Local First Nations and Métis people are among the most significant communities impacted by our business. We operate on the traditional lands of five Treaty 8 First Nations and the homeland of the Métis, and since our earliest days have worked to accommodate their interests wherever possible.

We aim to build strong relationships with Indigenous communities and establish mutually beneficial outcomes that mitigate concerns and provide shared value. Toward this, the goals for our Indigenous Relations program clearly define our engagement principles, with a focus on employment, education, business development, community-guided investment, effective engagement and consultation, and environmental stewardship.

EFFECTIVE STEWARDSHIP OF COMMITMENTS

A steering committee comprised of executives and senior management meets quarterly to steward our commitments and guide strategies which aim to ensure positive outcomes for local Indigenous communities. An Indigenous Relations team supports the committee, and manages the day-to-day engagement and relationships.
Syncrude’s relationships with Indigenous communities are guided by our Indigenous Relations Policy and Community Relations Policy. The effectiveness of our external relations program is assessed through internal and third party audits.

Our engagement processes are reviewed internally each year to ensure conformance with the requirements of the Indigenous and Community Relationships Protocol under the Mining Association of Canada’s Towards Sustainable Mining (TSM) initiative. An external assessment that includes interviews with Indigenous community members and stakeholders occurs every three years. For 2019, Syncrude was recognized as continuing to have a well-developed engagement program and received the top rating.

Syncrude also advocates for greater Indigenous inclusion countrywide, supporting organizations such as the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business, Indigenous Works and Indspire, and through our participation in related committees of the Mining Association of Canada and the Canadian Association of Petroleum Producers.

Our Indigenous workforce of over 480 First Nations, Métis and Inuit people represents around 10 per cent of our total employee population.
TOP-TIER ACCREDITATION WITH THE PROGRESSIVE ABORIGINAL RELATIONS PROGRAM

Syncrude has been certified six times at the Gold Level of the Progressive Aboriginal Relations program of the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business. Syncrude is one of 18 companies who have attained this level – and one of two in the oil sands – which recognizes our work to create opportunities for Indigenous businesses, employ Indigenous people, and engage with Indigenous communities.

RESPECTING THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Syncrude’s operations are located solely in Alberta; we have no international sites. We have always abided by the laws and regulations of the Government of Canada and support the constitutional right of Indigenous people to be consulted as delegated by the Crown. Recognizing the importance of national reconciliation, we support implementing the principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in a manner consistent with the Canadian Constitution and law, and will continue to monitor and seek further understanding on its application to our business.

ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION ACTIVITIES

We acknowledge the interests of local Indigenous people regarding our environmental stewardship and engage with them on matters such as end-land use, air quality and local operational updates. Syncrude completes this through various forums. These include operations tours, advisory committees, the Reclamation Engagement Focus Group, and committees established through the Air and Odour Improvement Program for Fort McKay.

Consultation occurs regularly and directly on key projects. We strive for early engagement wherever possible and have formal agreements with many of our neighbouring communities that work to mitigate project-specific concerns and provide socio-economic benefits and opportunities.

Our Mildred Lake Extension (MLX) Project involved extensive consultation over a number of years. We launched a broad-ranging consultation in 2013 with local Indigenous communities and other affected stakeholders which included opportunities to provide input into the draft terms of reference for the environmental assessment. We also sought proposals to carry out Traditional Land Use studies prior to Syncrude submitting the application. Over 300 consultation and negotiation meetings were held with local Indigenous communities on the project. Because of these efforts, the company reached agreements with four First Nations and two Métis Locals.
2020 ACTIVITIES

Stewardship of Impact Benefit Agreements continued throughout 2020 as well as ongoing consultation related to such key files as process water treatment, end-pit lakes and local odour concerns. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and restricted community access, direct face-to-face engagement was limited but continued where possible. Highlights included:

- Coordinated the delivery of food supplies to the community of Fort Chipewyan to alleviate shortages caused by the delay of the winter road opening and the pandemic.

- Participated in the groundbreaking ceremony for the new Elsie Fabian School in Fort McKay. This will be the first school built in the community in more than 40 years and will feature Kindergarten through Grade 9. School programming will include core programs, such as math, sciences and language arts, along with culture and land-based education. Academic programs will incorporate both Cree and Dene languages. Syncrude contributed $3.5 million towards construction.

- Utilized our company plane to transport items to Fort Chipewyan for the 2020 Santa’s Anonymous initiative to support local families in need. This included coordinating with the community to arrange delivery in Fort Chipewyan by local volunteers.

RECLAMATION ENGAGEMENT FOCUS GROUP

In cooperation with local Indigenous communities, Syncrude established the Reclamation Engagement Focus Group to help ensure the re-establishment of native tree species, shrubs and traditional medicinal plants of interest. By incorporating traditional knowledge into our reclamation plans, we aim to create a landscape similar to pre-disturbance that also supports the continued practice of Indigenous rights and traditional uses. Members of the group include both Elders and youth to ensure knowledge and discussions reflect input from all generations.
Syncrude's continued focus on identifying more opportunities for regional suppliers led to a record $672 million spend with Indigenous businesses in 2020. This represents over one-fifth of our total annual procurement expenditures. Cumulative procurement from Indigenous suppliers now totals over $4.7 billion.

Over the last few years, Syncrude's support of local Indigenous suppliers has resulted in significant growth for these companies. The types of businesses are diverse and include logistics, earthworks, site and environmental services, and facilities and mechanical maintenance.

Syncrude's definition of an Indigenous business is one that is at least 51 per cent owned by a First Nation, Métis Local, or Indigenous person. The Indigenous owner also must be in control of the daily operations of the business.

Our Indigenous workforce of over 480 First Nations, Métis and Inuit people represents around 10 per cent of our total employee population. In 2019, seven per cent of our leadership and eight per cent of all new hires were of self-declared Indigenous descent.

We strive to ensure our workforce reflects Indigenous representation in the Wood Buffalo region (6.7 per cent according to the 2018 census) and have an enterprise-wide inclusion approach to maintain strong levels of Indigenous hiring. It includes focused recruitment, our rotational employment program for Fort Chipewyan residents, and our participation in events organized by Indspire and Indigenous Works. We also support education and trades training programs that develop the next generation of Indigenous entrants to the workplace.
OUR INDIGENOUS WORKFORCE (Cont’d)

COMMUNITY INVESTMENT

Syncrude regularly invests in initiatives and programs that support our key Indigenous commitment areas of corporate leadership, education, employment, business, community development and the environment. Over $1 million was contributed in 2020 to organizations and initiatives such as:

- Athabasca Tribal Council Festival
- Belcourt Brosseau Endowment and Scholarship Award
- Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business (CCAB) program support
- Fort Chipewyan Winter Carnival
- Fort McMurray Public and Catholic School Districts First Nation, Métis, Inuit (FMNI) educational programming
- Indigenous Works program support
- Indspire - Indigenous Engineering Scholarship endowment fund
- National Gathering for Indigenous Education
- Northland School Division Land Based Training Program
- University of Alberta U School educational programming and engineering outreach
- Wood Buffalo Food Bank grocery delivery to Indigenous communities
- Wood Buffalo Native Youth Hockey Club
PATHWAYS MAGAZINE

Syncrude annually publishes a comprehensive overview of our Indigenous relations work and our progress in stewarding to our key commitment areas. Called Pathways, the review also profiles tremendous success stories and role models from Indigenous communities. It is available for download on our website.

IN YOUR COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

In Your Community helps us to effectively communicate with our neighbours, showcase initiatives and provide updates on our activities. Past and present newsletters are available to view or download on our website.