

The Rethinking Project: Relationship Time

Co-Learning Report #4

**Rethinking Transformation:
Centring Msit No'kmaq for Just
and Equitable Climate Action**



Introduction

On June 16, 2026, Rethinking Transformation: Centring Msit No'kmaq for Just and Equitable Climate Action (the Rethinking Project) hosted a session during the Partnerships and Early Career Forum, held at the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation and North Atlantic Forum (CRRF-NAF).

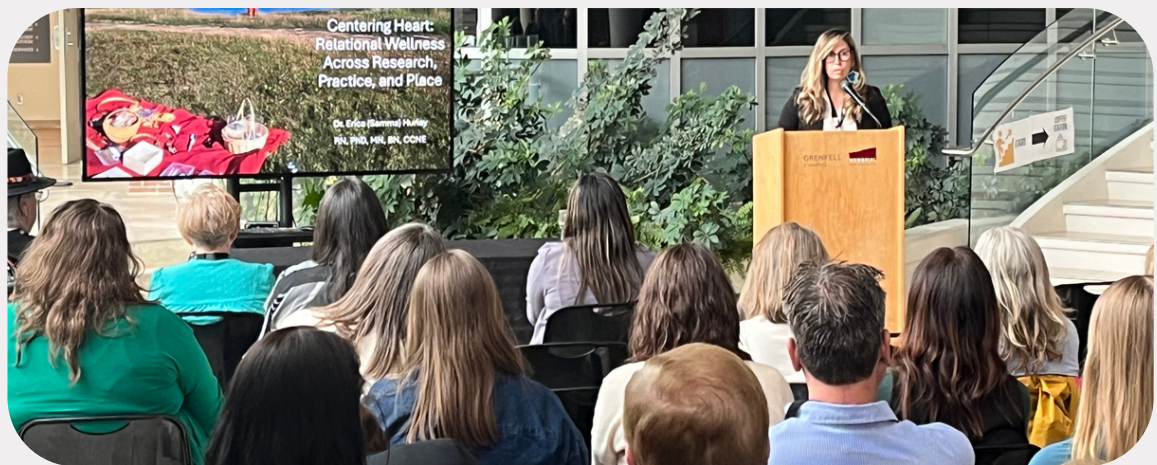


Figure 1. Dr. Erica (Samms) Hurley sharing her keynote presentation, introducing relational wellness to CRRF-NAF

The theme of the conference was relational wellness aimed at prioritizing connections that matter for sustaining rural, island, and Northern communities (Figure 1).. To contribute to the theme, the Rethinking Project held a conversation in a circle called, Relationship Time. The circle was opened to community leaders, members and researchers, as well as NGOs and university researchers of all stages to explore how to better base research on relationships and their relational foundations.

'Relationship Time' is a concept first introduced by members of the Rethinking Project during a meeting of the Ocean Frontier Institute. It began as a call to focus the types of human and financial resources that may be needed in research projects for building relationships. It is a play on the phrase, 'Ship Time', which is the scarce, carefully scheduled, and costly period a vessel is allocated for scientific work at sea, treated by funders and institutions as a finite resource that must be budgeted, justified, and competed for in advance.

Relationship Time refers to the sustained investment of time and human energy required to establish, deepen, and sustain trust-based relationships between researchers and the communities, knowledge holders, and partners they work alongside. Like ship time, it is a mechanism to do research and monitoring that must be planned for and protected. Yet, unlike ship time, relationship time is largely under recognized for its value, importance, costs, and qualities. It resists being scheduled in fixed blocks and measured in discrete units. It is fluid and dynamic.

Relationship Time has shared importance for people who are working with, in, or for communities. In the context of the Rethinking Project, relationship time is a way to characterise and organize thinking, action, and planning about understanding, building, and honouring relationships. Relationship Time takes special meaning when viewed through important worldviews like Msit No'kmaq, which draws focus on relationship time in the context of all relations that matter in place-based communities, including the human and non-human relations that are important to Mi'kmaw communities (see Hurley and Jackson 2020).

Relationship Time is therefore a way to imagine and enact quality relationships by asking questions about who, what, where, and why in building relations in different contexts and places.

At CRRF-NAF, the Rethinking Project explored relationships and relationship time across four rounds of discussion, facilitated by Arlene Blanchard-White, Erica (Samms) Hurley, Brennan Lowery, and Evan J. Andrews. Attendees used sticky notes to surface the relationships that matter in their research, how they currently honour those relationships, and the barriers and openings they encounter in making relational work a central part of their practice (Figure 2).

Following the conversation, attendees placed their sticky notes on a white board showing relationships in the middle of the whiteboard, with four corners labelled efforts, questions, challenges and prospects (Figure 3).



Figure 2. Attendees in a circle writing their reflections on sticky notes

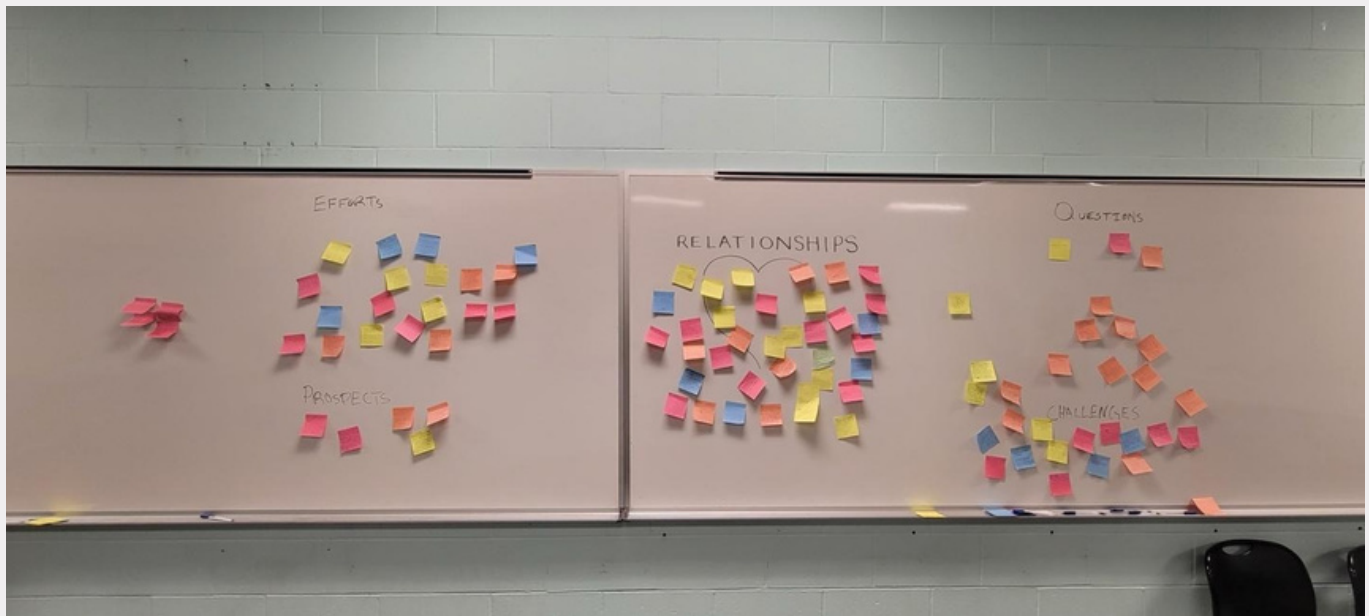


Figure 3. The resulting white board with sticky notes organized around key themes

Attendees shared so much about the importance of relationships, and the time and efforts to nurture them. They shared so much about the importance of the values and ways of being that underlie relationships in and with community. Attendees discussed those relationships and what they mean in community. The discussions moved into relationships in research, recognizing both universities and communities do research. Finally, the discussions covered institutional structures and funding dimensions. These conversations opened up perspectives about the efforts, challenges and prospects for supporting relationship time, putting it into context of relationships and relationship-building important to the attendees.

We are sharing the sticky notes of attendees, organized by some of the emergent areas of focus in the discussion. Figure 4 presents an interactive visualization of these notes and areas. We used Claude Sonnet 4.6, developed by Anthropic, a generative artificial intelligence platform to create the figure.

We selected the highest level of security, and then created the figure in 'Incognito' mode. This mode incorporates strongest baseline data protections, and provides an additional layer of security by excluding conversations from chat history, memory, and model training. Thus, no information or inputs are stored nor shared beyond the interaction used to develop the figure.



Rethinking Transformation: Centring Msit No'kmaq

Rethinking Transformation: Centering Msit No'kmaq for just and equitable climate action is led by Dr. Erica (Samms) Hurley, and based in the WATERR (Wellness and Transformative Engagement for Research Relationships) Lab. Funded by Transforming Climate Action, a Canada First Research Excellence Fund, the Rethinking Project researchers are providing an opportunity to learn and reflect on the relationships, processes, and strategies for meaningful, place-based, and transdisciplinary climate action. This figure represents the contributions from many people at the Canadian Rural Revitalizations Conference and North Atlantic Forum at the Partnerships and Early Career Researcher Forum, hosted by the Rethinking Project. The session, Relationship Time, created an opportunity to reflect on how to position relationships at the heart of research, whether led by community or university. We are grateful for all the attendees including participation from community members and leaders.

Figure 4. A screenshot of the interactive report back from the Relationship Time session

The interactive figure depicted in Figure 3 is organized as four concentric rings around a central heart representing the Rethinking Project. The figure moves outward from values and ways of being, through community and relationships and research practice, to structure and funding. Each ring segment can be clicked to reveal the specific themes and reflections shared by participants, offering a way to explore how relationships were positioned at the heart of research throughout the session. Explore the interactive figure at this link: <https://sites.google.com/view/relationshiptime>

We want to thank the attendees at the Relationship Time session (Figure 5), and to the organizers of CRRF-NAF for making space for our conversation. We will continue to explore the centrality of relationships in all types of research, and especially in research supporting climate action. We aim to honour the conversation held at CRRF-NAF by moving to action. Meaningful relationships are a common goal. Supporting and defending relationship time is an avenue to advance toward that goal. As long as relationships live, there must be time to build and honour them.



Figure 5. Attendees at the Relationship Time session