

# The Saskatchewan Indigenous Mentorship Network Midterm Evaluation Report



Author: Micheal Heimlick – Two Bridges Consulting

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## **The Saskatchewan Indigenous Mentorship Network – An Overview**

Since 2018, the Saskatchewan Indigenous Mentorship Network (SK-IMN) has been supporting Indigenous graduate students and new investigators in Saskatchewan by providing significant funding supports for students, by creating and hosting networking and professional development events based on student needs, and by communicating external opportunities on a regular basis. The SK-IMN is one of eight networks across Canada, all of which have the goal of increasing graduate student and new investigator success in the fields of health and wellness, Indigenous studies, and community-based research. The SK-IMN continues to grow in membership each year, and an evaluation was commissioned to begin to explore the impact it is having for students in Saskatchewan.

## **Evaluating the Saskatchewan Indigenous Mentorship Network**

Over the course of the past few years, the SK-IMN has periodically evaluated their events to obtain feedback, make the delivery of the program more efficient, and to understand the outcomes being experienced by attendees. The purpose of this report is to outline the results of all available evaluation evidence to determine the impact of the SK-IMN. To achieve this end, this report combined two years of data available from events and supported it with interview evidence from SK-IMN students, many of which have been with the Network for the past two years.

## **Methods Used to Form this Report**

Three primary methods of evaluation were used, including:

- **Event surveys**
  - Over the past two years, the SK-IMN have surveyed event participants a total of four times. Specifically, students, faculty, and staff who attended the 2018 & 2019 Annual Gatherings and the 2019-2020 Writing Workshops were sent similar surveys. The purpose of these surveys was to gather event-specific feedback for the SK-IMN team to use to tailor future events but also to gather evidence of outcomes over time. The results from each of these surveys were combined as part of this report and a total of 76 participants are represented in this data.
- **Database analysis**
  - The SK-IMN team has been collecting and storing operational data for the past two years. This includes, but isn't limited to, growth numbers on their social media platforms (Facebook, Mailchimp), page views on the SK-IMN website but also includes funding amounts given to students. This data was used to support both event survey and interview findings throughout this report.

- **Interview evidence**
  - To help explore the impact the SK-IMN is having for students, evaluators completed a total of 13 interviews in the fall of 2020. A list of past SK-IMN participants were supplied to the evaluators and these students were invited to take part in a conversation on their opinions of the Network. Each student was compensated \$50 to accommodate the time spent on the interview and all interviews were completed over Zoom. On average, the interviews lasted 32 minutes.

The results from each of these three methods are presented together in this report, as the results from each method supports the other two.

## **What's Changed? Outcomes Facilitated by the Saskatchewan Indigenous Mentorship Network**

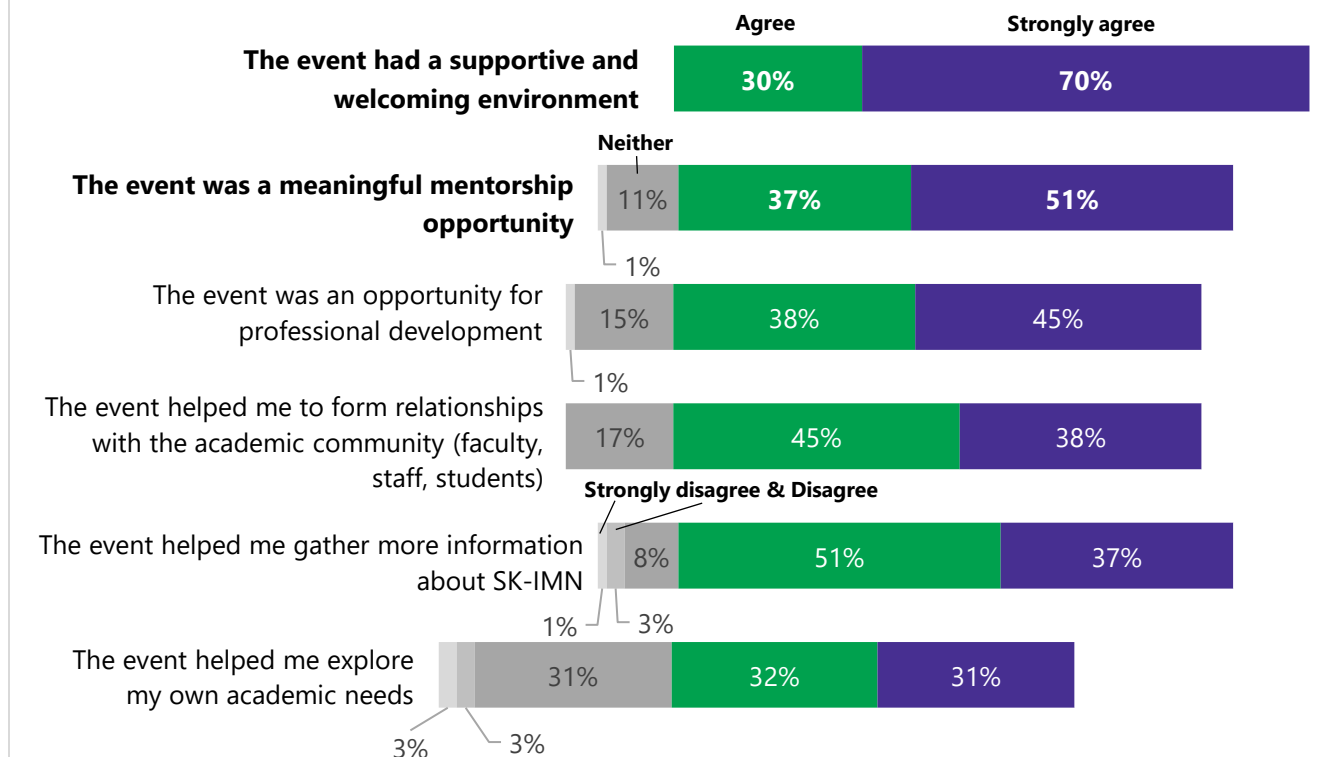
Overall, the SK-IMN appears to be facilitating many of the outcomes they intended to when the program first started (see Appendix A for the SK-IMN logic model that outlines these outcomes). To begin, survey evidence from event attendees suggested a high number of participants either 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with the attainment of measured outcomes. When combined, the percentage of 'agree' and 'strongly agree' selections from all 76 participants are as follows:

- The event had a supportive and welcoming environment – **100%**
- The event was a meaningful mentorship opportunity – **88%**
- The event was an opportunity for professional development – **83%**
- The event helped me to form relationships with the academic community – **83%**
- The event helped me gather more information on the SK-IMN – **88%**
- The event helped me explore my own academic needs – **63%**

These results suggest that, over the course of two years, the events put on by the SK-IMN were able to facilitate these intended outcomes. The fact that 100% of all survey participants either agreed or strongly agreed that the event had a supportive and welcoming environment is likely a strong facilitating factor that led to the other outcomes being observed. Specifically, if SK-IMN events were able to create a supportive and welcoming environment (as is suggested here by participants and strongly supported by interview evidence later on in this report) then it may have led to a higher perception that the event facilitated mentorship, relationships, and professional development. Considering the SK-IMN estimates that several hundred students, new investigators, and faculty have attended their events since 2018, the effect of this may be larger than we are able to interpret from these results.

These combined survey results are backed up by interview evidence, where students involved in the SK-IMN (many of whom attended events) told the interview how impactful the network has been in many varying ways. The following sections of the report will cover the thematic analysis done for all 13 interviews, starting with how the SK-IMN is meeting the needs of students.

Participants either **agreed** or **strongly agreed** with many intended outcomes, most notably that events had a **supportive and welcoming environment** and that they were **meaningful mentorship opportunities**.



## Interview evidence – Students’ Perspectives on the SK-IMN’s impact

The 13 interviews completed as part of this report were full of rich, positive evidence that suggested the SK-IMN is having a meaningful impact on students. Namely, the SK-IMN appears to be:

1. **Meeting the needs of students on many different levels**
2. **Facilitating professional development and career clarity**
3. **Creating a post-secondary environment that is culturally grounded and comfortable**
4. **Helping new investigators, students, and faculty to form relationships and expand their networks**
5. **Creating meaningful mentorship opportunities**

Each of these findings are explored in detail on the following pages.

## Meeting the Needs of Students

**Confidence & Independence.** In interviews, students often discussed how Network activities positively influenced their confidence in conducting Indigenous framed research as well as increased their confidence in their skills/abilities as a graduate student generally. Students attributed this to the support and inclusivity of the program and explained that it allowed them to realize their potential as Indigenous researchers. Students indicated that the networks facilitation of events aimed at connecting Indigenous researchers, and the corresponding openness that other Network members gave them, helped in this process. For example, one interviewee described how the Networked helped them grow as a person and as a researcher:

"I would say I've grown to be a lot more competent in my culture, a lot more competent in my ability to work with community, a lot more confident in my ability to, I don't want to say discuss stuff on my thesis topic, but act as though I'm the expert, even though I'm not the expert, but I am the expert on my project and it's something that I do know, and I know it well. The Mentorship Network contributed because they provided opportunities for me to do writing workshops for me to access other scholars, to talk to different students." - **Interviewee**

Further, some interviewees discussed how the SK-IMN helped them become more independent researchers. Likely, this stems from an increase in confidence, but students described that this facilitated their ability to work at their own pace while providing guidance on tasks needing to be completed. One interviewee described that this was helpful in mentees' ability to transition into an independent researcher:

"It's just because when you do online school, there's always someone telling you all these due dates and whatnot, and for this mentorship program, I didn't really have a timeline, I just was told, 'Okay, just on at your own time, research this and research that. If you find anything more interesting or you want to expand on it, go right ahead.' It was more independent research for me, which was really nice, so it's something I enjoy doing." - **Interviewee**

**A Source of Motivation.** Interview evidence indicated that the Network has been a source of motivation for students, specifically to meet their academic and professional goals. The writing groups' weekly meetings were useful for students to help set tasks, meet said tasks, and ultimately helped students integrate an Indigenous perspective into research. More broadly, the Network's ability for students to hear from other Indigenous researchers and professionals from helped spur additional motivation among students. Lastly, interviewees suggested that the Network kept many students motivated to continue working and researching in order to improve health services for Indigenous persons and stay focused on their research aims and research involvement. Providing a goal to strive for (i.e., the wellness of Indigenous peoples) and facilitating events where students can see other Indigenous peoples achieving that goal appears to be a significant motivating factor. As one interviewee put it:

"It's very hard having that Indigenous perspective and coming from that Indigenous worldview and wanting to do this decolonizing work and Indigenous work and stuff, and you feel very alone. And even when you don't, if you don't have that consistent support, it still makes you feel alone. And maybe it's harsh, but like it's not worth it. You could lose that motivation. Whereas I find now, when I can be supported by so many other Indigenous people or allies ... It's very motivating to know that there are just other like-minded people doing similar work as you, or relevant, or at least just connected and I guess it's the motivation, I think." - **Interviewee**

**Providing a Comfortable Environment.** Many of the 13 interviewees spoke of how the Network brought a sense of comfort within a university setting that had previously been missing. Namely, this comfort came from being around and interacting with other Indigenous students and professors. Interviewees described feeling comfortable conveying their ideas or perspectives with others, whereas prior to joining the Network they felt uncomfortable voicing their opinions to others, especially professors. The coaching and mentoring on how to communicate effectively was important to the, as one student stated:

"When I get to be in circles with these really talented professors and doctors and all these kinds of people, they speak to me as an equal and they want to hear what I have to say and at first that was really intimidating. When I was first involved with the network, I was afraid to use my voice, but as I progressed throughout the couple of years, I was really comfortable to speak to people like [name omitted] and [name omitted]. I think that's huge because if I can speak to the people like that with confidence and be able to convey my ideas and share my ideas and learn from them and have a really good conversation, then I can bring that out into my workplace. With people who don't necessarily have the same paradigms and seeing worldviews and seeing values and belief systems, but I can still have these really great conversations because I've been coached in that." - **Interviewee**

**Financial Support.** Since 2018, the Network has been able to provide financial support to **45 Indigenous students** with **a total of \$208,000.00 being awarded**. Interviewees pointed to the fact that this financial support that allowed many mentees to continue their academic career. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, this support not only helped the students focus on their research or courses without having to seek out additional employment, it also supported them to attend important international conferences that were key in their field of study. Demonstrating the flexibility afforded by this funding, interviewees described how it was important during the pandemic because of thesis or dissertation changes and lack of potential employment opportunities due to social distancing and lockdowns. The stress of financial burden that graduate students of face, including during the pandemic, is mitigated with the accessibility of financial support from the Network. This appears to be a crucial and important

part of the network and possible leads to many more outcomes (e.g., willingness to continue, increased motivation, increased confidence). When asked, one student described the importance of funding the SK-IMN had provided:

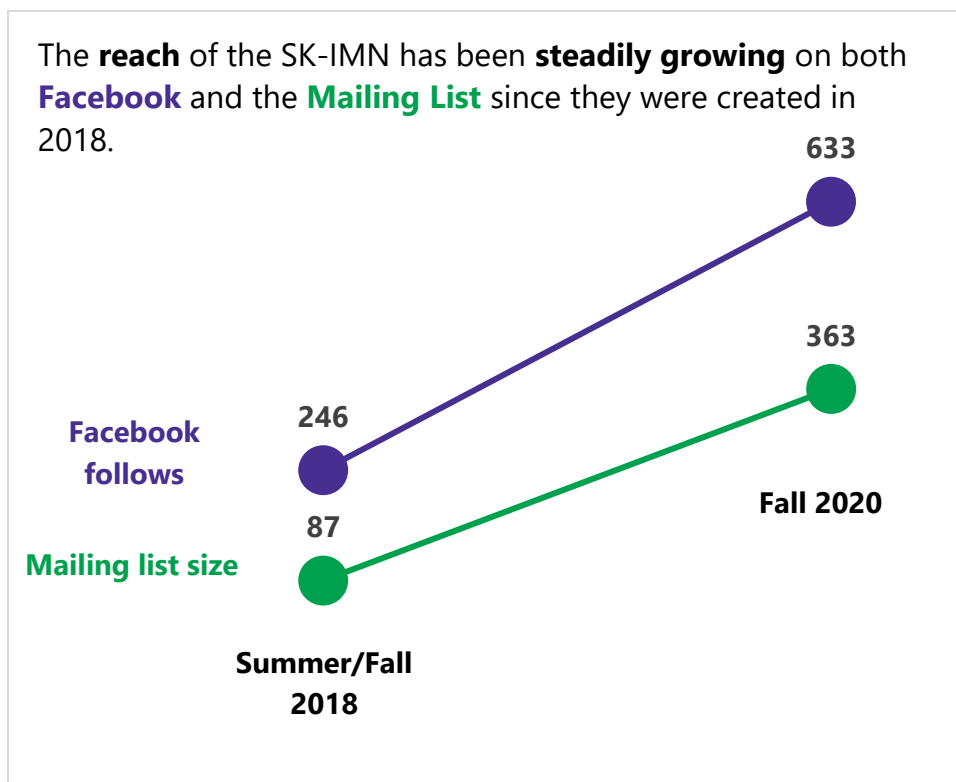
“In terms of the first financial support I got, which was for conference attendance, if I didn't have that I would not have been able to go. The conference that year was in New Zealand, and I just didn't have the resources as a student in order to pay for my entire trip. ... Although the conferences were canceled, they allowed us to keep the funding, which at the time when COVID was first starting that was huge. To be able to have that funding still given to us, I mean that made a huge difference to me and my family in terms of our daily lives. Then as well when they put out the call for the writing groups and the stipend that we would get for participating in the writing groups, that was huge as well too because that was also during the fairly early stages of COVID. Both of those things really helped stabilize my finances and helped me stay in school.” - **Interviewee**

**Perceived Importance of the Network.** Interviewees also described the SK-IMN's impact in terms of broader wellness of Indigenous peoples. Specifically, by bringing a variety of researchers together, interviewees foresaw community and social issues being addressed with innovative approaches and Indigenous perspectives. Through the facilitating mediator of SK-IMN events, students were afforded opportunities for professional development and many mentees credit the Network as contributing to their success as a student and new researcher:

“[The SK-IMN is] important for me because... there's a lot of really pressing issues facing our society right now. I mean, coronavirus now is just one more thing to add on top of the environmental disasters that's out and then the mental health and anxiety, that's crushing our young people and older people too. I guess for me we have to find new ways of doing things and maybe not necessarily new ways of doing, but being innovative and working together and coming together and bringing as many minds together into one place so that we can influence each other and have better ideas and help each other. And so that's why I find the mentorship network is so valuable for me and for my growth and my contribution to society that I want to make because they're [faculty, mentors] such accomplished people.” - **Interviewee**

The overall importance of the SK-IMN can also be interpreted through the lens of the increased 'reach' that the Network staff have been able to sustain throughout the past few years. Namely, the SK-IMN website has maintained a steady level of traffic since its creation and their Facebook page followers have roughly tripled since it was created in 2018 (up to 633 followers from 246). The same growth is seen in the self-selecting mailing list size, which currently sits at 363 registrants (up from 87 when it was first created).





## Professional Development & Career Clarity

**Skill Development.** In many of the 13 interviews, students described how the SK-IMN facilitated academic skill development and described how each was transferable to their academic and professional goals. For example, students positively described received training on writing, publishing, presenting skills, CV writing, conversing with other professionals, how to navigate non-Indigenous education systems, and application writing – all of which were seen as necessary and useful for graduate students. Finally, interviewees described that the structure and guidance the SK-IMN provided was imperative to improving their confidence and success in a university setting:

“I think it would be the writing practice because it gave me an opportunity. That writing group was really amazing for me, not just for the people that were in it, but how we approached it. Doing the writing group, writing every day, checking in with each other, sharing tips, reflecting every week and saying what were things holding us back. Building that habit was really powerful for me to get into the swing of writing every day. Which for me was... It was an area I was really struggling with.” - **Interviewee**

**Validation (Anti-imposter Syndrome) & Willingness to Continue.** Perhaps one of the more commonly described benefits of the SK-IMN was that it helped provide a sense of validation that students were capable and belonged in academia. Specifically, interviewees described that

hearing other Indigenous peoples struggles and experience imposter syndrome validated that they weren't alone and instilled a belief that they too belonged in academics. Prior to taking part in the Network, many interviewees felt that they did not belong in a university setting or were the only ones struggling but they described this changing once they were able to interact with mentors in the SK-IMN. Therefore, this suggests that the SK-IMN mentorship environment has been an important factor for students' willingness to keep pursuing their degree:

"I do think I'm more confident in some ways about my own research and about my place in academia. I've felt supported and I felt that my struggles are the same struggles everyone has. It's that imposter syndrome, but we all have it. And you're like, 'We all feel like we don't know anything sometimes.' And I think that's helped and I can remind myself when I'm having those feelings now or just like, 'Remember when, Dr. So-and-so said like, I can't write for 15 minutes,' or something without getting distracted and stuff. And just having those same struggles, I guess." - **Interviewee**

Further to this, many interviewees believed that their involvement with Network positively influenced their decision to continue to pursue their academic goals. For example, many described how they were motivated to continue their graduate degrees as a result of seeing how they could help their community or further Indigenous pedagogy within academic literature. Connecting it back to a previous finding, access to funding opportunities provided many students the confidence that they could continue their education without the worry of whether their family could afford this decision:

"Also, to continue with education because the other students were at PhD level. It motivated me to want to continue on to a PhD and work on to community level myself. I wanted to network more and then perhaps see where we go from there. I just know that it motivated me to take the next step to go further education." - **Interviewee**

**Research Clarity.** In many interviews, students described how meeting with other Indigenous students, faculty, and new investigators at Network events helped many interviewees clarify the purpose and intention of their own research and academic pursuits. Specifically, discussions with individuals from other departments and attending keynote speaker presentations helped generate new ideas, find publications or texts that aligned with their own research goals or ideas, helped provide a connection with additional Indigenous experiences in post-secondary institutions, and created a sense of an increased ability to situate their research with an Indigenous lens:

"Well, I have met professors that I would not have met before because they're not in my department, and I think that's been good for me. I mean, I've met people outside of my discipline and some of them through talks about their work, so it's been interesting. Then as well in their talks or in keynotes, or just through

meeting them, some of them I've gotten interested in seeing what their previous publications were, so I've gone and looked at that. Some of them I'll end up using in my dissertation and in my teacher work because I think that their work really lines up well, or parts of it does, so that's been helpful." - **Interviewee**

**Clarification of Career Vision & Purpose.** Further to an increase clarity on their own research, interviewees described how interactions with the SK-IMN helped them realize their career direction and purpose. This realization appears to have largely come from an increased understanding of what is needed in their community and by receiving the confidence and tools that would help them address those needs in the future if they continued their academic career. Interviewees commonly described that one significant factor of career purpose and clarification was hearing other Indigenous students and faculty accomplishments as scholars:

"Being able to not just serve myself but being able to better understand my position as an Indigenous scholar, is something that was really huge because without the network I often felt just so overwhelmed by the task of what that means. And then sometimes feeling like maybe I'm not up for this task and maybe I'm not the person who should be doing this and maybe I'm a fraud and a fake. The network was really able to ground me and I always felt reminded that I do belong here and that, that is my role to play. That was a really important aspect of that too. It's just the sense of, I don't know if it's belonging, but I can just be heard as a way of presenting Indigenous woman who wasn't raised in her culture." - **Interviewee**

## **SK-IMN Cultural Grounding & Comfort**

**Infusion of Cultural Teachings.** Interviewees commonly credited the SK-IMN for having cultural teachings infused within each event. Several interviewees enjoyed this aspect so much that it was a deciding factor for individuals to continue interacting with the Network. Specifically, students said that, because of the Network, they were able to learn about their own heritage, how to integrate Indigenous perspectives into their own research, as well as access language and ceremonial teachings that helped facilitate a comfortable and meaningful environment:

"I guess I understand my heritage a lot better than I actually did. I never actually really got a... Well, I did get a chance to expand on what my heritage is, but at the same time, I wasn't interested. I just felt like I learnt... like I grew up more in a sense where I'm actually interested in learning about the heritage." - **Interviewee**

**Cultural Grounding.** Encouragingly, interviewees described that the Network was a source of cultural grounding and knowledge that they believe was missing in their university environment before interacting with the SK-IMN. This is likely because one of the SK-IMN's goals is to integrate Indigenous teachings and perspectives into research that are commonly absent in the classroom or in non-Indigenous mentee-mentor relationships at post-secondary institutions.

Interviewees said that the Network provided a unique source of support, instruction, and opportunity for knowledge translation from professors to students that is traditionally completely missing or difficult to access on a campus. Therefore, actions taken by the Network were perceived as authentic attempts at reconciliation by educational institutions compared to other activities promoted by post-secondary institutions:

“Sometimes things will fall in other programs, but it's filling a very unique gap that's not filled anywhere else. I think connection with Indigenous students, especially just because in programs they're isolated. And they're the only one, and they're often the only one. So, it provides a place where they're not the only one. They're coming together, they're sharing. It's not tokenism. It incorporates so many Indigenous beliefs around reciprocity and ageism isn't a thing. It incorporates this intergenerational learning and all these worldviews that I think it's so important. Not only is it filling a need, but it's also true to its cultural grounding.” - **Interviewee**

**Comfort in Cultural Self Identity.** Evidence suggested that having access to a network of Indigenous individuals that shared similar experiences was a contributing factor in students feeling comfortable in a university setting, but also in who they are as people. For some, it was not until they took part in the Network activities that they recognized how uncomfortable they had been in the university setting. As a result of a new sense of comfort (as backed up by the quantitative evidence presented earlier), interviewees said that they feel more confident in using their voice in Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences than before their time with the SK-IMN. Furthermore, program activities provided an opportunity for mentees to see and talk with other Indigenous students and academics that created a sense of belonging and comfort in an educational environment that is largely non-Indigenous. As one interviewee describes it, this can go a long way to providing the support an Indigenous graduate student needs to feel comfortable in a colonial setting:

“It was a moment where I had felt comfortable and then I just noticed. It was actually the writing group when I was participating and I went in and I was so comfortable and then I was thinking, ‘Oh wow, I'm so comfortable.’ And then I was like, ‘Wow. How long have I been comfortable just entering a space with this identity?’ I couldn't know, but that was the moment where I knew. I just walked in and I said it. I didn't worry or flinch or be concerned about others' reactions, because I've actually had negative encounters with people before around it.” - **Interviewee**

## **Relations & Networks**

**Networking & Career Connections.** Commonly, interviewees mentioned how the SK-IMN helped provide opportunities for them to meet a variety of peers and individuals who may help them with work or research experience while they progressed through their academic career. In

other words, students felt as though the SK-IMN offered opportunities of support through established Indigenous faculty members or peers. This was important to mentees, especially since many mentees experienced feelings of isolation prior to Network enrollment:

“For me, it's just opened me up to new peers too. It opened me up to a network. But even just with the writing group, how close we got and we would email each other and sometimes we'd touch base. I'm working on a project with someone right now and we're looking at connecting with [name omitted] and she was my mentor for the writing group. It also helps open up possibilities for when projects are down the road and knowing who would be able and who'd be interested.” -

**Interviewee**

Students also discussed the importance of the Network in providing opportunities that would help secure future success in their career, be it in academics or in the community. As an example, one student found, applied for, and was successful in obtaining a teaching opportunity through her involvement in the SK-IMN. Overall, interviewees found that participating in the Network's activities gave them a greater focus on where they would like to see their career go after finishing graduate school:

“I found that it's created opportunity for me to advance both academically and my employment because it's leading into my career ... it's definitely helped motivate me to get my foot into the door, to getting to the next step and my academic journey.” - **Interviewee**

**Sense of Belonging, Valued Relationships, and Relationship Development.** As mentioned, students often described feeling lonely and isolated when navigating through a post-secondary environment prior to joining the SK-IMN. However, the SK-IMN's purpose of fulfilling connections between students, faculty, and new investigators appears to have facilitated a sense of belonging to a group of individuals in a university setting. This is likely due to the realization that there are other Indigenous people at the University have similar experiences or perspectives but, ultimately, provides one of the greatest supports a graduate student could have; a supportive and welcoming environment. Backed by survey evidence, interviewees described that having the opportunity to interact with others on an equal level allowed them to feel like they were “no longer the only one” and that they belonged to something bigger:

“I have taken some mainstream courses and a couple in particular are very western knowledge based. And a lot of times, I'm the only Indigenous person in the classes. It's nice to hear what other Indigenous people are doing. It takes away from the loneliness. It seems odd to talk about academics as being a lonely experience but having connections with other Indigenous people makes it exciting and you feel like there's a sense of belonging that comes with that. Whereas in studying by myself without other Indigenous people, sometimes if things were extremely challenging, I would get down on myself and wonder what

the heck did I get myself into? And I found out with my brief time with the mentorship program or the writing group, it was really beneficial.” - **Interviewee**

As a result of a feeling of belongingness, interviewees described that they have formed several valued relationships because of their time with the SK-IMN. These relationships are with other mentees, mentors, and Network staff and helped students through any challenge they may have been facing. The apparent ability for the SK-IMN to foster relationships, especially among students who may feel isolated at the university, was attributed as a factor for students' willingness to pursue their academic goals:

“Being a part of it, [name omitted] has been just the bomb. If I have a question, whether it's a good one or a stupid one, she's always just been so upbeat, and happy about it, and willing to share. She's just been so good. I wouldn't want anybody else in her shoes because she's got good knowledge on where to go and how to turn. And if I need help getting there, she's always been very good to, 'Okay, well, I'll find somebody to help you,' or, 'I'll get that for you.' It's nice to have someone like that in your corner.” - **Interviewee**

“I would say that they were very much a prominent player in my ability to start building relationships with my community and with the elders on my project and my thesis project, but also other kinds of interests... they provide that opportunity for students who then can go forward and continue that relationship and develop that relationship with whoever they find is really interesting, more towards a certain project or something.” - **Interviewee**

**Broader Community Engagement.** A smaller, yet important theme was the facilitation of community engagement connections for students through continued financial support. One student believed that these connections would create better health outcomes in the future as a result of intersecting Indigenous viewpoints and western approaches to social issues. Another described using their experiences from the SK-IMN as a means of forging their own career where they hoped to mentor other young Indigenous students in the community. When asked why the SK-IMN should be refunded, one student stated:

“I think that if you're funded for the next 10 years, that it's definitely going to reach to the level of impacting the larger community. I believe that eventually collaborations and partnerships will form because the guest speakers are already have strong ties to external organizations and affiliations. So if I move forward and I graduated, I'm going to become a part of their larger community. I believe that all of the graduates and everybody that's been involved in the academic institution at the career level, eventually there's going to be building bridges and there's going to be leverages, some people trying to make connections to the larger community and how this can improve health outcomes and how this can

improve in mentorship at the intergenerational level, how it can be applied to Indigenous philosophy or holistic social connection.” - **Interviewee**

## Meaningful Mentors & Opportunities

**Mentorship Actualized.** When asked what makes a good mentor, students often indicated that a good mentor was honest, accomplished, authentic, approachable, helpful, supportive, flexible, patient, respectful, and dependable. Interviewees also reported that they often found these attributes in mentors within the SK-IMN and appreciated that they were often open to hearing the students’ struggles while providing advice for navigating personal and professional challenges. Evidence suggested that many mentors provided honest feedback on students’ research in their interactions but also provided opportunities for professional experiences that the students would otherwise be unable to obtain. Overall, mentorship experiences in the SK-IMN aligned well with students’ expectations of an ideal mentee-mentor relationship and what they valued in a good mentor:

“Yeah, for me the network is a really good form of mentorship for me because the things that I like in a mentorship, I find that most of the people involved kind of interact that way and that's sort of the same, their worldview aligns with mine. It isn't a very formal place. It's more laid back and everybody just kind of expresses who they are and then while still being professional and getting our work done, but it just seems like a more authentic atmosphere and that for me, makes it more fun. And when I'm having fun, I tend to learn more and engage with people more. I'm more likely to be my true self.” - **Interviewee**

**Equal Footing.** Some interviewees described their mentorship experience within the SK-IMN as a partnership where they were treated with respect and were appreciated for their skills and background. Interviewees contrasted this with previous mentorship experiences where they felt disconnected from mentors. The evidence suggests that the SK-IMN has created the sense of collegiality and closeness that was inaccessible to students in other mentorship environments:

“They're down to earth. They help lift people up. It's never feeling like someone's talking down to them or that because they're a mentor like, ‘My job is to help you and to save you,’ which sometimes can happen. It's just very collegial and supportive and I've really appreciated that. Just warm. Everyone's always excited to see you and wanting to know who you are, which has always been, yeah. They're like, ‘Oh, what are you studying? Where are you from?’ They want to know who you are.” - **Interviewee**

**Informal Nature of Mentorship.** Some interviewees did not take part in a formal mentorship relationship in their time with the SK-IMN, but rather sought mentorship as needed from. This come-as-you-need mentorship was enough for these students, suggesting that not all students require a one-on-one mentorship experience, but rather a place to go in times of need:

"In terms of formal mentors, that is actually a part of the network that I have never participated in. I know you can apply to have a mentor assigned to you, and I have never done that, primarily because I feel like my work is not a close fit to the mentors that are available... I feel like I have received quite a bit of mentorship from the network, from particular professors and then as well from some of the elders that they've had participate in events. I feel like I've received quite a bit of general mentorship." - **Interviewee**

### **Delivery of the SK-IMN & Suggestions for improvement**

Overall, students were happy with the delivery of the program. However, they did suggest some factors that may help strengthen the delivery of the activities (see below). Nonetheless, mentees were appreciative of how the program was delivered before and during COVID-19 and, as mentioned, having a quality program that focused on supporting and mentoring students through their academic careers while incorporating Indigenous culture was important to mentees' success during their education:

"I've had really good experiences with everything and I think just keeping those going. I personally love how much stuff they're always doing, getting the newsletter, I love a good newsletter. You get some that have nothing in them and it's like, "Why are you sending this?" But with theirs, and with the entire program there's just always something going on, or something for you to do, or something to engage in. And it's all always restated that we can connect you with mentors if you need one. They don't say it once a year and stuff. It's very clear, they're accessible, they're there for you and there's always something going on." - **Interviewee**

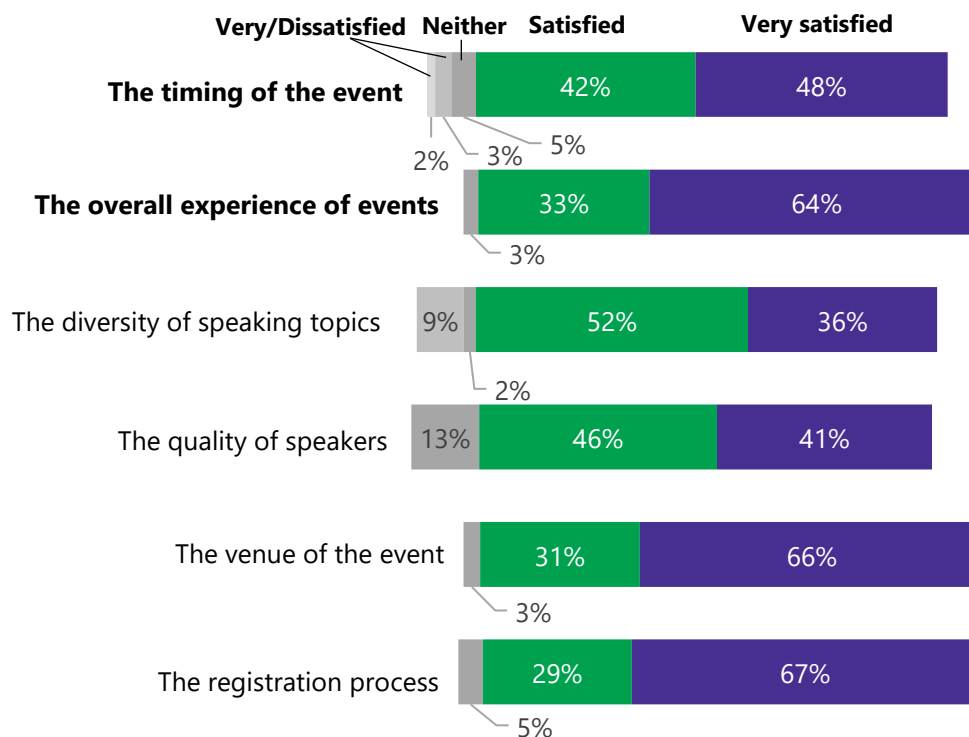
"I think the cultural piece is huge. I definitely can't dismiss that as one of the key pieces of why the network's been so helpful for me. I think just the quality of the organizers because there's different things you're involved in sometimes and they don't have that same momentum and same quality. I think it's just been a really great program." - **Interviewee**

### **Event Feedback**

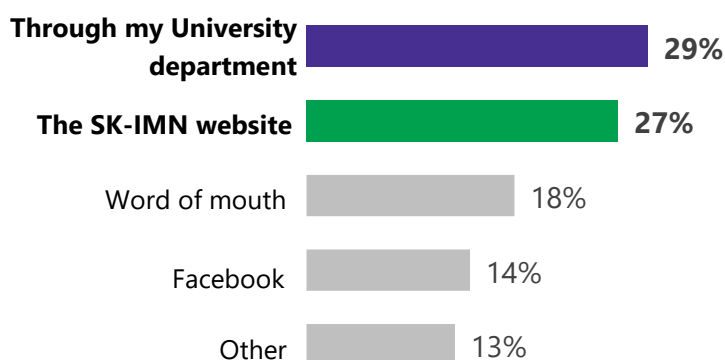
When combined, survey evidence from all 76 participants suggests that the delivery of SK-IMN events was satisfactory to most participants. As the reader can observe below, the overall experience of SK-IMN events was highly satisfying for participants over the past two years with other, more specific, elements being just as high if not higher (e.g., timing of the event, registration process, etc.). Further, the majority of survey participants reported hearing about events through their departments or finding it on the SK-IMN website.



Overall, the **vast majority** of participants have been either **satisfied** or **very satisfied** with the various elements of the SK-IMN events, most notably the timing of events during the year and a high satisfaction with the events overall.



Many (56%) participants indicated they heard about SK-IMN events through their **departments** or through the **SK-IMN website**.



## Students' Suggestions for Improvement

**Activities.** Although the SK-IMN is doing many activities, interviewees wished to see increased opportunities for informal meetups, inclusion of cultural teachings (e.g., trips to Northern Saskatchewan or outdoors), more opportunities for skill/professional development (e.g., CV workshops), and the continuation of writing retreats. Additionally, informal activities were seen

as the best way to help develop a connection between mentors and students because it is seen as a less intimidating environment. One interviewee suggested that incorporating more informal activities will promote the stronger connections between all Network members earlier in the program:

“You get so much formal stuff in terms of classes. Even though it might be nice to have more of a formal, let's say CV workshop, really at the end of the day, students just want to be like, ‘Hey, how can we make this better? How can you improve it? What's best for me? I want some advice.’ It doesn't necessarily always have to be like everybody on their proper behavior and acting like we'll have PhDs... I think that I always enjoyed the casual ones more of just getting to know people. Then you're doing what Indigenous people value, is you're building those relationships and then you can ask them later on, ‘Hey, I'm looking for some part-time work. Do you have any? Do you know of any research work?’” - **Interviewee**

**Time/Location.** Frequency, timing, and location of Network activities were often discussed by interviewees. Some suggested it would be helpful if activities were available each month to maintain motivation for all students but those with families or other commitments mentioned that the timing of Network activities influenced their attendance. For interviewees outside of the city, meetings during the day were difficult to attend. However, mentees who were taking courses on campus found activities immediately after a long day of courses were not ideal because they didn't feel energetic enough to attend. Lastly, some mentees discussed that location is a significant factor in whether they would attend Network events. For example, the geographic location influenced whether some participants were able to join in-person meetings, especially for those who rely on public transportation in another city. Students who faced this challenge suggested that meetings alternate locations once in a while to help with attendance of out of city mentees. Furthermore, the meeting environment was an important factor, with many mentees preferring informal settings or even settings outside of the city for activities, when possible. It should be noted that independent of the activity, all interviewees stressed the importance of providing food at meetings because of its cultural relevancy and its ability to create a sense of comfort and normalcy during training activities:

“A lot of the time you grew up in [classrooms] eight hours a day, five days a week, for 12 years of your life... it doesn't feel like a good, safe space to overly introduce yourself and everything because there's this underlying anxiety, for myself at least. I know that other people who feel the same way about classrooms and the trauma that they have caused. But that's why I would not start it in a classroom. I would do it more of like, you could do it in a student lounge, just a hallway even.” - **Interviewee**

**Broaden Target Groups.** Some interviewees suggested broadening the scope of the Network target group. Interviewees commonly believed that the focus of the SK-IMN was primarily on health-related disciplines, but some indicated that it contradicts the holistic approach to care:

“Well, I think one of the things that I've kind of felt about the network sometimes is that it is very narrowly-focused on public health and medicine. I mean, I do understand that that is the grant, that is the way that it got written and that's part of the mandate of the mentorship network. But then sometimes they're trying to broaden it as well, and so it feels like sometimes there's a bit of a tension there, or it's like it starts to broaden but then it gets closed down. - **Interviewee**

**Guidance.** Some interviewees suggested that more guidance could be provided during SK-IMN related activities as a means of developing more confidence in students. Past experiences of poor mentorship or prejudice in a post-secondary environment have created a need for additional encouragement for some current and future students. One mentee discussed the need for more interaction with mentors and Indigenous professors and researchers as well as the need for consistent check-ins to determine whether mentees were meeting their goals. Relatedly, another mentee felt that they would benefit from a more hands-on supervision approach when working for a mentor. Specifically, more frequent check-ins and guidance on progress/deliverables would be helpful for new SK-IMN students:

“I know they could improve a lot more because I think something like this, a mentorship program needs to be in your face and on top of it because that's what they're offering is guidance. They're offering mentorship, so those mentors need to be on top of those students because for one, I don't think I'm an average student. I'm not 21, and I'm not a go-getter just because I've been through a lot of... I wasn't bullied, but I was an Indigenous kid, so you go through a little bit more racism, prejudice a lot more than... I shouldn't say a lot more because I don't know what other people have been through. But I feel like just what I've been through, I need that extra encouragement. Just me personally, that's how I feel.” - **Interviewee**

**Administrative.** Contradicting event feedback data, a few interviewees described issues associated with applications for funding, SK-IMN involvement, or with advertisements for events. These issues included difficulties completing online applications for the Network and identifying whether the events were applicable to them. These interviewees said a localized source of information regarding SK-IMN members' roles, upcoming activities, and further detail on scholarships would be helpful:

“And prior to that, I had heard of it because sometimes the Indigenous studies department will get the emails and they'll send it and stuff. I didn't really think anything of it because I didn't think it was applicable to me. I thought it was just like health related, which it is, but it is open to Indigenous grad students and Indigenous students and whatnot. I hadn't really paid much attention to it prior to that.” - **Interviewee**

“Just be nice to have, like on the application itself, that it would have more details on what you guys are actually asking for. I just remember it was very hard to actually fill it out.” - **Interviewee**

### **Conclusion**

Overall, combined evidence from surveys and interviews suggests that the SK-IMN is a valuable source of mentorship for students in Saskatchewan. First-hand evidence from students points to a multitude of positive outcomes that, one can assume, will leave them feeling supported, motivated, and willing to continue their meaningful careers. The applications of those careers are yet to be determined, but one can be certain that the outcomes students are experiencing that described in this report will have a long-lasting effect on Indigenous research, academics, and mentorship in Saskatchewan for many years to come. Although students provided feedback on possible changes to the SK-IMN, they appear to be very satisfied with it and see it as a valuable, sometimes crucial and necessary, support for them in their academic and life pursuits.

## Appendix A - SK-IMN Logic Model

Saskatchewan Indigenous Mentorship Network – Institutional & Individual Program Logic Model

