsibilities

Advisory members may:
- Participate in an initial in-person gathering (June 2025) followed by quarterly online meetings
- Review project materials (e.g., training modules, ethics protocols, evaluation strategies)
- Share feedback on care practices, cultural values, and systemic inequities
- Co-develop ideas for knowledge mobilization and sustainability
- Contribute to shaping the broader vision of disability-affirming, culturally grounded early years education

## 6. Compensation and Support

- Advisory members will receive honoraria for their time and expertise, following community norms and institutional standards
- Supports for travel, accessibility (e.g., ASL, interpreters, mobility), and technology will be provided
- Youth, Elders, and caregivers and kin will be supported to participate meaningfully, and participation expectations will be flexible and respectful

## 7. Governance and Communication

- The Advisory Council informs the Research Team, which holds final decision-making authority and ensures alignment with research goals, ethics, and funder requirements
- Feedback and input from advisory members will be documented and regularly integrated into project development
- Decisions will be made through collaborative dialogue, and differences of opinion will be honored as part of a respectful process of learning and unlearning

## 8. Term and Review

- Advisory membership is invited for the duration of the project (2025–2027)
- Terms of Reference will be reviewed during the first meeting and adjusted in collaboration

with members
- Members may step in or out as their capacity allows

## 9. Contact

For questions, accessibility supports, or participation inquiries, please contact:
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- Asshwi Krishnagopol (Project Coordinator) / inclusion@torontomu.ca